

Why I am “A Warmonger”

by Carl S. Milsted, Jr.

When the tanks rolled into Baghdad, many Libertarians fumed and cursed. I cheered. For once, the United States was going after a nasty dictator primarily *because* he was a nasty dictator. The weapons of mass destruction excuse was merely a fig leaf to appease the U.N. – we had to bypass the objections of those who were loaning money to the ruthless dictator in defiance of the sanctions, after all. The real reason was that we didn’t finish the job in the Gulf War I, and the resulting sanctions left us holding the blame for the suffering of the Iraqi people.

This time we did it right. Instead of ramping up slowly, we hit suddenly in order to minimize the time of conflict and the number of innocent casualties. We used our air power to target government and Baath Party installations instead of taking out the nation’s infrastructure. We even put a price on the heads of the bad guys. The ground troops went in early in order to be able to quickly take out the bad guys without needing to blow up lots of infrastructure from the air. We now have a native police force in place and elections are coming.

Yes, tax dollars were used in this effort, but when you compare the force used to collect those dollars vs. the force and violence wielded by the Hussein regime, this was a huge step for *more liberty*. Yes, lives were lost and are still being lost, but lives were being lost before. And we are likely more safe here at home. The world’s dictators now know fear and are behaving much more nicely. The fact that Libya is halting its nuclear program is sufficient justification by itself for America’s interest in the war.

Does this mean I support an American Empire? Do I endorse all of our government’s foreign interventions?

Of course not! In fact, the first Gulf War was an example of a war done poorly and unethically. We spent most of that war using our air power to blow up the infrastructure of the country, ensuring poverty for the next decade or more. I remember the first George I *giggling* about how we blew up a sewer plant. Sorry George, there is nothing funny about cholera, dysentery and infant diarrhea. At that moment, I was ashamed to be an American.

As for hitting troops, we did that as well, but we mainly got the conscripts who were unwillingly manning the trenches. The Republican Guard survived intact, to continue their reign of terror.

Even our goals were wrong the first time around. It was a war concerned with legalities and borders. *We restored a monarchy!* Eventually political pressure got high enough that the administration called for Saddam’s removal, but the hope was for a *coup* to overthrow him. Sorry, anyone able to rise up in Saddam’s regime is unfit to rule a country. Such a person more likely deserves to be dragged through the street and kicked to death by the orphans of the people he helped kill. It was time for revolution. Eventually, Bush I called for that, but then betrayed those who responded to our call by not supporting them. Thousands of Kurds and Shiites were killed and tortured because of that betrayal.

“But at least George I was not a cowboy, going it alone,” some say. The first Bush built a nice coalition including dictatorships and monarchies. But it was *because* of this coalition that we failed to finish the job. Freedom and democracy were considered dangerous by our allies. I prefer a cowboy who is willing to go it alone in order to do the right thing to an internationalist diplomat concerned with building a “New World Order.”

But Didn't We “Initiate Force?”

Many Libertarian writers try to apply the idea of non-initiation of force to foreign policy, as if governments were private individuals. They are not. Governments are morally questionable, albeit necessary, organizations that have the potential to go really bad and hold an entire nation hostage.

Leaving Saddam Hussein in power was not an exercise in Iraqi self-determination; it was an exercise in leaving a hostage-taker alone to brutalize millions of hostages. Taking out a brutal cult of personality dictator is an act of *liberation*. Libertarians should be in *favor* of liberation.

Time for World Liberation?

So, should it be a libertarian principle to stamp out the world's nastiest dictatorships? We have the power now. Should we use our window of opportunity to force the world to be a better place? Should we act just as the British did at the height of their power to stamp out the slave trade? Consider:

- Once a nasty dictator gets nukes, it is rather too late.
- Nuclear technology is *old* technology. Can we afford to allow brutal thugs the resources (countries) to get access to this technology?
- Calling for oppressed peoples to get rid of dictators rarely works. A determined dictator can outgun his enemies. He can torture and kill at will. The only ones he really fears are his immediate underlings (who are also bad people generally) and foreign governments.
- Sometimes part of a country can get weapons to fight against such a dictator, generally resulting in a protracted civil war. Foreign invasion by a benevolent superpower is generally less bloody.
- Consider what the 20th Century would have been like if the Western powers had stomped out Lenin during the Russian civil war. A little extra effort from the West then could have prevented a dark age of totalitarianism.

Back to Reality

Then again, war is an ugly, expensive and bloody thing. Sometimes it is better to put up with some tyranny than to resort to war or revolution. Trying to

stamp out every bad dictator would do more harm than good. So which tyrants do we take out? Here are some factors to consider:

1. The estimated damage caused by war must be less than caused by the tyrant to justify war.
2. The destruction of war is certain. The benefits of liberation are uncertain. So we should err on the side of no war.
3. Some nations have a hard time making a republican form of government work. Such nations may be better off under their current dictator. We should compare the damage caused by the tyrant *over* that of the likely alternative when making our assessment. (But see my essay in the December issue of *The Free Liberal* on possible ways to make democratic government work in more places.)
4. People don't like being invaded. The shame of being invaded can outweigh the benefits of liberation.
5. Our government is not libertarian. Liberation by the U.S. is not likely to be total. We should consider the difference in what we are likely to impose vs. what is there when assessing the damage/benefit ratio.
6. We do not have the power to knock out large evil empires and dictatorships. In such cases war would have a huge cost and liberation is uncertain.
7. No such war should be done unless we have volunteers willing to fight it. This means no conscription. This also means no mandatory calls to war zone duty. Only those who volunteer for the *specific cause* should be sent. Other soldiers should stick to defensive positions. (Higher combat pay and better chances for promotions are appropriate for those who do volunteer, however.)

Taking the above into consideration, the case is strong for avoiding most foreign intervention, and the official Libertarian position on this subject has been correct in many cases. It may be true that the Iraqi invasion was a mistake because of these considerations.

But if we as Libertarians totally rule out *all* foreign intervention, then the time for revolution is well *before* a government gets nasty enough to justify war. Once the guns are taken away, it is too late. John Ross suggests in his novel *Unintended Consequences* that the time for revolution in the U.S. has already happened!

Sorry, I would rather pay some taxes and kowtow to some bureaucrats than man the barricades and shoot some of my neighbors. And this is the attitude of most people. For this reason, revolutions for liberty usually start up too late. Thus most people are left to the mercy of their overlords, and when this fails, help from countries abroad that still believe in liberty. In order to avoid the need for bloody war and revolution when government gets ugly, people need the option of help from abroad if things get extra ugly – help such as was given to the U.S. by France when we had our revolution.

The Health of the State?

Another argument many Libertarians use is that “war is the health of the state,” and that minimizing military action is the key to maintaining liberty. There is data to back up this position, but there are some rather important exceptions:

- Great Britain practiced free trade and had legal drugs at the same time she built the biggest empire the world has even seen.
- During the time between the world wars, Stalin practiced genocide, mass incarcerations, and made religion illegal. When he had to fight Hitler, he liberalized significantly.
- One of the reasons the Soviet Union allowed *glasnost* is that they needed a high tech economy to keep up with the United States’ SDI program. And letting people have computers means letting people have a print shop – quite a change for a country that strictly regulated mimeograph machines.
- Our own Second Amendment is a relic of wars on our soil.

Finally, which is better: huddling behind our borders in fear of attack or going out and taking the conflict to the bad guys?

Conclusion

I could be wrong. It is possible that nonintervention is a better path to liberty. I will not claim that those who disagree with me favor tyranny and as such are totalitarians.

But I will also not put up with Libertarians who say that all interventionists are not libertarians because of their foreign policy stances. The debate over the ideal libertarian foreign policy is *not* strictly a philosophical debate – there are practical and scientific questions as well.

There are calls by some to exclude Neal Boortz from speaking at the next LP convention because of his foreign policy stances. I would rather exclude the excluders. Mr. Boortz has done more to build the party than most. Look at the Georgia membership numbers. And if we are going to make nonintervention in foreign affairs a litmus test for the title of “libertarian,” then we need to disown such figures as Robert Heinlein, Walter Williams P.J. O’Rourke and Thomas Jefferson. Remember, Thomas Jefferson was the first president to send American troops into the Moslem lands.