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## **Ike Was Right and We Are Becoming What We Despise**

by Robert Scheer

*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:** ... for the *Los Angeles Times* for 30 years. The author of six books, he is today a syndicated columnist, based with the *San Francisco Chronicle*. He is a contributing editor at the *Nation*, an editor in chief of [truthdig.com](http://truthdig.com), one of the Internet's finest liberal Web sites. He is a clinical professor of communications at the Annenberg School, the University of Southern California. One of the things that distinguishes Bob Scheer from other critics of the Iraq war is that, as you know, many of the people that are now criticizing the war are criticizing in terms of, "Well, it hasn't been managed correctly. If only they had followed this plan, or if only they had had this person in the position." From the very beginning, what comes through in Bob Scheer's articles, and you can check them out on the Internet in the archives, is a sense of deep moral outrage and moral indignation. You just see the passion in this man's writings. So when he agreed to come and speak at this conference, it was a tremendous honor. The title of his talk was actually a combination of two of his op eds, "Ike was right" and "We are becoming what we despise." Please welcome Robert Scheer.

**Robert Scheer:** Thank you. I feel sort of like the atheist invited to address the Episcopalian congregation. Some people must be muttering, "Who let him in and what is he going to say?" And in fact, I've been thinking about this a lot all week. A half century ago, I hate to admit it, when I was at City College in New York, we had a wonderful building there, built with the stone from the subway. When they dug the subway, they built something called Shepherd Hall, the great hall. And we had alcoves in the cafeteria, the great City College. It was a great school of immigrant kids, the Harvard of the poor, had more Nobel prize winners than any college in America at one point, undergraduate education. And we had about 20 different socialist alcoves. We had vegetarian ones who had everything else, and the Trotskyists and the Stalinists and the

this one and the that one. It's sort of legendary going back at City College. And then there was one alcove, and I didn't agree with them, but I admired their courage. And these people believed in Ludwig von Mises and Friederich Hayek, and Ayn Rand and so forth. And they were very strange, and they didn't-- I didn't really talk to them or anything. And I've thought about it a lot over the years, one reason being this Web site that I edit, Truth Dig, is a site that, by the way, I'm very proud of it, and we won the Webby, for best political blog, and we're getting an award Tuesday night, and I feel very good about it.

**Robert Scheer:** The one reason we're still in business is because Lou Rockwell and another site called antiwar.com send us a lot of traffic and readers. And so I checked out those sites, and obviously I've been checking out libertarian thought. I've even voted for a few libertarians in my day.

**Robert Scheer:** But the larger view I have of all this is that, in fact, those fellahs in the alcove were closer to the truth than the fellahs in the other 20 alcoves. And I say this regretfully, because I was raised in a generation that believed in FDR. FDR was a god in my house, and as I say, I came from garment worker parents, and we looked to the New Deal as salvation, and what have you. But at this point, looking at what has happened to the country, I'd give up the federal government.

**Robert Scheer:** The programs that I care about really have been reduced to insignificance. I mean, Bill Clinton, who was the guy I voted for-- I'm sorry, am I doing something wrong? Okay, I'll speak up. Then they'll say the guy's shouting and so forth, show the passion. But Bill Clinton ended the last federal poverty program. The earlier attempt at a poverty program really was destroyed by Lyndon Johnson because of his foreign adventure in Vietnam. And when I look at the programs that the federal government is involved in that's supposed to help the vulnerable, help the poor, help the needy, level the playing field, all the things that I care about, they're minuscule compared to what's done for corporations. Bill Clinton and the Telecommunication Act, Bill Clinton and the Financial Services Modernization Act. When I look at all the lobbying and all the perks, and then particularly when I look at what General Eisenhower referred to, President Eisenhower, as the military-industrial-complex, if one were to propose a swap, let's just do away with the federal government, take our chances with state governments, take our chances in the private sector, I'd go for that bargain myself.

**Robert Scheer:** Now, as far as my appreciation of Eisenhower, I'm not new to this. Probably the bravest thing I've done in my life was wore an "I Like Ike" button in the Bronx when I was a kid. And I did like him. I thought he was the general who understood war, and its risks. I thought, and to this day still think, Eisenhower deserves a great credit for ending the Cold War, or beginning the end of the Cold War, when he brought Khrushchev to the United States, showed Khrushchev the front fields of candidates and so forth, and valued the notion of peaceful

coexistence and competition. And most importantly, Eisenhower was very aware of the dangers of foreign involvements. He's the one that refused to put ground troops into Vietnam. That remained for John Kennedy, who is somehow more admired by liberals. I don't know why. But Eisenhower was very cautious, and in his farewell address, a document that we used to pay more attention to, but is more vital than ever, Eisenhower warned about the military industrial complex. And even though I have a great deal of respect for our previous speaker, Karen Kwiatkowski-- I can never pronounce it correctly-- and we actually made her our truth digger of the week on our site, and I think she's one of the bravest and clearest-thinking individuals in the country-- I don't think our problem began with the abandonment of, or the adoption of the Constitution, and abandonment of the Articles of the Federation. I think the problem comes with the whole notion of empire and the obsession with the national security state. And I say this in part as a journalist. I know, when you write about local issues, when you write about domestic issues, even at the national level you can demand to see the documents, you can demand to get the facts. And your readers support you in that demand, and your editors support you in that demand. You can tell the city council, "Wait a minute. We have—even without sunshine laws—we have a right to know what you decided in that meeting, and what money changed hands and so forth." You talk about national security, we lose all those rights. That's what Daniel Ellsberg, one of the bravest guys in the country who's sitting here, and is going to be speaking tomorrow, is all about the Pentagon Papers. It's a basically academic--

**Robert Scheer:** A basically academic study. I remember. I was one of those who read the Pentagon Papers quite early on and at first I was disappointed. The thing of detail and texture and complexity, I thought it was going to have the hot stuff. Where are the good parts? And it was really a very thoughtful examination of how we got into Vietnam, or how did this travesty occur and so forth. There wasn't anything in the Pentagon Papers that we didn't have a right to know. We paid for this, Stali's study, and they didn't want us to read it because it was an embarrassment, an enormous embarrassment, because it revealed that they never believed in the war. We know that now, McNamara—see the movie *Fog of War*, where he says 3.4 million Indochinese died in this war, 59,000 American troops, and he clearly confesses that he never believed in it for a second. We have the Lyndon Johnson tapes, you know, the Johnson Library, where Lyndon Johnson in 1964 had a conversation with Senator Russell, said, "I could never justify sending a young American to die over there. I can't see any national interest in it," but he had to do it, why? Because Goldwater would use it against him in the election.

That kind of cynicism, the lying, the deceit that takes place when national security is invoked, that is not possible with other issues. They can't get away with it. So there is something very special about the national security state. I know libertarians just don't like the idea of big government, and government and so forth. But big government becomes particularly treacherous when you can invoke the fear the people have of the foreigner. That's what George Washington, a great libertarian, said. And he warned about foreign entanglements. And when Eisenhower spoke, and I just want to quote a few paragraphs from Eisenhower, it couldn't be more relevant to today.

He said," This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence, economic, political, even spiritual, is felt in every city, every State house, every office of the Federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development--" He was talking at the height of the Cold War. "Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society. In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted." General Eisenhower, "We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together."

What this administration did, and they were not the first, is they took advantage of our feelings, our panic, a real issue, what happened on 9/11, and they ran with it in the process of destroying, knocking out all of the restraints, all of the limitations that make a democratic society possible. And it was lying on a grand scale, and they got away with it. Why? Because of the national security fear. The media collapsed. Journalists, famous journalists, allowed their brains to be embedded, let alone their bodies.

**Robert Scheer:** The party that was not in power caved totally, went along with these lies. We know now that even the members of the Senate National Security Committee and others, Armed Service Committee, what have you, knew. Did not come clean, did not tell us. We've a succession of books by insiders in the administration. They never-- it says, never for a moment did they believe in it. Chapter 17 of Tenet's book, where he said that he never believed there was a threat that they were developing WMD, a nuclear bomb. That was just a convenient argument that they could agree on. That they never believed there was a tie between Al-Qaeda and Afghanistan, and Iraq. The cynicism that just runs right through.

Not new. It was there in the Gulf of Tonkin when Lyndon Johnson was informed by Captain Herrick of the *Maddox* that, "No, I don't think we've been attacked. The evidence is, it seems to be the radar picking up our zigzagging in the Gulf of Tonkin," and McNamara and LBJ knew that in real time, and yet rushed to the T.V. cameras to now say, "We're extending the war to North Vietnam," and getting us more deeply involved.

The cynicism is not new. It's just that with the terrorist attack of 9/11 and the particular crowd in the White House now, led by, my God, imagine what Eisenhower was thinking when he confounds the image-- confronts the image of Dick Cheney. Could there ever be a better example of the military industrial complex? The revolving door. Here is a company, by route of the division of Halliburton that was bankrupt. They ripped us off, in other words, was the main

one in the Vietnam. And now, top of their game. This company benefits from this, and there is no shame, no idea of the conflict of interest. The very person, the one example that Eisenhower would have been talking about would have been Dick Cheney. And what did they do? They took the fear, frightened the American people, then they developed a notion of war.

Terrorism has always been with us. It will always be with us, always. One man's terrorism is another's national patriarch, you know. Terrorists are people who don't have control of state power. So they don't have airplanes of their own, they hijack other people's airplanes. Terrorists do terrible damage, they hurt civilians. They're not the only one. There's 3.4 million people that got killed in Indochina, they were mostly civilians. Then we decided to drop the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Those people didn't vote for the Emperor. They were mostly civilians. We were trying to make a political point when we targeted them, when we burned Dresden or the wooden cities of Japan.

So terrorism, what we really mean by terrorism is nonstate actors, or presently called rogue cells. This has always been with us and it should be treated as a pathology. It's an example of rage and impotency, of fear or madness, whatever you want, religious fanaticism. It's not always religious. It could be nationalist fanaticism. So terrorism is a pathology. Instead of treating it as a pathology and analyzing it, being surgical about it, what did this administration do? It turned it into a war.

Think about it. If you went to a doctor and you had a bump on your head, and this doctor, without even looking at it, said, "Let's cut off the leg," you would know there's something bizarre about this. But somehow, the media, experts in our government, people on the Council of Foreign Relations, what have you, did not notice this. Here, if there was one place in the Mideast where Bin Laden could not operate, it was Iraq. Not the part that we controlled with the fly zone, but the part that Saddam Hussein controlled. He was their sworn enemy. This has clearly been outlined in the 9/11 Commission, everywhere else you want. He was a secular dictator. They were religious fanatics. They thought he sold out, their worst enemy. But no connection whatsoever. Evidence was fabricated, the Mohammad Atta, the secret meeting in Prague, they all turned out to be lies.

I interviewed Colin Powell quite recently in a brief little exchange, and I said, "How did you go along with this, when in fact your own State Department intelligence told you in real time that this was all lies, whether it was the aluminum tubes or Mohammad Atta meeting? The State Department got it right," and I said, "Joe Wilson got it right." He said, direct quote, "I didn't need Joe Wilson to tell me that. We had our own information." Yes, the State Department intelligence had it, you know. There was no connection between one event and the other, except fear. You could frighten the American public and go attack a country that has oil, and we want to go after. If you believe in military intervention there was, under Clinton, and under Bush,

ample reason to go do a surgical strike, if you want to get Bin Laden. That's what we're supposed to have Special Forces for. That's why we have effective, sophisticated airplanes. When Clinton sent in those cruise missiles, he was denounced for taking attention away from the important matter of Monica Lewinsky, you may recall. Bush didn't do that, no. Let's not go after Iraq. That has nothing to do with it. I'd better keep track of the time here, although, if this really is an anarchist libertarian crowd, forget the time restraints.

**Robert Scheer:** I guess a lot to cover here. But the first point is, that when you're dealing with national security, as we've evidenced in this case, all reason stops, fear enters, and otherwise intelligent people act like fools, whether they're editorial writers, whether they're senators, or whether they're working in national security, it doesn't matter. They go along with it, and that's what these books tell us. The people stepping out, Lehrer or any of the others, Clark, what have you. We don't have adults watching the store. There's careerism, as Karen pointed out, there's fear, there's fear of being smeared. And it doesn't work, again, as a journalist, it doesn't work on the local level. On the local level, I say, "Wait a minute, you gave the zoning permit to these guys, and you're getting money and blah, blah, blah." They can't say, "You commie, you traitor!" You can't pull that argument. You can't even pull it on the national level if you're having a debate about most of the normal things we talk about.

But you get into national security, and that's where it enters. And it doesn't matter, as I say, whether it's one president or another. Let me give you an example. Our problems with this whole misunderstanding of Afghanistan, Iraq and everything, didn't start with the Republicans and George W. I'm perfectly willing to criticize Bush. I mean, I holed up with a book, what my son called *The Five Biggest Lies Bush Told Us about Iraq*, and the only criticism I've heard of that book is, "Why only five?"

**Robert Scheer:** And so my defense is, they're rubrics. There's hundreds of lies that you could put in there, but it didn't begin with George Bush. Just take Jimmy Carter, who I think has been a marvelous ex-President. Really, I mean brave, he builds houses, he does things. He's actually willing to make some criticism of the Israel lobby, what have you, and talk honestly. Not a very good President. And the worst thing he did as President was, he was having trouble with the Iran hostage situation, and he had problems with inflation, and Zbigniew Brzezinski, not Cy Vance who was a reasonable Secretary of State, Zbigniew Brzezinski had the idea, which he recounted, quite gleefully years later in an interview with *Le Nouvel Observateur*, wanted to give the Soviets their Vietnam. Ha-ha-ha. Let's give them their Vietnam, and the Soviets are backing their surrogates there in Kabul, have gotten power and they happen to be secular guys, and Kabul was kind of a better place than any of the other guys. And oh, they've invaded, and we've given them their Vietnam. And the guys they're opposed to, they're freedom fighters, right? So we ended up on the side of the Muslim fanatics in Afghanistan. Remember, we didn't go to the Moscow Olympics, to show the Soviets, okay?

Fast forward, you read the 9/11 Commission Report, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, how does he meet Bin Laden? They're both recruited. They meet on the front line as freedom fighters in Afghanistan. How does Sheikh Mohammed, the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks? We couldn't find enough of these fanatics in Afghanistan from among the Afghani people, so we had to recruit them from all over the world. Right? And we bring them there. And that's the blowback. And that madness, that silliness, that mixture of political adventurism, and careerism and everything else, which is what Carter was doing. "How do I avoid this problem? I do it this way." Same thing that Johnson was doing when he went to sabotage Goldwater and let's do Vietnam and expand it and so forth, has been characteristic of this foreign policy of this building of empire.

Why were there hostages in Iran? Because somewhere back in 1953, my guy decided, "Let's get rid of this--" Allen Dulles said, "Let's get rid of Mohammad Mosaddeq," the last secular popular ruler we had in Iran. "Let's get rid of him." Kermit Roosevelt, the fellow I interviewed on his death bed, told me in great detail how he did it, when I was working for the *LA Times*. It's well documented now in the books. We bought off the opposition, we'll do this thing, get rid of Mohammad Mosaddeq. What are we saddled with then? The new George Washington, Ahmed Chalabi was going to be the George Washington of Iraq. So we had the Shah, a figure we invented, give him royal heritage and everything. What is the great crime of the Shah? We make him buy all this junk, all these airplanes, airport, hotels, everything else. He can't pay for it. He says, "I'd better stiffen this thing called OPEC and get some more money for my oil." Goodbye Shah. Next thing you know, you've got these ayatollahs, and they're angry with us.

Now the other side. You've got Saddam Hussein. How does he enter the picture? There's a guy named Kassim who is tilting ever so slightly to the Soviets in the Cold War, or so we think. Saddam Hussein is in a band of thugs. Hey, he can use him to bump off Kassim. So Saddam Hussein then becomes a player. And it's interesting, the only trial for the crimes against humanity for which Saddam Hussein was convicted after all took place-- did anyone notice in 1982? He was not convicted for any crimes. I'm not saying he didn't commit any. I think he committed crimes probably every month of his life, but the crimes that he was convicted of were in 1982. Now why did the media in this country ignore the fact that those crimes were all committed before he had his famous handshake with Donald Rumsfeld? Before our government embraced him. Before we developed the alliance with Saddam Hussein. These crimes were committed before he became our surrogate in a war against Iran, because they were the bad guys.

Now, what's the situation, fast forward, today in Iraq? Just this last week, our ambassador met with the rogue regime's ambassador in Baghdad, to get him to bail us out. That's what's really happening now. And we've given up on the idea this might be some kind of secular democracy, and forget Israel. I don't know, it keeps getting mentioned here at the conference. Let me just say, my view on the neoconservatives, with friends like the neoconservatives, Israel doesn't need enemies. Israel has never been more isolated, in a more vulnerable position in the Mid East,

thanks to Wolfowitz and Perle and these people. It's just incredible. And the Israeli public has rejected politicians who've taken that position.

And why? Because we now have an arc of religious fanaticism going from Lebanon to Iraq, Shi'ite fanaticism. We've destroyed any possibility of secular alternatives, and we are dependent for our exit strategy in Iraq on the very people that we said are the greatest menace in the world, the people of Iran. Our surrogates that are sitting there, we're protecting in the Green Zone, these are people who lived in exile in Iran. They were trained there. They've still got their money there. According to our military, they've got advanced weaponry from there, and Ahmed Chalabi was even accused by our government of having been an agent for Iran. Our George Washington turned out to be an agent. So what I'm suggesting then is that in the name of, you know, we know what we're doing, we have the information, we are rational, we are adults watching the store, if you actually look at the sequence of events, they're bizarre. If someone did this who was cleaning your house, you would fire them.

**Robert Scheer:** You know, I mean, not one single instance holds up. It's absolutely bizarre. And the argument is, compelling every time, we have to stay the course, whether it was wise to get in it or not, we have to stay the course, because getting out is worse, right? And that was the argument that drove Vietnam. Now Daniel Ellsberg, I don't want to speak for him, but I've interviewed him many times in my life. And Daniel Ellsberg was once a gung-ho believer in the mission, and he was there. And then, quite early on, figured out this was not working. Now, we still went on after many people figured that out, went on killing a lot of people. And you ask people now, what was the reason why we were there? Why was it so difficult to get out? Interesting question. Remember those arguments, you can't just get out? And the prediction is, if you get out, actually there are all these dire predictions about Iraq right now. If you get out, oh this will happen and this will happen and that will happen. They love to do that. They love to get you involved and then it's your responsibility to figure out how to get out.

I remember thinking about this, "Wait a minute, I first wrote about Vietnam sitting there in Saigon and Phnom Penh and everything in 1963, and I said don't go in here, don't." Somehow I had to spend much of my adult life telling them how to get out. That's the way I feel about Iraq, you know. You'll say, "Don't go in," and now somehow they hold all the high cards. You can't just get out. Well that was the great debate about Vietnam, and most of those American soldiers and most of those Indochinese people died after Nixon promised to get us out. Those who got out, the domino theory, the communism will be enhanced. You go back and look at what was said. No reason to ever say it. The Sino-Soviet dispute had begun back in the 1920s. There were already only two communist governments in the world that were speaking to each other. I mean, the tension was real. Read Khrushchev's memoirs or anything. There was no international communist conspiracy and a timetable to take over the world. It was hokum. They knew it. But they made all these dire predictions.

Fact is, they got out the wrong way. We waited too long and we got out under the most ignominious of circumstances, lifting people off the embassy. It wasn't necessary to do that. There were negotiated agreements five years before, seven years before that could have been put in place that could have been early. It didn't have to be chaos, you know. That same possibility is true for Iraq. We don't have to get out 8 o'clock the next morning. You just have to be serious about it. But you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem. You're making matters worse, okay? So when finally we're forced to leave Vietnam, we get out under the most ignominious of circumstances, that then goes to feed America's other hype. In the eyes of the world, what happens? Communism becomes supreme? The Red Tide. If we don't find them there, we'll have to find them in San Diego.

Now I know there are people in San Diego who actually believe those workers coming across the border are communist Chinese agents. I've had those conversations. But the fact of the matter is, the only thing that happened, which is anyone who had read anything-- had even read Graham Greene's *The Quiet American*, had read Bernard Fall, or read anything, would have known what happened: Red China and Red Vietnam went to war. They went to war over Cambodia, where the Red Chinese with our blessings, and Jimmy Carter's blessings, were backing the attempted return of Pol Pot back to power. Such is the cynicism, okay. After the Vietnamese had kicked him out, I think too late. So what happened? They first fight over that, and then they fight over their historic border disputes, and anyone who knew anything about the history of the region would know that after 1,000 years of Chinese occupation, the Vietnamese did not fight this whole battle to turn their country over to the Chinese. It wasn't going to happen and it didn't happen. Quite the opposite has happened. The two fastest growing capitalist nations in Asia are run by these communist regimes that defeated us.

**Robert Scheer:** That's just a reality, and no one absorbs it. How can we get this all so wrong? How could communist Vietnam and communist China be fighting a fierce war for shelf space at Costco and Wal-Mart now?

**Robert Scheer:** It's control, the old imperial model. We got angry with the French and the Germans, because they didn't agree going into Iraq. Now, why didn't they want us to go in? Why didn't they think it was smart? The argument was, "Well, they're wimps." My father was a German Protestant. My mother was a Russian Jew. I was born in 1936. I never thought I'd live to see the day when I was told the Germans lacked the DNA to be violent.

**Robert Scheer:** But that was the argument. Somehow the Germans and the French, they don't like to fight. The French, who had a big colonial empire, did it ever occur to anybody that the French learned from Algeria, they learned from Indochina, that the Germans learned from their foreign adventures that imperialism does not pay. It pays for some people. It pays for Dick Cheney. It pays for some sectors of the economy. It does not pay for your old world economy;

it does not pay for your average taxpayer by any means. And that's what they understood. That's why they told us not to go, and they understood what Colin Powell said, "If you break it, you own it." But you don't really own it, and the fact is, I just read an article in the *Wall Street Journal* as I was flying here, the Chinese economy is now growing at 11 percent, and ours is stagnating. And we control the oil. It turns out you can buy the stuff on the open market.

**Robert Scheer:** You don't have to be guarding the pipelines all the time and risking your lives, you know. So here the Chinese are following really the old Adam Smith capitalist model, as rapidly as they can get to it, buy it up, find it, exploit it, etc. I have only a few more minutes, so I want to put more of a little point on this, and that is that the fear mongering, I just want to give you an example of the disconnect about this, because this is not over. I remember talking about Vietnam. Right now, we have more of a military presence in Iraq as a percentage of the population than we ever had in Vietnam. Don't kid yourself. So here is the *Washington Post* today. Good thing I read it. You can tell the whole story of what's happening in Iraq. Our Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, follows up on the words of White House press secretary that the model now is Korea, and we may be in Iraq for 50 years. You think I make this stuff up. And why? Because they need us. And Snow said, he said, "What you're really dealing with is the internal security of Iraq, rather than trying to provide a reassurance against an external foe." Well why do they need our troops to protect themselves against themselves? It's incredibly bizarre. And you want to know how bizarre it is, the top story here, somebody who gets to travel out there with the American troops, he's quoting the mayor, the guy we like now because he's against Al-Qaeda, Abdul Kalik. And he said, this is a quote, "But if the Americans interfere, it will blow up, because they are the enemy of us both." This is our guy!

**Robert Scheer:** Really, you can't write stuff like this. "And we will unite against them and stop fighting each other." Did you ever hear a better argument for getting the hell out of Iraq?

**Robert Scheer:** And then finally, just showing you that we have an accurate sample here, there's three stories in the paper today, and this one is about the sad detainee from Saudi Arabia who killed himself, who was in Guantanamo. How did he get to Guantanamo? You read this story and you'll find out again, he's one of ours. We still don't have an Iraqi hijacker blowing up buildings here. We still haven't found one of Saddam Hussein's guys. But the Saudi who we accuse of being involved in Al-Qaeda was somebody we would have even trained. And then he kills himself, because we haven't brought him to trial, and we haven't found anything on him. So that's the *Washington Post*.

Let me just end by saying-- what do I have, five minutes, three minutes? Ten? Okay, let me say the real lesson here, and this is why I began by saying, I don't want to provoke the whole argument of big government. I do think there's something special about empire and the national security state. And I think that other general, George Washington-- I just reread it. I ran upstairs

instead of eating, and I read George Washington's farewell address. These guys write great farewell addresses, generals turned presidents. And you could not find a more nuanced, serious, complex, thoughtful critique of the dangers of foreign entanglement than George Washington did, just what is involved. And the bottom line is, you cannot have a democracy, popular control, free press, free society, limited government, all these things that I believe are possible with the Constitution, not just with the Articles of Confederation. I like the Bill of Rights.

I think we've got a pretty good model. I think we've done our best to destroy it in the eyes of the world. We lecture people around the world, division of powers is great, but our Congress rolls over. It's good to have a Supreme Court, but the Supreme Court lets the President reappoint himself. I mean, they write that all, the free press shows no independence at all. And I want to say something about courage, and I really respect our whistleblowers and so forth, but I asked my colleagues in the media, I said, "Wait a minute, we have asked people around the world, journalists, to stand up, and we have brave journalists who go and cover combat." I'm not taking anything back from that, but when I think of those editors at the big television stations and big newspapers who cave, who were afraid, what were they afraid of? Losing market share. "The reader is 90 percent against it so that's going to happen." They're worried about a slight kink in their career curve.

This is not torture, this is not your testicles crushed, this is not any of those things. Your relatives aren't killed. And the lack of courage on the part of people who live in a free society and benefit from it, who were raised to believe in the values of limited government and honesty and truth seeking, and accountability, and the public having a right to know, representative government. The betrayal of those ideas is unconscionable, unconscionable.

And I think that most serious danger that has occurred is the mocking, the destruction of this model, which I happen to think is the best model for people that want to blindly follow, not to be imposed on them, then I do believe in that model of limited government. I do believe in that model of citizen rights, and I think that this administration-- yes, others have done the same, particularly since World War II-- but this administration has taken our society to a new low. It is extremely dangerous. And the bottom line-- let me tell you what the bottom line-- the bottom line is, we do have a military industrial complex, we do have people who benefit from having a big military. To stop people who use \$3 box cutters that you can get at Home Depot, we have approved tens of millions and hundreds of millions for the Stealth fighter, designed to counter a Soviet air force that is no longer in existence. This War on Terror has been an excuse for ramping up a military budget that is at the point of exceeding Cold War needs when they had a serious enemy.

And so when you think about the difficulty of getting through to the public, it's not that there just such a small number of us libertarians, or such a small number of us bleeding heart liberals, like

this guy Scheer, you know. The real problem is that we have these big institutions, with a lot of talented people, a lot of smart people, who make a very good living lying to us. They get contracts, and whether they're at Boeing or they're Halliburton, or whether they're at the universities and everything Eisenhower warned about, all those contracts going from the government to the universities, or whether it's the newspapers that don't want to rock the boat, and want to have access to the White House. The fact is, we have people in this society who are very well trained, very smart, very articulate and are in the business of lying to us professionally because they line their pockets by doing that. That's the name of the game. That's what the military industrial complex is about, and if you continue to let them hold sway, you will not have a democracy, not even if you bring back the Articles of Confederation. Thank you.

**Robert Scheer:** Thank you. I didn't know if I'm supposed to stand here and take questions, or are we done or what? Everybody wants to go out and get drunk? I have nowhere to go. I can't play around.

Q: Would you like to take questions?

**Robert Scheer:** Yeah, I'll take questions all night. I don't care.

Q: Hello. I'm Jack Ross and as one of the few other people in this room who is something other than an anarcho-capitalist, I'd like to ask-- can everyone hear me? I'd like to ask your thoughts on the failure of the liberal intellectuals in particular, if you've read the essay by Tony Judt, "Bush's Useful Idiots," which I'd recommend to anyone here who hasn't read it.

**Robert Scheer:** I haven't read it. What is your question?

Q: What are your thoughts on the failure of liberal intellectuals?

**Robert Scheer:** Well, the biggest failure of liberal intellectuals is that they endorsed the Cold War in its simplicity, in a cowardly way and an opportunistic way. I still think of Daniel Ellsberg as a liberal. I don't know what he thinks of himself, but we had good liberals standing up. There just weren't too many. It turns out liberals, when they get into government, are opportunistic to the same degree as conservatives or anyone else. I've met a few people at this convention who tell me they work for government and they're libertarians. So we live in a society in which opportunism and careerism and making out is a pretty important thing. And I think that basically liberalism, right or wrong, lacked power, didn't withstand it. I'm not going to put everybody in that camp.

The other thing that happened to liberals was probably not familiar to the subject of this whole conversation, but the people who write and cover things and everything, don't tend to see things, and whether they're conservatives or they're liberals, from the point of view of the other. A lot of the gut economic issues, and we were talking about the ripping off of undocumented workers, or we're talking about screwing taxpayers who can't afford it and so forth, are not felt by politically empowered people, whether they're liberals or conservatives, in the same way they are felt by the other. And so there's very little reporting of how the state affects people's lives. I would say that's the big cop-out. It doesn't really matter at the end of the day what people tell you they believe in or what church they go to or practice. If they don't follow the rule of caring about the real vulnerable people in society and the people who don't have a voice, and people who can't spend a lot of time covering things, which is what generally happens, they betray them. That's it. Everyone just agrees with me?

Q: I was wondering how you felt about new, young people who go into journalism. Are they interested in becoming investigative reporters and to try to find out the truth, or are they just, "Buckle under, I've got a good job and don't want to rock the boat?"

**Robert Scheer:** Yeah. Let me also take issue with that. First of all, I have to preface this by saying that I think there are few more admirable people in the world than the speaker preceding me. However, I disagree with the general comment that's made about the state of education of young people. I teach at USC, a very good school. I have, I don't know, over 500 students a year, and they're as sharp as any group of young people I've met in the course of my life. I just don't buy into the general thing, they don't know. And what they don't know, they can learn very quickly, thanks to the Internet. Incredibly easy.

For instance, I show Oliver Stone's movie, "Nixon," and I bring John Dean in, yes, they'd never heard of John Dean. Because why? Because we're focused on the SATs and this and this. They don't really know what Nixon did and they don't know what a lot of it was about, but we have this movie that Oliver made, and suddenly I've got John Dean there, and he's played by a famous actor in the movie, so he's got their attention. And I can tell you, by the end of that three-hour class, they know more than their parents do about Watergate. It's right there on their wi-fis, on their laptop, they're checking out everything they can find.

And so when I think of the state of youth today, I think the failure is with the media, with the political leadership. I had a lot of young students who worked for John Kerry. Not too many worked for Bush, because they saw him as the frat guy who was cruising. But they worked for-- and they were betrayed by Kerry. I'll never forget the moment when Bush said, "Knowing what you know now, would you have voted for the war?" and Kerry said, "Yes." Instead of saying no, he lied to the Senate, you lied to the people. Of course I wouldn't vote for it. And I just remember how the air just went out of these kids. They were out there working, so I agree with

what some said. If the choice is just working for opportunistic candidates, forget it. It's just increased cynicism.

As far as young journalists, I don't like to put down journalists, because journalists are a-- are very often a varied group, particularly when they go far to cover things like Iraq, or people-- a lot of them get killed and injured and so forth. So I'm not going to take anything away from that. Where they tend not to be brilliant-- not only tend not to, where they become abject cowards, is in their own building. They sail out of the building. I don't care whether it's the *LA Times*, the *New York Times* whatever. They'll take on that CEO, they'll take on a dictator somewhere. But you ask them, "What's going on in your own building? Why was that story killed? Why was that person fired? Why was this decision made? Why don't we cover these things?" and they become like little church mice. It's like criminology. "I don't know. I think this one is closer to the other, I think this happened. I hear this story," and they whisper, and they look in the tealeaves. So the big problem with journalism is, you know, A.J. Liebling, a great media critic for the *New Yorker*, once wrote, "Freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one."

**Robert Scheer:** And the media will not do a good job of covering their own ownership, the problems of media concentration, the pressures of it. And again, I applaud the Internet, which I happen to think is the great liberating, saving aspect of American life. It's not perfect. There's all that crud on it, and garbage and everything else, but damn it, Mark Twain said, "A lie gets halfway around the world before truth puts its pants on." Now with the internet, It takes the truth only, what, a year. So I would say for young journalists, I agree with what Helen said before, there's curiosity, there's the concern, and I think they're going to come through.

I don't go for old fogeyism ever. I don't think the '60s were great. I don't think that the best generation was in World War II. I don't think the Goldwater youth, to think closer to home, were all so marvelous. I think we kind of glorify the past. Daniel Ellsberg can tell you, because I interviewed him when he was in the middle of Pentagon Papers thing, and he got damn little support from his old friends. Here was the guy doing the obviously correct, courageous, clear thing to do, right? And you can look. Where did they all scatter for cover? How many really came to his defense? How many really supported him? And this guy was not some pinko pacifist. He was a vet, he was a gun toter. He had supported war. And his message was just, "Here's the truth. Read it." No one ever said it wasn't the truth. No one ever said it wasn't accurate, it was bad history.

And I remember those days when he was a very lonely figure, and it looked like he was going to go to jail for a hell of a long time, if Nixon had his way. And I don't recall a long parade of people from the establishment, liberal or conservative, stepping up to defend him. So when people talk to me about the good old days, I don't recall them, and I think this group does just as

good a job. And as I say, on the Internet, our Web site is put out by 25-year-olds and they're great, and we have no shortage of people trying to apply for the jobs. If you guys have some companies and want to advertise there, you'll help us making it a better business model.

**Robert Scheer:** Any others? Is that it?

Q: We have time for one more question.

Q: Speaking of the good old days, I seem to remember another country that was attacked, that had never attacked us, and it was all based on a bunch of lies about genocide. It was called Serbia. Where did you stand on that war?

**Robert Scheer:** Well, I'll have to Google it.

**Robert Scheer:** I'm serious. I think I was-- I was certainly-- I wrote, I know I wrote, I was opposed to the idea of somehow, suddenly the Croatians and the Albanians and everybody were saints and the Serbians were monsters, because I remember that the Serbians were the ones who fought against Hitler. I remember that others were willing to be concentration camp guards and so forth. So I've always had-- I would not go along with the demonization of one side or another in that, and I was very-- the reason I said I would have to Google it is, I've said dumb things and I've written dumb things in my life. And it's possible this might fall into that category. I don't think so. I think I was opposed to Clinton's-- in fact, I know I was. Wait a minute. I have a movie called "Citizen Stan." It came back to me. You've seen that movie, right Dan? "Citizen Stan" where I have an argument with Lord Halpern what happened on this very issue in the documentary. Lord Halpern is defending it and I'm opposing it, and I'm saying it's just like Vietnam. So I don't have to Google it. I'll just send you-- give me your name, and I'll send you a copy.

But I'm not going to say-- let me just end on this. I don't claim-- you know, it's a very nice introduction. I think I've gotten it right more often than I've gotten it wrong, but let me tell you, one of the dumber things that I wrote. I wrote an article saying I thought George W. Bush would be a pretty good President. I did. I thought he hadn't been a half bad governor of Texas. I thought he would learn some lessons from his father. I didn't think he'd be our savior or anything, but I thought he'd have his head screwed on right. I had no idea he'd turn the government over to these neoconservative nutcases. And I don't mean to be disparaging of them in the sense that maybe they'd make good college lecturers, or they'd be good to have in debates, but the idea-- I mean, I'd have doubts if they turned the government over to me, and I'm relatively sane. Turning it over to Richard Perle and Wolfowitz and these people is madness,

absolute madness. And somehow this was done. It was done over the objection of all the people that his father had trusted and so forth.

So my feeling is, I'm not going to lie and say I've never taken a stupid position, I've never been wrong on something. What I'd like to think is that I work at it and try to get it right. I like to think I wake up at 3 o'clock in the morning and ask myself, "Did I blow it?" I'd like to think that I would correct myself. I'd like to think that I can be held accountable, you know. I mean, I've had conversations with Daniel Ellsberg where he tells me I get things wrong. He told me that twice this afternoon. So I remembered a name wrong or something. I don't shine it off. And I'm not running the U.S. government. I don't shine it off, because first of all, I don't think it's the right thing to do. I don't think it's the human thing to do. I think people bring up information that's contrary to your analysis, you ought to think about it. That's why I began this talk by saying maybe Hayek and von Mises were right.

What's scary about our situation now is not just our government, but our whole sort of professional class. The thing that was being discussed before, these people who were-- she was working in the Pentagon-- knew better. But these people don't speak up. I keep getting back to that bottom line. What is going on? I must find out. I need a moment of time when they tell me, "It sucks, it's bad." "Well, why don't you say something? Hey, I've got tape recorder. Let's talk." "Oh no, no, it's not the right moment." So what you've got to ask yourself, and unless you've got a grand theory about government corrupting and so forth, but I find it in the private sector, I find it all over the place, that people don't have that sense that truth matters.

Let me just end on this, because to me, it's a key point. What I've learned in my life, and one reason I'm against statism, I've seen plenty of states that hurt people in the name of saving them, and so forth, all over the world, you know. I interviewed Castro, and he told me why he had to round up homosexuals in Cuba, for their own good or something. So we've seen these horrors that are done in the name of states and so forth. And what I've learned from this whole long life is, that we do need these limits. We do need accountability. And that old thing, that freedom makes you strong, you know, the old marketplace of ideas, that we used to take seriously. That good ideas, truth drives out error, what do we have instead? The creation of the atmosphere in which there's no truth seeking. So error dominates.

And if I think of my work as a journalist, I always think, "Well wait a minute, why did it remain for me to make this point?" And as was mentioned before, I interviewed every President from Nixon on to this current one, up to this current one. I've interviewed these guys. I've been around, I've interviewed plenty of senators, plenty of experts and so forth, and I sit there, and I think, "Wait a minute, why didn't you read Khrushchev's diary and know that Stalin did not like Mao Tse Dong, and preferred Chiang Kai-shek, and that the Sino-Soviet dispute really started in the late '20s, and what the hell was this foreign policy all about? Why didn't you have that sense

of complexity?" I gave a speech here in Washington not long ago for my *Playing President* book and I said, "Colin Powell said if he had just read Bernard Fall French soldier and then as a reporter that died stepping on a landmine accompanying American troops." He said, "If I had just read Bernard Fall," I think he said this in his autobiography, "I would have known the Vietnam War never made any sense." So I repeated that, and a woman in the audience said, who turned out to be Bernard Fall's widow, Dorothy Fall, and she said, "Well, why didn't he read *Burnout*? The books are in the bookstore. They're available."

So when I think of what I've been able to do and others, Sy Hersch, or any of the journalists that I respect, it's not that we read tea leaves, and it's not that we're particularly bright. It's just that we bother to look. We didn't let them put the blinders on, and the other deliberately avoid looking. You know what the distinction is? They don't take positions. They position themselves. Think about that. That is the standard, whether you're a TV pundit, whether you're a big editor, whether you're a politician, or so forth. You don't say, "I must take a position because lives are at stake."

My wife is writing a book with Mary Tilghman, the mother of Pat Tilghman. Pat and Kevin Tilghman, we published on our site two of the most marvelous people who lived in history. A world of hope for me, third son and so forth. These are people who had big careers. Kevin was a baseball player, Cleveland Indians. Pat had a \$6 million contract. Response to 9/11, they say, "We've got to sign up. It shouldn't just be the children of poor kids. We've got to go do this thing, set an example." Then they're sent to Iraq, which they don't believe in, because they were smart and they'd done some research and they carried books with them, but they went along and they served their tour of duty. And then Pat was given a DO, "Well, why don't you go home now? You've done it, we've got our poster," and he said, "No, I signed up to get Bin Laden."

And he asked to stay in and he asked to go to Afghanistan, and then what do they do? He gets killed, the most benign explanation, friendly fire, an accident, what have you. What happens? They start lying about it within an hour. Everybody on the ground knows. His brother comes back and they lie to him. They are instructed to lie to his brother who is in the same unit but in a different area. He comes back to the camp. "Where's Pat?" and they lie. First they say they don't know, and then it was friendly fire, and they knew the truth. The guy who accompanied the body back with him knew the truth, and was under orders. They said, "You will be court-martialed if you tell the truth."

So the lying, it just goes on every level, and it besmirches people, it stains people who make sacrifice like Pat Tilghman and Kevin Tilghman. It's absolutely outrageous. And people who know the truth are in the whole chain of command. Of course, plenty of them knew it, right up to the White House. They knew this was lies, but they wanted to keep the poster boy, and if they wanted to be able to say at half-time shows, that the professional footballer, this great hero and

so forth died. It's like Jessica Lynch. Yes, that's a heroic woman. She's heroic because she wouldn't lie. She wrote an honest book, and they tried to use her.

So if you want my report card on this society right now, at this advanced age, it is yes, we are in terrible shape. I don't know if we're in terrible shape because of the Articles of Confederation. I don't mean to keep picking on that. And I don't know if the libertarian thing is the solution. Where I will agree with what I've heard at this conference, and you said to me, "At the end of this conference, you will be a libertarian." Okay, but what I will tell you is, we are in terrible shape. We have no control of our government. We do not have adults watching the store. We are lied to at every turn and we have a governmental process that corrupts people, corrupts them in the extreme, so you cannot count on them to do the right thing that they should be doing, that we pay them to do, that they're supposed to be there to do, no matter their education, no matter what church they go to, no matter what ideology they follow, they end up being liars, whether they're in a Democrat or Republican administration, and that's a very sad commentary on the state of our culture at this point in our history. Thank you.

**Jacob Hornberger:** Two announcements. We have copies of Mr. Scheer's books out on the table for sale, and for the sponsors and the speakers, there's a get-together in room 1118 right after this event. And otherwise, we'll see you bright eyed and bushy tailed in the morning, and that concludes tonight's festivities. Thank you.