

THE GLOBALIZATION OF AMERICAN WAR IN THE 21ST CENTURY:
MILITARISM AND IMPERIAL RENAISSANCE OR DECLINE?

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ABSTRACT

American war became global in the 20th century, during World War II and the Cold War. War is one of the primary ways the United States relates to the world. I argue that the US foreign and military policy elite is captured by militarist beliefs. I discuss how the US became a continental power in the 19th century and how this set the US to become a global power in the next century. I then compare the 20th century globalization of U.S. war with the current era. Specifically, I explore how U.S. war and grand strategy have changed since 9/11 and what ways it is likely to change in the remainder of the 21st century. I argue that, in some ways, war and national security are now, more than ever, determining U.S. foreign policy and domestic politics. In this sense, while it is hyperbole to argue that war is no longer “politics by other means”, war, militarism, and the global reaction to these elements of U.S. behavior are the major factor determining the politics and foreign policy of the U.S. in the contemporary era. It is hard to see how war and politics are distinct spheres and because this situation has become normalized, there is a great deal of path dependency. This leads to the question of the consequence of this path for American hegemony, renaissance or decline over the next several decades.

Keywords: Armed Conflict, Militarism, United States, Terrorism.

JEL code: Y8.

In the first six score and six years of US history, roughly from 1776-1900, apart from the example of its revolution, America was a marginal factor in world affairs. Its wars were confined to the continent and the other great powers, Britain, France, Spain, and the Netherlands, had more to do with shaping world affairs. The US was, nevertheless, an imperial power, expanding across the continent and eventually assuming its present geo-

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graphic borders. To the extent that its wars were limited in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, US warmaking is now global in the sense that the United States in its military doctrine and grand strategy concerns itself with “total domain awareness” and control. Its approach is characterized by a kind of hyper-vigilance and hyper-interventionism that is, on occasion, pitch perfect. But more often than not, to borrow from the idiom of Harold Lasswell – the great psychoanalyst of international relations – it is a little paranoid and more than a little delusional about the potential to control people, faraway lands, and political outcomes (Lasswell 1935; see also Staub 1989).

I explore three interrelated phenomena here. The first is the globalization of American war in the twentieth and twenty-first century. Second, I argue that the sources of the globalization of American war in the late twentieth century and in the current era are militarism, ethnocentrism and nationalism. I focus on militarism in this article, although all three are at play. And third, I argue that the consequences of these beliefs and the foreign policies that instantiate them, are counterproductive for the United States for the relative position of the United States in the world. And I show how and why that position is likely to shift over the next 75 years. The United States elite’s militarist beliefs, coupled with America’s unstable self-identity as an exceptional people and great power/super power, has set America up for a spectacular rise and the disastrous fall of hegemonic power. American exceptionalism, always a shaky proposition, is a myth. Like all imperial powers, the US has run the table and now run out of steam.

I focus here on the United States in a global context. That does not mean that the US is the only country that matters. Nor does it mean that the US is exceptional – that it is somehow unique. I also do not mean to suggest that the United States is the opposite of unique – that everything that happens in the US will or has happened elsewhere. There may be some continuities and similarities with British, Italian, Russian, and Chinese politics, but I do not have space to highlight them in this article.

THEORIES OF HEGEMONIC STABILITY AND CHANGE

Hegemonic stability theory points us to the ordering function that dominant great powers can provide in world politics, and the instability that attends their fall during times of great power transition. Those concerned with the affairs of the hegemon, and cycles of hegemonic rise and fall, focus on the sources of political and military power and the dynamics of competition among great powers. As the political scientist Robert Gil-

pin and the historian Paul Kennedy pointed out, the ever-changing relative growth rates of states yield changes in their relative position.

Great powers need economic assets to wage war. Gilpin and Kennedy suggested in the 1980s that rising powers overtake hegemony when their economic growth rates allow them to amass sufficient military power and economic influence (Gilpin 1981; Kennedy 1984). Hegemons want to maintain their dominance and can become aggressive in doing so, and rising powers may challenge hegemony if they think it is worthwhile. Meanwhile, as both Gilpin and Kennedy argue, the pursuit of power, overextension, and resistance can drain the economic assets of the hegemon. In the early 1990s Charles Tilly added a focus on the ways that warmaking bolsters statemaking. Tilly argued that war helps the state extract the resources and create the organizational and bureaucratic features of a state, enabling the state to be better able to wage war. Wars make states (Tilly 1992).

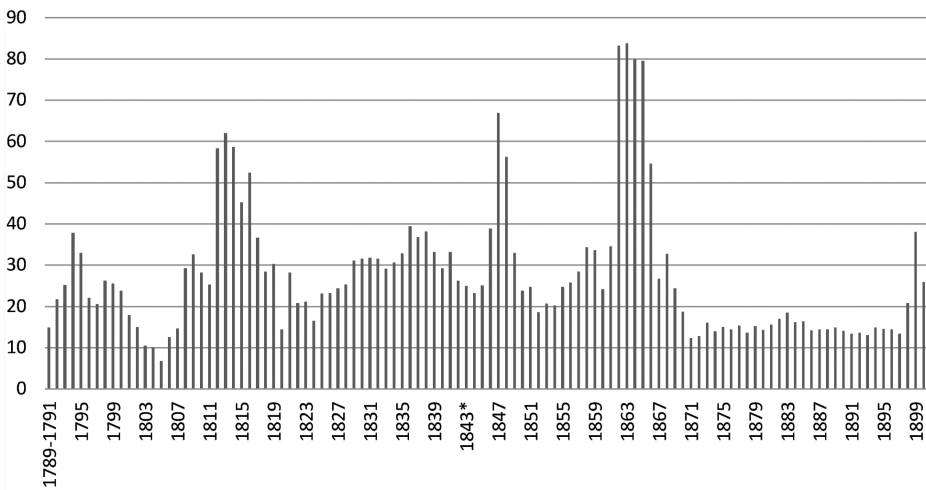
And the United States did, of course, continue to make war. Though we tend to think of discrete wars during the seventeenth through the twentieth centuries, war was nearly continuous from the arrival of the English in the early 1600s and after the Revolutionary War through the 19th century. During this period the conduct of American war was often extremely brutal toward both combatants and non-combatants alike. First, the US expanded across the continent through war in the 18th and 19th century, taking land from Native Americans, fighting Britain in 1812 and barely avoiding another war with Britain again in 1838, and then a war with Mexico in 1848. By the end of the nineteenth century the US had essentially destroyed Native American resistance to its expansion and was poised to move beyond the continent, to Hawaii and the Caribbean.

Harold Lasswell reminds us that the creation of US empire was violent at the same time that it was relatively egalitarian in terms of the risks that the average settler faced. Lasswell said, "When we look into the history of American colonization and settlement of the New World, we cannot fail to be impressed by the pervasive influence of violence, and the expectation of violence, upon the civic cohesion of the American people. This is a far more subtle manner than the War of Independence itself, which was a unifying crucible for the most dynamic elements from which the new nation was ultimately forged". Further, he said, "Many of the colonists along the eastern seaboard, to say nothing of the adventurers along the fingers of penetration that reached across the body of the continent and eventually grasped the whole, were ever aware of personal peril. It is no idle myth to recall the pioneer with his weapon leaning against a tree while he cleared a field and planted a field of corn. There were block houses to serve as emergency garrisons at the sound of alarm; the 'pioneer mother' doubled in firearms" (Lasswell 1951: 114). This long period (or *longue durée*) was so

deeply militarized, so fundamentally shaped by war and the preparation and expectation of it, that it is difficult to see militarism apart from the rest of American life – the political history and institutions of the US and its culture. This early American belief in the utility of war was only reinforced by the Civil War.

At the close of the nineteenth century, the historian Frederick Jackson Turner claimed that America's unique democratic institutions grew from the conquest of a wilderness: "it is the influence of her free lands that has determined the larger lines of American development" (Turner 1895: 70). Notably American expansion came at the expense of European powers, Britain, France, and Spain, which had overextended themselves. In the next phase of its expansion, the US went to war with Spain, taking Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines. War was an essential and unremarked upon element of the early American lifeworld, the *sine qua non* of American institutions and identity. No wonder military spending was often high during this period, as the US expanded across the continent in the early 19th century.

Figure 1. US War Department Spending as a percent of Total Federal Spending, 1789-1899.

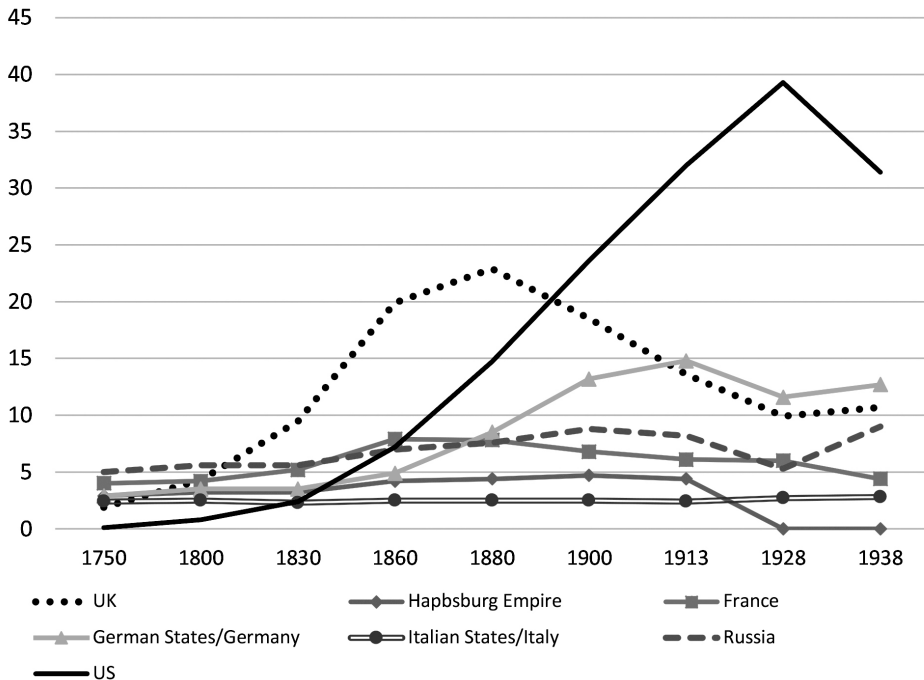


Source: *Historical Statistics of the United States, 1789-1945* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1949).

The United States manufacturing strength allowed it to become a military-technological giant while the Civil War, westward expansion, and the two World Wars also stimulated industrialization. Thus, the United States became a world economic power relatively quickly in the 19th and 20th cen-

turies. The rise of American economic power, measured as a percent of global manufacturing output from 1800 to 1929, was spectacular (see figure 2). Meanwhile, America's nearest rival, Britain, was rapidly declining in comparative manufacturing strength.

Figure 2. Shares (%) of World Manufacturing Output, 1750-1938.



Source: Kennedy 1984, 149, 202.

BELIEFS DRIVING THE GLOBALIZATION OF AMERICAN WAR

While the stock phrase, “manifest destiny”, suggests that American expansion was natural and rooted in divine providence, US expansion was quite unnatural. The desire for expansion was rooted in an imperial identity and militarist beliefs. Ethnocentrism is not only a belief that your group is superior in all ways to other groups, it is an extreme example of what psychologists call “attribution bias”: Others are hostile, dangerous and scheming; anything good they do is because they fear you while anything bad they do was because they did not fear you enough. Nationalism, the belief that we are the chosen people, is baked into American history from the

narrative that came over on the Mayflower of the Plymouth Colony as city on a hill, to the most recent iteration of nationalism in Donald Trump's America First rhetoric. Imperialism or at least the assertion of naked US power, is also implied in the slogan making America great again. The imperial identity may be a consequence of ethnocentrism and nationalism, but a state does not have to pursue security and influence through military force. The addition of militarist beliefs explains the frequent turn to war and threats of war.

Militarism is a cluster of core beliefs about military force that militarists and often the rest of us hold regardless of context. Specifically, militarists believe that force is always useful and that the wars our side initiates make us safer. Less often stated today, but a core element of early and mid-twentieth century militarism, is the view that war is glorious, noble and purifying.

Militarism is a belief system, a worldview, where the use of military force to resolve disputes and remove potential threats to "security" is understood to be effective, efficient, legitimate, praiseworthy and even glorious.¹ Militarists assume that the use of force in domestic and foreign politics is natural, expected, and effective in most instances, and they recognize few limits to the effective use of force. Security is understood to be a zero-sum commodity; if you have it, I don't. We can't all feel secure at the same time. Further, a strong military deters potential aggressors; there is no security dilemma, where what I do to feel secure may make an adversary feel less secure and therefore defensively aggressive. Threats and the use of force will cause others to back down. Militarism as a belief system assumes that a strong military deters aggressors. Further, the amount of military spending is positively correlated with military capacity and security. And, moreover, there is the assumption that military spending is good for the economy. Militarists can only see the upside of military spending, and discount the damaging and distorting effects of military spending.

Militarism is thus a mix of extreme insecurity (fear), hubris and a feeling of entitlement coupled with attribution bias and a distinct lack of empathy. The fear is that others are potentially violent and they are so powerful that they pose a direct threat to you and your interests. The hubris and entitlement are a sense of omnipotence and an inflation of what we need over what others might. Attribution bias reinforces the tendency to assume that when others act as you want them to, it is because they fear your power and when they don't do as you like it is because they have ill-intentions

¹ No one definition has become widely accepted. The short volume by BERGHAHN 1981 is an excellent introduction. Also see COCK 1989: 3 and 5-12 and FALK and KIM 1981.

or are aggressive. Militarists are bullish about the potential for threats and war to work. Militaries engage in peacetime pessimism about their own capabilities, threat inflation about the capabilities of their adversaries, and optimism about their capacity to win wars. They assure us that the other side is well prepared and ready to fight and that we can never have enough military spending and military force. Diplomacy is discounted, and we are told that conquest is easy. Allies who don't follow your lead are an unnecessary nuisance. In fact, allies who are not compliant are in some respects seen as adversaries.

On the road to war, militarists put moral and practical blinders on. They claim preventive war is legitimate because they believe that the other does not deserve to become an equal or surpass them. They believe that preemptive war and first strikes are generally successful, even despite evidence that they fail about half the time. They believe that escalation and war are controllable and that quagmires and stalemate are for the other guy. Further, they think that conquest is valuable, resources gained through force are cumulative. They exaggerate the value of international gains and wider spheres of influence, and worry that their reputation for keeping commitments and following through on threats will be tarnished should they seek negotiated threats. This view is summarized by the Latin saying, *si vi pacem, para bellum* – if you want peace prepare for war. Indeed, war works and is good for you. Once at war, militarists believe their own rhetoric, that war will be quick, decisive, and cheap in blood and treasure. They will be home before the leaves fall or the snow falls, or by whatever the next season is and they will be greeted by those they conquer as liberators and by those at home as heroes.

Militarist beliefs may become the lens through which actors see each other and construct knowledge about their social world. The institutionalization of militarist beliefs can and does yield a world that fulfills these expectations. Militarization is a process, specifically the social, psychological, political, and economic mobilization of a group's resources for the use or threat of violence and the ascription of extraordinary virtue to those who use military force. In a militarized culture, the majority takes war and mobilization for it for granted, understands "security" in military terms, and devotes a large share of economic and cultural resources to military and military-related purposes (Lutz 2004). In a state of continuous mobilization, the distinction between wartime (and all the things that context is said to allow) and peacetime blur. "Wartime becomes a justification for the rule of law that bends in favor of the security state" (Dudziak 2012: 3-4). When the term security is invoked in a militarized society, the realm of normal democratic political processes shrinks, and concerns and anxieties are reframed into threats that may demand a military response, a process

that has been called “securitization”.² The contents of dissenting views are marginalized, and dissenters are often discredited as unrealistic, unmanly, and by virtue of their questioning of militarist beliefs and the militarization of policies, dissenters may themselves be branded threats to security.

These beliefs are obviously not new, nor are they confined to American society. Theodore Roosevelt articulated the relationship between militarism and other ideologies at the turn of the last century when he said, “In this world the nation that has trained itself into a career of unwarlike and isolated ease is bound, in the end, to go down before other nations which have not lost the manly and adventurous qualities” (quoted in Hofstadter 1955: 170). Offensive war was necessary in this view, and offensive military doctrines, along with the forces required to implement them, were developed. Colonial destruction of indigenous cultures was considered “progress” and a sign of the advance of “civilization” and the colonizers’ superiority. The arts literally wrote, sang and painted the virtues of war and struggle. The Futurist art movement’s “Futurist Manifesto” of 1909 included these views: “Except in struggle, there is no more beauty. No work without an aggressive character can be a masterpiece” and “We will glorify war – the world’s only hygiene – militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for woman” (Martinetti 1909).

In the 1930s, the German scholar Alfred Vagts distinguished between militarism and the military way, opening the way to view militarism as set of beliefs that could exist outside the military as well as within it.

Every war is fought, every army is maintained in a military way and in a militaristic way. The distinction is fundamental and fateful. The military way is marked by a primary concentration of men and materials on winning specific objectives of power with the utmost efficiency, that is with the least expenditure of blood and treasure. It is limited in scope, confined to one function, and scientific in its essential qualities. Militarism, on the other hand, presents a vast array of customs, interests, prestige, actions and thought associated with armies and wars and yet transcending true military purposes. [...] It may permeate society and become dominant over all industry and arts. Rejecting the scientific character of the military way, militarism displays the qualities of caste and cult, authority and belief [Vagts 1959 (1937):13].

Vagts was wary of too much of what he saw as a good thing; in his view, military force was sometimes necessary, and if necessary, it should be used

² The argument is that the speech act of framing an issue as one of “security” moves politics from the rule of law to the rule of force and emergency measures. See WEAVER 1996.

with precision and minimal fuss. Armies were prone to militarism if they had too little war to make: "Since modern armies are not so constantly engaged in combat as were the ancient armies, they are more liable to forget their true purpose, war, and the maintenance of the state to which they belong. Becoming narcissistic, they dream that they exist for themselves alone". In other words, the "military way" is military professionalism, as executed by "realistic military men", while militarism is a perversion of that professionalism and an expansion of its purview beyond discrete military ends, "transcending military purposes" [Vagts 1959 (1937): 33-34]. But even more worrisome to Vagts was, perhaps, the tendency of civilians to be seduced by militarist beliefs, and to urge action that might be both reckless and ultimately self-defeating [Vagts 1959 (1937): ch. 13].

More recently, scholars have noted how national security establishments (military institutions, intelligence organizations, and civilian commanders/civilian elites) are often infused with core beliefs of militarism. Jack Snyder argues that military organizations are sources of oversimplification and motivational bias, that is, biases that favor their institutional interests (Snyder 1984: 17-18). Snyder argues that militaries prefer offensive doctrines as a consequence of cognitive oversimplification and parochial interests, and that "offensive strategies in themselves increase the likelihood that wars will be fought" (Snyder 1984: 9). As a consequence, Robert Pape argues, "Leaders are often drawn to military coercion because it is perceived as a quick and cheap solution to otherwise difficult and expensive international problems". Further, Pape suggests, "statesmen very often overestimate the prospects for successful coercion and underestimate the costs" (Pape 1996: 2).

Similarly, Stephen Van Evera argues that militarism is a set of "misperceptions" purveyed by militaries for bureaucratic/organizational reasons and war is an unintentional consequence of the military's "effort to protect their organizational interests". Militaries do not want war, Van Evera argues, but they persuade their leaders that military force is useful. Van Evera argues that eight "militarist misperceptions" or what he also calls organizationally self-serving myths, flow from the protection of the military's organizational interests (Van Evera 1984: 206). They are: 1) others are hostile, 2) force is useful and safe, 3) conquest is easy and security is scarce (reversing Clausewitz's dictum that defense is easier), 4) the advantages of preemptive war, first strike, are exaggerated 5) windows of opportunity are exaggerated, 6) the value of conquests is exaggerated as well as the notion that resources are cumulative, exaggerating the value of international gains and wider spheres of influence, 7) war is trivialized and glorified, and 8) militaries engage in peacetime pessimism about their capabilities and wartime optimism (Van Evera 1984: 254-362). Further, Van Evera argues

that militarist myths increase the probability of escalation if war should break out by discouraging civilian involvement in operational planning, opposing compromise, adopting total war strategies, and encouraging the adoption of offensive doctrines and operational plans (Van Evera 1984: 368-369). Echoing the liberal pre-occupation with standing armies and their pernicious influence, Van Evera argues that these “national myopias are rooted more in the nature of official bureaucracy than in human psychology” (Van Evera 1984: 203).

Dieter Senghaas argues that the managers of the military-industrial complex are “autistic”. Volker Berghahn summarizes Senghaas’ argument this way: “their perceptions of reality have become so distorted by suspicion and fear that little or no attention is being paid to the opponent actual behavior, only to his assumed future plans, ambitions of conquest and aggression”. Under these conditions, “decisionmakers have become prisoners of their own self-generated worst case assumptions. It is this ‘autistic’ siege mentality which also impels them to spare no effort to convince the nation of the accuracy of their threat perceptions” (Senghaas 1972, summarized by Berghahn 1981: 88). This requires a sophisticated propaganda effort designed to propagate military values and instill a sense of sacrifice.

While organizational accounts of militarist myths or beliefs are persuasive, organizational interests may not be the source of those beliefs. Rather, as the literature on militarism in social relations demonstrates, many of the core beliefs of militarism pervade societies, not only military organizations. Thus, it is entirely possible for civilians to be as or more militarist than their counterparts in the armed forces [Vagts 1959 (1937)]. Psychologist Ralph White argues that fear and “macho pride” lead to the same sort of worst-case analysis and inability to reasonably interpret the behavior of others and respond to it (White 1984).

In sum, militarism is a coherent set of beliefs about the nature of the international system and the best ways to get along in it.

1) Security is defined in military terms, rather than, for instance, economic or social welfare terms (Snyder 1984: 28).

2) Threats to non-military values are understood to demand or justify a military response.

3) Militarists tend to feel insecure. Others are self-interested and potentially hostile and aggressive (Snyder 1984: 28; Van Evera: 254-273). Thus, militarists are very cautious in their “threat assessment”. Militarists are reluctant to see conciliation in other’s behavior, always focusing on the threatening aspects of even the most benign behavior.

4) Emphasize the worst-case scenario: overemphasize the effectiveness of other’s forces and undervalue their own forces (Huntington 1961: 59-79; Van Evera: 254-273).

5) Military force is assumed to accomplish most objectives and the limits to military force are underemphasized or even unrecognized (Van Evera: 273-278).

6) Superior force is and ought to be the final arbiter of inter-state disputes, regardless of context.

7) Offensive strategies are favored because those who strike first has the advantage of choosing the place and time of the attack and the perceived prestige of the offensive.³

8) Secrecy is a value in conflict: this has the effect of limiting criticism and input to certain decisions.

9) Discipline, uniformity and conformity are understood to be positive aspects of morale and discipline. This discourages the full consideration of alternative points of view (Hull 2005).

Military organizational interests coincide with and bolster these beliefs. The socialization of officers and the institutional interests of the services have convinced military leaders of the validity of those beliefs. Moreover, promotion of officers, at least according to anecdotal evidence, is associated as much with the adherence of military officers to the core beliefs of militarism as it is with other criteria, such as combat service, performance, seniority and visibility (Moore and Trout 1978: 452-468). Out of this nasty, unholy, trinity of militarism, ethnocentrism and nationalism, militarism is particularly pernicious because it so imbues the very air we breathe, it is so taken for granted and rarely challenged, that it is hard to notice.

The victories in World War I and II cemented a now very sticky view that military power is effective if one is willing to “pay any price, bear any burden” (Kennedy 1961). The US continued high military spending through the Cold War period. The narrative of peace, indeed victory, through strength in the Cold War was in part that American military power and threats kept the peace. Though military spending went down in the post-Cold War 1990s, it could probably have been reduced even more. Indeed, the US continued to spend more on its military than most major competitors combined. Even when the US decreased military spending in the mid 1990s, its share of world military spending remained high. Thus, even after making some cuts, the rationale for military spending higher than the combined spending of the United States’ nearest rivals was uncertainty, and the need to hedge against it. The narrative was of danger, which was exemplified in the pre-9/11 period in popular narratives of fear, such as

³ Offensive doctrines also meet the organizational interests of militaries (SNYDER 1984: 24; VAN EVERA 1984: 294-297; POSEN 1986: ch. 2).

the journalist Robert Kaplan's *Coming Anarchy*, and American exceptionalism by the political scientist Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations* (Kaplan 1994; Huntington 1996). One *certain* challenge, before 9/11, in particular, was articulated as the next great power rivalry – the competition with China for influence in the Pacific and in global markets.

In this climate of fear, the 9/11 attacks were taken as the fulfillment of a prophesy of doom and assault. President Bush said “a group of barbarians have declared war on the American people” (Bush 2001). Donald Rumsfeld said that “[T]he world's changed [...]. Business as usual won't do it” (Rumsfeld 2002). Dick Cheney said that “9/11 changed everything. It changed the way we think about threats to the United States. It changed about our recognition of our vulnerabilities [sic]. It changed [...] the kind of national security strategy we need to pursue” (Cheney 2003). The Bush administration assumed that deterrence would not work against terrorists, “rogue states” and what it called “the enemies of civilization” (National Security Council 2002). Actually – contra Bush, Cheney, and Rumsfeld – in one sense, after 9/11 very little changed.

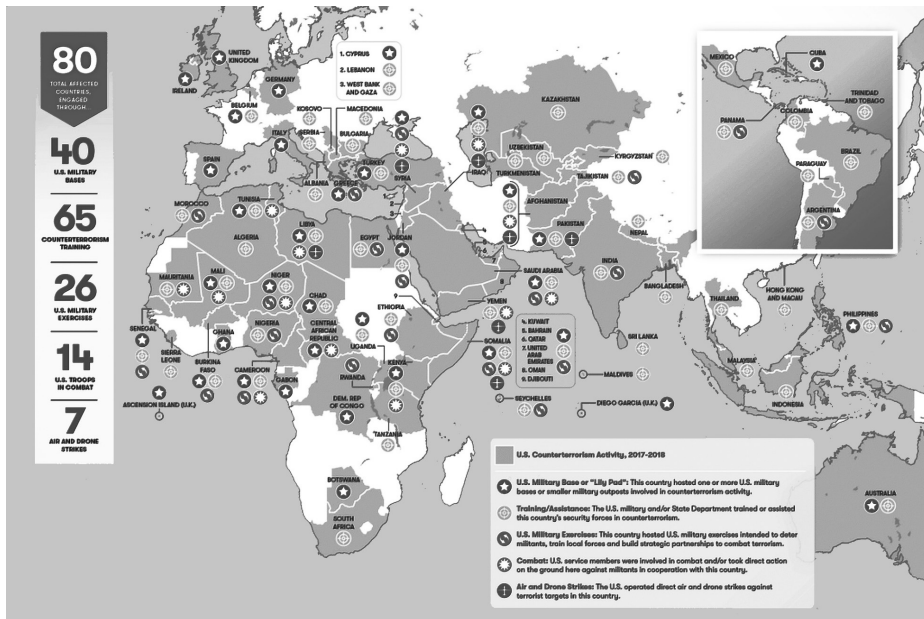
The existential fear evoked by the 9/11 attacks combined pre-existing American militarism, ethnocentrism and nationalism into a profoundly intoxicating brew. The US chose to respond to the 9/11 attacks with military force, and sought revolutions in Islamic countries. As the National Security Strategy of 2002 said, the best defense is a good offense. Successive administrations have never looked back or seriously considered other options. Further, fear of Islamic militants and a desire for control paved the way for domestic acquiescence to an aggressive foreign policy rooted in the argument that we must get them before they get us.

Again, these fears and beliefs resonated with and intensified and already underlying militarism, ethnocentrism and nationalism, and since the 9/11 attacks, the United States has become a more militarist, ethnocentric and nationalist. American militarism is a set of beliefs that says our fears have been and can almost always be cured by the efficient and effective application of military force. The militarization of America is the pervasive mobilization of our culture, economy, and politics in the service of this vision of security. It is the narrative that erases the violence that has been and is the American way of life and makes a sharp rhetorical distinction between war and peace, although our nearly continuous mobilization and war give lie to the notion of long periods of “peace”.

More than this, however, the US began a new kind of expansionism in the period since 2001. According to recent testimony by General Raymond A. Thomas, the Commander of Special Operations Command, the US is engaged in counterterrorism and war in between 80 and 90 countries in the world. The Costs of War project was able to identify 80 of those locations

(Costs of War project 2019; Savell and 5W Infographics 2019). The right wing of the US foreign policy elite and some moderates, without apology, promised to bring the world democracy and free markets on the argument that doing so would make the world safer for the United States and protect its economic interests. The direct overt use of force by the United States, the further funding of governments to wage war as proxies for the US, as well as the ever-widening deployment of US special operations forces, instantiates the ambition for perfect security against all possible threats and the desire to control economic and political outcomes in the world.

Figure 3. US Counterterror War Locations.



Source: Savell and 5W Infographics 2019.

Indeed, the roots of militarism are so deep that they are at the core of US identity and “foreign” policy. The practice of war, the mobilization for it, and the beliefs about it, fundamentally shaped not only the geographic contours of the United States – its boundaries and extension into a global empire – but America’s social structure and identity. My argument is that militarism (as a set of beliefs and attitudes) and an imperial identity are mutually constitutive.

Budgets are an indicator of these values and there is a panic when military spending drops for any reason. In 2011, the US Budget Control Act capped military spending and the Pentagon and those who favored increased military spending had to find ways around it. In more recent years, the Budget Control Act has been blamed for not allowing military spending to grow. For instance, in late 2018, the report of the National Defense Strategy Commission, *Providing for the Common Defense*, which was mandated by the National Defense Authorization Act in 2017, argued that, “due to political dysfunction and decisions made by both major political parties – and particularly due to the effects of the Budget Control Act (BCA) of 2011 and years of failing to enact timely appropriations – America has significantly weakened its own defense. Defense spending was cut substantially under the BCA, with pronounced detrimental effects on the size, modernization, and readiness of the military” (National Defense Strategy Commission 2018: v).

The idea that budget cuts have weakened the United States military is part of the argument that the US faces unique and enormous threats and must respond with greater investment in the military as a tool. The National Defense Strategy Commission argues that, “The security and well-being of the United States are at greater risk than at any time in decades. America’s military superiority – the hard-power backbone of its global influence and national security – has eroded to a dangerous degree” (National Defense Strategy Commission 2018: v). There is an aura of panic and emergency and as we see, the sentence quoted above about the Budget Control Act becomes evidence of a need to increase military spending.

Today, changes at home and abroad are diminishing U.S. military advantages and threatening vital U.S. interests. Authoritarian competitors – especially China and Russia – are seeking regional hegemony and the means to project power globally. They are pursuing determined military buildups aimed at neutralizing U.S. strengths. Threats posed by Iran and North Korea have worsened as those countries have developed more advanced weapons and creatively employed asymmetric tactics. In multiple regions, gray-zone aggression – intimidation and coercion in the space between war and peace – has become the tool of choice for many. The dangers posed by transnational threat organizations, particularly radical jihadist groups, have also evolved and intensified. Around the world, the proliferation of advanced technology is allowing more actors to contest U.S. military power in more threatening ways. The United States thus is in competition and conflict with an array of challengers and adversaries. Finally, due to political dysfunction and decisions made by both major political parties – and particularly due to the effects of the Budget Control Act (BCA) of 2011 and years of failing to enact timely appropriations – America has significantly weakened its own defense. Defense spending was cut substantially under the BCA,

with pronounced detrimental effects on the size, modernization, and readiness of the military.

There, further, the explicit assertion that the US is in a “crisis” and the suggestion that the US is under constant attack:

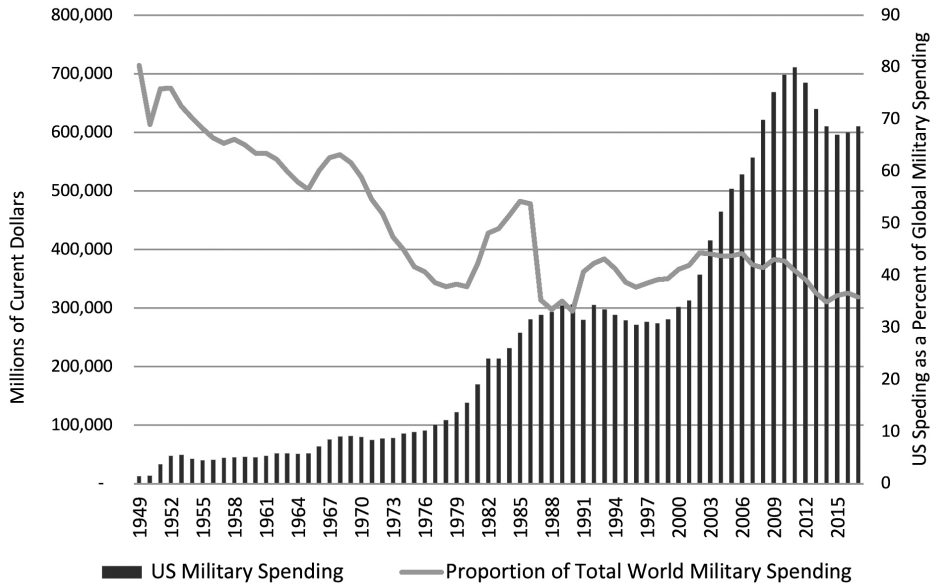
The convergence of these trends has created a crisis of national security for the United States – what some leading voices in the U.S. national security community have termed an emergency. Across Eurasia, gray-zone aggression is steadily undermining the security of U.S. allies and partners and eroding American influence. Regional military balances in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and the Western Pacific have shifted in decidedly adverse ways. These trends are undermining deterrence of U.S. adversaries and the confidence of American allies, thus increasing the likelihood of military conflict. The U.S. military could suffer unacceptably high casualties and loss of major capital assets in its next conflict. It might struggle to win, or perhaps lose, a war against China or Russia. The United States is particularly at risk of being overwhelmed should its military be forced to fight on two or more fronts simultaneously. Additionally, it would be unwise and irresponsible not to expect adversaries to attempt debilitating kinetic, cyber, or other types of attacks against Americans at home while they seek to defeat our military abroad. U.S. military superiority is no longer assured and the implications for American interests and American security are severe. (National Defense Strategy Commission 2018: v-vi).

But the budget part of the argument, at least, is misleading. As figure 4 shows, US military spending has consistently represented a high proportion of world military spending. In terms of total spending, only World War II rivals it – for now. Although the US constitutes about 4 percent of world population, it accounted for nearly 36 percent of world military spending in 2017.

The post-9/11 wars are, together, some of the United States most expensive, and certainly its longest wars. But, even when spending dedicated to the war zones in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other places has declined, such as when the US left Iraq in 2011, the “base” military budget which keeps the organization going whether or not it is in a war (used for procuring new weapons, health care, operations and maintenance, and so on) has not declined in proportion to war spending. Figure 4 shows the fairly steady increase in base military spending even as US direct war spending in Afghanistan and Iraq has declined.⁴ Such high levels of military spending come at the expense of funding other priorities.

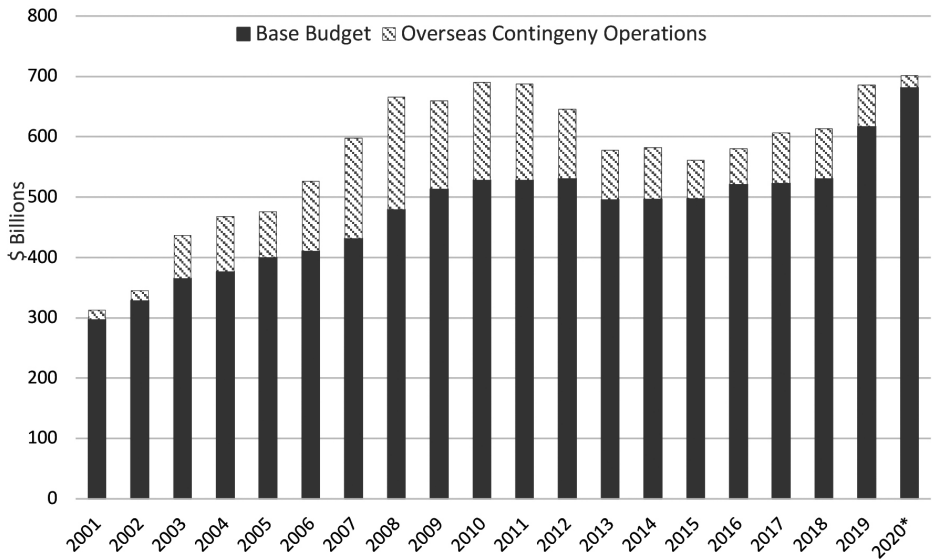
⁴ US spending related to war and counterterrorism in the Post-9/11 period, is actually higher than this since these figures do not count the already high costs of caring for veterans and the interest on borrowing to pay for the wars.

Figure 4. US Military Spending and Proportion of Total World Military Spending.



Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, (SIPRI) 2019.

Figure 5. US Department of Defense Base Budget and War (Overseas Contingency Operations) Spending since Fiscal Year (FY) 2001.



* FY2020 as estimated by the Department of Defense in their FY2019 Budget.

Source: Office of the Undersecretary of Defense (Comptroller) *Defense Budget Overview* (2018).

But even as wars make states, states can over-invest in the military, and the attempt to control outcomes through the use of force can cause states to drain their treasuries and go into debt. The US was in budget surplus in the last several years of the Clinton Administration. The US budget deficit has been steadily increasing since 9/11. War thus unmakes states that are in search of a kind of control that can generally prove either illusory or short lived. Empires fall when they overreach and create too many adversaries, or when they spend their blood and treasure on military ventures overseas. This is what the US is in the process of doing. Militarism, the high military spending it causes, and the hot and cold wars it produces, are unsustainable, or at least not sustainable without high opportunity costs which in turn diminish US stature in the world. Ironically, the hypervigilant focus on the threat of terrorism and remaking the world in its own image has accelerated the decline of the US and its loss of control and influence.

Figure 6. US Post World War II Budget Surplus and Deficit in \$Billions of Current Dollars.



Source: Office of Management and Budget, Historical Tables.

The attempt for control and the consequent overextension of military and economic resources marked the trajectory of ancient Rome, Spain, the Prussian Empire, France, and most recently Great Britain. All these imperial powers shared a colonizing mission and the sense that they were superior civilizations. They were militarist, ethnocentric and nationalist. Their foreign and military policies were unsustainable and their operations were often counterproductive, creating resistance to heavy-handed uses of force. They overspent, they over-reached, they made enemies who resisted them in ever costlier wars, and they over-taxed the institutions of the state and the people.

Other aspects of US military and foreign policy are counterproductive as well. The most significant of these is the profligate use of fossil fuel by the Pentagon to protect access to the fuel it says it needs. Indeed, the DOD is the largest single user of petroleum in the world. Between 2010 and 2015, the DOD purchased an average of 102 million barrels of fuel per year.

The trouble with this dependence on fossil fuel is two fold. First, it gets the US engaged in the affairs of oil-rich countries, even as the United States has grown less dependent on oil imports. The concern is that oil keep flowing no matter the cost to other values. Second, it is the cause of an entirely new problem. In the period between 2010 and 2015, the Pentagon likely emitted an average of 44 million metric tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂), per year.⁵ This makes the Pentagon the largest single source of CO₂, a greenhouse gas, in the United States, and major contributor to climate change (United States General Accountability Office 2016: 9; US Environmental Protection Agency 2017).

At the same time, the Pentagon itself worries about the consequences of climate change for US security. It paints an alarming scenario which includes war due to the disruptive effects of climate change and its consequences, and a military that is increasingly pre-occupied with disaster relief. Further, it highlights the dangers and complications that climate change poses to bases and military operations.

CONSEQUENCES OF TOO MUCH RELIANCE ON THE MILITARY

The United States is obviously still a global economic force in terms of Gross Domestic Product. However, the United States global hegemony is

⁵ Carbon emissions per barrel of oil are 0.43 metric tons. See US ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY 2018.

coming to a close. The post-9/11 policies of the administrations of George W. Bush, Barack Obama and Donald Trump, accelerated the demise of American hegemony even as they asserted that the U.S. was the greatest power the world had ever known. In their pursuit of hegemonic power and in their unilateralism, they have made new enemies and squandered American influence. American war is unmaking the position of the United States in the world.

We can see the rise of China and the decline of the US in the trends in manufacturing output since 2000. The United States was the world's largest manufacturer from 1970 to 2013. In 2000, the US accounted for about 33 percent of global manufacturing output. China overtook the US to become the largest manufacturer in 2014. By 2015, the US accounted for 18 percent and China accounted for 20 percent of all world manufacturing. Chinese exports of goods and services as a percent of Gross Domestic Product has been higher than the US since the early 1980s and China's economy has consistently grown faster than the US economy since the early 1990s. Thus, the Chinese economy, if trends continue, is set to dominate the global economy by the middle of this century (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development 2018).

There is a simmering panic about Chinese growth and the Chinese economy that is reminiscent of the panic about Japan's economy during the 1980s. Only this time, the Chinese economy is much less fragile than the Japanese. US strategists' response to this rising economic power has been to worry that China has engaged in unfair trade and has simultaneously become a military threat. The United States has managed to do great damage to its own economy by overinvesting in military force, a decidedly unproductive way to promote growth.

High military spending hurts the US economy as public investment is funneled away from infrastructure, education, and innovation, which are all more productive than military spending, to war and the expenses that go along with war. This is a tremendous opportunity cost for the Federal budget with ripple effects into the education and health of Americans. This is clear if we compare, for example job creation by spending in different sectors of the US economy. As Heidi Garrett-Peltier (2017) has shown, military spending produces fewer jobs than spending in other sectors of the economy. Table 1 compares the direct and indirect jobs created by different forms of spending. In late August 2018, the US Congress appropriated spending for Fiscal Year 2019 \$70 billion for the war zones in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and Syria, known as Overseas Contingency Operations.

Table 1. Comparison of Effects of Spending on Job Creation by Sector.

	Direct and Indirect Job creation per \$ Million	Direct and Indirect Job creation per \$ Billion	Potential Number of Jobs created by spending \$ 70 Billion
Federal Military Spending In defense industries and their supply chain	7	7,000	490,000
Elementary and Secondary Education	19	19,000	1,330,000
Health Care	14	14,000	980,000
Infrastructure	10	10,000	700,000
Clean Energy Sector	10	10,000	700,000

Source: Garrett-Peltier (2017).

But the problem is not only direct war spending. Current costs related to the war on terror include the expense of healthcare for active duty soldiers and their families, and spending on homeland security. Future costs include very long term expenses of veterans' care and additional interest on the debt caused by war spending since the war was not financed by taxes or war bonds.

America's imperial ambition, its hypervigilance and hyper-interventionism are draining, and over the long run the informal American way of empire and war, though different than other imperial powers, is equally unsustainable. The toxic stew of hypervigilant militarism, ethnocentrism, and nationalism is not the only source of the changing position of the United States in the coming century. The other problem is the perverse consequences of the particular form of capitalism the United States has pursued, and the consequences of this economic form of life for the planet.

In sum, the global position of the United States will continue to decline in large part due to the reliance of the United States on war, war-related and war-caused spending, and threats of war. This militarism, combined with a brand of capitalism that makes it anathema to have public services such as universal healthcare and education, weaken the economy and increase inequality and structural violence. The problem is not only relative decline, but absolute decline in the US where the life chances of the poor, and their life expectancies are declining. The decline of American power, occurring as it does in a globalized world, or more specifically, the attempt

of the US to forestall its decline, will have a profound effects on domestic US politics and world politics.

CONSEQUENCES OF DECLINE AND MILITARISM

Deep democracy, most fundamentally and ideally, is a mode of decision committing people to talk rather than fight. It is a promise to work together to set a common course, devise the laws that govern political association, and to resolve differences peacefully. Democratic institutions foster deliberation and consensus building. *Deliberative* democracy requires respect for others' right to hold different views from our own and procedures that allow for revising and enlarging the conception of rights and the community of rights holders. A continually renewed and improved set of practices, norms, and guarantees, democracy requires, reason giving, publicity and accountability.

It is true that war can enable the founding of a democracy and secure the conditions for its preservation in an anarchic world. War can create opportunities in a democracy for inclusion. Even as suspicion may prompt the censorship and imprisonment of those groups and individuals the majority fears, the necessity for mobilization, e.g. during and after the World Wars, can nurture, or at least allow, the expansion of citizenship, and of the civil rights of minorities, workers and women.

But war is also antithetical to democracy. War is violence, brute force and the threat of more of it, deployed for political ends. Deep democracy admits the possibility that another's views can be valid, and allows for the revision, compromise and amendment of policies and laws through deliberative processes. But, as Robert Holmes observes, violence is "for the morally infallible". Political argument, negotiation and diplomacy are increasingly powerless in this context. As Hannah Arendt observed, "Where violence rules absolutely [...] not only the laws [...] but everything and everybody must fall silent [...] violence itself is incapable of speech, and not merely that speech is helpless when confronted with violence" (Arendt 1963).

War denies and destroys not only the speech of its object, the enemy, it warps and muzzles domestic political discourse. Thus, democracy and war – two modes of decision – exert a pull on each other. Democratic reason giving, Vitoria argued, can be a hindrance to war and perhaps risk a state's existence: "A prince is not able and ought not always to render reasons for the war to his subjects, and if the subjects cannot serve in the war except they are first satisfied of its justice, the state would fall into great peril" [de Vitoria 1991 (1539)].

In 1941, Harold Lasswell articulated the “possibility that we are moving toward a world of ‘garrison states’ – a world in which the specialists on violence are the most powerful group in society” (Lasswell 1941: 455). Specialists on violence would permeate the civilian sphere, increasingly acquire the skills associated with civilian functions, mobilize the citizenry for military production and military service, and most perniciously, decrease civil liberties and sideline democratic processes. “Decisions will be more dictatorial than democratic, and institutional practices long connected with modern democracy will disappear” (Lasswell 1941: 461). Lasswell warned that in a garrison state, the symbols of democracy would remain, but legislatures and voting would “go out of use” (Lasswell 1941: 462). Further, war will be required to keep the populace satisfied, or at least, compliant. Lasswell argued that, “The rulers of the garrison state will depend upon war scares as a means of maintaining popular willingness to forgo immediate consumption. War scares that fail to culminate in violence eventually lose their value; this is the point at which ruling classes will feel that blood-letting is needed in order to preserve those virtues of sturdy acquiescence in the regime which they so much admire and from which they so greatly benefit” (Lasswell 1941: 465).

Lasswell argued that though militarization would not necessarily lead to diminished civil liberties, it might well do so gradually, through “tiny declivities”. Lasswell said, “To militarize is to governmentalize. It is also to centralize. To centralize is to enhance the effective control of the executive over decisions, and thereby to reduce the control exercised by courts and legislatures. To centralize is to enhance the role of military in the allocation of national resources. Continuing fear of external attack sustains an atmosphere of distrust that finds expression in spy hunts directed at fellow officials and fellow citizens. Outspoken criticism of official measures launched for national defense is more and more resented as unpatriotic and subversive of the common good. The community at large, therefore, acquiesces in denials of freedom that to go beyond the technical requirements of military security” (Lasswell 1951: 111).

The views of Lasswell and others who draw attention to the effects of militarism and militarization are not dominant in the US academy or public, in part because we can point to even *more* militarized societies than the US. For example, Aaron Friedberg argues that despite predictions that Cold War mobilization would lead to increased militarization of the economy and a decline in civil liberties, the United States did not become a garrison state. Friedberg believes that it was America’s distinct ideology – stressing free enterprise private industry and low taxes – and the decision to rely on a nuclear deterrence strategy that did not require a massive mobilization of conventional forces, which would have required a more

centralized economy – that prevented the United States from becoming a garrison state.

Friedberg emphasizes how Eisenhower rejected massive conventional forces quite explicitly because he sought to prevent the United States from becoming a garrison state: if the US were to do so, Eisenhower said, “we might as well stop any further talk about preserving a sound U.S. economy and proceed to transform ourselves forthwith into a garrison state” (quoted in Friedberg 1992: 125). On the other hand, Friedberg argues, the fact that the Soviet Union became a garrison state – “one that sapped the nation’s economy, militarized its society and led it ultimately to the brink of collapse and disintegration” – explains the outcome of the Cold War (Friedberg 1992: 142).

Yet, to say that somewhere else, say Russia or North Korea, is more militarized than the US, is to lose the forest for the trees. Because American expansion and political development are the result of war, and wars of a particularly brutal variety, the American way of life is deeply imbricated with war and infused by militarism. The democracy of the United States is, and has always been, limited by its violence as much as expanded by it.

Americans have navigated the tensions between democracy and war since the colonial era. American democratic norms, institutions, and practices were forged in war, and democracy has also shaped the American way of war and, at times, the motive for America’s wars. The American way of war is the American way of life and that the American way of life is war.⁶ Violence is accepted as routine and only challenged when it reaches extremes.

To rethink militarism and militarization would be disorienting and destabilizing of the American culture, economy, politics and identity. It means acknowledging that there is little here that was not originally taken by violent means and protected with threats or more violence. It is to court a fundamental legitimation crisis. Acknowledging the persistent and continued role of militarism is destabilizing for the American identity – its narrative of a benevolent beacon of liberty and democracy.

But that is the thing. Democracy and war, antipodal modes of decision, negate each other. Democratic procedures forswear the arbitrary rule

⁶ In writing about the United States, I am of course emphasizing US military and political history. That said, I do not want to be seen to be arguing that this history is unique and that American militarism and militarization are “exceptional”. Far from it. Yet, if the United States is not drowning in the extreme militarization and militarism of the garrison state, it is waist deep in the blood, fear and pain that is the militarized American way of life. From this position of partial or perhaps total immersion, it is hard to see and quite difficult to analyze the role of militarism and militarization in American life. In sum, a candid history of the US involves acknowledging the original and continued trauma of military violence that is constitutive of the United States.

of force and fiat; war's violence vitiates the promise of peaceful deliberation. Wars of any length, actually or potentially threaten democratic institutions, practices, and the development of the habits and capacities that enable deliberative, deep democracy. In 1795, James Madison warned, "Of all the enemies of true liberty, war is, perhaps, the most to be dreaded, because it comprises and develops the germ of every other. [...] No nation can preserve its freedom in the midst of continual warfare". Madison worried that "war is in fact the true nurse of executive aggrandizement" that could increase public debt, and lead to a "degeneracy in manners and morals". Madison highlighted the emotional impact of war on deliberation. "The strongest passions and most dangerous weaknesses of the human breast; ambition, avarice, vanity, the honorable or venal love of fame, are all in conspiracy against the desire and duty of peace" [Madison 1865 (1795): 491-492].

Does war always, as Madison averred, eventually corrode democratic institutions and norms? When and how has it not? As Alexis de Tocqueville [1966 (1835)] argued, "No protracted war can fail to endanger the freedom of a democratic country". I have argued that militarism imperils the United States position in the global economy. The long wars and militarization have also put American democracy at risk.

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