



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on October 29, 2010

## Bipartisan Warfare State

During the 1976 vice presidential debate between Senators Robert Dole, Republican of Kansas, and Democrat Walter Mondale of Minnesota, Dole outraged Democrats when he said: “All the wars of the 20th century have been Democrat (sic) wars.”

That remark came barely 18 months after the fall of Saigon and may have reminded the nation that the Vietnam War, like Korea and both world wars, began with Democrats in the White House and in the majority in Congress. Dole, born in 1923, began his congressional career in 1961, when Republicans were still boasting of their ability to keep America out of wars, rather than their readiness to start one. Today few in either party show any noticeable appreciation of the wise counsel of our first and greatest President in his Farewell Address:



Why quit our own to stand upon foreign ground? Why, by interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European Ambition, Rivalship, Interest, Humour or Caprice?

’Tis our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world.

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Historians may debate just when our nation began to ignore Washington’s sage advice, but we were clearly creating some long-term entanglements with several parts of the “foreign world” in 1898, when America went to war with Spain over Cuba and, in the process, captured Puerto Rico and the Philippines. Theodore Roosevelt — the “progressive” Republican beloved by today’s neoconservatives — was a hero of that “splendid little war” and was vice president when the assassination of McKinley propelled the popular Rough Rider into the White House. Though he seldom walked softly, he often waved the “big stick” at nations standing in the way of American ambition. When the Senate of Colombia in 1903 unanimously rejected the terms of a treaty granting the United States rights to build a canal in Panama, Roosevelt announced “the blackmailers of Bogota” would not be permitted to “permanently bar one of the future highways of civilization.” When Panamanians staged an uprising against the Colombian government, U.S. forces seized the Panama railroad and prevented the landing of Colombian troops within 50 miles. Roosevelt quickly recognized the new Republic of Panama and concluded a treaty, giving Panama \$10 million and \$250,000 a year for the Canal Zone.\*

Ohio Sen. Robert A. Taft, the “Mr. Republican” of his era, took mild exception to Roosevelt’s intervention in Panama in his 1951 book, *A Foreign Policy for Americans*. “I do not believe history will defend as lawful the action of President Theodore Roosevelt in seizing Panama,” Taft wrote. “On the



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other hand, that action was certainly not the making of war.” Taft’s father, William Howard Taft, who succeeded Roosevelt as President, was less restrained in describing his predecessor’s zeal for military adventure. Theodore Roosevelt, said the elder Taft, was “obsessed with his love of war and the glory of it.... He would think it a real injury to mankind if we would not have a war.” Roosevelt himself, in a speech to students at the Naval War College in 1897, said: “No triumph of peace is quite so great as the supreme triumphs of war.”

But as war raged through Europe in 1914, the American people were determined to remain apart from “the toils of European Ambition” and the wars that sprang endlessly from them. American neutrality, however, was sorely tested, as England’s blockade of Germany was designed, in the words of Lord Admiral Winston Churchill, to “starve the whole population — men, women, and children, old and young, wounded and sound — into submission.” U.S. ships were intercepted even when bound for neutral nations with land access to Germany. President Woodrow Wilson protested to no avail. Yet he continued to insist on the right of Americans to continue shipping goods to England and to travel on British ships, despite the danger of attack by German U-boats.

Thus, Americans in 1915 went unheeding onto the *Lusitania*, a British ship secretly loaded with munitions of war and bound for the British Isles. The German Embassy in Washington had filed a complaint with our government, and a warning that ships entering the war zone were subject to destruction appeared in the *New York Times* and other American newspapers on the day the ship sailed. Yet the German attack on the *Lusitania* and the death of 1,198 passengers, including 128 Americans, contributed to rising anti-German sentiment and brought America closer to war.

A desperate Germany’s later policy of unrestricted submarine warfare moved the United States still closer to the brink of war. The final push came with the discovery of a telegram sent by German Foreign Minister Alfred Zimmerman to his ambassador in Mexico, proposing a German-Mexican alliance if the U.S. entered the war that would help Mexico recover “her lost territories in New Mexico, Texas and Arizona.” On April 2, 1917, barely five months after winning reelection on the slogan, “He kept us out of war,” Wilson asked Congress for a declaration of war against Germany.

Yet during the period of American “neutrality,” billions in cash and credit from the United States had fueled the Allies’ war efforts, and U.S. banks had a strong interest in assuring that the Allies would emerge victorious and able to demand reparations from their defeated foes. Between 1915 and April 1917, loans from U.S. banks to Germany totaled \$27 million, while Britain and its allies received loans of \$2.3 billion in the same period. John Pierpont Morgan, Jr.’s inherited fortune of \$13 million doubled during the war, as he became the purchasing agent for the British. Morgan also was head of the United States Steel Corporation, the leading company in an industry whose profits during the war averaged \$20 million a year.†

Not surprisingly, America’s munitions manufacturers profited handsomely during the war. Du Pont, the largest of them, increased its number of employees from 5,000 before the war to more than 100,000 at its end, while amassing profits of \$266 million during that period. In the 1930s, a special committee of the Senate, chaired by Gerald P. Nye, a North Dakota Republican, investigated the role of the munitions industry during World War I and charged that America had entered the war to make the world safe for bankers’ loans and munitions makers’ profits.

When President Franklin Roosevelt and the Democrats came into office in 1933, they were as opposed as the Republicans had been to joining the League of Nations, which would have entangled America in the wars and internal affairs of member nations. Roosevelt himself was defending a policy that a few



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years later he would excoriate as isolationism and worse. “We shun political commitments which might entangle us in foreign wars,” FDR proclaimed. “We are not isolationists except insofar as we seek to isolate ourselves completely from war.”

Yet Roosevelt neglected to build America’s defenses during the 1930s, even as he pursued a diplomatic policy of containment against Japanese expansion in the Pacific and would soon be plotting with Churchill to bring America into the European war. By executive agreement, Roosevelt traded 50 old but still effective destroyers to England for British naval stations in Newfoundland and Bermuda and rent-free leases on six sites in the Caribbean — a move Germany might reasonably have considered an act of war. Roosevelt’s lend-lease program authorized the transfer of arms to Britain and her allies, to be returned or replaced after the war. Non-interventionist members of Roosevelt’s own party were as emphatic as any Republican in opposing the plan. In the Senate debate over the Lend-Lease Act, Burton Wheeler (D-Mont.) likened it to Roosevelt’s Agriculture Adjustment Act that paid farmers to kill livestock and plow under crops, in order to boost farm prices by reducing the food supply. Wheeler enraged Roosevelt by warning of “the New Deal’s AAA foreign policy,” whereby “every fourth American boy will be plowed underneath.”

While America was still ostensibly a “non-belligerent,” Roosevelt had U.S. ships trailing German submarines and radioing their positions to British torpedo planes nearby, leading to incidents of American ships being fired on by the Germans. When Roosevelt ordered U.S. naval vessels to shoot German submarines on sight, Senator Robert Taft called the order “contrary to the law and to the Constitution.”

Despite the provocations, Germany refused to take the bait. Having conquered France, Hitler had failed in his effort to bomb England into submission and dared not risk the perils of a cross-channel invasion against a superior British navy. Instead, he turned east and pursued his long-held goal of conquering Russia. Most Americans wished to stay out of the conflict and leave the Nazi and communist armies at each other’s throats. The America First Committee led the opposition to war with large rallies and speaking tours, featuring aviation hero Charles Lindbergh, the first to fly solo across the Atlantic. The Lone Eagle became, in the words of Roosevelt’s speechwriter, Robert Sherwood, “FDR’s most formidable competitor on the radio.”

America First Committee members included Brigadier General Hugh Johnson, who led the New Deal’s National Recovery Act; Democratic Party activist and future ambassador Chester Bowles; World War I flying ace Eddie Rickenbacker; and Alice Roosevelt Longworth, daughter of Theodore. Former President Herbert Hoover was a supporter. John F. Kennedy, son of the ambassador to Great Britain, sent a \$100 check to the America First Committee, along with a note: “What you are doing is vital.” † Future Republican President Gerald Ford was an energetic recruiter for America First while at Yale Law School.

As late as April 1941, Gallup’s polling found 83 percent of Americans against entering the war. Yet Roosevelt unleashed a verbal barrage against “appeaser fifth columnists,” and had Lindbergh put under surveillance by the FBI. The bureau shadowed the aviator for months and tapped his phone, but could find no evidence of “subversive activities.”

While running for an unprecedented third term in 1940, Roosevelt had promised “again and again and again: Your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign wars.” The response from his Republican opponent, Wendell Willkie, was both clever and prophetic: “If his promise to keep our boys out of foreign wars is no better than his promise to balance the budget, they’re already almost on the



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transports.”

Roosevelt found what is often called his “back door to war” through a series of trade and diplomatic confrontations with Japan, leading to the December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor. In his famous “date of infamy” speech to Congress the next day, Roosevelt expressed all proper indignation and horror at the “sneak attack” that, in fact, his administration anticipated and even welcomed. As Secretary of War Harry Stimson had noted in his diary on November 26, 1941: “The question was how we should maneuver them into firing the first shot without allowing too much danger to ourselves.” The United States had broken the Japanese code and many historians have since concluded that Roosevelt knew the attack on Pearl Harbor was coming. Yet the commanders at the base were never warned of the aerial assault that left more than 2,400 Americans dead and nearly 1,200 wounded.

Once the United States declared war on Japan, Hitler declared war on the United States in solidarity with his Asian ally. Germany and Japan would be crushed in the next four years, but the Soviet Union came out of the war as the dominant power in Europe and became a major force behind the communist conquest of China. Harry Truman, becoming President upon the death of FDR, initially enjoyed bipartisan support in the building of the postwar world, including the establishment of the United Nations and economic aid for the recovery of Europe. But the conservative wing of the Republican Party, led by Robert Taft, remained wary of those “permanent alliances” of Washington’s admonition. Even the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was presented as a temporary shield for our war-ravaged European allies. General Eisenhower, the first NATO commander, said the whole project would be a failure if American troops were not withdrawn from Europe within 10 years. Yet 65 years after the end of World War II, the United States still maintains armed forces in Europe, apparently to continue protecting allies from a Soviet Union that no longer exists.

“Think of the tremendous power which this proposal gives to the President to involve us in any war throughout the world, including civil wars where we may favor one faction against the other,” Senator Taft wrote in opposition to the North Atlantic treaty. His prophecy was borne out when President Truman, in June of 1950, took the nation into war in Korea without a declaration of war or any other authorization by the Congress of the United States. The only authorization Truman sought and received was from the Security Council of the United Nations. The armistice in 1953, ending three years of fighting, left Korea still divided in two armed camps and more than 40,000 Americans killed or missing in the undeclared war.

“War, undertaken even for justifiable purposes, such as to punish aggression in Korea, has often had the principal results of wrecking the country intended to be saved and spreading death and destruction among an innocent civilian population,” Taft said. “Even more than Sherman knew in 1864, ‘war is hell.’ War should never be undertaken or seriously risked except to protect American liberty.”

Yet a decade later, America was digging herself into another war hole, as the 600 military advisors Eisenhower left in Vietnam grew to 16,000 under Kennedy. A dubious allegation of an attack on U.S. ships off the coast of North Vietnam prompted President Lyndon Johnson to launch a retaliatory air attack. Congress immediately passed a resolution authorizing the President to take whatever steps he deemed necessary to protect American personnel in South Vietnam. But Johnson, following the path of Wilson and FDR, campaigned for election in 1964 promising that America would not bear the brunt of the fighting.

“We are not about to send American boys nine or ten thousand miles away from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves,” LBJ assured the American people en route to a landslide victory



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over Republican Barry Goldwater. But the following year, Johnson sent combat units to Vietnam, and by 1968 the U.S. presence there had grown to more than half a million men under arms. The Vietnam Resolution was retroactively declared by the Johnson administration to be the “functional equivalent” of a declaration of war.

“In this writer’s opinion we should never have become involved in Vietnam at all,” wrote John Birch Society founder Robert Welch in the summer of 1965. But once American troops were engaged in the war, the thing to do, he insisted, was “not to prolong, not to muddle through, but to win it.” Yet despite the investment of more than \$100 billion and some 58,000 American lives in a decade-long war, ostensibly to stop the advance of communism in the former Indo-China, South Vietnam fell to Hanoi in the spring of 1975. A decade earlier, Welch was raising probing questions about America’s approach to the containment of communism.

“Why fight ‘em in Vietnam and help ‘em everywhere else?” Welch asked. “In fact, the administration is right now moving heaven and earth to bring about more so-called trade with Soviet Russia and all of its satellites. Putting it more concisely, our boys in Vietnam are being killed by Russian bullets fired from Russian guns, while the Johnson administration sends the Soviets wheat to feed those who are making the guns and bullets.... And in one recent year, the Communist regime in Poland gave to our enemy Ho Chi Minh, in North Vietnam, thirteen million dollars taken directly out of the much larger sum which Washington had given to Warsaw. What kind of insanity (or worse) is this anyway?”

“The capitalists will sell us the rope with which we will hang them,” is a saying commonly attributed to Lenin. Antony Sutton, historian and research fellow at Stanford University’s Hoover Institution, spent much of his career documenting the sale of technology and parts by American companies to Nazi Germany as well as the Soviet Union. Sales to the Soviets included miniature ball bearings used in missile construction and auto manufacturing facilities readily adaptable to the production of military vehicles. In 1972, Sutton testified before the Platform Committee at the Republican National Convention.

“In a few words, there is no such thing as Soviet technology,” he said. “Almost all — perhaps 90 to 95 percent — came directly from the United States and its allies. In effect, the United States and NATO countries have built the Soviet Union.”

It is a pattern oft repeated. The “freedom fighters” we armed and equipped to fight the Soviet Union in Afghanistan are the terrorists fighting Americans there now. After years of selling weapons and deadly material to Saddam Hussein, we invaded Iraq over its alleged “weapons of mass destruction.” America’s global interventionists are no longer content to merely ignore the dictum of John Quincy Adams that America goes not “abroad in search of monsters to destroy.” We are now in the business of creating the monsters we must arm ourselves to destroy.

While the Democrats steered America into the wars of the 20th century, Republicans are doing their part in the 21st, having nominated and elected President George W. Bush and having stood by him as he called for a “global democratic revolution.” The party that once boasted of its ability to keep the peace now appears committed to an endless series of wars, enduring intervals of peace only as a last resort. It is today more the party of Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt than the party of Robert Taft. Or perhaps it is, once again, the party of that glorious Rough Rider, Teddy Roosevelt, who, in President Taft’s words, “would think it a real injury to mankind if we would not have a war.”

\* *The United States: The History of a Republic* by Richard Hofstadter, William Miller, and Daniel Aaron (Prentice-Hall, Inc., second edition, 1967).



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† *Encyclopedia of White Collar and Corporate Crime*, edited by Lawrence Salinger (Sage Publications, 2004, page 869).

‡ *A Republic, Not an Empire: Reclaiming America's Destiny* by Patrick J. Buchanan (Regnery Publishing, Inc., 1999, page 273).

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