

# Symposium

Another explanation for America's continued global activism is the imbalance of power between organized interests that constantly push for greater involvement and the far weaker groups who favor restraint. American liberal internationalism didn't just arise spontaneously as U.S. power grew; it was nurtured by groups like the Council on Foreign Relations, which was created to overcome isolationist sentiments. There are also civic action groups like the Foreign Policy Association, the World Affairs Councils, or the United Nations Association, as well as influential think tanks like the Brookings Institution, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the American Enterprise Institute, the Heritage Foundation, and the Center for a New American Security.

Washington is also home to numerous special interests with their own international agendas. Whether the issue is Cuba, Darfur, the Middle East, Armenia, arms control, trade, human rights, or climate policy, there is bound to be some well-funded group pressing Washington to focus more energy and attention on its particular pet issue.

Add it all up, and we have a foreign-policy establishment that constantly looks for problems to solve, even when U.S. vital interests are not concerned and when we have no idea how to fix the problems at hand. Nor does it matter which party is in power; when it comes to foreign policy, we increasingly have a one-party system of in-and-outers, endlessly circulating between government and these various supporting institutions.

America's persistent over-engagement in the world is due to two imbalances of power, not just one. The first is the gap between U.S. capabilities and everyone else's, which encourages the United States to do too much and allows others to do too little. The second imbalance is between organized interests whose core mission is pushing the U.S. to do more in more places and the less influential groups who think we might be better off doing less.

**STEPHEN WALT** is professor of international affairs at Harvard University and author, with John Mearsheimer, of *The Israel Lobby*.

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**Matthew Yglesias** Advocates of a more restrained American foreign policy have not had a good couple of decades. On the Right, the neoconservative faction appears more dominant than ever, notwithstanding the terrible consequences of their approach during the Bush years. On the Left, the Barack Obama of the primary campaign who said, "I don't want to just end the war, I want to end the mindset that got us into war in the first place" has transformed into a president who offers mostly incremental change—a more prudently managed ver-

sion of the same hegemonic aspirations that have governed the United States since the end of the Cold War. But in the nation's looming budgetary crisis, critics of this mindset will soon find an opportunity.

Integral to the dominant approach of recent decades has been the firm principle that nobody should have to pay any price for the upkeep of our military posture. Taxpayers are insulated from costs by the bipartisan consensus that military spending should be exempt from both formal budgetary constraint and the kind of political scrutiny given to other kinds of spending.

In normal times, such conduct might have been expected to produce a debt crisis. But the People's Republic of China has decided that it serves China's interests to engage in massive purchases of foreign currencies in order to keep its currency cheap and its volume of exports high. This is a shaky basis for global military hegemony, and all signs are that it won't last long.

Soon enough, interest rates will begin to rise and the retirement of the Baby Boomers will begin to weigh heavily on the budget. At that point, the political basis of America's national security posture will become untenable. It's not so much that we won't be able to afford the kind of defense spending we have today as that it won't be possible for the military-industrial complex to avoid having its funding priorities put into direct competition with other claims on tax dollars. And here is where advocates of a new approach must make our mark felt—by insisting that reformulating our "defense" policy more narrowly around the goal of defending the country is far and away the most appealing avenue available for closing the gap between revenues and expenditures.

**MATTHEW YGLESIAS** is a fellow at the Center for American Progress.

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**Justin Raimondo** I see little chance of a Left-Right alliance against anything at the moment, much less against our foreign policy of global intervention.

The presidency of Barack Obama has polarized the country to a degree we haven't seen since the Sixties. In the age of empire, the presidential persona so defines our politics that it overwhelms virtually all other factors. With the electorate and the elites divided between pro-Obama and anti-Obama camps, the issue of war and peace is viewed through a distorting prism, one that tends to fracture any Left-Right unity.

The Left is devoted to Obama for all sorts of political and cultural reasons and refuses to confront his administration on its conduct of foreign affairs. Never mind that their hero has out-Bushed Bush, escalating the war on terror and fol-

lowing through on Obama's campaign pledge to invade Pakistan. We hear not a whisper of protest from the formerly "antiwar" Democrats in Congress nor from the official peace movement of former Stalinists and wild-eyed Trotskyites. Indeed, United for Peace and Justice, the major lefty "united front against war," hailed Obama's election and since then seems to have dropped the "peace" aspect of its activities altogether.

On the Right, the neocons are still doing a bang-up business at the same old stand, unhurt by having been totally discredited by the Iraq War. Although facing an insurgency by Ron Paul's legions, the neocons are far from being finished as a political force. While gains have been made by anti-interventionist conservatives who can play the Obama card—I often call the current phase of our eternal war on terror "Obama's war" to prod right-wingers in an anti-interventionist direction—there is still much work to be done.

So what we have is the complete absence of a real leftist movement in this country, in the sense of the old-line hard-Left anti-imperialism that animated the antiwar movement of the 1960s, and a neocon-dominated Right that is fanatically devoted to militarism as a matter of high principle. This leaves us with a void in terms of political leadership.

But while the subjective conditions for a mass Left-Right movement against our crazed foreign policy are not good, the objective conditions—popular disgust with and rising opposition to endless wars—have never been better. A recent Pew poll showed that Americans would prefer a foreign policy described as "minding our own business." The same poll shows our elites have quite the opposite opinion. This divergence is the linchpin of any movement against interventionism: the brewing populist revolt against our corrupt, hapless elites can be turned against the War Party quite easily. Once we get political leaders on both sides of the spectrum who see this as an opportunity and move to take advantage of it, a Left-Right alliance against the empire will develop naturally.

**JUSTIN RAIMONDO** *is editorial director of Antiwar.com.*

**Robert Dreyfuss** Except in the unlikely event that things in Afghanistan go horribly awry—for instance, were the Taliban to launch a Tet-style countrywide assault that threatens to seize Kabul—it's almost impossible to imagine a significant antiwar movement emerging in the United States. Neither the mainstream media nor the political elite have challenged the dominant narrative that the war is a defensive crusade against the people behind 9/11. U.S. casualties have been confined to a tolerable level for the body politic. And so far, at least, the public seems to believe that the Obama administration can succeed.

Despite all that, a significant percentage of Americans, the polls tell us, no longer supports the war in Afghanistan. Yet incipient opposition to the war has not produced a vibrant antiwar movement.

In fact, opposition to the war in Afghanistan has been confined to a boisterous, usual-suspects coalition of activists, including such organizations as Code Pink that have little resonance with a broader constituency. That's unlikely to change, as long as the public at large—along with many progressive and left-leaning activists—believes that Obama can deliver the goods in areas such as job creation, financial regulation, and healthcare reform. Even during the Bush administration, when anti-Cheney, anti-neoconservative animus spurred leftist opposition to the war in Iraq, the antiwar movement was relatively small and ineffective.

Recently, some activists have tried to broaden the idea of an antiwar movement by imagining a Left-Right coalition, bringing together progressives, anti-military activists, and the peace movement on the Left with realist-minded, traditional conservatives and libertarians who oppose U.S. interventionism on the Right. Unfortunately, such a two-winged bird is unlikely to take flight, if for no other reason than the fact that its left wing is many times heavier than its right wing.

On the Right, few organized Republicans and libertarians will risk being exiled by challenging the party's lockstep embrace of the military and its counterinsurgency cult. With the exception of outliers such as Rep. Walter Jones—and, of course, the quixotic and weirdly off-kilter Ron Paul—there is no measurable opposition to the war among Republicans. Indeed, when Obama launched his escalation of the Afghan war last fall, the hyperpartisan Republicans abandoned partisanship and gleefully supported it. In that atmosphere, it's hard to imagine that antiwar sentiment can gain traction among the Republican base. Even the raucous, irrepressible Tea Party movement backs the war vociferously, if not intelligently.

On the Left, a band of progressive members of Congress—led by Reps. Dennis Kucinich and Jim McGovern and Sen. Russ Feingold—has pressed the Obama administration for an exit strategy. The antiwar caucus draws support from and energizes the antiwar movement, such as it is, including peace groups, church-based antiwar groups, and the organized Left. In contrast to the mindlessly pro-war GOP, there are scores of members of Congress who support their efforts, but just as their inability to block Bush's war efforts faltered, they've been undermined by the Democratic caucus's unwillingness to challenge Obama.

So what's the answer? Obama has declared that U.S. troops will begin leaving Afghanistan in July 2011. Between now and then, it's possible to imagine the small antiwar movement joining forces with liberal and centrist Democrats to press Obama