

## Wisdom of our Founders

Contributed by Paul Perry  
Tue, Aug 12, 2008, 03:00 PM

The Founding Fathers were concerned about our nation being involved in long-term alliances with foreign powers. The founders of our republic were in favor of trade, so they were not, as some state, isolationists. They were, however, generally opposed to military alliances overseas. They simply did not wish to be drawn into military conflicts based on any treaty requirements.

The Founding Fathers wanted a foreign policy aimed at maintaining good commercial relations as much as possible but avoiding military commitments to other powers.

Most viewed that we should not fight on behalf of others' liberty, but that we should be an example for others to follow. They also did not want our nation in material support of other regimes, nor dependent on them. Washington saw the need for temporary alliances, like our temporary arrangement with the French during the American Revolution, but he warned against permanent alliances. Jefferson warned against entangling alliances with foreign powers generally. The modern North Atlantic Treaty Organization comes to mind.

NATO was formed as temporary defensive alliance after World War II to oppose the Communist Soviet Union. Now it has morphed into a permanent alliance with multiple agendas. After the old Soviet Union and its alliance structure fell apart, NATO became a bureaucracy in need of a mission. That has worked to our advantage given our policy in Afghanistan. NATO troops are assisting us there.

In other ways, however, our NATO partners have often tried to use the old alliance to strengthen France and/or Germany's position in the world militarily and diplomatically by leveraging (remember your tax dollars support NATO) their membership in NATO. Indeed, NATO is now being used to further military cooperation with the new Russia which militarily and economically is the most significant remnant of the old Soviet Union's power base.

A recent NATO press release referred to "increasing interoperability between NATO and Russian forces."

As a nation, we abandoned the Founding Fathers' view of foreign policy some time ago. Perhaps a good argument can be made that some modification to their original vision was necessary, due to the realities of modern weapons technology, but is the overall principle still valuable? I think it is.

International news wires report that the nation of Georgia in Central Asia is now at war with Russia over the province of South Ossetia. South Ossetia declared its independence from Georgia in 1992, but its independence has gone largely unrecognized by the international community. That province also borders the nation of Russia. Recent violence may have been initiated by Georgia trying to force control over the province.

Additional reports now indicate that Russia has not only intervened on behalf of the rebels against Georgia in South Ossetia, but also has invaded Abkhazia, an undisputed province of Georgia. The Russian navy also may be on the move in the Black Sea.

Wire reports indicate up to 2000 civilians may have already perished, most from Russian air strikes.

In all fairness to the Ossetians, it appears that they have a long history of opposition to being part of Georgia. In fact, they have operated independently of Georgia, complete with their own government in recent years.

One sticky part for the good ol' USA is that we have friendly relations and what could be called low-level entangling alliances with both Georgia and Russia. Russia has to an extent supported our operations in Afghanistan. According to a NATO update dated March 23, 2006, Russia has allowed the leasing of large transport aircraft, in part

supporting NATO efforts in Afghanistan.

Georgia, on the other hand, has 2000 troops in Iraq supporting our operations there. Should I say had? It appears 1000 Georgian troops are being withdrawn from Iraq due to the crisis, as of Friday. More important than the mere number is the fact that after the U.S. and Britain, Georgia has the third largest ground force commitment in Iraq.

Since we have working agreements with both countries, where does this conflict leave us?

NATO cares enough about its relationship with Russia that it even has a special NATO-Russian cooperation working group called the NATO-Russia Council. A July press release from the NRC refers to "collaborative efforts to improve transportation ... through Russia to forces in Afghanistan." The release also refers to "increased cooperation in naval operations."

As stated earlier, the Georgians will soon send 1000 troops from Iraq back to Georgia. Will they eventually send all their forces home? That would appear to be a logical assumption if they believe they need to protect their own nation.

Other logical questions: What will both parties ask us to do in order to support them in the conflict? To whom will we say no? How will that affect our efforts in the Middle East?

As president, Thomas Jefferson once faced a group of North African-based Muslim pirates known as the Barbary Pirates. In subsequent military campaigns, the pirates or state-sponsored terrorists &ndash; pick your own language &ndash; were gradually forced to give up their attempts to extort money from the United States and the enslavement of Americans. Unlike in Iraq, there was no attempt at long-term occupation of foreign land. Also unlike how we are now trying to do things in the Middle East today, we did not put our mission at risk by depending on questionable allies to support our long-term presence.

Many will argue that times have changed. I will argue that principles and the Founders&rsquo; vision still matter.