

Libertarian Party Foreign Policy Is Not Immoral

by **Gil Milbauer**

In a recent [comment](#) Elliot Temple wrote:

“The US military should only be used to defend the US” [a paraphrase of the Libertarian Party position]. Because this position is divergent from “the US military should do what is right” it *is* immoral. And people trying to use it to oppose fighting against Iraq *are* stupid (the solution to terrorism is not more people patrolling our borders).

This gets several things wrong.

First of all, saying that the position is divergent from “The US military should do what is right” begs the question. What is right for the US military to do is what is in dispute. This depends on many things including what sort of institution the US military is, what its mission is, what its obligations are, etc. The US military is an agent of the citizens of the United States. It has a mission to defend them from foreign threats. What is right for it to do is different from what would be right for Superman to do. It has an obligation to use its resources wisely so as to defend America as well as possible, as well as to the soldiers who have volunteered and risk their lives for that purpose.

One thing that is NOT right for the US military to do, for example, is to engage in every conflict on earth where the exercise of the military's special capabilities can be expected to improve the local moral landscape, regardless of the resources required, and regardless of its effect on the safety of American citizens.

So, is it right for the US military to engage in campaigns like the one in Iraq? I think it is, because it does in fact use resources effectively and morally to make Americans safer. It combats the complex problem of the rise of radical Islamism (and the terrorism that comes with it) by striking a blow to open up one of a group of closed societies that help breed this threat (hopefully encouraging more liberalization in the region); it removes Saddam's terrible weapons from his reach, and that of future terrorists; it liberates the brutalized people of Iraq; and displaying the US military's impressive ability to effectively project force will make it unnecessary to do it on many future occasions. But this case is by no means obvious. It's possible that the costs outweigh the

benefits. Saddam could have launched a deadly attack that would kill many thousands of our soldiers and innocents. The action could incite more hatred of the US and cause more rather than fewer future attacks; there could be other ways to use our resources that would get us more long-term safety for less risk, etc.

Furthermore, some might argue that even if there are occasions like this when it's best to use force in the absence of a direct attack by the nation we invade, the policy of leaving it to the discretion of future congresses and presidents to identify these cases will make us less safe in the long run; it will lead to many mistakes that will be themselves immoral, and generate more enemies and entangling alliances, etc. So a simpler rule, even if it doesn't optimally address each situation, might leave Americans safer in the long run.

So, it's not at all clear that "the US military should only be used to defend the US" is divergent from "the US military should do what is right". In fact, "what is right" is misleading because it implies that only one policy is right, and all others are immoral. But that can't be true. Are we all immoral because we are not perfectly doing the absolute best thing we could be doing (morally) at all times? No. Morality can't require perfection. There are many moral paths that diverge from each other. There is not always just one thing that "is right" (although there may be one thing that is best). There are also things that are wrong and immoral, but it's not at all obvious that the Libertarian policy is one of them.

One thing that *is* obviously wrong is Elliot's assertion that people who use the Libertarian principle to oppose fighting in Iraq *are* stupid. There are many counter-examples to this claim, but one would be enough to disprove it. If he means that they are foolish to make this argument (rather than being generally stupid) then I hope the issues I've raised have disproved that claim as well.

Wed, 04/09/2003 - 18:34 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Stupidity

Being stupid is subject dependent, of course.

-- Elliot Temple
<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sun, 04/13/2003 - 15:31 | [reply](#)

Libertarians Don't Understand Morality

Is the sole responsibility of the US Army to defend the US from attack? It is the first priority by a large margin when the US is under direct attack but the thing is that it's not and seldom has been. The reason for this is that it is very difficult for the US to do anything at all is it gets destroyed, it's just common sense.

However, in the long run, the best way to make the US safe is for it to stick its nose into other state's business because the situations that might lead to military conflict are those in which the issue at

stake is related not to the geographical location of the US but to its political and moral values.

Take for instance the Arabs' fifty year long attempt to wipe Israel from the map. The Arabs are not directly attacking the US when they sponsor terrorism against Israel but it is still appropriate for the US to give money to Israel to kill Palestinian terrorists and to make alliances with Israel and to publicly support Israel when it takes on these terrorists. Why? Because the values the terrorists despise in Israel are the very same values held by the US and inevitably their attention would turn in the direction of the US among others once they achieved their goal of destroying Israel. The allegiance of the US army should be for the values that the US stands for not the piece of ground on which it happens to be sited. In the years to come there will be a lot of international politicking and possibly a few wars, these dealings will be replete with foreign aid deals and entangling alliances and most of it will be entirely good and right and the highups in the LP will still bitch about it endlessly because they don't understand the above argument.

by a reader on Sun, 04/13/2003 - 16:30 | [reply](#)

Why did you post *this*???? Y...

Why did you post *this*???? Yet another apologist for the LP.

by a reader on Tue, 04/15/2003 - 02:19 | [reply](#)