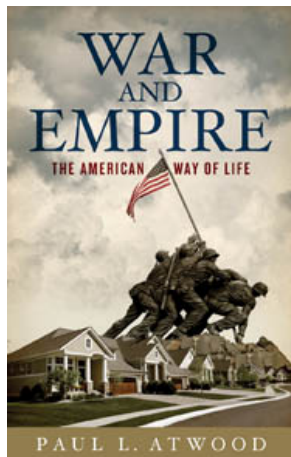


Paul L. Atwood, War and Empire. The American Way of Life, Pluto, London 2010, p. 268, L 14,99.



Former US President Ronald Reagan called in a speech to the “National Association of Evangelicals” in Orlando, Florida in 1983 the former Soviet Union an „evil empire“. Having read „War and Empire“ by Paul L. Atwood this characterization fits perfectly well to US-American foreign policy. What the author presents to the reader makes one shiver.

Starting out as a nation born in the fight against British colonialism, the US has become the world largest imperial power. The US does not only wages two neocolonial wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, in the later together with Nato, but it has also military bases in 141 states and 11 territories, out of 191 states comprising the United Nations. American arms patrol all the seas and skies, including outer space. This is not enough, the Pentagon declares flatly that it wants to achieve nothing less than „full-spectrum dominance“ over any potential foe in the future.

The paleoconservative columnist Patrick J. Buchanan describes this imperial demeanor in „Liquidating the Empire“ as follows: „While this worldwide archipelago of bases may have been necessary when we confronted a Sino-Soviet bloc spanning Eurasia from the Elbe to East China Sea, armed with thousands of nuclear weapons and driven by imperial ambition and ideological hatred of us, that is history now. It is preposterous to argue that all these bases are essential to our security. Indeed, our military presence, our endless wars, and our support of despotic regimes have made America, once the most admired of nations, almost everywhere resented and even hated.“

When former US President George W. Bush stated that Muslims might hate the US because of they hate freedom and American values, he was totally wrong. If Muslims hate at all the US, it would be solely for their brutal occupation of Muslim countries and their double standards in international affairs, especially towards their “albatross-like ally, Israel” as the autor calls it. After 9/11 the majority of Americans demanded revenge. President Bush initially called for a “crusade” against Muslims. Attacking Afghanistan was not enough. In his book “Stripping Bare the Body: Politics Violence War” Mark Danner quotes Henry Kissinger, who echoed this popular view. “The radical Islamists wanted to humiliate us. And we need to humiliate them”. For the sake of American prestige and the credibility of American power, the image of the burning and collapsing WTC towers had to be supplanted by images American tanks rumbling down the streets of Baghdad and planting the US flag on the top of Saddam Hussein’s

statute. It was to be a grand display of "shock and awe", unrestrained by the United Nations, international laws, and criminal courts, in order that get use to American power.

Paul L. Atwood, Senior Lecturer at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, set the record straight right from the beginning: The US is not a peace-loving nation that will avoid violence at all costs. On the contrary, "War is the American way of life." Every American schoolchild cut its teeth learning that "the United States represents principles and values that are the only hope of a rational, orderly, just and peaceful society". This template for current policies and war was set before the Founders rebelled against their government, writes Atwood. It appears like that: "we are a people apart, exceptional and singled out by God or Destiny to redeem humanity". Ideologically, the US government support to a morality "that defends self-determination universally and for all". The author writes "that assertion is mainly honored in its breach".

American history exemplifies that the US lives by the sword in order to "seek peace". Several chapters of Atwood's book deal with conquest of the American continent, which was not limited to slaughtering the indigenous Indian population but by defeating the British, French, and the Spanish colonial powers. The conquest of the American continent was marked by „aggression, extreme brutality, genocide and 'ethnic cleansing'". Since the US emerged from World War II as the most potent nation in history, it "slaughtered millions (...) the vast majority being helpless civilians". The proclamation of "A New American Century" by the neo-conservative ideologues of the Bush administration „depends on maintaining control of the critical fuel necessary to power the American economy and its massive military machine that now straddles the globe". In 1992, the outline for this "New American Century" were laid down by Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Paul Wolfowitz. He crafted a Defense Policy Guidance which became the policy template of the neo-conservative manifesto under the Bush government. The basic thrust constitute the so-called Bush doctrine, which called for actions to ensure the status of the US as the sole world power able to shape the global system to serve American geopolitical interests. In order to uphold American hegemony the US should be prepared to act unilaterally and pre-emptively against any power that could undermine US dominance.

In the chapter entitled "war on terror" Atwood describes the close cooperation that took place between the US and Mujahideens after the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union. The CIA recruited up to 50,000 Muslim volunteers from around the world, trained them and supplied them with weapons. Zbigniew Brzezinski, who was President Jimmy Carter's National Security Adviser, puts matters bluntly in his book "The Grand Chessboard". "Now we can give the USSR its Vietnam War." The US

designated at the time the Mujahideens "freedom fighters" who valiantly resisted Soviet occupation. Today the US calls the Taliban who resist the occupation of Afghanistan "terrorists". The author rejects the idealistic rhetoric of freedom and democracy with which the US tries to justify its policies of aggressions against the Muslime world. The interventions are directed against China and Russia. The US wants to prevent China from becoming a superpower, writes the author.

Atwood's statement that "war is the american way of life", is based on his determination that the military-industrial complex "has developed a vested interest in a permanent state of tension and preparation for war". The history of the US demonstrates "when the US prepares for war it usually goes to war", writes the author. According to Atwood, a "National Security State requires enemies and it functions to create them and then exploits that manufactured state of affairs to promote further actions in the name of national security." The author does not think that terrorism is an existential threat to the US but warns that "the continued US armed intervention in the Muslim world shows every indication of promoting just that". The book provides a deep insight into the real motives for the last empire's policies of aggression, policies which will probably lead to its self-destruction.

Ludwig Watzal