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The Sovereignty Solution

Simons, Anna

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The Sovereignty Solution

ANNA SIMONS, DON REDD, JOE MCGRAW & DUANE LAUCHENGCO

Within the next decade the United States will find itself handling terrorist attacks and other violations of its sovereignty very differently than it does today. Having exhausted other approaches, we will find ourselves with no choice but to respond to attacks against U.S. citizens, particularly those on U.S. soil, with overwhelming force. If we do so with forethought and as part of a broader policy, we can change for the better how the world polices itself. If not, and if we continue to respond in an *ad hoc* manner to security challenges, often promising ourselves and others more than we deliver, we will find ourselves locked into an ever tighter spiral of attack and response, expending ever more blood and treasure in places we can neither master nor change.

As time passes and the preemption plank of the Bush Doctrine generates more problems than it can solve, “new” strategic approaches are being bandied about. Some proposals, ar-

guing for both more realism and less unilateralism, urge the building of a new great power concert. Another proposal, laid out by Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay in the last issue of this magazine, argues for a Concert of Democracies to do for international security what the United Nations has not done and cannot do. What all such proposals have in common is their appeal to multilateralism and their advice that the United States limit its decision-making autonomy by accepting more or less binding obligations to others. But one need only look at the recent record of international crisis decision-making—take NATO when it was smaller than it is now, confronted by the crisis in Bosnia, for instance—to see that there is nothing timely or effective about international military operations.

The fact is that current and prospective threats to U.S. security can arise so quickly and unexpectedly from both state and substate actors that traditional alliance diplomacy may no longer be feasible. In at least two senses, President Bush had it right on September 20, 2001, as dark smoke still rose from the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, when he told the world that terrorists were not America’s only adversaries, but also the states that aided, harbored or abetted them. The President made clear that the use of U.S. power would not be restrained by old conventions and habits that, he suggested, no longer applied to post-9/11 circumstances.

President Bush was of course preparing the

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ground for attacking the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. But implicit was the general conviction that, if only state authorities possessed the means and summoned the will to police their own territories against terrorism, the problem would all but vanish.

That concept still exists in Administration thinking about failed states and in what Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice means by the capacity-building aspects of “transformational diplomacy.”¹ Unfortunately, however, the Bush Administration has not followed its own strategic principle to its logical conclusion. We do not hold implicated states responsible for their behavior. If we did, Syria and Iran would not have fighters in Iraq right now. Worse, the Administration’s “freedom agenda” contradicts what asking other states

tional security strategy is unlikely to bridge all our divides. But sovereignty does address many of the things Americans yearn for: clarity, consistency, transparency, accountability and responsibility. Just on principle, it will appeal to most Americans. Our proposal essentially takes two old ideas and refits them to 21st-century realities: the Westphalian state system married to a globalized, genuine liberal tolerance.

This will require a new way of thinking, for the Westphalian system, as it exists today, is profoundly broken. We are thus left two choices: Discard it in favor of some sort of globalized governance, or fix it in a way that gets the United States off the hook of being global hegemon and policeman. Because we believe that reinvigorating sovereignty will spread restraint in the use of force far more effectively than any collection of

international security institutions can, we favor the second alternative. The grand political bargain we propose is this: America will guard its sovereign prerogatives, responding to violations of sovereignty with overwhelming force, in return for which it promises other

states that it will not infringe on *their* sovereign prerogatives, including their rights to cultural integrity, national dignity and religious freedom.

We advocate strengthening sovereignty as the key foreign policy component of a new national strategy.

to police themselves must be based on: full, unfettered sovereignty.

Sovereignty represents the most useful double-edged sword in the international community’s arsenal. Sovereignty implies that every state has the right to order its society according to its own preferences. In return, every state bears the responsibility to prevent its citizens from transgressing the sovereignty of others. We advocate strengthening sovereignty on a global scale as the key foreign policy component of a new national strategy.²

National security in the current environment involves more than military and foreign policy. It also involves the domestic political environment, which is at present a significant vulnerability for the United States. The current penchant toward hyperpartisanship and confrontational political discourse is a weakness that our most dangerous enemies can exploit. The North Vietnamese, for example, proved particularly adept at turning us against each other—just as the Iraq war is dividing us again. Making sovereignty the cornerstone of our na-

Fixing Westphalia

As Karl Popper noted long ago, when a paradigm can no longer keep pace with reality, when “anomalous” problems outstrip theory’s ability to explain them, it is time to adapt a different approach. If one examines a range of

¹“A Conversation with Condoleezza Rice”, *The American Interest* (Autumn 2005), pp. 49–50.

²The full strategy we envision relies on two important corollaries to strengthening state sovereignty: the need to take seriously how divisions in American society provide avenues for adversaries to exploit, and the need to develop far more sophisticated political intelligence to determine the sources of violations and threats to U.S. sovereignty. For reasons of space, these corollaries cannot be elaborated here.

current practices, from NGO-orchestrated humanitarian assistance to terrorism by non-state actors, it should be apparent that while states remain the globally recognized units of political account and while we treat territorial integrity as sacrosanct, leaders of states are seldom held to sufficient account either by their own populations or by the international community. Hence the chronic need for foreign aid on the one hand, and the ease with which terrorists find safe havens on the other.

There is no habitable space on this planet that does not nominally belong to a government somewhere, nor is there a government that does not want to be taken seriously and treated as though it is just as sovereign as every other. Yet, for all the rights that states want to be accorded, how responsibly do governments act? Today we and other countries treat governments as sovereign even when they cannot effectively patrol and police their own territory. For Lebanon to harbor Hizballah, for Afghanistan to have protected al-Qaeda, for Pervez Musharraf to promise not to send Pakistan's own army into Waziristan—all of these abdications of sovereign responsibility raise major security concerns, not just in those regions but also for the United States.

This makes little sense, especially when there is a simple and elegant solution: If leader X wants to run his or her country, that individual and his or her government should be made responsible for what goes on there, as well as for what comes out of there. We should tell all national leaders: You are responsible for *anything* emanating from your sovereign territory that violates U.S. sovereignty, including anyone who bears your passport, and the U.S. government will hold you accountable.

This makes historical as well as common sense. Strengthening sovereignty was the only effective antidote the last time the West found itself embroiled in wars involving religion. The Westphalian system took hold, in part, because nationalism did, and nationalism remains strong. Just look at the 20th century: Wars of national liberation as well as both world wars demonstrate how powerful allegiances to states can be. Nor can we afford to ignore the fact that national ties are the only ties likely to trump Islam when it comes to cutting across

loyalties in the Muslim world. For this reason alone, it seems wise to make as much of states as possible.

It is true, of course, that many young states are states in name only. Many lack a genuine *demos*. Civil war is an ever-present danger as a result, and many are unable to control increasingly restive, politically awakened populations. Increased urbanization across the globe has brought with it greater literacy and more independent centers of exchange and social authority. New information technologies tend to empower civil (and uncivil) society actors of all types. All of this means that no matter how formidable anyone's military power may be—particularly U.S. military power, which trumps all others on and under the seas, in the air and in space—it is increasingly difficult to dominate from afar the one realm that matters most: where people live.

In many ways it is ironic that while we Americans pioneered two of the greatest forces of liberation the world has ever known, self-rule and free speech, we somehow do not fully appreciate what these now enable. From one angle it looks like they have wrought chaos and a world we think we need to, but can't, control; free people often refuse to conform to how we think they should behave. But from other angles this surfeit of information and yearning for autonomy mean that people are not only better able to reject what we or anyone else might want them to be, but they can also make something more of who they are. If we can combine this freedom, which states clearly seek, with a structure that forces them to act more responsibly, we should be able to help secure a more peaceable world for them and us.

Under this approach, it is how states choose to police themselves that will determine the nature of U.S. relations with them. Here's what should happen the next time U.S. sovereignty is attacked. The attackers' host or source—the state that “owns the problem”, in other words—would be delivered a list of U.S. demands that might include “eliminate al-Qaeda from your territory”, “disarm and disable Hizballah”, “turn over terrorist X”, or “stop sending fighters to country Y.” The level of compliance we receive would then determine the category into which that state would fall—partner state, struggling

state, adversarial state or failed state—and that in turn would shape our course of action.

What is radically different about this approach is that the willingness of other states to live up to their sovereign responsibilities dictates all else. All countries will be offered the same opportunities. It is their compliance with U.S. requests, or the lack thereof, that will determine how the U.S. government then treats them. U.S. actions will not be predicated on the type or nature of the violation, but rather on the nature of a country's responses *after* a violation or threat to U.S. sovereignty is detected.³ Essentially, our communication with the leaders of other states is that we have been attacked or believe we are about to be attacked and your country is the source of the problem. Then we ask: What kind of relationship have we had, and what kind of relationship do you want now?

Partner states are those both willing and able to meet U.S. demands—for instance, an allied European state whose territory has been used to plot terror attacks against the United States. Once the U.S. government has identified the problem and asked that it be addressed, a partner state would eliminate the threat, thereby solidifying its relationship with the United States. U.S. action would involve cooperation and assistance to the extent the partner state solicits it. The essence of the relationship would be one of mutual aid and full trust.

Partner states will include most if not all long-term U.S. allies, but could also include states not typically thought of in partner or allied terms. As long as the state that owns the problem is willing and able to meet U.S. demands, that state is considered a partner. Should a long-term ally balk at U.S. demands, that would alter the relationship and U.S. responses would be tailored accordingly.

Struggling states are those that may own a problem and are willing to meet U.S. demands, but are limited in their capacity to do so. An example might be Tanzania in the aftermath of the 1998 al-Qaeda attack on the U.S. Embassy in Dar-es-Salaam. In such cases, if the government in question is unable to meet U.S. demands but acknowledges that it wants to do so, the U.S. response could include military assistance delivered directly by U.S. military forces.

The priority U.S. requirement under this

policy is to destroy or degrade whomever attacked us. This and only this priority will uphold the deterrent nature of a policy based on strengthened sovereignty. As a consequence, U.S. policy will take into consideration, but cannot depend on, the strength or stability of the local government.

Adversary states are those that reject U.S. demands regarding a threat or violation for which they are responsible. Past relations become immaterial. Adversary states require the largest and loudest U.S. response, and our approach dictates that the U.S. government go ugly early. Action should not be incremental but massive, and the target will usually consist of the structures of state itself: the government and its levers of power. Ideally, the U.S. government would only need to do this once to send a clear deterrent signal: We punish by destroying, we don't occupy, and we don't rebuild.

Clearly, special treatment must exist for a special category of adversary states: those equipped with a nuclear or biological weapons arsenal. Our policy approach, however, does not treat states in this special category better; it treats them worse. The U.S. government should name publicly all countries it considers to be rogue WMD states. The United States should then disseminate a clear warning that were there to be a nuclear detonation on U.S. soil or an attack using biological pathogens, and should we be unable to immediately identify the source of the attack, then *all* countries on this list would be held culpable and should expect a punish-and-destroy response from the United States. The only way for a country to get itself off this list would be to open itself up to inspections and prove that it no longer deserves to be considered a rogue proliferator. This is congruent with the policy's ultimate aims: to force greater transparency, responsibility and accountability across the board, and thereby to deter attacks.

Failed states have no apparent central control and make no significant effort to govern their citizens. They attract our attention when

³Detection is not ensured these days, especially in failed-state environments. That is why political, or ethnographic, intelligence is so important and is one of the three pillars of our proposed strategy.



**Actions against adversary states should be massive,
not incremental. The United States should go ugly early.**

violators of U.S. sovereignty emerge from their borders or carry their passports. The sequence of policy responses in the wake of an attack by anyone hailing from a failed state is challenged by failed states' inherent weaknesses. There may be no government capable of even receiving U.S. demands, much less acting upon them. However, *somebody* represents authority within every population on earth, and therefore bears responsibility for failing to adequately police his population. Much better political intelligence than we currently generate is absolutely essential when dealing with failed states. But beyond that, the scenario remains the same: If the resident authority (a warlord, a group of elders, a traditional chief or a religious authority) does not meet U.S. demands, the reaction will be an overwhelming application of force to obliterate the violators and their supporters.

While the U.S. government will issue warnings to non-combatants who are often present in failed-state environments, it cannot afford to limit its response due either to the presence of foreign civilians or U.S. expatriates. Rather, U.S. policy needs to be clear that, should American expatri-

ates (whether businessmen or do-gooders) elect to live and work among people who plot against the United States, or hide and harbor those who do, they choose their fate. This posture would place additional pressures on communities to avoid giving shelter, succor or support to anyone who might violate U.S. sovereignty.

How We Must Fight

Strengthening state sovereignty imposes clear costs, but it also promises benefits: Violators will pay a stiff price for killing Americans, but those who do not attack the United States, and who make sure no one from their territory or carrying their passport does so either, will be left entirely free to pursue their own political objectives and ways of life as they see fit. The U.S. government will cease to lecture other governments and peoples about their supposed moral, political and philosophical shortcomings. We will no longer insinuate ourselves into others' affairs, and by so refraining we will cease to leave ourselves open to harmful charges

of hypocrisy and double standards.

This is not the place to discuss the force packages the United States would use to enforce a policy of strengthening state responsibility. Suffice it to say that the capabilities necessary to hold states accountable largely exist. That is because, regardless of the size or scope of the response, the application of U.S. power will be raid-like in nature. Its purpose will be to destroy and punish, not occupy, re-build, strengthen or provide security. There is no nation-building for the damned. At the same time, these actions, with limited exceptions, are *not* preemptive in nature.⁴ They will *follow* failure by another state to prevent a violation of U.S. sovereignty, and there should be very few such failures after we punish and destroy once or twice.

American taxpayers should like this posture

There is no nation- building for the damned.

since it is much cheaper to hit and raid than to occupy and rebuild. Less palatable, no doubt, is the idea that we will not shy away from killing those the enemy would try to portray as non-combatants. Anyone who aids and abets those bent on hurting us is to be considered a combatant. This will require a maturing of the American vision of defensive war, and more robust civic education. Americans will have to understand better what is at stake in a WMD-strewn world where combatants comprise not just the fighters, but active supporters who empower those who would kill us. If conscripts chained to the inside of their tanks, or uniformed boys held in fighting positions at gun-point, are considered combatants, then the same should hold for all militants who try to hide as civilians. We must be clear about whom we consider culpable: everyone who feeds, comforts, encourages, aids or otherwise supports fighters of any type. In hopefully infrequent cases, whole neighborhoods may need to be considered accessories to terrorism and, if so, we should not hesitate to hold *all* those people responsible for violations of our sovereignty when we use force. The clearer we are about whom we will no longer *avoid* killing, the less likely we are to make morally

confusing and politically damaging mistakes.

In other words, it should no longer be up to us to manage the virtually impossible task of differentiating between non-uniformed militants and militant “civilians.” Let a terrorist organization try to blur the lines in order to confound us; we will then treat everyone who belongs to or supports that organization as legitimate targets. Otherwise, our opponents will continue to make as much of “collateral” damage as they can by forcing us to inflict it upon them. This is a late-20th-century development that, unfortunately, is already metastasizing in the 21st century. Unless we resolve to do something about it, a lot of otherwise usable U.S. power will be paralyzed.

For complementary reasons the United States must return to the use of declarations of war. For too long we have relied on congressional authorization of force to allow military action aimed at limited political objectives and leveraging only small amounts of governmental effort. No more: A declaration of war is the only responsible action by a government reacting to a violation of its sovereignty. It empowers the president with more than 250 statutes under the U.S. Code that can be focused on adversarial states, organizations or individuals. Declarations of war also engage all branches of the U.S. government and demand that they fulfill their constitutional roles. In the context of strengthening state sovereignty, declarations are fully within the bounds of the UN Charter and other applicable international treaties, since responding to a violation of sovereignty is by definition a defensive action.

⁴Among exceptions: Nuclear states that pose an immediate threat can be dealt with through what we call a Standing Declaration of Preemption. Such declarations would permit the commander-in-chief to order operations—to interdict the transfer of nuclear weapons or technology, for example—when time does not permit request-response diplomacy of the kind described above. Unlike current preemption policies, however, Standing Declarations of Preemption would require prior approval from Congress, and would specify exactly what categories of threats and actors they include. They would not be expansive, vague or subject to the momentary whim of the president in a crisis.



U.S. Embassy in Tehran, November 9, 1979

Additionally, declarations of war reinforce and contribute to a less politically divisible America. The United States is either at war or it isn't, as Congress determines. With declarations of war there are no legalistic sleights of hand or half measures that can be used politically to promote domestic disputes over foreign policy. Here it is important to think beyond just the domestic price we pay for such disputes. Clever foreign enemies will always try to take advantage of our political divisions, which is all the more reason to use declarations to signal, both to Americans and to foreign audiences, the seriousness and unity behind U.S. intent.

Finally, declarations of war need not be time-limited. A rogue state's government may go into hiding, a substate organization may scatter across a region of states, and an individual may disappear into the shadows. But as soon as violators are located or as soon as they re-emerge, they will be destroyed.

Illustrations

How would a policy of strengthening state responsibility work in practice? Let us consider three examples, two rerun from the past and one arguably just ahead of us.

Recall the November 1979 seizure of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran by Iranian revolutionaries. Had our policy at the time been built around holding states accountable for their own sover-

eighty, here is what might have happened. Following the attack on U.S. sovereignty in the shadow of a rapidly changing relationship with Iran, the U.S. government would have delivered a list of demands to the Iranian government: Immediately release all U.S. prisoners and property, with all damages to be immediately repaired and repaid. The Iranian response (as either a partner or an adversary state) would then have triggered the corresponding U.S. reaction. If the Iranian government had agreed to U.S. demands, the U.S. government would have offered to provide

assistance in order to help it put its house in order and rid itself of its "student problem." If the Iranian government had waffled or refused, or had replied with the international equivalent of "up yours", then the entire Iranian government network, personnel and infrastructure, would have been immediately targeted in coordination with a full air/ground package to retrieve hostage American personnel.

Had that happened, the Iranian Revolution would most likely have either been short lived or de-fanged. Hizballah would either not exist or would not have attacked U.S. Marines in Beirut in October 1983. The militant Shi'a revival might have withered on the vine.

Consider next a variant of a more recent example. Suppose Hizballah elects to strike targets on U.S. soil. With a strategy built on strengthening state responsibility, the U.S. government would have the framework to deliver a list of demands to several different players: Lebanon as the host state of the parasite, Syria as the enabler of the organization, Iran as the sponsor. All three sovereign states would have the opportunity to redefine their relationship with the United States by meeting U.S. government demands. Acceptance by Lebanon, for instance, would trigger a support package for the Beirut government as it conducts a campaign to put an end to Hizballah's paramilitary capacities. Rejection of U.S. demands to dismantle and cut off Hizballah would result in the governments of Syria and Iran being decapitated.

What if the Israelis had pursued such a strategy last summer, and gone ugly early? The Hizballah threat might have been destroyed, Beirut's government truly liberated, and the Assad government in Syria toppled. Israel certainly would have fared no worse than it did from the precision-strike, incrementalist strategy its leaders chose instead, leaving Israel weakened, Iran strengthened and Hizballah the new darling of Islamic radicals everywhere.

Consider a final scenario. Iran continues to support the killing of U.S. and Iraqi government forces in Iraq. The U.S. government demands that Iran stop. It doesn't. The U.S. government declares war on Iran. At the same time, it asks Russia, one of Iran's major arms suppliers, to stop selling arms to Tehran. Citing economic reasons, Russia refuses. Will the U.S. government then be forced to declare war against Russia? With a declaration of war against Iran in place, Congress would not have to contemplate any such thing. Instead, Russia (and the rest of the international community) would simply be informed that, given our being in a state of war with Iran, the U.S. government will stop transfers of anything (to include all arms shipments) into Iran. U.S. actions would not specifically target Russia's or anyone else's trade, and certainly it would not touch trade anywhere else—just anything entering Iranian airspace, crossing its borders or approaching its shores.

As can be seen from these examples, strengthening state responsibility does at least three things that at present are not being done or not being done well. First, it turns accountability into an eminently useful tool. A posture built around state responsibility makes clear whom we hold accountable and how, and it forces the U.S. government to be overt, consistent and coherent in its responses. This should reduce others' misperceptions of U.S. attitudes and likely behavior.

Second, holding states accountable for their actions is sustainable because it draws power from the U.S. Constitution, resonates with how Americans typically behave toward one another, and is not a policy that can be shattered by surprise or attack. Holding states to account is exactly what Americans would demand should the nation suffer another 9/11. Such a policy is more sustainable eco-

nomically, too, than anything else we might do in the face of current challenges.

Third, strengthening state responsibility also advances (through indirect means) the desired end-state of any U.S. strategy: the spread of representative government. Representative government does not have to look like Western democracy. U.S. actions and those of its allies will make it clear that, if a leader wants to maintain power, he had better address his citizens' concerns. Should any of his citizens target us or our allies out of a sense of frustration or anger with him, and should he then not respond to U.S. demands, he and his regime are finished. That makes for a fairly stark choice: Either undertake reform within or risk punishment from without. A policy of strengthening state responsibility thus stands a better chance of making leaders more responsive to their populations than any other contemporary strategy.

Broader Considerations

Thus far we have focused on the U.S. military role in strengthening state responsibility, and for obvious reasons: It is the only way to effectively punish and destroy and thus to establish broad and credible deterrence. But we need to be busy on political and diplomatic fronts, as well.

While at first glance it might seem that the United Nations becomes virtually defunct within such a policy framework, it and other international organizations would remain significant. There is no way to keep commerce, or mail systems, airline travel, shipping, measurement standards and so forth adjudicated internationally except through international agreements. The more responsibly states behave, and the more peaceable the international environment becomes as a result, the greater the role international organizations will play, since peace creates the need for international institutions and enables them to prosper (*not* the other way around).

On the other hand, what goes on inside a sovereign country's borders should no longer fall under UN purview or that of any other external actor. Only what spills over a country's borders can trigger action.

For precisely these reasons, U.S. govern-

ment-funded humanitarian assistance must also become a thing of the past, with one major set of exceptions: natural disasters. People need rescue and care in the immediate aftermath of natural catastrophes. U.S. policy should be that, if a government is overwhelmed and asks for our assistance, we assist. But we should limit our assistance to the triage phase of natural disasters. We should not be in the business of offering long-term aid at all. Indeed, the U.S. government should no longer fund private voluntary organizations (PVOs) of any kind, whether through USAID or any other venue, because no matter how worthy a project may sound, nine times out of ten it serves to undermine indigenous capacity building, and thus runs completely counter to bolstering genuine sovereignty. States themselves need to be held accountable and responsible not only for their citizens, but to and by them, as well.

Truth be told, we are not in any event very good at nation-building. The task is far greater on a global scale than our proven capabilities. Making sure the streets are safe in unlit, benighted neighborhoods governed by corrupt mayors in the United States is a job for Sisyphus, never mind whole countries full of such neighborhoods. But we also cannot exert control or bring stability by acting like an empire either, given people's resistance to control or their resentment toward pressures we apply, such as economic aid with political and cultural strings attached. From their point of view, this insults their sovereignty. All the more reason that we leave them to make something of their sovereignty without our interference.

Nor is this asking too much. To anyone who fears this might place an undue burden on incapable states, let them spend time in any sub-Saharan capital. The capacity is there. Zambia may have had only six university graduates at independence, but it has been forty years and more since then. Indeed, one of the things feeding resentment among young, educated and upwardly mobile males (especially) in what used to be called the Third World is that their governments would rather pocket money from aid and foreign assistance projects than rely on their own citizens for development. There is nothing naive about populations in the developing world today. Instead there is growing

cynicism, which is yet another reason why the U.S. government needs to change its stance.

In the name of consistency, Americans also have to be willing to accept something else: Foreign governments have the right to reject visa applications from private American citizens, and the U.S. government must honor that right. If foreign governments do not want to host American missionaries, do not like Habitat for Humanity and kick out CARE, that is their prerogative. They likewise can allow in any PVO or NGO they choose, but U.S. *government*-sponsored foreign aid welfare needs to stop.

Just because we stop taxpayer funding of aid projects, however, does not mean we should stop doing two of the things we as Americans do best: educate and train. Because these efforts deliver intangibles, they don't encourage corruption: Nobody gets anything that can be pocketed or stolen.

If we consider what we do well and where our comparative advantages really lie, it is in a range of intangibles, as well as in institutions not easily reproduced elsewhere. By offering education and training we will help to ensure that English remains the dominant language of commerce, science and education. That alone would cement an incomparable advantage. We excel in medicine, and we tend to forget how many people come to the United States every year for medical treatment or to study medicine. The same holds for higher education in a host of different fields, including civil-military relations. In an ironic twist, nothing may hold more promise for stabilizing state security abroad than more mutual respect between security forces and their citizenries. The United States is one of the few countries that has never experienced military rule, and we should make more of this than we do. Fields we lead in, such as health care, environmental science and engineering, are critical to strengthening the sovereignty of other states. Even better, these are areas that can directly benefit others' citizens without seeming to directly benefit us. This is critically important for reprising our role as a Promised Land as opposed to a Crusader State, to borrow Walter McDougall's terms.

The only way to pull people our way is by example. Far better to be an exemplary state ourselves—and show people through our exam-

ple how well democracy and a free market *can* work—than try to push people to become more like us on their own turf. For the past four decades we have striven to get people to change, yet from Swaziland to Sumatra few have shed their values for ours. We still keep urging them to do so, but why? So long as they do not threaten us, what difference do our differences really make? That is no longer just a philosophical or libertarian question. In the 21st century it gets to the heart of why we have Islamist adversaries in the first place, with others doubtless waiting in the wings. If the U.S. government were to proclaim that America is no longer in the “change” business, our status as a target of resentment would instantly diminish, and our stature as the preeminent protector of multicultural rights would rise.

Indeed, if Americans would take liberalism (with a little “I”) and cultural (not necessarily moral) relativism to their logical conclusions, we would stop pushing much of our present agenda. Muslims, for instance, should be able to live according to a Quranic code in Muslim countries with no hectoring from us. That is what a *real* respect for other people dictates. If non-Americans want to become more like us, they will, and we can and should make room here for individuals who are serious about (but are persecuted for) wanting our kinds of freedom in their places of birth. This is hardly a new idea. It is what America has been doing since its inception.

In short, allowing people to develop at their own pace, letting them choose what they want to adopt from us and what they choose to reject (even if they shed one another’s blood in the process of deciding) represents the ultimate freedom agenda. It is the ultimate liberal cause. No more urging anything on others except the same responsibility and accountability we display ourselves.

In the end, strengthening sovereignty capitalizes on what we Americans are best at. We own an unparalleled military arsenal and a tried-and-true method of warfare. We should make use of these. We are also extraordinarily generous as a people, and we are great at logistics. We do not have a great deal of patience, however, or a very long attention span. So though we are incomparably good when it comes to rushing aid to distant places in the wake of natural disas-

ters, we are abysmal at doing much of anything helpful in the face of chronic failure, except occasionally to contain it.

Therefore, if we excel at breaking but not at fixing, and if as a people we prefer straight talking and straight shooting, why not build U.S. strategy around these traits? Or, to come at this from a slightly different angle: We are the world’s dominant power. Why not use that power for the ultimate liberation? You want to be treated as head of a sovereign state? Fine: Then act like one. But if you or your citizens violate U.S. sovereignty, the response will be destruction, not defeat.

If this sounds ruthless, it’s meant to. It is otherwise next to impossible to imagine how, given the way the world is moving, we can keep adversaries from continuing to pop up in locations all around the globe, from now until approximately forever. We cannot police the entire planet, and we cannot directly change others’ cultures or governments at anything remotely resembling a reasonable price in American lives and treasure. What we can do is set an example and through our words *and* deeds induce others to police their own lands.

As suggested at the outset, strengthening state responsibility is fully compatible with what Administration principals seemed to have in mind before September 11, 2001: a more humble foreign policy that nonetheless brooked no assaults on American security or sovereignty. Unfortunately, the Administration’s extended response to 9/11 has taken us in the opposite direction. It has placed us even more squarely in the crosshairs and increased the likelihood that sooner or later we will find ourselves having to use massive indiscriminate force in retaliation for a devastating WMD attack, or a wave of suicide bombings in crowded shopping malls, or who-knows-what. Far better if our response to any such violation is part of an overarching policy that promises strategic clarity and operational ambiguity, thereby promising that we will deliver a counterblow designed to prevent our having to respond more than once. The aim should be to make such an object lesson of those supporting actions against us that none dare do so again. Even better, of course, would be to adopt such an approach now, and not have to suffer further attacks at all. 🌐