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All the bullets in the world could not have ignited the fire sweeping across the Middle East and North Africa. The desire for freedom, opportunity, and dignity all came together in one powerful fire of its own: Tunisian fruit vendor Mohamed Bouazizi set himself aflame in an act of utter frustration with a system that didn't care for "those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and not clothed." There is an eternal debate in world politics over the viability of "hard power." Military force as a solution to world conflicts is the standard fall back position for the U.S., but it does not foster permanent peace. Afghanistan and Iraq serve as only the most current reminders. Dwight Eisenhower warned that when the only tool available is a hammer, it makes every problem look like a nail. It is vital to have options other than force when pursuing peace.

Now, more than ever, it is evident that the way to win a war is not down the barrel of a gun. It will be won by winning the hearts and minds of the civilians in the territory where stability and freedom are being pursued. The viability of hard power is declining in a climate where a battle is a loss if two civilians are killed, because each civilian killed can be used to justify a new insurgent effort in the area. The only way to conquer an enemy that feeds off of civilian deaths is to keep civilians alive, and improve their quality of life by spending more on aid and less on weapons. We have to wage peace, not war. Waging peace requires truth, not deception. It requires discipline, focus, determination, training, and strong leadership. Eisenhower recognized our world can only be made peaceful through peaceful means. Each time a gun is used to solve a problem that could have been solved otherwise, it puts the international community one step further from peace.

The most successful revolutionaries, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. and 1% of the population who followed their lead, made the greatest changes for their generations without firing a single bullet. They cared for those who were hungry and not fed, cold and not clothed. The plight of the downtrodden moved them to action.

Funds currently used to wage war must be spent on waging peace, and winning the minds and serving the needs of our brothers using soft power, not guns. The mission of Greg Mortenson, a philanthropist and school builder in Pakistan, has probably stopped more terrorists than any unit in our military today. The simple aid missions, and schools he runs, make more difference in a community than an anti-terror task force possibly could. Facilitating peace will allow the US not to be seen as a tyrant, but as a friend. Only when attempts to dominate end, and attempts to aid begin, will the international climate be peaceful.