



11350 Random Hills Road, Suite 800, Fairfax, Virginia 22030 Phone (703) 934-6101 Fax (703) 352-3678

fff@fff.org www.fff.org

The Shifting Rationales for Empire **by Anthony Gregory**

This article is based on a speech entitled “War, Foreign Policy and Empire, The Changing Political Dynamic,” which the author delivered on at The Future of Freedom Foundation’s June 1-4, 2007, conference entitled “Restoring the Republic: Foreign Affairs and Civil Liberties” in Reston, Virginia.

So the Democrats have caved. They voted for Bush’s war spending, minus the request for a timetable for withdrawal. Nancy Pelosi claims the debate will continue, as if there’s been much of one on the Hill. The Senate approved the spending by an overwhelming margin.

All it took was some political pressure and some logrolling, and now we have bipartisan madness in Iraq with no end in sight. This all comes with the news that Bush plans to double American combat forces in Iraq by year’s end.

Now, what is going on? According to a CBS/*New York Times* poll from May, 72 percent of Americans disapprove of Bush’s handling of Iraq. This includes 40 percent of Republicans. Sixty-one percent of Americans say the United States should have never started the war. Despite the compromise in Washington, 63 percent of Americans think the United States should get out by sometime next year. Have the tides changed? Is this conference a waste of time, given that most Americans are now with us on the war? Well, not exactly. Unfortunately, the need to educate people on the follies of empire is as pressing as ever.

A public weary and wary of war

Before I focus on the negative, I should say there is some reason to celebrate. The fact that most Americans are sick of this war is, in itself, wonderful. After all, as terrible as the Iraq war and occupation have been, there is a sense in which Americans are responding to the horrors and futility of war better than in the past. Yes, the United States has been in Iraq longer than it was in World War II. Yes, we have lost about 3,500 American lives in this war, more than were taken on

9/11, and, yes, tens of thousands more are traumatized and wounded. But Americans are upset about it, as they should be.

The biggest proponents of an all-out global jihad against radical Islam are quite disappointed by the public opinion. Shortly after the Afghanistan invasion began, neoconservative Max Boot complained that Americans just aren't willing to take as many casualties as we used to. Today, the more bloodthirsty hawks lament how quickly Americans have shied away from this war over what *they* see as a *mere* few thousand casualties. For the last few years, I've heard complaints that America used to be willing to wage all-out war on civilians, whereas now the administration tries to minimize the official enemy death count. Some said the United States shouldn't have just smashed Fallujah: it should have ensured the city never saw life again, and carried out the same policy throughout the region.

On the home front, the U.S. government should, according to these serious warmongers, take off the kid gloves, censor the media, abolish dissent, round up seditionists, impose loyalty oaths, and make life hell for all Muslims in the country. As far as money is concerned, so-called defense spending is a fraction of what it was during World War II, which consumed about 40 percent of the nation's income. Most Americans aren't sacrificing for the war effort as in the past. Some people regret all this, but I think we are fortunate that Americans have become a little more wary of total warfare.

Why have Americans become so sick of Iraq, in particular, despite what the neocons would say are, given the crucial mission, relatively low body counts and relatively few setbacks? Part of it, ironically, is because this war has done so much to discredit the American empire. This is largely why everyone from Carter's national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski and Reagan's NSA Director William Odom to that great advocate of American imperialism, historian Niall Ferguson, considers the Iraq war such a disaster. It has weakened our international standing, our diplomatic relations, and our military establishment. It has unnecessarily strained the U.S. government's alliances with other Western powers and the United Nations. It has hurt the American empire.

Well, insofar as the American people suffer from this, from a weakened national security, from international resentment, this is indeed quite regrettable. In terms of the human cost, the hundreds of thousands of Iraqis who have likely died because of this war should never be swept under the rug. This Iraq war has its particularly egregious aspects to it. It was unbelievably stupid from a strategic point of view.

Yet I will say if there's any silver lining to the Iraq quagmire, it is exactly that it might make it harder for the U.S. empire to wage war in the future.

Right now, most Americans wouldn't support a war on Iran. But that can change, and to see why, we need to back up a bit and consider the different arguments for and against the

American empire, and what their true implications are for a future of peace and freedom for our country.

The Iraq war and the foreign-policy establishment

Some of the establishment wasn't crazy about the Iraq war to begin with. The same prudence that guided the first Bush administration away from Iraqi regime change during the first Gulf War was echoed by its National Security Advisor General Brent Scowcroft in August 2002, when he warned that the war "would not be a cakewalk. On the contrary, it undoubtedly would be very expensive — with serious consequences for the U.S. and global economy — and could as well be bloody."

It is true that the neoconservatives in the Bush administration succeeded in breaking from some of America's post-World War II traditions when they launched their crazed attempt to turn Iraq into the 51st American state. What they tried to do was of a revolutionary nature. They tried to forcibly democratize and liberalize a country where, if the majority truly got its way, Jeffersonian liberalism would certainly not flourish. They thought elections could create freedom. They've also claimed this about Afghanistan, which is probably even more absurd. The unilateral preemptive strikes, full-blown military occupation, and regime change did mark a somewhat different course for the American imperium.

In 2004, John Kerry repeated the old-school line in criticizing Bush: The war had been conducted without United Nations approval. It had not incorporated the strong alliances we had used in the first Gulf War. All of it was a diversion from a realist conception of the war on terror.

But Kerry did not offer a much different policy or say the United States should pull out immediately. Many of the other Bush critics two or three years ago said pulling out would result in chaos and civil war. Since then, a couple thousand American troops have died and chaos and civil war have erupted.

John Kerry, like many other critics of Bush's Iraq policy, mostly focused on the unilateralism and bad timing. Well, I have to say, a UN-sponsored war on Iraq would have likely been worse. When something is an act of aggression, you don't necessarily want more aggressors joining in on the trouncing.

Sometimes the talk about how the Iraq war has been a break from past traditions fails to recognize two important things. One, the U.S. government *has* been involved in overthrowing foreign regimes and starting aggressive wars for a long time, for more than 50 or 100 years, depending on what precisely we're talking about. And two, it was the supposedly wise and wonderful tradition of American empire for global stability that got us into this huge mess in the first place.

America's bloody pre-9/11 legacy

It was Eisenhower whose CIA installed the Shah in Iran.

It was under Johnson that the CIA sponsored the Ba-athists in Iraq, so as to ward off others supposedly loyal to the Soviets.

It was under Carter that Brzezinski, who now warns against war with Iran, spearheaded a policy of support for Islamist extremists in Afghanistan, for the purpose of inciting a Soviet Invasion, and then fighting it off, as part of the Cold War. Ah, the good old days.

Under Reagan the U.S. government assisted Osama and really threw its weight behind Saddam. This was back when Saddam was doing all those nasty things that were used later to justify his overthrow. Reagan also helped the Iranians get some missiles, but that was more of a side project.

It was Bush Senior, that wise statesman, who ruined the opportunity of a lifetime at the close of the Cold War, attacking Iraq to protect Kuwait. This particular intervention, along with the ones in Afghanistan, might have been the worst of all the supposedly wise and responsible Middle Eastern policies of times past. It was at the end of this war that the United States bombed water-treatment facilities, prevented the importation of chlorine, and imposed some of the most cruel and unusual trade sanctions in world history. It was also during this war that thousands of American troops were stationed in Saudi Arabia.

Bill Clinton didn't pull those troops out of Saudi Arabia. And he didn't end the sanctions on Iraq. His Ambassador to the UN, Madeline Albright, said on *60 Minutes* that they were "worth it" as a means of overthrowing Saddam, despite the hundreds of thousands of dead children. Clinton then made her secretary of state.

The United Nations supported the first war on Iraq and made those sanctions possible, giving some international cover for the brutality. And it was under Clinton that the Iraq Liberation Act of 1998 was passed, which established Iraqi regime change as American policy. In this sense, Bush didn't break from tradition at all. He was just carrying the torch, although it was he who finally dropped that torch on Iraq's oil fields.

Indeed, it was the tradition of American foreign policy before 9/11 that led to 9/11. Bush *isn't* to blame for everything — just for a whole heck of a lot. And it was also under this enlightened, internationally respectful tradition that America waged total war all over the globe. This began in earnest during World War II, when the United States firebombed dozens of Japanese cities, even before Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

This tradition was continued during the Korean War, where the U.S. government unleashed napalm warfare, targeted North Korean civilians, bombed dams to cause flooding, and killed a million or more. This tradition was brought down on the Vietnamese people, killing more than a million of them. It was what inspired Nixon to bomb Cambodia, which led to blowback in the form of the Khmer Rouge, and it was also what inspired the Carter administration to back Pol Pot against the Vietnamese, encourage the Chinese to help in assisting his regime, and lobby the

international community to allow him a seat at the United Nations. Reagan continued this sorry legacy with millions of dollars in support of the Khmer Rouge. This was perhaps history's most brutal communist regime in terms of per-capita murderousness. It had killed a fifth of its population, singling out Westerners, Buddhist-monks, those who had been educated or who wore glasses. And those anti-communist Cold Warriors, Carter and Reagan, supported them.

It was also the pre-9/11 foreign policy tradition that guided several generations of American politicians to support any rightwing dictator who was anti-communist or anti-drug.

Sure, the international community might have backed a lot of this American aggression more than the current war, but if that means the United States was able to get away with more mass murder, this is hardly something to be nostalgic about.

Whether or not the U.S. government has global support for war does not determine the morality or defensibility of the war. Whether or not both political parties agree to butcher masses abroad should not be our biggest concern. All this ties in to the superficial reasons that people either support or oppose war, depending on their partisan loyalties or ideological prejudices.

Back in the 1990s, when Clinton was sending the military all over the globe, there was a post-Cold War rightwing resistance to much of it. Mostly, they couldn't stomach this draft-dodger's sending American troops on nation-building missions. His justifications were largely internationalist, not nationalist. He and the UN laughably called the situation in Haiti a threat to international peace as he deployed 20,000 Marines there to secure democracy. Republican Bob Dole from Kansas challenged Clinton's power to do so without Congressional approval.

A few years later, Clinton said he was protecting the world from genocide when he bombed Serbia. Ex-presidential candidate Bob Dole approved this time.

But most Congressional Republicans opposed Clinton's foreign policy, especially the NATO-backed Kosovo war. The rightwing largely opposed it, and so did many of us libertarians, and we were all labeled uncaring about foreign innocents. Most of the left defended the war. Some even called conservatives unpatriotic.

With the Iraq war and war on terror, we have seen a flip-flop. A good example of how the discourse changed can be seen in the words of the American Legion. During the Kosovo war, the Legion passed a resolution that said in part,

Neither the President nor the Congress have defined America's objectives in what has become an open-ended conflict characterized by an ill-defined progressive escalation.... It is obvious that an ill-planned and massive commitment of U.S. resources could only lead to troops being killed, wounded or captured without advancing any clear purpose, mission or objective.

The resolution stated that without guidelines being set, including a "clear exit strategy," the U.S. should "withdraw American forces immediately."

Fast forward six years to 2005 and it's the Iraq war, and the American Legion's national commander says, "Public protests against the war here at home while our young men and women are in harm's way on the other side of the globe only provide aid and comfort to our enemies."

Well, this is interesting. The left, on the other hand, has not hesitated to criticize this war savagely, sometimes claiming principle against the very act of bombing civilian areas, but many on the left were silent or even cheering when Clinton sent troops abroad and dropped bombs on civilians eight years ago.

This goes back a long way. It was the left, at least the non-Communists, who were most enthusiastic in the early Cold War for Truman's collective security, cheering on the deployment of American troops to Korea. It was the right that was a little hesitant, at least until the Cold War became their number one unifying principle.

Was the Korean war justified whereas the Vietnam war wasn't? Or vice versa? Was bombing civilians and bridges and TV stations and pharmaceutical plants okay when Clinton did it? Or was that wrong, whereas Bush bombs with some justification?

We hear different arguments for foreign intervention, generally falling under the categories of nationalist and internationalist, but many of them relying on a little of both.

A century of nationalist internationalism

For good reason, many historians look back at the Spanish-American War as the beginning of the American global empire. For a few years, many American imperialists had sought to extend U.S. influence further abroad. The closing of the western frontier, the popular idea that America would need a powerful navy to protect its commercial interests, and a nationalist desire to show force and shame the Old World nations all were important factors playing into the formation of the new empire. But the rationales that got many people on board included a humanitarian drive. The Spanish were committing atrocities against the Cubans, reported in exaggerated accounts in William Randolph Hearst's Yellow Journalism. Hearst had told a journalist, "You furnish the pictures, I'll furnish the war." He knew humanitarian sympathy would lead Americans to favor war as a means of liberating the Cuban people.

This combined with a zealotry to defend national honor when the Spanish allegedly sunk the *USS Maine*. Once in Cuba, the United States began asserting itself as a nationalist giant and claimed prerogative over internal Cuban politics. The United States spread the Spanish-American war to the Philippines, where U.S. forces, following orders to shoot all resisters above the age of ten, killed hundreds of thousands of insurgents. The U.S. government was also supposedly Christianizing the Filipinos, who, ironically, were mostly Catholic already. In the Philippines, and internationalist mission to do good quickly morphed into a license for nationalistic violence on a grand scale.

World War I was sold to the American people as a necessity for national security. The Zimmerman Telegram was held as proof that the Germans were conspiring with the Mexicans to attack America. The sinking of the *Lusitania* was depicted as an insult to America's nationalist honor. Many saw the war as a way to expand the U.S. government's power. But it was also advertised by Woodrow Wilson as a "war to make the world safe for democracy" and a "war to end all wars." The United States would vanquish tyranny and liberate the European masses.

When World War I failed in these internationalist goals, and instead resulted in a world safe for communism and fascism, Americans became cynical of war and empire. Over a hundred thousand Americans died in the war. Grandiose plans for Americans to march into battle to liberate the world seemed like a cruel joke. This attitude dominated for two decades, up until late 1941.

When Pearl Harbor was attacked, Americans rallied around their president for war with the Axis Powers. This was mostly a nationalist fervor. The idea was to avenge American deaths, to protect the United States, and to make the Japanese pay. Americans were more excited about fighting the Japanese than the Germans. Much of the popular culture at the time was viciously anti-Japanese. Even Dr. Seuss produced dozens of cartoons of racist propaganda to demonize the enemy.

Over time, however, the implicit argument became that the U.S. government had entered World War II at least in large part to save Hitler's victims. But the Holocaust had not nearly reached its genocidal peak until after the United States intervened. When the U.S. government entered the war, its ally, Stalin, had killed many more people than Hitler had. Franklin Roosevelt's blind support for Stalin and his turning exiled Jews away from America's shores show his true concern for human rights. The original rationale in entering the war was not internationalist; it was initially a nationalist crusade to assert, vindicate and protect American strength. Only by looking back and pretending it was a humanitarian endeavor can many Americans make sense of the degree of bloodshed Americans suffered and the total war the United States waged abroad.

The Cold War was also defended on internationalist as well as nationalist bases. It was a war to protect America, but essential to this protection was the defense of freedom everywhere, we were told. It relied on both justifications.

Wilsonianism in the post-9/11 world

Nationalist conservatives, many of them Cold War hawks, opposed Clinton's internationalist warmongering, but they became cheerleaders for war on 9/11. There was now an Islamic terrorist threat to the American nation, even more ubiquitous and elusive than the communists, and any cost in American blood or treasure, and certainly foreign lives, was worth it to protect America.

The mainstream right called upon all Americans to rally behind Bush as he launched the horrifying atrocity of Shock and Awe. It was supposedly to protect Americans from weapons of mass destruction — the ones, by the way, that the CIA told Bush Saddam wouldn't use *unless* he was attacked. Even some conservatives who were skeptical said we must back the war once it began. Although the UN didn't approve this war, it did serve, even then, as a major excuse for it — the hawks kept arguing that Saddam was violating UN sanctions, and the U.S. government would have to intervene, even without UN approval, to defend the integrity of the UN. We know the neoconservatives always had internationalist goals in this war. National security concerns are what brought most Americans to favor the invasion, however.

As soon as these nationalist arguments that Americans were fighting to protect America collapsed — as soon as the bogus ties to al Qaeda, the uranium forgeries, the phony WMD program all became apparent — all of a sudden the neoconservative internationalism that always motivated the war became the bigger argument for why the United States should remain in Iraq. Bush made history in his 2005 inauguration speech, talking about how America was a sleeping giant before 9/11 — yeah, right — and how now we Americans realize it is our mission on earth to spread liberty everywhere.

For that period in early 2005, the conservatives claimed the internationalist mantle. Rush Limbaugh attacked the Left for not living up to the idealism in Bush's speech. He said,

[W]hat the president did today was make the case for spreading human liberty, defending human dignity, which were once largely the preserve of liberalism. If you go back and look at FDR's speeches and look at the number of times he mentioned God in his inaugurals. Go back to JFK. "We will fight any foe. We'll go anywhere. We will do whatever it takes to spread freedom and liberty." Hey, he couldn't be a liberal Democrat today. JFK couldn't be. Truman couldn't be. They were committed to the triumph of liberty in the world, and that's what this speech was about today, the triumph of freedom and liberty in the world — and it is now conservatism that is propelling this.

The same month, those phony Iraqi elections were trumpeted as a sign that Iraq was now freer, thanks to Bush's bombs, bullets and belligerence. This led many on the left who weren't convinced Iraq was ever a threat to have second thoughts about the war. There was a short period when even Jon Stewart from the *Daily Show* suggested that maybe he had been wrong about it.

The dirty secret of U.S. Wilsonianism, of course, is that the U.S. government has in fact overthrown democracies, in Iran, Guatemala, and Chile. Furthermore, democracy doesn't guarantee liberty. All states rule with some tacit consent of most of the people being ruled. Majoritarian support doesn't secure freedom. This is supposedly why we have a Bill of Rights in this country — to assert certain rights of the minority against the whims of democratically elected

politicians. If anything, pure democracy encourages people to see government not as a potential threat to their liberty, but only as an extension of themselves.

As the Iraq occupation continued, the right also began pointing at everything the U.S. government was doing in Iraq to build schools, hospitals, roads, parks, and so on. It seemed that the domestic socialism they'd oppose when done by Democrats at home became something to cheer on when done by the government abroad. Why is it that conservatives say they support free markets and are skeptical of a welfare state, but then champion an American-created welfare state in Iraq as some sort of victory? Either they don't really believe the propaganda, or their opposition to such social spending is not grounded in any genuine understanding of economics or the ethics of property rights.

At any rate, many Americans who had not bought into the nationalist arguments for war began to swallow the internationalist baloney and agree that, nevertheless, the United States could not withdraw. No way. We owe it to the Iraqis to give them their liberal democracy — as if this were possible! As if our government, which has given Iraqis checkpoints, curfews, income tax, gun bans and price controls, will soon enough bring liberty!

So the occupation continued, even as the nationalist security reasons were long since discredited. But there was still a hubristic element of American supremacism here, an idea that we knew what was best for them. Ironically, the same people who argue that the Muslims can handle democracy as well as we can also argue they can't do it without us holding their hands, while we're armed to the teeth—since we can hardly trust them to govern themselves.

=Once again, what had been a very nationalist justification for aggressive war became quite a different argument. Before it was the classic warmongering argument that we would have to kill foreigners, including many civilians, to save American lives. And if you didn't go along with it, you cared more about foreign lives than American lives, and were thus un-American.

Then, it shifted. All of a sudden, it was a matter of letting Americans continue to die so as to protect Iraqi lives. All of a sudden, if you were against American involvement since it compromised our security and consumed our wealth, you were some sort of isolationist who didn't care about human rights abroad. It seems like there's no end to the justifications for mass slaughter, all under the guise of protecting human life.

This applies also to the calculation between life and liberty. After 9/11, we were all told we must sacrifice a little liberty so as to save our lives. Now we are told that Americans and foreigners must sacrifice lives in order to secure liberty. My head is spinning: Are we dying for freedom or are we enslaving ourselves to keep alive?

And why should we trust politicians with this calculation? This is the real problem with *all* these arguments for war. It is not Bill Clinton or George Bush or Hillary Clinton or Rudy Giuliani whose lives or freedom are at risk. It is the lives American troops, foreigners and, given the reality of blowback, American citizens that these politicians are playing with. It is our liberty

at home that has suffered, and, if you look at what life is like for Iraqi Christians, or Iraqi women, or pretty much most Iraqis who weren't direct enemies of the Saddam regime, it is their liberty that has suffered too. For some reason, our nation, which was born out of revolution against the British empire, and sees that revolution as one for liberty, despite America's many remaining problems — slavery, anti-Indian policies and so forth — for some reason our nation has trouble seeing Iraqi self-determination or foreign resistance to American empire as a struggle for liberty because those foreigners, like the early American colonists, have their societal and cultural imperfections.

Freedom at home during a war for liberation

Since 9/11 it has been startling the degree to which people who should know better have gone along with the government propaganda, swallowed the war on terror whole, and cheered on aggression abroad while losing sight of the struggle for freedom at home. On the left, we've seen some unfortunate sellouts, such as the Alan Dershowitz-types who defend torture. But many so-called libertarians have been even worse on civil liberties.

Right after 9/11, there was some talk on the left and among libertarians about how the U.S. government could stop its horrendous drug war now that it's busy with fighting terrorism. Hah. The opposite has happened. First, the government tied the two issues together with its ridiculous ad campaign saying that those who smoke marijuana finance terrorists. The drug war has only accelerated and the government began justifying every possible violation of our civil liberties in the name of fighting terrorism. Conveniently, it could argue that it's long been trashing the Bill of Rights to stop drugs, and terrorism is even worse than drugs, so what are we complaining about? The real question is why, seeing how purely evil the U.S. government can be in waging its drug war, with the largest per capita prison population in the industrial world, with a Bill of Rights destroyed so as to allow for asset forfeiture and snooping — why would we trust such an entity with even more power to wage a war on terrorism? Terrorism is not a concrete enemy, but a tactic. A war against it is going to be as doomed as a war on drugs.

The U.S. government has hundreds of thousands of peaceful people in its domestic prisons, and people think it's going to protect our rights if we only give it more of our liberty? This should be absurd on its face. As far as this relates to foreign policy, the same government that wages chemical warfare on plant life in Colombia and strong-arms Mexico to maintain draconian drug laws is probably not going to be very humanitarian abroad in the terror war.

Libertarians in particular should be quite skeptical of the idea of our government going abroad to advance liberty. Freedom is not simply a government program. If central planning can't deliver food and shelter, as the Soviet Union showed, how can it guarantee liberty itself throughout the world? If we can't trust it to allocate resources efficiently, how can we trust it with the calculus of trading our freedom and our lives for foreigners' freedom and lives, or their lives

and freedom for ours? The idea simply makes no sense, yet you have some so-called libertarians continuing to trust big government with the promotion of its very opposite — liberty.

If libertarians needed anything more concrete to understand our government is not entirely the best method of promoting liberty abroad all while protecting our freedom, we should look at what it's done at home since 9/11.

Since the 1990s, the change in partisan loyalties to the state as it concerns civil liberties has been interesting. After the Oklahoma City Bombing, it was right-wingers who were said to be encouraging terrorism. Now it's the left. It was the Democrats who were imposing new violations of privacy and passing national legislation like the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act. And John Ashcroft decried Clinton for his calling upon Big Brother to read our email. Nowadays, most on the right are doing all they can to feed Big Brother steroids.

Of course, elements of the left, like the ACLU, still resisted Clinton's power grabs. And today, some on the right have been great on these issues.

But by and large, the right has never cared enough about civil liberties. If they did, they would have known that many policies they supported like the war on drugs would be unmanageable. Further, they have tended to see the Bill of Rights as some sort of protection of the guilty.

Orwellian defenses of the domestic war on terror

When the Patriot Act was rammed through, conservatives gave us a very bizarre defense of it: It was absolutely necessary, and yet it didn't give Bush any powers he didn't already have.

We got the same runaround on Bush's extrajudicial wiretaps. Bush had claimed in April 2004 that all his wiretaps were all being judicially approved, but this was a lie. He had the NSA wiretapping Americans even without FISA warrants, which have been notoriously easy for the administration to get, even retroactively. When he was caught in this fib in December of 2005, Bush remarkably said that "the fact that we're discussing this program is helping the enemy."

Alberto Gonzales defended this program in February of last year with some odd reasoning. Bush, he claimed, had this power inherently, since he was the commander in chief. The Constitution and Congress's post-9/11 Authorization of the Use of Force granted Bush all the power he sought. Indeed, even George Washington conducted such electronic surveillance, Gonzales hysterically claimed.

But this simply defies reason. Why are they so quick to defend all these laws that empower the president if the president already has such powers? If the Patriot Act changed nothing, why was it so necessary?

In January of this year, Gonzales said the NSA spying is now being done with the approval of FISA. So either the warrantless spying wasn't as necessary as they claimed, or perhaps the

FISA oversight is even more of a rubberstamp than before. But is their attempt to work with FISA an admission they were before acting outside the law?

What they're really doing is warming us up for totalitarianism. Thus do they refuse to outlaw torture completely, even though they claim they never practice it. Thus do they say the president has had these powers since the Washington administration, but they never relent in asking for more powers. Thus do they cross their fingers and tell us they're doing things the old-fashioned way, then say that everything changed on 9/11, we can't do things the old-fashioned way anymore, and even discussing these matters is pro-terrorist. This is Orwellian nonsense to make us used to living in a world run by an absurdist total state.

And if this surveillance state isn't absurd, what is? The FBI has issued over 140,000 national security letters, forcing people to reveal information to the feds and forbidding them from talking about it to anyone. The FBI admitted in August 2005 to secretly collecting thousands of files from such groups as the ACLU and the Catholic Worker Movement. They have no-fly lists and databases to keep track of such dangerous groups as antiwar Quakers in Florida.

Liberals should remember all this if the administration doing the spying is Democratic. Franklin Roosevelt didn't shy away from compiling information on right-wingers as well as radical leftists, preparing lists of dissidents for possible detention, and using the FBI to spy on his political opponents. Throughout the Cold War, both parties engaged in surveillance of peaceful activists. The Democrats, knowing they will inherit these powers, have done nothing to take them away from Bush. And they are even more unsettling given modern technology.

New lows for civil liberties

Matters are even worse regarding detentions. Here, the rule of law has been turned on its head and then decapitated. With the Military Commissions Act, Americans can be declared enemy combatants on the president's say so. They claim that we Americans still have habeas corpus, and only foreigners don't, but how exactly is this supposed to work? If you're an American citizen, and they claim you're a foreigner and don't have habeas corpus rights, how can you protest? The whole point of habeas corpus is to guarantee to all defendants the right to challenge the very reasons for their detention. Once you strip it away from some people, it becomes impossible to rigorously defend for anybody.

The principle of innocent until proven guilty has lost almost all support on the right. How else can we explain conservatives defending the shooting of an unarmed man on a runway at the Miami airport in late 2005? Back in the day, rightwingers sometimes argued for allowing passengers to be armed on airplanes, or at least leaving it up to the airlines and not the federal government. And yet after 9/11 showed that would indeed probably be a good idea, a federal agent killing a totally defenseless man was upheld as the paragon of security in our Brave New

World. It is as if the conservatives who once upheld the Second Amendment fail to understand that the anti-federalists demanded it out of distrust of government.

Around the same time they passed the Military Commissions Act, they also passed the defense Appropriations bill that included new presidential powers to overturn Posse Comitatus, to use the military in domestic law enforcement. Now, Posse Comitatus has long been neglected and has for a while not applied to drug enforcement, which is why they claimed there was a methamphetamine lab in the Branch Davidian home when they were seeking military assistance in planning the raid that eventually took 80 civilian lives at Waco, Texas.

But now the president can call up the National Guard without congressional or gubernatorial approval and use it to enforce his dictates for the broadest and vaguest of reasons. This is discomfiting, to say the least, especially given how the government treated Americans at Katrina. They brought in troops from Iraq, the Louisiana governor bragged the troops were “locked and loaded” and then used them to enforce martial law. Most of the right, the left and most libertarians were not sufficiently outraged by this terrible abuse of civil liberties, and I can only guess that the post-9/11 fog of hysteria is a big reason why.

Even torture has become something Americans are okay with, and this is arguably the most troubling development of our time. During the second Republican debate, only Ron Paul and John McCain took a position against it. And McCain has in actual practice caved on the issue, despite his good rhetoric.

At that debate, the candidates were all asked what they would do in a ticking time bomb scenario. “Would they torture?” was the real meaning in the question. They all jumped over each other to look tougher than the rest. How disgusting. Mitt Romney said, in one of the basest of comments that night, that he would “double Guantanamo.”

Is this what passes as an intelligent policy position these days? Tom Tancredo said he’d be looking for Jack Bauer, the fictional torturer in Fox’s “24.” It seems the Republicans care mostly about war and torture, which is all that could explain why the South Carolina GOP audience exploded in applause when Rudy Giuliani attacked Ron Paul for his heroic statements about blowback and foreign policy. Giuliani claimed he never heard of blowback and the mainstream right seems perfectly willing to cheer on and support a fascist politician who jails entrepreneurs, finances abortion and enforces gun control, so long as he is willing to wage war and crack skulls. Any remaining commitment to smaller government, free markets, and skepticism of the honesty and effectiveness of politicians seems to have been drained from the rightwing base.

Although, I did recently learn in my research that Rudy Giuliani was the mayor of New York on 9/11. You wouldn’t realize it, since he never mentions it. Being mayor during 9/11 does seem to make him uniquely qualified to run the world, doesn’t it? Now that I have learned that the humble Rudy Giuliani happened to be mayor on 9/11, I am tempted to give him my unwavering loyalty and join the Republicans in worshipping this great hero.

The uncertain road ahead

What is going on in this country? Warrantless wiretaps. Military commissions. A national ID card. Torture. Our government ships people abroad to be violated by the same governments some in the administration seek to go to war with because they're supposedly so brutal. Saddam's torture chambers were one of the biggest humanitarian talking points for launching preemptive, non-defensive war, and yet American torture chambers are now one of the biggest campaign promises to excite the Republican base.

There has been some progress in the realm of civil liberties, and ignoring them is not wise. Eight states, both red and blue, and nearly 400 communities, including some major cities, have passed resolutions against the Patriot Act, and many are refusing to cooperate with federal officials in its enforcement. Maine, Idaho, Arkansas, Hawaii, and Washington have all come out against the Real ID Act, that defacto national ID card. People from the right are joining people on the left, just as they did during some of Clinton's police state excesses, in resisting Bush's national police state. Hopefully, this will all bolster the case for political decentralization among liberals.

And, as we know by virtue of having this conference, we don't have the censorship we did during World War I, when merely criticizing the flag or American allies could get you imprisoned, and people were caged simply for saying the draft was a form of slavery, which it is. Speaking of which, we don't have the draft. But we do have politicians calling for a draft. Most of them seem to be on the left, such as John Edwards, whose recent advocacy of mandatory universal service should be decried, condemned and rejected.

We don't have internment of all Arabs like we did the Japanese.

But Japanese Internment presents us with an interesting lesson, which relates to the changes in the political dynamic we've been seeing as in concerns war and civil liberties.

It was only sixty-five years ago that Democratic president Franklin Roosevelt issued a military order to round up Japanese-Americans and put them in "relocation centers" and internment camps. There were no trials and there was no due process. There was FDR's executive order, carried out by military and immigration officials.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, virtually no major opinion organs opposed Japanese Internment and over 90% of polled Americans approved of it. In contrast, after 9/11 only 31% agreed that Arab-Americans should be detained in camps until they could be shown to be innocent.

Yet this means almost one out of three Americans was willing to discard habeas corpus, round up Arabs and throw them into camps. Two out of three agreed that Middle Easterners should be randomly stopped and interrogated.

Disturbingly, some today look back with the wrong lessons learned. Michelle Malkin, who used to talk about how government was too big and powerful, wrote a book defending Japanese

Internment. Her reasoning echoed the reasoning of crackdowns during past wars. At one point she argues, "Virtually every major country from Japan to Germany, from China to Egypt, from Holland to New Zealand, interned its enemy aliens." Even the Nazis interned enemy aliens, so we can too? This is the perverse, unspoken standard during war: The government can do virtually anything the enemy does, as long as the enemy is even more evil.

Peace, liberty and the future of America

There is hope, but not much so long as the right and even many libertarians remain naive about the threat of the wartime state to our civil liberties and to international peace. What is really strange is hearing anyone say he's for small government and yet defend the war on terror and US empire generally. They are incompatible. Our government is as big as it is largely because of war. The Civil War, the World Wars, the Cold War and the war on terror explain the current leviathan, including in the domestic sphere, more than any solely welfare state program can. Even such programs as government health care and national education funding grew out of war.

This Iraq war alone has cost more than \$600 billion — that's about \$2,000 per American! The conservatives say this terror war will last our lifetimes. At this rate, that will mean we'll never have limited government and a freer market.

The fact is, we have a long fight ahead of us. It's good that Americans want to pull out of Iraq by 2008. But what about Afghanistan?

Some Democrats are arguing we should take our troops from Iraq and send them to Afghanistan. What a catastrophe that would be! It was American engagement there that eventually blew up in our face on 9/11.

What about Iran? Let's not start a war there. Yes, some Iraq doves argued foolishly that the real war to be fought was against Iran, not Iraq. Let's only hope this doesn't happen. Why is it that the prospect of one bomb in the hands of Iran would be worth going to war over? The US government hypocritically has many thousands of nuclear bombs, which, together, potentially pose a much greater danger.

The U.S. government needs to pull out of Iraq, Afghanistan, and the entire Middle East. It needs to pull out of Germany and the rest of Europe. It needs to pull out of Japan, Korea and the rest of Asia. This empire has more than 700 bases in more than 140 countries, and they are costing Americans dearly and continuing to draw resentment against us. The United States needs to stop propping up dictators, stop meddling in foreign elections and stop its foreign aid program, which ludicrously funds both sides of conflicts and leads to anti-American hatred.

As far as our situation at home goes, we need to do more than reform the Patriot Act or get Congress to have more oversight on Bush's spying program. We need to stop the unconstitutional

powers of the president altogether, and abolish the imperial executive that existed long before 9/11.

The answer isn't to go back to the times of the allied US empire that John Kerry says Bush ruined. Yes, it's unfortunate that now we talk of "collateral damage" as though it's somehow moral, but we must remember that outright targeting of civilians was U.S. policy for a long time. As was conscription.

The nationalists and internationalists will always have excuses for dragging us into foreign wars. They will shift from one to the other as times change. But when it comes to the politics beyond the water's edge, they're all wet. This war was supposed to protect us from WMDs that Saddam didn't have, and it has only encouraged other regimes to seek such weapons. It was supposed to make us safer but we are less safe. It was supposed to liberate Iraqis but it has given them a socialist constitution, military rule and Sharia law. It was supposed to protect Israel but it has only empowered Israel's enemies.

A political realignment for a freer tomorrow

The truth is, no nation should have the imperial reach that America does, not for the supposed protection of its people or the supposed betterment of foreigners. American foreign policy is sold as a blessing for people here, there and everywhere, but it is truly a bad deal for Americans and foreigners alike. It only truly benefits the elite powers here and the favored elite powers abroad.

The right and the left will always have different reasons to attack our civil liberties, but we must resist them all. If we give up our jealousy for our freedoms, we lose everything we could possibly want to fight for, just as if we kill and torture innocents abroad, we lose the morality we supposedly stand for.

The problem isn't Bush. The problem isn't even the neoconservatives, or even the conservatives. The problem is empire. This began with Woodrow Wilson and World War I, or William McKinley and the Spanish-American War, or Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War, or maybe it began with James Polk's Mexican War. The problem is a populace insufficiently jealous of their liberty and politicians willing to exploit that. This has always been a problem. The Founding Fathers knew it.

What we really need in this country, and what I sense is happening, is a political realignment, where people who call themselves leftists, rightists, libertarians, independents or whatever recognize that American liberty and American prosperity cannot withstand this insane perpetual foreign imperialism that, far more often than not, only hurts the people it's supposed to help.

The time is ripe to teach our fellow Americans that non-intervention abroad and a strong devotion to freedom at home are the answer. Many people do seem to be learning fundamental lessons from the Bush administration's follies, repression and lies. There were Cold Warriors on the Right who didn't buy into the national security excuse for this war. There are leftists who might not be fooled by the next Democratic war of aggression. Many conservatives have become more concerned with civil liberties than ever. Many liberals have come to distrust the ability and propensity of unchecked government power to do good. The aggressive sanctions on Iraq have even taught people something about how crucial trade is to the maintenance of civilization.

I certainly am glad for the American people's change of mind on Iraq. But it's time to go further. Before 9/11, many of us worried that American foreign policy would eventually come back to haunt the American people. And it has happened and led to more of the same aggression, Big Brother tactics, bureaucracy and piles of inflationary spending.

Now that it's been five and a half years since the 9/11 attacks, Americans are finally shaking out of their post-9/11 mentality of supporting anything and everything the government wants to do in the name of protecting them. Many Americans do see that the security is an illusion.

But many don't. The ones who understand the immorality and ineffectiveness of this war and who distrust the police state at home span from right to left. The ones who generally trust the post-9/11 Security State also span from right to left. So-called liberals defend torture and conscription. So-called conservatives have infinite trust in the effectiveness of big government bureaucracies. So-called libertarians will give up their moral opposition to aggression and economic distrust of central planning. There are people across the spectrum who will side with the total state at wartime.

But perhaps this means the spectrum is deeply flawed. Perhaps it is time to rethink left and right once and for all. What does it mean to be a pro-war libertarian, a pro-slavery liberal or a pro-democratic revolution conservative? Sometimes, it is interesting and informative and helpful to use political labels, especially to clarify or to challenge the status quo. But perhaps we have all relied on them a bit too much.

Regardless of labels, let us stand for peace and liberty. The next aggressive war, the next power grab, the next president who tries to use an emergency to overturn ancient liberties and replace them with ancient evils — whether he be a Republican or she be a Democrat—whether the propaganda wears the cape of humanitarianism or the cloak of national security — I hope as many of us as possible are still together, opposing the march toward human tragedy and pointing the way toward a brighter, freer, and more peaceful tomorrow.

Anthony Gregory is a Research Analyst at the [Independent Institute](#), a Policy Adviser for the [Future of Freedom Foundation](#), and a columnist at [LewRockwell.com](#). Anthony's website is

AnthonyGregory.com. This article is based on a speech entitled “War, Foreign Policy and Empire, The Changing Political Dynamic,” which the author delivered on at The Future of Freedom Foundation’s June 1-4, 2007, conference entitled “Restoring the Republic: Foreign Affairs and Civil Liberties” in Reston, Virginia.

This article was originally published in July 2007.