"**Refusing Battle: The Alternative to Persistent Warfare"**
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"Sir, I am deeply concerned about Iraq. The task you have given me is becoming really impossible ... if they (Sunni and Shiite) are not prepared to urge us to stay and to co-operate in every manner I would actually clear out. ... At present we are paying eight millions a year for the privilege of living on an ungrateful volcano out of which we are in no circumstances to get anything worth having."

Winston Churchill to British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, Sept. 1, 1922

Despite the seriousness of the present economic crisis, the greatest danger to the future security of the U.S. is Washington's inclination to impose political solutions with the use of American military power in many parts of the world where Washington's solutions are unneeded and unsustainable. President Barack Obama must arrest this tendency by making pragmatic and methodical changes to the goals of American military strategy. The Bush legacy in foreign and defense policy presents Obama with a stark choice: Will we continue to pursue global hegemony with the use of military power to control and shape development inside other societies? Or will we use our military power to maintain our market-oriented English-speaking republic, a republic that upholds the rule of law, respects the cultures and traditions of people different from ourselves, and trades freely with all nations, but protects its sovereignty, its commerce, its vital strategic interests and its citizens? This essay argues for the latter approach; a strategy of conflict avoidance designed to make the U.S. more secure without making the rest of the world less so.

For Americans who've lived in a world with only one true military, political and economic center of gravity — the U.S. — changing how America behaves inside the international system is not an easy task. Since 1991, Americans have become so accustomed to the frequent use of American military power against very weak opponents they seem to have lost their fear of even the smallest conflict's unintended consequences.

But the 21st century is no time for the leaders of the U.S. to make uninformed decisions regarding the use of force or to engage in desperate, end-game, roll-of-the-dice gambles. Recent events in the Caucasus involving Russia and Georgia may simply be a foretaste of what is likely to happen during the 21st century in much of Asia, Africa and Latin America, where the ancient practice of encouraging one ethnic group to dominate others as a means of securing foreign imperial power is breeding new conflicts. These conflicts are likely to resemble the Balkan Wars of the early 20th century, except that fights for regional power and influence will overlap with the competition for energy, water, food, mineral resources and the wealth they create. In nations such as Iran and Turkey, states with proud histories, huge populations under the age of 30 and appetites for more prominence in world affairs, the influx of wealth from the energy sector will also support much more potent militaries and, potentially, more aggressive foreign policies, too.

In this volatile setting, direct American military involvement in conflicts where the U.S. itself is not attacked and its national prosperity is not at risk should be avoided. Otherwise, American military involvement could cause 21st century conflicts to spin out of control and confront Americans with regional alliances designed to contain American military power; alliances that but for American military intervention would not exist. It is vital the U.S. not repeat the mistakes of the British Empire in 1914: overestimate its national power by involving itself in a self-defeating regional war it does not need to fight and precipitate its own economic and military decline.

Avoiding this outcome demands new goals for American military power and a strategic framework that routinely answers the questions of purpose, method and end-state; a strategy in which American military action is short, sharp, decisive and rare. Such a strategy involves knowing when to fight and when to refuse battle.

LEE'S CHOICE

On June 24, 1863, the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia — 74,000 strong — completed its crossing of the Potomac River and pushed northward into Pennsylvania toward Gettysburg. Six days later, when Robert E. Lee, the Confederate commander, arrived in front of Gettysburg, he discovered to his dismay that a much larger and better equipped Union Army — 115,000 strong — confronted him in strong defenses on the high ground above the town. As an officer of engineers, Lee knew what this development meant for his army; his troops would have to attack uphill while the Union troops poured rifle and artillery fire into them.

Fortunately for Lee, his opponent opted to immobilize itself in defensive positions. The Army of Northern Virginia was not yet decisively engaged. Lee still had options.

Lee could move his army away from Gettysburg, placing it between the Union Army and Washington, D.C., an action likely to draw the Union Army out of its strong defensive positions to attack and eliminate the danger Lee presented to Washington. Such a fight would occur on terms more favorable to Lee, increasing the likelihood of yet another Southern victory. A major Confederate victory on Northern territory would almost certainly have resulted in Lee's occupation of Washington, D.C., and maybe even Southern independence.

Flush with their victory at Chancellorsville seven weeks earlier, Lee and his troops were spoiling for a fight, and they got the one they did not want or expect. After repeated charges and the loss of thousands of men, Lee retreated southward over the Potomac River without interference from the Union Army, but Lee lost a battle that cost the Confederacy the war.

Lee should have refused battle. Had he done so, he would have kept his army and its capabilities intact until he could achieve a position of advantage and with it more favorable conditions for the employment of his force.

LOSING AN EMPIRE

When word reached Britain on Aug. 1, 1914, of Germany's mobilization for war, Winston Churchill recorded that of the Cabinet "at least three-quarters of its members were determined not to be drawn into a European quarrel unless Great Britain was herself attacked, which was unlikely." The members knew the English Channel and the massive Royal Navy made a German offensive against Britain not only unlikely, but impossible.

However, Edward Grey, the British foreign secretary, a man who spoke only English, seldom left England and was contemptuous of foreigners, reached a different conclusion. He believed moral obligations dictated British intervention to save its historic enemy, France, from defeat. While England's drinking classes sang the jingoistic ballad made popular during the Boer War, "We've got the men, we've got the ships, we've got the money too," Grey warned the House of Commons, "If France is beaten ... and if Belgium fell under the same dominating influence, and then Holland and then Demark ... the most awful responsibility is resting on the government in deciding what to do."

The argument was specious. Germany's war aims had nothing to do with Britain or the states mentioned. It did not matter. Grey's emotional appeal to patriotism, and fear, worked.

When Field Marshal Herbert Kitchener, the newly appointed British minister of war, told the Cabinet its decision to go to war with Germany and Austria-Hungary meant the British Empire would have to maintain an army of millions, the war would last for at least three years and that it would be decided on the continent — not at sea — the Cabinet ministers were astonished. For reasons that seem baffling now, Britain's political leaders, including Churchill, who was first lord of the Admiralty, believed a war with Germany would be short, and that the Royal Navy — not the British and French armies — would decide its outcome in a great sea battle with the German surface fleet. The possibility that Britain's very small, professional army could not sustain a war with Germany and Austria for more than a few months, that Germany would decline to fight on Britain's terms (at sea) and that the war on land would consume Britain's national wealth, did not seem to occur to most of the Cabinet members until Kitchener made his presentation.

How could the British leaders have been so misguided in their assumptions? The British interpreted the world that existed beyond Britain's global imperial power structure in ways that flattered their self-image of limitless money and sea-based power.

Britain should have refused battle and sought strategic conditions more favorable to the effective use of Britain's considerable, but still limited, military and economic resources. Instead, Britain joined a regional conflict, turning it into a world war; a war Britain, along with France and Russia would lose until the manpower and industrial might of the U.S. rescued them from defeat in 1918.

Britain's human losses were staggering; one in 16 British men aged 15 to 50, or nearly 800,000, died. Paying for Britain's victory in World War I led to a tenfold increase in Britain's national debt. Paying the interest alone consumed half of British government spending by the mid-1920s.

Britain fought a war that cost the British people their national power, their standard of living, and, in less than 20 years, their empire. Had anyone in London's leadership stopped to seriously examine what outcome (end-state) it was they wanted to achieve with military power (purpose) and what military capabilities (method) were at their disposal to do so, it is doubtful they would have reached the decisions they did.

PRICE OF VICTORY

The lesson is a straightforward one: When national military strategy fails to answer the questions of purpose, method and end-state, military power becomes an engine of destruction not just for its intended enemies, but for its supporting society and economy, too. Regardless of how great or how small the military commitment, if the price of victory is potentially excessive, then the use of force should be avoided. After all, the object in conflict and crisis is the same as in wrestling: to throw the opponent by weakening his foothold and upsetting his balance without risking self-exhaustion.

This strategy served President Franklin Roosevelt well during the years leading up to and including World War II. Roosevelt concluded it made no sense to challenge the German war machine on its own terms. That was a job Roosevelt left to Stalin. Instead, Roosevelt avoided German strength and moved his forces through North Africa and Italy waiting for the combined effect of massive Soviet offensives and Anglo-American bombing campaigns to weaken the Nazi grip on Europe to the point where France could be invaded. When American and allied forces stormed ashore at Normandy, the strategic outcome in Europe was effectively decided.

But even when conflict is forced upon the U.S., as it was in World War II or Korea in 1950, there are still opportunities to halt ongoing, inconclusive military operations before they consume America's military, economic and political reserves of strength. This was Eisenhower's rationale for ending the Korean conflict in 1953. Unfortunately, chief executives such as Eisenhower are rarer than hens' teeth.

Before committing to military action, political and military leaders must always measure what they might gain by what they might lose. Even when wars are won and the victorious military achieves total military domination of its opponent — the case in Iraq and Afghanistan — the population of the "defeated" country may not submit to the victor's demands, particularly if the victor insists on garrisoning his troops in the defeated population's territory. If the foreign military presence provokes local hostility — and it usually does — the result will be more fighting, not stability. These are all good reasons for the U.S. to end conflicts on terms the defeated party can accept and disengage U.S. forces; even when the terms may not meet all of America's security needs. What militates

against this line of reasoning is the delusion of limitless national power and the unhealthy condition of national narcissism that thrives on it.

The Johnson administration's decision to intervene with large-scale conventional forces in Vietnam rested on this delusion. Even worse, President Lyndon Johnson subscribed to the idea that whatever military action the American government initiated, it was inherently justified on moral grounds, even if, as in the case of Vietnam, the military action turned out badly for the U.S. Tragically, Johnson's wish-based ideology made retreat from inflexible and irrational policy pronouncements impossible when they no longer made sense.

Wish-based ideology is dangerous because it imagines a world that does not really exist; the kind of world described in 1992 by the late Defense Secretary Les Aspin, where the U.S. armed forces are employed to "punish evil-doers," or Ambassador Madeleine Albright's idea that armed forces not engaged in fighting should export democracy-at-gunpoint. Not only has this ideological thinking and behavior since 1991 failed to create stability around the world, it has made the U.S. and its allies less secure. Understanding why means leaving the 20th century's wars of ideology behind.

The U.S. and Europe spent most of the 20th century coping with the forces of nationalism and social change unleashed by the French Revolution and Karl Marx's mock scientific theory of history as the systematic unfolding of a predictable, dialectical process.

The Bolsheviks, later called communists, tried to unite the two in an attempt to perfect human society through force of arms at home and abroad. Fascists were ideological opportunists who borrowed from the right and the left seeking to fuse society's classes inside mass movements of radical nationalism.

The failed utopian projects resulting from both European ideologies turned the 20th century world into a battlefield littered with the ruins of great civilizations. Communism and fascism exalted territorial conquest and occupation; a form of total warfare that pushes violence to its utmost limits and rejects the deliberate employment of military means to achieve anything less than the opponent's complete annihilation — what Stalin and Hitler called "victory."

Such war aims are not limited to changing the opponent's policy stance to create the basis for a new status quo all sides can support. The aim of total war is to replace the defeated government and its supporting society with ones subservient to the victor's. It is the mentality that created the Warsaw Pact. This mind-set is dangerous and incongruous with the strategic interests of the American people and the realities of the 21st century. Political and military leaders who talk and think in these terms should be rejected. The disproportionate use of military force and the unlimited political aims it supports will not protect or safeguard American interests or the interests of our allies.

In the 21st century, the "total victory" construct as it equates to the establishment of Western-style governments and free-market economies subservient to the U.S. is

counterproductive. In the Middle East, as well as in most of Africa, Latin America and Asia, “damage control,” not “total victory,” is the most realistic goal for U.S. national military strategy.

NEW GOALS AND DIRECTIONS

America’s experience since 2001 teaches the strategic lesson that in the 21st century, the use of American military power, even against Arab and Afghan opponents with no navies, no armies, no air forces and no air defenses, can have costly, unintended strategic consequences. Put in the language of tennis, the use of American military power since the early 1960s has resulted in a host of “unforced errors.” Far too often, national decision-making has been shaped primarily by the military capability to act, not by a rigorous application of the purpose/method/end-state strategic framework.

Decision-making of this kind explains why Operation Iraqi Freedom never had a coherent strategic design. The capability to remove Saddam Hussein was enough to justify action in the minds of American leaders who assumed that whatever happened after Baghdad fell to U.S. forces, American military and civilian contractor strength would muddle through and prevail. It’s also why U.S. forces were kept in Iraq long past the point when it was clear that the American military and contractor presence in Iraq was a needless drain on American military and economic resources.

The superficial thinking informed by a fanciful view of American history and international relations that gave birth to the occupation of Iraq is not a prescription for American prosperity and security in the 21st century. The recently annunciated military doctrine known as “persistent warfare” is a case in point.

Persistent warfare advocates the use of military power to change other peoples’ societies through American military occupation. It’s a dangerous reformulation of Thomas Jefferson’s advocacy for the bloody excesses of the French Revolution summed up in his slogan, “Until all men are free, no man is free.” Fortunately for the American people, President George Washington rejected Jefferson’s enthusiasm for an American alliance with Revolutionary France, an alliance that would have invited the destruction of the new U.S. “Twenty years’ peace, combined with our remote situation would enable us in a just cause to bid defiance to any power on earth,” Washington argued in 1796.

Washington understood the importance of making prudent choices in national military strategy at a time when the economic and political development of the United States was extremely fragile. Today, America’s economic woes along with the larger world’s unrelenting drive for prosperity creates the need for new choices in national military strategy. The most important choice Obama must make is to reject future, unnecessary, large-scale, overt military interventions in favor of conflict avoidance; a strategy of refusing battle that advances democratic principles through shared prosperity — not unwanted military occupation.

ISLAMIST TERRORISM

This strategy does not change America's policy stance on Islamist terrorism. The exportation of Islamist terrorism against the U.S. and its allies must remain a permanent red line in U.S. national military strategy. Governments that knowingly harbor terrorist groups must reckon with the very high probability that they will be subject to attack. However, long-term, large-scale American military occupations, even to ostensibly train indigenous forces to be mirror images of ourselves, are unwise and should be avoided. Iranian interests gained prominence in Baghdad because Tehran's agents of influence wear an indigenous face while America's agents wear foreign uniforms and carry guns. And Iran will remain the dominant actor in Iraq so long as it maintains even the thinnest veil of concealment behind the façade of the Maliki government and its successors.

As a declaratory goal of U.S. military strategy, conflict avoidance is not merely a restatement of deterrence or a new affirmation of collective security. It is a policy stance that stems from a decent regard for the interests of others, regardless of how strange and obtuse these interests may seem to Americans. It is an explicit recognition by Washington that no one in Asia, Africa, the Middle East or Latin America wants American troops to police and govern their country, even if American troops are more capable, more honest and provide better security than their own soldiers and police. The question for Americans is how to translate the goal of conflict avoidance into operational strategy: What will the U.S. do if it is not compelled to fight?

Conflict avoidance would appear to require action on several levels. First, conflict avoidance requires that America continue to maintain the military power to make a direct assault on U.S. and allied security interests unthinkable and then pursue peaceful relations with the peoples of the world, so the danger of war involving the world's great military powers is reduced and contained. America already has a surplus of military power for this stated purpose. American nuclear power is overwhelming, and any state or subnational group that contemplates the use of nuclear weapons against the U.S. or its allies understands that nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in general have "return addresses" on them with ominous consequences for the user. American conventional military power is no less impressive when it is employed within an integrated, joint framework that exploits capabilities across service lines.

What America lacks is an efficient and effective organization of military power for the optimum use of increasingly constrained resources. More specifically, the 1947 National Security Act reached block obsolescence years ago.

Second, conflict avoidance balances the need to make the U.S. secure against the danger of making the rest of the world less so. Instead of defining events around the world as tests of American military strength and national resolve, and rather than dissipating American military resources in remote places to pass these alleged tests, the U.S. should define its role in the world without feeling compelled to demonstrate its military power. Otherwise, the U.S. runs the risk that other states, not the U.S., will dictate America's strategic agenda.

Though as privately pro-British as his cousin President Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt had no intention of declaring war against Germany on behalf of another state, including Britain. He would not make President Woodrow Wilson's mistake and commit millions of Americans to an ideological crusade that promised no tangible strategic benefit to the American people. Put more bluntly, Roosevelt would not commit political suicide for Churchill.

From 1939 to 1942, Roosevelt resisted Churchill's considerable powers of persuasion, providing only the assistance Britain needed to survive and nothing more. When Hitler turned on the Soviet Union, Hitler's closest ally until June 1941, Roosevelt reasoned he could afford the time to build up American strength while the Nazis and communists exhausted themselves in an ideological war of mutual destruction.

Even after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt declared war only on Japan. Roosevelt had no intention of declaring war on Germany if it could be avoided. It was Hitler who — in an essentially romantic gesture of solidarity with Japan unanimously opposed by the German General Staff — declared war on the U.S.

HANDLING RUSSIA

In the Caucasus, a region where political structures are closer in character to the Mafia organizations of Al Capone than Jeffersonian democracy, it makes no sense for the U.S. and its European allies to extend security guarantees. Russia's security interests in many of the states that border it are legitimately paramount. American interests in these regions shrink to insignificance next to Russia's.

Whereas Russia's proximity to Georgia and Ukraine ensures Russia's ability to effectively and efficiently apply military power, the U.S. and its allies are no more able to guarantee Georgian or Ukrainian security than Britain could guarantee Poland's security against Nazi and Soviet military intervention in 1939. In eastern Ukraine beyond the Dnieper River and the Crimea, where the population is unambiguously Russian in language, culture and ethnicity, it would be folly to think that a guarantee of NATO military assistance would be interpreted as anything but a threat.

Third, when the U.S. confronts crises and conflicts, American armed forces should be committed on terms that favor the U.S. where the use of military power can achieve tangible strategic gains for the nation. As Churchill argued in 1909: "It would be very foolish to lose England in safeguarding Egypt. If we win the big battle in the decisive theater, we can put everything else straight afterwards. If we lose it, there will not be any afterwards."

American military interventions have routinely violated this line of reasoning. In Vietnam, American military assistance failed for many reasons, chiefly because the Saigon government was thoroughly corrupt and indifferent to the security of its own people. All the military might at America's disposal, whether the North Vietnamese military enjoyed sanctuaries in neighboring states or not, was never enough to rescue the

incompetent South Vietnamese government from its eventual conquest by North Vietnamese communists.

America's decision to garrison Iraq after its initial goals of removing Saddam and eliminating WMD were achieved added little, if anything, of strategic value to American security, but the presence of so many conventional American forces did present America's enemies in the Muslim world with an opportunity they would have otherwise missed: the chance to directly attack U.S. forces, damage American military prestige and exhaust American economic resources while strengthening their own. By the beginning of 2008, the most serious unanticipated outcome of this exposure was a monthly bill of $12 billion to maintain U.S. forces in support of a Shiite-dominated government in Baghdad that was and is effectively tied to Iran.

Meanwhile, the U.S. military has become a co-belligerent for the various factions and peoples — Kurds, Turks, Iranians, Saudi, Sunni or Shiite Arabs — struggling for power inside Iraq. These realities explain why the Bush administration was reluctant to remove large numbers of troops from Iraq. The current status quo is not merely fragile, it will not survive the withdrawal of U.S. military power.

WHAT ABOUT AFGHANISTAN?

In consideration of what to do next about Afghanistan's rapidly deteriorating situation, current discussions in Washington are dominated by people who advocate increasing force levels and plunging these forces into Pakistan's tribal areas. Yet a more sober analysis suggests the real problem with Afghanistan resides in Kabul, another corrupt and ineffective government unworthy of American military support.

The key questions missing from discussions in Washington about Iraq or Afghanistan since 2001 include: Where is the legitimate government that asked for help from the U.S. in defeating the internal armed challenge to the government's monopoly of control over the means of violence and political power? Legitimacy is not exclusively a function of elections. Legitimacy is also defined by a government's competence to win and hold power in ways that benefit American and allied interests.

Where are the organized indigenous forces defending the legitimate government that must conduct the operations? While U.S.-provided training, equipment and advisers can significantly improve a partner state's capabilities, there must already be an indigenous force to equip, indigenous fighters to train and a senior leadership echelon to advise. And the costs of long-term U.S. military assistance should be realistically assessed. Had any of these questions been raised and accurately addressed within the purpose/method/end-state framework, it is doubtful American military action would have followed the course it did after Sept. 11.

Treating conflict avoidance as a declared strategic goal should give pause to those in Washington who think counterinsurgency is something American military forces should seek to conduct. For outside powers intervening in other peoples' countries as we have

done in Iraq and Afghanistan, so-called counterinsurgency has not been the success story presented to the American people. Making cash payments to buy cooperation from insurgent groups to conceal a failed policy of occupation is a temporary expedient to reduce U.S. casualties, not a permanent solution for stability.

Lord Salisbury, one of Britain's greatest prime ministers, told his colleagues in the House of Commons "the commonest error in politics is sticking to the carcass of dead policies." Salisbury's words should resonate strongly with Americans today. America's scientific-industrial base and the military power it supports give American policies and interests global influence, but the deliberate use of American military power to bring democracy to others in the world under conditions that never favored its success has actually weakened, not strengthened, American influence and economic power.

It is crucial that choices among competing resource allocations in defense be illuminated by a much clearer perception of their likely strategic impact. Strategy and geopolitics always trump ideology, and military action is not merely a feature of geopolitics and statecraft, it's the employment of it.

The choices the new president makes among various military missions will ultimately decide what national military strategy America's military executes. Of the many missions he must consider, open-ended missions to install democracy at gunpoint inside failed or backward societies along with unrealistic security guarantees to states and peoples of marginal strategic interest to the U.S. are missions America's military establishment cannot and should not be asked to perform.

Today, America's share of the total world gross national product is roughly 32 percent, substantially less than its 49 percent share of 40 years ago. Yet the U.S., like the British Empire 100 years ago, continues to lead the world in the creation of wealth, technology and military power. And, thanks to American naval and aerospace supremacy, America retains the strategic advantage of striking when and where its government dictates, much as Britain did before World War I.

But like Britain's resources in 1914, American resources today are not unlimited. Years of easy tactical military victories over weak and incapable nation-state opponents in the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq have created the illusion of limitless American military power. This illusion assisted the Bush administration and its generals in frustrating demands from Congress for accountability; allowing politicians and generals to define failure as success and to spend money without any enduring strategic framework relating military power to attainable strategic goals.

The result is an unnecessarily large defense budget of more than $700 billion and military thinking that seeks to reinvigorate the economically disastrous policies of territorial imperialism. Unchecked, the combination of these misguided policies will increase the likelihood the U.S. follows the path of Britain's decline in the 20th century. Though Britain was not defeated militarily in World War I, it squandered its blood and treasure on a self-defeating war with Germany in 1914 along with a host of imperial experiments

in the aftermath of World War I, all of which were political, military and economic disasters for the British people. A strategy of refusing battle that routinely answers the questions of purpose, method and end-state in the conduct of military operations is the best way for the U.S. to avoid following in the footsteps of the British Empire into ruin. AFJ

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