



Writing in this space about current events is generally unwise. Because of the lag between typing and the moment you read the magazine, "current" is no longer an accurate modifier.

Also, there are 8 billion people in the world, give or take, many equipped with immediate and seamless technological links to everyone else with a digital connection, so it's statistically very likely that someone will say what I'm thinking before I have a chance to share it with you. Plus, news-focused essays aggravate those who disagree with (or believe they are predisposed to) the writer's point-of-view. To ensure the success of this enterprise, I need all the happy readers I can get, so alienating some to express my opinions is, as I said in my opening sentence, unwise.

Yet there's a phrase that I have heard often in the last 24 hours, and it annoys me. So much so that I can't flush it from my consciousness. So much so that I'm parsing it now. Paraphrasing: 'appropriately, at a time of our choosing.' Perhaps you've heard it, too...it's being said a lot.

I had a strange feeling when I began to hear bits about three American servicepeople killed in Jordan. Like this distant tragedy wasn't as distant as such things often seem. Soon, I learned all three were Georgians. Then, I heard one of the soldiers was from Carrollton, where I recently owned a business. Then Waycross. Finally, "...graduate of Windsor Forest High School in Savannah... Breonna Moffett...age 23." A neighbor. A woman a few years younger than my daughters, who went to school every day for years a few blocks from them.

According to Reuters, "U.S. troops have been attacked over 160 times in Iraq, Syria and Jordan since October 7, and warships have been attacked in the Red Sea." A hundred and sixty is a big number...forestalling tragedy was a losing bet.

Speaking about the three dead soldiers including Breonna, National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communication John Kirby said (strategically?), "We do not seek to escalate...but will respond appropriately."

Within hours, Pentagon Deputy Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said, "We don't seek a war but we will take action and respond." Action she went on to describe repeatedly as "appropriate," and to occur "at a time of our choosing."

A written statement attributed to President Biden said, "We will hold all those responsible to account at a time and in a manner of our choosing."

Subsequently and repeatedly, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre echoed: "We will respond," "appropriately," "at a time of our choosing."

So, what's bugging me? The notion of "appropriate." What's an "appropriate" response that would relieve a parent's profound grief? What's "appropriate" in the context of a future erased? What's "appropriate" to ensure that more young Americans don't die in a faraway barracks trying to sleep? And the bit about "a time of our choosing." If I were choosing, I'd choose never. Never would we have to be compelled to respond. In fact, we have very little to do with choosing the time, if we're being honest. The timeline was set in motion by people who want to kill American human beings because they are American by birth and/or choice. The clock started ticking when a drone reached firing distance of Tower 22. We didn't wind the clock; all we are doing is hitting the snooze button to mute its alarm until we decide we are ready to wake up.

"Appropriate and at a time of our choosing." We have evolved, I suppose. We are masters of nuance, or we try to be. We don't want to offend anybody, but even the most empathetic among us would be hesitant to forfeit the standard of living our ancestors have built. Which results in much internal hand-wringing and unresolvable debate.

Less than one full generation ago, George Patton said, "The object of war is not to die for your country but to make the other bastard die for his." It's hard to imagine Patton getting anywhere near a microphone today.

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