



The War on Terror: America's Gift to Moscow and Beijing

Description

America loves a good mission statement. "Freedom isn't free," we said, and then spent 20 years proving just how costly it could be. The War on Terror? It was our grand declaration—a high-stakes campaign to rid the world of evil. But somewhere along the way, it became less of a mission and more of a distraction. Meanwhile, Moscow and Beijing were busy writing their thank-you notes.

Let's start with Moscow. Vladimir Putin must have watched our post-9/11 chaos unfold like a strategic bonanza, marveling at how neatly the pieces fell into place. While we were sending troops to far-off deserts and pouring trillions into nation-building, he was busy testing just how far he could push. Georgia in 2008? Check. Crimea in 2014? A confident follow-up. And the hybrid warfare—cyberattacks, propaganda, election meddling—it was like watching a master illusionist make an empire reappear while the audience looks the other way.

And China? Oh, China knew better than to make bold moves too soon. Their strategy was more like a slow strangle: militarizing the South China Sea, locking nations into economic dependencies, and quietly building the world's largest navy. They didn't need theatrics to assert dominance. While we were chasing shadows in mountain caves, Beijing was quietly stacking its deck.

Meanwhile, back home, we were celebrating every drone strike and insurgency victory like it was the end of the story. But stories have layers, and this one was no exception. By the time we'd spent trillions fortifying airport security, we'd missed the rise of hypersonic missiles, AI-powered warfare, and global influence campaigns that didn't rely on brute force. It was like locking the front door while the house burned down from the back.

Growing up, I learned that the trick to winning any game is understanding what's at stake—and knowing when the game has changed. Moscow and Beijing didn't just watch us play; they studied, adapted, and moved their pawns with precision. Distraction isn't new, but it works every time.

And now, as we pivot to address the challenges posed by those two rivals, it's impossible not to see the irony. For two decades, the War on Terror drew our focus, our resources, and our energy. We fought hard and spent big, only to realize we'd been fighting the wrong battles. Moscow sharpened

its claws. Beijing built its empire. And here we are, scrambling to catch up.

Sitting here in Mallorca, where the cliffs rise like unfinished sentences and the sea feels endless, I think about what distractions cost usâ??not just as nations, but as people. Americaâ??s War on Terror was a grand, costly campaign, but for Moscow and Beijing, it was something else entirely.

It was an opportunity, gift-wrapped and left on their doorstep.

Category

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Author

jackson