

The Case for Noninterventionism

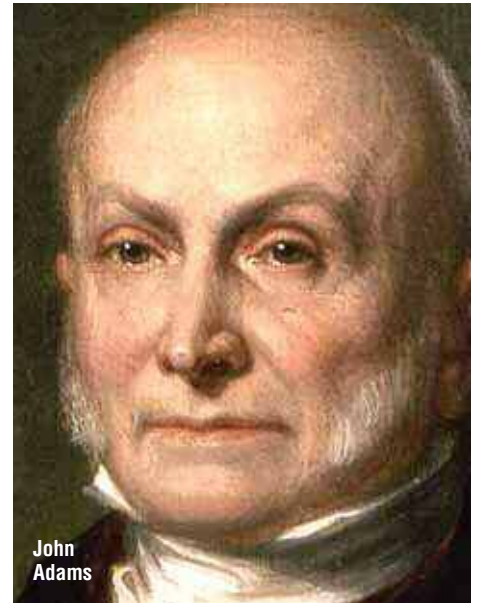
The term “isolationist” is slung like a curse in today’s conservative circles at those who don’t want America to police the world. But it’s interventionists who cause wars.



George Washington



Thomas Jefferson



John Adams

by Warren Mass

In some circles within the Republican Party, the worst tag that can be pinned on a politician is that of “isolationist.” After all, those who hurl this epithet claim, isolationism makes the world a more dangerous place and increases the likelihood of war.

However, the term as frequently used today misrepresents the foreign policy position of those at whom it is directed. When former Congressman Ron Paul was running for president in 2011-2012, his contenders and the media frequently tagged him with the isolationist label. He had an opportunity to explain why he was not an isolationist, but a *noninterventionist*, on December 14, 2011, in an interview with Wolf Blitzer, the host of CNN’s *The Situation Room*. Blitzer asked Paul: “Tell our viewers right now, once and for all, the difference between an isolationist and a noninterventionist.”

Paul replied:

An isolationist is a protectionist that builds walls around their coun-

try, they don’t like the trade, they don’t like to travel about the world, and they like to put sanctions on different countries. So some of the people who call me that, are actually much more in favor of sanctions and limited trade, they’re the ones who don’t want to trade with Cuba and they want to put sanctions on anybody who blinks their eye at them. And yet, the opposite is what we believe in, we believe Nixon did the right thing by opening up trade doors with China, because that is when we quit killing each other and we are more at peace, which we better be, because they have become our banker. So nonintervention is quite a bit different since what the founders advised was to get along with people, trade with people, and to practice diplomacy, rather than having this militancy of telling people what to do and how to run the world and building walls around our own country. That is isolationism, it’s a far cry from what we believe in.

The Texas congressman’s reference to the Founders and their advice serves to point us back to a time when noninterventionism was the rule. However, noninterventionism was abandoned in favor of interventionism, and as the historical record shows, it is the latter that has increased the likelihood of war, exactly the opposite of what those who apply the “isolationist” tar brush claim.

Our Founders Were Noninterventionists

Several months prior to the end of his second term as president, George Washington wrote a departing letter to “The People of the United States of America.” It was soon called Washington’s “Farewell Address.”

The address touched on many points, our nation’s relationships with other nations included. The Father of Our Country’s advice included:

- “Observe good faith and justice towards all Nations; cultivate peace and harmony with all.”
- “The great rule of conduct for us, in regard to foreign nations, is, in extend-

ing our commercial relations, to have with them as little political connection as possible.”

- “It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world.”

Thomas Jefferson, our third president, expressed similar noninterventionist concepts in his first inaugural address on March 4, 1801. Jefferson advocated: “Equal and exact justice to all men, of whatever state or persuasion, religious or political; peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations — entangling alliances with none.”

Jefferson was our nation’s first secretary of state, under President Washington. He shared Washington’s views in that capacity — views that were diametrically opposed to those of the modern-day interventionists who hold that same office.

Jefferson’s successor as secretary of state, John Quincy Adams, continued his noninterventionist policies, at least with regard to trans-Atlantic intervention. On the 45th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, in 1821, Adams delivered his much-quoted remarks to the members of the 22nd Congress. In his address, Adams observed:

[America] goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own.

The Rise of Interventionism

The United States for the most part followed its same noninterventionist foreign policy for the remainder of the 19th century. Our entry into the three-month Spanish-American War in 1898 was an exception that was precipitated by a galvanizing incident — the explosion that sank the battleship *Maine* on February 15, 1898. But the sinking of the *Maine* — which was never proved to have been the work of the Spaniards — was only the first in a long train of “incidents” that triggered U.S. involvement in wars, including the sinking of the *Lusitania*, the attack on Pearl Harbor, and the Gulf of Tonkin incident. (It could be said that the 9/11 terrorist attacks that launched our ongoing “war on terror” fall into the same category.)

World War I marked a radical change



Crafting internationalism: Edward Mandell House (left), an interventionist, is shown with President Woodrow Wilson. House had a major influence on Wilson’s decision to take us into World War I and in forming the postwar League of Nations.

in U.S. foreign policy, a change that was temporarily reversed in the 1920s under Presidents Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover, but which came back with a vengeance after Pearl Harbor. As we shall see, the interventionists would rule the day ever afterwards.

President Woodrow Wilson’s interventionist sentiments were strongly influenced by his mentor, “Colonel” Edward Mandell House. House traveled to Europe early in 1916 and formulated the House-Grey Memorandum with the British foreign secretary, Sir Edward Grey. The memorandum “invited” Germany to attend a peace convention, and included the veiled threat that if Germany did not agree, the United States would intervene militarily. (Britain had declared war on Germany in 1914, but the United States was still on the sidelines.) House had gone way out on a limb by co-drafting the memorandum, but the British government led by Prime Minister H.H. Asquith rejected the proposal, keeping the United States out of the war until the following year.

The British nevertheless did everything possible to involve the United States in their war with Germany. One week be-

fore the sinking of the *Lusitania* on May 7, 1915, Winston Churchill, then first lord of the Admiralty, wrote to Walter Runciman, president of Britain’s Board of Trade, that it was “most important to attract neutral shipping to our shores, in the hopes especially of embroiling the United States with Germany.” Germany had declared the seas around the United Kingdom to be a war zone, and the German embassy in the United States had placed a newspaper advertisement warning people not to sail on *Lusitania*, but Wilson did not heed the warning.

Wilson had been reelected in 1916 with the campaign slogan, “He kept us out of war.” Five months later, on April 2, 1917 — with the sinking of the *Lusitania* having fueled pro-war sentiment in the same way that the sinking of the *Maine* had back in 1898 — Wilson appeared before a joint session of Congress asking for a declaration of war to make the world “safe for democracy.” On April 6, Congress granted Wilson’s request and the United States was at war with Germany.

Wilson had charged the same mentor who was so eager to get the United States involved in World War I — Edward Man-

Noninterventionism was abandoned in favor of interventionism, and as the historical record shows, it is the latter that has increased the likelihood of war, exactly the opposite of what those who apply the “isolationist” tar brush claim.

dell House — with formulating his post-war policies. In September 1918, Wilson gave House the responsibility for preparing a constitution for a League of Nations. But a resurgence of noninterventionist sentiment following the war caused the Senate to reject U.S. membership in the League.

The Senate's rejection of their plan prompted House and other interventionists, such as Walter Lippman, to create a new organization to permanently steer U.S. foreign policy in an interventionist direction. That group was called the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). Because of the strong noninterventionist sentiment that prevailed in 1920s America, the CFR kept a low profile and its influence would remain inconspicuous for several more presidential administrations.

When Warren Harding campaigned in 1920 on the theme, "A return to normalcy (i.e., a return to the pre-war way of life) he was elected with 60.3 percent of the popular vote. Americans had clearly had enough of "foreign entanglements" that resulted in sending thousands of our young men overseas to die in foreign lands. Harding said during a campaign speech:

America's present need is not heroics, but healing; not nostrums, but normalcy; not revolution, but restoration; not agitation, but adjustment; not surgery, but serenity; not the dramatic, but the dispassionate; not experiment, but equipoise; *not submergence in internationality, but sustinment in triumphant nationality.* [Emphasis added.]

Americans welcomed Harding's "Return to Normalcy" with open arms. This non-interventionist foreign policy would continue for another decade, until the CFR interventionists who rallied following the end of the First World War were able to gain control of the foreign policy of another presidential administration in the person of Cordell Hull.

The memorandum "invited" Germany to attend a peace convention, and included the veiled threat that if Germany did not agree, the United States would intervene militarily.



Room-fillers: Charles Lindbergh, the first person to fly solo from America to Paris, was the leading spokesman for the America First Committee. After the death and devastation American soldiers suffered in a little more than a year of WWI, Americans didn't want to join WWII.

Did "Isolationism" Cause WWII?

Modern-day interventionists like to blame what they term "isolationism" for World War II, ignoring the fact that the governments responsible for bringing about this horrific war — very much including Nazi Germany, fascist Italy, and imperialist Japan — were not "isolationist" but were in fact aggressively pursuing foreign military adventurism at the time.

When what became World War II began with the nearly simultaneous invasion of Poland by Germany on September 1, 1939, and the Soviet Union 16 days later, most Americans wisely thought we should stay out of the European war. They remembered the high price in blood and money that our nation paid for our involvement in the First World War.

When a Gallup poll asked on March 13, 1939, in the event war broke out: "Should we send our army and navy abroad to help England and France?" An overwhelming 83 percent said "no," while only 17 percent were in favor.

On September 4, 1940, a year after war

started in Poland, R. Douglas Stuart, Jr., a student at Yale Law School and heir to the Quaker Oats Company fortune, organized the America First Committee (AFC), which opposed U.S. intervention in what would become World War II.

America First (which, at its peak, had 800,000 paid members in 450 chapters, indicating that noninterventionism was still a popular philosophy in America) issued a statement of four basic principles:

- The United States must build an impregnable defense for America.
- No foreign power, nor group of powers, can successfully attack a prepared America.
- American democracy can be preserved only by keeping out of the European war.
- "Aid short of war" weakens national defense at home and threatens to involve America in war abroad.

The last principle was a direct objection to Franklin D. Roosevelt's proposed "Lend Lease" program, officially titled "An Act to Further Promote the Defense of the United States."

The AFC was dissolved four days after Japanese forces attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. The United States declared war on Japan on December 8, and since Japan was bound by the Tripartite Pact, with Germany and Italy, those Axis

nations declared war on the United States on December 11. The United States responded in kind the same day.

America First had demanded that the United States build an impregnable defense for America. U.S. military strength was relatively weak as late as 1940, when the Roosevelt administration, anticipating our entry into the war, began building it up. The strength of our regular Army increased from 240,000 in 1940 to 1,300,000 in 1941. The Army Air Force increased from 51,000 in 1940 to 300,000 in 1941. In comparison, the German Army numbered around two million in 1940. In 1941, the Imperial Japanese Army had a total of 1,700,000 men.

In 1940, the U.S. Navy had just seven aircraft carriers. The Imperial Japanese Navy started the Pacific war with 10 aircraft carriers, making it the largest carrier fleet in the world at that time. Furthermore, Japan's carriers transported some of the best airplanes in the world, including the A6M Zero, which was considered the best carrier aircraft at the beginning of the war.

While no one knows the answer with certainty, it is reasonable to question whether Japan would have attacked Pearl Harbor (prepared or not) had the United States had a more formidable military and naval force.

Those who portray history from the interventionist perspective often neglect the obvious: Even if the United States were "isolationist" (which it was not), the Axis powers exhibited a textbook example not only of interventionism, but of interventionism combined with entangling alliances. When Germany, Italy, and Japan signed the Tripartite Pact on September 27, 1940, and agreed "to assist one another with all political, economic and military means when one of the three contracting powers is attacked" by a country not already involved in the war, they created an alliance of the most entangling sort imaginable.

Germany's abandonment of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact — a non-aggression pact signed with the Soviets on August 23, 1939 — and sudden attack on the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941 caused many Americans who had opposed U.S. involvement in the war to suddenly become interventionists.

On June 24, 1941, President Roosevelt told the American people: "Of course we are going to give all the aid that we possibly can to Russia."

Former president Herbert Hoover was not among those who favored aiding the Soviets, however. In a nationwide address on June 29, 1941, Hoover stated:

We know ... Hitler's hideous record of brutality, of aggression, and as a destroyer of democracies....

... Now we find ourselves promising aid to Stalin and his militant Communist conspiracy against the whole democratic ideals of the world.... It makes the whole argument of our joining the war to bring the four freedoms to mankind a gargantuan jest.

As Hoover continued, he seemed to have a near-prophetic insight into the Soviet's domination of Eastern Europe after Germany's defeat: "If we go further and join the war and we win, we have won for Stalin the grip of Communism on Russia and more opportunity for it to extend in the world."

It is questionable if Franklin D. Roosevelt sincerely wanted to avoid U.S. entry into the war, or just the opposite.

On October 30, 1940, as war raged in

Europe, Roosevelt delivered a speech in Boston, in which he said: "I have said this before, but I shall say it again and again and again: Your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign wars."

Roosevelt was reelected to an unprecedented third term a week later. In a little more than a year, in the wake of Pearl Harbor, he would follow the same playbook used by Wilson after the sinking of the *Lusitania* and ask Congress for a declaration of war.

Pearl Harbor was not the prelude of Roosevelt's efforts to drag us into the war, however, but the grand finale. With public sentiment against U.S. involvement in the war, Roosevelt knew that the only way he could change the prevailing opinion was to get Germany to strike the first blow.

In August 1941, after Roosevelt and Churchill met at the Atlantic conference, Churchill told his Cabinet, "The President had said he would wage war but not declare it and that he would become more and more provocative. If the Germans did not like it, they could attack American forces.... Everything was to be done to force an incident."

Roosevelt did his best, even dropping depth charges on German U-boats, in an attempt to force Germany to strike first.

Hitler made many tactical mistakes, but



Goading Americans into war: After U.S. intelligence learned that a Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor had been planned, top Roosevelt administration officials failed to warn the commanders in Hawaii.

When a Gallup poll asked on March 13, 1939, in the event war broke out: “Should we send our army and navy abroad to help England and France?” An overwhelming 83 percent said “no,” while only 17 percent were in favor.

provoking the United States, which he regarded as a formidable adversary, was not one of them.

Roosevelt had another ace up his sleeve, however. As noted earlier, Japan, Germany, and Italy had signed the Tripartite Pact, which bound the three Axis nations together in a military alliance. Therefore, if any one of them could be provoked into attacking the United States, it would mean war with all three.

Japan proved to be more willing to take the bait and strike first than Germany had been. Still, some maneuvering was necessary to goad Japan into attacking.

Roosevelt’s war secretary, Henry L. Stimson (a CFR member), effectively waged economic warfare on Japan: He imposed a trade embargo on the island nation, seized Japanese assets in the United States, and denied Japan use of the Panama Canal.

After a meeting with Roosevelt, Stimson wrote in his diary “The question was

how we should maneuver them [the Japanese] into the position of firing the first shot.” And, in case the Japanese proved to be as patient as the Germans, Roosevelt decided to turn up the heat a little more by demanding that Japan abrogate its treaty with the Axis — an unforgivable insult to Japanese national pride.

Roosevelt and company ensured that a Japanese attack would be successful and sufficient in magnitude to inflame Americans to the point that they would be ready to go to war. Nothing short of a catastrophic event could accomplish that end.

So when U.S. intelligence code breakers learned that a Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor had been planned and passed that information along to Roosevelt and his top officials — including Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall — nothing was done to warn the commanders in Hawaii so that they might take adequate defensive measures. Documentation of the Roosevelt administration’s foreknowledge of the attack

on Pearl Harbor is found in “Pearl Harbor: The Facts Behind the Fiction,” by James Perloff, in the June 4, 2001 issue of *THE NEW AMERICAN*. (The article is also found online, as “Pearl Harbor: Hawaii Was Surprised; FDR Was Not,” at this magazine’s website: www.thenewamerican.com.)

The rest is history, and, as we saw earlier, even the America First Committee disbanded after Pearl Harbor, since the country was attacked. But though the ensuing war effort brought about the defeat of the Axis powers, it also aligned the United States with another totalitarian regime, the Soviet Union, which, aided and abetted by U.S. lend lease, emerged from WWII as a world power.

The UN: The Interventionists’ Favorite Tool

Another important after-effect of World War II was that it provided the proponents of establishing the United Nations with a stronger argument that such an organization was needed to prevent another world war. The dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the closing of the war — which many historians regard as unnecessary, since Japan had made overtures to surrender seven months earlier — served as a stark warning to the world of what another war might lead to.

Future Secretary of State John Foster Dulles (a founding member of the CFR), who had been an early supporter of the League of Nations, served as a senior advisor at the 1945 San Francisco United Nations conference.

Another CFR member, Edward Stettinius, Jr., who was secretary of state under both Roosevelt and Truman, became chairman of the U.S. delegation to the 1945 UN conference. He was also instrumental in the formation of the UN and was present at its official founding on June 26, 1945. Soon afterward, President Harry S. Truman required Stettinius to resign as secretary of state to become the first U.S. ambassador to the United Nations.

Still another CFR member, Alger Hiss, served as secretary-general at the conference. Hiss was later convicted of perjury for lying to a congressional committee about his involvement in a communist spy ring.

The UN proved to be one of the most useful (if not the *most* useful) tools of U.S.



Handiwork to commit America to globalism: Delegates adopted the United Nations Charter in San Francisco at a conference on June 26, 1945, a document drafted by fervent internationalist John Foster Dulles in Washington, D.C., in 1944.

AP Images

interventionists to force our involvement in foreign wars. Long billed as “our last best hope for peace,” the UN has been just the opposite.

The language of the UN Charter reveals why our membership in the organization makes us vulnerable to forced participation in its “peacekeeping” operations. For example, in Article 25 we read: “The Members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council in accordance with the present Charter.”

After North Korea’s communist forces invaded South Korea in June 1950, the UN Security Council called on member nations to defend South Korea. President Truman complied with the UN’s directive, claiming he was using U.S. troops for a “police action,” not a war. When asked where he derived authority to use U.S. forces in that conflict without a declaration of war, Truman replied that, because he could provide troops to NATO, he could send troops to Korea. (NATO, itself, derives legitimacy from Articles 51-54 of the UN Charter. Secretary of State Dean Acheson admitted openly that approval of NATO was “an essential measure for strengthening the United Nations.”)

President Lyndon Johnson cited the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), another UN “Regional Arrangement,” as authorization for U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.

Taft vs. Eisenhower

In “1952 All Over Again,” a June 21, 2014 piece in the *National Journal*, columnist Michael Gerson devoted a large portion of his article to condemning one of the last prominent noninterventionist U.S. political leaders (at least, until former Congressman Ron Paul came along), Ohio Senator Robert Taft. Taft served in the Senate from 1939 until his death on July 31, 1953. A 1957 Senate committee named Taft as one of the five greatest senators in American history.

Gerson does not regard Taft so highly, though he does a credible job of summarizing the senator’s positions. He writes:

In the 1930s and early 1940s, Taft’s foreign policy views — keeping a distance from the problems of an incurable world — were predominant.... “I believe that the peace and



Ike should have known better: Despite his experience guiding Allied armies in WWII amidst the chaos and infighting that is the hallmark of international efforts, President Eisenhower picked John Foster Dulles as secretary of state, a man who was a founding member of the CFR, an early supporter of the League of Nations, and a senior advisor at the 1945 San Francisco United Nations conference.

happiness of the people of this country,” Taft said, “can best be secured by refusing to intervene in war outside the Americas and establishing our defense line based on the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.”

Gerson correctly summarized the effect of Dwight D. Eisenhower winning the 1952 Republican nomination over Taft: “Eisenhower’s eventual (and close) victory over Taft was a fateful moment in the history of Republican and American foreign policy.”

But it was much more than that. It represented the permanent takeover of the Republican Party by the neoconservatives (who champion an interventionist foreign policy) and the purging from the party of the noninterventionists, who are often described as “paleoconservatives,” or Old Right “classical conservatives.”

After his election, Eisenhower’s selection of John Foster Dulles as secretary of state spoke volumes. Dulles was a lifelong interventionist. In 1918, Woodrow Wilson appointed Dulles as legal counsel to the United States delegation to the Versailles Peace Conference, which created the League of Nations. He became a founding member of the interventionist CFR.

Dulles helped prepare the UN charter at Dumbarton Oaks, in Washington, D.C., in 1944, and in 1945, as already indicated, he served as a senior advisor at the San Francisco United Nations conference.

Recent Times

It’s worth noting that Michael Gerson served interventionist President George W. Bush as chief speechwriter from 2001 until 2006 and, as a senior foreign policy advisor from 2000 until 2006, was a member of the White House Iraq group. That group (also known as White House Information Group or WHIG) was described by a Wikipedia writer as “the propaganda arm of the White House whose purpose was to sell the 2003 invasion of Iraq to the public.”

Not surprisingly, Gerson is also a former senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, the influential policy organization we talked about earlier.

With more than a dozen U.S. secretaries of state having been CFR members over the years, the organization has been a major influence in driving U.S. foreign policy in an interventionist direction. Among the secretaries of state who were CFR members was Condoleezza Rice,



AP Images

The CFR's influence: President George W. Bush is pictured in 2006 with Vice President Dick Cheney and a group of current and former secretaries of state and defense. With the exception of Bush himself, everyone in the photo was a current or former member of the Council on Foreign Relations.

who headed State under George W. Bush from 2005-2009, and who served Bush as national security advisor from 2001-2005. It was while serving in that capacity that Rice shared membership in the White House Iraq Group with Gerson. Rice and Bush's vice president, Dick Cheney (also a CFR member), were among the administration's most strident advocates of the invasion of Iraq

In a WHIG meeting on September 5, 2002, Gerson proposed the use of a "smoking gun/mushroom cloud" metaphor to sell the American public on the supposed nuclear dangers posed by Iraqi strongman Saddam Hussein.

Shortly afterwards, when *New York Times* reporters contacted the White House to get some talking points for their upcoming piece about the Iraqis purchasing aluminum tubes (which supposedly had applications for a nuclear weapons program), a WHIG member leaked Gerson's phrase to the *Times*.

On September 7, 2002, Judith Miller of

the *Times* cited Bush administration officials who said: "In the last 14 months, Iraq has sought to buy thousands of specially designed aluminum tubes, which American officials believe were intended as components of centrifuges to enrich uranium."

On NBC's *Meet the Press* on September 8, 2002, Cheney cited the *New York Times* article, and accused Saddam of moving rapidly to develop nuclear weapons during the previous 14 months supposedly to add to his arsenal of chemical and biological arms.

On CNN, Rice acknowledged that "there will always be some uncertainty" in determining how close Iraq may be to obtaining a nuclear weapon but asserted, "We don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud."

The UN Serves Interventionism

Earlier, we observed that the UN, created in the aftermath of World War II as a supposed instrument of peace, has proved to

be a tool of U.S. interventionists to force our involvement in foreign wars.

The UN is a creature of the interventionists, by the interventionists, and for the interventionists. It is little wonder that when he was in Congress, the leading anti-interventionist congressman of his day, Ron Paul, repeatedly introduced H.R. 1146, the American Sovereignty Restoration Act "To end membership of the United States in the United Nations." Another firm noninterventionist still in Congress, Rep. Paul Broun (R-Ga.) has introduced the American Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2013 (H.R. 75), which would also end membership of the United States in the United Nations.

The specter of interventionism reared its head long before the UN was established, even before the League of Nations was established. But there is good reason to believe that, contrary to the claim that these organizations were created to prevent wars, the interventionists and their foreign internationalist allies precipitated two bloody world wars for the primary purpose of providing a pretext used to ensnare the United States in the sort of entangling alliances that our Founding Fathers warned of.

We continue to pay the price for our membership in the interventionists' "House of Entanglement." ■

Earlier, we observed that the UN, created in the aftermath of World War II as a supposed instrument of peace, has proved to be one of the most useful (if not the *most* useful) tools of U.S. interventionists to force our involvement in foreign wars.