



## Would Donald Trump Save Americans From Unnecessary War?

Doug Bandow

May 23, 2016

Donald Trump is headed toward the Republican Party's presidential nomination. He's among the most pugnacious of candidates.

Many of his political battles could reduce his chance of getting elected president. But his fight with foreign policy professionals might help. Given the disastrous course of U.S. foreign policy in recent years, there's little public support for more military adventurism in the Middle East.

Trump clearly is out-of-step with the neoconservatives and militaristic nationalists who dominated the Republican Party of late. One of Trump's most important pledges addressed personnel, not policy

He declared: "My goal is to establish a foreign policy that will endure for several generations. That's why I also look and have to look for talented experts with approaches and practical ideas, rather than surrounding myself with those who have perfect resumes but very little to brag about except responsibility for a long history of failed policies and continued losses at war. We have to look for new people."

Trump may have been reacting against the open letter from 117 self-described members of "the Republican national security community," including leading neoconservatives and right-leaning interventionists of other stripes. They denounced Trump as "fundamentally dishonest," acting like "a racketeer," being "hateful," and having a vision that "is wildly inconsistent and unmoored in principle."

Their critique contained some truth, but was fueled by Trump's lack of enthusiasm for new wars. In fact, a number of his GOP critics support Hillary Clinton, whose approach is largely indistinguishable from that of George W. Bush.

Ironically, Clinton claims support of foreign leaders as an argument for her candidacy: "I'm having foreign leaders ask if they can endorse me to stop Donald Trump." But their backing reflects the fact that her interventionist policies serve the interests of other states far more than of America.

Indeed, subsidizing prosperous, populous allies and attempting to remake failed states provides little benefit to most Americans, who do the dying and paying. Clinton's foreign support actually reinforces Trump's point: the need for an international policy that advances the interests of the American people.

Trump's promise to ignore the usual foreign policy suspects also may reflect media coverage of some members of the very same policy elite publicly stating their willingness to serve Trump—though only reluctantly, of course. An unnamed GOP official told the Washington Post: “Leaving any particular president completely alone and bereft from the best advice people could give him just doesn't sound responsible.”

Of course, it's all about advancing the national interest, and not gaining attractive, influential, prestigious, and career-enhancing jobs. No wonder Trump apparently sees no need for advice from such folks.

Author Evan Thomas defended the “global corps of diplomats, worldly financiers and academics.” Thomas seemed to miss Trump's point. Trump endorsed diplomacy, which would require the assistance of a variety of seasoned professionals. In fact, his policies would rely far more on negotiation than those of neoconservatives, who see war as a first resort.

Not needed, however, are such “advisers” with the reverse Midas Touch, whose counsel has proved to be uniformly disastrous. Indeed, every recent intervention, such as Iraq, has created new problems, creating calls from the usual suspects for more military action.

Trump may be feeling especially dismissive of those who never learn from their mistakes—like supporting the wars in Iraq and Libya, for instance.

In August 2011, after the ouster of Moammar Khadafy, Anne-Marie Slaughter celebrated the success in an article entitled “Why Libya skeptics were proved badly wrong.” Once that country imploded and the Islamic State made an appearance, she dropped any discussion of who had been “proved badly wrong” by that conflict.

Samantha Power later criticized the public for losing its faith in her strategy of constant war: “I think there is too much of, ‘Oh, look, this is what intervention has wrought’ ... one has to be careful about overdrawing lessons.”

Of course, what she really sought was to avoid responsibility for supporting multiple foreign policy blunders. Consider what the Iraq invasion has wrought: thousands of American dead, bloody sectarian war, promiscuous suicide attacks, hundreds of thousands of Iraqis killed, trillions of dollars squandered, rise of the Islamic State, destruction of the historic Christian community, dramatic increase in Iranian influence. No wonder Trump disclaims any interest in listening to such people with such ideas.

There are many reasons to fear a President Trump. However, he is right to dismiss Washington's interventionist foreign policy crowd. The resulting policies would require the assistance of a variety of seasoned professionals, have cost America precious lives, abundant wealth,

international credibility, and global influence. The next president should reject the same failed advisers with their same failed proposals.

*Doug Bandow is a Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute and a former Special Assistant to President Ronald Reagan. He is the author of Foreign Follies: America's New Global Empire.*