
Book Review

America's Turn From Republic to Empire

by Carl Osgood

Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy and the End of the Republic

by Chalmers Johnson

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“American leaders now like to compare themselves to imperial Romans, even though they do not know much Roman history,” writes Chalmers Johnson in his new book *Sorrows of Empire*. “The main lesson for the United States ought to be how the Roman Republic evolved into an empire, in the process destroying its system of elections for its two consuls (its chief executives), rendering the Roman senate impotent, ending forever the occasional popular assemblies and legislative *comitia* that were the heart of republican life, and ushering in permanent military dictatorship.”

Indeed, the example of the Roman Empire ought to be studied by anyone concerned about the fate of the United States. Although his historical evaluation of republican Rome is off the mark (agricultural production in Italy had come to depend on an army of slaves long before Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon), Johnson credibly shows that the trajectory that the neo-con cabal—led by Vice President Dick Cheney and his policy of perpetual warfare—has put America on, is that of empire, and is doomed to the same fate as that of Rome.

Relying on publicly available documentation, reports of investigative journalists, and the statements of the “empire builders” themselves, Johnson builds a picture of a vast U.S. military empire that encompasses the globe. He traces its origins to long before the present administration took office. He takes up the issue of American militarism, which he identifies as the military-industrial complex that President Dwight Eisenhower warned against in 1961. He identifies the chicken-hawks by name, and in their own words, as the driving force behind this militarism, noting as had retired Marine Gen. Anthony Zinni, and others, that though they are readily willing to apply military force in pursuit of their global empire, they have little in the way of military experience them-

selves. In his next-to-last chapter, Johnson challenges the economic assumptions of the new empire; much of it reads as though it was lifted from the pages of *EIR*. Missing from Johnson’s book, however, is an understanding of the historical battle in defense of the principle of the general welfare, which formed the context in which the United States republic was founded, and to which its key founders were committed. Without that crucial element, Johnson’s historical commentary tends to degenerate into a crazy, left-wing version of American history, which is no more truthful than the right-wing version which he attacks.

Towards New Roman Legions

In his infamous 1957 book *The Soldier and the State*, Harvard professor Samuel Huntington wrote, “The skill of the [military] officer is the management of violence; his responsibility is the military security of his client, society.” The ends to which his skills are to be put to use are not for him to question, his motivation being “a technical love for his craft and the sense of social obligation to utilize this craft for the benefit of society.” In Huntington’s view, there is no relationship between the military establishment and the idea of the nation. He takes this notion so far that he condemns the German generals who disagreed with Hitler’s war plans in the 1930s, and Gen. Douglas MacArthur for his disagreement with President Harry Truman on the conduct of the Korean War. “Both the German officers who joined the resistance to Hitler and General MacArthur forgot that it is not the function of military officers to decide questions of war and peace,” Huntington wrote. Though never quoting him, Johnson has detected Huntington’s notion of military professionalism: “The goal of professionalism is to produce soldiers who will fight solely and simply because they have been ordered to do so and not because they necessarily identify with, or have any interest in, the political goals of the war.”

Johnson traces the origins of this problem to the Korean War, when the military tried to inculcate the troops with what Johnson describes as a “John Wayne view of the world,” to substitute for the lack of public support for the war. Professionalization could not really get going until after the end of the draft, however, and the influx of recruits who joined the military primarily for economic reasons. And the unsatisfactory conclusion of the Vietnam War became a right-wing “lesson,” that foreign policy had to become the province of national security specialists who operated with little scrutiny by the media, the Congress or the public. “The result,” Johnson writes, “has been the emergence of a coterie of professional militarists who classify everything they do as secret and who have been appointed to senior positions throughout the executive branch.”

Johnson documents how this coterie has rewritten American strategic doctrine such that the pursuit of perpetual war is now its object. For example, he quotes the policy statement of U.S. Space Command (since absorbed into U.S. Strategic

Command) entitled “Vision for 2020” which states that United States must dominate space—to include denying other countries access to space—to protect U.S. interests and investments. He compares this aggressive, unilateral outlook to that of the 19th-Century British Empire, which made colonies of Egypt and South Africa “so it said, to protect the sea approaches to its imperial enclave in India. . . . But this kind of logic, comparable to the ‘domino theory’ in the Vietnam war, leads to an endless progression of places and commitments that must be protected, resulting inevitably in imperial overstretch, bankruptcy and popular disaffection, precisely the maladies that plagued Edwardian Britain.”

America’s Empire of Bases

Such logic also leads to an insatiable appetite for spreading the military across the globe, a subject which Johnson delves into in some detail. According to official government reports, the U.S. had some 725 bases in 38 countries, and over 254,000 military personnel overseas, just before the Sept. 11, 2001 terror attacks. Those numbers, of course, expanded after 9/11, with the building of several new bases in Central Asia for the deployment into Afghanistan, and the buildup in the Persian Gulf region and subsequent invasion of Iraq. Even so, those numbers do not give a complete picture by any means of the U.S. overseas military reach, given that there are bases in some countries, such as Israel, that go unacknowledged, and intelligence listening posts all over the world that are not even listed. Johnson lists some of the more prominent of these spy posts, including RAF Menwith Hill in North Yorkshire, England (said to be the largest spy station in the world), as well as others that serve as listening posts for the National Security Agency or satellite downlink sites for the National Reconnaissance Office.

Johnson quotes Marine Maj. Gen. Smedley Butler, who wrote in 1933 that he had spent most of his military service as a “high-class muscle man for big business, for Wall Street, and the bankers.” Big business included the oil companies, which, Johnson says, are profiting no less, today, than they did during the early part of the 20th Century. But whereas in the 1920s and 1930s, the countries had names like Nicaragua, Honduras, and Haiti, the main area of oil company interest now is in Central Asia. Johnson ties in such names as Condoleezza Rice (who sat on the board of Chevron), with Zalmay Khalilzad and Henry Kissinger, both of whom were involved in Unocal’s attempt to negotiate a pipeline deal with the Taliban rulers of Afghanistan. He goes after the entire chickenhawk gang that brought us the Iraq war, including Richard Perle, David and Meyrav Wurmser, and present Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Doug Feith.

Johnson doesn’t limit his exposure of America’s empire of bases to Central and Southwest Asia, however. He notes the decades-long tendency to establish bases elsewhere, in countries with fascist governments, as well, including Franco’s Spain, and Greece after the 1967 military coup there. In

the case of Spain, Johnson suggests that a case might be made that the United States had to deal with the leader it found there; no such case can be made for Greece, because America actively backed the overthrow of the elected government which would not accede to a U.S.-imposed solution to the Cyprus issue that favored Turkey. The result was a military dictatorship led by a Greek Army colonel, George Papadopoulos, trained by the United States, who was an avowed admirer of Hitler.

The Greek coup came only two years before the beginning of the “strategy of tension” terror campaign in Italy that began with bombings and ended in the kidnapping and murder of a prime minister, Aldo Moro, in 1978. As *EIR* has shown, the strategy of tension was the product of right-wing networks that had evolved from the efforts of the same synarchist banking interests that had promoted the rise to power of both Hitler and Mussolini, to recruit top Nazis after World War II to be deployed “against Communism.” Was the 1967 Greek coup also a product of the same networks? Johnson never explores that possibility, even though the evidence he presents points in that direction.

The Mission of America

Johnson concludes his book by warning that the American empire will go the way of all that preceded it unless something changes. That change, he hopes, will come from the people retaking control of the Congress, and turning it back into “a genuine assembly of democratic representatives.” This is the second major failing of Johnson’s book, in that he doesn’t identify the original mission of the United States, or who represents that mission today.

As the late Graham Lowry showed in his 1988 book, *How the Nation Was Won*, the founding of the United States was the outcome of a nearly 150-year battle against the oligarchical worldview, then and still today centered in London. The battle was to create a nation-state whose purpose was to promote the general welfare of its population, through scientific and technological progress, as opposed to the oligarchical system of looting. In a 1997 article, Lowry wrote that “America’s war of Independence was mobilized around the highest conception of mankind, as boldly set forth in the Declaration of Independence. Its military objective was to defeat the British Empire, so that all of humanity might enjoy the blessings of being created in the image of God. The foundations had been laid by Benjamin Franklin and George Washington, who seized every opportunity to promote scientific progress and economic development, and hammered the weak flanks inevitably exposed by any system of imperial rule.”

That mission-orientation, carried through by such leaders as Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt, and represented today by Lyndon LaRouche, can reverse the turn to empire. Otherwise, as Chalmers Johnson warns us, “Nemesis, the goddess of retribution and vengeance, the punisher of pride and hubris, waits impatiently for her meeting with us.”