



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

[fff@fff.org](mailto:fff@fff.org) [www.fff.org](http://www.fff.org)

## **The Neocon War on Peace and Freedom, Part 1**

**by James Bovard**

The main problem with Bush's war on terrorism is that he has not attacked enough foreign regimes and not sufficiently trampled the privacy of the American people. Such is the thesis of David Frum, former speechwriter for President Bush, and Richard Perle, currently on the Pentagon's Defense Advisory Board, co-authors of the new book *An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror*.

According to Frum and Perle, "Terrorism remains the great evil of our time, and the war against this evil, our generation's great cause.... There is no middle way for Americans; it is victory or holocaust." The terrorist threat is largely equated with the Muslim threat. Protecting Americans from terrorists requires toppling numerous Arab and Muslim regimes and compelling the reformation of much of Islam: "We must discredit and defeat the extremist Islamic ideology that justifies and sustains terrorism."

No one will accuse Frum and Perle of a shortage of contempt. After a breathless summary of daily life in the Arab world, the authors declare, "This fetid environment nourishes the most venomous vermin in the Middle Eastern swamp." The tone of *An End to Evil* brings to mind historian Thomas Macaulay's quip on British poet laureate Robert Southey: "What theologians call the spiritual sins are his cardinal virtues — hatred, pride, and the insatiable thirst for vengeance." The book contains more invocations of the Nazis than a Mel Brooks movie.

The book jacket identifies Frum as the "most influential thinker in the foreign-policy apparatus of the Administration of George W. Bush" and hails Perle as "the intellectual guru of the hard-line neoconservative movement in foreign policy." Inside the book, Frum and Perle reveal that people who say neoconservatives have vast influence are anti-Semitic. This is typical of the perverse double standard that pervades *An End to Evil*.

This book is impossible to understand without recognizing the neoconservative concept of government. The key to ending evil, from Frum's and Perle's perspective, is to greatly increase the power of the federal government both at home and abroad. Government becomes the ultimate force for the good — and distrust of government is the ultimate proof of a lack of sophistication.

We will consider Frum-Perle prescriptions for unleashing government at home, and then consider their recommendations for foreign wars.

### **No privacy, no problem**

According to Frum and Perle, the evil of fundamental Islam requires the quashing of American privacy. They recommend a vast expansion of government surveillance, calling for the revival of Operation TIPS (Terrorism Information and Prevention System), which Congress forced the Bush administration to abandon. Frum and Perle declare, “To the astonishment of the administration, TIPS provoked an outburst of anger and mockery.”

Yet, on this subject, as on every other civil-liberties issue, Frum and Perle offer no explanation of why people opposed the government. The feds sought to sign up an army of people to report almost anything — no clear guidelines were ever issued on what could be considered “suspicious” and worthy of being entered into someone’s federal dossier.

Homeland Security director Tom Ridge said that observers “might pick up a break in the certain rhythm or pattern of a community.” The feds aimed to enlist as many as 10 million people to watch other people’s “rhythms.” Rep. Bob Barr (R-Ga.) denounced TIPS as a “snitch system” and warned,

A formal program, organized, paid for and maintained by our own federal government to recruit Americans to spy on fellow Americans, smacks of the very type of fascist or Communist government we fought so hard to eradicate in other countries in decades past.

Frum and Perle liked Operation TIPS in part because they believe good Americans must always be ready to “drop a dime” on Muslim neighbors, co-workers, or suspected fellow travelers:

People who live next door to a storefront mosque in Brooklyn, New York, will almost certainly observe more things of interest to counterterrorism officials than will people who live next door to a Christian Science church in Brookline, Massachusetts. The software engineer who develops a sudden enthusiasm for Islam is more likely to be funding terror than the software engineer who develops a sudden enthusiasm for vintage cars.

The authors also advocate canceling the tax-exempt status of some American mosques and Muslim nonprofit groups.

Frum and Perle champion another surveillance monstrosity at least partially thwarted by Congress — a Total Information Awareness-type system to allow the government to compile dossiers on “an individual’s credit history, his recent movements, his immigration status and

personal background, his age and sex, and a hundred other pieces of information.” Frum and Perle insist that the government can be trusted with such data because procedures could be developed to link the data to a specific name only if “probable cause” of criminal conduct exists. In other words, regardless of the vast temptation for political and bureaucratic abuse of such data, the authors blithely assume that government officials — at least in the future — will be angels.

Frum and Perle also call for a National ID card, including “biometric data, like fingerprints or retinal scans or DNA.” Again, they shrug off any concerns about how such a system could be used to sabotage people’s lives and privacy, asserting, “The victims of executive branch abuse will be able to sue the wrongdoers and collect damages; the victims of a mass terrorist attack will have no such recourse.” This would be hilarious except for the possibility that people who watch Fox News might actually believe such a remedy exists.

The book’s discussion of the USA PATRIOT Act appears to rely heavily on a list of Justice Department talking points. Regarding wiretaps of email, the talking points assert that the PATRIOT Act sets “exactly the same standard that governs the wiretapping of telephones.” Email wiretaps are now carried out with a surveillance system created by the FBI, lovingly named Carnivore. Carnivore is contained in a black box that the FBI compels Internet service providers (ISPs) to attach to their operating system. Though a Carnivore tap might be imposed to target a single person, Carnivore can automatically impound the email of all the customers using that ISP. The ACLU’s Barry Steinhardt observed,

Carnivore is roughly equivalent to a wiretap capable of accessing the contents of the conversations of all of the phone company’s customers, with the “assurance” that the FBI will record only conversations of the specified target.

The PATRIOT Act puts email wiretaps on automatic pilot. An FBI agent or government lawyer need only certify to a judge on the secret Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court that the information sought is “relevant to an ongoing criminal investigation” to get permission to install Carnivore.

Judges have no discretion: they must approve wiretaps based on government agents’ unsubstantiated assertions. And, if past is prologue, there will be little or no oversight of how the FBI is using its new email vacuum.

Frum and Perle pooh-pooh concerns about the new intrusions: “The privacy of the American home is many millions of times more likely to be invaded by an e-mail spammer or a telemarketer than a federal agent.” But telemarketers do not conduct no-knock raids that leave innocent people dead, and spammers do not conduct mass secret arrests (followed by prison beatings), as did the feds after 9/11.

Perhaps most chillingly, Frum and Perle call for creation of a “domestic intelligence agency” to keep watch on people in America. At the time the CIA was created in the late 1940s, the agency was specifically prohibited from engaging in domestic surveillance because the example of the Gestapo was fresh in people’s minds. Now, half a century later, we are supposed to pretend that the government only goes after bad guys.

### **Terrorism and omnipotent government**

Because of the way the book was slapped together (written in “high speed in high summer,” as Frum notes in the acknowledgments), it is sometimes difficult to understand how far the authors want the government to go. On pages 228–29, they write,

The United States is proud to call itself a nation ruled by laws. But even a nation of laws must understand the limits of legalism. Between 1861 and 1865, the government of the United States took tens of thousands of American citizens prisoner and detained them for years without letting any one of them see a lawyer.

This appears to be a blanket endorsement of everything Lincoln did in the North during the Civil War — shutting down newspapers, suspending habeas corpus, arresting congressmen, effectively declaring martial law for the duration. When Frum and I recently debated on a San Francisco public radio station, he insisted that this passage referred to Confederate soldiers and enemy combatants. Yet there was nothing anywhere near this passage in the book dealing with either such category. Tom DiLorenzo, author of *The Real Lincoln*, notes that the most credible estimates of the total number of Northerners Lincoln jailed or imprisoned range from 13,000 to 38,000.

It is difficult to tell whether some of the book’s comments on law enforcement are simply naive or are preying on readers’ ignorance. The authors sanguinely declare, “The FBI is essentially a police force, and like all good police forces it goes to great lengths to respect the constitutional rights of the suspects it investigates.” From the 1992 unconstitutional “shoot to kill” orders that spurred an FBI sniper to slay a mother holding a baby in a cabin door at Ruby Ridge, Idaho, to the 1993 tank-and-gas assault on civilians at Waco, to the FBI’s illegal delivery of hundreds of confidential files on Republicans to the Clinton White House, to the 1994 FBI sting operations that sought to destroy the daughter of Malcom X, to the FBI’s framing of an innocent security guard for a pipebomb explosion during the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, to recent revelations that the FBI protected murderers who were informants in the Boston Irish Mafia and was complicit in sending four innocent men to prison for life on murder charges, the FBI has too often oppressed Americans and obstructed justice. But, in the post-9/11 world, good citizens are obliged to have bad memories.

Unlike some enthusiasts of Bush's wars, Frum and Perle do not talk about temporary abridgments of privacy; instead, the new Über-Surveillance State will presumably be with us forever. In the middle of their parade of proposed new intrusions, the authors remind readers, "Americans are fighting to defend their liberty." Since we are fighting for liberty, we should cheerfully abandon safeguards developed over hundreds of year to protect citizens from their rulers.

### **Endless war to purify religion**

Frum and Perle's domestic recommendations seem almost mellow compared with their foreign-policy prescriptions. They call for a war to the finish with "militant Islam" — which is sometimes identified as "fundamentalist Islam" and sometimes as "extremist Islam." The terms are never lucidly defined, though it is a sure bet that there is plenty of evil in Islam.

Frum and Perle adore "street tough" lingo: "When it is in our power and our interest, we should toss dictators aside with no more compunction than a police sharpshooter feels when he downs a hostage-taker." The authors confidently declare, "We must destroy regimes implicated in anti-American terrorism." "Implicated" presumably includes simply saying nasty things about a government. As long as the United States can find some disgruntled exiles to tell lies about their former government (as happened in the case of some of the Iraqi exiles), then the United States automatically has the right to kill as many foreigners as necessary to topple the regime. As Frum and Perle make stark in their comments on Iraq, even false accusations against a foreign government are sufficient to justify an American invasion.

Paranoia is now the highest statecraft. "When in doubt, drop more bombs" seems to be the Frum-Perle rule of thumb. The illustrious authors declare, "Where intelligence is uncertain, prudent leaders will inevitably minimize risk by erring on the side of the worst plausible assumption. And rightly so." In other words, if there is any doubt that a foreign nation might pose a threat to the United States, it would be irresponsible not to bomb that country into submission.

Frum and Perle were fiery advocates of going to war with Iraq. Perle famously predicted that the invasion would be a "cake-walk" for American soldiers — no fuss, no muss. There is not even a hint of remorse in this book for the fact that far more Americans have died in attempting to conquer Iraq than Perle promised. The book recounts a number of predictions by opponents of the war of events that did not come to pass — as if that somehow vindicates Perle's false prediction. The swagger of the book's portrayal of the Iraq issue is bizarre — since the book did not go to press until at least September 2003, at a time when the initial postwar euphoria had long since been replaced by widespread fears of a quagmire.

Frum and Perle scoff at those who doubt the transcendent benefits of the Iraq War:

By clutching Saddam Hussein's regime by the throat and throwing it against the wall, the United States demonstrated that bin Laden's boasts were false — that the US was overwhelmingly strong....

Perhaps, since neither Perle nor Frum has any combat experience, they naturally think of war in terms of a child's tantrum in a toy room. This is a peculiar phrase to characterize a campaign that has made hundreds of American widows and left more hundreds of American children fatherless. It wasn't a "regime" that was thrown up against the wall: it was an army and a people and a government that were bombed and assaulted into submission.

Frum and Perle sound as if the physical impact of the Iraq war was almost as transient as the flicker of a TV screen: "A visitor who walked through Baghdad in June would scarcely know that the city had been bombed in March." Hundreds of buildings had been destroyed and at least one residential neighborhood was bombed to smithereens (on the basis of a false tip that Saddam was there). The *Los Angeles Times* surveyed hospitals in and around the capital and concluded in mid May 2003 that between 1,700 and 2,700 Iraqi civilians were killed in the battle of Baghdad; more than 8,000 Iraqi civilians were wounded.

*James Bovard is author of **Lost Rights** (1994) and [\*\*Terrorism and Tyranny: Trampling Freedom, Justice and Peace to Rid the World of Evil\*\*](#) (Palgrave-Macmillan, September 2003) and serves as a policy advisor for The Future of Freedom Foundation.*

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