



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on March 2, 2017

Interventionist George W. Bush Warns of “Isolationist Tendency” in U.S.

Former President George W. Bush, speaking at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, California, on March 1, warned against what he called an “isolationist tendency” toward foreign policy in the United States. The Associated Press reported that Bush called that viewpoint dangerous to national security, speaking during a time when President Trump has faced questions about his commitment to the country’s international partnerships.



Bush was at the library to promote his new book, *Portraits of Courage: A Commander in Chief’s Tribute to America’s Warriors*, a collection of his paintings of military veterans.

Though the AP reported that Bush said it was not his intent to criticize his “successors” at the White House, his apparent criticism of former President Obama’s timetable for withdrawing troops from Iraq leaves only Trump exempt from criticism. “I don’t want to make the president’s job worse,” he said.

Bush also said he is optimistic about the future. Referring to his successor’s conduct of the Iraq War after he left office, Bush warned that there is a lesson “when the United States decides not to take the lead and withdraw.”

“Vacuums can be created when U.S. presence recedes and that vacuum is generally filled with people who don’t share the ideology, the same sense of human rights and human dignity and freedom that we do,” Bush added.

It would have been more correct for Bush to have said: Vacuums can be created *when the United States topples stable governments* — and that vacuum is generally filled with people who don’t share the ideology, the same sense of human rights and human dignity and freedom that we do.

Those who use the term “isolationist” — particularly in a disparaging way — invariably are interventionists who seek to discredit those who believe in adhering to the foreign policy advice of our nation’s earliest leaders. Noninterventionism was the prevailing philosophy guiding our nation’s foreign policy from the time of George Washington to the early 20th century, when Woodrow Wilson intervened in World War I. Following that war, Warren Harding was elected president on a campaign of “return to normalcy.”

The philosophy of “normalcy,” including noninterventionism, would prevail for 20 years, until the eve of America’s entry into World War II under President Franklin Roosevelt. Sentiment in the United States was against involvement in the war in Europe, which started on September 1, 1939, when Germany and the Soviet Union invaded Poland. In an address to the American people two days later, Roosevelt assured the nation that he would do all he could to keep the United States out of the war, but his subsequent actions cast doubt on the sincerity of this message.

As the war in Europe intensified during 1940, Americans became divided between the interventionist



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and the noninterventionist camps. In an address to the American people on December 29, 1940, Roosevelt seemed to be preparing Americans for intervention in the war when he said: “The Axis not merely admits but proclaims that there can be no ultimate peace between their philosophy of government and our philosophy of government.”

Congress passed the Lend-Lease Act on March 11 1941, which allowed the president “to lend, lease, sell, or barter arms, ammunition, food, or any ‘defense article’ or any ‘defense information’ to ‘the government of any country whose defense the President deems vital to the defense of the United States.’ ”

At first, Lend-Lease materials were supplied only to Great Britain. On October 30, 1941, Roosevelt approved \$1 billion in Lend-Lease loans to the Soviet Union — a communist dictatorship headed by Joseph Stalin. Congress approved this aid to the Soviets a week later.

The most well-known noninterventionist organization that opposed U.S. entry into World War II was the America First Committee (AFC), which was started on September 4, 1940, and dissolved on December 10, 1941, three days after the attack on Pearl Harbor. That attack made U.S. engagement in the war inevitable — a fact that has led many historians to conclude that Roosevelt and intelligence chiefs in his administration knew in advance of the attack, but deliberately withheld that foreknowledge from our commanders in Hawaii in the hope that the “surprise” attack would catapult the United States into World War II. (Read: [“Pearl Harbor: Hawaii Was Surprised; FDR Was Not.”](#))

The AFC was established by several then and future prominent individuals, including Yale Law School student R. Douglas Stuart, Jr. (son of R. Douglas Stuart, co-founder of Quaker Oats), along with other students, including future President Gerald Ford, future Peace Corps Director Sargent Shriver, and future U.S. Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart. The committee received substantial financial support from publisher William H. Regnery, H. Smith Richardson of the Vick Chemical Company, General Robert E. Wood of Sears-Roebuck, Sterling Morton of the Morton Salt Company (son of the company’s founder, Joy Morton), publisher Joseph M. Patterson of the New York *Daily News* and his cousin, publisher Robert R. McCormick of the *Chicago Tribune*.

The committee’s most prominent spokesman, however, was Charles Lindbergh, who had been regarded as a national hero since he made the first solo trans-Atlantic flight in 1927. On June 20, 1941, Lindbergh spoke to 30,000 people in a Los Angeles gathering billed as “Peace and Preparedness Mass Meeting,” in which he criticized those movements that were leading America into the war.

For their efforts, the members and leaders of the AFC were branded as “isolationists” — perhaps the first time that the term had been so widely used as a pejorative to demean those who opposed an interventionist foreign policy. Lindbergh was even smeared as a “Nazi sympathizer” after his visit to Germany in 1937. To the contrary, he was a staunch patriot and after witnessing the buildup of German air power firsthand, he secretly reported his findings to the General Staff of the U.S. Army, warning that the United States had fallen behind and must quickly build up its military aviation.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, Lindbergh’s patriotism was demonstrated by his following announcement:

We have been stepping closer to war for many months. Now it has come and we must meet it as united Americans regardless of our attitude in the past toward the policy our government has followed.

Whether or not that policy has been wise, our country has been attacked by force of arms and by



force of arms we must retaliate.

Lindbergh sought to be recommissioned in the USAAF, but Secretary of War Henry Stimson declined the request on instructions from the White House. Roosevelt would not forgive Lindbergh for his “isolationist” opposition to the war before Pearl Harbor. However, FDR’s opposition did not prevent Lindbergh from contributing to the war effort. He served as an aviation consultant to Ford and United Aircraft until 1944.

On May 21, 1944, Lindbergh flew his first combat mission — as a civilian. In his six months in the Pacific in 1944, Lindbergh took part in fighter-bomber raids on Japanese positions, flying 50 combat missions — again as a civilian.

By his service in the war, Lindbergh demonstrated unequivocally that an “isolationist” noninterventionist could be a true war hero and patriot.

In the years after World War II, as the interventionists held a firm grip on U.S. foreign policy (with most secretaries of state being members of the interventionist Council on Foreign Relations), the United States entered into a series of foreign wars in places such as Korea, Vietnam, and Bosnia, all without Congress issuing a declaration of war, as the Constitution requires. Many patriotic constitutionalists (as well as leftists — but for other reasons) opposed these wars.

However, it was when former constitutionalist Representative Ron Paul (R-Texas) started speaking out against the pointless U.S. involvement in the Middle East, that the term “isolationist” was dragged out of storage and repeatedly used in an attempt to discredit him.

Among the most disastrous of these foreign military interventions was the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, which Bush approved. Instead of asking Congress for a declaration of war, however, Bush relied on several visits to the UN, his own address before the General Assembly on September 12, 2002 (to outline the complaints of the U.S. government against the Iraqi government) and another by Secretary of State Colin Powell on February 5, 2003, to seek UN authorization for an invasion. The fact that our president and the executive department sought authorization from the UN, rather than a declaration of war from Congress, indicated a violation of the Constitution as well as a submission of U.S. sovereignty to the UN.

The invasion has been justified by the allegation that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction, a charge that was later proven to be false.

Britain’s former Prime Minister Tony Blair, a staunch ally of Bush at the beginning of the invasion, during a statement made last July, took responsibility for taking Britain into war, expressing “more sorrow, regret and apology that you can ever know or believe.” But Blair still insisted the world is a better place because of the removal of Saddam.

However, Bush, who ordered the invasion of Iraq, apparently has not changed his mind about the wisdom of that decision. Freddy Ford, a spokesman for Bush, said in a July 6, 2016, statement: “Despite the intelligence failures and other mistakes he has acknowledged previously, President Bush continues to believe the whole world is better off without Saddam Hussein in power.”

The statement continued: “[Bush] is deeply grateful for the service and sacrifice of American and coalition forces in the war on terror. And there was no stronger ally than the United Kingdom under the leadership of Prime Minister Tony Blair.”

In an article published by *The New American* last November, [“Save the Apologies, Just Stop Promoting](#)



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[War](#),” former representative Paul (perhaps the leading “isolationist” in Congress) commented on Blair’s surprising apology for the Iraq War during an interview on CNN the previous month. Paul noted that politicians rarely take personal blame for a misdeed and rarely do they atone for those misdeeds. He wrote:

Thus Tony Blair did not apologize for his role in pushing the disastrous Iraq war. He did not apologize for having, as former head UN Iraq inspector Hans Blix claimed, “misrepresented intelligence on weapons of mass destruction to gain approval for the Iraq War.”

No, Tony Blair “apologized” for “the fact that the intelligence we received was wrong,” on Iraq. He apologized for “mistakes in planning” for post-Saddam Iraq. He boldly refused to apologize for removing Saddam from power.

Paul also stated, “If we are waiting for any kind of apology from George W. Bush for Iraq we shouldn’t hold our breath. Likewise if we are looking for any kind of apology from President Obama for a similarly disastrous war on false pretext against Libya we shouldn’t bother waiting.... In fact, far from apologizing for leading the United States into the Libya war based on a false pretext, President Obama is taking US ground troops into Syria on a false pretext.”

Paul concluded his article by taking another shot at the interventionism that has persisted under Republicans and Democrats alike:

Here’s an idea: instead of apologies and non-apologies from politicians, how about an actual debate on the policies that led to such disasters? Why not discuss why the US keeps being drawn into wars on false pretexts? But that is a discussion we will not have, because both parties are in favor of these wars.

As Bush has just demonstrated during his talk at the Ronald Reagan library, he did not learn anything from his failed interventionist policy that removed Saddam Hussein from power under the pretext of eliminating nonexistent weapons of mass destruction and created a power vacuum that ISIS filled. He, instead, prefers to blame his successor, Obama, for withdrawing the remaining U.S. troops from Iraq too soon. And, furthermore, he is still waging a war of words against the “isolationists.”

There is plenty of blame to go around, with Obama picking up where Bush left off, but our foreign policy failures are definitely not caused by the “isolationists.”

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