

Wars or Jobs: Decide Now

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Can you imagine the outcries of national shame from liberal commentators if George W. Bush had accepted a peace prize by advocating for war and announcing his right to launch wars of aggression? What an embarrassment that would have been!

But Bush would have made such a speech with fewer troops in the field, fewer mercenaries in the field, a smaller war budget, a smaller military budget, bases in fewer nations, the imperial powers of the presidency less firmly established, and — of course — worse pronunciation.

And isn't that what matters? The current president is smart and belongs to a different party, so when he continues and escalates wars we despised, wars we made great sacrifices to try to end, well either the wars must be better than we thought, or escalating them must be the really super smart way of ending them. After all, the other war mongering party calls the president a foreign-born socialist traitor. Except that they loved his speech in Oslo.

One reason Obama believes he can claim the power to launch wars is that Bush's lawyers produced on October 23, 2002, a memo proclaiming that presidents have that power. And do you know what their central argument was? Bill Clinton did it. Bill Clinton launched minor attacks on Iraq and other parts of the world, not to mention the former Yugoslavia, and so therefore Bush had the right to do the same sort of things on a larger scale.

In right-wing rhetoric, Clinton was another socialistic traitor. In legalistic arguments, he was the justification for Bush's crimes. It's the same deal with Obama. In the surface-level charade of partisan bickering, he's a socialist — a term applied without any particular meaning. But underneath, his efforts to protect the criminals who preceded him and to continue their crimes are honored and appreciated.

Is Obama a war president? Is the pope Catholic? Because we have allowed presidents the power of war, the term "war president" will be redundant from here on out. Presidents gain power through wars. Presidents love wars. I don't mean that President Obama has no choice. He could defy expectations, refuse to be corrupted, and do what he is legally and morally required to do. If you imagine such things are not possible, I would ask you to look at the career and comportment of Congressman Dennis Kucinich.

But we have gone two and a quarter centuries without presidents readily answering the demands of the public. And this republic has lasted that long in large part because the public has compelled the Congress to restrain presidents. I hate to say this, but I'm not against escalating a war. I'm against continuing these wars at all. And I don't want a

president to end an escalation or a war. I want the House of Representatives to deny this president the money!

But our representatives are largely bought and paid for, they're terrified of the corporate media, they're servants of party bosses. Their corruption is the primary reason millions of people fantasize about lobbying the president. Sometimes we like to think as well that pressuring Congress to do its job, even through the most aggressive nonviolent resistance, somehow constitutes a naïve faith in the system, whereas pleading with the emperor amounts to true populism.

The people who wrote the U.S. Constitution got a lot of things wrong, but they were ahead of us on this one. They knew that we could not have peace if a single individual had the power of war. We must put the power of peace back in the Congress and force the House to use it. They have a final vote next week on a war funding bill, and do you know how they intend to pass it?

They're going to include unemployment insurance in the same bill. When it's not relief for hurricane victims it's education for veterans. Now it's unemployment insurance as the lipstick on this pig of a bill, a bill that creates unemployment in the first place. Investing money in wars creates fewer jobs than cutting taxes, and cutting taxes creates fewer jobs than investing in education, mass transit, infrastructure, construction, and other nonviolent industries. Every dollar for war is a dollar less for jobs.

Congress members are perfectly aware they can vote No on the whole package until the war money is taken out and the unemployment insurance is left in. And you know that you can force them to do it, now or in the coming weeks and months. You know that much more difficult things have been done. You know that it is far more enjoyable to engage in this struggle — even in the cold — than to sit home and complain. You know that the time is rapidly approaching when we must do what any civilized nation would have long since done and nonviolently shut down this town.

David Swanson is the author of the new book "Daybreak: Undoing the Imperial Presidency and Forming a More Perfect Union" by Seven Stories Press. You can order it and find out when tour will be in your town: <http://davidswanson.org/book>.

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