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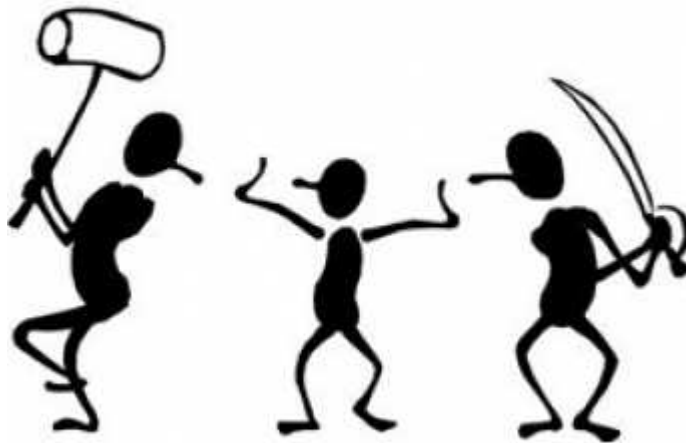
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What Lies beyond the War on Terrorism?

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| October 8, 2010

| [Christopher A. Preble](#) ^[2]



Next week the [Chicago Project on Suicide Terrorism \(CPOST\)](#) ^[3] and the New America Foundation are co-hosting a [day-long conference](#) ^[4] that promises to attract some attention, both because of the speakers assembled, and for the ideas discussed.

Aside from mentioning that the conference coincides with the release of Robert Pape's latest, *Cutting the Fuse: The Explosion of Global Suicide Terrorism & How to Stop It* ^[5], co-authored with James K. Feldman (I've [blogged elsewhere](#) ^[6] today about that), I wanted to preview my remarks at the conference, namely the implications of resource constraints and long-term fiscal imbalance on U.S. foreign policy, writ large.

Hope as I might, it would be premature to predict that we have already entered a post-GWOT era, or even that some form of strategic retrenchment is inevitable, with the United States shedding some of its global commitments, and eventually drawing down some of its military power. I'm inclined to believe [Steve Walt's pessimistic take](#) [7] from a few days ago, that the interests who stand to lose from such a shift will fight it hammer and tong, and that, if past history is any guide, they are likely to win.

That said, there are clear rumblings that the ill-advised foreign policy consensus that has held for at least two decades is vulnerable to attack. How else to explain the flurry of op-eds and articles by a few folks who seem desperate to fend off cuts in military spending and the strategic shift that goes with it?

The most recent entry, an [op-ed in Monday's *Wall Street Journal*](#) [8], has elicited [a number of](#) [9] [insightful](#) [10] [rejoinders](#) [11], including [here at TNI](#) [12].

Today, Cato President Ed Crane and I respond in [a letter to the editor of the *Journal*](#) [13], pointing out, among other things, that conservatives shouldn't shed their skepticism of government activism and their respect for the Constitution just because a few people claim, without evidence, that U.S. military power is the only thing that stands between the world and total, bloody chaos. Such assertions are ironic given that the authors were among the loudest cheerleaders for the war in Iraq, an operation which has unleashed plenty of chaos, and nearly wrecked our outstanding military, all in the service of the dubious proposition that we can and must implant democracy in distant lands.

Equally questionable is the assertion that U.S. military dominance preserves global peace and commerce. (Ben Friedman's latest observations [here at TNI](#) [14] [and](#) [15] [elsewhere](#) [16] [expose](#) the many flaws in this argument in exquisite detail. I recommend them highly. And if you want more, check out [our latest paper](#) [17] on the subject.)

Of course, no one country, nor any conceivable combination of countries, stands ready to replace the globe-straddling U.S. military. Plus, as Ben shows, the international system isn't as fragile as the primacists claim; it could be that we have convinced ourselves that the burdens are necessary and huge, when they might actually be superfluous and modest.

But it is incorrect to argue that the *only* alternative to American global hegemony is [insert scary country name here] global hegemony. On the contrary, because other countries have an interest in a relatively peaceful and stable international trading system, it is not unreasonable to assume that they should and would share the burdens of keeping this system open and free. As it is today, Americans bear the disproportionate share of the costs. (And if [insert scary country name here] were really as scary as the hawks say, wouldn't it be nice to have allies with some capabilities to balance against them?)

Messrs. Brooks, Feulner and Kristol, it appears, would allow the free ride for others to continue indefinitely, while American troops and taxpayers fight the wars and pay the bills. They seem to believe that the American people either a) won't notice that the true purpose of U.S. military power is to defend other countries so that they won't have to defend

themselves; or b) won't much care if they figure that out. I question whether either presumption holds. At a minimum, I am willing to wager with some confidence that several likely soon-to-be members of Congress agree more with Ed Crane and me than they do with the AEI/Heritage/PNACFPI triumverate.

More by

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