

American military munitions manufacturers should be called merchants of death

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■ Since the end of the Second World War, who was the least Imperial President of the United States?



Former US president Jimmy Carter talks with Zbigniew Brzezinski, his national security advisor, in the Oval Office on January 22, 1977.

The least Imperial president would have to be Kennedy because he at least had one good year when he was anti-imperialist in a positive way. There are others who have had glimmers of hope. During Jimmy Carter's first two years, we're looking for an alternative way of dealing with the world. But gradually Brzezinski, who was Carter's National Security Adviser, became more and more dominant and influential over Carter. And the last two years of the Carter's presidency went the exact opposite direction with the US involvement in El Salvador to prevent the rebels from taking power by propping up the reactionary military government. Also he did everything he could to force a Soviet invasion of Afghanistan: While Brzezinski in his public statements was horrified of the Soviets invasion, in private he would say, "Let's celebrate, we've got Russia, they're like we knew we would, now we can give Soviet Union its own Vietnam." That's what Brzezinski really thought. Also there was the Carter doctrine, threatening nuclear war against the Soviet Union if they tried to interfere with US interests in the Persian Gulf, and the US reestablishing itself in a much bigger way in the Persian Gulf.

■ What about Obama?



J Scott Applewhite (AP)
George H.W. Bush, Barack Obama, George W. Bush, Bill Clinton and Jimmy Carter pose together in 2009.

When Obama got elected, I had hoped that Obama would strike a different course. Look at his June speech in Prague where he called for nuclear abolition. It's not as good as it seemed on the surface because he effectively says that the United States is going to be the last country to give up his nuclear weapons.

But at least he called for nuclear abolition, which we thought was sincere, because back in 1982, while he was an undergraduate at Columbia, he wrote about the need for nuclear abolition. He also marched in the big anti-nuclear demonstration in Central Park in 1982. So there were reasons to think that Obama was going to sincerely pursue that course. But he quickly backed off. And when Obama got reelected in 2012, Ari Fleischer, who was George W. Bush's press secretary, said that this is really George W. Bush's fourth term. He doubled down on so much of Bush's policy as if Bush had prevailed: In Afghanistan and Iraq to some extent, as well as Bush's surveillance policies here at home. So in some ways, Obama was a big disappointment. Although when I compare him to what's happened since then, in some ways he doesn't look as bad as he did.

■ That is a very low bar, to compare anyone to Trump.

Right!

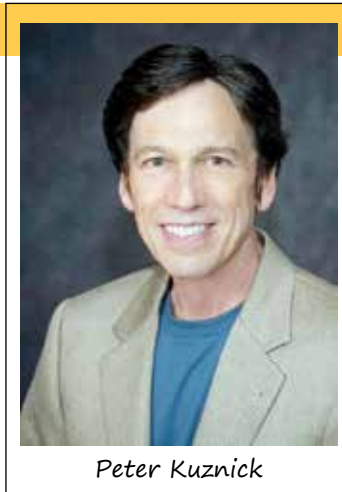
■ United States maintained global dominance for the second half of the 20th century for sure. But the power of the United States has been in decline since the dawn of the new century.

The power of the United States has definitely been declining in relative terms. And that's because other countries have been ascending, especially China's economic growth has been astounding compared to any other major power: When you compare it with the United States growth rate in the late 19th century, or even after the World War II, or with the growth rate of the British Empire, or any other empire, the Chinese have put them all to shame in terms of the rate of economic growth.



Mikhail Svetlov (Getty Images)
Russian President Vladimir Putin watches the Red Square Victory Day Parade, on May 9, 2019, in Moscow.

And then there is Russia which went through a period of collapse in the 1990s. Russia's economy shrunk and life expectancy declined at an extraordinary rate in the early 1990s. There's some dispute as to who was responsible but clearly the shock therapy that the West helped Yeltsin administer made Russia's economy the size of the Netherlands by the mid-1990s. That was going to go on until Putin took power there and the price of energy increased. Russia has never diversified its economy nearly as much as it needed to. However, when the United States pulled out of the ABM Treaty in 2002, that was a wake-up call for Russia. In fact, Russia had supported the US invasion of Afghanistan



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in 2001 but it was vehemently opposed to the invasion of Iraq in 2003: Russia realized that the United States was not going to play by the rules set for the rest of the world. That's how Putin began his nuclear modernization program early on in the 2000s. And on March 1, 2018, Putin announced in his address to the nation that Russia has now has developed five new nuclear weapons, all of which can circumvent US missile defense. That was the announcement to the world that Russia was back militarily.

■ Did the US war projects in 2001 and 2003 do more disservice than service to the American imperial ambitions?

It was totally a disservice. To begin with, it made the US look weak militarily: We could easily destroy those countries but we could not easily rebuild them. And so the US got into this quagmire.

■ How should we understand those war projects?



Kevin Lamarque (Reuters)
Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney.

I trace it back to 1990s when Charles Krauthammer, one of the leading neoconservative theorists, wrote a piece and gave some talks in which he said that this is America's 'Unipolar Moment' as nobody can begin to match US military strength or America's military reach. He said that American hegemonic unipolarity was going to last 30 or 40 years. These are the neoconservatives who went into the Bush administration. It was basically announced that America was not going to allow any rival to emerge in any region that can challenge the United States. When that came out, people were outraged. Even Joe Biden said that this is terrible, backward, and reactionary and we can't allow this. Cheney, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz, they all said "no, this is not true, this is not the American policy." But it was the American policy. And in 1997-8, they formed the Project for the New American Century which basically put that American unipolarity doctrine into effect.

■ And then came the 9/11.

Right. Then the United States gets hit on 9/11. At