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The Sovereignty Solution: Not Radical, But Measured

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Many thanks to James Hasik for the seriousness with which he has taken *The Sovereignty Solution*, especially since the three of us who co-wrote the book are not sufficiently expert to say exactly what impact our strategy might have on the United States' long term force structure. I can—and will—offer a few ideas here. However, there are also a number of things I should clarify. Among them, we contend that the U.S. needs to adopt a foreign policy premised on strategic clarity and operational ambiguity. Consequently, *which* U.S. forces Washington would use to respond to violations of U.S. sovereignty—whether the Marines or U.S. Special Operations Forces, Naval or Air Force bombardment—should matter less than that domestic and international audiences alike understand they can count on there *being* a response.

Nor would that response be aimed to "shock and awe," as Hasik implies. Rather, its purpose would be to render our attackers inert, and to pummel any government that willingly harbors or gives shelter to them.

In the Sovereignty Rules world we describe, there is no ceding the initiative to anyone. Rather, as we co-authors take pains to point out, not only must we Americans be our own first responders, but there are no other first responders

Americans can count on. No other cavalry will ride to our rescue. That is one reason we advocate the adoption of something we call Standing Declarations of Preemption, as well as a revival of the use of Declarations of War. Under our rubric, once red lines have been drawn, they cannot be redrawn, or erased, or fudged.

Nor do we suggest the U.S. become a punching bag for anyone. Just the opposite. Let some set of non-state actors launch another attack against the U.S., and whichever countries those individuals hail from would have a lot to answer for. *How* Washington would respond would offer a salutary demonstration effect to the world. But the U.S. would not be in the least arbitrary, or vengeful—just punishing.

Actually, six steps would be taken:

1) Our sovereignty is violated.
2) In the wake of an attack, Washington makes demands of the witting or unwitting government(s)/authorities it suspects, or knows, harbored our attackers. The demands are simple and public.
3) Those in authority reject Washington's demands, or drag their feet.
4) The president asks Congress—and the American people—for a Declaration of War.
5) Congress issues a Declaration of War.
6) Only at this point does the U.S. military tailor its means to achieve U.S. ends, which are to decimate those with whom we are at war. Our military forces will, to the best of their abilities, spare innocents.

But—and this is an important "but"—a whole suite of things, from the hollow deference currently accorded heads of state, to non-combatant status, to Just War theory would need to be rethought beyond just adoption of a new framework for

international relations. Otherwise, as we point out in the book, cunning adversaries will continue to turn residential neighborhoods into armed camps, forcing U.S. forces to try to make impossible determinations between non-uniformed militants and militant "civilians."

I do not want to reprise all of the book's arguments here. In fact, one reason we wrote the book rather than just an article or op-ed is that a whole succession of American principles have been thrown under the bus since World War II. Most of these principles need to be resuscitated. Do we really romanticize the Second World War, as Hasik implies? I do not think so. But we do like a number of pre-World War II sentiments. For instance, if I had to offer a pithy version of where we stand on warfare, here is what I would say. Actually, it is what I *have* said since *The Sovereignty Solution*:

1) If you are not prepared to wipe out the enemy, why fight?
2) If you will not, or cannot, wipe out the enemy, death and destruction are the wrong foreign policy tools to use.
3) And if you are not willing to either inflict or take large numbers of casualties, the cause must not be sufficiently existential. So again, why fight?[1]

Somehow, policymakers and plenty of otherwise smart people in Washington, think tanks, war colleges, and elsewhere have succumbed to the notion that our forces need to be re-tailored to fight long, sneaky "wars amongst the people" even though we have never been good at this kind of warfare —and nothing in our recent past suggests we will become better at it.

[1] Anna Simons, "21st Century Cultures of War: Advantage Them," *The Philadelphia Papers*, Foreign Policy Research Institute, April 2013.

Instead, the kind of warfare that fits with Americans' strategic personality remains a John Wayne-type of combativeness: "I won't be wronged. I won't be insulted. I won't be laid a hand on. I don't do these things to other people, and I require the same from them." In other words, "Don't cross me, or else." As for what that "or else" requires: it is serious firepower.

In this sense, Hasik reads us correctly. Where he errs, however, is in ignoring some of our chapters or not following through with our logic. For instance, under the sovereignty rubric, the U.S. would never have invaded Afghanistan preparatory to a long occupation. We never would have engaged in nation-building. Instead, Mullah Omar and his Taliban government would have been delivered an ultimatum; something like, "Turn over Usama bin Laden and root out al Qaeda." Washington would have issued clear deadlines and benchmarks. Only if Mullah Omar refused to comply would the U.S. have sought to obliterate both his regime (the Taliban) and al Qaeda—with no promise to the people in Kandahar that we would help them re-build in the wake of their continued support for either entity.

In other words, in a "sovereignty rules" world, there is minimal need for boots on the ground, and no need for occupation. Or alternatively, as we suggest in the book's Epilogue, say some gutsy politician decided to apply the "sovereignty solution" in real time, *now*. In that case, given the security commitments Washington has made, U.S. forces would have to quarantine Afghanistan so that Afghans, and only Afghans, can sort out their differences. As it is, Washington should have adopted a scorpions-in-a-bottle approach to Afghanistan years ago, without the CIA or the ISI delivering sacks full of money or U.S. taxpayers funding aid-cum-welfare. Arguably, the longer our involvement has lasted, the more we have managed not only to undermine Afghans' ability to govern themselves, but also the more we

have turned Afghanistan into a cockpit for regional and supra-regional trouble.

What kind of force structure *does* lend itself to erecting and maintaining quarantines? This should actually be a pressing 21st-century question, given the very real threat of pandemics, never mind the spillover effects when states implode. Imagine what the conversations about Syria might be like had the world's more capable militaries begun building quarantine capabilities a decade ago.

Surprisingly, Hasik fails to mention Syria. So I will. What—if anything—the U.S. should do about Syria (circa May 2013) begs the far stickier question: what do our allies want us to do? This, in turn, raises other uncomfortable questions, such as that of who in the region *is* an ally? And what do our alliances commit us to do? While the fact that no one in Washington seems able to answer these questions is itself highly revealing, it means that the Obama administration has plenty of wriggle room to continue to waffle publicly. It means that Syrian rebels are still stuck vying with each other, hoping for our help. And it means our putative friends—Turkey, Jordan, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE—can probably count on our doing some covert or clandestine things, while American taxpayers and most elements in the U.S. military remain clueless as to what those things might consist of, or what they might embroil us in down the road.

At least thus far into the 21st century, most members of the public seem to want transparency to be considered a critical public good, though even the Founders way back in the 1780s understood the degree to which foreign entanglements—never mind secret foreign entanglements (Iran-Contra, anyone?)—could corrode democracy. No doubt that is one reason the Founders delegated to the Senate the responsibility to ratify all treaties. Did they envision "Coalitions of the Willing?" Hardly. Rather, the whole point to treaties is to put everyone on notice: "we the people" of the United States of

America have entered into a full partnership with Country X. Mutual defense is a major commitment. It is also deadly serious business. But that is also precisely why such arrangements should only be bilateral and why they need to be publicly debated before they are agreed to. We explain all of this in the book. Thus when Hasik hones in on our hypothetical example of Hezbollah's violating U.S. sovereignty, it is not clear that Israel would not already be a U.S. ally, in which case we would not operate against Hezbollah *without* Israeli assistance. Would we, therefore, need to bypass Israel to conduct an amphibious landing in Lebanon? That seems doubtful.

I do agree with Hasik that self-defense in a Sovereignty Rules world calls for a much more robust U.S. Air Force and Navy, and that we should want to invest in the ability to pummel people into surrendering from stand-off distances. Again, I am not sure why Hasik thinks Marines would need to storm ashore, or why he thinks the Navy would need to develop forcible entry capabilities. Would we need a Navy that could blockade and quarantine? Absolutely.

Similarly, I do not see the connection between what we advocate in the book—many fewer, shorter, but much more decisive engagements (should they even have to occur)—and a much larger National Guard. To me, this hardly jibes. But, where I worry that Hasik does even more damage to our argument is in suggesting that "decisive and complete action" would be "demanded after every affront."

This description is flat out wrong. Let me try to explain. First, *The Sovereignty Solution* marries "don't tread on me" to "to each his own." Under our rubric, the U.S. government would get out of the business of telling other people how to arrange their lives. For instance, if most Afghan men and women want women to wear burqas, it would no longer be up to the U.S. government to convince them otherwise. If populations in Muslim countries choose to abide by sharia

law, that is their prerogative. In other words, push what all liberals say they respect—namely, others' cultures—to its logical conclusion, and what does a true respect for others' cultures mean? That we stop hectoring other people to become more like us.

Now, imagine this was one of the two major planks of U.S. foreign policy. Would that not remove the crosshairs from our back? Would not fewer people feel affronted by us? Or, flip this around. *Why* would jihadists still want to come gunning for us?

Secondly, we make a very sharp distinction throughout the book between deeds and words, or, as we write at one point:

> Warning people to stop doing things we don't like—with no ability to punish them—makes no more sense than urging people to rise up without being able to protect them when their government then cracks down. Essentially, talk is cheap. Having said that, we Americans who laud free speech should never want to license other governments to stifle speech, even if it is hate speech. Better that people be able to vent than explode. Or, to invoke something American parents used to instill in American children: "sticks and stones may break my bones, but names can never hurt me."[2]

In other words, we co-authors distinguish between words and deeds because it is deeds, not words, that mark violations of sovereignty. Affronts, insults, name-calling—all of those would likely diminish once Washington stops proselytizing the American way of life abroad. But, even if words are hurled, so what? At the same time, as a mature actor on the world stage, it is imperative that *our* deeds and words be congruent, since this is the only way to guarantee that Washington will act in accordance with what the U.S. can do,

[2] Anna Simons, Joe McGraw, and Duane Lauchengco, *The Sovereignty Solution: A Commonsense Approach to Global Security* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2011), 123.

and does not promise, threaten, or bluster to achieve things we cannot.

This brings me back to the use of force—which should only be used against named opponents under a Declaration of War (or a Standing Declaration of Preemption). Again, the aim whenever force is used would be to force an opponent to disarm and to acknowledge defeat. Or, to put none too fine a point on it: either the enemy concedes, or we do.

I am not sure this would entail exactly the kinds of changes to our force structure that Hasik envisions, but I certainly welcome the debate. And no question, "strategic clarity, operational ambiguity" *would* liberate DoD to re-think the military's division of labor, its manning, and its resourcing. Indeed, as Hasik points out, given the financial unsustainability of Washington's current approach, now would be the time to assess just how little something like the "sovereignty solution" would cost in comparison to other options. Though to make a truly fair comparison would also require taking into account the cost of everything from combat soldiers' long-term mental health to the rents in our social fabric when we Americans cannot agree on something that should be as straightforward as the question of who is an enemy combatant.

This is also why we co-authors advocate reinvigorating citizens' sense of what it means to be American. Much like General (ret.) McChrystal has recently advocated, we see the value in universal national service. But the book strives to make an even deeper point: at a minimum, we Americans need to understand what makes the U.S. so exceptional, we Americans need to understand what is required to preserve that exceptionalism, and we need to stop trying to foist our way of life on others. Indeed, only if we adopt a "we'll be us, you be you" attitude are we likely to be able to live more securely in the world so that it will no longer be up to the U.S.

military to either police the planet or re-build others' nations for them.[3]

In sum, by liberating others to follow their own path, we would be liberating ourselves. Nor would this require a retreat into isolationism. The opposite is true. For the first time in more than a century, we could re-separate U.S. national security from so-called American national interests. As it is, there is no "national" interest apart from security. Just try to name one. I guarantee you that whatever industry you might mention—oil, for instance—would provoke competitors (e.g. coal, or alternative energy) to disagree. But for that argument, you would have to take a look at pages 98-99 of our book.

All told, we offer 161 pages of text (and 67 pages of additional endnotes). *The Sovereignty Solution* is a relatively short read. And I'd like to thank James Hasik for giving me the opportunity to recommend it.

[3] As General, and then President, Eisenhower described the American way of life, it entails "freedom of choice for individuals, democratic procedures for government, and private enterprise for the economy" (John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 133). Nothing in such a definition requires that our exceptionalism be extended abroad, or that American companies, to do business abroad, need to turn others into individuated democratic capitalists. But likewise, preserving the American way of life here at home does not *require* that businesses be as aggressively far-flung as they are. The nature of their globalized profiteering—and whether they conduct themselves responsibly or not—is also up to them, and should never be allowed to imperil the rest of us.

Part IV: Empowering the Practitioner