

# Nolan Chart

Topic: Foreign Policy

## Not an empire, but as expensive.

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The US should not subsidize the first world's defense.

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(libertarian)

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"Obama seems indifferent to the fact that sophisticated Free World countries that could make nuclear weapons as they do Hondas or BMWs — Japan, Germany, Taiwan, South Korea, Australia, Canada, and most of Western Europe — depend on the vast size of the U.S. nuclear umbrella for their own strategic security."

Thus wrote Victor Davis Hanson in Tuesday's [National Review Online](#), arguing against reducing the size of the US's nuclear arsenal. It sounds, however, more like an argument in favor of defense cutbacks.

In the aftermath of World War II, with Europe a mess, the sun finally setting on the British Empire, and the Soviet Union intent on spreading and supporting the spread of a very authoritarian brand of socialism, American hegemony made sense. If we did not keep the free world free, it would not remain free. But now, if Hanson is correct, the moral question is different. Not only is the Soviet Union gone, but countries that can make nuclear weapons as they do automobiles do not need us to save them from domination from it or any other power.

We spend as though we have the responsibilities of an empire, but never receive or attempt to receive the benefits (nor should we). No matter their degree of dependence on the United States for defense our allies are allies. We do not dictate their domestic or foreign policy. We do not collect tribute, nor extract their natural resources. They don't shine our shoes, make our tea, or even call us "sir". Indeed what our expense earns us is often **contempt**—perhaps, as [Bruce Bawer argues](#), due to as much to the strength of our culture as to that of our armies—and deeply rooted in their culture. As was laid out by Olaf Gersemann in his 2004 book *Amerikanische Verhältnisse* (titled *Cowboy Capitalism* in its English translation) we do not even get the courtesy of truth.

To varying degrees the United States is condemned as singularly barbaric, for our individualism, our right to keep and bear arms, our religiosity, and (without even so much as acknowledging the tradeoffs) our refusal to replace civil society with a cradle-to-grave welfare state. We are uncultured, brutal, and above all ungenerous, despite in addition to paying for our own government also subsidizing their social democracies. They are free riders when it comes to drug development (perhaps a topic for a future article) and defense. The military consumes 5% of the US's GDP, but (according to a 2010 [Cato Institute report](#)) only 2.5% in Britain and even less—usually under 2%, on the continent.

It's difficult without being a professional policy analyst to put a dollar amount on this—one can add up how much it costs to maintain and man military bases, but that is by far the only expense—but it's unfair to the American taxpayer to spend so that, in effect, Europeans and Japanese can afford their welfare states. Americans paid for repressive hard-left turns in the UK in 1945 and France in 1981. We paid so that almost one in ten Dutch could receive disability checks equal to 80% of their old wages prior to 1980s austerity reforms. We pay for the German "social market economy" and we pay for a quarter of Greeks to be government employees. Never in entirety, of course, but our defense spending enabled the First World to keep taxes lower than they otherwise would be and to be "generous" with government revenues without having to consider the tradeoffs like grown men and women.

Commentators like Hanson would have us believe that this is the US's duty. There is a case to be made for the US having a military larger than necessary to defend itself *sensu stricto* and even to have one larger than necessary to project force to protect American interests.. But it must be acknowledged that assisting the oppressed in shaking off the rule of strongmen (as was done in Libya), defending weak countries like Taiwan that *can* not defend themselves against larger powers like China, and providing for the defense of Japan, Europe, and others who *will* not provide for their own defense are practically and morally very different things. Europe and Japan can afford cradle-to-grave welfare states; they do not *need* American military bases and shutting them down will not—as it would have following World War II—amount to enabling an oppressor. And if a nuclear umbrella is strategically important, let them build it as they do Hondas and BMWs.