

Are We Only Good at Waging War?

by Evelyn Pyburn

The mayor of one of Montana's cities was recently caught with his foot in his mouth, having been overheard to say, with the press close at hand, that "The only thing Americans are good at is waging war."

The mayor could hardly be more wrong about Americans, as a broad and candid look at the world and at history clearly demonstrates.

It's true that, while there is never much to glorify about war, when Americans have to wage war, they are a force with which to contend as no force in history has ever been.

The United States' "war machine," muddled even as it is in bureaucracy and waste, is in fact the very kind of war machine that despots and dictators the world over have tried to build for centuries. Since these tyrants have never held much regard for common folk, they have thought nothing of subjugating, mutilating, and even destroying their own people in this fervent quest. Each tyrant has drained the resources of his country, wreaking havoc and destruction, in trying to create the war machine of his dreams.

But never has one succeeded in building a war machine equal to that of the United States,

which was, by comparison, built almost incidentally to the general growth and development of the country.

It's an economic vitality so great that even to launch that war machine into major action hardly causes a ripple in the functioning of the rest of the country. As one man noted at the height of the war with Iraq, "It's hard to believe we are at war because it hardly affects our everyday lives."

The explanation for this phenomenon lies wholly within the means—the economic system. Americans are not superior people, they simply have more freedom than the people of other countries—that alone makes the difference. The opportunity to pursue individual goals and for each person to use his mind and stand by his actions is what created the awesome wealth and capabilities that the United States government has drawn upon to construct its war machine.

To build a war machine has never been the goal of most Americans, just as it is never the goal of average citizens of any country, but because of the capabilities of individuals and their freedom to use their talents, the results are significantly greater. It is the strength of the individual that makes the United States such a military power.

Americans are good at war because they are so good at everything else.

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The Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence

by John P. Finneran

One could have wished that this excellent instrument had been preserved for a longer period in this place, and had stayed in use, or else, that another instrument had been constructed in its place. Since, however, men as a rule are more interested in worldly matters than in things celestial, they usually regard with indifference such happenings which will perhaps be more harmful to themselves than they themselves realize.

—TYCHO BRAHE, the great 16th-century Danish astronomer, on the ruining through government neglect of a giant quadrant he had constructed.¹

Tychos lament is common among scientists who rely on government funding. As Tycho discovered, the state can be a wobbly crutch, since government aid can vary greatly from year to year.

One scientific program currently receiving Federal support is SETI—the search for extraterrestrial intelligence. SETI consists mostly of listening for alien communication signals, although, in some cases, signals are sent from Earth in the hope of provoking a response. The importance of SETI has been summed up by Lewis White Beck, who pointed out that, if intelligent aliens are discovered, “there is no limit to what in coming centuries we might learn about other creatures and, more portentously, about ourselves. Compared to such advances in

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knowledge, the Copernican and Darwinian Revolutions . . . would have been but minor preludes.”²

Is There Extraterrestrial Intelligence?

Great thinkers have debated the likelihood of extraterrestrial intelligence for many centuries. The probable existence of intelligent aliens has been supported by Aristotle, Plutarch, Lucretius, Nicholas of Cusa, Giordano Bruno, Pierre Gassendi, John Locke, Johann Heinrich Lambert, and Immanuel Kant. It has been opposed by Albertus Magnus, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas.³

The mathematical probability that extraterrestrial life exists and will attempt to communicate with Earth was expressed by Frank Drake: The probability = (the probability that a given star system has planets) x (the number of habitable planets among those planets) x (the probability that life evolved on those planets) x (the probability that intelligence developed among planets with life) x (the probability that an intelligent species will attempt interstellar communication within five billion years after the formation of its planet). The problem with the Drake equation, of course, is that many of the variables are unknown, so that, depending on the numbers you plug in, the results can vary widely.

Those who doubt the existence of extraterres-