

EXPAT

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The Rich Man's Burden

by [Lucas Laursen](#)

Weighty matters are afoot in the United Kingdom. Prime Minister Tony Blair's recent **plan** to upgrade the fleet's nuclear-armed submarines is sending waves of complaint across the island. The debate rages: does the UK really need a nuclear arsenal in this post-empire, post-Cold War era? Similarly Japan, which wrestles with the role of its own constitutionally hobbled **military**. These former island empires have more in common with the United States than they might care to admit. But I write to bring your attention to the most critical element of all: fat.



You see, Japanese health ministers Noritoshi Ishida and Keizo Takemi are **blogging** their weight loss efforts over the next few months as an example for their constituents. Hey, it worked for Arkansas Governor **Mike Huckabee**.

And England was recently named the **most overweight** member of the European Union. Call me a loud obnoxious American (you won't be alone), but I cheerfully cede the epithet of "fat" to the Brits, Japanese, or anyone else, really. In fact, the capitalist in me laughs at what happens when the government here tries to mother its charges by cutting junk food from school menus: real mothers exploit the gap in the market ...er, **schoolyard fence**.

Maybe my bitterness stems from a traumatic childhood visit to a family ranch in Andalucía, Spain. I was entrusted with breaking in a gray speckled colt by running alongside it, steering with a rope. The hardened, wiry men who ran the ranch chuckled at my huffing and puffing. They said the horse was giving my round American belly a workout, which I would have refuted if I could have caught my breath. But this is not about me. This is about schadenfreude.

This is a time when the American dollar and image are at serious lows. I don't have to be fanatically patriotic to be annoyed at the hypocrisy of rich Brits telling me I represent an overweight, consumer-crazed, imperialist power. Brits shop in New York for the weekend. They sweat how many nukes to float at sea. But as old empires like the United Kingdom and Japan grow stronger, they grow stouter. Welcome back, guys. No more hiding behind the virtues of a rice and soy diet or the frugal values inculcated by post-war austerity. When the dollar and the chips are down, everyone wants to buy burgers.

I am happy for the company. Not because America is miserable, but because I would rather everyone was able to indulge in the luxury of worrying about weight and not starvation, or how

many nukes to carry and not the surfeit of small arms in, well, **small arms**. In fact, I recently learned of a Buddhist term, roughly the opposite of schadenfreude, which may be a better fit for my feelings. *Mudita*: a sympathetic joy.

I invite Britain and Japan to rejoin America in the trappings and anxieties of being a leading power—including our portly pouting. Call it the rich man's burden.