DEBATING WAR

Why Arguments Opposing American Wars and Interventions Fail

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What arguments have critics of American wars and interventions put forward, and what arguments do they currently employ? Thomas Jefferson, Henry Thoreau, John Calhoun, the Anti-Imperialist League, Herbert Hoover, Charles Lindbergh, Martin Luther King Jr., and Ron Paul (among others) have criticized proposals to intervene in other countries, enter wars, acquire foreign territory, and engage in a forward defense posture. Despite cogent objections, they have also generally lost the argument. Why do they lose?

This book provides answers to these questions through a survey of oppositional arguments over time, augmented by the views of contemporary critics, including those of Ron Paul, Chalmers Johnson and Noam Chomsky. Author David J. Lorenzo demonstrates how and why a significant number of arguments are dismissed as irrelevant, unpatriotic, overly pessimistic, or radically out of the mainstream. Other lines of reasoning might provide a compelling critique of wars and interventions from a wide variety of perspectives—and still lose. Evaluating oppositional arguments in detail allows the reader to understand problems likely to be faced in the context of policy discussions, to grasp important political differences and the potential for alliances among critics, and ultimately to influence decision-making and America's place in the international power structure.

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OPPOSITION TO WARS AND INTERVENTIONS

Introduction

> First, many of you have asked, won't this put us on a slippery slope to another war? One man wrote to me that we are "still recovering from our involvement in Iraq." A veteran put it more bluntly: "This nation is sick and tired of war" ... Many of you have asked a broader question: Why should we get involved at all in a place that's so complicated, and where—as one person wrote to me—"those who come after Assad may be enemies of human rights? ... Finally, many of you have asked: Why not leave this to other countries, or seek solutions short of force? As several people wrote to me, "We should not be the world's policeman."[1]

When Barack Obama went to the airwaves to make his case for a possible American military intervention in Syria in 2013, he joined a public debate over the necessity, utility and morality of interventions that has been ongoing for more than 200 years. Part of his contribution to that debate was his acknowledgment of objections to his proposal. Critics argued that the costs of intervention were too high; that interventions lead to unintended consequences that make the scene of interventions worse off, and that interventions reveal hubris on the part of the US, which cannot set the world right by using force.

This book is an exploration of such arguments in general. What arguments have opponents used over time? How should we understand them? How do those arguments fit within the frameworks of general policy and foreign policy debates? What relationship exists between those arguments and the successes and failures of the opposition?

Opposition to wars and interventions

Scholars have recently re-emphasized the observation that the US has a long history of foreign policy activism. The US did not suddenly turn to the world after WWII, an observation Walter Mead underlined in his influential book on American foreign policy traditions, *Special Providence*. Yet we also know that resistance to foreign policy activism has been alive for as long as activist policies have been around, a point once emphasized by Samuel Huntington during another era of vocal foreign policy criticisms.[2] New England contemplated secession in the face of Madison's decision to confront Great Britain in the War of 1812. Thoreau went to jail in part to protest the war against Mexico. The declaration of war against Germany in 1917 was hotly contested by several members of the Senate. A variety of groups argued publicly against US involvement in the growing tensions in Europe during the 1930s. In the 1960s and 1970s, popular protests against the war in Vietnam dominated the news. More recently, major protests were launched against both Gulf wars, and Barack Obama's intervention in Libya was opposed by a majority of citizens and heavily criticized.[3]

Exploring these arguments can potentially yield interesting conclusions and shed light on important topics. Why have opponents often failed to stop interventions? What explains their sporadic successes? The fact that an often substantial opposition to particular military interventions has often been overridden creates an important puzzle for those who place hope in Kant's original argument that republics will be less likely to use violence internationally because citizens will restrain aggressive leaders. Could the nature of oppositional arguments play a role in the failure of critics to restrain the government?

In addition, surveying and understanding these arguments not only illuminates why some Americans view dubiously the prospect of engaging in interventions and fighting wars and whether those arguments contribute to the success or failures of critics; such a project also allows us to better understand foreign policy debates in the US and beyond. In exploring the logic and method behind the deployment of particular types of arguments, we can grasp relevant concepts and time-tested tactics and strategies. We can more fully understand the place of cultural assumptions and universal themes. We can also assess the merits of these arguments. Are they reasonable and persuasive, or irrational and unconvincing?

This book addresses these questions and propositions by analyzing, explaining, comparing, contrasting and assessing a significant sample of historical arguments critical of American interventions and wars alongside a deeper examination of several contemporary critics. In the process of discharging those tasks, it addresses the following sets of important questions:

What are the views of such important historical critics of wars and interventions as the Whigs, Thoreau, John Calhoun, The Anti-Imperialist League, Charles Lindbergh, Charles Norris and Martin Luther King (among others), as

well as present day critics Ron Paul, Chalmers Johnson and Noam Chomsky? What arguments did they employ? How did they ground their views?

How do the arguments we uncover fit with the oppositional arguments that have already been identified in the political science literature? What is the range of arguments that have been and are used?

What do these arguments tells us about the politics of American foreign policy-making? What logic do they follow? How do they go about undermining the rationale for interventions and wars?

What do these views tell us about the landscape of American foreign policy discussions and the relationship between such views and the fundamental materials of American political culture that inform them? In particular, what do these arguments tell us about opponents' conceptions of the US and its general relationship with the world in the context of understandings of American exceptionalism?

How can we categorize opponents of wars and interventions?

What generalizations can we make regarding the arguments critics deploy? Do they make arguments and occupy categories that may be common to critics who operate outside the US?

Investigating these questions is important for understanding foreign policy actions and decisions. First, it is imperative that we understand the nature of opposition to activist American foreign policies in order to understand the foreign policy-making process in general. Opposition arguments form an important part of that process. Historically, not only has opposition to interventions and wars been present; that opposition has at times importantly influenced American actions. Critics curbed American designs in Mexico, ensured that Cuba was not annexed, delayed US entry into WWI and WWII, kept the US out of the League of Nations and hastened the American departure from Vietnam. In recent times, the opposition can be credited (for better or worse) with US reluctance to intervene in the Sudan and Rwanda, its delayed response to the Serbian conflict of the 1990s, its refusal to treat Iran in the same way as it did Iraq, and the restraints put on President Obama in response to his Syrian proposal. Grasping the character of the opposition's arguments allows us to understand these relative successes.

Second, it is important to explore why such opposition has (since the middle of the 19th century) failed more often than it has succeeded when interventions and wars have been on the agenda. In particular, understanding oppositional arguments sheds light on why policy-makers often do not accept them. Opponents were unable to prevent US engagement in the Mexican and Spanish–American Wars, the two World Wars, the Cold War, Vietnam and the Gulf Wars. Addressing these failures allows us to assess in particular some aspects of Democratic Peace Theory. In its Kantian origins, that theory holds that leaders responsible to their citizens will be restrained from engaging in foreign adventures by their citizens' objections. Paul, Johnson and Chomsky are several of the voices whom Kant appears to have anticipated. Why haven't they been more consistently successful? Does the nature of their arguments contribute to this failure?

Third, it is important to investigate the "black box" of domestic policy-making from an international relations perspective. Understandings of international relations such as those contained in the various strands of realism hold that the distribution of power in the international system is the real cause of events and actions on the international stage. However, in adopting this framework, scholars often reify the state, taking it as an actor when actions are the realm of human policy-makers. Understanding the context in which policy-makers put US power in motion (or decline to do so) given its relative power position is important. So is the attempt to understand these arguments from a more general point of view. Can we draw general conclusions from critics' successes and failures? Do critics use or make reference to such ostensibly universal concepts as absolute and relative power, security, anarchy and international norms and if so, how? To answer these questions, we must again understand the nature of the opposition. Here, we use discursive institutionalism and a liberal pluralist approach: that is, the method here is to understand American foreign policy by treating the US position in the world as a context within which decisions are made, and to explore the clash of arguments over norms within a pluralist policy-making process.

Data sources

This book looks to several sources of arguments against interventions and wars for data. The first source is composed of historical arguments. These are included in various books, pamphlets and speeches by such figures as Washington, Jefferson, Thoreau, Eugene Debs, Robert La Follette, Charles Lindbergh, Martin Luther King and others. The second source is comprised of oppositional arguments to contemporary interventions. These are found in think tank publications, speeches on the floor of Congress, and contributions by members of the public on internet sites. These latter arguments provide additional context to the examination of contributions from more established figures. The third source is comprised of Paul's, Johnson's and Chomsky's publications.[4]

The figures and arguments surveyed here are admittedly far from exhaustive of the entire universe of critics and oppositional arguments. It is inevitable that one chooses which figures to highlight. The criteria by which figures were chosen are their high profile historically, their contemporary importance and their general diversity of arguments and positions. Along the way other figures are referenced to provide the reader a sense of the popularity of particular arguments at specific points in time and to provide a general overview of particular policy debates.

The Literature

> An isolationist is a protectionist that builds walls around their country, they don't like to trade, they don't like to travel about the world, and they like to put sanctions on different countries...what the founders advised was to get along with

> people, trade with people, and to practice diplomacy, rather than having this militancy of telling people what to do and how to run the world and building walls around our own country.[5]

When Ron Paul rejected (as above) the proposition that he critiques American interventions by advocating an isolationist position, he pushed back against the popular perception that such opposition always equals "isolationism." Indeed, the general shorthand for those who oppose interventions is that they desire that the US cut itself off from the world.[6] But that is not the case. One can oppose wars, interventions and a forward defense norm and not be an isolationist. Or, to put it differently, the ranks of critics includes more categories than that of isolationist.

If the popular characterization misunderstands critics' positions, what of the scholarly view? Is it any more accurate in terms of situating critics and understanding the types of arguments critics put forward? Here we note that critics and oppositional arguments are not the subject of any coordinated program of study. Instead, discussions of these topics are scattered among various analyses of American political culture, foreign policy and public opinion. As a result, there is a wide variability in the identification of general types of critics and only a partial understanding of the types and range of arguments critics deploy.

We begin with Kant's understanding. Unlike contemporary proponents of Democratic Peace Theory, who generally concede that democracies are less likely to fight one another but have no qualms in fighting non-democratic regimes,[7] Kant believed that morally autonomous humans will act as a general constraint on aggressive foreign policies because they will be practical pacifists. He assumed that arguments opposing interventions and wars will be general and of a decidedly pragmatic character, in that the populace would object to:

> having to fight, having to pay the costs of war from their own resources, having painfully to repair the devastation war leaves behind, and, to fill up the measure of evils, load themselves with a heavy national debt that would embitter peace itself and that can never be liquidated on account of constant wars in the future.[8]

Such sentiments are relatively uncontroversial in content, universal in nature (in that they could be found in all republics no matter their particular history or culture so long as humans have fully developed moral wills) and dependent upon a foundational commitment to individual well-being. Based on this understanding, we should expect critical discussions of interventions and wars to revolve around practical objections and that critics will themselves be proponents of practical, utilitarian positions.

A more recent literature ascribes to American opponents of wars and interventions a somewhat broader range of positions and arguments.[9] The dominant classification scheme comes from the influential studies by Wittkopf on non-elites

and Holsti and Rosenau's confirmatory study of elite views.[10] Most important in this scheme are a) citizens' orientations regarding openness to activism in foreign policy matters, and b) their attitudes towards types of intervention, whether military or non-military. This scheme produces a 2 x 2 typology, yielding four basic orientations. Of these, two are important for our purposes in representing positions that would most consistently oppose interventions and wars: *Isolationists* and *Accomodationists*. Isolationists in this understanding are those who wish to safeguard American values by withdrawing the US from the contaminating influence of the world, rejecting most or even all interventions of whatever type. The less activist the foreign policy, the better, in this view, due to the desire not to mingle with nations or forces outside the US. Accomodationists in contrast see an external role for the US, but only in the form of humanitarian and other nonmilitary projects undertaken in conjunction with allies and international institutions. In reserving significant skepticism towards military ventures and unilateral activities, they would generally reject military intervention as a whole.

Holsti augments his study of public opinion by examining elite arguments against activism. He identifies two main trends among the opposition. First is the tendency to argue that activist policies harm the welfare of the US and its institutions. Holsti describes this harm argument as focused on immigration and links foreign policy activism to globalization. Activism means opening up the US to the world, inviting in populations that are culturally and otherwise different from the American mainstream. Holsti references Patrick Buchanan's public arguments as examples, which might also be joined with some of Samuel Huntington's later work. The second critical theme Holsti notes is the accusation that activism promotes military interventions in situations that are not germane to American security. This argument can take several forms, from assertions that such interventions drain attention and resources away from real security problems (domestic terror attacks, the preservation of the military and its assets) to arguments that such interventions are unsupportable because the only practical and/or moral justification for the use of armed force is to repel an ongoing or immediately imminent attack on the US homeland or military personnel. Holsti locates most of these arguments in the former strain, holding that overall they tend more towards unilateralist than to strictly anti-activist positions. Thus Holsti understands arguments against activism as being relatively narrow, and generally based on attempting to persuade policy-makers to concentrate on protecting US borders, citizens and generic makeup.[11]

Other parts of the literature contain studies documenting a broader array of oppositional arguments.[12] Above we referenced Walter Mead's discussion of foreign policy traditions. Mead argues for the existence of four independent and important schools of foreign policy, three of which might be relevant here.[13] These respectively highlight the importance of protecting prospects for trade, shielding and preserving political institutions, and focusing attention on the narrow task of protecting the US from overt military attacks. Thus *Hamiltonians*

in Mead's parlance place importance on defending America's economic interests and using power to promote trade and commerce, but tend to oppose foreign policies that may harm those interests, including those that increase the possibilities of war or the use of economic sanctions. *Jeffersonians* are skeptical of foreign involvement in general because they deeply fear the harm that will be visited on republican political institutions by a turn towards imperial ambitions. In particular, they point to an excessive centralization of power in the executive and an increasing influence of the military which result from the attempt to police the world or create a colonial empire. *Jacksonians* in Mead's understanding resemble the realists Drezner describes in that they are reluctant to engage in foreign interventions unless US national security is directly involved. If US security interests are demonstrably at risk, they support the full and unilateral unleashing of American military power. Differences among such arguments stem from various definitions of security interests, with the narrower understandings taking only actual or imminent attacks on the US as sufficient to trigger a response and broader conceptions expanding the realm of security interests to include the Americas and/or important allies. But Jacksonians otherwise do not favor foreign policy activism or indiscriminate interventionism.

Dumbrell's study of isolationism is also relevant.[14] His results take the form of a four-part typology of isolationist arguments structured by a realist/idealist binary that construes oppositional positions in yet another fashion; these arguments respectively privilege American sovereignty (*Unilateralists*), domestic political needs (*New Populist America Firsters*), American economic exceptionalism (*Anti-Globalizationists*) or the sovereignty of foreign states (*Anti-Imperialists*). Johnstone's deconstruction of the concept of isolationism provides yet another approach to mapping arguments.[15] Rejecting the label of isolationist as empty and pejorative, he instead identifies two components of a general position opposing interventionism. The first is *Non-interventionism*, which he defines as resistance to "political entanglements and military engagements." Johnstone does not view this component as completely opposed to involvement in the outside world, but rather a position that emphasizes the need to minimize military involvement. It is at bottom an attempt to keep the US out of military conflicts given "the threat and potentially negative impact of war on the United States." Thus it is a practical argument, though the underlying nature of the "negative impact" is underdetermined. *Unilateralism*, in contrast, is in Johnstone's definition the resistance to becoming tied to alliances and bound by international laws and treaties. These can drag the US into ventures against the will of its citizens, denying them an important part of their autonomy. Thus the focus of this position and its accompanying arguments is on freedom of action, a goal, Johnstone argues, that is connected with positive conceptions of American exceptionalism. America's unique character must be safeguarded through the vigorous assertion of national sovereignty and the spirited attempt to prevent that sovereignty from being alienated or eroded by international commitments.

Mayers has provided another way of thinking about dissent that is located more deeply in American culture.[16] His typology roots opposition in Prophetic and Republican foundations. Prophetic criticism draws upon an understanding of the US as a Christian nation and holds that the US must follow the higher standards of Christianity. Republican critics, as with Mead's Jeffersonians, oppose wars and interventions because they fear that they will lead to empire and thus to the loss of republican institutions and culture.

A sixth typology of arguments is derived from the work of Davis and Lynn-Jones.[17] Their study hypothesizes that American foreign policy oscillates between activist and isolationist stances associated with different understandings of the meaning and implications of American exceptionalism, an important characteristic attributed to the US by a variety of actors in American culture. Davis and Lynn-Jones identify one rendering of exceptionalism as taking the US as a "city upon a hill" with a mission of spreading American values throughout the world. Here, America's perceived difference from the rest of the world informs a messianic mindset that promotes intervention. This understanding of *Offensive Exceptionalism*, so to speak, resembles the description of an activist position described by Pateman, McCartney, and Schmidt and Williams.[18] In the contrary rendering, understandings of what we might call *Defensive Exceptionalism* make Americans wary of contamination by the rest of the world. In this understanding, the difference between the US and the world creates anxieties lest that difference be lost through contact with inferior ways of life, thus resembling Holsti's understanding of isolationism in its fear of interaction. Davis and Lynn-Jones also note a third form of difference discourse, in the guise of Vietnam-era arguments that paint the US as uniquely aggressive in its interactions with the world, or what might be called *Malignant Exceptionalism*. This position would oppose foreign policy activism on the grounds that American motives are suspect because the economic, political and military aims of the US are hegemonic in nature and inflict harm on the rest of the world, and corresponds to Dumbrell's understanding of Anti-Imperialism.

In critiquing and augmenting this model elsewhere, I have shown that various foreign policy positions can be justified by positing a non-exceptionalist view, that is, the understanding that the US and the rest of the world are generally similar.[19] Some people will use such an understanding to justify foreign endeavors on the assumption that problems in the world are susceptible to the same policies and practices that have been successful at home. This is an *Offensive Universalist* type argument. It is this type of argument that important Neo-conservatives used to justify the G.W. Bush administration's foreign policy stance, asserting that the US has an obligation to help others exercise and realize common values such as those associated with democracy.[20] Of particular importance here are the analogous anti-activist arguments. In these *Laissez-faire Universalist* arguments the fact that the world is similar to the US (in terms of political and social environments and the character of foreign citizens) means there is no need for an activist foreign policy to help spread values and institutions. Human nature being universal, other countries

do not require US assistance to discover and construct norms and institutions whose moral worth and functional benefits are readily apparent to all. The US should tend to its own business and refrain from interfering with the natural development of others as they move towards the realization of quintessentially human values.

Stepping back, we see from even this limited survey that scholars have collectively identified a wide variety of arguments opposing interventionist policies, divided between discussions of general categories of arguments and specific types of arguments. These have not been consolidated nor systematically applied to the history of opposition to wars and interventions in the US. General types include Isolationist, Non-Interventionist, Exceptionalist, Accomodationist, Jacksonian, Jeffersonian, Prophetic, Republican and Practical. These broad categories provide us with the most general characteristics of critics and their arguments, but do not allow us to differentiate very carefully among them. Descriptions of types of arguments do allow us to differentiate more finely. The problem with the latter is that no one study has encompassed the entire range of arguments and, as we shall see in the following chapters, they have not identified all the types of arguments that critics have employed.

The following provides labels for and describes the types of arguments identified in the literature as well as those arguments that have not been identified and which are found in this study:

Jacksonian: Wars and interventions are to be resisted when they cannot be credibly related to American security needs. A restricted Jacksonian position understands security as relating only to the American homeland and threats to that security only in the form of actual or imminent attacks on the homeland.
Unilateralist: The US should avoid becoming involved in alliances and international organizations because in doing so it loses its ability to control its fate internationally and will likely end up in an unnecessary, avoidable war.
Isolationist: The US should not interfere in the affairs of other nations because doing so means involving the US with other political cultures and ways of life that will imperil America's exceptional character.
Jeffersonian: The US should not be involved internationally in aggressive or expansionist activities because such activities eventually erode republican virtues and distort republican institutions and organizations.
Laissez-Faire: The US should not interfere in other countries' affairs because those affairs would otherwise not affect American interests.
Pluralist: Nations have the right to choose their own forms of government, which naturally take diverse forms.
Kantian Pragmatic: Wars and interventions are to be opposed because their costs in human and material terms are too high.
America First: Wars and interventions consume resources, attention and action that are better used at home to solve domestic problems and/or to engage in necessary projects of reform.

Special Interest: These arguments hold that activist policies are the brainchilds of particular group. Opponents using this argument hold that those who support activist policies pursue narrow political and economic interests, will profit from those policies and manipulate the system to thwart the peaceful and anti-colonial will of the majority of American citizens. These interest groups are often identified as arms manufacturers, newspapers and foreign governments.

Constitutional [21] **and Democracy**: Decisions to go to war or intervene are illegitimate because they do not reflect the will of the American people. Constitutional arguments make this point by holding that policy-making does not follow correct Constitutional procedures and mainly take the form of lamenting the fact that Congress has been excluded or not adequately consulted. Democracy arguments reference the fact that the decision is not supported by the majority of citizens as evidenced by popular opinion, a failure to support the policy through actions (enlistment in the military on the positive side, demonstrations and riots on the negative).

Futility and **The World is a Jungle**: Futility generally refers to the proposition that a policy will not achieve its goals and therefore should not be pursued. The general contention of these arguments is that the world is resistant to American efforts, or the policy itself is unsuited to achieving those goals given the nature of the world. The World is a Jungle arguments hold that attempts to bring democracy and American values to other countries will never work due to the character of the world.

Libertarian: This holds that activist policies are the products of an excessively large state, either in terms of its own tendencies, or in its overbuilt capacities that are used by special interests. The presence of a large state makes possible the creation of large armies and engagement in martial and colonial projects. Such developments are to be avoided at all costs, as they will lead to the tyrannization of the individual by the state.

Irony: These arguments make their point by contending that the pursuit of particular policies result in unforeseen consequences that are the opposite of the policy's goal, whether it be increased security, the spread of American values, or the protection of other nations' citizens. These sometimes take the form of *Defensive Realist* arguments. *Defensive Realist* arguments adopt the understanding of the world contained in contemporary academic analysis in which the concept of security is understood as a zero-sum quantity—the more secure country A is, the less secure all others are, and the more likely other countries are to move to balance against country A or engage in activities that will enhance their own security in ways that threaten country A. Thus aggressive attempts to maximize security on the part of country A are ironic and counterproductive, in that they create security paradoxes—they provoke other countries to engage in similar security-enhancing activities, with the result that country A is less secure. The overall outcomes can be the establishment of hostile alliances, aggressive moves close to one's security perimeter, and the sparking of arms races and general