

A Conflict of Peace Visions: The Peacemonger Mentality vs. the Warmonger Mentality

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Abstract

The concept of a liberal order dominates discussions of international affairs. The dominant approach to achieving a liberal order is grounded in a warmonger vision based on state military force as a primary means to social cooperation, peace, order, and human flourishing. This stands in contrast to the peacemonger vision, which emphasizes the primacy of nonviolence in interactions between people, especially in conflict situations. We offer reasons for skepticism regarding the warmonger vision and then discuss features and misconceptions of the peacemonger mentality. In doing so, we discuss how the peacemonger vision better fits with the liberal ends advocated by many who share the warmonger mentality.

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I. Introduction

After World War II, the concept of a liberal institutional order came to dominate discussions of international affairs. The idea of a liberal institutional order emphasizes a liberal democratic polity and economy, free movement of goods, and human rights including human equality and self-determination (Lake, Martin, and Risse 2021, p. 229). Liberalism in economic, political, and social affairs is the

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stated end of proponents of this ideal. The means adopted to achieve this end is military primacy, which entails significant investments in military force and the projection of that force around the globe. Moreover, the US government, as a liberal empire, was, and is, seen by many as *the* central source of global order through military and economic strength (see Hogan 1998; Lal 2004; Ferguson 2004).

The historian Michael Hogan (1998) discusses the implications of the mentality for the United States during the Cold War: “In the national security ideology, then, the nature of the Soviet regime put a premium on military preparedness, the immediacy of the Soviet threat made preparedness a matter of urgency, the long-term nature of that threat required a permanent program of preparedness, and the danger of total war dictated a comprehensive program that integrated civilian and military resources and obliterated the line between citizen and soldier, peace and war” (p. 14). This total-war mentality continues to this day. As historian Andrew Bacevich (2005) points out, “Today as never before in their history, Americans are enthralled with military power. The global military supremacy that the United States presently enjoys—and is bent on perpetuating—has become central to our national identity” (p.1).

One consequence of this mentality is that suggestions of nonmilitary solutions to conflict are viewed as naive, unrealistic, and dangerous. F. A. “Baldy” Harper (1979) captured the sentiment well in the opening lines of his article “In Search of Peace”: “Charges of pacifism are likely to be hurled at anyone who in these troubled times raises any question about the race into war. If pacifism means embracing the objective of peace, I am willing to accept the charge. If it means opposing all aggression against others, I am willing to accept that charge also. It is now urgent in the interest of liberty that many persons become ‘peacemongers’” (p. 376).

What does it mean to be a peacemonger? A *peacemonger* advocates the primacy of peace in interactions between people, including while navigating conflicts. This stands in contrast to a *warmonger*, who advocates state military force—either threatened or actually employed—as a primary means to social cooperation, peace, and order.

The difference between a peacemonger and a warmonger lies in the underlying tacit presuppositions regarding the appropriateness of justified militarism and war as means for achieving liberal ends. A warmonger begins from the premise of a Hobbesian world with collective-action problems that cannot be resolved absent a Leviathan

that broadcasts force through military strength to generate order. In international affairs, warmongers assume that state military force is required to bring liberal order to the otherwise-anarchical world. Central to this worldview is the idea of deterrence through force, whereby nations invest in developing and obtaining tools and techniques of force and strategically deploy them to deter attacks. This type of deterrence dominates discussions of international relations, with a recent article noting that at least twenty-seven different types of deterrence exist in academic discourse (Wicker 2023). Also central to the warmonger vision is that the tools of deterrence should not be reserved for use in a passive and defensive manner; instead, they must be proactively deployed around the globe in the name of the national and the global interest. That is, deterrence goes beyond defense of a nation's borders and instead focuses on projecting force globally.

A peacemonger, in contrast, begins from the premise that all people (not just the elites) are capable of navigating collective-action problems in creative ways. Moreover, the peacemonger presupposes that centralized state power will reflect, and magnify, the imperfections of ordinary individuals. The peacemonger does not deny that conflict exists. Instead, they believe that people can resolve conflicts without threatening, or resorting to, force. For the peacemonger, elevating tools and techniques of violence as the primary form of interaction makes war more likely, not less. The peacemonger does not deny that violence may occur or that defense is necessary. They emphasize, however, that state-provided military force need not be the primary source of order in human relationships. Moreover, the bar for the use of state military force is high given the prevalence of government failure and the significant costs of war (both domestic and foreign). That is, the peacemonger seeks to shrink the scale and scope of violence to the greatest degree possible by always emphasizing the primacy of nonviolent means of conflict resolution.

The warmonger vision leads to a “peace through strength” view of the world in which strength corresponds to state-provided military power. This idea is captured in the well-known adage “*Si vis pacem, para bellum*” (“If you want peace, prepare for war”). This has been the dominant view among US policy makers since at least World War II, when the US government assumed the role of the world's police (see Wertheim 2021). But as F. A. Harper suggested, this is not the only possibility. An alternative view of the world is “*Si vis pacem,*

para pacem” (“If you want peace, prepare for peace”). This “strength through peace” vision requires a commitment to being a peacemaker who elevates peaceful means of human interaction as a feasible means of primary social interaction and nonviolent conflict resolution.

The purpose of this paper is to raise skepticism of the warmonger vision while bringing attention to the peacemaker vision as an alternative for achieving liberal outcomes. Toward this end, section 2 draws on the insights of political economy, which focuses on the constraints and incentives facing those within, and entangled with, political institutions. We offer four reasons for skepticism regarding state military might as the main source of liberal order, peace, and human flourishing, both at home and abroad. Our analysis is US-centric because of the dominance of the US government in terms of military power and because of the call of some classical liberals for the US to embrace its role as global hegemon (see Ferguson 2004; Lal 2004). Section 3 discusses overlooked features of the peacemaker mentality and discusses how it better fits with the liberal ends advocated by many proponents of the warmonger mentality. Section 4 concludes.

II. The Case Against the Warmonger Mentality

The warmonger mentality elevates military primacy as the central causal mechanism for achieving and maintaining peace and order. This downplays the domestic effects of maintaining a large-scale military apparatus; these effects undermine personal and economic freedoms and limits on state power. This mentality also neglects the constraints on state military might in the international space, including the limits of top-down state planning and the likelihood of negative consequences of state intervention in complex systems.

A. A Large Military Sector Increases the Fiscal Scale of the Domestic State

Liberalism requires constraints on government’s ability to engage in discretionary spending. A tension emerges, however, because a large military sector justified on the grounds of defending liberalism contributes to the erosion of fiscal constraints on government. Consider that the US government spends a significant amount of resources on military-related activities. Proponents of maintaining the status quo, or even increasing military spending, like to point out that as a percentage of GDP, between 2002 and 2022, military spending was in the 3 to 5 percent range (US Department of Defense Office of

the Under Secretary of Defense 2022). This makes it seem as if military spending is relatively small compared to overall economic activity. However, consider an alternative perspective.

For FY 2023 it is estimated that the US government will spend \$772.3 billion on the base defense budget used to fund the core operations of the Department of Defense (US Department of Defense Office of the Under Secretary of Defense 2022, p. 6). Included in this budget is \$42.1 billion for direct war requirements, funding for Operation Freedom's Sentinel in Afghanistan and Operation Inherent Resolve in Iraq and Syria, and remaining costs associated with the operations after combat ends (Congressional Research Service 2022, p. 1). As of February 2023, \$48.7 billion in supplemental appropriations for US security assistance to Ukraine had been spent in FY 2022 and FY 2023 (Congressional Research Service 2023, p. 1). The government spent another \$291.1 billion on defense-related agencies and functions including the Department of Veterans Affairs (\$134.9 billion; US Office of Management and Budget 2023, p. 164); the State Department (\$63.5 billion; US Office of Management and Budget 2023, p. 164); the Department of Homeland Security (\$59.8 billion; US Office of Management and Budget 2023, p. 164); the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which is housed in the Department of Justice (\$10.8 billion; US Department of Justice 2022, p. 4); and the National Nuclear Security Administration, which is housed in the Department of Energy (\$22.1 billion; US Department of Energy 2023, p. 1). Altogether, the total FY 2023 expenditure on defense-related activities by the US government is \$1.063 trillion.

To provide some context, consider that defense-related expenditures are the second-largest expenditure by the federal government following Social Security, which has a FY 2023 budget of \$1.346 trillion (US Office of Management and Budget 2023, p. 137). Further, according to the president's budget for 2023, military spending is much larger than expenditures on Medicare (\$821 billion; p. 137) and Medicaid (\$608 billion; p. 137). Military expenditures dwarf the budgets of other agencies, including the Department of Health and Human Services (\$130.4 billion; p. 164), the Department of Education (\$79.2 billion; p. 164), the Department of Housing and Urban Development (\$72.1 billion; p. 164), and the Department of Agriculture (\$26.4 billion; p. 164).

Many maintain that the US government needs to increase military spending because of looming threats from China and Russia. But

looking at relative outlays calls this argument into question. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute tracks military spending around the world. According to its research, in 2021, military expenditures by the US government accounted for 38 percent of total world military expenditures. To provide context, consider that the government of China, which is second to the US government in military spending, accounted for 14 percent of the world's military expenditures. The shares of military spending by other governments—led by India (3.6 percent), the UK (3.2 percent), Russia (3.1 percent), and France (2.7 percent)—are minimal compared to the spending by the US government. Indeed, if the US government cut military spending in *half*, its spending would still be greater than that of the governments of China and India combined. The spending of the next ten countries would need to be combined to match what the US spends on the military (Da Silva et al. 2022).

What about the cost of specific interventions? It turns out they are quite costly. The Costs of War Project at Brown University estimates the total cost (direct and indirect payments plus expected expenditures on veterans' care) of post-9/11 US-led wars to be approximately \$8 trillion (Crawford 2021). This includes predicted spending, such as spending on veterans' benefits and interest on the debt, that will occur well into the future.

An active foreign policy encourages a large military sector (a mix of public and private actors), which, in turn, requires spending, which contributes to increases in the scale of government. War financing can take place through taxation, the issuing of debt, or the printing of money. None of these options are desirable for those concerned with ensuring government operates within tight fiscal constraints. Once in place, wartime taxes tend to persist even after the intervention ends (Eland 2013). Debt simply shifts the cost of present interventions to future generations who must service the debt. Printing money to finance foreign interventions devalues the currency, reducing the wealth of the citizenry. An expansive military sector requires discretionary action and spending, which undermines constraints (formal and informal) on fiscal policy.

B. The Military-Industrial Base Threatens the Dynamism of Domestic Markets

The provision of military defense by government to protect the person and property of citizens is often viewed as a productive activity because it creates an environment conducive to positive-sum

activities by private citizens. This assumes, however, that all military-related activities are productive, value added, and neutral with respect to private economic activity. They are not.

Like all other government services, military production requires the transfer of resources—money, capital, and labor—from the private market to the military sector. Resources used by the military-industrial base cannot simultaneously be used by private citizens. This is not simply a matter of one-to-one crowding out (Coyne 2022, 2023). Private markets are dynamic because participants can rely on competitive market prices and profit and loss to gauge the opportunity costs of alternative courses of action. In political settings, in contrast, the ability to rely on economic calculation is absent. Political decision-makers can increase military-related outputs by investing more money in certain lines of production, but there is no mechanism to inform them whether they are allocating scarce resources to their highest-valued uses. In other words, there is no way for policy makers to know whether they are providing the right quantities and qualities of military outputs. Moreover, given the incentives in politics, there is a tendency for overreach and overproduction (Coyne and Hall 2019).

The funding of military activities does more than simply transfer resources from the private to the military sector. Government expenditures create new, and often undesirable, opportunities for profit. Like any other government expenditures, military expenditures create vested interests who not only benefit from immediate government expenditures but also seek to influence and manipulate future political decisions for their own narrow benefit. The existence of what President Eisenhower termed the “military-industrial complex” is well known, but the implications are often neglected: much of the government spending on what is categorized as defense is really corporate welfare in disguise.

An entire industry of defense-related companies has emerged and grown because of military expenditures by the state over the preceding decades. Many of these companies are dependent on government-provided defense contracts for their survival. To provide one illustration of this, consider table 1, which shows the 2021 revenues (defense and total) for the top five US-based defense contractors.

Table 1: Top 5 US-Based Defense Contractors, 2021 Revenues

	2021 Defense Revenue (in billions)	2021 Total Revenue (in billions)	% of Revenue from Defense
Lockheed Martin	64.4	67.0	96%
Raytheon	41.8	64.3	65%
Boeing	35.0	62.2	56%
Northrop Grumman	31.4	35.6	88%
General Dynamics	30.8	38.5	80%

Source: *Defense News* (2023)

Three of the five companies rely on government expenditures on defense for more than three-fourths of their annual revenue; the other two earn two-thirds and over half of their revenue from government defense expenditures, respectively. And this is just a small sample. There is a massive network of dedicated companies and subcontractors that have emerged to participate in, and perpetuate, the permanent war economy that began following World War II (see Ledbetter 2011; Roland 2021). The resources employed in this flourishing economy are not only monetary but human in the form of ingenuity and effort that are redirected from satisfying private consumers to instead satisfying government officials who award contracts.

One result of the military corporate-welfare system is that equipment and hardware that the military says it does not need, or cannot use, continues to be produced because politicians want to claim that they are creating and maintaining jobs for their constituents. For example, members of Congress have voted to continue spending taxpayer money on building and refurbishing tanks even though military leaders say they cannot use them in actual combat situations because of geographic and strategic constraints in locations where current military operations are taking place (Censer 2014).

The F-35 fighter-jet program is an additional example of a very similar situation. The program started in 2001 with projections to have a squadron in the air by 2010 and the goal to produce a lightweight, affordable jet. However, by 2011, the program was seven years behind schedule, with project costs having doubled (Mathis 2023). A report from the Pentagon in 2021 identified eight hundred unresolved defects in the plane (Hartung 2022). Despite no

longer meeting many of the program's initial goals, the jet is still being manufactured.

As yet another example, the Littoral Combat Ship program, which started in 2001, has repeatedly failed to meet mission requirements, struggles to survive battle damage, and has runover costs (Congressional Research Service 2019). The ship is still funded despite criticism, including that from the Government Accountability Office, which has repeatedly pointed to the need for action plans to fix the numerous mission failures of the program (US Government Accountability Office 2022). These and similar cases that permeate the military-industrial base are pure make-work waste that provides little to no value in terms of defense and security to US citizens.

Cronyism is rampant in the military sector (Coyne 2022). Consider the revolving-door phenomenon, whereby those in former government positions move to the private sector (Duncan and Coyne 2015). This allows private companies to more easily contact key people and navigate the labyrinth of bureaucracy to secure lucrative military-related contracts. One report by the *Boston Globe* found that, between 2004 and 2008, 80 percent of retired three- and four-star officers relocated to the private defense industry either in consultant or executive roles (Bender 2010). Another report, by *USA Today*, identified 158 retired generals and admirals who served as consultants, or "senior mentors," to the military after retirement. The report found that 126 had financial ties to defense companies and that 29 were full-time executives at defense companies (Brook, Dilanian, and Locker 2009).

In general, government programs and interventions create vested interests and promote cronyism. The military is no different. And given the significant expenditures on military-related activities, as well as the entanglements between the public and private sectors, it is not surprising that these perverse dynamics are rampant. The political capitalism resulting from an expansive military sector is at odds with the fundamental tenets of liberalism, which include free markets insulated from government manipulation and influence.

C. The Warmonger Mentality Expands the Scope of Domestic State Power

A proactive, militaristic foreign policy contributes to increases in the fiscal scale of the state. But that is not all; it also contributes to expansions in the scope of the state. While scale refers to the size of government, scope refers to the range of activities the government undertakes. F. A. Harper was well aware of the potential for increases

in the scope of government during times of war. He wrote, “By some strange twist of reasoning, fear of losing liberty drives persons to enslave themselves and surrender their liberty in the hope of keeping it. It is argued that this is necessary ‘to protect the people’” (Harper 1979, p. 381). This same logic is used today to justify continuous expansions in government power. US citizens now tolerate, and even accept, a variety of violations of their person, property, and privacy all in the name of protecting us from potential threats. Numerous authors have documented how the US government took on expanded police-state powers in the wake of the 9/11 attacks (see Higgs 2005; Priest and Arkin 2011; Coyne and Yatsyshina 2021). Many of the powers remain today, over two decades after the attacks. This is the latest in a long series of expansions in state power associated with war (see Unger 2013), which has included the rise of an imperial presidency (see Schlesinger Jr. 2004) and a largely unconstrained deep state (see Glennon 2014).

Driving this expansion in the scope of state power is the fact that a large military sector, combined with a proactive foreign policy, contributes to movements toward a centralized managerial state. These centralizing tendencies are a logical outcome precisely because the federal government and its agencies are responsible for designing, implementing, and overseeing foreign policy. As the federal government increases its power, the political periphery loses power, which weakens the checks created by individual autonomy and dispersed political decision-making (Coyne and Hall 2018). Perhaps the most eloquent characterization of this process was provided by Randolph Bourne (1964), who noted:

The State is the organization of the herd to act offensively or defensively against another herd similarly organized. The more terrifying the occasion for defense, the closer will become the organization and the more coercive the influence upon each member of the herd. War sends the current of purpose and activity flowing down to the lowest level of the herd, and to its most remote branches. All the activities of society are linked together as fast as possible to this central purpose . . . and the State becomes what in peacetimes it has vainly struggled to become—the inexorable arbiter and determinant of men’s business and attitudes and opinions. (p. 69)

This result of the dynamics identified by Bourne has been evident during times of war throughout US history (see Higgs 1987; Linfield 1990; Rehnquist 1998). Since 9/11, debates have been raging

regarding the extent of the government's surveillance powers and, most recently, the militarization of domestic policing. Often overlooked in these discussions is that these phenomena have histories deeply rooted in earlier US foreign interventions (Coyne and Hall 2014, 2018).

Many argue that the trade-off between liberty and security is necessary and assure us that it will be short-lived (see, for instance, Posner and Vermeule 2007). According to this view, the government benevolently increases security during times of crisis and returns to its previous path either of its own accord or after judicial review. However, there is reason to believe that this will not be the case, as the incentives facing politicians during times of war are to overreach and to target those minority groups that have the least protection. It is not that expansions in government power cannot be undone. However, expansions are likely to be sticky and last for long periods of time because of a variety of factors including vested interests, bureaucratic inertia, and changes in ideology whereby expansions in the scope of government power become normalized in the lives of average citizens (Higgs 1987).

Warmongers assume that state military force, combined with a proactive foreign policy, will strengthen the domestic polity by providing security and protection to citizens. It is crucial to remember, however, that the associated government activities can, and do, undermine the liberties of citizens at home. Quantifying the costs of lost liberties is extremely difficult, but this is even more reason to be cognizant of this overlooked cost of foreign interventions. Once liberties are lost, they are often difficult, if not impossible, to regain.

D. Foreign Military Intervention Is Limited in What It Can Achieve

One might argue that the significant amount of resources spent on the military, including the waste, is worth it if military activities can yield significant benefits through foreign interventions that promote peace and liberalism. Indeed, we hear politicians make grandiose promises all the time about spreading peace and freedom as if there are no constraints on achieving their stated ends. This unconstrained vision is nicely illustrated in a 2010 talk by then secretary of state Hillary Clinton (2010) to the Council on Foreign Relations, in which she stated that "Americans have always risen to the challenges we have faced. That is who we are. It is in our DNA. We do believe there are no limits on what is possible or what can be achieved." The

reality, however, is that foreign interventions are very limited in what they can accomplish because of the complexities of the world and limits on human reason.

Economic, political, legal, and social systems are all complex systems, meaning that individual elements are interconnected in a manner that generates an outcome that is beyond the grasp of human reason. Or, to use a term often associated with F. A. Hayek, they are spontaneous orders that are the result of purposeful human action but not human design. Proponents of foreign intervention tend to ignore this reality and, instead, treat perceived problems as technical, engineering problems that can be solved with the right expertise and resources. Politicians will say, “We sent a man to the moon; therefore we can do [insert grandiose vision here].” However, sending a man to the moon is an engineering problem. Nation building is not.

The problem with the unconstrained vision is that it overlooks the realities facing political decision-makers. One set of constraints is knowledge constraints, or limits on human reason, which have two related implications (Coyne 2022, pp. 67–82). First, policy makers cannot fully grasp the complexities of the world in our own society, let alone in other societies. Second, policy makers do not know how to go about designing a liberal society from scratch even under the best-case scenario. Policy makers typically attempt to circumvent these implications either by ignoring them or by attempting to mimic activities and outcomes in their own country, such as by holding elections. But holding elections absent complementary norms and institutions can lead to disaster for basic human rights and liberty. The failure of liberal governments to export liberal democratic institutions through nation building has been well documented (Pickering and Peceny 2006; Coyne 2008; Enterline and Greig 2008).

Because foreign interventions are necessarily simplistic relative to the complex system they seek to shape, a wide range of negative consequences, or public bads, are unavoidable as documented by Coyne and Davies (2007) and Coyne (2022). Because of the incentives they face, policy makers continually neglect the potential long-term, unseen consequences and, instead, focus narrowly on the short-term, visible aspects of foreign interventions. They overlook the crucial question: and then what? They cast the problem situation in a black and white manner—good and bad—and set out to destroy those in the bad category without asking what happens even if they are successful.

These dynamics were evident in Libya, where the enforcement of the no-fly zone and limited interventions more generally were initially considered a major victory for the Obama administration. This premature declaration of victory neglected the subsequent power vacuum and civil war that emerged and that has imposed significant costs on citizens of both Libya and the broader region. These same issues are relevant in the context of current US policy toward ISIS. Even if the multiyear mission to eradicate the group is successful, what is the end game in Iraq and in the region?

In addition to these knowledge constraints, foreign interventions suffer from massive incentive problems. As discussed, the US military sector is an enormous complex involving public and private organizations (Coyne 2022, pp. 53–66). Byproducts of the interactions in this space are waste, persistent resource misallocation, and inertia in policies and daily operations. Further, given the number of government agencies involved in military activities, petty infighting is common, as bureaus attempt to demonstrate their importance to secure greater budgets in the future.¹ The incentives inherent in the industrial organization of government bureaus are problematic when intervening abroad given the rapidly changing circumstances on the ground relative to the lethargy of bureaucracy.

There are other fundamental issues with the democratic political system through which foreign interventions are designed and implemented. For example, voters tend to be rationally ignorant of the specifics of foreign interventions. A poll taken in 2014 indicated that US voters had limited knowledge of the various countries that the US government was currently bombing (Edwards-Levy 2014). To the extent that elected officials respond to the desires of voters, they may pursue policies that are at odds with the idealistic visions of those who design the initial intervention.

Many critics of President Obama took issue with his withdrawal of US troops from Iraq, claiming that the move was responsible for the situation with ISIS. Putting aside the simplicity of this narrative, it overlooks the fact that a majority of American voters supported troop withdrawal. For example, one Gallup poll asked, “Do you approve or disapprove of President Obama’s decision to withdrawal nearly all US troops from Iraq by the end of the year?” Polling during

¹ For a firsthand account of these dynamics in Iraq, see Van Buren (2011). For another firsthand account of bureaucratic inertia and infighting, see Gates (2014).

October 29–30, 2011, indicated that 75 percent of respondents approved while 21 percent disapproved (Jones 2011).

It was very similar when President Biden decided to withdraw troops from Afghanistan in August 2021. Within two weeks the Taliban had taken over the country. However, leading up to the withdrawal, a majority of the public appeared to support the removal of troops. On April 16–18, 2021, an Ipsos survey found that 50 percent “supported the idea of the US bringing home ‘all of its troops from Afghanistan immediately,’ while 27 percent opposed” (Newport 2021) it. From July 7–26 the Chicago Council Survey found that 70 percent supported a decision to withdraw by September 11.

A final issue is the assumption that military might will always and everywhere be directed toward welfare-enhancing goods. One issue is that attempts to operationalize concepts like national interest and global good are problematic because these concepts are overly broad and elastic, allowing policy makers to use them to justify almost any action. Another issue is that the concentrated and discretionary power associated with the military might allow those who wield it to intervene in the lives of others as they see fit. For instance, O’Rourke (2018) documents numerous cases of the US government’s attempts to engage in covert regime change during the Cold War despite US officials’ rhetoric of commitment to international liberal norms.

The main takeaway is this: policy is not designed in a vacuum. That policy makers know what they want to achieve abroad does not mean that they know how to go about doing it. Further, policies are implemented through a political process that entails bureaucratic inertia, vested interests who seek to influence policy for their own narrow gain, and rationally ignorant voters who often demand policies that are at odds with the grand visions of “experts.” Moreover, reliance on top-down expert planning implemented through military might in the name of liberalism undermines those very values (Easterly 2013; Coyne 2022, 2023).

III. The Case for a Peacemonger Mentality

Why adopt the peacemonger mentality? Fundamentally, the case for the peacemonger mentality is that it is consistent with the liberal project, while the warmonger mentality is not. Among other things, liberals believe in individual freedom, self-determination, and the peaceful resolution of conflict. In elevating force and coercion as the source of order and peace, the warmonger mentality betrays these

values. As discussed in the introduction, the stated end of what we call the warmonger vision, as often stated by proponents of this mentality, is a liberal international order. In the prior section, we highlighted some tensions and incompatibilities between the means proposed by warmongers and their stated ends.

These tensions are succinctly captured by Fiala (2004), who notes, “Since the primary value of liberalism is liberty, to use force as a means is to undermine the entire project” (p. 206). Patrick Porter (2020) questions whether the post–World War II, US-led international order has been as liberal as its proponents suggest: “Even America’s most glorious achievements—with liberal ‘ends’—were not clean pluses on a balance sheet, made by liberal ‘means.’ They relied on a preponderance of power, a preponderance that has brutal foundations. America’s most beneficial achievements were partly wrought by illiberal means, through dark deals, harsh coercion and wars gone wrong that killed millions” (p. 6). This leads us to consider the peacemonger mentality, which consists of four foundational principles.

First, peace between people across geographic space and borders is possible. As Fiala (2004) writes, “Liberal hope is connected with the belief that peaceful means, such as education, open opportunity, and freedom of choice will be effective to bring about the liberal peace” (p. 206). However, we need not rely purely on hope and faith because we observe people from diverse backgrounds, experiences, and geographic locations engaging peacefully on a daily basis. It is well documented that people, absent state dictates, can navigate conflict situations (see Ostrom, Walker, and Gardner 1992; Ellickson 1994; Stringham 2006, 2015). Casual empirical observation reveals that millions of people around the world (both within and across states) engage in peaceful interaction on a daily basis absent direct state involvement.

Importantly, it is unclear that the shadow of the state is doing the work as the primary driver of peace, as states are not large enough in scale or scope to suppress violence on a sufficiently large scale. Many people choose to act in positive-sum, peaceful ways with others when there are clear opportunities for narrow opportunism. In addition, even in situations of violence (often perpetuated by the state itself) we see people engaging in pockets of peace with other private people (see Autesserre 2014, 2021). This suggests that peace and violence can coexist in the same space but on different margins.

Second, peace is a choice—people have the ability to decide to contribute to peaceful or violent outcomes. As John Horgan (2012) notes, “War is not a primordial biological ‘curse.’ It is a cultural innovation, an especially vicious, persistent meme, which culture can help us transcend.” Conflict is a fundamental part of life, but the way we navigate conflict—through nonviolent or violent means—is a choice. This holds not only at the individual level but also in interactions between groups. Kenneth Boulding (1978) emphasized that taboos matter a great deal; they delineate what behaviors are deemed acceptable—including behaviors of violence and nonviolence. Taboos can be shaped by human decision-making.

The warmonger mentality models people as if they are trapped in a Hobbesian dilemma with no escape except through Leviathan. But this assumes that ordinary people are limited in their ability to utilize their individual agency to change the parameters of the game in a way that transforms situations of conflict into situations of cooperation. As Elinor Ostrom (1990) documents, this is an inaccurate assumption in the context of common pool resources. Similarly, it is an inaccurate assumption in the context of peacemaking, in which people have the power to potentially change their situation, and the situations of others, for the better.

Third, peace is heterogeneous, meaning that there is no one-size-fits-all manifestation of peace that applies in every setting. As Fox (2014) writes, “What makes any given peaceful society work as such is a matter both complex and deep, as well as being relative to time, place, language, world-view, and other factors” (p. 89). The idea that peace can be designed and imposed in a top-down manner as desired by the intervener neglects the reality of cultures of peace that vary across time and contexts (E. Boulding 2000).

The warmonger mentality associates order with top-down state control and thus assumes that order is a result of design and control. This includes treating global peace as if it is a single hierarchy of ends that can be known and imposed. An alternative framing is that peace is an emergent outcome—an outcome that is not an object of control—of many micro-level interactions between people who engage in context-specific peacemaking.

Fourth, peacemaking is a skill that needs to be exercised and cultivated to avoid atrophy. Each person needs to develop the skills to navigate conflict situations peacefully. This development takes place through real-world experience and practice. Peace is not a final state but rather a constantly evolving outcome that emerges from

people experimenting and learning what works to resolve conflict in nonviolent ways. One implication of this is that reliance on the state as the main provider of peace and order can crowd out the self-governing capabilities of ordinary people. The skills of effective self-governance are not innate but rather must be learned through time (V. Ostrom 1997). This requires the opportunity to develop these skills. As in other areas of life, state action in the military realm can crowd out human creativity and experimentation as it pertains to the skills of peacemaking. To the extent this crowding out takes place, it is unseen since the skills that would have developed never do.

Of course it is possible that people, when left to their own devices, will fail to achieve peace and will resort to violence. But at least the peacemonger mentality provides the opportunity for peace based on liberal values, while the warmonger mentality gives up on the liberal project from the start under the presumption that private people are incapable of discovering, fostering, and nurturing peaceful means to navigate conflicts. From the peacemonger's perspective, the warmonger mentality fosters a cynicism that liberal values are hopeless ideals that are, at best, possible only if backstopped by state force on the grandest of scales.

The peacemonger position is often characterized as being naively isolationist. This criticism suggests that those who hold the peacemonger mentality are content to sit by the sidelines as the world crumbles. This, however, misses the nuance of the peacemonger position.

The peacemonger does not deny that conflict, defined as clashing interests, is a ubiquitous feature of the world. Conflict exists both at home and abroad. The open question is the best means of navigating conflict. The peacemonger holds that ordinary people are capable of finding peaceful solutions to conflict. They also hold that accumulating tools of force and elevating those tools as primary means of navigating conflict make violence *more* likely, not less. Peace is not about removing differences between people; rather, it is about taking steps to minimize the likelihood that the process of conflict navigation transitions to violence.

In matters related to direct interactions between nation-states, the peacemonger applies the core principles of the mentality while emphasizing nonviolent means of conflict resolution. As F. A. Harper (1979) noted, "Government in this country was designed as an agent to protect persons and property, to maintain peace and order by resolving conflict through a judicial system. And

it was supposed to administer resistance to threats from outside the country, but without ever becoming an aggressor in the outside world” (p. 389).

Nonviolent means to conflict resolution might include diplomacy, compromise, complacency, and acquiescence. As John Mueller (2021) notes, “In a condition of international peace a certain degree of complacency is often justified and is frequently superior to the routine opposite: agitated confrontation characterized by determined and often militarized alarmism” (p. 16). It might also take the form of nonviolent action, or resistance to internal and external threats without resorting to violence. Nonviolent action is not mere pacifism but rather a strategy for people to collectively resist a threat that possesses a comparative advantage in physical force. An existing literature documents numerous cases in which nonviolent means have effectively been deployed (see Ammons and Coyne 2020 for a survey).

What about the transaction costs associated with implementing the peacemonger vision? On the face of it the activities discussed here are only feasible on a small scale, especially given the present-day interconnectedness of a world with a population heading toward eight billion people. There are four responses.

First, in many instances of conflict, small-scale responses might be desirable precisely because the conflict is unique to the circumstances. The peacemonger mentality emphasizes the importance of context-specific knowledge for avoiding violence. What this means is that even if one holds that there are certain circumstances in which the transaction costs associated with operationalizing the peacemonger mentality are likely to be high, that does not mean the peacemonger vision should be rejected as a viable means of addressing all conflicts.

Second, there are instances of cross-country nonviolence that illustrate the potential for larger-scale coordination. For example, Lawrence Wittner (1993, 1997, 2003, 2009), a historian, extensively documents the rise of the global disarmament movement in the wake of World War II. He argues that nuclear deterrence cannot, by itself, explain the non-use of these weapons because nuclear states have not used them against non-nuclear states despite the opportunity to do so. He emphasizes the importance of the disarmament movement as an important check on the use of nuclear weapons by governments. This cross-country movement is bottom-up in that it is not centrally planned, although certain organizations that are part of the

movement are. Moreover, the movement contains members from all walks of life—scientists, public intellectuals, academics, and ordinary citizens. This provides one illustration of how larger-scale, cross-country organization can occur that contributes to peace, in this case by checking large-scale violence through the use of nuclear weapons.

It is important to note that we do not know exactly how the peacemonger vision will manifest in practice. Indeed, part of this vision is that peace is an emergent phenomenon rather than an object of top-down choice. This means that we cannot know, *ex ante*, exactly what the different arrangements or skills of peacemaking will look like prior to their emergence. As F. A. Hayek (1960) noted, liberty is desirable precisely because it allows people to discover what they do not (and cannot) otherwise know. The skills and arrangements of peacemaking are no different, as people need to be able to act on their subjective perceptions of the world, which include their perceptions of conflict, to find pathways that work for them and others.

Third, we live in a world of nation-states. To the extent these nation-states act in international affairs, government representatives can choose to adopt a vision that is more in line with the warmonger mentality or one that is in line with the peacemonger mentality. As noted above, diplomacy and complacency are two manifestations of the peacemonger mentality in practice since they emphasize nonviolent means of conflict resolution.

Fourth, turning to the nation-state as the source of international order, as adherents to the warmonger vision support, may solve one collective-action problem by creating another. The standard argument for a global hegemon points to the free-rider problem associated with public goods provided to the world. Defense and warmaking, the argument goes, involve hundreds of millions of people and cannot effectively be provided—in sufficient quantities and of the right qualities—by private people. Therefore, the state has to step in, with an especially powerful hegemon serving as a type of informal world government.

Even if we assume the hegemon can overcome the standard issues with efficient public good provision—preference revelation and incentive alignment—it creates another collective-action problem. If citizens of a polity cannot effectively coordinate to provide a good or service, it is unclear whether they can effectively come together to monitor and discipline a government body that provides not only that good but many others. The problem is further

complicated by the fact that a hegemon necessarily acts on people outside of its polity, with those outsiders having little to no voice.

We should, therefore, expect all the standard government-failure issues to be magnified under the warmonger vision given what it requires to be operationalized (see Coyne 2022, 2023). This includes the oversupply of militarism and military activity since those in charge of the hegemon do not fully internalize the costs of their actions and can take advantage of severe information asymmetries to conceal their actions while shifting costs onto a global population of hundreds of millions. From this perspective, the ability of a strong centralized state to effectively reduce the transaction costs of projecting military force in the name of liberal order may generate harms that run counter to that goal by generating disorder and imposing harms on people around the world.

IV. Conclusion

Discussing the reasons for the importance of visions of human well-being, Thomas Sowell (2002) notes that “the most obvious is that policies based on certain visions of the world have consequences that spread throughout society and reverberate across the years, or even across generations and centuries. Visions set the agenda for both thought and action” (p. 7). What we have called the warmonger vision dominates discourse today. It dominates economics (and much of the field of international relations) in the unquestioning attitude asserting the necessity of the state provision of the military in the name of national and global security (see Coyne and Lucas 2016). It also dominates the policy space, which assumes the necessity of large-scale state military action—typically by the hegemon preferred by the analyst.

We have highlighted an alternative—the peacemonger mentality—that we believe is a neglected vision. This vision offers the hope, but certainly not the guarantee, of achieving liberal ends through liberal means by empowering people to engage in self-governance. Of course if one rejects liberalism as a normative ideal, then they may too reject the peacemonger vision. But to remain consistent they must also give up on the end of a liberal international order resulting from state action in the international space.

What remains, then, is placing one’s hopes in a top-down technocracy in the name of efficiency through global control. In this case we would do well to remember the concluding lines of F. A. Hayek’s (1989) Nobel Prize address: “The recognition of the

insuperable limits to his knowledge ought indeed to teach the student of society a lesson of humility which should guard him against becoming an accomplice in men's fatal striving to control society—a striving which makes him not only a tyrant over his fellows, but which may well make him the destroyer of a civilization which no brain has designed but which has grown from the free efforts of millions of individuals” (p. 7). If Hayek is correct that this applies to economic control, then certainly it applies to efforts to design and control the world writ large.

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