

« 19 »

Peacekeeping vs. Peace

The American ruling class's consensus that it has the right and duty to prod, if not to shove, foreigners up the evolutionary ladder—and lesser Americans as well—led the US government to engage foreign peoples as deeply as many traditional empires had, and exposed the American people to the ills normally attendant to empire-keeping. This has deep Darwinist roots. As we have seen, during the Mexican War of 1846–48 some progressive-minded Northerners were as convinced of their duty to dominate Mexicans for their benefit as Southern slaveholders were of theirs to do that to Negroes. The architects of post-Civil War Reconstruction wanted to uplift the South's blacks while teaching Southern whites a lesson—America's first venture in “nation-building.” Turn-of-the-century imperialists wanted to take on the global “white man's burden.” Woodrow Wilson cast the Great War as mankind's final struggle for perpetual peace, and invaded Mexico to “teach them to elect good men.” Since World War II, our ruling class has imagined itself quieting mankind's quarrels and leading humanity to victory over poverty, disease, and ignorance.

Inertial Empire

The Cold War's consensus on foreign policy amounted to this: To keep Communists from “fishing in troubled waters,” America must prevent as many as possible of the globe's quarrels from turning violent. It must also provide “international assistance” (*né* “foreign aid”) to guide the mass of backward humanity's social development. While the Soviet Empire lasted, our ruling class's interference in other peoples'

business was limited to the single issue of alignment in the struggle against the Soviet Union. After the Cold War, the inertial force of habit and an environment of reduced risk led to deeper involvement in more countries with less and less force, more and more reflexively. Thus did the ruling class further hazard America's peace.

Because the American people recoil at the notion of being “the world's policemen,” few argued explicitly that the United States should take on Great Britain's former role in maintaining global order. “Imperialist!” had been the Soviet Union's slander upon America. Imperialism runs against the American people's grain. Nevertheless, by the turn of our century American troops were deployed in some 150 countries. Even when not engaged directly in military operations, US military and civilian personnel advise governments in Colombia and other places engaged in civil war. American diplomacy is the hinge of hot and cold wars in the Middle East and East Asia. Elsewhere, the US government is involved—if only verbally—in controversies of deadly importance. All agree that the American people want no part of empire. But (so goes the consensus) great power requires exercising imperial responsibility; if the great power shuns responsibility, the world will slide into chaos, and the great power will lose the peace.

But, by 2012, America's deep involvement had led to the black flag of the Muslim jihadist movement flying over four US embassies as rioters besieged two dozen more, and terrorism had become an American domestic reality.

In short: *America neither wages war in the dictionary meaning of the term nor enjoys peace. This is what so often happens to imperial powers: because they seek to manage peoples rather than to eliminate enemies, they seldom wage real wars. Nor can they ever really be at peace with those they are trying to manage. Eventually, colonial wars come home.* This is the polar opposite of John Quincy Adams's notion that wise foreign policy begins (but does not end) with an attempt to imitate the golden rule: If you want to be left in peace, it really does help to leave others in peace, too.

The elite consensus that reversed the founding generation's commonsense is as shallow as it is broad. Our foreign policy establishment, composed of liberal internationalist, realist, and neoconservative wings, is unanimous that America should lead the world and that

the world yearns for their particular brand of leadership. But its components' prescriptions, lacking as they do the capacity to compel results, result in more trouble than peace.

During the Cold War, anti-Communists were proud that America radiated some of its domestic peace, freedom, and prosperity from Helsinki to Hong Kong—the *Pax Americana*. Anti-Communists wanted to “make tyranny tremble” because, it just so happened, the principal threats to America’s interests were a species of tyrants, Communists. The widespread belief that opposing *these* tyrants was good for America and for the world brought together Americans whose primary concern was with what George Washington had called “our interest guided by justice” and *some* of those who, following Woodrow Wilson, imagined that there was no difference between the interests of Americans and those of mankind in general.

But other Wilsonians were anti-anti-Communists. Their mindset was mirrored by William Appleman Williams’s *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (1959). They wanted America engaged in the Cold War, all right—but on the other side. Eventually, this New Left’s thinking spread throughout America’s foreign policy establishment.

The Cold War’s immediacy helped to ease our ruling class into commitments intentionally fuzzy to cover the often-contradictory purposes of its various sectors.

Dramatis Personae

Liberal Internationalists believe that America must play a Progressive role in the world, and resent bitterly the American people’s unwillingness to do that. This position’s most concise statement in our time, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.’s 1995 *Foreign Affairs* article, “Back to the Womb? Isolationism’s Renewed Threat” argued that multilateral institutions embody the world mind—that is, the preferences of people like himself. Americans must cheerfully support the United Nations, engage in peacekeeping missions, increase foreign aid, serve multilateral causes.

Schlesinger’s point was *not* that Americans should overthrow the world’s bad guys, but rather that Americans should expose themselves to danger as part of largely peaceful multilateral efforts at

progressive reform—however the World Mind (i.e., US Liberal Internationalists and their far-flung friends) might define that.

Neoconservatism is nearly a mirror image of Schlesinger’s liberalism. Joshua Muravchik’s 1996 *Foreign Affairs* article “The Imperative of American Leadership: A Challenge to Neo-Isolationism” also inveighs against the American people’s preference for minding their own business. But Muravchik and neoconservatives believe that Americans have a duty to “rule—or lead—others” because “there is no authority higher than America. . . . In short, America must accept the role of world leader.” America freed the world from the Soviets, and only it has what it takes to help people free themselves from the remaining bad guys. We Americans have the moral legitimacy that comes from disinterestedness, and the power; we should also have the will. As William Kristol and Robert Kagan put it in the 1996 *Foreign Affairs* article “Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy,” declining responsibility for “the peace and security of the international order . . . becomes in practice a policy of cowardice and dishonor.” This position amounts to the “benign,” “temporary,” “imperialism” advocated by Norman Podhoretz.

Neoconservatives are more willing than liberals to use some force to benefit mankind. But, like liberals, they cannot imagine people to people wars because, like liberals, they hardly consider the possibility that foreigners’ resistance to our leadership might take more to overcome than it would be good for us to exert.

An older realism sees the world in need of a mere “sheriff,” and Americans wearing the star, but acknowledges that the “sheriffing” must actually serve US interests. Colin Gray argued (*The Sheriff: America’s Defense of the New World Order*, 2004) that the world is lucky, and that all states may benefit if non-predatory America quashes the world’s disrupters. Gray has no doubt that anti-US terrorism is a price that Americans must pay for playing what he considers America’s proper role in the Middle East. Yet Gray writes that the US government should play sheriff only to the extent that the price for doing so is kept low because, if the United States does not serve itself through sheriffing, its career as sheriff will be brief indeed. Realists, however, have seldom paid attention to how much war America must suffer just to *try* providing for others’ peace.

Modern realists William Odom and Robert Dujarric argued in *America's Inadvertent Empire* (2004) that America must "lead the world" because what the authors call "American institutions" fit America for the job. These they call "patterns, rules and practices most often manifested in organizations—political, social, and economic— . . . they also include ideologies, which are made up of beliefs—religious, moral and cultural—that individuals use to explain and rationalize the world around them." English translation: Americans are the only modern people so morally grounded that they are willing to give their lives for causes they deem just.

Our Soul at Stake

Yet while the authors do not describe what the source of that morality might be, what undermines it, and what preserves it, they make clear that bending US policy to reflect the interest of the countries they call the empire's "full stakeholders" might sacrifice America's soul. That is not news. John Quincy Adams had warned that an America engaged in others' business "would be no longer the ruler of her own soul."

Niall Ferguson's *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of American Empire* (2004) abstracts from souls. For Ferguson, all human activity has the same objective purpose: domination. Ferguson's America is necessarily imperialistic because it is big and pervasive. A British subject, Ferguson asserts: (1) Americans have always exacerbated their imperial grasping by hypocrisy; (2) Americans are insufficiently experienced in hypocrisy and must learn it from the masters; and (3) Americans deserve the troubles they bring on themselves, because they are both stupid and usually on the wrong side of things. Therefore, he blames the United States for terrorism: the United States helped "Israel establish military superiority over the Arab counties, *forcing* the Palestinians to resort to terrorism . . ." (emphasis added). He laments: why can't the Americans do empire with style—the way the British did, without American nonsense about right and wrong?

In short, Ferguson likes imperialism, but not imperial America because he detests America's culture, which he calls a "novel

Protestant-Deist-Catholic-Jewish fusion."² It does not occur to him that, without America's peculiar culture, there would be no American power—that all depends on the character of souls.

A Loose Grip on the Subject

Now for the reality: Today's American empire began in October 1956, when America's foreign policy establishment sided against Britain's and France's forceful protection of their property in the Suez Canal, which Egypt's new Gamal Abdel Nasser regime had nationalized. These Americans (especially at the CIA), who thought of themselves as "the real revolutionaries," believed that they could resolve the quarrels of what would become known as "the Third World," and *guide its administration and development*—an imperialist commitment that could be fulfilled only in the absence of significant opposition. They believed there would be next to no opposition.

But because opposition was always there, efforts to fulfill such commitments abroad produced inconclusive military engagements. At home, they upset the balance among the elements of America's culture.

Already in 1953 the US government had decided to create a surrogate in the Middle East by shaping Iran's monarchy to CIA standards. Under the guidance and with the help of the CIA's Liberal Internationalist experts, Iran's Shah Westernized his country, removing as much of Shia Islam's symbols and sustenance as he could. But this "white revolution," as his American advisers called it, made the Shah so unpopular that the black-robed Ayatollah Khomeini easily mustered mobs against him—and against America.

Desperate for a *point d'appui* in the Middle East after the Shah's overthrow by the Shia, America's liberals, neoconservatives, and realists imagined a Sunni-based, anti-Shia alliance composed of the Saudi monarchy (which ruled on behalf of the radical Wahabi sect) and of Iraq—Iran's historic enemy, where secular Sunni Saddam Hussein ruled a Shia majority on behalf of a Sunni minority. This US project also included several Gulf sheikdoms where the Shia are under Sunni rule. Our establishment did not imagine either that Saddam, whom

the CIA had helped to power would pay no attention to the role that Americans envisaged for him, or that Iran would become the focus of hope for the world's Shia. Both happened.

Our ruling class was surprised that Saddam took the first opportunity to aggrandize himself at the expense of his nearest neighbors—Kuwait and Saudi Arabia—Sunni-ruled though they are. Then, our statesmen convinced themselves that pushing Saddam back to his own borders (what they called the Gulf War of 1991) would cement their leadership of the Middle East (especially among the Arabs whose chestnuts America had pulled from the fire) and enable them to settle its disputes, including the perennial Arab-Israeli conflict. Reality baffled our bipartisan ruling class. Again.

They could not understand why, after 1991, these Arab states became more anti-American, more supportive of terrorism than ever, why the 1990s saw a crescendo of anti-American terrorist attacks, why terrorists cited specifically the US actions against Iraq as the justification for their outrages: the bombings of US embassies, the near sinking of the USS *Cole*, and 9/11 itself. Osama bin Laden's anti-American *fatwa* of 1996 deals disproportionately with Iraq. In short, they did not understand that the events of 1990–91 had increased hate for, decreased fear of, and hence decreased respect for, America.

US policy toward Egypt from 1956 to our time may be summed up as “futile attempts to purchase its rulers' favor.” Colonel Gamal Nasser had taken power in Egypt in 1953 with support from the Muslim Brotherhood and money from the CIA. But, thereafter, he did not need the latter to suppress the former. Just gallows and jails. The Americans offered Nasser liberal schemes of economic development. But Nasser wanted weapons to attack Israel, and got them from the Soviets. In 1972, his successors felt the Soviet grip tightening, and began to turn westward. They began accepting some \$2 billion per year from the United States in exchange for promises not to attack Israel—which they were not about to do, having recently lost yet another war to that country.

Americans thought that the money would also buy liberal socioeconomic development, a measure of democracy, and moderation too. But Egypt's military rulers kept the cash for themselves. Meanwhile

they diverted outward the ever-growing Muslim Brotherhood's anger. More and more, Egypt became the main intellectual source of Sunni Islam's terrorism against America to the point that, in 2012, when the Brotherhood replaced the military, its first demand was that America free the Egyptian cleric convicted of the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center. Yet by 2013, as the Brotherhood's misrule led to the military's renewed repression of it, the US government had so identified itself with the Brotherhood as to share in the Egyptian people's revulsion against it.

By 2012, Iran's Islamic Republic had erased any remaining doubt about the self-defeating nature of our ruling class's engagement with the Third World. It is no exaggeration to state that every administration from Bill Clinton's to Barack Obama's used every tool, every approach of every part of the US foreign policy establishment to prevent, dissuade, even just to delay Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons. But the liberals' offers of aid did not persuade Iran's mullahs to prefer joining “the international community” to having nukes. Nor did the neoconservatives' talk of “regime change,” coupled with empty threats of “surgical strikes,” do the trick. The realists' economic “smart sanctions” also proved unequal to this consensus US establishment objective.

In sum, the US foreign policy establishment's several factions speak in inherently meaningless terms such as “security assistance,” “democratic support,” “bombing,” or “boots on the ground.” Abstract language helps them to avoid explaining, above all to themselves, why their recipes should produce the results they expect—just what *this* alignment with a foreign faction, *those* subsidies, the destruction of *these* bombing targets or the killing of *those* individuals, or “boots on the ground,” would do to secure the peace Americans want. Having lost the habit of connecting ends and means, each faction talks loudly and then executes policies that discredit and dispirit America. Thus has America begun to suffer the fate of empires.

Souls, Forgotten and Lost

Rudyard Kipling's 1897 warning to his countrymen as they celebrated their empire is worth recalling:

*God of our fathers, known of old—
 Lord of our far-flung battle-line—
 Beneath whose awful Hand we hold
 Dominion over palm and pine—
 Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
 Lest we forget, lest we forget! . . .*

*Far-call'd our navies melt away—
 On dune and headland sinks the fire—
 Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
 Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!
 Judge of the Nations, spare us yet,
 Lest we forget, lest we forget!*

*If, drunk with sight of power, we loose
 Wild tongues that have not Thee in awe—
 Such boasting as the Gentiles use
 Or lesser breeds without the Law—
 Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
 Lest we forget, lest we forget!*

*For heathen heart that puts her trust
 In reeking tube and iron shard—
 All valiant dust that builds on dust,
 And guarding calls not Thee to guard—
 For frantic boast and foolish word,
 Thy Mercy on Thy People, Lord!*

A poet, Kipling did not specify what Britain's ruling class would "forget" by watching over "palm and pine." But always and everywhere, immersion in unessential things obscures the essential ones. Imperial Britain suffered more than its forces' wear on "dune and headlands." Like Athens and Rome, like other self-governing powers that lost their character by ruling others, Britain forgot how and why it had ruled itself.

In short, because empire-keeping sets up countless confrontations with alien ways, it forces the imperialist to choose again and again

between forcefully imposing his ways on others or having others' imposed on him. The imperialist fancies he can evade the choice and keep his compass. But empire cripples first his judgment, and then his soul.

Britain's imperial career began to end in 1919 in the city of Amritsar, India, when a British officer read "the Riot Act" to a mob of some 15,000, then killed 379 and wounded 1,100. A half-century earlier, British public opinion had noted such events as evidence that Britain was imposing civilization on savages. A story, likely apocryphal, illustrates that earlier era's mindset. An Indian protesting the viceroy's ban against the suttee (burning widows on their husbands' funeral pyres) as "our custom, our religion" is said to have received the following reply from a British officer: "We too have a custom driven by our religion regarding men who burn women. We hang them." But, by 1919, British society was no longer sure what it would tolerate, what not, which things are worthy of toleration and which things are not.

In our time, British society has become so tolerant of intolerant peoples that it tolerates less and less its own members' criticism of the intolerant ones. In the resulting confusion, the moral qualities that had made Britain the school of Europe, if not of the world, vanished quite as much as those of Athens had vanished through the Peloponnesian War that the Athenian empire had engendered. America seems to be following suit.

In twenty-first-century America, the ruling class consensus appears to be that many, prolonged, inconclusive involvements all over the world are a permanent, sustainable feature of America's life. But these adventures are unsustainable above all because they lead America to forget what it is about. In 2012 Afghan troops mingled with Americans were outraged that the infidels sometimes walked in front of them during prayers, and demanded that the infidels wear surgical gloves when handling the Koran, while the Americans were revolted by the Afghans' use of street waifs as "dancing boys" kept for anal intercourse, as well as by their torturing dogs for fun. The Pentagon's answer was to train US soldiers to tolerate the Afghans' ways. It did not occur to US officials to insist that the Afghans respect the Americans' sensibilities.

The following is exemplar of the contrary. After 30 US troops died when their helicopter was shot down over Afghanistan on August 6, 2011, their US military funeral featured an imam who chanted over the coffins (in Arabic): “The companions of the fire [that is, these dead infidels] are not equal with the companions of heaven, who are the winners. We present their fate to the people so that they may convert. . . .” If indeed America’s relations with the world are a struggle for hearts, minds, and souls, we may ask whose heart, mind, and soul had done what to whose?

Islam, by Default

Throughout the Muslim world there is no high-level dissent from the proposition that Muslims have the right and duty to kill *any* infidels, because *some* infidels have disrespected Islam, and no acknowledgment of the infidels’ right to their own ways when these conflict with Islam. In 2013 Muslim mobs and death squads burned and blasted Christian churches throughout the Middle East and Africa. Whereas in 1950 Christians amounted to one-fifth of the Middle East’s population, by 2013 that population had been reduced to two in a hundred.

In 2012 Muslim leaders cited an anti-Muslim video made in the United States as good cause for anti-American violence. The presidents of Egypt and Turkey (both of the Muslim Brotherhood) demanded that the US government act against any Americans who *they* say defame Islam. They argued that we who indulge our right to free speech cannot complain when Muslims indulge their right to burn our embassies and kill our diplomats. In other words: if you Americans want to feel safe, you must make sure not to offend us. They felt safe demanding this because our ruling class seems not to have thought of forcing respect for ordinary Americans’ safety and sensibilities—sensibilities that the ruling class shares less and less.

The mindset of America’s ruling class may be seen by its media’s definition as “hate speech” of a billboard in New York subways that said, “In any war between the civilized man and the savage, support the civilized man. Support Israel. Defeat jihad.” Without benefit of full-dress argument, *it judged the mere apposition of civilization*

and jihad to be more hateful than jihad. Thus also President Barack Obama, speaking to the United Nations, condemned *in equal terms* Americans who insult Muslims, and Muslims who burn and kill Americans. His administration also ordered the offending video maker’s imprisonment. Hate speech, you know.

However, none of those sensibilities kept the ruling class from denouncing its opponents in domestic fiscal struggles as “jihad-ists,” as “hostage takers,” as “terrorists with bombs strapped to their chests.”

As Americans adopt clashing civilizational sensibilities, America’s public life is increasingly characterized by groups that struggle to stigmatize each other as intolerable haters. Peace at home becomes as problematic as peace abroad.

Unlike America’s founders, unlike their forbears in the Cold War’s early years, today’s ruling class does not think about what America would have to do, and above all *to be*, for Americans to live peacefully among ourselves and among alien peoples. Our century’s foreign engagements of the imperial kind have abetted this willful forgetting of the basis of our peace.

<< 20 >>

The War on Peace

The “war on terror” became a war on peace itself because American statesmen, increasingly alienated from America’s culture, conceived of what they were doing in terms invented to skirt the cultural basis of terrorism. That is why these terms guarantee endless strife.

The Muslim world does not live in peace, domestic or international. The bedrock Koranic principle—that *dar al-Islam* is the realm of peace, whereas the rest of mankind lives in *dar al-harb*, the place of war—is the reverse of reality. The deepest reason for this, Sunni Islam’s theological rejection of reason in the mutawalite controversy of the eleventh century, is beyond our scope.

In modern times, the Muslim world began exporting its warfare beginning in the late 1960s. Our bipartisan ruling class did not take it seriously, treating even Iran’s 1979 seizure of the US Embassy and diplomats—a textbook act of war—as a minor irritation. It refused to confront the fact that its conception of a peaceful post-colonial world is flawed, that the Muslim world in particular would present Western civilization with deadly multidimensional challenges that reach within our own body politic.

What War, on Whom?

The events of 9/11, however, looked too much like war to be treated lightly. Still, our ruling class refused to consider what establishing America’s peace would take. President George W. Bush personally declared war: *sort of but not really, on no one in particular*. What he meant is beside the point of what followed, namely a lot of shooting

and spending that led not to peace but to the American people’s further alienation from peace, from their government, and from one another.

What did anyone expect? Ordinary Americans expected what President Bush promised on September 20, 2001, that US military operations post-9/11 would yield the heads, and surely the tails, of any and all who had bloodied Americans or had enabled terrorists. Americans wanted to exterminate mankind’s vermin as vehemently as had John Quincy Adams.

Although, by 2001, few alive remembered life as free as it had been before terrorism’s onset in the late 1960s, all wanted to live in peace at least as trouble-free as on September 10. But our ruling class concluded that America would have to change—and not for the better. Senator Phil Gramm’s *cri de coeur* “I don’t want to change the way we live!” reflected the popular view, but proved to be contrarian. Our ruling class rushed above all to change American people’s lives. Peace was the first casualty.

The *title* of the initial US military operation, “Enduring Freedom,” encapsulated the people’s interest. But the *substance* did not. No US military operation in the “war on terror” was ever formulated to restore any freedom, to end any problem.

The Congress never debated alternatives, nor settled on a course of action. Instead, the “war” policy, set by the executive branch of government, was the geometric resultant of the ruling class’s clashing intramural preferences. Its members doubled down on what they had been thinking and doing, never reasonably connecting means ad hoc to ends. *Whatever the American ruling class was thinking, it was not thinking about establishing peace or about maintaining the way we live*. Without explanation, it sacrificed both piecemeal to “the war,” slipped into the habit acquired during the Cold War of regarding the struggle as eternal, and settled down to the pleasure and profit of managing it.

The Muslim World

Understanding our ruling class’s dysfunctional war requires keeping in mind its misunderstanding of the Muslim world and of America itself. Aggressively ignorant of all religion, it took for granted that

Islam was even more a relic of the past than Christianity. Turkey's defeat in World War I had ended the Ottoman Caliphate. Mustafa Kemal, known thereafter as Atatürk (father of Turks), had forcefully secularized its Turkish home. For generations thereafter, polite opinion deemed unworthy of notice the Muslim response, the Muslim Brotherhood, founded by Hassan al-Banna, an obscure Egyptian.

Our ruling class supported the Muslim world's secular revolutionaries as if they were imitators of Atatürk, and as if they were inherently friendly to America. Neither was true. Thus, when speaking to CIA Director Allen Dulles (1953–1961), Secretary of State John Foster Dulles used to refer to Egypt's dictator Gamal Abdel Nasser as “your colonel,” because the CIA had had a big hand in bringing him to power. CIA was also present at Nasser's creation of Yasser Arafat's *Fatah* (1959), which became the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and which the US government later helped to transmute into the Palestinian Authority (PLA). In 1982, when Israel's invasion of Lebanon had placed Lebanese Christian forces in the position physically to annihilate the PLO, the CIA prevailed in US government councils to save Arafat and hundreds of PLO cadres, transferring them to Tunisia on US ships.

The fact that this happened a decade *after* the PLO had murdered Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics, *after* it had assassinated a US ambassador, the fact that the US government continues to subsidize the PLA, shows how impervious to reality have been the hopes that our ruling class continues to place on people like Arafat. The CIA also started Saddam Hussein's career in 1959, and helped bring to power the secular Ba'ath Party that ruled Iraq and Syria in alliance with America's enemies.

Ignorance about Islamist revolutionaries matched our ruling class's ignorance about secular ones. Islam's day had never passed. Islam is, and cannot but remain, the only authoritative standard of good and evil, right and wrong, available to the Muslim world. Whereas the Ottoman Caliphs had developed an increasingly Western outlook over centuries and had the authority to interpret Islamic law, the Sharia, as best suited them, the underground Brotherhood had no authority but the Sharia and no goal but to reverse the Atatürk revolution. Meanwhile Saudi Arabia's native Wahabi movement grew in

parallel, fed by oil money. Thus, roughly in proportion to Western civilization's evident weakening and to the failure of the Muslim world's westernizing regimes to embody appealing cultural models, Islam and its law reasserted themselves from the Atlantic to the Pacific in newly militant ways.

By 2012, Atatürk was history, and a version of Islam had reconquered its native region as well as energized violent dissidence within Europe and America itself. By 2012, Turkey itself was ruled by a party affiliated with the Brotherhood, which jailed the generals who had guarded Atatürk's revolution. It re-Islamized the state apparatus, and laid the groundwork for an Islamic dictatorship. In Egypt, a Brotherhood dictator had replaced Nasser's military heirs. These turned the tables a year later. But the Brotherhood remained the only alternative.

Western polling organizations in the Muslim world confirm that the Muslim masses' primary complaint against westernizing rulers is lack of Islamic, anti-Western commitment—neither brutality nor kleptocracy, much less authoritarianism. They accept Saudi Arabia's regime—which defines authoritarianism and kleptocracy—because it embodies the Wahabi sect at home and funds the Muslim Brotherhood abroad. Our ruling class has yet to catch on that this is problematic for our peace.

It did not grasp that the Ayatollah Khomeini's 1979 overthrow of Iran's Shah was a rejection of Western civilization. Nor did it see that such secularists as Saddam Hussein who styled themselves as champions of Islam were helping to redefine Islam in anti-Western terms. Nor did it grasp that Islam's perennial internal struggles are being won by its most violent elements—the Wahabis and the Muslim Brotherhood. The Obama administration officially reported to Congress that the Brotherhood is a “mostly secular” organization. Some at CIA even saw the Muslim Brotherhood as “the Muslim equivalent of Europe's Christian Democratic parties.” Our culturally, historically illiterate ruling class missed the fact that a whole civilization was being mobilized against America and that this is a big, multidimensional problem.

How big is the problem? Consider: Islamic civilization had been the West's biggest problem from the eighth century AD until 1683, when

Poland's king Jan Sobieski destroyed the Muslim host at the gates of Vienna. (What if his cavalry charge had failed, or if the 732 AD Battle of Tours had gone the way that the battle of Constantinople went in 1453?) Even so, Muslim pirates continued to terrorize the Mediterranean, to take Christian slaves, and to prey on commerce until France subdued North Africa in 1830. In the extraordinary period between 1830 and the 1960s, the Muslim world posed no problem. Now the problem is back. Might events on the scale of 723, 1683, or 1830 be required to restore our peace vis-à-vis that world? Perhaps not. But then what *would* it take? This question is the touchstone of seriousness.

Our ruling class skirts serious answers and doubles down on its own fancies, unable to see that the response to a civilizational challenge must begin by strengthening our own civilization.

What Is America About?

Whereas, at the outset of the Cold War, our leaders more or less came together for a crucial while on the need to reaffirm the American people's profession and practice of Judeo-Christian civilization—recall Will Herberg's *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* (1955)—the ruling class's response to 9/11 seemed to confirm the Muslim world's indictment of the West for cultural nihilism. Thus US media, US diplomacy, and US armed forces abroad promote the same recipe of secularism and sex roles that have been the substance of its *Kulturkampf* at home. Our ruling class tries to impose its preferred "human rights" on backward foreigners out of the same sense of intellectual-moral entitlement by which it bids to reform backward Americans. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton said: "Gay rights are human rights, and human rights are gay rights." Thus accordingly, every year, all US embassies observe "gay pride month," including rebukes to the locals who dissent from its premises—in the name of the American people. For example, while Pakistani law imposes two years' imprisonment for sexual acts "against the order of nature," the US Embassy publicly "stands with" those who violate that law.

No surprise, then, that the Muslim world's common-currency, by no means confined to "extremists," is that America embodies and

exports godlessness, immorality, the dissolution of families—that America is mankind's nuisance, if not the enemy of all good things. Indeed, a poll of Afghanistan's Taliban fighters confirmed that they were motivated principally by foreigners' attempts to impose an alien way of life upon them. Our ruling class counters that terrorism and violence in general are the consequence of insufficient secularization, of moral fixations, and of rigidity in gender roles. Hence America must fight to break down these mores.

So, while the Muslim world was always the enemy of Judeo-Christian civilization, it is twice fiercely the enemy of aggressively post-Christian America.

Al-Qaeda?

Yet, 9/11 demanded that the US government do *something* in or about the Muslim world. But what? And what would that achieve? The president, the government, the media, and, hence, public opinion accepted without question the CIA's definition of responsibility for 9/11 and, by implication, for terrorism in general: Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda. This was a motley crew of some 200, mostly Arabs, mostly useless, who had joined Osama in Afghanistan in the mid-1980s to fight the Soviets, had followed him in 1989 to Saudi Arabia and Sudan, and then followed him back again in 1996—on a Russian aircraft rumored to have been brokered in Iraq.

Imputing responsibility to these so called "Afghan Arabs," *persons extraneous to the Muslim world's ruling class*, with which the US government has what it considers good relations, delimited what US policymakers considered to be the problem. Conveniently, this exonerated the Muslim world's most influential people and diverted attention from weighty religious-cultural factors. But tailoring US actions to that narrowly defined problem guaranteed that no amount of effort would bring peace.

Reflexively, the US government labeled any and all persons against whom it directed the "war on terror's" operations as "al-Qaeda." It considered terrorism by non-"Afghan Arabs" as evidence that al-Qaeda had "*metastasized*" or "*franchised*"—metaphors that befog the question. Followed by academics who should know better and

by a lazy press, the government reasoned that since al-Qaeda does x, y, and z, therefore whoever does x, y, and z must be al-Qaeda, however extraneous they be to “Afghan Arabs.” So, people from Africa to Ruritania intent on terrorizing grasped that calling themselves al-Qaeda is something of a “force multiplier.” As Muslims born or converted in America and Europe radicalized themselves and committed terrorist acts, our ruling class debated fruitlessly whether they were “al-Qaeda” or not without reconsidering what use of the term adds to or subtracts from our understanding of the phenomenon.

In sum, our ruling class’s construct of al-Qaeda is emblematic of its lack of intellectual rigor in the service of escapism.

The Bush and Obama administrations seem to have assumed, privately as well as publicly, that eliminating bin Laden and his bunch would deliver peace from terrorism. They never explained how the demise of this set of “rogues” would achieve that result. But the notion that Osama, or any set of “rogues,” is the proximate (never mind the ultimate) cause of anti-American terrorism was always patent nonsense. Osama had proved irrelevant a decade before he died in 2011. *That death changed nothing.*

Even as al-Qaeda waned post-9/11 (estimates of the number of “Afghan Arabs” alive and at large in 2013 ranged around two dozen), terrorism continued to wax while what was left of respect for America turned to contempt: Whereas, on the night of 9/11, Muslim governments had quickly dispersed the crowds celebrating the carnage lest the sight provoke America, on September 11, 2012, governments through much of the Muslim world were neutral or complicit in murderous mob attacks on US Embassies in their capitals, as the marshaled mobs shouted: “Obama, Obama, there are a billion Osamas.” Indeed.

America, bloodied and thrashing like a wounded animal, was drawing predators small and large at home as well as abroad.

The Logic of Peace and War

The collective wisdom of our bipartisan “best and brightest” went so wrong, because it spurned the natural logic of peace and war.

By logic, defining military operations follows tightly from defining the ends that the operations are to serve. By nature, this work of definition consists of the deliberative concatenation of ends and means. This is a legislative function (intellectually though not necessarily organizationally). As such, it requires confronting alternatives and admits of no intellectual shortcuts: *What is the problem? Will these operations’ success restore the peace?* Military forces are good for killing people. Killing people can serve to eliminate troubles. *The test of military operations is whether, if and when they are successful at killing the people intended to be killed, the troubles persist or not.* If the troubles do persist, it means perforce that the people who were killed were less troublesome than those left alive, and hence that the military operations were ill conceived. It means that those who defined the operations proved themselves unworthy of their jobs.

US military operations in 2001–2003 killed any number of people in Afghanistan and Iraq in the process of overthrowing those countries’ governments. These deaths naturally reduced America’s problems to some extent. But our ruling class neither understood what opportunities these operations had produced nor could it draw benefit from them. Because it never grasped the problems, it had merely thrown effort at them. Thereafter, groping, it applied to both countries what had become its default remedy: sociopolitical “nation-building” shielded by military forces. This imperial negation of the distinction between war and peace fed new conflicts with mostly new enemies and without logical end.

This is how the “war on terror” produced more war than peace.

What Is the Obstacle to Peace?

By November 2001, US forces had provided air support to Afghanistan’s Northern Alliance of Tajik and Uzbek tribes, enabling them to win their long-running war against the Pashtun tribes of Southern and Eastern Afghanistan and their Taliban government. In the Afghan fashion, most Pashtun cast off the Taliban label, switched sides, and sold their “Afghan Arab” auxiliaries to the United States, which shipped them to Guantanamo Bay prison. Though there is

no evidence that anyone killed or captured in Afghanistan had a role in the September 11 attacks, and no one suggested that any significant proportion of the leaders or followers of anti-American terrorism were killed, or that the US invasion had defeated hopes for the causes that terrorists serve, the US operation did serve peace by placing the US government in the position to warn Middle Eastern governments that they might expect the same fate as the Taliban, if any anti-US terrorism came from within the places they control.

Our ruling class gave no such warnings. Although most realized that, *pace* the CIA, there was more to the terrorist problem than the “Afghan Arabs,” that anti-American terrorism had long predated 9/11 and al-Qaeda, and that as Thomas Friedman put it, “98 percent of terrorism is what governments want to happen or let happen,” our ruling class was loath to discuss what the problem to be solved might be. It did not ask: “what is the obstacle to peace?”

**In the absence of a good answer to that question,
no military operations make sense.**

In 2002, the ruling class did not ask those questions because its several factions defined the “war on terror” according to their international preferences and above all according to their own domestic political identities. It is no coincidence that former anti-anti-Communists were now anti-anti-Muslim, and vice versa. The CIA and State Department wanted to shield their “Third World” favorites from the American people’s wrath. As during the Cold War, “Progressives” blamed America’s troubles on their bellicose fellow citizens. So they pressed to confine antiterrorist operations to further efforts to capture bin Laden and any Afghan Arab or Taliban who remained on the loose. They did not argue that this would bring peace, but rather that this exclusive focus would bring the United States closer to the several Arab governments. This was less a strategy than a reflection of identity.

The Defense Department, for its part, pointed to the fact that most anti-Western terrorists had come from Arab countries, where governments rule with iron hands—Egypt, Syria, Iraq, the Palestinian Authority, and Saudi Arabia, as well as from Iran. It argued that these

governments’ basic attitudes are the problem, which could be dealt with, if at all, only by *a massive attitude adjustment*. Overthrowing Iraq’s Saddam Hussein would begin that adjustment by giving the other governments powerful incentives to curtail incitement and support of terrorism within their borders.

The media translated the interagency argument into partisan terms—Democrats in favor of the State/CIA position, Republicans in favor of the Pentagon. Thus it deepened a preexisting divide within the American body politic and further embittered Americans against one another. The bitterness could only fester unresolved, because the ruling class agreed that the “war on terror’s” character should not be set by votes in Congress or by executive branch choices between clear alternatives. So, it ended up being set by intragovernment infighting mostly behind the scenes, featuring competitive leaking to favorite media. The resulting domestic and international incoherence helped make the “war on terror” self-perpetuating—a war on peace.

Iraq War, I & II

George W. Bush adopted all of the contending positions presented to him, and none. At the outset, he sought only the most politically appealing rationale for invading Iraq and overthrowing Saddam. By May 2003, the Iraqi regime that had caused America trouble had been swept away. America had provided an incentive (*potentially lively, had it been pursued*) for good behavior to other Middle Eastern regimes. Regardless of what might have been on George W. Bush’s mind when he said that America’s military “mission” had been “accomplished” on October 30, 2003, on the USS *Lincoln*, in fact “Iraq War I” had been won. Regardless of what anyone intended or did not intend, the overthrow of an aggressive enemy regime was a (*modest*) gain for peace.

But by then Bush had already begun to squander that gain, because State/CIA and the Saudi king had persuaded him to occupy Iraq indefinitely—that is, to start “Iraq War II.” But to do what? Thinly did Bush’s rhetoric veil that he never decided.

Everyone except the United States, it seems, had coherent objectives. The Sunni Saudis wanted to preserve the role of Iraq’s Sunnis.

Iraq's Sunnis were fighting to keep their privileges. Iraq's Shias wanted to rule the country to avenge themselves against the Sunnis. Iraq's Kurds wanted independence from Arabs, whether Sunni or Shia. All were willing to kill whoever stood in the way of their visions of peace. The moment the Americans took on ruling the country, they got in everybody's way. Hence Americans got killed and maimed on behalf of no objective relevant to America's own peace.

The Bush administration's contention that American troops were fighting terrorists in Iraq who would otherwise be terrorizing American cities was laughable: Why would anyone interested in terrorizing defenseless civilians in Indianapolis take on superbly armed US troops in Fallujah? The Bush team then settled on a less obviously absurd argument: Behind the shield of military occupation, American specialists in nation-building would build Iraq into a united democracy that would not threaten Americans, and whose benign example would transform the Middle East from an incubator of terror into a stabilizing part of the new world order. Alas, by 2005 it was obvious to most sentient beings that Iraq had never been and would not become a nation—never mind a radiator of order.

Iraq War II hardened the divisions between this artificial country's main religious-ethnic groups. The occupation's signature policies, "democracy" and "the surge," also earned America a reputation for fecklessness and dissimulation. Democracy? Far from freeing Iraqis to choose their own government, US viceroys spent most of a decade fruitlessly trying to negate the Shias', Sunnis', and Kurds' democratically expressed mutual antagonism.

Nor did the "surge" defeat anyone. Rather, starting in 2007, the main "surge" policy consisted of turning over to Sunni insurgents the tribal areas into which the Shia were pushing them. Rather than defeating them, the US government began arming them, paying them and protecting their new de facto borders. By the same token, US forces also chose one Shia faction and helped it to defeat its competitors within Shia-majority areas. The results of "the surge" may be called "Shiastan" and "Sunnistan." Before as well as during "the surge," US forces also secured the border of what has become Kurdistan—complete with its own army, flag, and language.

In sum, after a bloody decade, Iraq ended up divided more or less along ancient ethno-religious fault lines but more mutually bitter—though (except the Kurds) united in anti-Americanism—than the United States had found it in May 2003.

The occupation of Iraq also turned Americans against one another, and induced senior US military leaders to violate some of the most basic ethics of the profession of arms: They ordered American troops to operate in replenished minefields, where they lost life and limb. Politicians and generals also imposed "rules of engagement" on the troops that increased the number of dead and wounded, and sloughed off onto subordinates the task of distinguishing friend from foe. Rarely did honor rise above the lower ranks. Americans at home who convinced themselves that some kind of victory had been won should know better. There was neither victory nor peace.

Afghanistan

Similarly, in Afghanistan. By early 2002, Afghanistan had ceased to be any kind of problem for the United States. The Uzbeks and Tajiks had pushed the Pashtun back to their own ethnic areas. All tribes had learned what can happen to those who harbor guests who draw powerful enemies. The several ethnic groups and tribes, left to themselves, were in the process of adjusting to one another as they had for centuries. Almost no Afghans had heard of 9/11. Few had heard of America, and of those who had most thought well of it while the rest feared it. Here, too, America's military squaring of accounts with some of its enemies had made a small but real gain for America's peace.

But the Democratic Party, as a way of attacking "Bush's Iraq war" without seeming unpatriotic, demanded that US troops take a bigger hand in Afghanistan. The Bush team did not have what it takes to reply that further interference in that "graveyard of empires," in the lives of those notoriously xenophobic and bellicose peoples was a recipe for disaster there, and in nearby Pakistan as well. And so, beginning in 2003, the US government began to apply its default "nation-building" recipe: strengthening the central government vis-à-vis the provinces *though this meant disarming the very tribes that*

had won the victory against the Taliban; spreading civilian advisers throughout the land bearing inflammatory advice on how to live; making war on anyone who objects. Republicans, not to be outdone in the appearance of patriotism, became champions of the “nation-building” they had despised.

Whatever else happens in Afghanistan, there are now more ferocious persons there with more grudges against America and fewer fears of it than before. But the greater problem is that the US government has contributed to the radicalization of Pakistan. That may well mean more serious threats to our peace than the ones to which we have become accustomed.

By 2013, all but a few of our ruling class had concluded that Iraq-Afghanistan-style “counterinsurgency” (read, nation-building) is never to be repeated, because it proved unsustainable. The ruling consensus on the “war” shifted to “counterterrorism,” defined as killing as many persons as possible whom US intelligence designates as members of al-Qaeda or affiliates—whatever that may mean.

Intelligence vs. intelligence

The problem is that, since US intelligence collectors accept what comes their way without too many questions, in practice, the US military simply targets special forces and drone strikes against the persons who their informants designate. The informants, in turn, prepare their offerings to the customer’s much-advertised tastes. So, because of US intelligence’s aversion to quality control, we can be fairly confident that those killed by counterterrorism operations are the informants’ enemies—not so sure whether the people killed had ever heard of America.

The December 30, 2009, deaths by suicide bombing of seven CIA officers in Afghanistan by a man who they had prized as a source of targeting data for over a year gives us a glimpse into this problem’s magnitude. How many people US forces had killed at that bomber’s behest is an embarrassing secret. The US intelligence system is not set up to protect itself from deception.

In fairness, we must realize how implausible it is to imagine that any intelligence service could deliver the names and addresses of

enemy troops, or that the way to end a war is to kill the enemy’s rank and file. Our ruling class entertains such notions because it is determined not even to think of the hard things they would have to do to earn respect for America’s peace vis-à-vis their counterparts in foreign lands.

Were US officials to shift the “terror war” from killing foot soldiers to constraining foreign rulers, they could use the universal reach of drones to force such potentates to choose between ridding their domains of anti-Americanism and their own sure death. The names and addresses of these persons, the persons whose constraint in pain of death would stop terrorism, are in the public domain. There is no need to seek them out through arcane sources. Hence, intelligence, in its ordinary meaning of commonsense and logic, is essential for dealing with a big problem that consists of mutually reinforcing phenomena: the internal decay of Euro-American civilization and the rise of a vengeful, political Islam. That intelligence is even more lacking, but is beyond our scope.

In sum, by its behavior in Iraq and Afghanistan, our ruling class forced upon American public opinion a version of Gresham’s law: Wars that bring no peace drive out ones well calculated to deliver it. Henceforth the US body politic is far less likely than before to support any forceful effort to establish America’s peace. What if our ruling class, instead of policing foreign lands and sifting their inhabitants, had confronted foreign rulers with the choice between doing that policing and sifting or having America wage deadly war on them? We will never know.

As our ruling class’s fumbling of minor foreign challenges was depleting the American people’s reservoir of resolve for dealing with challenges from abroad, serious ones were arising. Russia was re-drawing into itself major pieces of the Soviet Empire, while China was quietly becoming the mistress of the Western Pacific Rim.

“The New Way Forward”
(January 2007–November 2009)

On January 10, 2007—nearly four years after the invasion of Iraq—President George Bush formally decided to back the Petraeus group. He outlined a new strategy known as “The New Way Forward,” the official

title of the program. In a nationally broadcast television address, Bush promised that at least five additional army brigades and two marine battalions (that is, about twenty thousand troops, with additional personnel such as military police, engineers, and aviation units that would bring the total closer to thirty thousand) would be sent right away to Iraq, to be stationed mostly in and around Baghdad and Anbar Province. "So America will change our strategy to help the Iraqis carry out their campaign to put down sectarian violence and bring security to the people of Baghdad. This will require increasing American force levels. So I have committed more than twenty thousand additional American troops to Iraq." At that moment in the polls, the president enjoyed an average 28 percent approval rating. Only Harry Truman and Richard Nixon at their lowest points had been more unpopular sitting presidents. Over 66 percent of Americans opposed sending any more troops to Iraq.³⁸

That additional manpower was to facilitate a new effort at securing neighborhoods, protecting the population, and expanding basic services. Bush promised security for Iraqis to participate in their new democracy and to revive the economy—in contrast to the prior strategy of stationing American troops in fortified compounds from which they ventured forth to patrol neighborhoods and attack terrorist suspects. Up to now the mission had been mostly "force protection" (not losing American soldiers in battle) and "counterterrorism" (killing anyone who was trying to kill our own). But now, in Ridgway fashion, there were six new talking points that summed up the Petraeus strategy: "Let the Iraqis lead. Help Iraqis protect the population. Isolate extremists. Create space for political progress. Diversify political and economic efforts. Situate the strategy in a regional approach."³⁹

The protocols sounded almost more sociological than military, the product of a university rather than of a battlefield. They ranged from entering previous no-go zones to more widely dispersing troops in Iraqi neighborhoods. In addition, the president formally announced that General Petraeus would succeed General George Casey as commanding general of multinational forces in Iraq. In general, Bush's announcement was greeted by disdain. Senator Joe Biden a week later introduced a Senate resolution opposing the surge. Senator Obama added another, calling for a mandatory phased troop withdrawal. Yet among a small number of analysts and officers, and the shrinking number of war supporters, the news of a surge at last brought relief—and even greater hope that the taciturn Petraeus would be at last given a chance to win the peace.⁴⁰

By June 2007, all five new brigades were in Iraq. With some 150,000 aggregate ground troops at his disposal, Petraeus was at last fully implementing the long-promised strategy. He tasked them with securing Baghdad, the surrounding Sunni areas in Anbar Province, and the mixed Sunni-Shiite Diyala Province. Quite abruptly, counterinsurgency strategy became the new American gospel throughout Iraq. Past tribal violence and anti-American terrorism were no longer to be consistently considered proof of lasting enmity. Instead, once-hostile civilians were invited back into the government. Insurgents were coaxed to either lay down their arms or, better yet, switch sides, through a variety of financial inducements and political strategies. The message went out that Americans were not going to leave according to predetermined and political timetables, but only when the new Iraq democratic state was secure and free of its enemies.

In these first few months of the surge, both American and Iraqi casualties skyrocketed. That was not surprising as high-profile patrols increased and coalition forces went into previously no-go insurgent strongholds. Back in Washington, even though the surge was just weeks old, nervous members of the administration began worrying about the political fallout over possible failure. Republican senators and congressional representatives, still smarting from the 2006 midterm rebuke, pressured for some sort of political settlement—even without progress on the battlefield. The new CENTCOM commander in the Middle East, Admiral William J. Fallon—before his removal a year later—did little to facilitate the strategy or the sending of more troops into Iraq, perhaps reflecting the resentment of the Joint Chiefs, who, after all, had suffered an end run by surge proponents.

Yet for all the politicking, by midyear 2007 there was some sense that the surge was gaining momentum in securing the country. The additional numbers of American troops had helped, but the change of tactics was even more important as Lieutenant General Raymond Odierno, commander of Multi-National Force-Iraq, began reassigning even pre-surge troops out of their forward operating bases and into smaller outposts inside Baghdad's neighborhoods. In the past such a conspicuous presence was seen as needlessly provoking Iraqi sensitivities; now ubiquitous Americans (with their Iraqi counterparts alongside) on the streets and sidewalks were intended to reassure civilians that they would be safe when they either joined Americans or fed them intelligence about insurgents and terrorists in their midst.⁴¹

Baghdad was not only Iraq's largest city and capital, but symbolic of the entire country. With new surge troops, General Odierno soon began to ring the city. Five brigades through much of 2007 were monitoring entry and exit, hunting down bomb factories and weapons caches, and organizing small urban renewal projects. But these preventive measures did not mean that the Americans did not seek to kill the enemy. In fact, while the media focused on stepped-up efforts at providing security and nation building, Odierno and Petraeus ordered a new all-out assault on terrorist enclaves. The names of the operations—Phantom Thunder, Phantom Strike, Lightning Hammer, Arrowhead Ripper—were reminiscent of General Matthew Ridgway's own similarly branded offensives in 1951 to counterattack the Chinese and regain respect for American lethality. At the end of 2007, in Anbar Province, at the center of the violence, nearly seven thousand weapons caches were confiscated and thousands of terrorists killed. The Sons of Iraq, a popular Sunni movement to expel al-Qaeda, had helped to enlist over a hundred thousand militiamen—including thousands of Shiites—to join in operations with Americans against the terrorists. These new allies were an unexpected boon for Petraeus, even if their support was sometimes fraught with controversy, given that many of the Sons of Iraq had American blood on their hands as former insurgent terrorists—and were now receiving up to \$300 a month as paid constabularies.

As a result of their movement into Iraqi communities, for the first time in the war, the number of American dead exceeded one hundred over three consecutive months, from April through June, 2007. Iraqi civilian losses stabilized and then fell to levels not seen since the insurgency and Shiite-Sunni strife had begun in earnest in 2006. To uninformed observers, getting out of the safe compounds seemed to translate into getting more Americans killed. Pressure mounted back home. In June, Senate Majority leader Harry Reid and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) warned President Bush that the Petraeus half-year-old surge had already failed: "As many had foreseen, the escalation has failed to produce the intended results . . . The increase in US forces has had little impact in curbing the violence or fostering political reconciliation." Almost immediately, the Democratically controlled House of Representatives went on record opposing the surge in a February 16, 2007, House Concurrent Resolution. Only a filibuster by a minority of senators prevented passage of the nonbinding resolution. Senator Barack Obama had a few days earlier called the surge a "reckless escalation" and had gone further

still by introducing legislation to remove all U.S. combat troops by March 2008.⁴²

Then quite abruptly the violence began to taper off. American fatalities in July fell below a hundred. They would never exceed that monthly number again for the duration of the war. By fall 2007, Iraqi losses tapered off as well. Insurgents were increasingly hunted down and killed or captured, thanks to new cooperation from war-weary civilian informants. Although few prominent leaders in Congress had believed Petraeus's September 2007 assurances that promised benchmarks—reduced levels of violence, more government services, and fewer American losses—were being met, it was clear by year's end that almost all were exceeded in fact. In late December 2007, the well-regarded Brookings Institution scholars Michael O'Hanlon, a foreign policy senior fellow, and Jason H. Campbell, a senior research assistant, returned from Iraq to report to often stunned audiences that violence had dropped to 2004 levels and that the Petraeus pacification policy was in many areas already working.⁴³

Iraqi government officials cited their own reduced casualties and the extension of government control over formerly insurgent territory. It was difficult to tell whether the so-called Anbar Awakening that had begun in spring 2006—in which Sunni tribal leaders turned against both al-Qaeda terrorists and ex-Baathists in their midst—was independent from, or fueled by, the subsequent American change in tactics and determination to stay and pacify Iraq. In June 2006, Army Colonel Sean MacFarland, along with Marine officers, had first met with Sunni tribal leaders in Ramadi and promised them aid. The subsequent surge incorporated the Awakening under Sheik Sattar, as well as the so-called Sons of Iraq—most prominently both by supplying them with money, and through biometric data distinguishing them from current terrorists and killers in their neighborhoods.

Tribal leaders had also by mid-2006 developed a healthy—and cumulative—respect for U.S. military lethality. Most were sick and tired of gratuitous al-Qaeda cruelty and extortion. Some were even eager for the American military to advocate their own seemingly neglected interests with the new Shiite-dominated Maliki government in Baghdad. Petraeus's subordinates, laden with cash and reinforcements, tried to exploit all those fissures in isolating the terrorists—well before the president authorized greater troop levels. The emergence of Iraqi counterinsurgent forces would soon coincide with the arrival of more Americans.⁴⁴

The second year of the surge, 2008, proved even more successful. In

July 2008, only thirteen American soldiers were lost. Baghdad turned mostly quiet—just thirteen months after the deployment of more American troops. Media accounts conceded that most political and economic benchmarks promised by Petraeus—under dispute throughout 2007—were being met and passed by late 2008. Oil production exceeded 2 million barrels per day. Rates of increases in Iraq's GDP reached 7 percent per annum. Sunnis returned to parliament; former Baathists vowed to reenter politics. Almost all public criticism of Petraeus vanished. Indeed, the anti-Iraq War protests themselves dried up, which might have suggested to the enemy that there was no longer any chance that domestic opposition would result in a sudden withdrawal of U.S. troops.

Suddenly, by midsummer 2008, Iraq was no longer a key issue in the presidential race. It disappeared from the front pages of most newspapers and was no longer the lead story on the evening network news channels. Calls on the Democratic side for an immediate withdrawal were quietly dropped; campaign websites were scrubbed of their antiwar platforms. Even the acrimonious charges of the September 2007 hearings were forgotten. A new fallback antiwar position spread that Iraq was no longer "lost," but that the current quiet had come too late and cost far too much—and could not be sustained. The evaluation of the surge quickly found itself embedded in election-year partisan politics. War critics insisted that it had not worked soon enough; supporters argued that Bush's gamble redeemed the entire occupation. Such squabbling would go on until mid-2008, when the radical downturn in violence was then beyond dispute.⁴⁵

Political bickering remained not over whether Iraq had drastically improved—it most unmistakably had—but whether such unforeseen success could really be attributed to General Petraeus and/or his surge. All sorts of alternate exegeses were advanced—some in part quite true, some transparently partisan revisionism: The U.S. announcement of not giving up had ipso facto convinced allied Iraqis to regain their confidence and the insurgents to lose their own. The early 2006 "Arab Awakening," which saw thousands of former terrorists join the Americans in Anbar Province, almost alone had tipped the scales in reducing violence before the arrival of American reinforcements. The Iraqi hatred of al-Qaeda was such that by 2007 open civil war had erupted throughout Iraq, and the Americans simply piggybacked onto antiterrorist sentiment.

Still other critics of the surge argued that by 2007 the Americans had cumulatively killed so many insurgents and terrorists that there was

bound to be a turn of the tide, one that only happened to dovetail with the appointment of General Petraeus. Just as importantly, the Iraqi Security Forces, years in the making, finally reached critical mass in 2007 and were able to shoulder far more of the war effort. The world spike in oil prices sent extra billions into the Iraq economy that improved daily life. Diplomatic outreach and tough negotiations convinced Iran, Syria, and the Gulf monarchies to stop funding their respective terrorist appendages at previous levels of support. In short, reasons to account for the turnaround without necessarily directly crediting Petraeus or the strategy that sent him there seemed endless.⁴⁶

Although traditional military analysts sometimes claimed that Petraeus had not taken the war to the enemy, in truth he and General Odierno killed and captured more enemy insurgents than at any other period of the conflict. It was largely seen as politically suicidal to boast of enemy losses—due to the memory of inflated body counts in Vietnam and sensitivity to newly allied and formerly hostile Iraqis. But one unemphasized feature of Petraeus’s public focus on nonkinetic operations and civilian outreach was a new latitude given to hunting down and killing al-Qaeda-related terrorists. By the end of 2008, American forces had killed or captured tens of thousands of them—there were soon twenty-four thousand prisoners in Camp Bucca alone—in addition to inflicting well over a hundred thousand casualties since the beginning of the war. Or, as one counterinsurgency officer later reminded Petraeus, “There was a lot of killing for the first six months of the surge in Iraq—you could call it compellence theory.” Was it incidental or integral to COIN strategy that public attention on social and economic reconstruction deflected focus away from more controversial increased killing of the “irreconcilable” enemy troops who had no intention of quitting—which in turn was essential in reassuring civilians to step up and participate in the new democracy? The question of what tactic actually brought the peace was never really answered; but it remained undeniable that the U.S. military had killed more insurgents than ever before—at a time when public attention was focused on the arguably less important aspects of nation building and winning hearts and minds.⁴⁷

Down from Olympus

David Petraeus turned over his by then relatively quiet command on September 16, 2008, to the gifted General Raymond Odierno, and then returned from Iraq to widespread adulation. Just two weeks later, on October 31, 2008, Petraeus assumed command of CENTCOM in Tampa, Florida, the most prestigious and important regional theater of operations in the post-9/11 military—directing counterterrorism operations in some twenty countries as well as overseeing the combat theaters in Afghanistan and Iraq.

There had been no major terrorist attack since September 11, 2001. Iraq was relatively quiet. The fighting in Afghanistan still remained off the front page. In theory, Petraeus could enjoy a well-earned, relatively quiet administrative post as he oversaw operations from Florida that were largely successful—at least in part because of doctrines he had promoted and used with demonstrable results in Iraq. Given that he was the most popular American general in a generation, Petraeus could no doubt expect to be offered either the chairmanship of the Joint Chiefs of Staff or the supreme command of NATO, the usual capstones for such a singular career.

The public certainly felt an enormous sense of gratitude to Petraeus for turning Iraq around. He immediately became almost as respected as Dwight Eisenhower following World War II, or perhaps more than Colin Powell during the early 1990s. *Time* magazine had judged Petraeus one of the one hundred most influential people of 2007. Several newspapers and magazines followed suit throughout 2007 and 2008, along with various awards and honors. As Petraeus left Bagdad in late summer 2008,

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates praised him by asserting that "history would regard Petraeus as one of the nation's great battle captains." By January 2010, David Petraeus was consistently cited in polls as one of the most widely revered men of his generation in the United States. In early 2011, a guest *Wall Street Journal* opinion editorial advised that Petraeus should be promoted to five-star general, an honor not bestowed since Omar Bradley had been made General of the Army in 1950. Senator Lindsey Graham likewise raised the issue of a Petraeus fifth star and thought there might be bipartisan congressional support for it.

An April 2011 poll ranked Petraeus as the most popular of all potential Republican presidential candidates for the upcoming 2012 election—even though he had emphatically earlier denied, in Shermanesque fashion, to Washington reporter David Gregory any intention of running for president: "No way, no how." His Gallup poll favorable-to-unfavorable ratings were an unheard-of 61 percent to 7 percent. By the end of Barack Obama's first two years in office, Republicans yearned to see Petraeus join the presidential race—if somewhat unsure exactly what Petraeus's politics were. In any case, in comparison with all the great twentieth-century American generals, perhaps only Dwight Eisenhower matched Petraeus's political savvy and understanding of the press and uncanny ability to seem liberal to Democrats and conservative to Republicans.⁶¹

Yet within months, the mass adulation of Petraeus began to fade—in a way reminiscent of William Tecumseh Sherman's retreat into the shadows following the end of the Civil War and his adamant disavowal of any political aspirations. The Republican primary fight returned to normalcy as political veterans vied for the nomination and Petraeus reiterated his uninterest in running for political office—and made it known for most of 2012 that he was also not interested in the Republican vice presidential nomination. Petraeus himself sometimes stepped into political controversy as the new CENTCOM commander. For example, in March 2010, he told the Senate Armed Services Committee that "a perception of U.S. favoritism for Israel" was hampering U.S. efforts throughout the region—a common sentiment often voiced by former U.S. generals who usually dealt far more frequently with Arab militaries and heard their constant criticisms of pro-Israel U.S. Middle East policy.

As CENTCOM commander, Petraeus was directly in charge of turning around Afghanistan as well—a theater that seemed to have suddenly gotten worse in 2009 even as Iraq had continued to quiet. If America had

supposedly “taken its eye off the ball” by launching a war in Iraq, would the quiet in Baghdad not mean that the U.S. military could have its eye on the ball on a single front in Afghanistan, and thus a similar quiet should likewise follow there? Petraeus was in some sense already in the awkward position of not fully basking in the calm he had produced in Iraq, while inheriting the chaos of a war he heretofore had had nothing to do with. No matter—the public expected another successful surge. Petraeus no doubt would again become the savior general of Afghanistan who did what others could not.

Originally President Barack Obama had campaigned on the quieter Afghanistan as the “good” war that was a logical and direct retaliation for 9/11—and one that had far more United Nations and NATO support. But now it was becoming far more unsettled than George Bush’s “bad” theater in Iraq that Petraeus had once saved and that Vice President Joe Biden was proudly proclaiming might “be one of the great achievements of [the Obama] administration.” Indeed, in the Obama administration’s first eighteen months, more Americans died in the upsurge in violence in Afghanistan than had been lost during the entire first eight years of the war. It was almost as if Petraeus’s old work in Iraq was claimed by others, while the old mess of others was now his own new responsibility. In addition, promising as a candidate to fix Afghanistan did not necessarily mean that as president Barack Obama wished to risk recommitting to Afghanistan in the manner in which the surge had once salvaged Iraq—given that it was unclear whether the two theaters were all that similar.⁶²

In June 2010, senior Afghanistan ground commander General Stanley A. McChrystal was abruptly relieved of command by President Obama for indiscreet remarks to a *Rolling Stone* magazine journalist about the Obama administration’s allegedly inept conduct of the war. With two supreme commanders gone in just a year and a half from Afghanistan—General McKiernan had been relieved just months earlier—President Obama needed continuity and stability. So he asked the national hero Petraeus to step down from his CENTCOM post and take over active command of the ground war in Afghanistan. Quite unexpectedly, Petraeus was appointed commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan on June 23, 2010, and was directing operations by July 4. Petraeus, in characteristic confidence, reflected on the appointment by comparing himself to the savior generals Grant, Ridgway, and Slim, who in World War II had saved the allied effort in Burma: “I’ve had a certain affinity

for leaders who have been given seemingly lost or at least very difficult causes.”⁶³

Yet new command soon proved a thankless job. For all the challenges posed by Iraq, it was Afghanistan that had always posed much more challenging problems for long-term stability and the creation of constitutional government. The terrain was far more difficult, with towering peaks and snow. The country was landlocked, without ports of access. Neighboring Pakistan, a volatile nuclear power, was at best an unreliable ally that was nonetheless essential to American resupply. The country’s borders with Iran, Pakistan, and the former Soviet republics likewise afforded sanctuary and free passage to insurgents of various sorts. Afghanistan was impoverished, without the oil that boosted Iraq’s economy. Illiteracy and tribalism, as well as a thriving drug trade, made counterinsurgency a far different proposition than in more literate Iraq. There were more NATO allies in Afghanistan than in Iraq, but they operated under far more restrictions, nation by nation, on the rules of engagement. As a rough index of their comparative levels of security, during the first full month that Petraeus took over in Afghanistan (July 2010), there were eighty-eight coalition deaths, compared to only four fatalities in Iraq.

At first, Petraeus sought to apply the same sort of “inputs” that had saved Iraq, requesting a surge of forces, replicating his counterinsurgency and civilian reconstruction teams, and urging that his old counterinsurgency partner, General Mattis, replace him as CENTCOM commander. But again, it soon became clear that a popular President Obama, who inherited a deteriorating situation in Afghanistan from the Bush administration, did not quite feel the same urgency to take enormous risks to save the ten-year-long war effort in Afghanistan as had a desperate and unpopular George Bush in the case of Iraq in 2006. If most of the old Bush conservative base had supported escalation in Iraq, the new Obama liberal core did not especially favor a similar effort in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, a surge was ordered; but quite unlike the escalation in Iraq, its psychological effects were somewhat nullified by Obama’s announcement of firm dates for unilateral withdrawals of U.S. troops.

The lack of clear success of the Afghan surge between 2010 and 2012 now began to raise questions about the circumstances of its model, the 2007 Iraqi surge: If more troops and a change in tactics in Afghanistan were not turning the war around, had such developments really ever worked in Iraq? In other words, when the surge did not immediately save Afghanistan—despite undeniable successes in Helmand and Kandahar

Provinces—it strengthened revisionist arguments that the Anbar Awakening and general disgust with al-Qaeda, not the surge, had secured Iraq. And thus without a commensurate “Afghan Awakening,” sending more troops and protecting the population would have little effect.

In any case, by 2011, the American public, after a decade of support, had lost most of its zeal for war, and the public concern over a surge in Afghanistan was not what it had been earlier in Iraq. President Obama had not met with his commanders in Afghanistan until months after taking office, and the administration seemed more concerned with leaving the country than with defeating the Taliban and leaving behind a stable government.

The Taliban had also learned a great deal over the decade, especially about American tactics in Iraq. It was proving a canny enemy who saw that IEDs were the best way to maim Americans and demoralize the public in the sparsely settled terrain of Afghanistan. U.S. helicopter and fighter sorties were employed far more frequently than in mostly urban Iraq—and far more often hit civilian targets, forcing Petraeus to apologize for collateral damage. Targeted drone assassinations of suspected terrorists in Pakistan were a favored tactic of the new administration, and their sometimes wayward strikes made counterinsurgency efforts in Afghanistan all the more difficult—especially against a wily enemy that knew the propaganda value of collateral damage. Pakistan proved a far more effective sanctuary for terrorists than had Iran or Syria in the case of Iraq; Pashtun tribesmen considered both sides of the border their ancestral home. In Iraq, the United States had removed a mostly secular dictatorship without religious support; but in Afghanistan, U.S. forces had toppled an Islamic theocracy. The latter fact made it more difficult to isolate Islamic fundamentalists from the general population.

After only a year, without the envisioned calm in Afghanistan, Petraeus gave up his command on July 18, 2011, to assume a new civilian post as director of the Central Intelligence Agency. Rumors had spread that Petraeus was growing dissatisfied with the Obama administration’s policies over troop levels in Afghanistan, but had, after some discussion, decided neither to resign nor to go public with his unhappiness. At one point, Petraeus was supposedly said to have warned of the Obama administration’s efforts to muzzle his military assessments of Afghanistan and relations with Pakistan, “They’re fucking with the wrong guy.” Yet, in some sense, the political handlers in the administration may have surmised that the reputation of General David Petraeus by mid-2011 was

not what it had been at the end of 2008. The CIA appointment was often interpreted by the media as a way to ease the popular but frustrated Petraeus into a position of power and reputation befitting his status—but without providing him the means to embarrass the president over the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan or to launch a political career, given that he was working inside rather than parallel to the Obama administration.⁶⁴

The penultimate years of the brilliant career of David Petraeus bore an uncanny resemblance to Belisarius’ final ceremonial offices—close to but without ultimate power. In vain he had privately opposed the withdrawal of all U.S. troops from a quiet Iraq in December 2011 and the continual announcements of a planned complete drawdown from Afghanistan. Petraeus was no doubt still largely seen by some in the Obama administration as a “Bush general,” even while conservatives saw him as a newly reformulated Obama appointee. Bob Woodward, the widely read Washington insider journalist, echoed the old charge of Petraeus’s supposedly “endless campaign of self-promotion” that led to ever more appointments and press coverage.⁶⁵

Although in theory he could have served as CIA chief while in uniform, Petraeus instead either was advised to leave the military, or chose to retire from the Army on August 31, 2011. He was only fifty-eight years old. It was rumored that Petraeus, after leaving Iraq, had preferred a post on the Joint Chiefs—in the fashion of laurels given to earlier generals of similar stature such as General Colin Powell. With the appointment of General Martin Dempsey as chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Petraeus was passed over—again, amid rumors that the CIA post was considered the proper cul-de-sac for generals with possible political ambitions. In any case, the Obama administration had given Petraeus a key post on its own team and simultaneously denied him more prestigious military assignments. Of his desire to serve as chairman of the Joint Chiefs, retiring Secretary of Defense Robert Gates had warned Petraeus, “Forget about it.” The public was never apprised why its most successful living general should not warrant the military’s highest post.⁶⁶

The frantic twenty months to save Iraq had taken a toll not just on the country, but perhaps on the person of David Petraeus as well. In February 2009, just four months after returning from Iraq, CENTCOM commander Petraeus was diagnosed with prostate cancer and underwent a two-month regimen of radiation treatments. Questions arose again about his health the following June when he momentarily collapsed during a

hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee—a fainting spell he attributed to dehydration. Petraeus now appeared in photos without his customary camouflage of a soldier in the ranks; in formal military dress, the general seemed almost encumbered by his vast array of medals. That effect of seeming out of place and uncomfortable was only magnified when he was photographed in a civilian suit and tie. Many remarked of his wearied appearance.⁶⁷

Within a brief three-year period, a relatively young David Petraeus had ended his illustrious military career in a stalemated Afghanistan and switched jobs without leaving an impression of singular success at either. He was assuming control of a CIA infamous for tarnishing the reputations of many who had tried to harness it—an agency whose failures surface in the media, but whose successes usually remain classified, and whose director during scandal and catastrophe is usually first to be blamed and last to be exonerated. In that regard, the stunning and unexpected resignation of David Petraeus from his CIA post on November 9, 2012, after an admission of an extramarital affair, and right after the U.S. presidential election, shocked the nation—and at the time when this manuscript went to press remained a mystery that may involve far more than issues of adultery. Ostensibly he had helped save Iraq under the auspices of an unpopular Bush administration, and then was put into nearly the same situation in Afghanistan as the war worsened and President Obama's poll numbers dipped. The mess of Afghanistan had overwhelmed every American general sent to quiet the country since the upsurge in violence in 2008. In truth, the wars abroad, and the so-called war on terror at home, were no longer daily issues of national concern. Success earned generals neglect in the media, failure only occasional accusations.

If the fates of other controversial savior generals—and in particular, the scandals that forced David Petraeus from the CIA—are any indication, it is likely that our modern Ridgway's fortunes peaked in the darkest hours of 2007–2008, when one rare American—along with his brilliant cadre of civilian and military advisers—was able to save a war deemed lost by almost everyone around him. Or, to paraphrase the Roman poet Ennius of Quintus Fabius Maximus, “The Delayer” (Cunctator)—another savior general who in the late third century B.C. kept the Roman Republic alive after its four losses to Hannibal at the disastrous battles at Tricinius, the River Trebia, Lake Trasimene, and Cannae and who was equally criticized for not waging war in terms of just trying to kill enemy

soldiers—*unus homo nobis cunctando restituit rem*: “one man by delaying restored the state to us.”

We shall see whether Iraq shall stay won, as the United States, in a somewhat surprising decision, could not agree with the Iraqi government on establishing a small permanent American presence and so abruptly pulled out all its remaining troops from the country at the end of 2011. Nonetheless, in the final month of the American occupation—December 2011—not a single American soldier died, and the nascent Iraqi democracy was relatively free of violence as its oil production and revenues soared. Iraq's relative stability was David Petraeus's legacy and remained in sharp contrast to the Arab dictatorships throughout the Middle East that tottered and fell during the so-called Arab Spring of 2011, followed by general chaos and violence—all against a backdrop of hopes that some sort of constitutional government would survive in Iraq.

For now, we know only that without David Petraeus, the American effort in Iraq—along with the reputation of the U.S. military in the Middle East—would have been lost long ago.