

Maxims of Mad Dog Mattis

At the time, of course, no one knew he would become President Donald Trump's Secretary of Defense. James N. Mattis in the winter of 2015 was just a retired Marine Corps general with deep combat experience. The Senate Armed Services Committee wanted to hear his views on defense topics. What they got was a pointed denunciation of Washington's "reactive crouch" and "strategy-free" actions under President Obama; insistence that America "lead from the front" and "remain strongly engaged" in foreign relations; and a roadmap for the proper use of US military power.

The world is awash in change. The international order, so painstakingly put together by the greatest generation coming home from mankind's bloodiest conflict, ... is under increasing stress. It was created with elements we take for granted: the United Nations, NATO, the Marshall Plan, Bretton Woods, and more. ...

The constructed order reflected the wisdom of those who recognized no nation lived as an island and we needed new ways to deal with challenges that, for better or worse, impacted all nations. Like it or not, today we are part of this larger world and must carry out our part. ... We must remain strongly engaged. ...

The international order built on the state system is not self-sustaining. It demands tending by an America that leads wisely. ... America [must] adapt to changing circumstances, to come out now from its reactive crouch and to take a firm strategic stance in defense of our values. ... For certain we have lived too long now in a strategy-free mode. ...

America needs a refreshed national strategy. ... There is an urgent need to stop reacting to each immediate vexing issue in isolation. Such response often creates unanticipated second order effects and more problems for us. ... We [must] act strategically and morally, using America's ability to inspire as well as its ability to intimidate to ensure freedom for future generations. ...

With a smaller military comes the need for troops kept at the top of their game. When we next put them in harm's way it must be the enemy's longest day and worst day. Tiered readiness with a smaller force must be closely scrutinized to ensure we aren't merely hollowing out the force. ...

Strategy connects ends, ways, and means. With less military available, we must reduce our appetite for using it. ... Absent growing our military, there must come a time when moral outrage, serious humanitarian plight, or lesser threats cannot be militarily addressed. Prioritization is needed if we are to remain capable of the most critical mission for which we have a military: to fight on short notice and defend the country. ...

The need for stronger alliances comes more sharply into focus as we shrink the military. No nation can do on its own all that is necessary for its security. ... A capable US military, reinforcing our political will to lead from the front, is the bedrock on which we draw together those nations that stand with us against threats to the international order. ...

"Views on Global Challenge"

Gen. James N. Mattis, USMC (Ret.)
Testimony
Senate Armed Services Committee
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Find the full text on the
Air Force Magazine's website
www.airforcemag.com
"Keeper File"



Echoes from the past from retired Gen. James "Mad Dog" Mattis.

When we make clear our position or give our word about something, our friends (and even our foes) must recognize that we are good for it. ... This means that the military instrument must be fit for purpose and that ... our position is backed up by a capable military making clear that we will stand on our word.

When the decision is made to employ our forces in combat, the committee should ask if the military is being employed with the proper authority. ...

Are the political objectives clearly defined and achievable? Murky or quixotic political end states can condemn us to entering wars we don't know how to end.

Notifying the enemy in advance of our withdrawal dates or reassuring the enemy that we will not use certain capabilities like our ground forces should be avoided. Such announcements do not take the place of mature, well-defined end-states, nor do they contribute to ending wars as rapidly as possible on favorable terms.

Is the theater of war itself sufficient for effective prosecution? We have witnessed safe havens prolonging war. If the defined theater of war is insufficient, the plan itself needs to be challenged to determine feasibility of its success or the need for its modification. ...

Is the authority for detaining prisoners of war appropriate for the enemy and type [of] war that we are fighting? ... We should not engage in another fight without resolving this issue up front, treating hostile forces, in fact, as hostile.

Are America's diplomatic, economic, and other assets aligned to the war aims, with the intent of ending the conflict as rapidly as possible? We have experienced the military alone trying [to] achieve tasks outside its expertise. When we take the serious decision to fight, we must bring to bear all our nation's resources. *