

A lot of politicians seem to be calling for "boots on the ground," which is the idea that we should send American troops to faraway places to engage in combat against terrorists and their supporters. However, lessons from History provide better alternatives.

Much of our current military concerns are not centered on threats from other nation states.

Instead, they are focused on enemy combatants that have found safe havens in countries that have lost control of some of their territory.

If we send in troops, we could pacify an area. However, when we leave that area, a power vacuum would form and our enemies could resume operations again. In both Afghanistan and Iraq, because their native governments were ineffective, terrorist groups flourished when the U.S. started to reduce its military presence in the area.

A better solution is to encourage nation states to pacify their own and perhaps neighboring areas.

History is full of examples of when this worked successfully. For instance, the Middle East has always had unruly groups that fight among themselves or attempt to lash out at others. These groups were effectively pacified by the Ottoman Empire. Similarly, many areas in Eastern Europe have people that are prone to violence and often take to fighting among themselves. These people were effectively kept under control by the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. A nation state has the proximity and staying power to be able to effectively keep order within its own borders. An outside country, namely the United States, does not have these advantages, so we will not be as effective. The United States would do well to encourage states that are able to successfully govern themselves to extend their borders to areas that are currently ungoverned.

In his book, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, Edward Luttwak accounts a lesson that the Ancient Romans learned.

The Roman Empire had a huge border because its territory basically surrounded the Mediterranean Sea.

Rome did not have enough troops to keep the peace along its border, and it did not try to. Instead, Rome had client states that were charged with keeping the peace along the border. The Roman army was kept in reserve, in locations that could reach several potential trouble spots. Rome used its army to fend off threats that were both big and short term, like, for instance, an invading army. Rome relied on the client states to keep the peace by dealing with the minor threats. This arrangement kept the Roman army from being spread too thin to be effective. If it had to use its troops to keep the peace along the border, Rome would not have had enough troops to deal with its major threats.

The current calls for "boots on the ground" would be unnecessary if 1) existing successful nation states expanded their territory to include areas that are now ungovernable, and 2) regional powers kept the peace in their own regions.

In exchange, the U.S. could provide protection from big threats, much like the Ancient Romans did.

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