

David Rieff I see no reason conservatives and progressives can't join forces in opposing the war on terror. If they want to stand a chance of reining it in, they'd better. (I'm extremely pessimistic about the chances of stopping it entirely.) Like William Pfaff, who I don't think could comfortably be pigeon-holed as being Left or Right, I have a terrible fear that only a disaster will make a substantial number of Americans think differently about our descent into militarism since at least the end of World War II.

For now, the hold of the National Security State seems as impregnable as our two-party system. We may grumble about both from time to time, and look hopefully toward third-party candidacies, but from William Jennings Bryan and Eugene Debs to Ross Perot and Ralph Nader, they have never managed to realize their supporters' hopes. I see no unsentimental reason why a Ron Paul candidacy will do any better.

Perhaps the greatest achievement of the two-party duopoly that rules this country through the self-reinforcing mechanisms of money, gerrymandering, and incumbency has been to convince the public that this rigged game is in its own interest. Similarly, 50 years of propaganda—from liberals as much if not more than from conservatives—has persuaded the American public that the U.S. having roughly 1,000 foreign military bases is something we dare not change for the good of the world as much as for our own national interests.

This is not patriotism but narcissism. But try telling that to the propagandists at the liberal foreign-policy blog "Democracy Arsenal"—the name tells you everything you need to know—or the conservative ones at *National Review's* "The Corner." Castro once infamously said, "Inside the Revolution anything, outside it nothing." Replace revolution with Pax Americana or, if you prefer the soft-power liberal variant, American leadership and "moral authority," and the imperial consensus in contemporary Washington takes pretty much the same line.

Breaking this consensus is the great task of anyone who believes the continuation of the American empire will lead to disaster. For the antiwar Left and Right to come together to do so seems like common sense. Having said that, as readers of *The American Conservative* know far better than I, the vast majority of the American Right is still firmly committed to the Republican Party, and the Republican Party—as speeches of all the major contenders for the Republican nomination in 2012 make depressingly clear—is unbending in its support of the National Security State.

The Left of the Democratic Party isn't anti-imperialist enough for me, but it is anti-imperialist by tradition and inclination. Still, I have a difficult time seeing leftists within the party turning on President Obama. What they find intolerable is less that he is behaving like Bush 2.0 in Afghanistan than that this hawkish foreign policy has not been accompanied

by a strong push for the social-democratic domestic-policy agenda candidate Obama promised. Much like the attitude of the Bush administration to social conservatives, the Obama administration counts on the fact that the Left feels it has nowhere else to go.

Changing those two dynamics is the work of a generation, if it is even possible at all. But if we, on the anti-imperial Right and the anti-imperial Left, believe what we say, we had damned well better try.

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Thomas E. Woods Jr. I am skeptical about the prospects for a Left-Right alliance against war even though I would very much like to see one. My skepticism derives from personal experience: important progressive websites, seeking to damage my good name, have supported their case against me by pointing to Max Boot's criticism of my work. One of the world's shortest books might discuss the U.S. military interventions that Boot has not supported with macabre gusto. His impatience with me is due in part to my strong disapproval of Woodrow Wilson's decision to intervene in World War I.

If progressives prefer Max Boot to an antiwar libertarian like me, and in fact have a soft spot for the unspeakable Wilson, I am unable to see how a proposed alliance is going to work.

Yet there's no reason in theory that it can't, and in practice we do have a helpful model: the Anti-Imperialist League, established in the waning years of the 19th century. There Andrew Carnegie, Samuel Gompers, William James, Edward Atkinson, and a wide variety of other figures of Left and Right worked in happy concord against the War Party of their day.

One potential difficulty, some have suggested, is that such a coalition would lack a positive program, united only in its opposition to war. I disagree. Peace more than suffices as a positive program. War, after all, has managed to hold together the Lieberman/Limbaugh alliance pretty well.

I suspect Right and Left have much to learn from each other. Several years ago, I wrote a lengthy paper on the work of Seymour Melman, a leftist whose analysis of the military state struck me as valuable and original. I wrote the paper in order to alert libertarians to his important work, which I suspect had been neglected either because of Melman's (largely irrelevant) ideological commitments or simply because our side had never come across it before.

The most dangerous extremists in our society are to be found in that continuum from Mitt Romney to Hillary Clinton

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that we grotesquely describe as the “mainstream.” It thinks nothing of lying to the American public in the service of its foreign ambitions. (These are mere “mistakes” to be mildly regretted after the fact.) It cheers military campaigns that create widows and orphans in unimaginable numbers, all dissenters from this policy being, of course, America haters. Do I want to see an alliance against this horror show? More than anything in the world.

THOMAS E. WOODS JR. *is the author of nine books and co-editor of We Who Dared to Say No to War: American Antiwar Writing from 1812 to Now.*

John V. Walsh For too long we have all been Sunni and Shia. We in opposition to war and empire have been defeated because we have been divided. The deepest fissure is loyalty to the political parties of empire, Democrat or Republican, in place of a unifying commitment to the principle of nonintervention. As long as this crippling rupture persists, we shall have empire and its necessary acolyte, war, with all the death and destruction the latter entails.

When Bush II was in charge, the progressive wing of the Democrat Party properly railed against him for his war on Iraq. But with the Obama regime, these same critics have fallen silent or have muffled their criticism, turning it into an impotent, reverential plea to do the right thing.

There is an urgency to forge a unified antiwar program for at least two reasons. First, the march of technology is such that war in the future may well threaten the human species and perhaps all of life, a truth to which Einstein long ago called our attention. Certainly it can bring suffering of untold magnitude, greater by far than that of World War II. Second, the main target of the empire’s activities now and a large part of the rationale for its depredations in Central Asia is China. America’s policy is to allow no other country to approach it as the world’s number one economic and military power. But if China is to emerge from poverty, given its huge population, it will necessarily stand on an equal footing with the U.S. or even eclipse it in output and wealth. Conflict with China, especially using India as a U.S. proxy, would mean untold death and destruction, and no one knows where such a conflict would lead. It must not happen.

What then does it take to bring Left and Right together? First, a maturity that allows one to form alliances based on certain goals without regard to others. This is, after all, politics not theology. Second, confidence. If one feels that one’s views will not stand up to contact with those of differing philosophies, then nothing is possible. The third requirement is mutual respect

instead of stereotypes. If these can be achieved, there is no reason for failure.

JOHN V. WALSH *writes for CounterPunch.com and Antiwar.com.*

John Lukacs When the Soviet empire collapsed in 1989, the reactions of most Americans were commendable. They did not gloat over the troubles of their adversary. The few exceptions to this overall benevolence were the nationalist “conservatives” and so-called neoconservatives. The former kept shouting, “We won!”—meaning, of course, the Republican Party. The latter, on the ascendant, declared that the time had come for many things, including the rubbing of Russia’s nose in the dust. Yet the great majority of the American people were indifferent to those sentiments. Even the first Bush’s victory in the Gulf War left them largely unmoved. So in 1992, most voted for a Democrat to become their president.

Throughout the 40 or more years of the Cold War, the Democrats had seldom, or perhaps never, proposed a foreign policy markedly different from the Republicans. The main reason was their fear of not seeming nationalist enough. Meanwhile, the Republicans completed their transformation into a nationalist and populist party. As early as 1956, their platform called for “the establishment of American air and naval bases all around the Soviet Union.” (This was the party that liberals still called “isolationist.”)

Then in 1992, this country acquired a president who was almost entirely uninterested in foreign affairs. He appointed Madeleine Albright as secretary of state, and she committed what was probably the gravest mistake in the foreign policy of the Republic in more than 200 years—the extension of the American military alliance system after 1997 to a dozen countries such as Romania, Bulgaria, and Lithuania, many of them abutting the very frontiers of Russia.

This was part of a foreign policy that has by now established more than 700 bases across the globe and that an entire American generation—liberals and conservatives alike—has come to take for granted. This mental condition constrains even the current president.

So my melancholy answer to the question of whether Left and Right together can change our foreign policy is no. But I conclude with one of Rochefoucauld’s great maxims—things are never quite as bad, or as good, as they seem. In other words, history remains unpredictable. Not much comfort that, but there it is.

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