

21CAR and Political Violence

A political science professor at our university is known for saying, “All revolutions are accomplished by violence, actual or implied.” So, by calling ourselves “revolutionaries,” are we threatening violence? Would we use force to accomplish our political goals?

We think it important to be clear about our intentions.

Whether or not the professor’s quote is a universal maxim, it applies to America’s revolutionary war and the years leading up to it. Not only did the Founders raise and provision an army, a navy, and Marines to fight against imperial British troops, but the independence movement also depended at key moments on irregular, non-uniformed personnel – militias, privateers and smugglers offshore, and groups like the Sons of Liberty. Members of the latter group (Tories would have called it “the Mob”) famously destroyed a merchant’s boatload of tea in Boston Harbor. They also burned down buildings, chased away loyalists, and committed violent assaults, including tar-and-feathering.

It is not hyperbole to point out the first American revolution was accomplished through violence, and would not have succeeded but for the use of force.

So why do we reject violence? Three reasons.

The first is moral.

Members of our revolution represent different political perspectives and religious beliefs. Some are pacifists, and would be unwilling to respond with violence, even to violence perpetrated against them. Others are not pacifists, but do not interpret the current situation of the country as offering any justification for violence directed at other Americans. Still others are not philosophically or religiously opposed to the use of force in certain, tightly defined political circumstances (as, for example, with decisions taken by George Washington or Abraham Lincoln), but are unwilling to act contrary to the strongly-held moral convictions of their colleagues.

The second is tactical.

21CAR is not just a special interest organization. We intend to mobilize not just those who initially agree with us, but to build the broadest possible coalition in pursuit of fundamental, non-

partisan political reform. We would be smug and satisfied to have President Trump fear our political pressure, but it would be tragic and counter-productive if our fellow Americans were afraid we might cause mayhem. Furthermore, the alt-right's efficient propaganda network would welcome threats of harm or actual violence. Pledging to protect people from a made-up or exaggerated threat is an old fascist trick. (This is why we are on record as denouncing gratuitous, anarchist stunts like [this one](#).)

The third is prudential.

America has already had one terrible, bloody civil conflict. We should hope it never experiences even an echo of that, especially given the level of harm that can be inflicted by a single individual with modern weapons. In Trump and his followers, we face opponents who are better armed, less constrained morally, and less worried by collateral damage. Provoking an armed confrontation would be madness.

But what about the threats against us? After all, in our very short existence, one Rabble member has already had to face down neo-Nazi goons trying to intimidate and extort us in our own college town. We can't predict every future eventuality. It would be extraordinary if our own government made war on us or allowed others to do so. Should that occur, we would obviously have to reconsider our tactics.

We are, however, at this moment very comfortable rejecting violence (and law-breaking more generally, which we'll address in greater detail in a subsequent policy paper). Revolutions should set out on the highest road, and hold to it.