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Empire of Republic **by Jacob G. Hornberger**

We now live in a country in which the president wields the power to send the entire nation into war on his own initiative, without the congressional declaration of war required by the Constitution.

We live in a country in which the president and the military wield the power to arrest an American citizen and incarcerate him in a military installation for the rest of his life on suspicion of being a terrorist, denying him due process of law, trial by jury, and other procedural rights guaranteed by the Bill of Rights.

We live in a country in which the president wields the power to conduct warrantless searches and seizures, regardless of the provisions of the Fourth Amendment.

We live in a country in which the president wields the power to ignore any law passed by Congress simply by signing a statement, in his military capacity as a commander in chief, indicating an intention to ignore the law.

In fact, we live in a country in which the president effectively wields the same power here in the United States that he wields in Iraq, given his belief that the entire world, including the United States, is a battlefield in the “war on terror.”

How did it all come to this? How did a country that once prided itself on being the freest nation in history end up with a ruler who wields such omnipotent powers?

It’s not as if we haven’t been warned. Our Founding Fathers warned us repeatedly what would happen if we abandoned the founding principles of our nation.

James Madison, the father of the Constitution, said that of all the enemies to liberty war is the greatest, because it inevitably encompasses all the other threats to people’s freedom. War is the parent of armies, and with armies come death, destruction, taxes, inflation, regulations, and ever-increasing assaults on liberty at home.

John Quincy Adams, in his Fourth of July address to Congress in 1821, expressed pride in the fact that America does not go abroad in search of “monsters to destroy.” If America ever pursued such a policy, he said, she would inevitably make herself the “dictatress of the world.”

Thomas Jefferson, in his First Inaugural Address, warned against entangling alliances and against our nation's involvement in foreign intrigues and foreign wars.

Our forefathers warned against the dangers of big standing military establishments, pointing out that historically rulers could never resist the temptation to employ them against others, which inevitably fomented new enemies and crises, which then would be used to suspend rights and freedoms at home, the suspensions being enforced by the military.

What distinguished our ancestors from modern-day Americans was how the former viewed the federal government. Today, Americans look on the federal government as a close friend or even as a parent, sometimes even a god, given that it provides the people with retirement, health care, education, housing, food, money, and other "benefits." Our forefathers, on the other hand, viewed the federal government as the greatest threat to their rights and freedoms. They believed that government, being force, was neither their friend nor their parent nor their god.

The underlying philosophy of the Constitution, in fact, reflects how the Framers viewed the federal government. The primary purpose of its provisions was to limit the power of the federal government it called into existence. After all, if people trusted the federal government, what would be the point of placing restrictions on its power? With trust, the Framers would have simply said, "We need to elect the best people to public office and then delegate total power to them so that they can get the job done." But that's not what the Framers did. Instead, they divided the federal government and severely restricted its powers because they didn't trust anyone, not even themselves, with omnipotent power.

Even the restrictions on power in the Constitution did not satisfy the American people, however. Soon after the Constitution was ratified, people demanded and secured passage of 10 amendments to the document that expressly forbade federal officials to infringe on fundamental rights and to convict people of crimes without following long-established legal procedures, some of which stretched all the way back in English history to the Magna Carta in 1215.

Why they hate us

"But we live in a different time now. Today, the terrorists hate us and are coming to get us. The Constitution is not a suicide pact."

That raises the important question of why people around the world, especially in the Middle East, are angry and hateful toward our nation. The issue is important because getting the prescription right usually depends on arriving at a correct diagnosis of the malady.

The issue of why they hate us revolves around two conflicting rationales. The federal rationale is that foreigners hate America for its "freedom and values." The other rationale holds that foreigners hate our nation because of extremely bad things that the federal government has done to people overseas.

The obvious benefit of the first rationale, from the standpoint of U.S. officials, is that it obviates any critical examination of U.S. foreign policy. In fact, its underlying premise is that a major justification for a pro-empire, pro-interventionist foreign policy is to project power across the world in order to protect America from those who already hate us. The second rationale contends that it is that pro-empire, pro-interventionist policy itself that generates the deep-seated anger and hatred that produce the threat of terrorism against the United States.

Of course, this isn't the first time that federal officials have attempted to shut down a critical examination of federal actions in the context of terrorism. After Timothy McVeigh blew up the federal building in Oklahoma City, recall the immediate response of U.S. officials when libertarians tried to point out why McVeigh had committed the act. Federal officials suggested that to engage in such an examination would "justify" McVeigh's actions and, therefore, would not be in the best interests of the country. President Clinton even questioned the notion that one could love his country and, at the same time, hate wrongdoing by his government.

Yet, is it surprising that U.S. officials would take such a position? After all, the last thing they wanted was a critical examination of the federal massacre at Waco, which was what had generated the enormous anger and hatred within McVeigh, which then led to his terrorist attack in Oklahoma City.

But notice something important here: Since Waco, there have been no more federal massacres of American citizens, and there have been no more McVeigh-type retaliatory terrorist attacks. Who can doubt that if U.S. officials were still massacring large numbers of Americans, there would be more Oklahoma City retaliatory terrorist attacks?

The situation is no different in foreign affairs, which is precisely why U.S. officials do their best to shut down any critical examination of federal misconduct overseas by their claim that the "terrorists" hate America for its "freedom and values."

Iran and Iraq

Let's consider two examples — Iran and Iraq.

When Iranians took U.S. embassy officials hostage during the 1979 Iranian Revolution, I think that it would be safe to say that most Americans had no idea why the Iranian revolutionaries were so angry at the United States. No doubt Americans assumed that the revolutionaries simply hated America for its freedom and values.

But Iranians knew that in 1953 the CIA had surreptitiously entered Iran and fomented a coup that resulted in the ouster of Iran's democratically elected prime minister, a man named Mohammed Mossadegh. Not surprisingly, Mossadegh was highly respected by the Iranian people, and he also was selected as *Time* magazine's Man of the Year.

Ousting Mossadegh from power, the CIA replaced him with the shah of Iran, who, with his savage secret police force, proceeded to oppress, brutalize, and torture the Iranian populace for the next 25 years.

It was no different with respect to the Iraqi people. While President Bush today bases his invasion of Iraq on the notion that Saddam Hussein was a dangerous dictator who was trying to secure weapons of mass destruction, he fails to mention that U.S. officials, including President George H.W. Bush, had been strong supporters of this dictator throughout the 1980s. In fact, the current President Bush also fails to mention that it was the United States and other Western countries that [furnished Saddam with biological and chemical weapons](#) along with nuclear technology.

Then, when Saddam became the new official enemy of the United States after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the U.S. government, in combination with the UN, proceeded to implement what is arguably the most brutal set of sanctions in world history. Over the course of more than a decade, the sanctions contributed to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children. Ramzi Yousef, one of the 1993 terrorists who attacked the World Trade Center, angrily cited the sanctions as one of the reasons for that attack. Later, two high UN officials resigned in protest against what they termed U.S.-government-caused genocide. The most authoritative studies have concluded that approximately [300,000 children lost their lives from infection and illness](#) attributed to the sanctions. But when U.S. Ambassador to the UN Madeleine Albright was asked by *60 Minutes* whether the deaths of the Iraqi children had been “worth it,” she answered that, yes, the deaths had been “worth it.”

Then there were the illegal “no-fly zones” over Iraq, which had been authorized by neither the U.S. Congress nor the UN. The missiles fired by U.S. warplanes in the enforcement of the “no-fly” policy killed an untold number of additional Iraqis.

Finally, there has been the brutal invasion and occupation of Iraq, a country that never attacked the United States or even threatened to do so, which has resulted in the deaths and maiming of hundreds of thousands of more Iraqis (a recent study by researchers at Johns Hopkins University put the number at more than 650,000), not to mention the conversion of Iraq into a hellhole and wasteland of violence and destruction.

It is almost incredible that, although U.S. intelligence agencies have recently concluded that the invasion of Iraq has increased the threat of terrorism against the United States, there are still U.S. officials who maintain that all the bad things that the U.S. government did in the Middle East had nothing to do with the anger and hatred that led to the 9/11 attacks. It’s all because they hate America’s “freedom and values,” not because the U.S. government has killed, tortured, abused, and humiliated people in the Middle East for years.

A deadly dead end

I could be proven wrong but my hunch is that U.S. troops will be trapped in Iraq for the near future. Since President Bush has suggested that anyone who calls for exiting Iraq is a cut-and-run coward who would put our nation in jeopardy from terrorists, the chance that he will convert himself into such a person by ordering a withdrawal from Iraq is remote.

While U.S. officials and their mainstream media supporters have been fairly successful in immunizing Americans from the horrors of the war, death has an interesting way of forcing people to face reality. The increasing number of casualties among U.S. troops has caused Americans to confront the war in Iraq, like it or not. Moreover, since Bush undoubtedly wants to continue the occupation until he leaves office, Iraqi insurgents will have plenty of time over the next two years to ensure that Iraq stays on the minds of the American people with well-planned ambushes and sniper attacks.

The Iraq intervention might well be the dead end of the pro-empire, pro-interventionist, “super-power” foreign-policy paradigm that has held our nation in its grip for decades. If so, then as the death and destruction continue to mount, Americans might well begin looking for an alternative paradigm — one that not only is workable but is also consistent with the principles of morality, liberty, and limited government on which our nation was founded.

That’s why the libertarian paradigm on foreign policy and civil liberties is so critically important. By restoring the principles of a limited-government republic, libertarianism provides a way out of the morass into which the pro-empire, pro-interventionist paradigm has plunged the nation. Returning to the founding principles of our nation, libertarians would rein in the federal government by bringing home all U.S. troops stationed overseas, including those in Iraq, South Korea, Europe, Latin America, and Japan, and discharging them into the private sector.

The libertarian paradigm also entails dismantling the enormous military-industrial complex that President Eisenhower warned us against (along with the enormous taxes that fund it), retaining a relatively small but sufficient military force. Its sole purpose would be to provide an initial defense to an invasion of the United States, until able-bodied citizen-soldiers were able to come to its assistance. Given the fact that no nation today remotely has the military capability to invade and conquer the United States, the size of such a military force would be minimal.

By the same token, libertarianism calls for unleashing the private sector — that is, the American people — to travel, trade, and interact with the people of the world. That would entail the dismantling of all sanctions and embargoes against all other countries, including Cuba, North Korea, and Iran. The private sector, not the federal sector, provides the best means of restoring America’s rightful place in the world, one which reaches out to the people of the world in friendship and harmony.

The paradigm of empire and intervention has brought our nation nothing but death, destruction, militarism, taxation, and tyranny.

The paradigm of libertarianism would restore liberty, free markets, and a constitutional republic to our land. What better way to lead the world?

Jacob Hornberger is founder and president of The Future of Freedom Foundation.

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