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A July 4th Postcard to the President

Is there a way forward for America?

[Terry Michael](#) | July 1, 2011

It's been a tough few years for us anti-interventionist libertarian Democrats (all six of us). Our split-every-difference, poll-driven, focus-groping president has started an elective second war in Afghanistan, continued (but pretended not to) an inherited disaster in Iraq, and initiated a third pointless, congressionally unauthorized, guns-a-blazing big adventure in the play land of an aging drag queen in Libya.

Sixty-something anti-war baby boomers will recall a bit of 1965 black humor in the disappointing aftermath of Democratic peace candidate Lyndon Johnson's trouncing of Republican war hawk Barry Goldwater: "They told me if I voted for Goldwater in 1964 we'd be at war in Vietnam within a year. They were right. I did, and we were."

The most recent Democratic president—a Nobel Peace Prize winner, no less!—announced his own war less than a year after inauguration, bravely speaking to an audience of approving teenage West Point cadets in December 2009. Bowing to demands of the military-industrial-congressional complex after several months of hand-wringing, President Barack Obama chose a theater for his military adventure not far from those Vietnam jungles, a few B-52 or F-16 flying hours across South Asia, in the tribal hills of the

sort-of nation state of Afghanistan. There came the new boss, just like the old boss.

So the joke can now be updated: They told me if I voted for McCain in 2008, we'd be in a perpetual state of war within a year. They were right. I did and... *well, you know the punch line.*

As a Jeffersonian-Madisonian Democrat, and like so many modern left-liberal Democrats, my enthusiasm for Obama's nomination and election turned almost entirely on his anti-war talk. I was hopeful he wouldn't turn out to be another Lyndon Johnson. That was hoping against nothing but hope, and talk. Like Johnson, Obama rammed over-reaching social welfare legislation through a Democratic Congress, while starting his own congressionally undeclared war of choice. But unlike LBJ, he didn't exhibit even the partial saving grace of a bold initiative on civil rights. Our half-black and half-white, half-Kansan, half-Kenyan-American, finger-to-the-wind leader half-heartedly side-stepped the arguably most important American civil rights issue of the 21st century by waffling on same-sex marriage and avoiding a bold Truman-like executive order on gays in the military, timidly lagging behind the changing culture.

Hoping-against-hope is about all we voters have when we are confronted with two candidates with no informing political ideologies or philosophies. It's why we usually don't select a chief executive directly from Congress, an institution that rewards those who daily try to convince the National Association of This and the American Council of That he's on both their sides. We did it only in 1880 with Speaker James Garfield, in 1920 with Sen. Warren Harding, and in 1960 with seductive Sen. John Fitzgerald Kennedy, before we were faced in 2008 with two split-every-difference nominees, Sen. Obama and old-and-intemperate "war hero" Sen. John McCain, who never met a war or a position he didn't embrace.

Is there a way forward? A way out of the deep muddiness in which our president finds himself, unable to manage the marketplace (no president can) and too cautious to exercise his power *not* to intervene in the affairs of the rest of the world?

Maybe, but it would have to come from a principled politician of Obama's own party, and perhaps own state, even his inner circle. Someone willing to mount the bully congressional pulpit and break with his president. That's a task especially worth pondering on the Fourth of July, 235 years after a few good men risked not just their political careers but their very lives for a new-world experiment in liberty.

Born in Jefferson County, Illinois, former Democratic National Committee press secretary Terry Michael has observed politics in Washington, DC since 1975, when he arrived in the capital with newly elected Rep. Paul Simon of Barack Obama's adopted home state of Illinois. His "thoughts from a libertarian Democrat" are at www.terrymichael.net.