

need of assistance to accomplish the necessary change. This task would presumably be at once most important and trickiest when it came to U.S. allies—countries as distinct as Canada, Saudi Arabia, and Nigeria—whose economies are especially dependent on hydrocarbons. If U.S. manufacturers of windmills, electric vehicles, and solar panels enrich themselves in the process—locating many of their operations, perhaps, in Canada, Saudi Arabia, and Nigeria, etc.—this seems an acceptable price to pay for the rescue of global civilization. Of course, if a nominally socialist U.S. president were to

be so genuinely socialist as to sponsor worker-owned cooperatives to furnish the planet with wind farms, EVs, and solar arrays, so much the better.

The chances may be overwhelming that such a scheme will remain ecosocialist fan fic. Such long odds nevertheless seem worth taking where the only other option, in the face of galloping climate change, is giving up the game altogether. ♻️

BENJAMIN KUNKEL's *play about global warming*, Buzz, was published in 2014.

How to End Endless War

The case against American military supremacy

BY STEPHEN WERTHEIM

IN 1992, PENTAGON officials took stock of America's fortunes. "Today, there is no global challenger to a peaceful democratic order," observed the group, led by Under Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz. The Soviet Union had fallen. America stood alone as a global power. At such a moment, the country might have declared victory and brought its troops home. Instead, it resolved to seek greater supremacy than ever. In the future that Wolfowitz and his colleagues envisioned, the United States would maintain a "predominant military position" atop the world. No one would dare rival it.

In the Middle East, America's pursuit of primacy led it to contain both Iraq and Iran, and to treat the advance of either as a grave threat. Under this dictate, succes-

sive presidents imposed sanctions that starved Iraqis and squeezed Iranians. They launched wars to change regimes. They partnered with authoritarians throughout the region. If all this was the price of keeping America on top, so be it.

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After decades of catastrophe, the same basic strategy endures. Donald Trump's presidency makes plain that global supremacy has become an end in itself, unmoored from the interests of the American people and most of

humanity. "Our military dominance must be unquestioned," Trump has declared, "and I mean unquestioned." Trump has stripped supremacy of ethical pretense and strategic justification. He values it for its own sake, as a gesture of brute domination.

What have liberals to say about this? Scandalously little. For decades, they have failed to stop war and violence for the same reason they have failed to reverse soaring inequality. At best, they have offered solutions inadequate to the scale of the problem. At worst, they have denied there was a problem, casting endless war as "global leadership." Few Democrats will admit, for example, that not one power in the Middle East poses an existential threat to the United States, not one merits devoting precious lives and scarce resources to such misadventures as Saudi Arabia's proxy war in Yemen.

Trump and the establishment are one in assuming that the United States must maintain global military dominance, regardless of circumstances, forever. It is long past time to question this assumption, and today only the rising left possesses the dynamism and independence to do so. In order to stand for peace, systematically not episodically, the left should oppose armed supremacy as a perpetual goal of America's foreign policy. For permanent armed supremacy produces permanent armed conflict. And its burdens are mounting.

WOLFOWITZ AND HIS Pentagon colleagues originally justified their focus on primacy by claiming that it would bring peace. In a draft of their report, called the Defense Planning Guidance, they argued that the United States should seek a preeminence so overwhelming as

to prevent any potential rival from even “aspiring to a larger regional or global role.” After a public outcry, the final language was softened. But at least policymakers back then felt some compunction to demonstrate that Pax Americana would live up to its name.

Decades later, the opposite has transpired. America spends more on defense than the next seven countries combined, with roughly 800 bases ringing the globe, yet its might has not prevented China from rising nor Russia from asserting itself, and may have antagonized both. Instead of cowing others into peace, primacy has plunged America into war. It has forced the United States to resist any significant retraction of its military power, lest it lose influence relative to anyone else. The endless wars are endless because the United States has appointed itself the world’s “indispensable nation,” in Secretary of State Madeleine Albright’s formulation, responsible less for ensuring its own safety than for maintaining its material and moral privilege to police the world. The costs include 147,000 lives in Afghanistan and \$5.9 trillion for a war on terror that has stretched on since 2001, according to Brown University’s Costs of War Project.

What’s more, armed primacy may well have allowed Trump to rise in the first place. To justify America’s massive commitment of resources around the world, leaders have routinely claimed that foreigners are going to kill us. Trump took those inflated threats and ran with them, turning fear of deadly foreigners into the basis for his movement. That fear dates back to the second term of George W. Bush, when the xenophobia he directed toward distant “Islamofascism” turned inward. White supremacists rallied against immigrants at the border; nativists spread conspiracy theories that Sharia law was subverting American society. Now Trump has birthed his way to the White House, surrounded by a national security adviser and secretary of state who indulge rank Islamophobia. (John Bolton and Mike Pompeo have ties to Frank Gaffney, the author of such manifestos as “The Muslim Brotherhood in the Obama Administration.”)

To be sure, many advocates of American primacy did not wish for this to happen. But it has happened. We face a world beset by war and awash in nationalism and nativism—our own included. And as other powers rise, the costs of pursuing primacy will rise with them.

ONLY A PARTICULARLY enlightened and unaggressive country, facing deplorable alternatives, should exercise

enormous coercive power over peoples to whom it offers no membership and no accountability. Today the United States is not that country, if it ever was. Its political system is hardly delivering for its own citizens, let alone those of other countries. Even if Democrats were angels, they rotate power with a Republican Party whose last two presidents married aggressive visions with careless decisions. All other things equal, the world will be better off as America retracts its coercive power, and so will America.

True, the United States should retain a potent military, and other instruments, to pursue the genuine interests of its people. And it matters what powers might take the



place of a hegemonic America. But endless supremacy must itself end. The burden of proof now falls on those who favor a large military role, and they must justify not only the purposes they seek but also the perils that outsize power poses when the vicious and the reckless get to swing the sword.

At an uncertain moment, the left has the opportunity to bring some measure of soundness to America’s world role. After decades of misrule and misconceptions, we begin our foreign policy over again. 🌍

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