



## **For Which Country Would You Send Your Kid to Fight and Die?**

**March 8, 2022**

My three kids range from eleven to twenty, so from too young to fight to eligible for a military draft. I wouldn't send one of them to fight for Ukraine. In fact, I wouldn't send one of them to fight for any European country in a war with Russia. The same goes for Taiwan against China. It isn't even a hard question for me. If my kids are going to shed blood for America it must be here at home or in defense of America like in Afghanistan after the 9/11 terrorist attacks (but certainly not for twenty years), not some vague notion like defending or promoting democracy in a far-off country simply because some politician in Washington, D.C., claims it is in our national interest.

I suspect most American parents would answer the same way. In response to a recent Rasmussen survey asking should the U.S. military be involved in a wider war in Europe, only 49% said "yes," led by those making over \$200,000 at 66%. A very slight majority of those making between \$100,000-\$200,000 and between \$50,000-\$100,000—52% and 51%, respectively—said "yes." Those making \$30,000-\$50,000 came in at 48% and those making under \$30,000 only supported military involvement at 37%. Given the military is largely made up of those coming for America's middle class and poor, the willingness to shed blood for Europe (again) came from those least likely to shed that blood.

America in 2022 just isn't like America in 1917 or 1944. With the advent of 24-hours news channels and the Internet, wars can no longer be fought without those back home seeing exactly how it is being fought and who is dying every day. The turn started during the Vietnam War when television images and news readers showed what was happening in the jungles of Southeast Asia. Support for the war waned as the casualty count rose. It took 58,220 deaths to turn Americans against that war.

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq really were the first wars America fought in this new era in which Americans could see in real time, or close thereto, what was happening on the battlefield. With newspapers publishing pictures every week of those who died and horrific videos from embedded reporters being widely seen, support crumbled after less than 7,000 combined deaths. This new era makes fighting real-time, public access wars incredibly hard to do.

Imagine if Americans in 1916 had access to videos of the Battle of the Somme where 300,000 men died fighting for just six miles of territory. Would they have supported America's

involvement thereafter? Think about if Americans saw daily videos from the Battle of the Hürtgen Forest in 1944 where over 50,000 soldiers were killed or wounded in a tactically worthless fight. I'm not suggesting America shouldn't have fought in World War I or World War II, or that the men who fought aren't entitled to our greatest admiration and remembrance; rather, I'm making the point that our military and its leaders no longer have the "benefit" of fighting a war in which Americans won't see nearly everything about that war **as it happens**.

This reality, I believe, requires our political and military leaders to comprehensively reevaluate America's current commitments, alliances, and promises to ensure that the checks that have been written will in fact be paid by American blood should it be required. America must determine which allies and enemies American parents will send their kids to fight and possibly die for or against. I'm not suggesting polling data should drive our national strategy, but I do believe in this real time, public access era it must play a stronger role than it currently does, as failure to answer that fundamental question will result in strategic withdrawals when Americans sour on a war in which they see the daily grind of it disconnected from any tangible national security interest.

In his excellent new book, The Strategy of Denial, Elbridge Colby details how America should approach its national defense strategy. He makes this statement roughly a third of the way in:

If a war with China is seen to bring costs and risks that exceed Americans' tolerances, US policy-makers could find themselves on the cusp or in the midst of a necessary war only to realize that the American public does not want to fight or to fight hard enough.

Colby is more right than he realizes. Unfortunately, he only lightly touches upon this fact a few times in the rest of the book. Because of real-time, public access, I think it is a paramount question that **must** be answered before America fights another war and as it affirms, confirms, renews, or creates new alliances.

Will Americans fight to defend Europe against Russia? Taiwan against China? Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines against China? Israel against Iran? South Korea against North Korea? I suspect the answers to the first two questions and the last question are "no," but likely "yes" for China going beyond Taiwan given the impact it would have on global trade and security and for Iran because of the belief the irrational mullahs would use nuclear weapons against the U.S. should they ever acquire those weapons.

If I'm right, then America needs to recalibrate its defense posture accordingly. Do we need troops in Europe at all? Would we really allow ourselves to be pulled into a war against Russia should it attack a minor NATO ally? How can we help Taiwan without enmeshing ourselves too much militarily? Do we need to invest more defense assets in Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines? What should we do about Vietnam and India? Should we redouble our efforts via Donald Trump's Abraham Accords to protect Israel and our other allies in the Middle East from Iran?

Equally critical, America needs to alter our trade policies to treat enemies as enemies. Our over-dependence on Chinese and, assuming an eventual invasion by China, Taiwanese goods compromises our national security and economy. We can no more put money into the pockets of depots like Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping than we did with Nikita Khrushchev or Adolph Hitler. Setting aside the ridiculousness incumbent with shutting down U.S. energy exploration and production, the fact that the Biden Administration is seriously pursuing oil from Venezuela and Iran to replace Russian oil vividly illustrates the absurdity and failure of our current foreign policy posture.

Going forward, America's credibility must rest upon a realistic assessment of what its citizens are really willing to sacrifice on behalf of other countries in which our national security is tenuous or amorphous. When that sacrifice is the blood of our kids, it better be unequivocally justified.