War, Foreign Policy, and Empire: The Changing Political Dynamic
by Anthony Gregory

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: Our next speaker, Anthony Gregory, is a research analyst at the Independent Institute and also serves as a policy advisor for the Future of Freedom Foundation. A graduate of the University of California Berkeley, Anthony has published articles in a wide variety of Libertarian publications and websites and other newspapers and publications. He has also been awarded the Ron Paul Liberty in Media Award. As you’ll see when Anthony comes up here, if you haven’t had the pleasure of meeting him, he is in another generation from most of us in the room; he sort of popped out of nowhere a couple of years ago, from Berkeley of all places. And then just started writing the most fantastic Libertarian articles. All of us were just stunned in the Movement because here’s this young fellow pops up out of nowhere and he’s writing these purist no compromise tracks. I told him he’s become one of my heroes in very quick order. It’s nice to know that we’ve played a role in his intellectual development because there is an eating establishment at Berkeley that reportedly sells the finest hotdogs in the area. On the walls are a bunch of Libertarian tracts. This guy is a hardcore Libertarian; he’s actually a supporting of the Future of Freedom Foundation, and on the walls were a couple of our essays and Anthony saw a couple of those things and was moved by them and has been writing articles for us, and agreed to become formally associated with the Future of Freedom Foundation. The title of Anthony’s talk is, “War, Foreign Policy and Empire, the Changing Political Dynamic,” Anthony Gregory.

Anthony Gregory: Thank you very much. I must say this is a tremendous honor. I have to thank Jacob, and all of the Future of Freedom Foundation, this is an amazing honor to be included in this program. I also have to thank him for putting me in the third day where I have over a dozen tough acts to follow. That was really generous of you to do for the “rookie;” it’s
very nice of you. So the Democrats have caved, they voted for Bush’s war spending, minus the request for a timetable for a withdrawal. Nancy Pelosi claims the debate will continue, as if there’s been one.

**Anthony Gregory:** The Senate approved the spending by an overwhelming margin, and[,] all it took was some political compromising, some log rolling and now we have full bi-partisan support to continue this madness in Iraq without any end in sight. And this all comes with the news that Bush wants to double American combat forces in Iraq by year’s end. What’s going on?! According to the *New York Times* poll in May, 72% of Americans disapprove of Bush’s policy in Iraq, this includes 40% of Republicans; 61% of Americans say the U.S. never should have started the war. Despite the compromises in Washington, 63% of Americans think the U.S. should get out by sometime next year. Have the tides changed? Is this conference a waste of time given that most Americans agree with us on the war? Not exactly, unfortunately; the need to educate people on the follies of empire is as pressing as ever.

Before I focus on the negative, I should say there is some reason to celebrate. The fact that most Americans are sick of this war is wonderful. After all, as terrible as it has been, the war and occupation, there’s a sense in which Americans have responded to the horrors of this war better than in the past. Yes, the U. S. has been in Iraq longer than in World War II. Yes, we’ve lost 3,500 American lives in this war, more than were taken on 911, and; yes, tens of thousands more Americans are traumatized and wounded, but Americans are upset, as they should be. The biggest proponents of all-out global jihad against radical Islam are quite disappointed by this public opinion. Shortly after the Afghanistan invasion, neoconservative Max Boot complained that Americans just weren’t willing to take the casualties we were in the past. Today the more blood-thirsty Hawks lament how quickly Americans have shied away from this war, over what they see as “a mere few thousand casualties.”

For the last few years, I’ve heard complaints that America used to be willing to wage “all-out war on civilians,” whereas now the Administration tries to minimize the official enemy death count; some said the United States shouldn’t have just smashed Faluja, it should have insured the city never saw life again and carried out the same policy throughout the Middle East, if not just Iraq. On the home front, the U. S. government should, according to these series warmongers “take off the kid gloves,” “censor the media,” “abolish dissent,” “round up seditionists,” “impose loyalty oaths, and make life Hell for all Muslims in this country.” As far as money is concerned, so called “defense spending” is a fraction of was during World War II, which consumed about 40% of the nation’s income. Most Americans aren’t sacrificing for the war effort as in the past.

Some people regret all this, but I think we’re fortunate that Americans have become a little more wary of total war. Why have Americans become so sick of Iraq in particular, despite of what the “Neocons” would say are relatively minor setbacks. We have this mission to cleanse the world
of evil. What’s up with Americans? Don’t they get it? Part of it, ironically, is because this war has done so much to discredit the “American Empire.” This is largely why everyone from Carter’s National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Reagan’s NSA Director, William Odom, to that great advocate of American Imperialism, historian Neil Ferguson, considers this Iraq war such a disaster. It has weakened our international standing, our diplomatic relations, and our military establishment. It has unnecessarily strained the U.S. government’s alliances with other western powers in the United Nations. It has hurt the American Empire.

Well, in so far as the American people suffer from this, from a weakened national security, from international resentment, this is regrettable, and in terms of the human cost, the hundreds of thousands of Iraqis who have likely died because of this war should never be swept under the rug. This Iraq war has its particularly egregious aspects to it and, it was unbelievably stupid for a strategic point of view, yet I will say that if there is any silver lining to the Iraq war, it’s exactly that it might make it harder for the U.S. Empire to wage war in the future.

**Anthony Gregory:** According to the recent polls I have seen, most Americans wouldn’t support war in Iran, but that could change. To see why, we need to back up and consider the different arguments for and against the American Empire, what their true implications are for our future, as a free, peaceful society. Now some of the establishment wasn’t crazy about the Iraq war to begin with. The same prudence that guided the first Bush Administration away from Iraqi regime change during the first Gulf War was echoed by its National Security Advisor, General Brent Scowcroft in August, 2002 when he warned that the war “would not be a cake walk. On the contrary, it undoubtedly would be very expensive with serious consequences for the U.S. and global economy and it could as well be bloody.”

It is true that the Neoconservatives in the Bush Administration succeeded in breaking from America’s post World War traditions of stability and caution when they launched their crazed attempt to turn Iraq into the 51st American state. What they tried to do was of a revolutionary nature. They tried to forcibly democratize and liberalize a country, whereas if the majority truly got its way, Jeffersonian liberalism would certainly not flourish. They thought elections could create freedom. They’ve also claimed this about Afghanistan, which is even more absurd, so all this unilateral preemptive strikes, full blown military occupation, regime change; it did mark some a somewhat different course for the American imperium.

In 2004, John Kerry repeated the old school line and criticized Bush. The war had been conducted without UN approval. It had not incorporated the strong alliances we had used in the fist Gulf War. All of it was a diversion from a realist conception on the war on terror, but Kerry didn’t offer a much different policy or say that the U.S. should pull out. Many of the other Bush critics two or three years ago said, “Pulling out would result in chaos and Civil War.” Since then, a couple of thousand American troops have died and chaos and Civil War have erupted.
Now, John Kerry like many other critics of Bush’s Iraq policy mostly focused on that unilaterialism and bad timing. Well, I have to say, a UN sponsored war on Iraq would have likely been worse. When something is an “active aggression,” you don’t want more aggressors joining in on the trouncing.

**Anthony Gregory:** And sometimes, this talk about the Iraq war being a break from past traditions, it fails to recognize a couple of important things. One, the U.S. government has been involved in overthrowing foreign regimes and starting aggressive wars for a long time, for more than fifty or a hundred years, depending on what precisely we’re talking about. And two, it was the supposedly wise and wonderful tradition of American Empire for global stability that got us into this huge mess in the first place. Was him who CIA installed” the Shah. It was under the Johnson and Nixon Administrations that the U.S. actually started backing the Baathists according to Roger Morris, from the National Security Council. It was under Jimmy Carter that Brzezinski who now warns against war with Iran, to his credit, spearheaded a policy to support the Islamic extremists in Afghanistan for the purpose of inciting a Soviet invasion and then fighting it off, as part of the Cold War. Ah, the good old days.

**Anthony Gregory:** Under Reagan [was Regan], the U.S. government assisted … and really threw its weight behind Saddam. This was back when Saddam was doing all those nasty things that were later used to justify regime change, his overthrow. Reagan also helped out the Iranians with some missiles but that was a side project. It was Bush Sr., that wise venerable statesmen, who ruined the opportunity of a lifetime at the close of the Cold War attacking Iraq to protect Kuwait; this particular intervention along with the ones in Afghanistan starting under Carter, that might have been the worst of all the supposedly “wise, measured, Middle Eastern policies of times past.” It was at the end of this war that the U.S. bombed the water treatment facilities, prevented the importation of chlorine, and imposed some of the most cruel and unusual trade sanctions in world history.

It was also during this war that thousands of troops were stationed in Saudi Arabia. Bill Clinton didn’t pull those troops out of Saudi Arabia. He didn’t end the sanctions on Iraq. His Ambassador to the UN, Madeleine Albright, said on Sixty Minutes that they were “worth it,” as a means of overthrowing Saddam, despite the hundreds of thousands of dead Iraqis. Clinton then made her a Secretary of State. The United Nations supported that first war on Iraq and made those sanctions possible, giving some international cover for the brutality and; it was under Clinton that the Iraqi Liberation Act of ’98 was passed, which established Iraqi regime change as American policy. In this sense, Bush didn’t break the tradition at all. He was just carrying the torch, although it was he that finally dropped that torch on Iraq’s oil fields. It was this tradition of American foreign policy before 9/11 that led to 9/11. Bush isn’t to blame for everything, just a whole heck of a lot.
And it was also under this “enlightened, respectful tradition,” that America waged total war all over the globe. This began in earnest probably during World War II when the U.S. fighters bombed dozen of Japanese cities. Even before Hiroshima and Nagasaki, this tradition was continued during the Korean War, where the U.S. government introduced Napalm warfare, targeted North Korean civilians, bombed dams to cause flooding and killed a million or more. It was brought down on the Vietnamese people, killing hundreds of thousands if not millions of them. It was what inspired Nixon to bomb Cambodia, which led to blowback in the form of a much-strengthened Khmer Rouge, and; it was also what inspired Carter to assist the Khmer Rouge in it’s conflict with the Vietnamese. And also, these anti-Communist administrations like Carter did everything they could to keep the Khmer Rouge in the United Nations as the proper representatives of their country, and then; Reagan funneled millions of dollars to the Khmer Rouge.

It was this tradition, this supposedly pre-9/11 “good tradition” of the realists, that guided several generations of American politicians to support any right wing dictator who is anti-Communist or anti-drugs supposedly. Sure the international community might have backed a lot of this American aggression, more than the current war, but that means the U.S. was able to get away with more mass murder? This is hardly something to be nostalgic about. Whether or not the U.S. government has global support for a war does not determine its morality. Whether or not both political parties agree to butcher masses abroad should not be our biggest concern. All this ties to the superficial reasons that people either support or oppose war depending on their partisan loyalties or ideological prejudices.

Back in the ’90s when Clinton was sending the military all over the globe, there is a post Cold War right wing resistance to much of it; part of it was because they just couldn’t stand that draft dodger sending American troops on national building missions. His justifications were largely internationalist, not nationalist. He and the UN laughingly called the situation in Haiti “a threat to international peace,” as he deployed 20,000 Marines to secure democracy there. Republican Bob Dole, from Kansas, challenged Clinton’s power to do this without Congressional approval. A few years later, Clinton said he was “protecting the world from genocide” when he bombed Serbia, killing lots of people. Ex-presidential candidate Bob Dole largely approved this time, but most Congressional Republicans opposed Clinton’s foreign policy, especially the NATO backed Kosovo [was Cosivo] War.

The right wing largely opposed it and so did many [all?] real Libertarians. We were all labeled “uncaring,” about <inaudible>. Much of the left defended the war and some even called conservatism “patriotic.” With the Iraq War and War on Terror, we’ve seen the flip-flop. A good example of how the discourse change can be seen in the words of the American Legion. During the Kosovo War the Legion passed a resolution that said in part, “Neither the President nor the Congress have defined America’s objectives in what has become an open ended conflict characterized by an ill defined progressive escalation. It is obvious that an ill planned and
massive commitment of U.S. resources could only lead to troops being killed, wounded or captured without advancing any clear purpose, mission or objective.” The resolution stated that without guidelines being set, including a clear exit strategy, the U.S. should “withdraw American forces immediately.” Fast forward six years to 2005 and it’s the Iraq War and, the American Legion’s National Commander says, “Public protests against the war here at home while our young men and women are in harm’s way on the other side of the globe only provide aid and comfort to the enemies.”

Anthony Gregory: Well, this is interesting but the Left on the other hand has not hesitated to attack this war savagely, sometimes claiming principle against the very act of bombing civilians; but many on the Left were silent or even cheering when Clinton sent troops abroad and dropped bombs on civilians eight years ago. This goes back a long way; it was the Left, at least the non-Communists, who were most enthusiastic in the early Cold War for Truman’s Collective Security, cheering on the deployment of American troops in Korea. It was the Right that was a little hesitant, at least until the Cold War became their number one unifying principle. Was it that the Korean War was justified and the Viet Nam wasn’t, or vice versa? Was bombing civilians and bridges and TV stations and pharmaceutical plants okay when Clinton did it, or was that wrong?

Whereas Bush is doing it with some justification, we hear different arguments for foreign intervention generally falling under the categories of nationalist and internationalist, but many of them rely on a little of both. Many people mark the beginning of American Empire, the Spanish American War. It’s not a bad argument to make. Originally, the people who really wanted the U.S. [to] going abroad to slay monsters, I’d say were mostly “nationalists.” As the frontier was closing they wanted to expand American power. There was this view that the U.S. needed a huge Navy like all great empires. It was our “manifest destiny.” We conquered the wilderness and the savages here, it’s time to go abroad, and of course there’s lots of economic interests. They didn’t understand economics then either, except a lot of businessmen actually do understand economics and they know that the free market is better for other people. They understand that “corporatism” is better for them, so there was a lot of this kind of selfish, nationalist view toward the U.S. becoming an empire, but it wasn’t sold to the Americans purely by that.

There was the national security threat that was supposedly presented when the USS Maine blew up. They blamed that on the Spanish, but a lot of it was this “anti-imperialism,” ironically. They said, “Look, the Spanish are butchering Cubans.” They had William Randolph Hearst in his yellow journalism-rag trumping up the case for war. Telling his photographer, “You furnish the pictures. I’ll furnish the war.” It was this idea of liberating Cubans from the Spanish Empire and then later, liberating Hearst Filipinos from the Spanish Empire. The U.S. did that by killing hundreds of thousands of them and Christianizing these Catholic Filipinos, torching their churches and issuing orders to kill any Filipino who resisted above the age of ten.
Now this whole idea of “fighting empire” to democratize the world, of course, everyone here knows I’m sure that it really started off under Wilson, and this was a lot of the rhetoric behind this support of the war, but there was also the nationalist side. The Lusitania, they were afraid of the threat posed by the Zimmerman Program or the Zimmerman telegram; supposedly Mexico and Germany were going to team up and take over the U.S. Until the Iraq War that might be the most absurd things I ever heard. But after World War I, as Sheldon mentioned, there was a lot of disappointment with that. There was disillusionment. The war didn’t democratize the world. They saw fascism and Communism taking root.

World War II is interesting because, it really was a nationalists’ war, at least in the beginning. By far, most Americans didn’t want war, they were sick of war, and it was Pearl Harbor that made Americans rally around the flag like it was this national greatness. And the truth, if you look at the propaganda at the time, there was a lot of vicious racism, Doctor Zeus of all people was drawing cartoons of Japanese, dozens of them on behalf of the U.S. government. The polls showed Americans cared much more about killing Japanese than Germans, but after World War II, at the end FDR started talking about Stalin as some great partner to create international peace and freedom.

It was after World War II that people started thinking of that war as an “internationalist war.” Even if you could get someone to agree the Axis powers would have never taken America, which was the fear of most Americans, or they at least wanted to assert their power. It was after World War II that the argument became that “the U.S. jumped in there to liberate Hitler’s victims” which is not true. First of all, Hitler really ramped up the Holocaust after the US jumped in the war, whereas Stalin who the U.S. jumped into the war on the side of had killed millions by then. Of course, the U.S. turned Jews away from the shores, so that wasn’t it at all, so that war was interesting because, in that case it was nationalism first and now it’s become, the “U.S. saved the world.”

The Cold War was a lot of both. We had to assert freedom everywhere for our national security, but skipping back ahead to more modern times, the nationalist conservatives, many of them were Cold War hawks. They opposed Clinton’s international war mongering, but they became cheerleaders for war on 9/11. There was now an Islamic threat to the American nation, even more ubiquitous and confusing and scary and unknowable than the Communists, and at any cost in American blood or treasure, certainly in foreign lives, was worth it to “protect America.” The mainstream Right called upon all Americans to rally behind Bush as he launched the horrifying atrocity of “Shock and Awe,” and this was supposedly to protect Americans from “weapons of mass destruction”—the ones the CIA said that Saddam wouldn’t use unless the U.S. attacked. But putting that aside, even some conservatives who were skeptical said that once the boots were on the ground, we had to support the troops.
The UN didn’t approve this war. But it was a major excuse for it, there was an internationalism here too, and of course, the neoconservatives had an internationalist goal all along. The argument that “we need to protect national security,” was just made up. The UN was used as an excuse, even though they didn’t approve it. The Right Wing kept saying, “Saddam is violating the UN. You should never violate what the UN says, so despite what the UN says, let’s wage war to defend UN’s honor,” was the argument. It’s very confusing, but it was really the fear of the mushroom cloud, the fear of the threat to America, that made most Americans in the 60%, 65% or whatever, support that war. But as soon as these nationalist arguments and national security arguments began to fall apart, the bogus ties to Al Qaeda, the uranium forgeries, the phony weapons of mass destruction program—after all this became apparent, all of a sudden the neoconservative nationalism[,] that was always part of the argument became the bigger argument. Bush made history in his 2005 inaugural speech talking about how, America was “a sleeping giant” before 9/11. <suppresses laugh> Was talking about how the United States just minded its own business before 9/11 and, how now we Americans realize it’s our mission on earth to spread liberty everywhere. And for that period in early 2005, the conservatives claimed the internationalist mantle. Rush Limbaugh attacked the Left for not living up to the idealism of Bush’s speech. Rush, the oxy-conservative, he said...

Anthony Gregory: Rush said, “What the president did today was make the case for spreading human liberty, defending human dignity which was once largely the preserve of liberalism.” If you go back and look at FDR’s speeches and at the number of times he mentioned God in his inaugurals. Go back to JFK. “We will fight any foe. Go anywhere. Do whatever it takes to spread freedom and liberty.” Hey, he couldn’t be a liberal Democrat today, JFK couldn’t be, Truman couldn’t be. They were committed to the “triumph of liberty in the world,” and that’s what the speech was about today. “The triumph of freedom and liberty in the world and, it is now conservatism that is propelling this.”

That same month, those phony Iraqi elections were trumpeted as a sign that Iraq was now freer thanks to Bush’s bombs, bullets, and belligerence. This led many on the Left who weren’t convinced Iraq was ever a threat to us to have second thoughts—there is even a short period where Jon Stewart of the Daily Show thought maybe he had been wrong. But despite all this Wilsonian baloney of the U.S. spreading Democracy everywhere, there’s some dirty little secrets. Of course, the U.S. hasn’t overthrown Democracies in Iran, Guatemala, Chile. Furthermore, Democracy doesn’t guarantee liberty; all states rule with some tacit consent of most of the people being ruled, majoritarian support doesn’t secure freedom, this is supposedly why we have a Bill of Rights to assert certain rights of the Minority against the whims of Democratically elected politicians.

f anything, pure Democracy encourages people to see government not as a threat to their liberty but as an extension of themselves. As the Iraq occupation continued, the Right also began pointing at everything the U.S. government was doing in Iraq to build schools, hospitals, roads,
parks, and so on. It seemed that the domestic Socialism they’d opposed when done by Democrats at home became something to cheer on when done by the government abroad. Why is it that conservatives say that, and Sheldon talked about this, why is it they say they support free markets and are skeptical of a “welfare state,” but they champion an American created welfare state in Iraq as some sort of victory? Well, I think it’s either they don’t believe this propaganda, the war propaganda, or their opposition to such social spending isn’t grounded in any real understanding of economics or property rights. It has to be one or the other.

At any rate, many Americans who had not bought into the nationalist arguments, who had rejected the “Saddam was a threat,” began to swallow this internationalist baloney and agree that the U.S. could not withdraw. No way! No, we owe it to the Iraqis to give them their liberal Democracy, as if this were possible. Check points, curfews, U.S. imposes an income tax in Iraq, gun bans; Saddam Hussein was, as if we don’t all know, a horrible guy. People in Baghdad had personal arms that the U.S. helped the new regime round up. There was even a story about a year ago, U.S. soldiers imposing price controls, or enforcing price controls on gasoline on Iraqis. So as the occupation continued, even as the nationalist security reasons had been discredited, there was this internationalist defense that kicked in. There’s still a hubristic element of American supremacism here, an idea that “we know what’s best for them.” Ironically, the same people who argue that the Muslims can handle Democracy as well as we can also argue, they can’t do it without us holding their hands, while we’re armed to the teeth, since we can hardly trust them to govern themselves.

Very interesting logic, but overall what was once a very nationalist justification became a very different argument. It was the classic warmongering argument, “We have to kill foreigners including civilians to save Americans and assert American honor.” This was the sentiment right after 911, and; if you didn’t go along with it, you cared more about foreigners than Americans and were un-American. Then it shifted; all of a sudden it was a matter of letting Americans continue to die so as to protect Iraqis! All of a sudden if you were against American involvement since it compromised your security and consumed our wealth, you were some sort of isolationist that didn’t care about human rights! It seems like there’s no end to the justifications for mass murder, all under the guise of protecting human life.

This also applies to the calculation between life and liberty. After 9/11 we were all told we must “sacrifice a little liberty so as to save our lives.” We were told that “Americans and foreigners must sacrifice lives in order to secure liberty.” My head is spinning! Are Americans dying for our freedom or are we enslaving ourselves to keep alive? Which is it? Why should we trust politicians with this calculation even if we believe there was some justice to it—which of course, anyone who believes in individual rights wouldn’t believe in this—but[;] why trust this to the central planner and the politician? It’s not Bill Clinton, or George Bush, or Hillary Clinton, or Rudi Giuliani. Actually I heard Rudi Giuliani. I used to have bad opinions of him but I read something recently; he was actually the Mayor of New York City during 9/11.
Anthony Gregory: And I don’t know, I feel bad about everything I said about this guy. He was actually, I mean anyone. I’m sorry…

Anthony Gregory: When I think of Rudi Giuliani…

Anthony Gregory: As Christ-like a figure as he is. It’s not these politicians whose freedom and lives are at risk. It’s the lives of American troops, foreigners and given the reality of blowback, Americans. It is these that the politicians are playing with. It is our liberty at home that has suffered and if you look at life for Iraqi Christians or Iraqi women or almost any Iraqi who wasn’t direct enemy of Saddam’s regime, it’s their liberty too. For some reason this nation which was born out of revolution against the British Empire and seized that as a revolution for liberty and self governance, even though, America was far from perfect. There was slavery, but we see the Revolution against the British as good, but for some reason, we see Iraqi resistance to U.S. empire as evil. Why? Because they have problems in their culture; it doesn’t make any sense.

Another thing that doesn’t make sense is this whole thing, “fighting for our freedom.” I wrote this piece on the anniversary of 9/11 about surrendering, because right after 9/11, of course, the proper thing to do was withdraw, get the U.S. Empire down. Close down the bases and everything. But the hawks said, “That would be surrendering to what the Islamists want.” But they also said, “The Islamists don’t want us. They don’t care about our foreign policy. They care about our freedom.” On the one hand just closing down the empire which would be good for our freedom, certainly our economic freedom, supposedly, that’s giving into the terrorists and what they want, even though the terrorists don’t hate our foreign policy. They hate our liberty. You’d think that the real surrendering the terrorists would be giving up our liberty.

Anthony Gregory: Since 9/11 it has been startling the degree to which people who should know better have gone along with this propaganda, swallowed the War on Terror whole and cheered on aggression abroad while losing sight of the struggle for freedom at home. On the Left we’ve had people like Alan Dershowitz who defend torture, but many so-called Libertarians have been even worse than a lot of Leftists on Civil Liberties. Right after 9/11, there was some talk on the Left and among Libertarians, I remember: “Now the U.S. government can stop the drug war because there’s the terrorists to fight.” Well the opposite has happened of course; first the government tied the two issues together with that ridiculous ad campaign, “Anyone who smokes marijuana is funding Al Qaeda.”

Anthony Gregory: Then the drug war accelerated and the government began justifying every possible violation of our liberties now to fight terrorism, and; they have this new great argument. They’d say, “The U.S. has been doing this to combat drugs. Terrorism is worse than drugs.” Yes, the U.S. shouldn’t have been doing it to fight drugs either. The real question is why, seeing
how purely evil the government can be, we have the largest per capita prison population in the industrial world at a minimum. A Bill of Rights destroyed for asset forfeiture and snooping, why would anyone trust this entity with more power to wage a war on terrorism? Terrorism is a tactic; it’s not an enemy. It’s a tactic and a war against it is going to be at least as doomed as a war on drugs. The U.S. government has hundreds of thousands of peaceful people in just its domestic prisons, and people think it’s going to protect our rights if only we give it more of our liberty? This should be absurd on its face, as far as this relates to foreign policy; the same government that wages chemical warfare on plant life in Columbia, strong arms Mexico to maintain a U.S. drug war internationally, is probably not going to be very humanitarian in the war on terror.

Libertarians in particular should always be skeptical of the idea of our government going abroad to advance liberty. Freedom is not a government program. War is. Freedom is not. If Central Planning can’t give us food and shelter, as the Soviet Union showed us, how can it guarantee liberty itself? If we can’t trust it to allocate resources efficiently, how can we trust it with this calculus of trading freedom and lives, of both us and foreigners? It makes no sense and yet some of these so-called Libertarians continue to trust big government with a promotion of its opposite, liberty. If Libertarians needed anything more concrete to understand our government, it’s not entirely the best method of promoting liberty abroad, all while protecting our freedom. We should look at what it’s done since 9/11. Our civil liberties have been battered without real end. The change in partisan loyalties to the state on civil liberties since the ’90s has also been interesting. It was right-wingers who were said to be encouraging terrorism after the Oklahoma City bombing. It was the Democrats who were imposing new violations of privacy, passed the effective Anti-terrorism and effective death penalty Act, and John Ashcroft decried Clinton for his calling upon Big Brother to read our Email. Nowadays, the Right is doing all they can to feed Big Brother steroids.

**Anthony Gregory:** Elements on the Left, there were good elements to the Left, even under Clinton. The ACLU challenged some of Clinton’s power grabs, and today, there are people on the Right who have been good too. By and large, the Right has never been good on civil liberties; if they were they’d understand this drug war they’ve always liked. It’s just unmanageable. They’ve kind of seen the Bill of Rights as a protection of the guilty. That’s the big problem with our country is the Bill of Rights is too strong. And when the Patriot Act was rammed through we got this really bizarre defense of it, it was absolutely necessary and yet it didn’t give Bush any powers he didn’t already have. We got the same runarounds on Bush’s extra-judicial wiretaps. Bush had claimed in April 2004 that all his wiretaps were all judicially approved, but this was a lie. He had the NSA wiretapping Americans without FISA warrants, which themselves have been notoriously easy for the Administration to get, even retroactively. When he was caught in this “fib,” in December 2005, Bush remarkably said, “The fact that we’re discussing this program is helping the enemy.” Alberto Gonzalez defended this program in February of last year with some odd reasoning. Bush said he this power inherently since he’s the Commander-in-

Anthony Gregory: All of this defies reason, why are they so quick to defend all these laws that empower the president if the president already had the powers? If the Patriot Act changed nothing, why was it necessary? In January of this year, Gonzalez said the NSA spying is now being done with the approval of FISA, so either the warrantless spying wasn’t as necessary as they claimed, or perhaps the FISA oversight is more of a rubber stamp now, but is their attempt to work with FISA an admission that they were violating the law before? I don’t know. I think that what they’re really doing is warming us up for totalitarianism. Thus, do they refuse to outlaw torture completely, even though they claim they never practice it? Thus, do they say the president has had all these powers since the Washington Administration but they never relent in asking for more powers; thus do they cross their fingers and tell us that they’re doing things “the old fashioned way.” Then they say that “everything’s changed on 9/11. We can’t do things the old fashioned way. Even discussing this is ‘pro-terrorist.’” This is all Orwellian nonsense. It’s to make us used to living in a world run by an absurdist, total state.

Anthony Gregory: And if this surveillance state is not absurd, what is? The FBI has issued over 140,000 national security letters forcing people to reveal information to the Feds and forbidding them from talking about it to anyone. I’ve heard there have been some changes lately, but who knows what’s going on? The FBI admitted in August 2005 to secretly collecting thousands of files from groups like the ACLU and the Catholic Worker Movement. They have no-fly lists. They have databases to keep track of dangerous groups like the anti-war Quakers, in Florida. Liberals need to remember all this if the next administration is Democratic because Franklin Roosevelt didn’t shy away from compiling information on right-wingers and radical-Leftists. Throughout the Cold War both parties engaged in surveillance of peaceful Activists.

Matters are of course much worse regarding detentions. The rule of law here has just been turned on its head and then decapitated. With the Military Commissions Act, Americans can be declared enemy combatants. They say that the habeas corpus only applies to non-citizens; [but] maybe for a while will, but I don’t understand how this is supposed to work. What if they say “You’re not a citizen” and you don’t have a hearing? Habeas corpus, if it doesn’t apply to some people, it doesn’t apply, it seems to me. I don’t know. I’m not a lawyer so I probably don’t understand all this. Now the principle of “innocent until proven guilty” has lost almost all support, especially on the right. How else can we explain a peaceful, unarmed guy was killed in Miami airport runway? Almost every conservative on line said, “Well, yeah, this is the paradigm of national security, this is great.” It’s funny because conservatives, some of them at least, used to say, “You should bring a gun on a plane,” or it should at least be up to the airline. It’s like they don’t understand the Second Amendment’s point; the reason that the anti-Federalists want a Second Amendment is because they didn’t trust the government.
Anthony Gregory: Things are working so fast, they pass a Military Commissions Act, the same day or week that they change Posse Comitatus. Posse Comitatus has been beaten back in the past, but now it looks like the administration can order up the National Guard to do whatever, in case of “emergencies” or other stuff. Very vague language and this is discomforting because this is something that was ignored pretty much. If you looked at the way the government treated people in Katrina, Americans in Katrina, rounding up weapons, putting people in detention centers or whatever you want to call them, it was not good. I think post 9/11 fog of hysteria helped them get away with this brutality.

And torture, if there’s anything that’s gotten really bad it’s this widespread support for torture, during the GOP debate that many of us saw in South Carolina, only Ron Paul [ph?] and John McCain took a stand against it, but McCain, as far as I know has never said the CIA shouldn’t torture. Most of the Republicans, they just tripped over themselves to sound like they were more pro-torture, double Guantanamo and get Jack Bauer in here. The Republicans love that. It’s not good. If you’re pro-torture and pro-war, it doesn’t matter if you want to subsidize abortion or round up guns or expand the government, or jail entrepreneurs, they’ll like you. Wait. I’m talking about that guy who’s the Mayor of…I’m sorry. I keep forgetting. I shouldn’t defame him. So, the torture thing is really upsetting because the torture chambers are one of the big reasons to invade Iraq. Now it’s a talking point for getting votes.

Anthony Gregory: There’s been progress though, there’s mention of communities standing up against the Patriot Act, communities standing up against the Real ID Act; there are some things that aren’t as bad as they used to be. We don’t have the outright censorship like in World War I; if you just said the draft is “slavery” they might put you in prison, and of course, the draft is a form of slavery. We don’t have the draft but John Edwards and a lot of people on the Left, they’re for slavery. They say we should have a draft, but they put in “civic duty,” but the Left and Right might unite one day, especially if there’s another terror attack. We don’t have Japanese internment, or Arab internment, or Muslim internment, but right after 9/11 a surprising number of Americans, not as many as supported Japanese internment but a surprising number of Americans, according to some polls as many as one-third at one point, would support this idea. We have all of the institutional mechanisms for something like this and a little shift in ideology and another terror attack and something as bad like this could happen. They already deprive habeas corpus right after 9/11 rounded up hundreds of people. I think Jim Bovard mentioned. Of course, we have people actively defending internment; in retrospect, Michelle Malkin had this book defending internment. While I don’t want to put words in her mouth, the book was actually called, “In Defense of Internment.”

Anthony Gregory: She made a lot of points. I don’t have time to address some of her points but I’ll just mention one because it’s very important. She points out, “Virtually every major country from Japan to Germany, from China to Egypt, from Holland to New Zealand interned it’s enemy aliens” during World War II; that’s a good argument, because if the Nazis are doing it...
Anthony Gregory: Then we shouldn’t get too upset if our government is doing it. But that’s kind of the standard when you’re fighting a regime that the government claims is “evil embodied.” We all know that you can’t have small government and free markets in war. We know that most of what we have now, big government, came from the wars, even more than the New Deal or the Progressive Era. Even the Department of Agriculture, the New Deal itself like Bob Higgs points out, it’s very important, it grew out of World War I. Just the Iraq war has cost, the estimates are all over the place but I’ve seen $600 billion so far, it looks like it’s going to be soon. Which is what? It’s $2,000 per American. I want to say it’s good that Americans want to pull out of Iraq and Afghanistan. Wait, what am I saying? It’s good that Americans eventually want to pull out of Iraq but we have to pull out of Afghanistan. This Democratic idea of U.S. troops should leave Iraq and go to Afghanistan, where the real war is, is obscene. The U.S. needs to pull out of Iraq, Afghanistan, the Middle East, Japan, and Germany, Korea, Latin America. It should stop meddling in elections. We should end foreign aid. We should close down this disgusting “empire” of bases in over 140 countries…sorry I slipped up. I’m an American. I think all those countries belong to us.

Anthony Gregory: People are saying that a lot of people are feeling bad about Iraq, but we need to go much further than that. We don’t just want to reverse some of these policies in Iraq and get Congress to tap on Bush’s shoulder and say, “Are you sure the Patriot Act is still necessary?” We need to abolish the Imperial Executive. It existed long before Bush; if there’s ever been proof that no good can come from it, it’s Bush.

Anthony Gregory: Thanks. We don’t want to go back to the “good old days” of conscription and terror bombing, and the nationalists and internationalists will; they’ll always have shifting excuses. They’ll shift as the times change, but when it comes to the politics beyond the water’s edge, they’re all wet. Because, they’ll say, “We need to protect Americans,” it endangers Americans. “We need to get rid of weapons of mass destruction,” but they don’t exist. “We need to liberate Iraqis by giving them … Civil War and a Soviet style Constitution. Even the ones that say, “We need to protect Israel,” it doesn’t do very much good when you empower their biggest enemies. The truth is no nation should have this imperial reach, this nuclear stockpile. They talk about Iran, but of course the U.S. has tens of thousands weapons, even a mistake could be a huge disaster; and they’ll always have different reasons but if we want this country to get its liberty, we need to go much further.

I sense there’s a re-alignment and this is what we need. There are Leftists who are pretty good on the stuff and are starting to think, “Maybe government is kind of dangerous?” And there are right-wingers who are thinking, “Maybe government’s dangerous.” It’s actually happening on the Right too, but there are people on the Left who are pro-torture, pro-slavery. There are people on the Right who are pro-Democratic Revolution and central planning. There are so called “Libertarians” who are pro-war, dropping bombs on civilians, but what’s any of this mean? It means the spectrum is flawed. It’s time to rethink Left and Right once and for all. What’s it
mean to be a pro-war Libertarian? Pro-slavery Liberal, pro-Democrat, it doesn’t mean anything. Sometimes labels are useful but they also have their limits, so I favor peace and liberty, and I know all of you support peace and liberty. We need to do all we can so the next aggressive war, the next power grab, the next president who tries to use emergency as an excuse to strip away ancient liberties and replace them with ancient evils…whether he be a Republican or she be a Democrat, whether the propaganda wears the cape of heroic humanitarianism, or the cloak of national security, we need to stick together and oppose the march towards human tragedy and point the way toward a brighter, freer and peaceful tomorrow. Thanks.

Q: Much more of you out of Berkeley anywhere?

**Anthony Gregory:** I have well over a dozen personal friends who are not as politically involved but they agree with these ideas, in Berkeley. I think it’s very important. I’ve met leftists in Berkeley who say what Roger Scheer said, “It could change, which is why we need to make the argument now.” They say, “Maybe we shouldn’t have a Federal government,” not a bad first step.

**Anthony Gregory:** And they say, “Maybe we shouldn’t have this Empire,” and I think a lot of Libertarians haven’t been very good with the Left, which of course, Berkeley, is what people of when they think of “Left.” There are a million kinds of Leftists at Berkeley. You should see the arguments over at Ralph Nader, the Capitalist Pig vs. George Bush, the Communist…it’s just weird Left in Berkeley, but a lot of Leftists they either go two ways in life. They either realize at some point business is what makes, property is important, business is important, markets are important and they either become cynical about it and say, “I’m just going to become a ‘corporatist, imperialist’” and conflate everything they used to oppose. They used to oppose imperialism and Capitalism, so they come to embrace both the way the Neocons are and a former Leftist who becomes pro-war is like the worst thing in the world, but a former Leftist that retains his radicalism and anti-authoritarianism but understands markets and spontaneous order and individual rights, it’s about the best Libertarian that can exist.

**Anthony Gregory:** We need to understand these arguments. Just because someone agrees with us that they want the income tax lower doesn’t necessarily mean they’re the best recruit. I’m not saying we should stop talking to anybody, but some of these people, they were very Libertarian before I met them. Berkeley has a horrible government but there’s some Libertarian spirit there. Our Congresswoman, for all her problems, was the only one who voted against initial authorization of force, and she has a lot of bad positions, of course. But there is a sense of decentralist Leftism, and you explain economics well enough to a Leftist and sometimes they’ll get it.

Q: Great speech by the way.
Anthony Gregory: Thanks.

Q: On your topic about the “changing dynamics,” excuse me, I stepped out for a bit so I don’t know if you actually discussed it, but, as mentioned before by a speaking…I’m speaking about Iran. The dynamics of dealing with Iran, we know about the Mossaddeq overthrow. I didn’t even realize the Russians overthrew a Democratic elected government in the ’20s either. Are you familiar with any of the dynamics concerning Iran after the Shah?

Anthony Gregory: Do you mean with American opinion?

Q: Not necessarily, I mean policy.

Anthony Gregory: I’m not the biggest expert on this. The CIA helped install the Shah and eventually he was overthrown. The latola just took over and all of a sudden they were the “pure evil.” They were pure evil, of course, it didn’t stop Reagan from hooking them up with some weapons. If the U.S. supports the Khmer Rouge, which is per capita perhaps the most brutal Communist regime in world history, one of the most evil regimes, killed anyone with glasses. Killed anyone, or tried to, killed people who understood English or were Christian. One of the just pure evil regimes, and if Carter and Reagan are going to support them to make some point with China, goading the Chinese on to help the Khmer Rouge, so the biggest Communist regime and the most evil Communist regime against this country [ ] What kind of anti-Communist war is that? I don’t know exactly what people were saying, and I don’t know exactly what the U.S. did after in Iran, but I’m sure it wasn’t good.

Q: You covered an awful lot of subjects. You did a great job.

Anthony Gregory: Yes. Thanks.

Q: Anthony, I just want to remind you that when you started off your little speech today, you described yourself as “the rookie.” I would like to elevate that to “rookie of the year.”

Q: Great speech.

Q: I had some questions but you answered them, so thanks a lot.

Anthony Gregory: Thank you so much.
Q: I’ll tell you one more story about Anthony. I saw him speak at a Lew Rockwell conference that I had the good fortune of speaking at, about a year ago. He gave the exact same kind of talk that he gave today. He came up and he said, “Do you have any advice for me?” I said, “Yes, you really need to start telling people exactly where you stand and what you believe in.”

<laughs>

**Jacob Hornberger:** We’re breaking for lunch, same system as before. Remember we got Doug Bandow, if you’d like to attend in one hour, in this room here.