



Why the War Party Insists Intervention Is Always Necessary

Otherwise there Would be Consequences!

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The world seems in chaos, a dream come true for Washington's War Party as it continues to press for a battle or two on every continent. However, this campaign for perpetual intervention and endless war by the Blob, as the foreign policy establishment is known, has lost public support.

Even President Joe Biden, a captive of the conventional wisdom for nearly a half century, turned on Neoconservatives and liberal interventionists, withdrawing from Afghanistan. Before him President Donald Trump publicly trashed leading hawks, denounced US "aggression," and admitted that America wasn't so different from other nations in killing foreigners.

The War Party's biggest problem, however, is its string of disasters. Little more need be said about Afghanistan, in which the Taliban emerged stronger than before, with enough US-supplied weapons to open a global Arms-R-Us. Libya stumbles along hoping for a political solution after a decade of civil war, with American allies and adversaries divided between two warring "governments." Backed by US aid the Saudis will soon enter their 7th year of ravaging Yemen for fun and profit.

Iraq remains a political wreck and is widely recognized to have been an American created catastrophe. Washington invaded based on a lie, triggered a sectarian conflict, caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands of civilians and displacement of millions of people, destroyed historic communities of Christians and other religious minorities, unleashed the Islamic State, and strengthened Iran. Heck 'uva job, Uncle Sam!

Although Washington failed to oust Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, it now imposes sanctions designed to punish the already impoverished Syrian people and prevent them from rebuilding their nation. The final indignity for the usual pro-intervention suspects is that at the very moment the War Party looks most vulnerable its one supposed success, the Balkans, appears to be falling apart.

Washington and Brussels "solved" the Yugoslav civil wars by insisting that Bosnians remain in a hated and artificial tripartite state. For nearly 30 years a European Union colonial viceroy or governor, the so-called "High Representative," has imperiously ruled that land, constantly subjecting residents to allied diktat. However, the Serbian enclave, which once fought to become the independent Republika of Srpska, is on the verge of seceding, with unknown but potentially dramatic consequences.

If the Dayton Agreement collapses, what will Washington's inveterate hawks then point to as a success? Haiti? Somalia? Panama? Grenada? Or will they just return to their one trusted standby, World War II? Alas, the Blob doesn't have much to show for all the lives sacrificed and money wasted in recent years. But then, members of the War Party usually spend their time far from the battle plotting new conflicts, allowing others to fight and die.

Still, advocates of perpetual intervention continue to tell the American people that there is no alternative. Staying out of the world's battles just isn't an option, no matter what common folks want. The unsophisticated masses need to listen to their betters and go off to fight and die when instructed to do so for the good of humanity, yadda, yadda.

A hint of that came through in a recent discussion of Syria, one of the great human tragedies in recent history – and one for which Americans, thankfully, do not bear most of the responsibility, in contrast to Afghanistan and Iraq. Syria is a conflict in which the War Party was constantly frustrated at its inability to push Uncle Sam all in. The grand plans for no-fly zones, bombing and drone campaigns, and perhaps much more never came to fruition.

CNN correspondent Clarissa Ward recently was asked what she learned from covering the conflict. She evidently believed that Washington had no choice but to jump into the nationwide charnel house. She imparted what she evidently viewed as wisdom from on-high: "Nonintervention is a form of policy too. And this is a really, like, mind-blowing idea to a lot of people who understandably think if we just don't get involved it's not our problem. Aha. That's not the way the world works. If you're the leading superpower in the world, it's always going to end up being your problem."

She cited the conflict's consequences – refugees to Europe, rise of ISIS, control of Syria's Idlib by an al-Qaeda affiliate, and increased Russian influence – arguing that "because there was such a reluctance to engage actively and in meaningful policy as opposed to lip service in Syria that was just allowed to kind of flourish." Looking at these results, she added: "it becomes abundantly clear that even when the US doesn't want to be involved and doesn't want to have an ownership role there are going to be consequences. Everything has consequences. So then you have to ask how do you choose how to be engaged. And how can you take a more responsible role in how you engage?"

Although passionately advanced, this is a farrago of nonsense surrounding one incontrovertible fact. The latter is that everything has consequences. Which obviously includes not acting. However, Ward's apparent assumption that this basic truth requires the US to join presumably every war, conflict, tragedy, crisis, disaster, challenge, problem, predicament, mess, disappointment, bother, and inconvenience elsewhere around the globe is bizarre. To the

contrary, if Washington takes its duty to the America people seriously – sadly rare in today’s world – the balance should weigh strongly against intervening.

First, the US government has a special responsibility to the American people. That doesn’t mean American lives are more valuable than other lives, but that the US political system is created, staffed, and funded by Americans. Washington’s primary duty is to its own political community. Thus, the ill consequences to Americans must be weighed more heavily than to other peoples. Efforts to advance US interests should be constrained by respect for the rights of others, but Washington officials have neither moral nor legal warrant to launch grand crusades with American lives and money.

Second, the lesson of government generally, so well encapsulated by the Public Choice school of economics, is that power tends to corrupt, institutions have their own incentives, US officials usually are woefully ignorant and insensitive, and efforts to transcend history, religion, custom, geography, ethnicity, religion, and more typically fail. Thus, the case against foreign intervention strengthens as objectives grow in ambition, require increased force, and are more distantly applied. Consider nation-building in Afghanistan, located in Central Asia surrounded by Russia, China, India, Pakistan, and Iran: Is there a dumber idea? Joining a civil war in the Middle East: almost as stupid, but much worse when done multiple times (Lebanon, Libya, Yemen, Syria).

Third, the record of US military interventions is extremely poor. Until the Korean War, Washington typically defeated its opponents. However, even then the end games rarely went smoothly. The Spanish-American War led to brutal suppression of Filipino independence activists. The World War I settlement imposed at Versailles lasted just a generation. In Korea the US barely sustained the original status quo. The Republic of Vietnam survived America’s military departure by just two years.

Paradoxically, America’s experience has worsened as its power has increased. The Afghan government *folded before the last American troops left!* While this dismal record might not automatically foreclose future intervention, it certainly sets a very high standard of proof that the next promised cakewalk likely would be different.

Fourth, nothing in logic or experience indicates that US involvement normally would yield a superior outcome compared to abstinence. Of course, the world is full of horrendous conflicts in which the situation *could* be improved. And had America acted differently it *might* have achieved better results – in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and Yemen. However, even though the form of Washington’s involvement varied dramatically among these wars none succeeded. Washington policymakers exhibited scarcely any aptitude, even the most minimal skill, knowledge, understanding, or wisdom, at foreign social engineering. Officials were much more practiced at dissembling to each other and the American people. There is no reason to assume that they will do better next time: expecting the next intervention to work well represents the ever-popular triumph of hope over experience.

Fifth, in plenty of cases staying out looks like the better outcome. In Afghanistan Washington bequeathed the people the same government after years of tragic, disastrous war. Although urban Afghanistan developed, Americans delivered hell to rural residents, who lived in what became

the chief battlefields. Had the US left in 2001 after ousting the Taliban and wrecking al-Qaeda, at worst Afghanistan would have had the Taliban eventually back *without* American involvement and *without* two decades of war and tens of thousands of dead civilians.

Staying out of Vietnam would have yielded the same political result for that country – control by a communist government – without the mass slaughter and destruction that resulted from years of war. It is difficult to imagine how the ultimate outcome of World War I, a Europe infected with communism, fascism, and Nazism and ready for an even greater conflict a generation later, could have been worse without America's participation.

Sixth, being a superpower insulates America from the adverse impact of many foreign events. A great power may find itself touched by almost everything happening everywhere. However, very little looms large for a country as powerful and wealthy as America. Economic, political, and military events that would cripple other countries often are barely noticed by the US. Issues "end up being" America's problem, as Ward contended, only if Americans accept the burden imposed by others. Hence the sustained campaign by the usual establishment suspects to convince US citizens that they have no choice.

Consider Syria. The conflict's consequences were awful, but primarily born by its neighbors. Had Washington not intervened against the Islamic State, virtually every government in the region would have had to refocus its energy on a force that threatened all of them. Washington's intervention allowed Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to shift to the invasion of Yemen; Syria focused on combating non-ISIS forces, especially those backed by America. Turkey might have felt pressure to drop its emphasis on the Syrian Kurds. Virtually every nation in the region was only too happy to allow Washington to take over the problem.

The world is simultaneously fascinating and tragic, productive and murderous, enlightened and bestial. Americans should engage it at all levels, doing their best to improve what they can. However, their lives and wealth do not belong to the elites who dominate policy in the Imperial City, otherwise known as Washington, D.C.

Ultimately American foreign policy should serve the interests of the American people. Which means blocking Washington elites the next time they seek to loose the dogs of war. Contra the Siren's song that US intervention is inevitable, going to war is a choice, one which the American people should decide.

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