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# The Costs of Empire

(Tuesday, 20 April 2004) - Contributed by David Isenberg

While empire in all its imperial, multicolored, geopolitical hues, like Joseph's Coat of Many Colors, may be an alluring sight, one thing should be kept in mind. The process of creating and maintaining one is costly, very costly, in terms of lives, money, and liberty. My remarks today give just a brief overview of some of those costs, particularly those in the military realm.

As Newhouse News has reported, the rising cost of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, together with expensive new weapons systems and other growing commitments, is pushing military spending inexorably upward, part of a pattern of federal spending that some economists say threatens American and global economic stability. That unanticipated cost is \$12 billion to \$19 billion this year and each year on into the future as forces rotate through the combat zones. And the Pentagon is paying billions more for the health care of troops mobilized from National Guard and reserve units, a recurring charge expected to grow in the coming years.[i]

Let's look at the budget first. For FY 2004 Congress approved about \$400 billion for "national defense," or in plain English, military spending. Keep in mind that in FY 2004 military spending accounted for over half of all discretionary spending.

The annual military appropriations bill is expected to grow from \$369 billion this year to nearly \$600 billion by 2013, according to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO).[ii]

Despite concerns about rising deficits, protracted wars and costly weapons, this year President George W. Bush has asked Congress for about \$470 billion in military spending for 2005, including a \$50 billion supplemental bill to pay for Iraq and Afghanistan war which won't kick in until after the Nov. 2 presidential election.[iii]

That would be the third massive supplemental spending bill sought to support these wars. Last spring Congress approved a \$62.6 billion supplemental and an \$87 billion supplemental in November.

The financial cost of maintaining U.S. forces in Iraq is currently running at \$4 billion per month, or \$48 billion a year. Last September the Wall Street Journal predicted further spirals in future Iraq postwar costs attributable to gross overestimation of near-term Iraqi oil revenues, surprise at the decrepit state of Iraq's basic infrastructure; extensive and continued looting; sabotage of oil pipelines, electrical power lines, and other key reconstruction costs; downstream costs of financing expanding Iraqi government and security forces; and poor prospects for significant international donor support.[iv]

To say nothing of what about "nation-building" which Niall Ferguson, a British historian, calls a fashionable euphemism for empire-building. Whatever the terminology, the process is expensive.

## Implications of occupation

Iraq is also having an impact on the entire structure of military force. As you will all have seen by now, fighting "major combat operations" is relatively easy – compared to occupations.

Many hands have been wrung in Congress over the "stretched to thin" military.[v] In fact, you could halve the active Army from ten to five divisions and still have more than enough for defense of the country. However, it is true that defending an empire is different.

Lt. Gen. John M. Riggs, head of the task force charged with fashioning the Army of the future, told the Baltimore Sun earlier this year that the Army was too small and must be increased "substantially" to more than 10,000 soldiers.[vi]

Keep in mind that January saw the start of the U.S. military's biggest unit rotation since World War II. According to Riggs, eight of the 10 active-duty Army divisions are now rotating in and out of Iraq, while one-third of the Army National Guard's combat battalions have been called to active duty. We do not have enough soldiers in the Army to provide for a reasonable rotation schedule of fresh troops into Iraq and for other missions, such as Afghanistan.[vii]

In short, more people are needed. The question is: should these be U.S. personnel, foreign soldiers, or mercenaries, as in private military companies? The Tauscher bill, currently under consideration in the House of Representatives, would add 40,000 to the army, 28,700 to the air force and 15,000 to the marines. This overall increase of 83,700 can be compared with the entire strength of the British army, namely 114,000.[viii]

With some exceptions, most of the media have overlooked this critically important connection. In other words,

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maintenance of the empire is costly. It requires more troops than presently available. If you are not going to increase end strength, or if reservists are to be deployed for far longer than they ever expected or the government intended, then larger numbers of private sector employees will be required.

Given that the rationale, or perhaps I should say the pretext, for expanding the American empire beyond its previous Cold War boundaries is the GWOT - the Global War on Terrorism. This is an unlovely acronym if ever there was one. We should note a recent report issued by the U.S. Army War College's Strategic Studies Institute. While the report does not necessarily reflect the views of the War College, the Army, or the U.S. government, per the standard disclaimer<sup>[ix]</sup>, it is a safe bet that many military officers agree with the author, Jeffrey Record. He wrote, "Operation IRAQI FREEDOM saddled the U.S. armed forces, especially the U.S. Army, with costly and open-ended imperial policing and nation-building responsibilities outside the professional military's traditional mission portfolio."<sup>[x]</sup>

#### Pre-emptive war

If one takes seriously the expansion of the U.S. Empire via military means, through so-called preemptive wars, as part of a unilateral GWOT, I believe that we are going about it in the worst possible way.

Strategic independence is fine as a concept and even I can imagine a scenario when we must go it alone. However, we have alliances for a reason and it's not some sort of warm, fuzzy, sentimental, liberal interpretation of multilateralism. As Michael Ignatieff, a Harvard professor, has noted, we depend on others. We depend on Mexico and Canada and on Europe's police forces to track terrorist cells in the Islamic Diaspora. We cannot contain the North Korean nuclear threat without the Chinese, Japanese and South Koreans. We need the Indians to prevent Pakistan from collapsing - and its nuclear weapons from falling into terrorist hands.

Why is the United States military establishment structured to deploy anywhere in the world within days? Were the antiwar protesters right? Is it really about blood for oil? Remember the report of the National Energy Policy Development Group, established by President Bush shortly after taking office, and headed by Vice President Cheney. This read in part: "U.S. national energy security depends on sufficient energy supplies to support U.S. and global economic growth."<sup>[xi]</sup>

Contrary to popular press reports, the basic goal of the Cheney plan is to find additional external sources of oil for the United States. One third of all the recommendations in the report are for ways to obtain access to petroleum sources abroad. Between now and 2020 imports of petroleum or other sources, such as natural gas will have to increase by 7.5 million barrels per day to keep up with consumption and the decline in domestic U.S. production.

I believe that the Cheney report will have a significant impact on future U.S. foreign and military policy. Officials will have to negotiate for these overseas supplies and arrange for investments that will increase production and exports. They must also take steps to ensure that wars, revolutions or civil disorder do not impede foreign deliveries to the United States. These imperatives will be especially significant for policy toward the Persian Gulf area, Caspian Sea basin, Africa and Latin America.<sup>[xii]</sup>

Ironically, Iraq's oil will not provide much relief. The world uses about 27 billion barrels oil per year. This means that 112 billion barrels—the proven oil reserves of Iraq, the second largest in the world, would last little more than four years at today's usage rates.<sup>[xiii]</sup>

Even more ironic is the fact that prior to the war the United States was concerned that the war would interrupt production, thus boosting oil prices, and negatively impacting the world economy. So an agreement was reached with OPEC to stabilize the markets by increasing production levels as needed. OPEC rose to the occasion, raising production by about 3.2mbd. About 65 percent of that increase came from just two countries, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Saudi Arabia alone contributed more than half and probably controls what remains of any spare production capacity.<sup>[xiv]</sup> So much for reducing Saudi influence.

#### Overseas bases

Foreign bases are another key aspect of empire. In fact the Pentagon plans to dramatically change the traditional shape of U.S. military abroad<sup>[xv]</sup> – from large permanent garrisons to a web of far-flung, lean, forward operating bases, maintained in peacetime only by small permanent support units. Of course, this would mean a large reduction of the traditional U.S. military presence in Europe is necessary.

While such plans were in the works before President Bush took office, September 11 did much to accelerate them.

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U.S. Undersecretary of Defense Douglas Feith has used the interesting term - a lighter footprint – to describe this new approach. Last year saw the removal of some US troops from Germany and the establishment of new bases in, as Defense Secretary Rumsfeld phrased it, “New Europe,” the new NATO members Romania and Bulgaria. Poland and Hungary are also possible sites for U.S. bases.

In addition, according to Gen. William J. Begert, commander of Pacific Air Forces, the Air Force wants to return to the Cold War-era practice of basing fighter jets and other strike and support planes on Guam, the Pacific island that is in ready striking distance of the Korean peninsula.

Despite this restructuring, the U.S. military empire is staggeringly large. The global “footprint” spans the world. Bear in mind the fact that the United States is the only country in the world that divides the world into military fiefdoms, or “unified commands” in Pentagonese. The U.S. even has a Unified Command Plan, which slightly reconfigures the boundaries of those fiefdoms every two years.

Pentagon officials are now in the final throes of crafting an updated National Military Strategy that is expected to acknowledge a need to redistribute U.S. forces and revamp their chains of command throughout the globe. “Global sourcing,” a term to describe the distribution of U.S. forces across the Earth, is also an issue to be addressed in the new national military strategy. The new posture is expected to carry with it a new lingo for bases, including “power projection hubs,” main operating bases and more flexible and agile “forward operating sites,”[xvi]

Those new bases, in places like Poland and Uzbekistan, could serve as launching points for military strikes to protect U.S. interests or quickly strike out at terrorists.[xvii]

Not to mention Iraq. As I speak, in Iraq engineers from the 1st Armored Division are working through an \$800 million project to build half a dozen camps for the incoming 1st Cavalry Division. The new outposts, dubbed enduring camps, will improve living quarters for soldiers and allow the military to return key infrastructure sites within the Iraqi capital to the emerging government.

The largest of the new camps, Camp Victory North, will be twice the size of Camp Bondsteel in Kosovo — currently one of the largest overseas posts built since the Vietnam War.[xviii]

It will not be built overnight, though. the United States has yet to begin serious negotiations with Iraqis on an agreement to guarantee that American troops in Iraq will remain immune from arrest and prosecution by local authorities once a new Baghdad government takes over in June.[xix]

This use of overseas bases recalls 19th century imperialists, who carved out little extraterritorial enclaves all along the coast of China. Also, it was certainly the modus operandi of the collapsed Soviet empire,

So this is what we have: a peacetime way of life in which the U.S. military’s forces abroad are largely shielded from local judgments. Increasingly, if the Bush administration has its way (thanks to bilateral agreements forced on other nations), American soldiers in wartime will be responsible to no other body, certainly not to the new International Criminal Court, for crimes of war or crimes against humanity. [xx]

And let us not forget the aspect of time. Empire is an open ended commitment. If you think diamonds are forever, try nation building, which is the new pretext for extending the American empire. As Francis Fukuyama, of the end of history fame, has pointed out, our forces stayed in Germany and Japan for generations.

#### Danger of self-delusion

Empire also makes us prone to self-delusion. Critics of empire are not merely critics. They become anti-patriots. Writing in the journal *Ethics and International Affairs*, scholar Pratap Bhanu Mehta has written, it is in the nature of empire to transform the character of patriotism.

Noted psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton talks of a sense of “superpower paranoia”. In a recent book he wrote of “cosmic ambition” accompanied by an equally vast sense of entitlement, hardened by the events of September 11.

Despite the military power, the question remains: can America do empire properly? Noted academic Joseph Nye points out that the term “empire” may be a misnomer.

He says it is a mistake to confuse the politics of primacy with the politics of empire. The United States does not seek to

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exert direct political control in the manner of the European overseas empires of the 19th and 20th centuries. While the United States now has more power resources than Britain at its imperial peak, the U.S. has less control over the behavior that occurs inside other countries than Britain did when it ruled a quarter of the globe

Unlike Britain in Kenya, for example, the U.S. does not control schools, taxes, laws and elections— though the last may be arguable – in places where it exercises influence.

To conclude, the costs of empire are heavy - and we have not even had time to address the psychological burden – the weight, whether conscious or subconscious, on every American that the fate of all the citizens of another country is very much in our hands.

[i] David Wood, "Defense Spending Pushes Upward, With Ramifications For Deficit," Newhouse.com, January 16, 2004.

[ii] Martin Kady II, "Defense: A Deficit Driver," Congressional Quarterly Weekly, January 17, 2004, p. 154. [iii] William Matthews, "\$470 Billion for U.S. Defense: Deficits, Election, War Won't Slow Spending in '05," Defense News, January 19, 2004, p. 1. See also Amy Klamper, "DoD May Wait Until After Elections To Push Supplemental," National Journal's CongressDailyAM, January 22, 2004. On Jan. 23 the Pentagon announced "the president's request for a fiscal 2005 defense budget of \$401.7 billion in discretionary funding authority. This represents a seven percent increase over fiscal 2004 funding levels, Source: Pentagon Press Release No. 046-04, Jan. 23, 2004..

[iv] Record, op. cit., p. 36. See also Paying for Iraq's Reconstruction, Congressional Budget Office, January 2004.

[v] See, for a typical example, "The Size of the U.S. Army," the transcript of a Newshour with Jim Lehrer, January 13, 2004, [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/military/jan-june04/army\\_1-13.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/military/jan-june04/army_1-13.html).

[vi] Tom Bowman, "Army Big Enough To Do The Job, Rumsfeld Says: Senior general contended that Army is too small," Baltimore Sun, January 22, 2004.

[vii] Tom Bowman, "3-Star General Says Army Is Too Small To Do Its Job: 10,000 more soldiers would not be enough modernization, chief says," Baltimore Sun, January 21, 2004. [viii] "Is the U.S. Military Too Small?," Defense News, January 12 2004, p. 8 .

[ix] Anne Plummer "Military Academics Entertain Intellectual Freedom, To A Point," Inside The Army, January 19, 2004 , p. 1. [x] Jeffrey Record, Bounding The Global War on Terrorism, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, December 2003, p. 3.

[xi] Michael Klare, Bush-Cheney Energy Strategy: Procuring the Rest of the World's Oil, Foreign Policy in Focus, January 2004, <http://www.foreignpolicy-infocus.org/papers/03petropol/politics.html>. The energy provided by oil is vital for critical sectors other than heating and transportation, such as agriculture. For detail see Richard Manning, "The Oil We Eat: Following the food chain back to Iraq," Harper's Magazine, February 2004.

[xii] Ibid.

[xiii] Alfred Cavallor, "Oil: The illusion of plenty," Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, January/February 2004, Vol. 60, No. 1, p. 20.

[xiv] Ibid, p. 70.

[xv] This section draws heavily on Colin Robinson, "Worldwide Reorientation of U.S. Military Basing Will mean Major Changes," The Defense Monitor, Vol. XXXII, No. 4, p. 5. See also Jamie Dettmer, "Plan to Shift Bases Shakes Up Allies," Insight Magazine, December 23, 2003.

[xvi] Amy Butler, "Pentagon's New Military Strategy To Include Redistributed Forces, Official Says," Defense Daily, January 22, 2004, Pg. 5.

[xvii] Greg Jaffe, "U.S. Advances Plan To Redeploy Forces In Europe," Wall Street Journal, January 9, 2004.

[xviii] Rick Scavetta, "In Iraq, 1st AD is 'improving the foxhole'," Stars and Stripes, European edition, January 22, 2004

[xix] Walter Pincus, "Immunity Pact For U.S. Troops In Postwar Iraq Still Unsettled: Status-of-Forces Agreement Establishes Rules for Forces," Washington Post, January 23, 2004, Pg. 12.

[xx] Tom Engelhardt, "The Neo-Imperialists: Bush's evolving empire goes well beyond devolving Iraq," Mother Jones, November/December 2003.

