



## Endless Interventionist Clichés: Washington's Bipartisan War Party is Never at a Loss on Why War Is Necessary

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Starting last Spring the coronavirus pandemic kept me at home, encouraging me to watch webinars. Many webinars. Washington, D.C.'s gaggle of think tanks have filled online space with seemingly endless discussions of what to do about the world. With an emphasis on do.

Members of the infamous Blob, the Washington foreign policy establishment, bridle at criticism of their uniformity of views. Why, they insist, they argue about *everything*. Like whether we should sanction a country before bombing it. Whether the post-invasion occupation of a nation will require 50,000 or 100,000 troops.

Whether the U.S. should remove a government from power or merely create a "political process" that ensures its departure. Whether American officials should limit themselves to being hypocritical or whether it is okay for them to be sanctimonious as well. And whether rejecting just one of Washington's righteous demands is a *casus belli*, or at least two denials are necessary.

Absolutely, there is an incredible diversity of views within the Blob.

In fact, the main disagreement is partisan. Democrats who voted for the Iraq war when it was popular conveniently noticed rising murder and mayhem along with dropping public approval, causing them to later realize that they had opposed the conflict all along. They hated the idea of new Middle Eastern wars – until Democratic President Barack Obama decided to double and triple down in Afghanistan, and join conflicts in Libya, Yemen, and Syria.

Of course, though Obama increased military outlays, launched several wars, and tried to run the world, Republicans were convinced he was a wimpy "isolationist" who allowed jihadists and communists to run wild all over the planet. But for Obama, in the GOP's view, Mesopotamia would have returned to its status as the Garden of Eden. After all, George W. Bush was the beau ideal of a president, whose brilliantly conceived Iraq invasion was ruined by Obama, who was dumb enough to follow *the Bush withdrawal timetable*.

Then along came President Donald Trump. The only international issue he really seemed to care about was reversing Obama's opening to Iran. After all, that is what the Saudi and Israeli governments wanted! Otherwise he complained about Democratic policies, only to follow them in practice – punish Russia no matter what, stay in Syria no matter what, stay in Afghanistan no matter what. And despite raucous, often insulting complaints, subsidize the defense of Europe, South Korea, and Japan no matter what. His only significant difference with the Blob was dealing with North Korea, and even in that case he still mimicked conventional wisdom by demanding immediate and complete denuclearization upfront.

Yes, Washington features an astonishingly interesting and vibrant debate. How can we best intervene everywhere? What exactly should we demand from everyone? How quickly should we send in drones? When do we pretend to allow other nations to make their own decisions? Does exercising global leadership require bombing any government that doesn't recognize America's authority or merely sanctioning and threatening such nations?

Conservative GOP policymakers are the worst. Progressives at least pay lip service to the idea of consulting other nations. Right-wing hawks just want to destroy anyone and anything in their way. While genuflecting to the latest approved brutal strongman – like Mohammed bin Salman and Abdel Fattah al-Sisi – they treat every decision as a moral imperative to spread the blessings of liberty to the world. (When introducing his human rights initiative, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo enlisted the support of 56 other nations, 46 of which were only partly free or even not free, according to the group Freedom House. Apparently, he assumed that the more repressive the regime, such as Saudi Arabia, the better it understood what liberty was!)

There are a number of dangerous interventionist clichés. Anyone using them should be banned from policymaking for life.

**America is an exceptional nation with unique responsibilities.** Therefore, whatever it does is justified, good, and for the benefit of mankind. Anyone else doing the same thing is acting selfishly and for the detriment of mankind. This view plays out in endless ways. Most important, because Americans are so good, we are entitled to run the world, even bomb, invade, and occupy other nations at will. As Madeleine Albright understood, Washington gets to decide whether "the price is worth it" when it comes to killing hundreds of thousands of foreigners. And if the US is attacked, like 9/11, it is because we are so free, virtuous, and all around really sweet people – and certainly not because of anything we did.

**Spheres of influence are inappropriate.** Except for the Monroe Doctrine. Obviously, Washington is entitled to run the Western Hemisphere as a US territory. Military action is sometimes necessary to discipline errant states which mistakenly believe they are independent nations and thus are entitled to make their own decisions. However, in its great wisdom Washington is entitled to be for autocracy in the name of democracy whenever aiding dictatorships is thought to better serve America's interests. Which has been often over the years. None of these principles apply to anyone else, of course.

**Military aggression is an outrageous anachronism.** Except when America does it, like against Serbia and Iraq. And supporting Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates against Yemen. And

joining civil wars in Libya and Syria. Moreover, no US aggression is a precedent for anyone else. As other governments should long ago have learned, only Washington gets to do whatever it wants irrespective of what anyone else wants. Other governments are required to ask America for permission to do the same.

**Military force must be the foundation of diplomacy.** Otherwise negotiations might fail when other nations realize that they can refuse US dictates. Which obviously is unacceptable since, as noted earlier, America is an exceptional nation with unique responsibilities entitled to do anything that it wants. Indeed, no country has the right to resist Washington's demands, which reflect the mandate of heaven. Of course, no other government has the right to threaten any other country – ever. Certainly, China and Russia should not be allowed to talk dirty to any of their neighbors, like Georgia and Taiwan, respectively.

**Red lines must be enforced and credibility must be preserved.** To prevent other nations from doing things we don't like – invading Crimea or Taiwan, building nuclear weapons, etc. – America must always be at war so it can always bomb weaker nations for defying the US. Indeed, Washington must always be prepared to intervene in the dumbest and most ridiculous circumstance even if against America's interests because otherwise nations will stop taking the US seriously and World War III is likely to erupt. Obviously, Obama's failure to bomb Syria over its use of chemical weapons is responsible for every ill today, including the willingness of Venezuela, Iran, Russia, and China to constantly defy America's instructions.

However, it is equally evident that other nations have no interest in red lines and credibility. Thus, none of them will decide to set red lines, such as entry into NATO. And none of them will act to preserve their credibility, by, for instance, interfering with Gulf oil traffic, bombarding US bases in Iraq, and upping nuclear reprocessing, as Iran has done. Foreigners are never as determined, brave, or tough as Americans. Never.

**US policy toward rogue states always should be firmer than before.** The US must be tougher toward Syria, North Korea, Russia, China, and Iran, to prevent them from misbehaving. If only the Obama administration had been serious enough, a liberal, democratic pro-Western government would have taken over in Syria. Pyongyang would have abandoned nuclear weapons and respected human rights. Russia would have surrendered Crimea and defenestrated Vladimir Putin. China would have become liberal, capitalist, and democratic. Iran would have ended the Islamic Republic and turned regional leadership over to Saudi Arabia and Israel. All to be followed by the Second Coming and the lion lying down with the lamb.

At first glance it might seem that sanctions failed to achieve their promised results against all these nations. That threats of war only spurred countries' armaments – including nuclear – programs. And that US attempts to punish adversaries triggered a harsh response, such as Russian military intervention in Syria, aggressive Chinese maneuvers in Asia-Pacific waters, myriad Iranian provocations, and ruthless military actions in the Syrian civil war. However, if Washington just perseveres and exercises leadership, all will be well.

**America should not let other countries do what we don't like.** For instance, Washington should not have "let" Russia take Crimea, communism survive in Cuba, China build artificial

islands and launch the Belt and Road Initiative, Venezuela defy US demands for regime change, Iran reprocess nuclear fuel, and Bashar al-Assad remain in power in Syria. Although the US attempted to prevent or reverse all these actions, feckless American presidents obviously did not do enough.

Never mind the faint of heart who dismiss Washington's ability to force other nations to submit. True, diplomatic pronouncements have turned into wasted breath. Sanctions have hurt populations more than their governments. And the public has opposed wars over stakes that were peripheral at best for the US. However, such failures only demonstrate the need for stronger leadership at home!

**Doing nothing would be worse.** If America doesn't run the world, the inevitable result will be global tyranny. Or anarchy. Or something equally bad. Obviously, not acting has consequences which are hard to measure. It should be self-evident that doom is inevitable if Americans don't fulfill their destiny to make the world safe for democracy, liberalism, wokedom, or whatever else becomes the latest fad to dominate Washington.

Never mind the fact that all of America's military adventures over the last two decades have turned out worse, and sometimes much worse, than predicted. As do most wars for the US and other nations. Although the US government has demonstrated little aptitude for global social engineering, which requires transcending history, geography, ideology, culture, religion, tradition, and more, surely next time the same people suffering the same deficiencies and employing the same strategies will do better.

**We must fight our enemies overseas before they come to America.** Only by waging endless wars and staying in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, and everywhere else forever can we prevent others from attacking America. Never mind the fact that most foreigners, such as the Taliban and Islamic State, are focused on creating and/or ruling their own territories. And that constantly intervening overseas is why many of Washington's enemies acted in the first place: Such as supporting multiple Arab dictatorships, backing decades of Israeli occupation over Palestinians, warring against Muslim lands, taking sides in Mideast civil wars, and deploying troops to Arab nations. Having put Americans at risk by intervening promiscuously, Washington now has no choice but to continue intervening promiscuously. Indeed, from the standpoint of Public Choice Economics endless wars has the advantage of creating endless enemies, thereby ensuring the need for endless intervention, creating the perfect endless bureaucratic loop.

The Blob is forever. Even under President Donald Trump the Blob was in charge. The Beltway's bipartisan War Party remained active. At least Trump remained somewhat resistant to Washington's deadly charms: unlike his predecessors, he started no new wars.

Unfortunately, Joe Biden is a charter member of the Blob. If he cares about his legacy – and, more important, America – he should avoid the interventionist clichés. His overriding objective should be to end old rather than start new wars. Then, whatever else happens during his tenure, he at least would be remembered for promoting peace.

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