The British Empire in Yemen

Region: Middle East & North Africa
Theme: History, Militarization and WMD

Over the holidays, I began watching a BBC series entitled The Last Post, which revolves around a contingent of British troops in the early 1960s stationed in Aden, a port city in Yemen, the Arabian country today that Saudi Arabia and the United States are bombing to smithereens.

The British troops were there as a remnant of the British Empire, which once controlled foreign lands all across the globe but which, mostly as a result of World War II, had been pretty much dismantled. The British troops in Aden were able to have their families living with them. One of their favorite pastimes was enjoying the amenities of a beautiful seaside resort in Aden.

But not was all hunky dory. Periodically British patrols were being ambushed and killed by Yemeni terrorists. The terrorists also kidnapped the 8-year-old son of a British officer and threatened to kill him if the British refused to release a Yemeni terrorist who had been arrested for killing British troops.

One British soldier innocently asked another, "Why do they want to kill us?" He really didn't know. The soldier to whom he addressed the question responded, "I just don't know."

And they really didn't seem to know. After all, the British were bringing highways, schools, manners, and culture to this backward land. Security too, in the form of British military police. Why would anyone want to kill people who were willing to travel so far away from their home country to make such big sacrifices for people in overseas lands?

As I was watching the program, I wondered what the average American would say when he heard the exchange between those two soldiers. Would he recognize why they wanted to kill those British troops? Or would he be as clueless as the British soldiers?

It was easy for me to see why they wanted to kill British troops, but of course I'm a libertarian. The Yemenis were saying to the British Empire: No matter how many benefits you might be bringing to this part of the world, our part of the world is none of your business. Get out of here. Go home. Leave Yemen to the Yeminis.

What was happening to the British Empire in Aden is essentially what is happening to the United States today, all over the world. Unfortunately, that is something that all too many Americans just do not want to see.

Of course, Americans don't like to think of their own country as an empire. After all, the United States was born in rebellion against empire, the British Empire.

Nonetheless, what was happening to the British Empire in Aden is what is happening around the world to the United States. Foreigners are saying to the U.S. government: What is happening over here in this part of the world is none of your business. Get out. Go home. Leave us alone.

One of the reasons that Americans are unable to draw the parallels between Great Britain and the United States is that the U.S. version of empire hasn't followed the British model. Instead of converting foreign lands into colonies, the U.S. government has followed the Soviet Union's model of empire that was established in Eastern Europe. It uses local proxies or "puppets" to serve as agents for the U.S. government, just as the Soviets did in Eastern European countries. This has enabled the United States to maintain the façade of supporting "independent" regimes in the countries it controls, which just happen to "invite" the United States to maintain military bases in their countries.

In fact, I wonder how many Americans know that the U.S. government maintains a giant military base in Yemen today. Indeed, I wonder how many Americans realize that the terrorist attack on the USS Cole, which preceded the 9/11 attacks, took place in Aden.

Today, the most popular mantra among the American people involves thanking U.S. troops for protecting our rights and freedoms or, in American churches, asking for God's protection for those who are making the "ultimate sacrifice" in the defense of our rights and freedoms. That mindset is undoubtedly one of the most successful propaganda and indoctrination programs in history.

I can't help but wonder if the British people ever believed that British troops in Aden were protecting their rights and freedoms. My hunch is that they didn't. After all, the Yemenis never desired to attack and invade England and conquer the country, which is the way they would take away the rights and freedoms of the British people. All that the Yemenis wanted was to end the British Empire's control over their part of their world. At the risk of belaboring the obvious, trying to win one's independence from the British Empire is not the same as threatening the rights and freedoms of the British citizenry at home.

Of course, it's no different with respect to the massive worldwide presence of U.S. troops and U.S. military bases. No foreigner and no foreign regime is threatening to invade the United States and take over the federal government, which is how someone would take away our rights and freedoms. Foreigners are killing American troops to resist the control, domination, and presence of the U.S. Empire in faraway lands, just as Yemenis were doing against the British in Aden in the early 1960s.

Indeed, that was also why the Vietnamese people were killing French troops in Vietnam in the 1950s. It was why Cubans and Filipinos were killing Spanish troops in Cuba and the Philippines in the late 1800s. No matter what benefits that Spanish, French, British, or American officials think they are bringing to foreign lands with their troops, whether with highways, schools, security, or other such things, people over there respond with: Our problems are none of your business. Go home. Leave us alone.

Ironically, what inevitably ends up happening is that an overseas military empire ends up destroying one's own country, specifically in two ways.

First, there is the massive, ever-growing spending and debt that is needed to sustain the troops, their bases, and their overseas projects. That means higher taxes and increasing

debasement of the currency. The end of this road is governmental bankruptcy, which means lower standards of living for the citizenry.

Second, there is the ever-growing threat of terrorist retaliation, both abroad and here at home. That inevitably leads to ever-increasing measures to keep us safe here at home. As the empire clamps down on people overseas to overcome resistance, the threat of terrorist blowback increases, causing officials to expand their control at home, with measures like mass surveillance, assaults on financial privacy, and travel restrictions. Empire abroad means destruction of liberty and privacy at home.

Thus, the notion that the troops are defending our rights and freedoms with their activities abroad is totally wrong-headed. In actuality, it's the exact opposite. What the troops are doing abroad is, indirectly, bringing about the destruction of the rights and freedoms (and economic well-being) of the American people at the hands of their own government.

The solution to all this is clear: End American's experiment with empire. Bring all U.S. troops home (and discharge them). Leave people in foreign lands free to resolve their own problems. Restore America's founding principles against empire and foreign interventionism. Restore a limited-government republic to our land. Unleash the private sector to interact with the people of the world. Build a model society of freedom here at home for the world to emulate.

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