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Why we must lose this war

by [Jack Lessenberry](#)
2/9/2005

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Gwynne Dyer isn't exactly a wimp. Not many guys from Newfoundland are. Born during World War II, he has been fascinated by things military all his life, and has served in three navies — ours, Canada's and Great Britain's. He has university degrees from all three countries too, and a Ph.D. in military and Middle Eastern history. During the 1980s, he produced and narrated the best documentary series about the nature of war that I've ever seen.

And here's what he says about what we are doing:

"The United States needs to lose the war in Iraq as soon as possible. Even more urgently, the whole world needs the United States to lose the war in Iraq. What is at stake now is the way we run the world for the next generation or more, and really bad things will happen if we get it wrong."

Those are the opening lines of his latest and perhaps most important book, *Future Tense: The Coming World Order* (paperback, McClelland and Stewart, \$12.95). If you plan on reading only one book this year, make this the one. In perfectly clear prose, with arguments as well-researched as they are compelling, this military expert explains why what we're doing is mad.

He explains how we haven't grasped that the world has changed, that we aren't living in our old superpower world anymore, one in which we're the leader of the forces of light against the evil dark powers of communism. Nor are we, in fact, even a military superpower in the way we like to think we are; in reality, our military machine can only be used against very weak countries. As he notes, "War with a serious opponent would lead to a level of American casualties that the U.S. public would not tolerate for long."

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What the world needs most in the long run (if there's to be a long run), he reminds us, is a stable international order in which all nations gradually work on abandoning war as an acceptable way of settling any differences. Dyer isn't starry-eyed about this; he thinks it will take a hundred years at least to get major countries to stop resorting to war, "for it is trying to change international habits that had at least 5,000 years to take root."

That, he reminds us, is the whole purpose of the United Nations, which we played the major role in starting exactly 60 years ago this spring. Yes, we've resorted to war before, as have other countries, but we always at least pretended that what we were doing was legally justified by international standards.

Now, however, the current administration is essentially spitting on this, and openly proclaiming our right to intervene unilaterally anywhere we want. Why is that so bad? Because others will do it too, and, eventually, it will break down even the ideal of an international order, causing a general return to "the old world of alliances, arms races and all the other old baggage."

Dyer writes, "No other major power wants to abandon the project to outlaw war ... but if the world's greatest power becomes a rogue state, they won't have much choice." Some days, it appears we've already crossed the line.

Interestingly, if that happens, we may not be able to afford to be a rogue state for very long. In what's surely the most telling and terrifying part of this book, the author takes on the most frightening topic of all — the real condition of the American economy, which is now totally dependent on foreign investment.

You'd scarcely know it from the "mainstream media," but we're now the biggest debtor nation in history, owing far more to foreign countries than they do to us, and running up \$500 billion more on our "credit card" every year.

Why does this go on? Dyer argues what other economists have told me in whispers: "The U. S. economy is a confidence trick based on everybody else's perception that the United States is centrally important for the world's security and that its economy is centrally important for the world economy."

That was absolutely true in 1945, and largely true even in 1985. But not anymore. If you look at only those foreign investments that could be liquidated fairly quickly, the total, he estimates, would come to about \$8 trillion. If those investments started to move elsewhere, the value of the dollar could be cut in half, Dyer estimates, overnight.

That would mean not only no more Lincoln Navigators, it more than likely would lead to the end of democracy as we know it. Which would be especially unfortunate since, as he notes, "global warming and other environmental problems are going to hit us very hard over the

next 50 years.”

“How fast they hit and how great the resulting upheavals will be cannot be known in advance, but very few people apart from the usual suspects in the United States any longer doubt that climate change is a reality.”

Incidentally, if you're tempted to tell me why Gwynne Dyer is all wrong, I'll be willing to listen — but not if you haven't read this book first.

Social Insecurity — What's in it for you: Meanwhile, taking a break from destroying the international system of collective security, George W. Bush & Co. are attempting to destroy, for ideological reasons, a key part of the fabric of our domestic society, namely, Social Security.

Social Security has saved the lives and dignity of many millions since the New Deal days. Bush claims the system will run out of money to pay full benefits along about 2042. What he wants to do is not really fix it, but allow workers to divert some (read: eventually, all) of their Social Security contributions into stocks and bonds, where he thinks they will make more money on their investment, etc. Unfortunately, what he doesn't say is that if they pick a stock that goes bust, they may be eating dog food in their dotage.

Last week, I called the expert I most respect on the issue, Max Skidmore, a political science professor at the University of Kansas who has studied the system since 1964, and is the author of an exceptional book, *Social Security and its Enemies*. He told me Bush's assertions are too pessimistic.

The idea that we can know exactly where the trust fund will stand in 2042 is silly; imagine trying to predict today's economy in 1968. Besides, if the Social Security system needs more money, there's a simple solution: “Remove the cap.” Currently, Social Security deductions are taken from only the first \$90,000 a worker makes each year. Those few who make more, like Michael Jordan and George W. Bush, can afford to keep paying. If worse comes to worst, maybe we'll have to stop aged millionaires who don't need their checks from collecting. That ought to buy some time until the last baby boomer's estate collects the \$255 death benefit.

Hear for yourself: Not so incidentally, Max Skidmore is coming to town, thanks to the Michigan Alliance to Strengthen Social Security and Medicare. He'll speak at 6 p.m. Friday, Feb. 18, at the UAW headquarters on George Merrelli Drive in Warren. And there may not be a free lunch, but this is a free speech. For more details, call Maurice Geary, 248-545-7002, and, until then, watch your wallet.

Jack Lessenberry opines weekly for Metro Times. Send comments to letters@metrotimes.com.

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