

War, Reason, and Libertarians

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I thank the editors of *Reason Papers* for hosting the comments of Spengler, Irfan Khawaja, and Roderick Long on my *No Victory No Peace*.¹ No author can ask more than to be taken seriously. These gentlemen did that. I especially appreciate that their thoughts proceed from an attachment to liberty.

In sum, Spengler agrees with my understanding that war means killing until the enemy cannot or will not continue as such, and raises the practical question: What will it take? Khawaja admirably describes and agrees with my thesis in principle, but disagrees with every part of it in practice largely because he posits the enemy as immune to defeat. Long cheers my love of liberty and lack of faith that government will safeguard it, notes correctly that nevertheless my thoughts have nothing to do with Libertarian orthodoxy, and then restates that orthodoxy's tautology: War is useless because the only enemy is the state, and all states are created equal.

1. Response to Spengler

Spengler notes that history has seen many contentions “of one people against another people for interests so vital that the young men of a people will die rather than concede them” (p. 37).² Sometimes, such “existential” or “civilizational” wars are not settled until two generations of losers are killed or doubly decimated. He’s right. The American South was lucky: only three percent of its men died in the U.S. Civil War. In the seventeenth century, between a third and a half of the population of central Germany perished. In the ancient world, wars often ended with all men on the losing side slain, and all women and children sold into slavery. In many others, the winners did not bother enslaving; they just eliminated the land’s inhabitants. Rome erased Carthage. Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, Africans largely de-

¹ Angelo Codevilla, *No Victory, No Peace* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

² Spengler, “Angelo Codevilla and William Tecumseh Sherman,” *Reason Papers* 28 (Spring 2006), pp. 35-42.

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populated their west coast as they sold each other off to Arab slave wholesalers. The cruelest wars, however, have accompanied revolutions. Thucydides' account of the Corcyrean affair is prototypical. We will never know how many multiples of twenty million deaths Stalin's famines, wars, and Gulag caused. Our estimates of the Cambodian and Rwandan genocides, to mention just a couple, are just that. And if anyone doubts that human beings find heartwarming joy, inspiration, and fulfillment in causing or witnessing the tortured slaughter of those they consider enemies, he should recall that millions of Arabs danced in the streets in joyful vindication, while irreligious ones found religion and felt warm all over, at the sight of Americans burning alive as they fell from the World Trade Center.

Who starts what, and why, who is more right than wrong according to what standard, are matters of the greatest importance. But in no way do they diminish the fact that once the killing starts, once the war is on, each side must kill the other to save their own lives and peace. Hence, for each side, the practical question becomes, who on the other side has to die?

How much killing any side has to do to end the war depends first of all on what the enemy is after, on his character, and on one's own objectives. Few peoples have ever fought "to the last man." Even the Japanese on Okinawa surrendered after the futility of resistance had become obvious, they sickened of suicide, and noticed that the Americans were sparing captives. Japan's emperor, and his people, eventually accepted the shattering of their sacred myths. But Germany's Nazis chose *Gotterdammerung* for themselves and their people. Some may shout "victory or death." To what extent anybody means that, or can lead his followers to feel that way, under what circumstances, depends largely on them. Foreign affairs is about dealing with foreigners—people whose character, objectives, and calculations, are their own, over which we have no control.

At best we can control what we are after. A country bent on exterminating peoples from which enmity arises must expect all of its victims to die fighting. One that is bent on desecrating another's way of life must expect having to kill more than the one that aims to undo an enemy regime—simply because fewer people have a life-or-death investment in regimes than in sacred ways. And of course since regimes' roots run unequally deep, eradicating them will be more or less bloody business. Usually, putting an end to interference in one's own affairs takes less blood and treasure than interfering in others'. When, however, one's contemptible reputation inflames enemies' passions, only much blood can quench them.

Killing only (or first) those most responsible for the enemy's enmity should minimize war's gore. That is why assassinating enemy leaders often is the most just and economical of war measures. That is also why ordinary soldiers are taught to shoot at enemy officers rather than enlisted men, and not to waste effort on enemy civilians. But of course the nexus between the

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enemy and his civilian base has always been key, and dealing with it is always problematic. Prudent commanders always confront the dilemma: Making war on the enemy's civil society ensures its enmity, while sparing it in the hope of separating it from enemy leaders removes the negative incentives for that separation. Rome's classic epic, the *Aeneid*, dealt with this; Aeneas's enemy, Turnus, was ensconced in a Latin city whose brotherhood the future Romans sought. But the more Aeneas professed and practiced restraint, the more firmly the city held on to Turnus. Only after Aeneas started slaughtering the city did it separate itself from Turnus, and expose him to his fate. Only then did Aeneas's clemency have its intended effect.

In short, the answer to Spengler's question, "how many enemies of the United States must perish in order to have peace?" (p. 35) was stated succinctly by the rescue workers at Ground Zero who shouted to George W. Bush: "Whatever it takes! Whatever it takes!" Spengler is correct that "the extreme anti Americanism of Arab regimes ... must reflect extensive support for extremism among their populations" (p. 37). My figure of some 2,000 persons in regimes such as Syria's whose deaths would bring us peace is very much a baseline. How many more it will take depends on whether we do the killing in ways that discourage our enemies, or whether—Iraq is the latest example—moderation results in deaths more numerous and less useful.

2. Response to Khawaja

Khawaja begins by summarizing my point:

We must first decide whether or not to go to war. If we elect to go to war, victory automatically becomes our goal, and we are obliged both to get clear on what the goal requires of us and then to satisfy its requirements. If we find ourselves unclear about its requirements or unwilling to bring it about, then rationality demands that we abjure war altogether. A war that aims at less than full victory is not worth fighting at all. By contrast, a war that aims at victory can be worth fighting even at a colossally high cost The failure to heed the mutually exclusive options we face in warfare—to blur the relevant distinctions, gloss over inconvenient facts, or exaggerate or understate the consequences of action or inaction—is the thin wedge of defeat Warfare, like all meaningful human activities, has a logic we ignore at our peril. (p. 9)³

³ Irfan Khawaja, "Victory: Means and End," *Reason Papers* 28 (Spring 2006), pp. 7-18.

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He prefaces his critique (as does Long) with the contention that I don't offer an "explicit definition of the term" *regime*. But my meaning is plainly neither more nor less than Aristotle's. In a book about that topic, I wrote that every regime is "an arrangement of offices and honors that fosters a peculiar complex of ideas, loves, hates, and fashions and that sets standards for adults and aspirations for children."⁴ I follow Aristotle's well-known insight:

Since the city is a partnership of citizens in a regime, when the form of the government changes and becomes different, then it may be supposed that the city is no longer the same, just as a tragic differs from a comic chorus, although the members may be identical. In the same manner ... every union or compound is different when the form of their composition changes.⁵

I stress that Arab regimes are responsible for the enmities that come from them because they are in fact the artificers and arbiters of what is loved and hated, fashionable and unfashionable, permitted or forbidden, within their borders.

Khawaja then charges that my book "misidentifies the enemy we face ... [and] subtly misdescribes the nature of victory" (p. 10). Hence, its prescriptions would "achieve too little for us at too high a price" (p. 10). He builds that critique on a deceptive foundation, granting with one hand that "the principles of warfare are timeless and applicable to all wars as wars" while *asserting* with the other (never trying to show) that such "novelty" as "might emerge in a given case" falls outside those principles (and this is such a case) (p. 11).

This leads to his first main point: He affirms, where I had denied, that "Islamic fundamentalism of the al Qaeda variety is a genuinely novel phenomenon or even at the very heart of the problem we face" (p. 11). So new is this phenomenon, in his view, that it practically negates all previous rules of war and obliges us to concoct new ones. But his view that anti-American terrorism is the same thing as "Islamist ideology," as formulated by Sayyid Qutb, Abdullah Azzam, and Osama bin Laden and hence beyond earthly control, is triply mistaken: Anti-American terrorism from the Middle East flowered under secular auspices long before it acquired an Islamic element (for many a patina) after the Iranian revolution of 1979; Islamism is less about God than about politics; and insofar as it is religious, its strength depends

⁴ Angelo Codevilla, *The Character of Nations* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), p. 7; see also pp. 8-16 and 23-41.

⁵ Aristotle, *Politics*, III.3.1276a40-1276b7.

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heavily on the massive amounts of money that Saudis and other Gulf Sunnis are pouring into Wahabbism.

Taking back with his left hand what he appears to concede with his right, he writes, “Codevilla is certainly right to draw attention to the relationship between al Qaeda and its partners in various states, but ... he exaggerates it” (p. 11). Khawaja neither explains the relationship nor the alleged exaggeration. Arguing by authority, he cites the 9/11 Commission’s denial of “significant” (how significant?) state sponsorship for the 9/11 attacks, then mentions that I had “rightly” drawn attention to “holes in the Commission’s view,” states that the “anomalies” are “significant,” and then dismisses them (p. 12 n. 8). In sum, he swallows whole the U.S. government’s post-1993 argument that terrorism is a private matter. But my critique of U.S. intelligence was not mere picking at details. Rather it showed that the 9/11 Commission’s view—which was uncritically the CIA’s—is a conscious evasion of an obvious reality that the U.S. government wishes not to face. The undisputed fact that there is no evidence (for once, likely for good reason) of a specific order by any government to Khalid Sheikh Muhammad or Muhammad Atta to hijack four airplanes on 9/11 to strike three U.S. targets says nothing about the relationship between these men and a host of governments. Much less does it imply—as the CIA contends and so many who should know better accept—that there is no relationship between Arab governments and these men, between them and al Qaeda, or between them and anti-American terrorism in general.

Start from the last point. No great expertise is needed to realize that every terrorist group of which we have any knowledge depends on, is the tool of, and its controlling elements consist of, personnel of some country’s intelligence service—usually several, always in tension with one another. Today’s Hezbollah teeters between Syria and Iran. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PLFP) is a wholly owned subsidiary of Syrian intelligence. The granddaddy of them all, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), began as a tool of the Egyptian army and of the Soviet Union, diversified its support with the Jordanians between 1964 and 1970, then transferred its operations to Syria with Saudi and Gulf funding. Briefly after 1979 it had an Iranian contingent. During the 1980s, Iran dropped out and Iraq came in. After 1990 Saudi Arabia briefly dropped out and then came back in. Egypt never left completely. Al Qaeda, at its inception, was wholly Saudi. The Sudanese, Egyptians, Iraqis, Syrians, and Jordanians came into it early on, each in its own way. Such intelligence as we have on these groups comes from the “liaison services” that have infiltrators in them. These infiltrators are there primarily to steer these groups according to their governments’ agendas—only secondarily to gather information. The information we get from them is what the governments who gather it decide

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we should have. In the real world, professional intelligence services manage amateurs—not the other way around.

Without speculating as to why, it is important to note that Khawaja misunderstands Islam's role in terrorism. Arab anti-American terrorism came first, starting in the 1960s. Islamic justification for it followed in 1979, and really got going only in the 1990s. Sayyid Qutb and Islamism coexisted peacefully with the West in the past, and may well do so in the future. Khawaja writes too easily of "a theological-political conception that finds resonance wherever disaffected Muslims reside—be it Jidda, Jakarta, or Jersey City" (p. 12). That conception owes much to garden-variety social-political resentments. The little it owes to Islam comes from one strand: Wahabbism, the house cult of Saudi Arabia. Massively fertilized by Saudi money, that loco weed has maddened more and more of the Islamic world—from Pakistan to the American Black Muslim movement. The world's Shi'a, as well as ordinary Sunnis, are its immediate targets. Westerners are secondary ones, and that only because our fecklessness in defending ourselves inspires such contempt. Take away the money and the respect, and Wahabbism ceases practically to be interchangeable with Islamism, and becomes a minor nuisance in the West.

Khawaja writes that, in my view, the growth of "Islamic fundamentalism" is merely "the cynical work of Arab regimes" (p. 13). No. It is the result of their own massive corruption and betrayal of their peoples' moral as well as secular expectations. But it is also a tiger that they have been unable to tame, that they have chosen to ride, and that they dare not dismount lest it eat them. His statement that this phenomenon is "no more encouraged by contemporary Arab regimes than David Koresh's interpretation of Revelation was encouraged by Bill Clinton's Protestantism" (p. 12) shows that he misunderstands regimes as well as religion: David Koresh was, in fact, an outrider of the California Democratic Party. His followers were Protestants somewhat familiar with the Book of Revelation—roughly on the level of, say, a Bill Clinton. The cult was conceivable only in the context of the twentieth-century Liberal "Protestant Deformation" characteristic of our regime.⁶ On behalf of the U.S. Senate, I once asked FBI director William Webster why the FBI had not infiltrated the movement. He answered that it did not do so for the same reason that it would not infiltrate the Presbyterian Church. Officially, the U.S. government was (and remains) blind to the difference between religion, nut cults, and scams. Alas, so is Khawaja.

Unfamiliarity with religion—sound and unsound, as well as with its various secular admixtures—leads Khawaja to lend credence to the claim that

⁶ See James Kurth, "The Protestant Deformation and American Foreign Policy," *Orbis* 48, no. 2 (Spring 1998), pp. 221-39.

terrorist troops can never be defeated because they will die even for lost causes. Hence, “we are facing an enemy that is encouraged by victory but not discouraged by defeat” (p. 15). Nonsense. Suicide bombers don’t just jump into their bomb vests. They are carefully manufactured products of hothouse environments, maintained by standard secular power in Saudi Arabia, the Palestinian territories, etc. Both World Trade Center attacks used Islamists, but were mounted by Khalid Sheikh Muhammad and his “nephews,” very secular folks with ties to standard intelligence services, principally Iraq’s. The history of deadly heresies—Christian as well as Muslim—is clear that their adepts obey the laws of human motivation: once their causes are crushed, so are their spirits. When the Ottoman Empire crushed Wahabbism after its early nineteenth-century massacres of Shi’ites (including humiliating its Saudi patrons before killing them), that sect caused no more trouble for a century and a half. We became targets of terror more and more since the 1960s as people from Moscow to Mandalay realized how safe, profitable, and fun it is to make us cower. Because that is so, Khawaja’s dismissal of our desire to live without having to worry lest somebody blow us up for some cause, his mocking of “peace on our terms” by calling it “turning the clock back forty years” (p. 15), his conclusion that we had better get used to living with the states and sects that breed terror, is sure to get us more terror.

Khawaja does not dispute that we have the capacity to wreak enough damage on the peoples who glorify harming us possibly to stop them from doing so. But he invokes prohibitive moral costs: “If as [Codevilla] says we lack the right to rule Arab regimes (p.50) it is far from clear we have the right to inflict invasions on them simply because a few thousand people in their midst espouse anti-American ideologies” (p. 14). Apples and oranges. What other peoples do among themselves is their business. Their indulging, glorifying, and advocating murder of us is our business. And these “few thousand people” happen to be the ones who make those countries what they are, who determine what is indulged, glorified, advocated, and taught. They are the ones who decide “who gets what.” Nor is it any more legitimate for Khawaja than for Colin Powell to equate making war on another regime with occupying and trying to police another country.

Having counseled us to lie down and enjoy such relationship as the Muslim world thrusts upon us, Khawaja bids us put our faith in the prophylactic of “domestic law enforcement’s response to crime” (p. 17). This does not even rise to the Bush team’s risible recipe: all the world’s governments must, just must, crack down on terrorists. The kernel of truth in that is that, in fact, any people can police, and be policed by, only itself. Policing by foreigners is an oxymoron. But alas, the problem is precisely that, for many regimes, terrorists are either constituents (the tools of choice) or the police itself. The only way we can cause the people who count in foreign countries to crush rather than encourage terrorism against us is to make it very

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bloody clear that we will accept no excuse for any harm that comes to us from their realms, and that we are the final judges of what contributes to or detracts from our safety. That is the logic of life.

3. Response to Long

Prefacing his “A Florentine in Baghdad,” Long writes that I misunderstood Plato to have held up dogs as paragons of wisdom, whereas Plato’s reference to dogs is “a joke” (p. 19 n. 2).⁷ This misunderstands Plato and, incidentally, me. Plato’s dog’s affection for the familiar is no more the fulfillment of wisdom than is Thrasymachus’ fixation on power or Cephalus’ piety. All are points of departure, essential elements of wisdom. Plato mocks none and builds on all. The dog’s instinct, namely, love of one’s own, is a *sine qua non* of political life, though not sufficient. Also by way of preface, Long assumes that I am unmindful of the fact that the moral good is not merely an end but is the constitutive means of the good life. Indeed, *ethos* means habit, and virtue is the practice of good ethics. As I wrote in my commentary on Machiavelli’s *Prince*, Machiavelli’s principal focus was to change the meaning of “virtue” from the Greek (and Christian) to the pagan Roman.⁸ I dedicate a chapter in my co-authored *War: Ends and Means* to explaining that no justice, no good, can come from intentional (as opposed to incidental) harm to innocents, that evil means corrupt good ends rather than the other way around—indeed to explaining the Christian doctrine of *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*.⁹

But Long did notice that my *No Victory, No Peace* misrendered Condoleezza Rice as “Condolezza.” I had *not* noticed—perhaps because, being Italian (Lombard, not Florentine) and remembering too well her describing to me that her mother gave her that name by modifying the Italian musical term “*con dolcezza*,” meaning “with sweetness,” or “sweetly,” I unconsciously singled the “e” Italian style.

Morality is the first axis of Long’s critique: “[A]ccording to the natural law tradition of Aristotle, Aquinas, and their modern successors, what is proper in war depends also on the inherent, not just the instrumental character of the means” (p. 28). Then comes the *non sequitur*: “[M]oral

⁷ Roderick Long, “A Florentine in Baghdad: Codevilla on the War on Terrorism,” *Reason Papers* 28 (Spring 2006), pp. 19-33.

⁸ Angelo Codevilla, *Machiavelli’s Prince* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. xiv and xxxiv-xxxv.

⁹ Angelo Codevilla and Paul Seabury, *War: Ends and Means*, 2d ed. (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2006).

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considerations such as freedom of speech are not a luxury to be tossed aside when serious considerations arise. They *are* the most serious considerations” (p. 28). By this Long means to argue that the means of war that I say (and he does not dispute) are necessary to stop the Arab world from venting its deadly troubles on us are immoral because shutting down television stations, killing people for what they teach, and for how they organize others, is immorality itself. But while extreme Libertarian ideology may deify freedom of religion, speech, and association, the natural law tradition regards these not as goods in themselves but as instruments that may or may not serve good ends depending on circumstances. Aquinas could not be clearer: The value of freedom depends on the purpose for which freedom is used. Religion? In the real world, insofar as it merges with earthly quarrels it must be dealt with by earthly means. Property? Though Libertarians regard property rights as sacred, Plato tells us that no sane man would return a weapon to an owner gone mad. As for killing, nowhere in the classical or Christian tradition is there any basis for condemning it *per se*. The good or evil of killing always depends on who is to be killed, by whom, why, and under what circumstances.

Long asks: “Are moral considerations *part* of the human good or external to it?” (p. 28). Of course they are its ruling part. But the moral good, which so depends on peace and justice, usually requires establishing them by killing some, dispossessing others, and silencing others yet. Of course what some regard as justice others regard as the opposite. That is one reason why there are wars. Libertarian ideology cannot do away with moral conflict by positing a morality that boils down to worshipping the notion of the autonomous individual.

The other axis of Long’s critique is precisely the assumption that this Libertarian morality is common to mankind, and that its enemies are states—all states, but especially ours, the United States of America. If only the U.S. government would mind its own business, neither the Arabs nor anyone else would bother our peace. Long refuses to see that the real, limited benefits of restraint in international relations depend strictly on daunting military power. Wisely, Theodore Roosevelt had counseled Americans to “speak softly” to foreigners, while carrying “a big stick.” The two must balance, as must ends and means. Necessarily, however, the balancing takes place in the course of conflict because, *pace* Libertarian ideology, human interests and purposes clash. And when they do, your state, be it ever so imperfect, is the only thing between you and death or worse.

Far from being Machiavellian, this statement of reality is classical philosophy’s point of departure. In the *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*, Socrates explained that though his mind obeyed the God, his body belonged to Athens, without which neither mind nor body would have existed. Plato’s reference to

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the dog made the same point: The familiar may not be very good, but neither dog nor man can survive except by holding close to its own.

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No Victory, No Peace was about how to deal with the fact that, for reasons that seem good to them, lots of Arabs and some Persians find it fulfilling to kill the likes of us. Reason—though regrettably not *Reason Papers*—strongly suggests that the best way to reduce the chances that we be killed is to kill whoever has anything to do with killing us.