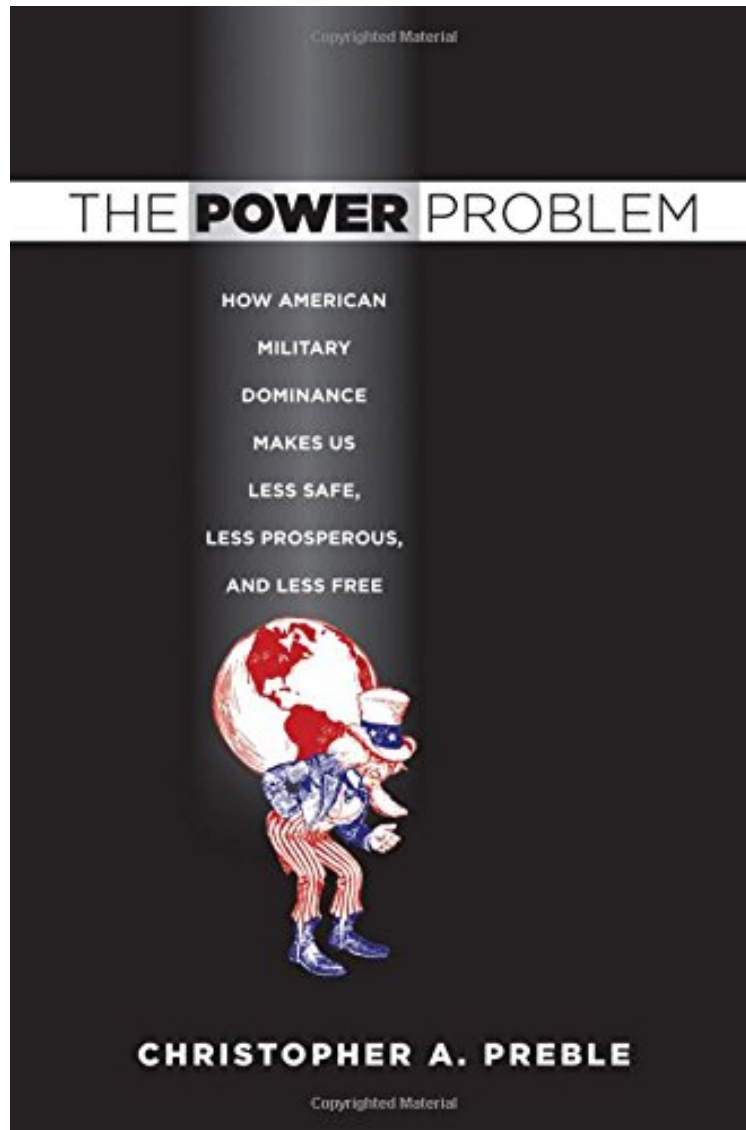


(Download free pdf) The Power Problem: How American Military Dominance Makes Us Less Safe, Less Prosperous, and Less Free (Cornell Studies in Security Affairs)

# The Power Problem: How American Military Dominance Makes Us Less Safe, Less Prosperous, and Less Free (Cornell Studies in Security Affairs)

*Christopher A. Preble*

*ebooks | Download PDF | \*ePub | DOC | audiobook*



[Download](#)

[Read Online](#)

#1321708 in Books 2009-03-17 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.40 x .82 x 6.321, 1.06 #File Name: 0801447658232 pages | File size: 23.Mb

**Christopher A. Preble : The Power Problem: How American Military Dominance Makes Us Less Safe, Less Prosperous, and Less Free (Cornell Studies in Security Affairs)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Power Problem: How American Military Dominance Makes Us

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. More for less? More secure with less? By George Fulmore

Currently, there is a great debate over the difference between military spending and defense spending. This book gives the reader some valuable insight on this debate. The thesis of the book is that we have been spending way more than we should have on our military, and that we have been taking on much more world responsibility that we have been asked to take on. It would be better for our country and we would be more secure if we were to reduce our military power and commitments. Sarah Palin would have done well to have mastered this book before being asked about the "Bush Doctrine" by Katie Couric, as there is a great deal of documentation about the road to the military policy eventually adopted by President George W. Bush. With hindsight, it is relatively easy to agree with the author on what the policy of our country should be relative to our military and its power and responsibilities: "We should deploy forces abroad only when there are vital U.S. security interests at stake; when there is a clear and attainable mission; when there is broad public support; and when there is a clear understanding of what constitutes victory; and, therefore, when our forces can leave." But, as it is, and by our choice, via our ex-President George W. Bush, today, our military is clearly superior to any competitor in the world. If nothing else, we have the numbers: nearly 300 naval vessels, including submarines; more than 1,100 aircraft just under the Navy; about 336,000 men or women in the active-duty Air Force; more than 186,000 in the Marines; and nearly 600,000 in the Army. And, in 2008, we spent more just in "research, development, testing, and evaluation" than the total amount spent by several other developed countries on their entire defense budgets. It did not have to be this way. After the Cold War, the U.S. defense budget was cut about 25%, but building war materials had become a lucrative business that attracted those who could get projects approved in Congress. The military-industrial complex that President Eisenhower warned us about became entrenched. By the 1990s, the U.S. was the sole superpower in the world, and, in effect, it was haunted by the Spiderman comic book theme of "with great power comes great responsibility." The author sees defense secretary Dick Cheney and a document begun in 1992, entitled, "The Defense Planning Guidance," as essential to the development of the military policies of the U.S. after the Cold War. The document said that U.S. power was crucial to the functioning of the world order. The U.S. would be the "global hegemon." It would be ready to be involved any time, any place. It would strike preemptively, if need be. It would view all other countries with suspicion. And the thrust of our policy would be "to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equaling the power of the United States." All this can go well, if one can afford it. But, per the author, the U.S. clearly can no longer do this. He pegs the total military costs in 2008 as about \$800 billion. The Joint Strike Fighter (Jet) costs about \$122 million per plane. Each F-22 Raptor cost about \$356 million. And those who prosper from the sales of these planes know how to spread the business around. Per the author, for the engines of these F-22 planes, "more than 1,000 subcontractors in at least 44 states are involved in the program." Navy ships, of course, cost huge amounts of money to maintain. And there are always new ships being built and/or planned. Then, there are the costs of military personnel. Not in the book, but well-reported is the \$1 million per year cost for each soldier sent to fight in Afghanistan. The point made by the author is that the United States has chosen to make this monetary commitment, while it has neglected things back home. For this, the author uses the term "opportunity costs." And his thesis, again, is that the U.S. military has too much power for its own good and for the good of the nation. "If we focused most of our attention on our own security, we would need less power, and we would use it less." He argues that the U.S. has little or no authority to be the sheriff of the world. He quotes George W. Bush in a 2002 address to West Point Cadets: "In the world we have entered, the only path to safety is the path of action. And this nation will act." Per the author, the U.S. has treaty agreements with at least 60 countries. Any of these treaty agreements could obligate us to act. Per the author, this decision of being the strongest nation on earth, militarily, is not shared by the American people. He cites a survey that found only 13% of Americans "said the United States should be the single most important leader in the world." So, the author thinks that, over time, we should shrink our military forces in the pursuit of becoming more secure than before. This does not mean that we become complete pacifists. What it means is that we "only engage in such operations when truly vital national interests are at stake; when the object is clear and obtainable; and only after we have exhausted all other options." A "right-sized" navy might have no more than 200 ships. "For the most part, Americans want to be engaged in the world without being in charge of it." The less we use our power, the greater it will be. We need to end the fool's game that we have been pursuing. As for our dependency on oil, Preble points out that about 35% of our supply is from domestic sources, 25% is from Canada, and another 20% is from Mexico and Venezuela. Only about 20%, he would argue, of the oil consumed in the U.S. is from the Middle East.

20 of 20 people found the following review helpful. Fabulous book

By James T. Ranney

As a long-time peace activist, I was amazed that a person who is both a Navy veteran and a member of the somewhat conservative Cato Institute could write such a thoroughly stirring indictment of excesses of military spending. Moreover, it is not only a cogent and timely update of the classic work of the likes of Seymour Melman, it is also, more importantly, a very thoughtful larger argument against our "out there" posture all over the world. While those who are big on R2P (responsibility to protect) may have a basis to argue with his conclusions in this area (I might also), this is just too great a book to pass up. I wish it could be read by everyone in congress.

16 of 16

people found the following review helpful. Sound ThinkingBy Lawrence A HainesA clearly written and clearly explained discussion of the problem of being the world's policeman. The USA has in fact become such and is spending its resources curiously without any compensation from the rest of the world. A sad state of affairs that needs correcting.

Numerous polls show that Americans want to reduce our military presence abroad, allowing our allies and other nations to assume greater responsibility both for their own defense and for enforcing security in their respective regions. In *The Power Problem*, Christopher A. Preble explores the aims, costs, and limitations of the use of this nation's military power; throughout, he makes the case that the majority of Americans are right, and the foreign policy experts who disdain the public's perspective are wrong. Preble is a keen and skeptical observer of recent U.S. foreign policy experiences, which have been marked by the promiscuous use of armed intervention. He documents how the possession of vast military strength runs contrary to the original intent of the Founders, and has, as they feared, shifted the balance of power away from individual citizens and toward the central government, and from the legislative and judicial branches of government to the executive. In Preble's estimate, if policymakers in Washington have at their disposal immense military might, they will constantly be tempted to overreach, and to redefine ever more broadly the "national interest." Preble holds that the core national interest—preserving American security—is easily defined and largely immutable. Possessing vast military power in order to further other objectives is, he asserts, illicit and to be resisted. Preble views military power as purely instrumental: if it advances U.S. security, then it is fulfilling its essential role. If it does not—if it undermines our security, imposes unnecessary costs, and forces all Americans to incur additional risks—then our military power is a problem, one that only we can solve. As it stands today, Washington's eagerness to maintain and use an enormous and expensive military is corrosive to contemporary American democracy.

"The Power Problem doesn't flinch from offering specifics as to what commitments the United States should keep and which it should shed. In addition to proposing criteria for using military force that are stricter than the old Weinberger-Powell doctrine—'allied interests would no longer be treated as synonymous with American national interests'—Preble suggests 'right-sizing' our military forces for the defense of American territory and the Western hemisphere. . . . Preble has started a debate where too often there has been a monologue."—W. James Antle III, *Washington Times*, 18 June 2009

"In this readable new volume, Preble argues flatly that the current level of American military capabilities makes the United States less safe, less prosperous, and less free. America's military power should be reduced to fit within the balances of the constitution and a realistic view of security requirements in a multipolar world. . . . Preble's spirited analysis gives rise to some big questions: Are American elites prepared to give up running the world? Can we afford to relinquish the prerequisites of global hegemony? Who will keep order in the world if not hegemonic America? . . . Whatever the inconveniences of change, Preble makes clear that the status quo itself is increasingly expensive and ultimately unsustainable."—David Calleo and Marco Zambotti, *Survival*, October 2009

"I want to recommend a new book called *The Power Problem: How American Military Dominance Makes Us Less Safe, Less Prosperous, and Less Free*. The book's got a good explanatory subtitle, but to briefly sketch the thesis, Preble argues that our over-large military establishment isn't just a waste of money, but actually harmful to our security. . . . If we had much less military capacity, we would have a much narrower definition of the strategic purpose of our military—to defend the country against threats—and would find that we were happy with that equilibrium. But the large military spawns a grandiose strategic concept that winds up writing checks that even a gigantic military can't cash. I think this analysis is dead on."—Matthew Yglesias, *Think Progress*, 25 April 2009

"I recommend Christopher Preble's excellent new book, *The Power Problem* . . . which tackles the familiar justifications for American dominance head-on, and shows that the usual pieties about global stability or spreading democracy are far from airtight."—Stephen M. Walt, *ForeignPolicy.com*, 12 May 2009

"In an important new book, *The Power Problem*, Christopher Preble defies the conventional categories and gives us a 21st-century foreign policy consistent with American traditions. . . . Preble argues that our current defense posture is radically out of line with American interests, properly understood. He calls for scrapping our outdated Cold War alliances, and insists that the constitutional goal of 'the common defense of the United States' could be secured by a military budget far smaller than what we currently spend."—Gene Healy, *Washington Examiner*, 14 April 2009

"An important book, *The Power Problem*, . . . puts forth the case that American military power naturally invites excessive or irrelevant use, and that the habits of mind created by military supremacy have caused the United States to be less safe than otherwise, less free, more vulnerable, and less able to do the things that fundamental national security demands. Its author, Christopher A. Preble, is a former officer in the U.S. Navy and is head of foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute. He argues, as many others do, that the United States has a level of military power that it doesn't need, that has limited utility against stateless enemies and insurgents, and causes confusion between military strength and national power, the latter being the ability to actually produce a desired effect. It is a good and lucid book and should be read."—William Pfaff, *International Herald Tribune*, 16 April 2009

"Here is a book that Dwight D. Eisenhower—the general and the president—would have greatly admired. Like Ike, Christopher Preble has a keen appreciation for the limits of military power, for the consequences of its misuse, and for the dangers of militarization. *The Power Problem* is simply terrific."—Andrew J. Bacevich, author of *The Limits of Power: The End*

of American Exceptionalism"Those who believe that U.S. military power alone can protect our national security should read Christopher Preble's *The Power Problem* very carefully. By analyzing the costs and benefits of using military power, Preble provides a useful guide that policymakers and the American public should consider before sending our troops into harm's way."?Lawrence J. Korb, Senior Fellow, Center for American Progress"This extremely important book could not be more timely. Should the United States pursue 'military dominance'?Christopher Preble, a traditional conservative, courageously challenges the conventional wisdom. This thoughtful, tightly argued work is rich in insight and useful information and should be required reading for every member of Congress."?Carolyn Eisenberg, Hofstra University"Christopher Preble compellingly argues that America's recent predisposition toward deploying force rather than more subtly using the mystique of limitless ability that only superpowers can wield is hurting its interests and place in the world. The Obama administration is inheriting a nation wounded by a 'power problem' after the exposure of key limits in Iraq and Afghanistan. Preble's book is must reading for the Obama team and others if they want to understand why American power is slipping and what can be done to reverse this worrisome reality."?Steve Clemons, Director, American Strategy Program, New America Foundation, and publisher, *The Washington Note*"Christopher Preble skillfully analyzes the enormous and unaffordable economic and moral costs of our national security apparatus. He also shows that the cosmetic steps likely to be taken to reform the behemoth will fail. The basis of real reform, reducing the muscle-bound military colossus commensurate with a new grand strategy of prudence and restraint, is not what most liberal and conservative policy poo-bahs in Washington have in mind. Preble provides a useful guide to those truly interested in change, and he raises important questions for those who are going to wait for the wreckage to become obvious even to them."?Winslow T. Wheeler, Director, Straus Military Reform Project at the Center for Defense Information"Christopher Preble offers a provocative challenge to the presumption?prevalent among liberal internationalists as well as conservative interventionists since the earliest days of the post-Cold War era?that the world welcomes America's global military presence and that chaos would ensue if the United States were to step back from serving as a global sheriff. With striking clarity of logic and command of current American policy, he makes a strong case that American policy makers routinely allow ambitions to exceed even the awesome military might of a sole superpower?with the result that America is less safe and less free than necessary. The Obama administration would do well to carefully consider Preble's solution to this 'power problem': a more humble grand strategy based on a more realistic balance of America's power and foreign policy commitments."?Robert A. Pape, University of Chicago, author of *Bombing to Win*From the Back Cover"Here is a book that Dwight D. Eisenhower--the general and the president--would have greatly admired. Like Ike, Christopher Preble has a keen appreciation for the limits of military power, for the consequences of its misuse, and for the dangers of militarization. *The Power Problem* is simply terrific."--Andrew J. Bacevich, author of *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism*.

---

"Those who believe that U.S. military power alone can protect our national security should read Christopher Preble's *The Power Problem* very carefully. By analyzing the costs and benefits of using military power, Preble provides a useful guide that policymakers and the American public should consider before sending our troops into harm's way."-- Lawrence J. Korb, Senior Fellow, Center for American Progress.....

..... "This extremely important book could not be more timely. Should the United States pursue 'military dominance'? Christopher Preble, a traditional conservative, courageously challenges the conventional wisdom. This thoughtful, tightly argued work is rich in insight and useful information and should be required reading for every member of Congress."--Carolyn Eisenberg, Hofstra University.....

..... "Christopher Preble compellingly argues that America's recent predisposition toward deploying force rather than more subtly using the mystique of limitless ability that only superpowers can wield is hurting its interests and place in the world. The Obama administration is inheriting a nation wounded by a 'power problem' after the exposure of key limits in Iraq and Afghanistan. Preble's book is must reading for the Obama team and others if they want to understand why American power is slipping and what can be done to reverse this worrisome reality."--Steve Clemons, Director, American Strategy Program, New America Foundation, and publisher, *The Washington Note*.....

..... "Christopher Preble skillfully analyzes the enormous and unaffordable economic and moral costs of our national security apparatus. He also shows that the cosmetic steps likely to be taken to reform the behemoth will fail. The basis of real reform, reducing the muscle-bound military colossus commensurate with a new grand strategy of prudence and restraint, is not what most liberal and conservative policy poo-bahs in Washington have in mind. Preble provides a useful guide to those truly interested in change, and he raises important questions for those who are going to wait for the wreckage to become obvious even to them."--Winslow T. Wheeler, Director, Straus Military Reform Project at the Center for Defense

Information.....

..... "Christopher Preble offers a provocative challenge to the presumption--prevalent among liberal internationalists as well as conservative interventionists since the earliest days of the post-Cold War era--that the world welcomes America's global military presence and that chaos would ensue if the United States were to step back from serving as a global sheriff. With striking clarity of logic and command of current American policy, he makes a strong case that American policy makers routinely allow ambitions to exceed even the awesome military might of a sole superpower--with the result that America is less safe and less free than necessary. The Obama administration would do well to carefully consider Preble's solution to this 'power problem': a more humble grand strategy based on a more realistic balance of America's power and foreign policy commitments."--Robert A. Pape, University of Chicago, author of Bombing to Win About the Author Christopher A. Preble is Director of Foreign Policy Studies at the Cato Institute and a former commissioned officer in the U.S. Navy. He is the author of John F. Kennedy and the Missile Gap and Exiting Iraq: Why the U.S. Must End the Military Occupation and Renew the War against Al Qaeda.