
Interview: Dr. Chalmers Johnson

Singapore Summit Could Signal 'End of American Empire in Asia'

Dr. Johnson is President of the Japan Policy Research Institute, and Professor Emeritus at the University of California, San Diego. He is also the author of two books, MITI and the Japanese Miracle and, this year, Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire. He gave the following interview to Kathy Wolfe on Nov. 25.

EIR: In your recent book, *Blowback*, you open by saying that the United States has imprudently continued to expand its global empire, despite the end of the Cold War, especially in Asia; that American financial action has forced economic globalization profitable to the United States, whatever the cost to others, and that sooner or later, as all empires do, unless we mend our ways, the United States will face economic and political retribution. What does the U.S. election crisis mean in this context?

Dr. Johnson: I'm afraid it won't stop the process of U.S. decline. Neither Gore nor Bush shows any sign of changing the direction, so America will continue to over-extend itself, making more and more demands upon countries around the world, until the inevitable happens. But our arrogance will not let us see this. We know from history that expanding world empires sooner or later over-extend. This is precisely what happened to the Soviet Union, but Americans can't imagine it happening here.

When *Blowback* was published ten months ago, I said that it was possible for the U.S. to lose its authority, in a way comparable to the collapse of the U.S.S.R. Now, it's hard to believe how fast that's happening! Not that Gore's any better, but Bush first bought the nomination and then stole the election and yet he's obviously totally incapable of governing. If you were in Mexico watching a PRI Presidential election, and the voting in, say, Chiapas, was held up; then you discovered that the Governor of Chiapas was the younger brother of the PRI candidate, everyone in the country would understand exactly what was going on! Jeb Bush is so quiet because he almost surely had the whole thing rigged from the get-go, and that's why the Republicans are screaming so loudly about Democratic fraud—it's a preemptive strike. And now the Supreme Court has gotten involved.

EIR: A neo-conservative Republican Supreme Court at that.

Dr. Johnson: Exactly. When our major institutions, such as

the Supreme Court, become the playthings of party politics, that is the unravelling of the American System. One of the most obvious problems with the Florida election is the open partisanship of the people charged with supervising it. The most elementary requirement for justice is that a judge not be party to the dispute he is judging.

EIR: The Founding Editor of *EIR*, Lyndon LaRouche, made a speech in Berlin in October 1988, forecasting that the Soviet empire would collapse, unless they changed economic and military strategy. This was considered impossible at the time.

Dr. Johnson: Certainly, in 1988 it was unimaginable to most Americans that the Soviet Union would fall apart only three years later, just break up and vanish. What destroyed the Soviet Union was its imperial over-extension, not competition with the U.S. Americans believe they are immune from this fate, and they are wrong. It can happen here. Suppose the U.S. economy turns sour? The Nasdaq is already headed south; supposed we have an economic downturn? Most of our so-called production is outsourced abroad, we have a record trade deficit, we're living on over \$1 billion a day in capital inflows from the rest of the world, and we have a ballooning indebtedness of private households. The electoral crisis has made us a laughingstock internationally. What will the rest of the world do if they see, on top of our political paralysis, an economic



Dr. Chalmers Johnson comments on the ASEAN-Plus-3 summit, "It is long overdue for the East Asians to create their own institutions, and what's impressive is from whence the new initiatives are coming."

crisis set in?

Another alarming thing is CINCPAC [Commander in Chief of the U.S. Pacific Command] Adm. Dennis Blair's recent speech in Melbourne, in which he argued that the U.S. will remain in force in Asia, in military force, mainly to keep the pressure on China. The Australians at this meeting were terribly shrill against China, and they wanted the U.S. openly recognized as the successor to the British Empire, to protect them and their lifestyle, against their non-Caucasian neighbors. Why should Admiral Blair be making such an important foreign policy statement? Why are the Pentagon and CINCPAC making American foreign policy for the Pacific? Recall that Admiral Blair's predecessor is now American ambassador to Beijing. If neither Presidential candidate can govern, who's in charge here? Are we looking at the start of some sort of right-wing military coup?

So, the damage abroad of the American election to American prestige is enormous, especially in East Asia where the U.S. leaders and ideologists have lectured them so strongly, saying things like, "You Asians don't have the right values," and, "The enrichment of East Asia was based on 'crony capitalism.'" And now, here we are, obviously ourselves having real trouble implementing, or even defending, democratic values. After the O.J. Simpson trial, the IMF [International Monetary Fund]-sponsored economic meltdown of East Asia in 1997, the open revolts against "globalization" that started in Seattle a year ago, the Clinton impeachment circus, and now a crooked Presidential election, no one believes a thing we say any more.

EIR: I especially wanted your comments on the Nov. 24-25 Singapore heads of state summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations plus China, Japan, and South Korea (ASEAN-Plus-3), with the sudden rapprochement of Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori, and South Korean President Kim Dae-jung. These men, whose nations are historically adversaries, clasp hands, and the local papers compare them to the Three Musketeers. They meet with the ten ASEAN countries, Kim Dae-jung calls for an Asian Free Trade Association and an Asian Investment Area, to rival the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the European Union (EU), and all 13 nations announce that it's time to study this seriously.

Dr. Johnson: Dispatches from Singapore and regional editorials thus far would indicate that this is a breakthrough. It could be the beginning of the end of the U.S. empire in Asia. It is highly significant that the leaders of Japan, China, and South Korea have agreed to hold a meeting every year, with China hosting the next one. This is extremely positive. It was most powerful, the way the South Koreans attacked globalization, saying in effect that "globalization of economies allowed the 1997 financial crisis to spread quickly." They recognized that, "due to this changing paradigm, we

have to form a community; it is time for Asia to work closely together" in order to prevent another assault of global capital against the region.

China's Premier Zhu Rongji also made a large number of positive proposals at Singapore, from concretizing the Chiang Mai Initiative on currency swaps, to expanding Mekong Delta development. The fact that China is so committed to ASEAN, to some kind of customs union, is extremely encouraging. Chinese President Jiang Zemin's recent visit to Cambodia, which was all but blacked out in the U.S. press, was extremely important, a key initiative to reopen China's ties to ASEAN. By taking such leadership, China now appears as the reasonable peace-maker in East Asia, and it becomes the U.S. which appears as the problem child, particularly in light of China's support for North-South rapprochement on the Korean peninsula while the U.S. sulked.

It is noteworthy how un-cautious Japanese Prime Minister Mori was in supporting Kim Dae-jung and the Chinese; the Japanese are normally much more cautious and reserved. The Japanese did seem a bit surprised at how fast regional multilateral organization is going forward, but not only did Mori not dig in his heels, he said the Japanese were happy about it, and that was amazing.

Malaysian Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir's remarks that the region is moving to become a unit, and the U.S. won't be able to stop it this time, is a direct reference to his original East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC) proposal. Given the U.S.'s sabotage of the EAEC and Vice President Gore's direct attacks on Mahathir the last time APEC met in Kuala Lumpur, Mahathir (and Singapore's senior minister Lee Kuan Yew) must be having a terrific laugh over the "banana republic" election in the U.S.

We also have Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong's remarks, regarding a free-trade zone and a free investment area for Asia, that he "does not see why they should not do this, because the Americans compete as a group—they have NAFTA." Also very important was the speech at the APEC [Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum] meeting in Brunei by Malaysia's Trade Minister, Ms. Rafidah Abdul Aziz, who said that Southeast Asians cannot agree to a new round of global trade liberalization talks until there is a mutually beneficial agenda agreed to in advance. She rejected the U.S. moves to push further its one-way scheme for the globalization of trade in Asia.

Then we have President Clinton's visit to Vietnam, which was entirely pulled off by the Vietnamese. The Western newswires were lying when they said that Hanoi was angry with the big popular turnout for Clinton. The population could never have gone ahead with this kind of enthusiasm without the full encouragement of the government. Hanoi wants to use this and other visits to promote the normalization of the country on the world stage. The Vietnamese leaders also went out of their way to say that they don't trust globalization, but

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clearly they do want to normalize their nation's standing in the world. Vietnam is also an important member of ASEAN.

EIR: As North Korean leader Kim Jong-il did in welcoming Kim Dae-jung to Pyongyang so warmly?

Dr. Johnson: Yes. Vietnam showed itself to be more magnanimous than the U.S., letting bygones be bygones, despite all the ruin the U.S. inflicted on the country. Just as their skillful diplomacy made France one of the best friends of Vietnam, they want to turn the U.S. into a repentant sinner who will help them.

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This is important because Japan continually suffers from American accusations that Tokyo's economic initiatives and aid programs in Asia are merely selfish promotions for Japanese big business while the U.S. pretends that it has no real control over "globalization." The American ideology is unravelling — to the advantage of Japan. Asians have been disappointed in the past by various Japanese initiatives, such as the Asian Monetary Fund (AMF) or the Miyazawa Initiative, in which Japan began to act seriously for the good of the region. But when the Americans objected to these initiatives, saying, "You can't do this, or you'll foul up the IMF," the Japanese would always back down. Now, however, China and South Korea have also gotten into the leadership act in a significantly new way, with Japan directly supporting them. On top of that, the U.S. has no functioning government. The U.S. situation gives the Asians an opening to move against American hegemony.

And they must act, because the Asians are rightfully quite worried that the whole 1997 crisis could happen again, and has in fact already begun again. They do not see any new

international financial architecture, as promised, being delivered by the U.S. Worse, they surely noticed the first Presidential debate, in which Bush was asked what he would do in an economic crisis, and he replied that he would call in [Federal Reserve Board Chairman Alan] Greenspan!

EIR: Mr. "Ayn Rand-Laissez Faire-Free Market."

Dr. Johnson: Precisely. That means they cannot trust the U.S. to help them in a financial crisis. The U.S. didn't exactly help them in 1997; they were left hanging out in the cold, with Greenspan chortling to Congress that this is what happens to countries that do not follow the Anglo-American model. When financial instability recurs, they will be left hanging again. And the "good ol' boys" from Texas surely aren't going to help them. They remember that the Republicans coming into power in Washington were the same ones who wouldn't spend a single dollar for the bailout of Mexico in 1995. Clinton had to get [then-Treasury Secretary Robert] Rubin to find a way to finance the Mexican bailout without having to ask [then-House Speaker] Newt Gingrich to authorize the money.

It seems to me fairly clear that the Asian Monetary Fund and the new idea for an ASEAN-Plus-3 free trade agreement are more serious than ever. The AMF idea has been around since 1997 as a successor to the Malaysian EAEC, and the Americans have stepped on these ideas at every turn, seeing to it that they've never gone anywhere. Yet at this year's meetings in Brunei and Singapore, these ideas are back again, alive and kicking, with many other, more radical things like a free trade agreement and other concepts, all live possibilities — and all endorsed by China. The important thing to ask is: "Why has the time finally come that the East Asian nations have begun to seriously cooperate in this way?"

Reason number one, is the great Asian fear of a re-run of 1997, with an even worse response by the Americans this time, because of the utter cop-out reply of Bush in the debates.

Reason number two: Now the Asian leaders are actually questioning whether there is a United States government, and whether there is any legitimacy to anything the U.S. does. In the past, no one thought that Japan would really be serious, because the Japanese always complied with U.S. wishes, but now, with China and South Korea taking the lead, the Japanese don't have to worry so much. This is why Mori was so cooperative; he didn't have to worry about [U.S. Ambassador

to Tokyo Thomas] Foley complaining to him afterwards, “What do you people think you are doing cooperating with the Chinese and the Koreans?”

Reason number three: South Korea and China have now joined Japan as sponsors, whereas in the past [former Japanese Vice Finance Minister Eisuke] Sakakibara and [Finance Minister Kiichi] Miyazawa were alone and therefore weak.

Reason number four: There is a growing realization in Asia that the Americans have deliberately kept East Asia without any regional organization, in order to enforce U.S. predominance in the area. Now we’re starting to reap the blowback against that old policy. The standard American excuse for the need of their presence in East Asia, is the lack of any multilateral regional organizations comparable to NATO or the EU. This is now being seen through as a ruse, just as British imperial policy was ultimately seen through. It’s a famous dictum that British imperial policy in East Asia “was often in charge of both the arson squad and the fire department,” as the professor of Chinese history, Joseph Levenson, used to put it. Their presence and their policies provoked the fires in the first place (e.g., forced sales of opium to China), and then the British were the only ones who had the equipment and troops to put the fires out. This is the same faulty rationale being given for why the U.S. should run Asia. The growing realization in East Asia is that Asia’s previous efforts at multilateral organization have failed precisely because of American interference, that the real reason for the lack of regional organization is that the U.S. has actively prevented it.

Reason number five: The Chinese are now so deeply disturbed by things like the TMD and NMD [theater and national missile defense], especially if the Bush coup goes ahead, that they are thoughtfully acting now to take leadership. They are moving past the stage of trying to figure out the Americans, which was legitimate with Clinton as President being pro-China, while the Congress was opposed. Now Clinton is gone, and whoever comes in, it appears the Americans will be the enemy of Asian economic development. Thus, China has to take leadership, and is showing an increased willingness to compromise with other nations in the region to accomplish greater unity.

Regardless of who is elected in Washington, I think that any rational person in East Asia would find it hard to accept indefinite U.S. dominance. It is long overdue for the East Asians to create their own institutions, and what’s impressive is from whence the new initiatives are coming.

Kim Dae-jung, for example. He told Clinton point blank at Brunei that Clinton should go to North Korea, in open contradiction to all the advice Clinton has received from the Pentagon and the U.S. bureaucracy. Kim Dae-jung told Clinton that Kim Jong-il is, in fact, the leader in Pyongyang, that he’s empowered to negotiate and wants to negotiate, and that Clinton should go speak to him. Kim Dae-jung generally contradicted all the “go slow, we can’t trust North Korea” nonsense spilling out of U.S. institutions. Clinton had received

uniform advice from the U.S. bureaucracy that nothing was prepared for his visit to North Korea, together with the U.S. press trashing Albright’s trip—and now Kim Dae-jung uses all his clout to put direct pressure the opposite way. “Don’t wait for a new North Korea administration, there won’t be one,” he said. “Don’t be swayed by all these negative ‘No Peace’ views of the Pentagon, please go ahead and take a chance, you’re not going to be President long anyway, please don’t leave it to the next administration, please help me lock in the peace policy now, hand over to whoever follows you, the *fait accompli* of a Presidential visit to Pyongyang.” Kim Dae-jung said this publicly; I read it in the Nov. 16 *Los Angeles Times*.

EIR: What’s your assessment on the timing of all this ASEAN-Plus-3 activity?

Dr. Johnson: The “bottom line” is that the Asians will go slow, but go slow the same way that Kim Dae-jung opened up to North Korea: slow, and steady. They will look to see if the Americans continue to drift, can’t put together a government. If we continue to throw our weight around on TMD, then the Asians will move faster. It’s like what happened to the U.S. representative to the UN Global Warming Conference in The Hague this past week, which was finally about to produce a treaty out of the Kyoto conference. As the chief U.S. delegate was making his speech finalizing the treaty, a young Dutch lady got up and hit him in the face with a pie. The U.S. press blacked it out, but the Europeans and Japanese made a big deal out of it. Correctly so.

LaRouche: Don’t Shut Down Korean Industries

On Nov. 23, Lyndon LaRouche answered questions submitted in writing following his Nov. 14 address by teleconference to an audience in Washington, D.C. and webcast to a live international audience. The questions were submitted by a correspondent from the South Korean daily Chosun Ilbo. The full text of the webcast, “Now Comes the Aftermath,” appears in EIR, Nov. 24 and Dec. 1.

Q: 1. How would you evaluate the performance of the IMF [International Monetary Fund] program in Korea for the past three years? Has it totally failed?

LaRouche: From the standpoint of the human race, IMF policy throughout East and Southeast Asia will be judged a failure at the point the observer recognizes either, that the IMF system has collapsed world-wide, as it will, soon, or, that the observer recognizes the inevitability of that collapse. However, IMF policy has been a success insofar as it accom-