

Institute for Spirituality and Global Economics (SAGE)

THOUGHTS ON CREATING PEACE

by Bob Rundle



We all want to create peace in the world. But it seems few of us are prepared to create the political and economic changes that are necessary for this. We have to start with the recognition that war is a very profitable business and that governments are the chief customers. [Thich Nhat Hanh](#) wisely notes that the roots of war are found in the way we live our lives. It's not only the violence we struggle with internally. Our tacit support for an economic system that values money more than people and now largely controls public policy is a key. I think [John Kenneth Galbraith](#) has it right: "War remains the decisive human failure". (See his excellent article "[A Cloud Over Civilisation](#)" for details.)

So to think about world peace we had better be thinking about the U.S. political system. If your main customer is the federal government, any decent business leader knows you need to find ways to expand your influence there in order to increase business. [President Eisenhower's concern about the military-industrial complex](#) has come to full fruition. Our war industry (this is a more accurate description than "defense" industry), like other big businesses, enjoys great advantages in our current political system:

- An election system that requires lots of cash. Money largely equates to influence. And who can buy lots of it? Then after you get elected to Congress or become president what do you need to spend a lot of time doing?
- A lobbying system with few restraints. And who has the money to hire gobs of well-paid lobbyists? Who has most of the lawyers who can be so helpful to suggest or even write legislation that the busy legislators don't have time to create, or often even read? Which lobbyists are best equipped to help out with the fund raising needs of legislators and the president (either through direct donations or assistance in fund raising efforts)? And then the plum: Who better to hire as lobbyists to influence government policy than ex-legislators and executive staff who can return at higher salaries to schmooze with their former colleagues? Then you hire ex-military staff to convince their former Pentagon brethren about the absolute necessity of building purchase of the latest lethal weapon on the industries' drawing boards into their next budget request.
- A friendly Supreme Court. Who benefits most as a result of their ludicrous ruling in the [Citizens United case](#) on 1-21-11 that the Constitution can't tell the difference between me and General Motors when it comes to rights of political speech? Their finding that money equals speech (so you can't limit it or require disclosure of its source) makes the decision even more bizarre.

Extensive public relations and friendly media that buy acceptance for our war business leaders and reinforces our culture of "redemptive violence" (as Walter Wink so aptly put it) top off the package. In contrast to the old capitalists of the 19th century, these leaders and their staff have the credibility to be serving in the White House and administrative departments, particularly the State Department, or used as consultants. Think [Dick Cheney](#) here. In recent decades a feature of our political system is the revolving door between our war industry and Congress, executive departments, and the Pentagon.

As Galbraith notes, this ensures that the military option is always given serious consideration in dealing with world affairs. A classic example is the primary choice of military means to fight terrorism after [9-11](#). When a job requires a surgeon's scalpel and use a jackhammer instead, why should we be surprised we only made the problem worse? But who is complaining? This approach just led to a larger (and more profitable) military effort. Military influence also ensures that a sizeable chunk of our foreign aid is actually used for purchase of military goods. (This is a neat trick when you think of it: give our taxpayer dollars to foreign nations who then return part of it to enrich our war industry and its investors.)

Is it any wonder that we:

- Live in a culture that glorifies violence and the military, and emphasizes fear;
- Build weapon systems we don't need;
- Maintain a military size far out of proportion to our real needs;
- Sell more arms than the rest of the world combined;
- Maintain over a thousand bases around the world;
- Privatize war (This practice led at one time in Iraq to our having about the same number of private contractors as military personnel. From the perspective of the war industry this "improved" way of waging war creates more profits while avoiding the political opposition that a draft can generate.);
- Try exempting our war establishment when it comes to making necessary budget cuts (even though in the 2011 fiscal year it comprised 48% of the budget excluding the trust funds like Social Security);
- Are involved in armed conflicts around the world almost continuously for many years?

John Kenneth Galbraith's volume of essays, [The Economics of Innocent Fraud](#), is an excellent summary of the myths and realities of our current economic system. This excerpt describes how our war industry dominates U.S. military and foreign policy. He notes we are accepting "programmed death for the young and random slaughter for men and women of all ages". Galbraith puts war in perspective as "the decisive human failure".

So what can we do about all of this? Click into next month's column for some answers.

-- Bob Rundle

**SAGE is the [Institute for Spirituality and Global Economics](#), an arm of the Peacebuilding Institute, and a new contributor to the Peace Memo. We hope they will become frequent contributors.*