

The Demise of the US Empire

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international / prose / post

It's over that is plain as day but how it ends no-one knows.

The final days of US empire are fast approaching. Perhaps its end will pass slowly and gradually, or perhaps the event will unfold rapidly and catastrophically. Maybe chaos will break loose, or maybe its demise will be organized well and proceed smoothly. This nobody knows, but the end of empire is coming as surely as day follows night and sun follows rain. Overexpansion, overreach and over-indebtedness will take their toll—as all past empires have discovered. Empires are like bacteria in a Petrie dish; unthinking, unseeing, unfeeling, they expand until they run out of food or contaminate their environment with their waste, and then they die. They are automatons, and they just can't help it: they are programmed to expand or die, expand or die, and, in the end, expand and die.

What does the empire feed on? It feeds on money and fear; your money and your fear, both obtained with your cooperation. It is bigger now than when it faced an actual adversary in the Soviet Union. Russia is no adversary; all it wants is to be a normal country, at peace with the world. But the empire won't let it, will it? It must create enemies. Who are these enemies? According to the authors of endless war they are North Korea, Iran, Syria, and Islamic terrorists. Are any of them actually capable of threatening the US? Well, yes, but they are all quite easy to deter. But the plan of the authors of endless war is not to deter them; it is to back them into a corner with political instability and sanctions, while whipping up the population on both sides into fear-filled frenzy.

We all know that the US military-industrial complex has become a self-perpetuating and uncontrollable organism, just like Dwight D. Eisenhower warned us in 1961. Everyone knows the phrase and Eisenhower's warning—it is part of our collective memory. At a trillion dollars a year and growing, with over 1000 bases ringing the planet, it has expanded far beyond what Eisenhower could have imagined in his worst nightmare. We can't say we didn't know: he warned us. After the National-Socialist episode in Germany, many good Germans voiced regrets at not speaking up, claiming that they didn't know what was being done in their name. But we do not have that excuse: we all knew all along.

Nor was it the first time we were warned. General Smedley Butler told us before, in 1933, and his words are still with us, posted [online](#). Why is it that everyone, generals included, suddenly gain wisdom immediately upon reaching retirement? Butler offered an explanation: his "mind was in suspended animation while serving as a soldier and following orders." In 1933 Butler told us that he "was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism." He said:

"I helped make Mexico, especially Tampico, safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefits of Wall Street. The record of racketeering is long. I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers in 1909-1912...I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. In China I helped to see to it that Standard Oil went its way unmolested."

This empire is nothing new, and we knew what it is and what it does all along. We can't say we didn't know. We have watched throughout our lives as the US put down every popular uprising against local autocrats and oligarchs, placed countries under US control, then helped organize and train the death squads that killed off the opposition. Think of Indonesia, Argentina, or Honduras. We watched as the empire crushed every democratic government that threatened US business interests under the false pretext of "anti-communism," starting with Iran in 1953, Guatemala in 1954, and proceeding to Congo, Haiti (numerous times), and most notably and infamously Chile in 1973 (assassinating president Salvador Allende on September 11, 1973), Nicaragua in the 1980's, and many, many others. (For details see William Blum's [Killing Hope](#).) And of course, many of us lived through the epic lies and genocide of millions in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia during the so-called "Vietnam War." We knew, we watched, and we paid taxes that paid for the bullets and the bombs.

More recently we've seen the barefaced lies of empire laid out for all to see in Iraq, Libya, Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, Georgia, Pakistan, Yemen, Ukraine... they never end! But the trouble we stir up in other places never seems to come home and ring our doorbell, does it? Maybe that's why it keeps on going. We think that we can just ignore it and go on with our lives—that it won't affect us. Or does it?

Let's leave aside the destruction of democracy that always accompanies a militarized, fascist police state that the US has gradually turned into. And let's ignore the violence that pervades US society, or the vast gulag of incarceration that disposes of our useless eaters. Consider that the only military attack on US soil that actually scored a palpable hit since Pearl Harbor was 9/11. Pearl Harbor was on the periphery, way out in the Pacific, "A Day that will live in Infamy," the more so since FDR knew it was coming and did all he could to provoke it by cutting Japan off from oil supplies, directly provoking it into launching the attack. But Hawaii is the periphery while 9/11 struck at the heart of the empire, the financial center in New York that drives the imperial wealth pump, and the Pentagon, which is charged with the mission of US world domination.

Whether you believe that 19 Arabs armed with box cutters who couldn't fly propeller planes took down 3 World Trade buildings that plummeted straight down at the speed of freefall in what looked like controlled demolition (yes there were 3, look up "Building 7"), and destroyed a section of the Pentagon, or whether you believe it was an inside job, doesn't matter. The point is, in that act of destruction, the wars of the empire finally came home.

What was the result? Did these events cause us to reconsider what we are doing? Of course not! Instead, we went all-in for war. Remember, the empire is an automaton, a self-perpetuating organism, living on money and fear. What better way to whip up fear than to stage, or to allow, or to simply fail to prevent, an attack on the "homeland"—which is, by the way, a Nazi propaganda term. The purpose of war is simply to cause more war, since it is so profitable for the badly misnamed "defense industry." Butler told us in 1933 that "war is a racket," and documented massive war profiteering during WWI. Do you know how much money Lockheed, Northrop-Grumman, Boeing, General Dynamics, Raytheon et al. are making from the "War on Terror"? The sums are astronomical.

As you read these words, the empire is busy doing its work in Ukraine. Here is how that works. First, it overthrows the elected government in a US-backed coup. Next, it directs its local puppet regime to unleash a military attack and organize death squads to deal with the population in the east that won't go along with the US-backed coup, in this case using actual Nazi-branded death squads, complete with [Nazi SS Insignias](#). (Anyone can verify these facts with the most cursory internet search.) And for the final, consummate imperialist touch, it [votes in the UN](#) (together with Canada) against a resolution condemning the Ukrainian Nazis and other racist murderers, while the

Europeans shamefacedly abstain. This sort of plan used to work really well, and so the empire keeps repeating it over and over again, even though the results are worse every time.

Vast numbers of Americans support the empire's wars of conquest because they help maintain their lavish lifestyles. They bother some of us more than others. Many of us are adamantly against them, but only a few find it emotionally unbearable to countenance the destruction of millions of lives in our names and with our money. What makes them different? Who knows, you would have to ask a psychologist.

The question for those who oppose endless war is, What have we done about it? A mass movement in the 1960's that added up to an uprising by a vast segment of society perhaps had something to do with ending the conflict in Vietnam. In spite of these protests, the empire was able to extend the war by an extra five years all the way to 1973, when it agreed to end it on the same terms that had been offered in 1968 to Nobel "peace laureate" Henry Kissinger. There has been no significant anti-war protest since then, and certainly none that succeeded in preventing or ending war. Why?

First, the draft was ended. This put an end to the involvement of average US families in the wars of empire, and therefore ending the requirement for consent of the governed. The strategists realized that the draft was a disaster for the empire. The new, much better and cheaper way to procure cannon fodder for the endless war is to enlist the children of the underclass, by using economic oppression in order to deprive them of any other means of advancement except military service.

Second, the military has been outsourced and privatized, requiring even less involvement by US families in the military, and less need for their consent. "You're all volunteers, so shut up" is the attitude.

Third, the vastly increased scope of domestic spying by the NSA and other government agencies has helped keep everyone under control and stifle dissent.

Fourth is the tight government/corporate control of the US media, which has become consummately successful in brainwashing and propagandizing the population.

Finally, there is the war on whistleblowers and journalists who expose the truth, from Tom Drake to William Binney, Sibel Simons, Jesselyn Radack, Bradley Manning and Julian Assange. If necessary, the police, who are vastly more militarized than in the past, together with national guard troops, can squash any dissent like a bug. All these measures ensure that efforts at reform pursued through legal, nonviolent means such as voting, protest, civil disobedience, civil resistance, etc. will have absolutely no effect. The only action that can possibly stop the empire in its tracks is cutting off its food supply—the tax money on which it lives. We have to starve the beast through divestment, capital expatriation, tax resistance, tax refusal and tax revolt. Former Secretary of State Alexander Haig told us this flat out in the 1980's when, being confronted with huge protests over US Central American policy, he said: "Let them protest all they want as long as they pay their taxes." Truer words were never uttered by a US official. Is there any evidence to contradict his statement? Has any other measure had any impact on the war machine? The honest answer is no. Millions of people around the world protested before the 2003 invasion of Iraq. These protests were ignored. No amount of protest or other efforts can stop it, because it doesn't cut off the empire's food supply of money and fear. Only by cutting off its funds by not paying taxes can we stop the empire.

Many have said that the US doesn't need tax money as it survives on endless debt. Yes, the empire lives on debt, but the ability to sell debt is based on the bond rating of US treasury bonds. Most recently in June, 2014 S&P gave the US a AA+ rating with "[stable outlook](#)."

If there is any doubt about the US credit rating, the ability to sell debt to continue financing the empire comes into question. The ability to collect taxes is what maintains the US bond rating. Any reduction of the US bond rating, and interest rates have to go up in order to continue attracting more investment. Then the interest on the debt balloons out of control and becomes unrepayable—never mind the principal, which they have no intention of ever paying back. By the way, the Tea Party's efforts to shut down government by refusing to raise the debt ceiling was helping this effort for a time, although for different reasons. They thought that the welfare system is bankrupting the country. This is a laughable claim, because welfare spending looks negligible when compared to military spending. Still, they did manage to lower the bond rating for a time. Shutting down the federal government is a step in the right direction, and since in recent years only the Tea Party has managed to do it, let's give them some credit.

If the US became unable to reliably collect taxes, then its ability to finance the empire with debt would be diminished, and the US would have to turn to increasing taxes—another politically unpalatable choice, especially in the age of the Tea Party, when the empire's main constituency is dead-set against more taxes. So it is absolutely clear that the only thing that could stop the empire is a tax revolt. It wouldn't even have to be that big; the slightest question about the ability of the federal government to collect taxes could reduce the bond rating. Even a minor reduction could raise interest rates enough to make the US debt unrepayable.

Let's get down to brass tacks: How do you avoid paying taxes, when the IRS withholds our salaries, and the tables are rigged to withhold about 15% more than necessary on average, so 80% of people get a refund? Did you think that this is a coincidence? No, this is a one-year interest-free loan to the empire from taxpayers. But it's actually quite simple not to pay taxes. Get a W-4 form, write EXEMPT in the space provided, and turn it in to your friendly HR office. Your employer is not allowed to change it unless directed by the IRS. Normally they have no reason to question it.

Here's what happened last time it was tried on a big scale. In 2007, Code Pink joined the War Resisters League to organize a national project for war tax refusal, to "Stop Bush's Wars." This was not a true tax revolt, just more or less a referendum on how many people would potentially support withholding a portion of their taxes owed, even a token amount. The online petition asked people if they would be willing to commit to withhold some of their taxes, even \$1, if 100,000 other people would agree to do the same. Out of the US population of 316 million, how many people do you think signed it? About 2,000. So you see, there is not much evidence that people will do the only thing that could stop the empire: a true Tea Party tax revolt.

What this implies is that the empire will continue to churn along, and debt will continue to build up, because any other approach to paying for it is not feasible, and therefore collapse is inevitable. The aftermath of collapse is unpredictable; maybe there will be a soft landing, maybe not. But unless you are willing to engage in some form of tax revolt, collapse is inevitable. You will get to live with the results: stage a tax revolt now, or face collapse later.

Are you sure you want to take your chances on collapse? The results of a personal tax revolt are predictable: retribution with penalties and interest from the IRS; living in fear of having your salary, your property, even your house seized, or worse, your door broken down by federal agents (although these extreme measures don't happen too often, they happen often enough to instill fear). Perhaps there would be loss of income, or even your job. Losing one's job often leads to depression, divorce, drug or alcohol abuse, etc. So you may prefer collapse after all: loss of your savings, no heat, electricity or trash removal, shops looted or closed, armed gangs roaming the streets... Your choice!

On the other hand, collapse might go well! Hope springs eternal in the optimistic American heart.

We are (or used to be) the “can-do” people. Maybe we can-do collapse better than anyone else? Doubtful though if you read Dmitry Orlov’s Collapse Gap presentation.

The results of collapse later are likely to be worse then the effects of tax revolt now. Especially, since the IRS takes years to catch up to exempt W-4 forms, and it would be even harder to crack down if it were being done en masse. But it’s perfectly understandable if you opt to do nothing now and suffer no consequences, while engaging in ineffective protest to assuage your conscience. You probably have a family to support, an expensive hobby, or some other excuse. So you decide to take your chances with collapse later. After all, collapse might turn out OK for you! This psychology is quite understandable. I truly hope that collapse will be as painless as you wish it, but somehow I doubt it. Good luck though! Whatever happens, you will have to live with your decision for the rest of your life—be it long or short.

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Jungle Drum Prose/Poetry. <http://jungledrum.lingama.net/news/story-1372.html>