



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on December 29, 2013

Establishment Terrified Tea Party Won't Back Unnecessary Wars

The interventionist establishment is terrified that a reinvigorated Tea Party may prevent new unnecessary wars and foreign military interventions in the coming years, according to an [article](#) in *Democracy* magazine. The article — “R.I.P. Republican Internationalism” by Council on Foreign Relations President Emeritus Leslie H. Gelb and Michael Kramer — frets that “a common thread emerges: a Tea Party-wide reluctance to engage with the world, except for those they view as true U.S. friends, such as Israel.”



The authors of the article — [reposted](#) on the website of the [center of America's political establishment, the Council on Foreign Relations](#) — say that Americans can “count on three consequences then. First, a stronger, even more vociferous Tea Party. Second, a growing isolationist, anti-world impulse among its adherents. Third, much rougher opposition for any President wanting to conduct necessary business abroad.”

By “necessary business,” Gelb and Kramer mean ground wars and air strikes in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. And woe to those who oppose such foreign interventionism, since they risk being branded “isolationist” and “anti-world” — as the authors do in their article. Of course, the epithets are not accurate, since it is neither “isolationist” nor “anti-world” to want to stay clear of foreign quarrels.

Gelb (a retired *New York Times* correspondent) and Kramer [fear](#) that the Tea Party — which has continued to show strength and resiliency after the media trumpeted its death this past fall — “will threaten what remains of the Republican Party’s great tradition of internationalism and further strain the ability of any U.S. President to conduct diplomacy, to negotiate, and to compromise. To Tea Party members, these three staples of a successful foreign policy are akin to unilateral disarmament.”

Gelb and Kramer describe the Tea Party as a movement led by persons dedicated to “opposition to free trade, immigration reform, and attempts to resolve disputes involving Iran, Syria, and China with diplomacy.” Of course, it’s not diplomacy that [non-interventionist Tea Party members](#) oppose, but unnecessary war and the “entangling alliances” that George Washington warned about in his [Farewell Address](#).

Like the misstatements on war, Gelb and Kramer also [mischaracterize](#) Tea Party leaders on the issue of international trade: “Some, like Senator Rand Paul, have talked only about the ‘take’ — threatening a trade war with China in the quixotic hope that such a stance will cause Beijing to pressure nations like North Korea to bend to U.S. wishes.” But the only “trade war” Rand Paul (shown above) has called for is an increase in global trade. Paul [told](#) Washington, D.C.-based WMAL on September 11, 2013 that he wanted to trade with China, and to use diplomacy to encourage them to get their client states to stop subsidizing terrorism:



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It's in our self-interest to trade with China and to trade with Russia. But they need to be aware that that trade is dependent on them trying to get their client states to cooperate. And I think if that lever were used and if Russia could be convinced, and China convinced, that it's in their self-interest to help bring these rogue nations back from the brink, then I think it's possible that could happen.

In short, Paul favors the use of diplomacy over war, something neo-conservative and establishment interventionists have long opposed.

The authors particularly [lament](#) the electoral defeat of interventionist senators such as former Indiana Republican Richard Lugar, who "represented Republican internationalist realism, and [whose] defeat was devastating, symbolically and practically. The Tea Partiers are now gunning for others formerly considered conservative stalwarts, such as Mitch McConnell, Lindsey Graham, Lamar Alexander, and Thad Cochran, four senators rightly seen as at least semi-internationalists." Lugar, McConnell, and Cochran were in the Senate during the 2002 [Iraq war vote](#) (Graham and Alexander had yet to be elected), and [all three voted for](#) this unnecessary war. Yet Gelb and Kramer mourn the possible loss of their impact on foreign policy.

Interestingly, the authors assume that the peace movement among Tea Party Republicans, as represented by Rand Paul and a number of congressmen in the House such as Michigan's Justin Amash, may come to dominate the GOP leadership in Congress. Gelb and Kramer [write](#) that despite "the apparent divisions among Tea Partiers over foreign policy — the seeming divide between unashamed isolationists like Rand Paul and unabashed hawks such as Ted Cruz. It would be wrong to bet on those differences marginalizing the movement's impact. More likely, the Tea Party's varying messages will fuse into a reborn and more potent form of hawkish isolationism."

If the reader is confused by the contradictory and absurd term "hawkish isolationism," Gelb and Kramer try to clarify that internationalist senators such as Marco Rubio are the most warlike among the new crop of senators elected with Tea Party support, and that they may move toward another war in the Middle East:

But in many instances, rolling back sanctions will require congressional approval, which will require House acquiescence, which in turn will require Tea Party assent. And that is just not likely, especially if Israel continues to oppose any serious diminution of economic pressure. As the elements of a possible deal with Iran become clearer, Marco Rubio's position, which is likely shared by other Tea Party leaders, is virtually indistinguishable from Israel's. Rubio has said he will support lifting sanctions only if Iran agrees to "completely abandon any capability for enrichment or reprocessing" of nuclear materials.

Yet Rubio — though backing a far more pugnacious foreign policy than Rand Paul — at minimum [voted against war with Syria](#). The same could not be said of the author's favorite "moderate" and "internationalist" senators, such as [John McCain \(R-Ariz.\) and Lindsey Graham \(R-S.C.\), both of whom beat the war drums for military strikes](#). By way of contrast, Tea Party favorite [Rand Paul threatened a filibuster](#) over the Syria war vote in order to stop the war.

The Gelb/Kramer piece was part of a larger series in the leftist *Democracy* magazine, which included stale leftist silliness and smears of the Tea Party movement. The editors [complained](#) about the "baleful influence" of the Tea Party, and another article, ["Republican Leaders' Two Choices"](#) by Alan I. Abramowitz, absurdly bemoaned "the most conservative Republican majority in the House since the



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1920s” and also complained that the Tea Party was “driving the GOP further and further to the right of mainstream American opinion.”

A third article, “Will the Tea Party Outlast Obama?” by Christopher S. Parker, completely [smears](#) the Tea Party along with the constitutionalist [John Birch Society](#) by sandwiching them with racist organizations, claiming the Tea Party “is simply the most recent version of what we call reactionary movements, similar to the Know-Nothing Party, the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s, and the John Birch Society.” At base, Parker portrays the Tea Party movement as racist, sexist, and homophobic: “Tea Partiers also remain wary of the improving status of all historically marginalized groups.”

Abramowitz fears that “so far, there is little evidence that Republican leaders in Congress are willing to risk their careers to challenge the Tea Party and its media allies.” Of course, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce has [committed \\$50 million to back establishment Republicans over Tea Party candidates in 2014](#). But the Tea Party has never relied upon establishment businesses for its electoral success. And a variety of other positive signs — including an [overload in demand for “Don’t Tread On Me” license plates](#) and [record fundraising for Tea Party-aligned independent groups such as the Senate Conservatives Fund](#) — means that the establishment authors have good cause to be concerned.

Photo of Rand Paul at Tea Party rally in Shepherdsville, Ky., July 1, 2010: AP Images



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