

America's Warm Wars Military Initiatives

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To begin this article, assume the four items in quotes below are displayed on your television screen during the evening newscast.

“Working in concert with each other, China and Russia are:

- establishing army, navy, and air force bases in 38 countries, including Mexico and Canada, as well as providing military aid to citizens on an island near the coast of California.
- placing 300,000 troops on land in several of these places, as well as deploying 90,000 sailors and marines on-board ships that are stationed at some of the sites.
- making plans to expand defense budgets to be almost as large as the defense budgets of the entire world combined.”

For these observations, I've taken considerable latitude in altering a Bloomberg news release (available at www.bloomberg.com/apps/news). China and Russia are not engaged in these maneuvers. These actions are part of America's military initiatives. In the scenarios above, Mexico and Canada were substituted for Okinawa and South Korea. Catalina Island was substituted for Taiwan.

These facts are reflective of the real world:

- America has 662 overseas bases in 38 foreign countries, including Okinawa and Japan. It has provided military aid to citizens on an island near the coast of China (Taiwan).
- America has placed 300,000 troops on land in several of these places. It has deployed 90,000 sailors and marines on-board ships that are stationed at some of the sites.
- America's defense budget is almost as large as the combined defense budgets of all the nations in the world.

Given these facts, what would you do if you were in the shoes of China's leaders, specifically Xi Jinping, the President of the People's Republic of China and Vladimir Putin, the President of Russia? If I were one of these men, and knowing the history of America's military interventions, I would be arming my countries to the teeth.

Yet when we read of China's decisions to build up its military strength, the U.S. media is filled with stories of Chinese and their saber rattling provocations. From the perspective of America, we are allowed to build our arsenal, but China is not.

Increasingly, even liberal journals contain articles about China assuming a more aggressive stance in regard to military actions. Aggressive? If we place China's foreign military initiatives in the context of U.S. activities, the Chinese come across as Portland pacifists.

(I make an exception to this last statement in relation to China's assertions of its "rights" in the South China Sea and filling in coral reefs with airplane runways. In a later article, I will also address Russia's annexation of Crimea.)

China and Russia point to the American actions cited above as well as its history of what they call U.S. "over-reach" as justifying the building up of their military. China also claims that because of its emergence as a financial and economic power, it is as justified as America in sticking its nose into others' business around the globe. Why should Uncle Sam alone have the right to carry around the world's police officer nightstick? (Russia's pronouncements imply the same claim.)

I am in opposition to these countries' repression of their citizens, of China's leaders' delusion that their so-called Communist way of life is superior to a republican free-market society. I served in Vietnam. I was inside the Iron Curtain before it fell (East Germany). I've traveled in China and Russia. I despise how these country's leaders treat their citizens. Regardless of their lofty oratory, the Communists rule China through despotism and tyranny. As for Russia? It has one of the most corrupt governmental bureaucracies on earth.

Nonetheless, it's a parallel path of misgiving and mistrust on the part of both parties. The Chinese and Russian leaders have doubts about America's intentions. After the 2008 financial debacle, they have expressed an even stronger distaste for "capitalism." Here are a few examples of why China, Russia, (and other nations) do not view America and the West in the same benign way that American citizens do:

- They saw the WWI Western victors carve up the Middle East into fiefdoms for the convenience of the European powers. (America was only indirectly involved in this region, but the U.S. made up for this absence in annexing Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and several islands in the Pacific.)
- During the Cold War, they witnessed the CIA-led overthrow of Iran's democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh, principally for the sake of preserving Western control of Iran's oil.
- Also during the Cold War, they witnessed the influence of the Dulles brothers (CIA and State Department heads) in South America in preserving *shareholder stakes* of the brothers and their friends in the South American fruit market.
- They watched the incalculable damage done to the Middle East because of George W. Bush's rush to dispose Iraq's Sunni Saddam Hussein. This unnecessary war upset the balance of power in this region.

- Closer to their home, in earlier times, the Chinese bore the brunt of earlier brutal exploitations by the Western powers through the opium market.

These memories will not go away, and the West would be wise to remember them when they deal with China and Russia.

My point is that the West is not the knight in shining armor that we often paint ourselves to be. Furthermore, China is doing nothing more than assuming its place in the family of strong nations. Does that mean that America should acquiesce to China (or Russia)? Of course not.

But in the long run, regardless of the lack of their rule of law inside their borders, it is not China or Russia whom America need worry about. It is the nationless tribes who wish to eliminate the West from this earth. China needs America's business. Russia needs Europe's as well.

Does my contrarian view of America paint me as unpatriotic? At the risk of blowing my own horn, I fought Communism during eight amphibious landings, six amphibious assaults, and five amphibious raids in Vietnam. If I believed Russia or China and their ways of life threatened America, I would put on my (now ill-fitting) uniform and prepare to do battle with them. But they do not, at least not at the present time.

So, let's stop conjuring up imaginary enemies with our almost incessant warm wars. We've quite enough real foes around the globe to keep America's defense budget intact.