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## Obama ▼'s Change, In Which We Can Bereave.

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Guest commentary by [Terry Michael](#), founder and director of the [Washington Center for Politics & Journalism](#) and former press secretary for the Democratic National Committee.

A year ago, some of us believed we were electing an anti-war president. Complete with a [George W. Bush ▼](#)-style speech at West Point, we got the opposite -- change in which we can bereave, as the bodies of more American boys will be flown home in boxes from the tribal hills of a non-nation, a graveyard of foolish imperial powers, a geographic entity, a sort-of-country called Afghanistan.

Nominated because he opposed an elective war and elected because he opposed an old warrior, a young president has been unable to resist the lure of the military industrial complex, about which we were warned the year [Barack Obama ▼](#) was born by retiring soldier-President Dwight David Eisenhower.

Even sadder, [President Obama ▼](#) has been unable to stand up to the war hawk "liberal internationalists," as they like to call themselves, in his own party -- more accurately described as "Neo-Con Lites." I know them well. They are from my generation of Democratic operatives. Political careerist baby boomers with draft deferments, who raged against the Vietnam madness in the 1960's, but as they approached their own sixties forgot the lessons of that tragedy as they devised political strategies to make us look tougher, so we could win presidential elections by wooing back the Nixon and Reagan Democrats, the World War II "good war" voters, who are now mostly not voters....because they are mostly dead.

[President Obama ▼](#), half-Kenyan, half-Kansan, from an apostate Muslim father, and himself now a Christian dad, is a fascinating study in human compromise. Like the larger-than-life Superman action figure in front of which he once posed for a picture in Metropolis, Illinois, he is able, with great speeches, to leap tall differences in a single bound. It's why we elected him. But a politician's strength can be a policy-maker's weakness, as he succumbs to the drum beats of American exceptionalist war-makers in both of our political parties.

Assembling a "team of rivals," [Obama ▼](#) learned too much from history -- or at least too much from a popular historical biography of a fellow Illinoisan, Abraham Lincoln. Making Hillary Clinton his Secretary of State, he all but chained himself to a mid-1980's Democratic Party foreign policy/national security political strategy, which prescribed "tough on defense" as the key to keeping Democrats in The White House. And by retaining [George W. Bush ▼](#)'s Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, the new president sealed his fate, tethering himself to what is now his own elective war, without an American purpose.

America has "The Power Problem," as Chris Preble of the libertarian [Cato Institute](#) has explained in a book with that title. It is a field of defense industry dreams, military dominance built over a

Cold War half century, demanding to be used because it's there, not because it makes us more safe, more prosperous, or more free. And we have developed "The Cult of the Presidency," defined in a work of that name by another Cato scholar, Gene Healy, a grandiose vision that misleads Leaders of the Free World to believe their place in history comes from projecting all that hard power.

All this comes at a time when the nation is sick and afraid, with unemployment of the young in double digits, with retirement plans of the old on hold, with fathers and mothers wondering whether they can hang onto their homes. How would we even pay for another elective power projection?

It is time for Congress to accept its Constitutional responsibility to impede Executive war-making. Are you listening, Speaker Nancy Pelosi, are you ready to speak against this disaster from the House floor? Are you willing, Assistant Senate Majority Leader Dick Durbin, to call back from the Afghan abyss the youthful fellow Illinois colleague you touted to lead us?

This is not the highway appropriations bill, health care re-structuring, or bailing out banks and auto companies. It's life and death.