

AMERICAN HEGEMONY: DELIVERING “UNPREDICTABLE INSTABILITY” THE WORLD OVER

I love Global Threat Hearings and curse you Richard Burr for holding the Senate Intelligence Committee’s hearing in secret.

At least John McCain had the courage to invite James Clapper for what might have been (but weren’t) hard questions in public in front of Senate Armed Services Committee Thursday.

Clapper started with a comment that was not prominent in (though it definitely underscored) his written testimony (Update: Here’s the transcript of his as-delivered statement.)

Unpredictable instability is the new normal. The year 2014 saw the highest rate of political instability since 1992. The most deaths as a result of state-sponsored mass killings since the early 1990s. And the highest number of refugees and internally displaced persons (or IDPs) since World War II. Roughly half of the world’s currently stable countries are at some risk of instability over the next two years.

It’s a damning catalog. All the more so given that the US has been the world’s unquestioned hegemon since that period in the early 1990s when everything has been getting worse, since that period when the first President Bush promised a thousand points of light.

And while the US can’t be held responsible for all the instability in the world right now, it owns a lot of it: serial invasions in the Middle East and the coddling of Israel account for many

of the refugees (though there's no telling what would have happened with the hundred thousand killed and millions of refugees in Syria had the second President Bush not invaded Iraq, had he taken Bashar al-Assad up on an offer to partner against al Qaeda, had we managed the aftermath of the Arab Spring differently).

US-backed neoliberalism and austerity – and the underlying bank crisis that provided the excuse for it – has contributed to instability elsewhere, and probably underlies those countries that Clapper thinks might grow unstable in the next year.

We're already seeing instability arising from climate change; the US owns some of the blame for that, and more for squandering its leadership role on foreign adventures rather than pushing a solution to that more urgent problem (Clapper, by the way, thinks climate change is a problem but unlike Obama doesn't consider it the most serious one).

There are, obviously, a lot of other things going on. Clapper talked admiringly of China's modernization of its military, driven by domestically developed programs, an obvious development when a country becomes the manufacturing powerhouse of the world. But China's growing influence comes largely in the wake of, and in part because of, stupid choices the US has made.

There was, predictably, a lot of discussion about cyberthreats, even featuring Senate Intelligence Committee member Angus King arguing we need an offensive threat (we've got one – and have been launching pre-emptive strikes for 9 years now – as he would know if he paid attention to briefings or read the Intercept or the New York Times) to deter others from attacking us with cyberweapons.

Almost everyone at the hearing wanted to talk about Iran, without realizing that a peace deal with it would finally take a step towards more stability (until our allies the Saudis start

getting belligerent as a result).

Still, even in spite of the fact that Clapper started with this inventory of instability, there seemed zero awareness of what a damning indictment that is for the world's hegemon. Before we address all these other problems, shouldn't we focus some analysis on why American hegemony went so badly wrong?