

# THE MORAL LIBERAL

## American People Must Tell Politicians No More War

By Doug Bandow

American foreign policy is a bipartisan failure. The U.S. must intervene everywhere all the time, irrespective of consequences?

No matter how disastrous the outcome, promiscuous interventionists insist that the idea was sound. Any problems obviously result from execution, a matter of doing too little: too few troops engaged, too few foreigners killed, too few nations bombed, too few societies transformed, too few countries occupied, too few years involved, too few dollars spent.

As new conflicts rage across the Middle East, the interventionist caucus' dismal record has become increasingly embarrassing. Anne-Marie Slaughter, a cheerleader for war in Libya, recently defended her actions after being chided on Twitter for being a war-monger. She had authored a celebratory *Financial Times* article entitled "Why Libya skeptics were proved badly wrong." Alas, Slaughter's Mediterranean adventure looks increasingly foolish.

Slightly more abashed is Samantha Power, one of the Obama administration's chief Sirens of War. She recently pleaded with the public not to let constant failure get in the way of future wars: "I think there is too much of, 'Oh, look, this is what intervention has wrought' ... one has to be careful about overdrawing lessons." Just because the policy of constant war had been a constant bust, people shouldn't be more skeptical about a military "solution" for future international problems.

President Barack Obama also appears to be a bit embarrassed by his behavior. The Nobel Peace Prize winner has been as active militarily as his much-maligned predecessor.

Yet in 2013 he admitted that "I was elected to end wars, not to start them." He sounded like he was trying to convince himself when he added: "I've spent the last four and a half years doing everything I can to reduce our reliance on military power."

The two parties usually attempt to one-up each other when it comes to reckless overseas intervention. Yet Uncle Sam has demonstrated that he possesses the reverse Midas Touch. Whatever he touches turns to mayhem.

In the Balkans the U.S. replaced ethnic cleansing with ethnic cleansing and set a precedent for Russian intervention in Georgia and Ukraine. In Afghanistan the U.S. rightly defenestrated the Taliban but then spent 13 years unsuccessfully attempting to remake that tribal nation.

Invading Iraq to destroy nonexistent WMDs cost the lives of 4500 Americans and 200,000 Iraqis, wrecked Iraqi society, loosed radical furies now embodied in the Islamic State, and

empowered Iran. Bombing Libya prolonged a low-tech civil war killing thousands, released weapons throughout the region, triggered a prolonged power struggle, and offered another home for ISIL killers.

As I point out on Forbes online: “Not only has virtually every bombing, invasion, occupation, and other interference made problems worse. Almost every new intervention is an attempt to redress problems created by previous U.S. actions. And every new military step is likely, indeed, almost guaranteed, to create even bigger new problems.”

Yet virtually never do foreign policy practitioners admit that things hadn't gone well. Most of official Washington simply takes the Samantha Power position: “What, me worry?”

There may have been a mistake or two, but one certainly wouldn't want to “overdraw” a lesson from these multiple and constant failures. No responsible policymaker would want to admit that even one foreign problem was not America's responsibility.

Washington's elite might disagree about details, but believes with absolute certainty that Americans should do everything: Fight every war, remake every society, enter every conflict, pay every debt, defeat every adversary, solve every problem, and ignore every criticism. Unfortunately, over the last two decades this approach has proved to be an abysmal disaster.

There's an equally simple alternative. Indeed, the president came up with it: “don't do stupid” stuff. Too bad he failed to practice his own professed policy.

Washington should stop doing stupid things. But only the American people can make that happen. They must start electing leaders committed to not doing “stupid” stuff.

*Doug Bandow is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, specializing in foreign policy and civil liberties.*