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## **Rebuilding America: Foreign Policy**

**by Jacob G. Hornberger**

Ever since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the demise of the Soviet empire, it has been an article of faith among many Americans that an extensive overseas military empire and a massive domestic military-industrial complex are vitally important and greatly beneficial to our country. Being the world's "sole remaining superpower," it has been widely believed, enables the United States to effectively impose its will everywhere in the world without significant opposition or costs.

In the wake of continued terrorist attacks against the United States since 1990, however, culminating in the September 11 attacks, and in the wake of unrestrained federal spending, it is now clear that the old paradigm of empire and militarism actually does the opposite of what its supporters intend. The old paradigm subjects the American people to constant threats against their lives arising from terrorist responses to U.S. foreign policy, to increasing infringements on their liberties arising from the federal government's attempts to combat the terrorist responses, to economic danger arising from unrestrained federal spending, and to national dependency on military spending on bases and posts in cities across the nation.

In the July 1992 issue of *Freedom Daily*, I wrote an article entitled, "Dismantling America's Military Empire," in which I argued that the American people had been handed a tremendous opportunity to dismantle America's military empire and military-industrial complex in the wake of the demise of the Soviet threat, which had been used to justify ever increasing levels of military spending for decades. That article stated,

Today, the Pentagon sees America as a new Roman Empire — with American politicians and bureaucrats ruling the world through military might. For the military-industrial complex, the empire means bigger budgets and more power. But for us — the citizenry — the empire holds a darker destiny: death, destruction, taxation, enslavement, impoverishment, and collapse.

Unfortunately, the allure of empire and military prowess — the siren song of being the world’s “sole remaining superpower” — was too strong, and America went in the opposite direction. The empire was expanded and military interventions continued. The results have proven to be disastrous for the American people, in terms of lives lost, liberties infringed upon, and negative feelings toward our country among the people of the world.

### **The myth of “defense” spending**

What we must now confront is what might be an uncomfortable truth for some: the old paradigm of empire and militarism, — of being the world’s sole remaining superpower, funded by so-called defense spending — is not only not necessary or beneficial but actually a tremendous threat to the lives, liberty, and prosperity of the American people.

Consider the fact that the United States has some 350,000 troops stationed in more than 100 countries overseas. Ask yourself: What are they there for? What are they doing? How many of the military bases on which they are stationed are Cold War relics that should have been dismantled years ago? How many of those troops are in those countries to defend America from invasion?

The answer: None. As I pointed out in my July 1992 *Freedom Daily* article, the chances of the United States’s being invaded are nonexistent. No country in the world possesses the military capability to amass an armada of ships necessary to send hundreds of thousands of troops across the ocean to effect such an invasion. Oh, some gang might be able to commit a terrorist act here and there, but no one possesses the necessary military might to invade and conquer the United States.

So why does the United States maintain all its overseas bases and troops? Empire, pure and simple. In other words, while it has become an almost mindless mantra to “support defense spending,” the truth is that virtually no one asks a very simple question: “What does all that military spending have to do with the actual defense of the United States from invasion?” And the most likely reason they don’t is that they subconsciously know that all that “defense” spending they mindlessly support has absolutely nothing to do with actual defense. Instead, it has everything to do with empire.

One of the finest and most pertinent books of our time is *The Sorrows of Empire* by Chalmers Johnson. It is one of the most insightful scholarly works on the dangers posed to our country by the U.S. military-industrial complex in our time. Johnson, who has served as a consultant to the CIA, is now president of the Japan Policy Research Institute and professor emeritus at the University of California, San Diego. In this book, Johnson pierces through all the myths surrounding the notion that massive defense spending and an extensive overseas military empire are in the best interests of the American people. On the contrary, Johnson carefully

documents that the existing paradigm of empire and militarism poses perhaps the greatest danger to the American people in our lifetime.

Here's what Steven C. Clemons, executive vice president of the New America Foundation, says about the book:

There is no more important book to read than *The Sorrows of Empire*. Like Rome, the United States today is struggling with the consequences of a permanent global military engagement, from which self-dealing political elites derive great benefits at the expense and ultimately the survival of America's heretofore resilient republic.

Ted Galen Carpenter, vice president of defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute, adds,

Chalmers Johnson's searing indictment of America's flirtation with an imperial foreign policy should be required reading for all concerned citizens. One need not agree with all of his arguments to conclude that *The Sorrows of Empire* is an extremely important and disturbing book.

In his prologue to the book, Johnson succinctly states the problem facing the American people:

As distinct from other peoples on this earth, most Americans do not recognize — or do not want to recognize — that the United States dominates the world through its military power. Due to government secrecy, they are often ignorant of the fact that their government garrisons the globe. They do not realize that a vast network of American military bases on every continent except Antarctica actually constitutes a new form of empire....

Americans like to say that the world changed as a result of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. It would be more accurate to say that the attacks produced a dangerous change in the thinking of some of our leaders, who began to see our republic as a genuine empire, a new Rome, the greatest colossus in history, no longer bound by international law, the concerns of allies, or any constraints on its use of military force. The American people were still largely in the dark about why they had been attacked or why their State Department began warning them against tourism in an ever-growing list of foreign countries. ("Why do they hate us?" was a common complaint heard on talk shows, and the most common answer was "jealousy.")

For far too long, the blind support of ever-increasing levels of "defense" spending has become an article of faith for many Americans. Anyone who had the audacity to suggest that

military spending should be reduced, especially after the demise of the Soviet Union, would be branded as weak or, even worse, unpatriotic. The suggestion has been that anyone who favored such “defense” spending was for America, while those who favored reductions in such spending stood against America.

The validity of that thinking, however, is being called into question because an increasing number of people are now showing that the relationship is exactly the opposite: the existing paradigm of empire, militarism, and “defense” spending actually threatens the liberty and well-being of the American people, while a new paradigm based on the restoration of a nonmilitary republic to our land would provide Americans with the best security for their lives, liberty, and well-being.

### **Blowback and terrorism**

What about terrorism? Another fine book by Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire*, which was written just before the September 11 attacks, sets forth a critical thesis: that the U.S. government’s imperial foreign policy had generated so much anger and hatred among foreigners that it was a virtual certainty that some of them would ultimately retaliate with a major terrorist attack on the United States.

Consider Johnson’s prophetic words in *Blowback*:

Terrorism (by definition) strikes at the innocent in order to draw attention to the sins of the invulnerable. The innocent of the twenty-first century are going to harvest unexpected blowback disasters from the imperialist escapades of recent decades. Although most Americans may be largely ignorant of what was, and still is, being done in their names, all are likely to pay a steep price — individually and collectively — for their nation’s continued efforts to dominate the global scene. Before the damage of heedless triumphalist acts and the triumphalist rhetoric and propaganda that goes with them becomes irreversible, it is important to open a new discussion of our global role during and after the Cold War.

Thus, is it at all surprising that immediately after the 9/11 attacks — even before anyone knew who had committed them and why — the standard line of all U.S. officials was that the terrorists had struck America out of hatred for our “freedom and values.” That mantra was immediately picked up by the media and millions of Americans, primarily for the reason that Johnson points out — since “defense” is for the experts in the government, and since much of what they’ve been doing has been kept secret for decades, supposedly out of concern for “national security,” Americans had no idea that the real reason that the terrorists were striking was to retaliate for wrongful things the Pentagon and the State Department had been doing overseas for decades, including giving support to cruel and corrupt dictators; maintaining brutal military

embargoes against foreign countries, imposing enormous costs in both lives and impoverishment; intervening into the internal affairs of other nations; basing U.S. troops in foreign lands; ousting democratically elected leaders; carrying out assassinations; and much more.

In fact, if the secret files of the Pentagon and the CIA are ever opened, the generations of Americans living at that time are likely to be quite shocked at all the things that were done in their name and with the resources that the American people entrusted to these agencies. As Johnson points out, and as we at The Future of Freedom Foundation pointed out long before 9/11, what's surprising is that there have been so few terrorist attacks against the United States, especially when we add all the horrible things U.S. officials have done to people overseas in the name of the "war on drugs."

### **Empire and economy**

We must also consider the economic burdens imposed by a massive military industrial complex. Government bureaucrats sometimes suggest, "Well, we're just like everyone in the private sector because we have to pay taxes too." But they are incorrect. Actually, a bureaucrat, unlike those in the private sector, is an enormous economic drain for a society.

As Adam Smith pointed out long ago, the key to rising standards of living is free enterprise, which means a society in which people are free to enter into mutually beneficial trades with one another and to accumulate unlimited amounts of wealth. Through the simple act of exchange, both sides benefit. And rising levels of savings provide the means of purchasing capital equipment, which makes workers and companies more productive.

What happens if a government official seizes, say, 50 percent of everyone's wealth? Obviously, people's plans have been frustrated to that extent. They no longer have half their wealth to trade or save, which means they have less productive capital. And the fact that the government turns around and spends part of that money on purchasing, say, guns doesn't change the nature of what has happened. The people who produced the wealth in the private marketplace have been frustrated in their plans by their money's having been taken from them and given to others, i.e., gun manufacturers. Moreover, the soldier who is learning to shoot those guns (or learning how to march left-face and right-face) is obviously producing nothing of value in terms of rising standards of living.

That's not to say that a soldier (or, say, a cop) doesn't perform a valuable function (defending against invasion, for example) but the expenditure is still a drain, not a positive contribution to economic prosperity. It's what people might consider a necessary and worthy expense that they're willing to pay for out of their income.

But think about the economic consequences of bringing 350,000 troops from overseas and discharging them into the private sector. The inclination might be to think that this would be a horrible thing, causing massive unemployment, but actually the exact opposite would be the case,

as we have learned at the end of other foreign wars, when massive numbers of troops were discharged into the private sector, helping to produce an economic boon.

The dismantling of America's military empire would entail a doubly positive effect in terms of economic prosperity. First, a large percentage of the wealth of the private (producing) sector would no longer be taken from it to fund the imperial military portion of the public (nonproducing) sector. Moreover, those in the public (nonproducing) sector who are discharged into the private (producing) sector) would themselves become part of that private (producing) sector, thereby adding to the wealth and rising overall standard of living.

### **Restoring the republic**

The old paradigm of empire and militarism and “defense” spending have brought — and will continue to bring — nothing but more crises, wars, and terrorism, increasing infringements on civil liberties, more animosity and hatred for America, and increasing threats to our economic well-being. The paradigm will continue to provide a deadly and destructive trap for the American people.

There is only one way out — discarding the old paradigm and embracing the paradigm that our Founders envisioned for us — a paradigm based on a nonmilitarist republic that encourages foreign friendships and interrelationships by people in the private sector but, at the same time, precludes the government from entangling itself in the affairs of other countries or going abroad “in search of monsters to destroy.”

Chalmers Johnson summarizes the challenge facing the American people in *The Sorrows of Empire*:

As militarism, the arrogance of power, and the euphemisms required to justify imperialism inevitably conflict with America's democratic structure of government and distort its culture and basic values, I fear that we will lose our country. If I overstate the threat, I am sure to be forgiven because future generations will be so glad I was wrong. The danger I foresee is that the United States is embarked on a path not unlike that of the former Soviet Union during the 1980s. The USSR collapsed for three basic reasons — internal economic contradictions driven by ideological rigidity, imperial overstretch, and an inability to reform. Because the United States is far wealthier, it may take longer for similar afflictions to do their work. But the similarities are obvious and it is nowhere written that the United States, in its guise as an empire dominating the world, must go on forever.

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