



What Is To Be Done?

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In the midst of an election in which the issues are largely ignored in favor of sensationalism and smears, the anti-interventionist voter is pretty much at sea. Hillary Clinton's demagogic Russia-baiting of Trump as a Kremlin "puppet" augurs a foreign policy that will take us back to the arctic winter of the cold war, circa 1950. On the other hand, the GOP nominee, for all his encouraging "America first" rhetoric and his stated unwillingness to get into another arms race with the former Soviet Union, would likely take us into other quagmires – ISIS, China, Iran – and, in any event, cannot be trusted.

So what is to be done?

The first thing is to disabuse yourself of the notion that any politician or political party currently prominent will magically get us out of the business of Empire. This isn't to say that political action is wrong, or ineffective – far from it. What I'm saying is that *it is up to us* to build a movement out of which a new politics of peace and liberty can be nurtured and brought to maturity.

Our second task is to take stock of our assets: what kind of shape is the anti-interventionist movement in, and what are our prospects for future growth?

The first part of that question is easily answered: there is no anti-interventionist movement, as such, and there hasn't been for quite some time. Oh sure, there are scattered organizations and individuals with a public platform, but none of these have a truly national presence.

Yes, Antiwar.com is one such voice with not insignificant reach, but we aren't an organization – we're a web site. We don't have chapters, support groups, members, etc., and have quite deliberately avoided setting up any such network for the simple reason that we don't have the resources to do so. Every movement has different components that specialize in various functions, and our specialty is education. That is, we give our readers the information they need in order to understand the problem, but as far as *acting* to eliminate the problem – that's a mission we must leave to others.

The big problem is that there *are* no "others" – no action groups, no lobbyists, no real grassroots organizations that can respond to events as they occur, and mobilize the public against the War

Party. The “movement,” such as it is, is top-heavy with thinktanks – the Cato Institute, the Center for the National Interest, the Ron Paul Institute, and the newly-organized student-oriented John Quincy Adams Society come to mind – and sorely lacking at the grassroots: essentially, a head with no body.

This isn't because there is no potential for such a grassroots movement: indeed, the objective conditions are ripe – I would say *overripe* – for such an undertaking. Polls consistently show that the American people are increasingly skeptical – and that is really too weak a word – of foreign entanglements, and basically endorse a foreign policy of minding our own business. This sentiment is one major – and deliberately overlooked – aspect of the populist “resentment” that catapulted Trump to the top of the GOP ticket and upended the political prognostications of the “experts.” The idea of putting America first – instead of, say, Europe, or the Saudis, or whichever country we're supposedly “liberating” at great cost – has visceral appeal to ordinary Americans.

The astonishing fact of the matter is that, a few short years ago, the GOP was the spearhead of the War Party, with militant neoconservatives at its head – and is, today, the party of a man who said we were lied into the Iraq war, who wants to basically dismantle NATO, and who has adopted “America First” – a slogan resonant with historical meaning – as his campaign theme.

When I was a kid I used to play a game with a good friend of mine: what would we do if we had a million dollars? Of course, I'm really dating myself, because today, of course, a million dollars is chump change. In any case, this column is basically a reiteration of that game: what would I do if I had the resources to organize a real grassroots anti-interventionist movement?

Well, the very first thing I would do is to organize those millions of Trump voters attracted to his banner for precisely the reason the neocons and the foreign policy “experts” disdain him. Item number one on my agenda would be creating a grassroots America First movement, one with the following three components:

- The America First Action (AFA) groups – the function of this organization is implied in its name. Its mission would be to respond to every move by the War Party to involve us in some foreign war by rapidly mobilizing people against it. At the first indication that such a move was in the works, congressional phone lines would be ringing off the hook with howls of protest. This is what happened when President Obama announced he was going to bomb Syria – and it worked, with very little central direction. Aside from telephonic harassment of congressional warmongers, AFA would organize meetings, rallies, lecture tours, media appearances, Internet trolling (my favorite!), and every other form of public activity, always focused like a laser on the War Party's latest scheme.
- The America First Political Action Committee – the electoral arm of the America First movement, AFPAC would help candidates from any and all political parties who oppose foreign wars and entangling alliances. This is one of our greatest weaknesses: currently, the War Party's tame politicians are well-rewarded for their labors, while pro-peace candidates are routinely punished financially. The military-industrial-congressional complex takes care of its own – we must do the same. Yes, the war profiteers have

tremendous resources but we can best them at their own game by appealing to the millions of Americans who are sick and tired of perpetual war.

- The America First Lobby – while a different name would probably be best, I’m calling it a lobby because that is precisely its function. While practically every foreign government on earth has a Washington-based lobby, which meets with government officials and presses its case for more “foreign aid,” and often direct military intervention on their behalf – the American people have no such organization, no lobby to pursue and defend their interests. I would take as my model AIPAC, the notoriously powerful pro-Israel lobby, which practically storms Capitol Hill every time Bibi Netanyahu gives the signal. If only anti-interventionist Americans would do the same every time war clouds gather on the horizon, we would put an end to our foreign policy of constant warfare once and for all.

These three components of a newly constituted America First movement would be supplemented by subsidiary groups targeting specific constituencies. First and foremost, what’s needed is a student affiliate – it’s been a long time since we’ve heard “Hell no, we won’t go!” on the nation’s campuses. And what about abolishing draft registration? Hillary Clinton wants to force women to register for the draft – why isn’t this horrific proposal roiling the student bodies of universities and high schools across the country?

African-Americans suffer from our foreign policy of global intervention much more than most others: they are, too often, the cannon fodder that feeds the war machine, and if they return they come home to an economy drained by the diversion of vital resources toward war-making and away from productive job-creating and wealth-creating investment.

Racial minorities, women, rural communities – all these groups suffer inordinately as a consequence of an internationalist elite that sacrifices our sons and daughters on the altar of the war god. They can and must be won over to the cause of peace.

Such a movement isn’t a pipedream. It *can* be born – and it can prosper to the extent that it organizes itself according to a strategic vision that unites people of various political persuasions around a single issue – intransigent opposition to military intervention abroad.

“Peace” movements launched by the left have failed because they took a multi-issue approach: each and every leftist hobbyhorse was invoked to the point where the central issue – war and peace – was overshadowed. The organizers of these efforts, which have fallen by the wayside by the dozen, thought they were organizing a political party, which is why these movements never got off the ground. The one time they did manage to achieve some success – the antiwar protests of the 1960s – was when they junked the multi-issue approach, and focused on the single issue of getting us out of Vietnam.

The potential is there for such a movement today – but only if we cast aside our preconceptions and prejudices, and work to bring together elements that would naturally tend to split apart. Libertarians and Trumpists, Bernie Sanders supporters and “isolationist” conservatives, students at elite universities and rural folks who object to being used as cannon fodder – all must be united in a common cause to put America first, and rid ourselves of the albatross of empire.

It can be done. It must be done. But will it be done? I can't answer that question: what I can say is that you, my readers, have the power to do it. Now, if only you have the will....