

Imperialism 101 - The US Addiction to War, Mayhem and Madness

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Part I

The US-led aggression in the Middle East and the three failed attempts to oust Venezuela's Hugo Chavez since 2002 (with a fourth now planned and likely to be implemented soon) are just the latest examples of this country's imperial agenda and the "new world order" it has in mind. The way this country now engages throughout the world isn't much different than what it's done close to home and worldwide since inception. Only the venues chosen, the scope of our aims, and the extent of our power have changed. This article in two parts gives some historical perspective and then concentrates on the imperial grand strategy of the Bush administration under which regime change is a central element.

In Part II, the focus is on the war in Iraq as a case study of imperial madness and its consequences. It also covers a possible little discussed economic motive behind what's now being called "the long war."

Maybe it's something in the air or water around the Capitol that makes it happen - causing the men and women elected or appointed to high office to do bad things. It may in part be going along to get along for some of them. But mostly it's the dangerous and deadly sickness or syndrome of power corrupting and absolute power doing it absolutely. That's bad enough, but when it happens to rulers of a superpower and those in league with them, it can inflict immeasurable harm and human suffering. In cost/benefit analysis terms: what serves the interests of a superstate comes at the expense of the public welfare.

The US Has Always Been A Warrior, Imperial Nation

There's no longer a dispute that the US pursues an imperial agenda. What once was hidden behind a politically correct facade and would never be admitted publicly is now seen as something respectable and even an obligation to advance "western civilization." How low we've sunk in coming so far. But how different is today from the past? Not much for those who know the country's true history that's quite different from the proper and polite version of it taught in school at all levels. Expansionism and militarism have always been in our DNA since the early settlers first confronted the nation's original inhabitants and then over the next few hundred years slaughtered about 18 million of them to seize their land and resources. We may even have put language in our sacred Declaration of Independence to give us a birthright to do it. In it we called our native people "merciless indian savages," and with that kind of framing gave ourselves a moral justification to remove them. It's a code based on the notion of might makes right and what we say goes. It didn't matter that our original inhabitants lived mostly in peace for 20-30,000 years on the lands we took from

them. There also was no concern that the native peoples treated the early settlers graciously, helping them survive through the early years of struggle and hard adjustment. We showed our gratitude with hostility, open warfare and genocidal extermination. It never ended and continues in less conspicuous ways today as the current unstated national policy is to eliminate native cultures through assimilation into our own. It's hardly a testimony to the benefits of "western civilization" Gandhi thought would be a good idea when asked what he thought of it.

Our belligerence wasn't just directed against the Indian nations as we always were apparently willing to pick a fight. It's hard to believe that this country since inception has been at war with one or more adversaries every year without exception to this day. That's in addition to all other attempts to destabilize or overthrow governments of nations whenever their leaders weren't willing to sacrifice their national interest in service to ours. Imperialists don't ever tolerate that, especially one that happens to be an unchallengeable superpower.

But long before we gained that status, we pursued a land-grab policy throughout the 19th century to expand the new nation from "sea to shining sea" including taking the half of Mexico we wanted along the way. It's surprising we didn't take all or most of Canada as well and nearly did twice in the past: during the War of 1812 with the British when our interest was more on expansion than the British impressment of our seamen and again in 1920 when we eyed Canada for the same reason we're waging two wars today – O-I-L. Only fate may have prevented it from happening. A few cooler heads also likely prevailed, and our attention both times got diverted to other "adventures" and priorities.

But despite our tradition of imperial expansion, we stated our aims carefully and diplomatically and still do. The closest we came early on to an open admission of our true intent was in code language like "manifest destiny" or being willing to heed Rudyard Kipling's racist call to ally with Britain, take up the "White Man's Burden," and engage in "savage wars" to bring civilization to dark-skinned people in countries like The Philippines we decided didn't have any. So in our imperial wisdom, we came, stole, and conquered "for their own good" and in the process left lots of bodies around to prove our good intentions.

Theodore Roosevelt welcomed Kipling's call, publicly supported an expansionist foreign policy before he became president and during most of his time in office. He wanted colonies to make over in our own image and was willing to go to war for it if that's what it took to do it. He won a Nobel Peace prize for his efforts and was the only US president to get one until Jimmy Carter (another dubious man of peace) received the award in 2002. While president, TR's foreign policy was to solidify the country's world position it gained from the Spanish-American war during which and after he had a hand in extending the US empire to The Philippines, Cuba, Haiti, Guam, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and the Canal Zone area part of Colombia that broke away to become the new nation of Panama. Building the canal there across its isthmus fulfilled TR's dream to link the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans even though it took devious tactics to arrange the deal, manage to begin construction during his time in office, and finally see it completed about four and a half years before he died. TR also ironically allowed the number of US possessions to shrink during his second term in office – maybe out of guilt over what he did in his first four years and earlier.

Woodrow Wilson was another of the "noted" presidents we now revere as one of our greatest who came to office with noble promises of wanting to reform national politics and have an enlightened presidency only to fall far short. While proclaiming all nations had the right of self-determination, he believed that America had a duty to see they all had the kind

we practiced even if we had to bring it to them at the point of a gun. The result during his tenure was the military occupation of Nicaragua, Haiti (beginning 20 oppressive years) and the Dominican Republic. He also had his problems with Mexico and did what any good US president would do. He sent in the Marines to invade the country, seize and occupy Veracruz, the country's main seaport, manage to resolve that dispute and then do it again with Army regulars under General John Pershing (the Dwight Eisenhower of WW I in charge of the American Expeditionary Force sent to Europe) to hunt down Pancho Villa as payback for Villa's cross-border incursion into the US killing 19 Americans. Pershing didn't find him but nearly began a full-scale war with Mexico trying before Wilson decided the whole adventure was a bad idea and called it off.

But all this was prologue to what Wilson wanted most while claiming otherwise – getting the US into WW I to further our undeclared imperial ambitions. In 1916 Wilson was reelected on a platform promise of: “He Kept Us Out of War” – referring to the one raging in Europe since 1914. Of course, he had to promise that as the US public overwhelmingly wanted nothing to do with it. But he no sooner was reelected than he began making plans to get into it. He established the Committee on Public Information under George Creel which was able to turn a pacifist nation into raging German haters resulting in the Congress overwhelmingly declaring war on Germany in April, 1917. Once in the war, he managed to control most public anti-war sentiment with the help of the outrageous Espionage and Sedition Acts that outlawed criticism of the government, the armed forces or the war effort, imprisoned or fined violators and censored or banned publications daring to publish what the Wilson administration wanted suppressed. It all has a familiar ring to it.

After the war, Wilson failed to create the new world order he had in mind. The vengeful Treaty of Versailles set the stage for the greater conflict to follow in 20 years, and Wilson left office a defeated, broken and very ill man. Despite it all, we hail him as one of our greatest presidents, even though with an honest assessment it's clear he fell far short. It's also clear there's a thin line between the ones we call our best and those we rate our worst. It hardly matters as the only qualification for the job is to faithfully pursue the interests of the power brokers who get to choose the ones they think will serve them best. It was true for Theodore Roosevelt, his younger cousin Franklin (who had a little Great Depression to deal with and had to give some to save capitalism), Woodrow Wilson and the current undistinguished incumbent in Washington.

At the heart of those interests is the pursuit of wealth and power and a system of governance beholden to capital, now more than ever dominated by giant predatory corporations that control and decide everything – who governs and how, who serves on our courts, what laws are enacted and even whether wars are fought, against whom and for what purpose. It's for the profit, of course, because wars are good for business, which is why we wage so many of them. Corporations have to keep growing. They're mandated by law to do it to maximize shareholder value for their owners, and the only way they can is by increasing profits. They do it by growing sales, keeping costs low, expanding their market share when possible and always seeking new opportunities globally for their products and services. It doesn't matter how they get them as long as they do, and the surest way when others fail is through strong-arm imperialism. The easy kinds through favorable (one-way) trade agreements or other market-opening arrangements are always preferred. But if those methods fall short, the alternative is direct confrontation or all out aggressive war. When it happens, corporations are the winners as long as the adventure doesn't harm the economy. It usually harms the public interest asked to sacrifice butter for guns and their civil liberties

in the name of greater security (never gotten), and then having to pick up the tab.

It's part of the same dirty business Senator Henry Cabot Lodge noted in his 1885 unguarded moment comment that "commerce follows the flag." Today it's more true that the flag goes where commerce directs it to secure new markets and a corporate friendly environment once they've been opened for business. That's how imperialism works and why war is an effective geopolitical way to pursue it. War, of course, is just geopolitics by other means, and powerful capital-controlled countries like the US use it freely because it works so well most often. The great political economist Harry Magdoff wrote of it this way in his *Age of Imperialism* in 1969: "Imperialism is not a matter of choice for a capitalist society; it is a way of life of such a society." He also knew the only way our system can work is through repression, institutionalized inequality and militarism all camouflaged in the deceit of serving the public interest. Magdoff knew those elements are in the DNA of our capital-controlled society that thrives and prospers best by pursuing a global predatory policy that assures continued economic growth at the macro level, geopolitical control, and greater wealth for the rich and powerful at the expense of all others.

Our tradition of imperialism began at the republic's birth, but until the end of the "cold war" wasn't discussed in polite society or acknowledged publicly. But that changed in the 1990s, and now it's seen as something respectable, a matter of national pride and contributing to the advance of civilization. It shows in our new language that portrays us as agents of a humanitarian mission (a benign Pax Americana or modern "white man's burden") still hiding the cold reality that what we're really up to is keeping the world safe and profitable for corporate America. Those on its receiving end need no explanation, but the public at home does as it harms them too. They must be convinced that what's good for business also serves them, but it's never stated in those terms. It's always sold at home as an effort to achieve national security, make the world safe for democracy, or bring our form of rule to other parts of the world we decided need our version of it. It doesn't matter if it's true or not, just that we say it is and can convince people to believe it. Based on our track record, that's not a problem as time and again the public is willing to swallow most any reasons government officials tell them (reinforced, of course, by the corporate media trumpeting them like gospel) to get them to go along with the schemes they have in mind, no matter how outrageous they are. They're never told the truth because it's so unpalatable it's has to be suppressed, especially in time of war when it's the first casualty.

The Second Great War to End All Wars Changed Everything

The US emerged from WW II as the only dominant nation "left standing." We became the world's leading and unchallengeable economic, political and military superpower almost like we planned it that way, which we did. We decided while the war was still ongoing to take full advantage of our new post-war status once it was clear what the outcome would be - to dominate all other nations, have them serve our interests, and do it either through cooperation or by force of one kind or other. With our allied global North partners we've done it through political and military alliances as well as trade and other economic agreements and incentives where we have to give enough to developed nations to get more back in return if we do it right. With the developing world though it's another story, especially those nations with vital strategic resources like large hydrocarbon reserves. Our dealings with them are crafted one-way on the basis of all take and little give in return. For us, it's a sweet deal to serve our dominant capital interests, but for them it's a pact with the devil - one always made at the expense of the public welfare everywhere.

The Beginnings Of Our Current Imperial Grand Strategy

One way or another, the US is moving ahead with its plan to rule the world with little regard for how likely it is to succeed. The Bush administration makes no pretense about this and has put its plans in writing for anyone to read and know what it has in mind. Current era thinking goes back at least to 1992 and a Pentagon document written by Paul Wolfowitz, former Bush administration Deputy Defense Secretary and current World Bank president, and the now-indicted Richard Cheney aide Lewis Libby. It was an outline of a plan for US world dominance with no allowable challenge from other nations. At the time, the George H. W. Bush administration dismissed it as off-the-wall and over-the-top after it was leaked to the public, but in September, 2000 the neo-conservative think tank Project for a New American Century (PNAC – established in 1997) revived the plan and put meat on its bones in a document they called – Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategies, Forces and Resources for a New Century. Leading PNAC members are well known and include Vice President Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and a rogues gallery of many other high ranking Bush administration neocon officials.

This document was and still is a grand imperial plan for US global dominance to extend well into the future to be enforced with unchallengeable military power. The PNAC plan was a blueprint for the current "war on terror" (now being rebranded as a war against "Islamic fascism") and "preventive wars" now raging in Iraq, becoming that in Afghanistan, and planned and "signed off" for against Iran, likely Syria, and possibly Venezuela and other targeted states not submissive to US authority. This plan was also a 21st century update of the Truman Doctrine, conceived by State Department advisor and analyst George Kennan who was the ideological godfather of "containment" and the "cold war." Kennan's plan became the first post WW II formulated strategy for US global military and economic dominance. He did it by creating the myth that the Soviet Union was a serious threat to our security, and we had to take preventive action.

The truth was the "Russians were never coming." In fact, they had their hands full until around 1960 just rebuilding their war-torn nation to its former state after being devastated by the Nazi Wehrmacht. The public, of course, never knew the truth, and the leadership was able to convince it to go along with the big lie through scare tactics. As already explained, it's an age-old tactic that always seems to work. This time it was to justify a planned military buildup in peacetime. The myth of a Soviet threat and world communist conspiracy was used to sell it, and it remained the method of choice until that nation came apart in 1991 to what are now 15 separate and independent republics.

We then had a brief respite while the first Bush administration desperately tried to find a new enemy to keep the public off guard and hypnotized by the fear of a "new Hitler" threatening us. Saddam, of course, took the bait and obliged, and the Gulf war and its aftermath ensued, followed by a dozen years of brutal and crippling economic sanctions and continued bombing up to the second Iraq war. Now after nearly 16 years, the US-led reign of terror against a defenseless nation and its people continues unabated with no end in sight or plan for it except the apparent intent to foment a full-scale civil war hoping to divide the country to make it easier to rule. The combination of endless war, harsh economic sanctions and no serious effort to rebuild or aid the people has effectively destroyed the most advanced and prosperous nation in the Middle East. It's also caused extreme suffering, hardship and mass disease, death, and destruction to millions of Iraqi victims whose only mistake was having been born in the wrong country at the wrong time. It's a country with the terrible misfortune of having immense and easily accessible oil reserves that are

coveted by the most powerful nation on earth wanting to control them.

Post 9/11, The Gloves Came Off As Well As Any Pretense of What Our Present Aims Are

The second war against Iraq became possible after 9/11 and was spelled out in what may be called the Bush Doctrine. It refers to this administration's aggressive foreign policies which were framed by George Bush in an address to the Congress shortly before the attack against and invasion of Afghanistan in which he stated the US would "make no distinction between 'the terrorists' who committed these (9/11) acts and those who harbor them." Bush arrogantly went on to say "Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." It didn't matter that Osama bin Laden was our invention and a former CIA asset against the Soviets in Afghanistan and again in Bosnia in the 1990s against Slobadan Milosevic and Serbia in the Balkan wars. The public didn't know it or once did and forgot so it was easy using him and an ill-defined al-Quaida to scare it to go along with the schemes we had in mind but needed the power of fear to do it. The ploy worked as it always does, and now the nation is embroiled in two endless wars and others in the queue to begin by whatever means the plans are to pursue them and whenever they're intended to be rolled out.

It's all part of the Bush Doctrine and Messianic mission which also include the notion of a permanent state of preventive war (now called "the long war") against those nations and "Islamic fascists" we claim threaten our national security, whether or not it's so. That notion became the pretext for the Iraq war, others we have in mind, and our claiming the right to ignore the inviolable rules and established codes of warfare in the Hague Regulations and Geneva Conventions going back to the 1850s. This recognized and accepted body of international law covers what weapons are banned, the treatment of prisoners including prohibiting torture and mistreatment, and the care of the sick and wounded. But, by Bush Doctrine standards, those laws are now judged "quaint" and "obsolete" and no longer apply. From now on, the law is only what we say it is or make up as we go along despite the fact that all treaties and conventions we're signatories to are the supreme law of the land. That's a level of arrogance only an imperial superpower without challengers can get away with, but it's much easier when a complicit corporate media goes along as cheerleaders "fixing the facts around the policy." The Bush administration pursues this policy wantonly and recklessly regardless of who approves or doesn't. It even writes it down so others can read it and know what we have in mind. It makes for frightening reading for those who do it.

It's there in the National Security Strategy (NSS) of September, 2002 that was just updated earlier this year. This plan lays out an "imperial grand strategy" with more belligerent language than the original version which was intended to be a declaration of "preventive war" against any nation or force this administration claims is a threat to our national security. It doesn't mean it is, just that we say it is. That threat includes any nation we label "unstable" or a "failed state," a term we use for nations seen as potential threats to our security which may require our intervention in self-defense. However, the very notion of what a "failed state" may be is imprecise at best. It may be its inability to protect its citizens from violence or destruction. But it may also be a nation that believes it's beyond the reach of international law and free to act as an aggressor. Under any of those conditions, the US now claims the right to wage preventive war in self-defense although in so doing that makes us the kind of "failed state" we claim the right to protect ourselves from.

Before the NSS was updated in 2006, we had four other important imperial documents. First was the May, 2000 Department of Defense (DOD) Joint Vision 2020 that outlined a plan for

“full spectrum (or world) dominance.” This was code language or “Militaryspeak” meaning total control over all land, sea, air, outer space and information with enough overwhelming power to defeat any potential challenger or adversary even by use of nuclear or any other new weapons we might develop. Second was the Nuclear Policy Review of December, 2001 that claims a unilateral right to declare and wage future wars using first strike nuclear weapons that have the potential to destroy all human life on the planet if enough of them are used. Third was the FY 2004 Air Force Space Command Strategic Master Plan. This was a plan to “own outer space”, weaponize it with the most advanced, destructive and planet threatening weapons and technology we have or hope to develop including nuclear ones. It also called for developing and placing out there unmanned space vehicles to surveille the entire planet and be able to launch an overwhelming attack against a target country or enemy force that can’t retaliate against us from that vantage point.

The fourth document is the Pentagon’s 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review issued in February. As congressionally mandated, this report is a “comprehensive examination of the national defense strategy, force structure, force modernization plans, infrastructure, budget plan, and other elements of the defense program and policies....for the next 20 years.” The review covers the military’s main missions of homeland defense – which, if implemented, even by federally mandating National Guard troops to patrol our southern border as has been done, will violate the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878 that prohibits the military from acting in a domestic law enforcement capacity unless expressly authorized by the Constitution or Congress and only in an extreme situation like putting down an insurrection. Other missions are the so-called “war on terrorism” which famed author Gore Vidal says is “idiotic...slogans...lies (and as nonsensical as) a war against dandruff,” irregular or asymmetric warfare (against non-state enemies), and what Pentagonspeak calls “shaping the choices of countries at a crossroad” which translated means the potential threat of China as an emerging global power able to challenge our dominance.

The document also unveiled the notion of “the long war” Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld signaled in his February National Press Club appearance when he said “The United States is a nation engaged in what will be a long war.” George Bush then announced it in his September 5 speech to an association of US military officers in which he declared war against “Islamic fascists.” The Pentagon report used the phrase “long war, long global war (or) long irregular war” 34 times in its Quadrennial Review including as the title for the first chapter called “Fighting the Long War.” The clear message is that all resisting Muslims and their sympathizers are Islamo-fascists and must be defeated in a “long war” struggle to preserve and spread “western civilization.” The much clearer message is that post-9/11 the Bush administration embarked on a messianic bankrupt global racist colonial “war OF terror” against all nations and peoples everywhere opposing its quest for world dominance.

The bottom line for the Pentagon, backed by administration rhetoric, is to assure the Congress will go along with the near half-trillion dollar defense budget for adventurism in the next fiscal year with steady increases in subsequent years plus the off-budget add-ons for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, others to come, and any other special funding DOD may ask for. So far, since 9/11, the Pentagon got a blank check for anything it wants called “national security” – meaning grand theft from the public to enhance profits for defense-related industries and the well-connected corporations chosen to rebuild and police the countries we first destroy so they can then get large, no-bid war-profiteering contracts. It also means the erosion and eventual loss of our civil liberties now fast disappearing, as a nation dedicated to perpetual unjustifiable war can only do it at the expense of a free

society at home. It's what James Madison meant when he wrote: "Of all the enemies to public liberty, war is, perhaps, the most to be dreaded because it compromises and develops the germ of every other. In war, too, the discretionary power of the executive is extended...and all the means of seducing the minds are added to those of subduing the force of the people."

Imperialism Often Includes Regime Change

A previous article called War Making 101 – A User's Manual prompted the writing of this one as a follow-up. The earlier article about war making laid out the steps or rules this country follows in preparing to take the nation to war. The same idea is used here to explain how we pursue our imperial aims. For them to work, it's essential to have foreign leaders in place who know "who's boss" and will cooperatively go along and serve our interests ahead of those of their own people. When they don't, the plan calls for regime change to replace them with someone who will. Below are listed and explained the different ways we go about it in order of preference. Here they're called plans instead of rules.

Plan One: Always try the easy way first. It works most often.

No imperial state, now or in the past, prefers the messiness and bother of hot conflict. Even the tyrannical ones need to convince their people of a plausible reason to get their young men motivated enough to go to war and fight hard enough to win it. The US is no different, and ideally prefers "convincing" foreign leaders to do it our way through diplomacy with enough of a sweetener to their key political and business elites to gain their acquiescence. That way works best in states headed by "strongmen" who gained power politically, militarily or from their royal predecessor or family. It's a lot easier having relations with one person in power who can decide everything rather than having to deal with messy democrats chosen by elections who must answer to voters and may have to consider their needs along with or ahead of ours. It still works with them if they're subservient enough to our wishes. It's only when they aren't that we try another method.

Plan Two: If Plan One fails, up the ante to harsher tactics. This second choice also works most often.

If at first you don't succeed the easy way, try again more forcefully. So the second choice is always: remove the "uncooperative leader" and install a more dependable new one we can rely on – to do things our way but nearly always at the expense of the great majority of the people. We've also had lots of experience with Plan Two, and most often it works.

There are two ways to do it. Method A is the easy and preferred way. It involves co-opting and bribing officials to do the dirty work. There are usually ready-takers willing to go along and share in the spoils. We then train and fund them, choose the time, opportunity and place to implement the scheme, then stand back and hope all goes as planned. However it turns out, we can claim plausible deniability they did it, not us. This was the method used in Venezuela in three unsuccessful attempts from 2002 – 2004 to oust Hugo Chavez, put the country's oligarchs back in power, and destroy the Bolivarian Revolution that created a model system of participatory democracy based on the principles of political, economic and social justice. Method A failed in Venezuela because Hugo Chavez gave his people what they never had before and despite the coup plotters' best efforts they weren't able to defeat the will and spirit of the people who showed through their determined efforts they wouldn't tolerate returning to the ugly past they'll never again accept.

So when things don't work out, as happened in Venezuela, Method B is tried. It involves eliminating an uncooperative leader by assassination as discretely as possible. It may be by a "rogue element's" bullet, some well-placed and hard to detect poison, or an unfortunate plane crash the CIA conveniently arranges. We've used this one enough times too, so we're usually able to pull it off with the public none the wiser in the target country or at home.

The CIA used this method to murder Panamanian president Omar Torrijos in a 1981 plane crash and Ecuadorian president Jaime Roldos in a helicopter crash the same year. Perhaps the most infamous CIA arranged coup and presidential assassination happened on another September 11 in 1973 when General Augusto Pinochet with strong US backing overthrew and had murdered democratically elected President Salvador Allende. It ended the strongest and most vibrant democracy in the Americas and ushered in a brutal right wing military dictatorship for the next 16.5 years. Hugo Chavez now fears this is the fate the US has in mind for him and has said so publicly. What happened in Chile can happen anywhere, and it shows the fragility of a free and democratic society that can easily be toppled by forces determined and strong enough to do it. It's not that hard when the public is unprepared or unwilling to resist to save the liberties it takes for granted until it's too late. But it also shows how successful people-power can be when mobilized in force to resist a looming tyranny it refuses to accept. That's the lesson of Venezuela under Hugo Chavez, and it's visible on the streets of Mexico in the wake of (another) stolen election and a system of authoritarian rule the people have begun to resist.

Plan Three: This choice of last resort is only used when the two preferred methods fail – open conflict or war involving an invasion and possible occupation.

If the top two choices fail, as was the case in Iraq after years of trying Plans One and Two, and the target is too important to pass up (again like Iraq), the only choice left is open conflict or war. It can be simple, quick and easy like Ronald Reagan's walkover against Grenada in October, 1983 that was mostly over after several days or G.H.W. Bush's Operation Just Cause invasion of Panama in December, 1989 that was almost as easy. It might also be like the Gulf war which was not simple because of the long buildup and expense but was still quick and involved no occupation.

However it's done, this least preferred option is messy, costly and usually takes much more time from planning to completion. It's also only undertaken against targeted foes too weak to put up a good fight and have no weapons that will cause us heavy damage or loss of life. Guessing wrong on either count will make it hard to maintain public support for long, as it's never easy explaining the body bags when they arrive home in large numbers. It's even harder when the pretext for going to war in the first place was based on lies (as they always are), and they're beginning to unravel.

Once the war option is chosen though, the administration needs to prep the public to go along with the "big lie" they concocted. It takes time and effort but involves what so far is the proved the time-tested method of choice guaranteed to work as explained above – scaring the public to death by convincing it the targeted country threatens our national security and welfare. The message repeated ad nauseam is that we patiently tried reason, but all diplomatic efforts failed and we're only left with one viable option – force. We've done this so often we're expert at it, so it's likely the public will be traumatized enough to go along with even the most implausible, extreme or outrageous plan we have in mind like using nuclear weapons against a targeted enemy that likely can't even put up a decent fight against conventional ones.

Sometimes though we outsmart ourselves or refuse to listen to cooler heads and end up in a hopeless quagmire. It happened in Vietnam, and it's being repeated again in Iraq and heading toward more of the same in Afghanistan. But despite a bad situation that's getting worse, it's usually not good strategy for an imperial power to admit making a mistake, decide to cut its losses and leave. It's generally not popular with voters (except when most of them are fed up and want a quick exit) and doing it also emboldens others targeted to see us as willing to back down when things go sour. They'll likely get the idea they can make us quit if they make it tough enough long enough, and they're likely to be right. It's no different than a schoolyard bully able to get away with it as long as the ones picked on allow him to do it. Once one retaliates and strikes a telling blow, it shows the bully isn't as tough as he wants others to believe.

So to avoid that fate, as well as saving face, we can never admit a mistake or decide to give up a bad fight, even ones we can't win – just like we're now doing in Iraq and beginning to face in Afghanistan. Instead we foolishly have to keep up the charade with the public, say we're making good progress, and claim there's light at the end of the tunnel. At most we'll admit it's taking longer than expected, but we're still on plan and with some patience we'll succeed. But that strategy only works for so long, because if winning isn't likely or can't happen before patience runs out, the only light the public will see in the tunnel is a train wreck in the making. If it comes to that, the game is over, the administration suffers, and the opposition party (if that's a proper term any more) will likely be the beneficiary. The public never is. It's always the patsy during a conflict and when it ends. It must sacrifice butter for guns and then pay the tab when the bill comes due.

Will the Public Ever Realize It's Been Had

The scaremongering scam has been used so often before with the same or similar language that later proved false, you'd think the public by now would have caught on. But you'd be wrong. Up to now, it's worked like a charm every time proving again you can fool most people all the time so why not keep doing it – as long as it keeps working. The only differences from one conflict to the next are the names, dates and places. The playbook is always about the same. All that's needed is an old one, and then fill in the blanks.

But imagine a “what if” using the well-known Aesop fable about The Boy Who Cried Wolf but with a different moral. We remember the tale about the bored shepard boy who broke his monotony by falsely crying “wolf” and getting the nearby villagers to come to his rescue. When the villagers tired of his false alarms they stopped coming. That's where our analogy ends. In the fable the wolf finally came, the villagers ignored the boy's cry for help and the flock perished. Aesop's fables always had a moral so we'd learn from them. His was that even when liars tell the truth, they're never believed. Today, however, when liars keep lying, the public never catches on and they keep getting away with it – to our detriment. Hopefully, one day the lesson learned will be that liars can only get away with so many lies until finally no one believes anything they say. Maybe some day if the public knew about famed journalist IF Stone and what he once said – that “all governments are run by liars and nothing they say should be believed.”

Watch for Part II of this article to follow soon on this site. It will include a case study of imperial madness.

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