

# Defending a Free Nation

*Written by Roderick Long.*

## **Defense: How?**

How should a free nation defend itself from foreign aggression?

## **Defense: Why?**

This question presupposes a prior question: would a free nation *need* to defend itself from foreign aggression? Some would answer no: the rewards of cooperation outweigh the rewards of aggression, and so a nation will probably not be attacked unless it first acts aggressively itself.

On the other hand, if this were true, conflicts would never occur — since no one would make the first aggressive move. It's true that the rewards for cooperation are evident enough that most people do cooperate most of the time. That's what makes human society possible. If people weren't basically cooperative, no government could make them so — since the people in government would have as much difficulty working together as all the rest of us.

Still, a small but troublesome minority obviously do believe they're better off not cooperating: we call them criminals. Maybe they do tend to lose out in the long run — but on the way to that long run they cause a heck of a lot of damage to the rest of us.

More importantly, governments face different incentives from those faced by private individuals. Under a government, the people who make the decision to go to war are not the same people as those who bear the greatest burden of the costs of the war; and so governments are much more likely than private individuals to engage in aggression. Thus it's a mistake to model a nation-state as if it were a single individual weighing costs against benefits. It's more like a split personality, where the dominant personality reaps the benefits but somehow manages to make the repressed personality bear the costs. (Hence the superiority of private protection agencies: a protection agency that chooses to resolve its disputes with other agencies through war rather than arbitration will have to charge constantly rising premiums, and so will lose customers to nicer agencies.)

That doesn't mean governments are completely isolated from the bad effects of war. Certainly the people in power will suffer if they *lose* the war, especially if their country is conquered by the enemy. And they can also share in the prosperity that peace and free trade bring. But the disincentives for war are much weaker for governments than for individuals — which means that it's a dangerous world out there, so a free nation needs a

defense.

## **Why Not a Government Military?**

Most societies, at least in this century, handle the problem of national defense by having a large, well-armed, permanent military force, run by a centralized government, funded by taxation, and often (though not always) manned by conscription. Is this a solution that a free nation can or should follow?

I don't think so. First of all, I don't think there should *be* a centralized government. My reasons for this position have been set out in some detail both in FNF Forums and in recent issues of *Formulations*, so I'll just summarize the main points briefly:

First, government is unjust. Government, by definition, requires its citizens to delegate to the ruler all or part of their right to self-defense. (An institution that does not require this is no government, but something else.) But to "delegate" a right involuntarily is no delegation at all; the right has simply been obliterated. And I do not see how this can be justified. By what right does one group of people, calling itself a government, arrogate to itself the right to take away the rights of others? (As for taxation and conscription, I can't see that these are anything more than fancy words for theft and slavery.)

Second, government is impractical. Government is a monopoly: it prohibits competition and obtains its revenues by force. It thus faces far less market pressure, and its customers are not free to take their money elsewhere. As a result, governments have little incentive to cut costs or to satisfy their customers. Hence governments are, unsurprisingly, notorious for inefficiency, wastefulness, and abuse of power.

So, since I don't want a government, I obviously don't want a government military. However, even in societies that do have a government, I think it's still a good idea not to have a government military. A government which has an *army* that it can turn against its own citizens is a lot more dangerous than a government that doesn't. That's why so many of this country's Founders were so adamantly opposed to a standing army, seeing it as a threat to domestic liberty (see, e.g., the Virginia Declaration of Rights, drafted by George Mason). (A standing navy worried them less because it's harder to impose martial law on land by means of sea power! If the United States had been an archipelago of islands, they might have thought differently.) In this country today, U. S. soldiers are reportedly being asked whether they would be willing to shoot American citizens! A free nation needs to find a less dangerous way of protecting its citizens.

## **The Dangers of Centralization**

Centralized government poses yet another threat to a nation's liberty. The more that control over a society is centralized in a single command center, the easier it is for an

invading enemy to conquer the entire nation simply by conquering that command center. Indeed, invaders have historically done just that, simply taking over the power structure that already existed.

By contrast, a society in which power is decentralized lacks a command center whose defeat or surrender can deliver the entire nation into bondage. For example, during the American Revolution the British focused their energies on conquering Philadelphia, at that time the nominal capital of the United States, on the assumption that once the capital had fallen the rest of the country would be theirs as well. What the British failed to realize was that the United States was a loose-knit confederation, not a centralized nation-state, and the government in Philadelphia had almost no authority. When Philadelphia fell, the rest of the country went about its business as usual; Americans were not accustomed to living their lives according to directives from Philadelphia, and so the British troops ended up simply sitting uselessly in the occupied capital, achieving nothing. Hence Benjamin Franklin, when he heard that the British army had captured Philadelphia, is said to have replied, "Nay, I think Philadelphia has captured the British army."

### **The Dangers of Decentralization?**

Having pointed out how excessive centralization can make a nation more vulnerable to foreign domination, let me also point out a respect in which extreme *decentralization* might seem to pose a similar threat.

In the fourth century B.C., the mass murderer we fondly remember as Alexander the Great conquered nearly all of the area we know today as the Middle East. If you want to read a terrifying story, put down the latest Stephen King novel and pick up Arrian's *Campaigns of Alexander*, which in dry and matter-of-fact style records how this erratic psychopath and his tired and aging army somehow swept like lightning across the shattered remnants of the Persian Empire, conquering city after city after city after city after city ....

Now if the various cities had organized some sort of collective defense, and attacked Alexander simultaneously, they would have destroyed his army. Hundreds of thousands of lives would have been saved, and hundreds of cities would have kept their freedom. Instead, the cities faced Alexander one by one, each confident of its own unassailability. And one by one they fell.

This might seem to show that some sort of centralized defense is needed in order to provide effective security. But I don't think it shows exactly that. It does show the need for *organization* — for collective, concerted, cooperative action. But not all organization should be viewed in terms of a top-down hierarchical model in which a central authority issues directives and imposes order on the lower ranks. The key to defending a free nation is to have a system of security decentralized enough to lack a command center the enemy

can capture, but organized enough so that the invader must face a united collective defense, not a series of individual skirmishes.

In other words, the key is:

ORGANIZATION  
WITHOUT  
CENTRALIZATION

Organization Without Centralization, then, is the goal. How to realize that goal is, of course, another matter.

### **An Encouraging Note**

It is admittedly a difficult balance to strike. Before we despair, however, we should notice that the goal we are trying to achieve is relatively modest. The defense of a free nation will be limited to just that: defense. No military interventions around the globe, no imperialism, no foreign adventuring, no gunboat diplomacy. Which means that a free nation's defense budget will be *much cheaper* than those of its potential enemies. If we put that fact together with the fact that a free nation is also likely to have a much more prosperous economy than its enemies have, we can see some reason for optimism.

### **Let the Market Take Care of It**

Most libertarians have heard the joke: "How many libertarians does it take to change a lightbulb?" "None, the market will take care of it."

Perhaps we can give the same answer to worries about national defense. As students of Austrian economics (see, *e.g.*, the writings of F. A. Hayek) we know that the free market, by coordinating the dispersed knowledge of market actors, has the ability to come up with solutions that no individual could have devised. So why not let a solution to the problem of national defense emerge through the spontaneous order of the market, rather than trying to dictate ahead of time what the market solution must be?

In a sense I think that *is* the answer; but it's incomplete. As students of Austrian economics (see, *e.g.*, the writings of Israel Kirzner), we also know that the efficiency of markets depends in large part on the action of *entrepreneurs*; and on the Austrian theory entrepreneurs do not passively react to market prices (as they do in neoclassical economics), but instead are actively alert to profit opportunities and are constantly trying to invent and market new solutions. I see our role in the Free Nation Foundation as that of intellectual entrepreneurs; our coming up with solutions is part of (though by no means the whole of) what it means for the market to come up with solutions. *We are* the market.

The lightbulb joke captures the Hayekian side of libertarian economics, and Hayek's insight is an important one. But before following Hayek in a tirade against the evils of "constructive rationalism," we should remember to balance the Hayekian insight against the equally important Kirznerian insight that the working of the market depends on the creative ingenuity of individuals.

I would thus suggest a different ending to the joke: "How many libertarians does it take to change a lightbulb?" "I'll do it, for a dollar."

### **The Three Economies**

In short, then, although we cannot hope to predict precisely what solutions the market will come up with, it's worth trying to figure out what could work — and indeed, like good entrepreneurs, try to influence the market process in the direction of the solutions we like. (In any case, we'll have an easier time getting people to join the free nation movement if we have something to tell them about how we propose to defend the nation we hope to found!)

In attempting to devise solutions to the problem of national defense, we need to make sure that we're not limiting our search to an excessively narrow range of options. In this context I find extremely useful a distinction that was first explained to me by Phil Jacobson. Jacobson pointed out that one can distinguish three kinds of economy: the Profit Economy, the Charity Economy, and the Labor Economy [\*]. (I'm not sure I'm using Jacobson's exact terminology, but never mind.) In the Profit Economy, the people who want some good or service X can obtain X by paying someone else to provide it. In the Charity Economy, the people who want X can obtain it by finding someone who will give it to them for free. In the Labor Economy, the people who want X can obtain it by producing it themselves. As Jacobson notes, when free-market anarchists start looking for voluntary private alternatives to government, they tend to think primarily in terms of the Profit Economy — while left-wing anarchists, on the other hand, tend to think primarily in terms of the Labor Economy. Yet in any real-world market system, all three economies coexist and interact, in different combinations depending on culture and circumstances.

Suppose, for example, that a family emergency arises, and I need more money than my regular income supplies. How can I get the extra money?

I might take a second job, or get a loan. Both these solutions are available through the Profit Economy; if I take the job, I am paying for the money with my labor; if I get a loan, I am paying for the loan through interest payments. In either case, I solve my problem by finding someone who will help me in exchange for some good or service I can offer.

Or I might appeal to a private charity, or to a government welfare program — or obtain an interest-free loan from a friend. In this way, I would be getting my money through the

Charity Economy: I find someone who will help me for free.

Or I might cut down on expenses by growing my own food in my garden; or perhaps I could draw on the pooled resources of a mutual-aid organization like those I have described in “How Government Solved the Health Care Crisis: Medical Insurance that Worked — Until Government “Fixed” It” (*Formulations*, Vol. I, No. 2 (Winter 1993-94)) and “Anarchy in the U.K.: The English Experience With Private Protection” (*Formulations*, Vol. II, No. 1 (Autumn 1994)). This solution involves the Labor Economy: I find some way of helping myself (perhaps in concert with others who are helping themselves).

In looking for free-market approaches to national defense, then, we should be sure to consider ways in which each of Jacobson’s “three economies” might be able to help.

### **Defense via the Profit Economy**

In the literature of market anarchism, the most commonly offered solution to the problem of *domestic* security is the private protection agency. (I shall assume general familiarity with this theory. For more details, see, *e.g.*, David Friedman’s *Machinery of Freedom*, Murray Rothbard’s *For A New Liberty*, and Bruce Benson’s *Enterprise of Law*.) In this context, the most obvious solution to the problem of *national* security is simply to have the protection agencies (or some of them, or a consortium of them) offer to sell protection against foreign invaders as well as domestic criminals.

Some market anarchists, like David Friedman, are sympathetic to this solution, but pessimistic about its viability. The difficulty is that national security poses a much greater *public goods problem* than domestic security, because it is much harder to exclude non-contributors from the benefits of national security — and if non-contributors can’t be excluded, there’s no incentive to contribute, and so the agencies selling this protection can’t gain enough revenue to make it worth their while.

In previous issues I have explained why I do not regard the public goods problem as a terribly serious difficulty. (“The Nature of Law, Part I: Law and Order Without Government,” *Formulations*, Vol. I, No. 3 (Spring 1994); “Funding Public Goods: Six Solutions,” *Formulations*, Vol. II, No. 1 (Autumn 1994).) So I won’t say much about it here.

There are other problems associated with a Profit Economy solution. A united military defense seems to require some degree of centralization in order to be effective, and there is the danger that a consortium of protection agencies selling national security might evolve into a government, as the Anglo-Saxon monarchs in the Middle Ages, thanks to the pressure of constant Viking invasions, were able to evolve from military entrepreneurs providing national defense in exchange for voluntary contributions, to domestic dictators with the power to tax and legislate.

This danger might be especially pressing if the consortium's soldiers are more loyal to the consortium than to the clients. Political authors from Livy to Machiavelli have warned against the use of foreign mercenaries rather than citizen soldiers, because it is easier for a government to turn foreign mercenaries against its own citizens. A vivid example of this was seen during the Polish government's attempt to crack down on the Solidarity movement in the 1980's; when a crowd had to be crushed and beaten, the government used Russian troops, because they feared Polish troops might be divided in their loyalties. (This perhaps gives us some reason to view with alarm the increasing use of multinational U.N. forces by Western governments.)

But the problem is perhaps not insuperable. A consortium of defense agencies would lack the mantle of legitimacy and authority available to a king or government, which would make a power grab more difficult. Moreover, the citizens of a free nation would presumably be armed; and the freedom of any people against an encroaching government rests, in the final analysis, on their possession of arms and their willingness to use them. (Hence governments bent on consolidating their power have generally followed Cardinal Richelieu's advice to the French monarchs: disarm the people, disband local militias, and monopolize access to weapons in the hands of the central government. But Machiavelli advised the opposite, since he saw an armed populace as an integral part of national defense; thus, like such earlier political thinkers as Xenophon, he would have regarded today's advocates of gun control as unwisely weakening their nation's security against invasion. [1] In any case, whether a government or would-be government can succeed in disarming the people ultimately depends on the vigilance of the people themselves; and for this I know no automatic formula.)

### **Defense via the Charity Economy**

People donate money all the time to causes they care about. And the more prosperous they are, the more they donate. Unless libertarian economics is hopelessly wrong — in which case we might as well give up now — people in a free nation would be extremely prosperous. And they would presumably care about national security. So we can predict that a great deal of money could be collected for purposes of national defense by charity alone. Since, as mentioned above, the financial needs of a truly *defensive* national defense are relatively modest, charity could easily be a major source of defense funds.

Let me mention two problems that occur to me. First, there's the matter of determining the appropriate *recipient* of these donations. How could such a recipient be prevented from misusing the weapons it purchases? In essence this is simply the problem of a consortium turning into a government, which was discussed above. The subject of how to prevent libertarian anarchy from evolving into government again — and perhaps a worse government than the one the anarchist system displaced — is a vitally important issue, but one too vast to consider in depth here. (I think this would be an excellent subject for a



future FNF Forum.)

The second, related difficulty is this: As I mentioned in “Funding Public Goods: Six Solutions” (*Formulations*, Vol. II, No. 1 (Autumn 1994)), large companies will have a motive — namely, good publicity — to donate large sums to national defense (just as they now improve their image by donating to environmental causes, *etc.*). That’s the good news. But the bad news, seemingly, is that these contributions might enable such companies to skew national security decisions in their favor (analogous to large corporations like United Fruit / United Brands getting the U.S. military to intervene to promote corporate interests in Guatemala — or oil companies getting the CIA to oust Mossadegh in Iran; for details, see Jonathan Kwitny’s *Endless Enemies*).

But I think this would be much less of a problem in a market anarchist society than it is today. Government *magnifies* the influence of the rich, because government decision-makers do not own the money they control, and so are willing to spend a larger sum to promote corporate interests than they actually receive from those interests in the way of bribes and campaign contributions. Private protection agencies’ costs would be internalized, and so the corporate class would be deprived of this crucial lever. (This would not make it utterly ineffective; for my worries on this score, see my article “Can We Escape the Ruling Class?” (*Formulations*, Vol. II, No. 1 (Autumn 1994)). But it would significantly decrease its power.)

### **Defense via the Labor Economy: An Armed Populace**

I think both the Profit Economy and the Charity Economy are viable as providers of defense services. There are admittedly problems about trusting the providers of those services, but I think those problems may be soluble.

But to the extent that it *is* dangerous to delegate the power of national defense, perhaps a significant degree of *self-help* should be an important ingredient in any national security package. As mentioned above, an armed populace is the ultimate safeguard of a nation’s liberties, against threats both foreign and domestic.

A possible drawback to a heavy reliance on armed civilian-based defense is that it cannot take effect until the enemy has already entered the country — at which point it might seem that the cause is hopeless. But Machiavelli, in his *Discourses on Livy*, argues persuasively that it is better to meet the enemy on your own home ground rather than his — *if*, he adds, you have an armed populace. If your populace is *not* armed, he warns, you should engage the enemy as far from your own soil as possible.

I have often heard it said that it takes roughly three times as many troops to invade a country as to defend it; the defender knows the territory better, does not face hostile locals, and has a much shorter and so less vulnerable supply line. Many military theorists



have argued that the South might have won the Civil War if they had stayed put and relied on sniping and guerilla warfare against the invader instead of marching forward to meet the Northern troops on equal terms, in regular battle array. The armed citizenry of Switzerland has long posed a powerful deterrent against potential invaders, enabling that country to maintain peace and freedom for what in comparative terms is an amazingly long time. (Of course, having your country surrounded by Alps doesn't hurt!)

An armed populace, then, may be a viable defense. But recall the lesson of Alexander: unless an armed defense is *organized*, an invader can simply pick off individual armed neighborhoods one at a time. What is needed, then, is some kind of citizens' militia. But a militia called up and directed by a centralized government poses difficulties we've mentioned already. The key, remember, is: ORGANIZATION WITHOUT CENTRALIZATION.

The best kind of militia, then, might be one organized along the following lines. Begin with a number of local neighborhood militias, run by their members on a democratic basis — the military equivalent of the mutual-aid societies discussed in previous issues of *Formulations*. A number of these local militias get together to form a county militia, which in turn combines with others to form a statewide militia, and so forth — so the ultimate National Militia would be organized as an “association of associations” (the French anarchist Proudhon's formula for what should replace the state), with power and authority running from bottom to top rather than top to bottom. (As for manpower, although many militias have traditionally relied on conscription, this seems unnecessary; if a nation is genuinely under attack — as opposed to engaging in foreign interventions — there is never a shortage of volunteers. And where the populace is used to bearing and handling arms, the training period required for new recruits would be shorter.) Members of each militia would elect their commanding officers (as American soldiers did during the Revolutionary War), and so on up to the commander-in-chief of the National Militia. This bottom-up approach, replacing the top-down approach of a traditional military, would make it much more difficult for the supreme military leader to seize power. Such a militia might well be able to achieve the goal of organization without centralization. [3]

This model might have to be changed somewhat in order to be adapted to a minarchist rather than an anarchist society; we would need to think about whether or not to make the commander-in-chief of the militia subordinate to the libertarian government. Both a yes and a no seem to pose dangers. I welcome suggestions on this topic.

### **Defense via the Labor Economy: Nonviolent Resistance**

Another possible form of organized self-help against an invader is the strategy of nonviolent resistance. This may sound impractical; yet sustained and widespread nonviolent resistance ultimately drove the British out of India, the French and Belgians out of the Ruhr, the Kapp Putschists out of power in Weimar Germany, and racial segregation

out of the United States. Nonviolent resistance — “the secession of the plebs” — was also used effectively in ancient Rome by the plebeians against the Senate; and nonviolent resistance by war protestors in this country played an important role in ending the Vietnam War. Nonviolent resistance also had a significant impact against the British in the early phase of the American Revolution, and more recently against totalitarian governments during the Fall of Communism.

Nonviolent resistance often fails, of course, as the blood of Tiananmen should remind us. But violent resistance often fails too. It’s worth considering whether, to what extent, and under what circumstances nonviolent resistance could be an effective tool of national defense.

Many theorists of nonviolent resistance — *e.g.*, Tolstoy, Gandhi, LeFevre — advocate it primarily on ethical grounds, because they view the use of violence as immoral even in self-defense. I do not share this view. (For my reasons, see my article “Punishment vs. Restitution: A Formulation,” in *Formulations*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Winter 1993-94).) But a recent article by Bryan Caplan (“The Literature of Nonviolent Resistance and Civilian-Based Defense,” *Humane Studies Review*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (1994)) defend the superiority of nonviolent resistance on purely *strategic* grounds:

“The ability of the government to use violence greatly exceeds that of the rebels. Indeed, violent rebellion often strengthens oppressive regimes which can plausibly claim that rebel violence necessitates repression. Government’s comparative advantage lies in violent action. The comparative advantage of the people, in contrast, lies in their ability to deny their cooperation without which it is nearly impossible for government to persist. Consider the deadliness to a government of tax strikes, boycotts, general strikes, and widespread refusal to obey the law. While these tactics are nonviolent, their universal and unyielding use should terrify any government. Nonviolence has other advantages as well. Because it seems less dangerous and radical than violence, it more easily ... wins broad public support. The costs of participation are lower, so more people are likely to participate. Traditional non-combatants like children, women, and the old can effectively participate in nonviolent struggle. It is more likely to convert opponents and produce internal disagreement within the ruling class. It generally leads to far fewer casualties and material losses than violence. And since it is more decentralized than violent action, it is less likely to give rise to an even more oppressive state if it succeeds.” (Caplan, p. 6.)

To those who object that an oppressive government can simply mow down such defenseless dissenters, making nonviolent resistance impractical, Caplan replies that

“... ideology and consent — whether grudging or enthusiastic — rather than brute force are the ultimate basis of political power. If a large enough segment of the population refuses to comply with the government, it will lose its ability to rule. Merely the threat of non-

compliance is often serious enough to provoke the government to redress grievances. Moreover, when governments use violence against protesters who are clearly committed to nonviolence, they undermine their ideological foundations and often make uncontested rule even more difficult. ... the very fact that the protesters remain committed to nonviolence even as the government turns to repression to combat them tends to win over previously neutral groups, and inspire and involve other members of persecuted groups. [Gene Sharp] refers to this as 'political jiu-jitsu' — jiu-jitsu being a style of martial art that uses an opponent's aggressiveness and ferocity against him. ... insofar as it succeeds, it usually does so by converting opponents, making repression too costly to maintain, and threatening the very ability of the government to maintain power." (Caplan, pp. 4-5.)

The rise of Christianity might be a good example of what Caplan is talking about; through their nonviolent resistance to persecution, the tiny sect won the sympathy and admiration of many Romans, and ultimately secured their conversion. (Unfortunately, after the Christians gained power, their attachment to nonviolence waned ....)

Caplan extends the idea of nonviolent resistance to the arena of national defense:

"... deterrents are not limited to standard military ones. Rather, it is merely necessary to make occupation so difficult that the costs of conquest exceed the benefits. Massive tax resistance, boycotts, incitement of desertion, and strikes might accomplish this. And, if a would-be conqueror realized that nonviolent techniques might make the costs of occupation skyrocket, he might be deterred from trying." (Caplan, p. 7.)

Nonviolent resistance to foreign invasion has had a surprisingly strong history of success, and Caplan cites many fascinating examples. He also notes that nonviolent resistance has sometimes been effective, at least in a limited way, even against the most brutal and totalitarian of invaders: "the nations which nonviolently resisted National Socialist racial persecutions [e.g., Norway, Denmark, Belgium] saved almost all of their Jews, while Jews in other Nazi-controlled nations were vastly more likely to be placed in concentration camps and killed." (p. 10.) But he stresses that nonviolent resistance could be far more effective through *organization*:

"... since most nonviolence has historically been sporadic and unorganized, it might be possible to increase its effectiveness through training and strategic and tactical planning. ... What would happen if countries spent as much energy preparing for a nonviolent struggle as they do for a military struggle?" (Caplan, p. 6.)

Among possible stratagems for increasing the effectiveness of nonviolent resistance, Caplan suggests

"general education and training in the techniques of nonviolence, as well as a 'West Point' for training specialists; the wide-spread dissemination of publishing and broadcasting

equipment to prevent invaders from seizing all of the means of communication; and local stockpiles ... to ease the pain of a general strike." (Caplan, p. 7.)

Caplan's main source for the ideas he discusses is Gene Sharp, who has devoted his career to investigating how the techniques of nonviolent resistance might be applied to the problem of national defense. Among the works by Sharp cited by Caplan are: *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*; *Exploring Nonviolent Resistance*; *Gandhi as a Political Strategist*; *Social Power and Political Freedom: Making Europe Unconquerable*; *National Security Through Civilian-Based Defense*; and *Civilian-Based Defense: A Post-Military Weapons System*. Caplan also cites dozens of other works on the subject; I shall simply mention two of the ones that sounded most interesting: *Civilian Resistance as a National Defense* by Adam Roberts, and *War Without Weapons* by Anders Boserup & Andrew Mack. I have not read any of these books, but I intend to.

I can also recommend two delightful science-fiction novels that illustrate these ideas: Eric Frank Russell's *The Great Explosion* and James Hogan's *Voyage From Yesteryear*. In *The Great Explosion*, a very funny and satirical book, bureaucrats and military brass from Earth attempt to reestablish Earth's control over the planet Gand, a world of anarcho-pacifists who successfully apply the techniques of nonviolent resistance to frustrate and/or win over the would-be invaders. In *Voyage From Yesteryear*, a less satirical, more realistic work, the basic plot is the same, except that the anarchist planet (now Chiron, not Gand)<sup>3</sup> is not pacifist, and its inhabitants are willing and able to use violence to defend their freedom. They do not rely on violence alone, however, but successfully blend violent with nonviolent techniques to frustrate and/or win over the invaders, with the same result as in Russell's book. (On a rather different note, Vernor Vinge's novel *Across Realtime* tells the story of a government whose invasion of an anarchist society fails because rich crackpots holed up in the anarchist wilderness turn out to have been stockpiling privately owned nuclear weapons! Different strokes for different folks, I guess. All three books are well worth reading.)

I am, I suspect, somewhat less optimistic than Bryan Caplan is about the effectiveness of a purely nonviolent approach to national defense. I'm still inclined to rely on an armed populace, private protection agencies, and an organized but decentralized militia. (For a more cautious assessment than Caplan's of the effectiveness of nonviolent techniques, see Ted Galen Carpenter's "Resistance Tactics: A Review of *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: The Dynamics of People Power in the Twentieth Century* by Peter Ackerman and Christopher Kruegler," in *Reason*, January 1995.) But Caplan's suggestions deserve our serious consideration. Perhaps the best solution would be one that, rather than either rejecting nonviolence altogether or relying on nonviolence *alone*, managed to integrate aspects of nonviolent resistance into a violent-if-necessary militia framework (thus following the example of Chiron rather than of Gand). [4]

In any case, I strongly endorse Caplan's closing plea for further research by libertarians into this area:

"Despite their distrust of state power and interventionist foreign policy, classical liberals have had a difficult time envisioning specific alternatives to violence to combat tyranny. The literature of nonviolent resistance is filled with penetrating insights in this area. And, while classical liberals frequently long for alternatives to both electoral politics and violence, specific suggestions have been sparse. These are merely a few gaps that the nonviolence literature may fill. On a more aesthetic note, many of the historical examples of nonviolence are beautiful illustrations of the power of voluntary institutions to supplement or replace the role of the state." (Caplan, p. 12.)

### **Who Will Defend Against the Defenders?**

On surveying the options, then, I would argue that as libertarians we have reason to place confidence — albeit cautious confidence — in a three-pronged strategy for defending our free nation, should we be fortunate enough to get one.

- First prong: a regular high-tech military defense, supported by paying customers and charitable contributions alike.
- Second prong: an armed citizenry, organized into a decentralized militia.
- Third prong: organized nonviolent resistance.

These prongs might well be combined into a single fearful scimitar: a militia, collecting dues from its combatant members and contributions from noncombatants or nonmembers, and coordinating violent and nonviolent resistance through one and the same democratic structure.

This would be an impressive military force, I think. And it makes me wonder: what will protect other nations from *us*? As I read more and more ancient and mediæval history, I come to realize that anarchic, decentralized, egalitarian, individualistic societies are not necessarily peaceful societies. The Celtic and Viking societies we admire so much as libertarian models were among the most effective raiders and conquerors in history. What is to prevent our free nation from itself becoming a threat to the security of other nations (and thus ultimately a threat to its own security, as those nations are provoked into attacking us)?

This worry might be reinforced by reading Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy*, a book I have already cited several times now — and a much more interesting and important book, I think, than his more famous (or notorious) work *The Prince*. (The *Discourses on Livy* is not a libertarian book by any means; but it contains much for libertarians to ponder. What strikes a libertarian in reading it is the odd way in which Machiavelli manages to combine

the *political* insight and perspicacity of an Isabel Paterson — with the *economic* insight of a log.)

Machiavelli argues that a free nation is the greatest possible threat to the freedom of other nations:

- free nations are more prosperous, and thus better armed;
- they are more politically stable, and thus harder to defeat through treachery;
- there is higher morale among their citizens, thus making them better soldiers;
- equal opportunity and free competition among citizens tend to reward, and thus to foster, what Machiavelli calls *virtù* (by which he means, not “virtue” in our sense, but a combination of self-discipline, boldness, and ingenuity — which are nice things to have in your own nation, but can be dangerous traits in a vigorous and aggressive nation next door);
- and the high standard of living enjoyed by free nations leads to an increase in population, thus creating a pressure to expand into the territory of their neighbors.

Machiavelli cites Rome and Athens as instances (see also the account of Athens in Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War*, in particular comparing Pericles’ panegyric to Athenian libertarianism at II. 34-46 with the Corinthian speech on the restless energy and *virtù* of Athenian imperialism at I. 68-71); today Machiavelli might add the United States. Of course there are counterexamples: Switzerland, for instance. And despite Machiavelli’s brilliance, he seems to have little understanding of the free market; his notion of a free society thus does not appear to include the concept of free trade, which nineteenth-century classical liberals favored in part because of its tendency to create ties of mutual dependence that discouraged war. Still, it is true that freedom, together with the technological progress that freedom brings in its train, has the effect of increasing people’s options; and one goal one can better pursue when one’s options have increased, is the decreasing of one’s neighbors’ options.

But maybe the solution is that the free nation’s neighbors had better become free nations themselves!

## Notes

1. Though Machiavelli may not be consistent on this point. He insists that it weakens a nation militarily to have a disarmed populace; but he also insists that it’s dangerous in peacetime to have an armed populace — since, in the absence of an external enemy, they might turn their arms against the government. (Oh no!) But I suspect Machiavelli’s solution would be to keep the nation constantly at war — since his model of an ideal nation is the Roman Republic, which Machiavelli praises precisely for its policy of permanent war, whereby it constantly and unceasingly expanded and gobbled up other people’s territory.

That way, since pesky peacetime never arrives, you get all the advantages of an armed populace with none of the disadvantages. Since my aims are rather different from Machiavelli's (I want to *discourage* imperialism and *encourage* resistance to government, not the other way around), I can accept his analysis without sharing his precise recommendations!

2. Phil Jacobson has pointed out to me that volunteer fire departments have historically succeeded in coordinating their activities with one another without centralized control; an unusually large fire in town A will bring in fire departments from towns B, C, and D as well. This example makes me wonder whether an association-of-associations militia would need a commander-in-chief at all.

3. Gand is named, of course, after Gandhi. The significance of the name Chiron is harder to guess. In Greek mythology, Chiron was the centaur who tutored Achilles, and Hogan's use of the name may be a reference to the fact that the first generation of his Chironians were reared by robots rather than humans. Another hypothesis (somewhat less likely given Hogan's militant antipathy toward Christianity) is that Chiron is a pun on Chi-Rho, the traditional Greek abbreviation for Christ, signifying that the Chironians embody the true essence of Christianity.

4. As this issue goes to press, the secessionist rebels in Chechnya are having a surprising, though sadly limited, degree of success in employing a mixture of violent and nonviolent techniques against Russian troops.

[\*] Web Archive Editor's note: see Jacobson's essay "Three Voluntary Economies" in *Formulations* Vol. 2, No.1

Originally published at FreeNation.org.