

Libertarians Are Not Isolationists

By Roy Minet (Rev. 07/31/14)

The two old parties work hard to paint us Libertarians as “isolationists.” We aren’t. Apparently, they call anyone who doesn’t support their various military interventions around the globe an isolationist.

It should come as no surprise that Libertarian foreign policy derives from the exact same simple non-aggression principle (NAP) that informs libertarian positions on all domestic issues: Force may not be used on somebody unless they have used it first. This “live and let live” philosophy certainly is not pacifism. Everyone definitely has the right to self-defense against an aggressor. So, what foreign policy arises from the NAP?

First, Libertarians do support a very strong national defense. After all, this is one of the few things our federal government does that it is actually authorized to do by our Constitution. The only legitimate purpose of a government is to protect and secure the individual rights to life, liberty and property. Protecting these rights from foreign aggressors is clearly important and a function more appropriate for government than individuals.

Governments produce no wealth. In order to do anything, they must first confiscate the required wealth from citizens. Government is overhead and notoriously inefficient as well. This is one of the many excellent reasons for keeping government as small as possible. Thus, Libertarians definitely do not support *excessively* strong national defense. How strong is strong enough?

U.S military strength obviously must be adequate to repel any attack. Beyond that, it should be formidable enough to prevent attacks. A potential foe must be convinced that they would come out on the losing side of a confrontation. No doubt, that requires some key bases strategically located around the world. However, it likely does not require nearly as many foreign bases as we now have, and it certainly does not require thousands of troops stationed in countries such as Germany, Japan and South Korea. We are not the world’s policeman and we are not responsible for defending other countries at U.S. taxpayer expense. Libertarians would carefully evaluate all entangling alliances, mindful of George Washington’s warning to avoid them.

It is impossible to sustain a strong defense without a strong economy. Our anemic economy, staggering debt and fiat currency are causes for concern. Especially while these serious problems persist, we have no business borrowing even more to hand out billions of dollars in foreign aid. Only if it is clearly the most cost-effective way to augment our defense posture should it be considered. Any other aid needs to come voluntarily from private sources as already happens regularly, such as with the Haiti earthquake, the Thailand tsunami, etc.

We must not meddle in other countries’ affairs, especially not militarily. Defense means defense *only*. We attack first only if and when there is a clearly identifiable, credible, serious and

imminent threat to the U.S. The invasion of Iraq, for just one example, came nowhere near to meeting that standard; it was highly un-American, and an unforgivable waste of blood and treasure. Constitutionally, Congress must declare any war, and that has not been done since World War II.

If ever utilized, “red lines” or “ultimatums” must be backed by the national will, ability and intent to follow through.

At every opportunity, we eagerly reach out to engage in free and voluntary trade with willing partners. This is the antithesis of isolationism. Those actively trading goods benefit greatly and seldom trade bullets.

We must not force our principles on others, but we surely should explain at every opportunity why freedom works best, as well as extol its great value to human rights and prosperity. Above all, we need to be a shining example that starkly contrasts to the many demonstrated failures of collectivist systems. We have some work remaining to become that best example.

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