

On Loyalty – Part 1: True Allies, True Loyalty

Down with loyalty! In international relations, the very concept undermines the struggle for good against evil and plays into the hands of the enemy.

The redoubtable **Steven Den Beste** once mused on the subject of which countries are truly “allies” of the United States, and **concluded** that

It's a very short list. We've got the UK, and Canada, and Australia. That's the lot.

He contrasted these countries with others who merely co-operate with the US out of “self-interest”:

Real allies sacrifice for you, take risks for you.

Well, yes, of course allies sacrifice and take risks to help you. But so do fair weather friends, whenever they consider it expedient. The West sacrificed plenty to help the Soviet Union in World War 2 but that did not make them “real allies” of Stalin in the sense that Steven is looking for.

Steven – do you think that there exist countries who make sacrifices to help another country *to do wrong* as they see it? That never happens. You have put your faith in a chimera - the chimera of loyalty. As George Washington said in his **Farewell Address**:

There can be no greater error than to expect or calculate upon real favors from nation to nation. It is an illusion, which experience must cure, which a just pride ought to discard.

What about those countries who take risks, not ‘for you’ but because they *agree with you* - because they share fundamental moral values with you and therefore have reached the same conclusion about what should be done? Such countries do not count as “allies” by Steven's definition! Because if, by some quirk, you embarked on what they saw as a morally wrong path, they would refuse to help. Instead, they would offer friendly criticism.

No doubt some readers will see in this an echo of the slimy excuses that are always trotted out by the Weasels when they are

weaseling, such as: “friends don't help friends to drink and drive -

so the fact that we are trying to thwart the liberation of Iraq doesn't mean we're not friends of America". Such readers are not seeing the wood for the trees. The point is, drunk driving is *wrong*; liberating Iraq is *right*. The Weasels are at fault, not for 'lack of loyalty' in refusing to condone a war that they believe to be wrong, but for believing that it is wrong in the first place.

As soon as you take the argument out of that moral arena and into that of morality-free analysis - loyalty and betrayal, gratitude and ingratitude, sacrifice vs. self-interest - you have let the Weasels off the hook. Because then, for every accusation that the Weasels have betrayed a friendship, they can counter that so have you: it takes two to fracture Western unity, does it not? Has not Britain fractured EU unity too, by siding with the US? For every appeal to gratitude for saving France from the Nazis, they can claim that the US wouldn't even exist if it had not been for French help in the Revolutionary war. For every claim that the the war is enforcing UN resolutions, they can claim that the war violates the UN Charter.

These claims are absurd; but one cannot discover this by examining the entrails of who has been more disloyal to whom. One has to face the issue of who is in fact right about Iraq and who is wrong.

The Weasels are in fact wrong. America and Britain and Australia are right. And they are helping each other to fight this war because they have all come to similar, right conclusions about what should be done about Iraq. It was no coincidence that they have: it is because of fundamental moral values which they share. And that does indeed make them true allies. But loyalty did not come into it. It would have been shameful if it had.

UPDATE: Steven Den Beste points out that his comments [here](#) regarding allies are congruent to ours.

Part 2

Thu, 04/03/2003 - 09:41 | [permalink](#)

Loyalty

I've always thought of loyalty as a virtue, but I like your argument. Is loyalty always the wrong focus? Is it legitimate to use the word as a shorthand to refer to acting rightly in certain ways?

by [Chris](#) on Fri, 04/04/2003 - 12:01 | [reply](#)

Loyalty

I think loyalty takes on a worthwhile meaning when you define it between a state and an idea, rather than between two states. In that case, it might mean something like ideological integrity i.e. in the face of adversity, the state sticks up for its principle, instead of wimping out and falling back on a more conciliatory one.

by [Daniel Strimpel](#) on Wed, 04/09/2003 - 01:04 | [reply](#)

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