

Bloated Military-Industrial Complex Needs to be Challenged in this Election

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One issue the American people likely are not going to hear about in this presidential campaign are arguments for slashing a bloated Pentagon down to size. No matter that each passing day brings some new revelation of gross mismanagement, cronyism, waste, and extra-legal activity, it is a topic no candidate for the White House dares to broach lest he or she be deemed “naïve” or “soft” on the subject of defense. Yet, the military-industrial complex(MIC) is here and it is running this nation into the ground, sucking trillions of dollars out of taxpayers’ wallets and, by starving other human services, laying waste to civilian sectors in urgent need of repair and regeneration.

When the Pentagon was under construction, members of the Roosevelt cabinet questioned the wisdom of bringing together under one roof the numerous military offices scattered around Washington, D.C. They feared the impending consolidation of awesome martial powers into one of the greatest structures on earth; they worried, too, that the war machine might take on a life of its own. Tragically, their fears have been realized.

As James Carroll writes in “House of War”(Houghton Mifflin), by 1965 nearly 6 million Americans were employed in Pentagon-run enterprises. After all, in the 20 years following World War II, “the Pentagon spent nearly \$100 billion, ten times the federal expenditures devoted to all aspects of health, education, and welfare in the same period.” By 1997, Father Philip Berrigan, humanitarian and anti-war activist, could tell the judge who would shortly sentence him to two years in prison for spilling blood on a U.S. warship: “The United States has spent fourteen trillion dollars on arms since 1946. Our government has intervened in the affairs of fifty nations and has violated the laws of God and humanity by designing, deploying, using, and threatening to use atomic weapons.”

Carroll sees it in much the same light: “The Pentagon is now the dead center of an open-ended martial enterprise that no longer pretends to be defense...the Pentagon has, more than ever, become a place to fear.”

“What the Bush administration has done,” Carroll writes, “is to lay bare the real character of the ‘disastrous rise’ of Pentagon power of which Eisenhower warned in 1961. In Iraq, despite America’s overwhelming military might, there will be no winning ever.”

Carroll’s words sound more prophetic each time another general testifies the Pentagon is “making progress” but the situation remains “fragile” and so we must stay on an on. Two years ago Carroll literally predicted Senator John McCain’s comment about staying in Iraq for a hundred years if need be, writing, “there will be no winning ever. Whether the U.S. occupation is terminated abruptly or is maintained for years, violence and mayhem will

define Iraq indefinitely, while the rest of the Middle East copes with Iraqi-spawned waves of chaos.”

McCain says, if elected, he will be out of Iraq by 2013, but as Senator Joseph Biden pointed out in a recent talk carried on C-Span, McCain gave no specifics. And so one begins to suspect the goal in Iraq is not necessarily to win a war but to make war again and again, forever and a day, so the MIC can prosper while non-defense sectors starve, so that government contractors can erect a monster embassy in Baghdad and huge, permanent military bases nearby to dominate the oil-rich Middle East.

Carroll writes the U.S. under President Bush has “normalized” war: “Not noted by most Americans, a new archipelago of U.S. military bases stretched across the Middle East into the heart of the former Soviet Union...Such forward basing of forces was designed to control, by means of ‘regime change’ and ‘prevention,’ emerging political trends around the globe, with the unabashed goal of guaranteeing U.S. dominance everywhere.” (America operates about 1,000 military bases at home and more than 700 overseas.)

“Such a strategy,” Carroll goes on to write, “assumes not only the possession of unparalleled military power but the display of it and the ready use of it. Under George W. Bush, a self-styled war president, ‘the normalization of war’ was thus established.”

What’s more, Carroll writes, under former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, the Pentagon in 2002 embarked “on the stunning project of developing a new generation of nuclear weapons including a burrowing device designed to go after underground targets and ‘mini-nukes’ to be used in concert with a conventional attack.”

The effect of all this, Carroll writes, “is to legitimize nuclear-based power politics, giving other nations, friend and foe alike, compelling reasons to acquire a nuclear capacity, if only for deterrence, and prompting them to behave in similar ways.” Carroll says the U.S. return to nuclear development was to spur Iran and North Korea to become nuclear-capable and to make states that renounced the atom—such as Brazil, Egypt, South Africa— rethink that decision. Meanwhile, Carroll says, Russia, China, Israel, India and Pakistan “are all furiously adding to their nuclear arsenals” and “The Pentagon has become the engine of proliferation.”

If the public hasn’t figured it out yet, the United States of America cannot go on this way forever, spending nearly half of every tax dollar on war. It is being run by a criminal enterprise, just as surely as if some family of Mafia gangsters occupied the White House and decided to loot the planet. The Bush regime is in Iraq to steal oil, to swindle taxpayers, to give lucrative defense contracts to its friends, to fleece motorists, to explode radioactive ammunition, to test new weapons, and to intimidate the world.

And the tyrannosaurus Rex in the family room smashing our domestic tranquility is the MIC. President Eisenhower had the guts to warn us of it. Senator McCain is a traveling salesman for it. And Senator Obama, who seemed to be the last best hope for checkmating it, appears in his July 3rd call for expanding the military, to have sold out to it. What now, humanists? #

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