

# ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

## **John McCain was a brave man but his foreign policy was dangerously belligerent**

Doug Bandow

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John McCain was a brave man, from his time spent as a POW in Vietnam to his final battle against cancer. May he rest in peace.

However, his public career warrants a harsher judgment. Indeed, we should bury his aggressive, militarized foreign policy along with him. Had he been elected president in 2008 many more Americans and foreigners likely would have died unnecessarily.

McCain was one of the Senate's most ferocious advocate of military intervention, almost irrespective of circumstance. Over the last quarter century McCain favored aggressive war against Serbia, an endless democracy crusade in Afghanistan, the disastrous invasion of Iraq, the equally counterproductive destruction of Libya, a combat role in Syria's horrific civil war, and military aid for Saudi Arabia in its brutal aggression against Yemen.

He recklessly promoted Georgia against Russia in their short-lived war, advocated striking North Korea militarily, and sang about bombing Iran in a little ditty set to the Beach Boys' "Barbara Ann." McCain suggested that support for terrorism could justify attacking Iran, Libya, Syria, and even North Korea. He proposed creating a "no-fly" zone in Sudan and intervening in Nigeria against the Islamic terrorist group Boko Haram.

Last year he urged the Trump administration to "choose the Kurds" against Iran and Iraq, since for decades America "has protected them from attacks, both from within and outside Iraq." Ukraine was a disappointment, causing him to lament: "I do not see a military option and that is tragic."

His militaristic vision was flawed in multiple ways. First, he treated war as just another policy option, an answer to any number of problems from the mundane to the monstrous. He exhibited no reluctance to visiting death and destruction on other peoples and nations.

In none of the conflicts he backed was the nation's security seriously threatened. In most U.S. intervention actually increased the resulting humanitarian tragedy.

McCain also failed to appreciate the ill consequences of promiscuous intervention. For instance, the Iraq War predictably unleashed a virulent insurgency and sectarian conflict.

These, in turn, spawned ISIS, which spread death and failed to understand that the American people believed wars should have a point. As Iraq imploded, he advocated years more of combat despite what he admitted would be the high cost in lives and wealth; he later urged an occupation of 100 years if necessary.

McCain defined success in Afghanistan and Iraq as “the establishment of peaceful, stable, prosperous, democratic states that pose no threat to neighbors and contribute to the defeat of terrorists.” Yet a few locals with AK-47s and IEDs had a different vision, and after years of war Washington still has failed to meet McCain’s test. Good intentions are not enough to transcend history, culture, religion, ethnicity, geography, and ideology, as well as other people’s determination to rule oneself.

McCain’s support for democracy and human rights was largely rhetorical. McCain promoted a potpourri of dubious opposition/insurgent groups. After fomenting war in Libya, he acknowledged human rights abuses by the victorious rebels, who he previously termed “my heroes.”

He was a particular partisan of repressive Saudi Arabia, regurgitating Saudi talking points absolving Riyadh of the well-documented slaughter of civilians in Yemen. He was lauded for his fierce support for Israel, but showed little concern for millions of Palestinians living under military occupation.

In 2011 McCain predictably advocated war against Libya. Yet two years earlier he enjoyed a pleasant visit with Muammar el-Qaddafi, discussing potential rewards for the regime’s shift westward. McCain reported his “interesting meeting with an interesting man” in a tweet.

Despite his exaggerated support for military action, McCain was otherwise quite conventional in his foreign policy approach. Most importantly, he did not recognize how American policy might result in blowback, encouraging the very behavior which he claimed threatened America.

For instance, the only reason North Korea might target the U.S., which McCain argued would justify a preventive attack, is because the U.S. is in Northeast Asia, threatening the North. Yet the Korean War ended 65 years ago and South Korea has raced past the North, giving it the means to defend itself.

Sen. John McCain has been lauded as a foreign policy giant by more than his usual press advocates. However, he invariably chose the most confrontational position, resulting in almost inevitable failure and war.

Celebrate John McCain’s courage and fortitude. But reject his foreign policy. There is no better way to commemorate the life of yet another American serviceman who suffered in an unnecessary, counterproductive war.

*Doug Bandow is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute. A former special assistant to President Ronald Reagan, he is author of Foreign Follies: America’s New Global Empire.*