

December 30, 2011

# HUFF POST POLITICS

THE INTERNET NEWSPAPER: NEWS BLOGS VIDEO COMMUNITY



**Doug Bandow**

*Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute*

GET UPDATES FROM DOUG BANDOW



238

## Irresponsible Foreign Policy: The Republican Establishment, Not Ron Paul

Posted: 12/30/11 10:11 AM ET



Even loyal Republicans are disheartened by their choices this year: the man who flips and flops whenever convenient, the official turned lobbyist who imagines he is Churchill (or maybe Caesar) reincarnated, and the governor with memory problems. But the man the GOP elite most fear is a genial 76-year-old congressman from Texas. He actually believes in something and remembers what it is. And he has been largely right on the big issues.

Of course, Rep. Ron Paul suffers from some self-inflicted problems. But for most of his critics what most matters is his stand on the issues. Especially on foreign policy. If the Republicans ignore him they deserve to lose the 2012 election.

A decade ago President George W. Bush chose arrogance over humility as his foreign policy. Since then virtually every Republican presidential candidate has embraced his philosophy of endless war: in effect, the GOP mantra is "we're all neoconservatives now."

Only Paul (and Gary Johnson, excluded from most of the debates) challenge America's role as a de facto empire. Paul observed that conservatives enjoyed spending money, only "on different things. They like embassies, and they like occupation. They like the empire. They like to be in 135 countries and 700 bases."

All of Paul's establishment GOP opponents support defending a gaggle of prosperous and populous "welfare queens" around the world. Rick Santorum warned: as commander-in-chief Ron Paul "can shut down our bases in Germany. He can shut down the bases in Japan. He can pull our fleets back."

Why would this be bad? The European nations have a larger GDP and population than America. The U.S. faces fiscal crisis: after 66 years, it is time for [the Europeans to defend themselves](#). Japan, long possessing the world's second largest economy, also [could take care of itself](#).

Americans must worry about the transition of power in North Korea primarily because nearly 30,000 U.S. troops remain on station in the South. Yet South Korea has about 40 times the GDP and twice the population of the North. Why, nearly six decades after the end of the Korean War, are Americans still [paying for Seoul's defense](#)? Observed Paul: "How long do we have to stay in Korea? We were there since I was in high school."

No less bizarre is the new-found Republican love affair with nation-building. [It is widely recognized](#) -- outside of neoconservative think tanks and Republican presidential campaigns, anyway -- that Iraq was a disaster. The war, fought under false pretenses, killed thousands of Americans, wounded tens of thousands more, killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, drove millions more from their homes, and will end up costing Americans trillions of dollars. The chief beneficiary of Bush's foolish misadventure was Iran.

Yet the GOP presidential contenders criticized the Obama administration for not forcing Iraq's elected government from accepting a continued U.S. military presence. For instance, Mitt Romney denounced this "astonishing failure." Left unmentioned was the fact that the year-end departure was negotiated by *George W. Bush*. Anyway, [it would be foolish to keep America forever entangled](#) in Mesopotamia.

Most of the other Republican contenders, except Ambassador Jon Huntsman, have similarly defended Washington's endless nation-building exercise in Afghanistan. Santorum demanded that we achieve "victory," whatever that means. Romney said that he would listen to the counsel of the military commanders -- as if that would relieve him of making an independent decision as president.

Most Americans agreed with the original objective of wrecking al-Qaeda and ousting the Taliban but now want out. [And rightly so](#). No "conservative" should sacrifice Americans' lives and wealth in an attempt to create a strong, effective, and honest central government in Afghanistan, something which never before has existed.

As if these wars were not enough, Romney backed the [counterproductive intervention in Libya](#). (To Michele Bachmann's credit, she was opposed.) Newt Gingrich ended up on both sides of that war. Romney and Gingrich also suggested undermining the Syrian government through covert action. Rick Perry advocated imposing a no-fly zone there. Why do they believe America needs [another war to fight](#)?

Even more pitiful is the reflexive war-mongering against Iran. "You have to take whatever steps are necessary to break its capacity to have a nuclear weapon," declared Gingrich. Romney and Perry pronounced their willingness to use military action. Gingrich and Santorum advocated covert action to kill Iranian scientists and disrupt

Iranian activities. Gingrich also demanded that the U.S. pursue "regime replacement." Romney urged indicting Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for "genocide." Bachmann charged that talking with Iranian officials was "appeasement." Even the normally measured Huntsman pronounced Iran as "an example of when I would use American force." One imagines the GOP contenders enthusiastically dancing the Maori Haka, as if exuberant shouts and chants were enough to defend America.

Republicans once elected war heroes, like Dwight Eisenhower, who understood the reality of war and sought to avoid it. This year Republican voters seem to favor draft avoiders in the mold of [Richard "I had other priorities" Cheney](#) whose desire to wreak death and destruction on other peoples expands as their refusal to serve when their country called grows more distant. When asked why none of his five sons had served, Romney explained that "one of the ways my sons are showing support for our nation is helping get me elected." (Perhaps they felt that working for their dad was a bit like serving in Fallujah.)

There are good reasons to try to keep nuclear weapons out of Iran's hands, but the costs of military action likely would be horrendous. Moreover, every additional threat to attack Iran only more clearly demonstrates to Tehran the necessity of developing nuclear weapons.

Paul warned: "I'm afraid what's going on right now is similar to the war propaganda that went on against Iraq." No surprise, none of the establishment Republicans acknowledged that U.S. intelligence agencies failed to confirm the existence of a nuclear weapons program.

Worse, Gingrich apocalyptically claimed that the U.S. "would never, ever be safe" with the current regime in Tehran. Yet America survived decades of Stalin's Soviet Union, Mao's China, and Kim Il-sung's and Kim Jong-il's North Korea. Deterrence worked. America's military power remains overwhelming; any attack on the U.S. would lead to Tehran's destruction. And no Republican has offered evidence that Iran's rulers are suicidal.

On Israel the pandering is fearsome to behold. The leading Republicans uniformly embrace Israel's extreme Likud-dominated government and celebrate Israel's right to treat millions of Palestinians as helots, with neither economic opportunity nor political sovereignty.

Several GOP contenders advocate attacking Iran to defend Israel, even though the latter is a regional superpower possessing a couple hundred nuclear weapons. Romney said his first foreign visit as president would be to Israel. Bachmann promised to move the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Gingrich said he would consider freeing [convicted Israeli spy Jonathan Pollard](#).

Perry said God told him what to do about Israel: "as a Christian I have a clear directive to support Israel, so from my perspective it's pretty easy." (Alas, figuring out what that

means is not so easy for those [who do not share his particular eschatological Biblical views](#).) Most pathetic, though, is Romney who, after giving a foreign policy speech with the usual formulaic call for American leadership, promised not to act in the Middle East without the approval of Israeli leaders. Such groveling can only inspire contempt in Israel.

Finally, only Paul acknowledges that [an interventionist foreign policy encourages terrorism](#). Seeking an explanation for terrorism obviously does not excuse it. But his opponents appear to be astonished at the argument that killing other people and occupying their lands may cause them to retaliate against America. The Republicans prefer to believe that "they hate us because we are perfect." For instance, Santorum declared that Americans were attacked "because we have a civilization that is antithetical to the civilization of the jihadists. And they want to kill us because of who we are and what we stand for."

Those may be comforting thoughts to people unfamiliar with U.S. foreign policy, but they are profoundly misguided. The U.S. embassy in Tehran was not occupied because the Iranian people were shocked that American women went about life without a veil. Rather, there was deep-seated animosity toward Washington for having help engineer the coup that brought the Shah to power in 1953 and consistently supported his repressive government thereafter.

The U.S. embassy and Marine Corps barracks were not attacked in Lebanon in 1983 because Islamic extremists were angry about America's First Amendment freedoms. American facilities were attacked because Washington placed U.S. forces in the middle of a civil war. The *USS New Jersey* sat offshore and bombarded Muslim villages. President Ronald Reagan had the good sense to respond [by getting out](#), rather than launch a full-scale invasion and attempt to remake Lebanon in America's image.

The Khobar Towers apartment complex in Saudi Arabia was not attacked because Islamic fundamentalists were horrified by American MTV. The U.S. stationed troops in [the brutally repressive kingdom](#) to support the Saudi monarchy. Even Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz admitted that the U.S. military presence on Saudi soil was a grievance that animated Osama bin Laden.

Today Washington claims the inherent, absolute, and unreviewable right to kill other peoples. When then-UN Ambassador Madeleine Albright was challenged over the human cost of Iraqi sanctions, [she answered](#) "We think the price is worth it." Unfortunately, other peoples are prepared to respond in kind, [including against American civilians](#). Any sensible foreign policy must honestly consider costs as well as benefits.

Paul's willingness to rethink U.S. foreign policy means he is the only candidate to propose [a realistic military budget](#), one that supports the "common defense" of America, not the rest of the world. The other GOP candidates decry nonexistent spending cuts. Military outlays under President Obama [are higher](#) than under President Bush. Only in Washington is slowing the rate of increased called a "cut."

In real terms U.S. military outlays have doubled over the last decade. America today spends more in real terms than it did during the Cold War, Korean War, or Vietnam War. Washington accounts for roughly half the globe's military outlays, while allied with every major industrialized state other than China and Russia. America's closest competitor is China, yet Washington alone spends several times as much on the military as Beijing, and many U.S. friends in Asia are arming against China.

This isn't all. Most of the GOP contenders -- again other than Paul and in this case Huntsman -- endorse torture. For all of their talk about American exceptionalism, the Republicans see the U.S. as a beleaguered, virtually helpless giant, [which must sacrifice its very being](#) to survive. This depressing picture is unworthy of America. This may be why service members ([at least who have contributed to candidates](#)) have overwhelmingly backed Paul, one of only two veterans in the race.

The response to Ron Paul's foreign policy views raises the question: Can the Republican Party any longer be taken seriously on national security issues? Over the last decade the GOP has needlessly sacrificed Americans' lives, wasted Americans' wealth, overextended America's military, violated Americans' liberties, and trashed America's reputation. As a result, we are less prosperous, free, [and secure](#). If the Republican Party refuses to learn from Rep. Paul, it does not deserve the public's trust.