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## **U.S. Foreign Policy After Iraq**

*by Andrew J. Bacevich*

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

**Jacob Hornberger:** Our after dinner speaker, Andrew Bacevich, is Professor of History and International Relations at Boston University. He received his Ph.D. in American Diplomatic History from Princeton. He has taught at West Point and Johns Hopkins and is the author of several books, including *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War* and *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy*. He is also the co-editor of *The Long War: A New History of U.S. National Security Policy Since World War II* and *The Imperial Tense: Problems and Prospects of American Empire.* His articles have appeared in a wide variety of publications, including the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *London Review of Books*, *The Nation*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Financial Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and many, many others.

Andrew is a graduate of the VMI of the North. Now, the reason I say that, to inject a little bit of personal history into this introduction, is that as a graduate of VMI, we just get so tired of being referred to as the West Point of the South. This is a little bit of retaliation. One of the things that was most moving in my four years at VMI, which took place from '68 to '72, was the times in the mess hall when, I forget what exactly the corps commander would say, but there were certain words where everybody knew what it meant. And he'd say, "Attention to orders, Republic of Vietnam," something like that. And all of a sudden a hush would sweep across the mess hall, and everybody knew what was coming. Lieutenant such and such, VMI Class of '66, this day killed in action. And over those four years, you just got used to that, but, you know, you just get that grimace when that hush would sweep across the mess hall.

And I know that Andrew experienced that, as well. And, of course, I'm sure he experienced it much more closely than I did, since he was a military officer that served on active duty. One of his most moving pieces that I ever read, especially since 9/11, was a piece entitled, "I Lost My Son in Iraq." And we were both

doing our duty. So here is a man to whom U.S. foreign policy dealt the cruelest blow that can ever befall a parent, the loss of a child. He is a man of tremendous principle. Every morning when I Google articles to look for our daily e-mail update, one of the first names that I insert in that Google search engine is Andrew J. Bacevich, because I can't wait to read the articles of this man of principle. Please welcome Andrew Bacevich.

**Andrew Bacevich:** It's just my luck to be the after dinner speaker. You've had three glasses of wine, and I have 45 minutes to fill. I'm grateful to have the invitation to speak to you. I have to confess, I'm not a Libertarian. I'm a, I guess, a conservative realist. If you have to have a label it'd probably be the one I'd put on my forehead, but I figure that conservative realists and Libertarians are probably sort of related, like Catholics and Episcopalians, so we can get along.

I arrived late for the day's festivities. I apologize for that. I came in the middle of Stephen Kinzer's very fine talk. I'm kind of tempted to scrap my talk in order to fashion a response. And I'll make a very brief response, with the promise that Stephen Kinzer can ask the first question when we get to questions. And that response, I think, is this. I read his book, the *Overthrow* book, when it came out. And there is not an iota of his narrative with which I would disagree. In particular, I would affirm the extent to which there are so many cases of American interventionism that have produced unintended and deeply problematic consequences, with Cuba and Iran being two spectacularly illustrative examples.

But having said that, my difference would be that he leaves a big part of the story out with regard to the tale of U.S. foreign policy. That it's not simply been, in my narrative, a story, you know, sort of concocted by corporate interests, and then unfolded in order to benefit the very few. Frankly, if it were that, I think we'd have a pretty good chance of persuading our fellow citizens to throw the rascals out and adhere to a course that a conservative realist probably would agree with. The problem, from my point of view, and my difference, is that if we look at the broad sweep of U.S. foreign policy, going back really to the founding of the Anglo-American colonies in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and recognize the extent to which the overarching theme of that foreign policy, moving in fits and starts, but nonetheless, the basic theme that runs throughout, has been a theme of expansionism and, yes, interventionism. The problem is that it's the expansionism and interventionism of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the 19<sup>th</sup> century and, yes, through much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that made this country the most powerful in the world, the richest in the world, and the freest in the world, with a wealth and a freedom that benefits, not simply corporate bigwigs, or people who hang around this particular city, but benefits really that I think we have all enjoyed.

So interventionism, yes, intervention, interventionism in 1898 that leads to our problems with Cuba, the stupid decision to annex the Philippines. What a moronic move. But in many respects it's the Spanish-American War of 1898 that vaults the United States to the position of being a rising world power. My story of U.S. foreign policy says that the real problem is that sometime around the 1960s-- pick a date, like the U.S. intervention in Vietnam-- this correlation between expansionism through intervention, and ever greater power, and ever greater abundance, and yes, ever greater freedom-- that correlation began to come undone. And that if we look at the interventionism of the '70s and the '80s and the '90s, and most emphatically the interventionism of the present day, the effect has been to squander our power, to undercut our prosperity, and to compromise our freedom.

So the basic notion of how you get to be powerful and rich and free, that in many respects, despite important missteps along the way, served the Republic very well, no longer does. And we, the American people, have not yet awakened to recognize that fact. And certainly our political elites are determined to keep us in the dark for as long as possible. They keep us in the dark by insisting that, yes, one more act of intervention, one more effort to try to expand our influence, expand our power, is going to get us back on that road to power and prosperity and freedom. They're wrong, but we haven't awakened to that fact yet.

So that's my brief comment, and now I have to give you the talk, which I will do quickly in order to allow time for Stephen to make a response. Now, the title of my talk is "U.S. Foreign Policy After Iraq," and the title requires a little bit of explanation. I'm certainly not implying that the Iraq War is now somehow visible in our rearview mirror. On the contrary, I believe that, frankly, regardless of who wins the presidency, the war is going to be with us for years to come, and the consequences of this war are going to be with us for decades to come. But I do believe that what to do about Iraq narrowly is not really the big question confronting the country. Rather, the big question is how are we to deal with the implications of Iraq, that is to say, with the implications of a war of choice that has gone badly wrong. So I'm using the term "after" in the sense of "in light of." U.S. foreign policy in light of all that has occurred since the Iraq War began over five years ago.

My own judgment is that the developments of the past five years have left us strategically adrift. That is, today we have no agreed-upon, principled approach to dealing with the world in which we live. Now, the presidential election campaign ought to provide an opportunity for us to have a great debate about what those principles ought to be. But I fear that the election is shaping up to be a missed opportunity in that regard, in part because the focus remains on what to do about Iraq, rather than on examining the larger issues stemming from our failure.

Now, let me emphasize that in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the Bush administration did, in fact, articulate a principled strategy for the global war on terror, a principled strategy that possessed logic and coherence, and this was the strategy of the Freedom Agenda. It was logical. It was coherent. It was also wildly unrealistic and totally unworkable. That strategy rested on three key assumptions. We need to focus on these key assumptions because this gets us to the essence of the problem.

The strategy rested on three key assumptions: First, that American power, and above all American military power, is so vast as to be irresistible. Second, the Bush administration strategy assumed that the great arc of land and people referred to as the Greater Middle East-- probably stretching from, what, Morocco all the way to the southern Philippines-- the Bush administration assumed that the Greater Middle East is malleable; indeed, is ripe for transformation. And third, the strategy of the Freedom Agenda created by the Bush administration assumes that democracy provides the necessary antidote for the pathologies afflicting the Islamic world, with the United States, of course, possessing a particular knack for exporting democracy.

Now, here in 2008, given everything that has gone wrong, there are many people, I think, who would say that this Freedom Agenda of the Bush administration was never genuine, was always cynical and contrived. Personally I'm not so sure. I've never met President Bush. My own sense from sort of trying to

watch the man and understand the man over the course of several years, is that he probably was a true believer in the Freedom Agenda; that on 9/11 the president was struck down as decisively as Saint Paul was struck down on the road to Damascus, and he became a true believer, a born-again Wilsonian. Now, whether or not the same would be said of Donald Rumsfeld, or Vice President Cheney, is another matter. My guess is that they assumed that even if the Freedom Agenda didn't succeed in transforming the Greater Middle East through the export of democracy, at the very least the Freedom Agenda, again with this understanding of irresistibility of American power, would at least enable the United States to control the Greater Middle East.

In essence, for the Bush administration, pseudorealists, hegemony offered a satisfactory alternative to liberation. Nonetheless, what's more important from our point of view is that events have long since demolished all three assumptions, and therefore have left the Freedom Agenda in tatters. Let's go back down to three of them again.

First, American power. Well, American power turns out to be limited; especially American military power, widely assumed to be our strong suit, has turned out to be utterly inadequate either to liberate or to pacify the Greater Middle East. I mean, what are the key military lessons since 9/11? Well, one of them certainly is that shock and awe, this high tech approach to warfare, which can do a lot of things, cannot prevent and is of little avail as a response to peoples' war.

A second military lesson since 9/11 is that preventive war-- the chief means by which the Bush administration intended to advance its Freedom Agenda-- preventive war does not work. I mean, set aside questions of morality, preventive war does not work. Preventive war has not been able to allow the United States to achieve the quick, decisive, and economic victories that our strategy required.

And the third lesson, I think, the third military lesson since 9/11 with regard to the limitations of military power, has to do with the fact that although the force-- the young men and women who serve in the Army and the Marine Corps, especially, going back for their third and fourth combat tours-- although the force has proven to be remarkably durable, the truth is we find ourselves with too much war for too few warriors. And given the fact that we decided some 35 or so years ago to rely on volunteers to fill that force, there's really no easy way to close the gap between too much war for too few warriors.

The second assumption was about the malleability of the Greater Middle East. Well, turns out to be a little tougher perhaps than people imagined. Remember that the Iraq War was never simply about Iraq. Operation Iraqi Freedom was intended to be the start of something much bigger. It was supposed to be a way station. Baghdad was a way station, not the final destination. Some of you may recall that former Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz once promised that Iraq would become what he called the "first Arab democracy." And the key word there was "first." The implication, the expectation, was that after the first would come the second, the third, the fourth, the fifth. That success in Iraq would breed success.

Well, this hasn't happened. I mean, based on the progress toward the democratic transformation of Iraq and Afghanistan, only a cockeyed optimist would think that the prospects of change elsewhere in the

region are promising. Iraq has become a dependency of the United States. Iraq has become a strategic cul de sac, a dead end. Remember that third assumption about democracy as the answer in a U.S. ability to export democracy? Well, it turns out that the United States does not possess any particular affinity for exporting democracy. We've not been able to repeat the achievements of 1945, not surprisingly, given the fact that the conditions we're dealing with today in terms of cultures, in terms of the wars, in terms of the military situation, are radically different than existed in Japan and Germany in 1945. Worse, ironically, paradoxically, where the seeds of democracy have germinated, they have not exactly produced the expected crop.

There have been democratic successes, in a sense, in the Greater Middle East. One of them brought Hamas to power. Another one has certainly enhanced the power and clout of Hezbollah in Lebanon. Wasn't supposed to turn out this way. As a consequence of the demolition of the three assumptions that provided the foundation of the Freedom Agenda today, we find ourselves with, as I said at the outset, no strategy at all. As a substitute for strategy, the Bush administration, in its twilight days, has reverted to policies it once disdained. The focus is no longer on transforming the region; the focus is now on preventing the region from falling apart.

Three examples of how the Bush administration is embracing those policies it once disdained: the Bush administration now deigns to speak to members of the Axis of Evil, North Korea most prominently, but, yes, Iran also, less officially in less high profile ways. The Bush administration has just about given up pressing nations in the region to transform themselves politically. Early on, much pressure, very public pressure-- on the Saudis to liberalize, on President Mubarak in Egypt, to get onboard the democratic bandwagon-- well, all of that has pretty much gone by the board. Most intriguingly, the Bush administration, which once openly disdained, expressed its contempt for, the peace process, has now, of course, embraced the peace process, with President Bush and Secretary Rice promising, they tell us, to forge a peace deal between the Israelis and the Palestinians before the president leaves office.

Now, do these moves make sense? To a degree, they do; to some degree they do. But together they don't constitute a coherent strategy. So, where does that leave us? Well, it leaves us, it seems to me, in a situation where, regardless of who wins the presidency in November of 2008, the new president will inherit a strategic vacuum, and to complicate the new president's task, the new president is going to inherit a host of problems. The new president's going to find from day one that he has an ongoing war in Iraq and another ongoing war in Afghanistan. And in neither case is a favorable outcome likely anytime in the foreseeable future.

Now, there is much talk among the prowar camp about the success that the surge has produced. And there is no question that the surge has reduced the level of violence in Iraq, and that cannot be anything other than a good thing. But the surge was not designed simply to reduce the level of violence. It was designed to facilitate this magical process called political reconciliation, and that was going to allow us to achieve our aims and then to leave in good order. Well, there is no political reconciliation. What the surge has achieved is a stalemate, and it's a stalemate that we have achieved at the cost of providing arms and bribes to those who opposed our presence for many years.

Then there's Afghanistan. Afghanistan, you remember the code name for Afghanistan is Operation Enduring Freedom. Well, it's now become Operation Enduring Obligation. The Taliban are resurgent. And amazingly, pathetically, contemptibly, Osama bin Laden is still at large.

That's not all. That's only part of the new president's inheritance. Barring something miraculous-- and it is the Holy Land-- a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is highly unlikely. Frankly, whatever President Bush's intentions, and however many plane trips Secretary Rice makes to the region, the fact is that neither Mr. Abbas nor Prime Minister Olmert is strong enough to actually close a meaningful deal.

One of the things that worries me most is the new president also is going to inherit Pakistan. Now, President Bush tried to sell us this notion that Pakistan is an ally, and in particular that President Musharraf was a quote unquote friend of the United States. I don't see it that way. My guess is Pakistan is actually emerging as the greatest proximate source of danger to our country. It's the one place where we have a significant violent, Islamic, radical presence, combined with a weak, almost illegitimate government, combined with nuclear weapons.

The new president, whoever that may be, will also host a set of constraints largely an outgrowth of the failures of the Bush years. One of those constraints has to do with boots on the ground. Our ground forces are badly overstretched. I mean, it strikes me that if Senator McCain gets elected and says, "Wow, the surge worked the first time. Let's do another surge," the cupboard's bare. The troops are used up. We've reached our limit. The new president may well, and indeed I kind of hope, may well inherit an Iraq syndrome that will limit the president's freedom of action with regard to intervention, with the public now, even if only briefly, less willing to defer to the chief executive on matters related to the use of force.

And, of course, the new president is going to inherit a pot of economic problems. Now, I was born in 1947, and so I grew up in the 1950s and the 1960s, a typical American, largely oblivious to everything that was going on in the rest of the world. But there was one thing that I knew, that I knew for sure, and that was that the greenback was worth more than the Canadian Loonie. I have to report to you that that is no longer the case. So the dollar's in sharp decline. I was traveling most of today. I just, you know, quickly looked at the *Washington Post* on my computer when I checked into the hotel. If I read it correctly, the market today dropped 396 points, because the price of oil spiked up again. Let me tell you; let me make a small confession: This is not the first time I've given this talk. And if you could read this line, if you could see that it's, yeah, it's crossed out, that's because the next line is, "The price of oil, is \$100 a barrel the new standard?" Crossed it out. I put a 125; could have put a 150. The president's also going to inherit the military weakness of our allies. Much talk, you know, about, by God, we can get this Afghanistan thing turned around if we can just sort of energize NATO to come help out. I need to tell you, folks, NATO as a serious military alliance has ceased to exist. NATO is not going to come bail us out.

Now, given all that, will it be possible, is it theoretically possible, for the next president to devise a coherent strategy to replace the failed strategy of the Freedom Agenda? Well, there has to be. What might that strategy look like? Let me conclude with a few, sketching out just a few thoughts. And I'll give you a set of five principles that I think might undergird a new strategy. Let me emphasize, though, I'm going to stipulate that this is a strategy which takes as a given the notion that the global war on terror, the GWOT,

is in fact the proper, what, framework for us to think about U.S. foreign policy. Now, I could scrap what I'm going to say for the next five minutes, which assumes that the GWOT is the proper framework, and say that, you know, let's assume that the GWOT is not the right framework, and I could provide you with a set of alternative principles or ideas to define strategy. And to tell you the truth, I actually think that's the path we should go down, that we should recognize that the global war on terror has been a fool's errand from the outset. But nonetheless, given that about 98% of our fellow citizens believe that the GWOT ought to inform our thinking, let me give you five principles, three general and two specific, to describe what a new strategy might look like.

General Principle No. 1: Rather than squandering American power, husband it. As Iraq has shown beyond dispute, U.S. military strength is finite. All the chest-thumping talk from the '90s about a world's only superpower, and the indispensable nation-- and it wasn't just neoconservatives who were peddling those lines-- all that has turned out to be mistaken. Further, we have found that our nation's economic reserves and our diplomatic clout are also limited, and all of these things badly need replenishment. Key here is rethinking the use of force. I believe that it is essential for the next president to abrogate the Bush doctrine of preventive war, and that the United States should revert to policies more in line with the just war tradition, which sees war as a last resort, justified only for defensive purposes.

General Principle No. 2: We need to align ends with means. Although Bush's penchant for Wilsonian rhetoric certainly warms the cockles of neoconservative hearts, it raises expectations that we cannot meet. Therefore, the next president should promise only that which is achievable.

General Principle No. 3: And here I'm piling on Stephen Kinzer's, one of his concluding remarks. We need to exemplify the ideals we profess. Rather than telling others how to live, Americans should devote themselves to repairing their own institutions, and our enfeebled democracy just might offer the place to start.

Specific Principle No. 1 of 2: This is the one I can never explain in ways that people-- it's my failure to explain, not your failure to understand. This is the principle that says let Islam be Islam. The United States possesses neither the capacity nor the wisdom required to liberate the world's 1.4 billion Muslims, who just might entertain their own ideas about what genuine freedom entails. I believe that Islam-- much as was the case with Christianity-- I believe that Islam will eventually accommodate itself to the modern world. But Muslims are going to have to work out for themselves the terms of that accommodation. Now, when I say Islamic world, I'm not implying that this is one solid, uniform, undifferentiated entity. At least in a general way, I appreciate the fact that there is substantial diversity in that world. Turkey is not Saudi Arabia. Iran differs from Pakistan. But I am implying that it lies beyond the ability of any American statesman to bend that world to our will, as the Bush administration has attempted to do. We will bankrupt ourselves in the effort.

Specific Principle No. 2: And this really gets to sort of the operational aspect of strategy. We need to reinvent containment. The process of negotiating that accommodation with modernity, which Muslims are going to have to undertake on their own, is going to produce, has already produced, unwelcome fallout in the form of alienation, scapegoating, and violence. And in collaboration with its allies, the

United States must insulate itself against the threat posed by Islamic radicalism. It's a real threat, it's not an existential threat; it's one we need to take seriously. And imperative toward that end is not to wage global war, whether real or metaphorical, but to erect effective defenses as the West did during the Cold War. And I would emphasize containment does not preclude selective engagement, although it is based on the premise that the people in the Islamic world for the most part are going to have to work out their own destinies.

Well, I've already had the sign; there's people flashing signs at me, that I know tell me that I'm supposed to wrap things up. So let me end there. Thank you very much for your attention, and call on Stephen Kinzer. I see a hand here at the front table. Does Stephen Kinzer have a question or a comment?

**Stephen Kinzer:** That was a great speech, and thank you for inserting a little bit of academic discipline and military experience into an evening that's been maybe a little bit too overly tinged with passion. We will have the scotch you requested waiting after you answer this question. You're sharing speakers' secrets from the head table; I'm not going to share the other ones, though. I believe you suggested that it was American interventionism, originally, which is what made America very rich and very powerful and very free. I agree with two-thirds of that. I don't think it was American intervention that made us more free. I think that was something that we were on a project to do for ourselves. In fact, we were well on that course before we became such an interventionist nation. But I do agree with you that it was this American interventionism that made us so rich and that made us so powerful. Al Capone used the same strategy. He also became rich and powerful by stealing from everyone around him and ultimately turning everyone against him, so that he fell. Don't you feel that although interventionism undoubtedly is what put us in the position of being so rich and so powerful, that it also set off forces in the world that ultimately came to turn against us, and that in the long run threaten not only our freedom but also our wealth and our power?

**Andrew Bacevich:** I think, you know, Capone's mistake was he didn't know when to quit. Now, I'm not an expert in this regard, in terms of the history of the Mafia, but is it not the case that there were other individuals in that line of work who basically went legal?. And said we're getting out of the rackets in New York, we're going to move to Las Vegas and build hotels and participate in legal gambling, and they basically converted their ill-gotten gains into permanent wealth and security. It seems to me that one could make the same comment with regard to U.S. foreign policy. And believe me, I'm not making a moral judgment here at all. I'm trying to make a practical case that if Stephen and I can agree that a foreign policy of expansionism produced power and abundance, we can argue later about whether freedom came as part of that package. I wonder if we could not also agree that the problem, or the challenge for the United States, is to realize that we've kept playing that game long after it continued to pay, and so we need to go to a different game. Or to put it another way, we need to abandon the foreign policy of expansionism and interventionism, that did for a very long time serve us well, in favor of another foreign policy, another approach to foreign policy, that will enable us to consolidate and to preserve all that we gained, even if much of what we gained was ill-gotten.

**Bill Anderson:** You got other hands up, but I got the mike. But first I do want to thank Bumper for another all-star cast, and our speaker tonight. But following up on Stephen's question, granted. I'm Bill

Anderson; I teach economics at Frostburg State University, which is up in the mountains west of here. I bet you know Maryland had mountains, but we have them. But in a very real sense, I'm wondering if our interventionism actually makes us poorer, because after all, let's look at a wealthy country, Switzerland. Those of us who have been in Switzerland do not think of Switzerland as a poor country, but one thing I do not think about Switzerland is interventionism. I do think about trade, I think of commerce, and the like. But hasn't this fetish with interventionism actually made us poorer, not wealthier?

**Andrew Bacevich:** I think you have to talk specific cases, right? I would argue, perhaps you would disagree, that the Mexican War of 1846 to 1848, which really was a war of naked aggression begun by the United States of America, paid magnificently. That were it not for President Polk, had we not seized the Southwest and California, we would not enjoy the way of life we enjoy today.

<Applause>

**Andrew Bacevich:** Now, the blowback, actually, the blowback-- I'm just working on a book review now that the blowback is the infiltration of immigrants from Mexico that are reclaiming that which they owned in the first place. There is a certain ironic justification for that. But nonetheless, I would stick to my point that the Mexican War benefited the United States substantially. And so you have to talk certain intervention, not simply interventions across the board. Garreth.

<Applause>

**Q:** What I'd like to ask is to what extent you think this shift from a foreign policy which has, in fact, supported U.S. power and wealth to a foreign policy that had the opposite effect, is a function of the degree to which the military national security bureaucracy became such a powerful influence on U.S. national security policy that it began to drive the United States in the direction of a sort of permanent war situation that you address the opposite.

**Andrew Bacevich:** Thank you. Bumper failed in his introduction, I think he did, to mention my new book coming out in August. Pick up your pencils. It's called *The Limits of Power*. You get the drift of what it's about. Okay. August, *Limits of Power*. And I try to flesh out in greater detail a response that I gave to Stephen as a preface to my talk, and I think that's part of it, okay, that after 1945, there developed a national security apparatus of considerable clout and influence. Stephen talked about that a bit. And the members, particularly the members at the top of that apparatus, I think, subscribed to a national security ideology that caused them to see the world in a particular way, and led Americans to increasingly believe that if a problem had a solution it was likely to involve the use of military power. That therefore maintaining enormous reserves of military power was an essential aspect of the way we approach the world. And 9/11 just renewed this ideology in really unfortunate ways, and helps to explain, I think, the Iraq War.

Having said that, it's not simply Washington that is the problem. I think that one of the reasons that the foreign policy of expansion came not to serve our interests after roughly the 1960s had to do with a larger deterioration of our economic standing in the world. And there it seemed to me one points to two, I think,

very important factors. And one has to do with the dependence on oil. We began importing oil I think somewhere around 1949, 1950. The amounts were trivial. It's only by the 1970s it's driven home that our growing dependence on oil is problematic, that it constitutes vulnerability. Much talk from President Nixon, President Carter, frankly every president down to the current guy who bemoans the fact that we're addicted to oil-- much, much talk that we need to do something about that.

We don't do anything about it. And frankly, don't blame Washington; blame us, really, [for] the response to our ever-growing dependency. At this point, now we import something like 65% of the oil that we use. The response to ever-growing dependency is an ever-greater determination to determine the course of events in the Persian Gulf through military action, direct or indirect. So I think that oil, energy, our unwillingness to acknowledge the implications of dependency, also help explain the problem.

And the second thing has to do with our unwillingness to live within our means. I mean, the savings rate in our country now is zero, if not negative. You know? The balance of trade is now in the red, something on the order of \$800 billion per year. National debt's now \$9 trillion plus, out of a, what, \$13 trillion economy.

I'm not making these facts up. Frankly, they're sort of scattered over op-ed pages and in senatorial speeches on a daily basis. And they have absolutely no political purchase. I mean, any candidate for national office, you know, if Obama stands up tomorrow and says that, by God, the budget will balance no matter what taxes it takes, or what cuts in entitlements, he's toast. Because we, I'm sorry to say, not necessarily you and me, but we, the American people, are not willing to really face up to the contradictions that bedevil our economy.

Matter of fact, this is where this whole bizarre infatuation with the presidency comes in. There is somehow this expectation that, gosh, if we can just elect the right guy in November, he's going to fix everything. It's nonsense. But that's what we have as a substitute for serious politics. That would be my answer to the question.

Q: Time for one more question.

**Andrew Bacevich:** Thank you for that. It's really hot up here.

Q: This question is about national security, a domestic police force, and how would it change in the next few years under your scenario? Would it be increased? Would it need to be increased, or could it be decreased?

**Andrew Bacevich:** [The answer to] this is, no. This is probably one of the areas in which the Catholics and the Episcopalians would disagree a bit. Believe me, I hope and pray that I am a conscientious supporter of civil liberties. But I do think that the proper response to violent Islamic radicalism, which again is real, not a figment of our imagination, really lies in the realm of effective policing. I'd much rather have the intelligence services and the FBI and agencies of that type working the problem of al Qaeda, rather than having, you know, the United States Army invade some country on the other side of the world, with the expectation that we're going to remake it into a liberal democracy. So I probably would, I have a feeling I

would support a more robust police effort than many Libertarians would be comfortable with. Thanks very much. I appreciate your kindness.