Saving the Republic, Resisting the Imperial Temptation
by Doug Bandow

The following is a transcript of a speech given at The Future of Freedom Foundation’s June 2007 conference, “Restoring the Republic: Foreign Policy & Civil Liberties” held in Reston, Virginia.

Jacob Hornberger: Doug Bandow is former Special Assistant to President Reagan, and he’s been affiliated with several free market organizations, libertarian and conservative, The Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute, Competitive Enterprise Institute. He is presently the Robert A. Taft fellow at the American Conservative Defense Alliance. He’s the author of several books including Foreign Follies, America’s New Global Empire, which we’ll have copies out there for sale. And the title of his talk is “Saving the Republic, Resisting the Empirical Temptation.” Doug Bandow.

Doug Bandow: Well thank you all very much. It’s a great honor to be here, especially in such a stellar lineup of people. I mean you look at the other speakers, there are people who have been heroes of mine, somebody like a Daniel Ellsberg that I’ve only read about to actually see the person and hear him was a wonderful opportunity. And longtime friends of mine, Ted Galen Carpenter, Ralph Raico and others. It’s truly an exceptional panel that Bumper has put together. And, you know, it’s a lineup that should be heard not just by hundreds of people, it should be heard by thousands or millions of people.

The message I think out of this conference is absolutely critical. Now there’s also a certain personal pleasure. I was kind of the understudy I joked, you know. Bumper had asked me to be a backup if anybody, you know, couldn’t speak, and at dinner last night I mentioned that I was getting kind of desperate as we got closer to the Monday morning end of the session, that I was thinking of the Tanya Harding solution, you know, that maybe one of the other speakers needed to have, you know, an unfortunate accident. And I noticed that Ted Galen Carpenter moved his
chair perceptibly away from me at that moment. Ted, who I might note, you might want to talk to him when you next see him. He’s a new grandfather and he assures me that Carson Robert is the most beautiful baby who has ever been born.

But it really is a great pleasure of mine to be here. And I thank you especially for giving up your break time and, you know, kind of coming in on short notice to hear me talk. And I appreciate Bumper bringing me on. You know, my topic, “Saving the Republic, Resisting the Empirical Temptation,” comes out of my thought in terms of what really is the theme of this conference, what unites the talks that you have heard and which you will continue to hear through tomorrow morning. And then I think that what comes out of that, to me, is that the Republic itself is in danger. That my guess is that within this room there’s an awful lot that would divide us. We would probably have some interesting arguments both as speakers and members of the audience over abortion, over the role of the Libertarian Party, educational choice, vouchers. I could imagine arguments over taxes, affirmative action. I mean any number of issues one could imagine even people of good will who share many views were going to come to enormous disagreements.

But I also think that we’re united by something very fundamental and very important. And to my mind what we see today, and I think what we all fear, is an assault on the very foundation of our Republic. The kind of public polices that we see today go far beyond any particular, you know, policies that we normally argue about, and go much deeper, to the very fundamentals of our system. And this surely is a Republic that is worth preserving and protecting.

Now for all the faults of our people and of our leaders I’d argue that over the years the United States of America has offered a vision. It has, at the best of times, at least been a shining city upon a hill. It has been a model. It is something, a nation, an opportunity, a vision, that has inspired imitators around the world. It’s a country that’s encouraged freedom fighters, genuine freedom fighters, in other nations. It’s a nation and its people who help liberate people around the globe, and it’s filled certainly with warm-hearted, generous people, people who are willing to sacrifice, people who are willing to give, people who would give up their lives to help others, people who will serve, you know, people who care deeply about their community around them and people beyond their own shores. And this is certainly something to be proud of.

And I think of moments that kind of encapsulate America and moments that kind of bring out the best of our society and there are an awful lot of those. And we think of heroes and I think, you know, Daniel Ellsberg, I think, you know, very powerful call to ask people to sacrifice when they see that sacrifices must be done. And I think over the years and throughout our history some of the visions, some of the people, and I think, for example, of a Patrick Henry, you know, give me liberty or give me death. I mean the notion that, you know, a political people should be free, that the tradition and other things should not stand in the way, should not prevent us from
having our liberty. You think of the Declaration of Independence, signed by many people who
did suffer greatly. I mean that wonderful document, that we hold these truths to be self-evident.
And we can look back on that and appreciate the rhetoric, but the people at the time who signed
it understood that they were signing a treasonous document, you know. They were people who
faced hanging, whether separately or together, you know. They were people who would suffer
greatly if their cause failed. I mean these are heroic people.

And that document and that vision, you know, that rhetoric, has gone around the world and has
animated people and convinced people, helped people understand the importance of liberty. I
think of George Washington where whether or not one wants to call him our greatest president,
he certainly deserves appreciation by libertarians for stepping back from political power. That a
man who frankly many people would’ve been happy to made a king, certainly would’ve been
happy to have taken a third term in office, that there is something very important about the
ability to step away from political power. ’Cause, you know, if we look at the politicians we
have today, who can imagine-- would Bill Clinton have turned down the opportunity to have a
third term in office, or a fourth term or a fifth term, you know? Would George W. Bush, would
so many of these others? So there is someone early in our history who I think set a very
important principle to it. That in fact, imbued with the most political power in your society, you
can step away from it.

I think of Henry David Thoreau, you know, that didn’t want to be involved and didn’t want to
support, didn’t want to fund a war of aggression against our southern neighbor. I think of
William Lloyd Garrison, you know. I will be heard he said. It didn’t matter if mob showed up
to his rallies. It didn’t matter if people destroyed his printing press. This is a man who would
 inveigh against, you know, the abomination of slavery. He would demand liberty for all of
America’s people and not just some based on their skin color. I think of the anti imperialists of
the late 1800s, Charles Sumner and many others, who fought against America’s odious war in
the Philippines where we managed, in the name of democracy or something, to kill 200,000 or
more people. Now these are people who stood against the tide, you know, at a time where the
tide was rising for an Imperial America. America had to have saltwater imperialism at that
point. We had to have, you know, provinces and we had to have possessions in East Asia, the
markets of China. All of this was suddenly very important and very attractive to many, many
people.

I think of William Jennings Bryan. And of course many of these people, you know, we can have
some very fundamental disagreements with on other issues. William Jennings Bryan resigning
as secretary of state as he sees Woodrow Wilson is going to take us into this horrendous, awful
war in Europe, you know, the most grotesque of wars, which set the stage of course for the worst
human conflict and carnage we’ve ever seen in World War II. I think of Robert La Follette, who
on the Senate floor opposed World War I and was enormously abused, called a traitor, called
many of the things that people today are called when they oppose the war. But he stood fast and was vindicated after that war was over.

I think of Harry Weinberger, you know. Last night Joseph Margulies mentioned in passing, and I don’t know if many of you know of it, Molly Steimer, who was prosecuted by the Woodrow Wilson administration, you know, the great liberal administration, because she had thrown leaflets out opposing America’s intervention against Russia, a nation which notably we had not declared war against. And she was sentenced to prison and ultimately deported. Harry Weinberger was an American lawyer who took up the radicals’ cause. He was not a communist. He was no socialist. But he was horrified at the assault on the Bill of Rights, horrified that people would go to jail for speaking their minds, speaking on political issues and matters of great public concern. And there are a lot of heroes out there.

I think of Robert Taft, a man who after World War II ends stands up and criticizes the Nuremberg trials, not because he had anything good to say about the Nazis, but his concern about ex post facto justice, his concern about victor’s justice, his concern about taking a judicial process and turning it into politics. And this is a man who had presidential ambitions. Despite having presidential ambitions he was willing to take on about as unpopular a cause as one can matter. I think of Dwight Eisenhower who’s been mentioned. This is a man who’s determined to get us out of the Korean War, and he kept us out of the Indochina War, you know, a man I think, again, somewhat the __ perhaps of George Washington, a military man, a man of some simplicity perhaps. But he understood basic principles, someone--perhaps the last president we’ve had who understood that the power to declare war is a congressional power not a presidential power, where he said quite explicitly if we need to go to war I’m going to go to Congress, you know, that congress is where that power lies.

I think of Rosa Parks, you know, a simple gesture. No longer will I stay on the back of the bus. I don’t care what that state law is, it’s an unjust law. Or Martin Luther King who will lead a peaceful protest against the kind of horrors-- you figure 40 years ago, many of our citizens oppressed by government policy. I think of Daniel Ellsberg, a great sacrifice telling us the truth, willing to come forward, willing to risk tens of years or a hundred years or more in jail. There are many people, many average people, many people we don’t know who have taken stands and have made this country such a great place and have stood for principle and this quality.

And I think in many ways one of the dramatic moments that kind of represents this, especially if we think about these principles going outward, occurred about 20 years ago, almost exactly 20 years ago. On June 12, 1987, Ronald Reagan stood in front of the Berlin Wall. Now the Berlin Wall kind of encapsulates the worst of humanity. It encapsulates a system of utter tyranny. The first escapee, or attempted escapee, from Germany after that long wall was erected was shot and killed August 24, 1961. There’s a famous picture of a man who was shot the following year
named Peter Fechter. He was an 18-year-old bricklayer and he laid and died. It took him 50 minutes to bleed to death as he was shot down and the East German border guards did nothing to help him. He would’ve been 62 years old today, but he was killed because he wanted to escape his country. And that of course was a crime. Indeed East Germany it was a crime. It was called Republikflucht, fleeing the republic. It was a crime. Kind of imagine that, you know. I mean it was against the law to flee the republic. And those deaths continued throughout—indeed the last—I mean this I found shocking when I found it. The last person to die trying to escape from East Germany died on February 5, 1989. He was a 20 year old named Chris Gueffroy, and he was murdered, murdered simply because he wanted freedom.

And this wall, I think in many ways the symbol, the symbol of mass murder, the symbol of the gulag, the symbol of mass impoverishment, the symbol of the loss of hope. You know, Joseph last night talked about the attempt to use Guantanamo to kind of create this atmosphere of no hope. Here you had systems where the entire societies—people didn’t have hope, the desperation to escape, you know, the suppression of all, you know, kind of individuality, just the horror, tyranny most evil, tyranny most horrid. And you think about communism, I mean Nazism was awful but almost everybody recognized that outside of the Nazis in Germany. What makes the communist experience of course so dramatic and I think so particularly awful is how widely it was embraced, and not just embraced and imposed, but how widely it was admired by intellectuals around the world, intellectuals in countries where they could speak and they could take advantage of the wonders of capitalism. And they were free, yet they found the future in the system of mass tyranny.

So the Berlin Wall represented all of this, the horror, the callousness, the brutality, the depravity of human beings. And I think to Reagan’s credit, you know, on that day 20 years ago, he stood next to that wall and he gave a speech that’s, you know, a typical Reagan speech, very nice, very eloquent. And as part of that he said, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall,” a very simple, very simple challenge. If you are changing your system, if you want to be part of the international human community, if you want all of that, tear down this wall. And 2 ½ years later that wall came down. Now it came down I would argue in part due to Ronald Reagan’s efforts, part due to Mikhail Gorbachev’s policies, and certainly due to the efforts of thousands of millions of heroic people throughout the Eastern Bloc and the Soviet Union who put all on the line, you know. An electrician at a shipyard in Poland, a playwright in Czechoslovakia, any number of these people, heroic people, people in churches, people in any number of occupations. For these people liberty meant something more than rhetoric, for them it meant their lives and their futures.

And that, to me, represents the best of America, presenting that kind of challenge to the rest of the world, liberate your people, tear down the wall, join the human community, allow freedom for your people. Well America today requires the services of those same kinds of people, common heroes, people in the media, people in the military, people in the bureaucracy, people in business, in school, colleges, people all over our society. Joseph mentioned last night we are not
the Nazis. We are not the communists. We’re not like the Stalinist Soviets. We are not like the Maoist Chinese. But that of course is not the standard. The standard is, are we living up to our principles? Are we true to ourselves? Are we protecting the liberty of our people? Are we providing justice for those who come under our jurisdiction? Are we still a shining city on a hill? Are we still an example, an example for those around the world? Are we living up to our responsibilities?

Because America has always set a very, very high standard for itself. Our standard is not just better than the common mass murderer. The question is, are we the best that humanity has to offer? And unfortunately I don’t think we any longer--the government--the government no longer represents the best that America has to offer, an America that liberates, an America that affirms the dignity and the lives of its people, an America that respects the rule of law, an America that insists on accountability for those with political power, an America that respects the lives and the worth of people who live outside our own society, you know. That’s the America that we love, we respect, we admire, we deserve.

And unfortunately I don’t think today what we see in government policy, we don’t see that America. I think how we’ve fallen is illustrated by the kind of role of dishonor, or the images, you know, to match the image or the heroic images, I think, that our history is filled with. Think of recent images, images of dishonor, images of embarrassment, images that unfortunately continue to this day, that there’s kind of a parallel universe. We have one universe that’s Patrick Henry and George Washington and Ronald Reagan and Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King and all of these people, and we have another, another set of images. I think, for example, of a Congress that quickly passes, with virtually no debate, the Patriot Act. Not that there may not be legislation that’s needed, but essentially without debate, essentially without considering changes, essentially without balancing what it does to our society itself. A Congress that has no interest in holding the executive accountable. A Congress that cares primarily about passing a vote and getting political credit.

I think about the American Secretary of State appearing before the Security Council of the United Nations and making a speech to the world to explain why we must go to war. And I think of what it means when it turns out that everything that the Secretary of State of the United States, representing all of us, said was false. Every claim, every charge, false. Not just one, not just slightly off, but false. What does that tell the world? I think of a Donald Rumsfeld, our Secretary of Defense, who after we have initiated war on a country, when it falls into mass disorder, looting appears on the TV screens, his response is, well, stuff happens. Of course, kind of like sunspots, you know. The sun goes up and people loot in Baghdad. What can we do about it? I don’t know, what could we do about that? What on earth is that as a representative of America?
I think of the Greek __ backing the war, who as the carnage mounts, as the insurgency gains steam, all they can tell us about is all the good news that we’re not hearing about. Now remember you’re listening to something that a Republican congressman said, you know. We’re picking up the trash in Baghdad. I thought oh boy that’s a good bit of good news. I’d invade a country for that. You know, columnist Mark Stein talked about we’re dredging the harbors over there. Boy that’s a really wonderful one, you know. Well we’re opening schools. Now of course kids are too scared to go to the schools and their parents get shot if they take them to the schools, but why stand in the way of letting people know about all this good news? That--is that an image of America that we want to present to the world? Never mind the carnage in your streets, look at all the good news.

I think of the Vice President of the United States, a position I always thought of as high honor, who criticizes those against him, calls them traitors. He lies about minor factors such as the Al Qaeda connection to Saddam Hussein. He tells us how the insurgency is in its last throes. I don’t know, that was what, two years ago? Whatever. What’s a little time among friends. He orchestrates a campaign to discredit the truth tellers. This is a representative of America.

I think of the scene in a hospital where the counsel, the White House counsel to the president of the United States, joined by the chief of staff to the president of the United States, go to the hospital to try to browbeat the medicated attorney general who is recovering from an operation to sign off on a surveillance program that he has determined is illegal. Who would’ve thought that for four years the strongest defender of civil liberties for us was John Ashcroft? But it was. Because to his credit, in that hospital bed he said, away from me. I’m not signing that. And I’ve turned over powers to my deputy who said, no way, it’s illegal. Who would’ve imagined that that scene--what does that say about the American Republic? It is so important that we have this illegal program inaugurated we’re gonna go to the hospital bed of this poor man.

This represents, it seems, the American government today. We live in a time when the vision is the United States president says that he can determine that any American citizen, even if captured in America, is an illegal combatant. That’s it. No problem. It’s the vision, I have to say, of conservatives who’ve long mourned against executive power and abusive state power, who now want to create the national security state for who? Hillary Clinton I suppose. President Hillary Clinton, Attorney General Jamie Gorelick. I try to imagine them having all of these powers. What kind of vision of America is this?

The America today is an America where we snatch a poor German who has the unfortunate, you know, decision to go to the Balkans for holiday and he spends 5 months in a Pakistani prison, apparently enjoying the, well I wouldn’t want to call it torture, whatever it is that we provide these days, the hospitality, of the CIA and military interrogators. At which point we suddenly realize he’s the wrong guy. So of course what we do is we drop him back in the Balkans with
his passport and say oh well, we’ll refuse to be held accountable. Certainly don’t expect the German government to, you know, get any answers out of us. Of course we do more or less the same thing with a poor Canadian citizen. We managed to get him deported off to Syria and of course--now this is a government that we think is so hideous we won’t talk to it, but we’re very happy to have citizens of a democracy sent off there to be interrogated and enjoy the hospitality there. And of course now we will not be held accountable. The Canadians say it was bad information and we refuse--he’s still on the no fly list. We won’t explain. We don’t have to explain. We are, after all, the United States of America. Who is to hold us accountable?

There is the endless, endless succession of deaths of Iraqis in a raid, at a checkpoint, a bomb going off. The same in Afghanistan. These are deaths for which we should weep. These are deaths that we are, unfortunately, ultimately responsible for. Now it may very well be that war will always have awful consequences, but a war voluntarily undertaken, a war undertaken on the basis of lies, has resulted in carnage and death of innocent human beings around the world. And this is the vision of America now that is transmitted around the world. This is the vision of America that’s on every TV station. This is the vision of the world, as I think Joseph indicated last night, that’s seen in the Muslim world. This is a horror. It’s a moral horror for us and it’s a policy horror for us.

Indeed what we see is the disintegration of an entire society before our eyes, entire communities there, the Christian community for example, destroyed, half of the people driven out of their home country, neighborhoods destroyed, people tortured, all of this, all of this, inaugurated as kind of grand social engineering on the part of American policy makers who had a great theory, a great theory of how we can remake the Middle East. And by God we have remade the Middle East. And it’s also the funerals that occur every day in America, now an average of three a day, of American soldiers killed. Now these are people--these are patriots. My father was career military. My brother in law was career military. Our friends are in military. These are not evil warmongers. These are people who want to serve their country. Many of them believe in their mission, they want to do good. These are wonderful, wonderful people. And their lives are being squandered when it comes down to supporting the troops.

Yes, let’s support the troops. And how do you support them? You don’t put them into this kind of a conflict. You don’t put them into the kind of situations where they face what they do. I don’t blame soldiers who shoot at somebody approaching a checkpoint when they fear there’s a bomb in the car. We have put people in this horrible, horrible situation, the only way they can survive, only way they can protect themselves. These people, this is America today. These people, our best, people who want to serve, wonderful people, are dying. And their families and their loved ones, the ones--just watch these funerals, one after another. The children, the parents, the siblings, day after day after day. The symbol of America today then, around the world, is of endless war, a war prosecuted over the objection of allies and friends, a war increasingly opposed by those we supposedly are trying to help in Iraq. The image of America is
Guantanamo Bay, of scores of other prison camps, we don’t know where they are, or the images of planes and rendition. This is the America that other people see.

This is not the America that I recognize. This is not the America of us. This is not the America of our ideals. This is not the America of the people. I think our country, I think our Americans, are decent people, wonderful people. They want to do the best. They’re generous. This is not their America. It’s not our America. So what to do? Quite simply, we must save the Republic. I think that’s what we are facing now today. I don’t claim that we’re about to fall into a fascist dictatorship and that, you know, Dick Cheney’s going to declare martial law. No, no, I don’t think that’s it. The danger is not so much that we will see that kind of overt abuse. The danger’s much more step by step, the erosion of rights, the destruction of our values, where we become callous, where our consciences no longer work, where the fact that thousands die abroad doesn’t bother us, where we no longer question and reflect on our conduct. That’s the great danger.

And look around us. We have a president today who tells us that Korea is now the model for Iraq. And we’ve been in Korea for 57 years, which I suppose means we can be in Iraq then to at least 2060. Now wouldn’t that be a lot of fun. How many have to die? How much more terrorism? How much more destruction? How many more Americans have to die? How many more Iraqis have to die? Can that seriously be diplomacy? But then look at the alternatives. Look on the Republican side. Other than Ron Paul, who do we have? The great hopes, right, the ones to come in to save the Republican Party. It’s Fred Thompson and Newt Gingrich. Is this the Republic that we all know and love and respect? Look at the Democratic side. Hillary Clinton. Well it’s not as if Hillary Clinton’s against the war, the issue for Hillary Clinton and Obama and most of these people is not do we have war, it’s which war? Kosovo’s fine. Darfur would be fine. Oh we just don’t like George Bush’s war. The reality, I think we know, is if it was Bill Clinton who had started the Iraq war, most of the Democrats would have been applauding wildly and the Republicans would have been out there talking about Bill Clinton’s war.

What we see today is partisan politicians, hacks, people who care nothing about the Republic, people who care nothing about principle, people who are willing to sacrifice anything, essentially, for their own political ambitions. So at this time of peril we have to look beyond the differences that we have. What we have to do today is defend the essence of the American Republic. It’s a system that protects our liberty, a system based on the rule of law, a system that treats everyone justly. You don’t get sent off to a secret prison camp. Someone, someone somewhere, can step forward to protect you. It’s a system that holds people accountable, even the most powerful people in the land must be held accountable. It’s a system that seeks to protect its citizens while respecting the lives and the dignity of people around the world. It’s a system that resolutely defends us from foreign threats but also is intelligent enough to discern what are threats and how best to defend against them. It’s also a system that balances very carefully, very carefully, the sacrifice of liberties and pursuit of security.
The Constitution is not a suicide pact, it’s been said, and that’s absolutely true. On the other hand, what makes this country great, what makes it so great, is it’s a system of ordered liberty and our freedom. What makes this nation unique is, what other countries don’t have, that we start with the individual. We’re not part of the king or something else, whereas Britain, they know. The official secret’s out. We have these things, and we have something very fundamental here that we must protect. We are not like other nations in that way. And that’s the essence of America. It’s a system that resolutely deals with foreign threats while at the same time rigorously, rigorously, reassesses our own conduct. And recognizes that sometimes, sometimes Americans, American leaders, American institutions, make mistakes. And when they do, we admit it. We repent. We change course. We do not act as if we’ve been anointed from on high to rule the world unquestioned by anyone else.

Now the practical task in front of us is enormous. We need a foreign policy that befits the Republic. We need to restore the constitutional checks and balances. We need to hedge any restriction on liberty with safeguards and oversight to protect us against abuses by those who are unscrupulous or too zealous. We must reverse the centralization of power that we’ve seen. But I think we need more. We need an attitude of humility, not of arrogance, in our dealings with the rest of the world. We need a commitment to not only learn about history, read about history, but to truly learn from it in terms of our conduct. We need a sense of deep repentance about what’s been done in America’s name. We also need to hold our leaders to a standard that befits the leaders of a moral free society. The society that our politicians are leading is a great society, they should be held to conduct accordingly. Again, it’s not enough to say they aren’t just a Stalin or Adolph Hitler, but I want them to be appropriately said, they are an American president, they’re an American Vice President. They’re representatives of us, the people, in a republic.

To whom much is given, much is expected, scripture tells us. And surely that is the case when we live in the mightiest, the most prosperous, the most dominant, most powerful, richest nation on earth. Too much has been given us. Our advantages, our opportunities, they’re extraordinary compared to anywhere else around the world. You know it’s a cliché, often, to say we live in a critical moment of time in history, but I think at this point that cliché is accurate. We do live in a critical time. The U.S. Republic itself is at risk. It’s at risk not from evil monsters, people, not at risk from Mao Tse Tung. It’s not at risk from great dictators, but it’s at risk from men of zeal, well intentioned, seemingly dedicated to our well being in the nation’s security. It is these people, some of whom are our neighbors, some of whom may be friends, many of whom may be colleagues. It is these people who are putting the country at risk.

These are the people who launched an aggressive war. These are the people who destroyed another society abroad. These are the people who loosed the horrors of war. These are the people who’ve spawned more terrorism. These are the people who’ve sacrificed precious American lives. These are the people who’ve wrecked our constitutional balance. These are the
people who have magnified executive power. These are the people who’ve demonized their opponents and their critics. These are the people who have given away our precious liberties for nothing, not making us more secure. These are the people who’ve jailed the innocent, who’ve squandered America’s international reputation and have demanded, demanded, they not be held accountable. These are the people, and they are well meaning men of zeal. These are not evil, these are not monsters, these are the most dangerous, dangerous sorts of people, because they are not so readily recognized for the harm that they do.

To whom much is given much is expected. We cannot alone save the Republic, the people in this room. But it cannot be saved without the efforts of people like yourselves. If not us, who? asked Ronald Reagan. If not now, when? Many of you have given much, you’ve given financially, you’ve given of your time, you’ve committed yourselves to the cause of liberty in many forums. Many of you may very well wonder what good is it to do more. Look at what we see around us. Despite our efforts, look at what we see. But we have no choice. The American Republic needs you. It needs all of us. So as we leave this conference let us all ask if not us, who? If not now, when? Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you. I think we have time for a few questions.

Q: Thank you very much for the speech. It was very illuminating. And you did refer to the Berlin Wall, I wondered if you would be good enough to comment on the war that’s being constructed right now between the United States and Mexico to cover about 30% of the frontier? Thank you.

Doug Bandow: Now the immigration issue is one that--I mean the irony of course with that wall is we’re keeping people out as opposed to, you know, preventing our own people from escaping. Well the theory anyway, the theory, the theory, you know, it’s--we’re not--the barbed wire is outward, not inward. My view on immigration, broadly speaking, is I think immigrants are good for us, I think they enrich us. I think the challenge for us is, number one, a welfare state, that… You know, my father lives in southern California. There are an awful lot of babies born in southern California emergency rooms, where the challenge of course is you have these--they’re coming from immigrants over the border. And what do we do? We can’t turn them away. You’re not going to turn away a pregnant woman. On the other hand, do the American taxpayers have to pay for all of this?

I think there’s also the challenge of socializing institutions. I worry about a society where, you know, you don’t even have to learn enough English to vote. I mean, my view is, whatever you speak at home I don’t care. I mean I like the idea of Vietnam town and Korea town. I think all this is wonderful. But the notion that you have 60 or 70 different language ballots--so I think the questions to my mind is, you know, how do you ensure that people are properly socialized, and
how do you make sure that we don’t have a huge economic drain in terms of people coming over and using services.

But I think, broadly speaking, I know it’s a controversial issue. It’s a controversial issue certainly among conservatives and even among libertarians, but I generally think we are enriched by immigration. I think that the issue especially with Mexico is a large inflow and what that does, and I do think there’s a very real problem when it’s illegal, because of the whole set of kind of incentives that grow up as part of that. I don’t have an easy answer there. I think to some degree it makes sense to have a larger, better kind of legal process, but also trying to restrict illegal flow, making your, you know, but--and that’s kind of a compromise you try to set. I don’t have a good answer there. Broadly speaking I think immigrants--I mean these are, for the most part, a people who want to come over and work, they want to do good, you know. They’re family people. So I tend not to view them as a threat, even though I recognize it’s a very hot political issue.

Q: Picking up on that subject, do you think that the reason that it’s come to the fore now is that it’s being driven by the fear that if we don’t seal the borders all the terrorists are gonna come across? Do you think that that’s part of it and can you comment on that?

Doug Bandow: Well certainly one of the arguments that’s used on immigration is the fear of terrorists. I mean of course, you know, none of the folks who piloted the--and took the airplanes had anything to do with--they didn’t come over the border from Mexico I mean. So for the most part--I mean there is a legitimate problem there because you have people overstaying visas and other sorts of stuff that I think has got a very different issue from immigration. I mean there’s some concern about Canada, you know, where people might come over the border from Canada, but the reality is we have a very porous country. One of the challenges for a free society is how do you defend yourself? I mean--and it’s not easy because the very freedoms that we take for granted and that make us great also make it easier for people to sneak over the border and do other things. So I think we have to work with that. I don’t think the immigration reform that’s going on in Capitol Hill, whatever you think of that, has anything to do with terrorism. Strikes me there are issues that one can argue about in terms of visas and whether you should target particular countries and a number of these things which make a lot more sense in terms of how do you try to make sure the wrong people don’t show up that have basically nothing to do with the inflow of Mexicans over the border. That I think is much more--I think it’s kind of a sovereignty issue and an economic issue. I don’t think it’s a terrorism issue. I mean there are legitimate issues on terrorism, that’s not it.

Q: I wanted to thank you for crediting and quoting Ronald Reagan. I sense in this group there’s not a whole lot of 100 percent credence with him. I worked for him for 2 years in Sacramento, came very much to admire the man, and had several conversations with him, one of which had to
do with what he would do to keep the power elite away from him once he became president. He looked me right in the eye and said Howard, I know exactly who you’re talking about. There are 19 of those people around Carter and we’re going to have to do a whole lot better than that. He did indeed. I went home and got my Council on Foreign Relations and Trilateral Chart out and counted 19 that he had mentioned right on that chart. That man did his homework. To me he was a real hero and I thank you for admiring him.

Q: Why has there not been another attack on us in this time from Bin Laden? Are they weaker than we think? Is it intentional? Do they think they’re gaining elsewhere without awakening us, etc. And secondly if there is another real terrorist blow what would be the reaction inside the country? Do we go further right? Do we lash out as some of the late night, so called conservatives think? Oh bomb every Muslim city or Mecca. I mean what would be the reaction here?

**Doug Bandow:** Well I think one of the bits of good news is it’s not easy to mount a terrorist attack in America. I mean among other things, the people who are most likely to want to harm us, I think, you know, it’s hard to show up over here if you don’t speak English and to do all the sorts of things-- I mean the-- what happened with 9/11. I mean they spent a lot of time plotting and, you know, we weren’t expecting that sort of thing. I think that the world we live in today is different. I think we’re still very vulnerable. I mean again, being an open society, I mean I’m actually surprised that they haven’t simply gone after kind of soft targets, shopping malls, schools, any number of things. But I do think there’s good news there, that it turns out, I suspect, it’s just harder, harder for them to do it. And I think that one of the parts of that is our Muslim community tends to be pretty much assimilated with America, and indeed most of our Arabs are Christian, not Muslim. So kind of the complexion of America’s Islamic and Arab populations is different from Europe. So these are Americans. So these are not people who want to see terrorism. They don’t share, you know, the same view there. And I think-- I mean it could be strategy I suppose. I have trouble believing that Bin Laden would not mount an operation if he thought he could. He may very well believe that it’s more cost effective to be bombing the Spanish and some of the others and, you know, it may be easier and it may get more political out of it. On the other question, what would happen if a big bomb went off. I think- my guess is in the short term that it would probably rally around the president and the authoritarian kind of response. In the long term I hope that people would step back and say wait a minute, didn’t they do all of this stuff and go to war and all these crazy things to stop this and look what happened? But I think it might cause more people to look at kind of, you know, Ron Paul’s argument that’s finally gotten out there about what we do does matter. It doesn’t justify terrorism, but it sure helps you understand why some people might want to do you ill. So my hope is that there would be a more reflective response. One more? Okay.

Q: Hello. I’m Linda from Georgia. And I guess you saw that I am happy that there’s someone that respects the troops that defend our country and that…
Doug Bandow: It’s my family.

Q: Whose coffin is draped by the American flag. I’m the mother of a Marine. I am personally friends with three people who have gave up sons in this war. And not only have they given up sons in this Iraqi war, I have two personal friends right now whose sons reenlisted to serve in Iraq. I would like for you to explain to this crowd that the United States, which represents only 5% of the world’s population, could not have survived for this conference to even be held without the strong military that protects us today.

Doug Bandow: I think that we owe an enormous debt of gratitude to those who serve our nation. I mean it’s my family. My associate pastor is a Marine Corps reservist who’s activated. One of my former racquetball partners is, you know, a Navy reservist. A neighbor across the street, takes care of my house when I travel, is a JAG Corps officer, works at the Pentagon. I think we should have enormous respect and that when we think and argue about American foreign policy, that that is not a criticism of the troops. That these are people who do serve us and in my view, for the most part, are motivated by very, very basic patriotic and humanitarian considerations. I mean the best sorts of people I have dealt with over the years are people in the service, just wonderful human beings. And I think that’s something that we all should make very clear. And I think you’re right. The impressions that can be given off--I’m very critical of American foreign policy. I’m very critical of prior wars we’ve gotten into, not because of the troops, these are people who heroically came to the standard that was raised. I would argue the problem is the politicians who raised the standard, that our politicians have put at risk and have killed patriotic, wonderful human beings for causes that were not worth it. That in fact the noblement-- I mean our soldiers are noble, and the sacrifices, the sacrifices they made I think were noble. The causes they were entered into were not. And we need to make very clear that we distinguish between-- I mean these poor mothers. I mean we’re not criticizing them or their sons, we are criticizing people in Washington, many of whom have of course--have worked very hard to stay away from the slightest danger of any war and being in any uniform at any time. These are the people who we should be criticizing and focusing on, not the people at the ground who do the dirty work, the kind of stuff, frankly, I would not want to do and my guess is most people here wouldn't want to do.