



Isolationism: Unrealistic and Ahistorical

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March 25, 2023

Concern that some antiwar media personalities and backbenchers will ruin the Republicans as the party most faithful to a strong defense and foreign policy is not new. The conservative movement always has to contend with the libertarian (classical liberal) ideology that infiltrates as an advocate of capitalism but from whose very different roots spring a flood of foolish (and therefore dangerous) notions. Conservatives do not need theorists to tell them about the success of capitalism when world history provides abundant proof. That same history then makes hash of the broader libertarian view of international politics as illegitimate. As Ludwig von Mises claimed in *Omnipotent Government* "under free trade and free migration, no individual is concerned about the territorial size of his country." In this ideology, there is nothing larger than the individual, no sense of duty only personal gain. Arrogance is the driving emotion, the feeling that opportunities, even survival, are independent of the fate of the society in which the individual resides.

Consider the classical liberal approach to the conflicts that have dominated human affairs since there were humans (see *Waging War: Conflict, Culture and Innovation in World History* by Wayne E. Lee, the best one volume survey of some 5,500 years of groups finding better ways to defeat their rivals). There is British Radical Richard Cobden's silly claim 175 years ago that "commerce" was "the grand panacea" and that under its influence "the motive for large and mighty empires, for gigantic armies and great fleets would die away." French economist Frederic Bastiat agreed, stating "we place this indirect and social effect a thousand times above the direct or purely economic effect." He is often cited at the libertarian Cato Institute. Their ideas led directly to the recent globalization mania from whose debilitating effects we are trying to recover. The reality is that from Cobden's "commerce" comes the wealth and capabilities that create the gigantic armies and fleets that contend for control of world affairs. China's rise is just the current chapter.

But reality means nothing to ideologues who live in imaginary worlds. In 1849, Bastiat proclaimed "I shall not hesitate to vote for disarmament because I do not believe in invasions." Yet, what would he do if Russia again invaded France? "I sincerely believe that the best thing we could do would be to receive them well, to give them a taste of the sweetness of our wines, to

show them our stores, our museums, the happiness of our people, the mildness and equality of our penal laws, after which we should say to them: Return as quickly as possible to your steppes and tell your brothers what you have seen.” The Ukrainians will not have any luck with this approach since it is Vladimir Putin’s desire to not just visit but to conquer their land. It certainly didn’t work when Germany invaded France three times.

When I served on the GOP staff of the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee. Rep. Ron Paul (R-TX) was a member. A prominent libertarian, he felt it was his duty to prevent war with Iran by defending Tehran at every hearing and denying that the U.S. has any “right” to interfere with Iran’s policies including its nuclear weapons program.

Paul spoke at the “Rage Against the War Machine” rally in Washington February 23. His rage was not against Russia for starting the war,



but against the U.S. for helping Kyiv defend itself. This slant is common but was made dramatically so when radical Left activists took over the event waving Russian flags, including some old Soviet banners to celebrate Russia’s return to the fight against Western “imperialism.” The new leftist slogan beyond “No to NATO” is “The U.S. War Against Russia in Ukraine” meant to portray Putin as the victim.

Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY) follows in his father's footsteps. In a March 17 fundraising email, he claimed "We can't afford to continue sending our sons and daughters into harm's way simply because Democrats and the Neocons enjoy supporting the military-industrial complex." If this rhetoric sounds like it came from Code Pink or ANSWER it should not be a surprise. Sen. Paul's attempt to put a partisan spin on his appeal cannot hide how often he has partnered with Sen. Bernie Sanders (D-VT) to undercut national security policy. He should also be reminded that it wasn't Neocons who invaded Ukraine, it was Russians. Putin is not some petty warlord harassing humanitarian aid convoys. He has launched what NATO has correctly identified as a threat to "global security. Russia's energy blackmail, its impact on global food supplies, its malign hybrid activities, its worldwide disinformation campaign, and its irresponsible nuclear rhetoric demonstrate clearly Russia's disregard for international norms and the welfare of billions of people around the world." Putin is trying to overturn the outcome of the Cold War when Eastern Europe, including Ukraine, won its freedom as the Soviet Union collapsed under U.S.-led pressure.

And Putin is not alone. He has just met with China's Xi Jinping to reconfirm their quest for a new world order. As Yar Xuetong, a Chinese thinker who has held high posts under Xi, stated in his book *Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers*, "attaining world domination is the main strategic interest of rising states" like China, and once attained, "the new international leadership will reform the existing international norms in such a way as to ensure optimum durability of their own state's leading position."

To the libertarians, these larger issues which give the Ukrainian cause both moral and strategic worth mean nothing. As the Cato Institute says about the war "The U.S. military [which they want to cut] exists to defend the United States and its citizens, not to repel aggression across the world." This extreme form of isolationism is both unrealistic and ahistorical. The U.S. originated as colonies of a global empire. It won its independence with the help of foreign powers that intervened with money, weapons, and troops. French soldiers and warships helped General Washington win at Yorktown, and the Spanish siege of Gibraltar played its part as well. War and diplomacy paved the way west for the new United States. Even during the Civil War, Union warships battled insurgents who were attacking Western traders in Japan. By the end of the 19th Century, the U.S. was the largest industrial economy in the world, which gave it the means to become the Arsenal of Democracy and leader of the Free World in the 20th Century, beating back the forces of evil time and again. This is a history to be proud of. Tragically, we have not prevailed in all our attempts to shape a better world. Horrendous things have happened to those we have failed to protect. Irresolution is our source of shame.

I've travelled across the globe in both private and official capacities. Other Americans are always there ahead of me doing good work as entrepreneurs, scientists, educators, doctors, missionaries, reformers, soldiers, and diplomats. America was populated by people from everywhere, and their descendants have gone out everywhere. We are the lead nation in the lead civilization of our time. Yet, there are people who are tired of being on top. They want to crawl under their beds to take a nap. Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-FL) actually named his bill to end all aid to Kyiv the "Ukraine Fatigue Resolution." Heroic people are fighting for survival against an

invading army, their cities being bombed and their children being kidnapped (the war crime for which the International Criminal Court has charged Putin), but it is Gaetz sitting safely in his Washington office who is feeling “fatigued?”

Realists are properly placed on the Right side of the spectrum. In America, that means working to “conserve” the principles and policies that built this country into the preeminent power in a contentious world. Those with other agendas need to look elsewhere.