

America: An Empire in Decline

Part 1: Dawn of a New Century

By [Devon Douglas-Bowers](#)

Global Research, July 02, 2011

2 July 2011

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

Introduction

The American Empire came into full being after its main rival, the Soviet Union, collapsed. The US then found itself as the world's sole military and economic superpower. With this new found position in the world, America could have used its power to help those in need and aid in global security. However, the events of 9/11 changed all of this and the US went from a once proud, powerful, law-abiding nation, to what it is today: a declining empire that is virtually bankrupt and has moved from using diplomacy to a "might makes right" mindset (as can be shown from its current engagement in multiple wars across the world in order to maintain its global empire), as well as trying to make sure that new powers, such as China, do not threaten its dominance.

This series is an examination of how this downfall took place, how the US strayed from its original military, economic, and foreign policy plans to become an empire in decline, from the 1990s to the present day, ending with an analysis what may lay in the future for the Empire.

DAWN OF A NEW CENTURY

Military

During the Cold War, the US had had troops stationed all over the world, from Europe to Asia. Its military doctrine consisted of a policy of containing the Soviets and battling the "Communist threat" where ever it was. Battling the "Communist threat" meant (either directly or indirectly) overthrowing leftist governments in Latin America, Asia, and Europe or supporting right-wing death squads, as was seen in Latin America (some of these coups led to the massacre of innocent civilians). Despite this, it seemed that after the Soviet Union fell, the US was going to change its military doctrine.

Even though the US was now the world's unrivaled superpower, it still planned to "devote the necessary resources to military, diplomatic, intelligence and other efforts" [1] to maintain its global leadership position and also wanted to "shape the international environment through a variety of means, including diplomacy, economic cooperation, international assistance, arms control and nonproliferation, and health initiatives"[2] to establish and keep the new status quo.

In shaping this new world, American planned for diplomacy to play a major role. The thinking was that diplomacy was "essential" to ensuring that US interests were met, sustaining alliances, averting global crises/solving regional conflicts, and ensuring global

economic stability. “Preventive” diplomacy would play a major role in helping to solve potential conflicts before they blew up. The military would only be put into play as a last resort. Military force would only be used if it would “advance U.S. interests,” was “likely to accomplish [its] objectives”, “the costs and risks of their employment [were] commensurate with the interests at stake,” and “other non-military means are incapable of achieving [US] objectives.” [3]

Thus, with the collapse of the Soviets, the US plan was to shape a new world order in which they would lead, yet diplomacy would take the lead in shaping this new order instead of military might. The reason for this was two-fold. The US had already spent \$13 trillion on defense spending during the entirety of the Cold War [4] and using diplomacy on a regional and international level would allow it to cut back on defense expenditures. Also by using diplomacy, it would give nations the illusion that they were on equal footing with the US, when in reality, if the diplomacy failed, the US may decide that the conditions had been met for them to use military force in order to “advance U.S. interests.” It was, in a way, following Theodore Roosevelt’s advice of speaking softly, but carrying a big stick.

America was also changing its nuclear defense policy. America had “reduced [its] nuclear stockpile, through both the START I cuts and reciprocal unilateral initiatives” [5] as well as did the following under the 1991 Presidential Nuclear Initiative:

- Eliminate[d] [its] entire inventory of ground-launched non-strategic nuclear weapons (nuclear artillery and LANCE surface-to-surface missiles);
- Remove[d] all non-strategic nuclear weapons on a day-to-day basis from surface ships, attack submarines, and land-based naval aircraft bases;
- Remove[d] [its] strategic bombers from alert;
- S[tood] down the Minuteman II ICBMs scheduled for deactivation under START I;
- Terminate[d] the mobile Peacekeeper and mobile Small ICBM programs; and
- Terminate[d] the SRAM-II nuclear short-range attack missile. [6]

In addition to this, the US took further steps in 1992. Due to the second Presidential Nuclear Initiative (PNI II), the US was “limiting B-2 production to 20 bombers; canceling the entire Small ICBM program; ceasing production of W-88 Trident SLBM warheads; halting purchases of advanced cruise missiles; and stopping new production of Peacekeeper missiles.” [7] Due to decreasing the number of nuclear weapons and nuclear weapon transporters, the US government saved a large amount of money and still ensured that it would have nuclear first-strike capability for quite some time.

Overall, the United States was lowering its guard not only due to the collapse of its main rival, but also due to financial concerns and its plans to reshape the world.

Economics

Near the turn of the century, new economic thought was being brought up, namely globalization. Globalization was only but another step in the transformation of capitalism that would allow corporations to move capital and people on a global scale and therefore cut costs and increase profits. By pushing this new economic thought, governments were able to push the thinking that a more inter-connected society was good not only for corporations, but for people as well, while ignoring the problems globalization would bring.

Globalization was defined as “the process of moving toward a world in which we produce,

distribute, sell, finance, and invest without regard to national boundaries.” [8] By disregarding national boundaries, it would allow for corporations to “also gain access to new sources of raw materials and intermediate inputs, and to lower-cost locations for assembly operations that use unskilled labor.” [9] This would allow for US companies to move in and have their way in the third-world without the CIA or the US military having to engage in regime change (either covertly or overtly). US corporations would also more stability as a corporation that “operates in many countries will find that recessions and booms in the many markets in which it operates are likely to be out of sync,” [10] thus they will be able to move people and capital to the locations which are doing well.

However, while this shifting of people and capital across the world would create benefits for corporations, it would bring about problems for workers. “As with the relocation of manufacturing in the U.S., globalization generates some of its gains by allowing — or sometimes forcing — relocation of production. Not everyone benefits. Just as relocation of manufacturing from Pennsylvania to South Carolina generates losers as well as winners, so does globalization.” [11]

Even when globalization was first being discussed, it was acknowledged that it “contributed to the decline in real wages of those with few skills and little education.” [12] What this meant for the US was that it would experience the death of the working class as jobs would be shipped overseas. When this subject was brought up, proponents of globalization would argue that “In the process of shifting resources, some production facilities are abandoned and some workers suffer unemployment. They do not share the gains, at least not immediately.” [13] (emphasis added) As we now know, those who are unemployed due to offshoring/outsourcing rarely, if ever, “share in the gains” of globalization. It was not meant to benefit the working class, but rather corporate greed.

Another factor that was ignored by proponents of globalization is that foreign economic shocks have more of an effect on the US economy. As Edward G. Boehne, President of the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, said to the World Affairs Council of Greater Valley Forge:

An economic slowdown in Europe or Asia, for example, has a bigger effect on the U.S. economy now than it did when exports and imports were smaller relative to GDP. And greater international financial linkages mean that the U.S. financial sector is more exposed to foreign financial shocks than used to be the case. [14]

The US economy and the global economy at large, would be put more at risk due to there being greater interconnectedness. However, despite these risks, globalization was endorsed by the US and the effects have been seen in the form of the decimation of the American economy [15] and also the global economy at large was put more at risk, all for the sake of corporate profits.

NATO Alliance

After the Cold War, it seemed that the NATO alliance had lost its reason for existing. Western Europe was no longer under the threat of Communist takeover, thus NATO’s mission had been a success. However, NATO, instead of disbanding or keeping a stable membership, decided to go on an era of expansion which continues to this day.

After the Soviet Union collapsed, there was some debate for a short while as to what NATO

would do, now that it no longer had an enemy, yet in 1990 NATO “began its adaptation from a Cold War institution to a modern instrument of North Atlantic and European security, revising strategy and restructuring force posture to reflect the changed European security environment and the disappearance of the Soviet threat.” [16] This force restructure consisted of maintaining “an adequate military capability and clear preparedness to act collectively in the common defence remain central to the Alliance’s security objectives.” [17]

NATO also integrated even deeper into Europe. The alliance’s 1999 Strategic Concept stated:

The European Allies have taken decisions to enable them to assume greater responsibilities in the security and defence field in order to enhance the peace and stability of the Euro-Atlantic area and thus the security of all Allies. On the basis of decisions taken by the Alliance, in Berlin in 1996 and subsequently, the European Security and Defence Identity will continue to be developed within NATO. This process will require close cooperation between NATO, the WEU and, if and when appropriate, the European Union. [18]

This further integration with Europe would greatly serve US interests in the future as it would aid the US in dominating all of Europe and the Mediterranean (currently a nation that wants to join the EU, must first join NATO). [19] Also, by having the European Security and Defence Identity continue its development within NATO, it would allow the US to make sure that European defense arrangements were subordinate to US interests.

When NATO expansion was bought up there was a battle between the White House and the Pentagon as then-President Bill Clinton was interested in expanding NATO yet the Pentagon was against it, and with good reason as there were several problems with NATO expansion. Clinton was quite interested in NATO serving US interests. In a letter to Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson, he stated that “Europe has changed dramatically over the past decade and NATO must also adapt if it is to continue to serve our interests in the future as well as it has done in the past.” [20] In an question and answer session with the Senate, Bill Clinton argued for NATO expansion by making Russia into a bogeyman, saying that expansion would “make NATO more effective in meeting its core mission: countering aggression against its member states,” “help guard against non-traditional security threats from outside Europe that threaten NATO members, such as the spread of weapons of mass destruction and long-range delivery systems,” and that NATO “must be prepared for other contingencies, including the possibility that Russia could abandon democracy and return to the threatening behavior of the Soviet period.” [21] All of the arguments are aimed at Russia, to keep alive the idea of Russian aggression. However, Russia being a threat was near impossible as they were going through was going through the IMF’s “shock therapy” and the entire nation was hurting.

By pushing for the expansion of NATO, the Clinton Administration was also pushing for US-NATO involvement in the religious, ethnic, and other conflicts of central Europe. When questioned on this, President Clinton responded that NATO “will make such disputes less likely and increase the chances that they will be peacefully resolved” [22] as states would have to resolve their disputes before they could join the alliance and that “There is nothing in the historical record to suggest that current Central and East European disputes are more deep-rooted or violent than, say, past disputes between France and Germany.” [23] However, there was a major difference as the conflicts in central Europe were based on

“border, ethnic, nationalist, and religious disputes,” where the populace of states were fractured and stayed within their own groups. The disputes between France and Germany, on the other hand, were between two states whose people were homogeneous in the sense that they all saw themselves as being French or German.

There were also economic concerns that were bought up. The Administration reported to Congress in February 1997, that the “United States would pay only 15 percent of the direct enlargement costs, with the new members paying 35 percent of the bill, and the current (non-U.S.) members paying 50 percent.” [24] When the Senate asked if new or current members would pay that amount and would this cost-sharing plan be part of negotiations, Clinton responded that each country would pay the upkeep of its own military, yet enhancements would be 40% nationally-funded and 60% NATO-funded (or “common-funded”). Of the NATO-funded costs “the United States would pay its 24 percent share of the common-funded enhancements (about 15 percent of the total direct enlargement bill, or approximately \$1.5-2.0 billion over the 2000-2009 timeframe), averaging between \$150 and \$200 million per year.” [25] However, these costs estimates were not accurate, as they varied quite widely. A 1996 RAND Corporation study predicted costs of \$17-\$82 billion, the US Congressional Budget Office predicted \$21 to \$125 billion, and the British Defense Ministry predicted \$18-20 billion. With costs fluctuating all over the place, there was no way to get an accurate cost assessment for expansion.

The Senate also bought up the question of economic competition, stating that “By conferring NATO membership on a few nations now, those nations will have a distinct advantage over their neighbors in the competition to attract new business and foreign investment. This type of economic competition and imbalance could well breed friction and instability in Central Europe.” [26] In his response, Clinton said:

While the role of the EU is critical, there is no reason to insist on a choice between EU enlargement and NATO enlargement. Both are important. Both make independent contributions to European prosperity and security. EU enlargement alone, however, is not sufficient to secure our nation’s security interests in post-Cold War Europe. Unlike NATO, the EU lacks a military capability. Military capability remains the heart of NATO’s strength and continues to be needed to preserve European security. [27]

The fact that Clinton said that EU enlargement alone was “not sufficient” to ensure America’s security interests in Europe suggests that he may have thought that the EU and NATO were two sides of the same coin. The EU would provide the economic stability while NATO would provide the military protection.

A final problem with expansion of NATO is that many European countries did not want it, regarding it as a US initiative. They had “stated privately for months that they are not going to raise taxes or cut social programs to pay for Washington’s pet scheme. (Indeed, one leader, French president Jacques Chirac, stated publicly that France would not pay a single franc for NATO expansion.)” [28]

Besides the aforementioned problems, the Pentagon did not back the expansion as they no longer wanted to be a part of a larger, more costly NATO. They preferred to go the route of the “Partnership for Peace, which allowed East European nations to join in NATO military exercises but not be full members.” [29] However, the White House kept pressing the issue and in 1994 senior Defense officials ended up having a shouting match with Assistant

Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke. Holbrooke was stated to have yelled “The President has made the decision, and you’re being insubordinate!” [30]

Eventually the Pentagon fell in line.

Middle East Foreign Policy

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States found itself the region’s most powerful and influential outside player. America’s main goal was to keep the oil flowing by any means as could be seen by the establishment of the Carter Doctrine which stated the US intended to keep Mideast oil flowing, even if it meant military intervention and created Central Command, which covered the entire Middle East.

Due to the Middle East being of vital importance to the US, America sought to contain certain “governments or political forces that use violence as a matter of policy to advance a hostile agenda” and to “expand the depth and breadth of [US] partnerships with friendly governments in the region to promote peace, stability, and prosperity.” [31] In addition to this, the Americans also “sought to encourage states in the region that have developed the bad habit of acting outside of international norms to change [their] ways that would permit reintegration into the international community.” [32] This diplomatic language disguises the true nature of US Middle East policy. What the US means to do is to make sure that pro-US regimes are propped up and to isolate any and every nation that threatens US interests.

The US had major plans for Iraq and Iran. Since US policy had failed in that the Iranian revolution took place and the US went to war with Iraq in 1991, the US decided to contain both nations since they “judged that both regional powers, while war-weary and economically weakened, were still militarily ambitious and clearly hostile to the United States and our interests in the region.” [33] The US wanted to keep tabs on Saddam Hussein and make sure that Iran acquiring or developing WMDs. With regards to Iran, however, just as today, the American government had no proof whatsoever that Iran was trying to acquire WMDs.

While the US aimed to contain both Iraq and Iran, there were different strategies for both nations. With Iraq, the US decided that Iraq could no longer “be rehabilitated or reintegrated into the community of nations” and would “work with forces inside and outside Iraq, as well as Iraq’s neighbors, to change the regime in Iraq and help its new government rejoin the community of nations.” [34] This last part may hints at US interest in regime change. The US kept UN sanctions on Iraq as to permanently damage its military and economically decimate the country. It should also be noted when it came to regime change, the US was willing to support anyone as long as they were anti-Saddam, as well as wanted to destabilize Iraq. The US saw the support of Iraqi exiles as “indispensable” and argued that the “internal Iraqi resistance need[ed] a voice, through the Iraqi Opposition living in freedom, to make clear to all Iraqis and to the world its aims.” [35] The US also gave \$8 million in Economic Support Funds to Iraq and used the funds to “strengthen the political unity of the opposition, to support the Iraq war crimes initiative, to support humanitarian programs and the development of civil society, and for activities inside Iraq.” [36] By supporting internal dissidents, the US made sure that if there was an overthrow (successful or not) of the Saddam regime, that it would seem as if the entire struggle was internal and that it represented the will of the Iraqi people, when in reality, the overthrow would have been backed (and probably planned and financed) by the US and the new Iraqi regime would be nothing but a puppet government that followed its orders from Washington.

In regards to Iran, the US strategy was much different. Besides sanctions, there was a large amount of economic warfare against Iran. The US opposed “bilateral debt rescheduling, Paris Club debt treatment for Iran, and the extension of favorable credit terms by Iran’s principal foreign creditors” [37] as well as international monetary agencies such as the IMF and the World Bank loaning Iran money. Also the US government continued to argue that Iran was trying to create WMDs. “Clandestine efforts to procure nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons continue despite Iran’s adherence to relevant international nonproliferation conventions.” [38] In terms of nuclear weapons, the US had no proof that Iran was trying to gain nuclear weapons.

The issue of energy security was also bought up in the formulation of US Middle East policy. The US saw the Middle East as its new main source of energy since “at the end of 1997, U.S. crude reserves had declined to 29.8 billion barrels” and since the 1970s, the US had “become even more dependent on [oil] imports and thus theoretically [was] more vulnerable to crude oil supply distributions” [39] than ever before. Seeing the Middle East as unstable, America wanted to have most of its crude come from Western sources, however, there were still shortfalls even when the Strategic Petroleum Reserve was factored in. This, coupled with the fact that it was predicted by 2015 that US oil production would have declined to 5-7 million barrels daily and that “barring development of huge new reserves in the western hemisphere, the US [would] become increasingly dependent on the more unstable sources of crude oil, such as from the Middle East,” [40] it was in US interests to make sure that the regimes of Arab nations with large amounts of oil were under the control of Washington and that the status quo of American regional dominance was maintained in order to keep the oil flowing.

The Chinese Threat

In its plan to create a new global status quo where the US was in charge, the US government had to make sure that there would be no current threats to its dominance in the future. While it may seem that today the US is viewing China as a major threat, this manner of thinking goes back to the 1990s.

In terms of defense issues, the US thought China’s “defense modernization programs and foreign policy objectives could realistically pose a challenge to US interests and security,” [41] specifically noting China’s “nuclear weapons modernization program and her related arms control policies could pose some possibly severe implications to world peace” and “China’s sale of nuclear technology.” [42] By acquiring modern weaponry China was ensuring that it would be better able to protect its nation, but from the American perspective it was a threat because it threatened US military technological dominance. By selling nuclear technology, China was threatening US nuclear dominance as more countries would have nuclear weapons and therefore were less likely to be intimidated by America and less likely to concede to US demands. In order to combat China’s nuclear program, the US planned to “make a concerted effort to involve China in any future talks concerning nuclear proliferation,” [43] however, these talks would involve China decreasing its amount of nuclear weapons while America’s nuclear weapons stockpile went untouched.

Economically, the US wanted to have a “stable and prosperous China,” but for its own reasons. Bill Clinton stated

A stable, open, prosperous, and strong China is important to the US and to our friends and allies in the region. A stable and open China is more likely to work cooperatively with others

and to contribute positively to peace in the region and to respect the rights and interests of its people. A prosperous China will provide an expanding market for American goods and services. We have a profound stake in helping to ensure that China pursues its modernization in ways that contribute to the overall security and prosperity of the Asia Pacific region. (emphasis added) [44]

While it may seem by Clinton's statement that he wants the best for China, what he is actually doing is passively attacking the Chinese government and promoting US corporate interests. By saying that "A stable and open China is more likely to work cooperatively with others and to contribute positively to peace in the region and to respect the rights and interests of its people," Clinton is implying that certain actions of China (such as modernizing its military and encouraging economic growth) weren't in the interests of its people. How is modernizing one's military and nuclear program not in the interests of the Chinese people? Also, by saying that "A prosperous China will provide an expanding market for American goods and services," Clinton is backing economic globalization and shows his contempt for China as it is reminiscent of how in the 19th century, the US saw China nothing more than but a place to sell its excess goods to.

In order to get China to bend to its will, America planned on using "the positive applications of the instruments of power (political/diplomatic, economic, information, and military) rather than their coercive use." [45] By using diplomacy, the US would give China the illusion that both nations were on par with one another, when in reality they weren't.

Another reason engagement was chosen was due to speculation that the containment of China would not work as "it would be hard to obtain a domestic consensus to subordinate other policy goals (including trade and investment) to dealing with a Chinese threat that is as yet, to say the least, far from manifest" [46] and that containment "would require, to be effective, the whole-hearted cooperation of regional allies and most of the other advanced industrial countries of the world." [47]

There was also speculation as to China's defense situation by 2015. It was predicted that by 2015, China could emerge "as a formidable power, one that might be labeled a multidimensional regional competitor." (emphasis is the author's) [48] It was speculated that as such, China could potentially "exercise sea denial with respect to the seas contiguous to China," "contest aerospace superiority in a sustained way in areas contiguous to China's borders," "threaten US operating locations in East Asia with a variety of long-range nuclear assets," challenge US information dominance," and "pose a strategic nuclear threat to the United States." [49] In order to make sure that these predictions did not come true, as well as get markets for US corporations and attempt to curb China's rise, the US may have decided to engage China.

Rise of the Neoconservatives

The group that played a major role in American defense and foreign policy in the 21st century were the neoconservatives. They were a new breed of conservatives that favored laissez faire economics and a strong, robust military. Several neoconservatives came together to form the Project for the New American Century (PNAC). This think tank was to become extremely influential in the Bush Administration.

PNAC and other neoconservatives shared a disdain for and criticized average Republicans, saying:

Conservatives have criticized the incoherent policies of the Clinton Administration. They have also resisted isolationist impulses from within their own ranks. But conservatives have not confidently advanced a strategic vision of America's role in the world. They have not set forth guiding principles for American foreign policy. They have allowed differences over tactics to obscure potential agreement on strategic objectives. And they have not fought for a defense budget that would maintain American security and advance American interests in the new century. [50]

It initially seemed that this new group was not that dangerous as the goal of neoconservatives was to promote and sustain American global leadership. They wanted "a military that is strong and ready to meet both present and future challenges; a foreign policy that boldly and purposefully promotes American principles abroad; and national leadership that accepts the United States' global responsibilities." [51] They were extremely dedicated to the idea of America leading the world and were near-fanatical in pushing for the US to have global dominance, saying that America "cannot safely avoid the responsibilities of global leadership or the costs that are associated with its exercise" and that "America has a vital role in maintaining peace and security in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East." [52] This was not the language of people who want to just stick to the plans that were already outlined, it sounded more like the language of people who want to take the already laid-out plans to their extremes and in many cases change them entirely.

In PNAC's document *Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources For a New Century*, PNAC outlines its main goal which is to see the entire world dominated by American global military might. The document outline four main goals for the US military which were to "defend the American homeland; fight and decisively win multiple, simultaneous major theater wars; perform the 'constabulary' duties associated with shaping the security environment in critical regions; [and to] transform U.S. forces to exploit the 'revolution in military affairs.'" [53] It can be seen here that PNAC was already planning for there to be a major shift in America's foreign affairs and that they had a war-mongering agenda.

This militaristic agenda was going to be felt throughout the world. Besides the fact that they wanted the US military to "fight and decisively win multiple, simultaneous major theater wars," PNAC also pushed for having America's nuclear deterrent based "upon a global, nuclear net assessment that weighs the full range of current and emerging threats, not merely the U.S.-Russia balance" and for the US to "develop and deploy global missile defenses to defend the American homeland and American allies, and to provide a secure basis for U.S. power projection around the world." [54] The phrase "current and emerging threats" in reality means any nation that is currently or in the future will threaten US global dominance, such as China and Russia. This notion is further proven by the fact that PNAC wanted the US to reposition US "permanently-based forces to Southeast Europe and Southeast Asia" and to change "naval deployment patterns to reflect growing U.S. strategic concerns in East Asia." [55] Doing this would ensure that America would always be able to keep an eye on its rivals and quickly counter any military moves that they made.

In addition to wanting to assure American dominance on Earth, PNAC also wanted to move the American military into space. The group advocated for American "control [of] the new 'international commons' of space and 'cyberspace'" and for America to "pave the way for the creation of a new military service - U.S. Space Forces - with the mission of space control." [56] In advocating for US control of space, PNAC was also arguing for the destruction of the long-term tradition that space was meant to be used for peaceful

purposes, as can be shown in the [Resolution Preventing Arms Race in Outer Space](#) which was passed by the UN General Assembly in 2007 which reaffirmed the [1967 Outer Space Treaty](#), which in itself affirmed that space should remain demilitarized.

It was this group of militaristic, war-mongering Americans that would lead America to try and dominate the world in the 21st century by taking the original plans and twisting them to facilitate a foreign policy based on a “might makes right” mentality, which would lead America to become the world’s first truly global empire.

Notes

1: <http://www.fas.org/man/docs/nssr-1299.pdf>

2: Ibid

3: Ibid

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5: <http://armed-services.senate.gov/statemnt/980331ew.htm>

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http://www.philadelphiafed.org/publications/speeches/boehne/1998/03-20-98_world-affairs-council.cfm

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15: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=25056>

16: http://www.fas.org/man/nato/offdocs/us_97/dos970212.htm

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19: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=23525>

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21: Ibid

22: Ibid

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28: http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=6034

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Devon DB is 19 years old and studies political science at Fairleigh Dickinson University.

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