

A Test for President Obama: A Wartime Commander-in-Chief

I am going to speak to you about our Commander-in-Chief. John McCain or Hillary Clinton might have held that position, but the Commander-in-Chief is Barack Obama. I'm going to place him in the context of our two greatest Commanders-in-Chief, towering figures – first, Abraham Lincoln and second, Franklin Roosevelt. Now, Abraham Lincoln had an advantage over Obama in his military experience. He served for two weeks in the Blackhawk War. He was an elected captain, but didn't even have a chance to fire a shot. Eric Larrabee, author of the book *Commander-in-Chief*, notes that nevertheless, Lincoln turned out our greatest strategic genius. In his second year, lacking victories in the Civil War, he resorted to reading books on strategy from the Library of Congress, but he simply had that DNA of a great strategist.

When Obama took over as Commander-in-Chief, he inherited two simultaneous wars. In 1862, Lincoln's Cabinet clamored for war against Great Britain due to interference on the high seas. Smart old Abe said, "whoa, one war at a time." That's the strategic principle of unity-of-effort. By 1938, Franklin

Roosevelt was convinced we would have to fight Hitler. His strategy was to avoid war with Japan. He miscalculated. He left the fleet at Pearl Harbor thinking it would deter the Japanese. Rather, it presented an inviting target, and we ended up with two wars.

If two wars at a time is not a severe challenge for Obama, another challenge piles in. This is the greatest financial crisis since the Great Depression. Roosevelt had to face that Great Depression, but sequentially. Actually, the mobilization for war helped him get out of that depression. With Obama, the wars are a strain, costing us more than \$1 trillion since 2001, with a price tag of \$126 billion this year.

The challenge to Barrack Obama doesn't end there, at least in my judgment. You may recall a recent cover story of *Newsweek*, ominously on Pearl Harbor Day, December 7th. The cover pictured the Capitol Building upside down, pointing toward the title "How Great Powers Fall." The subtitle read, "Steep Debt, Slow Growth, and High Spending Kill Empires – and America could be next." The lead

article was by the eminent historian and economist Niall Ferguson of Oxford and Harvard.

I believe, whether we like it or not, whether Barack Obama likes it or not, that he stands at the crossroads of either America's decline or renewal. I was at two important meetings with high-ranking Chinese in the last few months. The one was the wrap-up of the Strategic and Economic Dialogue, where I was asked to be a co-sponsor of the dinner that followed. It was, under the circumstance, perhaps appropriate that Secretary Clinton almost had to curtsy before her largest banker sitting on the dais, the number two man from China. The Secretary of the Treasury, Geithner, came close genuflecting before the largest holder of our debt.

I was also at a small meeting with their Vice Minister of Defense. At the end of it, a good looking four star Air Force General, came around the table to give me a watch, and a copy of the works of the ancient Chinese strategist Sun Tzu, on how to win without having to fight. I know people that say, "with Chinese investments in the United States, they would never yank the financial chain." However, in the Suez Crisis of 1956, when against President Eisenhower's wishes the British and

the French were sending forces into the Sinai, Ike told Secretary Dulles to tell the British that we would pull the chain on the Pound Sterling. The British and the French obeyed and got right back aboard their ships. Ultimately, we don't want to pick a fight with China. So much of China's future conduct depends on how we mold the strategic playing field in the Pacific and manage the balance of power. However, today, our Commander-in-Chief is, understandably, engaged in the two wars and combating extremism in the Muslim world, that we are neglecting this big game in the Pacific. As China grows stronger and more assertive, we are ignoring our strategic partners in Japan, South Korea, and Southeast Asia. If I were President Obama, I would call back former Secretary of the Treasury Henry Paulson to serve as a special envoy regarding China and our financial relationship. During the financial crisis, he developed a strong relationship with then-Candidate Obama, and this task would call on his considerable experience dealing with China.

Now I turn, not to the war that is winding down, Iraq, but the one that is wound-up, Afghanistan. That war has such ramifications for Pakistan, India, and Central Asia.

From my study of Presidential leadership, the first question is always, “is the President organized to deal with the challenge with the maximum success possible?” Lincoln, as a model, had as his first concern unity of effort, and this included within his own Administration. “A house divided cannot stand.” Lincoln brought in his so-called “Team of Rivals.” In this case, not so much for their abilities, but to unite the Republicans and Democrats of the North in mobilizing to defeat the South. He delayed the emancipation until later in the war, and did not make the mistake that Obama has done. In general, that is trying to do too much at once and too soon.

When Roosevelt was convinced that war with Hitler was coming in 1938, he formed an extraordinary bipartisan Cabinet. He had two eminent Republicans. He promoted George Marshall over the heads of a plethora of more senior generals to become his Chief of Staff and adviser on the path to victory. He chose a young Brigadier General, who was willing to tell Roosevelt that he was wrong. This was the man Roosevelt wanted close.

I give President Obama the highest marks for what he has done to organize himself for national security. At the beginning of the Obama transition, which made it clear that it was open to suggestions, I had suggested 6'4" Marine general and NATO Supreme Allied Commander Jim Jones to be National Security Advisor. Along with Ambassador Tom Pickering, he had chaired our Afghanistan Study Group, which was the first realization that al-Qaeda and the Taliban were winning due to insufficient resources and the distraction of the Iraq War. Jones was closer to McCain than to Obama. Jones had been in a private sector energy study with the Chamber of Commerce, therefore close to some of those companies. Obama, with his voting record, like the new President Lincoln, had come from the political left. To my surprise, Obama selected Jones to be the National Security Advisor. This is someone that Hillary and others can salute! It is also someone that I believe will be like George Marshall who will tell the President when he thinks he's wrong.

Now the importance of that post is this: the catastrophic failures of recent history have been due to a flawed national security process. The National Security Council was set up in 1947 to make sure that all the key players worked as a team in examining decisions from all viewpoints, intelligence, and a totality of national

power. Examples of the opposite are these; the Bay of Pigs disaster under Kennedy, where the CIA alone ran the show; the *ad hoc* Tuesday Lunches during the Johnson build-up in Vietnam, where the McNamara and Westmoreland strategy of winning by gradual escalation, kill ratios, and body counts was never re-examined until it was too late; the handling of the Iranian crisis of 1979, where the Secretary of State and the National Security Advisor were at such odds that we had a dual policy; the Iran-Contra catastrophe (where I was called back from my post as NATO Ambassador to help get us on a better-organized track); or the way we went to war against Iraq, with the advice of the most experienced, Colin Powell, was discounted. All of these resulted from a flawed system.

My argument on General Jones is that he was the man that was to be the keeper of a new team of rivals. Furthermore, Obama shrewdly took Secretary of State Clinton out of the Senate, where she could have become a third force. In my judgment, she has become an extraordinarily talented and shrewd Secretary of State. The President persuaded Republican Secretary of Defense Gates to stay on. The feeling in Washington is that this self-effacing leader will become one of our greatest Secretaries of Defense, under inconceivably difficult circumstances.

Obama shrewdly chose Leon Panetta, with experience in the White House and Capitol Hill for the CIA.

When Abraham Lincoln came into office, his biggest problem was finding good generals. As the war broke out, Lincoln tried to hire Colonel Robert E. Lee. He heard he had the smartest military mind in America. Lee prayed about it, wasn't happy with secession or slavery, and figured he'd sit the war out. However, when Virginia seceded, he felt he had to fight with the South. None of Lincoln's generals wanted to meet and fight Lee in open battle. They knew they'd be licked. It wasn't until Lincoln found Grant, who was willing to use the North's numerical and industrial superiority to wear down Lee through attrition warfare.

Obama, on the other hand, inherited some extraordinary generals and admirals, a new breed of agile strategists. I have come to know and work closely with Admiral Mike Mullen, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He is a remarkable strategic thinker, always calm and thoughtful of the men and women serving under him. General David Petraeus, as I've said to him, and he doesn't seem to mind the compliment, despite his modesty, is practically another Robert E.

Lee. After his initial exploits as a division commander in Iraq, Dave went to the Command and General Staff College and studied the lessons of Iraq. Like all great commanders, he has placed the human factors first, not body counts and kill ratios. “If we cannot change hearts and minds, we cannot ultimately win,” he said as commander of the 101st Division as he landed in Mosul. He created and sold a new doctrine of counterinsurgency, and was forerunner of the new strategy that the President developed. This is to seize, hold, and rebuild but only in a few key areas of Afghanistan. In Marjah, where the 6th Marines are fighting today, a narcotics producing center, they are prepared immediately following the end of combat to open school houses and to sow the wheat seeds to educate the populace and move away from poppies.

Barrack Obama was criticized for the two and a half months that he took to determine the new strategy on Afghanistan, but this was more thorough a process in reviewing escalation or intervention than we have seen since Eisenhower’s deliberation and decision not to intervene in Indochina in 1954. He questioned and improved military judgments.

Our predilection has been marshalling and mobilizing the NATO Alliance in the fighting, training, and reconstruction fronts. But Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India are all interlinked, and where interactions take place. Waziristan in Pakistan is now the headquarters of the al-Qaeda and Taliban, and the Pakistani security forces, the ISI, have always tended to play a double game. With the Indians involved in Afghanistan, they are not sure we will do as we did following the Soviet defeat and pick up and totally leave. Some of us are proposing a new Marshall Plan for Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. This would involve the 28 NATO allies, the 20 NATO partners, and the G-20 participating to show that there is a long-term plan for this area of the world beyond military action. We are happy that talks have resumed between India and Pakistan again.

In a sense, he added to this public mobilization effort by his Nobel Peace Prize lecture in December of 2009. This University of Chicago Law Professor, laid out the case for war and his role as Commander-in-Chief. I don't think his speech is what that group, in which some are anti-military in any form, expected. He noted, "perhaps the most profound issue surrounding my receipt of this prize is the fact that I am the Commander-in-Chief of the military of a nation in the midst of

two wars...and I'm responsible for the deployment of thousands of young Americans to battle in a distant land.” He noted that the problems of war had been debated over the centuries, with the problem of just and unjust wars.

Then this man of the left noted the hard truth that, “There will be times when nations -- acting individually or in concert – will find the use of force not only necessary but morally justified.” He longingly quoted Martin Luther King Jr., saying, “violence never brings permanent peace,” he however noted, “as a head of state sworn to protect and defend my nation, I cannot be guided by their examples alone. I face the world as it is, and cannot stand idle in the face of threats to the American people. For make no mistake: Evil does exist in the world. A non-violent movement could not have halted Hitler's armies. Negotiations cannot convince al Qaeda's leaders to lay down their arms. To say that force may sometimes be necessary is not a call to cynicism -- it is a recognition of history; the imperfections of man and the limits of reason.”

Barrack Obama, had been thrown into severe crises of terrorism, the two wars, the economic collapse, and yet also steep debt, slow growth, and high spending can

kill empires. A group we have promoted is a statutory fiscal commission to take the resolution of so many of these contentious issues out of the hands of Congress. We regret that we were near victory in the Senate, but then had Republican Senators back out when President Obama finally endorsed the idea. The President then moved forward and announced such a commission to be formed via executive order. This is a major step forward, because so many to his left have opposed such a measure, and the hard right has joined them. This commission model is the right way to deal not just with entitlement reform, but also the tax reform needed to balance government revenues and vital economic growth.

The eloquence of the Nobel Lecture, which so effectively conveys the necessity of American power and the military operation, must also be applied to our fiscal crisis. This will be President Obama's greatest test, facing down the debt and deficit, and building the coalitions to support hard choices. Here he must not only be our Commander-in-Chief, but our Persuader-in-Chief. I hope he will grow to the challenge, which will so affect our children and grandchildren.