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OFFENSE WILL NOT WIN THE PEACE

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Yesterday, in the United States, we celebrated our Memorial Day; a day to honor those who sacrificed their lives fighting our nation's wars.

The only speech that President Dwight D. Eisenhower ever gave on this national holiday was on May 30, 1958, to a group of Medal of Honor Winners. Ike told the men, "Because you have been such great fighters, I am quite certain that all of you feel a great compulsion to be a fighter for peace. The cornerstone for fighting for peace and winning the peace is the strength of America—first of all, its spiritual strength, its determination to stand before the world as an exemplar of those ideals and principles of human dignity and freedom and liberty in which we so deeply believe."

It is time to heed Ike's call and return to the idea that the US stands for ideals —freedom, strength, and human dignity.

The exemplar Ike referred to, of America's leadership and goodness, is not the petroleum adventurism in Iraq, war in Afghanistan, torture or any of its euphemisms — Enhanced Interrogation Techniques — and the Guantanamo Prison, to name a few.

We are better than this, Ike knew it, and it's time again to show the world.

Today, the United States and Western nations are once again imperiled.

After more than half a century of economic and military superiority, other nations and security threats are poised to challenge the leadership of Western powers. China's industrialization and technological boom have become a growing concern. According to the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan "fact tank" in Washington, DC, "The rise of China has generated serious concerns in many countries. China's favorability ratings have fallen since 2002, particularly in Europe and its biggest neighbors - India, Japan, and Russia. China is already widely regarded as one of the world's top economic powers and is seen by many as likely to replace the United States as the world's dominant power."

Fifty years before the late Samuel P. Huntington penned his famous book, "The Clash of Civilizations," US Army Lt. Col. W.F. Kernan described an America, "...committed to a conflict of civilizations, of cultures, of continents." Lt. Col. Kernan's book titled, "Defense Will Not Win The War," urged the US to become militarily offensive and take the initiative to prevent fascism and totalitarianism from destroying democratic principles.

The United States heeded the call, and as one of the victors of WWII became one of the world's superpowers.

For the next half-century America essentially took the offensive. In wars and military incursions countering the Soviet Union, the US maintained an aggressive foreign policy. And even as the Cold War ended, American policy continued with armed interventions on several continents – Grenada, Panama, Lebanon, Iraq, Haiti, Somalia, and Bosnia.

Then, 9-11 started a series of events that would lead the US to intervene militarily in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

Indeed, in a Foreign Affairs article titled, "The Future of American Power: How America Can Survive the Rise of the Rest," Fareed Zakaria indicates that America's invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq have caused it to be "...overextended and distracted, its army stressed, its image sullied."

Vali Nasr writes that perhaps the most important lesson America can glean from years of misdirection is "that trying to force a future to its liking will hasten the advent of those outcomes the United States most wishes to avoid."

So, as we reflected yesterday on the past to celebrate and honor those who died in the service of our nation, we should seriously consider returning to Eisenhower's trumpet call, to "...those ideals of human dignity and freedom and liberty in which we so deeply believe."

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