

The Decline and Fall of the United States

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War is a Crime

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

*Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.*—Robert Frost

After a speech I gave this past weekend, a young woman asked me whether a failure by the United States to properly surround and intimidate China might result in instability. I explained why I thought the opposite was true. Imagine if China had military bases along the Canadian and Mexican borders with the United States and ships in Bermuda and the Bahamas, Nova Scotia and Vancouver. Would you feel stabilized? Or might you feel something else?

The U.S. empire can continue to see itself as a force for good, doing things that would be unacceptable for anyone else but never to be questioned when performed by the global cop — that is, it can go on not seeing itself at all, expanding, over-reaching, and collapsing from within. Or it can recognize what it's about, shift priorities, scale back militarism, reverse the concentration of wealth and power, invest in green energy and human needs, and undo the empire a bit sooner but far more beneficially. Collapse is not inevitable. Collapse or redirection is inevitable, and thus far the U.S. government is choosing the path toward the former.

Let's look at a few of the indicators.

Failing Democracy

The United States bombs nations in the name of democracy, yet has one of the least democratic and least functioning of the states calling themselves democracies. The U.S. has the lowest voter [turnout](#) among wealthy, and lower even than many poor, countries. An election is looming for next year with leading contenders from two aristocratic dynasties. The United States does not use national public initiatives or referenda in the way that some countries do, so its low voter turnout (with over 60% of eligible voters choosing not to vote

in 2014) matters all the more. The U.S. democracy is also less democratic than other wealthy democracies in terms of its internal functioning, with a single individual able to launch wars.

Low public participation is not the result of satisfaction so much as recognition of corruption, combined with antidemocratic barriers to participating. For years now 75% to 85% of the U.S. public has been saying its government is broken. And clearly a big part of that understanding is related to the system of legalized bribery that funds elections. Approval of Congress has been under 20% and sometimes under 10% for years now. Confidence in Congress is at 7% and falling quickly.



Recently a man, expecting to lose his job at the very least, [landed](#) a little bicycle-helicopter at the U.S. Capitol to try to deliver requests to clean the money out of elections. He cited as his motivation the “collapse of this country.” Another man [showed up](#) at the U.S. Capitol with a sign reading “Tax the 1%” and proceeded to shoot himself in the head. Polls suggest those are not the only two people who see the problem — and, it should be noted, the solution.

Of course, the U.S. “democracy” operates in greater and greater secrecy with ever greater powers of surveillance. The World Justice Project [ranks](#) the United States below many other nations in these categories: Publicized laws and government data; Right to information; Civic participation; and Complaint mechanisms.

The U.S. government is currently working on ratifying, in secret, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which empowers corporations to overturn laws enacted by the U.S. government.

Wealth Concentration

A political system dominated by wealth could be democratic if wealth were evenly distributed. Sadly, the United States has a [greater disparity](#) of wealth than almost any other nation on earth. Four hundred U.S. billionaires have more money than half the people of the United States combined, and those 400 are celebrated for it rather than shamed. With the United States [trailing](#) most nations in income equality, this problem is only getting worse. The [10th](#) wealthiest country on earth per capita doesn’t look wealthy when you drive through it. And you do have to drive, with 0 miles of high-speed rail built. And you have to be careful when you drive. The American Society of Civil Engineers gives U.S. infrastructure a D+. Areas of cities like Detroit have become wasteland. Residential areas lack water or are poisoned by environmental pollution — most often from military operations.

The core of the U.S. sales pitch to itself is that, for all its flaws it provides freedom and opportunity. In fact, it trails most European countries in economic mobility, self-assessment of [wellbeing](#), and ranks [35th](#) in freedom to choose what to do with your life, according to Gallup, 2014.

Degrading Infrastructure

The United States contains 4.5 percent of the world's population and spends 42 percent of the world's health care expenses, and yet Americans are less healthy than the residents of nearly every other wealthy nation and a few poor ones as well. The U.S. ranks [36th](#) in life expectancy and [47th](#) in preventing infant mortality.

The U.S. spends more on criminal justice and has more crime, and [more](#) gun [deaths](#) than most countries, rich or poor. That includes shootings by U.S. police that kill about 1,000 per year, compared to single digits in various Western nations.

The U.S. comes in [57th](#) in employment, stands against the trend of the world by providing no guarantee of paid parental leave or vacation, and trails [in](#) education [by](#) various [measures](#). The United States, however, leads the way in putting students into debt for their education to the tune of \$1.3 trillion, part of a wider problem of [personal debt](#).

The United States is [#1](#) in debt to other countries, including [governmental](#) debt, although [#3](#) per capita. As others have [pointed out](#), the U.S. is declining in terms of exports, and the power of the dollar and its use as currency for the globe are in doubt.

Drop In Popular Opinion Abroad

In early 2014 there were unusual news stories about Gallup's [end-of-2013 polling](#) because after polling in 65 countries with the question "Which country do you think is the greatest threat to peace in the world today?" the overwhelming winner had been the United States of America. In fact, the United States is less generous with aid but more profligate with bombs and missiles than other countries and trails generally in [how it treats](#) the rest of the world.

The United States leads the way in [environmental destruction](#), trailing only China in [carbon dioxide emissions](#) but almost tripling China's emissions when measured per capita.

The second U.S.-backed dictator in Yemen in the past few years has now fled to Saudi Arabia and requested the bombing of his own country with U.S. weapons, a country in chaos in significant part because a U.S. drone war has given popular support to violent opposition to the U.S. and its servants.

ISIS produced a 60-minute film depicting itself as the leading enemy of the U.S. and essentially asking the U.S. to attack it. The U.S. did and its recruitment soared.

The United States is favored by brutal governments in Egypt and around the region, but not by popular support.

Militarism for It's Own Sake

The United States is [far and away](#) the leading selling seller and giver of weapons to the world; the leading spender on its own military, with expenses having skyrocketed to now about \$1.3 trillion per year, roughly equivalent to the rest of the world put together; the leading occupier of the world with troops in almost every other country; and the leading participant in and instigator of wars.

The United States is also, far and away, the leader in incarceration, with more people and a higher percentage of people locked up than in any other time or place, and with even more people on parole and probation and under the control of the prison system. More African-Americans are locked up than were slaves prior to the U.S. Civil War. The U.S. is likely the first and only place on earth where the majority of sexual assault victims are male.

Civil liberties are eroding rapidly. Surveillance is expanding dramatically. And all in the name of war without end. But the wars are endless defeats, generating enemies rather than any advantage. The wars empower and create enemies, enrich nations engaged in nonviolent investment, and empower the war profiteers to push for more wars. The propaganda for the wars fails to boost military enlistment at home, so the U.S. government turns to mercenaries (creating additional pressure for more wars) and to drones. But the drones boost the creation of hatred and enemies exponentially, generating blowback that sooner or later will include blowback by means of drones — which the U.S. war profiteers are marketing around the globe.

Resistance Growing

Resistance to empire does not come only in the form of a replacement empire. It can take the form of violent and nonviolent resistance to militarism, economic resistance to exploitation, and collective agreement to improve the world. When Iran [urges](#) India, China, and Russia to oppose NATO's expansion, it is not necessarily dreaming of global empire or even of cold war, but certainly of resistance to NATO. When bankers suggest the [Yuan](#) will replace the dollar, that need not mean that China will duplicate the Pentagon.

The current U.S. trajectory threatens to collapse not just the United States but the world in one or both of two ways: nuclear or environmental apocalypse. Green energy models and antimilitarism constitute resistance to this path. The model of Costa Rica with no military, 100% renewable energy, and ranked at the top in happiness is a form of resistance too. At the end of 2014, Gallup of course did not dare ask again what nation was the greatest threat to peace but did ask if people would ever fight in a war. In many nations large majorities said No, never.

The United States is growing isolated in its support for the institution of war. Last year 31 Latin American and Caribbean nations [declared](#) that they would never use war. U.S. support for Israeli wars has left it virtually alone and up against a growing campaign for boycotts, divestments, and sanctions. The United States is increasingly understood as rogue, as it remains the lone or nearly lone holdout on the treaty on the rights of the child, the land mines treaty, the covenant on economic, social, and cultural rights, the International Criminal Court, etc.

Latin American nations are standing up to the United States. Some have kicked out its bases and ceased sending students to the School of the Americas. People are protesting at US bases in Italy, South Korea, England, and at US Embassies in Philippines, Czech Republic, Ukraine. German courts are hearing charges that it is illegally participating in US drone wars. Pakistani courts have indicted top CIA officials.

Exceptionalism on the Ropes

The idea of American exceptionalism is not a serious claim so much as an attitude among the U.S. public. While the U.S. trails other nations in various measures of health, happiness, education, sustainable energy, economic security, life expectancy, civil liberties, democratic representation, and peace, and while it sets new records for militarism, incarceration, surveillance, and secrecy, many Americans think of it as so exceptional as to excuse all sorts of actions that are unacceptable in others. Increasingly this requires willful self-deception. Increasingly the self-deception is failing.

When Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said that a nation that continues year after year to spend more money on the military than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death he wasn't warning us. He was warning our parents and grandparents. We're the dead.

Can we be revived?

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