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## Military Adventures That Weren't

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October 27, 2010

[Benjamin H. Friedman](#)<sup>[2]</sup>

Micah Zenko has a [good time](#)<sup>[3]</sup> on *Foreign Policy*'s website mocking the crazy, unimplemented, ideas U.S. civilians have had for military adventures in the last half century.

He doesn't do much to discuss why the suggestions were dumb, unfortunately, but it's worth reading both for amusement and in the spirit of knowing people's track record.

[Truman National Security Project](#)<sup>[4]</sup> types, for example, might note that Dean Acheson's terrifying [idea](#)<sup>[5]</sup> of sending an armored division down the autobahn to liberate Berlin during the 1961 crisis (maybe not even his [worst advice](#)<sup>[6]</sup> to Kennedy) exemplified a [reflexive hawkishness](#)<sup>[8]</sup> that plagued US foreign policy for two decades.

Likewise, Zenko's inclusion of Robert Gates' 1984 [proposal](#)<sup>[7]</sup> to bring down the Nicaraguan government—with measures including air strikes—might remind his [journalist](#)<sup>[9]</sup> [acolytes](#)<sup>[10]</sup> of his dubious [late Cold War](#)<sup>[12]</sup> [record](#)<sup>[13]</sup>.

On the other hand, Zenko is unfair to Bill Clinton. The President's 1999 or 2000 [suggestion](#)<sup>[14]</sup> of special operations forces raids on al Qaeda's Afghan camps was not a silly idea, even if the President's language (it would "scare the shit out of al Qaeda if suddenly a bunch of black ninjas rappelled out of helicopters into the middle of their camp") was. If anything, Clinton deserves fault for not pushing his [resistant generals](#)<sup>[15]</sup> to more seriously consider what could be done to overcome the logistical hurdles.

Along similar lines, it would have been useful to mention that military officers are not always advocates of sage restraint. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, after all, gave the Bay of Pigs invasion a [fair](#)<sup>[16]</sup> chance of success and [recommended](#)<sup>[17]</sup> bombing Cuba during the missile crisis. That reminds us why we need armchair warriors, although one might hope for better ones.

Anyway, if it were my top ten list, I would have included at least two schemes that Zenko didn't:

### 1. The Bay of Goats

This was Anthony Zinni's term for the 1990s neocon plan, pushed especially by Paul Wolfowitz, to overthrow the Iraqi government using Iraqi exiles. Dan Byman, Ken Pollack, and Gideon Rose's 1999 *Foreign Affairs* article "[The Rollback Fantasy](#)<sup>[18]</sup>" shows why this plan would have ended badly.

### 2. Invade to Aid

The Burmese junta's desultory effort to help cyclone victims in 2008 and its reluctance to accept foreign aid caused [various advocates](#)<sup>[19]</sup> of the "responsibility to protect doctrine" to call for military intervention to deliver aid. Veteran armchair warriors, like [Andrew Sullivan](#)<sup>[20]</sup>, [Robert Kaplan](#)<sup>[21]</sup>, and the New Republic's [editors](#)<sup>[22]</sup>, suggested that the United States should take the lead, even if it meant overthrowing the government and managing the resulting chaos. Madeline Albright [lamented](#)<sup>[23]</sup> that Iraq's troubles had resurrected the popularity of sovereignty and prevented us from occupying another fractious nation likely to resist.

Finally, it's worth noting that because our relative power [allows us to run amok](#)<sup>[24]</sup> and because advocates of these interventions are rarely held responsible for their flaws or failures, many more cockamamie schemes are surely hiding in old classified documents—and coming in future ones.

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[2] <http://nationalinterest.org/profile/benjamin-h-friedman>

[3] [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/10/22/armchair\\_warriors](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/10/22/armchair_warriors)

[4] <http://www.trumanproject.org/about/mission/values>

[5] [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/10/22/armchair\\_warriors?page=0,1](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/10/22/armchair_warriors?page=0,1)

[6] <http://www.slate.com/id/3001/>

[7] <http://books.google.com/books?id=5mJWvEeqMfgC&pg=PA122&dq=acheson+japan+oil+embargo+world+war+II&source=bl&ots=4PWZChGgz8&sig=gbghnyjdt6kvOuwvDU8ne>

[8] <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2626746>

[9] <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/09/12/what-gates-plans-to-do-before-he-leaves-office.html>

[10] [http://www.nypost.com/p/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/item\\_CkFmkmUrkgvx3gWPZvrg7K](http://www.nypost.com/p/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/item_CkFmkmUrkgvx3gWPZvrg7K)

[11] <http://motherjones.com/politics/2006/12/cia-veteran-how-robert-gates-cooked-intelligence>

[12] [http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/walsh/chap\\_16.htm](http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/walsh/chap_16.htm)

[13] [http://books.google.com/books?id=yp01AUkrE-gC&printsec=frontcover&dq=garthoff+great+transition&hl=en&ei=ImlbITKK7BYL7lwewil3nAQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=1&pg=PA189#v=onepage&q=%22black%20ninjas%20rappelled%20out%20of%20helicopters%22&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=yp01AUkrE-gC&printsec=frontcover&dq=garthoff+great+transition&hl=en&ei=ImlbITKK7BYL7lwewil3nAQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&pg=PA189#v=onepage&q=%22black%20ninjas%20rappelled%20out%20of%20helicopters%22&f=false)

[14] <http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/003/613twavk.asp>

[15] <http://www.gwu.edu/%7Eensarchiv/bayofpigs/chron.html>

[16] [http://books.google.com/books?id=1eYD1TFLqj4C&pg=PA206&pg=PA206&dq=joint+chiefs+cuban+missile+crisis+bomb&source=bl&ots=nMjALSi83l&sig=-JdWNaT3le9NSHC7S7\\_KOAwWmUE&hl=en&ei=kW\\_ITP6yAYOglAf3\\_PjnAQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=9&ved=0CEMQ6AEwCA#v=on](http://books.google.com/books?id=1eYD1TFLqj4C&pg=PA206&pg=PA206&dq=joint+chiefs+cuban+missile+crisis+bomb&source=bl&ots=nMjALSi83l&sig=-JdWNaT3le9NSHC7S7_KOAwWmUE&hl=en&ei=kW_ITP6yAYOglAf3_PjnAQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=9&ved=0CEMQ6AEwCA#v=on)

[17] [http://books.google.com/books?id=1eYD1TFLqj4C&pg=PA206&pg=PA206&dq=joint+chiefs+cuban+missile+crisis+bomb&source=bl&ots=nMjALSi83l&sig=-JdWNaT3le9NSHC7S7\\_KOAwWmUE&hl=en&ei=kW\\_ITP6yAYOglAf3\\_PjnAQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=9&ved=0CEMQ6AEwCA#v=on](http://books.google.com/books?id=1eYD1TFLqj4C&pg=PA206&pg=PA206&dq=joint+chiefs+cuban+missile+crisis+bomb&source=bl&ots=nMjALSi83l&sig=-JdWNaT3le9NSHC7S7_KOAwWmUE&hl=en&ei=kW_ITP6yAYOglAf3_PjnAQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=9&ved=0CEMQ6AEwCA#v=on)

[18] [http://books.google.com/books?id=1eYD1TFLqj4C&pg=PA206&pg=PA206&dq=joint+chiefs+cuban+missile+crisis+bomb&source=bl&ots=nMjALSi83l&sig=-JdWNaT3le9NSHC7S7\\_KOAwWmUE&hl=en&ei=kW\\_ITP6yAYOglAf3\\_PjnAQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=9&ved=0CEMQ6AEwCA#v=on](http://books.google.com/books?id=1eYD1TFLqj4C&pg=PA206&pg=PA206&dq=joint+chiefs+cuban+missile+crisis+bomb&source=bl&ots=nMjALSi83l&sig=-JdWNaT3le9NSHC7S7_KOAwWmUE&hl=en&ei=kW_ITP6yAYOglAf3_PjnAQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=9&ved=0CEMQ6AEwCA#v=on)

[19] [http://books.google.com/books?id=1eYD1TFLqj4C&pg=PA206&pg=PA206&dq=joint+chiefs+cuban+missile+crisis+bomb&source=bl&ots=nMjALSi83l&sig=-JdWNaT3le9NSHC7S7\\_KOAwWmUE&hl=en&ei=kW\\_ITP6yAYOglAf3\\_PjnAQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=9&ved=0CEMQ6AEwCA#v=on](http://books.google.com/books?id=1eYD1TFLqj4C&pg=PA206&pg=PA206&dq=joint+chiefs+cuban+missile+crisis+bomb&source=bl&ots=nMjALSi83l&sig=-JdWNaT3le9NSHC7S7_KOAwWmUE&hl=en&ei=kW_ITP6yAYOglAf3_PjnAQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=9&ved=0CEMQ6AEwCA#v=on)

[20] [http://books.google.com/books?id=1eYD1TFLqj4C&pg=PA206&pg=PA206&dq=joint+chiefs+cuban+missile+crisis+bomb&source=bl&ots=nMjALSi83l&sig=-JdWNaT3le9NSHC7S7\\_KOAwWmUE&hl=en&ei=kW\\_ITP6yAYOglAf3\\_PjnAQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=9&ved=0CEMQ6AEwCA#v=on](http://books.google.com/books?id=1eYD1TFLqj4C&pg=PA206&pg=PA206&dq=joint+chiefs+cuban+missile+crisis+bomb&source=bl&ots=nMjALSi83l&sig=-JdWNaT3le9NSHC7S7_KOAwWmUE&hl=en&ei=kW_ITP6yAYOglAf3_PjnAQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=9&ved=0CEMQ6AEwCA#v=on)

[21] [http://books.google.com/books?id=1eYD1TFLqj4C&pg=PA206&pg=PA206&dq=joint+chiefs+cuban+missile+crisis+bomb&source=bl&ots=nMjALSi83l&sig=-JdWNaT3le9NSHC7S7\\_KOAwWmUE&hl=en&ei=kW\\_ITP6yAYOglAf3\\_PjnAQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=9&ved=0CEMQ6AEwCA#v=on](http://books.google.com/books?id=1eYD1TFLqj4C&pg=PA206&pg=PA206&dq=joint+chiefs+cuban+missile+crisis+bomb&source=bl&ots=nMjALSi83l&sig=-JdWNaT3le9NSHC7S7_KOAwWmUE&hl=en&ei=kW_ITP6yAYOglAf3_PjnAQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=9&ved=0CEMQ6AEwCA#v=on)

[22] [http://books.google.com/books?id=1eYD1TFLqj4C&pg=PA206&pg=PA206&dq=joint+chiefs+cuban+missile+crisis+bomb&source=bl&ots=nMjALSi83l&sig=-JdWNaT3le9NSHC7S7\\_KOAwWmUE&hl=en&ei=kW\\_ITP6yAYOglAf3\\_PjnAQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=9&ved=0CEMQ6AEwCA#v=on](http://books.google.com/books?id=1eYD1TFLqj4C&pg=PA206&pg=PA206&dq=joint+chiefs+cuban+missile+crisis+bomb&source=bl&ots=nMjALSi83l&sig=-JdWNaT3le9NSHC7S7_KOAwWmUE&hl=en&ei=kW_ITP6yAYOglAf3_PjnAQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=9&ved=0CEMQ6AEwCA#v=on)

[23] [http://books.google.com/books?id=1eYD1TFLqj4C&pg=PA206&pg=PA206&dq=joint+chiefs+cuban+missile+crisis+bomb&source=bl&ots=nMjALSi83l&sig=-JdWNaT3le9NSHC7S7\\_KOAwWmUE&hl=en&ei=kW\\_ITP6yAYOglAf3\\_PjnAQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=9&ved=0CEMQ6AEwCA#v=on](http://books.google.com/books?id=1eYD1TFLqj4C&pg=PA206&pg=PA206&dq=joint+chiefs+cuban+missile+crisis+bomb&source=bl&ots=nMjALSi83l&sig=-JdWNaT3le9NSHC7S7_KOAwWmUE&hl=en&ei=kW_ITP6yAYOglAf3_PjnAQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=9&ved=0CEMQ6AEwCA#v=on)

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- [18] <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/54619/daniel-byman-kenneth-pollack-and-gideon-rose/the-rollback-fantasy>
- [19] <http://www.slate.com/id/2191275/>
- [20] [http://andrewsullivan.theatlantic.com/the\\_daily\\_dish/2008/05/burmas-crisis.html](http://andrewsullivan.theatlantic.com/the_daily_dish/2008/05/burmas-crisis.html)
- [21] <http://www.cato-at-liberty.org/invade-to-aid/>
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