John Kerry, Cambodia, And Iraq

John Kerry claimed that he was in Cambodia during the Vietnam war. If he was, he failed to appreciate features of the Cambodia campaign that are analogous to the role of Iraq in the War on Terror. Why did Nixon order troops into Cambodia? First, he wanted to prop up an anti-Communist leader Lon Nol who was under attack from Pol Pot's Communist forces. Second, he wanted to cut off North Vietnamese supply lines in Cambodia. This was a single offensive in a much larger campaign. If Kerry had understood the strategic situation, he might not have objected to the incursion into Cambodia then, and he might be President now.

Pol Pot wasn't an immediate threat to American forces, let alone the American people. However, he was an ally of the Communists of North Vietnam, whom he allowed to operate in regions that he controlled. As a result, the North Vietnamese Army had supply bases in Cambodia. Also, as a Communist, Pol Pot was dedicated to the destruction of freedom and so would harm the United States if he were given the chance, just as the North Vietnamese Communists would.

Was Saddam the biggest threat to the civilised world? In the immediate sense, no. However, like Pol Pot, Saddam supported enemies of freedom, such as Palestinian suicide bombers. Like Pol Pot, he was utterly hostile, ideologically, to the United States and was bound to act upon this enmity sooner or later because the very existence of the United States and its allies would be a standing rebuke to his evil regime. Saddam had to go: the only question was when and how.

The main reason to choose to liberate Iraq by force in 2003 was tactical: Saddam was the most convenient target who couldn't be disposed of by other means.

Any war consists of many small campaigns that don't achieve much on their own but add up to something larger. This is the business of war, the day-to-day substance behind the glamour of declaring victory over the forces of evil. Iraq's liberation is already a great achievement but it is only the start of something much larger. One day, all of the citizens of the Middle East will be free and America will only be safe when they are. This is at the heart of the Bush

Doctrine. Kerry showed no sign of understanding it. The majority of

Americans did.

Flaws and Strengths

As an editorial opinion there is no argument with the central point of the above. However it is an opinion obscured by some nebulous reverse geopolitical crystal ball gazing as well as a train of thought which seems to be a rather frayed string of mostly unconnected threads. What does John Kerry have to do with any of it? Nixon and Pol Pot? Who knows that a majority of Americans understand the Bush Doctrine? It is likely a jolly good waste of time to try to answer such questions. Anyway, these loose asides make the editorial statements seem like an exercise in flamboyant name dropping. We need not answer such distant questions in order to draw a sound conclusion.

If the writer were a journalist he or she might be justly accused of sloppy journalism or ill-defined sweeping editorialism. The writer is not beholden to this standard. Therefore it can be conjectured all over the blogosphere as to the meanings and connections without risk of anyone being sent to the back copy room. Yet, redeemingly, despite the sweeping banter and conjectural historic asides, the core argument is beyond reproach. It can be stated in a dozen words.

Freedom in the Middle East is better and safer for us all.

by a reader on Sat, 11/20/2004 - 01:06 | **reply**

Flaws?

Some bloke wrote:

'What does John Kerry have to do with any of it?'

John Kerry supposedly went into Cambodia then bitched about it being illegal. Also he was a Presidential candidate for the Dems, which kinda makes him important, after a fashion.

'Nixon and Pol Pot?'

Nixon: American President fighting a war. Pol Pot: rather beastly tyrant. Note the similarity to the current situation. Note also that John Kerry understood neither situation.

by **Alan Forrester** on Sat, 11/20/2004 - 01:38 | **reply**

An offer

to Alan Forrester, Elliot Temple, David Deutsch, Gil, Sarah, et al. I will donate $200 for the airline ticket so any one of you can fly to Iraq and pursue your passion for liberating the Middle East.

by a reader on Sat, 11/20/2004 - 03:59 | **reply**

A Counter-Offer

A counter-offer: for a mere $100 we'll explain the fallacies in the **chickenhawk** argument to you.

by **Editor** on Sat, 11/20/2004 - 04:24 | **reply**

i'm famous

you just made my 15 minutes (i was doing fun stuff b4...). i know it was meant as a criticism, but, well, unintended consequences ;-P

Anyway, I'm scared of getting sand in my laptop.

-- Elliot Temple
http://www.curi.us/

by **Elliot Temple** on Sat, 11/20/2004 - 05:26 | **reply**

If you believe in your cause

why are you not willing to fight and possibly die for it?

by a reader on Sat, 11/20/2004 - 15:14 | **reply**

Re: if you believe in your cause

"Why are you not willing" in the question above is an equivocation on the word "willing".

One meaning of "willing to do X" is that one will do X if not physically prevented. (Or financially prevented, or legally prevented, or prevented in some way considered to be force majeure.)

Another meaning is that one will do X if necessary -- and again, there is a range of meanings of 'necessary', such as 'if you are the most skilled at doing X', or 'if no one else is able (see above) to do X', and so on.

By equivocating between these two meanings, one can construct, at will, a specious argument for any proposition whatever. For instance, an arsonist (or apologist for arsonists) could accuse soldiers serving in Iraq of not really believing in the cause of firefighting in their own home towns.

by **David Deutsch** on Sat, 11/20/2004 - 16:14 | **reply**

I believe in other things too

I'm busy.

Also I believe in specialisation and division of labor. I like computers, but no one asks me to build them.

I'm not avoiding going to Iraq out of fear of death. I don't think I

should go.

-- Elliot Temple
http://www.curi.us/

To David and Elliot:

When should it be your turn? Should you go to war ahead of those who do not believe in your cause (such as draftees)? Should you go to war ahead of those who believed they were going to war for some other reason (such as a threat from WMDs)?

turns?

I don't take turns doing the computer building. Nor the firefighting.

-- Elliot Temple
http://www.curi.us/

It's odd that reader expects

It's odd that reader expects **The World** to go to Iraq and fight for a flat sum of $200, what I assume is far less than soldiers are getting. Will $200 even cover the airfare? Anyway I think reader should just take up **The World**'s generous offer of $100 to explain the fallacy. Reader would save $100 and end up sounding less moronic for his trouble.

Reader, I sure hope your home never catches fire. Because unless you are or have been a firefighter, evidently by your stout principles you have no right to call the fire department and expect them to do anything.

That said, I'm not sure what Kerry/Cambodia has to do with any of this either. AFAIK it's simply not true that Kerry was in Cambodia in the first place. What the two military campaigns seem to really have in common, vis-a-vis Kerry, is that in both cases he made stuff up (I was in Cambodia, Bush misled...) so that he could accuse the US government of duplicity in their carrying out.

They are different in an important way, however, which is that the Cambodia campaign was "secret" and non authorized (AFAIK) - making that criticism at least partially valid - whereas the Iraq invasion was authorized by act of Congress, and Kerry voted *in favor*, making his criticism of *that* utterly hypocritical and irresponsible.

Re: turns?

Elliot, I take your response to mean: Never. If the 140,000+ troops in Iraq were all killed or disabled, you still would be under no obligation to take up arms for your cause. Some of the troops there are less skilled (and certainly less motivated)than you would be.

$200

Blixa the $200 is for part of the air fare I'm sure you could find a well paying job with Haliburton or some other contractor once you are there... and you will be supporting your cause!

the fire station fallacy

Guess who argued in real life that since GW Bush is spending money to build fire stations in Iraq, he can't be serious about fighting fires at home?

http://www.cfr.org/publication.php?id=6532.xml

Hint: this person also said, in the same speech: "I know something about aircraft carriers for real. And if George Bush wants to make this election about national security, I have three words for him he'll understand: Bring. It. On."

Tastes like chicken

'Blixa the $200 is for part of the air fare I'm sure you could find a well paying job with Haliburton or some other contractor once you are there... and you will be supporting your cause!'

You're sure? Really? Cause I'm not. Haliburton is an oil company and I don't know much about oil or geology and so I wouldn't be of much use to them.

I also don't currently know how to shoot and I can't really learn in Britain due to the government being a bunch of pansies who wouldn't even let Derren Brown play Russian Roulette :-P. So somebody would have to pay for firearm training in another country where the government isn't a bunch of pantywaists too.

Then there's the fact that if everyone who fought the war went off to fight it there'd be no one left back home to argue in favour of it and get funding and so on. There are also other things I'd like to argue for too, like going back to the good old days when you could shoot a burglar stone dead and a police officer would pat you on the back instead of clapping on a pair of handcuffs.

Also, the whole death thing sounds a bit boring. What? Am I just

supposed to lie around all day? Without anything to read or a decent selection of TV programmes?

by **Alan Forrester** on Sat, 11/20/2004 - 21:45 | **reply**

So Alan,

you are too busy making arguments for the war to actually participate in it?

by a reader on Sun, 11/21/2004 - 01:54 | **reply**

So, "a reader",

Why aren't you in Iraq fighting for *your* side?

by another reader on Sun, 11/21/2004 - 02:47 | **reply**

I really doubt that the US ar

I really doubt that the US army would be interested in having David or Elliot on their side. Don't mean to be rude, chaps, but they don't take just *anybody*, you know!

by a reader on Sun, 11/21/2004 - 05:12 | **reply**

Stupid-Fallacy-Spouting Reade

Stupid-Fallacy-Spouting Reader persists:

Blixa the $200 is for part of the air fare

That's swell. So you're generously offering to pay *only part of the air fare*. Meanwhile if Elliot or whoever would just *enlist*, he'd get there free, plus a salary. Now, given that (I think) he hasn't done that, you can expect your - less lucrative - offer to hold no appeal. Why bother making it then?

What is your point? Do you have one? Ok I actually know the answer to that, but what is it that you *think* your point is?

Still waiting to hear about what you will do in the event of a fire. Or burglary, robbery, assault, accident, garbage pickup, or... well, frankly, any service the government provides which involves workers performing tasks that you yourself do not do. You must be a jack of all trades!

by Blixa on Sun, 11/21/2004 - 06:16 | **reply**

Re: Why aren't you in Iraq fighting for your side?

Because the insurgents are not on "my" side. I know this wouldn't make sense to someone with an "either you are with us or against us" mentality.

by a reader on Sun, 11/21/2004 - 14:31 | **reply**

$200

Blixa the point is this: Should those that advocate war bear any additional burden in that war vs those who oppose it or remained silent? I am not contesting the concept of social division of labor.

P.S. I'm sorry if I offended you by not mentioning you by name in my initial offer.

Re: Why aren't you in Iraq fighting for your side?

Oh, I know there are billions of people who are not on either side. *You* aren't one of them; you have clearly picked a side. You're engaging in argument for your side exacty[*] as the World is for theirs. (You are, I'm sure, perfectly aware of how important this activity is, since it was vital for your side in taking Vietnam.) You're a propagandist, not a soldier, and that's why you're not actually in Iraq fighting any more than the World's writers are.

[*] OK, not exactly. Not nearly as well, for one thing.

Strategy and Tactics

"What happens now is that we (by which I mean the West) eradicate state-sponsored terrorism. And we can achieve that only by replacing all political systems that perpetrate or collaborate with terrorism, by systems that respect human rights both domestically and internationally." – David Deutsch.

"The main reason to choose to liberate Iraq by force in 2003 was tactical . . " – **The World**.

Let's assume (which I do) that David's strategic assumtion is true. Assume, as well, another time, not so differentiated from ours, where in light of the world situation taken as a whole, certain tactical choices have been made differently.

Afghanistan, the launching pad for 9/11, a nerve center of state-sponsored terrorism, and a historically strategic asset, bordering Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Pakistan and Iran, is attacked and liberated. Large numbers of troops, money and human resources are poured into the near far-East. The first democratic country in the region is assured and secure military bases are established that directly threaten Iran – the chief, long-term threat to Israel. Russain and China (long interested in the region) take note and there is increased pressure on them to help achieve the West's strategic objectives in connection with Iran and North Korea. Our historical allies are pressured (perhaps with some success, perhaps not) to assist us to increase military, political and economic

pressure on Irag – but we proceed in any event, and our relations

with our allies are no better or worse than inour time. Yassar Arafat dies . . .

In this world, albeit presented in a very simple and truncated manner, policy makers have decided that Saddam wasn't "the most convenient target who couldn't be disposed of by other means." They chose different tactics to achieve strategic goals. Arguably, these tactics involved a broader, longer-term play, with perhaps a greater chance of, among other things, (i) forestalling future 9/11's, (ii) increasing pressure on Iran and North Korea, (iii) confronting Iraq without creating the chaos and risks that we see currently, (iv) transforming the Middle East, and (v) maintaning our strategic alliances. Or, perhaps not!

We know that this history and the future(s) that flow from it has occured. We don't know how many worlds bear a closer resemblence to this history or to the one in which we find ourselves today – perhaps fewer. In any event, we find ourselves in this world, and we know that choosing to cut and run in Iraq, does not seem to point to any favorable strategic outcome.

My main point, however, is simply this: these questions are complicated, the variables numerous and there is a real difference between strategy and tactics. Contributors to **The World** would be well advised not to dismiss each others views by confusing the two.

by Mike Bacon on Sun, 11/21/2004 - 17:28 | **reply**

Should those that advocate wa

Should those that advocate war bear any additional burden in that war vs those who oppose it or remained silent?

If you advocate a social program which I do not, and it passes, should you be required pay extra for it?

If you advocate a regulation which I do not (such as carpool lanes), and it passes, do I get to disobey it more than you do?

If you advocate protectionism and I do not, and it passes, do I still get to conduct free trade?

If you vote for a bond measure which I do not....

If you vote for a candidate which I do not....

If you supported the US's actions in Yugoslavia - which I did not - did you pay extra for its funding? did you sign up to fly on an air force bomber plane?

Um. So it looks as if the answer is no. In fact I reckon the principle you are (pretending to be) sincerely suggesting, as conceived, has never actually been implemented in the history of human government.

I am not contesting the concept of social division of labor.

Actually you are. You are arguing that at least *some* people

should become soldiers solely on the basis of their political opinions rather than on whatever factors currently attract people to and make them good at soldiering. In essence, if Stephen Hawking had favored the war you'd be here saying "then go and become a soldier".

This is clearly, if not a rejection of division of labor altogether, a sub-optimal application of it. We have an all-volunteer army and a democratic republic. Most people understand these processes and institutions quite well enough without needing these explanations.

by Blixa on Sun, 11/21/2004 - 18:18 | **reply**

Re: Should those that advocate wa...

Blixa, I have never advocated or voted for any of those things you mentioned. And I was not asking if the principle has actually been implemented in the history of human government. I was posing the question to David and Elliot as a moral issue (since they are presumably interested in such issues).

Re: social division of labor: to be sure, Stephen Hawking would not make a good soldier, but motivation is a very significant factor in the performance of an army, if not, most wars could be won with mercenary armies.

by a reader on Sun, 11/21/2004 - 23:51 | **reply**

Re:Re: Why aren't you in Iraq fighting for your side?

Wow! You nailed me exactly! Yes, I am part of a vast Islamo-communist-KKK-Freemason conspiracy! I am also opposed to motherhood and apple pie!

by a reader on Sun, 11/21/2004 - 23:58 | **reply**

And I was not asking if the p

And I was not asking if the principle has actually been implemented in the history of human government. I was posing the question to David and Elliot as a moral issue

Ok well then you have my answer. They'll have to speak for themselves although I doubt theirs are all that substantially different.

motivation is a very significant factor in the performance of an army

Indeed. One of the strongest arguments for an all-volunteer army rather than an army constituted by some other rule, like universal involuntary conscription, or for that matter a partial conscription based on "if you're in favor of the war taking place you must join the army".....

Best,

by Blixa on Mon, 11/22/2004 - 00:34 | **reply**

moral issues

I am interested in this moral issue. in fact, i thought about it before you brought it up here. and, in fact, nothing you've said here is a new argument to me.

-- Elliot Temple
http://www.curi.us/

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 11/22/2004 - 00:45 | **reply**

partial conscription??

I don't know exactly what that is, but which is more involuntary: "if you're in favor of the war taking place you must join the army" or "even though your joined the National Guard mainly to keep order in case of natural disasters you must now go to war in another country for a cause you don't understand and the rational for which keeps changing"

by a reader on Mon, 11/22/2004 - 01:36 | **reply**

Re:moral issues

So what is your answer?

by a reader on Mon, 11/22/2004 - 01:38 | **reply**

"even though your joined the

"even though your joined the National Guard mainly to keep order in case of natural disasters"

Nobody should join the National Guard thinking that this is all that will or could ever be required of them. You may as well ask me to take into consideration that there are people who join the Army thinking they'll spend most of their time playing ping pong because of Forrest Gump. There may (for all I know) be people who think this way, but if so, their misapprehensions about what they are getting into are not my fault.

by Blixa on Mon, 11/22/2004 - 01:43 | **reply**

my answer

I am still in the US, with no plans to leave.

-- Elliot Temple
http://www.curi.us/

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 11/22/2004 - 02:45 | **reply**

Moral Issue?

Sorry, I'm arriving late to this. I just wanted to add how perplexing

this complete non-sequitur "moral issue" is to me.

What I should do with my life depends on a great many factors including my values, skills, obligations, plans, etc. I advocate a great many things. I couldn't possibly personally commit all of my time to each of them, and my lack of personal participation in implementing them is no argument at all that I'm not seriously committed to them, nor that I have insufficient regard for the contributions of others.

I think that the firefighter analogy is a good one. Did the reader who poses this issue agree that his lack of personal involvement in firefighting exposes his hypocricy about advocating professional firefighting?

Those who volunteered to fight in the US military had (or should have had) no expectation that he would be able to pick and choose the battles he would be asked to fight. There was an expectation that he would be asked to fight battles that were within the historical range of causes to which the military has been comitted. I don't think that the Iraqi engagement falls outside of this range, so I'm not sure if there's anything at all to any aspect of this "moral issue".

Gil

Re: Moral Issue?

Gil, I'm not sure you understand the issue I was bringing up.

It is clear that David and Elliot feel they have other priorities based on their response to my initial offer. I was then asking if they would ever feel any obligation to fight in the war they advocated. To give an extreme example, what if the only people left to fight the war were David, Elliot, and pregnant women & children. Would they then feel obligated to fight? Where on their hierarchy of priorities would such an obligation lie?

As a side note, it has not been that uncommon for intellectuals to participate in the wars they believed in, Ernest Hemingway and Jean Paul Satre come to mind.

Moral Issue?

I'm still not clear. Is this really a serious question?

I'm sure that there is a point where David, Elliot, and I would decide that the best thing for us to do would be to fight for a good cause (perhaps not the same point, but each of us has one).

What "point" are you trying to make? Are you implying that we are bad at choosing for ourselves the proper points where we should fight?

Do you think we don't think any cause is worth risking our own lives for?

We risk our lives every day! It really seems to be a silly line of inquiry.

Please come out and be explicit about what you're trying to argue.

Do you think we under-value the risks that soldiers take when they fight a war that we support? Why would you think so? Surely not because we are not fighting it ourselves, because that's an absurdly invalid inference.

So, what *do* you think?

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 11/23/2004 - 01:37 | **reply**

It's odd indeed. Given that

It's odd indeed. Given that presumably everyone in question lives in countries which have provisions for conscripting people if need be, Reader can already surmise that an upper bound for the "point" at which Elliot, David etc. would fight is: "If drafted." Unless of course one of them would, if drafted, *dodge* that draft.

In other words, Reader appears to be asking folks if they would dodge a hypothetical draft. Well.. everyone will have to answer for themselves. In case you're interested, Reader, here's my answer: No. Now that you have your answer, what interesting things have we learned from this exercise? Anything?

by Blixa on Tue, 11/23/2004 - 01:45 | **reply**

Re: Moral Issue?

"Are you implying that we are bad at choosing for ourselves the proper points where we should fight?" No, I am asking what you think that "proper point" should be. If you want to answer a specific question answer this: Do you think you, as an advocate of the war, should go to war before my children? Would you volunteer before they were conscripted?

by a reader on Tue, 11/23/2004 - 02:31 | **reply**

Conscription

The World is vigorously opposed to conscription, whether in the UK or the US, under all foreseeable circumstances.

by **Editor** on Tue, 11/23/2004 - 03:22 | **reply**

Volunteering Before Conscription

If your children don't want to fight in the war, then they shouldn't.

Everyone who wants to, and can be helpful, should do so before anyone else is conscripted.

I don't know when they would be conscripted in this alternate universe you're imagining, so I can't really answer directly about whether I would volunteer first. My decision would be based on many things, perhaps including delaying an impending draft, but that wouldn't and shouldn't be decisive.

But, I do think that the war should be fought entirely by volunteers; so I think your children should never be conscripted.

And, I would volunteer to fight before never.

Does that answer your question?

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 11/23/2004 - 08:00 | **reply**

Do you think you, as an advoc

Do you think you, as an advocate of the war, should go to war before my children?

Sheesh. How old are your children? If they are *children* I don't want them sent to war in any event. If they aren't children, and don't volunteer, this would mean that we can presume that they and **The World** and Elliot and I are all in the same boat: won't be going unless conscripted (and in **The World**'s case perhaps not even then?).

In that case whether or not your children go first or someone else goes first would depend on a number of factors: age, able-bodiedness, etc. If your children are between say 18-22, and could pass a physical, then because I am older than that, they would likely go before me, were there a draft, which there's not, nor is there going to be.

Does that answer your question?

BTW I too oppose a draft, except in rather armageddon-like or perhaps Red Dawn type emergency situations which are rather difficult even to envision. So the real answer is that if your children don't want to fight in a war then neither do I want them to. K?

by Blixa on Tue, 11/23/2004 - 15:37 | **reply**

Re: Moral Issue?

"what if the only people left to fight the war were David, Elliot, and pregnant women & children."

Send the pregnant children.

Seriously, do you think the only way to contribute to a war is to

carry a gun?[*] Back when the USofA actually had conscription and rationing and all, should **these guys** have been handed M14s and shipped off to the south Pacific? Would that have helped win the war?[**]

[*] **Rhetorical question.**

[**] Also a rhetorical question. Answer: No. But *winning* the war is not a reader's goal, is it?[***]

[***] Not necessarily a rhetorical question.

by another reader on Tue, 11/23/2004 - 15:39 | **reply**

Do We Need a Draft?

Here's part of a piece I ran across by Dennis Rodgers, who writes at newsobserver.com. He was a former Army NCO who voluntarily enlisted in 1962 and re-upped for six years in 1964. I'm currently unclear regarding my own view on the question; but by way of full disclosure, I fervently opposed the draft in the early 70's, when I was eligible and in the midst of a very unpopular war.

In any event, I thought it would be useful to quote some reasons why a reasonable person could, in the current circumstances, consider supporting a draft. I think this piece at least raises certain questions that should be addressed -- not that more general philosophical opposition alone is without merit -- by those who strongly oppose a draft and wish to convince others of the merits of their view.

I believe that some of his points can be answered pretty easily (some have already been addressed in prior posts), but others need more serious consideration. Anyway, here it goes:

"We need the warm bodies. There are simply not enough active-duty soldiers or reservists to do the job today.

It would be cheaper. Draftees would get a hefty pay raise only if they re-enlisted.

It would keep the reserves strong. The minimum service should be two years active and two years of reserve meetings.

A military hitch would bond those who served with a shared cultural experience that doesn't exist in America today except for TV and franchise stores.

It would improve the nation's health. At least for two years, people would be forced to eat right and stay in shape.

It would bridge the wide social gap between races, ethnic cultures and economic classes. Taking showers together breaks down all sorts of barriers.

No politician should send Americans to war unless that person has served in uniform and appreciates the sacrifice they're asking of others.

It would end disputes over the physical and mental equality of races and genders.

Society would be better off if more young people received a dose of discipline from a tough-as-nails drill sergeant at 5 a.m.

It's high time children of the rich and powerful did their share of the fighting and dying for this country. They get the biggest rewards from living here, so it only seems fair they shoulder more of the burden."

by Mike Bacon on Tue, 11/23/2004 - 16:11 | **reply**

Re: Do We Need A Draft?

Um...

Which points do you think need serious consideration?

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 11/23/2004 - 16:29 | **reply**

Re: Do We Need A Draft?

Surely one could only consider the draft *cheaper* if one makes the mistake of ignoring the forgone productivity of the drafted people in their preferred occupations, the poor performance of people working under threat rather than incentive, and the costs of enforcing the draft. Slavery is highly inefficient economically.

And that is to say nothing of the effect of conscription on war fighting. If you were to conceal from generals, say, the cost of a certain munition, then they would tend to over-use it, thus reducing the overall capacity of the economy to supply war materials. This is just as true if you provide them with 'free' recruits as if you provide them with 'free' aircraft carriers. And 'over-using' troops in this sense probably means causing excessive casualties as well as fighting less effectively.

by **David Deutsch** on Tue, 11/23/2004 - 17:25 | **reply**

Kids today... They could u

Kids today...

They could use a nice healthy dose of slavery.

As for bridging the races... The Vietnam draft sure did wonders in that department. If we could only return to the racial harmony of those days...

by **R** on Tue, 11/23/2004 - 17:54 | **reply**

weird
Reading over this exchange again, I just want to note how odd

Reader's question turned out to be, when pressed. Essentially it boiled down to: Would e.g. David Deutsch and Elliot Temple agree to fight in a war if only they and pregnant women & children, remained among non-combatants on our side?

I dare say that if we ever got to that point our resp. nations would be in a heap of trouble and it really wouldn't matter who did or did not agree to fight. :-) But Reader was intensely curious nonetheless! "What if that happens!! I must know!!"

Parents Today

Parents could use a nice healthy dosage of slavery. To prevent them from enslaving their children, I guess. Or maybe just for fun.

-- Elliot Temple
http://www.curi.us/

Re: Do We Need A Draft?

Thanks to David for seriously addressing some of the points I quoted in my post.

David's economic analysis is surely right. Correctly pricing things is notoriously difficult and one would be hard-pressed to support the claim that a draft is ultimately cheaper and more cost-efficient that a voluntary army.

In a similar vein, it has been argued that the incorrect pricing of oil (ignoring necessary environmental remediation caused by production and use) and water (almost universal governmental subsidization) has led to gross over-consumption and has otherwise distorted rational decision making.

David's final thought, that ". . .'over-using' troops in this sense probably means causing excessive casualties as well as fighting less effectively," also seems right, but raises for me a further question. Assuming the assertion is true – which seems highly likely – how should we measure its applicability and helpfulness in solving actual war fighting problems that we may face?

The assertion is consistent with good economic analysis, and with a broad, coherent philosophical theory that to a significant approximation seems to reflect the way the world works – in this sense it is true and should almost always be. However, while correct in principle in each of these ways, and undoubtedly correct in fact in a variety of times and situations, there also must be times and situations when, for example, the use of overwhelming force made up largely of conscripts has led to the best result possible in the circumstances – less casualties than would otherwise have occurred, victory by the forces of progress, and effective fighting in

the sense of actually winning a war that might otherwise have been

lost.

It may never be that the most desirable option is to institute a draft. It may be that, even in very dire circumstances, it should still be opposed on moral, economic and philosophical grounds. But from time to time, when confronted by a terrible and ruthless enemy, limited by other military commitments, and faced with domestic and international political and economic problems, there may simply be no other rational choice.

Maybe WWII was close to this type of situation. While it was a great patriotic war drawing huge numbers of men to fight for a clearly defined objective against a truly evil enemy, the need for soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines was so great that most objective observers agree that the military could not have been adequately manned to fight on two fronts without conscription. The lack of a draft could have led to greater casualties and ultimate defeat. Of course, we do not seem to be in such a situation today. Nevertheless, the theoretical question remains.

Regarding R's comment that "[a]s for bridging the races... The Vietnam draft sure did wonders in that department. If we could only return to the racial harmony of those days...;" he's certainly right that the relationship between the races was not very good in the 60's. Most people agree, however, that it was much worse in the 30's and even worse farther back as you approach real, direct and unambiguous slavery in the United States. Most historians also believe, with pretty good evidence, that the WWII armed services, into which large numbers of racially, ethnically, religiously and economically diverse men were conscripted, had more than a little to do with the rapid racial progress that was made in the United States during and after the war, because although forced, it helped break down irrational stereotypes and prejudices through mutual efforts and bravery.

The extent to which the Vietnam era draft helped or hindered racial progress is an open question – much else, including the civil rights movement, was taking place during the same time.

Another question also remains open: if institutions like the draft favorably affect human progress, even if only at the margins, should this ever be taken into account when trying to decide whether a draft, however distasteful, is needed in a particular set of difficult circumstances? Of course, this question is only relevant to the extent that one would ever, in any circumstances, consider a draft.

by Mike Bacon on Tue, 11/23/2004 - 23:02 | **reply**

Re: draft

We need the warm bodies. There are simply not enough active-duty soldiers or reservists to do the job today.

Doesn't this depend on what "the job" is? This is like saying "there

aren't enough tax dollars to fund all government programs"... no, not if you do too many government programs... As of now from everything I've heard the army has met their recruiting goals. But of course we could not invade and occupy all of China. I suppose "the job" is somewhere in between but it needs to be specified. In context I guess the author is talking about Iraq, but there is no sign that the administration has any desire to double the # of troops in Iraq, even if you or I may think that's required...

A military hitch would bond those who served with a shared cultural experience that doesn't exist in America today except for TV and franchise stores.

So would forced-labor camps...

It would bridge the wide social gap between races, ethnic cultures and economic classes. Taking showers together breaks down all sorts of barriers.

Can't we just have the communal showers w/o the draft then? ;-)

No politician should send Americans to war unless that person has served in uniform and appreciates the sacrifice they're asking of others.

I object the most to this one. Civilian control has been tossed out the window, apparently? Also, "can't appreciate the sacrifice unless he served" is just a dumb fallacy. I do not want to see it propagated and indulged any more than it already is.

It would end disputes over the physical and mental equality of races and genders.

Yes, in many cases presumably it would end those disputes in the negative: such equality does not hold. Now, expanding our knowledge of humans is always nice, but listing this as a significant benefit of instituting a draft is a bit strange. Or am I misreading?

It's high time children of the rich and powerful did their share of the fighting and dying for this country.

This sounds nice, or at least "fair", as a rhetorically stated principle but as a practical matter it's a non-starter. Who would be implementing this draft? The "powerful", by definition.... Recall that we *had* a draft, during Vietnam, and there were plenty of complaints about the "children of the rich and powerful" getting shielded from it. I'm quite sure the same was true of all preceding drafts as well. It will be different this time around, because...? because we'll just do it right this time, because...? because we *say so*?

The most perplexing thing about most pro-draft arguments I've seen is that the desire to implement a draft seems to run several laps ahead of any actual conceivable need for one in the immediate future. Is this author arguing that we need a draft because the military is too small, or is he arguing that the military is too small because he wants there to be a draft? Not clear. I hasten to add that Congress could expand the size of the military at virtually any

time if it wanted to. Failing any sign of an effort on their part to do so, why people indulge in these draft arguments in the first place is beyond me.

Prior to the election I had assumed it was all electoral posturing on the part of the Democratic party - scaring people into voting for them by raising the spectre of a draft as a serious possibility - but now I'm not so sure....

Mike, you're right. I don

Mike, you're right. I don't know whether the Vietnam draft helped, hindered or was inconsequential to race relations. It just seemed like an odd argument in favor of it. It reminds me of a joke I heard in the eighties about the positive aspect of rampant cocaine use in this country: It teaches our kids the metric system.

I oppose the draft on some practical grounds (like the example David gave) but mostly moral ones. To talk about the great bonding experience and exercise benefits that slavery brings seems to detract from any reasonable argument one could make in favor of a draft.

I like to think that WWII could have been won without a draft, but as you pointed out, we'll never know for sure what the differences would have been.

Many argue that Israel could not exist if not for their constant draft. One could also argue, that if a nation cannot exist without conscription, then it should perish. At any rate, it makes for an interesting discussion

Re: Do We Need A Draft?

Mike Bacon wrote:

Maybe WWII was close to this type of situation. While it was a great patriotic war drawing huge numbers of men to fight for a clearly defined objective against a truly evil enemy, the need for soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines was so great that most objective observers agree that the military could not have been adequately manned to fight on two fronts without conscription. The lack of a draft could have led to greater casualties and ultimate defeat.

It seems to me that there is a paradox here. In a situation where a significant fraction of the population is needed to fight a war, one needs overwhelming political support for the draft to be viable. In other words, one needs the overwhelming majority of the population to agree with an analysis such as the above. But if everyone agrees that a large army is needed to avoid defeat (and that defeat is bad enough to be worth fighting to prevent), then

why don't they just form one? Are they just going to sit around and

wait for doom? Why would they do that?

Because they can't solve the free rider problem? Pschaw. First of all, I don't think that exists at all. Second, there are cases in history where large armies have in fact been formed without any draft.

In reply to R: well, yes, but the cases where a draft has broad support and where it does not, are utterly different. In the former case, as I just said, a draft isn't really needed, but whether it is enacted or not says little about whether the society 'deserves' to survive. In the latter case, it won't work, and *that's* when the society is doomed.

by **David Deutsch** on Wed, 11/24/2004 - 03:40 | **reply**

Re: Draft

I agree that a draft could not be sustained over a significant period of time other than in a situation where it had overwhelming (but not necessarily universal) support among the population. Is this a true paradox? Might not a draft still be ultimately necessary for victory in some circumstances? Perhaps the leaders and populations of the US during WWII and Israel today, were and are wrong in believing in the need for a draft. This is certainly a possbility. In any event, whether or not correct in supporting a draft, I would agree that their willingness to do so in the face of a real threat to survival, at the very least demonstrates an attitude of determination and sacrifice that enhances their ultimate chances for survival.

by Mike Bacon on Wed, 11/24/2004 - 05:56 | **reply**

Re: Draft

I disagree that societies who institute drafts should be praised for their determination. They should be criticized for their lack of respect for individual autonomy, and lack of confidence that their people will respond to real needs when they occur.

Yes, there are lifeboat scenarios when it can be right to violate other people's normal rights. But those are exceptional cases and can be handled that way. Normally, there is enough time and enough reasonableness that people agree to do what's necessary and right.

Institutionalizing the emergency case will cause more harm than good. Violating more and more rights will be seen as normal.

That slippery slope is best avoided.

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 11/24/2004 - 18:01 | **reply**

Re: Draft

Gil,

I wasn't as clear as I should have been. Did I say that a people (e.g. the Israelis today, or Americans during WWII) should be praised for their "determination" to institute a draft? Regardless of their perception of the circumstances in which they find themselves, it may well be that they should still be criticized for seriously misunderstanding the true situation, as well as for, as you say, their lack of respect for individual autonomy and their lack of confidence that their people will respond. What I meant to say was that, even if they are wrong in instituting a draft, their willingness to go to such lengths to defend themselves at the very least reflects an attitude of determination and sacrifice (even if misplaced in connection with their draft decision) that gives them a real fighting chance to win on the battlefield. Perhaps you view this as a distinction without a difference. Nevertheless, it's what I meant.

by Mike Bacon on Wed, 11/24/2004 - 18:54 | **reply**

Praise

Mike,

I read: "Their willingness to do so in the face of a real threat to survival, at the very least demonstrates an attitude of determination and sacrifice that enhances their ultimate chances for survival." as praise.

If one were to write "Castro's communist revolution demonstrated his determination to improve the lot of poor Cubans." Without adding "but it turned out to be a humanitarian disaster that revealed just how much his lust for power exceeded his concern for human liberty and welfare." I would assume that the first quote alone was a form of praise. Even with a qualification, I'd think the author was trying to say something like "Well, he may have been mistaken about the best policies; but his heart was in the right place."

Isn't "an attitude of determination and sacrifice" usually interpreted as virtuous and praiseworthy?

I think we should be clear that trampling on other people's liberty, and using their lives as means to your ends, is serious business; and good intentions of the tyrants should not soften our attitude about how wrong it is.

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 11/24/2004 - 20:21 | **reply**

Gil, I don't think your an

Gil,

I don't think your analogy to Castro is apt, and in fact, its use points out what I see as a basic flaw in your argument. To

paraphrase David Deutsch from his answer to the Edge Question

"What Now?", (David, I apologize if I'm misinterpeting or misapplying your reasoning), I don't think that Castro is motivated by a state of mind similar to that which is motivating Israel or that motivated the US during WWII. The US and Israeli actions — and even the mistakes, like supporting a draft, are driven fundamentally by respect for human beings, human choices and human life. These values are life-affirming and life-seeking. The values that drive Castro are antithetical to this. There is no symmetry between between the two positions. I continue to believe that the determination and sacrifice shown by the Israelis and the Americans, despite their mistakes, is praiseworthy, and in that sense, their hearts are in the right place.

Mike

Analogies

Mike,

I agree about Israel and the US. I wasn't implying that they have/had attitudes similar to Castro. I was just using the Castro line as an example of wrongly implying praise.

Gil

Mike, I don't think you'v

Mike, I don't think you've pointed out a flaw in Gil's argument. I don't think the assumption that: the Americans in WWII and the Israelis were (are) well intentioned, and that Castro is not (an assumption that I happen to agree with by the way), has anything to do with the fact that Gil took your earlier statement as praise. In fact you seem to be saying that he was right to interpret your statement that way. You wrote:

"I continue to believe that the determination and sacrifice shown by the Israelis and the Americans, despite their mistakes, is praiseworthy, and in that sense, their hearts are in the right place."

Perhaps I'm misinterpreting your point about Gill's argument. Maybe you're just saying that doing the wrong thing with good intentions is better than doing the wrong thing with bad intentions. At any rate, for the sake of argument, (yes, I used that expression for you, Gil) let's assume that you and I are wrong, Mike, and that Castro's intentions were good, however misguided. Should we then praise him for his determination and sacrifice given the results, and the means he used to achive these results?

Anyway, all of us seem to be around the same place morally, when it comes to the draft. But I would like to here more from David (or

anyone else) about its futility. I would like to believe that what

David is saying is true, but I'm not entirely convinced.

In the case of Israel, I tend to think that you are right. If they ended their conscription, I believe that they would still get enough volunteers to defend themselves. But you seem to be saying that the fact that they have a draft proves that the draft is overwhelmingly popular and therefore proves that they would get enough volunteers without it.

Does your logic follow that there is no social program in this country, that is currently funded with coerced tax dollars, that would vanish if left to survive on volunteer dollars, by virtue of the fact that we, as a society, allow the money to be taken from us in the first place? Maybe that's a bad analogy, and I'm probably completely misunderstanding you, but I'll go on with my questions.

Have there not been drafts in countries, at different times historically, that were not overwhelmingly popular (at least not by those who were being drafted) but still viable? Or are you saying that any wars won by those armies could have also been won with an all volunteer army?

Or is it more of combination of practicality and morality? Something like: any war where conscription made the difference between winning and losing, shouldn't have been fought in the first place because it didn't have enough of a mandate from the people in order to be fought effectively without it?

Anyway, I'm sure you can make your own point better than I can.

by **R** on Thu, 11/25/2004 - 02:08 | **reply**

Re:Conscription

The editor wrote:

"**The World** is vigorously opposed to conscription, whether in the UK or the US, under all foreseeable circumstances." yet **The World** is in favor of the war. How is this different from me saying: "I'm in favor of national free lunches but I'm opposed to raising taxes." Having a war doesn't guarantee that there will be a draft and having free lunches doesn't guarantee that taxes will increase, but the chances are dramatically better. And someone is paying the price in any event.

by a reader on Thu, 11/25/2004 - 02:46 | **reply**

taxes

well, we're aware the war costs money, and so could lead to higher taxes in the same way free lunches could. however, are you aware of this method of recruiting more soldiers: you offer them higher pay. thus you can get a war for just money, no draft.

-- Elliot Temple

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