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The Failed Legacy of Interventionism

by Jacob G. Hornberger

Last week, the *New Hampshire Union Leader* went [on the attack](#) against Republican presidential candidate Ron Paul's foreign-policy views, making the standard pro-empire, pro-intervention arguments that unfortunately have come to characterize the modern-day conservative movement. (Paul's response to the editorial is [here](#).) Nastily referring to Paul as a "libertarian darling," the paper implied that the United States should continue serving as the world's international policeman, intervening and meddling in countries all over the world. Ridiculing the notion that the United States should go to war only in self-defense, the *Union Leader* suggested that that the United States should even be willing to go to war to "contain ambitions" of China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran.

The paper harked back to interventionists' favorite war, World War II, mocking the vast majority of American people who opposed U.S. entry into that conflict. Not surprisingly, however, the paper failed to mention why Americans were so opposed to entering into World War II: still fresh in their minds was the bitter fruit of World War I, a war that interventionists undoubtedly wish would remain long forgotten, which is perhaps why the *Union Leader* failed to mention it.

Ironically, the primary reason for entering World War I was remarkably similar to one of the reasons President Bush gave for the invasion of Iraq: to spread democracy or, as President Wilson put it, "to make the world safe for democracy." While President Bush dreams of bringing peace to the Middle East, Wilson's dream was much more grandiose: America's entry into World War I, he said, would ensure that that war would be the war "to end all wars."

Some 20 years later, however, Hitler's totalitarian regime was waging war against Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union. So much for "making the world safe for democracy" and the "war to end all wars." So much for the more than 100,000 American lives lost in World War I.

President Roosevelt understood why Americans opposed entry into another European conflagration. That's why he promised them on the campaign trail, "I've said this before, but I shall say it again and again and again: Your boys are not going be sent into any foreign wars." It was a lie. In truth, Roosevelt was doing everything he could to involve the United States into the war. Knowing that Congress would never declare war without an attack on the United States, he attempted to induce a German attack on American ships. When that failed, he turned to the Pacific for a "backdoor" to war, with policies designed to corner, maneuver, manipulate, and humiliate the Japanese rulers into firing the first shot.

For the past 60 years, while wanting to forget World War I, the interventionists have described World War II as the “good war” — the war in which good prevailed over evil. Never mind that their concept of “good” includes the communist takeover of all of Eastern Europe and half of Germany. And never mind that it was U.S. officials who knowingly, deliberately, and intentionally delivered Eastern Europe and East Germany to their communist partners.

As long as the communists were on “our side” in ending the Hitler regime, Americans were supposed to consider it all “good.” Well, until the day Germany surrendered, at which point the interventionists soon discovered a new official enemy to replace the Nazis, one that could be used to justify the ever-growing budget of what General Eisenhower would later term the “U.S. military-industrial complex.”

That new official enemy was, of course, the communists. Yes, the same communists whose World War II victory some interventionists still celebrate today — the same communists to whom Eastern Europe and East Germany were given after ending Hitler’s control over the same territories.

The World War II victory was followed by more than 50 years of Cold War plus hot wars in Korea and Vietnam that took the lives of almost 100,000 American men.

The interventionists now say that 9/11 changed the world. Nonsense. The attacks of 9/11 were simply part of a series of terrorist attacks that took place in retaliation for the U.S. government’s interventionist foreign policy, especially its poke-the-hornets’-nest policy in the Middle East after it lost the communists as its official enemy in 1989. After all, there were the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center — the same target on 9/11 — and the terrorist attacks on the USS *Cole* and on the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

By using 9/11 to invade and effect regime change in Afghanistan and Iraq, the U.S. government was simply following a long interventionist pattern of effecting regime change in foreign countries, either by coup, assassination, foreign aid, or invasion.

In 1953, the interventionists effected regime change in Iran, where the CIA ousted the democratically elected prime minister of Iraq, bringing back into power the shah of Iran, who proceeded to terrorize and torture his own people for the next 25 years, with the support of U.S. officials. That resulted in the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the anger and mistrust that Iranians still have for the United States.

There was the Guatemala intervention in 1954, where the CIA ousted the democratically elected president of that country and installed a brutal military general in his stead. That coup led to three decades of civil war entailing the deaths of millions of Guatemalans.

There was the CIA-supported ouster of the democratically elected president of Chile and his replacement by military strongman Augusto Pinochet, who proceeded to torture and murder thousands of his own people, with the support of the CIA, whose agents participated in the murder of a young American journalist during the coup.

There were the CIA-supported murders of Vietnam’s Ngo Dinh Diem and the Dominican Republic’s Rafael Trujillo.

There were the CIA's assassination attempts on Fidel Castro, not to mention the brutal embargo that has so contributed to the misery and suffering of the Cuban people.

There was the U.S. partnership with Saddam Hussein, which included the delivery of weapons of mass destruction for him to use against the Iranian people, who were now our enemy for having ousted the shah. Later, turning on Saddam, there was the Persian Gulf intervention, accompanied by the intentional destruction of Iraq's water-and-sewage facilities and followed by more than a decade of brutal sanctions that contributed to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children.

There was the infamous statement by UN Ambassador Madeleine Albright that the deaths of half a million Iraqi children from the sanctions had been "worth it," a sentiment shared by her compatriots within the U.S. government.

There were the deadly "no-fly zones" over Iraq that had never been approved by either the Congress or the UN. There was the stationing of U.S. troops on Islamic holy lands.

There was the unconditional support, both financial and military, of the Israeli government.

President Bush's war of aggression on Iraq — a country that never attacked the United States — which has resulted in the deaths and maiming of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, none of whom had anything to do with the 9/11 attacks, is just one more intervention among many others.

"By their fruits you will know them." Herein lies the legacy of almost a century of empire and interventionism: death, chaos, mayhem, and terrorism, not to mention out-of-control federal spending that is leading to severe monetary crisis.

But we can't say we weren't warned. The Founding Fathers warned us against empire, militarism, standing armies, and war. They pointed out that among all the enemies of liberty and prosperity, these were the greatest. That's why they stood for a limited-government republic, one in which the federal government lacked the power and the means to go abroad "in search of monsters to destroy"; Americans in the private sector, however, would be free to interact with the people of the world while devoting their efforts to building a model society of freedom at home.

Today, with their nation mired in the sands of Iraq, Americans will have ample opportunity to choose between conflicting paradigms — the morally bankrupt paradigm of empire and interventionism that will only bring more death, destruction, and monetary chaos — or the morally sound paradigm of noninterventionism and free commerce envisioned by our American ancestors.

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