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Progressive Ponderings  
Imperialism – Part 2

The United States Constitution places most of the power regarding foreign affairs with the executive branch. The wise founding fathers designated one extremely important power, the power to declare war, to the legislative branch, Congress. The number of wars declared by Congress throughout out history is very small. The number of wars we have fought and other military actions involving our military is very large and very frequent.

When Congress acquiesces this power to the president, it allows him to act as a monarch. A monarch who sets his own foreign agenda, who answers neither to Congress nor the people, and who uses the military to enforce his foreign policy is an imperialist.

Since World War II and the growth of the Soviet communist threat, real or imagined, the size of the U.S. military budget has grown and grown despite President Eisenhower's warning regarding the military/industrial complex being a threat to democracy. Not only has the budget continued to grow despite the fall of Communism, but in doing so has made many needed domestic programs impossible to fund. The military budget consumes nearly half of all federal discretionary spending. Also, it nearly matches the military budgets of all other nations combined.

This huge military budget provides the strongest military force the world has ever known, strong enough to destroy our earth several times. The United Nations has approximately 190 to 200 members. Of these countries, the United States has military bases in over 100. As Commander-in-Chief, the president has sole control after budgets are approved by Congress.

Add to all of this the president's ability to hide behind "national security" to operate in secret; an "embedded" press which yields to manufactured news, ideologies and opinions; a nation accustomed to fear mongering from its leaders; and a radical fundamentalist right urging him on as God's current avenging angel. All of the above leads to an extremely perilous situation – an imperial presidency with complete war-making power, the world's greatest military machine at his disposal, military bases around the globe from which to act, control of the production of news, and God's approval. Did a monarch ever have such power?

A president with all of these factors in place operates with impunity. He surrounds himself with like-thinking "yes" people. Anyone with a difference of opinion is kept at bay and branded as unpatriotic. His appointments to positions dealing with America's foreign affairs can be made without regard for the feelings of other nations. His appointment to the UN has a history of anti-United Nations rhetoric; his defense secretary can be offensive to other nations and to Congress without fear; his Secretary of State is expected to lecture others rather than listen; his chief of intelligence knows enough to report only intelligence that fits the agenda. Anyone, foreign or domestic, who attempts to fault any of these factors, is attacked by political hacks always at the defense of their master.

In a time of war, chicken hawks – people who aggrandize war and label any opposition as "soft" on security and some who themselves have never served in the armed forces – provide a steady drumbeat of fear and negativity toward other nations and people. Centuries of American tradition and good will are relinquished, nuclear nonproliferation and the security it provides are sacrificed on the ideological altar of "might makes right," unilateralism becomes policy and "the hell with the rest of the world." Worst of all, the United States may win the current war but has already lost the world.

Progressives have an overwhelming task in challenging this shift from democracy. A return to the ideals of equality of race, equality of nations, and the dignity of all people, is necessary to combat imperialistic notions and those who pursue them.

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