

Empire or Republic. How the Empire Destroys its Own People

From Joplin, Missouri to Kabul, Afghanistan

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Introduction

On May 29, 2011, President Obama visited Joplin, Missouri, the site of a devastating tornado that killed 140 and pronounced it a terrible “tragedy”. But were the deaths the inevitable result of ‘natural events’ beyond the human intervention?

Coincidentally the same week Afghan President Karzai condemned the killing of a family of 14 by a NATO fighter bomber, running the total to several hundred civilians killed so far this year and thousands over the decade.

The relation between the civilian deaths in Joplin and Afghanistan raises fundamental questions about the priorities, character and direction of the US Empire and the future of the American republic.

Geography of Tornadoes

Every year at least 20 major violent tornadoes – with winds exceeding 200 mph – hit “tornado alley” and beyond, including central Texas, northern Iowa, central Kansas, Nebraska, western Ohio, Missouri, Indiana, Mississippi, Louisiana and Alabama. Each and every year at least sixty are killed and several hundred are maimed and injured. This year, through May 2011, over 519 have been killed, 25% of whom were in mobile homes, almost three times as many as those in standard houses.

In other words, these tornado-related deaths are predictable, annual, and region-specific and have a higher incidence among low income households. Government agencies and academics have compiled data banks and time series information mapping the route, frequency and impact of tornadoes.

Information about the nature of killer tornadoes is plentiful. Nevertheless deaths mount from year to year. Fear and insecurity stalks the region’s most susceptible to the violent whirlwinds, even as the Congress and White House have increased personnel and funding for ‘Homeland Security’ twenty fold over the decade. The current budget is over \$180 billion. If we add the deaths caused by other ‘natural’ disasters like the flooding of New Orleans, the numbers of deaths are staggering. What explains this perverse relation between huge public funding for ‘homeland security’ and the increased insecurity of vulnerable Americans in clearly identified danger zones?

The reason is clear: 'Homeland Security' (HS) is an Orwellian misnomer. The agency is not concerned with domestic, civilian, American security. HS is part of a military-police response to imagined overseas threats, which have not materialized or at least have not produced deaths comparable to tornadoes and floods in the last 11 years.

HS spends billions and employs thousands to investigate, spy and harass citizens engaged in legal-constitutional activities. HS and the Pentagon spend tens of billions on overseas infrastructures - buildings, bases, camps -and over 900 billion in arms. HS and the Defense Department forcefully intervene militarily throughout the world via overt and clandestine operations.

To be precise HS intervenes offensively overseas, attacking civilian targets, while it fails to engage domestically to protect American civilians who are left defenseless in the face of predictable natural disasters.

HS and the Pentagon's sustained violent overseas operations are rejected and regarded as a hostile imperial intervention by the civilians in those countries adversely affected. In contrast, defenseless citizens in the US would welcome large-scale intervention in the form of community shelters, which would provide survival, security, life-saving protection and financial aid for rebuilding their lives. Moreover, Pentagon and HS spending on overseas infrastructure, bases and bombs results in deficits, whereas investments in tornado and flood shelters would stimulate jobs, growth and investment in the US .

The current activity of HS destroys lives abroad and neglects survival at home: It has nothing to do with our "homeland" and even less with our "security". Five percent of HS budget would have prevented many of Joplin 's 'tragedy' (and saved us from Obama's gaseous oratory!) and the other 400 deaths from this year's crop of tornadoes.

Systemic Bases of Perpetual Domestic Neglect

Death from 'natural' events raises a fundamental POLITICAL question: Why is the budget of Homeland Security and the Pentagon directed overseas, toward destructive, offensive, military activity rather than to domestic, constructive, defensive activity to protect American lives and productive economic activity?

The problem is systemic not due to some personal flaw or political idiosyncrasy of the moment. The structures of the US economy and military institutions are oriented 'outwardly' to conquering foreign financial markets and building a military empire. The ideology which informs strategic policymakers is imperial-centered not republican: They do not speak of developing and deepening the economy and security of ' middle America '. Every member of the political and corporate elite talks of 'world' or 'global' leadership - a thinly veiled euphemism for the drive to sustain world dominance. Within the imperial framework the entire 'security' budget is directed toward maintaining offensive military supremacy. No wonder there is a steep decline in all spheres of domestic security - natural, social, personal, health and employment -a phenomenon that proceeds with little public debate. The only exception is when threats to security impinge most directly and forcefully on a significant sector of the population. For example, witness the storm of protest from those directly affected when the politicians moved to privatize social security and Medicare.

Nevertheless, the entire political spectrum, the two parties, the Congress and the White House over the past 30 years, have created an artificial consensus in which overseas wars,

foreign aid to patrons (Israel) and clients (Pakistan and Egypt) absorbs the greatest percentage of budgetary spending. No political or economic leadership has stepped forward to articulate the obvious connection between global expansion and domestic decay; to forcefully state that the deterioration of the republic is a direct product of the vast resources channeled into military and economic empire building. Who on New York City 's Wall Street or Washington 's Pentagon is going to even look at or consider a 'security plan' with regard to the geography of catastrophes - tornado alley covering a dozen states and the floods and deaths that overwhelm the lowlands from Montana to Louisiana ?

Listen America

Their message is loud and clear:

Small towns and trailer parks do not count! You have your 2nd amendment (the 'right to bear arms'), you have your 'small government', and you have your flags: 'Wav 'em and weep' as tornadoes blow down your houses and your sons and daughters return wrapped in flags to the Battle Hymn of the Empire!

Conclusion

One might argue that community storm shelters won't break the Treasury or reverse the empire. More to the point, their absence, from the federal, state and local political agenda, is emblematic of the total subordination of domestic America to imperial Washington . The 'cost' of building community shelters at the strip malls and trailer parks in Joplin , Missouri is less than a regional training outpost in Kandahar , Afghanistan . It is not a question of money.

Conquering Afghanistan villages enhances the prestige of the Generals, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and NATO officials. Can saving 145 lives in Joplin , Missouri match that in terms of world politics or the politics of imperial leadership? For Afghanistan , Washington builds a thousand military shelters and bomb proof bunkers .For the Americans living in tornado alley and the flood plains of the Mississippi people must make do.

When you hear the tornado warning, it's up to you. As a proud, free American you can find a rock to crawl under and say your prayer: the Federal government and Homeland Security have the Endless, World-wide War against Terror to fight and cannot be bothered by a Joplin , Missouri nursing home in the path of a tornado.

We exaggerate: Obama will jet in and speak before the cameras in solemn terms of the 'tragedy' and 'courage' of the people of Joplin ... But will any local politician stand up and speak truth to power? Most of these deaths and (many more to come) are avoidable; under a democratic American republic, the government 'intervenes' to provide protection, health and employment for its people.

In the meantime, as the empire continues to grow it destroys its own people, just like the sow that devours its offspring.

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