

We Need an 'Alert and Knowledgeable Citizenry' To Avoid Imperial Wars

Col. Lawrence Wilkerson (ret.) served for 31 years in the U.S. Army, in Vietnam, in the Pacific Command, on the faculty of the Navy War College, and at the Marine Corps University. In 1989, he became Chief of Staff to Gen. Colin Powell in the final months of Powell's tenure as President Ronald Reagan's National Security Advisor. He was Chief of Staff to Powell at the Joint Chiefs of Staff under George H.W. Bush; and held the same position when Powell served as Secretary of State to George W. Bush.

Wilkerson has been an outspoken critic of the Iraq War, and continues to speak out against the ongoing war in Afghanistan, as well as the abuses of the U.S. Constitution, in both the Bush and the Obama administrations.

This interview was conducted on Dec. 22 with EIR Counterintelligence Editor Jeffrey Steinberg.

Steinberg: Colonel Wilkerson, I want to thank you very much for joining me today. I've got some questions about the present strategic situation.

First of all, Israel is threatening, as you know, to bomb Iran's nuclear facilities. Two questions: Number one, is this an appropriate moment for another war in the Middle East? And [second,] what would be the consequences if the Israelis do launch such an attack?

Wilkerson: First, I think this is a highly inappropriate time for another war in Western Asia, or the Middle East, as we call it. We've already got one just wrapped up [in Iraq], which is falling apart, even as I speak; we've got another one

going, with no end in sight, that one in Afghanistan; and the global war on terror, which ranges from the Horn of Africa, to Somalia, all around the Maghreb, and elsewhere in Africa, and as far as I know, all over the world. We don't need a fourth war.

Israel is another imponderable in this entire issue. One, Israel does not have the military capacity to inflict much damage on Iran. It could fly long-range strikes at the very end of its operational tether, if you will, and it could drop a few bombs, but it would do very little damage. It would probably be a pinprick, in terms of damage. But what would Iran do in reaction to that? Would it send some of its missiles towards Tel Aviv, Haifa, or some other place in Israel? And then, what would we do in reaction to that?

The real fear here, is that Israel will administer this pinprick with complete knowledge that we're going to follow her and make it more than a pinprick. That's what I worry about. So the answer to your question is: Israel could not do much, but we would probably follow and do a lot.

And second, we certainly don't need another war in Western Asia.

The War Instrument Is Not the Answer

Steinberg: Do you see the possibility of such an Israeli-initiated conflict, drawing the United States in, and being the trigger for an even larger, perhaps even global conflagration? Do you see the danger that this could really get out of control, at a moment when there's a lot of fragility in the world economy?



New American Foundation/Sarah Brennan

Wilkerson: Well, I do see that, but I don't see it in the way you just described. The way I see it, is that it continues to go the way it's been going for the past ten years. And that is, that China, and to a lesser extent other countries, like Russia, Brazil, Turkey, India, steal not one or two, but multiple marches on the United States, and for that matter on Europe, too, because we're so mired in conflict that we can't see the bottom of our feet!

This is a situation, where we're transferring enormous wealth to Asia, right now. We're transferring wealth to the near part of Asia, in the form of petroleum dollars. We're transferring *immense* sums of wealth to the eastern parts of Asia, to China, to Southeast Asia, Korea, and so forth, through their productive capacity and our *buying* that productive capacity. This is one of the greatest wealth transfers in human history that's taking place right now.

So what China, and India, and Russia, and others like them are going to do, is sit back and steal even more marches on us, as we mire ourselves even further in warfare! This is tantamount to the "end of empire" for us, if you will, if we don't wake up and realize that we are 1) frittering away our power on the fringes of our empire; 2) possessed of an utterly unsound economic and financial base, and do something about it; and 3) figure out that the war instrument, and the military in general, is not the answer to every problem in the world!

Of course, those things are complementary; they all go along with one another, as it were. And at the same time, you have to realize that you don't have a very powerful military, if you don't have a very solid economic foundation. So, even that element of our hard power, which seems to be the only thing that we can use these days, is going to atrophy and fall apart, if we don't fix our economic base. The number-one problem for this country, right now, is fixing our economic base, and in that regard, another war in Western Asia is not about to fix that economic base; it's just going to cause further deterioration.

Steinberg: Recently, we heard from Sen. Carl Levin



DoD/U.S. Army Spc. Kristina L. Gupton

Colonel Wilkerson has been an outspoken critic of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the so-called war on terror. He warns that, "We don't need a fourth war," this time, with Iran.

(D-Mich.) [chairman of the Armed Services Committee], that the Obama Administration insisted on the inclusion, within the just-passed National Defense Authorization Act, of provisions that would actually mandate that the military engage in indefinite detentions, including of American citizens on American soil. Do you see in this, and some other recent actions—the al-Awlaki killing—an erosion of some of the most fundamental Constitutional principles of our republic?

Wilkerson: I certainly do. I think it started with the Patriot Act, which I think was a draconian piece of legislation that demonstrated, as is so often the case with us, particularly in our post-World War II history, that we overreact to almost everything, particularly when it presents a threat to us that we think is existential—when it isn't.

It's a situation that started with the Patriot Act: It started with the fear and the political exploitation of that fear, post-9/11. And now, it's some years later, and we're doing this, which is really perplexing! We're walking our military back to the days of Reconstruction: We're doing away with *Posse Comitatus*:¹ We are

1. The *Posse Comitatus Act*, passed in 1878, states: "Whoever, except in cases and under circumstances expressly authorized by the Constitution or Act of Congress, willfully uses any part of the Army or the Air Force as a posse comitatus or otherwise to execute the laws shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than two years, or both" (Title 18, U.S. Code, Section 1385).

telling the military that we expect it to be an element in domestic law enforcement. This is nonsense!

And the only reason that I figure that this may be happening, *so long* after the 9/11 attacks, is because the Congress and others, who have pretty much signed on to this, wholesale, are not so scared of terrorists and what terrorists might bring to this country, as they are of what movements like Occupy Wall Street and so forth, might ultimately bring to this country. That's the only way I can see it: They're worried about what Americans, what the domestic situation might be like, given their inability to do anything about the wealthiest people in this country running this country.

And so, they're taking measures right now, to make sure they can protect themselves in the future. And who are "they"? "They" are the Congressmen themselves, the

White House, and others, who are in the government, in the leadership of this country! And ultimately, those in the oligarchy who are running this country: the corporations, big food, big oil, big pharmacy, and so forth, that really have the intrinsic power in this country to make it go one way or another.

That's the only way I can explain it. Otherwise, it's utterly perplexing to me, why we would be going back to Reconstruction days, to martial law, if you will, to handle law enforcement in this country.

A Pattern of Erosion of the Constitution

Steinberg: We've seen a pattern of erosion, as you say, starting with the Bush Administration, with the Patriot Act, and now you've got a President, who has a law degree from Harvard in Constitutional law, who flagrantly brought us into the Libya War, without going to Congress; who apparently has some team at the White House that decides on executions of American citizens overseas; and now we have this new development, as you say, creating a situation where the military can be deployed on the streets of the country to prevent the population from revolting against this problem.

Are these, in your view, impeachable crimes? And where is Congress in all of this?

Wilkerson: Well, you didn't mention another one, that's as insidious as all the rest, if not more so, and that's this incredible increase in the use of the "national



Al Jazeera

The policy of murdering American citizens, such as that of Anwar al-Awlaki (seen here in an Al Jazeera video), goes back to the Patriot Act, following 9/11, Wilkerson stated. "We're doing away with Posse Comitatus: We are telling the military that we expect it to be an element in domestic law enforcement. This is nonsense!"

security" argument in the Article III [Federal] courts.

The Administration can get away with almost *anything*—or any of its acolytes, like the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency—they can get away with *anything* now! They can do it against American citizens, they can do it against anyone they want to do it against, and have almost total immunity, because the government's going to haul this "national security" argument into the Article III court, and the case is going to be dismissed. This is nonsense! This is not the way a democratic federal republic operates!

And you're right: These ought to be offenses that the Congress stands up on its hind legs, and looks at the Administration and says, "Hey! We're a separate and equal branch of government, and we object to what you're doing!" Instead, the Congress is saying, "Send it over, and we'll rubber stamp it for you." It's disgraceful.

Steinberg: The recent extrajudicial killing of Anwar al-Awlaki, and a second American citizen in that incident; and then a few weeks later, the murder of his son in a follow-on drone attack in Yemen—we're dealing here with three American citizens. We certainly don't know the total number of American citizens who might have been subject to this extrajudicial execution, but I wonder if you could comment further on this?

Wilkerson: Doing this sort of thing, taking American citizens' lives, no matter how heinous they might be, or how criminal their acts might be, without due process of law, is an *outright, clear, unmistakable violation of the Constitution of the United States*. There are people in this government, and I *know* there are people in the previous government—I served in it—who don't believe the first ten Amendments to the Constitution [the Bill of Rights] should have been passed in the first place, because they're impediments to their power!

I don't know what we do about this! This is clearly unconstitutional, but the Congress, which is supposed to be a check on the Executive, when this sort of thing happens, and the [Supreme] Court, which is supposed to be the legal determinant of whether an act is Constitutional or not, seem to be the lackeys of the Administration. So where do you go? I'll tell you where you go: You go to the people.

Steinberg: And now, you've got this included element within the National Defense Authorization Act, which seems to be directly targeted at the American people, at a point when you're seeing growing popular demands for a radical overhaul of government.

Wilkerson: But, you know, when we broke away from Britain, we stated it quite succinctly: "Governments derive their power and their authority from the consent of the governed": That's us, the people! If we don't stand up, and get *noticed*; if we don't make our Congressmen, and our President, and all else that serves *us*, ultimately, aware of the fact that we're not happy, that we don't like the way they're doing things, then it's just going to go on. And it's going to get worse.

Dwight Eisenhower said in 1961, when he was giving his famous farewell address, where he mentioned the "military-industrial complex"—and this is a part of it we often forget—that the only thing that could save the republic from such immense power being abused or used not in accordance with the people's wishes, was "an alert and knowledgeable citizenry." And I ask you: Do we have "an alert and knowledgeable citizenry" today?



President Eisenhower, in his famous farewell address (shown here), in which he mentioned the "military-industrial complex," warned that the only thing that could save the republic from such immense power being abused, was "an alert and knowledgeable citizenry."

A Breakpoint as a Republic

Steinberg: It's a media-dumbed-down, dangerously disconnected population. But I think we've reached a point in the last several years, particularly in the aftermath of the 2007-2008 blowing of the bubble, where more and more people have figured out—whether they act on it is another story—but they figured out that we are at a real breakpoint as a republic.

Wilkerson: I think you're right. I'm going to watch the 2012 elections—both in the legislature and in the White House—and the run-up thereto, very, very closely, because I think we may see some things happen, that, say a year or two ago, any political pundit surveying the scene would have laughed at. We may see some *real* unique things happen.

And as far as I'm concerned, if they're positive, that's great. I mean, the last time we did this, in a really almost successful way, was when Teddy Roosevelt came out, and the Bull Moose Party, the Progressive Party, more or less handed the election to Woodrow Wilson. The time before that, of course, the most seminal political moment, probably, in that century, before the Civil War: We invented the Republican Party!

We've destroyed political parties in our past before, and morphed old ones into new ones. I wouldn't be surprised to see that happen again, and not too far off.

Steinberg: One of the issues that we've been promoting very aggressively, and which has gotten support from some Tea Party elements in Congress, as well as the Occupy Wall Street people, is the urgent need to return to Glass-Steagall, in order to dismantle and bankrupt the power of this financial oligarchy that's been asserting its control, increasingly, with more and more power, in the last several years.

Wilkerson: I couldn't agree with you more. I think the basic, clear, simple answer, and I know it's a complex situation, but I do think the answer in this regard, as you just suggested, is simple: to move banks over to where they do what banks should do. They talk to me and you about mortgages, about starting small businesses, and so forth, and then they monitor us during the entire life of our mortgage or small business effort, or whatever. And we let those people like Goldman Sachs, and the rest of that crew, go off and play their gambling games, enter their casino, play their mess—but not with taxpayer money. They do it with their own money. And *not* with the expectation that when they fail, which they inevitably will, they're bailed out.

Steinberg: We are talking about a dramatic shift in political power, and the necessary, unavoidable first step toward economic recovery.

Wilkerson: Absolutely! You're right on both counts. That's the first thing we need to do, to start towards the *real* economy being repaired, and making middle-class Americans successful again. And it's also the step we need to take, to shift this political power away from the oligarchy.

When Americans Go Abroad To Fight Monsters...

Steinberg: You had mentioned briefly, at the outset, the Iraq situation as one of the areas where we've withdrawn the last American fighting forces, and where the situation has not exactly moved in a healthy direction. Could you give a bit of a picture of how you see this



DoD/Erin A. Kirk-Cuomo

In 2004 and 2005, Wilkerson and others at the State Department were told that the moment we leave Iraq, whether in 1 year or 100, civil war will break out, a prediction which now appears to be coming true. Shown: a ceremony marking the end of the U.S. mission in Iraq, Baghdad, Dec. 15, 2011.

Iraq situation devolving?

Wilkerson: Well, in 2004 and 2005, there were those of us in the State Department who were listening to experts from all across the government spectrum, and all across academia—and I remember this vividly—they were saying things like, “It doesn't matter whether we stay in Iraq another year or two, or another 20 years or another century, the moment we leave, civil war's going to break out,” or something approximating it.

And for all intents and purposes, it looks like there's a real high possibility that civil war's going to break out in Iraq. [Prime Minister Nouri al-] Maliki did not even have the decency to wait an interval before he started consolidating power. And, of course, the Sunnis don't like that; the Sunnis are still powerful. The Awakening Movement alone proved that. And so, you had huge casualties in Baghdad today, as I understand it, from bombings and so forth, mostly perpetrated by Sunnis against the Shi'a government.

So this is by no means guaranteed. It should stand out as a vivid example to all Americans who forgot Vietnam, that Americans do not do state-building very well. That, when Americans go abroad to fight monsters, they generally become a monster themselves, just as John Quincy Adams said, and that we probably

should refrain from doing this in the future, for monetary reasons, as well as reasons that we don't do it very well—in fact, we do it abysmally.

Steinberg: Maybe it's in the deep character of the United States, and the memory that we came into being as a nation by fighting for independence from a British Empire; that's one of the reasons that we don't do imperial wars very well. We've never done it well, and it's always had disastrous consequences that have blown up in our faces, for a long time.

Wilkerson: Actually, history says no one does it well. If you read something like David Kilcullen's work,² where he studies some 300 insurgencies, he points out that, in, I think, 80% of those insurgencies, the insurgents won—[laughs]—that is to say, the government lost!

And in all, almost all of this, where the government was not fighting alone, or was assisted from abroad only in an indirect way, in almost every case, when a foreign power comes in, and literally takes over the counterinsurgency *for* the incumbent government, a loss will occur. The odds are just phenomenally against a foreign power entering another country and fighting an insurgency in that country successfully: Vietnam, Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan—how many examples do we need before we learn our lesson?

Steinberg: I know that you're in touch with many other retired military officers, retired intelligence people. How would you characterize their view of this present crisis? What, in your mind, do we need to do at this point, to restore our actual republican heritage?

Wilkerson: I think the thing that concerns most of my former colleagues—some of whom are still active, in almost every walk of life, whether it be actually in the government, or advising the government, or in some way studying the government, or whatever—the *real* concern, at bottom, is the economy. Because everyone, from soldier to academic, understands that without a strong, functioning, with-a-future economy, you don't have anything else! You don't have the well-being of whole numbers of your population that you need, as

2. David Kilcullen is the author of numerous books and articles, including, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (Oxford University Press, U.S.A., 2009), and *Counterinsurgency* (Oxford University Press, U.S.A., 2010).

Eisenhower *constantly* talked about the middle class, which is why he kept the tax on the wealthiest in America at over 90%, for his entire eight years—a good Republican, he!

You don't have that sense, as Eisenhower kept saying—in NSC [National Security Council] meeting after NSC meeting—you don't have that sense of psychological well-being, of even, he said, *spiritual* well-being, if you don't have the bulk of your people employed, *gainfully* employed, and looking ahead to the future, thinking that their children are going to have a higher standard of living than they have, a better life than they have, *working* for that life, working for that future: If you don't have that, and you don't have the fundamentally sound economy wrapped around that, you're lost.

So that's the problem I think that's concerning most of my colleagues, right now.

Steinberg: On that note, I want to thank you very much for taking the time this afternoon. And I hope we can continue this discussion in the very near future.

Wilkerson: Thanks for having me.

10 Years Later

An LPAC-TV Feature Film

Eight months before the September 11, 2001 attacks, Lyndon LaRouche forecast that the United States was at high risk for a Reichstag Fire event, an event that would allow those in power to manage, through dictatorial means, an economic and social crisis that they were otherwise incompetent to handle. We are presently living in the wake of that history.

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