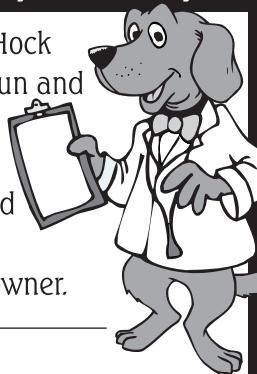


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viewpoint BY BRIAN BOGART

Taxed to Death

For the few and the Pentagon

"Those who expect to reap the blessings of freedom must, like men, undergo the fatigues of supporting it."

Thomas Paine penned this in 1776 with gunfire sounding from every direction. Writing to soldier and civilian alike, he admonished Americans to participate in the new republic, warning that control in the hands of the few will ultimately destroy all freedoms.

Americans have long benefited from such visionary thinking. In a time of great crisis, our Founding Fathers focused on the big picture and passed along stern warnings to be diligent in keeping watch over those who represent us.

These days, our focus is limited to chronic myopia. We have relegated our responsibility to monitor leadership to a news media that has impenetrable strategic partnerships with our leaders. Nearly 400 million Americans receive news from a mere six organizations. Case in point: While attention was on Terri Schiavo's condition, the Pentagon dropped a bombshell of a National Defense Strategy and a handful of newspapers reported it.

Paine also wrote, "If there must be trouble, let it be in my day, that my child may have peace." Clearly, these are words by an individual and to individuals willing to accept responsibility so that tomorrow might be better.

Where is our sense of responsibility today? The permanent war economy we have is worlds away from what our founders fought to create. Those who sacrificed themselves so long ago would have been mortified that their beloved America would one day become an international tyrant seeking dominion by force over weaker countries.

Just after World War II, a decision came, devoid of the knowledge or consent of the American people, to adopt a military-based economy. That decision effectively transformed our country from one guided by people of conscience to one guided by greed.

Power wielders, sitting in circles of secretive subterfuge, justified their decision by the Cold War. Yet the vast majority of Americans still have no clue that this deadbeat decision – an irresponsible act of a powerful few – handed us a permanent war economy that enthroned military corporations as the primary recipients of our taxes.

What the public receives from this Pentagon system are leftovers, trickle-down dollars for our needs. In a people-based system using such vast sums, public transportation would be free, health care would be free, schools would be fully functional and free through college, jobs would be abundant, retirement would be a reward, and oil, a military necessity, would not be an obsession.

With the end of the Cold War, the threat that justified a permanent war economy vanished; other excuses for supporting a military-based economy had to be found. So, in 1992, members of a new circle of secret subterfuge, right-wing extremists, began drafting the National Security Strategy of 2002 and the just-released National Defense Strategy (NDS). Both documents cite the events of 9/11 as the strategic motivation for maintaining a permanent war economy.

The NDS pointedly threatens those who use "judicial processes" and emphasizes a determination to "protect freedom" by "demonstrating our resolve" through military force. Thus, countries that suffer the impact of our corporate excesses cannot appeal to the brand of fairness conceived by our founders and are subject to a demonstration of a gravely different brand of resolve.

For the few, it is exceedingly profitable to deploy a robot army around the world, a stated Pentagon objective. But where does the graceful vision of our Founding Fathers fit into this equation? After all, it was our current president who said, "I think one way for us to end up being viewed as the Ugly American is for us to go around the world saying, 'We do it this way; so should you.' We trust freedom."

The idea of America as a country operated by its citizens is an inviting and uniting concept. If we are hated today, it is not for the freedoms that were bought with the blood and sweat of our forebears, but for the impact of our excesses from a lack of popular control.

Americans, as well as people around the world, would benefit tremendously by knowing the vigor, both philosophical and personal, that led to the rise of participatory government. Trusting and participating in the legacy of the wisdom of our Founders would be far more intelligent and more profitable – in human and financial terms – than continuing as fodder for a perpetually expanding military regime. If we the people fail to do so, we may as well rewrite the Declaration of Independence to read, "a government of, by, and for the few and the Pentagon."

As Americans, we need to rediscover our roots, rededicate ourselves and free ourselves from this deadly system, because a country that spends for permanent war condemns itself to permanent war. That kind of strategy taxes much more than our finances: It taxes us out of existence.

Brian Bogart is the first graduate student in Peace Studies at the UO. He will present a talk on the Pentagon's National Defense Strategy at 4 pm Friday, April 15 in 127 Chiles Hall (across from UO Bookstore).



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