

The Journal of Peace, Prosperity and Freedom

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To Make and Keep Peace: Among Ourselves and with All Nations

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Publisher: Hoover Institution Press

Year: 2014

[W]e need to make it as hard as possible for politicians to involve us in war. We must find a way to keep them away from loaded weapons forever. That's the one kind of gun control that really will save lives.

Harry Browne²⁰¹

I.

It is intriguing that after centuries of warfare human beings have not been able to absorb any lessons to avoid engaging in the economically destructive activity of militarism. It is even more intriguing that the United States – which spends about \$1 trillion on defence annually, has the biggest nuclear weapon stockpile and advanced capability to deliver warheads – has not been



201 Harry Browne, 'What is war?' <<http://www.antiwar.com/orig/browne1.html>>

able to forge any peace for its residents.²⁰² Why does America apparently need to wage conflicts in faraway lands in the Middle East just to secure itself despite its military might and strategically advantageous location?

In *To Make and Keep Peace* Angelo Codevilla, an emeritus professor at Boston University, asks how America might return to a state of peace after decades of permanent war. He criticises both utopian pacifism and idealistic internationalism, arguing that they provoke and prolong conflicts rather than ensure peace. A middle ground between the two that defeats the enemy, discredits its cause and removes the underlying political conditions that lead to aggression is more likely to forge lasting settlements.²⁰³ Codevilla wants the US to have a strong military but advises policymakers to be less bellicose – or as Theodore Roosevelt put it, ‘speak softly, and carry a big stick’. He suggests that diplomacy is effective when backed by sufficient military resources appropriate to the issues being discussed. A nation must not attempt to participate in wars that it does not have the tools to win (‘peace depends on the proper balance between commitments and the capacity to uphold them’²⁰⁴).

The book begins by offering insight into Christian theology and its link to national security matters. ‘Christians assert that since government exists to serve the people’s secular interest, the primordial of which is peace, war can only be a means to establish peace or an extraordinary counter to threats to peace.’²⁰⁵ The Christian faith ‘sees no ultimate value in any collective secular enterprise, much less in war’.²⁰⁶ Christianity therefore advises that rulers be judged by how well they contribute to peace and order.

Next readers are treated to the foreign policy views of America’s founding generation. It is here that Codevilla deduces that:

The distinction between ‘our business’ and ‘their business’ is the ultimate foundation of peace – the natural limiting principle of international affairs (as it is of interpersonal affairs). American foreign policy, as conceived by

202 Robert Higgs, ‘The trillion-dollar defense budget is already here’, 15 March 2007 <<http://www.independent.org/newsroom/article.asp?id=1941>>; Robert Higgs, ‘Defense spending is much greater than you think’, 17 April 2010 <<http://blog.independent.org/2010/04/17/defense-spending-is-much-greater-than-you-think/>>

203 Foreword, *To make and keep peace: among ourselves and with all nations* (Hoover Institution Press, 2014) iv.

204 Ibid 98.

205 Ibid 5.

206 Ibid 44.

[George] Washington and explained by [John Quincy] Adams, was based on this distinction, on this 'golden rule' of mutual forbearance. America would mind only its own business, fight only its own battles, not because it was weak, but because others' business is their own just as much as ours is our own, because no one has constituted Americans as judges of others' business, and because, while others may forbear much that we might do in our own interest, they will not stand for anything we might presume to do in theirs.²⁰⁷

Codevilla points to Washington's laser-like focus on peace, which can be contrasted to today's politicians who have no clear objectives or fight unwinnable wars without end. Codevilla cites Washington's approach to the Pennsylvania Whiskey Rebellion, during which he hanged nobody despite Alexander Hamilton urging him to teach the rebels a harsh lesson. Codevilla observes that '[t]he absolute priority of peace at home was the lesson he wanted to teach'.²⁰⁸ Overseas, Washington supported armed neutrality – America should be prepared to defend herself but Europe's various intrigues were no business of hers. In his farewell address, Washington proposed that America engage in trade and commerce with all nations but in extending commercial relations have as little political connection as possible; that is, treat everyone impartially. 'It is important to note that *Washington named no substantive objectives for American foreign relations - none*,' Codevilla writes, '*Only peace*'.²⁰⁹

Adams, sixth president and secretary of state under President Monroe, helped formulate the Monroe Doctrine which carved a sphere of influence that included Cuba, Mexico, Central America and South America in addition to North America. The doctrine warned Europe's colonial powers that America would treat as an act of aggression any attempt to interfere with nations in the aforementioned areas. Unlike today's American empire which spans the entire globe, Adams' concern was geographically limited and Codevilla sees this as a good thing: it established a boundary beyond which others must not tread lest America intervene to put a stop to their ambitions, while avoiding the perils of overreach by having a presence in 130 countries as America does now.

For Codevilla, a proper defensive posture would incorporate a policy of forward defence with bases in strategic locations to secure peace ('failure to secure

207 Ibid 191.

208 Ibid 62.

209 Ibid 64-65.

peace abroad [will] undermine peace at home²¹⁰). The US should become more realistic about nuclear weapons: the theory of ‘mutually assured destruction’ – which states that nations will be reluctant to nuke nuclear states for fear of being likewise annihilated in return - does not absolve policymakers of the responsibility to strategize ways to defend the homeland. Thus the US should plan for eventualities through measures like building missile defence systems.²¹¹

II.

Unlike neoconservatives, who are gung-ho about pretty much any intervention, Codevilla believes it would be better if the regime change option was never exercised given all the unintended consequences that could arise. Rather than invading countries and sifting through residents to find terrorists, which is inefficient and causes inhabitants to hate the US more, it is better to outsource the burden to foreign rulers through an ultimatum: either police their people on behalf of the United States or face death by drone.²¹² A credible threat of force through diplomatic channels may be sufficient and actual force may not be needed.

Even if targeted killing of foreign rulers was undertaken the US should not attempt a subsequent occupation of the foreign ruler’s country.²¹³ Illustrating his analysis, he opines that invading Afghanistan could have been a good idea if coupled with a warning to Middle Eastern governments that they can expect the same fate as the Taliban should they harbour anti-American radicals however he thinks policymakers got too involved in nation building.²¹⁴ Likewise the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in Iraq was a modest gain for American peace but the subsequent occupation was a disaster.²¹⁵ In the Syrian situation, he does not come to a conclusion but details how removing President Assad might be a good idea because Syrian agents have been directly responsible for the deaths of US citizens. He recognises however that it is problematic to support rebel opposition to Assad because those individuals might end up turning on America once they have removed Assad.²¹⁶

210 Ibid 68.

211 Ibid 131

212 Ibid 167

213 Ibid 163

214 Ibid 162, 165.

215 Ibid 163.

216 Ibid 193.

In Chapter 19, Codevilla confirms he understands the hypocrisy of America's imperial policies when he explains the US is effectively shooting itself in the foot by supporting – whether through money, arms, diplomacy or other aid – its enemies. Codevilla delivers a zinger on the Egypt situation when he explains that “US policy toward Egypt from 1956 to our time may be summed up as ‘futile attempts to purchase its rulers’ favor’”. The failed approach is evident because ‘Egypt became the main intellectual source of Sunni Islam’s terrorism against America’.²¹⁷ Plus, America helped Saddam Hussein rise to power.

He is able to drive home his points with excellent examples. In Chapter 20, he points out the US intelligence community’s failings with respect to the War on Terror. The CIA has for years relied on unreliable informants that are manipulating the US government into doing their dirty work for them. He gives the example of the death by suicide bombing of seven CIA officers in Afghanistan at the hands of an informant they had prized as a source on who to kill. ‘Because of US intelligences’ aversion to quality control, we can be fairly confident that those killed by counterterrorism operations are the informants’ enemies,’ he explains.²¹⁸

He correctly notes that ‘our ruling class’s construct of al Qaeda is emblematic of its lack of intellectual rigor in the service of escapism’.²¹⁹ By this he means to point out the abuses of the label ‘al Qaeda’ by the US government, which has used it to loosely refer to a wide spectrum of persons engaging in terrorism, even though many of these groups have different motivations and management. He calls for an investigation into the connections between the US government, Saudis and 9/11 due to the favouritism received by Saudi Arabia’s elite.²²⁰

For the most part, his arguments are sound, and anyone familiar with the work of Robert Pape or Michael Scheuer will not find much new in the sections on terrorism. However he makes contradictory statements that confuse the message of his book. Does he want the US to recognise the motives of the terrorists or does he not? Does he accept the idea of ‘blowback’ pointed out by Chalmers Johnson or does he not?²²¹ At one stage he says that the seizure of the American embassy by

²¹⁷ *To Make and Keep Peace*, 149.

²¹⁸ *Ibid* 166

²¹⁹ *Ibid* 160

²²⁰ *Ibid* 179

²²¹ For example, on page 143 he endorses the theory of blowback: ‘If you want to be left in peace, it really does help to leave others in peace, too’. But then on page 194 he recites a standard chicken-hawk line: ‘...Western elites – including our statesmen – seem eager to accept whatever blame for the Muslim world’s troubles Muslim politicians impute to Western civilization. That eagerness is the source of the Muslim world’s increasing disrespect for America and Americans. Hence we should not even try to imagine what Islamists might cite to excuse anti-American

Iranians in 1979 was a ‘textbook act of war’, but ignores CIA provocation in the form of a coup d’état that overthrew the Iranian Prime Minister in 1953.²²² The US started the war, not the Iranians, and had the CIA not meddled so much in others’ affairs many problems could have been avoided.

Codevilla has an impressive mastery of the issues and it shows in the detailed narrative he constructs in going through every major war in American history and elucidating each. Take, for instance, the deep understanding indicated by this sweeping statement:

Each and every one of the creatures that [President Woodrow] Wilson conceived at Versailles, from the special status of the Rhineland and the Polish Corridor to Yugoslavia, to Czechoslovakia, to the Mandates of Palestine, Syria, and Iraq, ended up as the proximate cause of one or more wars – horrors for which America bears some responsibility. Particularly gratuitous and fateful was Wilson’s alienation of Japan, whose good relationship with Britain he destroyed.²²³

I have a problem, however, with Codevilla’s portrayal of the events leading to World War II. Although he accurately notes how the harsh economic settlement of World War I led to World War II, he seems to think that pacifist opinion among American political elites was a contributing factor because of deterrence measures they failed to take to preserve peace, such as fortifying East Asia so that Japan would not have a free hand there. Pacifist is hardly the appropriate term to describe the American machine in the 20th century; ‘bloodthirsty’ is closer to the mark.²²⁴ He may have a legitimate point that deterring Germany and Japan through diplomatic measures and fortifying bases could have made a difference,²²⁵ but if he wanted to make that point it would help to address the counterarguments of those

violence’. He then goes on the offensive against Muslim politicians at page 195: ‘Our business now is forcefully to restore respect for ourselves by holding those rulers responsible’.

222 Codevilla does realize that the CIA played a part in the Mohammad Mosaddegh’s overthrow, alluding to it on page 147, which makes his characterisation of the 1979 incident as an ‘act of war’ all the more inconsistent.

223 Ibid 104-105.

224 For elaboration on how the US has been recklessly violent throughout the 20th century see the sources in Anthony Gregory, ‘Libertarians and war: a bibliographical essay’ <<http://libertarianstandard.com/2013/03/20/libertarians-and-war-a-bibliographical-essay/>>

225 Although some argue that such power-play measures only end up provoking war, rather than deterring it.

who suggest America should not have disturbed its peace by joining World War II even once it broke out.²²⁶

There is another flaw in Codevilla's arguments. In chapter 11 (pp. 81-85) he portrays President Lincoln as an adherent to the rule of law, who tried to avoid armed conflict until the South's aggression left him no choice. He writes, '[t]he Civil War had made sense, to the extent it did, as the resolution of a set of questions about what kind of peace America could live with'.²²⁷ This ignores James Ostrowski's legal analysis where he finds that Lincoln violated the Constitution in using force to keep the southern states inside the union.²²⁸ And although it is commonly thought that the South initiated the war with its attack on Fort Sumter, things are not as black and white as Codevilla wants readers to believe. Fort Sumter was located in South Carolina, which had declared secession, yet the Fort's northern loyalists refused to leave, probably to manoeuvre the south into firing the first shot. Lincoln shrewdly took advantage of the situation to wage a war on all the southern states rather than just negotiating on the subject of Union property in South Carolina.²²⁹ There is much scholarship showing how Lincoln waged a war of northern aggression (rather than for peace) and repressed civil liberties. Many other nations abolished slavery without violence, yet Codevilla writes as if the Civil War was a necessary evil rather than a flawed policy perpetuated by Lincoln's lack of imagination in devising alternatives.

In whitewashing Lincoln, Codevilla harms the cause of serious analysts of peace because he indirectly justifies suppressing secessionist movements everywhere. But as Mises wrote, 'The right of self-determination ... thus means: whenever the inhabitants of a particular territory, whether it be a single village, a whole district, or

226 Gareth Garrett, *Defend America First* (Caxton Press, 2003); Murray Rothbard, 'America's two just wars: 1776 and 1861' in *Costs of War: America's Pyrrhic Victories* (Ludwig von Mises Institute, 1999). See also Patrick Buchanan, *Churchill, Hitler and 'The Unnecessary War': How Britain Lost its Empire and the West Lost the World* (Three Rivers Press, 2009) and Peter Hitchens, 'Was World War II just as pointless and self-defeating as Iraq?' *Daily Mail*, 19 April 2008 <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-560700/Was-World-War-Two-just-pointless-self-defeating-Iraq-asks-Peter-Hitchens.html>>

227 Codevilla, *To Make and Keep Peace*, 84.

228 James Ostrowski, 'Was the Union Army's invasion of the Confederate states a lawful act? An analysis of President Lincoln's legal arguments' in *Secession, State and Liberty* (Transaction Publishers, 1998).

229 Abraham Lincoln, First inaugural address, 4 March 1861: 'The power confided to me will be used to hold, occupy, and possess the property and places belonging to the Government and to collect the duties and imposts; but beyond what may be necessary for these objects, there will be no invasion, no using of force against or among the people anywhere'. See also John Denson, 'Lincoln and the first shot: a study of deceit and deception' in *Reassessing the Presidency* (Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2001).

a series of adjacent districts, make it known, by a freely conducted plebiscite, that they no longer wish to remain united to the state to which they belong at the time ... their wishes are to be respected and complied with'.²³⁰ Allowing secessionists to depart peacefully can in many cases avoid bloodshed. If Codevilla understood what it takes to bring about peace, he would have understood that the south should have been allowed to depart. I noticed hints of such belligerence sprinkled throughout the book, which clouds a message delivered more consistently by other authors.²³¹

III.

Were the recommendations of this book followed by policymakers, American foreign policy would be better than it is now in terms of advancing peace. It would of course not be perfect and would have much irrationality. Many innocent people would die and America would still be hated around the world. However things would be better than they are now because, in the final analysis, Codevilla does advocate a more restrained and focused use of American power abroad. One can see this in the way he distinguishes himself from the mainstream schools of international relations thought by criticising liberal internationalists, neoconservatives and realists. He is more a dove than a hawk, but he appears less dovish than libertarian thought which advocates a foreign policy grounded in the rule of law.

The question posed at the beginning of this review can now be answered. Codevilla's essential message is that the US has lost its way. Successive administrations have forgotten how to achieve peace and flay about like bloodied animals rather than thinking clearly about the problems facing them. Codevilla gets the main points right but confuses the message through internal inconsistencies within his argument. *To Make and Keep Peace* is worth reading for its positive analysis but reject some normative recommendations where they are inconsistent with the founding fathers and the libertarians who follow in their steps.

²³⁰ Ludwig von Mises, *Liberalism* (Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2002) 109.

²³¹ In chapter 17, Codevilla wants the US to deliver aid to East German rebels to revolt against the Soviet Union. This contradicts his praise of George Washington in the earlier chapters, since it is unlikely Washington would have advocated such extensive interference in Europe's affairs. For fidelity to the founding fathers see Ivan Eland, *The empire has no clothes: US foreign policy exposed* (Independent Institute, 2008).