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## **Speaking Out for Freedom in War and Peace**

**by Richard M. Ebeling**

If war comes between the United States and Iraq, one of the first results right here in America will be the attempt to close off all further criticisms of U.S. foreign policy.

Spokesmen for the Bush administration, various members of Congress, and many of the talking heads on the television news shows will all chime in and sing the same tune. Criticism and doubt about the need and necessity for going to war were all fine and good before our troops were committed to battle. But now that “our boys” are in harm’s way every “real American” must stand behind his president and “our fighting men in the field.” Nothing should be done to undermine their morale or the goal of victory so they can be brought home in the shortest time with the fewest casualties.

The appeal will be to the notion “My country right or wrong,” now that the nation is at war and facing unknown perils.

It will be at just such a time that doubts and criticisms of American foreign policy will, in fact, be most needed. War invariably brings a lexicon and an imagery of a world divided into two parts: good and evil, right and wrong, them and us. Brutalities and cruelties committed by “our side” are swept under the rug or rationalized as unfortunate tragedies and inevitabilities of war. And every action by “the enemy” is demonized as justification for anything that “we” have to do to bring the war to a victorious end.

War does bring in its wake terrible barbarities and cruelties, and precisely because it does so the eye and voice of criticism must be turned on it, and not only when the battle has been won and the conflict has passed into history. It is during the course of the war that its designers and implementers must be held accountable for their actions, while there is still time to minimize, if not prevent, some of the death and destruction, which gets euphemistically sanitized under the phrase “collateral damage.”

It is also precisely during war that the citizenry must remind the government that its function is to protect the lives, liberty, and property of the people. Government must be prevented

from using the cover of war and national emergency to expand its own powers of intrusion and control over the people whose freedom it is meant to guard.

Ultimately, the greatest long-run threat to the freedom of any people is its own government, which possesses the legitimized right to use force and the threat of force against them in its own territory. If history has taught anything, it is that once freedoms have been lost by a people, regaining those lost freedoms from their own government is no easy task. The first duty, therefore, is to prevent those freedoms from being taken away.

Thus, when war comes, no one who values freedom at home and wishes to minimize the harm done to the innocent abroad should allow himself to stand mute when the flag is waved in front of him. Indeed, all who cherish what that flag was originally meant to represent must take the individual responsibility to remind their fellow citizens and their government that it is the protection of liberty and the respect for human life that must be the guide in all that the political authority presumes to do.

To speak out in such manner is the highest form of patriotism in a free society, because it is motivated by the desire to see that even in the heat of battle and the trauma of war we expect our government and ourselves to act in ways consistent with the principles of liberty on which the country was originally founded.

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**This article was originally published in February 2003.**