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America's Eight Unwinnable Wars

A Monday Morning Musing from Mickey the Mercenary Geologist

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"War is a racket. It always has been. It is possibly the oldest, easily the most profitable, surely the most vicious. It is the only one international in scope. It is the only one in which the profits are reckoned in dollars and the losses in lives. A racket is best described, I believe, as something that is not what it seems to the majority of the people. Only a small 'inside' group knows what it is about. It is conducted for the benefit of the very few, at the expense of the very many. Out of war a few people make huge fortunes.

There are only two things we should fight for. One is the defense of our homes and the other is the Bill of Rights." Marine Major General Smedley Darlington Butler, 1935, reformed warrior and pacifist, one of 19 soldiers to be twice awarded the Medal of Honor.

America is a Warrior Society. Our republic, the United States of America was founded by an act of revolutionary war from 1775-1783. American leaders often have been military men, including the first President, General George Washington, who very reluctantly took the job because he was the only man all sides could agree on.

With a single exception from the end of the First World War in 1918 until the beginning of the Second World War in 1941, there is not a consecutive 15 year period in our 235 year history as a nation when we were not at war sometime, somewhere, someplace, with somebody.

We the People unfortunately must accept that war is a way of life in America.

However, we have not *won* a major war since General Dwight David Eisenhower commanded the end of World War II in 1945.

In January 1961 Eisenhower, in his final speech as President of the United States, warned America's citizens about the looming danger of a growing military-industrial complex and that it could perpetuate a constant state of war for America. As we have seen, Ike's words were prophetic.

During the 48 years since that speech, the Presidents of these United States have repeatedly ordered war without a formal Declaration of War by Congress. These acts are in direct and defiant disregard for our founding document, The Constitution of the United States of America.

More egregious. our elected leaders who took oath on a Bible to support and defend the Constitution consistently have chosen wars that America cannot win. Simply stated, the US government does not have the political will, the social backing, the peoples' support, and/or the military might to win these wars.

American Presidents have started eight unwinnable wars in the nearly five decades since 1961; six of these wars are on-going; one is over and we lost it; one was never finished and led to another.

Let's examine the timeline and the Presidents who were and are responsible for these unwinnable conflicts:

The Vietnam War was started by John F. Kennedy while presiding at his wife's self-proclaimed "American Camelot".

Kennedy was an early advocate of Special Forces warfare in Southeast Asia during his Senate years in the 1950s. He sent thousands of U.S. military advisors, initiated clandestine bombing of North Vietnam, backed the CIA-sponsored military coup in South Vietnam, and dramatically escalated the civil conflict into a small war from 1961 to 1963. Upon his assassination in November 1963, there were 16,500 American troops in Vietnam.

Kennedy's stated determination to win the Vietnam War was precursor for the 1968 downfall of his successor, the disgraced Lyndon B. Johnson.

Johnson's "My Fellow Americans" speech in 1968 and a divided pro-war /anti-war Democratic party spawned a win by Richard Nixon and return of Republican rule to the White House after eight tumultuous years. This internal turmoil and polarization would escalate in the late '60s and early '70s.

From 1969-1973 Tricky Dick attempted to negotiate a successful end to the quagmire while also taking the fight to Laos and Cambodia. The French had tried it before in the 1950s and failed. Predictably Nixon could not accomplish an honorable extrication of America from Indochina either.

On March 29, 1973, the last American combat troops abandoned Saigon for their R & R haven in Manila and the infamous LBFMs. With Nixon's resignation over the Watergate Scandal in August 1974, it fell to a never-elected executive Gerald Ford to order helicopter evacuation of remaining American Marines and civilian personnel from the American Embassy on April 30, 1975 as Saigon fell to the North Vietnamese.

Over 58,000 American soldiers were killed, 300,000 were wounded, and countless others were scarred for life by their in-country experiences at the end of a war which America lost.

- John Fitzgerald Kennedy's *Vietnam War* was America's First Unwinnable War.

President Johnson's decision to escalate Vietnam into a full-blown war was not the only bad deed that he perpetrated on the American public. In 1965, LBJ embarked the United States on a socialist agenda called "The Great Society" and commenced The War on Poverty.

In the 44 years since that fateful *faux pas* (definition: A “social blunder”), American society has not progressed significantly. Instead it has regressed on nearly every social metric despite trillions of dollars spent on government entitlement programs to cure our ills.

In 1966 the US government classified 28 million or 15% of Americans as “living below the poverty line”. Despite changes in how the numbers are calculated that effectively reduced the number of poor in 1969 and 1981, the government classified 40 million or 13.2% of Americans as living below the poverty line in 2008. Given current unemployment and a depressed economy, that number and percentage will jump dramatically in 2009.

Despite its failure, The War on Poverty continues unabated with more and more social programs and government safety nets supposed to lift society’s economically challenged out of the poorhouse.

- Lyndon Baines Johnson’s *War on Poverty* is America’s Second Unwinnable War.

In September 1969 President Richard M. Nixon started an endless battle of his own and called it The War on Drugs. A simple way to illustrate its abject failure is to look closely at a relatively harmless recreational drug, marijuana, although similar cases can be made for the harder drugs.

Nixon’s Operation Intercept targeted marijuana entering the United States from Mexico. With border traffic nearly shutdown for 20 days, effected states rebelled, and that particular effort was discontinued. In 1972 a bipartisan commission appointed by the Dick called for decriminalization of marijuana. The recommendation was flatly rejected.

Though Peanut Farmer President Jimmy Carter originally ran on a platform supporting decriminalization of marijuana, his tune changed once in office. In the late 1970’s, excess warehouse supplies of a Vietnam-era defoliant called paraquat were given to Mexico and our government subsidized airborne spraying of marijuana fields south of the border. It laid the pot fields barren and killed everything green in every direction. Who knows what it did to the health of the *campesino*, his wife, and six kids less than ten years of age who struggled to raise enough *maiz* and *frijoles* to feed the family until the next rainy season and grew *mota* as a cash crop?

With marijuana from Mexico viewed as contaminated and in short supply, growing instead shifted to at first outdoor and then increasingly indoor operations in the United States. Low grade Mexican marijuana soon was replaced by much higher grade domestic varieties. The price of a “bag of weed” increased from \$10 to hundreds of dollars an ounce as potency increased and trafficking penalties were made harsher.

Marijuana is now America’s largest cash crop, exceeding corn by over 60%. The value of marijuana grown in California alone exceeds the value of all crops grown in the entire United States except for corn and soybeans. There was a 10-fold increase in domestic marijuana production in the 25 years from 1981, when a DEA eradication program was begun, to 2006. See www.drugscience.org.

According to www.norml.org, in 2007 a record 872,271 arrests were made for cannabis violations in 2007. Eighty-nine per cent of these were for simple possession; that is 42% of all arrests made in the United States. On October 10, 2008, the 20 millionth American was arrested for possession of pot since it was made illegal in 1937. One hundred million Americans admit to smoking marijuana at some point in their lives.

The War on Drugs was escalated exponentially during the Reagan years. Subsequent major efforts and initiatives by Bush Sr., Clinton, and Bush Jr. did not succeed in anything more than creating international

organized crime syndicates and terrorist organizations that control drug growing, processing, production, manufacture, and distribution thru out the world and in the United States.

As our nation discovered with alcohol from 1919-1933, use of mind-altering drugs cannot be stopped with prohibition by law. If a War on Alcohol didn't work why would anyone think that a War on Drugs would?

It's a really simple equation: People like to get high.

Recreational drug use in America is rampant and unabated. C'mon folks, do you really buy that Billary didn't inhale??

- Richard Milhous Nixon's *War on Drugs* is America's Third Unwinnable War.

To their credit, our next three leaders, Gerald Rudolph Ford, Jr., James Earl Carter, Jr., and Ronald Wilson Reagan, did not start any more unwinnable wars. Ford ended The War in Vietnam with a loss. Carter and Regan both ran on platforms of limiting the size of the federal government but made little headway on The War on Poverty. As documented above, they escalated The War on Drugs.

Gerald Ford's foreign policy record was soiled by a bungled skirmish with Cambodian gunboats that resulted in 41 American deaths.

Jimmy Carter gave a Senate speech in which he called the energy crisis the "moral equivalent of war" and clenched his fist dramatically. He is most famous for his mishandling of the Iran Hostage Crisis in 1979 in which 53 Americans were held hostage by Iranian students and militants in the American Embassy in Tehran. After months of failed negotiation, his Operation Eagle Claw in April 1980 resulted in the crash of two aircraft and deaths of eight American servicemen and one Iranian civilian. The unresolved hostage crisis contributed in large part to his landslide loss in 1980. The hostages were finally released 20 minutes into the Reagan Presidency.

In late 1983 Ronald Reagan declined to go to war in Lebanon after the Hezbollah suicide bombing of American barracks killed 241 Marines who were part of an international peacekeeping force. Two days later, American troops invaded Grenada to topple a Communist government put in place by military coup in 1979. In the first major operation conducted by the US military since the Vietnam War, several days of fighting resulted in a U.S. victory with 19 American fatalities. A new government was established within two months and US forces withdrew. In his second term, Reagan bombed the palace of Libyan bad guy Muammar Gaddafi and supported guerilla insurgents fighting against the left-wing Sandinista government of Nicaragua. He often called these operations the "War on Terror".

After 17 years of Presidencies with nary a new unwinnable war, it fell to George H.W. Bush to be the next culprit.

On August 2, 1990, Iraq invaded and annexed its oil-rich southern neighbor, Kuwait. Saddam Hussein's actions were met with wide international condemnation, economic sanctions were enacted against Iraq by the UN Security Council, and immediate preparations for war were made by America, the UK, and Canada.

The case for war was aided by testimony before members of Congress of alleged atrocities committed by Iraqi troops in Kuwait. These purported acts were used as justification to invade Iraq but were later shown

to be fabricated by a US public relations firm paid \$11.2 million by the exiled Kuwaiti Royal Family to influence American public opinion.

With a UN Coalition of 34 nations led by the United States, bombing commenced on January 17, 1991, ground troops were deployed on February 23, and four days later Coalition forces composed of Americans, British, and French pursued fleeing Iraqi troops to within 240 km of Baghdad before withdrawing. President Bush declared a cease-fire and Saddam's "mother of all battles" was over.

Or was it?

In an ill-fated decision, George Bush, Sr., despite the urging of his Commanding General Norman Schwarzkopf, refused to allow US troops to enter Baghdad and finish off Saddam Hussein and his Republican Guard.

When asked for his reasoning, President Bush said, "We would have been forced to occupy Baghdad and, in effect, rule Iraq." In 1992 Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney declared, "We'd achieved our objectives and we were not going to get bogged down in the problems of trying to take over and govern Iraq."

These two quotes would come back to haunt the other Bush-Cheney team in the mid-2000s.

Though American casualties were light with 294 dead and 458 wounded, more than 25% of the Gulf War's 183,000 veterans were classified as "permanently disabled" by the Department of Veterans Affairs in year 2000. Of course, many Gulf War veterans classified as disabled can still walk, talk, and chew gum at the same time. Our government will dole out entitlement payments to whoever is willing to stand in line and play the system for what it will give them.

This was a different situation than previous "unwinnable" wars. The Gulf War was a very winnable war at one particular juncture in time. But our Commander-in-Chief was too busy looking for a thousand points of light to make his new world order. Simply put, he did not have the military guts or the political will to stick it out and pull it off.

- George Herman Walker Bush's *Gulf War* became America's Fourth Unwinnable War.

William Jefferson Clinton entered the White House in 1993 defeating George Bush Sr. largely because of a weakening economy and *read my lips*, Bush's tax raise.

Numerous minor military events occurred during Clinton's two terms as President: A skirmish in Somalia in 1993 killed 18 Americans; Serb targets in Bosnia were bombed and peacekeeping troops deployed in 1995; and a NATO-led bombing of Serb targets occurred in Kosovo in 1999.

None of these minor conflicts started or led to an unwinnable war. But the following did:

In his 1998 State of the Union Address, Bill Clinton warned of Saddam Hussein's development of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, i.e., the fictitious "weapons of mass destruction" in Iraq, and the missiles to deliver them. Later that year, he signed a policy bill for regime change in Iraq and began a four day bombing campaign. The last two years of his tenure in office were marked by routine bombing of Iraqi anti-aircraft installations.

William Jefferson Clinton's actions in his second term as President led directly to the War in Iraq by his successor George W. Bush.

Three other episodes during Bill Clinton's Presidency are of strategic importance:

The February 1993 World Trade Center car bombing that killed five and injured 1042, masterminded by a former al-Qaeda camp trainee in Afghanistan; the 1998 US Embassy bombings by al-Qaeda in Kenya and Tanzania that resulted in 12 dead and led Clinton to order missile strikes in Afghanistan and Sudan; and the 2000 al-Qaeda suicide bombing of the USS Cole at port in Yemen that killed 17 sailors.

Clinton did nothing to avenge two of these attacks despite direct ties to Osama Bin Laden and al-Qaeda. On the third, he managed to bomb a civilian pharmaceutical plant in the Sudan that manufactured the country's supply of anti-malarial drugs.

The Sudanese government offered to deliver Bin Laden to the US in 1996, 1998, and 2000 and provide intelligence information about militant organizations in the Middle East, including al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, and Hamas. The Clinton Administration reportedly ignored these offers.

These three attacks were precursors to 9-11 and Bill Clinton's repeated lack of response to Sudanese offers to have Bin Laden captured, arrested, and extradited to our shores allowed it to happen.

During his last four years in office, William Jefferson Clinton's inaction to take out Osama Bin Laden led directly to 9-11 and George Walker Bush's War on Terror and the War in Afghanistan.

By the time George W. Bush was sworn in as President of the United States in January 2001, the seeds of three unwinnable wars already had been sown by Bill Clinton: The War on Terror, The War in Afghanistan, and The War in Iraq. But make no mistake, Bush Jr. was the man that adopted and nurtured these forever wars as he would his own.

Eight months into the second Bush's presidency, the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks occurred on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia; 2995 people died including the hijackers. Three days later in a speech from the still smoldering ruins of Ground Zero and armed with a megaphone, George W. Bush gave us his most Presidential moment while addressing workers cleaning up the site. Nine days later in an address to Congress, he announced the global War on Terror.

With those three words originally used by Ronald Reagan in the '80's to describe his campaigns in Libya and Nicaragua, America was plunged into not only an unwinnable war but a perpetual, endless, forever, Orwellian-style *1984* war.

- George Walker Bush's *War on Terror* is America's Fifth Unwinnable War.

Lil' Bush also said this at the time: "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime."

Employing this agenda, he ordered the invasion of Afghanistan in early October 2001. The stated goals were to capture Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda leadership, put them on trial, wipeout their training camps, remove the Taliban regime that supported them, and destroy the entire organization.

Initial attacks in 2001 removed the Taliban from power but since then they have made a strong resurgence in many parts of the country. Little progress has been made in destroying al-Qaeda as the terrorists retreated to the high mountains of western Pakistan. Since 2006 Afghanistan's opium production has grown significantly to an estimated 90% of world supply. There is little control of the country by the UN-supported government outside of the capital city of Kabul and recent elections were tainted with charges of widespread fraud.

The USA currently has about 53,000 troops in Afghanistan. Many are located in large, permanent military bases with on-going construction. It looks like our leaders have determined to make a stand in Afghanistan.

- George Walker Bush's *War in Afghanistan* is America's Sixth Unwinnable War.

The unfinished Gulf War spawned its own progeny 12 years later when Bush Sr.'s progeny, *Dubya*, restarted Clinton's War in Iraq using his previously false pretense of "weapons of mass destruction".

Thus Bush Jr. and Vice-President Cheney did what his daddy and Secretary of Defense Cheney refused to do 12 years earlier: "Occupy Baghdad and, in effect, rule Iraq."

Prior to the war, the Americans and the British made allegations that Iraq possessed and was developing nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and long range missiles. The United Nations Security Council passed a resolution forcing Iraq to allow international weapons inspectors to verify or deny these allegations. Despite finding no evidence, inspectors were unable to verify Iraq's weapons declarations. So the United States issued a statement that "diplomacy has failed" and on March 20, 2003, an international coalition force led by the US and UK invaded Iraq.

Despite repeated assurances of weapons of mass destruction by the Bush and Blair administrations, none were ever found. Other reasons given to justify the invasion of Iraq by US officials include Saddam Hussein's genocide of Shiite and Kurdish peoples after the Gulf War, his support for suicide bombers, human rights abuses, aiding and harboring al-Qaeda, and imposition of democracy on the country, a la the nation-building platform of Woodrow Wilson.

However, it seems the most likely reason was the Bush, Jr.-Cheney desire to resolve unfinished business from the 1991 war by removing Saddam Hussein from power. That goal was accomplished and Saddam was executed in December 2006.

The Iraq War has been a nightmare for the US. Like Vietnam, it is a guerilla conflict but is set in a desert and urban environment versus a jungle and rural countryside environment, it is a civil war, and it has become an increasingly unpopular war with the American public. The US occupation is strongly opposed by Iraqi citizens.

And it is unwinnable.

In October 2009 the US remains the only country with combat troops on the ground. Service casualties include over 4300 killed and 31,500 wounded, not including US mercenary contractors. There are 130,000 troops currently deployed to Iraq and the war has cost over \$800 billion. (Source: www.usliberals.about.com)

- George Walker Bush's *Iraq War* is America's Seventh Unwinnable War.

On January 20, 2009 Democrat Barack H. Obama II was sworn in as the 44th President of the United States ending eight years of Republican rule. A relative political newcomer as a first term Senator from Illinois, Obama was elected over old school Republican Senator John McCain. Throughout the campaign, he advocated an end to the Iraq War, energy independence, and government health care. The American people's extreme dissatisfaction with the failed economic and foreign policies of Bush Jr. during his second term in office was a strong factor in Obama's easy win.

Obama immediately changed foreign policy direction from the Bush administration, going so far as bowing to the King of Saudi Arabia. This move was viewed as a political and social disgrace by the American public.

Upon entering office, he immediately announced closure of the Guantanamo Bay terrorist detention camp within a year. Five weeks later, he asked the military for plans to remove all combat troops from Iraq within 18 months. But he made no mention of when or if complete troop withdrawal ever would occur.

In March 2009, employing disturbing Orwellian "*Newspeak*", Obama directed that Pentagon staff discard the term War on Terror and replace it with, "Overseas Contingency Operations". In August John Brennan, Obama's assistant for counter terrorism, officially announced the end of the War on Terror from a military standpoint and pledged that the on-going battle would focus on the political, economic, and social causes of terrorism.

That sounds eerily like the government's 45 years of strategy for our second unwinnable war, The War on Poverty.

Obama also directed that the term "War on Drugs" no longer be used. He favors needle exchange programs, increased money for social programs, and mental health treatment versus incarceration, but does not support legalization of marijuana.

However, lest he be perceived as a dove, Barack Obama has increased troop strength by 17,000 for the unwinnable War in Afghanistan to quote, "stabilize a deteriorating situation". General Barry McCaffrey, the US commander in Afghanistan, said recently that the US faces ten more years of the War in Afghanistan to build a "*viable state*" and at a cost of \$5 billion a month. Obama is moving military personnel from one theater in the Middle East to another in central Asia.

Shifting emphasis from one war to another is not a reduction in warfare and it is not a peace initiative.

Yet despite accelerating the War in Afghanistan, Barack Obama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on October 9, 2009, becoming the third sitting President to receive it. The award was roundly criticized and derided by American and world media with one suggesting it was a joke, perhaps an excerpt from the satirical newspaper, *The Onion*.

Obama joined two other notable "peacenik" Presidents: Teddy Roosevelt, famous for quotes such as "I should welcome almost any war, for I think this country needs one", and "Speak softly and carry a big stick"; and Woodrow Wilson, who brought the United States into World War I, designed the Sedition Act to suppress anti-war opinion and dissent, invented the League of Nations, a concept so flawed that his own country refused to join, and embraced a policy that the United States should "fight for democracy" in the world arena.

But Obama has not brought peace. In fact, he is carrying out the longstanding tradition of his predecessors: Obama has violated the Constitution by declaring war without the consent of Congress.

Barack Obama has declared War on Capitalism.

His proposed domestic agenda includes government health care, increased spending on entitlement programs, redistribution of wealth, higher taxes, more regulation of free enterprise, increasingly nationalized banks, taxpayer bailouts of large corporations, creation of vast amounts of fiat money, monetization of debt, restrictions on individual rights, and draconian control of the people's right to bear arms.

Simply put, Obama is a socialist, albeit of the so-called "soft" variety.

Socialism and its evil conjoined twin, fascism, constitute a fatally flawed economic, social, and political system.

For the greater part of the 20th century, many governments of the world tried variations of the collectivist, statist, and totalitarian theme. These governments repeatedly failed: The nazis of Germany, the fascists of Italy and Spain, the absolute monarchy of Japan, the communists of Russia with their satellite governments of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the communists of China, and in the latter half of the century, numerous Third World countries in Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

Most now embrace capitalism in one form or another.

Capitalism will ultimately triumph as an economic and social system because the means of production is privately and individually controlled thru a free marketplace. Individual risk, responsibility, and work are rewarded with individual profit.

Socialism will eventually fail because the means of production is controlled by a collective or a state, all work accrues for the benefit of the state, and there is no profit incentive. Reward is distributed and shared equally without regard for enterprise, risk, or work. There is no incentive to grow and prosper and that absolutely is counter to the human spirit.

- Barack Hussein Obama II's *War on Capitalism* is America's Eighth Unwinnable War.

America's founding father, libertarian, and founder of the Democratic Republican party, Thomas Jefferson, is oft quoted. Some of his thoughts on war, government, debt, socialism, liberty, and the right to bear arms include:

"I abhor war and view it as the greatest scourge of mankind."

"My reading of history convinces me that most bad government results from too much government".

"It is incumbent on every generation to pay its own debts as it goes; a principle which if acted on would save one-half the wars of the world."

"The democracy will cease to exist when you take away from those who are willing to work and give to those who would not."

“When the people fear their government, there is tyranny; when the government fears the people, there is liberty.”

“The beauty of the Second Amendment is that it will not be needed until they try to take it.”

We cannot expect a socialist such as Barack Obama to heed any of this sage advice.

But no worries. Obama’s approval rating already has fallen to 45%. In my opinion he will be a one term President and the Democrats will lose Congress in the 2010 elections.

The Heartland of America knows that socialism does not and will never work.

We can trust that a future President and Congress, reacting on demand from the American people, will act to restore a limited government, our sovereignty, our borders, and our individual rights to *life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness* before our great democratic republican experiment fails.

Upon exiting the Constitutional Congress in 1787, Benjamin Franklin was asked what they had finally accomplished after seven months of toil. He replied, *“A republic if you can keep it.”*

It is my sincere hope that ours is not irretrievably lost.

To explore my thoughts on war, capitalism, socialism, and libertarianism, I invite you to read other musings: [Socialistic Capitalism, July 22, 2008](#); [100 Years of Amoralism, August 11, 2008](#); and [Nine-Eleven: Another American Day that Will Live in Infamy, January 26, 2009](#).

Ciao for now,

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Please note that all of the views and opinions expressed here are mine and do not necessarily reflect those of my editor or reviewers.

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