

Words of wisdom from Russia?

From [Reuters](#) we learn:

“Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev raised the specter of an interminable or a world war if powers failed to negotiate an end to the conflict in Syria and warned against any ground operations by U.S. and Arab forces.

Medvedev, speaking to Germany’s Handelsblatt newspaper on the eve of talks between major powers on Syria in Munich, said the United States and Russia must exert pressure on all sides in the conflict to secure a ceasefire.

Asked about Saudi Arabia’s offer last week to supply ground troops if a U.S.-led operation were mounted against Islamic State, he said:

‘This is bad as a ground offensive usually turns the war into a permanent one. Just look at what happened in Afghanistan and many other countries.’

‘The Americans and our Arab partners must think well: do they want a permanent war?’ It would be impossible to win such a war quickly, he said according to a German translation of his words, ‘especially in the Arab world, where everybody is fighting against everybody’.

‘All sides must be compelled to sit at the negotiating table instead of unleashing a new world war.’”

If our experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan taught us anything, it’s easy to get into a shooting war in the Middle East. Getting out is an entirely different matter.

As U.S. Army Gen. John Campbell, former commander for Resolute Support and commander of U.S. Forces-Afghanistan, [stated](#) this week about U.S. troops in Afghanistan:

"I do believe we're going to have to have a continued modest forward presence ... for years to come. We shouldn't sugar-coat it."

George Washington's words of advice in his *Farewell Address* (1796), seem quite wise even today. When you read it below, swap out "Europe" and replace it with the "Middle East":

"The great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little political connection as possible. So far as we have already formed engagements, let them be fulfilled with perfect good faith. Here let us stop. Europe has a set of primary interests which to us have none; or a very remote relation. Hence she must be engaged in frequent controversies, the causes of which are essentially foreign to our concerns. Hence, therefore, it must be unwise in us to implicate ourselves by artificial ties in the ordinary vicissitudes of her politics, or the ordinary combinations and collisions of her friendships or enmities.

Our detached and distant situation invites and enables us to pursue a different course. If we remain one people under an efficient government. the period is not far off when we may defy material injury from external annoyance; when we may take such an attitude as will cause the neutrality we may at any time resolve upon to be scrupulously respected; when belligerent nations, under the impossibility of making acquisitions upon us, will not lightly hazard the giving us provocation; when we may choose peace or war, as our interest, guided by justice, shall counsel.

Why forego the advantages of so peculiar a situation? Why quit our own to stand upon foreign ground? Why, by interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition, rivalry, interest, humor or caprice?"

Yes, many Americans want ISIS obliterated. But at what cost to us in blood and treasure?