The fissures of imperial overreach and excess are widening and the Empire is being exposed for the ridiculous bully it really is. Cindy Sheehan

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Myth of US Innocence LTE by Dick Bennett

In its editorial of March 23, 2011, the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette repeated the old imperial lie: “But of course America doesn’t have to do anything—right, wrong, or in-between—to be the target of protest. Our very existence is a standing provocation to the tyrannies of the world. It’s been that way since we first proclaimed that all men are created equal. . . .So no one should be surprised to hear any protesters-for-hire in the Mid-east start chanting ‘Death to America!’ . . . Maybe chanting ‘Death to America!’ is just an old habit. By now it may be custom—a tradition!—when any two or three gather together in an Islamic country.”

Little of this is true. Who cried “Death to America!” in the nineteenth century? Not the Muslims or anybody except the British in 1812 and the Filipinos at the end of the century. Our Statue of Liberty welcomed the oppressed of the world, and they came, and still wish to come, including Muslims. Not our “very existence” has inspired enemies, but our many invasions and interventions, the tens of thousands of innocent people we have killed. Before us the cry was “Death to the Romans.” And then “Death to the British!” “Death to all the imperial tyrannies.” So “Death to the USA.” And it’s not just by Muslims. The cry has come not only from Filipinos, but from Hawaiians, Guatemalans, El Salvadorans, and all the many victims of US aggression.

So long as the myth continues of enemies who hate us for our democracy and affluence (‘our very existence’?), US imperial interventions will continue. We can contribute to an end of US wars of conquest or subversion by refuting this myth. Here is a brief list of some of the immense scholarship exposing the lie.

READING LIST FOR US EMPIRE

By Dick Bennett

US HISTORY OF IMPERIAL CONQUEST

DELUSIONAL NATIONAL MYTHS LEADING TO IMPERIAL DREAMS

Lawlessness of US Empire

Rise of Imperial Presidency


Military-Industrial-Congressional Complex
US Empire, Mainstream Media, Public Acquiescence


DICK BENNETT LTE, THE TROOPS PROTECT OUR FREEDOMS

250 words

Letters to this newspaper have defended the US invasions, occupations, assassinations, and troops, because they “defend our freedoms.” But there’s an irony in that argument. In the crusade of “defending” the US from a succession of ever-threatening diabolical enemies, our nation has become ever less free, not because of the enemies but because of our leaders’ own xenophobia, permanent war, distorted patriotism, and greed (and other devices of control exposed by Orwell in 1984). Internally, the fear and hatred, the militarism and imperialism have become the people’s real enemies in the name of exterminating heresy and affirming orthodoxy.

I’ll draw examples from the more distant past, trusting readers to remember the last two decades of external and internal McCarthyism—the war against the new enemies, the “terrorists.” The 1917 Espionage Act, the 1918 Sedition Act, the 1940 Smith Act, the 1950 Internal Security Act, the 1951 Supreme Court Dennis decision, the 1964 Communist Control Act, the 1960s COINTELPRO and tens of thousands of our own citizens political prisoners; President Reagan’s campaign of information control: the gag rule for public officials, Executive Order 12356 increasing the secrecy classification, increased use of the Foreign Agents Registration Act and the McCarran-Walter Act—these manifest a Soviet threat successfully sold to the public at the expense of the very freedom of thought and political pluralism allegedly endangered by the SU, our mirror image.

Let us treat with skepticism any alleged external threat which rationalizes military expansion abroad and erodes our liberty at home.

ANTI-IMPERIALISM


American Insurgents: A Brief History of American Anti-Imperialism By Richard Seymour

All empires spin self-serving myths, and in the United States the most potent of these is that America is a force for democracy around the world. Yet there is a tradition of American anti-imperialism that gives the lie to this mythology. Seymour examines this complex relationship from the American Revolution to the present-day.
About the author

Richard Seymour is a socialist writer and columnist and runs the blog Lenin's Tomb. He is the author of *The Liberal Defense of Murder* (Verso, 2008), and *The Meaning of David Cameron* (Zero Books, 2010). He has contributed to *Christopher Hitchens and His Critics: Terror, Iraq and the Left*, (NYU Press, 2008) and *The Ashgate Research Companion to Political Violence* (Ashgate, forthcoming). His articles have appeared in *The Guardian, The New Statesman, Radical Philosophy* and *Historical Materialism*. Originally from Northern Ireland, he now resides in London, where he is studying for a PhD at the London School of Economics.

Praise for *American Insurgents*

“American Insurgents presents an indispensable history of anti-imperialist movements in the United States, beginning with the resistance to slavery and moving forward through the various seasons of U.S. imperialism. Seymour shatters a whole host of standard misconceptions about resistance to overseas adventures, refuting the common portrait of a US public apathetic to the crimes of its government in foreign lands, documenting the many times that large movements have challenged the bipartisan support of empire-building, and highlighting the internationalist nature and diverse membership of these movements. He demonstrates that anti-imperialist efforts have been most effective when they have forged links of solidarity with the victims of US policies, when they have emphasized the connections between domestic oppression and overseas imperialism, and when they have maintained independence from the two major parties. The book is illuminated by the courageous and inspiring voices of US anti-imperialists, from Frederick Douglass to Muhammad Ali to current opponents of recent US wars in the Middle East.”

—Michael Schwartz, author, *War Without End*

“In the tradition of Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History of the United States* and Joe Allen’s *Vietnam*, Richard Seymour shows that, from Manifest Destiny and the ‘White Man’s Burden’ to ‘Humanitarian Intervention and the ‘War on Terror,’ U.S. imperialism has generated significant domestic opposition rooted in grassroots movements for racial, economic and social justice. Stressing the trap of Democratic Party co-optation, he offers important lessons about how today’s movements of the 99 percent can most effectively oppose wars of the 1 percent.”
“Aggression causes attacks” by Bill Orton, LTE Arkansas Democrat Gazette (2-10-12).

Poor paranoid Paul Greenberg. He sees the rest of the world as “our enemies” and “forces of tyranny,” who will surely attack if the U.S. policy changes from world’s worst aggressor state to non-interventionism. And what chutzpah! He gives a list of terrible and deadly events caused by U.S. military intervention and attempts to spin them as a reason to continue the same insane policy of aggression.

Like Rudy Giuliani (and unlike Ron Paul and Dennis Kucinich), Greenberg seems oblivious to the concept of blowback—that military aggression has consequences. Instead, he disparages peace heroes and antiinterventionists like Charles Lindbergh and Ron Paul.

Smedley Butler, the World War I hero, had it right: War is a racket. In Butler’s day the beneficiaries were banana companies and the munitions industry; today we have oil companies and the munitions industry sucking the prosperity from the country.

Greenberg appeals to Keynesianism, claiming that paying people to die and/or blow things up is good for the economy. The astute reader should note that paying people to destroy things is even more irrational than digging holes and filling them in.

Get real. If the U.S. shut down all its military bases outside the U.S. and limited itself to defense, the chances of being attacked would be tiny fraction of what they are today.

It’s simple: If you’re not a brutish bully, you’re less likely to get attacked.

BILL ORTON Fayetteville

February 5, 2012

Tomgram: Engelhardt, Kicking Down the World's Door

[Note for TomDispatch Readers: Just a reminder for those planning their week: Jeremy Scahill, one of the best investigative journalists in the business, and I will be talking together on stage at New York University’s Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute on Friday, February 10th, 6-8pm. Click here for details and directions. It’s for the official launch of my book, The United States of Fear (Haymarket Books), which you can buy by clicking here. For a contribution of $75 or more to TomDispatch, you can get a signed, personalized copy of the book with my thanks to you. (Visit our donation page by clicking here.) If you buy the book, or anything else, via any of our book links that take you to Amazon.com, this website gets a modest percentage of your purchase, which is a good way to contribute at no extra cost to you. Tom]

Offshore Everywhere

How Drones, Special Operations Forces, and the U.S. Navy Plan to End National Sovereignty As We Know It

By Tom Engelhardt

Make no mistake: we’re entering a new world of military planning. Admittedly, the latest proposed Pentagon budget manages to preserve just about every costly toy-cum-boondoggle from the good old days when MiGs still roamed the skies, including an uncut nuclear arsenal. Eternally over-budget items like the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, cherished by their services and well-lobbied congressional representatives, aren’t leaving the scene any time soon, though
delays or cuts in purchase orders are planned. All this should reassure us that, despite the talk of massive cuts, the U.S. military will continue to be the profligate, inefficient, and remarkably ineffective institution we’ve come to know and squander our treasure on. Still, the cuts that matter are already in the works, the ones that will change the American way of war. They may mean little in monetary terms -- the Pentagon budget is actually slated to increase through 2017 -- but in imperial terms they will make a difference. A new way of preserving the embattled idea of an American planet is coming into focus and one thing is clear: in the name of Washington's needs, it will offer a direct challenge to national sovereignty.

Heading Offshore
The Marines began huge amphibious exercises -- dubbed Bold Alligator 2012 -- off the East coast of the U.S. last week, but someone should IM them: it won't help. No matter what they do, they are going to have less boots on the ground in the future, and there's going to be less ground to have them on. The same is true for the Army (even if a cut of 100,000 troops will still leave the combined forces of the two services larger than they were on September 11, 2001). Less troops, less full-frontal missions, no full-scale invasions, no more counterinsurgency: that's the order of the day. Just this week, in fact, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta suggested that the schedule for the drawdown of combat boots in Afghanistan might be speeded up by more than a year. Consider it a sign of the times. Like the F-35, American mega-bases, essentially well-fortified American towns plunked down in a strange land, like our latest “embassies” the size of lordly citadels, aren't going away soon. After all, in base terms, we’re already hunkered down in the Greater Middle East in an impressive way. Even in post-withdrawal Iraq, the Pentagon is negotiating for a new long-term defense agreement that might include getting a little of its former base space back, and it continues to build in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Washington has typically signaled in recent years that it’s ready to fight to the last Japanese prime minister not to lose a single base among the three dozen it has on the Japanese island of Okinawa. But here's the thing: even if the U.S. military is dragging its old habits, weaponry, and global-basing ideas behind it, it's still heading offshore. There will be no more land wars on the Eurasian continent. Instead, greater emphasis will be placed on the Navy, the Air Force, and a policy “pivot” to face China in southern Asia where the American military position can be strengthened without more giant bases or monster embassies.

Click here to read more of this dispatch  http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/175498/tomgram%3A_engelhardt%2C_kicking_down_the_world%27s_door/#more

THE EMPIRE'S WEB: ENCYCLOPEDIA OF INTERVENTIONISM AND SUBVERSION

The Author
Eva Golinger
Venezuela
Press), “The Empire’s Web: Encyclopedia of Interventionism and Subversion”, “La Mirada del Imperio sobre el 4F: Los Documentos Desclasificados de Washington sobre la rebelión militar del 4 de febrero de 1992” and "La Agresión Permanente: USAID, NED y CIA". Since 2003, Eva, a graduate of Sarah Lawrence College and CUNY Law School in New York, has been investigating, analyzing and writing about US intervention in Venezuela using the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to obtain information about US Government efforts to undermine progressive movements in Latin America. Her first book, The Chávez Code, has been translated and published in 8 languages (English, Spanish, French, German, Italian, Russian, Farsi & Turkish) and is presently being made into a feature film.

Tuesday, November 18, 2008

THE EMPIRE’S WEB: ENCYCLOPEDIA OF INTERVENTIONISM AND SUBVERSION

The Empire’s Web: An Encyclopedia of Interventionism and Subversion is a tool essential to understand the deep and complex mechanisms of U.S. interventionism that has plagued people’s movements around the world during the last two centuries. In this book, the authors demonstrate the connections and relationships between different actors, institutions, government agencies, NGOs, think tanks and political parties around the world, such as the Rockefellers, CIA, Human Rights Watch, National Endowment for Democracy (NED), Bilderberg Club, USAID, the Military Industrial Complex, and many others, and how they form part of a massive network seeking world domination and imposition of the capitalist-consumerist model. The Empire’s Web is not your typical book. Use it as a reference manual, a guide to imperialism, a political tool that can help you understand the intricacies of the relationships between actors and entities that act against the will of sovereign peoples. There is not one entry in this book – person, institution, multinational, agency, NGO, think tank or strategy – that is more important than the others. This is The Empire’s Web; get to know it well, because if you don’t, you could get trapped in its fatal grasp.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION COMING SOON. FOR INTERESTED PUBLISHERS IN ENGLISH, PLEASE EMAIL ME AT EVAGOLINGER@GMAIL.COM

About the Authors

Eva Golinger: Venezuelan-American lawyer, writer and investigator dedicated to investigating and denouncing U.S. intervention in Venezuela and other Latin American nations during the last decade. Author of the books The Chávez Code: Cracking United States Intervention in Venezuela (Olive Branch Press 2006) and Bush vs. Chávez: Washington’s War on Venezuela (Monthly Review Press 2007), amongst other publications and articles. Her books have been translated to English, French, German and Italian. She has won two National Book Awards (Venezuela 2006) and the Municipal Book Award (Caracas 2007) for her first book, The
Chávez Code. She is currently and investigador with the Centro Internacional Miranda (CIM) and co-founder and General Director of the Center for Strategic Studies “CESE” in Caracas, Venezuela.

Romain Migus: Investigator and French sociologist residing in Venezuela since 2004. Author of various publications and articles in French, English and Spanish about the Bolivarian Revolution and the Media War against Venezuela. During 2006-2007 he was an investigator with the Centro Internacional Miranda. He is co-founder and Communications Director of the Center for Strategic Studies “CESE” in Caracas, Venezuela.

Posted by Eva Golinger at 12:13 PM

VIETNAM WAR, IRAQ WAR, THREATENING IRAN, FEAR-MONGERING, US DECLINE

Noam Chomsky, “Losing” the World

Tom-Gram Op-Ed, NationofChange, Feb. 14, 2012: “There are important lessons in all this for today, even apart from another reminder that only the weak and defeated are called to account for their crimes. One lesson is that to understand what is happening we should attend not only to critical events of the real world, often dismissed from history, but also to what leaders and elite opinion believe, however tinged with fantasy.” READ | DISCUSS | SHARE  http://www.nationofchange.org/losing-world-1329237182

Peace has a day in Court
Cindy Sheehan

For those of you who know me and have been following my story, you know that part of my resistance to the US Empire is my refusal to pay income taxes.

This morning (April 19th), a new episode unfolded in my ongoing struggle with the IRS and the Empire the agency is nestled in.

I was subpoenaed to appear in the 9th Circuit court of the US Federal Court system in Sacramento, California—my state’s capitol.

For background, I have had two meetings with the IRS agent assigned to my case where I expressed to him my unwillingness, due to my principles, to participate in funding a system that commits crimes almost every second of
every day. At this point, the IRS is trying to collect 105 grand that it says I owe for the tax years 2005-2006. I first became a war tax refuser in 2005.

My defense is one based on a far superior morality than one practiced by the US government and the fact that my outspokenness against this immorality, and my notoriety in doing so, has put me into a precarious position in a climate where free speech and peaceful protest is being suppressed, sometimes very violently, as we have increasingly witnessed.

In the past after about 15 arrests, I have also had many opportunities to appear in court, federal and otherwise, in front of judges who never showed one bit of compassion or sympathy towards the protesters’ first amendment right trumping the governments’ harsh rules and laws profoundly inhibiting those rights.

I have never once “gotten off” using a defense based on the Bill of Rights of the US Constitution.

In that Bill of Rights, there’s an especially pesky little 1st Amendment that says, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.” Yet Congress and other legislative bodies routinely pass these laws prohibiting the free exercise of speech and the right to peaceably assemble and our protests become more and more meaningless as we are pushed farther and farther away from our, for want of a better word, targets. In addition, the police state is increasingly chasing protesters away by tear gas, pepper spray, rubber bullets, sound weaponry and other supposedly "non-lethal" means.

When I decided to be a conscientious objector to war tax, I knew that the consequence could be harassment and/or punishment, but I decided to do it long before I became well known as a gadfly to Empire. I was willing to accept those consequences because I felt that if I were put on trial, the reasons that I don’t fund war crimes would have to also be put on trial, and I think it’s the only way that the illegality of the wars can actually get a hearing.

I have an advisor who is an experienced tax attorney who advises the National War Tax Resister’s Coordinating Committee and he feels that the Empire may be targeting me to get publicity and to intimidate others from taking the same course of action that I actually encourage others to do, so he could inform me as to what usually happens every step of the way, but my case could be “special” and contain many surprises, a few which did occur in court today.
Before I continue, I’d like to say that since I have become an antiwar “criminal,” my respect for the legal profession has grown by leaps and bounds. I have always managed to attract some amazing attorneys to help me in my cases always on a pro bono basis and this case is no exception. My attorney of record in California is San Francisco attorney, Dennis Cunningham, who has been involved in many protest cases and advising us is Peter Goldberger in Pennsylvania. I am so thankful for the help of my attorneys and for the NWRTCC and I honestly don’t know what I would do without their legal help and peer support.

Anyway, there was a pre-hearing rally in Sacramento today and supporters came there from Los Angeles, Ventura, San Jose, San Francisco, Nevada City and Sacramento—we filled the small courtroom after the rally (my pre rally statement is linked here).

After we went through security and had to relinquish cameras and the signs we had pinned to us showing my son’s picture and my picture and NO WAR TAXES printed on top, we went to the courtroom where my hearing was the final one on a short docket of four.

We were arguing that I had a 1st Amendment right to the protest and a 5th Amendment right against self-incrimination and the attorney for the IRS and her buddies that traveled from DC (yes, of course, this is not a political persecution) argued that a “blanket 5th” is not allowed by case law and rulings and she wanted me to be ordered to go to a room in the federal building to answer questions about my “assets.” (My lawyer brilliantly argued that the “secret” agencies already had all that information on me, anyway)—but there was no way that I was going to be blindsided by an unwarranted demand like that and this is where some extraordinary things happened.

Dennis was able to expound at length about our fears of political retribution and my moral opposition to the wars and he was able to iterate that I was against militarism and the huge proportion of our taxes that go towards it. This is what I have always wanted—the position of Peace had its day in court today! I was thrilled beyond belief, but what happened when Dennis finished literally blew me away.

The Magistrate who presided over the hearing, John Moulds, is an older man whom my attorney said has been on the bench for years and years, but is known to be “fair” and not too “excitable.”

The Magistrate said that he read all of our motions and he looked me right in the
eyes from across the room and with great emotion in his voice he said, "It strikes me as a civilized way to protest uncivilized acts." (Reuters) I actually started to cry because it was such a beautiful thing to say in such a loving way and I can’t ever recall anyone in the government and/or establishment that has ever genuinely acknowledged my pain and practically admitted that what happened to Casey and my family was disordered. Oh, many democrats pretended that they were sorry for my pain, but they were only doing it for crass political gain—and when the republicans acknowledged it, they were “thanking” me for my son’s brave service to the country—I don’t know which approach was worse, but I felt no compassion until today.

Then the lady from DC said that she could “sympathize with conscientious objectors” but “losing a son” was no excuse to “break the law with impunity.” What’s the empire’s excuse for breaking the law with impunity in many ways on every day?

Dennis and I agreed to meet with the IRS at a future date so I could do a line by line 5th amendment claim to each question and the lady from DC requested that the magistrate order me to comply and show up for the meeting and he said something like, “I want the parties to talk, this hearing is over and I have 45 days to make a ruling one way or the other on your motion—I may, or I may not.” According to Peter, this is also something unprecedented. I came away feeling very energized and encouraged by today’s proceedings and if the Empire wants to make someone cower before them in fear to intimidate others, they picked the wrong person. Even if the magistrate hadn’t been so favorable to our side, I still would feel triumphant.

The fissures of imperial overreach and excess are widening and the Empire is being exposed for the ridiculous bully it really is.

No Empire lasts forever and the terribly destructive nature of ours requires us to help its inevitable collapse. I am doing everything I can in my own small ways with all the courage I can muster and I appreciate all the support and help I get along the way.

Posted by Cindy Sheehan at 6:00 AM

RACHEL MADDOW’S DRIFT
Bullet Points

Rachel Maddow proposes solutions to decades of American military bloat.  
By Emily Bazelon | Posted Saturday, March 31, 2012, at 12:13 AM ET

The appeal of Rachel Maddow lies in her ratio of comedian to wonk. On TV, she dives into charts and graphs and long, winding fact trails, unafraid of geeking out because she can depend on her funniness to save her. She connects the dots from fact to fact, or statistic to policy, and along the way a parachute of jokes opens.

So, sure, I’m a fan. But I worried that Maddow wouldn’t be as sharp on the page. After all, she’s a big enough celebrity that she could outsource the hard work to a half-dozen MSNBC interns and a ghostwriter, sit back, and reap the royalties. Or she could crank out a polemic that’s light on evidence, make some jokes along the way, and call it a day.

In her new book *Drift: The Unmooring of American Military Power*, Maddow takes neither shortcut. Instead, she takes her readers on a biting, bracing tour of the rise of American military bloat. Maddow wants us to confront the size and heft of the national security complex we’ve built, and also to understand how its gargantuan growth is tied to the wolfish executive branch’s usurpation of the sheeplike legislature’s war-making powers. Plenty of legal scholars and others have been here before Maddow. But they didn’t bring along a joke parachute.

*Drift: The Unmooring of American Military Power* by Rachel Maddow
Crown

*Drift* starts with Thomas Jefferson and his distrust of the standing army. Seven pages later, we’re in the thick of Vietnam, and Maddow’s making the case that Lyndon B. Johnson changed the rules for American armed conflict. Unlike presidents before him, LBJ refused to call up the U.S. Army Reserve and the National Guard to fight his war, mostly because “he didn’t want to get Congress and the rest of the country all het up and asking too many questions.”

Maddow has two problems with Johnson’s decision. First, it divided the military from the rest of the country in a way that previous wars had not—and that the end of the draft has perpetuated. Since 9/11, Maddow writes, less than 1 percent of the U.S. population has been called on to serve. This has drastically altered how presidents tally the cost of going to war. “We’ve never been further from the ideal of the citizen-soldier, from the idea that America would find it impossible to go to war without disrupting domestic civilian life,” Maddow writes.

LBJ also set a precedent for sidelining Congress in the decision about whether to go to war—a decision that the Constitution explicitly gave to the legislature, not the president. In 1973, Congress tried to hit back with the War Powers Resolution, written to reassert its constitutional prerogative. But, as Maddow shows, that idea has been kicked around by every president from Ronald Reagan (Grenada) to Bill Clinton (the Balkans) to the Georges Bush (Saddam) to Barack Obama (Libya). Congress doesn’t declare war, and the president sends the troops anyway.

Maddow is very good on the master of executive-branch high jinks, Ronald Reagan. We first meet him starring in World War II propaganda films for the Army Air Corps’ First Motion Picture Unit, better known as Fum-Poo. Forty years later, as president, Reagan seems like he’s still in a movie when he tilts at the windmill of “Soviet-Cuban militarization” by attacking Grenada. Maddow reminds us just how thin the justification for bombing that small island really was: In an Oval Office speech, Reagan made Grenada’s new airfield sound like Castro’s personal launching pad when in fact it was built for tourists with funds from the British government. These are details that I’d forgotten. By making us remember, Maddow doesn’t just send up Reagan. She reminds us how easy it is for the government to make claims that are utterly ridiculous only in retrospect.

Tomgram: Andrew Bacevich, The Golden Age of Special Operations
They have a way of slipping under the radar, whether heading into Pakistan looking for Osama bin Laden, Central Africa looking for Joseph Kony, or Yemen assumedly to direct local military action against al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. I’m talking, of course, about U.S. special operations forces. These days, from Somalia to the Philippines, presidential global interventions are increasingly a dime a dozen; and they are normally spearheaded by those special ops troops backed by CIA or Air Force drones. Few Americans even notice.

An ever expanding secret military cocooned inside the U.S. military, special operations types remain remarkably, determinedly anonymous. With the exception of their commander, Admiral William McRaven, they generally won’t even reveal their last names in public, which only contributes to their growing mystique in this country.

But for a crew so dedicated to anonymity, they also turn out to be publicity hounds of the first order. In 2011, for instance, active-duty U.S. Navy Seals (first-name only please!) became movie stars, spearheading a number one box office hit, Act of Valor. It was the film equivalent of a vanity-press production, focused as it did on their own skills in battle in... hmmm, the Philippines (to prevent a terror strike against the U.S.). A team of SEALs even parachuted onto Sunset Boulevard for the film’s Hollywood premiere.

Then last week another special ops team, in coordination with their Norwegian and Australian counterparts, heroically rescued the mayor of Tampa Bay, held "hostage." They also rappelled down from helicopters and arrived in Humvees to secure the area around the Tampa Convention Center, which will service 15,000 members of the media when the Republicans hit town to nominate Mitt Romney for president. Whew! Another close publicity call!

It was a mock assault on terror watched by thousands of Tampa residents, all timed to the annual Special Operations Forces Industry Conference, also in town and swarmed by 8,000 attendees, including McRaven. Its goal: to bring together special operators from around the world and the industry that arms and accessorizes them. (U.S. special ops forces have a $2 billion purchasing budget each year for all the gadgets the defense industry can produce.)

Oh, and if you want a measure of how hot the special ops guys are these days, how much everyone wants to horn in on their act, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton spoke before the conference, offering, according to Danger Room’s David Axe, “a vision in which shadowy U.S. and allied Special Operations Forces, working hand in hand with America’s embassies and foreign governments, together play a key role preventing low-intensity conflicts.” And if those conflicts aren’t prevented, then the Foreign Service, Clinton assured her listeners, will be happy to lend its “language and cultural skills” to the fighting prowess of the special ops troops. Diplomacy? It’s so old school in such a sexy, new, “covert” war-fightin’ world.
The basic principle is simple enough: if you see a juggernaut heading your way, duck. As TomDispatch regular Andrew Bacevich, editor most recently of *The Short American Century*, makes clear, war American-style is heading back "into the shadows" and it's going to be one roller-coaster of a scary ride. (To catch Timothy MacBain's latest Tomcast audio interview in which Bacevich discusses what we don’t know about special operations forces, click [here](#) or download it to your iPod [here](#).) *Tom Unleashed*  

**Globalizing the Global War on Terror**  

By [Andrew J. Bacevich](#)

As he campaigns for reelection, President Obama periodically reminds audiences of his success in terminating the deeply unpopular Iraq War. With fingers crossed for luck, he vows to do the same with the equally unpopular war in Afghanistan. If not exactly a peacemaker, our Nobel Peace Prize-winning president can (with some justification) at least claim credit for being a war-ender.

Yet when it comes to military policy, the Obama administration’s success in shutting down wars conducted in plain sight tells only half the story, and the lesser half at that. More significant has been this president’s enthusiasm for instigating or expanding secret wars, those conducted out of sight and by commandos.

President Franklin Roosevelt may not have invented the airplane, but during World War II he transformed strategic bombing into one of the principal emblems of the reigning American way of war. General Dwight D. Eisenhower had nothing to do with the Manhattan Project that developed the atomic bomb. Yet, as president, Ike’s strategy of Massive Retaliation made nukes the centerpiece of U.S. national security policy.

So, too, with Barack Obama and special operations forces. The U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) with its constituent operating forces -- Green Berets, Army Rangers, Navy SEALs, and the like -- predated his presidency by decades. Yet it is only on Obama’s watch that these secret warriors have reached the pinnacle of the U.S. military’s prestige hierarchy.

John F. Kennedy famously gave the Green Berets their distinctive headgear. Obama has endowed the whole special operations “community” with something less decorative but far more important: privileged status that provides special operators with maximum autonomy while insulating them from the vagaries of politics, budgetary or otherwise. Congress may yet require the Pentagon to undertake some (very modest) belt-tightening, but one thing’s for sure: no one is going to tell USSOCOM to go on a diet. What the special ops types want, they will get, with few questions asked -- and virtually none of those few posed in public.
Since 9/11, USSOCOM’s budget has quadrupled. The special operations order of battle has expanded accordingly. At present, there are an estimated 66,000 uniformed and civilian personnel on the rolls, a doubling in size since 2001 with further growth projected. Yet this expansion had already begun under Obama’s predecessor. His essential contribution has been to broaden the special ops mandate. As one observer put it, the Obama White House let Special Operations Command “off the leash.”

As a consequence, USSOCOM assets today go more places and undertake more missions while enjoying greater freedom of action than ever before. After a decade in which Iraq and Afghanistan absorbed the lion’s share of the attention, hitherto neglected swaths of Africa, Asia, and Latin America are receiving greater scrutiny. Already operating in dozens of countries around the world -- as many as 120 by the end of this year -- special operators engage in activities that range from reconnaissance and counterterrorism to humanitarian assistance and “direct action.” The traditional motto of the Army special forces is “De Oppresso Liber” (“To Free the Oppressed”). A more apt slogan for special operations forces as a whole might be “Coming soon to a Third World country near you!”

The displacement of conventional forces by special operations forces as the preferred U.S. military instrument -- the “force of choice” according to the head of USSOCOM, Admiral William McRaven -- marks the completion of a decades-long cultural repositioning of the American soldier. The G.I., once represented by the likes of cartoonist Bill Mauldin’s iconic Willie and Joe, is no more, his place taken by today’s elite warrior professional. Mauldin’s creations were heroes, but not superheroes. The nameless, lionized SEALs who killed Osama bin Laden are flesh-and blood Avengers. Willie and Joe were "us." SEALs are anything but "us." They occupy a pedestal well above mere mortals. Couch potato America stands in awe of their skill and bravery.

This cultural transformation has important political implications. It represents the ultimate manifestation of the abyss now separating the military and society. Nominally bemoaned by some, including former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and former Joint Chiefs Chairman Admiral Mike Mullen, this civilian-military gap has only grown over the course of decades and is now widely accepted as the norm. As one consequence, the American people have forfeited owner’s rights over their army, having less control over the employment of U.S. forces than New Yorkers have over the management of the Knicks or Yankees.

As admiring spectators, we may take at face value the testimony of experts (even if such testimony is seldom disinterested) who assure us that the SEALs, Rangers, Green Berets, etc. are the best of the best, and that they stand ready to deploy at a moment’s notice so that Americans can sleep soundly in their beds. If the United States is indeed engaged, as Admiral McRaven has said, in "a generational struggle," we will surely want these guys in our corner.

Even so, allowing war in the shadows to become the new American way of war is not without a
downside. Here are three reasons why we should think twice before turning global security over to Admiral McRaven and his associates.

*Goodbye accountability.* Autonomy and accountability exist in inverse proportion to one another. Indulge the former and kiss the latter goodbye. In practice, the only thing the public knows about special ops activities is what the national security apparatus chooses to reveal. Can you rely on those who speak for that apparatus in Washington to tell the truth? No more than you can rely on JPMorgan Chase to manage your money prudently. Granted, out there in the field, most troops will do the right thing most of the time. On occasion, however, even members of an elite force will stray off the straight-and-narrow. (Until just a few weeks ago, most Americans considered White House Secret Service agents part of an elite force.) Americans have a strong inclination to trust the military. Yet as a famous Republican once said: trust but verify. There's no verifying things that remain secret. Unleashing USSOCOM is a recipe for mischief.

*Hello imperial presidency.* From a president’s point of view, one of the appealing things about special forces is that he can send them wherever he wants to do whatever he directs. There’s no need to ask permission or to explain. Employing USSOCOM as your own private military means never having to say you’re sorry. When President Clinton intervened in Bosnia or Kosovo, when President Bush invaded Afghanistan and Iraq, they at least went on television to clue the rest of us in. However perfunctory the consultations may have been, the White House at least talked things over with the leaders on Capitol Hill. Once in a while, members of Congress even cast votes to indicate approval or disapproval of some military action. With special ops, no such notification or consultation is necessary. The president and his minions have a free hand. Building on the precedents set by Obama, stupid and reckless presidents will enjoy this prerogative no less than shrewd and well-intentioned ones.

*And then what...?* As U.S. special ops forces roam the world slaying evildoers, the famous question posed by David Petraeus as the invasion of Iraq began -- "Tell me how this ends" -- rises to the level of Talmudic conundrum. There are certainly plenty of evildoers who wish us ill (primarily but not necessarily in the Greater Middle East). How many will USSOCOM have to liquidate before the job is done? Answering that question becomes all the more difficult given that some of the killing has the effect of adding new recruits to the ranks of the non-well-wishers.

In short, handing war to the special operators severs an already too tenuous link between war and politics; it becomes war for its own sake. Remember George W. Bush’s “Global War on Terror”? Actually, his war was never truly global. War waged in a special-operations-first world just might become truly global -- and never-ending. In that case, Admiral McRaven’s "generational struggle" is likely to become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

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TomDispatch regular. He is editor of the new book The Short American Century, just published by Harvard University Press. To listen to Timothy MacBain's latest Tomcast audio interview in which Bacevich discusses what we don’t know about special operations forces, click here or download it to your iPod here.

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War Without End: The Iraq War in Context
By Michael Schwartz

(from the publisher) In this razor-sharp analysis, TomDispatch.com commentator Michael Schwartz demolishes the myths used to sell the U.S. public the idea of an endless “war on terror” centered in Iraq.

He demonstrates how the U.S. occupation is fueling rather than restraining civil war in Iraq, and how U.S. officials systematically dismantled the Iraqi state and economy, helping to destroy rather than rebuild the country.

In a popular style, reminiscent of the best writing against the Vietnam war, he shows how the real U.S. interests in Iraq have been rooted in the geopolitics of oil and the expansion of a neoliberal economic model in the Middle East—and around the globe—at gunpoint.

War Without End also reveals how the failure of the United States in Iraq has forced U.S. planners to fundamentally rethink the imperial fantasies driving recent foreign policy.

About the author

Michael Schwartz, professor of sociology and faculty director of the Undergraduate College of Global Studies at Stony Brook University, has written extensively on the war in Iraq at sites including TomDispatch, ZNet, Asia Times, and Mother Jones, and in numerous magazines, including Contexts, Against the Current, and Z.

Video

Michael Schwartz discusses the neoliberal occupation of Iraq:
“Americans have all along needed a sociologist, not a general, to help them understand Iraq. They need to know about social movements, not just militias, and about oil politics, not just personalities in the news. We have the incredible good fortune that the perspicacious Michael Schwartz boldly stepped forward to cast floods of illumination on the Iraq War and its tragic social costs.”
—Juan Cole, Informed Comment

“The best history of the U.S. occupation of Iraq that I’ve seen…. This book puts incidents of violence we hear about in the context of the massive violence we don’t hear much about, and puts all of it in the context of the economic and social devastation imposed on Iraq…. Schwartz also helps to make the complex clearer and simpler by framing his account in terms of the actual oily motivations of our government, rather than any of the pretended rationales.”
—David Swanson, Global Research

"War Without End is a brilliant and readable introduction to the destruction wrought by America’s lust for oil and an insightful look at 21st century colonialism."
—Eleanor J. Bader