

Scholar Profile

Ted Galen Carpenter

Ted Galen Carpenter is a senior fellow in defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute. He is the author of 8 and the editor of 10 books on international affairs, including, most recently, *Smart Power: Toward a Prudent Foreign Policy for America*.

Carpenter is contributing editor to the *National Interest* and serves on the editorial boards of *Mediterranean Quarterly* and the *Journal of Strategic Studies*. He is the author of more than 400 policy studies and articles, which have appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Financial Times*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, the *National Interest*, *World Policy Journal*, and many other publications. He is a frequent guest on radio and television programs in the United States, Latin America, Europe, East Asia, and other regions.

Carpenter joined Cato in 1985. He has just stepped down from his longtime position as vice president for defense and foreign policy studies at the Institute.

My upbringing did not offer a hint that I would become a committed libertarian. My parents were staunch liberal Democrats who admired the socialist heritage of Milwaukee, where I grew up. My father believed that the greatest U.S. president was not George Washington or Abraham Lincoln, but Franklin Delano Roosevelt. It was an unpleasant shock to him that his youngest child became an enthusiastic high school volunteer for Barry Goldwater's presidential campaign.

My political apostasy was not just a case of youthful rebellion, though. I had read Goldwater's *Conscience of a Conservative*, and it bothered me how large and intrusive government had become. But I was not a conventional conservative on every issue. It seemed to me that conservatives were hypocritical when they criticized oppressive government but were enthusiastic advocates of censorship laws and statutes that prohibited drug use or certain types of sexual behavior.

Meeting my future wife, Barbara, at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee decisively shaped my ideological education. She introduced me to *Atlas Shrugged* and the other writings of Ayn Rand, which intensified both my suspicion of government and my commitment to individual liberty.

I started out as a foreign policy hawk, but two developments transformed my outlook.

One was the increasingly evident failure of the Vietnam War and the lies from military and civilian leaders that accompanied that debacle. The other was my exposure to the writings of the founders, especially Washington and Jefferson, regarding foreign policy. I began to conclude that promiscuous military interventions were inherently destructive of limited government and individual liberty.

Those views were reinforced during the pursuit of my PhD in history at the University of Texas during the mid and late 1970s. As I read the works of realist writers such as George Kennan and Walter Lippmann, and so-called isolationist figures such as William Henry Chamberlin and Charles Callan Tansill, it became apparent to me that U.S. foreign policy was badly off course.

As I became more active in the libertarian movement at the end of the decade, including joining the Texas Libertarian Party and working on Ed Clark's presidential

campaign, I decided to focus even more on foreign policy issues. There was already an impressive array of libertarian scholars and pundits on most domestic policy issues, but with the exception of Earl Ravenal and one or two others, the ranks of good libertarian foreign policy experts seemed rather thin.

Since my three-year post-doctoral research post with Lyndon Johnson's national security adviser, Walt W. Rostow (an interesting adventure), was coming to an end, I approached the Cato Institute about future plans, including a grant to write a book on how an interventionist foreign policy erodes domestic liberty. It is somewhat ironic that although I've published 18 books as a Cato scholar, I have yet to write the book that I originally proposed. It is a project to which I hope to return in the next few years.



The bulk of my work now focuses on such topics as policy toward Iran and North Korea, relations with China, and the disastrous consequences of the international war on drugs. My latest book, which will appear in 2012, examines the alarming drug-related violence next door in Mexico.

My proudest achievement during the 26 years that I've worked for Cato is building a defense and foreign policy department that

achieves the highest standards for both quantity and quality of scholarship. Cato is now a major and highly respected participant in the debate about America's role in the world. Our Institute is also the brightest hope to create a foreign policy for the 21st century that is consistent with a constitutional system based on limited government and individual liberty. ■