

Military power and its use

One of the issues we need to address in view of the US defeat in Afghanistan is what I would call “the impulse to a military response” when faced with a challenging situation. It provokes both a practical (will it achieve the ends being sought?) and an ethical (will it bring unacceptable levels of harm?) question.

At the core of this impulse is the seemingly unlimited military means to activate it; the power to cause great harm to enemies wherever they live. The temptation to use it is all too often the first instinct rather than the last resort.

It’s as if having the power is good enough reason for using it!

Rather than being a necessary means to a particular end it all too often becomes an end-in-itself from which little or no good results for those the powerful claim to be helping and for their own citizens.

Too little attention is given to what the on-the-ground implications are for external and military involvement in the history and conflicts of another nation. Whose nation is it? Who is liberating who?

The USA of today is war-weary and more divided than ever-and on basic questions related to truth, governance and public policy. It presents to the world not as one, but as two nations. Uncertainty prevails as to which of these two nations will emerge victorious and how the internal divisions will be reflected in the way military power is managed.

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