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The American Mission

Michael A. Ledeen

*A*merican leaders cannot conduct foreign policy the way others do, because America is a very different kind of country, and the American people are very different from others. Yes, I know that all countries are different, but America is *more* different.

To begin with, America is amazingly lucky. Our good luck begins with our fortunate location. Our two big oceans make invasion by would-be conquerors almost impossible, which is why we have nearly always felt invulnerable to direct attack. Moreover, our land is not only remote from danger but good for planting, harvesting, digging and drilling. We've got rich farmland and fabulous natural resources, from precious minerals to big, strong rivers and abundant forests. Our national psychoanalyst, Alexis de Tocqueville, thinks that this enormous natural abundance is the primeval basis for American democracy: "Not only is legislation democratic, but Nature herself favors the cause of the people."¹ He, like most Americans, looks upon America as a Divine gift, offered to us at the precise moment when mankind had learned how to exploit natural riches, and needed the space to create "an asylum for repose and freedom. Just then North America was discovered, as if it had been kept in reserve by the Deity and had just risen from beneath the waters of the Deluge."

Our luck continues with our neighbors, who have neither the desire nor the means to threaten our survival. Our first neighbors, the Indians, were easily driven out of the lands we craved, and then reduced to misery. Our subsequent and present neighbors, the Canadians and

the Mexicans, threaten us only with cheap labor and low-cost goods, not with armed aggression. No wonder we have great difficulty understanding most other countries, which are bounded by hostile neighbors with large appetites.

Imagine if we had the Red Army across the border to the north, and a big Syria, armed to the teeth, on the far side of the Rio Grande! We wouldn't have the luxury to indulge in our many political and social experiments; we'd be worried about making it to next year in good shape. As it is, we're so "laid back" that we're blissfully unconcerned about the emerging military might of the People's Republic of China, even though the Chinese regime makes it quite clear that it intends to challenge us once it has become powerful enough.

Our enemies are far away, our neighbors are friendly, and we're doing very well. Why worry about the rest of the world? For a long time, nearly a century and a half after the Founding, we really didn't think much about the rest of the world. Now we do worry, albeit only when the world intrudes, and even then in a peculiar, conflicted way. We have a love/hate relationship with the outside world. We hate it and fear it, because most of us came from some foreign country where we were treated badly, and we came to America believing that we would find something better for ourselves and our children. For the most part, we succeeded, and we all believe, deep within our national genome, that things are better here, and there is danger of contamination back where we came from. With rare exceptions, the only happy American expatriates are intellectuals who resent American success. The great movement of people is into America, not out of it.

The past century has driven home that instinctive dread because we were dragged into three world wars (World War I, World War II, and the Cold War) and two "peacekeeping missions" in Europe, at an enormous cost in money and blood. Although we saved the Europeans from their own suicidal inclinations, we were contaminated by them, above all in the growth of a centralized state that the Founders tried so desperately to prevent.

Yet we also love the Old World, and not only in our secret yearning for royalty and aristocracy that occasionally bursts into blind infatuation with families like the Kennedys, or the importation, stone by stone, of London Bridge to the banks of a river in Arizona. Luigi Barzini, who was raised in a society replete with aristocrats and royal families, sniffed it out with his usual elegance: "the compulsive and impatient rush toward the West, the ever-retreating perfect future, always went

with an aching and disproportionate yearning for the East, the past they did not have or had rejected."²

To this built-in ambivalence toward the outside world, we add an ideological conflict. We believe we have created the best political system and we want to see the rest of the world adopt it. We are the most successfully revolutionary nation in the world, and we believe in exporting our democratic revolution. Of course we want our leaders to support opponents of tyranny. Call it the Jeffersonian impulse.

But we also believe, with nearly equal passion, that it is wrong to meddle in the internal affairs of other countries. This conviction combines with our dread of foreign contamination to make it very difficult for the United States to use its power overseas until and unless some dramatic event occurs. Call it the Washingtonian persuasion.

The debate between Jefferson and Washington is part of our national DNA, because we revere them both and agree with both. It is not so much a debate between the partisans of one or the other as it is an internal conflict within the soul of every American.³

These two conflicting passions help explain why, when we do get involved, we generally convince ourselves that we are engaged in a righteous crusade. The conviction that we are doing the Lord's work helps us paper over the underlying tension that has invariably exploded in our political debates over foreign intervention. We never think in the old traditional European terms of advancing our national interest: we wage holy wars or we don't fight at all. Whenever we have leaders who fancy themselves masters of statecraft and try to conduct a purely pragmatic foreign policy they come to ruin. The American people will not long tolerate it, as Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger found to their dismay. No matter how brilliant the stratagems, Americans need to believe that they are "engaged in a crusade to improve not their life alone but the whole world."⁴

The same righteousness governs our long periods of isolation, which we justify by an appeal to our moral and material superiority, combined with fear of contamination from the corrupt outside world. So whichever passion has the upper hand, we tend to have a total commitment: All or nothing; either a grand crusade or splendid isolation. And we are quite capable of violent mood swings, as in Somalia,

where we first hurled ourselves into action, then turned on a dime and withdrew.

The rest of the world almost never understands this. It baffles and frustrates our friends and allies, and fools and tempts our enemies. A European foreign minister once said to me that he could live with a hawkish or a dovish America, but he could not cope with an America that constantly changed its mind. I understood his frustration and sympathized with it. But he could not have his wish. It's tough to be our ally sometimes.

Secure in our boundaries, confident of God's blessings, we invariably wait until the very last minute, paralyzed by the tug-of-war that exists within every American. We do not feel obliged, as do normal countries, to constantly prepare for the next war. We have *never* been ready for the next war. As far back as 1846, when we were on the verge of launching a two-front war to expand into Texas, California, and Oregon, the Congress was planning to close the Military Academy at West Point, thereby establishing a pattern that still shapes our decisions. Whenever a war is over, we dismantle our military establishment because we are the first people in human history to believe, in the teeth of all historical evidence, that peace is the normal condition of mankind and war is an aberration. The very opposite is true.

When I was a graduate student, I was required to read a book about the 19th century called *The Great Transformation*. Early in the first chapter, we find:

The nineteenth century produced a phenomenon unheard of in the annals of Western civilization, namely, a hundred years' peace—1815–1914. Apart from the Crimean War—a more or less colonial event—England, France, Prussia, Austria, Italy, and Russia were engaged in war among each other for altogether only eighteen months. A computation of comparable figures for the two preceding centuries gives an average of sixty to seventy years of major wars in each.⁵

Of course, Polanyi notes that there were wars in that century, most notably the Franco-Prussian War, but there was no really *big* war, nothing on the scale of the three world wars in the next century or the continental conflicts of the preceding several hundred years that culminated in the global wars revolving around revolutionary and then Napoleonic France. Historians therefore marveled at the rare tranquility of the period from the Congress of Vienna to the outbreak of the First

World War. You really need no other example to understand the oddity of peace and the ubiquity of war. If you want another illustration, however, reflect on the fact that the present moment is one of the most peaceful in decades. There are fewer wars and fewer people killed in war. Yet I dare say most people believe we are unfortunate to live in such a dangerous time. Most of us think we are living in an unusually violent time, even though the data show the opposite.

Convinced that peace is normal, that wars are infrequent, and that America only fights wars to remove evil itself from the face of the earth, we are always candidates for a “sucker punch.” Consider the last century: We were torpedoed into the First World War by Germany on the North Atlantic; we were providentially bombed into the Second World War by the Japanese; we were dragged into the Cold War by Stalin’s expansionist appetites; we were catalyzed into the first Gulf War by Saddam’s misjudged advance into Kuwait; and we were shocked into the war against terror by the events of September 11, 2001.

Barring such exceptional circumstances, we shun military preparations and ignore the ancient advice: “If you want peace, prepare for war.” Neither the long centuries of human history nor our own national experience convinces us otherwise. Whenever war is over, we alchemically transform guns to butter and pretend to go back to “normal,” namely, the abnormal and temporary period known as peace. During peacetime, our political and military leadership declines because, unlike most traditional countries, the most talented people in America rarely go into politics or the military. They go into business or the professions.

Yet, in another of those paradoxes that strain the American soul, we rather like war, and we love successful military heroes. With rare exceptions, our presidents have either been state governors or generals who have won wars, from George Washington to Andrew Jackson to Dwight Eisenhower. As recently as this past year, there was considerable support—from a political party largely hostile to war—for General Wesley Clark, although he served in only a minor war in Kosovo. Furthermore, Senator Kerry embodied both sides of our ambivalence, having fought in war and opposed it thereafter. And four years ago, retired General Colin Powell decided not to run for the White House, although he quite likely would have been elected. He remains the single most popular figure in American political life.

Foreign policy has always been the greatest weakness of American democracy, as Tocqueville saw nearly two hundred years ago:

[A] democracy can only with great difficulty regulate the details of an important undertaking, persevere in a fixed design, and work out its execution in spite of serious obstacles. It cannot combine its measures with secrecy or await their consequences with patience. These are qualities which more especially belong to an individual or an aristocracy; and they are precisely the qualities by which a nation, like an individual, attains a dominant position.⁶

It's very hard for us to define a long-term strategy, and harder still to conduct it with patience and perseverance. We're an impatient people in all aspects of national life. Corporate executives are under constant pressure to produce results, and quickly, even if it might make more sense for the company to sacrifice short-term gains for far greater middle- or long-term profit. No go. Shareholders and fund managers want to see large black numbers on the bottom line every quarter. So it is in foreign affairs; we expect our leaders to deliver positive results, and fast. If we invest men and money in a particular policy objective, we want a good, speedy return. The electoral cycle sets the basic rhythm for foreign policy, and, unless we are in a clearly perceived international struggle, even a president who is prepared to sacrifice the interests of his party to a greater national good has to produce good news within four years. Never mind that it is often prudent to spend money for weapons that are never used, or that governments are supposed to protect us against worst-case scenarios that hardly ever happen, instead of having to react to crises when they arise. Finally, the requisite secrecy of which Tocqueville writes is almost impossible to sustain in modern democracies, and utterly impossible in contemporary America. It is only a matter of time before secret plans and operations leak out.

Moreover, we do not have the same luxury as the Europeans and the British. Their leaders have a virtual blank check (and usually a private budget) to spend on foreign policy, paramilitary, and intelligence operations. Our European allies in Iraq today are acting in the teeth of overwhelming domestic opposition, yet the governments remain in office until the next election. This would be impossible in the United

States. If a large majority of the American people opposed our presence in Iraq, the president would be forced to change his policy or to resign.

We therefore conduct foreign policy in fits and spasms, not with the patient cunning recommended by the grand masters of the art. We are more inclined to “a sudden effort of remarkable vigor, than for the prolonged endurance of the great storms that beset the political existence of nations.”⁷ Our wars are great moral crusades, never strategic strokes, and our wars are usually waged until total victory or humiliating defeat is achieved.

Our best leaders recognize this weakness and try to prepare us for the exigencies of international affairs, while our worst give in to our weaknesses and make no pretense of serious strategic planning. John F. Kennedy began his presidency with a warning of a “long twilight struggle,” and promised that America was prepared to sacrifice in order to fulfill its Jeffersonian mission. In contrast, Warren Christopher, the first Secretary of State in the Clinton years, convened the top officials of the Department of State and told them not to expect any strategic vision from the Clinton administration. “We do not have one,” he briskly informed the diplomats, “and we do not want one. We will simply deal with problems as they arise.” He, his successor, and his president were largely true to his words.

This fundamental component of American character is sometimes blamed on the emergence of the electronic mass media. It is hard for the American public to understand the nuances of world affairs when everything is reduced to short sound bites, and when television demands pictures in order to cover a story. Furthermore, the very nature of the medium often imposes action on politicians even though patience might be the wiser course. How can our leaders remain calm when the news networks are showing us awful pictures of dreadful events? How can we sustain a difficult foreign enterprise when we see mass casualties every night? Television may be a cool medium, but it generates heated responses and a clamor for action.

James Woolsey, the former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, has wittily suggested that if modern television reporters had accompanied our GIs to the Normandy beaches, we would have been forced to withdraw because of the enormous numbers of casualties that would have been seen on the evening news.

It’s a tempting argument. Americans love to explain the world by referring to some vast, irresistible change—technological innovation,

in this case—and certainly the power of the contemporary press represents a factor in policymaking that was not anticipated by even the most thoughtful strategic thinkers a generation or two ago. But when Tocqueville says we're more inclined to feel than to reason, or that we are not capable of long-term strategic vision, he is not talking about the effect of the evening news. He is talking about the way we are.

All of these factors are at play in our current debate concerning the war against terrorism, the struggle I have called the war against the terror masters. Rarely has any country been so slow to respond to attack as we were in this war, which is quite old. Terrorist attacks against the United States go back at least twenty-five years, to the Iranian Revolution of 1979, and ever since, Iran has been near or at the top of the State Department's list of countries that sponsor anti-American terrorism. Every American president, starting with Jimmy Carter, has declared war against terrorism, but we only began to actually wage that war on September 12, 2001.

We have been inundated with analyses of the intelligence failures leading to the September 11 massacres, and there were certainly many such failures. But the central point is that, prior to the devastating attack on American soil, no American president was prepared to engage in a real war against our self-proclaimed terrorist enemies. And if the policymakers weren't interested, as night follows day, the Intelligence community wasn't going to be very interested either.

None of the several committees and commissions that have picked apart our intelligence services has drawn attention to this central fact. Our spies and analysts do not operate in a vacuum. They know that facts are not neutral. Facts and assessments invariably imply policies, and the Intelligence community had two-and-a-half decades to learn that American presidents weren't going to wage war against terrorists and their state sponsors. This lesson was duly absorbed, often in very personal ways. Analysts learned that it was bad for advancement to warn excessively about terrorism, and case officers were all too happy to avoid the high risks involved in penetrating the terror network or the tyrannies that supported it. With every passing year, the Intelligence community knew less and less about terrorism because our political leaders didn't want to hear about it.

The politicization of intelligence is not something that happens only when a strong willed, internationally activist president wants justification for dramatic undertakings. It also happens when president after president doesn't want to hear alarming news that would oblige him

to take politically dangerous action. From Carter to Reagan and Bush the Elder to Clinton, every president kicked the terrorist can down the road, leaving his successor to pry it open and deal with the nasty worms inside. That is the main reason why, despite abundantly available information, the CIA and the other intelligence agencies did not sufficiently warn our presidents about the impending attack on American soil. Once the habits of mind are instilled and spread throughout the Intelligence community, it becomes part of their culture.

In the matter of terrorism, it was luminously clear that even the most alarming facts were not sufficient to provoke a vigorous response. Indeed, even when there *was* an attack on American soil, at the World Trade Center a few weeks after the inauguration of President Clinton, both our political leaders and the Intelligence community strained mightily and, in the end, successfully to ignore the import of the fully documented fact that the men who tried to kill tens of thousands of people in New York City in early 1993—and were quite unlucky to fail, by the way—were part of a network that stretched from the Philippines to the Middle East by way of the American heartland. Elements of that network were already planning to hijack commercial jetliners and crash them into targets in the United States. Not even that knowledge was sufficient to generate aggressive action.

The terror war thus fits the general model. We waited to be attacked—attacked not just once but multiple times. We were not ready for the new war, and we were surprised when peace didn't last. If you read the literature that appeared after the defeat of the Soviet Empire, you will find countless books and monographs declaring that, henceforth, military power would be largely irrelevant in international affairs because the problems of the future generally would be commercial or economic ones. The destinies of nations would be determined by such factors as "economic overreach," or perhaps by the triumph of liberal democracy that had led to a world sufficiently stable to warrant the colorful phrase "the end of history."⁸

We're utopian Washingtonians at peace and crusading Jeffersonians in wartime, and it's rare that we are able to think far beyond the present moment. We invariably insist that every major conflict ends with unconditional surrender and, if possible, with the imposition of American values, from self-determination to liberal democracy. When we destroyed the Taliban in Afghanistan, it wasn't good enough. We had to create a democratic Afghanistan. When we removed Saddam Hussein and smashed the Baathist state, that wasn't good enough either.

We had to create a democratic Iraq. These are the requirements of the Jeffersonian mission. (Jefferson himself was content to merely defeat our enemies on the Barbary Coast. But that was then, when our power was limited. Today he'd be a regime-changer. Big time.)

Our Jeffersonian crusades are often wonderful things, as most Japanese and Germans and Italians—and Afghans and Iraqis—will tell you. But they are not always a blessing because they leave little room for calm judgment. Sometimes it is wise to use power for more limited objectives in order to avoid a bigger problem in the future. To illustrate, Wilson's grandiose vision of a restructured Europe—to the point of redrawing the map of the continent despite previous agreements between our allies—was one of the primary causes of the next world war. It would have been wiser to recognize the legitimacy of the arrangements that brought Italy into the war,⁹ and to have been less punitive to Germany. A bit of Washingtonian leavening of a Jeffersonian loaf can serve us well. But that recipe is almost impossible for us to blend.

In like manner, Jeffersonian missions are often wise in otherwise Washingtonian times. If we had reacted forcefully and successfully against Hizballah in Lebanon after the slaughter of hundreds of American and French marines and diplomats in 1983, then we might well have prevented the emergence of the kind of terror network we're fighting today. And, as I have argued for several years now, we have frittered away invaluable time with regard to Iran, now on the verge of acquiring atomic bombs that the mullahs promise to use against us and against Israel. Too much Washington, too little Jefferson.

Our long acquiescence in the terror war fits the Washingtonian model, but I don't think there is any reason to be proud of it. The Washingtonian impulse, which gives our enemies the opportunity to strike first, has fortunately not yet proven fatal to the nation. But it is an extremely dangerous policy because it clearly risks the possibility that one day our luck will run out, and a first strike will defeat us.

All this takes us to the ongoing debate over "preemptive war," the critics of which act as if there were some basic principle of international law, or some moral principle, that requires us to absorb a first strike before the use of military power can be justified. Was our inaction before Pearl Harbor proper and noble? Was the Israeli inaction before the Yom Kippur invasion admirable? Was Soviet paralysis before the Nazi invasion a model for our own foreign policy? There is no such principle negating preemption. Yet despite our isolationist impulse,

not even we have embraced it, even in the extreme case of nuclear weapons. Throughout the Cold War, the Soviet Union and many West Europeans pressured us to adopt the principle of “no nuclear first strike.” Every American president rightly rejected it, because we shouldn’t want our enemies to believe they are entitled to land the first blow, especially when they have atomic bombs.

Finally, the war against the terror masters fits the model in another way. Like the other major conflicts of the past hundred years, it was initiated by our enemies, whatever real or imaginary grievances they have invoked to justify the decades-long murder of Americans and our friends and allies. Inevitably, we are drawn to the question of their motives. Why do they hate us? Why do they wish to kill us?

This is a variation of the question, who is our enemy? It is helpful to recall that this question, which occupied many of our finest thinkers throughout the twentieth century, is rarely answered satisfactorily. Was the Second World War waged against fascism or against several nation-states? I don’t think there are many contemporary scholars who still believe that the three members of the Axis—Germany, Italy, and Japan—shared a common ideology. Yet we certainly fought them all over the world. Was the Cold War waged against international communism or against Soviet imperialism? Or were both wars actually waged against a broader evil called totalitarianism? Those debates have never been resolved, whether among the community of scholars, within NATO, or even within any American administration, but we fought all over the planet and even in space. Whatever the still unresolved answer to the question, the important policy fact is that when we won, the ideology invoked by our enemies vanished. Nothing is so devastating to a messianic ideology—and both communism and fascism were intensely messianic—as the defeat of the believers, because it demonstrates that the vision was false. The divinity of the emperor, the inevitability of the triumph of the proletariat, and the vision of the master race all perished with the victory of the West.

As Wittgenstein reminds us, we sometimes ask the wrong question and thereby trap ourselves into looking for an answer that doesn’t exist, except in the trickery of language. There’s a lot of this in our current debates.

As of the twelfth of September, 2001, we faced a galaxy of terrorist groups and four main countries that sponsored the bulk of the terror network: Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. What did they have in common? Surely not radical Islam, nor even jihadism. The Baathist regimes in Syria and Iraq were anything but Islamist. They were secular socialist regimes. That's why the West, including the United States, liked dealing with them. We thought the Syrian and Iraqi leaders were quite like us, which was not the case with the Iranian radical Shi'ites or the Saudi Wahabis. Riyadh and Tehran were, and are, the essence of radical Islam, the one Sunni, the other Shi'ite.

Yet despite their profound differences, all four countries supported anti-American and anti-Western terrorism. All four hated us. Despite their differences, they worked together to support a wide variety of terrorist organizations, some of them Islamic, some secular, some of them Sunnis, others Shi'ites, to a degree that most experts and intelligence officials find shocking in retrospect. It was taken for granted (and still is, in some quarters) that the religious, cultural, and political divisions within the Middle East were so deep that strategic or even tactical alliances were impossible. Sunnis couldn't work with Shi'ites, for example, and the very idea of secular terrorism virtually disappeared from the horizon.

If they didn't share an ideology, what bound them together? As in the case of the Axis, they were all tyrannies, and the tyrants were united in their common fear and hatred of us, because the very existence of the United States threatened their legitimacy and undermined their authority. Contrary to the popular view of the "Arab street" that has been propagated by all too many "blundits,"¹⁰ most people in the Middle East would rather be free than oppressed. The tyrants know that and they know that the American example inspires their people. If leaders were elected in the Middle East, and policies were subject to the approval of the people, there would be a dramatic reduction in support for terrorists. The pro-democracy demonstrators in the streets of Iranian cities often carry signs that say, "Don't talk to us about the Palestinians, talk about us." And huge numbers of Iranians took to the streets following the September 11 attacks to mourn for the victims in New York and Washington, and repeated their expression of solidarity and grief a year later.

To say this is mildly heretical. There is a lot of misguided talk in intellectual circles to the effect that democracy is inappropriate to some peoples and some countries. They warn that, given a free choice, some

countries in the Middle East would chose a fanatical tyrant rather than a democratic leader. Perhaps so. It has surely happened in the past (Algeria and Iran being two examples, although one might argue that the Iranian Revolution wasn't really a free choice), but those cases are few and far between, and the number gets smaller with every passing year. For the most part, this theory is just another form of racism, as if there were something in the Arabs' or the Muslims' DNA that makes them incapable of self-government and somehow allergic to freedom. It's quite a preposterous thing to say, since those chromosomically and culturally challenged Arabs and Muslims created great civilizations that preserved scientific knowledge and philosophical wisdom at a time when the Europeans, with their presumably superior genetic material, were mired in the Dark Ages, soon thereafter to institutionalize the Inquisition and the *auto-da-fé*.

Those who argue for the unique cultural legitimacy of the Muslim and/or Arab version of tyranny seem not to know that, in the very recent past, Western Europeans with glorious cultural traditions freely embraced tyrannies of their own. Hitler and Mussolini were enormously popular. Perhaps the most horrific aspect of German National Socialism and Italian fascism was their mass popularity among the heirs of Hegel, Beethoven, and Frederick the Great, and Cicero, Augustus, and Verdi. At the time, there were those who believed that there was something fundamentally rotten in the German or Italian soul, but there are few who believe that today. Why should we believe the heirs of Suleiman and Averroes have mutated into malignant monsters incapable of tolerant self-government? And notice, please, that the virulent anti-Semitism in which so much of Middle Eastern popular culture is now drenched came from Western Europe in the first place. They often sound like Nazis because they copied it from the Fuehrer.

The current war is not something dramatically new, something altogether different from previous conflicts. I do not think it is a clash of two cultures or civilizations that are fundamentally and irreconcilably at odds with each other. The terror war is just one more example of something that has recurred throughout modern history: a war between freedom and tyranny. The tyrants attacked us, as they have so often in the past, knowing that either they expand the realm of tyranny or they will be swallowed up in the tide of democratic revolution. Their actions against us are the ultimate proof that the tyrants are right to fear us, and that they fear us for what we are, not for what we do. Whether or not there are American troops in Saudi Arabia, whether

or not a Palestinian state is created, whether or not Israel exists, the tyrants will come after us, as they always have. Our options remain the same as ever: we must defeat them or be dominated by them.

In the last two world wars, we recognized the political dimension of the conflicts, even if some of the nuances were open to debate. It was not necessary to believe that Japan, Germany, and Italy shared a single evil vision to know that spreading freedom was central to our victory, or that, if we failed, freedom would be crushed wherever our enemies prevailed. It should not be difficult to see that the same is true today.

In short, the Jeffersonian mission is the right one in the war against the terror masters. Don't we see it everyday? After the fall of Saddam, there were suddenly pro-democracy demonstrations in the most unlikely places, like Syria and Saudi Arabia. Every Middle Eastern ruler is now searching for at least the illusion of a reform program that will satisfy his people yet keep him firmly on his throne (or in his comfortably padded chair). Victory in the war against the terror masters means spreading democratic revolution throughout the Middle East. Just ask Tom Jefferson.

Victory does not mean Empire now, any more than it did at the end of the previous world wars. Americans are not interested in ruling the world. We cringe at the very thought. It is quite contrary to the American character and to the American mission. Those who dread and those who welcome the American mission, seeing it as a new form of imperialism, have both misunderstood America and Americans. Our Washingtonian impulse will not permit empire. We don't want to be hegemons. We certainly don't want to occupy ourselves with the management of overseas territories or colonies. Indeed, we are incapable of it. Our Jeffersonian side will cheer the spread of freedom, but as soon as our tyrannical enemies have been defeated we will inevitably lapse into our other incarnation. We will clamor to bring the boys home, transform guns into butter, and chant the old mantra that peace is normal and there is no need to prepare for war.

Today, as throughout our history, we are going to pack up and come home from the war as quickly as we possibly can. How soon will that be? It is likely to be too soon if we continue to focus obsessively on Iraq and fail to see the regional and maybe even the global dimensions of this war. I am not inclined to believe that this is a fourth world war,

but some very smart people believe it, and they may be proven right. I have no doubt that we are facing a regional war, and we cannot win it so long as the tyrants continue to rule in Damascus, Tehran, and Riyadh. I said this long before the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom, when I wrote that we could not possibly have a free and secure Iraq if the followers of the Ayatollah Khomeini remained in power across the eastern border, and the Stalinist Baathists remained in Damascus, and the Wahabis continued to fund terrorism and radical *madrasas* in Saudi Arabia and across the world, including in the United States itself. That has been proven accurate. Every day we find more evidence of Syrian, Saudi, and Iranian money, weapons, agents, and terrorists in Iraq.

There must be regime change throughout the region. Happily, we have the winning weapon against the tyrants. It is not armed invasion but democratic revolution. Tocqueville was right when he foresaw that America would be the champion of freedom in the world, and that we would inevitably have to battle the partisans of tyranny to determine the destiny of mankind. He predicted our protracted struggle with Russia in 1831, describing it as a war between the two organizing principles of human society. He would not be surprised to see us engaged in a new war against other tyrants. That has always been our destiny.

Despite our great weaknesses and our celebrated inability to do many of the things required by serious foreign policy—such as careful planning for post-war Iraq—we have a good chance to win. Our principal adversary in the Middle East is Iran, the country identified by the distinctly non-hawkish and non-neoconservative Department of State as the world's leading sponsor of international terrorism. No one should be surprised to find leading Al-Qaida figures in Iran, both before September 11 and after the liberation of Afghanistan from the Taliban. Nor should one be surprised at the close Iranian ties of Abu Musab al Zarqawi, the Palestinian from Jordan who has become the current *deus ex machina* of the terror war against us in Iraq. Zarqawi has operated from Iran for many years, as publicly available court documents in both Italy and Germany demonstrate. Headquartered in Tehran for several years before September 11, Zarqawi created a European network to recruit terrorists for the cause, and organized their travel to Afghanistan, Iran, and Syria for *jihād* training. Surprisingly little attention has been paid to Zarqawi's support from Iran, in part because Secretary of State Colin Powell, in his presentation to the United Nations shortly before Operation Iraqi Freedom, said that Zarqawi had spent time in Baghdad.

The Israeli government has identified Iran as the principal supporter of Hamas and Islamic Jihad. We have long known that Hizballah, arguably the world's most dangerous terrorist organization, is an Iranian creation. In addition, Iran has advanced a wildly radical version of Shi'ism, in which the traditional separation of mosque and state (advocated, for example, by Iraq's leading Shi'ite cleric, the Ayatollah Shirazi) has been scrapped in favor of a theocratic dictatorship governed by a Supreme Leader who speaks for Allah as well as the nation. The defeat of the Iranian mullahs would simultaneously strike a mortal blow at the heart of the terror network and undermine the standing of the Iranian theory of Shi'ism. Not least, it would free the Iranian people from the murderous oppression of a hated regime.

One cannot find a better example of a society more fully ready for democratic revolution than Iran. We brought down the Soviet Empire when only a small proportion of its subjects were prepared to openly fight for their freedom. In Iran today the overwhelming majority of the people (upwards of 70%, according to the regime's own public opinion polls) openly despises the regime and would work for its overthrow, if only it had the support of the Western world. We should certainly be willing to do for them what we did for the oppressed peoples of the Soviet Empire as well as for the Filipinos under Marcos and the Yugoslavs under Milosovic. It is not only an imperative for our national security but also an imperative for our Jeffersonian impulse. We're prepared to march and spend and declaim and even fight for Haitians, Sudanese, and Liberians, and rightly so. Why not for the Iranians?

It doesn't require armies, it requires money and equipment (like satellite phones and radio and television stations) and above all consistent and coherent statements from all our leaders. A free Iran would give free Iraq and free Afghanistan a real chance, and serve as a model for the rest of the region. Even those who argue the "genetic" theory of democracy have a hard time contesting the ability of Iranians to govern themselves or grasp the subtleties of democracy. Their Constitution of 1906 is as thoughtful and sophisticated as anyone could wish. Prior to Khomeini's seizure of power in 1979, Iranian women were the envy of the region. Despite the bloody madness of the past quarter century, Iranian education remains quite serviceable.

Innumerable objections will be raised against my call for support of democratic revolution in Iran. Even many of those who sympathize with the goal, with suitable passion and undoubted good faith, contend that anything we do to encourage it will only produce greater misery

and repression. I heard many of the same objections during the Reagan years, when those who supported the president's clear call for freedom for the captive nations and an end to the Soviet Empire were branded as hopelessly brainwashed ideologues. Events proved us right, and once the Wall fell and people were free to speak their minds, we were thanked by the victims of Soviet communism. They told us that once they heard Reagan describe the "evil empire" for what it was, they gained new hope, and redoubled their efforts to bring it down.

Those willing to fight Soviet communism from within were a small minority, both in the Soviet Union and in places like Poland and Czechoslovakia. Yet, in the end, they were strong enough to win their freedom. Given that experience, it seems perverse to argue that freedom cannot be won in Iran, where a huge majority of the population hates the regime and wishes to be free.

The policy of advancing freedom in Iran is made more urgent by Iran's support of our terrorist enemies and by the mullahs' relentless drive to acquire atomic bombs. But it would be the right policy—the very essence of Jeffersonianism—even if there were no war against the terror masters, and even if there were no impending nuclear threat. It is what we are all about, isn't it? And it is far better to get on with it quickly than to await the first Iranian nuclear test.

That is the American mission as I see it. If we do it well, it will continue, to the great benefit of peoples who wish to choose their own form of government and elect their own leaders. If we fail, the tyrants will continue their attacks until they have finally dominated us, which is their announced goal. It doesn't seem a difficult choice. ●

Notes

1. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, I (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1835), p. 291.
2. Luigi Barzini, *O America*, p. 158.
3. It's just one of many internal conflicts. We're the most religious country in the world and the most secular. We're the most materialistic and the most idealistic. We're the most individualistic (indeed, the word was invented by Tocqueville to describe us) and the most communitarian—no other country has so many spontaneous associations. The contradictions abound. I've argued that these internal conflicts account for our amazing energy. Cf. Michael A. Ledeen, *Tocqueville on American Character* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).
4. Barzini, p. 303.
5. Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1957), chap. 1.
6. Tocqueville, p. 235.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 228.

8. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992). Fukuyama certainly did not believe that history had come to an end, but only that the liberal democratic vision had effectively discredited competing ideologies, at least for the moment.
9. For an account of the Italian rage against Wilson and the melodramatic response by the Italian veterans who occupied the city of Fiume, see Michael A. Ledeen, *D'Annunzio: the First Duce* (New Brunswick: Transaction Press, 2000).
10. The word "Blundit" was invented by Bernard Lewis and means "a pundit who's always wrong."