



Yemen: Intervention, Nation-building, and the Constitution

When Rep. Ron Paul (R-Texas) vented his frustration at further involvement by the United States in foreign countries despite constitutional limitations against such involvement, he declared: “Stay out of Yemen!” Unfortunately, almost no one is listening.

Yemen is located on the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, bordered by Saudi Arabia on the north, the Red Sea on the west, the Gulf of Aden on the south, and Oman on the east. It is one of the poorest countries in the world, with unemployment exceeding 40 percent and the average citizen living on less than \$1.25 a day. Its history is a running sore of intervention by outside influences and internal civil wars. It could be a vital, prosperous country by dint of its strategic location alone. Instead, it is best known for internal political corruption and increasing dependence upon foreign aid.



And it’s now the next target of the expansionist policies of the United States. Following the failed attempt by the Christmas Day bomber who received his training in Yemen, President Obama declared that he has no intention of intervening militarily in Yemen. But foreign aid to Yemen has increased six-fold over the past four years in an attempt to buy the support of the government against the terrorists operating there. And covert military operations have begun.

Ron Paul’s statement before the House Foreign Affairs Committee Hearing entitled: “Yemen on the Brink: Implications for U.S. Policy” on February 3, 2010, expressed his exasperation:

Mr. Chairman, I am extremely concerned over current U.S. policy toward Yemen, which I believe will backfire and leave the United States less safe and much poorer. Increasing U.S. involvement in Yemen may be sold as a fight against terrorism, but in fact it is more about expanding U.S. government control and influence over this strategically-placed nation at the gateway to Asia.

When I look at the U.S. assistance plan for Yemen I see that it is primarily focused on nation-building. That is the failed idea that if the United States sends enough money to a foreign government, with which that government purchases U.S.-manufactured weapons and hires U.S.-based consultants and non-governmental organizations, that country will achieve a strong economy and political stability and in gratitude will become eternally friendly to the U.S. and U.S. interests. I have yet to see a single successful example of this strategy.

Paul quoted the testimony of Assistant Secretary of State Jeffrey Feltman: “Priorities for U.S. assistance



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on February 8, 2010

include political and fiscal reforms and meaningful attention to legitimate internal grievances; better governance through decentralization, reduced corruption and civil service reform; human rights protections; jobs-related training; economic diversification to generate employment and enhance livelihoods, and strengthened natural resource management.”

And then Paul asked the rhetorical question: “How can we believe that the US government can achieve abroad what we know it cannot effectively achieve at home?”

According to [Eric Margolis](#), the attempted Christmas Day bomb attack “was retaliation for extensive covert US military operations in Yemen.” These “operations” were coordinated with Saudi Arabian forces as a response to the reality that “Yemen has become a haven for anti-American militants. Osama bin Laden’s father came from Yemen. The destroyer *USS Cole* was bombed in Aden harbor in 2000 and the US Embassy in [the capitol city of] Sana’a was attacked by gunmen in 2008.”

The “operation” involving U.S. aircraft killed between 50 and 100 Houthi tribesmen just a few days before Christmas. As Margolis explains, “US Special Forces, warplanes and killer drones have been active [in Yemen] since 2001, assassinating Yemeni militants and antigovernment tribal leaders. It was only a matter of time before Yemeni Jihadists struck back at the US.”

Which is precisely the point Paul has tried repeatedly to make about foreign adventures and interventions. On December 21, [he said](#):

If a foreign government attempted to isolate the U.S. economically, cut off our supply of gasoline, or starve us to death, would it cause Americans to admire that foreign entity? Or would we instead unite under the flag for the survival of our country? We would not tolerate foreign covert operations fomenting regime change in our government.

In opposing sanctions against Iran in December, Paul said such sanctions would “only strengthen [the] regimes they target ... [and] will likely serve to strengthen the popularity of the current Iranian government.” Paul went on to remind his colleagues that interventions, sanctions and other interferences “are themselves an act of war.”

In another post about intervention in Afghanistan, Paul wrote: “I have always opposed nation-building as unconstitutional and ineffective.” He expressed his frustration in his post on December 7, 2009: “There is nothing to win in Afghanistan and everything to lose. Today’s military actions are yet another futile exercise in nation-building and have nothing to do with our nation’s security, or with 9/11.”

A supporter for such nation-building efforts, [Jim Carafano](#) explains the rationale behind sending “aid” to Yemen:

The administration is going to have to roll up its sleeves if it wants any sustained effort to succeed in Yemen. Yemen’s government is a reluctant ally more concerned about Houthi rebels and secessionists than al Qaeda. Right now they are just trying to figure out how to hold on to power and have any influence at all outside the capital. It will take pressure and resources from the US to get them to do more.

In the meanwhile, we’ve got to win in Afghanistan and Pakistan and crush al Qaeda’s leadership once and for all. That would be a deep psychological blow to these affiliated movements. Though they have their own agendas, losing al Qaeda central will cool their global aspirations.

Sorry we have to fight on so many fronts ... but it beats battling them on the Tarmac in Detroit.

To which Christopher Preble of the Cato Institute says, “Sorry, but that just doesn’t fly. We have an



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unreliable ally. We have minimal capacity for making them more reliable. Neither of these observations are unique to Yemen. The same could be said of many other countries.”

Yemen’s Deputy Prime Minister for security, Rashad al-Alimi, [agreed](#) that there are limits to its military cooperation with the United States: “If there is direct intervention by the United States, it will strengthen al-Qaeda. We cannot accept any foreign troops on Yemeni territory.”

In defending continued covert military invention in Yemen and elsewhere, Michael Hayden, former Director of the CIA and the National Security Agency, [explained](#):

At what a military guy would call the deep battle, we are seeing signs of progress. Here, specifically what you have are authentic voices in the Muslim world who are seriously questioning both the vision and the tactics of al-Qaeda.

Fundamentally, that’s the only way out, isn’t it? Otherwise we’re in a state of *perpetual* conflict, *perpetual* danger, and all these — I hesitate to use the word — “extraordinary measures” we now take (will continue) for as far as the eye can see, just out of our own self-defense. [Emphasis added.]

In summary, Hayden is defending the proposition that peace can only be obtained through war. This is a strategy that dates back to at least WWII. Harry Elmer Barnes’ [Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace](#) provides remarkable insight into FDR’s machinations to lead the United States into the Second World War, and is now considered one of the finest introductions to that political and military philosophy in action.

The authors of the Constitution knew well the temptation to use unchecked military power to accomplish political objectives, and so wrote clear limitations of such powers to be granted to the federal government. James Madison [explained](#) the danger, and the response to it with these words:

- “The power to declare war, including the power of judging the causes of war, is fully and exclusively vested in the legislature ... the executive has no right, in any case, to decide the question, whether there is or is not cause for declaring war.” (1793.)
- “The constitution supposes, what the History of all Governments demonstrates, that the Executive is the branch of power most interested in war, and most prone to it. It has accordingly with studied care vested the question of war to the Legislature.” (Letter to Jefferson, c. 1798.)

Ron Paul concluded his remarks on his December 7 post with [these words](#): “The pressures of the war racketeers need to be put in check before we are brought to our knees by them. Unfortunately, it will require a mighty effort by the people to get the leadership to finally listen.”

Understanding what the constitutional limitations are on such adventures is a good place to begin.

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