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## The Infected Scalpel: An Exchange with Rocky Anderson On "Humanitarian" Intervention

Posted By [John Walsh](#) On February 7, 2012 @ 1:09 pm In [News](#) | [16 Comments](#)

A few days back I received an announcement from Rocky Anderson, announcing the platform of his newly formed Justice Party. Although social justice was mentioned prominently along with the desperate economic plight of many in the U.S., I was struck by the fact that the struggle against war was not prominently mentioned and the question of the U.S. Empire and overseas bases seemed to get no mention. "Human Rights," an increasingly plastic category at least in the hands of the U.S. ruling elite, figures prominently in Anderson's campaign literature and world view. I was further surprised that "High Road to Human Rights," an organization founded by Anderson, counted on its board of advisers, Elie Wiesel, a defender of the Apartheid Israeli regime. On the other hand, Anderson was a staunch opponent of the war on Iraq and even the war on Libya, the latter because it lacked Congressional approval.

I wondered about Anderson's commitment to anti-interventionism and his view on "humanitarian" interventions, something that should be crystal clear from someone who is trying to appeal to progressives. The following email exchange resulted:

From JW to RA:

Hello Rocky,

I wish that you would spell all this out a bit more clearly.

Are you for "humanitarian" interventions as in the Balkans? Have you read Jean Bricmont's great (and short) book "Humanitarian Imperialism"?

Are you for getting rid of all our overseas bases and devoting a limited military to purely defensive purposes?

Many pwogs, for example Amy Goodman and CIA "consultant" Juan Cole, were cheerleaders for the Libyan intervention, despite Libya having had the highest Human Development Index in all of Africa before NATO destroyed its infrastructure and reduced it to rubble in the name of human rights.

We have two versions of imperialism – the "tough guy" Dick Cheney brand and the "humanitarian" Susan Rice version. Both are the same in reality whatever the words attached to them. We must break with them both and cease viewing the world solely through the very arbitrary lens of "human rights," a good sell among the pwoggressives. But what good are human rights to a starving illiterate woman in India, a category that Mao consigned to the dust heap of history in China?

From RA to JW:

Yes, so long as we are in compliance with the War Power Clause of the Constitution and the U.N. Charter, I favor the U.S. working with the international community in putting to an end massive atrocities. I strongly believe in living up to the promise of "Never Again." Given all my work in this area (see [www.highroadforhumanrights.org](http://www.highroadforhumanrights.org)), I don't know how you would have any doubt about my position. I don't think political boundaries should control our moral obligations to our brothers and sisters elsewhere.

I recommend to you "A Problem From Hell," by Samantha Power.

Your reference to Susan Rice was a curious one. She sat on her hands (as you apparently would have had her do) when she was with the NSC and failed to take any action to stop the genocide that led to the slaughter of 800,000 Rwandans in 100 days. According to an article in The Atlantic by Samantha Power, Susan Rice was apparently more concerned with the political implications in the mid-term elections in 1994 than she was about the horrendous fate of the Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Rwanda. Those who stood by when their action could have ended the atrocities are, in my view, complicit.

From JW to RA:

I think the Samantha Powers of the world are a big part of the problem.

I recommend that you read "Humanitarian Imperialism" by Jean Bricmont.

From RA to JW:

I think isolationist nationalists who don't care about the suffering of other people who happen to be in other parts of the world are "the problem". Sorry, John, we're on completely different moral planets here.

I'll try to read the book you referenced. Have you read "A Problem From Hell"? It's heart-breaking — and a real indictment of the failure of the US to do what is required to stop the atrocities.

From JW to RA:

I cannot agree, Rocky. The "international community" is a euphemism for NATO and the US. The UN foolishly went along with the destruction of Libya — and we can now see that Russia and China are finally drawing a line in the sand at Syria.

You fail to see that the US is the most ruthless Empire in the history of humankind, and it will cover up its atrocities with appeals to "human rights." It is the biggest lie of all. Would you favor military intervention to end apartheid in Israel? Will you take that position on the campaign trail?

For those of us living in the heart of Empire there is no alternative to being principled anti-interventionists. The Empire is incapable of waging a "good war," whatever that may be. An anti-interventionist is not an "isolationist nationalist." That is simply a smear.

Samantha Power has not written a heart rending account of what has been done to Iraq, I notice.

Finally, the Empire has always cloaked its wars in virtue, from the White Man's burden to "human rights," and it always will. The path to hell is paved with naiveté.

From RA to JW:

Samantha Power has not written that account of Iraq because we did not intervene on humanitarian grounds. It was an illegal war of aggression, at odds with the War Power Clause and with the UN Charter. You paint with a very misleading, broad brush. You can advocate abandoning people during genocides and other mass atrocities. I will always be on the other side. I share your anti-imperialistic views; I do not share your willingness to turn a blind eye to humanitarian disasters.

You will never convince me of what I perceive to be an extremely selfish, heartless isolationist position. I would always advocate doing what I would want the U.S. and international community to do if I were in the position of a victim of genocide. To advocate doing what is right is hardly naïve. And it is hardly countenancing wars of aggression. No one has a stronger record of opposition to the illegal invasion and occupation of Iraq than I.

From JW to RA:

You are well meaning as far as I can tell, but you hold very dangerous views IMHO.

If people want to help those in far off lands, let them form their Abraham Lincoln brigades, something the US Empire also opposed. Of course that means putting one's body on the line, not someone else's body.

First do no harm.

From RA to JW:

So you would advocate repeal of the Genocide Convention? We couldn't be further apart in our views on this.

But, then, I recognize the concerns with US empire that drive your views on this. We need to strive to be better on all counts. That's why I have worked so hard in all of these areas over the years — and a large part of why I'm doing what I am now.

From JW to RA.

I never said that I wanted to repeal the Genocide Convention. Why do you conclude that?

But what is being done to the Palestinians is a slow genocide. Do you advocate military action against Israel to get rid of the Apartheid regime there? You should be explicit about that.

Noam Chomsky points out that the slaughter in the Balkans, greatly exaggerated, took place AFTER NATO's bombs started falling. And that was not really a genocide either.

Nor is Darfur a genocide either — a brutal war on both sides apparently but not a genocide. In fact only the US and that outrageous liar Susan Rice label it as such.

And then there is the slaughter in Libya a country that once had the highest Human Development

Index in all of Africa. The concrete reality is that the US is always up to no good and will kill and kill to get its way. We should not be in the business of providing cover for that.

I do not think that you really appreciate that the formerly colonized peoples of the world do not want Western interventions. They have had quite enough of the benefits of such neocolonial acts.

From RA to JW:

You are so incredibly wrong. The people (at least the Tutsis) of Rwanda, and of Kosovo, view the U.S. as heroically coming to their aid and stopping the massacres. You would have been content with sitting back after the massacre at Srebrenica. To me, that is the greatest moral cowardice.

And how can you maintain that you would not seek the repeal of the Genocide Convention? It creates a legal obligation to take action to stop genocides wherever they occur.

I cannot countenance the U.S. continuing to build its empire; neither can I countenance people — or our nation — turning a blind eye to mass atrocities when they can be stopped.

This will be my last email on this topic. I'm dismayed that any person can be so insensitive toward victims of genocide or other mass atrocities. (I'm curious. What have you done, if anything, to help stop wars of aggression or mass atrocities?)

Good luck -

At this point someone on the list of those cc'd to this exchange jumped in, J.A., an Israeli expat who as a young man was swept into the Yom Kippur war and saw many of his friends needlessly killed. He left Israel in part to save his son from future slaughters of this sort and has vowed never to return. He wrote.

From J.A. to RA and JW:

Rocky,

Humanitarian intervention is a slippery slope argument, and is being used for imperialistic ambitions (The latest example is Libya, and still Afghanistan – freeing the Afghan women. If remember well, Samantha Power supported this view.), and in general, being used to justify our military power. (Humanitarian aid via aircraft carriers, being the good policeman of the world, etc). BTW, you wrote "illegal invasion"; is there a legal invasion?

Here is a question: Since you support "humanitarian" intervention, do you support attacking Israel and freeing the Palestinians from the Israeli harsh occupation? You must know about the suffering of the Palestinians under the Israeli Apartheid and the stealth genocide by Israel, so should we invade Israel?

(It is a rhetorical question to demonstrate how absurd is the "humanitarian" intervention view).

Joshua

From JW to RA:

You did not answer whether you would advocate in your campaign a military expeditionary force led by the US to end Israeli apartheid and the slow genocide of the Palestinians? Why can you not answer that?

And will you launch another expedition to restore the Tibetan theocracy? It will probably take a few million persons under arms and a return to the draft. Or how about an occupation of India where the most dire poverty continues and the farmers driven from their agriculture by agribusiness commit suicide in huge numbers? Or is that OK because "democracy" reigns?

And a second point. The greatest stimulus to nuclear proliferation is the huge conventional military force which the US has. That is the force that you need to preserve in order to save the world. The only protection for a small nation is nukes.

Long ago when the US was trying to take down the Chinese revolution and waging a war on Vietnam, Mao Zedong opined that US imperialism is the number one enemy of the peoples of the world. I am afraid that remains true.

I recommend again that you read Chomsky on the Balkans.

And you are proof positive that the progressive movement, so called, is no longer anti-interventionist or anti-Empire.

As they say, "You've come a long way, baby."

At least you admit it outright – and that amount of honesty deserves credit. I suggest that you openly proclaim the new humanitarian interventionism as part of your platform. Now if only other progressives would also do that, we could separate wheat from chaff more readily.

jw

p.s. As a medical student I learned that there are some things that are beyond one's control and that when one tries to control them the only thing that results is harm – sometimes fatal harm. Using the US imperial military to save the world is like operating with an infected scalpel.

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