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Ron Paul Institute Conference

18 August 2018

As Prepared For Delivery

**What Is the Empire’s Strategy?**

OPENING PLEASANTRIES

I ASKED DANIEL TO LIST MY TITLE AS “WHAT IS THE EMPIRE’S STRATEGY?”

I DON’T MEAN, HOW DO WE GET THROUGH THE WEEK, OR MONTH OR YEAR, OR EVEN THE NEXT DECADE—OR, AS IS BEING INCREASINGLY ASKED THESE DAYS, THROUGH THE PRESENT PRESIDENCY.

THESE ARE NOT UNIMPORTANT MATTERS BUT WITHOUT SOME SORT OF STRATEGIC UMBRELLA UNDER WHICH TO OPERATE, EVEN GOOD ANSWERS TO THESE SHORT-TERM ISSUES MIGHT NOT BE THE BEST ANSWERS FOR THE LONG-TERM.

FOR EXAMPLE, DRILLING FOR OIL OR MINING FOR COPPER IN PRISTINE ALASKAN ENVIRONMENTS MIGHT SEEM A POSITIVE, PROFITABLE ACTIVITY FOR THE SHORT-TERM—WHETHER IT’S IN THE ARCTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE OR IT’S PEBBLE MINE IN BRISTOL BAY, FEATURING ONE OF THE LARGEST COLLECTIONS OF SALMON LEFT ON EARTH.

I’VE FISHED FOR SOME OF THOSE SALMON AND I KNOW PERSONALLY HOW MAGNIFICENT THOSE RIVERS ARE.

I FEAR THAT IN THE LONG-TERM, SUCH EXPLOITATION WILL LIKELY PROVE HIGHLY NEGATIVE FOR A MAJOR ECO-SYSTEM AS WELL AS FOR THE PEOPLE WHO DEPEND ON IT.

MOREOVER, IT MIGHT WELL PROVE EXTREMELY NEGATIVE WITH REGARD TO THE PLANET’S CAPACITY TO CONTINUE TO ABSORB HUMANITY’S ASSAULT UPON IT WITHOUT SOME MAJOR REPERCUSSIONS.

FOR INSTANCE, I BELONG TO A GROUP CALLED THE CLIMATE AND SECURITY WORKING GROUP HERE IN WASHINGTON. WE ARE COMPOSED OF ACTIVE-DUTY AND RETIRED DOD PERSONNEL, SAME FOR HOMELAND SECURITY PERSONNEL, AND OTHER CONCERNED CITIZENS.

WE ARE PARTICULARLY CONCERNED WITH SEA RISE. WHERE THE COMPUTER MODELS HAVE BEEN WRONG, THEY HAVE BEEN WRONG IN OUR DISFAVOR. THAT IS, THE SEAS ARE RISING FASTER THAN THE MODELS PREDICTED—IN SOME CRITICAL CASES, MUCH FASTER.

THIS MEANS MASSIVE COSTS OVER THE NEXT TWO TO THREE DECADES FOR THE MILITARY TO PROTECT COASTAL INSTALLATIONS OR TO RELOCATE THEM ALTOGETHER. WE’RE TALKING TENS OF BILLIONS OF DOLLARS.

NORFOLK, CHARLESTON, MAYPORT, MIAMI, PASCAGOULA, NEW ORLEANS, HOUSTON AND ESLEWHERE ALL HOST THREATENED FACILITIES.

THIS MIGHT SEEM A LONG-TERM CHALLENGE—AND IT IS—BUT IT IS SWIFTLY BECOMING AN ‘IN YOUR FACE’ CHALLENGE AS WELL, PARTICULARLY FOR THE MILITARY.

SO, WHAT AMERICA IS STILL WITHOUT ALMOST THIRTY YEARS AFTER THE COLD WAR’S END IS A NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE FUTURE, OR AT LEAST AS MUCH OF THAT FUTURE AS WE CAN SEE AND INTERPET SUFFICIENTLY TO PLAN FOR.

A NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE LONG-TERM, WHETHER IN WAR OR PEACE, IS TRUE STRATEGY, OR WHAT SOME HAVE CALLED GRAND STRATEGY.

FOR EXAMPLE, THE WWII GRAND STRATEGY OF BEING THE ARSENAL OF DEMOCRACY AND USING OUR UNPRECEDENTED AND PENT-UP INDUSTRIAL CAPACITY TO OUTFIT NOT ONLY OUR OWN ARMIES BUT THOSE OF BRITAIN, FREE FRANCE, FREE POLAND, THE SOVIET UNION, AND OTHERS, SUCCEEDED IN WINNING A TWO-OCEAN WAR AGAINST THE POWERFUL EMPIRES OF GERMANY AND JAPAN.

AND ALMOST IMMEDIATELY AFTERWARD, A GRAND STRATEGY OF CONTAINMENT, ATTACHED ADROITLY TO OUR ECONOMIC POWER AND EXECUTED FAIRLY WELL OVER ABOUT A HALF CENTURY, ENDED THE COLD WAR ON TERMS FAVORABLE TO US.

BUT SINCE THAT WAR’S END—AND PARTICULARLY SINCE THE MAJORLY DESTABILIZING ATTACKS OF SEPTEMBER 11, 2001—THE US HAS POSSESSED NO GRAND STRATEGY. ZERO. ZILCH. NADA. NOTHING.

AND AS KING LEAR SAID TO HIS DAUGHTER CORNELIA, “NOTHING WILL COME OF NOTHING.”

WHAT DID COME WAS A REPUDIATION OF GEORGE H. W. BUSH’S NASCENT EUROPEAN STRATEGY OF WELCOMING A REFORMED RUSSIA INTO NATO AND ITS REPLACEMENT BY A RAPACIOUS AND OLIGARCHY-BASED STRATEGY, LED BY GOLDMAN SACHS’ BOB RUBIN AND LARRY SUMMERS, TO EXPAND NATO DIRECTLY INTO MOSCOW’S SPACE AND THUS PROVOKE THE REACTIONS WE HAVE WITNESSED SINCE THE PUSHBACK BY RUSSIA IN GEORGIA AND THE TAKEOVER OF CRIMEA.

THEN CAME GEORGE W. BUSH WHO SAID HE WANTED TO ESTABLISH IN THE WORLD A BALANCE OF POWER THAT FAVORED FREEDOM BUT FORGOT TO CONSIDER HIS MACHIAVELLIAN VICE PRESIDENT, DICK CHENEY.

ALONG CAME THE TERRORIST ATTACKS OF 2001 AND CHENEY TOOK OVER. HIS STRATEGY—I AM LOATH TO CALL IT “STRATEGY”—WAS NOT ONLY FOOLHARDY BUT POTENTLY DESTRUCTIVE OF WHAT REMAINED OF AMERICAN CREDIBILITY.

IN THE FIRST PLACE, TO MAKE WAR ON A METHODOLOGICAL PHENOMENON—TERROR—IS ABOUT AS STUPID AS MAKING WAR ON A HUMAN ADDICTION SUCH AS DRUGS OR A HUMAN CONDITION SUCH AS POVERTY, UNLESS OF COURSE YOU WANT THE WAR TO LAST FOREVER AND COST ZILLIONS, BECAUSE YOU CAN NEVER WIN.

I RECALL MY FIRST REAL DEBATE WITH COLIN POWELL, AT THE TIME A NEW FOUR-STAR GENERAL AND COMMANDER OF THE ARMY’S FORCES COMMAND IN ATLANTA, GEORGIA.

HE’D JUST LEFT THE WHITE HOUSE WHERE HE HAD BEEN PREISDENT REAGAN’S SIXTH AND FINAL NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR.

I WAS A FRESH-CAUGHT LIEUTENTANT COLONEL HIRED TO BE HIS SPEECHWRITER, SO I DARED NOT TAKE TOO MUCH LICENSE WITH HIM THIS EARLY-ON.

BUT HE WAS IN HIS NEW, VERY SPACIOUS OFFICE WAXING ELOQUENT ABOUT HOW THE MILITARY WAS NOW GOING TO FULFILL REAGAN’S—AND THEN H.W. BUSH’S—DESIRE TO HELP WITH THE DRUG WAR.

I LOOKED AT HIM AND ASKED: “WHY WOULD THE ARMED FORCES WANT TO JOIN IN A WAR THEY CANNOT WIN?”

INCREDULITY SPREAD ACROSS HIS FACE AND HE RESPONDED: “WHAT DO YOU MEAN?”

WELL, I KNEW DISCRETION AT THAT POINT WAS WARRANTED, SO I JUST REPEATED SOFTLY WHAT I’D SAID, SIMPLY “WE CAN’T WIN THAT WAR.”

“I DISAGREE,” HE EXCLAIMED, AND THAT WAS THAT. BUT I HAD MADE MY POINT, HOWEVER WEAKLY. “WARS” ON HUMAN ADDICTIONS OR HUMAN CONDITIONS ARE FUNDAMENTALLY SENSELESS BECAUSE THEY CAN NEVER BE WON.

NOW TODAY, I WON’T PRETEND THAT IN MY ALOTTED TWENTY MINUTES I CAN DELINEATE A GRAND STRATEGY FOR YOU.

AND LEST I SEEM TOO PRAISEWORTHY OF OUR PAST, LET ME OFFER A CAVEAT FOR THE PAST HALF-CENTURY AS WELL, A PERIOD THAT DONALD TRUMP SEEMS TO YEARN FOR.

HERE I’M QUOTING FROM A CATO INSTITUTE PIECE OF JUNE 5 OF THIS YEAR, IN WHICH PATRICK PORTER WRITES:

“WHILE LIBERALISM AND LIBERAL PROJECTS EXISTED, SUCH ‘ORDER’ AS EXISTED RESTED ON THE IMPERIAL PREROGATIVES OF A SUPERPOWER THAT ATTEMPTED TO IMPOSE ORDER BY STEPPING OUTSIDE RULES AND ACCOMMODATING ILLIBERAL FORCES…[AND] SOME OF THE MOST DOCTRINAIRE LIBERAL PROJECTS PRODUCED ILLIBERAL RESULTS.”

SUCH AS INTERVENTIONS IN AFRICA, SE ASIA—MY WAR, IN VIETNAM—CENTRAL AMERICA, IRAN, AFGHANISTAN, IRAQ, LIBYA, SYRIA, AND I COULD OF COURSE CONTINUE.

PORTER GOES ON TO CONCLUDE THAT THE UNITED STATES NEEDS
“TO APPRAISE ITS GRAND STRATEGY IN ORDER TO BRING ITS POWER AND COMMITENTS INTO BALANCE.”

MY DIFFERENCE WITH PORTER, AS YOU MIGHT HAVE GLEANED, IS SIMPLY TO ASK: SINC E 1993, WHAT GRAND STRATEGY, PRAY TELL?

LET ME START WITH THE MOST IMPORTANT PARTS OF SUCH A STRATEGY AND BRIEFLY MAKE SOME KEY POINTS: WAYS, MEANS, AND ENDS.

THE WAYS ARE THE METHODS TO BE USED TO EXECUTE THE STRATEGY; THE MEANS ARE THE RESOURCES WE POSSESS TO BE APPLIED TO THAT EXECUTION; AND THE ENDS ARE OF COURSE WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE.

WAYS ARE THINGS SUCH AS DIPLOMA CY, FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS, ECONOMIC POLICIES, CULTURAL INFLUENCES, TECHNOLOGIES, AND MILITARY POWER. NOTE WHERE I PLACED MILITARY POWER—AT THE VERY END, THE LAST “WAY” TO BE CONSIDERED, NOT THE FIRST.

MEANS ARE MONEY AND PEOPLE, BASICALLY.

ENDS ARE: WHAT THE DEVIL DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE IN THE WORLD AND AT HOME---AND INCREASINGLY YOU CANNOT DECOUPLE THE TWO ENVIRONMENTS. THE IDEA, E.G., THAT DEBATES OVER FOREIGN POLICY STOP AT THE WATER’S EDGE IS UTTER NONSENSE, AS RECENT LETTERS FROM MEMBERS OF CONGRESS TO FOREIGN LEADERS CLEARLY INDICATE.

AND SUCH AFFAIRS DID NOT START WITH TOM COTTON AND HIS GANG OF MORONS. THEY ARE AS OLD AS OUR REPUBLIC—INDEED, AS OLD AS ATHENS IN 400BC.

MOST OF MY OVER 500 STUDENTS ON TWO CAMPUSES OVER THE PAST 13 YEARS, HAVING STUDIED EVERY POST-WWII PRESIDENT FROM TRUMAN TO TRUMP, WILL TELL YOU THAT DOMESTIC POLITICS INFLUENCE NATIONAL SECURITY DECISION-MAKING ALMOST AS MUCH AS ANY OTHER ASPECT OF THAT DECISION-MAKING—AND IN SOME SPECIFIC CASES LIKE PRESIDENT JOHNSON AND HIS 1965 DECISION TO UP THE ANTE IN VIETNAM, INFLUENCE IT OVERWHELMINGLY.

AND ALL ONE NEED LOOK TO FOR AWESOME PROOF OF THAT TODAY IS OUR PRESIDENT AND HIS “STRATEGY”.

AS GERMANY’S FOREIGN MINISTER SAID, RATHER LACONICALLY, WHEN TRUMP VIOLATED THE JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OF ACTION—THE NUCLEAR AGREEMENT WITH IRAN—HE DID IT BASED ON DOMESTIC POLITICS. ANYONE WITH HALF A BRAIN KNOWS HE DID.

BUT BACK TO OUR GRAND STRATEGY…

ONE OF THE MOST VITAL ASPECTS OF A GOOD GRAND STRATEGY FOR THE U.S. IS HOOKING UP THE ECONOMY—ONE OF OUR STRONGEST FEATURES—TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF OUR ENDS, AS WE DID SO BRILLIANTLY IN WWII AND SOMEWHAT BRILLIANTLY IN THE COLD WAR.

I SAY ‘SOMEWHAT BRILLIANTLY’ BECAUSE I AM READING AT PRESENT WILLIAM TAUBMAN’S NEW BOOK, *GORBACHEV*. WHEN ONE BEGINS TO COMPREHEND THE PROBLEMS OF THE SOVIET UNION IN THE 1980S ONE CAN ONLY LAMENT HOW LITTLE WE REALLY UNDERSTOOD ABOUT THE KREMLIN AND ABOUT THAT COUNTRY AND, AS A RESULT, HOW AWKWARD AND STUMBLING WE WERE IN HELPING BRING AN END TO THAT COLD WAR CONFLICT.

AND HERE A SIDE NOTE: AS THE SOVIETS DISCOVERED, USING THE VERY, VERY EXPENSIVE MILITARY INSTRUMENT DRAINS THE ECONOMY AND MUST BE AVOIDED AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE. EVEN GIVING THAT MILITARY UNQUESTIONED AND SELDOM WELL-OVERSEEN FUNDING AND SUPPORT SHORT OF WAR IS DEBILITATING AND TO BE DONE ONLY IN EXTREMIS AND CERTAINLY NOT AS A CONSTANT PART OF A SANE AND SOBER GRAND STRATEGY.

KEEPING ONE’S POWDER DRY—OR AS WASHINGTON SAID, BEING PREPARED FOR WAR—DOES NOT MEAN BREAKING THE BANK TO FUND THE MILITARY INSTRUMENT.

BUT LET’S FOCUS FOR A MOMENT ON THE MOST IMPORTANT INITIAL PART OF ANY GRAND STRATEGY: THE ENDS.

 STATED SIMPLY, WHAT IS IT THAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE AT HOME AND IN THE WORLD OVER, SAY, THE NEXT HALF CENTURY?

AND NO PABLUM HERE, LIKE THE ANONDYNE STATEMENTS THAT COME OUT IN THE NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY EACH YEAR. THINGS LIKE WHERE THIS YEAR’S STRATEGY DECLARES THAT “NO EXTERNAL THREAT CAN BE ALLOWED TO SHAKE OUR SHARED COMMITMENT TO OUR VALUES, UNDERMINE OUR SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT, OR DIVIDE OUR NATION.”

WELL, WE MIGHT WELL CONCLUDE SCRATCHING OUR COLLECTIVE HEADS, WE ARE DOING THAT BEST OURSELVES; NO NEED FOR AN EXTERNAL THREAT.

BUT LOOK AT THAT STATEMENT FROM A GENERAL PERSPECTIVE OF HELPFULNESS IN DELINEATING A GRAND STRATEGY. IT’S USELESS.

IT’S LIKE LOOKING AT A BEAUTIFUL TROUT STREAM WITH A THREE THOUSAND-DOLLAR HANDMADE CANE FLY-ROD IN YOUR HAND AND SAYING YOUR OBJECTIVE IS TO CATCH FISH.

WELL, OF COURSE THAT’S PART OF IT. BUT IT’S FAR AND AWAY NOT ALL OF IT.

I WANT TO CATCH 19-INCH, WESTSLOPE CUTTHROAT TROUT AND I WANT TO CATCH THEM ON DRY FLIES DURING A MAGNIFICENT HATCH OF CADDIS AND BLUE-WING OLIVES. AND I WANT TO CATCH THEM ON A TUMBLING, ICILY-COLD, CRYSTAL-CLEAR STREAM, HIGH IN THE BITTER ROOT MOUNTAINS, WITH ONLY THE SILENT SOUND OF MY SUPERBLY-BALANCED CANE-ROD-DELIVERED FLY GENTLY TOUCHING THE WATER AND NO OTHER HUMANS AROUND TO DISTURB THAT IDYL. AND PERHAPS WITH AN ELK STANDING DOWNSTREAM, STARING AT ME WARILY.

IN SHORT, A GRAND STRATEGY NEEDS SPECIFICTY, GRANULAR DETAILS.

FDR HIRED THE “DOLLAR MEN”—SOME OF AMERICA’S MOST BRILLIANT INDUSTRIALISTS—TO PUT TOGETHER THE LINKAGE BETWEEN AMERICA’S AWESOME BUT THEN-LATENT PRODUCTIVE CAPACITY AND THE URGENT NEEDS OF A GLOBAL WAR. THESE MEN DID THE DETAILS. AND I WANT TO TELL YOU THEY DID.

AIN’T NOBODY, MAN OR WOMAN, DOING THE DETAILS FOR ANYTHING TODAY—EXCEPT ON A SELECT BASIS, FOR EXTREMELY NARROW INTERESTS, WITH LITTLE NATIONAL PAYBACK, AND LOTS OF NATIONAL DEBT, HARM, AND INJURY .

AS AN EXAMPLE, LET’S TAKE THE MIDDLE EAST FOR A MOMENT—AND I’M TAKING THAT REGION BECAUSE REGARDLESS OF HOW MANY TIMES TRUMP, BOLTON, OR MATTIS SAYS INDO-PAC IS THE NEW U.S. STRATEGIC EMPHASIS, WE CANNOT ESCAPE THE FACT THAT THE MAJORITY OF OUR TIME, EFFORT, AND MILITARY MIGHT IS IN THAT REGION AT THE MOMENT.

WHAT SHOULD A PRESIDENTIAL ADMINISTRATION DECLARE TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE AS OUR STRATEGIC END FOR THAT REGION?

HERE’S WHAT I SUGGEST: THAT THE OIL FROM ITS PRODUCING COUNTRIES FLOWS CONSTANTLY, AND AT A CONSISTENT AND AFFORDABLE PRICE, TO OUR FRIENDS AND ALLIES AND, IF NECESSARY, TO OURSELVES. ALL THIS, AS WE READY OURSELVES FOR A FUTURE WITHOUT ANY OIL WHATSOEVER. AND THAT LAST IS KEY FOR IT IS THE LARGEST CHALLENGE WE AND THE WORLD CONFRONT.

OH YES, AS SHIPS WITH SAILS DID NOT IN THE PAST DISAPPEAR FROM THE FACE OF THE EARTH, SO OIL MIGHT LINGER IN ESOTERIC PLACES. BUT IT WILL NOT BE THE VERY ESSENCE OF ECONOMIC MIGHT; NOT EVEN CLOSE.

NOTE THAT THERE IS NOTHING IN THIS EXPRESSION OF “ENDS” ABOUT STATE-BUILDING OF JEFFERSONIAN DEMOCRACIES, NOTHING ABOUT BRINGING FREEDOM TO THE HUDDLED MASSES, AND NOTHING ABOUT SIDLING UP TO DICTATORS AND THEIR GANGS IN ORDER TO ENSURE ACCESS TO THEIR OIL—AND ABSOLUTELY NOTHING ABOUT BUILDING U.S. MILITARY FACILITIES ALL ACROSS THE REGION.

THERE IS, ON THE OTHER HAND, A RECOGNITION THAT OIL IS FUNGIBLE, THAT IT MUST BE SOLD, THAT HOARDING IT FOR LONG, ANYWAY, IS NOT A TENDENCY OF PETROLEUM-PRODUCING STATES, AND THAT IF THEY ARE CONVINCED YOU WILL NOT LIKE IT IF THEY DO SOMEHOW PROHIBIT YOUR ACCESS TO IT, THEY WILL IN FACT AGREE TO SELL IT TO THE WORLD AT A REASONABLE PRICE. AND THEY WILL SCRAMBLE TO ACCOMMODATE YOU AS OIL DISAPPEARS FROM USE. TAKE A LOOK AT SAUDI ARABIA’S NEW PLAN FOR THE FUTURE AND THEN TELL ME THAT EVEN THOSE DEMENTED LEADERS DON’T REALIZE THIS REALITY.

WE COULD DO THE SAME SORT OF REASONABLE DELINEATION OF ENDS FOR EUROPE, THE WHOLE OF SOUTHWEST ASIA—INCLUDING AFGHANISTAN BUT WAIT A MOMENT THERE—NORTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA, AND MOST IF NOT ALL OF THE WORLD.

I BELIEVE THAT IF WE DID THIS SORT OF REALISTIC FORMULATION OF STRATEGIC ENDS, WE COULD MOVE ON TO AN EQUALLY REASONABLE LOOK AT THE WAYS AND MEANS WE HAVE AT HAND TO ACHIEVE THEM.

FOR EXAMPLE, IN THE MIDDLE EAST IT WOULD DEFINITELY NOT FEATURE THE LARGEST U.S. AIR FORCE BASE ON EARTH IN QATAR, A COUNTRY NOW AT ALMOST WAR-PROVOKING ODDS WITH SAUDI ARABIA AND ITS FRIENDS LIKE THE UAE; NOR A HUGE AIR FORCE BASE IN SAUDI ARABIA ITSELF; NOR THE LARGEST US FLEET HEADQUARTERS IN BAHRAIN; NOR HUGE LOGISTIC FACILITIES IN KUWAIT; NOR A USAF BASE IN ISRAEL; AND CERTAINLY NOT A US WAR EFFORT IN SYRIA NOR A RESIDUAL US MILITARY PRESENCE IN IRAQ. NEITHER WOULD IT INCLUDE A COMPLETELY ANTAGONISTIC RELATIONSHIP WITH THE TRUE POWER IN THE REGION, IRAN.

NOW, AS I INTIMATED, AFGHANISTAN IS AN ALTOGETHER DIFFERENT MATTER. THAT COUNTRY DEMONSTRATES THE DANGER OF HAVING A PRESIDENT WHO IS ONLY INTERESTED IN DOMESTIC POLITICS.

INTO THE VOID CREATED BY THAT OVERRIDING PRESIDENTIAL FOCUS COMES THE MOST POWERFUL AND MOST STRATEGICALLY-ORIENTED BUREAUCRACY IN OUR GOVERNMENT, THE MILITARY.

HERE IS WHAT IT HAS DECIDED FOR AFGHANISTAN.

THERE ARE THREE STRATEGIC REASONS WE WILL BE IN AFGHANISTAN, AS WE HAVE BEEN IN GERMANY SINCE WWII, FOR A VERY LONG TIME—WELL BEYOND THE ALMOST TWENTY YEARS WE HAVE BEEN THERE TO DATE.

THESE REASONS HAVE LITTLE TO DO WITH STATE-BUILDING, WITH THE TALIBAN, OR WITH ANY TERRORIST GROUP THAT MIGHT BE PRESENT. THESE THINGS ARE ANCILLARY TO OUR REAL OBJECTIVES.

THE FIRST REAL OBJECTIVE IS TO HAVE HARD POWER DIRECTLY NEAR THE CHINESE BASE ROAD INITIATIVE (BRI) IN CENTRAL ASIA.

ASK DONALD RUMSFELD HOW DIFFICULT IT WAS TO GET MAJOR MILITARY FORCES INTO THIS EXTRAORDINARILY DIFFICULT LAND-LOCKED TERRAIN IN THE FALL OF 2001. FOR THAT REASON, WE ARE NOT ABOUT TO DEPART.

SECOND, IN AFGHANISTAN WE ARE RIGHT NEXT TO THE POTENTIALLY MOST UNSTABLE NUCLEAR STOCKPILE ON EARTH, PAKISTAN’S. WE ARE NOT ABOUT TO LEAVE THAT EITHER. WE WANT TO BE ABLE TO POUNCE ON THAT STOCKPILE VERY SWIFTLY SHOULD IT BECOME A THREAT.

THIRD, WE WANT TO BE ABLE TO MOUNT AND COVER WITH HARDPOWER CIA OPERATIONS IN XINJIANG PROVINCE, CHINA’S WESTERNMOST SECTION. THESE WOULD BE OPERATIONS AIMED AT USING THE SOME 20 MILLION UIGHURS IN THAT PROVINCE TO DESTABLIZE THE GOVERNMENT IN BEIJING SHOULD WE SUDDENLY FIND OURSELVES AT WAR WITH THAT COUNTRY.

I WILL WAGER THERE ARE NOT A HANDFUL OF OUR CITIZENS WHO REALIZE THAT WE—OUR MILITARY, THAT IS—PLAN TO BE IN AFGHANISTAN FOR THE ENTIRE TIME WE ARE CONSIDERING FOR OUR GRAND STRATEGY—AND PERHAPS BEYOND.

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LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, IT IS ALMOST TRITE TO DECLARE OUR NATION AT A CROSSROADS. NEVERTHELESS, WE ARE. ONE THAT REMINDS ME EERILY OF THE PLACE WE CAME TO IN 1866.

IF YOU HAVE NOT READ RON CHERNOW’S RECENT BOOK, *GRANT*, YOU SHOULD. IT’S ALMOST A THOUSAND PAGES BUT WELL-WORTH THE READ, PARTICULARLY WHEN IT GETS TO THE PERIOD IMMEDIATELY AFTER APPOMATTOX AND LINCOLN’S ASSASSINATION.

AS PRESIDENT ANDREW JOHNSON APPROACHES IMPEACHMENT PROCEEDINGS IN THE CONGRESS, GENERAL GRANT ACTS *OUTSIDE THE CONSTITUTION AND OUTSIDE THE STANDARD INTERPRETATION OF CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS.*

BRIEFLY, JOHNSON INCREASINGLY WANTS TO REVERSE THE OUTCOME OF THE CIVIL WAR. HE WANTS TO GIVE BACK TO THE SOUTH MUCH OF WHAT IT LOST IN THAT WAR—TO INCLUDE POSSIBLY FREED SLAVES.

GRANT IS TORN AND CONFLICTED OVER WHAT TO DO BUT HE IS NOT ABOUT TO LET A MILLION DEAD AND UNTOLD OTHER CASUALTIES BE NEGATED BY A WILLFUL CHIEF EXECUTIVE.

GRANT IS AT THE TIME PERHAPS THE MOST POWERFUL MILITARY FIGURE ON EARTH AND HIS MILLION-STRONG, BATTLE-TESTED MILITARY PERHAPS THE BEST AND MOST POWERFUL MILITARY AS WELL.

WITH LITTLE HESITATION, GRANT ORDERS HIS COMMANDERS, SUCH AS SHERIDAN AND SHERMAN, TO REVERSE WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE SOUTH WHERE BLACKS ARE BEING SLAUGHTERED WHEN THEY TRY TO ORGANIZE AND TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THEIR NEWLY-ACQUIRED FREEDOM AND POLITICAL POWER.

IN NEW ORLEANS, IN CHARLESTON, AND ELSEWHERE MANY BLACKS ARE DYING OR BEING WOUNDED IN WHAT ARE BASICALLY ONE-WAY FIGHTS, WITH FORMER CONFEDERATE SOLDIERS FORMING MANY OF THE KILLING GROUPS.

GENERAL GRANT, ACTING OUTSIDE THE CONSTITUTION, DIRECTS HIS MASSIVE ARMY TO STOP THE KILLINGS AND PROTECT THE NEW BLACK CITIZENS OF AMERICA.

IT’S TOUCH AND GO FOR THOSE CITIZENS AS THEY FIND THEMSELVES CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE, AS THE PRESIDENT IS IMPEACHED---AND MISSES BEING REMOVED FROM OFFICE BY A WHISKER—AND THE NATION IS CONVULSED AS FORMAL RECONSTRUCTION BEGINS, BACKED SOLIDLY BY FEDERAL TROOPS.

TO MY MIND, THE POLITICAL SIMILARITIES WITH TODAY ARE POSITIVELY BIZARRE. THEY AFFORD CREDIBILITY TO KARL MARX’S DECLARATION THAT HISTORY DOES IN FACT REPEAT ITSELF, FIRST AS TRAGEDY AND THEN AS FARCE.

PRESENTLY, WE ARE LIVING THE FARCE.