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For International Friendships, Dismantle the Military Empire

by Jacob G. Hornberger

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The U.S. government has an un-American way of making friends in foreign affairs, one that the American people should abandon once and for all. It's a method of friendship based on militarism, extortion, bribery, and military mercantilism.

Concerned about the rising tide of friendly relationships that China is establishing with countries in Asia, Latin America, and elsewhere, the U.S. government has decided to respond with its own series of friendship initiatives.

Since the U.S. military establishment plays such a dominant role in American life, the military is playing a leading role in the current friendship initiative. For example, just this past Friday three U.S. Navy warships arrived as guests in the Vietnamese port of Da Nang as part of an anniversary establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. As a sign of friendship, the U.S. government is seeking permission from the communist regime to establishing U.S. military bases in Vietnam.

Where does the bribery come in? That's what U.S. foreign aid is all about. Since the U.S. government has a wealthier private sector to extract money from, as compared to other countries, one of its comparative advantages in the friendship business is to offer millions or billions of dollars in cash or armaments to foreign regimes, especially ones that have powerful militaries. A good example involves Egypt, whose powerful military dictatorship receives \$1.3 billion in

annual aid from the U.S. government, thereby fortifying the long-time friendship and partnership between the Egyptian military and the U.S. government.

Whenever a recipient of U.S. foreign aid doesn't do what U.S. officials want it to do, there is the inevitable threat to cut off U.S. foreign aid. That's where the extortion comes in. A good example involved Yemen's vote in the UN against authorizing force against Iraq after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. A U.S. official told the Yemeni ambassador, "That was the most expensive vote you will have cast." What he was referring to was the U.S. government's intention to slash foreign aid to Yemen from \$22 million to \$3 million.

Right now, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is on an official friendship tour of Asia, during which she is trying to expand American trade and investment across Asia. Or as the *New York Times* aptly puts it, "It has become more common these days for the nation's chief diplomat to play a role as a business booster." Or we might just call it "military mercantilism."

Is all this what America should be all about? Should America be a country in which its military forces are playing a role in friendship initiatives with other countries? Should America be a country in which government officials are serving as international lobbyists for American businesses?

Libertarians say no to all of the above. This is not what America should be all about. Friendships based on militarism, military force, extortion, and bribery are not genuine friendships at all. Instead, the U.S. government ends up breeding resentment, discord, conflict, and hostility toward America, which the U.S. government then uses as an excuse to take away our freedoms here at home.

What is the libertarian approach to international friendships?

First, end all foreign aid. No, don't reduce it. Instead, terminate it entirely, immediately.

Second, completely dismantle and abandon every single overseas military base and bring all U.S. troops home from everywhere and discharge them into the private sector. Prohibit the Pentagon from playing any role in diplomatic affairs.

Third, prohibit the U.S. government from interfering with the internal affairs of all countries, including the support of military dictatorships and "pro-democracy" initiatives.

Fourth, lift all embargoes, sanctions, and trade restrictions against all other countries, including Cuba, Iran, North Korea, and China.

Fifth, liberate the American private sector, including tourists, cultural groups, and business people, to visit, tour, buy from, sell to, donate to, and invest in any other country. Prohibit the U.S. government from lobbying on behalf of U.S. business and industry. Unilaterally remove all U.S. restrictions on international trade and leave business people alone to make deals with whomever they want anywhere in the world.

The American people are the greatest friendship ambassadors for our nation. People around the world love the American people. They just hate the U.S. government. They hate the invasions, occupations, meddling, hypocrisy, double-dealing, militarism, regime-change operations, sanctions, embargoes, bribery, extortion, assassinations, torture, Guantanamo, secret prisons, and renditions that characterize the U.S. government.

Therefore, the United States has it entirely backwards. It's establishing international "friendships" with things like warships, military bases, foreign aid, and weaponry while, at the same time, isolating the American people from the rest of the world with things like sanctions, embargoes, travel regulations, and trade restrictions. It should be the other way around: It should be the American people who are unleashed around the world while reining in the U.S. government.

The statist means of establishing international "friendships" brings enmity, hatred, bankruptcy, and loss of liberty. The libertarian vision of economic liberty, free trade, and genuinely limited government (i.e., no overseas military empire and no international meddling) is the key to peace, prosperity, and harmony with the people of the world.