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WAR

I. THE GREATEST CRIME AGAINST FREEDOM

If the worst crime that can be committed against an individual is murder, then the worst possible crime is organized, deliberate, self-righteous, mass murder. “War” is just a word that governments use to make mass murder and theft seem acceptable. Only the sickest and most deranged individuals support murder as a matter of policy and only the sickest and most deranged governments engage in war. To get away with it, they have to convince a critical mass of the population to materially support it. It’s not too difficult when they are already convinced that murder is acceptable if enough people do it.

None of the propaganda around war can disguise its true nature. It is massive organized violence for the purpose of expanding government power. It is the height of statism and it is the greatest affront to freedom. Governments will go to great lengths to convince people that war is glorious and those who oppose it are cowards. None of this changes the physical reality of war: mass destruction of human life, shooting people because of the racket they are fighting for, bombing people for being in the wrong place at the wrong time, and poor men dying for the benefit of government sponsors. Wars make governments more powerful and more powerful governments are better at ripping people off.

The destruction of combat is an affront to freedom and denies us the prosperity of peace. Governments use war as an excuse to increase taxation. When they can frighten people with a foreign threat, this is much easier. Once convinced, not only will they pay their taxes enthusiastically, they will attack anyone who suggests taxes should

be lower. When fear fails to trick enough young people into joining the military, governments enslave people with “conscription.” War diverts an incredible amount of productive capacity from serving demand in the market to destruction. Immeasurable future labor is lost from the dead and wounded.

To make a society support the crazy ideas behind war, governments need to instill an intense sense of collective identity, which is in itself an affront to freedom. The great tragedy of war is the deception behind it. Yes, it’s quite tragic when someone is murdered, but it is far more tragic when mass murder is so clearly preventable. War is the height of statism and the greatest crime against freedom. It is only possible because individuals are willing to commit horrific acts when doing a government’s bidding.

II. SOLDIERING

Once a government has developed a strong sense of national identity and patriotism among its citizens, it is not particularly difficult to convince a large number of them to sign up to defend the collective. This is still true for governments with consistent records of sending people to kill and die in ways that clearly have nothing to do with defense. But being called a soldier does not separate you from responsibility for your actions.

The human tendency to cooperate is much stronger than the tendency to fight, so it takes a significant amount of conditioning to make war possible. It starts with the general propaganda of collectivism and demonization of outsiders. The sacrifice of individuality and dehumanization of the self necessary to be a soldier makes it easier to condition a soldier to dehumanize the enemy. Once the enemy is seen as less than human, killing is much easier. When soldiers are so detached from reality, they are easy to manipulate with rewards of honor and praise represented by bits of cloth and metal pinned to their chests.

In every military system, a certain kind of leadership is praised and promoted. Some of the values promoted by militaries are universally positive traits, but they emphasize leadership because it takes a unique ability to so severely misdirect our good intentions. It takes a certain kind of leader to get people to follow orders without

question. It takes a certain kind of propaganda to make it so easy to kill. It takes a certain kind of person to entrust their moral decision-making power to an institution so inherently misguided.

To be a soldier is to take a stand against your own freedom. It is to endorse the protection racket in the most significant way. It is to give up any moral authority you might claim. It is to sacrifice your autonomy to the collective. It is to serve government sponsors. It is to make yourself subservient to your oppressors. It is to give up responsibility for your own life. It is to be merely a paid killer, or at least an enabler of paid killers. It is to be used as a dumb animal, a pawn for politicians. Joining the military means removing yourself from the productive sector of society to join the parasite.

Soldiering is sold as fighting for freedom, and governments want us to be grateful for their wars, but just by putting on that uniform, every soldier makes the citizens less free. Being a soldier is a choice. No one can force you to do something immoral. When we see through the propaganda of collectivism, there will be no more militaries. When we hold each other accountable for individual acts of violence, there will be no more war. When we demand our freedom, there will be no more soldiers.

III. THE MOTIVATION FOR WAR

Understanding governments as competing protection rackets makes it possible to understand the reasons for war. Governments give all kinds of noble reasons for starting wars, but they are only as legitimate as any other propaganda. Today, most of them claim they only use military force for defensive purposes, but if all governments only fought defensive wars, militaries wouldn't be necessary! Governments start wars to expand or strengthen their protection rackets.

Nothing encourages patriotism like war. Governments like war because patriotism leads people to sacrifice for the imagined collective and tolerate more oppression. Patriotism reinforces the essential myth that governments act on behalf of the people, and the language of war often confuses the government itself with the people. When two countries are at war, we often say that one country attacked another, but that is a misrepresentation of one government

attacking another government's territory. Or more precisely, a group of people wearing uniforms of one color from one place, killing people wearing uniforms of a different color from a different place. Countries don't attack other countries. Governments use violence to expand their power.

Governments also like war because it is extremely profitable for a few special interests. Just the constant threat of war is enough to make the arms industry very profitable. Other than politicians, no one is more eager to buy bombs than a frightened population willing to give up everything to be safe. When a population is frightened enough to support a war, it will support increased taxation and buy war bonds. It will support a massive increase in the money supply, supposedly to pay for soldiers' salaries and equipment, even though it will only enrich the bankers by devaluing everyone's savings. Although war spending is clearly a way of diverting productive resources to destructive purposes, governments always count this spending in positive economic measurements to perpetuate the most dangerous myth that war is good for the economy.

War gives governments the excuses necessary to do the things they always want to, but usually can't in peacetime. During war, governments claim to need new powers, supposedly necessary to protect from a new threat. Those who stand to profit from such wartime policies will attack opponents as unpatriotic. They always say these powers are temporary, but they're often permanent. War has been used as an excuse to raise taxes, destroy privacy, enslave through conscription, and demand greater loyalty to the collective.

We might think a protection racket would not want to kill too many of its subjects, if only because of the loss of productivity, but governments don't always behave rationally. They are always seeking more efficient means of exploiting us, but if they have to kill large numbers of people to maintain their oppression of the rest, they will. Sometimes they get carried away and kill so many that some of the oppressors are affected. Sometimes, governments and their beneficiaries truly lose out in the struggles between competing protection rackets, but war is still a very effective tool. Even with the loss of productivity, wars make governments more powerful.

IV. THE ISOLATION OF INTERVENTION

Violence is the greatest obstacle to commerce and cooperation. When governments do not intervene, commerce between countries brings us together. When they make war, it drives us apart. When governments intervene in the affairs of other countries, just as when they intervene in the lives of individuals, productive relationships are displaced by coercive relationships. While the immediate costs of war are often extremely high (in numbers counted as profits by some), the indirect costs are many times that.

Free trade is dependent upon mutual respect for the self-ownership and property rights of others. War is the ultimate act of disregard for human rights. To the extent that a war is supported by the people, it says, “We would rather kill you than trade with you.” To the extent that it is opposed by the people, but happens anyway, it says, “We respect you and want to trade with you, but not badly enough to stop our government from trying to kill you.” Allowing relations between countries to be managed by governments isolates us and keeps us from enjoying productive relationships.

While not considered war by some, embargoes and blockades represent widespread threats of force, and can be just as destructive as war. A complete blockade says, “If you do business with anyone in this country, we will attack you.” This is easier when the victim is seen as having committed some significant collective crime, but governments frequently impose lesser international trade restrictions that cause problems (and unfair trade advantages) on a massive scale. With countries so interdependent, the consequences of cutting one off from the rest can lead to widespread shortages of essential goods like food, fuel, and medical supplies.

Because war drives resources from productive uses to destructive ones, it also limits the people of a country at war in their ability to engage in trade with people of other countries. However, the international trade cut off by war, embargoes, or some form of managed trade is far more significant. When an embargo is declared, it says anyone engaging in certain trade will be shot or bombed. As a result of that single threat, thousands of regular daily exchanges essential to the standard of living of millions may be cut off, and countless more potential exchanges might never happen.

While the measurable costs of war in lives and resources might be so immense as to be unfathomable, the total costs of war are incalculable.

V. FOREIGN AID

One of the many ways modern governments pervert the good will of their people is with foreign aid. For citizens who want to vote away their problems and never have to think about them again, electing a politician who “cares about poor people throughout the world” is a nice option, but it doesn’t change reality. Foreign aid takes money from the poor in one country through taxation, and gives it to the rich in another country through handouts.

Like many problems that governments pretend to be solving, the problem of foreign suffering is one we want to solve. Despite governments taking such a large role with stolen funds, we still give generously to foreign charities. While some foreign charities are frauds, all government foreign aid programs are frauds because if we don’t like how our money is being spent, we only have two choices: pay our taxes or go to jail.

Governments love foreign aid because it allows them to buy off smaller governments and expand their influence without wars. Only people who believe governments are efficient would want them to handle foreign aid donations. Governments tend to give the money not to the people of other countries, but to the governments. Even if the majority of this money is used for its stated purpose, it will serve to entrench the existing power structure and the diversion of only a small part of it is enough to make plenty of corrupt politicians more than rich enough to buy the next few elections. Thus, foreign aid can serve to prop up governments that might otherwise fail due to excess corruption or unpopularity. When foreign aid is disbursed based on where there is terrorism, starvation, or disease, it ends up subsidizing terrorism, starvation, and disease.

There are tragedies going on all over the world and many caring people genuinely want to help. When we pool resources, amazing things can happen. Sometimes, even governments accomplish great feats of relief. Unfortunately, foreign aid funded by theft and carried

out by people who are unaccountable for the results predictably leads to diversion of funds for personal gain.

VI. WAR ON TERROR

Governments come up with many excuses for war, but the “war on terror” is especially dangerous because it can be used to keep a country in an endless state of war. Because government programs are very difficult to end, an armed conflict against an unspecified enemy is every government’s dream come true: perpetual war. The policies of the war on terror, as with most government programs, cause more of the problem. Governments of developed countries that occupy and intrude on developing nations cause terrorism. People resent having their societies taken over by foreign militaries, and after seeing their families killed and their way of life destroyed, resentment can become so great as to drive people to horrific violence. Foreign occupations cause such despair that victims often find their lives worth so little as to be easily sacrificed in resistance.

Governments have always used war as an excuse to restrict individual freedoms at home in the name of security. The war on terror is especially dangerous because it is based on an ever-present hypothetical threat that can affect every aspect of our lives – giving governments an excuse to regulate every aspect of our lives. Restrictions of speech and privacy are especially useful because they make people less likely to figure out how badly they are being robbed and how to resist. Normally, wartime regulations expire with the threat, but with the war on terror, the “threat” continues forever.

Trusting governments to “fight terror” invites massive corruption. If we ask someone to fight imaginary demons for us and decide how much it will cost, we will soon find ourselves in a world full of demons that are very expensive to fight. Governments claim to stop acts of terrorism all the time, but many of these are entrapment, some are completely fabricated, and most are greatly exaggerated. When a government fails to prevent an act of terror, it will say it needs more money to fight a more sophisticated enemy – no matter how simple the attack. When a government “prevents an act of

terror,” whether or not it actually did anything, it will say it needs more money to keep doing its job.

Any time a country is at war, the people tend to be fearful and that makes them want to rally around a strong leader or authority. This makes them less likely to question or challenge government. When the people are afraid, they are much more likely to tolerate an increase in taxation. A fearful people will be easier to control when their fear of each other makes everyone a snitch. If the people accept the excuses for war, they will feel much more dependent on government, especially for protection.

The war on terror is a particularly nasty racket, but it reveals how challenging it is now for governments to make large-scale war. In this age of global connectedness, starting a traditional military conflict seems increasingly unfeasible. By applying the same scrutiny to all excuses for violence, we will end all forms of war. Justifying violence in the name of promoting safety makes everyone less safe, but it still happens because someone is profiting.

VII. REAL SECURITY

Given what we know about governments and the motivation for war, it seems absurd that anyone would turn to one for security. Governments are not protection, they are protection rackets. National security is an excuse to defend exclusive taxation authority in their territory. Governments protect us like a rancher defends cattle. At home as abroad, governments use violence to expand their power. The best defense of a country is a well-armed population that refuses to submit to any organized system of exploitation.

When a territory is taken over by a foreign government, the first priority is to seize control of the tax base. The invading government wants to expand its protection racket. If it tries to take over an area that costs more to control than it produces in taxes, it will soon abandon the effort. The best defense against invasion is to have no government. An invader would need to build tax collection mechanisms from scratch and they would be extremely difficult and costly to maintain.

Having no government informs potential invaders that if they try to take over this territory, they will lose. The message is, “You

might never be defeated in battle, but by the power of decentralized resistance, both violent and nonviolent, you will lose because we are committed to freedom and will defeat any oppressor, foreign or domestic.” Widespread oppression is only possible when we believe we need to be ruled.

Supporting a “professional” military makes countries less secure. A more free society will be more prosperous. A more prosperous society will be a more lucrative trading partner, and thus less prone to attack. A country that is not militarized will make no enemies. A society without a central authority will not erect any obstacles for free people seeking to defend themselves appropriately. The illusion of protection from militaries hides the fact that they make us less safe.

It is very important to understand that governments are lying when they tell us they are doing something for our safety. Merely fabricating a threat gives them an excuse to spend money on false solutions to enrich their sponsors. We are at the point when large scale invasions are relatively rare, and while that may lessen the significance of being an armed individual, we must all be armed with the truth in order to not fall for the protection racket. The best national defense is a population that refuses to be governed.