

Article THE TRUE PURPOSE OF NEVER-ENDING WAR

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My name is Walter Williams. I received my Ph.D. in history from the University of North Carolina, and before my retirement I taught at five major universities. I want to speak today about

[text: THE TRUE PURPOSE OF NEVER-ENDING WAR by Walter L. Williams]

[photo: G.W.Bush with Cheney standing over him]

In 2002, when President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney told flagrant lies to the American people to gain popular support for the United States to get involved in a second war with Iraq, they were just two in the long parade of politicians who think the best way to promote their popularity is to start a war.

[photo: G.W. Bush in military gear on U.S. aircraft carrier]

The tragedy is that such a strategy often works. And it works only because so many people are stupid enough to fall for it. They fall for it because they do not know history, and they have no knowledge about how political leaders through history have used this tactic as a distraction from their inability to provide good governance.

[photo of suffering Iraqis] Now, many years later, the United States is still in Iraq. After thousands of American deaths, and hundreds of thousands of Iraqi deaths, the situation in that doomed nation shows little improvement despite the many hundreds of billions of dollars that the American taxpayer has funded.

[graph: US foreign aid: Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel, Egypt, etc.]

And continues to fund: presently the United States spends more money in Iraq than in any other nation except Afghanistan. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are indicative of the nature of war in the post-Cold War military systems in the 21st century. Now that the Soviet Union lies in the dustpan of history, these systems need a new enemy, to justify their gigantic expenditures.

[photo: George Orwell]

The horrid nature of the policy of unending war was astutely analyzed by George Orwell, a British writer who published his novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* back in 1949. He wrote just as the United States was beginning to establish its global military dominance, but in the decades since then American policymakers have followed a trajectory that Orwell would no doubt recognize. For over half a century U.S. policymakers have justified military intervention into numerous nations on the perceived stated need “to protect American interests.” Perceptive observers understand that these “American interests” are the financial investments of large U.S. corporations that conduct operations in other countries. Since

American corporations have large involvements in almost every nation on earth, this exists as an easy justification for a military invasion almost everywhere.

[world map: US military bases in over 100 nations]

The wealthy corporations want above all, to retain and increase their wealth. But the upper class does not want to see this wealth spread around to everyone. After all, if everyone has an increase in wealth, there would be no distinction between the elite and everyone else.

[photo: piles of money]

The upper class use their wealth, and guard it jealously, through federal regulations that favor reinvestment of saved dollars, and by gaining repeated tax cuts for themselves. With each generation of the wealthy inheriting more money, and then reinvesting that money to produce still more money, the hierarchal nature of society becomes even more unequal than it was in the previous generation. This policy guarantees increasing wealth disparity. Those who have money invest it, while those who do not have it cannot take advantage of this means of generating income without working for it.

This growing inequality is a cause for celebration by the economic elite, because only by increasing their personal wealth can they retain their elite status.

[photo: fancy dodads of the wealthy]

It is this status, more than money per se, which defines the elite. They use the law and the financial system to keep themselves above the middle class person. They grab power and hold it firmly, to keep themselves on top of the social and legal pyramid. Because these policies have been enforced for generations, the United States is no longer a democracy. We are now a plutocracy—rule by a wealthy elite.

Because the prime goal of the elite is to keep themselves in power, and above the average person, they do not care if the masses of people are trapped in a daily struggle for survival. If people become too settled, with plenty of financial security, free education and good healthcare, they will eventually realize that the privileged minority has no function and is not necessary. To prevent this from happening, those in power work ceaselessly to keep the common people insecure, on the edge of bankruptcy due to high health costs, and with a large burden of student debt.

[photo: struggling middleclass]

They do not care if the poor get insufficient education. In fact, poor education in public schools is an advantage to them, since they can afford to send their children to expensive private schools, and thus preserve their elite status into the next generation.

[cartoon: rich kid vs poor kid]

They do not want the mass of the people to be knowledgeable beyond the skills that are required to fill the labor jobs in the companies they own. Because their primary concern is to increase their wealth, they prefer to keep public education costs to a minimum so their taxes will be lower. Paying as few taxes as possible is a mania with the wealthy. The higher they are in the income bracket, the more they want to reduce their taxes.

[cartoon tax form]

A hierarchical society is only possible when the masses of people are kept on the edge of financial disaster. Those in power not only do not care if most people have money problems, they actually like it when the mass of people is on the verge of impoverishment. The political and economic leadership class realizes all this. At the same time, they want increased production of goods, which is the basis for more wealth.

[photo: cogs of a huge machine]

The problem in this arrangement is how to keep the wheels of industry going, producing more wealth for those on top, without at the same time increasing the real wealth of the masses of people. To keep a hierarchical society hierarchical, goods must be produced, but they must not be distributed widely.

Those in power have figured out that the easiest way to surmount this problem is by a policy of continuous warfare.

[photo: ghastly deaths] The essential act of war is destruction. While many humans lose their lives in war, historical statistics prove that the people who are most likely to be killed or wounded are usually people of the lower class and the middle class. Very few soldiers die from elite families. But even more significant than the destruction of human lives is the destruction of things.

[photo: huge explosions] War is, above all, a means of obliterating great quantities of expensive products. Bombs are destroyed when they blow up, [photo: great carnage] but in the process they also demolish buildings, roads, bridges, harbors, airports, dams, electric plants, and many other things on land. [photo: sinking ship] They sink ships to the bottom of the sea, destroy aircraft in [photo: airplane crash] the skies, and disable costly satellites in the upper atmosphere. [photo: space explosions]

In war, the material products of human labor, which might otherwise be used to make the masses of people more comfortable and secure in their daily life, are blown up in an instant.

Governments are very skillful in persuading people to pay for all these expensive military gadgets. The way they manipulate people to support the war machine is to whip up war fever in recurring bouts of patriotic spectacles.

[photo: military flags] Flags are flown, hands are placed on chests in displays of national loyalty,[photo: pledge of allegiance] and costs are ignored as the threat of a perpetually threatening enemy is emphasized. [photo: cartoon of evil enemy]

Even when weapons of war are not actually destroyed, their manufacture is still a means of expending the labor of workers without producing anything that can actually be utilized by them for their individual benefit. A complex attack aircraft, [photo: complex airplane electronics] for example, has in its hull the labor that might otherwise build many buses and trains for human transportation.

[photo: bomb burst] Every bomb costs many thousands of dollars, which is completely spent when it explodes. Every weapon of war that is never used, is ultimately scrapped as obsolete. [photo: large military dump] Products designed for war, after never bringing direct benefit to anyone, whether used or unused, are replaced by even more expensive models as quickly as possible.

[photo: shiny new military weapons displays]

Notice how war spending is always carefully labeled as ‘defense spending,’ even when it is for a conflict that is waged on the other side of the world, against people who never even had an opportunity to get anywhere near to the country that is supposedly being ‘defended.’

The governing principle is to spend so much on military equipment and operations that those expenditures will eat up any surplus which might be available after meeting the bare needs of the people.

[photo: George Orwell] The insight of George Orwell is that all of this is deliberate policy, it is not an accident. Unending war is deliberately designed by those in power to keep both the middle class and the lower class with a chronic shortage of material goods that they are instructed by advertisements to be dire necessities. After all, a general scarcity magnifies the importance of small privileges. The elite have access to innumerable luxuries, and the main upper class somewhat less so, while the upper middle class can only afford perhaps only half of what they would like to possess.

[photo: lottery winners, game show winners] The typical middle class and lower class person can only dream of winning such luxuries in state-sponsored lotteries and television prize shows.

While the large majority of people either buy some luxuries using their credit cards, which are offered at high interest rates by banks, or they live austere lives, but both groups are perpetually on the brink of bankruptcy. They do not challenge this state of affairs because the national consciousness of being at war makes the handing over of almost all surplus production, and all power, to a small caste seem to be a natural and unavoidable condition of life in a dangerous world.

[cartoon: puppet master pulling strings of puppets] Continuous war is a psychologically effective means of providing an emotional basis for a society

which realizes it is controlled by a small elite. What is important is to develop a mentality appropriate to a state of war. It does not matter if the war is going well or badly. It does not matter if no decisive victory is possible. It makes little difference if the war is being waged for purposes quite different from the declared ones. All that is needed is that a state of war exists. The puppet master pulls the strings, and the masses of people jerk appropriately.

By being in existence, the requisite war hysteria allows fear and hatred of the enemy to flourish. The true patriot cannot afford to question or doubt that victory will be attained, and they are persuaded that victory can only be attained by building up an overwhelming predominance of power. Victory in the future will be ensured by the additional manufacture of even more advanced new weaponry. [photo: chemist in laboratory] To keep attaining victory in a society that is involved in unending war, scientific research is consequently devoted to developing more intense explosives, or the armor plating that will protect against them. [photo: giant lenses or beam from a space satellite] Glass-makers work to build giant lenses which can focus and direct the rays of the sun with such intensity that entire buildings can be burned from reflecting satellites in space. [photo: oceanographer scientists] Oceanographers search for a way to create artificial tidal waves that will destroy coastal harbors. [photo: chemist wearing a gas mask] Chemists seek to produce more deadly gases and poisons that are capable of killing whole forests and croplands. [photo: person dying from a terrible skin disease] Biologists breed disease pathogens that have no antibodies.

With such advances, government spokespersons are sure to recite, the upcoming military campaigns are bound to end in victory. The professed goal is for the United States to be universally recognized as the undisputed master of the world. All that is needed is to eliminate the current pesky enemy, those unreasoning evil-doers who need to be brought under control by us, the rightful authorities who are destined by God to hold dominance over the entire world. [cartoon: Uncle Sam with outstretched arms around the globe]

And yet, despite the enthusiasm displayed by each official, none of these projects ever comes anywhere close to completion. The real threat of nuclear war has scared thoughtful political and military authorities, who know that additional technological advances, or even just a few more applications of existing weapons, [photo: nuclear blast] could easily result in the total destruction of whole nations, and the consequent breakdown of organized society. Such a result, they have finally realized, could destroy their own hold on power. And so, in consequence, the war machine must not be used to its maximum extent.

This viewpoint suggests that while war must be ongoing, it must also be kept limited. [world map: US military bases in over a hundred nations] So, while

strategists conclude that more U.S. military bases should continue being built in more parts of the world, and even out in space, the nuclear weapons that are stored at these sites must not actually be used. The goal is to surround any enemy or potential enemy wherever they may arise. All this is terribly expensive, so of course the war hysteria must be kept at fever-pitch among the populace.

[cartoon: rabid warmongers]

Without war fever, it is not even remotely possible to get enough people to agree to finance their own deprivation.

Thus, when Russia is discovered attempting to influence still another American election, the corporate mass media leads the people into spasms of condemnation about such acts of outrageous barbarism. At the same time, however, the United States government is regularly interfering in the elections of numerous nations to an even greater extent. The underlying secret is that the governments of both the United States and Russia are increasingly similar, in the way they act internationally and the way they treat their own people. But they need to demonize each other to keep their people convinced of the need for each nation's vast war-making establishment, which they have erected in the interest of their own power.

The continuous war that each government wages is not, in its true essence, a war against its rival. The policy of continuous war by each government is in reality, a war against its own subjects. The government's goal is not to decisively defeat the enemy, but to use the war fever against the enemy so as to keep their own structures of power intact. Unending war is the means by which those who hold power keep themselves in power. For over a century, the United States government has been extremely effective in accomplishing this goal. It will keep on pursuing this goal until it either is reduced in power, or abolished altogether. Those are the choices.