

Conflict with Small Powers Derails U.S. Foreign Policy: The Case for Strategic Discipline

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Aug 12, 2020

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Although containing or deterring minor powers can help shape the behavior of great powers, conflicts with these smaller foes have proliferated in the twenty-first century, tying down resources and attention needed elsewhere.

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Over the past decade, U.S. policymakers have argued for a renewed focus on great-power competition. The primary threats facing the United States, they suggest, are powerful states with global reach that seek to counter both American interests and the international order that safeguards them. But American foreign policy has in reality focused elsewhere. The United States remains mired in struggles with small adversaries, including military conflicts—such as those in the African Sahel and in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria—and efforts at coercion short of war, such as those involving Iran, North Korea, and Venezuela. Entanglement in small conflicts has bedeviled presidents with starkly divergent foreign policies—all of whom entered office vowing to avoid such engagements...

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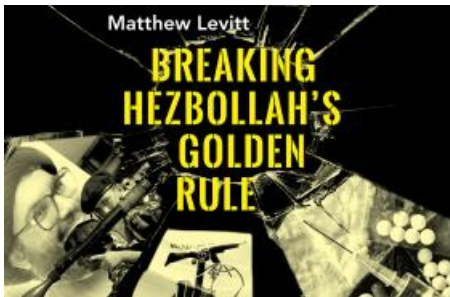
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