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Ron Paul challenges GOP's foreign policy agenda

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It has been nearly a decade since President George W. Bush chose arrogance over humility as the basis of American foreign policy. The intervening years have not been good for the United States or the Republican Party. As the GOP seeks to take back the White House it needs to conduct a serious foreign policy debate. Republicans should start by listening to Rep. Ron Paul (R-Texas).

At the recent Southern Republican Leadership Conference big spending Mitt Romney bested Rep. Paul by just one vote in the popularity contest. Yet Paul eschewed reliance on easy applause lines and challenged the newfound Republican fondness for big militaries and constant wars.

For instance, Paul observed that conservatives, like liberals, enjoyed spending money, only "on different things. They like embassies, and they like occupation. They like the empire. They like to be in 135 countries and 700 bases."

Similarly, Paul said, conservatives talked about following the Constitution, "except for war. Let the president go to war anytime they want."

Paul garnered applause from more youthful members of the audience. But boos were heard as well. Many establishment GOP activists appear to have become wedded to a big-government foreign policy.

When [Politico](#) polled activists and analysts about why the GOP mainstream was hostile to Paul, James Carafano of the Heritage Foundation complained that "The deliberate self-weakening of America is an invitation to disaster." Carafano argued that Paul failed to fulfill the constitutional obligation to "provide for the common defense" and that the latter's vision would not keep America "safe, free, and prosperous."

Yet Washington's policy of promiscuous intervention is not providing for America's "common defense." Rather, the U.S. is protecting virtually every other nation. That's one reason why the Pentagon was incapable of

defending Americans when the U.S. was attacked on 9/11,

Indeed, the “Defense Department” has become anything but. Most of America’s forces do nothing to secure the U.S. They instead are employed to remake failed societies, impose Washington’s meddlesome dictates, and subsidize populous and prosperous allies.

Do the Europeans want someone to stop a civil war in Yugoslavia? They leave it to Americans. Do the Georgians want someone to protect them after they start a war with Russia? Tbilisi begs Washington.

Do the South Koreans hope to subsidize North Korea while someone else guarantees their security? The South Korean “Blue House” calls the American “White House.” Do the Japanese want to concentrate on economic development while leaving the protection of regional security to another country? They turn to the U.S. Do the Israelis want someone else to disarm Iran? They call on Washington.

And in every case the Republican elite willingly answers “yes,” spending Americans’ money to provide for most every other nations’ defense.

The Europeans might have a larger collective GDP and population. The South Koreans might enjoy a GDP 40 times that of the North. Japan might have the world’s second largest economy. Israel might be a regional superpower with up to 200 nuclear weapons.

Yet in GOP eyes all are helpless American dependents, to be defended by Washington at all cost—and apparently forever.

This policy has made America weaker. We are less “safe, free, and prosperous” as a result.

America’s safety is compromised because we are more often at war and at risk of war. Indeed, intervening promiscuously and setting tripwires around the world has kept the U.S. involved in conflict almost constantly after the Cold War.

Iraq is the most obvious disaster. More than 4,000 dead and tens of thousands maimed or injured Americans. Total cost likely to hit \$2 trillion. The U.S. military overstretched. Iran’s strategic position greatly strengthened.

In fact, many Republican legislators apparently have come to recognize reality in Iraq. When asked how many GOP congressmen believed that the Iraq war had been a mistake, a panel of three Republican members at a recent Cato Institute conference agreed: “almost all of us.”

But it could be far worse. It appears that top Bush administration officials debated launching air strikes against Russian forces during Moscow’s conflict with Georgia.

Ponder the thought: After the U.S. made it through the Cold War without getting into a shooting match with the Soviet Union, Washington officials considered attacking that nuclear-armed power to defend a country which: by most accounts other than its own started the fighting; was not party to any military alliance or treaty with America; and was irrelevant to U.S. security. Had the administration initiated military action, the unsuspecting American people could have found themselves in a nuclear confrontation and even war in August 2008.

Such are the risks to Americans’ safety when their government plays globocop.

The national security state also has made Americans less free. A century ago social critic Randolph Bourne observed: “War is the health of the state.”

The U.S. was created as a constitutional republic, with a limited national government bounded by law. Yet the last Republican administration claimed that the president could unilaterally, subject to review neither by Congress nor the courts, order the arrest and indefinite detention of American citizens in America. In effect, the

president asserted that he was an elected monarch or dictator, presumed infallible and beyond reproach. The defining characteristic of the so-called Patriot Act and other such enactments was not the expansion of federal power, but the refusal to hold accountable those who exercised the new power.

Finally, Americans are less prosperous. While U.S. citizens pay to defend dozens of nations around the world, those countries invest in business enterprises, economic research and development, and generous welfare states. Trade competitors cheerfully accept U.S. military troops while excluding commercial products.

The defense budget is the price of our nation's foreign policy, and the price is high. The U.S. is spending more than \$700 billion annually on the military. In real terms that is more than at any point during the Cold War, Korean War, or Vietnam War. Today America accounts for roughly half of the globe's military outlays.

This is a year when the deficit will run almost \$1.6 trillion. When America faces \$10 trillion in deficits over the next decade. When Washington's debt is climbing skyward. And when Social Security and Medicare face unfunded liabilities of an astounding \$107 trillion.

Yet Americans, like Ron Paul, who advocate a policy to actually make America safer, freer, and wealthier, are routinely vilified by Republican apparatchiks. The Bush administration and its neoconservative supporters accused opponents of being defeatists and even traitors. *Politico* guest contributor Robert White was more mild, merely accusing Paul of preaching "isolationism and appeasement" and of not appearing to be "strong on national defense."

For these Republicans opposition to bombing or invading other nations is "isolationist." Failing to view war or the threat of war as the best response to every foreign problem is "appeasement."

In fact, war should always be a last resort, a matter of necessity rather than choice. And we can learn much from the Cold War: there were enthusiastic advocates of preventive war against both the Soviet Union and China, but deterrence kept the peace against the likes of Joseph Stalin and Mao Zedong. In retrospect the latter policy looks good compared to the potential of triggering World War III.

Moreover, intervention and conflict beget intervention and conflict. America's troubles with Iran began in 1953 with the CIA-backed coup d'état against the democratically elected government. Washington's support for the autocratic Shah sowed the seeds which turned into the 1979 Islamic revolution.

Fear of aggressive Islamic fundamentalism caused the Reagan administration to back Saddam Hussein in the 1980s after he invaded Iran. That encouraged Baghdad to invade Kuwait. Then came the first Gulf War and Washington's stationing of troops in Saudi Arabia. Those forces later were targeted in the Khobar barracks bombings; the U.S. presence also inflamed hostility from the likes of Osama bin Laden.

According to Paul Wolfowitz, a desire to bring home those forces was a benefit of the Iraq war. But the Iraq invasion empowered Iran, now accused of pursuing the Shah's dream of nuclear weapons. So Washington's sofa samurai are demanding that bombers be sent forthwith against Tehran.

It would have been much better in 1953 had Washington's coup plotters stayed home. Much brutality, war, and horror might have been avoided.

Ron Paul isn't likely to be the GOP presidential nominee in 2012 whatever position he takes on foreign policy. But for the last decade GOP politicians have inflated foreign threats, ignored military costs, and disregarded America's interests in their search for political advantage. If the Republican Party wants to return to power—and especially if it genuinely wants to keep America "safe, free, and prosperous"—it will engage rather than dismiss Rep. Paul's critique of U.S. foreign policy.

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