

# Decadence, Waste, Corruption in the New American Empire

America's "dance of the billions"

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Theme: [Global Economy](#)

## Part I

"An empire is always coercive and autocratic: It is like a cover that presses on a boiling cauldron. At a certain point, the internal pressure is too strong, the cover is blown off and there is a sort of volcanic eruption." Umberto Eco, Italian medievalist

"An empire is a despotism, and an emperor is a despot, bound by no law or limitation but his own will; it is a stretch of tyranny beyond absolute monarchy." John Adams (1735-1826), 2nd American President

"The deterioration of every government begins with the decay of the principles on which it was founded." Montesquieu (1689-1755), Charles Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu

**A** sure sign of [decadence](#) in an empire is when hard earned money seems to lose any meaning and is wasted left and right. There are instances that indicate that is what is happening in the United States today. There is a dance of the billions that defies imagination and that nobody seems to understand. First case in point:

In 2006, investment banker and securities firm [Goldman Sachs](#) paid out a whopping \$16.5 billion in year-end bonuses to its executives and employees. That sort of cash, if it were to be transported in boxes of 100-dollar bills would require about fifty 10-ton truckloads.

This came out to a Christmas gift of \$625,000 for each man and woman in that organization, whose main production is to shift papers around. Last year, the firm paid its two co-presidents \$54 million each in salary, bonuses and benefits. Do you think there is a link between exorbitant private profits and political power? Well, you may want to ask yourself why Bush nominated a former chairman and CEO of Goldman Sachs as [Treasury Secretary](#) and chose a lawyer from Goldman Sachs as his [Chief of Staff](#).

Case two where money is flowing freely is the [Pentagon](#). The military budget of the United States government for 2007 piles up to the huge amount of 623 billion dollars. That is more than \$2,000 for each American man, woman and child. As the 9/11 Commission Report pointed out, *"The Department of Defense is the behemoth...With an annual budget larger than the gross domestic product of Russia, it is an empire."*

The real [\*\*New American Empire\*\*](#) is the U.S. Department of Defense. Its annual budget represents more than 50 percent of the military expenditures of all the 191 other countries in the world bundled together. It is an empire that spreads its tentacles in [\*\*135 countries\*\*](#), with troops in every single one of them, and which has deployed the unbelievable number of [\*\*737 military bases\*\*](#) in these foreign lands. This is really an empire out of control that has become an increasing threat to the world.

Obtaining defense contracts is a sure way to quick riches. For example, a report by the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction has concluded that the highest proportion of overhead was incurred in oil-facility contracts won by KBR Inc., the [\*\*Halliburton subsidiary\*\*](#) and Vice president Dick Cheney's former firm. As to links between defense contracts and political power, you may want to ask yourself why Bush nominated the president of a major arms supplier to the post of [\*\*under secretary of the Navy\*\*](#).

With so much money floating around, it is no wonder that a congressional committee, the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, recently discovered that about thirty-six 10-ton [\*\*truckloads of newly printed \\$100 bills disappeared in Iraq\*\*](#) (363 tons of cash at a value of some \$12,000 million at the last count) and were unaccounted for. They are in somebody's pockets, but Congress still does not know whose pockets it is, not being able to follow the meandering maze of fraud, waste, abuse and corruption that is taking place in the Iraq war.

It is reasonable to think that some of this cash served to buy the famous December 15, 2005 Iraqi elections heralded by the Bush-Cheney regime as a model of democracy for the Middle East. If the \$12 billion unaccounted for had been spread equally among 12 million eligible Iraqi voters, each one of them in that impoverished country would have received \$1,000 in freshly minted \$100 dollar bills. We have to remember that the December 15, 2005 election handed over power, until 2009, to a coalition of fanatical fundamentalist and theocratic Shiite parties backed by Iran, and led by the [\*\*Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq \(SCIRI\)\*\*](#).

Of course, the first and greatest cost of the Iraq War is the human cost and the destruction of a country by immoral foreign invaders. But the money corruption comes a close second.

In peaceful times, [\*\*corruption\*\*](#) is a constant menace in a democracy. In times of war, if no special steps are taken, it becomes endemic.

And under the Bush-Cheney regime, no such steps were taken to avoid corruption. To the contrary, it would appear that such corruption was welcome, possibly on the knowledge or hope that some of the money floating around would find its way back into the political system.

That is why money corruption poses a deadly threat to the American democracy. Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790), for one, feared the U.S. Constitution would in time *"fail ...because of the corruption of the people, in a general sense."* For his part, President Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) thought that corruption in high places would follow as *"all wealth is aggregated in a few hands and the Republic is destroyed."*

The question that remains to answer is whether the American democracy can be saved from the ambient corruption, or whether it is already too late. Indeed, has the United States fallen into a chasm of corruption so deep that it cannot recover from it?

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