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A blog by Timothy Sandefur

"America must remain freedom's staunchest friend, for freedom is our best ally."--Ronald Reagan

December 11, 2009

Cato's foreign policy: just *accept* madmen with nukes

Wow. Just when you thought Cato's foreign policy scholars could not get more willing to appease tyranny and dictatorship, along comes Ben Friedman with this post, in which he says

If the United States had sacrificed its desire to promote anti-communism and free trade and contain Communism in Korea in 1950, as we did Eastern Europe, we could have avoided the Korean War. **By accepting some risk from Iranian nuclear weapons, we avoid preventive war.** We keep the peace with Sudan because we do not enforce humanitarian norms in Darfur. We could overthrow the government of Zimbabwe or North Korea and save people from disease and starvation. But we prefer peace.... [M]aintaining peace with autocracies is usually virtuous but tragic.

Oh, *there's* a good tradeoff for you. We can avoid a *preventative* war by *accepting the risk that Iran will obtain nuclear weapons*.

Come to think of it, if the United States had sacrificed its desire to promote anti-Nazism in the 1940s, we could have avoided World War II. It would have been *virtuous but tragic*, you see. If the United States had sacrificed its desire to defend economic and personal freedom in 1775, we could have avoided the Revolution. Tragic, yes, but *virtuous*. Why, if the Yankees had just been willing to *accept the risk* of the expansion of slavery in the 1860s, we could have avoided the Civil War, and dropped a compassionate tear over our tragic virtue.

The suggestion that America ought to “maintain peace” with murderers and thugs who threaten us and our allies with nuclear annihilation so as to avoid a preventative war is *cowardly and absurd*. No sane person likes war—but a sane person will incur a short-range pain to avoid a worse pain in the long run. If “preventative” war is the price for avoiding nuclear holocaust or nuclear blackmail in the future, then the rational and moral thing to do is to undertake the preventative war. There’s a word for people who will ignore a growing future threat because they don’t want to go through the short-range pain. It’s not a pretty word—and the word I’m thinking of isn’t “virtuous.”

Where is Algernon Sidney when our alleged libertarians need him?

When Crassus, Pompey, and Caesar, who had torn the commonwealth into three monarchies, were killed, and the flower of the Roman nobility and people destroyed with them, or by them: When Cato's virtue had proved too weak to support a falling state, and Brutus with Cassius had perished in their noble attempt to restore the liberty: When the best part of the senate had been exposed for a prey to the vultures and wolves of Thessaly, and one hundred and thirty of those who deserved the hatred of tyrants, and had escaped the fury of war, had been destroyed by the proscriptions: When neither captains nor soldiers remained in the desolate city; when the tyrant abhorred and feared all those who had either reputation or virtue, and by the most subtle arts endeavoured so to corrupt or break the spirits of the remaining people, that they might not think of their former greatness, or the ways of recovering it, we ought not to wonder that they ceased from war.

But such a peace is no more to be commended, than that which men have in the grave.... This peace is in every wilderness: The Turks have established it in the empty provinces of Asia and

Greece. Where there are no men, or if those men have no courage, there can be no war. Our ancestors the Britons observed, that the peace which in that age the Romans established in the provinces, consisted in the most wretched slavery and solitude: *Miserrimam servitutem pacem appellant*. And in another place, *solitudinem faciunt, pacem vocant*. This is the peace the Spaniards settled in their dominions of the West-Indies, by the destruction of forty millions of souls. **The countries were very quiet, when wild beasts only were left to fight in them, or a few miserable wretches, who had neither strength nor courage to resist their violence. This was the peace the Romans enjoyed under Augustus: A few of those who made themselves subservient to his pleasure, and ministers of the public calamities, were put into a flourishing condition; but the rest pined, withered, and never recovered.** If yet our author will have us to think the liberty and people of Rome obliged to Augustus, who procured such a peace for them, he ought to remember, that besides what they suffered in settling it, they paid dear for it even in the future; for Italy was thereby so weakened, as never to recover any strength or virtue to defend itself; but depending absolutely upon barbarous nations, or armies composed of them, was ravaged and torn in pieces by every invader.

That peace is only to be valued which is accompanied with justice; and those governments only deserve praise, who put the power into the hands of the best men.

Posted by Timothy Sandefur on December 11, 2009 at 11:29 AM | [Permalink](#)

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