

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

**SORROWS OF EMPIRE:  
IMPERIALISM, MILITARISM, AND  
THE END OF THE REPUBLIC**

**Chalmers Johnson**

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# SORROWS OF EMPIRE: IMPERIALISM, MILITARISM, AND THE END OF THE REPUBLIC

Chalmers Johnson

**M**y book, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic*, is a survey of the U.S.'s "Baseworld," a term I coined for the complex of over 700 military bases we maintain in other people's countries. As distinct from those on the receiving end, most Americans do not recognize—or do not want to recognize—that the United States dominates the world through its military power. Due to government secrecy and complacent journalism, our citizens are often ignorant of the fact that our garrisons encircle the planet. One of my goals in writing the book was to mobilize inattentive citizens to information they need but that I know they do not have—because our government does everything it can to see that they do not get it. There are no foreign military bases in the U.S., which means that most of us cannot even imagine what we impose on the people of 135 different countries, plus the British territories of Diego Garcia, Gibraltar, and St. Helena in the Atlantic Ocean, Greenland (which is technically a part of Denmark), and the former Serbian province of Kosovo. We also have over 3,200 troops on Guam, which we seized from Spain in the Spanish-American War. We have troops based in 70 percent of the 192 countries in existence as listed by the State Department.

This vast network of American bases actually constitutes a new form of empire—an empire of bases with its own geography not likely to be taught in any high school geography class. Without grasping the dimensions of this network of military garrisons, one

can't begin to understand the size and nature of our imperial aspirations or the degree to which a new kind of militarism is undermining our constitutional order.

Our military deploys well over half a million soldiers, spies, technicians, teachers, dependents, and civilian contractors in other nations. On March 9, 2004, NBC News quoted Pentagon sources that more than 320,000 troops from the Army alone are currently stationed overseas. That's more than 60 percent of the entire U.S. Army. To dominate the oceans and seas of the world, we maintain some thirteen naval task-forces built around aircraft carriers whose names sum up our martial heritage—*Kitty Hawk*, *Constellation*, *Enterprise*, *John F. Kennedy*, *Nimitz*, *Dwight D. Eisenhower*, *Carl Vinson*, *Theodore Roosevelt*, *Abraham Lincoln*, *George Washington*, *John C. Stennis*, *Harry S. Truman*, and *Ronald Reagan*. A carrier battle group is composed of the aircraft carrier itself, two cruisers, two to three destroyers, a frigate, an attack submarine, and a combat support ship and constitutes, in essence, a floating base. We also operate numerous secret espionage bases outside our territory to eavesdrop on what all the people of the world, including our own citizens, are saying, faxing, or e-mailing to one another. This is done by the National Security Agency and other secret intelligence agencies under the control of the Pentagon.

Our installations abroad bring profits to civilian industries, which design and manufacture weapons for the armed forces or, like the now well-publicized

Kellogg, Brown & Root company (a subsidiary of the Halliburton Corporation of Houston, headed by Dick Cheney until he became vice-president), undertake contract services to build and maintain our far-flung outposts. One task of such contractors is to keep uniformed members of the imperium housed in comfortable quarters, well fed, amused, and supplied with enjoyable, affordable vacation facilities. Whole sectors of the American economy have come to rely on the military for sales. On the eve of our second war on Iraq, to take just one example, while the Defense Department was ordering up an extra supply of cruise missiles and depleted-uranium shells, it also bought 273,000 bottles of Native Tan sunblock, almost triple its 1999 order and undoubtedly a boon to the prime contractor in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and its subcontractor, Sun Fun Products of Daytona Beach, Florida.

It's not easy to assess the size or exact value of our empire of bases. Official records on these subjects are misleading, although instructive. According to the Defense Department's annual "Base Structure Report" for fiscal year 2003, which inventories foreign and domestic U.S. military real estate, the Pentagon currently owns and operates 702 bases in foreign countries and another 6,000 bases in the United States and its territories. Pentagon bureaucrats calculate that the "plant replacement value," as they call it, of just the foreign bases is at least \$113.2 billion—which is larger than the gross domestic products of most countries. The Pentagon claims these bases contain 44,870 barracks, hangars, hospitals, and other buildings that it owns, and that it leases 4,844 more.

These numbers, although staggeringly large, do not begin to cover all the actual bases we occupy globally. The 2003 Base Structure Report fails to mention, for instance, any garrisons in Kosovo—even though it is the site of the huge Camp Bondsteel built in 1999 and maintained ever since by Kellogg, Brown

& Root. Bondsteel is the largest base we have built since the Vietnam War, and it lies astride the planned route of a pipeline that is to carry oil from the Caspian Sea across the Balkan peninsula to the Adriatic Coast in Albania. It is part of our military-petroleum complex. The Report similarly omits bases in Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Qatar, and Uzbekistan, although the U.S. military has established colossal base structures throughout the entire southern Eurasian area that was opened up to our imperialism by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

For Okinawa, the southernmost island of Japan, which has been an American military colony for the past 58 years, the report deceptively lists only one Marine base, Camp Butler, when in fact Okinawa "hosts" more than a dozen Marine Corps bases, including Marine Corps Air Station Futenma occupying 1,186 acres in the center of that modest-sized island's second largest city. (Manhattan's Central Park, by contrast, is only 843 acres.) There are actually 38 Air Force, Navy, Army, and Marine Corps bases in Okinawa, Japan's poorest prefecture where 1.3 million people live on an island smaller than Kauai in the Hawaiian Islands.

The Pentagon similarly fails to note all of the \$5-billion-worth of military and espionage installations in Britain, which have long been conveniently disguised as Royal Air Force bases. We know about many of these bases because of the work of Ms. Lindis Percy of the U.K.'s Committee for Nuclear Disarmament. Ms. Percy's avocation is breaking into British military bases and getting herself arrested for criminal trespass. The American Embassy inevitably intervenes to ask that all charges against her be dropped because if she were brought to trial she would reveal that these are actually covert American bases. She briefly appeared on American television in the autumn of 2003, when President Bush visited Buckingham Palace. She was seen trying to attach an American flag upside down to the gates.



If there were an honest count, the actual size of our military empire would probably top 1,000 different bases in other people's countries, but no one—possibly not even the Pentagon—knows the exact number for sure. Except for the fourteen “enduring bases” currently under construction in Iraq, these are not necessarily unpleasant or dangerous places to live and work. Military service today is a voluntary career choice rather than an obligation of citizenship, and it bears almost no relation to the duties of a soldier during World War II or the Korean or Vietnamese wars. Most traditional chores like laundry, KP (“kitchen police”), guard duty, and cleaning latrines have been subcontracted to private military companies like Kellogg, Brown & Root, DynCorp, and MPRI (Military Professional Resources, Inc). Fully one-third, about \$30 billion, of the funds recently appropriated for the war in Iraq are going into private American hands for exactly such services. Private military companies do everything but pull the trigger.

Some American overseas bases are so gigantic they require as many as nine internal bus routes for soldiers and civilian contractors to get around inside the earthen berms and concertina wire. That's the case at Camp Anaconda, headquarters of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, whose job in early 2004 was to police some 1,500 square miles of Iraq north of Baghdad. Anaconda occupies about 15 square miles and will ultimately house as many as 20,000 troops. Despite extensive security precautions, the base has frequently come under mortar attack, particularly during and after the Sunni-Shi'ite uprising that began in early April 2004.

Even when the military tries to create a simulacrum of small-town America on its bases, not everything is idyllic. For example, while more than 100,000 women live on our overseas bases—including women in the services, spouses, and relatives of military personnel—obtaining an abortion at a local military hospital abroad

is prohibited. Since there are some 14,000 sexual assaults or attempted sexual assaults each year in the military, women who become pregnant overseas and want an abortion have no choice but to try the local economy, which cannot be either easy or pleasant in Baghdad or other parts of our empire these days. In the Central Command, which includes Iraq, Afghanistan, and Kuwait, there have been at least 112 reports of rapes and other sexual abuses in the year and a half since the autumn of 2002.

Our armed missionaries live in a closed-off, self-contained world serviced by its own airline—the Air Mobility Command—that links our far-flung outposts from Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean to Iceland in the North Atlantic. For generals and admirals, the military provides seventy-one Learjets, thirteen Gulfstream IIIs, and seventeen Cessna Citation luxury jets to fly them to such spots as the armed forces' ski and vacation center at Garmisch in the Bavarian Alps or to any of the 234 military golf courses the Pentagon operates worldwide. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld flies around in his own personal Boeing 757 jetliner, called a C-32A in the Air Force.

Of all the insensitive, if graphic, metaphors we've allowed into our vocabulary, none quite equals “footprint” to describe the impact of our military empire. In the wake of our conquest of Iraq, establishing a more impressive footprint has now become part of the new justification for a major enlargement and an announced repositioning of our bases and forces abroad. The man in charge of this project is Andy Hoehn, deputy assistant secretary of defense for strategy. He and his colleagues are supposed to draw up plans to implement President Bush's preventive war strategy against what they call “rogue states,” “bad guys,” and “evil-doers.” They have identified something they have named the “arc of instability,” which is said to run from the Andean region of South America (read: Colombia) through

North Africa and then sweeps across the Middle East to the Philippines and Indonesia. This is, of course, more or less identical to what used to be called the Third World—and perhaps no less crucially it covers the world's key oil reserves. Hohn contends, "When you overlay our footprint onto that, we don't look particularly well-positioned to deal with the problems we're now going to confront."

In order to put our forces close to every hot spot or danger area in this newly discovered arc of instability, the Pentagon has been proposing—this is usually called "repositioning"—many new bases, including at least fourteen huge permanent facilities in Iraq. (Currently, U.S. forces occupy some 120 so-called "forward operating bases" in Iraq.) A number of these are already under construction—at Baghdad International Airport, Tallil air base near Nasariyah, in the western desert near the Syrian border, and at Bashur air field in the Kurdish region of the north. The contractor building all of these bases is Kellogg, Brown & Root, which won the job in a closed, non-competitive process. In addition, we plan to keep under our control the whole northern quarter of Kuwait—1,600 square miles of that country's 6,900 square miles—that we use to resupply our Iraq legions and as a place for Green Zone bureaucrats to relax.

Other countries that have been mentioned as sites for what Colin Powell calls our new "family of bases" include: in the backward areas of ex-Communist "new" Europe, Romania, Poland, and Bulgaria; in Asia, Pakistan (where we already have four bases), India, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, and even, unbelievably, Vietnam; in North Africa, Morocco, Tunisia, and especially Algeria (scene of the slaughter of some 100,000 civilians since 1992, when the military took over, backed by our country and France, to quash an election); in West Africa, Senegal, Ghana, Mali, and Sierra Leone (even though it has been torn by civil war since 1991); and in East

Africa, Uganda and Kenya (where we are actively intervening in that country's civil war). The models for all these new installations, according to Pentagon sources, are the string of bases we have built around the Persian Gulf in the last two decades in such anti-democratic autocracies as Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates.

Most of these new bases will be what the military, in a switch of metaphors, calls "lily pads" to which our troops can jump like so many well-armed frogs from the "homeland" (a literal translation of the old German nationalist term *der Heimat*), the few remaining NATO bases, or the docile satellites of Japan and Britain. The lily pads themselves will be manned by small units of soldiers who carry out maintenance on prepositioned tanks, weapons, and munitions. To offset this expansion the Pentagon has leaked plans to close some of the huge Cold War military reservations in Germany, South Korea, and perhaps Okinawa as part of Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld's "rationalization" of our armed forces. In the wake of our Iraq incursion, the U.S. withdrew virtually all of its forces from Saudi Arabia and Turkey, partially as a way of punishing them for not supporting the war strongly enough. It wants to do the same thing to South Korea, perhaps the most anti-American democracy on earth today, which would free the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division on the demilitarized zone with North Korea for probable deployment to Iraq.

In Europe, plans for giving up some of our bases in Germany are also motivated in part by pique over Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's domestically popular defiance of Bush over Iraq. But the degree to which we are likely to withdraw may prove very limited. At the simplest level, the Pentagon's planners do not really seem to grasp just how many buildings the 71,702 soldiers and airmen in Germany alone occupy and how expensive it would be to reposition most of them (not to mention their dependents) in even slightly

comparable bases, together with the necessary infrastructure, in countries like Romania, one of Europe's poorest places. Lt. Col. Amy Ehmann in Hanau, Germany, has said to the press, "There's no place to put these people" in Romania, Bulgaria, or Djibouti, and she predicts that 80% of them will end up staying in Germany. It's also certain that generals of our high command have no intention of living in backwaters like Constanta, Romania, and will keep the U.S. military headquarters in Stuttgart while holding on to Ramstein Air Force Base, Spangdahlem Air Force Base, and the Grafenwöhr Training Area.

One reason why the Pentagon is considering moving out of rich democracies like Germany and South Korea and looking covetously at military dictatorships and poverty-stricken dependencies is to take advantage of what the Pentagon calls their "more permissive environmental regulations." The Pentagon always imposes on countries in which it deploys our forces a so-called Status of Forces Agreements, which exempt the United States from cleaning up or paying for the environmental damage it causes. This is a standing grievance in Okinawa, where the American record on the environment has been nothing short of tragic. Part of this attitude is simply the desire of the Pentagon to put itself beyond any of the restraints that govern civilian life, an attitude increasingly at play in the "homeland" as well. For example, the 2004 defense authorization bill of \$401.3 billion that President Bush signed into law in November 2003 exempts the military from abiding by the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act even though these acts already contain national security exceptions. Such arrogance is a sign of advancing militarism.

While there is every reason to believe that the impulse to create ever more lily pads in the third world will remain unchecked, there are several reasons to doubt that some of the more grandiose plans, for either

expansion or downsizing, will ever be put into effect or, if they are, that they will do anything other than make the problem of terrorism worse than it is. For one thing, Russia is opposed to the expansion of U.S. military power on its borders and is already moving to checkmate American basing sorties into places like Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. The first post-Soviet-era airbase in Kyrgyzstan has just been completed forty miles from the U.S. base at Bishkek, and in December 2003, the dictator of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, declared that he would not permit a permanent deployment of U.S. forces in his country even though we already have a base there.

When it comes to downsizing, on the other hand, domestic politics may come into play. By law the Pentagon's Base Realignment and Closing Commission must submit its fifth and final list of domestic bases to be shut down to the White House by September 8, 2005. As an efficiency measure, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld has said he'd like to be rid of at least one-third of domestic Army bases and one-quarter of domestic Air Force bases, which is certain to produce a political firestorm on Capitol Hill. In order to protect their respective states' bases, the two mother hens of the Senate's Military Construction Appropriations Subcommittee, Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) and Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), are demanding that the Pentagon close some overseas bases first and bring the troops now stationed there home to domestic bases, which could then remain open. Hutchison and Feinstein included in the Military Appropriations Act of 2004 money for an independent commission to investigate and report on overseas bases that are no longer needed. The Bush administration opposed this provision but it passed anyway and the president signed the law on November 22, 2003. The Pentagon is probably adept enough to hamstring the commission, but a domestic base-closing furor clearly looms on the horizon.



By far the greatest defect in the “global cavalry” strategy, as the American Enterprise Institute terms it, is that it accentuates Washington’s impulse to apply irrelevant, even counterproductive, military remedies to terrorism. The U.S. attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq only increased the threat of al-Qaeda. During the eight years from 1993 through the 9/11 assaults of 2001, al-Qaeda carried out five major attacks worldwide; in the two-and-a-half years since then it has launched eighteen such bombings, down to and including the Istanbul suicide assaults on the British consulate and the HSBC Bank and the bombings of commuter trains in Madrid in March 2004. Military operations against terrorists are *never* the answer to terrorism. As the British military historian Correlli Barnett puts it, “Rather than kicking down front doors and barging into ancient and complex societies with simple nostrums of ‘freedom and democracy,’ we need tactics of cunning and subtlety, based on a profound understanding of the people and cultures we are dealing with—an understanding up till now entirely lacking in the top-level policy-makers in Washington, especially in the Pentagon.”

There is only one effective way to fight terrorism. That is to separate the terrorists from their passive supporters so they will supply intelligence on who are the activists in their midst, allowing them to be arrested and incarcerated. There is only one way to gain the support of the passive supporters, and that is to respond to their legitimate grievances against the United States by changing our foreign policy. This, on issues like support for the Sharon policies in Israel, we have refused to do.

But the “war on terrorism” is at best only a small part of the reason for all our military expansionism, as former counterterrorism chief Richard A. Clarke has made clear in his book *Against All Enemies*. The real reason for constructing this new ring of American bases along the equator is to expand our empire and

reinforce our military domination of the world in accordance with schemes hatched by the neoconservatives who have seized control of the Pentagon. And the resultant imperialism and militarism threaten our domestic democracy just as they did that of the Roman republic two millennia ago.

One of the main conclusions of my book is that imperialism inescapably brings with it militarism. By militarism, I do not mean the defense of the country but vested interests in the military as a way of life, as a way of acquiring wealth, as a form of cradle-to-grave state socialism for those who make a career of it, and an expanding claim on the wealth of the American people. I fear that just as the Roman Republic between 80 and 27 BC lost its political liberties and succumbed to military dictatorship, the United States is tempting fate by following its footsteps. The ending in 1973 of the draft and of a male citizen’s obligation to serve in the armed forces, turned military service into a career choice. Combined with the growing secrecy surrounding the huge sums of tax monies poured into the Pentagon, this suggests that the Department of Defense has reverted back to what we called it before 1947—the War Department.

The most famous warnings against militarism were issued by two of America’s former generals who also became presidents. In his farewell address of September 17, 1796, George Washington said, “Overgrown military establishments are under any form of government inauspicious to liberty, and are to be regarded as particularly hostile to Republican liberty.” And in his farewell address of January 17, 1961, Dwight D. Eisenhower added, “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, whether sought or unsought, by 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."

Washington and Eisenhower were not isolationists. They were drawing attention to the effects of imperialism and militarism on the separation of powers built into our constitution and to how large military establishments, as distinct from citizen armies raised to defend the country, skew the structure in favor of an imperial presidency. The identical thing had happened to the Roman Republic when it rather thoughtlessly acquired an empire around the Mediterranean and then had to transform its legions of citizen-soldiers, mobilized for a particular emergency, into standing armies to police, protect, and expand its territory. The end result was that the Roman Senate gave up all its powers to military dictators, who promised at least to maintain the peace. The collapse of the Roman republic in 27 BC has profound significance for the United States today because we took many of our key political institutions from our ancient predecessor.

Imperialism provoked the crisis that destroyed the Roman republic. After slowly consolidating its power over all of Italy and conquering the Greek colonies on the island of Sicily, the republic extended its conquests to Greece itself, to Carthage (north Africa), and to what are today southern France, Spain, and Asia Minor. The republic became increasingly self-important and arrogant, believing that its task was to bring civilization to lesser peoples and naming the Mediterranean *Mare Nostrum* (our sea), somewhat the way the U.S. Navy refers to the Pacific Ocean as an American lake.

The problem was that the Roman constitution made administration of so large and diverse an area increasingly difficult and subtly altered the norms and interests that underlay the need for compromise and

consensus. The most important change was the transformation of the Roman army into a professional military force. During the early and middle years of the republic, the Roman legions were a true citizen army composed of small, conscripted landowners. Differing from the American republic, all male citizens between the age of 17 and 46 were liable to be called for military service. One of the most admirable aspects of the Roman system was that only those who possessed a specified amount of property could serve, thereby making those who had profited most from the state also responsible for its defense. (By contrast, of the 535 current members of Congress, only seven have children in the U.S.'s all-volunteer armed forces.) The Roman plebs did their service as skirmishers, or in the navy, which had far less honor attached to it. Slaves were not used in the legions.

When a campaign was over, the troops were promptly sent back to their farms, sometimes richer and flushed with military glory. Occasionally, the returning farmers got to march behind their general in a "triumph," a victory procession allowed only to the greatest conquerors that was the most splendid ceremony in the Roman calendar. The general himself, who paid for this parade, rode in a chariot with his face covered in red lead to represent Jupiter, king of the gods. A boy slave stood behind him holding a laurel wreath above his head while whispering in his ear "Remember you are human." In Pompey's great Triumph of 61 BC, he actually wore a cloak that had belonged to Alexander the Great. After the general came his prisoners, in chains, and finally the legionnaires, who by ancient tradition sang obscene songs satirizing their general. Over time, the Roman legions were transformed from citizen armies raised for a particular emergency into standing armies, with soldiers serving for as long as twenty years. Ultimately, the interests and the grievances of this increasingly militarized republic caused the rise of military populists

among members of the Senate, people who were willing to champion the interests of the troops in return for the promise of a lifetime dictatorship.

Julius Caesar was by far the most important example of this phenomenon. He became consul for the first time in 59 BC and enjoyed great popularity with the ordinary people. After his year in office, he was rewarded by being named proconsul of Gaul, a post he held between 58 and 49 during which he earned great military glory and became immensely wealthy. In 49 he allowed his armies to cross the Rubicon, a small river in northern Italy that served as a boundary against armies approaching the capital, and plunged the country into civil war. Caesar was dictator from 48 to 44, and a month before the Ides of March he had arranged to have himself named dictator for life. Instead, he was stabbed to death in the Senate by a conspiracy of eight members, led by Brutus and Cassius, known to history as “principled tyrannicides.”

After several wars against the conspirators of the Ides of March, Octavian, Caesar’s eighteen-year-old grand nephew, came to power and decisively changed Roman government. He replaced the republic with an imperial dictatorship. Cicero, who had devoted his life to trying to curb the kind of power represented by Octavian, now gave up on the rule of law in favor of realpolitik. In the words of British historian Anthony Everitt, he recognized that “for all his struggles the constitution was dead and power lay in the hands of soldiers and their leaders.” Somewhat like Sen. Robert Byrd of West Virginia today, Cicero devoted himself to warning his fellow Romans about the folly of their course. He would ultimately pay with his life. Octavian ordered at least 130 senators executed and their property confiscated after charging them with supporting the conspiracy against Caesar. Octavian ordered Cicero’s head and both hands displayed in the Forum.

On January 13, 27 BC, the Roman Senate, which had legitimized its own demise by ceding most of its powers to Octavian, bestowed on him the new title of Augustus, first Roman emperor. Although his rise to power was always tainted by constitutional illegitimacy—not unlike that of our own Boy Emperor from Crawford, Texas—Augustus proceeded to emasculate the Roman system and its representative institutions. He never abolished the old republican offices but merely united them under one person, himself. Imperial appointment rather than election to one of the old offices became a badge of prestige and social standing rather than of authority. The Senate was turned into a club of old aristocratic families, and its approval of the acts of the emperor was purely ceremonial.

The system of government Augustus created was a military dictatorship, which depended entirely on the incumbent emperor. And therein lay the problem. The emperors who followed Augustus were a very sorry lot. Tiberius retired to Capri with a covey of young boys who catered to his sexual tastes. His successor, Caligula, was the darling of the army, but on January 24, 41 AD, the Praetorian Guard assassinated him and proceeded to loot the imperial palace. Modern archaeological evidence strongly suggests that Caligula was an eccentric maniac, just as history has always portrayed him.

The fourth Roman emperor, Claudius, was selected and put into power by the Praetorian Guard in a de facto military coup. He had his first wife killed and married Agrippina, daughter of the sister of Caligula, and had the law changed to allow uncles to marry their nieces. In 54 AD, Claudius was killed with a poisoned mushroom fed to him by his wife, and that same day, the sixteen-year-old Nero, Agrippina’s son by a former husband, was acclaimed emperor in a carefully orchestrated piece of political theater. Nero was an insane tyrant who has been credited with setting

fire to Rome in 64 AD and persecuting some famous early Christians (Paul and Peter), although his reputation has been somewhat rehabilitated in recent years as a patron of the arts. All in all, however, not much recommends the Roman Empire as an example of enlightened government despite the enthusiasm for it by such neoconservative promoters of the George W. Bush administration as the *Washington Post*'s Charles Krauthammer, the pundit Max Boot, and the *Weekly Standard*'s William Kristol.

The history of the Roman republic for the twenty years after the death of Julius Caesar suggests that a rather thoughtless and poorly understood imperialism and militarism brought it down. The professionalization of a large standing army created invincible new sources of power within the republican polity. Late republican leaders had to mobilize the masses in order to exploit them as cannon fodder, which led in turn to the rise of populist generals who understood the grievances of their troops and veterans. It could happen here. It is worth remembering that only a few months ago a four-star American general, Wesley Clark, entered the primaries as a candidate for president.

Given the course of postwar Afghanistan and Iraq, it may not be too hard for someone to defeat George Bush in the election of 2004. He seems bent on defeating himself. But regardless of who or which party replaces him, they will have to deal with the Pentagon, the military-industrial complex, the empire of bases, and the fifty-year-old tradition of not telling the public what our military establishment costs and the devastation it can inflict.

From the moment the United States assumed the permanent military domination of the world, it was on its own—feared, hated, corrupt and corrupting, maintaining “order” through state terrorism and bribery, and given to megalomaniacal rhetoric and sophistries while virtually inviting the rest of the world to combine against it. The U.S. had mounted the

Napoleonic tiger and could not get off. During the Watergate scandal of the early 1970s, the president's chief of staff, H. R. Haldeman, once reproved White House counsel, John Dean, for speaking too frankly to Congress about the felonies President Nixon had ordered. “John,” he said, “once the toothpaste is out of the tube, it's hard to get it back in.” This homely metaphor by a former advertising executive who was to spend eighteen months in prison for his own role in Watergate fairly accurately describes the situation of the United States.

The sorrows of empire are the inescapable consequences of the national policies American elites chose after September 11, 2001. Militarism and imperialism always bring with them sorrows. The ubiquitous symbol of the Christian religion, the cross, is perhaps the world's most famous reminder of the sorrows that accompanied the Roman Empire—it represents the most atrocious death the Roman proconsuls could devise in order to keep subordinate peoples in line. From Cato to Cicero to Paul Wolfowitz, the slogan of such leaders has been “Let them hate us so long as they fear us.”

Four sorrows, it seems to me, are certain to be visited on the United States. Their cumulative effect guarantees that the U.S. will cease to resemble the country outlined in the Constitution of 1787. First, there will be a state of perpetual war, leading to more terrorism against Americans wherever they may be and a spreading reliance on nuclear weapons among smaller nations as they try to ward off the imperial juggernaut. Second is a loss of democracy and Constitutional rights as the presidency eclipses Congress and is itself transformed from a co-equal “executive branch” of government into a military junta. Third is the replacement of truth by propaganda, disinformation, and the glorification of war, power, and the military legions. Lastly, there is bankruptcy, as the United States pours its economic resources



into ever more grandiose military projects and shortchanges the education, health, and safety of its citizens.

Allegedly in response to the attacks of al-Qaeda on September 11, 2001, President Bush declared that the United States would dominate the world through absolute military superiority and wage preventive war against any possible competitor. He began to enunciate this doctrine in his June 1, 2002, speech to the cadets of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, and spelled it out in his "National Security Strategy of the United States" of September 20, 2002.

At West Point, the president said that the United States had a unilateral right to overthrow any government in the world that it deemed a rival to the United States. He argued that the United States must be prepared to wage the "war on terror" against as many as sixty countries if weapons of mass destruction are to be kept out of terrorists' hands. "We must take that battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans and confront the worst threats before they emerge." Americans must be "ready for pre-emptive action when necessary to defend our liberty and to defend our lives.... In the world we have entered, the only path to safety is the path of action. And this nation will act." Although Bush did not name every single one, his hit-list of sixty possible target countries was an escalation over Vice President Dick Cheney, who in November 2001, said that there were only "forty or fifty" countries that United States wanted to attack after eliminating the al-Qaeda terrorists in Afghanistan.

At West Point, the president justified his proposed massive military effort in terms of alleged universal values: "We will defend the peace against threats from terrorists and tyrants. We will... extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on every continent." He added an assertion that is demonstrably untrue but that in the mouth of the president of the United States on an official occasion amounted to the

announcement of a crusade: "Moral truth is the same in every culture, in every time, in every place."

The paradoxical effect of this grand strategy is that it may prove more radically disruptive of world order than anything the terrorists of September 11, 2001, could have hoped to achieve on their own. Through its actions, the United States seems determined to bring about precisely the threats that it says it is trying to prevent. Its apparent acceptance of a "clash of civilizations"—wars to establish a moral truth that is the same in every culture—sounds remarkably like a *jihad*, even including its basis in Christian fundamentalism. Bush seems to equate himself with Jesus Christ in his repeated statements (notably on September 20, 2001) that those who are not with us are against us, which duplicates Matthew chapter 12, verse 30, "He that is not with me is against me."

Bush and his administration have worked zealously to expand the powers of the presidency at the expense of the other branches of government. Article 1, Section 8, of the Constitution says explicitly that "The Congress shall have the power to declare war." It prohibits the president from making that decision. The most influential author of the Constitution, James Madison, wrote in 1793, "In no part of the Constitution is more wisdom to be found than in the clause which confides the question of war or peace to the legislature, and not the executive department.... The trust and the temptation would be too great for any one man." Yet, during October 2002, both houses of Congress voted to give the president open-ended authority to wage war against Iraq. It permitted the president to use any means, including military force and nuclear weapons, in a preventive strike against Iraq as soon and for as long as he—and he alone—determined it to be "appropriate." The vote of 296 to 33 in the House and 77 to 23 in the Senate was undoubtedly influenced by a National Intelligence Estimate that the White House ordered explicitly to



reinforce statements by the president and vice president. But there was no debate; members of Congress were too politically cowed to address the issue directly.

Equally serious, the Bush administration arrogated to itself the power unilaterally to judge whether an American citizen or a foreigner is part of a terrorist organization and can therefore be stripped of all Constitutional rights or rights under international law. President Bush's government has imprisoned 664 individuals from forty-two countries, including teenage children, at a concentration camp in Guantánamo, Cuba, where they are beyond the reach of the Constitution. It has also designated them "illegal combatants," a concept unknown in international law, to place them beyond the Geneva Conventions on the treatment of prisoners of war. None of them has been charged with anything: they are merely captives.

The third sorrow is lying and disinformation by the executive branch to the Congress, the people, and the world in order to protect and advance its covert militarism. The Department of Defense calls this "information warfare." Probably its most corrupt manifestation is to fabricate intelligence to justify the policies of a president and his staff. This is a criminal offense, even if it is rarely prosecuted. When it is exposed, it inevitably undermines the credibility of government officials and the agencies that perpetrated the fraud. It also makes it more likely that, if intelligence should reveal a genuine impending threat to the nation, the public will not believe the president when he warns them about it.

Over the years many governments have manufactured pretexts for going to war, including the Nazis in their assault on Poland of September 1, 1939. On February 5, 2003, Secretary of State Colin Powell went before the U.N. Security Council to set the stage for war by presenting what he called "definitive" American secret intelligence proving the existence of

chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons in Iraq. The secretary of state even tried to emulate the famous occasion in 1962 when U.N. ambassador Adlai Stevenson introduced photographs taken by a U-2 spy plane showing Russian nuclear missile emplacements in Cuba. Powell came with his own blowups of satellite reconnaissance photos. Apparently to add to the credibility of the presentation, George Tenet, the director of central intelligence, sat directly behind him and appeared in all television pictures of Powell speaking. Tenet made no comment, but his presence seemed to imply that what Powell had to say came with the full backing of the CIA. As we know today every word uttered by the secretary of state was a lie, which he is now trying to blame on the CIA. However, the result of this public deception is that today there is not a statesman, informed citizen, or foreign correspondent that would believe a single thing said by the chief American diplomat.

The final sorrow of empire is financial ruin. It is different from the other three in that bankruptcy may not be as fatal to the American Constitution as endless war, loss of liberty, and habitual official lying; but it is the only sorrow that will certainly lead to a crisis. The U.S. proved to be ready *militarily* for an Afghan war, for an Iraq war, perhaps even a North Korea war, but it is unprepared economically for even one of them, much less all three in rapid succession.

The permanent military domination of the world is an expensive business. Total costs of the American military establishment, including the Defense Department appropriation, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which are not included in the Defense budget, atomic weaponry, and military pensions and medical disability payments hover around three-quarters of a trillion dollars per year. Even more ruinous, we are not actually paying for our military activities but simply adding their costs to the monstrous federal deficit. Herbert Stein, when he was chairman

of the Council of Economic Advisers in a Republican administration, once said, "Things that can't go on forever, don't." That is the case today in the United States. Its solvency depends on the savings of people in East Asia, particularly in Japan and China. If they should decide to hold their wealth in Euros rather than dollars, the United States empire will crash much the way the Soviet Union did between 1989 and 1991.

In my judgment, American imperialism and militarism are so far advanced and obstacles to its further growth have been so completely neutralized that the decline of the U.S. has already begun. The U.S.'s refusal to dismantle its own empire of military bases when the menace of the Soviet Union disappeared, combined with its inappropriate response to the blowback of September 11, 2001, makes this decline virtually inevitable.

There is only one development that could conceivably stop this cancerous process, and that is for the people to retake control of Congress, reform it and the election laws to make it a genuine assembly of democratic representatives, and cut off the supply of money to the Pentagon and the Central Intelligence Agency. That was, after all, the way the Vietnam War was finally brought to a halt.

John le Carré, the novelist most famous for his books on the role of intelligence services in the Cold War, has written, "America has entered one of its periods of historical madness, but this is the worst I can remember: worse than McCarthyism, worse than the Bay of Pigs and in the long term potentially more disastrous than the Vietnam War." His view is somewhat more optimistic than mine. If this is just a period of madness, like musth in elephants, we might get over it. The U.S. still has a strong civil society that could, at least in theory, overcome the entrenched interests of the armed forces and the military-industrial complex. I fear, however, that we have already crossed

our Rubicon and that there is no way to restore Constitutional government short of a revolutionary rehabilitation of American democracy. Without root and branch reform, Nemesis awaits. She is the goddess of revenge, the punisher of pride and arrogance, and she is increasingly impatient for her meeting with us.

I had never given any thought to what Nemesis looks like, but not long ago John Shreffler of Brookline, Massachusetts, sent me a poem he wrote after reading *The Sorrows of Empire*. He calls it "Neighborhood Girl."

*She's new to the neighborhood, her family just moved in  
From Greece or somewhere, she's a great, tall, gawky girl,  
Big-boned and awkward, with uneven skin:  
Acne and hormones, she's just before the change,*

*And today, she's playing hooky. January's fog settles in.  
The orange lights on the school zone sign beat out  
their tattoo*

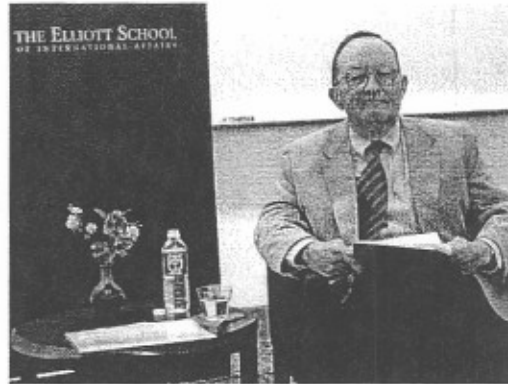
*And caution the Homeland's socked-in morning rush  
With their strobe-light samba: Condition Amber,*

*As she sits invisible, swinging her legs to the beat,  
Perched up high on aluminum over  
The uncanny Day-Glo of the key-lime fluorescence  
That says: School at the top of this composition.*

*I see her and she lets me. I'm an old family friend:  
Sometimes I play poker with her Aunt Erato.  
Her name is Nemesis and she's just moved in,  
She's new to the neighborhood, she's checking it out.*

\* This paper is based on a talk delivered as the 8<sup>th</sup> Gaston Sigur Annual Memorial Lecture, at the George Washington University on April 20, 2004.

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Chalmers Johnson, author of *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (Metropolitan Books, 2004) at the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Gaston Sigur Memorial Lecture on April 20, 2004.

