



## Ron Paul: A Lesser Evil?

by Charles Davis / April 28th, 2011

Ron Paul is far from perfect, but I'll say this much for the Texas congressman: He has never [authorized a drone strike](#) in Pakistan. He has never [authorized the killing](#) of dozens of women and children in Yemen. He hasn't protected torturers from prosecution and he hasn't overseen the torturous treatment of a 23-year-old young man for the "crime" of revealing the government's [criminal behavior](#).

Can the same be said for Barack Obama?

Yet, ask a good movement liberal or progressive about the two and you'll quickly be informed that, yeah, Ron Paul's good on the war stuff — yawn — but otherwise he's a no-good right-wing reactionary of the worst order, a guy who'd kick your Aunt Beth off Medicare and force her to turn tricks for blood-pressure meds. By contrast, Obama, war crimes and all, provokes no such visceral distaste. He's more cosmopolitan, after all — less Texas-y. He's a Democrat. And gosh, even if he's made a few mistakes, he means well.

Sure he's a murderer, in other words, but at least he's not a Republican!

Put another, even less charitable way: Democratic partisans — liberals — are willing to trade the lives of a couple thousand poor Pakistani tribesman in exchange for a few liberal catnip-filled speeches and NPR tote bags for the underprivileged. The number of party-line progressives who would vote for Ron Paul over Barack Obama wouldn't be enough to fill Conference Room B at the local Sheraton, with even harshest left-leaning critics of the president, like *Rolling Stone*'s Matt Taibbi, [saying](#) they'd prefer the mass-murdering sociopath to that kooky Constitution fetishist.

As someone who sees the electoral process as primarily a distraction, something that diverts energy and attention from more effective means of reforming the system, I don't much care if people don't vote for Ron Paul. In fact, if you're going to vote, I'd rather you cast a write-in ballot for Emma Goldman. But! I do have a problem with those who imagine themselves to be liberal-minded citizens of the world casting their vote for Barack Obama and propagating the notion that someone can bomb and/or militarily

occupy Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Somalia, Yemen and Libya and still earn more Progressive Points than the guy who would, you know, not do any of that.

Let's just assume the worst about Paul: that he's a corporate libertarian in the *Reason* magazine/Cato Institute mold that would grant Big Business and the financial industry license to do whatever the hell it wants with little in the way of accountability (I call this scenario the "status quo"). Let's say he dines on Labradoodle puppies while using their blood to scribble notes in the margins of his dog-eared, gold-encrusted copy of *Atlas Shrugged*.

So. Fucking. What.

Barack Obama isn't exactly Eugene Debs, after all. Hell, he's not even Jimmy Carter. The facts are: he's pushed for the largest military budget in world history, given trillions of dollars to Wall Street in bailouts and near-zero interest loans from the Federal Reserve, [protected oil companies like BP](#) from legal liability for environmental damages they cause – from poisoning the Gulf to [climate change](#) – and mandated that all Americans purchase the U.S. health insurance industry's product. You might argue Paul's a corporatist, but there's no denying Obama's one.

And at least Paul would – and this is important, I think – stop killing poor foreigners with cluster bombs and Predator drones. Unlike the Nobel Peace Prize winner-in-chief, Paul would also bring the troops home from not just Afghanistan and Iraq, but Europe, Korea and Okinawa. There'd be no need for a School of the Americas because the U.S. wouldn't be busy training foreign military personnel the finer points of human rights abuses. Israel would have to carry out its war crimes on its own dime.

Even on the most pressing domestic issues of the day, Paul strikes me as a hell of a lot more progressive than Obama. Look at the war on drugs: Obama has continued the same failed prohibitionist policies as his predecessors, maintaining a status quo that has placed 2.3 million – or one in 100 – Americans behind bars, the vast majority African-American and Hispanic. Paul, on the other hand, has called for ending the drug war and said he would pardon non-violent offenders, which would be the single greatest reform a president could make in the domestic sphere, equivalent in magnitude to [ending Jim Crow](#).

Paul would also stop providing subsidies to corporate agriculture, nuclear energy and fossil fuels, while [allowing class-action tort suits](#) to proceed against oil and coal companies for the environmental damage they have wrought. Obama, by contrast, is providing billions to coal companies under the guise of "clean energy" – see his administration's policies on carbon capture and sequestration, the fossil fuel-equivalent of missile defense – and promising billions more so mega-energy corporations can get started on that "[nuclear renaissance](#)" we've all heard so much about. And if Paul really did succeed in cutting all those federal departments he talks about, there's nothing to prevent states and local governments — and, I would hope, alternative social

organizations not dependent on coercion — from addressing issues such as health care and education. Decentralism isn't a bad thing.

All that aside, though, it seems to me that if you're going to style yourself a progressive, liberal humanitarian, your first priority really ought to be stopping your government from killing poor people. Second on that list? Stopping your government from putting hundreds of thousands of your fellow citizens in cages for decades at a time over non-violent "crimes" committed by consenting adults. Seriously: what the fuck? Social Security's great and all I guess, but not exploding little children with cluster bombs — shouldn't that be at the top of the Liberal Agenda?

Over half of Americans' income taxes go to the military-industrial complex and the costs of arresting and locking up their fellow citizens. On both counts, Ron Paul's policy positions are far more progressive than those held — and indeed, implemented — by Barack Obama. And yet it's Paul who's the reactionary of the two?

My sweeping, I'm hoping overly broad assessment: liberals, especially the pundit class, don't much care about dead foreigners. They're a political problem at best — will the Afghan war derail Obama's re-election campaign? — not a moral one. And liberals are more than willing to accept a few charred women and children in some country they'll never visit in exchange for increasing social welfare spending by 0.02 percent, or at least not cutting it by as much as a mean 'ol Rethuglican.

*Mother Jones'* Kevin Drum, for example, has chastised anti-Obama lefties, complaining that undermining — by way of accurately assessing and commenting upon — a warmonger of the Democratic persuasion is "extraordinarily self-destructive" to all FDR-fearing lefties.

"Just ask LBJ," Drum added. The historical footnote he left out: That LBJ was run out of office by the anti-war left because the guy was murdering hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese. But mass murder is no reason to oppose a Democratic president, at least not if you're a professional liberal.

There are exceptions: *Just Foreign Policy'*s Robert Naiman has a [piece](#) in *Truth Out* suggesting the anti-war left check out Gary Johnson, the former governor of New Mexico who's something of a Ron Paul-lite. But for too many liberals, it seems partisanship and the promise — not even necessarily the delivery, if you've been reading Obama's die-hard apologists — of infinitesimally more spending on domestic programs is more important than saving the lives of a few thousand innocent women and children who happen to live outside the confines of the arbitrary geopolitical entity known as the United States.

Another reason to root — if not vote — for Ron Paul: if there was a Republican in the White House, liberals just might start caring about the murder of non-Americans again.

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