



The Real Ron Paul on Foreign Policy

In his most recently published book, [Liberty Defined](#), Paul elaborates at some length on his controversial views. Contra the Republican neoconservative establishment, he thinks the current course of waging an interminable [War on Terror](#) for the sake of establishing “democratic” governments throughout the Middle East (and beyond?) is most unwise. America’s crusade to transform the world into its image — what else could it be, given that we have “troops in 135 countries” and “900 [military] bases” around the world? — has had the effect of transforming America from a Republic into an empire. But empire and liberty are incompatible. Paul is swift and decisive: “The American Empire is the enemy of American freedom. It is every bit as much the enemy of American citizens as it is of its victims around the world.”



This isn’t hyperbole. As Paul correctly states, an empire “is incompatible with a free society,” for the former “requires perpetual war and preparation for war.” As many observers — students of the classical conservative tradition in particular — have long noted, a “free society” is at no time more unrecognizable to itself than during times of war. And when this “war” is undeclared, as is our current War on Terror — that is, when the Constitution’s demand for a declaration of war by Congress is ignored — American-style liberty is dealt a blow of incalculable proportions.

War is the quintessential crisis, and as Rahm Emanuel once succinctly put it, it is imprudent for government to ever “[let a good crisis go to waste.](#)” The point is that during a crisis, especially a crisis such as war when the governed are threatened by an enemy resolved to destroy them, a free people, in order to satiate its desire for safety and victory, will be more disposed to relinquish its liberties than it otherwise would be. At the same time that citizens become less free, the government becomes less constrained. Paul writes: “War feeds the growth of the state. The state is nourished on the liberties of the people.”

A second reason that Paul supplies for his opposition to “our foreign policy of interventionism” pertains to the extent to which it debases its supporters. President George W. Bush himself provided a vintage example of this back in 2004 at the Annual Radio and Television Correspondents’ Dinner. Some may recall that at this event the President presented [a slide show of himself searching the White House for the weapons of mass destruction](#) that were never found in Iraq. “To treat with such levity such a serious blunder (some would call it a lie) that has caused so much death and destruction,” Paul asserts, “is beyond the pale.” Worse, “those present at the dinner all had a good laugh over it.”

Another illustration of this “callous disregard for decency relating to foreign policy” transpired during



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Democratic Senator [Max Cleland's](#) reelection race in 2002. Cleland lost both of his legs and an arm while serving in the Vietnam war, yet because he opposed the impending invasion of Iraq, his Republican rivals ran ads depicting Cleland as weak on issues of national defense. Paul explains: "The ad had Senator Cleland's face morphed into Saddam Hussein's while it implied that Cleland didn't care about the security of the American people because he didn't always vote with President Bush." Moreover, there were Republicans who "even insisted that Max Cleland not be referred to as a war hero though he had been awarded a Silver Star for gallantry in action."

Paul concludes that all of this "was about as low as one can get in politics."

The third reason Paul resists with every fiber of his being "our foreign policy of interventionism" is its exorbitant monetary costs. "When empires are rich ... the people grow dependent, work and produce less, and enjoy the 'bread and circuses' or their 'guns and butter' while drowning in consumer excesses, encouraged by moral decay and financed by debt." But this only "hastens the day of reckoning when the bills come due and the empire collapses."

As Paul points out, "[Tea Party activists](#)" who "often claim to oppose the system of tax and spend, bailouts and socialism," fail to realize that "to the extent that they uncritically defend U.S. foreign policy, they are supporting all the policies they claim to be against."

The fourth and final reason Paul gives for his position is, quite simply, that it doesn't work. Our invasions and occupations of Islamic lands, far from rendering us more secure, have made an already dangerous world that much more dangerous, for our aggression only emboldens those against whom our policies are aimed. No amount of "lying, or denying the ... [blowback](#)" from our actions in "other nations, especially Arab and Muslim countries," can nullify it. And all such lying or denying actually "presents the greatest danger to our security, freedom, and prosperity."

In summary, Ron Paul favors a more "humble" foreign policy. He opposes the "foreign adventurism," as he characterizes it, of his neoconservative Republican detractors for essentially four reasons. This militaristic enterprise undermines our liberties, corrupts the characters of those who endorse it, depletes our resources, and makes us less secure.

The reader is now left with a thought or two to ponder: Is there anything in Congressman Paul's case against the Republican establishment's foreign policy vision that warrants the treatment to which it has subjected him? In fact is Paul's position not eminently sensible?



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