



America's Perpetual War

When former Speaker of the House and 2012 presidential candidate Newt Gingrich spoke of the Palestinians as an “invented people,” many were offended on behalf of the Palestinians. But former Massachusetts Governor and GOP presidential frontrunner Mitt Romney was offended on behalf of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.



“Before I made a statement of that nature,” Romney admonished Gingrich in a [debate](#), “I’d get on the phone to my friend Bibi Netanyahu and say: ‘Would it help if I say this? What would you like me to do?’”

That was vintage Mitt Romney. Expect to hear more of it as we enter the summer season, the national conventions and the fall campaign. When he was a candidate for the 2008 presidential nomination, Romney was asked if the President could launch military action against Iran without congressional authorization. The lawyers, Romney replied, will sort out those questions. (Ron Paul responded as though he had been launched from anti-ballistics missile, as he pointedly shot down the notion that lawyers, in the White House or elsewhere, could explain away the constitutional requirement that Congress declare war.) Romney has repeatedly said he wants the generals “on the ground” in Afghanistan to decide when we should bring our troops home from that desolate land that has little to offer besides endless warfare. And he apparently is prepared to submit our foreign policy and, indeed, our domestic political debate, to the imprimatur of the Prime Minister of Israel.

Consider: The U.S. Secretary of Defense, the director of our Central Intelligence Agency, and 16 different intelligence services of the United States have said at various times from 2007 to the present that there is no evidence that Iran has decided to build a nuclear bomb. Yet it is ostensibly because of the possibility that what Iran maintains is its civilian nuclear program might be converted to a strategic military capability that the United States has imposed what David Axelrod, senior political advisor to President Obama, has called the “most withering” economic sanctions ever imposed on any nation. And Romney and many leading Republicans claim those sanctions are not tough enough. Romney has called for truly “crippling” sanctions, backed by serious and credible threat of military [force](#).

“You’re a tough guy?” asked Fox News commentator Bill O’Reilly. You’re going to stare them down and say ‘Look, I’m gonna use them?’” Romney sat passively, showing no emotion as O’Reilly warned. “If you bomb Iran that starts World War III. You know that. They’re going to try to block Hormuz. Oil will double. The unintended consequences to the United States all across the Muslim world will be horrible.” Yes, Romney no doubt knows all that. But does he care?

That anyone should need to ask if the presumptive nominee of a major political party cares if he starts World War III should be startling enough. The possibility that he would be willing to do that out of a desire to help “my friend, Bibi Netanyahu” is even more shocking.

For Netanyahu has said repeatedly that he regards a nuclear-armed Iran as an “existential threat” to Israel. This despite the fact that Israel has an estimated 200 to 300 nuclear bombs of its own. If the Israelis have their own ability to deter the Iranians or retaliate in devastating fashion if Iran does attack, why do they need the economic and military power of the United States not merely to back them up, but to wage a preventive war for them?



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And why have we repeatedly put American soldiers in harm's way throughout the world when the United States was not attacked or even threatened?

Americans have grown accustomed to the role of champion of other people's freedom and well-being. We have long been proud of the fact that the graves of American soldiers circle the globe. We have liberated countless people and we celebrate our willingness to put the lives of young Americans on the line for the oppressed of the world. But is it not now time to take a step back from the precipice of war and ask ourselves if we are really prepared to back up the check to which President Kennedy affixed our name and seal, to be paid to the order of "To Whom It May Concern"? America, the young President pledged in his Inaugural [Address](#), would "pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty. This much we pledge — and more."

"And more?" Good Lord, there's more? Oh, yes. There is nation building around the globe. There is the duty of killing Afghanistan's opium business, building schools, making sure their daughters receive the same education as their sons. I recall that when my state still lacked a Job Corps program, one of our local builders complained that Iraq would have a Job Corps program before New Hampshire would. As a comedian remarked way back in the Fifties, "Satire doesn't stand a chance against reality anymore." Lyndon Johnson was determined to prove him right. Remember the promise of a Great Society on the Mekong Delta of South Vietnam?

Most people with even a minimal knowledge of history know that the last time the United States issued a formal declaration of war was in World War II, and not without cause. Try as he might to drag Americans into war to redeem the pledges made by the Machiavellians at Ten Downing Street, America did not go to war until Japan attacked an American military base on American territory in Hawaii. And we did not declare war against Germany until the Germans, bound by a treaty commitment to Japan, declared war on the United States.

When North Korean divisions invaded South Korea in June of 1950, President Harry Truman, in the absence of any previously announced defense commitment to South Korea, sent American troops into the battle without so much as a "by your leave" to the Congress of the United States. "We are not at war," he insisted at a press [conference](#) a few days later.

When a reporter asked if our involvement might be called a "police action under the United Nations," Truman, mistaking an anchor for a lifeline, grasped it and said, "Yes, that is exactly what it amounts to." Over the next three years Americans would come to bitterly resent that "police action" and the President who arbitrarily and unilaterally committed American lives to it. In all likelihood, that decision and the circumlocution describing it cost Mr. Truman another term in the White House.

Today President Obama has America committed to Afghanistan well beyond the 2014 deadline for withdrawing combat forces. There is a ten-year commitment beyond that and beyond that...? Well, who knows?

In the summer of 1972, the United States was in the middle of its eighth year of combat operations in an undeclared war in Viet Nam, a war that began under suspicious circumstances concerning a naval attack that may or may not have occurred in the Gulf of Tonkin. Senator George McGovern of South Dakota accepted the presidential nomination of the Democratic Party at its national convention in Miami that summer with a speech few Americans heard, let alone heeded. Because of time-consuming procedural battles, McGovern's speech was delivered at what one wag called "prime time in Guam. Yet



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its message was clear: “Come home, America!” was its oft-repeated theme. McGovern lost in a landslide to President Richard M. Nixon, who was fond of secret diplomacy in China and secret bombing in Laos and Cambodia. America did not come home.

We still have not. This Memorial Day, before we further decorate the earth with more graves of more young Americans, let us pause to consider who really “supports the troops.” Is it those who are eager to send young Americans to die in other people’s quarrels or even for other nations’ imperial ambitions, all under the endlessly “entangling alliances” of the United Nations and NATO? Let patriots stand, rather, with John Quincy Adams in his July 4th toast of 1821, noting with pride that America once again, in keeping with her heritage of peace and freedom, “goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own.”

Photo of American soldiers in Afghanistan: AP Images



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