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## The Revolt Against NATO

By Justin Raimondo  
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It's a revolt against interventionism

A recent report published in *Foreign Policy* magazine illustrates quite neatly how the anti-interventionist cause is making big gains – and how to effect real change in American foreign policy. The headline reads: “Senators Slam NATO ‘Free Riders’ in Closed Door Session With Secretary General,” and the story went on to relate how GOP Senators are suddenly complaining about how and why the burden of NATO falls largely on Uncle Sam’s sagging shoulders:

*“For under an hour, senators grilled [NATO Secretary General Jens] Stoltenberg, a former prime minister of Norway, about why only five members of the 28-nation club spend at least 2 percent of their gross domestic product on defense, the official amount NATO recommends each nation to set aside. Some expressed particular dissatisfaction with Germany, the fourth largest economy in the world, which does not meet the 2 percent threshold.”*

Although the article claimed that Sen. Bob Corker (R-Tennessee) “and other US officials” have “blasted” our feckless allies for years over this imbalance, this is the first time we’ve heard about it. Why is that? Well, it’s because the Republican frontrunner, one Donald J. Trump, is making an issue of it, and even suggesting that NATO, which he says is “obsolete,” is a relic of the cold war that ought to be entirely abandoned.

This has the foreign policy Establishment in a panic, with legions of “experts” rising up to denounce Trump’s heresy as misguided, absurd, and – of course! – “isolationist.” Yet the politicians can’t afford to be so dismissive: after all, they have to listen to their constituents, at least to some extent. And it’s quite telling what Sen. Corker – who has warned the “Never Trump” crowd to back off – had to say to Stoltenberg:

*“I did mention to him that there’s a populism that is taking place within our country right now, both sides of the aisle. The American people know that we are a nation spending way beyond our means and when our European counterparts are not honoring their obligations as they should, at some point, there’s going to be a breaking point.”*

Ah yes, the “breaking point” – we’ve been waiting for it for, lo these many years, and finally – *finally!* – it looks like it’s happening. And we owe it all to an unlikely figure, a New York real estate mogul who has never run for office and whose public persona is a cross between a reality TV star and P. T. Barnum. Nobody – including myself – predicted the effect he would have on the presidential race, and, more importantly, on the political discourse in this country. Due to Trump’s astounding rise, even the haughty mandarins in the US Senate are being forced to pay attention and give voice to their usually *very* muted criticism of an institution that is the linchpin of our internationalist foreign policy. As *Foreign Policy* puts it:

*“Donald Trump has spent much of his campaign deriding NATO allies for ‘ripping off’ the American taxpayer and failing to contribute to the world’s most powerful military alliance. But on Wednesday, his fellow Republicans joined the chorus during a closed-door meeting with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on Capitol Hill, according to sources inside the room.”*

Corker claims to have raised the issue “in Munich, I have expressed this in Davos, I have expressed this in every forum where Europeans are listening.” Now he is finally forced to express it in a forum where *Americans* are listening – and that is the key point.

Support for our interventionist foreign policy has never extended much beyond the Washington Beltway. It’s a common complaint among the wonkish “experts” who inhabit the thinktanks along the Potomac that the average American doesn’t have a passport, doesn’t care about what happens overseas unless it impacts him directly, and is basically one of those dreaded “isolationists.”

Yet they also reveled in the alleged ignorance of Joe Sixpack, who – up until this point – hasn’t had any way to protest the billions that flow overseas in the name of “national security” while our roads and bridges deteriorate and their tax burden gets heavier by the year. The bipartisan commitment to maintaining an overseas empire has always muted the voices of ordinary Americans, who would like nothing better than to mind their own business, and tend to reflexively oppose meddling in the affairs of other nations. The free-spending lobbyists over at Lockheed-Martin, General Dynamics, and the rest of the military-industrial complex were always far more persuasive than NATO’s occasional critics. That’s now changed, as the *Foreign Policy* writer explains to his elite audience:

*“But what once was an esoteric concern confined to the halls of think tanks and embassies is now a red-hot campaign issue. Corker said Trump’s campaign rhetoric speaks to a concern he’s heard from his own Tennessee constituents, which he relayed to Stoltenberg.”*

This illustrates the incalculable value of the Trump campaign for anti-interventionists: he has taken ideas about America’s role in the world once considered too “extreme” to be seriously considered and popularized them to the point where the politicians must respond. And by suggesting that maybe it’s time for NATO to go the way of the old Soviet Union – into the dustbin of history – Trump has forced them to move in his direction, while attempting to salvage what they can:

*“Still, a number of senators in the room emphasized that their frustrations about burden-sharing within the NATO alliance did not mean they see eye-to-eye with Trump, who has called the alliance ‘obsolete’ and said it may have to dissolve.*

*“‘I believe NATO’s an indispensable alliance,’ said Sen. Marco Rubio, who suspended his failed presidential campaign last month. ‘It certainly needs to be modernized but it has a real value to it.’”*

“Failed” is a mild term indeed to describe Rubio’s fate: crushed by Trump in his home state of Florida, the Boy Wonder of the neocons had no choice but to drop out. The only victories he could point to were Minnesota (a caucus state) and the US colony of Puerto Rico. And he was the prime spokesman of the neoconservative internationalists, who abhor Trump’s “isolationism,” and are absolutely terrified that his anti-NATO stance will short-circuit their planned revival of the cold war with Russia. He wasn’t shy about attacking Trump’s call for America to come home – it was one of his main talking points – and the voters rejected him soundly and decisively. Ask the average American if they think NATO is “indispensable” and they’ll look at you as if you’ve gone mad, because the question that foreign policy mavens in the Beltway don’t care to ask (or answer) is: “Indispensable” to *whom*?

That Trump’s supporters are now loudly asking this question is what has the War Party so terrified that they will apparently stop at nothing in their campaign to steal the nomination – by hook or by crook – in a “contested” (i.e. rigged) convention. It isn’t only the enormous sums of money that are at stake here: the power and prestige of the entire foreign policy Establishment is at risk. Which is why the internationalists are desperate to save what they can from the wreckage of what used to be the bipartisan consensus:

*“Democratic Sen. Chris Murphy of Connecticut said that reasonable people can disagree about the contributions of NATO members, but Trump’s open speculation that the alliance may be worth leaving is far outside the mainstream. The United States has been a member of NATO since it was formed to counter the Soviet Union in 1949.*

*“‘I think it’s important to explain that Trump isn’t the tip of an iceberg,’ Democratic Sen. Chris Murphy of Connecticut, told Foreign Policy. ‘He is a tiny isolated chunk of ice out in the ocean on this.’”*

Since 2011, Sen. Murphy has received over \$700,000 in campaign contributions from investment bankers – a category of donors that depends heavily on America’s willingness to defend their overseas investments, and that finances the huge arms deals NATO members (including the US) must make to “modernize” their arsenals. In Sen. Murphy, Goldman-Sachs, J.P. Morgan, and the rest of that gang are surely getting their money’s worth.

Murray Rothbard explained the key role played by the investment bankers in pushing for and maintaining our interventionist foreign policy. In his fascinating and detailed history of how the financial elites have dominated and shaped US foreign policy, Rothbard wrote:

*“The great turning point of American foreign policy came in the early 1890s, during the second Cleveland administration. It was then that the United States turned sharply and permanently from a foreign policy of peace and nonintervention to an aggressive program of economic and political expansion abroad. At the heart of the new policy were America’s leading bankers, eager to use the country’s growing economic strength to subsidize and force-feed export markets and investment outlets that they would finance, as well as to guarantee Third World government bonds. The major focus of aggressive expansion in the 1890s was Latin America, and the principal enemy to be dislodged was Great Britain, which had dominated foreign investments in that vast region.”*

Using the US military as their unofficial police force, the great financial combines – the Morgans, the Lehmans, the Rockefellers, et al – were the motor of American expansionism throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Their lobbyists and congressional spear-carriers in Washington created the vaunted postwar “architecture” of which NATO is the cornerstone, and that is now threatened by a populist-nationalist uprising. In seeking to head off and stifle this insurgency, Sen. Murphy, and his internationalist Republican co-thinkers in the “Never Trump” cabal, are simply defending their financial and personal interests. Yet there is every indication that they are vastly underestimating the challenge they face.

Murphy is quite wrong that “Trump isn’t the tip of an iceberg.” A huge glacier has been lurking beneath the waves of American politics for many years, and it hasn’t surfaced until now due to lack of a spokesman.

That avatar of populist discontent has now appeared in the person of Donald J. Trump, who is anything but “a tiny isolated chunk out in the ocean.” Millions of Americans support Trump precisely because he is willing to take on the sacred cow of NATO, and the Republican foreign policy dogma that led us into a disastrous war in Iraq.

The political elites in both major parties have been steering the country toward an iceberg that they have ignored at their peril. This is what has made the rise of Trump almost inevitable. And it’s significant that a great deal of his support comes from the Trumpian critique of our relations with the rest of the world: not only in regard to questions of war and peace and our alliances, but also our trade and immigration policies. I plan to deal with the trade issue in a future column, but for now I’ll just recall that infamous quote from an unnamed top aide to President George W. Bush (later identified as Karl Rove) cited by Ron Suskind in the *New York Times Magazine* during the Iraq war:

*“The aide said that guys like me were ‘in what we call the reality-based community,’ which he defined as people who ‘believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality. ... That’s not the way the world really works anymore. We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you’re studying that reality – judiciously, as you will – we’ll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that’s how things will sort out. We’re history’s actors...and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.”*

“History’s actors” have led us to one disaster after another: they have impoverished a once wealthy nation, exhausting its resources in a futile crusade to remake the world and enrich the few at the expense of the many – leaving death and much destruction in their wake. And now the American people are rising up, and saying: “Enough!” No longer content to be left to just watch helplessly as the Karl Roves of this world wreak havoc on a global scale, ordinary people are waking up – and standing up.

If populism is anything it is an *awakening* – a move away from the traditional passivity of the ordinary citizen and toward an activist rebellion against the regnant elites. This is the essence of the Trump campaign, and it is having a salutary effect on the movement to fundamentally alter and reverse our interventionist foreign policy.

This is what Trump’s many critics – including many anti-interventionists, and certainly most libertarians – fail to understand. No one would be talking about the costs of NATO if Trump hadn’t challenged the conventional wisdom, made it a campaign issue, and put it front and center. And surely no one would’ve ever imagined the Republican frontrunner calling out the second Bush administration for lying us into the Iraq war and disdaining the Bushian mantra that “he kept us safe.” And in spite of his disgraceful pandering to AIPAC, Trump’s actual stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – that we have to be “evenhanded” – represents a total break with the bipartisan pro-Israel consensus that would’ve been inconceivable just a short while ago.

All of this represents a sea change in American politics, and in the way foreign policy is debated and shaped – and it is having its effect,, and will continue to reverberate for many years, no matter what the fate of Trump’s campaign.

Which brings me to my main point – which is that Trump, *as a candidate*, is entirely beside the point. What’s significant about his campaign is the tremendous response he has evoked from voters in every demographic, from coast to coast, even as he smashes every icon sacred to the globalist-interventionists in both parties. To ignore this is just sheer blindness – and to condemn it without deigning to acknowledge its many positive aspects is just plain stupid. Anti-interventionists who have been toiling in the vineyards for years trying to catch the attention of Americans should be jumping for joy that people are finally paying attention to the issues they care about. As *Foreign Policy* magazine put it:

*“[F]or longtime NATO observers, the unusually high profile of NATO scrutiny is novel for any U.S. election cycle in recent memory.*

*“‘NATO has never really gotten attention in presidential campaigns before this year’s with Trump,’ said Robbie Gramer, a NATO expert at the Atlantic Council. ‘The fact that the only attention it has received is through this light underscores how frustrated the US electorate is with its allies. And NATO really hasn’t found an effective way to combat this message.’”*

The Atlantic Council – which has received money from “more than two dozen countries since 2008,” including from practically all our European allies – is one of NATO’s many lobbyists in Washington. Their shtick up until now has been to ignore ordinary Americans and make their appeal to the political class. They haven’t had to venture out beyond the Beltway to do this – and now that they’re forced to do so, they haven’t a clue as to how to go about doing it.

The American people – thanks to Trump – are finally seeing that our “allies” are freeloaders and that the vaunted “security architecture” the politicians and the foreign lobbyists have been building up over the years is an albatross hung around our necks. Critics of our interventionist foreign policy don’t have to support Donald Trump’s candidacy to acknowledge their debt to him. They may not like him, they may abhor his other views – on, say, immigration – but it’s vitally necessary for them to give him credit where and when it is due. Failure to do so will result in their complete irrelevance. It’s absolutely imperative we in the anti-interventionist movement reach out to the millions who will troop to the polls to vote for Trump, and the millions more who are rooting for him. And it’s impossible to do that by sitting around virtue-signaling to his critics.

The choice before us is this: anti-interventionists can either continue their traditional tactics of talking among themselves, or they can broaden their movement to include the many millions who are now beginning to question the wisdom of a foreign policy that puts America and Americans last. As far as I’m concerned, the choice we have to make is too obvious to require much comment beyond posing the question.