

Crisis and Military Adventurism

A Review of Chalmers Johnson's "Nemesis"

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Chalmers Johnson is professor emeritus of the University of California, San Diego where he taught for 30 years as well as at UC, Berkeley (where he was educated). At Berkeley, he was chairman of the Center for Chinese Studies and its Department of Political Studies. He's currently president of the Japan Policy Research Institute (JPRI), a not-for-profit research and public affairs organization involved in public education relating to Japan and international relations in the Pacific region. Johnson is also a prolific writer and author of 17 books, numerous articles and various other publications.

From 1967 through 1973, he served as well as a consultant to the Office of National Estimates (ONE) within the CIA, and during the Cold War years was, by his own characterization, a former "spear-carrier for the empire." At least since the age of George Bush, however, Johnson radically transformed himself into one of the nation's sharpest and most important intellectual critics of the current administration having now completed the third and last volume of his "inadvertent trilogy" in his newest book *Nemesis* that's the subject of this review.

The previous two he refers to are *Blowback* based on 1953 CIA terminology in the aftermath of the spy agency's first ever engineered overthrow of a foreign leader – democratically elected Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq ushering in the 26 year tyrannical rule of Shah Reza Pahlavi who was himself forcibly ousted in the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Volume two was *The Sorrows of Empire – Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic*. Volume three is *Nemesis – The Last Days of the American Republic* and subject of this review that hopefully will encourage readers to get the book and read the others in Johnson's trilogy to get the full picture of his powerfully vital message.

Combined, the three volumes show how imperial hubris and overreach have undermined the republic. Johnson characterizes it as dealing "with the way arrogant and misguided American policies have headed us for a series of catastrophes comparable to our disgrace and defeat in Vietnam or even to the sort of extinction that befell....the Soviet Union (that he believes is) now unavoidable." In his view, the present state of the nation is dire, and it's "too late for mere scattered reforms of our government or bloated military to make much difference."

Our democracy and way of life are now threatened because of our single-minded pursuit of empire with a well-entrenched militarism driving it that's become so powerful and pervasive it's now an uncontrollable state within the state. History is clear on this teaching we can choose as could all empires before us. We can keep ours and lose our democracy, but we can't have both. Rome made the wrong choice and perished. Britain chose more wisely and survived. We must now choose, and so far the signs are ominous. Our current behavior

under all administrations post-WW II requires resources and commitments abroad that in the end, Johnson believes, “will inevitably undercut our domestic democracy and....produce a military dictatorship or its civilian equivalent.” We’re perilously close already because a hyper-reactionary statist administration hijacked the government and is driving the nation to tyranny and ruin.

The evidence post-9/11 shows it:

- A nation facing no outside threats permanently at war.
- Secret torture-prisons around the world with no accountability to which anyone, anywhere for any reason can be sent never to return or receive justice.
- The most secretive, intrusive and repressive government in our history and a president who’s a congenital, serial liar.
- Social decay at home.
- An unprecedented wealth disparity and extent of corporate power. Former US Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis warned years ago: “We can either have democracy in this country or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can’t have both.”
- A de facto one party state with two wings and a president claiming “unitary executive” powers ignoring the rule of law and doing as he pleases in the name of national security on his say alone.
- The absence of checks and balances and separation of powers with no restraint on a reckless “boy-emperor” Executive on a “messianic mission.”
- A secret intelligence establishment with near-limitless funding operating without oversight.
- A dominant corporate-controlled media serving as a national thought-control police and collective quasi-state ministry of information and propaganda glorifying imperial wars to “spread democracy” without letting on they’re for conquest, domination and repression.
- An omnipotent military-industrial complex Dwight Eisenhower couldn’t have imagined when he warned us nor could George Washington, to no avail. In his Farewell Address in September, 1796, 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.” He meant large standing armies leading to an imperial presidency. They destroy our system of checks and balances and separation of powers and in the end our freedom.
- A weak, servile Congress acceding to a dominant president under a system of authoritarian rule keeping a restive population in line it fears one day no longer will tolerate being denied essential services so the nation’s wealth can go for imperial wars and handouts to the rich.
- A cesspool of corruption stemming from incestuous ties between government and business mocking any notions of government of, for or by the people.

Johnson points out America is plagued with the same dynamic that doomed other past empires unwilling to change – “isolation, overstretch, the uniting of local and global forces opposed to imperialism, and in the end bankruptcy” combined with authoritarian rule and loss of personal freedom. Hence, the title of the book – Nemesis, the goddess of vengeance and punisher of hubris and arrogance in Greek mythology. She’s already here among us, unseen and patiently stalking our way of life as a free nation awaiting the moment she chooses to make her presence known that won’t be pleasant when she does. Johnson compares her to Wagner’s Brunnhilde in his opera cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Unlike Nemesis, she collects heroes, not fools and hypocrites. But she and Nemesis both announce themselves the same way – “Only the doomed see me,” even though we’ll all feel her presence and suffer her sting.

Our present crisis isn’t just from our military adventurism in Iraq and Afghanistan. It’s from growing international anger and revulsion that America is no longer trusted with a president showing contempt for the law including our treaty obligations Article 6 of the Constitution says are the “supreme Law of the Land.” They include the Third Geneva Convention (GCIII) of 1949 covering the treatment of prisoners in time of war and Fourth Geneva Convention (GCIV) the same year on protection of civilians in wartime in enemy hands or under occupation by a foreign power.

No authority gives presidents, governments or militaries the right to ignore them, but this president and government flaunt them openly, almost gleefully. They practically boast about it, enraging people everywhere including allies and the entire Muslim world. This country collectively demonizes as terrorists, militants and Islamofascists in its concocted “war on terror” the Pentagon now calls the “Long War” that won’t end in our lifetime.

In early 2003, Johnson warned us about “the sorrows already invading our lives....to be our fate for years to come: perpetual war, a collapse of constitutional government, endemic official lying and disinformation, and finally bankruptcy.” Then and now, he still hopes Americans will see the threat and act before it’s too late, but time, he believes, is short, and overall, he’s not hopeful. His newest book explains how we got here, and what we must do to avoid our appointment with Nemesis who’s very patient, but even hers has limits and we’re approaching it.

This review covers the essence and flavor of Johnson’s case he makes in seven powerful chapters. They’re not recommended at bedtime.

Militarism and Breakdown of Constitutional Government

Johnson begins by noting other 20th century empires that rose and fell with parallels to our situation today. He cites among others the Brits, Soviets, Nazis, Japanese, and Ottomans to press his case that we like them, and ancient Rome earlier, “are approaching the edge of a huge waterfall and are about to plunge over it.” He quotes historian Kevin Baker’s fear we’re perilously close to the day when our Congress, like the Roman Senate in 27 BC, will use its power for the last time before turning it over to a military dictator. Based on the past six years, it’s arguable it’s already with a civilian one.

The Bush-Cheney administration brought us to this point, but the crisis didn’t start with them. It began at the beginning when Benjamin Franklin warned us we have a Republic if we can keep it. It advanced gradually but accelerated post-WW II when we emerged as the only dominant nation left standing and planned to keep it that way causing the “sorrows” we

now face – an imperial presidency, erosion of checks and balances and separation of powers, and a culture of militarism that's a power unto itself that today who would dare challenge.

The Founders tried preventing the kind of tyranny colonists endured under King George III. They invented a system of constitutionally mandated republican government with a federal authority sharing power with the states and three separate branches in Washington able to check and balance each other with the single most important power put in the hands of Congress so presidents would never have it – the ability to declare war. James Madison, Father of the Constitution, said it's because: "Of all the enemies to liberty war is, perhaps, the most to be dreaded, because it comprises and develops the germ of every other.... (Delegating) such powers (to the president) would have struck, not only at the fabric of the Constitution, but at the foundation of all well organized and well checked governments."

The last times Congress used its sole power were on December 8, 1941 after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and on December 11 after Germany and Italy declared war on America because their Axis Power obligations required them to do it and Hitler's and "Il Duce's" imperial eyes were bigger than their realpolitik stomachs.

Today more than two centuries later, Benjamin Franklin's warning hits home harder than ever as the Founders' constitutional framework has nearly disintegrated. The president is more powerful than a monarch. Along with the military, he has his own private army in the form of a clandestine CIA plus control of all 15 extraconstitutional intelligence organizations. They and the military answer to no one including the Congress because they operate secretly with undisclosed budgets (even the Pentagon has in part), and the law of the land is just an artifact, powerless to constrain them.

In *Nemesis*, Johnson concentrates on the power of the military and a single intelligence agency, the CIA. He says upfront he believes "we will never again know peace, nor in all probability survive very long as a nation, unless we abolish the CIA, restore intelligence collecting to the State Department, and remove all but purely military functions from the Pentagon." Even if we do it, he now believes it's too late as the nation once called a model democracy "may have been damaged beyond repair (and) it will take a generation or more (at best) to overcome the image of 'America as torturer'" and rogue state showing contempt for international law, human rights, and ordinary people everywhere. It's not what the Founders conceived nor how things should have been in a democratic state Lincoln said at Gettysburg was "of the people, by the people, for the people...." Today it's only for the privileged.

It turned out badly because power corrupts those getting too much of it, and since 1941 that power grew as the nation prepared for wars it never stopped mobilizing for since. It comes with a price – the end of democracy and loss of freedoms that can't coexist with imperialism on the march for conquest and dominance that turned America the beautiful into a nation to be feared and hated. We emerged from WW II haughty and confident as the world's unchallengeable economic, political and military superpower almost like we planned it that way which we did. We weren't about to give it up and intended taking full advantage to rule the world, tolerate no outliers, and demand fealty and deference from all nations with hell to pay to ones that balk.

The mislabeled "good war" launched our global imperium now on the march for "full-spectrum dominance" meaning absolute unchallengeable control of all land, surface and

sub-surface sea, air, space, electromagnetic spectrum and information systems – no small aim indeed for rulers with larger than possible ambitions and no intention backing off, so help us all.

It makes the cost painfully high with more military spending than the rest of the world combined, but never enough for a voracious military-industrial establishment and complicit government going along meaning finding justification for it. September 11, 2001, dubbed the “New Pearl Harbor,” served it up like room service ushering in an intense and contrived climate of fear allowing the country to go on a rampage to solidify control through aggressive wars against enemies always easy to invent to assure we won’t run out of them. Heading the list are resource-rich countries or ones like Afghanistan because they’re strategically located near energy-rich areas like the Caspian Basin. But any leader forgetting “who’s boss” gets in the target queue for regime change, even model democrats like Hugo Chavez needing reminders our sovereignty comes ahead of theirs.

And who’ll dare challenge the notion that might makes right so international laws, norms and “supreme Law of the Land” treaties can be dismissed to get on with the business at hand. It doesn’t matter to a rogue empire on the march and a president believing the law is what he says it is, the national security is just rhetoric for I’ll do as I please, and the Constitution is “just a goddamned piece of paper.” What he and those around him lack in subtleness, they make up for big time in brazenness, but that kind of attitude paves the road to hell we’re on for our appointment with Nemesis.

Johnson reviews our campaign against Iraq since the Gulf war in 1991. That conflict, killer-sanctions for the next dozen years, and the Iraq war since 2003 all violate international laws and are clear instances of war crimes and crimes against humanity, but what power will hold the world’s only superpower to account. The toll on Iraq and its people for the past 16 years has been devastating. The US campaign destroyed a once prosperous nation and its priceless heritage leaving in its wake a surreal lawless armed camp wasteland with few or no essential services including electricity, clean water and sanitation facilities, medical care, fuel and most everything else needed for sustenance, public safety and survival.

Johnson quotes experts saying the looting of the National Museum of Baghdad and burning of the National Library and Archives and Library of Korans at the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments amounted to “the greatest cultural disaster of the last 500 years (and some say since the) Mongol invasion of Baghdad in 1258 to find looting on this scale.” Donald Rumsfeld and the Pentagon went to great pains protecting the Oil Ministry, but were indifferent, almost gleeful seeing priceless treasures looted and burned. It destroyed a “whole universe of antiquity” Iraqis and civilized people everywhere won’t ever forgive us for.

In all, the Gulf war and US-imposed sanctions caused 1.5 million or more Iraqi deaths up to March, 2003 plus another 3.5 million or more refugees to the present outside Iraq or internally displaced. In addition, the shocking 2006 Lancet published study estimated the joint US-British invasion caused another 655,000 violent deaths since then through mid-2006, although they readily admitted the true figure might be as high as 900,000 because they were unable to survey the most violent parts of the country or interview thousands of families all of whose members were killed.

Already the US-inflicted devastation on Iraq and its people since 1991 amounts to one of the great war/sanctions/and occupation related crimes in human history. Their effects keep

mounting exponentially with no way to know how great the toll will be when it's over. One day it will be because Iraqis won't stop fighting for their freedom till it is, but none of this gets reported in US media and precious little anywhere in the West. So far, war continues because America's on the march, and Johnson notes US soldiers in Iraq are only accountable to their superiors in the field or the Pentagon, and an estimated 100,000 civilian contractors are only accountable to themselves.

The darkest side of our adventurism is our global network of military prisons (authorized by the Secretary of Defense and Pentagon) where physical and mental torture are practiced even though it's known no useful information comes from it. Instead it's used for social control, vengeance and a policy of degrading people regarded as sub-human because they happen to be less-than-white Arab or Afghan Muslims. It's also a symbolic act of superpower defiance daring the world community to challenge us. International Geneva Convention laws and the 1984 UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment no longer matter for the lord and master of the universe. The US is accountable under them, but clever lawyers and a lawless Attorney General rewrite the rules of engagement claiming justification even when they don't have a leg to stand on.

Imperial Pathologies – Comparing America to Rome and Britain

Johnson makes his case citing ancient Rome to show how imperialism and militarism destroyed the Republic. He notes after its worst defeat at the hands of Carthaginian general Hannibal in 216 BC, Romans vowed never again to tolerate the rise of a Mediterranean power capable of threatening their survival and felt justified waging preemptive war against any opponent it thought might try.

That was Paul Wolfowitz's notion as Undersecretary of Defense for Policy in the GHW Bush administration in 1992 that he began implementing as Deputy Secretary of Defense in 2001 and made part of the National Security Strategy in 2002. It was an ancient Roman megalomaniac vision called Pax Romana that post-WW II became Pax Americana with illusions of wanting unchallengeable dominance to deter any potential rival, and, like ancient Rome, wage preemptive or preventive war to assure it.

A culture of corruption and militarism eroded the Roman Republic that effectively ended in 49 BC when Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon River in Northern Italy plunging the country in civil war that left Caesar victorious when all his leading opponents were dead. The Republic died with them as Caesar became the state exercising dictatorship over it from 48 to 44 BC when his reign ended on the Ides of March that year after his fateful meeting in the Roman Senate with Brutus, Cassius and six other conspirators whose long knives did what enemy legions on battlefields couldn't. It led to the rise of Caesar's grandnephew Octavian. In 27 BC, the Roman Senate gave him his new title, Augustus Caesar, making him Rome's first emperor after earlier ceding most of its powers to him. He then emasculated Rome's system of republican rule turning the Senate into an aristocratic family club performing ceremonial duties only.

It was much the same in Nazi Germany only much faster. The German Reichstag made Adolph Hitler Reichschancellor on January 30, 1933 ceding its power to him March 23 by enacting the Enabling Act or Law to Remedy the Distress of the People and the Empire establishing a Nazi dictatorship and allowing the Weimar Republic to pass quietly into history. With a whimper, not a bang, it gave Hitler absolute power and the right to enact

laws and constitutional changes on his own with little more than rubber-stamping approval from an impotent Reichstag that anointed him Reichsfuhrer a year later allowing him supreme power to destroy the state he only got to rule for 12 years.

Like Nazi Germany and other empires, Johnson explains the “Roman Republic failed to adjust to the unintended consequences of its imperialism (and militaristic part of it) leading to drastic alterations in its form of government” that was transformed into dictatorship. It’s constitution became undermined along with genuine political and human rights its citizens once had but lost under imperial rule. Rome’s military success made it very rich and its leaders arrogant leading to what Johnson calls “the first case of what today we call imperial overstretch.” It didn’t help that a citizen army of conscripts got transformed into professional military warriors. It grew large and unwieldy becoming a state within a state like our Pentagon today. It created a culture of militarism that turned into a culture of moral decay leading to the empire’s decline and fall.

The US Republic has yet to collapse, but an imperial presidency now places great strain on it with a dominant Pentagon and culture of militarism undermining Congress, the courts and our civil liberties. Ancient Rome proved republican checks and balances aren’t compatible with imperial dreams and a powerful military on the march for them. The US may have crossed its own Rubicon on September 18, 2001 with the passage of the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) by joint House-Senate resolution authorizing “the use of United States Armed Forces against those responsible for the recent attacks launched against the United States (and) giving the President....authority under the Constitution to take action to deter and prevent acts of international terrorism against the United States....”

By this act alone, George Bush got congressional authority to seize near dictatorial power in the name of national security, ignore constitutional and international law, be able to wage aggressive war to protect the nation, and get repressive laws passed threatening citizens and others alike with loss of our freedoms. Then in October, 2002, Congress voted the president unrestricted power to preemptively strike Iraq whenever he believed it “appropriate” meaning he was free to wage aggressive war against Iraq or any other nation he henceforth called a threat using tactical nuclear weapons if he chooses.

This kind of unrestricted power isn’t just dictatorial authority. It’s insanity courtesy of the Congress and supportive right wing courts. It’s taking us the same way as ancient Rome assuring our fate will be no different unless it’s stopped and reversed. It’s the inevitable price of imperial arrogance making leaders feel invulnerable till they no longer are, and it’s too late.

We may still have a choice, and Johnson cites the one Britain took to explain. They sacrificed empire to preserve democracy knowing they couldn’t have both. They earlier took up the “White Man’s Burden” in a spirit of imperial “goodness” we now call “spreading democracy” believing Anglo-Saxons deserved to rule other nations, especially ones of color they thought inferior. Johnson explains “successful imperialism requires that a domestic republic change into a tyranny.” It happened to Rome, and he sees it happening here under an imperial presidency with militarism taking ever greater root in society. Britain was spared by a democratic resurgence followed WW II. People finally freed from the scourge of Nazism said never again and chose democracy to assure it.

We must now choose whether to return to our founding roots or stay on our present path heading to imperial tyranny. For Johnson, Rome and Britain are the “archtypes” defining

where we stand and what we face. Rome chose empire, lost its Republic and then everything. Britain went the other way choosing democracy despite the Blair government's disgraceful post-9/11 imperial indiscretions acting as Washington's pawn in service to our adventurism. Now late in the game, we must choose one way or the other. We can either have our democratic "cake" or "eat it" and suffer the consequences. We can't have it both ways.

The CIA – The President's Private Army

Imperial Rome had its elite praetorian guard to protect and serve its emperors. The CIA here works the same way as a private army for the president that in the end will go his way as it did producing phony intelligence the Bush administration used to justify war with Iraq. It proved its loyalty by its willingness to lie, but it does lots more than that – the kinds of extrajudicial things it gets away with because everything about "the company" is secret, including its budget. It puts CIA beyond the law making it unaccountable to the public and Congress that have every right to know in a "democracy" but none under imperial rule. Johnson stresses that US presidents have "untrammeled control of the CIA (and it's) probably (their) single most extraordinary power" as it puts them beyond the check and balancing powers of Congress and courts constitutionally required in republican systems of government. Not in our "Republic," at least since 1947 when the National Security Act created the CIA under Harry Truman to succeed the wartime OSS dissolved in 1945.

Johnson explains CIA originally had five missions. Four dealt with collection, coordination and dissemination of intelligence. The fifth one was vague allowing the agency to "perform such other functions and duties related to intelligence affecting the national security as the National Security Council (overseeing it) may....direct." This mandate caused the problem turning "CIA into the personal, secret, unaccountable army of the president" and making secret covert, often mischievous illegal, operations its main function. Their duties include overthrowing democratically elected governments, assassinating foreign heads of state and key officials, propping up friendly dictators, and snatching targeted individuals for "extraordinary rendition" on privately-leased aircraft to secret torture-prisons for not too gracious treatment on arrival that may include "destroying" the evidence after completing interrogation.

We claimed justification for it during the Cold War even though extrajudicial activities are never permissible under republican constitutional government. Today under George Bush, things are further complicated as CIA is one of 15 intelligence agencies under a director of National Intelligence (DNI). But even with this realignment, CIA remains the president's private praetorian guard army accountable only to him with tens of billions of secret budget power to do plenty of damage.

It now lets CIA be more active than ever as under Bush it's got double the number of covert operatives making Johnson believe the spy agency's original purpose is history with DNI now handling most intelligence gathering functions. CIA is now a mostly global hit squad Mafia with Bush its resident Godfather sending it off to do "assassinations, dirty tricks, renditions, and engineering foreign coups. In the intelligence field it will be restricted to informing our presidents and generals about current affairs." In all it does, the agency's secrecy shields the chief executive from responsibility giving him plausible deniability if anything leaks out. Johnson explains "CIA's bag of dirty tricks....is a defining characteristic of the imperial presidency. It is a source of unchecked power that can gravely threaten the nation....(Its) so-called reforms....in 2006 have probably further shortened the life of the American republic."

“The company” is a menace to democratic rule. Either it goes or our freedoms do.

US Military Bases Around the World

People in US cities would be outraged if another country garrisoned its troops close by with all the resulting fallout: unacceptable noise, pollution, environmental destruction, appropriation of valued public real estate along with drunken soldiers on the loose violating laws, causing damage and raping local women. Not the kinds of neighbors we choose, especially when they’re mostly unaccountable for their actions.

We don’t generally give other nations basing rights here. But the Pentagon practically demands other countries allow us the right to put our troops on choice parts of their real estate around the world. That’s real heavy-handed imperial arrogance mindful of an earlier time when imperialism could be measured by an empire’s colony count. Military outposts are our version set up to operate by our own rules when we show up. Locals have no say and neither does the host country once a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) is finalized that gives the US “guest” freedom from host country laws and restraints governing civilian life and exemption from any inconvenient environmental cleanup obligations. That subject is covered in the next section.

Only one superpower remained after the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, and the Russians never posed a serious challenge before it did. All along we greatly outclassed and outgunned them, and Moscow only wanted a standoff if it came to that. During the Cold War, we had many military outposts around the world supposedly aimed at them, but how do we justify them now. They’re not for defense. They’re for offense in contrast to home-based ones to defend the nation.

Johnson reviews the known number of US bases in other countries by size and branch of service. According to the Department of Defense’s Base Structure Report through 2005, the official total of all sizes is 737, but so many were built in recent years, Johnson believes the actual number exceeds 1000 and is rising. Unlisted ones includes dozens in Iraq, 106 garrisons in Afghanistan, the gigantic Camp Bondsteel in Kosovo built after the Yugoslav war in 1999, and others in Eastern Europe, Israel, Qatar and other Gulf states plus ongoing negotiations all the time to build new bases in new locations in new and currently “occupied” countries.

It takes a lot of resources maintaining an operation this sized. Just the facilities and staff alone make the cost truly staggering. Included are the number of military, civil service and locally hired personnel, facilities, acreage, weaponry and munitions (including thousands of nuclear weapons) and everything else needed to keep a worldwide operation this size functioning. And this only covers what’s open to the public and Congress excluding what the Pentagon and host countries keep secret. There’s plenty of that including information about bases the US uses to eavesdrop on global communications or our nuclear deployments violating treaty obligations. The Pentagon keeps much of this hidden deploring any oversight as part of its culture of secrecy concealing from Congress and our NATO allies the true extent of our strength, breath and intentions.

Once Donald Rumsfeld got to the Pentagon he fit right in and served there once before under Gerald Ford. He didn’t hide how he wanted to restructure the military to make it lighter, more agile and high tech but no less secret. The result was Department of Defense’s Global Posture Review first mentioned by George Bush in November, 2003. It divides

military installations into three types:

- (1) Main Operating Bases (MOBs) having permanently stationed combat forces, extensive infrastructure, command and control headquarters and extensive accommodations for families including hospitals, schools and recreational facilities. The Pentagon calls these bases “little Americas.”
- (2) Forward Operation Sites (FOSs) that are major installations smaller than MOBs and over which the Pentagon tries maintaining a low profile. They exclude families, and troop rotations in and out are for six months, not three years as at MOBs.
- (3) Cooperative Security Locations (CSLs) – they’re the smallest, most austere and are called “lily pads” to cover the entire planet’s “arc of instability” that could include countries earmarked for future military action. Preparation here includes prepositioned weapons and munitions.

The new global repositioning plan comes with a huge price tag. The Overseas Basing Commission estimates it at \$20 billion and would be much higher but for the Pentagon’s standard practice getting host countries to pay their share of the tab allowing us basing rights on their territory. It’s called “burden sharing” or our notion of a country we occupy helping pay the cost of deterring potential common enemies. At a time when only US militarism poses a threat to world peace, one day countries like Germany, Japan, South Korea, Spain and others no longer will tolerate our garrisoning troops on their soil. Ecuador under its new president, Raphael Correa, already served notice his country won’t renew the US base lease in Manta when it expires in 2009 unless Washington allows his country comparable basing rights in Miami that’s impossible. Other countries may follow suit just like the East Europeans kicked out the Soviets after their nations broke away in 1991.

Today the Middle East commands center stage with the Pentagon building major military installations in Iraq similar to the permanent kind in Germany and Japan. Iraq is key to US imperial plans because of its vast and easily accessible oil reserves but for a covert reason as well. Johnson believes it’s part of our “empire building” – to shift major Saudi bases to the country making it a “permanent Pentagon outpost” to control the area’s “arc of instability” and region’s oil reserves that comprise 60% or more of the world’s proven total.

Add together all Muslim nations everywhere and their combined known oil reserves are between two-thirds to three-quarters of total world supply. If we control it all, it gives Washington enormous veto power over all nations wanting accessing to the vital juice economies run on. And if we keep demonizing Muslims as enemies and people believe it, it’s easy justifying our state-sponsored terror wars on them for all the wrong reasons we say are the right ones.

Headquarters for what’s planned in the Middle East are now on four or more permanent Iraq “super-bases” with possible others to come. Many billions of dollars went into them, and they’re anchor fixtures in the country along with 100 or more others ranging from mega to micro showing the extent of our digging in for the long haul in a country and region we’re not planning to leave in a hurry.

It also shows in the kind of embassy we’re building inside the four square mile Green Zone in central Baghdad. Critics call it “Fortress Baghdad” because it’s to be the largest US embassy in the world by far, encircled by 15-foot thick concrete walls and rings of

concertina wire along with protective surface-to-air missiles. Large numbers of private-sector bodyguards and US military guard its vast facilities, there's modern infrastructure comparable to any large US city with all the comforts and luxuries of home, Saddam's private swimming pool is for GIs and others to frolic in, hometown comfort food abounds, and staff and officials are planned to number around 1000. It's larger than Vatican City, six times the size of the UN New York compound, and has become a hated symbol of imperial occupation, death and destruction it caused, and the oppressive dominance Iraqis are committed to end.

Iraqi history shows an intolerance to occupation, and Iraqis are convinced they'll maintain tradition proving again that notions of permanency are in the eyes of the beholder and their end may come sooner than planned. Our super-facilities may end up just like their mega-predecessors in Danang, Cam Rahn Bay and the Saigon embassy housing the last remnants of US presence helicoptered off its rooftop in defeat and humiliation. We left them and much more behind when the Vietnamese kicked us out, even though we never go anywhere planning to leave in a hurry if ever.

US Imperialism at Work – Status of Force Agreements (SOFAs) and How They Work

SOFAs are formal contractual arrangements the US negotiates with other countries implementing basic agreements we first agree to with host nations allowing us the right to garrison troops and civilian personnel there either on a new base we build or an existing one. They follow once the Pentagon arranges a contractual "alliance" with a host country usually based on "common objectives" and "international threats to peace." In final form, they're intended to put US personnel as far outside domestic law as possible and spell out host nation obligations to us. Except for our reciprocal NATO agreements with member countries, they also give our military and civilian personnel special privileges unavailable to ordinary citizens of the host nation. It doesn't work that way with western European states. They have collective clout and won't tolerate the types of one-way deals we impose on smaller, weaker nations that can't stand up to our kind of bullying.

For host nations, SOFAs come with problems along with perceived benefits. They result in unacceptable noise, pollution, environmental damage with no remediation obligation, and they use valuable real estate unavailable to the host or their people who can't avoid the kinds of fallout problems showing up after we do. They include foreigners on their soil accountable to US military rules and justice but not to theirs even when crimes are committed against innocent civilians like local women being abused and raped by drunken unruly troops believing away from home they can do as they please and get away with it. They nearly always can.

Johnson cites between 1998 and 2004 in Japan, US military personnel were involved in 2,024 reported crimes or accidents on duty. Only one led to a court-martial, 318 to "administrative discipline, and the remainder were apparently absolved even though at least some of these crimes involved robberies, rapes, reckless homicide, assaults and other kinds of abuses no one would get away with at home. The result abroad is growing public anger and discontent Johnson illustrates with a prominent example.

It's on the island of Okinawa, Japan's southern-most and poorest prefecture and a place Johnson knows well from his time in the Navy and as an expert on the country and region that includes a book he co-wrote and edited called Okinawa: Cold War Island. The US has its way with Japan having defeated its empire in 1945, wrote its constitution in the aftermath,

and has occupied the country ever since. It's well dug in for the long haul with 88 bases on the Japanese islands, a country smaller than California. Thirty-seven of those bases are on Okinawa, a tiny sliver of land about the size of a large US city. It's easy understanding why Okinawans are justifiably angry. They've been practically pushed into the Pacific to make way for US occupation of their island taking over most of its valued real estate and not treating it too well or the people.

Okinawans' greatest outrage, however, is over SOFA-related article 17 covering criminal justice. It states "The custody of an accused member of the United States armed forces or the civilian component (shall) remain with the United States until he is charged." It means when US personnel commit crimes, Japanese investigative authorities have no exclusive access to suspects until they're indicted in court. That hamstring investigations enough to make prosecutors often reluctant to press charges because they can't get enough evidence to go to trial.

Johnson cites a particularly grievous example he calls the "most serious incident to influence Japanese-American relations since the Security Treaty was signed in 1960." It happened in September, 1995 when two marines abducted a 12-year old girl, beat and raped her, then left her on a beach going back to their base in a rented car. In October, 85,000 Okinawans protested in a park demanding Japanese and American authorities address their grievances after the US military refused to hand over the suspects to Japanese police. This may be a notable example, but it illustrates what Okinawans have endured for over 60 years. The US military runs their territory without accountability to Japanese law. As a result, US personnel get away with rapes, drunken brawling, muggings, drug violations, arson and criminal homicide – because they're superior white-skinned Americans, not yellow-skinned Japanese judged inferior.

Things likely can't get much worse for Okinawans, but if the US gets its way they probably will for all Japanese. It relates to Washington's growing concern over China's explosive growth and increasing dominance in the Pacific region. That makes the Chinese a major US regional rival and potential superpower challenger some day. Bush officials won't tolerate it and are pressuring Japan to revise article 9 of its constitution renouncing force except for self-defense. The US wants Japan to be our "Britain of the Far East" or "cop on the beat" to use the country as a front line regional proxy against China, North Korea or any other East Asian state forgetting "who's boss."

But that notion doesn't set well with Japanese people resulting in mass protests throughout the country in opposition. They know how destructive WW II was and want no reoccurrences of it even though already Japan again is a military power. It has the most powerful navy in the world after the US, a total force size of nearly one-quarter million in uniform, 452 combat aircraft and a military budget equalling China's.

After long and difficult negotiations, the Japanese cabinet finally agreed to approve a planned US realignment of forces in their country that won't please its neighbors or its own people. Former prime minister Koizumi and his right-wing supporters yearn to make their country a formidable power again and thus agreed to various unpalatable US basing decisions despite popular opposition to them. It shows Japanese and US officials' insensitivity to deep-seated feelings on the ground that will only lead to further heightened tensions in the region with China and North Korea facing off against their US and Japanese rivals.

The Ultimate Imperial Project in Space

The notion of “full spectrum dominance” spelled it out. The US considers outer space part of its territory, claims sole right to dominate it, and won’t tolerate a challenger interfering with our plans to militarize the heavens reigning supreme over planet earth from them. The whole idea is chilling having grown out of Ronald Reagan’s March 23, 1983 speech calling for greater defense spending during the Cold War. He wanted a huge R & D program for what became known as “Star Wars” – an impermeable anti-missile shield in space called the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). It hardly mattered that the whole idea was fantasy, but a glorious one for defense contractors who’ve profited hugely on it since. From inception, the program’s funding ebbed and flowed with a tsunami now going into it for an administration addicted to all things military and a friendly Federal Reserve acting as “pusher” printing up all the ready cash to do it.

The Clinton administration only gave it modest support, but that all changed once George Bush became president and Donald Rumsfeld returned to the Pentagon for his second tour as Secretary of Defense with fewer restraints than the first time. He wanted the US prepared for space warfare as insane as the idea is. What’s not insane is how hugely defense contractors profit from an open-ended boondoggle padding their bottom lines as long as no future president and Congress halt the madness. Rumsfeld had his own ideas about committing the country to building and deploying space-based weapons to destroy nuclear-armed missile launches even though it can’t be done now or ever.

MIT’s Theodore Postal is a leading authority on ballistic missile defenses. He’s spent years debunking notions that any useful defensive shield will ever work. He flatly states: “the National Missile Defense System has no credible scientific chance of working (and) is a serious abuse of our security system.” Nonetheless, the program is ongoing and running strong under Robert Gates’ new management at the Pentagon as he’s not known as one to buck his White House bosses that’s one reason he got the job.

Johnson says all the “rhetoric about a future space war is ideological posturing” similar to the “missile gap” nonsense beginning in the Kennedy years. The notion of wars from or in space are self-defeating because the adverse consequences from them affect us as well as any adversary. Waging one would be like firing a gun exploding in our face harming us as much as anyone hit by it. Dangerous orbiting space debris, already a growing problem, is just one of many serious consequences space wars would produce. Enough of it would threaten military and commercial spacecraft that, in turn, would threaten activities in space. Johnson notes the Air Force currently tracks 13,400 man-made space objects, only a few hundred of which are orbiting satellites. We also know of more than 100,000 smaller pieces of untrackable junk, each the size of a marble and millions more even smaller fragments.

The problem isn’t their size. It’s the speed they travel at – up to 17,500 miles per hour (same as the space shuttle), meaning when they strike an object they pack a wallop that can be lethal if large enough debris hits an orbiting spacecraft or satellite. Johnson quotes UC Santa Cruz professor of physics Joel Primack saying: “Weaponizing of space would make the debris problem much worse, and even one war in space could encase the entire planet in a shell of whizzing debris that would thereafter make space near the Earth highly hazardous for peaceful as well as military purposes....(and) will jeopardize the possibility of space exploration.”

Johnson concurs on how ill-conceived our missile defense schemes and notions of real star

wars are that need to come off the table but won't under warrior leadership. He says: "The conclusion is unavoidable: Washington has given us the best illusion of protection against nuclear attack without reducing the odds of such an attack." He goes on adding the whole program is fraught with insurmountable problems from space debris to the inability to distinguish between a hostile missile launch and a decoy plus a record of endless test failures proving they'll only continue as long as the charade does. He then speculates about what's likely true. The whole business of missile defense is just a PR ploy plus another scheme to enrich defense contractors who return the favor with big campaign contributions and plush job offers whenever politicians retire to move on to "greener" pastures.

The amount of money spent since the 1980s has been enormous without a single success to show for it - between \$92 and \$130 billion with an estimated cost by a theoretical completion date of 2015 of \$1.2 trillion. One analyst called it "Pork Barrel in the Sky," but it boils down to one of the most extreme cases of corruption in Washington adding to the vast cesspool of it there. It played heavy on voters' minds in mid-term elections with public outrage a major factor in them demanding change that always ends up getting none. Voters never learn new faces don't mean new policies, at least not in Washington where the criminal class is bipartisan and one back gets scratched to assure others do.

It adds up to further trouble ahead and the greatest danger we now face - our imperial adventurism heading from one conflict to another in an endless cycle harming us as much as any adversary. The longer it continues, the worse things get making only one solution obvious. On responsibly using space Johnson puts it this way, but it applies to all our actions if we plan on surviving: "...we must relearn how to cooperate with our fellow inhabitants of the planet and take the lead in crafting international agreements on the rules of the road in space....We should outlaw all weapons that are designed to destroy other nations' (space assets). If one side blinds the other," it will conclude the worst and retaliate, and one way would be to detonate a nuclear weapon in space that would have an electromagnetic pulse instantly "fry(ing) the electronics in all orbiting satellites."

That would produce a level global playing field the hard way meaning - no more "smart bombs," electronic battlefields, global positioning systems, secure communications from field to commanders or any satellite communications. Instead of crafting multilateral agreements to prevent this, the US instead continues acting hostilely by pushing full steam ahead on space-based antisatellite weapons and driving the nation to bankruptcy doing it. Johnson notes space is another "arena for American hubris and one more piece of evidence that Nemesis is much closer than most of us would care to contemplate."

The Crisis of the American Republic

George Bush wasn't our first president to abuse his power. Other far more notable predecessors also did it like Lincoln suspending habeas rights during the Civil War and FDR's home front war against the Japanese - the ones who were honorable, decent Americans whose only "crimes" were their ancestry and skin color. It made them less human and denied them justice. Instead, it got them incarcerated for the remainder of the war they had nothing to do with or wanted, even though the ones allowed to fight against the Nazis did it courageously and honorably.

The difference between then and now was checks and balances were in place and the separation of powers worked restraining presidents from abusing their authority. That ended the day five arrogant Supreme Court justices annulled the popular vote letting George Bush

steal the office Al Gore won at the polls including in Florida. It's been straight downhill since the way it was for Rome when it passed from Republic to repressive empire. The freedoms we've long take for granted have eroded and democracy in America is an endangered species hovering somewhere between life support and the crematorium unless a way is found to resurrect it.

As things now stand, Bush and Cheney rule a rogue state working cooperatively in a corrupted two-party alliance assuring the skids are greased and fix is in. The US Congress is no different than the kind of social club for aristocrats the Roman Senate became when it gave its power to the Caesar it hailed. It lets the administration conduct affairs of state according to what it calls the "unitary executive theory of the presidency" that's a simple "ball-faced assertion of presidential supremacy....dressed up in legal mumbo jumbo" written by clever lawyers easily finding lots of ways getting around pesky laws in the name of national security for a nation at war against enemies invented to justify schemes now playing out around the world.

It boils down to despotic rule or a national security police state all repressive regimes become in the end including the fascist kinds we're now on the tipping edge of. Unless it's stopped, things won't be pretty when the final mask comes off and jackboots are in the streets along with tanks when needed. And when the public resists, as it surely will, expect South Chicago to look like Baghdad today and its North side too.

Johnson notes it's possible the US military one day will usurp authority and declare a military dictatorship the way it happened in Rome, but he thinks it's unlikely. If dictatorship comes, he expects the civilian kind with military power backing it up. Most likely, Johnson thinks things will muddle along and continue drifting under an illusion of constitutional cover until fiscal insolvency unravels it all. But that won't end the nation state any more than it did to Germany in 1923 or Argentina in 2001-02. It might even herald a new beginning even though transitioning to it would mean lots of turbulence, a lower standard of living and a much different relationship between this country and others including ones supplanting us as most dominant.

Johnson concludes his narrative returning to where it all began starting with volume one of his unintended trilogy. He says in "Blowback" he tried explaining why people around the world hate us. It's not just our government's actions against others but refers to retaliation for the kinds of acts we commit like ousting outlier regimes not willing to play by our imperial management rules meaning we're "boss," and what we say goes. It's a simple law of physics that there's no action without reaction. If we slap them enough, they start slapping back. Volume two was "The Sorrows of Empire" written while America prepared the public for wars against Afghanistan and Iraq. It covered the country's militarization since WW II best symbolized by our sprawl of bases across the planet assuring hegemony over it but guaranteeing more blowback from our "indiscretions" any time we decide reminders are needed who's "boss" and those reminded get cranky.

Volume three is Nemesis and the subject of this review. In it, Johnson "tried to present historical, political, economic, and philosophical evidence of where our current behavior is likely to lead." He believes our present course is a road to perdition in the form of fiscal insolvency and a military or civilian dictatorship. Our Founders knew the risk and tried preventing it with our constitutional republican government now in jeopardy. It's come from our commitment to large standing armies, constant war, reckless stimulative military Keynesianism spending causing an erosion of democracy and growth of an imperial

presidency. Once a nation goes this way, its fate is the same as all others that tried – “isolation, overstretch, the uniting of forces opposed to imperialism, and bankruptcy.” It’s symbol is that patient Greek goddess now visiting our shores awaiting the tribute she’ll demand – “our end as a free nation.”

It’s now our choice. We can continue the same way as imperial Rome and lose our democracy or chose the British model keeping it at the expense of sacrificing empire. Johnson ends his book citing Japanese scholar and journalist Hotsumi Ozaki as a role model example. Ozaki understood his country’s occupation of China would fail and lead to the kind of blowback caused by the Chinese Communist revolution. He tried warning his government, but was hanged as a traitor for his efforts late in WW II. Johnson hopes he won’t meet a similar fate but is as certain as Ozaki “that my country is launched on a dangerous path that it must abandon or else face the consequences.” We should hope we never see them, but wishing alone won’t make it so.

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