



The Koch Brothers Are More Anti-War Than The Center For American Progress

By [J. Arthur Bloom](#)
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Wednesday night in DC, MIT professor Barry Posen took aim at Washington's bipartisan foreign policy consensus, arguing for a guiding ethic of restraint, as opposed to the "liberal hegemony" currently endorsed by both Democratic and Republican elites.

The [lecture](#), sponsored by the Charles Koch Institute and held at the Mayflower Hotel, is another piece of evidence pointing toward a meeting of minds between libertarians and foreign policy realists, neither of whom enjoy much sway in the GOP at present. The case could be made that they need each other: No voter is going to get excited by something called realism, but the non-interventionist foreign policy views of many libertarians are often not well articulated, and don't enjoy much intellectual clout.

Rand Paul has realized this. A week ago in New York he rolled out his case for "conservative realism" at a dinner hosted by the Center for the National Interest.

The case for a more sober look at American power, as Posen tells it, goes something like this: The fall of the Soviet Union led to a moment of unprecedented global power for the United States. In the absence of significant enemies, we had the freedom and the duty to bring the world more in line with American values of freedom and democracy, even at the point of a gun. Today in Washington it is taken as a given that this preeminence must be maintained at any cost, which will become more burdensome as China and India continue to grow.

"The problem is that the world is resistant to our ministrations," said Posen. China, which is much bigger and more productive than the Soviet Union, won't be contained the same way we were able to contain the evil empire, bearing the vast majority of the cost. We would exhaust ourselves if we tried.

On a more granular level, Posen says "you want to think hard before you knock over an autocrat. I have no love for these people, but they're often sitting on a big wrestling match that wants to happen. They are the local 911."

Recent events have taught this lesson painfully. We toppled Qaddafi, and got anarchy, lawlessness, and a government [meeting on a Greek ferry](#). We toppled Saddam, and got ISIS.

This is all bad news for the neocons, many of whom, despite the chaos in Syria, still argue for regime change there. They seem to be [nervous](#) about this budding libertarian-realist alliance. The Free Beacon's Alana Goodman wrote a long [insinuation](#) that the publisher of the *National Interest* Dimitri Simes is a Kremlin symp. Simes was an adviser to Richard Nixon and now Rand Paul, and was in the front row last night.

Wednesday David Adesnik of AEI [chided](#) Rand Paul for citing George Kennan in his [speech](#) last Thursday, who he thinks is a very bad man. Jennifer Rubin, *gendarme* of the amnesty, abortion and armaments wing of the GOP, [thinks](#) Rand Paul is just trying to fool you, and says he "can't hide" his — you guessed it — isolationism.

Perhaps they are right to be nervous. It's possible that what we're seeing is the coalescence of a bona-fide conservative foreign policy counter-establishment. There is a lot of amorphous negative opinion out there over foolish wars, civil liberties, defense spending, but no organization or well-articulated alternative. That's been one of Rand Paul's big problems until now.

It's funny, then, that intransigent libertarians and [clueless lefties](#) sometimes claim that the Kochs are crypto-neocons, or at least went soft on their non-interventionism. It's usually mentioned that they tried to nominate self-described neocon John Hinderaker and a former spokesman for John McCain to the Cato Institute's board, leading to headlines like [this](#).

There were legitimate concerns there — it's especially important to be vigilant about partisanship in the area of foreign affairs, for reasons the Center for American Progress makes clear — but to dwell on it is to miss the forest for the trees. Wednesday night's event does seem to point to the Kochs being willing to go out on a limb on foreign policy more than they have to date. The left would love it if the Kochs were hawks, but it's just not the case. For one thing, Ken Vogel [reported](#) in August that sources had said Rand Paul and Charles Koch "bonded over their shared leeriness of foreign intervention." David Koch has also said he [supports](#) withdrawing from the Middle East.

There's something sublimely Machiavellian in the fact that the Kochs and those funded by them are more anti-war than the Center for American Progress. The right-wing billionaire might have a lot of pull, but the thing he's pulling on is a *liberal* hegemony, though it's comprised of neoconservatives and liberal hawks. The insurgencies we support usually talk about things like democracy and human rights; left-wing values, not right-wing ones — we take down autocrats and make the world safe for gay rights and democracy. And if you're part of the permanent revolution, you better obey the party rules.

Left-leaning journalist Michael Tracey [detailed](#) recently in The Daily Caller how the CAP laid the intellectual groundwork for Obama's war in Syria and Iraq, [endorsing](#) bombing the latter in June. Tracey himself was smeared by CAP president Neera Tanden, who [suggested](#) that he supported the extermination of religious minorities for questioning their pro-intervention line.

That work included a [position paper](#) this September that is the platonic ideal of wishful thinking. It praised Obama for initially ruling out boots on the ground, but made it clear that circumstances

had changed, calling on him to “stabilize the heart of the Middle East through a reinvigorated and reengaged U.S. leadership role.”

Former ThinkProgress writer Zaid Jilani [described](#) an interesting encounter back in March:

... all of us ThinkProgress national security bloggers were called into a meeting with CAP senior staff and basically berated for opposing the Afghan war and creating daylight between us and Obama. ... what that meeting with CAP senior staff showed me was that they viewed being closer to Obama and aligning with his policy as more important than demonstrating progressive principle, if that meant breaking with Obama.

It's just politics, but this kind of behavior doesn't bode well for the health of the left. After the Soviet Union signed the Nazi-Soviet Pact, Moscow directed its American adjunct, which had previously been agitating for America to enter the war, to shut up and toe the party line. After Hitler invaded Russia the Communist Party was back to beating the war drums. (Obama inauguration singer Pete Seeger's pro-war union [songs](#) from this period are a hoot; “there'll be a union label in Berlin” — and he enforced the no-strike pledge during the war.) But it was too late; many had become disillusioned, and the party never recovered.

A good question for committed anti-war lefties is whether they'd prefer Rand Paul to a Democratic Party controlled by “[machine-gun-toting messiahs](#)” like Samantha Power.