

## Chapter 20

# Militarism and Empire

*Final Draft August 2009*

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Most Americans think of the military power of the United States in roughly the following way:

The world is a dangerous place. There are war-making aggressive, hostile forces in the world, countries which oppress their own people and threaten others, as well political movements that are prepared to use violence to get their way. We must oppose these threats to our national security. But we are not aggressors. We have a Department of Defense, not a Department of War. We use our military power to defend freedom, to defend democracy, to protect America, but not to dominate other countries and people. If sometimes serious problems arise from our use of military power, as in the Vietnam War or in the Iraq war, mostly these reflect bad judgment, poor information or inadequate understanding of the context rather than bad motives or malevolent goals. Even though we are not perfect, we are a moral force in the world and use our military power for moral purposes.

That is the dominant view of the American military. Three stark facts about the reality of American military power stand in tension with this idealized view.

1. *The United States spends orders of magnitude more on the military than any other country.* As indicated in Figures 20.1 and 20.2, in 2008 military spending in the United States accounted for *nearly half of the world's total military spending*.<sup>1</sup> This is more than the next 46 highest spending countries in the world combined. It is 5.8 times larger than the spending on the military in China, 10.2 times larger than in Russia and almost 100 times larger than in Iran. If you add to the American figures the spending by the strongest allies of the United States – the NATO countries, Japan, South Korea and Australia – the total comes to 72% of the world's total. The United States is not simply the world's only superpower; our military dwarfs that of all potential adversaries combined.

-- Figures 20.1 and 20.2 about here --

2. *The use of military power is a pervasive aspect of U.S. foreign policy.* The United States uses military power as a central instrument of national policy throughout the world more than any other country. The threat of force and the actual use of force are frequent strategies in pursuit of what are perceived as United States interests. To facilitate this, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the United States had over 730 military bases and installations in over 50 countries (see Figure 20.3). It once was said that the sun never set on the British Empire. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century it never sets on the U.S. military. The U.S. has directly used its troops to overthrow the governments of other countries or to attempt to

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<sup>1</sup> These figures come from a report on military spending on the website Global Issues, <http://www.globalissues.org/article/75/world-military-spending>. The original data analysis comes mainly from the Center for Arms Control and nonproliferation, Washington, D.C., <http://www.armscontrolcenter.org/>.

do so more frequently than any other country since the end of WWII. The Iraq War is only the most recent example. It also has frequently subsidized proxy military forces for these purposes when, for political reasons, it was difficult to use its own.

A partial list of the interventions since the end of WWII is given in Figure 20.4. Some of these interventions involve the overthrow of democratic regimes (e.g. Iran 1953; Guatemala, 1954; Dominican Republic, 1965; Chile 1973). Others involve fighting insurgencies against authoritarian regimes which we supported (e.g. the Philippines, 1948; Vietnam, 1960-75), or supporting insurgencies against regimes we opposed (Cuba, 1961; Angola, 1976-92; Nicaragua, 1981-90; Afghanistan, 1981-88). In only two cases – the Korean War in 1951-53 and the first Gulf War, 1990 – was the United States responding to military aggression by a foreign state which had any plausible bearing on American national security. The United States uses its military to impose its will around the world, not simply to defend itself from military attack.

-- Figures 20.3 and 20.4 –

3. *In the U.S., the domestic economy and internal politics are deeply affected by the military.* The military budget constitutes a huge part of government spending, and of necessity, this reduces the flexibility for domestic programs. Figure 20.5 indicates that if we include in military spending the current cost of past wars (mainly interest payment on debt attributable to past military spending, military pensions and veterans administration spending), then for Fiscal year 2009 total military spending was just under 45% of the annual Federal budget.<sup>2</sup> Since this has been true, with some ups and downs, since around 1940, the result has been a deep penetration of military spending in the American. Particularly in the context of a state that has been reluctant to directly create jobs through public investment in the civilian economy, military spending has become one of the principle ways that the Federal Government intervenes in the economy through contracts for military products. In addition, military spending is one of the main ways that the government provides funding for research and development, which often has large spillovers for the civilian economy. The manufacture of weapons is also one of the sectors in which the U.S. has a large positive trade balance, thus adding to its importance for the overall health of the economy. Whenever there are proposals to end particular weapons systems or close military bases, members of Congress from the affected region object on the grounds that this will harm the economy. Often they do not even bother to debate the issues on grounds of military policy of efficiency. Political coalitions form around military spending for economic reasons, and this further distorts the role of the military in foreign policy.

-- Figure 20.5 about here --

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<sup>2</sup> These figures are before the addition of the huge stimulus package and bank-bailout spending beginning in the fall of 2008 and continuing into 2009. It is not a straightforward matter to estimate the amount of total military spending, since some military spending is hidden in non-military agencies, and the attribution of costs of past wars is difficult. As a result, there are different overall estimates depending upon the precise methodology used. The War Resisters League, for example, estimates total military spending as 54% of the 2009 Fiscal Year Budget rather than the 44% estimated by the *Friends Committee on National Legislation* reported in Figure 20.5.

These three facts suggest that the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is not simply a society with a strong military; it has become a militaristic society. *Militarism* can be defined as a political and ideological orientation towards international affairs in which three conditions are present:

- (1) The use and threat of military power is a central strategy of international policy.
- (2) The military plays a pervasive role in the economic and political life of a country.
- (3) Military strength is the highest priority of government policy.

Militarism is not just the “policy” of a particular administration; it is institutionalized into our economic, political, and social structure. Over the past half century American militarism has been built up by administrations lead by both the Republican and Democratic parties. It is supported, although perhaps with differing fervor, by both parties, and the leadership of both parties advocates an American role in the world that depends on militarism. All American politicians in leadership roles argue that we must have a strong military that is flexible in ways that enable it to be deployed on short notice around the world. No viable presidential candidate can stand up and say: “the American military should be used exclusively for the defense of the United States against attack. We should dismantle bases abroad, and bring our troops home. Our military budget should be tailored entirely for defensive purposes.”<sup>3</sup> If military action abroad is needed for humanitarian reasons, then this must be done by international authority, not by unilateral action of individual states.” Such a position is completely outside of legitimate political discourse in the United States.

### **A SKETCH OF THE HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY OF AMERICAN MILITARISM<sup>4</sup>**

It was not always the case that militarism was a prominent feature of American political culture. At the founding of the United States there was widespread objection to the idea of a standing army and great skepticism about the use of military power for national objectives. George Washington and James Madison expressed these worries in the early years of the Republic:

Washington: “Overgrown military establishments are under any form of government inauspicious to liberty, and are to be regarded as particularly hostile to Republican liberty.”

Madison: “Of all enemies to public liberty, war is, perhaps, the most to be dreaded, because it comprises and develops the germ of every other. War is the parent of armies; from these proceed debts and taxes; and armies, debt and taxes

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<sup>3</sup> In the 2008 presidential three marginal candidates took this position: Ralph Nader and Denise Kucinich on the left, and Ron Paul, a Republican on the libertarian right. Ron Paul’s position was especially surprising to many people. He advocated cutting the military budget by 2/3, closing all bases abroad, and ending the practice of global military interventions. This is in keeping with a consistent libertarian positions that argues for a minimalist state that only provides for security.

<sup>4</sup> This discussion draws heavily from Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004)

are the known instrument for bringing the many under the domination of the few.”<sup>5</sup>

Nearly 200 years later Dwight Eisenhower expressed the same worry in his famous farewell address:

“This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience...In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence...of the military industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted.”

Even more poignantly, he rejected militarism as a tolerable way of life:

“Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. The world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hope of its children...This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron.”<sup>6</sup>

Anti-militarism is thus also a current throughout American history. But right from the start anti-militarism was challenged because of because of the importance of military power for the conquest of lands in North America itself. This became crystallized early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as Manifest Destiny -- the belief that the United States then on the Eastern part of North America had a natural right to expand westward to the Pacific Ocean. Military power was pivotal to this conquest: initially through displacing indigenous people, and in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by invading and taking over territory from Mexico – Texas and California. Most historians today acknowledge that the Mexican War of 1848 was a war of conquest initiated by the United States.

The key turning point for the emergence of a more coherently militarist state occurred at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Spanish-American War launched the modern period of U.S. imperial wars and conquests, including the military suppression of resistance by conquered people. The Philippine resistance to American occupation in 1901-1903 is the starkest example, in which 200,000 Filipinos were killed. The U.S. justified this suppression on the grounds of racial superiority and the need to liberate the Philippines from Spanish control. Ironically, this ideology contributed to the Japanese sense of entitlement to conquest as the right of Great Nations.

Before the Spanish America War, the US military was a somewhat chaotic, relatively underdeveloped organization, not really organized in a way that could be readily deployed for national purposes. This changed in the years running up to WWI during which time a modern military bureaucracy was created, modeled in some ways after what was seen as the most successful military organization around – that of Prussia.

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<sup>5</sup> Cited in Chalmers Johnson, *ibid.* p.

<sup>6</sup> Speech delivered before the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Washington, D.C. April 16, 1953

Woodrow Wilson articulated what was to become the core ideology of the use of American military power, which Chalmers Johnson calls the ideology of “crusades”. The earliest example was Wilson’s military expeditions to Mexico during the Mexican revolution to teach it democracy. These interventions were justified on grounds of benevolence and liberation. WWI was proclaimed “the war to end all wars,” the war “to make the world safe for democracy.” These were very lofty, humanitarian goals, and were sincerely meant, even if they always mixed with other motives.

After WWI there was a general military demobilization, and tendencies towards militarism were largely curtailed. During the first part of the Great Depression, the military was substantially neglected as the American state built the institutions of the New Deal affirmative state. It was only during the late 1930s as the threat of war with Germany and Japan grew, that a serious effort at building U.S. military capacity was begun.

WWII was a monumental military mobilization for the United States, by far the most intense foreign military conflict in American history and the most popular. Still, even after WWII there was a good chance of demilitarization and briefly after the war it looked like the military would be significantly reduced in scale and importance. The Cold War changed all that. The rivalry with the Soviet Union, fueled by virulent anti-Communism, created the context for definitively consolidating militarism as a core feature of American politics and society.

From the early 1950s to the present, the military has played an absolutely central role in both government spending and the US economy. Throughout the period military spending was at least \$300 billion/year in 2008 dollars, and in four periods it shot up to over \$400 billion: during the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Reagan military build-up and the Afghan/Iraq War. Defense contracts are the single most important way that the government intervenes in the economy, providing jobs, research, technical change, and economic stimulation. The livelihood of millions of Americans depends upon military spending. And, ultimately, this means on war: in the absence of war it is almost impossible to maintain over a long period of time huge military spending, so the deep dependency of the economy on militarism itself promotes militarism.

-- Figure 20.6 --

This kind of massive military spending has significant corrupting effects on politics and economics. There can be no real competition in the contracting process, since so few companies can really place bids, and thus military contracts are chronically plagued with inflated prices with huge amounts of fraud. The Inspector General of the Pentagon reported in May 2001, even before the rapid expansion of military spending following 9/11, that something like a trillion dollars of spending on the Pentagon’s books could not be traced. The massive scandals during the Iraq War by Halliburton and other military contractors are just the most recent instance of a long line of such pillaging of the public purse. Because military contracts are surrounded by secrecy under the shield of “national security” and “classified information”, it is almost impossible to have adequate monitoring of military spending.

Militarism became an organic part of American society in the decades of the Cold War. In the aftermath of the Cold War one might have thought that there could have been

a reversal of this trajectory, and there were some signs of this happening. There was much talk in the 1990s of the “Peace Dividend” and how this might open up policies for a wide range of important public investments: environmental protection, energy transformation, high speed rail, rebuilding infrastructure. But since the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center there has been an energetic reinvigoration of militarism in the name of fighting the war on terrorism. This reinvigoration was backed by an extreme version of the doctrine of the supremacy of American military might and the right of the United States to unilaterally decide when and where to intervene in the world on the basis of its own views of its national interest.

### **MOTIVATIONS FOR MILITARISM IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: THE PROBLEM OF “EMPIRE”**

The historical trajectory describes the development of our enormous military machine, its importance to the American economy and its use as a tool of foreign policy. But still this leaves unanswered: what are the real motives behind American militarism? Why does the United States so aggressively use its military power around the world?

There is no single, simple answer. We do not think it is possible to point to one overriding factor or motive and say: this explains American militarism. Most pervasive, durable features of a social system are supported through complex combinations of interests and motivations rather than some single overriding cause. These complex interconnected motivations and interests help explain the broad political coalition behind militarism. When we say that militarism is an “institution” what we mean, in part, is that it becomes self-perpetuating because the interests that support militarism are in significant ways generated and reinforced by militarism itself.

Analyzing the motivations and interests behind militarism is also complicated by the problem of ideology -- the beliefs people hold about the world and how it works. For example, consider the problem of national security, one of the motives behind militarism. One view during the Cold War was that the USSR and other communist countries really would militarily attack the US if they could. Communism was viewed by some people as an aggressive, militaristic force in the world that directly threatened capitalist democracies like the U.S., and thus the only way to protect the United States was to have a very aggressive military capacity. The best defense is an offense, as the sports metaphor goes. Other people argued that we really had no reason to fear such attack, that a policy of engagement, international cooperation, and strengthening of international institutions would be the best way to advance national security. These differences reflect in part different views about how the world works, about what sorts of strategies will produce what sorts of outcomes. These are very difficult matters to sort out.

The problem of sorting out the underlying reasons and motivations for militarism is a particularly pressing issue for the opponents to military aggression. Before the outset of the Iraq War, protesters in the run-up to the War held signs saying “No Blood for Oil”. This implied a theory that one of the driving motivations for the war was the desire to control oil reserves in the Middle East. If that was indeed a central motive, then seeking ways of reducing American dependence on foreign oil by developing a new energy system would be part of anti-militarism initiatives. But if oil as such was more of a side

issue, and militarism is more based on a broader motive for American global pre-eminence, then energy independence might not do much to undermine the structural foundations of militarism.

We believe that six different clusters of motivations play a role in sustaining American militarism. In different times and contexts one or another of these may become preeminent and others become less important, but the long-term robustness of American militarism comes from the ways in which they interact.

### **1. Specific economic interests.**

This is the simplest motivation for the use of American military power abroad: it serves specific economic interests of powerful sectors of American capitalism. There are certainly instances in which this is the case. In the 1920s the United States sent the Marines on several occasions to small Central American countries to protect the interests of the United Fruit Company. In the 1950s the US overthrew the elected government in Guatemala which was interested in land reform, and the government of Iran that wanted to nationalize the oil industry. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the strongest candidate for a narrow economic motivation for militarism is the desire to control crucial global resources, especially oil. The large oil companies are powerful corporations that have great access to the heights of political power and in some situations considerable influence on public policy. The US is highly dependent upon foreign oil, and some people believe that the only way to guarantee those supplies is for the US to directly dominate the sources. This issue is likely to become ever-more pressing in the next three or four decades, as oil supplies begin to be depleted and the demand for oil from rapidly industrializing countries like China increase. There are alternatives, of course: massive effort to develop alternative energy supplies and conservation, but both of those would require more direct economic intervention by the state, and in any case will take a long time to achieve. In the meantime it is essential to protect our sources of oil, and the use of military force is one strategy for doing so.

### **2. Maintenance of and expansion of global capitalism in ways that are beneficial for American-based corporations.**

Large, American-based corporations make investments all over the world. To do so, they need a global economic environment in which they have relatively open access to world markets and their investments are protected from confiscation by governments. One of the motivations for a large and effective military is that force can play a role in securing these conditions. In earlier periods of capitalist development, this was one of the central motivations for colonialism: colonial empires, forged through military conquest, provided access to markets and products for capitalists based in the home countries of colonial powers.

Colonialism more or less came to an end in the decades following the Second World War, but the need for a secure global environment for capital accumulation remained, and military power continued to play a role in creating and protecting that environment. In particular, American military power played an active role in opposing certain kinds of nationalist movements and revolutionary socialist movements in poor countries that posed a potential threat to global capitalism in general and American corporate interests

in particular. The fact of the Chinese Revolution in 1949 and the earlier Russian Revolution raised the specter of more and more parts of the developing world seceding from world capitalism. One of the tasks of the American military, therefore, was to make this less likely by raising the costs of anti-capitalist struggles and make it less likely that when revolutions did occur that they would be shining examples of alternatives. This is the kind of reasoning that is often used to explain things like the War in Vietnam. The United States did not really have significant direct economic interests in Vietnam. Our concern was more that if an anticapitalist revolution succeeded there and if it was successful in improving the lives of the people, then in the long-term this would reduce the scope for global capitalism, and that in turn would harm American economic interests.

These first two motivations for militarism are often referred to as “empire” or “imperialism”: the use of military force to back the global economic interests and expansion of American capitalism.

### **3. National security**

National security is certainly one of the motivations behind militarism. In the Cold War many people believed that Communism in general and the Soviet Union in particular (and maybe China as well), did pose a real military threat to the US. Even if the threat was not imminent – few careful analysts really feared a direct attack by the USSR – there was a fear that over a long period of time this military threat could grow and that we needed to counter it with a fairly aggressive policy of military containment, which meant above all militarily intervening to prevent “the spread of communism.” During the Vietnam War, defenders of the war argued that it was better to fight the communists in Southeast Asia than on the beaches of California. Even if most people felt that this was overheated rhetoric, nevertheless it reflected a belief that communist insurgencies in poor countries, backed by the Soviet Union and China to varying degrees, posed some kind of long term threat to American security. To counter this threat it was sometimes necessary to support dictators and even overthrow democracies, but this was defended on the grounds of protecting the U.S. from future communist aggression.

After the end of the Cold War this threat disappeared, and with it an important prop to militarism. New threats, however, were soon found and crystallized in the War on Terror directed against Islamic fundamentalists. The attack on the World Trade Center became the anchor for the view that the United States was seriously threatened by a global network of malevolent, ruthless fanatics. Nightmare scenarios of biological weapons being released in large American cities or small nuclear bombs carried in suitcases being exploded were taken seriously in the mass media and used to justify a renewed emphasis on the importance of military power for national security.

### **4. Distinctive interests of the military-industrial complex itself.**

Militarism is, in significant ways, a self-perpetuating system. Once it is in place, then large numbers of people with considerable economic power develop a strong stake in militarism itself. Cuts in military programs hurt powerful corporations. But they also hurt workers and communities, and this is very important: our national economy has become deeply dependent upon public spending in this particular area. The result is the military

contractors form a coalition with regional politicians and workers whose jobs are threatened by reductions in military spending and fight for military budgets. To justify such budgets you need threats. Since the world is filled with so much uncertainty, it is usually easy to find threats if it is one's interests to do so.

It might possible, of course, to replace all cuts in military spending with equivalent increases in job-creating civilian spending, so in principle it could be possible to accommodate many of the economic interests currently supported by militarism. The Federal Government could, for example, build a national high-speed rail system, which would help with energy independence, for a fraction of the cost of what it spends on the military. It is easy to show that such spending would improve the quality of life and even improve American productivity far more than military spending. Corporations currently receiving military contracts could receive high-speed rail contracts, and many of the workers in the defense sector could get jobs in the newly expanded civilian infrastructure sector. This is what could happen *in principle*. In practice there are two large problems with demilitarization. First, there will be inevitably mismatches between the firms and individuals who lose out from a significant reduction in military spending and those who will gain from alternatives. Since it is generally clearer in advance who will lose than who will gain, political mobilization against demilitarization is likely to be stronger than mobilization for the alternative. Second, massive infrastructure projects like a national high-speed rail system pose a serious problem for political conservatives since such projects affirm the legitimacy of the state's role in shaping the economic environment. The beauty of military spending is that it is the one form of large scale economic intervention by the state into the economy which can be defended by people opposed to government in general. There is a clear line of demarcation between military spending and the wide range of other public goods we might care about: health care, transportation, energy, the environment. The result is that the alliance between economic interests that are bound-up with the military-industrial complex and the conservative political forces that support militarism in general oppose civilian projects that would have an equivalent economic impact.

### 5. Ideological Crusades.

Chalmers Johnson, a leading political scientist who studies international relations, argues that crusading has been part of the American global project for over a hundred years. The precise character of the crusade changes from time to time – spreading democracy, defending freedom, fighting communism -- but its core is the belief that the United States has a divine mission to spread its values and way of life around the world, not just because this is in its narrow national interests but also because it is the right thing to do – or even stronger, because America is doing God's work by extending American institutions globally. The Bush administration staked out this position starkly in a national security strategy document, saying that there is “a single sustainable model for national success....that is right and true for every person in every society...The United States must defend liberty and justice because these principles are right and true for all people everywhere.”<sup>7</sup> Of course, in the real world the ideas of “liberty and justice” are sharply contested, and what the U.S. means by these ideas is very different from what

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<sup>7</sup> Chalmers Johnson, p287.

many others mean by them. Nevertheless, they serve as a moral justification for our actions.

It is easy to dismiss these kinds of moralistic claims as mere rationalizations, symbolic covers for actions whose driving motivations lie elsewhere. Particularly given the historical record of the United States supporting dictators and overthrowing democracies when these are seen as serving important national interests, high-minded claims about fostering American ideals around the world do seem like cynical manipulations. Nevertheless, these ideals would not serve as a cover for other motives if they did not resonate strongly for many people. Even if they are not the primary motivations of elites in supporting militarism, the self-righteousness of moral crusades may increase the self-confidence of elites in pursuing militaristic goals and may help rally broader support and increase the certainty with .

## 6. Fueling a politics of Fear

Militarism is one of the central foundations for what can be called the *politics of fear*. Political action is not only rooted in ideas; it is also connected to emotions. Love, fear, hate, anger, hope – all of these can provide potential emotional underpinnings for politics. A politics of fear revolves around defending oneself from enemies, protecting oneself from danger and threats. It has a kind of primal potency; other things which one might care about tend to be displaced when fear rules. For this reason, throughout history political leaders have used the presence of a foreign threat as a way of building support and repressing dissent. This strategy is particularly effective when fear is successfully joined with anger and hate. Militarism fosters these emotions: it cultivates foreign threats; it identifies enemies who become objects of hate; and it fuels anger from the harms endured in conflicts. Dissenters who object to the priorities fostered by militarism are then deemed unpatriotic, perhaps even traitors. One of the motivations for militarism is fostering this kind of political culture.

## CONSEQUENCES OF MILITARISM AND EMPIRE

Militarism is both a fact of life and a way of life in the United States at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While the Obama administration was elected partially because of his early opposition to the Iraq War, he has continually reassured the American public that he fully supports a strong military and has demonstrated his willingness to use military force to advance foreign policy objectives. There is no indication that he will depart in any fundamental way from this institutional configuration.

What can we expect for the future? Chalmers Johnson argues that if the kind of intensive militarism that has become part of the fabric of American society continues, four consequences are likely to follow:

### 1. Perpetual war

Militarism generates war; it is not simply a response to war. The triumph of American militarism is likely to place the United States in a situation of nearly continuous warfare. With a massive and flexible military force in hand, the U.S. is much more likely to use the military option in the context of a conflict than if we had a purely defensive military

posture. An aggressive, interventionist posture around the world provokes reactions in response to our interventions. This is sometimes called “blowback”: terrorism is in part a response to militarism. This terrorism then provides justifications for further intervention and militarism.

## **2. Reduction in democracy at home.**

Militarism and imperialism erode democracy in many ways. Militarism brings with it an increasing concentration of power in the presidency, creating what has come to be called the “Imperial Presidency.” The Imperial President can act with minimal accountability to Congress or the Courts in the name of national security, elevating the powers of the president as the “commander-in-chief” of the armed forces to the status of a general principle of autonomous power over anything connected to foreign affairs. This concentration of power in the presidency has characterized both Democratic and Republic presidents in the era of militarism, but was greatly intensified during the Bush Administration where a wide range of constitutional safeguards were violated on the grounds of autonomous Presidential power.

Militarism also pre-empts other forms of state spending, and this curtails the scope of democratic deliberation about the public good. As we argued in chapter 16, a society is democratic to the extent that decisions which are matters of collective importance are subjected to collective deliberation and democratic choice. Militarism threatens this principle both because decisions over the use of the military are likely to be made in relatively undemocratic ways by elites operating behind closed doors, and because militarism squeezes out other priorities.

More broadly, militarism undermines democratic political culture. Military priorities are bolstered by intensified fear, and people are more willing to give up civil liberties and democratic rights when they are afraid. In debates over domestic priorities people can see their opponents as legitimate. Some people want a public health care system, others want to maintain a private system; both are legitimate views within a political spectrum of debate. In a militarized context of debates over war and security, opponents to militarism are treated as unpatriotic by putting the security of the nation at risk. The polarized good and evil view of the world that is linked to militarism and the politics of fear corrodes the civility and mutual respect needed for democratic deliberation.

## **3. Degradation of information:**

Militarism brings with it deception and misinformation. Deception becomes official policy. Of course, politics always involves misinformation; politicians distort information to their own political advantage all the time. The problem is much worse in the case of militarism because information is surrounded by strong mechanisms of official secrecy. Political leaders can distort the facts to fit their purposes and claim that what they are saying is based on classified information unavailable to the general public. The use of secrecy classifications makes it much harder for such lies to be revealed. The War on Iraq was a stunning example of this: lies and deception were a routine policy both in the run-up to the war and in the subsequent conduct of the war.

#### 4. Bankruptcy

Historically, Empires typically crumble because the overhead costs of running an empire become unsustainable. The central component of such costs is the military. The attempt by the United States to be the World's only global super power is extraordinarily costly, both directly and indirectly: directly through the costs of maintaining a large military presence around the world and accounting for nearly half of the global military spending; indirectly by neglecting investments in infrastructure and civilian technologies that would enhance productivity and strengthen the economy. The result has been both a massive government debt held largely by foreign governments and a massive trade deficit. These trends were greatly exacerbated by the financial crisis that began in 2008. It is only the global power of the US that prevents this debt load from crashing down as it did in Russia in 1997 or Argentina in 2002. This situation cannot go on forever.

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**Figures**


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**Military spending in 2008 (\$ Billions, and percent of total)**

Country	Dollars (billions)	% of total	Rank
United States	711	48.28%	1
China	121.9	8.28%	2
Russia	70	4.75%	3
United Kingdom	55.4	3.76%	4
France	54	3.67%	5
Japan	41.1	2.79%	6
Germany	37.8	2.57%	7
Italy	30.6	2.08%	8
Saudi Arabia	29.5	2.00%	9
South Korea	24.6	1.67%	10
India	22.4	1.52%	11
Australia	17.2	1.17%	12
Brazil	16.2	1.10%	13
Canada	15	1.02%	14
Spain	14.4	0.98%	15
Turkey	11.6	0.79%	16
Israel	11	0.75%	17
Netherlands	9.9	0.67%	18
United Arab Emirates	9.5	0.65%	19
Taiwan	7.7	0.52%	20
Greece	7.3	0.50%	21
Iran	7.2	0.49%	22
Myanmar	6.9	0.47%	23
Singapore	6.3	0.43%	24
Poland	6.2	0.42%	25
Sweden	5.8	0.39%	26
Colombia	5.4	0.37%	27

**Notes:**

The figure for the United States is the budget request for Fiscal Year 2009 and includes \$170 billion for ongoing military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as funding for the Department of Energy's nuclear weapons activities.

All other figures are projections based on 2006, the last year for which accurate data is available.

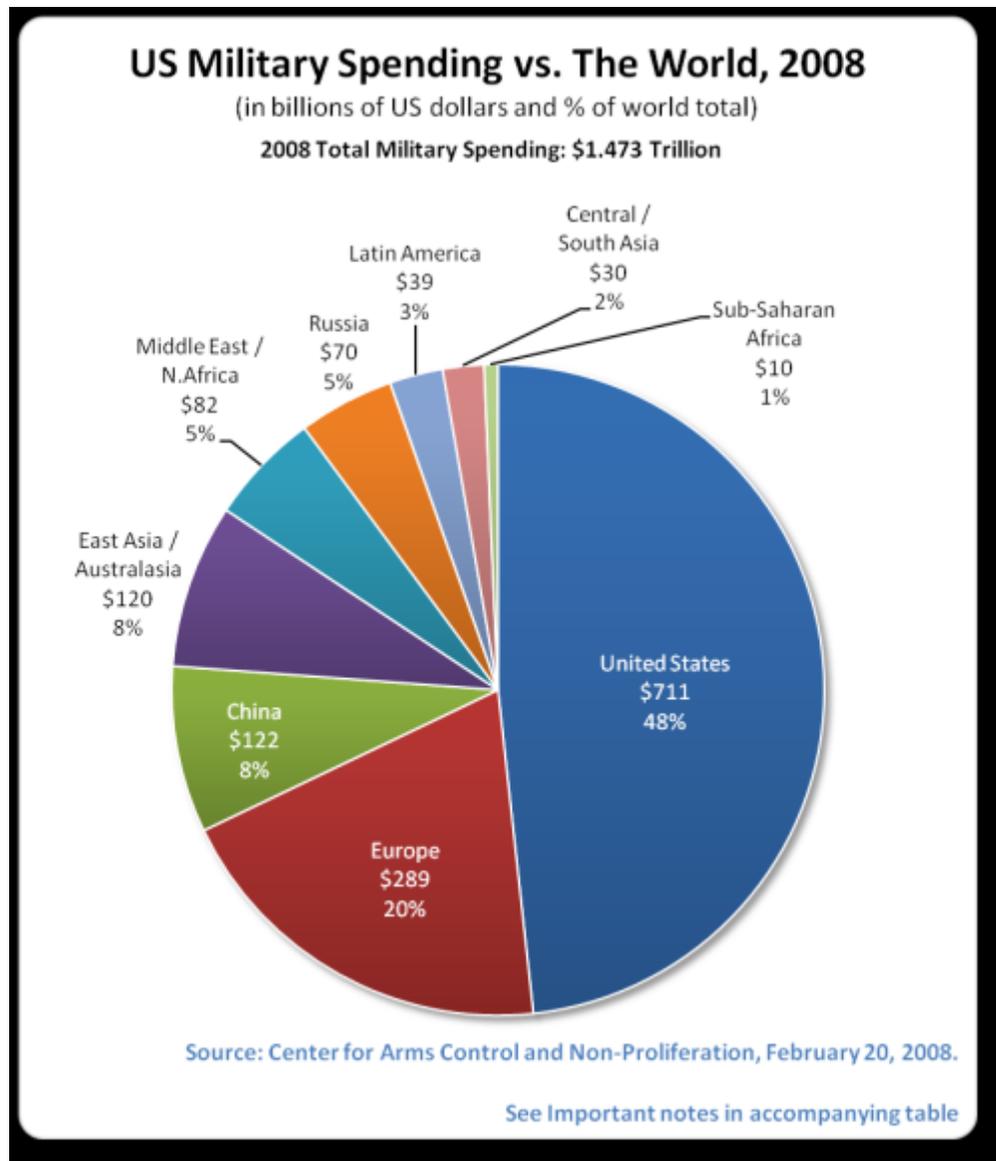
All countries that spent over one billion per year are listed.

Due to rounding, some percentages may be slightly off.

Source: [U.S. Military Spending vs. the World](#), *Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation*, February 22, 2008

**Figure 20.1**

**Military spending in countries that spent at least \$5 billion a year on the military, 2008**



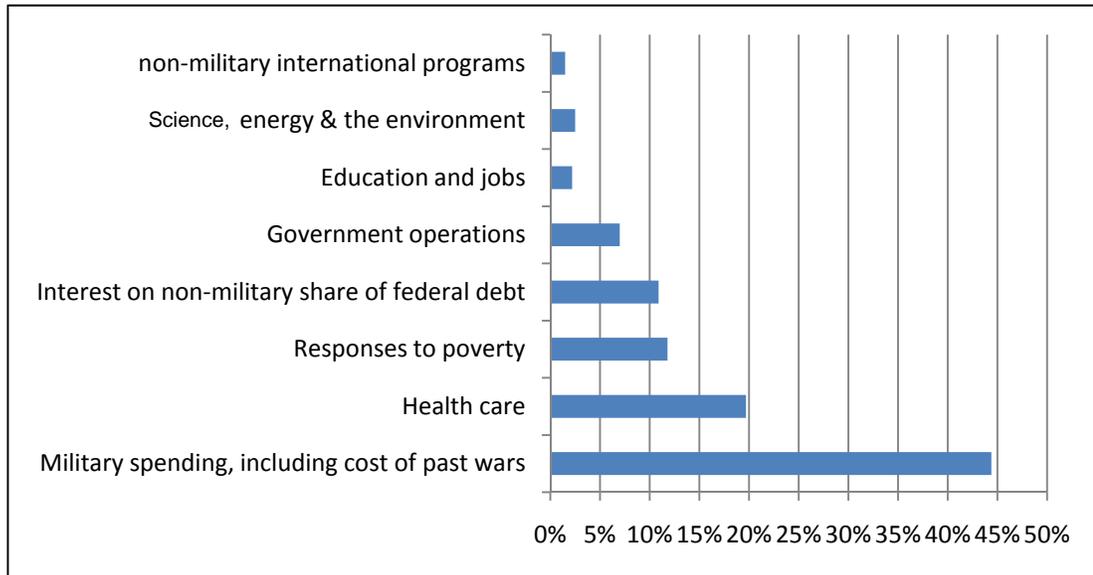
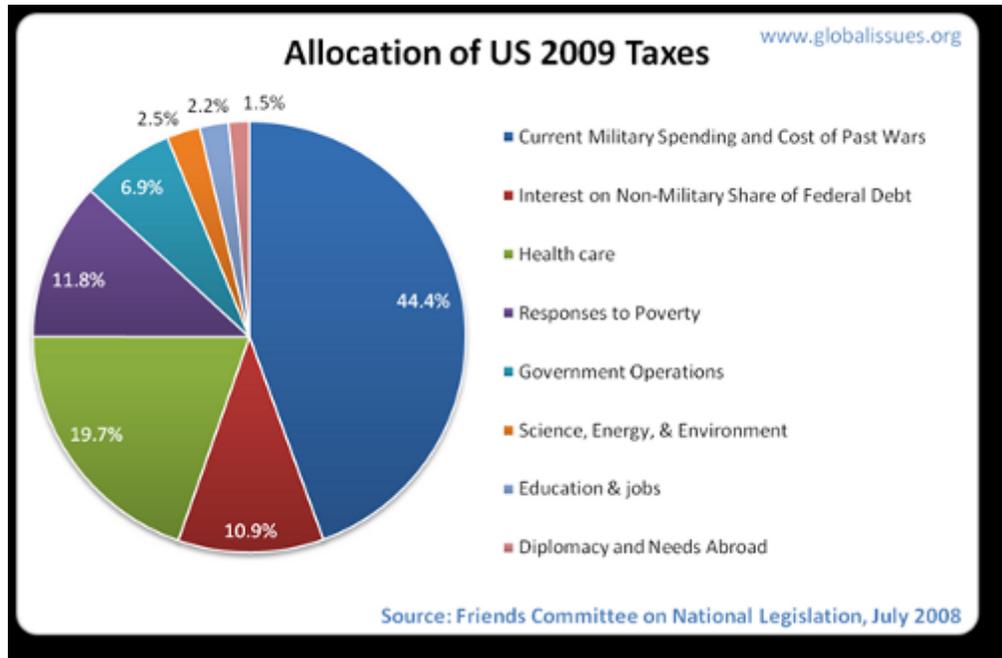
**Figure 20.2**  
U.S. Military spending vs the World, 2008



GREECE	1947-49	U.S. directs extreme-right in civil war.
PHILIPPINES	1948-54	CIA directs war against Huk Rebellion.
KOREA	1951-53	Korean War
IRAN	1953	CIA overthrows democracy, installs Shah.
GUATEMALA	1954	CIA directs overthrow of democratic government
LEBANON	1958	Marine occupation against rebels.
VIETNAM	1960-75	Vietnam War
LAOS	1962	Military buildup during guerrilla war.
CUBA	1961	CIA-directed exile invasion fails.
INDONESIA	1965	Million killed in CIA-assisted army coup.
DOMINICAN REP.	1965-66	Marines land during election campaign.
GUATEMALA	1966-67	Green Berets intervene against rebels.
CAMBODIA	1969-75	Bombing
LAOS	1971-73	U.S. directs South Vietnamese invasion
CHILE	1973	CIA-backed coup ousts elected marxist president.
ANGOLA	1976-92	CIA assists South African-backed rebels.
EL SALVADOR	1981-92	Advisors, overflights aid anti-rebel war,
AFGHANISTAN	1979-89	CIA support for mujahedeen fight against Afghan regime and Soviet army
NICARAGUA	1981-90	CIA directs exile (Contra) invasions
LEBANON	1982-84	Marines expel PLO and back Phalangists,
GRENADA	1983-84	Invasion four years after revolution ousts regime.
IRAN	1984	Two Iranian jets shot down over Persian Gulf.
LIBYA	1986	Air strikes to topple nationalist gov't.
IRAN	1987-88	US intervenes to protect Iraqi tankers in Iran war.
PANAMA	1989	Nationalist government ousted by 27,000 soldiers
KUWAIT	1991	first Gulf War
SOMALIA	1992-94	U.S.-led United Nations occupation during civil war
BOSNIA	1993-?	No-fly zone in civil war; downed jets, bombed Serbs.
HAITI	1994	Troops restore Aristide to office 3 years after coup.
YUGOSLAVIA	1999	Heavy NATO air strikes after Serbia declines to withdraw from Kosovo
AFGHANISTAN	2001-?	Afganistan War
COLOMBIA	2003-?	US special forces sent to rebel zone
IRAQ	2003-?	Iraq War
HAITI	2004-05	Marines land after rebels oust elected Pres. Aristide
PAKISTAN	2005-?	CIA missile and air strikes on suspected Taliban sites

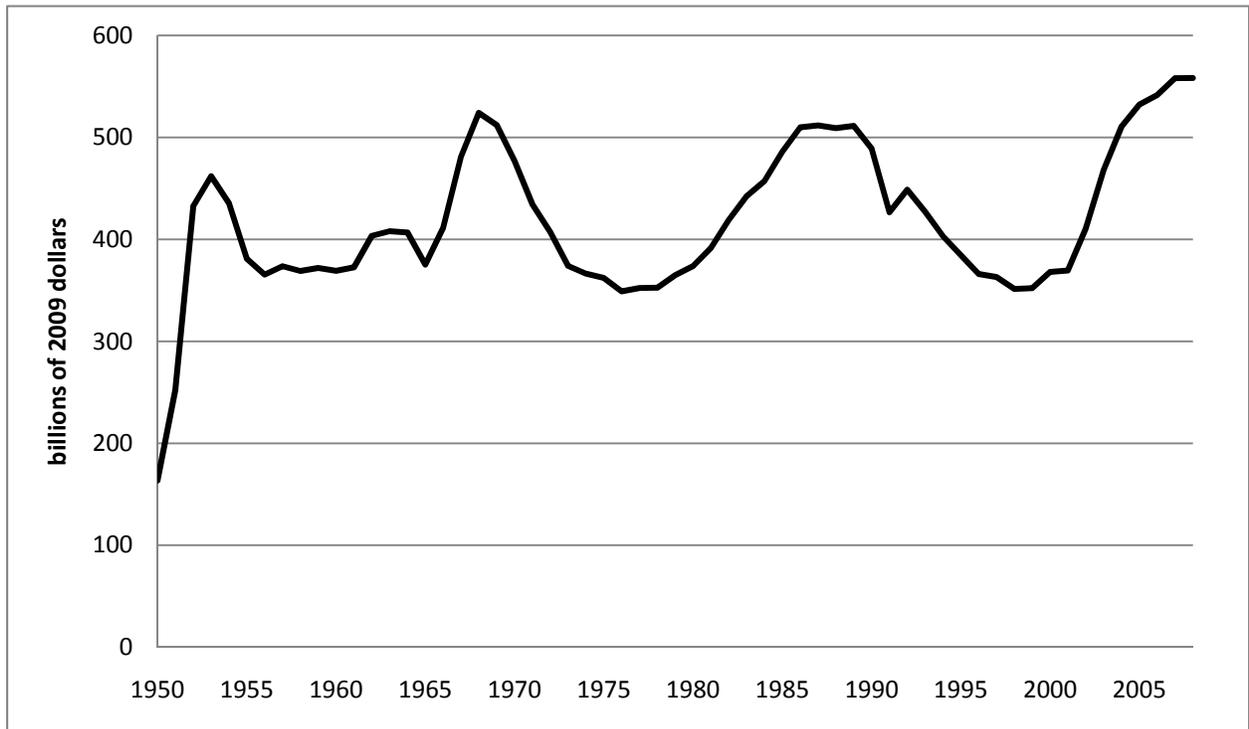
Source: list compiled by Zoltan Grossman, <http://academic.evergreen.edu/g/grossmaz/interventions.html>

**Figure 20.4**  
**Partial list of U.S. Military Interventions, 1947-2009**



Source: *Friends Committee on National Legislation*, July, 2008, reported by Global Issues Forum, <http://www.globalissues.org/article/75/world-military-spending>

**Figure 20.5**  
**Military Spending as a proportion of total federal government spending, 2009 fiscal year**



Source: U.S. Department of Defense (2008) *National Defense Budget Estimates for FY 2009*, Table 6.12.

**Figure 20.6**  
**Department of Defense Budget 1950-2008**