

The Perpetual Business of War

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Shortly before its attack on Syria, the US [declassified](#) its “Report on the Legal and Policy Frameworks Guiding the United States’ Use of Military Force and Related National Security Operations.” As its name implies, this paper concerns itself with US military operations abroad. The word “war” is never officially used, as you may notice, because the procedure for declaring war is a rather complicated process.

According to the report,

“US. forces remain in Afghanistan for the purposes of stopping the reemergence of safe havens that enable terrorists to threaten the United States or its interests.”

In regard to Iraq and Syria, the picture is much the same. US armed forces are deployed “to conduct operations against ISIS with indigenous ground forces.” Such evasive wording in regard to the second group suggests that this is a reference not only to terrorists, but also to Syrian government troops. This is confirmed a bit further into the document, where it states that

“US Armed Forces participating in the Defeat-ISIS campaign in Syria have taken a limited number of strikes against Syrian government and pro-Syrian government forces.”

As for the Kurdish divisions, only the Iraqi Peshmerga are mentioned, although in Syria the US has also provided military assistance to the Kurdish units of the SDF.

Only a relatively small contingent of American troops have been posted to Yemen, where they are conducting operations against the local branches of al-Qaeda. In addition to taking part in combat operations, the US provides logistical assistance from Saudi Arabia against Houthi rebels.

In Somalia, the US carries out both air strikes as well as ground operations, which includes cooperation with the African Union mission in Somalia. The US has designated al-Qaeda, ISIS, and al-Shabaab as its military targets.

Libya has mostly been on the receiving end of air strikes that are supposedly coordinated with the Libyan Government of National Accord.

The seventh country mentioned in the document does not often come up in any of the various news reports about the military hostilities. This is Niger, and the official reason for

the presence of the US military there is to train, assist, and advise the local government in the fight against ISIS. Moreover it states that “United States and Nigerian partner forces responded with armed force in self-defense.”

In 2007 General Wesley Clark [claimed](#) in a television interview that after the attack on New York in 2001, the US planned to conduct seven wars in the Middle East region over the course of five years. The Pentagon would start with Iraq and then move on to target Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and Iran.

The fact is that all of these countries, with the exception of Iran, have been the subject of direct or indirect aggression and political pressure from the US and its satellites. There are US military forces that remain stationed in some of them still to this day.

With regard to the legal framework, which is based on both local as well as international law, this document states that there has been no change that would apply to the presence and actions of the US armed forces there. Only in Yemen are certain restrictions in place. The section about the capture and detention of the citizens of various countries who are seized in conflict zones, as well as the sadly infamous Guantanamo prison, includes a similar statement. Despite the fact that this prison is actually even physically located on an illegally occupied part of Cuba at Guantanamo Bay, Washington continues to maintain that “detention operations at Guantanamo Bay are legal, safe, humane, and conducted consistent with U.S. and international law.” It reports that the detention operations at the prison will continue and new prisoners will be sent to Guantanamo.

Long War or Perpetual War?

To understand the US practice of warfare, one must turn to systematic studies that have been done on this subject, as this report is a logical continuation of the strategic research and development conducted by American academic and military institutions. In 2008, the RAND Corporation released a study, called [“Unfolding the Future of the Long War: Motivations, Prospects, and Implications for the U.S. Army.”](#) The document was drafted on the basis of the grimmest forecasts, i.e., the assumption that the US will be involved in conflicts against a unified Muslim world that will seek to supplant Western dominance until at least 2020, thus making it necessary to identify the ambiguities and actors in that war, as well as how it might unfold, and to come up with potential strategies to contend with that scenario.



The authors of the report suggest that methods such as capitalizing on the Sunni-Shiite conflict be used to sway US enemies in a future long war. For example, shoring up the region’s traditional Sunni regimes is suggested as a way to contain Iran and limit its influence in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf.

Another proposal is that the US might adapt its strategy to focus more on the long-term, relying less on forceful aggression in the Middle East. Under this option, the State Department, USAID, Peace Corps, Department of Agriculture, and Department of Justice could become the primary actors in this new American strategy.

It is revealing that the term “long war” was not simply added to the lengthy backlist of numerous other theoretical analyses, but has instead been transformed into a concept that

is part of the common parlance of the current Washington establishment. This was confirmed by the relatively recent testimony presented by Seth Jones on April 27, 2017 before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade, titled [“Managing the Long War: U.S. Policy toward Afghanistan and the Region.”](#)

Given that Afghanistan is located in an important geopolitical region — between Iran and Pakistan and relatively close to the Central Asia states of the former USSR — this country is doomed to be the object of a long and perhaps even perpetual US war.

But apparently the Pentagon is gearing up to wage an unending war on three fronts — not only in Afghanistan, but also against China and Russia. At least [that’s the claim of Professor Michael Klare](#), who calls this evolution of events “an invitation to disaster” and cautions officials in Washington to think hard before committing to any strategies that involve the use of force.

War is Business

On April 16, 2018 the news broke that some US senators were drafting a new [war authorization](#) bill. Its authors are Sens. [Bob Corker](#), R-Tenn. and [Tim Kaine](#), D-Va. and its co-sponsors include Sens. [Chris Coons](#), D-Del.; [Jeff Flake](#), R-Ariz.; [Bill Nelson](#), D-Fla., and [Todd Young](#), R-Ind. The bill would regulate the president’s power to press the US armed forces into service. But if one bothers to scrutinize even a bit all the work done by defense contractors and the political decisions related to combat operations, one can quickly see that there is a definite connection between the two. Therefore, any such restrictions can be not only political in nature, but also aimed at business interests. Both of the US missile strikes in Syria (April 2017 and April 2018) used Tomahawk missiles, which are manufactured by the American company Raytheon. In April 2017, when the US attacked a Syrian airbase (firing 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles), [Raytheon surged 3%](#) before paring its gain by half, but closed above its 50-day moving average and a 152.68 flat-base buy point. That put the stock back in buy range. Other Pentagon contractors, such as Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, and Boeing, also edged higher. Interestingly, after April 11, 2018, [Raytheon shares began to creep upward](#), rising from \$219 per share to a ceiling of \$228 by April 17. And this was despite the fact that most of the Tomahawks landed wide of their target.



The U.S. Senate

One would have thought that this would have put the Russian company Rosoboronexport in a better position, since it supplies weapons systems to Syria (and some of those systems prevented the Tomahawks from reaching their target), but not Raytheon, whose products were virtual duds. However, on April 16, Russian companies suffered a bad day on the stock market due to the latest US sanctions, with financial analysts claiming that [Rosoboronexport, along with Rusal, took the biggest beating](#). And that was despite the fact that military products from Russia are in high demand on the global arms market. In other words, some other kind of mechanism exists that makes it possible to manipulate the quotes for securities and the exchange rates. And sure enough, back in [2015 Business Insider reported](#) that Donald Trump’s investment portfolio included stock holdings in Raytheon. At the time, a number of publications [suggested](#) that [Trump’s financial interests](#) benefited from the 2017 missile strike. If someone has administrative leverage

and the assistance of brokerage firms, a military campaign could be used for personal enrichment. And the whole shebang could be branded as a “defense of national interests” or “protection of democracy.”

The oil market also reacted to the attack on Syria. [The price of crude oil jumped](#). Analysts explained this as a side effect of the potential danger that the conflict might escalate, thereby affecting the entire Middle East. And that could jeopardize the existing supplies. But those prices had changed before the US and Great Britain launched their missile attack. As early as April 11, Brent crude had risen to [\\$71.96](#) a barrel, its highest point since December 2014. If one tracks the momentum of oil prices and the work of oil companies and traders on the global market, it's easy to see who cashed in on this price hike.

Given that the US political system is based on “iron triangles” — the intersecting interests of corporations, government officials, and special-interest groups — it is unlikely that any truly sensible decision will be made in the US in regard to the use of armed force that would make it possible to resolve conflicts by means of diplomacy instead. The interests of the American military-industrial complex are clearly more compelling than those of the organizations that specialize in negotiations and consultations. War (or, to use the official rhetoric: “military operations abroad”) will be long, perpetual, and lucrative for the many actors involved.

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