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## War as Government Program

by Sheldon Richman

*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:** Okay. A couple of housekeeping announcements. Today at lunch we're opening up the lunch to everybody, all speakers. If there's a certain speaker that you see that has arrived or is still here and you'd like to sit with him and talk with him and whatever, be sure you go and buttonhole him and try to sit next to him. Please no fights over where to sit, but it's a total open lunch today for everybody, all speakers and all participants.

Also, we have an extra little bonus for you if you would like to attend. You'll notice on the schedule we have a break after lunch from 1:00 to 1:45. You're certainly free to take that break. However, we're offering a bonus speaker during that period of time, a 45-minute talk by Doug Bandow. Those of you that are familiar with Doug know that he's been a long-time writer. He's formerly with the Cato Institute. There's no one that knows this subject of foreign policy and civil liberties better than Doug Bandow. And actually he's been our standby speaker in case somebody got sick or canceled out. And finally we said, "Well, Doug, you've already got some remarks prepared for that contingency how about just giving us a bonus," and he's ecstatic about it. So that's going to be an extra bonus from 1:00 to 1:45. And if you're not exhausted, and you're not tired out, and you don't want to take that break it's going to be, I think, a very nice talk. Okay.

Sheldon Richman has been the editor of *The Freeman* magazine for some ten years now. *The Freeman* is arguably the finest libertarian publication in the movement. It is, of course, published by the Foundation for Economic Education. I think Sheldon's been the second longest running editor of *The Freeman* since FEE took it over in the 1950s. He also serves as the Senior

Fellow at the Future of Freedom Foundation and has contributed articles to our journal, *Freedom Daily*, since 1991. He's been a monthly contributor and written op-eds for us for many, many years. He's actually the author of three of our books: *Separating School and State: How to Liberate America's Families*, which is the leading book in the libertarian movement on a total free market in education; *Your Money or Your Life: Why We Must Abolish the Income Tax.*; and *Tethered Citizens: Time to Repeal the Welfare State.*

One of the things that I have found about being in the libertarian movement for so many years is one of the great advantages of this is the friends that you meet along the way, and that you make in this movement of people that share your same principles, and your same perspective on life, same philosophy, and I can tell you that Sheldon is one of the greatest friends I've ever made in my life. It's just been a real treat to be able to interact with him and share ideas on liberty back and forth. I would say in all the years I've been in this movement he would rank at the very top, number one, in terms of personal and ethical integrity, respect for the libertarian philosophy, refusal to compromise his principles. I hold him in the absolute highest esteem, and it's been an absolute joy working with him over the years. He's a former Senior Editor at the Cato Institute. His articles have been published in the *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Chicago Tribune*, *USA Today*, and many, many others. The title of his talk is "War as a Government Program." Please welcome Sheldon Richman.

**Sheldon Richman:** Thank you all very much. Good morning. Being the disputatious person that I am I really almost feel obliged to offer rebuttal to the introduction, but time is so short I'm going to dispense with that. But if anyone wants to hear it out, out there later during the break I'd be happy to tell you. Let me just say as a preface, back in August I got a phone call. Of course, I speak at least what, three or four times a day with Jacob. We have to be on the same cellular network so that we wouldn't run up, you know, humongous bills talking to each other because I live in Arkansas and he, of course, works in Virginia, so that's the reason. Sprint hates us for that reason.

But he told me back in August he was planning to put on a conference on foreign policy. So I thought, okay, maybe he is going to do a one-day thing, or a weekend, and then he started telling me, and I thought well, here he goes off on some flight of fancy, some dream. He's going to put on how many days, and he's going to have who? All these names he's thinking of, Daniel Ellsberg. And I said, "Okay. I'll be as encouraging as I can be. Sign me up, obviously." But yeah, I really wondered whether this was really going to happen.

Then I ended up getting progress reports from him. Of course we come here a few days ago and wow! All I can say is, and as I told him before, his Hero of the Revolution medal is being forged as we speak because I envision a Nobel Prize-style ceremony where this medal is placed around his neck along with a million dollars. I'm almost speechless when I see what he's done, and see

everybody here, and the lineup of speakers. It's just awe-inspiring. FFF is not a huge organization. It doesn't have a huge budget. It's just fantastic. So anyway, I probably went on a little long, but I know you all understand this and agree with me, but I just wanted to say this out loud in front of everybody. I said it to him, but I want everyone else to hear it.

Well, "War as a Government Program." It's a little daunting to speak to a group like this, okay? Please be a little sympathetic. It's not often I get to speak in front of a group that is as knowledgeable, as motivated, as interested in liberty, and as factually based in what's going on in the world as this group. So it's a little scary to think that I can say something that you haven't heard before, but I'll try, and I hope it will be interesting. It would be a little easier to speak in front of a hostile group that didn't know a whole lot. Okay? So I'll just put that on the record too.

Now the title, "War as a Government Program," of course to this group is going to be a truism. It's going to be like duh, you know, tell me something I don't know. But of course, a lot of people out there don't know it. It's funny, even some people who say they're against this war, this current war-- I've been criticized for even calling it a war, although I think we are making war on the Iraqi people. You know what I mean when we say we. I'm sorry if I slip into that. I agree with Bob Higgs. That is the most dangerous word in political discourse, we and words like that, right? We, them, us. George the Second, as I like to think of him, he's making war on the Iraqi people, but it's an occupation.

But even people who don't like what's going on there, still slip into things like the troops are serving their country, or they're protecting our freedom, or something like that. You hear Chris Matthews, for example say this all the time, who claims to be against what's going on. But they still talk that way. I even wrote him an e-mail about that. Of course I didn't get an answer. I'm not pointing to him as some great intellectual or anything of that nature. He's a journalist. Although he takes himself seriously and he's written books about politics and Nixon and Kennedy and stuff like that. But look how easily people slip into that, that the troops are there, they answered the call of their country. They're serving their country.

That very rhetoric, of course, is very damaging, which we need to work every day correcting. They are not serving their country. Now, they may think they're serving their country, but I'm talking objectivity now. The country did not call them and tell them to go to Iraq or Afghanistan. I mean I'm part of the country and I don't remember getting on the phone and calling up anybody and saying, "I'm part of the country. Go to Iraq or go to Afghanistan." I can't believe anyone else has. As far as I can tell a small group of people with Bush at the top, at least nominally at the top, did the calling and ordered people to go. That's not the same as the country, but people, of course, don't make a distinction between the country and the government,

which, of course, is one of our top agenda items, right? To get people to understand there's a huge distinction.

I always think it's funny to hear conservatives complain, and they still complain in terms of Vietnam on this count and they do it about Iraq, that the generals could win the wars if we just got the politicians out of the way. They always say things like that. Politicians are subordinating the military to their own considerations. Political considerations seem to be coming ahead of military considerations. It's like a paraphrase of that old Pink Floyd song. Politicians, leave those generals alone. That wasn't quite the spirit of the Pink Floyd song, which I thought was always a pretty libertarian song.

Now this is amusing for a couple of reasons. First of all, these same conservatives who say this claim to worship the Constitution, and the last time I read it, it did seem to subordinate the military to the civilian authority. That's just one minor point. I don't want to say a lot about that. I'm part of the let's get the Articles of Confederation back caucus. Karen declared that the other night and I second that. I will concede that was a lot more government than I wanted, but I would take it as a transition program. The anti-Federalists did leak, okay? As we say around FEE they did leak, but they were small leaks compared to what we see in many places. Any way, okay, that's the first reason.

The second reason is this complaint about the politics taking precedence over military concerns. It seems willfully blind to the nature of war. I mean, they don't seem to understand this. At its most fundamental level war is no more a military phenomenon than it is a scientific phenomenon. After all, science is very important to war, right? I mean, physics, the laws of physics. You need the laws of physics to create weapons. If you know nothing about ballistics, or you know whatever, you're going to have a hard time making effective weapons. But we don't for that reason say the politicians should get out of the way and let the physicists run the war. I mean, that would sound stupid, even though physics and physicists have a lot to do with warfare. By the same token I think it's just as silly to say the politicians ought to get out of the way and let the generals fight the war because it misses the point about war.

Now, it just so happens that the other day, June 1<sup>st</sup>, was the 227<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Carl von Clausewitz. I haven't seen this mentioned anywhere. I must be the only one who stumbled on it. Now, he has some relevant things to say about this, of course. He's got a very famous line which is sometimes simplified, but the meaning is not really changed. He wrote a book that was posthumously published called *On War*, a very famous book. I think they used to read it even in business schools, thinking it had some relevance to business. He wrote in the first chapter, very early in the book, "War is not merely a political act, but also a real political instrument. A continuation of political commerce. A carrying out of the same by other means." That's usually

oversimplified, or truncated to just say, "War is a continuation of politics by other means." The meaning is preserved there.

That strikes me as entirely true and commonsensical, and I never actually heard anybody offer a counterargument to that. War is politics. What else could it be? Wars are government programs. So why do so many who profess belief in limited government judge war by other standards? Why is critical judgement suspended? Why do conservatives sneer at some government programs and never apply the same kind of principles to war? It's no mistake that the other things that government attempts to stamp out besides human life directly are also called wars. The war on drugs. The war on poverty, you know, the list goes on. The war on this, the war on that, the war on teen pregnancy, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Government is always thinking in terms of war, and that should be a tip-off that war is also a government program, just like the war on drugs, just like the war on poverty, just like all these other so-called metaphorical wars.

This all begins back in, I think, after World War I, which was so bloody and so disillusioning to so many people who went into it with, you know, they thought they were going into it with a great deal of idealism, and then they saw what happened and people began to think. And I think it was William James who actually came up with this and said, "You know what? We need all the great spirit of war without the bloodshed. We need everything about war except for the one thing, the killing." It was his phrase, "We need the moral equivalent of war." They wanted everything about it, the collectivism, everybody marching in step on the common purpose, except he didn't have the stomach for the bloodshed. So, you know, he was wondering, "How can we have that without that part of it?" Well, you know, good luck, and they've been trying ever since.

So that's why everything is a war. Everything is called a war. I think what goes along with this is that almost every important post in the government now is a czar. You are a czar. We now have a czar of war. What took them so long I kept wondering? They only just got around to that. We had a drug czar. We had all kinds of czars. Now we have a czar of war. It's interesting that they had trouble finding somebody to take the job. I'd like to know what they said to this three star general. "You like those stars? We have something for you to do." That maybe will come out in 20 years or so.

Anyway, why is there a different standard for war versus other government programs in the eyes of conservatives? Well, I don't know. There's probably a lot of reasons, and a whole talk could be given on that. But I think one of the main reasons is nationalism. It's a sort of quasi-religious, prerational instinct almost, or intuition about their nation which is just a form tribalism, in my view, writ large. And the essence of the nation in this world view is the state. The state sort of is the distilled essence of the nation, and therefore there's an assumption that at

least when it comes to war, military conflict, it is acting in the name of the people for the good of the people. It sort of already knows what the people's good is. They just know that. The people who have gotten into office as a result of this mystical process we call elections just sort of know what the people's interest is. We don't need to consult people when it comes to war. We're the last to know, right? I'm going to say more about that. That's why I think war gets treated differently from other things by people who claim to not like big government.

I mean, the connection between big government and war seems so obvious that a kindergartner could grasp it, and yet look at all of these people who don't grasp it who say they're for limited government, and they want the U.S. to be-- what's the word? A benevolent hegemony, to use William Kristol's term. In other words, the U.S. striding the globe, keeping peace, protecting national security, which, of course, is a blank check. That's all supposed to be combined with a small government at home, which is kind of ridiculous. George Will said something interesting a long time ago in the '80s. He swings back and forth somewhat between Jeffersonism and Hamiltonism. You never quite know where he is. It's kind of interesting. Someone, someday, who has nothing else to do should chart the phases of George Will because there's moments where he says fantastic things and you can cheer and everything, and he doesn't seem to be to enthusiastic about this war right now. But in one of his Hamiltonian phases in the '80s he said conservatives ought to be really careful about saying that government cannot maintain minimum wages, or control prices, or engage in rent control because if conservatives teach the American public that government can't do, then aren't the people going to draw the conclusion there may be some other things that government can't do like regime change in Cuba?

This was in the '80s, okay? We weren't thinking about Iraq. In those days Saddam Hussein was on our side, remember? Or we were on his side. I don't know how that works. But those were the days when Rumsfeld was shaking hands with him and being photographed and wasn't embarrassed by that. So this is an interesting argument, right? He's saying to conservatives, don't go tell the people that the government can't regulate the economy because if you convince them of that you won't be able to contain that reasoning. And then we'll think, well, maybe the government can't do other things like in foreign affairs, like change regimes. This, of course, is a recommendation for conservative totalitarianism isn't it? We need to tell the people the government's capable of doing anything so that they'll have trust in us when we tell them that it's capable of doing some particular things that we really want, like overthrow Castro or something of that nature. So I thought that was a very interesting argument by Will, and I've never forgotten that. I don't know what he would say today about that. He might be embarrassed, I don't know.

Okay, getting back to war being politics, not primarily military matters. You know, generals don't start wars unless they also happen to be the head of the state at the time. Okay, typically generals don't start wars. Politicians start wars. In fact, generals often have been known to oppose wars. Those who have had first-hand experience with combat, and know how bad it is,

often have been the moderating influence internally. We don't always learn this until later on. So it's an interesting twist there. But it, I think, goes to make this point that war is political. When I say political I don't mean to exclude the economic, but I don't want to call it economic because when I think of economics I think of markets, and of course we're not talking about markets. So when I say wars are political that includes the idea that the politicians are acting on behalf of their patrons in say the corporate world, for example. That's part of it. I mean that as part of it. So I don't mean that it's purely political and the politicians just have nothing else in mind but, you know, their own political interest, although they have that too. So there is an economic component. They start wars for political reasons. They may seek to control resources in a foreign place, or a foreign population.

They may seek to secure markets, export markets. This is very important. If you read Schumpeter's work on imperialism. Now Schumpeter, of course, is a fan of capitalism, although he was pessimistic about the future of capitalism. I really don't like the word capitalism. I mean free markets. But he's got an interesting essay on imperialism where basically he almost sounds like a Leninist but it just means that Lenin happened to hit the, you know, it's like a broken clock, right? He got something right in this case. Just because someone's in business or runs a big corporation doesn't mean he understands economics, right? You can run a corporation and not know anything about, say, Austrian economics. So you can make a mistake even if you're at the head of a big corporation, and big corporations, big business elites have often thought that if we don't have foreign outlets for goods we're going to have depression here, and idle resources and it's going to be really bad for profits.

And so they've turned to the government to secure foreign markets for so-called surplus goods. Mises also wrote about this. If you have protectionism that raised the price of goods higher than they would be in the domestic market then the corporations can't sell all of their inventory and also get the economies of scale, right? They can't produce enough to get the economies of scale, and if they do produce enough to get the economies of scale they can't unload all the inventory in the domestic market because the price is higher than the market clearing level. That's the whole point of the protectionism. So what are they going to do with all of the surplus? They turn to the government for military and other ways, gunboat diplomacy, other methods to open up foreign markets. And that explains a good deal of what happened in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Looking for foreign markets for certain privileged business interests, and this sometimes can lead to war, colonialism and war.

So those are some of the motives for war. Politicians may also act to secure interests, "interests," national interests that may be jeopardized by something that's going on in some foreign place. It seems to me the mark of a global empire is that nothing can happen anywhere in the world without it potentially involving the interest of the imperial power. That seems to me one of the definitions of an empire. Nothing can happen anywhere without it having some potential impact on "the interests" as interpreted by the policy makers of the imperial power, which means we

have to always be ready to respond to anything, right? This is the way the U.S. has acted throughout a lot of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I mean, it's hard to think of a region on the earth where there could be a coup, or something that our policy makers wouldn't say, "Uh-oh, some interest of ours is affected. We better be watching this very closely and be ready to pounce or do something. Regime change, send in money, send in the CIA, something, covert, overt, but something."

I don't think you can name a place. And eventually it'll be interplanetary. Something won't be able to happen on Pluto—it isn't a planet any more is it?—the former planet called Pluto without our being concerned about our interests. And this is sort of the Henry Kissinger position. Also Henry Kissinger said we had to respond to everything because otherwise our credibility would slip. So no matter how small and inconsequential, if it would be perceived as our lacking credibility in the world if we don't respond, then we have to respond. Which means we have to respond to things that aren't even really threatening, any interest no matter how you conceive of them, because to not do it is to tell the world we're weak, we're not credible, and so we can't do that either. In other words it means we have to run the world essentially. This is what the thinking leads to, and of course not just leads to it, I think we've been doing it. Okay.

So the military is a means to political/economic ends. Politicians are obviously concerned with military matters, but they're not only concerned with military matters. They may have other political considerations which the military people themselves would not be attuned to. So it may not be in the political interest of the rulers to do just about anything to win the war because that could have repercussions on the domestic population. They've got to be juggling all those things, so the politicians know that wars are not military purely. They have other considerations. Not that these are benign considerations, but they're other.

Now war, of course, always has a domestic side which is kind of lost too. And you've all read and heard talks about this and thought about it. We can't get away from the very unlibertarian consequences at home regarding the war. I mean ruling classes hold power so that they can live off the toil of the domestic population. That's the whole point. Because the people ruled always far outnumber the rulers, right, the number of rulers is always very small compared to the rest of the population. Ideology and propaganda are necessary to maintain the allegiance of the subject population. You've got to tell them stories to keep them loyal. And war is very useful for keeping the population in a state of fear and therefore trustful of their rulers. It's been one of the best things they've ever come up with, right, for keeping the population rallied tightly around the flag.

H.L. Mencken put this, you know, as well as anybody, and probably better than anybody, "The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed and hence clamorous to be led to safety by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary." That's Mencken. War and punitive external threats are used to justify conscription, higher taxes,

regimentation, suspension of civil liberties, lucrative contracts for cronies, let's not forget that, and the like, all this other stuff that goes with it. So every war is a government program.

Now, what does this mean? It means it shares certain characteristics with other government programs. So let's focus on that for a moment. On the surface one characteristic it shares with other government programs, in a sense, is sheer incompetence. Now, even conservatives like to laugh about how incompetent government is at some of the domestic things that it does. Here again the double standard kicks in because there's this sense that when government goes to war, especially the U.S. Government—I'll talk about American exceptionalism in a moment, but I'll mention it here—especially when the U.S. Government goes to war, suddenly this bumbling bureaucracy is the supercompetent well-oiled machine. It's amazing that in that one area it can be great, and maybe in a couple of other areas like the war on drugs, but in this one area it's this well-oiled machine, and you know, so many other things conservatives like to make jokes about, how stupid and ridiculous the bureaucracy is.

Do they not listen to themselves? I mean, it's ridiculous. I mean, a model of this would be, say--two models of this would be Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity, okay? And I think they may be the same person. I think the Rush Limbaugh's like a big body suit that Sean Hannity wears. But listen to that. There are moments when these guys, after talking about, you know, medical care, will get that just right. That the government can be guaranteed to screw it up. Now they can't go very deep, obviously. They talk more than two minutes and they're already out of their depth, but at least they can get the sound bite out that government will mess it up.

Get them on war a minute later-- in fact I heard Sean Hannity do this in the space of like two minutes. He was denouncing a plan for nationalized healthcare because the government's totally incompetent, and then a minute or two later on his program he's talking about how competent the government is at fighting wars. So if I wasn't a Szaszian, Thomas Szaszian, I'd say he's schizophrenic, but I think that's a myth. That's another talk. I couldn't get that one on the program. I think there are some psychiatric aspects to this whole question of war, by the way, which I can't go into, so we better hurry along here.

Okay, the competence, competence. Now, of course we're led to believe that the government is supercompetent because the government controls the information. It's very selective. I love the movie *Wag the Dog*. If you haven't seen that movie, watch it, and don't just watch it once. I don't need to tell you this. You won't want to watch it just once. You'll want to watch it maybe once a month. It's one of the best political lessons you can get anywhere. I won't give too much of the movie away except to say that in the war that they fought in that movie nobody died. So in a sense it was a better war than the ones we're seeing. I guess it would be an advancement if the government started doing what they do in that movie because at least nobody died, okay? That's something. Well, actually a couple of people died, but collateral damage. But in that

movie Robert De Niro plays this great character. He's Mr. Fix-it. He comes in. He's a consultant. So when the president's got a scandal going on, in this case it was a sexual scandal, indiscretion with a Brownie, a young girl, like a 14-year-old girl who is touring the White House with her troop. So they call in Mr. Fix-it. It's right before the election. They call in Mr. Fix-it to fix this up, to buy time until the election, take people's mind off this. They are only 11 days out from the election. They just have to distract people for 11 days, and people say that's too much. Eleven days is too much. Anyway, he concocts a phony war to get everybody's mind off of the little girl. When he's convincing people that he can do this he says, "Look, war's a showbiz anyway," and they enlist Dustin Hoffman who's a movie producer to produce a war in the studio.

And he says, "Look, war's showbiz anyway." He says, "Remember the Gulf War? What did you see about the Gulf War? What do you remember from the Gulf War? You remember one thing. You saw a video of a missile going into a chimney, or whatever, right, an air shaft or something." He said, "You saw that 500 times. The same thing over and over again. That's all you remember from the war. That's all people remember from the war." He says, "That was done in a studio." And the girl from the White House, his sort of assistant said-- He says, "I was there. It was done in a studio." She says, "Really?" He says, "How the hell do I know?"

But the point of that movie is government stuff as far as getting the people to support it is showbiz, and so it's not nearly as competent and well oiled, and this is an understatement, as we're led to believe.

And if you want proof of this I can recommend two books to you which are wonderful books: Paul Fussell's *War Time*, which is about World War II, and his book about World War I, *The Great War and Modern Memory*. Now, Fussell gave a talk a couple years ago at the Mises Institute, and you could find it online. It's an mp3. You can put it on your iPod. I was listening to it, actually, flying here. I hadn't heard it before. And he astonished me with the following facts. This is about the Gulf War, the '91, the first Gulf War. I guess we don't call this one the Gulf War, so the Gulf War. But he pointed out that one-third of American casualties, that's deaths and injuries, one third were by friendly fire. That's astounding. What's friendly fire? We call it friendly fire, it sounds so benign. Who wouldn't want to be a victim of friendly fire? It sounds nice. He actually traces the evolution of that term. Originally, I guess, they called it something like, you know, a horrible accident, something like that. It's much more accurate, but then they had to clean it up. So it's friendly fire. It sounds so warm and fuzzy. So one-third, 23 percent of the American deaths were by friendly fire. That's astounding.

In his book *War Time* he discusses all the screwups—well, not all of them, there are probably too many to put into a book—but in World War II, I mean if you read Brokaw and *The Greatest Generation*, you think that went, you know, off without a-- it was perfectly executed, well planned, the planners knew exactly what they were doing. It was perfectly executed, and clean,

and efficient; and yet the whole thing was a screwup from one end to the other. Paratroopers are dropping into Sicily and allied gunners on the ground are shooting them thinking they must be the enemy. They're shooting them down. I mean, this is the standard for war.

Fussell tells a great story also in that lecture. I think this was also during the Gulf War. There was a picture or a video, which the Department of Defense would not release, that showed Iraqis being sheared in half, literally in half by helicopter gunships, you know, fire from helicopter gunships. They wouldn't release this. But the existence of them, I guess, was known because it was asked why aren't these being released, and a spokesman said quote, "If we let people see that kind of thing there would never again be any war." And Fussell pointed out that that quote was in a book that someone gave him called, *The 776 Stupidest Things Ever Said*. He said the irony of that is that that wasn't a stupid thing to say. That was actually a wise insight, and maybe explains a lot of why we don't get information.

Anyway, war shares with other government programs the fact that it's not very—not that I want it to be competent in the sense of I don't want them to be a clean efficient killing machine—but it's worth pointing out that this image that they portray, and that the conservatives buy into, is completely ridiculous. It's what we'd expect of any government program. It has all the perversities we've come to expect from government domestic affairs—hubris, corruption, self-interestedness disguised as public service, insulation from accountability, the inability to calculate true costs—it's riddled with all those things.

But war is more to be feared than other government programs, and not just for the obvious reason, which is mass murder, of course; it's only in matters of war and foreign affairs that the politicians can demand and achieve almost total secrecy. And I think this was covered by someone who spoke earlier. If a politician refused to discuss—the president, say—refused to talk about Social Security on grounds that the information was classified, everybody would laugh at him, okay? The media would savage him. What's classified? Social Security, why is it classified? Now there may actually be stuff we don't know about it. They don't exactly brag about the size of the unfunded liability, do they? You have to find that other places. But it would be hard to get away with that in domestic matters.

But in war it's routine and there's a surface plausibility. Most people will buy it. Of course they can't talk about all the stuff that's going on, and we can't have 535 secretaries of state. There's a plausible reason, it looks like, given their premise is to basically keep Congress out of it. But of course this provides them ever more scope for the horrors because they have so much privacy. Presidents have so much privacy in this area. So anyone with a scintilla of suspicion about state power ought to be wary of the state's power to make war.

And as James Madison pointed out it's the root of so many other evils. Ralph Raico used the quote the other day, but let me remind people of it. I'm not a big Madison fan, but this was a great quotation: "Of all the enemies of true liberty war is perhaps the most to be dreaded because it comprises and develops the germ of every other. War's the parent of armies. From these proceed debts and taxes. And armies and debts and taxes are the known instruments for bringing the many under the domination of the few." It goes on and on, but he makes a great statement toward the end of this quote which we need to tell people: "No nation can preserve its freedom in the midst of continual warfare." Something a lot of people don't get, and most conservatives don't get. The warfare state does not go hand in hand with laissez-faire. Is there anything more obvious than that? I don't think so.

Now, it's maintained by conservatives and others that these concerns may be relevant to other countries, but not to the United States. And here is where the American exceptionalism comes into full force. We have sort of a blessing and a curse as libertarians in this country that other countries don't have. The founding of the country, the Jeffersonism, the Lockeanism, the Declaration of Independence are truly noble. I mean those are our ideals and they are important, and in that sense the United States was exceptional, the fact that it had such a founding document and such a founding inspiration. But that has ended up also being a license for government to do pretty much anything it wants on the grounds that we are exceptional because of our founding. So it says in a sense the government is not subject to the same rules, the same laws of politics and international law that others are subject to, other governments are subject to.

It's sort of Nixon's maxim. If the president does it, it's not illegal. Well, written a little larger if the U.S. does it, it's not illegal. It's the same thing: the president is the embodiment of the United States, so those are actually the same statements. When he acts it's the United States acting. Well, it's a non sequitur to try to go from the noble principles of the Declaration of Independence to giving the U.S. Government a blank check. Many links of that chain of reasoning would have to be forged and I don't believe it could be done. Even about the Constitution. For some reason we think, well, we have this Constitution. That means anything the government does, certainly in foreign affairs, must be good and outside of the normal rules because after all we're a constitutional republic. We have the Constitution. This is almost the way people like Hannity and that gang talk.

Well, this argument doesn't work either because even if we overlook the flaws of the Constitution: I do think there were a lot of flaws in the Constitution. Well, I won't say too much more about that right now. Governments since 1789 have been evading the limits and pushing the limits every chance they get. They have never respected the Constitution. If they've done it it's only because they assume the people wouldn't let them get away with it. When you come down to it a true constitution in any country is one that's here and here in the people, not the written piece of paper, because the interpretation of the written paper will change depending on what's here and here. That will change and that's what's happened in the U.S.

So it's not so much the Constitution that's acted as the barrier to government activity and where they feel the limits are. It's not the Constitution, the one hanging in the National Archives that provides the limits. The limits exist here, and those can change over time depending on how the ruling class propagandizes us. The public schools are extremely useful in this regard, right? They're mills for turning out quote "good citizens". That means good citizens who have their version of the Constitution here and here, the official version, the version the politicians want people to have. The war power is illustrative of what I've been saying. I see I'm going to run short on time. Article 1 Section 8 reserves to Congress the power to declare war, yet of course, as we know, presidents have been invading and occupying countries since what, 1950 or '51, '50 I think, without a formal declaration of war. Even when Congress has authorized a president to commence military operations, such as in Iraq in 2003, it does so in a way that does not resemble the declarations that were approved before U.S. entry in World War I and World War II.

If you go back and read those: I did an article on antiwar.com a few years ago quoting those actual declarations and the presidential messages asking for those declarations. Compare that to the authorization for the use of force in Iraq and you'll see it's extremely different. I'm not fans of Wilson or Roosevelt, obviously they cooked up those wars to begin with, but at least they felt they had to go to the Congress and say, not let's go to war, but a state of war exists now with Germany, or in the case of Roosevelt with Japan. And then they deferred to Congress's constitutional power, saying it's up to you now to recognize this state of war and declare it, and then give me the authorization to, you know, use all means to end it. Again, I'm not giving my blessing to those entries in those wars. I'm just trying to point out that even these two guys, Roosevelt and Wilson, felt obliged to speak in those terms.

And that's because at least people had some sense that a president shouldn't just go to war on his own. That's been totally lost. Okay. Now, this is not to say that all we need to do is bring back the Constitution. You often hear this, but, you know, I'm not sure how you do that. I mean, no constitution can enforce itself. It's words on parchment. And even Madison called the Constitution a parchment barrier, which means he didn't have a whole lot of confidence that it was going to protect freedom. Again, it gets to what's here and here in people.

We often invoke, and I don't mean to shatter a lot of myths here, but I'll try, we often invoke a distinction between the rule of law and the rule of men. Okay? We say we're a nation of laws not of men. This is a famous American kind of saying. Again, in the service of this American exceptionalism, we're different. But, you know, the closer you look at that distinction the more it dissolves because laws don't interpret themselves. Laws don't enforce themselves. We don't have some robot standing outside of our society that mechanically and perfectly has hard wired in it the meaning of the Constitution or the laws, and then ruthlessly enforces that one correct meaning. I mean, that's not the way human society works. There's no such robot and a parchment can't enforce itself; it's got to always be interpreted by people.

So what is the distinction between a rule of law and a rule of men? I don't see it because people have to interpret the laws, and we know how laws and Constitution have changed in their interpretations over the years, depending on a lot of things. Propaganda by state officials, and government schools, and events going on in the world, all kinds of things have acted to change the interpretation. And any interpretation itself is subject to interpretation. I don't mean to invoke-- I don't think Ludwig Lichtenstein is invoked at many libertarian gatherings, and his politics and his economics weren't too good, but he did make some sense in some other areas like the nature of language and thought. And if you think about it, any interpretation, if you write a law or constitutional provision, then at some point you're going to need to quote "interpret" it, but those are words too, so the interpretation is also subject to interpretation. So it gets very complicated. We're not hard wired with the interpretation.

People who talk about knowing the original intent and things of that nature, there's a lot less there than meets the eye, because whose original intent, the ratifiers', Madison's? Hamilton and Jefferson looked at the document and saw two different things and they were living there at the time; I mean, they were living at the time. So it's not so simple. So just to say, well, we've got to bring back the Congressional power to declare war, isn't going to get us very far. After all we did get into World War I and World War II with a declaration, right? The Constitution was obeyed, I suppose. Of course Roosevelt had done a whole lot in advance to get the Congress ready to give them whatever they wanted. And the person who really nailed this whole point is Randolph Bourne.

Now, I think Randolph Bourne was mentioned by Justin Raimondo. And I recommend you read Bourne's two great essays. One is the called the *War and the Intellectuals*. Now, here is a guy who was sort of a progressive liberal, not in the exactly classical sense. He's kind of a mixed bag. He's for national service. There's bad stuff in that. Writer for the *New Republic*. But when all his colleagues became gung-ho about World War I, he said "Whoa, this is a mistake. War's a wild elephant. You don't direct war surgically and achieve your, you know, preconceived ends. War is like riding a wild elephant," and he broke with his mentor John Dewey and his colleagues couldn't write in the *New Republic* anymore.

He wrote two really good essays. One's called *War and the Intellectuals*, and the other, which he died before finishing in 1918, was called *The State*, which I really recommend to you. And he understood that even in a democracy, or a democratic republic, whatever you want to call it, it doesn't really matter that the rule is the Congress or the Parliament has to declare war. That's a mere formality. Let me quote him a little bit. He says, "The government with no mandate from the people, without consultation of the people, conducts all the negotiations, the backing and filling, the menaces and explanations which slowly bring it into collision with some other government and gently and irresistibly slides the country into war. For the benefit of proud and haughty citizens it is fortified with a list of intolerable insults which have been hurled toward us by other nations. For the benefit of the liberal and beneficent it has a convincing set of moral

purposes which our going to war will achieve. For the ambitious and aggressive classes it can whisper of a bigger role in the destiny of the world. The result is that even in those countries where the business of declaring war is theoretically in the hands of representatives of the people no legislature has ever been known to decline the request of an executive which has conducted all foreign affairs in utter privacy and irresponsibility in order to take the nation into battle."

In other words a Congress is not going to turn down a president. Especially since the president has already put everything in place. If you remember back to the '91 war, now there he wasn't asking for a declaration, in a sense. It was one of those authorizations again. But all the press and all the TV commentators rhapsodized about how this was Congress's greatest moment. They were debating the people's business of war and peace. Yeah, what they didn't mention were a couple of the following facts. The troops were already in place in the Middle East, and the UN had already issued a deadline to Saddam Hussein to get out of Kuwait. Now, is a Congress going to deny the President, under those circumstances, anything he asks for? In fact the argument was, when a few courageous people questioned this in Congress, everyone else stood up and said, "Are you going to yank the rug out from under the President in the world?" Tell me how many people, I can think of only one today, who would vote against that? So it's a sham. It's a paper protection of the people against presidential adventurism.

You know, you heard the Hermann Göring quotation that, "Of course, the people don't want war, but it's the job of the politicians to drag them into war." Mencken also knew this. Mencken wrote, "Wars are seldom caused by spontaneous hatreds between people. For people, in general, are too ignorant of one another to have grievances, and too indifferent to what goes on beyond their borders to plan conquests. They must be urged to the slaughter by politicians who know how to alarm them." Imagine if some private effort to go to war in Iraq were somehow formulated and people were going door to door asking for a contribution to fund some private army to go to Iraq. How many people would have put some of their own money into this? I mean, they wouldn't have raised anything. War is political. War is not private sectors. It's got nothing to do with quote "the people" except that the people are the fodder and they do the dying.

But we must remember one more thing, and I'll close on this note. And I think even a lot of war criticism lacks this obvious point, and we really need to wake people up to this. The greatest tragedy of this war, these wars, these occupations is not that American soldiers are dying or are getting horribly maimed, or that we're spending so much money. It's that we're killing innocent people in Afghanistan and Iraq. That is what's wrong.

I'm going to close with a quotation which everybody I know is always hesitant to use this quotation, but I think it's something that needs to be said. Herbert Spencer said this. Herbert Spencer was a great champion of not only individualism, but a great opponent of colonialism and

imperialism. He's one of the most smeared people in intellectual history because in the *New York Times* recently they declared that he was one of the people who used Social Darwinism to justify imperialism and colonialism, which is about as opposite from the truth as could be. It drove Roderick Long, you know, insane to hear that because he's the founding member of the Herbert Spencer antidefamation league.

Anyway Spencer, in the 1880s some time when Britain was fighting its second Afghan war, was at his club, the Athenian Club, a gentleman's club, I guess, and some retired colonel came up to him. Some incident had happened the day before and some British soldiers were killed, or something. I forget the exact details. In Afghanistan. And this retired military man is just sort of bemoaning, lamenting this to Spencer, and Spencer looked the guy in the eyes and said, "When men hire themselves out to shoot other men on order, asking nothing of the justice of the cause, I don't care if they're shot themselves." So I will end on that note. I think we have some time for questions.

##### End of Sheldon Richman Part 1.mp3 #####

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**Man 1:** ...people are so wonderful is that usually the American war program is conducted in conjunction against other countries' war programs. So in other words it's one government against another government, so our government may look very effective in that context.

**Sheldon Richman:** Well, that's true. It's another one of the cases of a blessing and a curse. We're an extremely wealthy society thanks to the huge element of markets. Obviously, nothing near pure that we have. So that's a blessing. The curse is we produce a hell of a lot of resources for the state that they then use to turn into war technology and weapons, which is true, if you compare to other governments. Yeah, it's probably-- I don't know, maybe you could make a case it's more efficient than all the other governments, but here's the thing though. It's not terribly efficient against terrorism, which used to be called guerilla warfare.

And there's a book I've only read about, have not read yet, but I want to—I was going to mention this, but of course I didn't have time to mention everything—by John Robb. I don't know if anyone here's already seen it. Called *Brave New War*. David Brooks, who's not someone I'm used to quoting, but David Brooks the columnist at the *New York Times* did a column about this book, and I swear that column, if you read between the lines, sounded like a case for totally really privatizing defense in this country. Because the point of the book apparently is, and Brooks seemed to be buying it, the quote "the new enemy" is totally decentralized, totally unbureaucratic, which means a bureaucracy is completely incapable and unqualified to counter it.

So I think we need two things if we're going to make ourselves safe. It's a dangerous world, but maybe not quite as dangerous as the government wants us to believe, according to John Mueller in *Overblown*, but there are dangers. There are some dangers. Two things. A totally noninterventionist foreign policy, obviously. Bring all the troops home and then disband the standing army, but that won't put all the toothpaste back in the tube, okay? There are grievances from the past that aren't going to be given up just because we say from now on we're not interventionists. I think that's a little Pollyanna to think all grievances then disappear. Some people are going to say okay, that's great. Starting now you're not going to intervene. You killed my family, you know, yesterday.

So the other half of that is private, real private free market defense, defenses, because it's not just one big monolithic defense. It's decentralized security. That's the only thing it seems to me that's capable of countering the kind of stuff we're seeing now. Not any big plodding bureaucracy. I thought it was great that Ron Paul condemned the Department of Homeland Security in the debate. He endorsed getting rid of it and he shocked everybody. He shocked everybody. And what did he say? What did we do, we created some big monstrous bureaucracy. Well, the smaller bureaucracy couldn't prevent 9/11, so what do we need? A big monstrous bureaucracy. That's what Ron Paul was saying. And as other people have pointed out, I mean, this point we need to be driving home all the time: the Pentagon couldn't protect its own headquarters. What have we been paying hundreds of billions of dollars for since World War II if they couldn't do that? Okay, I've gone on too long. Go ahead.

**Man 2:** Well, I enjoyed your talk very much. It was very interesting, very courageous, but I'd like to go out on a limb here...

**Sheldon Richman:** Let me just say something about courageous. This is not courageous. Courageous is Daniel Ellsberg and Joe Margulies and nothing is going to happen to me.

**Man 2:** Okay. It was cowardly talk. I guess I'd go out on a limb here and disagree partly with Göring because I think that it's not just fear that drives us into war, it's also an appeal, actually, to people's better instincts sometimes. For example, and this is something that I think is being overlooked. We alone in the world now, our President, the only nation in the world that's calling what's going on in Darfur a genocide. It's not a genocide. It's a complex civil war and already we're preparing to intervene there to quote, unquote "prevent a genocide." The aid workers are complaining that the no-fly zone which is going to demand a military intervention is going to interfere with them delivering aid. And actually, if you look at it, the same people that drove us into war in the Balkans and that drove us into war in Iraq are very interested in getting us involved in another oil-rich country, which has the usual enemies on the international scene, an Arab country, Sudan. I just hope that this will be mentioned; more and more people will take to writing about it because we're on the verge. While people are thinking about Iran they're moving us into Sudan.

**Sheldon Richman:** Well, that's a good point. I mean, we've been very distracted for good reasons by Iraq and Afghanistan, and so maybe we haven't paid the attention to Darfur and all that. We have time to do more than one thing, and so good point. You said the public sometimes wants to go into these things for good reasons. I think the public can be naive, and there can be some good reasons. I mean, a lot of people might have thought, yeah, we ought to really topple Saddam Hussein, he's a vicious guy. But that reminded me of one other thing. I mean, the polls show that people don't like the war in Iraq now and want to get out in some way. Maybe not immediately get out, but I can't help but think that what if things on the surface seem to be going well? I'm not sure they're concerned about all the Iraqis that are getting killed and the troops bursting into homes and things of that nature. I think their main concern is Americans are getting killed. Americans are getting wounded and there doesn't seem to be any end in sight. If it looked like things were going swimmingly I'm not sure the people would be concerned about it. That's my fear.

I think there is sort of a maybe almost instinctual distrust and fear of foreigners. Another book I can recommend to you, which discusses this, although not in the context of war and foreign affairs, but betrayed rather than military things, is Bryan Caplan's new book, *The Myth of the Rational Voter*. I was going to say something about it, but I don't have the time, and it's a little bit far afield. But let me just recommend that; it's a very interesting book, and it gets into what he calls the antiforeign bias. Anyway, let me not ignore this side. One more? I'm sorry. I took too much time.

**Man 3:** Good morning. Gene Carver out of Portland, Maine. I want to get back to the beginning of your talk about the certain catch phrases, and I'd be interested in your comments about the phrase, "I'm against the war, but support the troops."

**Sheldon Richman:** I don't know. What do you say? There are a couple of ways you can go there. First of all, it doesn't seem coherent to say you don't support the war, but you support the troops because you can't support their mission. On the other hand if you really support the troops it seems like you'd want them home safely in their beds. I'd go either way with that. There's one other point I was going to make about that. Oh gosh. What was it? I think one reason people say that is the fear that gets instilled in them when it comes to matters of war. People are timid about uttering criticism of it because they still have somewhat bought into the nationalism and this tribalism. So that even when they don't like the particular war they have to say a lot of other things as if to show, you know, their card, their membership card: listen, I'm still pro-American. I love the country. You know, I love everything. I love the troops. However, I just want to make this one little criticism.

So I think that comes out of this timidity about uttering criticism of the war. And I think we need to proudly say we don't support the troops. The only thing we support is bringing them

home. I'm happy they'll be safer. But you know who else will be safer if we bring them home? A lot of Iraqis and Afghans will be safer, and I think we always need to mention that and not just buy into the only danger there is to Americans. To me that's bordering on criminal negligence to say. The other thing that bugs me is that we should temper our criticism because of the troops' morale. In my blog I wrote let's get our priorities straight. There's more important things than the troops' morale. There's all the people dying over there. Let's bring them home and then we can address their self-esteem issues. That's my priority. Thank you.