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ISSUE 63

Conflicts Of The Past As Lessons For The Present

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SHOULD THE UNITED STATES LEAVE THE MIDDLE EAST?

IN THIS ISSUE

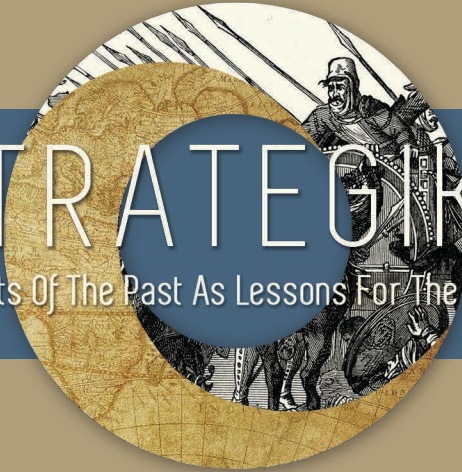
EDWARD N. LUTTWAK • PETER R. MANSOOR • JAMES O. ELLIS JR.

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ABOUT THE POSTERS IN THIS ISSUE

Documenting the wartime viewpoints and diverse political sentiments of the twentieth century, the Hoover Institution Library & Archives Poster Collection has more than one hundred thousand posters from around the world and continues to grow. Thirty-three thousand are available online. Posters from the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia/Soviet Union, and France predominate, though posters from more than eighty countries are included.

Learning from Failure: Formulating a New U.S. Middle East Foreign Policy

By Edward N. Luttwak

A commentator recently complained that President Trump does not have a “Syria strategy” and therefore awful Assad is winning. Countless Op-Ed writers before him likewise commented that President X “did not have a [insert the name of any country from Morocco to India] strategy,” and therefore awful Z was winning.

That sort of writing is still today considered honest work by Op-Ed editors, who studiously ignore what happened when U.S. presidents did have “a strategy”—and not just in 2003 when the awful Saddam Hussein was removed to allow the Iraqi people to advance towards democracy.

It was only upon entering the country that the absence of any actual Iraqis was discovered, as opposed to rival Shi’a, Kurdish, and Sunni factions, in none of which the leaders are chosen democratically, thereby making an Iraq-wide democracy impossible twice over, intra-factionally as well as inter-factionally.

Yet when I testified to that effect in a Senate Foreign Relations hearing before the 2003 invasion, the pro-administration witness easily prevailed, by pointing out that I had just said that Iraqis were incapable of democracy, which was “racist”—I confessed that I was a culturalist, but failed to note that anyone who is not is a total fool, forever expecting Neapolitans to behave just like the Japanese, and vice versa.

No strategy for any country can possibly succeed if intersectional American inhibitions preclude the acceptance of its simplest cultural realities, thereby allowing a country like Iraq to be confused with, say, Norway or Denmark, whose 1945 liberation was indeed followed by democratic elections.

Unfortunately, such confusions and even greater ones are the norm rather than the exception: Afghanistan, for example, was judged ripe for Scandinavian feminism when its constitution was mostly drawn up by American lawyers: it mandates a higher quota of female parliamentarians than the proportion of female members in the U.S. Congress or the Canadian Parliament. Naturally, they count for nothing in an assembly dominated by warlords and their lieges.

In another Afghan example, in June 2017 Secretary of Defense Mattis overcame strong resistance from President Trump to send out 4,000 more U.S. troops to serve as instructors for the Afghan Army, to enable it to resist the Taliban, which was winning, as it still is.

The mystery is why Afghan soldiers needed training, from very expensive American NCOs no less, while the Taliban do not. But the answer of course is that individual skill levels have nothing to do with it: the Afghan



Image credit: Poster Collection, RU/SU 775, Hoover Institution Archives.

Army cannot be trained to fight *by definition*, because it can only exist as a lucrative business for its bosses and as a form of welfare for their underlings, and not as a fighting army in the absence of an Afghan national identity on which cohesion can be built.

For much less money the U.S. could have built up a formidable army of separate Tadjik, Uzbek, Hazara, Aimaq, and selected tribal-Pathan regiments that would have smashed the Taliban. But any such proposal would have horrified Secretary Mattis, who of course knows that ethnic regiments served the British in both Asia and Africa very well indeed (and a Gurkha regiment still does), but who evidently felt compelled to scrupulously eschew even the most elementary Afghan realities in framing policies for Afghanistan, i.e., the nonexistence of an Afghan identity, except among some expatriates.

Science advances because erroneous theories are refuted, but in forming U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, nothing whatever has ever been learned even from total failures.

To cite an example that would have nefarious consequences for decades, in 1955 the United States did have a “strategy” for Israel and the Arabs, to finally end the war that had started in November 1947. It being a proper strategy, it had a code name, “Project Alpha,”¹ and like all strategies that Op-Ed writers approve of, the U.S. did not pursue it alone but with an ally, the British Empire no less—it was still that, with dozens of colonies large and small. Indeed the plan was first unveiled on November 9, 1955, by Prime Minister Anthony Eden, Churchill’s erstwhile foreign secretary, who was himself an expert on the region: he had studied Arabic and Persian at Oxford, and like many “arabists” was much enamored with T. E. Lawrence—type camel-riding Arabs and robed potentates.

John Foster Dulles, the U.S. secretary of state and Eden’s partner in the venture, was not at all sentimental but certainly believed in Project Alpha, which was deemed eminently rational. To finally arrive at a peace that would keep the Soviet Union out of the Middle East, and facilitate building up the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), which was to be NATO’s counterpart, Israel was to hand over its larger southern portion, the Negev, to Egypt and Jordan thereby providing territorial contiguity for the Arabs from Morocco all the way to the Turkish border, once the brutal French would leave Algeria (yes, many in the U.S. as in Britain sided with the National Liberation Front [FLN] “*freedom* fighters” as the young Jack Kennedy defined them, thereby mistaking killers for budding democrats).

In formulating Project Alpha it was taken for granted that Egypt’s new ruler, the young Abdul Gamal Nasser—an extremely promising “anti-Communist” according to the CIA—would be downright enthusiastic at the prospect of gaining more territory and direct access to Jordan and beyond, while reducing enemy Israel to an indefensible enclave. Jordan’s King Hussein for his part could hardly refuse the gift of part of the Negev, and in any case he was on the CIA’s monthly payroll.

As for the Jews—as Eden always called the Israelis—they would of course whine at the imminent loss of much of their already exiguous territory, and of their Red Sea port of Elat—but the latter was worthless anyway because of Egypt’s “irremovable” blockade of the straits. In any case Israel’s viewpoint was simply irrelevant: it was a mini-state of less than 1.5 million inhabitants with no oil, hardly any industry, a miserable economy, and a ragged little army equipped with variegated bits of war-surplus equipment. Eden refused to concede even a five-minute meeting to Israel’s ambassador, because the Jews would just have to do what they were told, with any diplomatic palavers nothing but a waste of time.

Everything was promising for the Project Alpha strategy, yet within twelve months every one of its premises had been utterly overturned. That is what happens to Middle East premises, as the Obama administration discovered when it very warmly embraced Iran in the nuclear accord, only to see its Revolutionary Guards unleashed against U.S. interests everywhere.

In 1955 likewise, Nasser bitterly disappointed his CIA handlers by turning to Moscow for weapons, and then outraged Eden by nationalizing the Suez Canal, thereby forcing him to partner with the Israel he hated as well as with the France colonialists to reoccupy the Canal Zone, which still contained vast British military

depots. When the fighting started in October 1956, Israel's ragged soldiers swiftly conquered the Sinai, but the French paratroopers rearing to go from Cyprus were maddeningly held up by the British, who kept delaying H-hour to gather a vast amphibious armada, as if they were up against the Waffen SS. Yes, having known and despised Egyptian soldiers for generations, the British nevertheless allowed their intelligence estimate to be dominated by the impressive numbers of newly delivered Soviet tanks and jet fighters in Egyptian hands.

That too is a constant: the overestimation of the region's military forces, which keeps recurring whenever a war is imminent, and whose present expression are the gross overestimates of Turkey's armed forces, notwithstanding their utter lack of combat experience, except against unarmed civilians of course, a form of war in which Arab armies also excel.

When British hesitation caused the collapse of the Suez Canal operation, John Foster Dulles moved on without pausing to contain the damage, Anthony Eden who had waited for two decades to become prime minister had to resign after a mere two years, and the Soviet Union was installed as Egypt's military patron. There it stayed for years to come—until it made the fatal mistake of gifting enough weapons and training to really prepare the Egyptian Army for war. Thus all failed in the end, the USSR included, just as the Russians will fail in their present attempt to convert Syria into a platform for Russian power across the region.

So yes there really is a “strategy” that will work successfully every single time, that every president should adopt and rigorously follow: when invited to intervene in the Middle East, don't.

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- 1 Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–1957, Arab-Israeli Dispute, 1955, Volume XIV, 9. Memorandum of a Conversation, Department of State, Washington, January 27, 1955, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v14/d9>.



EDWARD N. LUTTWAK works as a contractor for the U.S. Department of Defense and for some treaty allies, and has served as consultant to the White House chief of staff, the U.S. Department of State, and the U.S. Army, Air Force, and Navy. Luttwak also co-founded and heads a conservation cattle ranch in the Amazon. His books, including *The Rise of China vs. the Logic of Strategy*, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire*, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, and *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace* have been published in multiple English-language editions, and also in 23 other languages, including Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Hebrew, Korean, and Russian. He has also published other books in Italian and in Japanese, and has a number of honorary as well as academic degrees.



Image credit: Poster Collection, UK 1365, Hoover Institution Archives.

Leaving the Middle East?

By Peter R. Mansoor

With the exception of President George H. W. Bush, every U.S. president since the end of the Cold War has promised American retrenchment from the Middle East. They all have failed to make good on their promises.

Bush 41 understood the importance of American leadership in stabilizing the post-Cold War world. In a speech at West Point on January 5, 1993, he stated, “In the wake of the Cold War, in a world where we are the only remaining superpower, it is the role of the United States to marshal its moral and material resources to promote a democratic peace. It is our responsibility; it is our opportunity to lead. There is no one else.”

Succeeding presidents felt otherwise, at least upon entering office. Bill Clinton came into office promising to focus on the economy, yet he was unwillingly dragged into conflicts in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Iraq. Candidate George W. Bush shunned messy overseas commitments, declaring, “I don’t think our troops ought

to be used for what’s called nation-building. I think our troops ought to be used to fight and win war.” After eight years in office he had used the military to overthrow two regimes, followed by counterinsurgency and nation-building campaigns in both Afghanistan and Iraq. In November 2011 after nearly three years in office Barack Obama declared, “The tide of war is receding. Now, even as we remove our last troops from Iraq, we’re beginning to bring our troops home from Afghanistan, where we’ve begun a transition to Afghan security and leadership.” Nine years later, the United States still has troops deployed to both countries, with an additional war begun in Libya and troops deployed in Syria for good measure. Donald Trump also campaigned on ending America’s “forever wars,” deriding Syria as nothing more than “sand and death.” Yet despite his desire to extricate U.S. forces from the Middle East, U.S. troops are still deployed in Iraq, Syria, and the Gulf region.

Why have presidents of both parties, despite their stated willingness to remove U.S. forces from the Middle East, proven unable to do so?

The fact is that promises to reduce the U.S. military presence abroad in order to nation-build at home sell well on the campaign trail, but once in office presidents are confronted with challenges that do not lend themselves to trite slogans or easy solutions. Flashy campaign promises set the stage for foreign policy failure, for in the Middle East, Las Vegas rules do not apply: what happens in the Middle East does not stay in the Middle East. Promises of retrenchment poll well, until the realities of migrant displacement, terrorism, and oil shocks cause reconsideration of simplistic policies ungrounded in Middle Eastern realities.

In a recent op-ed, Janan Ganesh put the issue clearly. “The problem, I used to think, is the failure to honour these promises of retrenchment. In truth, the promises are the problem. The US accumulated foreign interests over the course of the 20th century that cannot be divested at speed, at least not without grievous

cost, and at least not in a region as intractable as this one. A responsible political class would not pretend otherwise every four years. It would gird voters for a process of extrication that might turn out to be the work of a human lifetime.”¹

Here are six reasons why the United States must remain engaged in the Middle East for the foreseeable future.

1. Terrorism. In 2011 President Barack Obama opted to allow the Status of Forces Agreement with Iraq to lapse, bringing home all of the U.S. forces deployed to that country. His desire was to normalize relations, removing forces that some believed served as an irritant to a smoother U.S.-Iraq relationship. But by removing U.S. forces from Iraq, the Obama administration squandered the leverage those forces created for U.S. interests in the region. High among these interests was the war against Islamist extremists, which did not magically disappear with the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq. I need not go into the subsequent rise of the Islamic State here, but suffice it to say that Middle Eastern political and security realities intruded on the view of the region held by some in the Obama administration. It turned out the tide of war was not receding, at least not without substantial investment by the United States in stabilizing troubled areas. Now that the Islamic State has been defeated, some in the Trump administration are all too ready to make the same mistake, believing that the war is over and the troops can now come home. Such hubris ignores the history of the defeat of al-Qaeda in Iraq and the rise of ISIS, a history that may rhyme if not exactly repeat itself absent continued U.S. involvement in the region. And lest we think that the war against the Islamic State wasn't important to our security, I would note that since its destruction there have been no ISIS-inspired mass murder events in the West.

2. Iran. Retrenchment comes at a cost. We can debate whether the cost is acceptable, but we cannot ignore that there will be a cost to withdrawal from the region. Iran in particular desires to establish hegemony across the Middle East, and is likely to achieve that goal absent U.S. resistance. We may want Saudi Arabia to assume the costs of containing Iran, but it is unable to do so. Iran's population of 81 million dwarfs the Saudi population of 33 million. The Saudi economy is also highly vulnerable to disruption, something the world discovered when cruise missiles and drones damaged a facility at Abqaiq and thereby halved Saudi oil production.

3. Oil. Although thanks to the fracking revolution the United States is now nearly self-sufficient in the production of oil and natural gas, the other major industrial nations of the world still rely on Middle Eastern oil to fuel their economies. The hydrocarbon market is global, so any disruption to oil exportation from the Middle East will have an impact on the availability and price of oil, which in turn could cause economic disruption or recession. It is convenient to say the Europeans, Chinese, or Japanese should defend their access to Middle Eastern oil since they are more dependent on it than the United States, but this is a pipe dream. Those nations would rather allow Iran to run roughshod over the Middle East than to defend their interests there with force. And do we really relish the prospect of Chinese military forces intervening in the Gulf to ensure the flow of oil to Asia?

4. Israel. Despite the lack of a formal alliance with Israel, that state is America's only reliable partner in the Middle East. It is also highly vulnerable, surrounded by an Arab-Islamic world that desires its destruction. Abandonment by the United States would jeopardize its security in any number of ways that could lead to unpredictable results, including a potential war between Israel and Iran that would threaten the use of nuclear weapons for the first time since 1945.

5. Counter-proliferation. Possession of nuclear weapons by major powers have arguably kept cold wars from turning hot in the 75 years since the end of World War II, but a significant increase in the number of states possessing nuclear weapons and ballistic missile technology would likely destabilize the international security environment. Imagine if Iran had nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles today; pushed to the brink by economic sanctions, the Supreme Leader might opt at some point for a nuclear attack against Saudi Arabia or Israel, leading to certain retaliation by the latter. Saudi Arabia would hardly stand by as Iran acquired these

technologies; instead, it would simply purchase devices from Pakistan or North Korea or buy the technical expertise to develop its own weapons and delivery systems. This is a likely scenario, but one that can be avoided provided the United States remains engaged in the region.

6. Refugees. Millions of refugees have departed their homelands in the Middle East for safer destinations. Most of these people have settled in other Arab nations, but around 3.5 million are in Turkey. Since 2008 more than 5 million refugees, many of them from the Middle East, have arrived in the 28 states of the European Union, significantly destabilizing the domestic political climate of a number of countries, including Great Britain, France, Germany, Poland, and Hungary. A U.S. retrenchment from the Middle East, if it led to a war between Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Iran, would lead to another refugee crisis.

Remaining engaged in the Middle East does not mean the United States must act as a global or regional hegemon. In fact, working with and through allies, as the United States did in the successful war against the Islamic State, is by far preferable to going it alone, a course of action that usually leads to an excessive reliance on the military instrument of power. But the sad fact is that in the upcoming presidential election politicians from both the right and the left will play to populist demands to bring the troops home, consequences be damned. They will blithely ignore the consequences of retrenchment because they are ignorant of the history of U.S. relations with the Middle East, even in their own adult lifetimes. Those developments that would help the United States leave the region—the development of alternative sources of energy, an Iranian government less bent on exporting revolution, and the defeat of radical Islamism—may come in time, but are unlikely to arrive soon. Until then, the United States must remain engaged in the Middle East to protect its interests and provide the leadership and means that alone can ensure the stability of the region for the foreseeable future.

1 Janan Ganesh, “The Impossible Promise of a US Middle East Withdrawal,” *Financial Times*, September 18, 2019.



PETER R. MANSOOR, colonel, U.S. Army (retired), is the General Raymond E. Mason Jr. Chair of Military History at The Ohio State University. A 1982 distinguished graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point, he earned his doctorate from Ohio State. He assumed his current position after a twenty-six-year career in the U.S. Army that included two combat tours, the first as a brigade commander in Baghdad and his final duty as executive officer to General David Petraeus, commander of Multi-National Force-Iraq. His latest works are *Surge: My Journey with General David Petraeus and the Remaking of the Iraq War* (Yale University Press, 2013), a history of the surge in Iraq in 2007–8; and *Grand Strategy and Military Alliances* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) and *The Culture of Military Organizations* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), both co-edited with Williamson Murray.

Leaving the Middle East: The Fallacy of a False Dichotomy

By James O. Ellis Jr.

In classical logic, the false dichotomy, or false dilemma, is defined as an argument where only two choices are presented yet more exist, or a spectrum of possible choices exists between two extremes. False dilemmas are usually characterized by “either this or that” language but can also be characterized by the omission of choices. This insidious tactic has the appearance of forming a logical argument, but under closer scrutiny it becomes evident that there are more possibilities than the either/or choice that is presented.

The dichotomy appears often in national security policy debates surrounding the role of the United States in the Middle East. On the one hand, politicians (and successful presidential candidates) on both sides of the aisle vowed a policy of retrenchment to end the region’s “forever wars” that have been the primary focus of American national security policy for almost two decades at a cost of billions of dollars [\$2.4 trillion, actually] and thousands of lives. On the other hand, pragmatists note the difficulties that come with such wishful thinking: America still has enduring vital interests and lasting allies in the region, and efforts to focus elsewhere have brought a resurgence of Islamic extremism, humanitarian disasters, and repeated geopolitical failings.

In U.S. Middle East policy, the choice is often perceived as “stay the course” or “cut and run.” The reality is that there exists a continuum of possibilities, a range of engagement options, a spectrum of costs, and an ability to vary them in size, scope, and character in ways appropriate to our national security needs, reassuring and supportive of regional allies and partners, and confounding to potential adversaries. In electrical engineering terms, we do not want to install an on/off switch when what we need is a continuously adjustable rheostat.

The key to an effective Middle East policy is situational awareness (SA); a deep understanding of the political, social, economic, and security environment and, more importantly, emerging trends. Technology, in many ways, is increasing our ability to observe, orient, decide, and act, enhancing the classic “OODA [observe, orient, decide, act] loop” of military tactics and strategy. In past decades, that required a large human presence; no longer. As Peter Singer from Brookings wrote over a decade ago: “Throughout history, from the wheels that powered the Pharaohs’ chariots to the early use of cannon to batter down the walls of Constantinople, the greater Middle East has long been a cauldron for military change.” Today, the latest revolution in technology and war is the growing use of unmanned systems, better described as the “robotics revolution.” Ranging from palm-sized drones to unpiloted aircraft with the wingspan of a Boeing 737, aerial surveillance has become ubiquitous, and, as the ability to couple that with broader space-based imagery and signals intelligence has grown, we are now able to remotely compile vast



Image credit: Poster Collection, UK 1364, Hoover Institution Archives.

amounts of data and then draw on artificial intelligence, nodal analysis, and pattern recognition to separate the needles from the haystack. Finally, as we have seen recently in the Soleimani attack, there remains the undetected capability, within policy, ethical, and law of armed conflict guidelines, to take decisive kinetic action.

On the human side, today in the region, as in the rest of the world, technology has also brought sweeping societal and sociological change. Using that newfound capability to listen and understand what is happening in the region is now an essential element of SA. Nine out of every ten young people in the Middle East use at least one social media channel every day, and more often than before, they do so on their phone. Mobile social media in the region has doubled in the past five years, now reaching 44 percent overall. Much of that information, along with internet chat rooms and other venues, can be monitored easily, heard remotely, and even engaged with appropriately. I am not talking espionage here, though that has its place, but rather the societal “buzz” in which anyone with a computer and the requisite language skills can immerse themselves. As I often remind myself, listening is not the same as not talking; we have to actually hear. There is an active, continuously evolving, vibrant, and, to some degree, transparent social pulse in the region that even the best of diplomats and advisers cannot tap. We need to be more of a part of all of that, appreciating cultural differences, bringing broader perspectives, and encouraging positive outcomes while remembering that American exceptionalism is not the same as American triumphalism.

Former secretary of state George Shultz, drawing on his decades of international engagement, often notes that “trust is the coin of the realm.” The military corollary injects the time dimension, noting that “you cannot surge trust,” implying that it must be cultivated and nurtured over time. Despite the points I made above, the building and sustaining of personal relationships does, ultimately, require presence, but we need to think differently in scope and scale, not necessarily interacting the way we always have. A strategically cohesive and coordinated whole-of-government plan of professional diplomatic presence, regular high-level commercial delegations, and episodic, targeted military-to-military engagement can lay the foundation, but we need to sometimes reduce the scope and do more at the local and personal level. As an example, decades ago, during the brief Kosovo conflict, I visited the chief of staff of the then Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia armed forces. Arriving at the headquarters, I was amazed to be greeted by a UK brigadier general. In British parlance, he had been “seconded” to the headquarters for an extended period of time and, working within the General Staff, was a key architect of the Macedonian national security planning, including their Balkan border with Kosovo. Needless to say, the insights gained in an hour-long conversation with him were worth hundreds of dispassionate intelligence reports and pages of overhead imagery. In addition to capability, he could also talk in detail on politics, people, personalities, capacity, and intent.

A final area where we can tailor our regional efforts is in the timing or periodicity of our presence. Why do we insist on announcing our planned presence, much less our departure, from every overseas engagement and commitment? Rather than just large set-piece force deployments, why not expand episodic, small, land, sea, and air exercises, tailored to need or partner capabilities? In times of constrained resources, if ever, every presence requirement does not need an aircraft carrier strike group or a bomber wing; we also need to continue to tap our Coast Guard, National Guard, and police partners whose capabilities are often a closer match with the needs of our regional allies. Quietly arriving, largely unannounced, professionally conducting our training engagement, and departing without fanfare can reduce the regional pressure on our friends, build reliable and enduring partnerships, establish the optics that we are “always around,” and create uncertainty on the part of our foes as to whether we have really left and when we might return.

The choice to either leave or stay in the Middle East is a false, dangerous, and unnecessary one. Announcing that we are staying the course, as currently structured, implies we aspire to a hegemonic role we can no longer afford, are no longer willing to play, and that is increasingly unacceptable to friends and allies. An announced departure creates a geopolitical vacuum and understates the costs of

retrenchment by failing to account for the real possibility that we can be drawn back in. It ignores our painful experience with devastating terrorist attacks, the rise of ISIS, the creations of jihadist sanctuaries in Yemen, Syria, and Iraq, and the perceptions of abandonment of allies who have fought alongside us and on whom we rely for counterterrorism intelligence and critical early warning. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, as Yaroslav Trofimov wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* in October of last year: “In other parts of the world, people and leaders are closely watching the fallout from America’s behavior in the Middle East—and drawing conclusions that will affect the global balance of power.” Binary, black-or-white thinking doesn’t allow for the many different variables, conditions, and contexts in which there would exist more than just the two possibilities put forth. It frames the argument misleadingly and obscures rational, honest debate.

Why choose one of the extreme solutions when we can appropriately adjust the rheostat?



JAMES O. ELLIS JR. is an Annenberg Distinguished Fellow at the Hoover Institution. He retired as President and Chief Executive Officer of the Institute of Nuclear Power Operations (INPO), a self-regulatory nonprofit located in Atlanta, Georgia, on May 18, 2012. In 2004, Admiral Ellis completed a 39-year Navy career as Commander of the United States Strategic Command. In this role, he was responsible for the global command and control of United States strategic and space forces. His sea service included carrier-based tours with three fighter squadrons, and command of the USS *Abraham Lincoln*, a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier. His shore assignments included Commander in Chief, U.S. Naval Forces, Europe and Allied Forces, Southern Europe, where he led United States and NATO forces in combat and humanitarian operations during the 1999 Kosovo crisis. Mr. Ellis holds two master’s degrees in aerospace engineering and is a member of the National Academy of Engineering. He serves on the boards of the Lockheed Martin Corporation and Dominion Energy. In 2013, he was elected to the National Academy of Engineering. In 2017, he was appointed by the Vice President as Chairman of the Users’ Advisory Group to the National Space Council.

POLL: Why is the U.S. in the Middle East?

- Even if we don't import oil from the Middle East anymore, we must secure oil access for the global economy.
- Israel's security hinges on a strong U.S. presence in the Middle East.
- America must secure the region to deny money and resources to both terrorists and would-be nuclear powers.
- Our allies can do fine, and we can offer help with a radically smaller force of mostly air and naval assets.
- The U.S. has no real strategic interests in the Middle East and should leave as soon as possible.

Discussion Questions

1. How has the Shiite–Sunni renewed rivalry created strategic opportunity for Israel?
2. Is Iran currently isolated in the Middle East or in the ascendance?
3. How does Israel’s strategic position compare now versus twenty years ago?
4. Has Russia gained any strategic advantage from its new presence in Syria?



IN THE NEXT ISSUE

China after the Pandemic

Military History in Contemporary Conflict

As the very name of Hoover Institution attests, military history lies at the very core of our dedication to the study of “War, Revolution, and Peace.” Indeed, the precise mission statement of the Hoover Institution includes the following promise: “The overall mission of this Institution is, from its records, to recall the voice of experience against the making of war, and by the study of these records and their publication, to recall man’s endeavors to make and preserve peace, and to sustain for America the safeguards of the American way of life.” From its origins as a library and archive, the Hoover Institution has evolved into one of the foremost research centers in the world for policy formation and pragmatic analysis. It is with this tradition in mind, that the “Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict” has set its agenda—reaffirming the Hoover Institution’s dedication to historical research in light of contemporary challenges, and in particular, reinvigorating the national study of military history as an asset to foster and enhance our national security. By bringing together a diverse group of distinguished military historians, security analysts, and military veterans and practitioners, the working group seeks to examine the conflicts of the past as critical lessons for the present.

Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict

The Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict examines how knowledge of past military operations can influence contemporary public policy decisions concerning current conflicts. The careful study of military history offers a way of analyzing modern war and peace that is often underappreciated in this age of technological determinism. Yet the result leads to a more in-depth and dispassionate understanding of contemporary wars, one that explains how particular military successes and failures of the past can be often germane, sometimes misunderstood, or occasionally irrelevant in the context of the present.

Strategika

Strategika is a journal that analyzes ongoing issues of national security in light of conflicts of the past—the efforts of the Military History Working Group of historians, analysts, and military personnel focusing on military history and contemporary conflict. Our board of scholars shares no ideological consensus other than a general acknowledgment that human nature is largely unchanging. Consequently, the study of past wars can offer us tragic guidance about present conflicts—a preferable approach to the more popular therapeutic assumption that contemporary efforts to ensure the perfectibility of mankind eventually will lead to eternal peace. New technologies, methodologies, and protocols come and go; the larger tactical and strategic assumptions that guide them remain mostly the same—a fact discernable only through the study of history.



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