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**JULY 20, 2010**

## Can the GOP Get Its Realist Mojo Back?

I ended a [recent piece](#) suggesting that Republicans would do well to "reclaim their realist roots." Daniel Larison [isn't so sure](#):

If all that reclaiming "realist roots" accomplished was to persuade Republicans to turn against the war in Afghanistan entirely, or to settle for George Will's preferred recipe for future blowback, what would have really been gained? It isn't going to make them less hawkish on Iran policy, and it is hardly going to make them more skeptical about using force to solve international disputes. Indeed, rejecting a nation-building role in conflict zones will make the immediate costs and risks of military action lower than they would be otherwise. Far from making them less obsessed with the "threats" from Russia and China, it will allow them to reject the one policy where the cooperation or at least tolerance of both major powers is most obviously valuable, which will give them even greater incentives to stoke tensions with one or both.

In practice, if the GOP "reclaimed its realist roots" I wonder how much would change for the better. Republican realism sounds good by comparison with what we have had for the last decade, but most actual Republican realists, especially those in elected office, did little or nothing to challenge the endless hyping of foreign threats and the frequent recourse to military intervention abroad in the '90s. Back in 1999, many of the defenders of the war against Yugoslavia were such Republican realists as Chuck Hagel and Richard Lugar. At the time, they supported yet another completely unnecessary war for the sake of the "credibility of NATO" and, of course, regional stability, which resulted in confirming the worst Russian fears about NATO expansion and significantly destabilizing the region with a massive refugee crisis and the spread of ethnic unrest into neighboring Macedonia. How many realists not affiliated with the Cato Institute expressed serious reservations about NATO expansion into Ukraine and Georgia before the August 2008 war?

A good point. Realism in defense of an extravagant view of U.S. interests is still dangerous and counter-productive. In practice, especially in the short-term, a revival of Republican "realism" would still be predicated on a fairly expansive view of what America's global interests are.

Posted by Greg Scoble at 12:20 PM | [Send to a Friend](#) | [Email Author](#) | [Print](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Share](#)

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