

abroad outweighed the resources it was willing to devote to them, but even such imbalances can produce favorable results. After the Vietnam War, President Richard M. Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger were faced with a Congress insistent upon reduced military spending, so they devised creative responses to check Soviet expansion, including détente with Moscow, the initiation of relations with China, and a welter of covert actions and regional alliances. After the Gulf War of 1990–91, however, the administration of George H. W. Bush called for retrenchment but also insisted on ambitious foreign-policy goals, with the result that the level of military spending remained high.

Overall, Leffler concludes, “the negative consequences of defense austerity have been exaggerated.” The significant problems that did arise under tighter budgets “were rarely, or only partly, the result of austerity itself. . . . The country’s worst military problems of the post–World War II era—China’s intervention in the Korean War, the quagmire in Vietnam, the morass in Iraq—had nothing to do with tight budgets.”

The key to prospering in a time of defense austerity is “an artful combination of initiatives to reassure allies and engage adversaries.” And the challenge,

Leffler notes, is not all that great. U.S. defense spending will not be slashed but only reduced slightly, or it might simply grow more slowly than before. In any case, the United States will still spend “more on its military than all its geopolitical competitors combined.” ■

THE CONSERVATIVE CASE AGAINST WAR

THE SOURCE: “Warfare State to Welfare State” by Ivan Eland, in *The Independent Review*, Fall 2013.

AN ISOLATIONIST, ANTIWAR STREAK RUNS through U.S. political history, and its standard-bearers have often been conservatives. Before the attack on Pearl Harbor, for example, Republicans frequently criticized President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s support for Britain’s war effort.

But the Cold War, and President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s commitment to “contain” the Soviet Union, transformed the Right. Combating the communist menace in the international arena became a bipartisan affair, and most conservatives, led by *National Review* founder William F. Buckley, championed an aggressive foreign policy even as they advocated smaller government.

Ivan Eland, director of the Center on Peace and Liberty at the Independent

Institute, in Oakland, Calif., believes that these goals are at odds, and that “conservatives should be more leery of jumping into wars.” War, he argues in *The Independent Review*, inevitably leads to a larger government, requiring new taxes and vastly expanded powers that are only partially rolled back in peacetime.

The Founding Fathers were wary of foreign entanglements, and many bridled at even the notion of a standing army. “War is the parent of armies,” said James Madison. “From these proceed debts and taxes.” Yet pensions offered as an inducement to soldiers during the Revolutionary War were the proverbial camel’s nose under the tent and eventually led to the 20th century’s massive federal retirement programs. The Civil War pension system bred a newly expanded Bureau of Pensions, along with powerful interest groups and widespread corruption. “Many people who derived pensions from the Civil War didn’t suffer from war wounds or poverty. By 1910, forty-five years after the end of the war, about 28 percent of American men 65 years of age and older were receiving federal benefits,” Eland writes.

Such lavish spending, as well as the industrial demands of America’s first modern war, necessitated a new source of revenue: the income tax. Instituted as an emergency measure during the Civil

War, when federal spending went from two percent of gross national product to 15 percent, the income tax was discontinued seven years after the war. President Grover Cleveland briefly resurrected it two dozen years later, when an economic depression lessened U.S. imports and tariff revenues, but the Supreme Court quickly struck it down. “The U.S. Constitution clearly required any direct tax to be allocated across the states according to population,” Eland explains, “and taxing people according to their incomes did not meet that requirement.”

In 1913, the Sixteenth Amendment made the income tax constitutional, and by 1917, when President Woodrow Wilson led the United States into World War I, the tax had supplanted tariffs and excises as the federal government’s largest source of revenue. After the war, rates dropped but the tax remained, and, in Eland’s view, the federal government began to crawl further into the private lives of citizens.

“World War I was transformational in bringing about permanent ‘big government,’” he says. There was a dramatic upswing in American manufacturing, for instance, but there wasn’t enough housing for factory workers—until three separate federal agencies stepped in with the government’s first public-housing programs.

The largest of these, the Department of Labor's U.S. Housing Corporation, ended up building homes for almost 170,000 individuals.

The Wilson administration also established the first federal bureaucracy designed to find jobs for people, the U.S. Employment Service. It fell apart after the war, but the idea reappeared even before the New Deal in many federal efforts to put the unemployed to work.

Washington also used the Great War to intrude into Americans' bedrooms. The U.S. armed forces once had a permissive attitude toward servicemembers' off-duty pursuits. "During the guerilla war in the Philippines," according to Eland, "[the U.S. Army] ran the biggest licensed house of ill repute in the world." But more troops prompted more regulation, and morality crusaders won an order putting certain American cities off limits to military personnel and initiation of a public campaign warning of the dangers of venereal disease. The ultimate result was the closing of every red-light district in America. Not satisfied with fighting prostitution, the War Department protested against burlesque theaters and began sending "purifiers" to military bases to badger soldiers and their girlfriends who went off to "secluded spots."

Decades later, the Vietnam War directly contributed to the expansion of Medicaid. In the war's early years, half of all draftees failed medical or mental aptitude tests. A Johnson administration report pinned the problem on "mental, physical, and developmental conditions, many of which could have been diagnosed and treated in childhood and adolescence." The report was a major factor in President Lyndon Johnson's legislation expanding Medicaid to cover the early diagnosis and treatment of disease in poor children.

Eland has a long list of other war-related expansions of government, including bank bailouts (the War of 1812); price controls; government takeovers of industry; Daylight Savings Time (World War I); and subsidized child care (World War II).

Washington used the Great War to intrude into Americans' bedrooms.

The lesson, Eland argues, is plain. "Traditional conservatives recognized in the past that war is the primary cause of big government in human history, so they promoted peace.... That important lesson needs to be relearned." ■