



THE FUTURE
— of —
FREEDOM FOUNDATION

www.fff.org

How Major U.S. Neo-Imperialist Wars End

by Robert Higgs

The following is a transcript of a speech given at The Future of Freedom Foundation's June 2008 conference, "Restoring the Republic: Foreign Policy & Civil Liberties" held in Reston, Virginia.

Jacob Hornberger: Robert Higgs is Senior Fellow in Political Economy at The Independent Institute. He received his Ph.D. in economics from Johns Hopkins University. He's the author of eight books and the editor or co-editor of six others, including my longtime personal favorite, *Crisis and Leviathan*, and his most recent book, *Depression, War, and Cold War*. His articles have appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Financial Times*, and many, many others. Please welcome Robert Higgs.

Robert Higgs: Well, that opening talk by Bumper was rousing, as we would expect it be, and my being next is what's known as balance. And those of you who have heard me talk before will understand what I'm driving at here. In any event, it's an honor for me to be included among the speakers at this conference. The speakers here include many distinguished and courageous opponents of the present wars and of the government's conduct of the so-called war on terror. Some of them are working at the barricades to expose or stop the government's unjust actions, and I hold them in the highest regard for their services to humanity.

My own work is much less important. I work not as these heroic activists do, but only as a writer, editor, and analyst. Whatever I may have to offer is aimed not at stopping the government in its tracks, however much I wish I had the power to do so, but at helping the general public to understand better the situation in which we find ourselves. Such efforts, however, may still have some value because unless we

understand our situation correctly, our political actions and other efforts in the service of peace may be misdirected and hence fruitless. With this understanding as background, I will offer my remarks here today.

All wars end. But someone must bring them to an end. Someone in authority must order the men to stop fighting, or the fighters themselves must decide to stop fighting, even if doing so requires that they disobey standing orders. Either way, someone makes a decision to bring the war to an end. And we may presume that the actor makes the decision only because he believes that it serves his interest, however he may conceive of that interest.

In general, in our day, nations do not go to war spontaneously, nor do they lay down their arms spontaneously. National leaders make those decisions, and they make them in their own interest. Any other view is romantic and obscurantist. Notwithstanding the torrents of propaganda by which leaders and their court intellectuals attempt to represent themselves as servants of the nation, as embodiments of the national will, as executors of the public interest, even if political and military leaders were inclined to put the public's interest ahead of their own, they would have no way to identify such a foggy and multifaceted entity. Each individual has many interests, and different individuals have different sets of interests. And nobody has discovered a defensible method of aggregating all those interests into a single social interest.

Although we may feel confident that, for the great multitude, peace is preferred to war, other things being equal, even this claim is contestable. Anyone who circulates in American society knows full well that many Americans love war and killing. And other things being equal, they would be delighted to have the U.S. military constantly engaged in slaughtering people around the world. Fortunately, such individuals count no more heavily than their peace-loving neighbors, so long as they do not hold positions of high political authority. The people do not decide questions of war and peace directly, and even their indirect effect on the decision process is usually tenuous and variable.

As a first approximation, the realistic political scientist may take for granted that in this country, the masses don't count. In most cases, they can be brought to acquiesce in anything the movers and shakers dictate that they do, notwithstanding a modicum of grumbling and disobedience at the margins. Although some people recognize that specific self-interested leaders make the decisions that plunge the nation into war, many fewer people employ this insight systematically in seeking to understand why wars end. Too often, people simply presume that one side unequivocally defeats the other, and therefore the other capitulates because it has no capacity for further fighting. Rarely, however, is this depiction accurate.

Even in horribly damaged and occupied societies, individuals may continue to fight in some fashion, if only as loosely organized civilian insurgents or guerrillas combating an occupation force. In 1945, for example, the Germans and the Japanese might have continued to fight in various ways, and indeed the U.S. authorities were surprised when they did not do so. In Iraq, during the U.S. occupation of the past five years, resistance has been stout, if temporarily fluctuating and spatially shifting. Given the circumstances there, it seems unlikely that the resistance fighters will give up completely until U.S. and other foreign forces leave the country. Therefore, if the war is to end, rather than to continue indefinitely as Senator John McCain is pleased to contemplate, that end will come only when U.S. leaders determine that its continuation no longer serves their interest.

I'm setting aside here the possibility that there be a general mutiny in which U.S. armed forces refused to continue fighting. Although this event is conceivable, I can't foresee its occurrence in prevailing circumstances. Therefore, the question becomes, what events might bring the U.S. authorities to conclude that stopping the war serves their interest? We have two important precedents for the ending of a major U.S. neo-imperialist war: the Korean War and the Vietnam War, especially the latter. Although neither case provides a perfect analogy, the comparisons may still be worthwhile as we try to identify the events and influences that bring U.S. political leaders to perceive that continuation of such a war no longer serves their interest. I want to speak now for a while about the Iraq War as a catastrophic success.

On the campaign trail in October 2004, Vice President Dick Cheney created a small stir when speaking of the Iraq War. He declared, "I think it has been a remarkable success story to date, when you look at what has been accomplished overall." In view of the rampant violence raging in Iraq, the widespread devastation of the country's human and material resources, and the dim prospects for its future peace and prosperity, Cheney's statement seemed bizarre. And the Democrats seized on it as still another example of the disconnect between the Bush administration and reality. Yet, on closer inspection, we can see that the war has indeed been a huge success, though not in the way that the vice president intended to claim.

In a characteristically unwitting way, President George W. Bush himself stumbled upon a resolution of the seeming paradox when he told *Time* in the summer of 2004 that the war had proved to be a "catastrophic success." By that oxymoron, he sought to convey the idea that in the invasion, the U.S. military forces had overcome the enemy unexpectedly quickly, "being so successful so fast, that an enemy that should have surrendered or been done in escaped and lived to fight another day." Although this hypothesis seems far-fetched as an explanation of the nature and extent of the ongoing resistance waged against the U.S. occupation forces and their collaborators in Iraq, the term "catastrophic success" does express the character of the war precisely. We need only bear in mind that the catastrophe affects one set

of people, whereas the success accrues to an entirely different set. Moreover, to appreciate the war's success, we must keep in the forefront of our thinking the instrumental rationality of its perpetrators. We must ask, who bears the responsibility for launching and continuing the war? What are these individuals trying to achieve, and have they in fact achieved these objectives?

Having answered these questions correctly, we shall be obliged to conclude that the war has been a huge success for those who brought it about, however disastrous it has been for many others, especially for the unfortunate people of Iraq. A short list of the worst perpetrators must include the president and his close advisors; the neo-conservative intriguers who stirred up and continue to stoke elite and popular opinion in support of the war; the members of Congress who abdicated their exclusive constitutional responsibility to declare war, authorized the president to take the nation to war if he pleased, and then finance the war by a series of enormous appropriations from the Treasury; certain politically well-placed persons in the munitions petrochemical and financial industries; and members of other interest groups who have chosen to support, sometimes for reasons based on religious beliefs, a war that they perceive as promoting Israel's interests or as helping to bring about fulfillment of biblical prophecy.

Each of these responsible parties has gained greatly from the war. President Bush sought, above all, to be re-elected. In his 2004 campaign, he made no apologies for the war. Indeed, he sought to take credit for launching it and for waging it relentlessly since the invasion. Vice President Cheney also campaigned actively on the same basis. Bush and Cheney's efforts yielded them the prize they sought. In reshuffling his cabinet for a second term, the president retained the belligerent Donald Rumsfeld as Secretary of Defense. Paul Wolfowitz, Douglas Feith, and other key warmongers remained in their top positions at the Pentagon. And other neocon desk warriors such as Lewis (Scooter) Libby, Cheney's chief of staff, and Elliott Abrams, a special assistant to the president at the National Security Council, retained their important offices elsewhere in the government-- continued success for one and all. Even George "slam-dunk" Tenet, who resigned as Director of Central Intelligence of his own accord, not because the president held him accountable for the manifest failures of U.S. intelligence efforts during his tenure, later emerged from the darkness to accept the Presidential Medal of Freedom in recognition of what the president described as Tenet's tireless efforts in service to the nation.

Members of Congress had no regrets about authorizing Bush to attack Iraq or about continuing to fund the war lavishly. These career politicians craved nothing more than they craved re-election to office, and nearly all the incumbents who sought re-election in 2004 gained this supreme objective. All but one, Tom Daschle, of the 26 incumbent senators who ran, and all but six of the 402 incumbent representatives who ran, succeeded, outcomes that imply a re-election rate greater than 98 percent for incumbents who ran in both houses combined. Backing the war obviously proved entirely compatible with, if not

absolutely essential to, the legislators' quest for continued tenure in office. If, as a consequence of their political actions in the service on their personal ambitions, thousands of Iraqi children had to lose their eyesight or their legs or even their lives, well, c'est la guerre. Politics is no place for sissies.

While authorizing enormous increases in military spending during the past seven years, members of Congress have helped themselves to generous servings of pork from the defense appropriations bills they have passed. According to Winslow Wheeler of the Center for Defense Information in Washington, D.C., "by the time Congress had finished with the fiscal year 2005 Appropriations Bill for the Defense Department, House and Senate members had added more than 2,000 earmarks for home district projects, thereby dishing out to themselves a record-setting \$8.9 billion in pork" to use in buying votes from their constituents.

Nor did they stop at that point, because each succeeding year has offered a new opportunity for more of the same. And in this workaday plundering of the taxpayers for wholly self-serving reasons, congressional doves and well as hawks, Democrats as well as Republicans, relish the opportunity to act as pork hawks. Between fiscal years 2001 and 2007, national defense outlays, defined narrowly in the government's official reports, rose by nearly 88 percent, and that's 50 percent after official adjustment for inflation. This still-continuing upsurge ranks with the great military buildups of the 1960s and 1980s. The beauty of all this increased spending, of course, is that every dollar of it lands in somebody's pocket. Those to whom the pockets belong make a practice of lobbying hard for increased military spending and they're prepared to compensate in various ways, some legal and some not, the politicians and bureaucrats who steer the money their way.

Procurement of goods and services from private contractors has been a major item in the increased military spending of recent years. In fiscal year 2000, the top ten contractors together received prime contract awards of almost \$51 billion. Just six years later, in fiscal year 2006, they got nearly \$108 billion, an increase of 113 percent, or about 70 percent even after generous adjustment for inflation. A useful gauge of how greatly the run-up in the volume of military contracting enriched the owners of these companies, who include, by the way, many members of Congress, is the Philadelphia Stock Exchange's Defense Sector Index. This measure tracks the stock prices of 16 leading aerospace and defense companies, including Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Northrop Grumman, General Dynamics, and Raytheon, which are the biggest boys on this block nowadays. At the time of the U.S. attack on Iraq in March 2003, this index began to rise steadily, and it continued to rise with only brief and slight setbacks until the general market downturn late last year, by which time it had increased by approximately 185 percent. During the same period, the Dow Jones Industrials and Standard & Poor's 500 Indexes had advanced less

than half that much, and the NASDAQ Composite Index, only about two-thirds as much. In short, the past five years have brought a bonanza to the merchants of death.

Lest anyone think that an aspiring smaller fellow cannot play in this major league, let Halliburton serve as an inspiring counterexample. Back in fiscal year 2002, this company ranked 37th among the Defense Department's prime contractors. Thanks to the war and Halliburton's foot in the door as an oil field service expert and caterer to the troops in Iraq and its environs, the company leaped to 7th place in the rankings in fiscal year 2003, with prime contracts in that year valued at nearly \$4 billion. Furthermore, even this outstanding corporate success seems to have been but a springboard to greater accomplishments. By the end of 2004, Halliburton's contracts for Iraq work had accumulated to nearly \$11 billion, with more in the works. During the three fiscal years from 2004 through 2006, the company received prime contract awards from the Department of Defense valued at approximately \$20 billion, and in fiscal year 2006, it ranked 6th in the Pentagon's list of top contractors. Perhaps it helps to have friends in high places.

Notwithstanding the success that Halliburton, Bechtel, DynCorp, and other old boy service contractors have achieved in connection with the Iraq War, the really big military money still goes to the suppliers of whiz-bang weapons platforms and related products-- aircraft, rockets, ships, tanks and other combat vehicles, satellites, and communications and other electronic equipment, along with the software maintenance training and upgrades for these products. In this area of institutionalized cronyism, the living dead rise from the Cold War graveyard to haunt the halls of Congress whenever the Defense Appropriation Subcommittees are in session. You might wonder how the military will employ, say, an FA-22 fighter, a B-2 bomber, or an SSN-774 attack submarine to protect you from a small nuke or a vial of anthrax slipped into the country along with the many shipments of contraband that enter unseen by government agents every day.

But never mind, just keep repeating, there is a connection between the war on terror and the hundreds of billions of dollars being spent on useless Cold War weaponry. It's important to Congress, the Pentagon, and the big contractors that you make this connection. As for the Christian dispensationalist soldiers marching onward as to war, and in this case it's more than a metaphor, in order to ease the worries of God's chosen people about Israel's hostile neighbors or to hasten the glorious mayhem of the prophesied end times, suffice it to say that these fundamentalists work hard to elect their favorite man to the presidency, and they succeed in doing so. Indeed, one can scarcely imagine a viable national politician who would come closer to satisfying this interest group than George W. faith-based Bush.

In sum, when we ask ourselves who took the United States to war, and who keeps it engaged there, and what those individuals hope to gain by doing so, we quickly come to appreciate what a roaring success this venture has been, and continues to be, for all of them. In view of the endless death and destruction being visited upon the hapless people of Iraq, however, not to mention the great and growing number of deaths, injuries, and mental disorders being suffered by U.S. troops in the Mesopotamian killing fields, we might well describe this adventure as a catastrophic success.

Turn now to discuss war weariness. War weariness is the prevailing public sentiment in the third stage of a major U.S. neo-imperialist war. In this prolonged stage, most people have grown tired of the war, they've surrendered their prior illusions about the glorious outcomes it was supposed to bring, they've come to understand that for them, it is worse than pointless, that its costs have been real and it's benefits a chimera and that it seems likely to damage them further as it continues. Yet, the war goes on and on, with no end in sight.

We are now well into this stage of the present war in Iraq. I recall all too well the war weariness of the late 1960s and early 1970s. By 1968, the Americans had come to understand that no good outcome lay in store for them in Vietnam. The war was unwinnable in any meaningful sense, yet its daily horrors continued with no prospect of stopping; more bombing, more shelling, more close-contact combat in the jungles and rice paddies. Each year, tens of thousands of young Americans were wounded, killed, or taken prisoner, many of them draftees, sucked into the maelstrom as de facto military slaves, and hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese and other Asians were slaughtered. Each horrible day was followed by another horrible day, each horrible month by another horrible month, and each horrible year by another horrible year, until weighted down by despair, one wondered whether the madness would ever end.

The war in Iraq now elicits the same hopeless feeling. By major neo-imperialist wars, I mean, so far, those in Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq, long before them, in the Philippines from 1899 to 1902, the American people had a foretaste of neoimperialist wars to come. But the Philippine War never reached a great enough magnitude or affected the general public deeply enough to become a large factor in the public's outlook on national affairs. Then as now, some people actually approved of the war from start to finish. In those days, racism was more flagrant and redder in tooth and claw than it is now, which helps to explain why so many Americans supported a totally inexcusable imperialist venture.

In Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq, the U.S. experience presented a similar course of events. In each case, except in Iraq, where the conflict has yet to run its full course, the war moved through four stages. One, upper echelon plotting; two, outbreak and early combat; three, sustained combat and strategic stalemate; and four, cessation of combat and some kind of workable resolution. The stages may vary in

length and form. Stage one, in which U.S. leaders and their official and unofficial advisors concoct their war plans, may go on for years, as it did for the present Iraq War. Or it may go on for only a short while, as it did for the Korean War, when U.S. diplomatic blunders and unanticipated events provoked the North Korean invasion and triggered U.S. engagement in the fighting. Stage two may occupy weeks or months, whereas stage three always drags on for years. Stage four may take different forms. The tense, heavily armed truce in Korea bore no resemblance to the hasty, unceremonious, and humiliating U.S. exodus from Vietnam, yet each outcome served the same purpose, to silence the guns.

Each stage elicits or corresponds to a particular public mood. Because stage one takes place with little or no public awareness, it goes along with blissful public ignorance. Few people appreciate that their national leaders and want-to-be leaders secreted in their inner sanctums are up to no good. The onset of stage two invariably ignites great public enthusiasm as the people rally around their national leaders, support the troops, and reflexively accept the tales they are told about the enemy's wickedness and their own nation's blamelessness and its well-grounded justification for sending its armed forces into combat. Note, in neoimperialist wars by definition, the fighting always occurs over there, where it remains conveniently out of sight of the American public, which then relies heavily on what its leaders say about relevant events and conditions on the ground-- declarations that are, at best, biased and distorted accounts, and at worst, brazen and calculated lies.

In stage three, as the war drags on, the casualties and the financial costs accumulate, the cakewalk's failed to eventuate, and hence the initial enthusiasm for the war fades. When military reversals, gross leadership mistakes, and embarrassing U.S. atrocities come to light, the public shifts even more quickly from approval to disapproval. However disillusioned and embittered the public may become, though, it cannot, or perhaps it simply will not, do anything effective to change the government's course. Even if the war-making president is chased from office, as Lyndon Johnson was, in effect, in 1968, his successor may simply continue the U.S. engagement, as Richard Nixon did for many years, widening the war in the process. Once the U.S. government goes to war, the public is simply stuck with it, because in this country, the public will not actually rebel against the government, and nothing short of rebellion can ensure an affirmative government response to the public's preferences.

We all know that the public for years now has been overwhelmingly opposed to retaining the American troops in Iraq, but so far as I can tell, that has had absolutely no effect whatsoever on political actions. No president will admit that his decision to undertake the war was a mistake from the get-go. Notice, for example, George W. Bush's complete, intractable dismissal of every sort of public disapproval of his war in Iraq, despite polls that show huge drops in support for the war and in approval of his leadership, and despite the Democratic takeover of the House and Senate in the midterm elections of

2006. He continued to order the armed forces to fight, and they continued to obey. In our system of government, no one can stop this hell-bent Caesar. People can only hope that when his term expires, he will actually step down and that his successor will set a new course, as Dwight Eisenhower did in 1953.

In general, however, to repeat my earlier point, only when the ruling political elites conclude that their personal interests, and of course the interests of the special interest coalition that props them up financially, will suffer if the war is continued will they act decisively to end it on the best terms available. Thus does stage four finally arrive, bringing the general public a sense of relief, although in the higher political circles, leaders and strategists always launch into finger-pointing and blame-casting with regard to who lost China this time around. We see that beginning already.

These characteristic stages of U.S. neoimperialist war are not merely descriptive, but also reflect the political logic of the U.S. system of government. Most important, they arise from what I call the reality of rule, which is to say, from the government's effectively having gone to war permanently against the bulk of the American people, as well as episodically against unfortunate groups of foreigners in the Third World, where the U.S. government seeks to establish or maintain its hegemony.

By saying that the government has placed itself in a state of war against most of the people, namely all those outside its own supportive coalition, I mean no more and no less than John Locke meant when he wrote about this condition in his *Second Treatise of Government*. And I'll quote a passage: "Whenever the legislators endeavor to take away and destroy the property of the people," by which Locke means lives, liberties, and estates, "and to reduce them to slavery under arbitrary power," as done most recently in this country by the Military Commissions Act of 2006, "they put themselves into a state of war with the people, who are thereupon absolved from any further obedience. The same holds true also concerning the supreme executor, who having a double trust put in him, both to have a part in the legislative and the supreme execution of the law, acts against both when he goes about to set up his own arbitrary will," which we now call the inherent powers of the presidency, "as the law of society."

As Locke argued, people cannot be presumed to have consented to the exercise of government powers that do not protect but rather destroy their natural rights to life, liberty, and property. And therefore, when the government takes such destructive actions, it acts as a mere robber or murderer. That is, it places itself in a state of war against them. Can anyone seriously deny that the U.S. government has chronically violated the people's natural rights to life, liberty, and property from its very inception, and that recently, its audacity in this regard has risen to heights that the absolute monarchs of the old world would have envied? Because the government is always in a state of war against most of the people, whom it exploits and torments for the profit or pleasure of its supporting coalition. It invariably finds that as the

immediate fear and knee-jerk nationalism of stage two wear away, the people come to see more and more plainly that they are being sacrificed on the altar of their rulers' ambition, folly, and corruption. They understand increasingly that they are being made to play the patsy for the reptilian creatures who control the government. In short, they begin to see, as F.A. Hayek warned in *The Road to Serfdom*, that under a system of unchecked government powers, the worst really have got on top and that the masses down on the bottom are in danger of suffocation under the crushing weight of gross, impudent oppression.

Yet, notwithstanding this growing awareness, the people have been so deeply conditioned and so callously propagandized to equate loyalty to country and loyalty to the government, that they hesitate to act vigorously in their own self-defense. Many fall for cheap tricks that divert their attention or shift the blame for their troubles onto socially marginalized or unpopular groups, such as, currently, the immigrants and Muslims. They are also bombarded ceaselessly with official disinformation, which the cooperative mainstream news media dish out in ample servings each hour of each day. The government, we are told, has never made any serious mistakes, and if it ever should err, it will do so only with the best of intentions.

Holding actions of this sort help the government to retard the growth of public resentment against its crimes as stage three drags on. So, in the wake of the 2006 elections, in which one faction of the war party displaced the other in control of Congress, we had scant grounds for expecting a great change of course in the conduct of the Iraq War. The Democrats had announced grand plans to fleece and bully the public in the greater service of the leading special interest groups that helped to elect them, and the Republicans, eminently pleased to serve as the loyal, not much oppressed, not much opposed opposition, looked forward to bipartisan cooperation in logrolling those splendid 1,500-page statutes in which every species of outrage and robbery is declared to be the law of the land.

The war was certain to continue, at least for another two years and perhaps for another five or ten years. And why not? And why not? Only the people at large, those beyond the precincts of the ruling figures and their major supporters, stood to lose. And what member of the power elite really gives a damn about them? Perhaps, given the people's slow-witted willingness to tolerate their own oppression, these exploited outsiders really don't care much about themselves. They have their creature comforts, and their amusements, so the sacrifice of their rights to life, liberty, and property does not strike them as an especially big deal. In any event, they imagine that when the government's hammer does come down hard, it will strike their Muslim neighbor or the Mexican immigrant on the other side of town, not themselves.

Let us think now briefly about what might induce U.S. leaders to end the war. What might cause our government's leaders to reach a new conclusion about what serves their personal interest? Several

developments might turn the trick; as I said before, all wars end. Nearly all of them, these developments, work by heightening the public's anger with their leaders' decision to continue the war. And I would submit that Americans aren't very angry about the war in Iraq right now. Some of us are, but we're a small minority. Historically, the decisive development in similar situations has been the accumulation of public costs, especially the costs in life and limb.

In both the Korean War and the Vietnam War, the public's disfavor of the engagement closely tracked the accumulation of casualties. As political scientist John Mueller showed in his book, *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion*, "Every time American casualties increased by a factor of 10, support for the war dropped by about 15 percentage points" in the polls. Support for the present war has dropped dramatically since its beginning. Indeed, as Mueller has noted recently, "Casualty for casualty, support has declined far more quickly than it did during either the Korean War or the Vietnam War." Yet, it seems to me that the intensity of the public's abhorrence of this war is much less than it was during the revulsion against the Vietnam War. One reason the public has continued to tolerate the leaders' continued prosecution of the war in Iraq is that the casualties have not been nearly so great by an order of magnitude as they were in Korea and Vietnam. So far, somewhat more than 4,000 U.S. military personnel have died in Iraq. That amounts to only one death for every 75,000 persons living in the United States, and therefore the loss of life has not cut deeply into the public's psyche.

Most Americans have not been personally acquainted with anyone killed in the war. The vastly greater loss of Iraqi lives seems to have made much less impression on Americans. As Mueller notes, "The military has worked enterprisingly to keep Americans from seeing pictures of body bags or flag-draped coffins, in the hope that this will somehow arrest the decline in enthusiasm for the war effort." Sad to say, the public may not turn decisively, which is to say, intensely and angrily, against the leaders' continued prosecution of this war until many more American soldiers have died. Economic costs have also mounted, and they have loomed relatively much larger in this war than in the earlier wars in Korea and Vietnam. Who says the military leaders never learn? They've certainly learned how to increase hugely the financial costs of fighting a war. Estimates of the cost to date vary widely, depending on how one accounts for various joint, indirect, and entailed costs, but a total cost to date in the neighborhood of a trillion dollars, a trillion dollars so far, is not implausible. And delayed costs, including those associated with decades of care for the war's legions of physically and mentally disabled, will add enormously to the total cost.

In earlier wars, even though the costs were relatively greater in blood than in dollars, the public eventually wearied of the economic sacrifices entailed by the financial expenses of continued fighting. Economist Hugh Mosley concluded that the Johnson administration "was reluctant to resort to increase taxes to finance the war for fear of losing public support for its policy of military escalation." Historian

Stephen Ambrose wrote that President Nixon "realized that for economic reasons, the war was simply costing too much, and for the sake of domestic peace and tranquility, he had to cut back on the American commitment to Vietnam." The retrenchment was "forced on him by public opinion."

If the current recession, or stagflation, if that's what it is, worsens, the public may well object more strenuously to the government's squandering of such vast amounts of tax money on a senseless continuation of the war in Iraq. When people's purses are not so full, they may resent every additional dollar spent on the war more than they did previously. Ultimately, they may become so angry that they will take actions to punish severely the political leaders who continue to support the war. Serious political challengers might attract a mass following by embracing the example of Eisenhower, who promised in 1952 to end the enormously unpopular war in Korea, and after he took office, kept his promise expeditiously.

So far, however, this prospect appears extremely unlikely. When substantial negative feedback begins to jeopardize the incumbent's personal job security, not to speak of the respect and fawning the electorate lavishes on them, they will begin to take notice and to discount more heavily the contributions from big defense contractors, big financial establishments, petrochemical companies, and other high rollers who've encouraged them to stay the hopeless course, though not hopeless for these special interests, of course. As I've noted, the war's been a bonanza for them. George W. Bush parlayed a campaign of fearmongering into his re-election in 2004. But unless another major terrorist attack occurs in the United States, the public will grow increasingly resistant to such appeals and more eager to throw the rascals out as the war's costs continue to mount.

As we can see already, however, the candidates in the next presidential election offer no hope whatsoever of these outcomes. It is terribly unfortunate that escalating costs in blood and money are the only proven means of bringing the general public to resist strongly their political leaders who are committed to a continuation of an unnecessary, unwise, and immoral war. Some of us wish that rational argument, cogent evidence, and humane sentiment would persuade a preponderance of the public to demand an end to the war. History suggests, however, that only personal grief and economic pain will induce the American public to act against their perfidious leaders. Needless to say, if the public remains as passive and as easily bamboozled as it has been during the past seven years, the war will continue, maybe even for the 100 years in which Senator McCain declares that the U.S. occupation of Iraq would be "fine with me." Thank you very much.

W1: Thank you very much, Mr. Higgs, for the nice talk. I have a question. The word, "neo"-- "neocon" and "neoimperialist"-- has been used. Could you define that term, please?

Robert Higgs: Well, I think the neocons have pretty much defined themselves by their personalities and their actions. If you want a living embodiment, I'd say Paul Wolfowitz is your best model. And many of the other leading figures have much in common with Wolfowitz. As for neoimperialist, I have in mind the kind of imperialism the United States has carried out, especially since World War II, but to some extent earlier as well. That is to say, unlike the European powers of the centuries before the last one, who went out into the Third World and established colonies that they purported to rule and to control directly, neoimperialism does not involve, usually, the direct establishment of subservience by the administrators of a given territory. The U.S. exerts its power through puppet regimes, as Jacob Hornberger was describing this morning, and through indirect sanctions of various kinds, many of them by bribes and payoffs to government officials, and big interests in these countries that make it worth their while to prop up the U.S. aims and projects in these countries. So it's less obvious, less blatant than classic imperialism, but I would think actually that it's, if anything, even more effective, because some people are fooled by it. Many Americans don't think there's an empire. What empire, they say. What colonies does this country have? And our political leaders are always denying that they have colonial or imperial ambitions, notwithstanding the facts that fly in the face of those protestations. So, neoimperialism is just a little more subtle form of the classic form of imperialism. Yes, ma'am?

W2: First of all, Mr. Higgs, thank you for attending the FFF Conference. I've certainly, as many in this audience, have admired you for years, and I'm so glad that you were here. It's good to hear someone in person that you respect. You have just given us an excellent overview of the power that the incumbents and Congress-- and someone such as Bush and his gang-- have over us. And I certainly-- this is sort of a follow-up to a question that was posed to Mr. Hornberger earlier in terms of what we can do. I certainly, like everyone in this room, am a firm believer in the dissemination of ideas, and yet barring, as you said, a rebellion, how would we go about changing that? Toward that, because I deeply respect your opinion, I was wondering if you were familiar with the Initiative, the National Initiative for Democracy, which Mike Gravel proposes in *Citizen Power*, in chapters 2 and 12, that would actually, just as we do at the state level, give people the power to legislate. I remember Benjamin Franklin said, "We gave you a Republic, as long as you can keep it." But at this point, we do not have representative government, and I was wondering if you're familiar with that. And what are your views on the idea of a National Initiative where, I would think, we might could limit government because before people could vote upon something, a so-called benefit, they would actually have to know the taxation that it would incur. Or in the cost of Iraq, it seems to me if we had a National Initiative, that the American people, as you said, would never have gone for such an unjust invasion. And should the people make a mistake, they would be the ones with the power to rein that government in and stop it even if they did. Are you familiar with it, and what are your thoughts?

Robert Higgs: I'm not familiar with that particular movement, but I am familiar with a number that are moving along similar lines. My general feeling is that our dilemma will not be remedied through political measures. I believe that our political system has shown itself to be extremely robust to twisting and turning every form of protest and reform to its own ends. And I don't believe the answer to our dilemma, either in the wars that are raging now or in our more general dilemma of being subjected to so much unjust government power, lies along narrow political lines. So long as the political culture of this country remains as subservient as it is now, so long as people do not have a sense of the violation of their rights to which they are exposed daily, at every level of government, then there's no hope. Whoever is in office will be exposed to powerful incentives to sell out and be co-opted. And nearly everybody, if not everybody, will succumb to those temptations. We have overwhelming evidence of that.

Many good people have been elected to office, and what do we have to show for it? Only more oppression. So I don't look for our salvation along strictly political lines. I look for it, if it's possible at all, along the lines that were described centuries ago by Étienne de la Boétie, who said that the minute we refuse to obey, all of these rulers crumble and fall to the ground. And I think the beginning of the cultivation of that kind of refusal lies in denouncing and condemning to the heavens every form of government oppression that we are subject to in this country. And by discrediting the current regime, we have some hope of bringing people to a genuine appreciation of their human rights and insisting on freedom for themselves. Yes, sir?

M1: Thank you, Dr. Higgs. I appreciated the serenity with which you presented a deep passion and deep principles very much. My question has to do with law, or how a certain term is used in the military but elsewhere: lawfare, law as an instrument of war. And I'd like to connect that with something that President Eisenhower said in his farewell address that I found over the years that very few students or others knew. In addition to the military industrial complex, he warned about one other thing, the scientific and technological elite. In my experience involved in these things, very often the pressures from that area, I don't know what President Eisenhower meant and the conditions of technology then. He knew about the projects at MIT and everything, but they had been a very important factor. But in this matter of lawfare, I know from experience in the military and intelligence community that the lawyers are all over the place and the sophisticated deconstructions are very strong.

But on the other hand, in the international community-- what I saw during the Cold War, where a lot of people had the orientation of preemptive surrender-- then we got into interventionist democracy, and this was a preparation for preemptive wars. So my question is, what do you think that President Eisenhower meant then, and its implications for today, of the power of the scientific and technological elite? And second, what will be the effect of law and the deconstruction of law to the point where, as I've

heard recently from military friends in Canada, under certain national security conditions and legal process, truth is no longer a defense?

Robert Higgs: Well those question...

M1: Another form of lawfare, I mean.

Robert Higgs: Yes, those questions are very large ones, and I can't hope to answer them well in 30 seconds. But President Eisenhower had in mind this mass of scientists, many of them ostensibly private, working in companies or universities on government contracts, as well as the people on the government side of these relationships who were developing new technologies of warfare. And new ideas about fighting wars, some of these people were geostrategists, for example, who didn't get their hands dirty with matters of hardware. But he recognized that there were many of them, and that, in a sense, this bureaucracy and its affiliates was self-directing. It's very hard to control these people; they almost move of their own momentum once they've been established and set to work. And so I think Eisenhower was apprehensive about that kind of self-moving force in that military, industrial, technological, scientific apparatus that the government had brought into being, first during World War II and then during the Cold War, to assist the armed forces.

Now, about the use of law and the perversion of law and so forth, this takes so many forms that I would be hard pressed to say anything quickly in response to your question. But do let me say that we have on this program some heroic lawyers. And we all like to badmouth lawyers, often for good reason, but lawyers are sometimes absolutely essential to the cause of liberty, because they can get in there and undercut the government on terms that are more likely to be recognized and complied with. So the people we will have speaking to us later in the program deserve our greatest esteem and respect. And I hope we'll all attend to what they have to say. Thank you very much.