

**Libertarians on the US Military: A Critique of Mercer,  
Anderson, Boudreaux, Friedman, Oi, McCobin  
and Markevičiūtė**

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**Abstract:**

Libertarians, all too often, focus, and brilliantly so, on economics and personal liberties. Unfortunately, many do so at the expense of foreign policy, imperialism, U.S. adventurism abroad. The purpose of the present paper is to set the record straight, and to correct this imbalance. This paper is a critique of libertarian warmongers, whether they support imperialism purposefully or not.

**Key words:** Libertarianism, imperialism, political correctness, the voluntary military, religion

**I. Introduction**

The overwhelming majority of libertarians apply this philosophy, accurately, to economic issues and personal liberties. Since no one may properly initiate violence against anyone else or his legitimately owned property, minimum wages, rent controls, protective tariffs are widely seen, in this community, as illicit in the former sphere, as are laws prohibiting drugs, any and all sexual acts between consenting adults, alcohol, firearms, etc.

It is with regard to foreign policy, I contend, that libertarians, all too many

of us, have been left sleeping at the switch. The appreciation of the evils of foreign adventurism, imperialism, unjustified war, etc. is all too often sorely lacking. It is one thing, when a foreign country unjustifiably attacks us, or threatens to do so. Then, all stops are out. The nation under attack is justified, more than justified, in defending itself. However, it is an entirely different matter when the home country is itself an imperialist invader. At present, the U.S. military is engaged in more than a half dozen undeclared wars against nations that have never even come within a million miles of threatening us, let alone actually invading this country.

In section II we take Mercer to task for her erroneous treatment of this subject. The same fate awaits Anderson, Boudreaux, Friedman and Oi in section III. Section IV is devoted to pointing out the errors of McCobin and Markevičiūtė in this regard. We conclude in section V.

**II. Mercer**

Mercer (2017) waxes eloquent about some relatively new dangers to the U.S. military; she explores these challenges and offers solutions that will strengthen

this institution. The present paper starts with a critique of her essay from a libertarian point of view.

In her analysis, it is “killer PC” that is to blame for the weakening of American armed forces. She sees “multiculturalism, feminism and all manner of outré sexual politics, affirmative action, and political correctness” as the viper in the bosom of the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines.

First up in her list of examples undermining our power to project compulsory power around the world is Major Nidal Malik Hasan. A psychiatrist in the army with the phrase “Soldier of Allah” embossed on his business card, he killed thirteen soldiers at Fort Hood. Was he excoriated for this deed of his? No. Instead, Mercer informs us, “Commander Colonel Steven Braverman, a colleague of Hasan’s at the Darnall army medical center on Fort Hood, vouched that Hasan had performed well in his job and had shown no obvious signs of trouble.”

The second instance of this weakening, she points out, is the gun free zone policy at military bases: “Lieutenant General Robert W. Cone, commander of III Corps at Fort Hood, brag(ged) about the ‘no-guns’ policies on that base.” Avers Mercer: “These left Hasan’s victims helpless.” Cone went on to say: “As a matter of practice, we don’t carry weapons here, this is our home.” Mercer’s reaction? This policy led to “A funeral home for some!,” namely Hasan’s victims.

Mercer’s next cause of dwindling U.S. military power is “LGBTQ as Social Engineering.” To wit, “payment for drastic elective medical procedures and the attendant hormonal maintenance” cannot help strengthen this organization. She continues: “In other words, LGBTQ in the military isn’t about enhancing a fighting force, it’s about introducing

another state-driven reformation program.”

Then, there is the inclusion of females in our fighting forces; this, too, has weakened them. States Mercer on this matter: “To the surprise of liberals, a few good women have protested. Former Army Spec. Catherine Aspy, for instance. Her account, published in Reader’s Digest, February, 1999, was relayed by columnist Fred Reed. Aspy, who had graduated from Harvard in 1992 and enlisted in the Army in 1995, said this: ‘I was stunned. The Army was a vast day-care center, full of unmarried teen-age mothers using it as a welfare home. I took training seriously and really tried to keep up with the men. I found I couldn’t. It wasn’t even close. I had no idea the difference in physical ability was so huge. There were always crowds of women sitting out exercises or on crutches from training injuries. They [the Army] were so scared of sexual harassment that women weren’t allowed to go anywhere without another woman along. They called them “Battle Buddies.” It was crazy. I was twenty-six years old but I couldn’t go to the bathroom by myself.’”

Mercer concludes her essay as follows: “Biological reprogramming and brainwashing, courtesy of Rome on the Potomac, were already plain to see in a Pentagon-endorsed VH1 series entitled ‘Military Diaries,’ which this writer covered in 2002. Touted as a ‘powerful firsthand look at our heroes, their stories and the music that gets them through,’ this ‘militarytainment’ could but strengthen the resolve of the enemy.... These poster-girlie recruits wanted viewers to know that their ‘real duty is to provide humanitarian aid to the Afghans’ (it’s in the revised Oath of Enlistment, apparently). They shared their dreams of being ‘self-help authors.’ And

they imparted the joys of manning posts like 'Diversity Awareness Officers' and 'Drug and Alcohol Counselors.' Suffice it to say that the 'human face' of our coed men and women of the armed forces exudes mush, not mettle. 'Military Diaries' was a motivational video for America's ascetic, Islamic enemy."

What is the libertarian to say about all of this? At least in the view of one such, the present author, Mercer makes an excellent case in favor of her contention: soldiers, sailors, aviators, marines, have been greatly weakened by the fact that political correctness has infected the leaders of these institutions. In addition, when 10 men form a platoon, they can be a powerful coherent force. Add a woman to the mix, and, at least among heterosexual men, they all compete for her favors, to the detriment for the morale of their squad. Further, women, at the margin, are the limitation on population growth; they are too precious to be risked in hazardous conditions, faced by the military (Block, 2015).

In all this I am a firm supporter of Mercer's hypothesis. These politically correct initiatives do indeed weaken the military, and are horridly objectionable on all sorts of other grounds.<sup>1</sup> However, I must part company with this author in one very significant regard. No. Scratch that: in one overwhelmingly crucially important respect: she opposes the infection of the military with political correctness. I, in sharp contrast, welcome it.

The point is, does the libertarian favor a stronger or weaker U.S. armed force? The proper answer is dependent upon the question: is the U.S. military offensive, and therefore in violation of

the libertarian principle of non-initiatory aggression, or is it mainly defensive, and therefore compatible with this axiom of our philosophy, at least the minarchist version thereof. To ask this question is pretty much to answer it. Yes, our armed forces do indeed play a defensive role, in part, as does the army of pretty much every other country on the face of the earth. But the U.S. is unique amongst its fellow nations insofar it alone has some 800 military bases stationed in roughly 140 countries.<sup>2</sup> No other state even remotely approaches this record. Thus, I conclude that the cause of liberty would be enhanced, not decreased, with an infusion of even more harmful political correctness in this institution. Why stop with encouraging the signing of women, gays, the gender fluid, "soldiers of Allah," etc. What about elderly people, say, aged 70 plus. True, they would not in any great numbers be able to pass the stringent physical requirements of soldiering, but we have already made exceptions for females; why not for them, too? Then, there are the physically and mentally handicapped.<sup>3</sup> Their inclusion would also further deteriorate the (invasive!) fighting ability of our armed forces. So, let us have less prejudice against the disabled; let us apply more and more political correctness to the military of this imperialist war-mongering nation. Would that the Nazi Army had imposed this sort of recruitment upon itself. They would have been far easier to conquer, as they so richly deserved.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/BSR\\_2007\\_Baseline.pdf](http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/BSR_2007_Baseline.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Please do not think I have taken full leave of my senses. (Partial, maybe, but, please, not full). I oppose all governmentally imposed affirmative action, discrimination, etc., in all "normal contexts." But, in this one, where I welcome inefficiency, is a justified exception, I claim.

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<sup>1</sup> They undermine our traditional culture, they play havoc with our mores in all sorts of other areas other than the military, for example in marriage, divorce, academia, the labor market, etc.

### III. Anderson, Boudreaux, Friedman and Oi

Mercer is far from the only libertarian not to take foreign policy into account in her otherwise exemplary analysis. Others who mis-step on this point include Anderson, 1978, Boudreaux, 1993; Friedman, 1967; Oi, 1967a, 1967b. Their error concerns not opposition to political correctness, as in the case of Mercer, but, rather, their attack on the draft, in favor of the voluntary military, during the unjustified U.S. invasion of North VietNam.

The same point deserves to be made again, only this time in a rather different context. Stipulate that the all-volunteer army is far more efficient and effective, for precisely the reasons given by the authors mentioned in the previous paragraph. For example, with an artificially low wage for soldiers, military brass will be led by an “invisible hand”<sup>4</sup> to employ with too much labor and not enough capital: massive numbers of GI’s with rifles, instead of a very few of them, in bombers, fighter planes, etc. As well, inductees such as Muhammad Ali and Elvis Presley can do far more for morale, and thus the overall war effort, in their civilian capacities, rather than as just two more grunts in the army. Then there is the fact that a voluntary force will have a lower turnover rate, necessitating less expense on continuous training and re-training. This is not to say that the libertarian can support the compulsory draft. He cannot, of course. However, he can favor the voluntary military *in spite of the fact* that it will render the armed forces more effective, rather than *because of* this, as is the case with Anderson, 1978,

Boudreaux, 1993; Friedman, 1967; Oi, 1967a, 1967b.

Boudreaux (1993) is on record with the following:

“Operation Desert Storm is considered to be one of the American military’s greatest victories. The goal given by the United Nations was to drive Saddam Hussein’s troops out of Kuwait. Regardless of one’s opinion of the scope of this goal or of the propriety of United States military involvement in foreign nations, the fact is that American armed forces accomplished their task. They did so completely, unambiguously, quickly, and with very little loss of life. Americans should be especially grateful for this last fact.”

Au contraire must be the only proper libertarian response. It most certainly *does* matter whether or not this goal was justified. If yes, then yes. But if no, then no. And, it is exceedingly difficult to furnish a libertarian justification for the “United States military involvement in foreign nations.” What in bloody blue blazes were our servicemen *doing* in that far off underdeveloped nation in the first place? The police force of one of our major cities, and maybe even a smaller one, could have put paid to this tin-pot dictator. He was no danger to the US at all. He hadn’t come within 10,000 miles of us with his so-called “weapons of mass destruction.” Boudreaux, a highly credentialed libertarian in many other regards, simply cannot be counted as such in this context.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Greatly truncated in the public sector, but never quite disappearing

<sup>5</sup> For more on Boudreaux, see Block 2011

#### IV. McCobin and Markevičiūtė

Then we have McCobin and Markevičiūtė (2014) who attack Dr. Ron Paul for his views on Russia and its attachment to the Crimea. These authors, both of them leaders of the supposedly libertarian organization, Students for Liberty, are in grave error. But they do start out on the right foot.

They aver: “The War on Terror and seemingly endless interventions by the US military in the Middle East and Africa over the past 12 years have rightly shaped our generation’s critical attitude toward foreign intervention. This principled opposition to unnecessary war is a branch of the increasingly libertarian nature of today’s youth. Whether the antagonist is foreign or domestic, governmental or nongovernmental, the libertarian philosophy of this generation should condemn aggression and foreign intervention by all agents.”

So far, so good. Libertarians are indeed rightly and properly suspicious of foreign adventurism on the part of the U.S.

They continue, also on this high level: “The War on Terror and seemingly endless interventions by the US military in the Middle East and Africa over the past 12 years have rightly shaped our generation’s critical attitude toward foreign intervention. This principled opposition to unnecessary war is a branch of the increasingly libertarian nature of today’s youth. Whether the antagonist is foreign or domestic, governmental or nongovernmental, the libertarian philosophy of this generation should condemn aggression and foreign intervention by all agents.”

None of this can be denied, and I am thankful to these authors for making this important point so strongly.

I even go along with them when they object to the fact that: “Former Congressman Ron Paul(’s)... views are interpreted by many as wholly representative of the libertarian movement...”<sup>6</sup> These authors are correct here too. We are not a Randian Cult (Rothbard, 1987). No one’s views, not Ron Paul’s not Murray Rothbard’s, not anyone’s, no matter how strong their past contribution, are above criticism. The contributions of each of us, no matter how little or much exalted within the libertarian movement, cannot be counted as correct based on who voices them. The usual criteria still stand: logic, evidence and adherence to the non-aggression principle of libertarianism, are our only criteria.

Let us now consider the charges these authors make against Dr. Paul’s position:

- Russia, too, not the U.S. is an aggressor country. It also deserves condemnation for its ongoing wars in the Northern Caucasus, the invasion of South Ossetia, and it’s most recent annexation of Crimea”
- they cast aspersions on “Crimea’s right to secede”
- “Crimea was annexed by Russian military force at gunpoint and its supposedly democratic “referendum” was a farce. Besides a suspiciously high voter turnout without legitimate international observers, the referendum gave Crimeans only two choices — join Russia now or later.”
- “Putin’s government is one of the least free in the world”
- “...the Yanukovych regime ... shot and tortured its own citizens on the streets of Kyiv.”

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<sup>6</sup> Material in parentheses supplied by present author.

- “Speaking of the Crimean secession being democratically legitimate is intellectually dishonest given that the referendum was essentially passed at gunpoint with no legitimate choice for the region to remain in Ukraine’s sovereign power.”

In my critique of McCobin and Markevičiūtė, I utilize what I consider one of the most powerful and thorough rejoinders to these two authors. It comes to us courtesy of MacAdams (2014).

Most telling is MacAdams’ notice of the fact that this organization, Students For Liberty, issued its own reaction to the statement of McCobin and Markevičiūtė (2014): this “organization quickly took to Twitter to back down from (their)<sup>7</sup> screed, explaining that, ‘This is just a statement by individuals -- SFL doesn’t have an official stance on foreign policy.’”

But this is no less than preposterous. There are only three broad areas on which libertarians may have a position: economics, personal liberties, and, wait for it, foreign policy. To say that an ostensibly libertarian organization such as SFL has no stance whatsoever on the third of these is akin to saying Mozart has no view of string instruments,<sup>8</sup> Mises has no perspective on one third of economics, Dr. Paul is oblivious to one third of medicine, Muhammad Ali had no position on the right cross or of stinging like a bee. At the risk of violating the insights of the diamond water paradox, and eschewing the economic insights about marginalism, foreign policy is far more important than either of the other two; far more important than both of them put together. For it is a nation’s foreign

policy that determines what occurs domestically. Yes, there is a two way street going on here. But most of the direction of causation stems from the foreign to the domestic, not the other way around.<sup>9</sup>

States MacAdams: “First, he<sup>10</sup> condemns Dr. Paul’s view that anyone or any group should have the right to secede from any other group with which they seek to disassociate. This is a problem for McCobin’s brand of libertarianism? Besides being enshrined in international law, one would assume it is basic libertarian thinking that forced association is antithetical to liberty.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this point of MacAdams’. If there are three building blocks of libertarianism, they are the non-aggression principle, private property rights based on homesteading, and free association. No one should be forced to associate with anyone else against his will.<sup>11</sup>

MacAdams also criticizes McCobin on the grounds that the latter provides no evidence for his claim that

- “Crimea was annexed by Russian military force at gunpoint.”
- “the Russians used violence to force the vote to go Russia’s way”
- the high vote totals signify an illicit vote

As to McCobin’s claim that “the referendum gave Crimeans only two choices

<sup>9</sup> Support for this contention is supplied by Rothbard () and Higgs (1987, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> MacAdam is under the impression that there was only one author of this unwarranted criticism of Ron Paul, namely, McCobin. It is my understanding that McCobin had a co-author, Markevičiūtė. I will no longer correct MacAdam on this matter.

<sup>11</sup> Not ever secession is successful. Some do not meet the utilitarian criterion. But the same may be said of a marital divorce. Sometimes, the spouses would have been better off, had they stayed together. But it is a basic libertarian right that each of them make that choice.

<sup>7</sup> Material in parentheses supplied by present author.

<sup>8</sup> One third of the orchestra?



— join Russia now or later” MacAdams offers the actual choices:

- 1) “Are you in favour of unifying Crimea with Russia as a part of the Russian Federation?”
- 2) “Are you in favour of restoring the 1992 constitution and the status of Crimea as a part of Ukraine?”

MacAdams also tellingly mentions “135 international observers and over a thousand local ones...” who oversaw the election and the fact that the US has long meddled in the Ukraine. In my view, MacAdams wins hands down in his rejection of the thesis of McCobin and Markevičiūtė.

Let us consider some additional weaknesses of the McCobin and Markevičiūtė position. They claim that “Putin’s government is one of the least free in the world and is clearly the aggressor in Crimea.” But this is an example of the fallacy of a priori history. Just because a government is vicious internally, it does not at all logically follow that the same is true internationally.<sup>12</sup> Great Britain, for decades, centuries, even, was one of the freest countries in the world, internally, and yet one of the most imperialist, in terms of taking over other the territory of other nations. The U.S. has, seemingly, followed this pattern too. On the other hand, if you discount a few recently constructed island atolls, China has never been an expansionist nation. And yet, millions of innocents died under Mao’s totalitarian dictatorship. A similar case can be made for Russia, if we ignore the Cuban missile situation. Yes, it has expanded into eastern Europe and Afghanistan, but these are all contiguous land masses. This country has been invaded by Germany several times in the last century, so a case can be made that

its expansion was more defensive than offensive. Yes, from a strict libertarian point of view, these actions of Russia are unjustified. But, if we take seriously the international context, and compare that country with our own, the former does not come off looking too badly. In fact, I now want to go out on the limb, way out, and contend that even if every claim of McCobin and Markevičiūtė was correct, and none of MacAdams’ refutations were<sup>13</sup>, the former’s conclusions would still not follow. The thesis of these two authors is that yes, the U.S. is improperly imperialistic, but so is Russia. Nonsense on stilts, if we take not the libertarian position<sup>14</sup> but look at it from a realpolitik point of view. Imagine, then, that something akin to what happened to Russia with the Crimea was experienced by the US. This would mean that along our border with Canada, or Mexico, a breakaway revolutionary group took over some American territory and wanted to secede, with the aim of undermining this country. Just how gentle does anyone think the U.S. would be in supporting fair elections? Most likely they would put the evil Yanukovych regime entirely in the shade. We already have evidence of this likelihood, the unpleasantness of 1861–1865.<sup>15</sup>

## V. Conclusion

Further evidence for the fact that libertarians have almost criminally avoided foreign policy is the Nolan chart.<sup>16</sup> Although there are some discrepancies between the different version of it, all them

<sup>13</sup> I am speaking arguendo here

<sup>14</sup> On the basis of which they, along with every other state known to mankind was and is evil

<sup>15</sup> See on this DiLorenzo (1998, 2002, 2007)

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.nolanchart.com/survey-php>;  
<https://www.nolanchart.com/faq/faq8-php>

<sup>12</sup> See on this Rothbard 1978, 2004

ask for answers to 10 questions, typically five on economics, five on personal liberties. Notice any omission? Yes, there is usually not a single solitary mention of foreign policy, imperialism, US interventionism, etc. Perhaps that is why Mercer, Anderson, Boudreaux, Friedman, Oi, McCobin and Markevičiūtė, good libertarians, all, on many, many issues, go so far astray on matters of war and peace. Libertarians pretty much eschew this vital one third<sup>17</sup> of our intellectual turf. It is time, it is past time, that this imbalance be corrected. It can be done by seeing the military might of the U.S. in an entirely different light than that employed by the targets of this present essay.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Or more

<sup>18</sup> I cannot write about eminent libertarians who are war-mongers without mentioning, also, Randy Barnett. On this see Block 2007, 2008.





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