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**Regime Change: Promise and Peril**  
*by Stephen Kinzer*

*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:** Stephen Kinzer is a veteran *New York Times* correspondent who has reported from 50 countries on five continents. During the 1980s, he covered revolution and upheaval in Central America. In the 1990s, he covered eastern and central Europe as they were emerging from Soviet rule. From 1996, he was the *New York Times* Bureau Chief in Istanbul, Turkey. His several books include *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup*, a book that when I read it I was just absolutely ecstatic. Here was one of the greatest books I've ever read that encapsulated in easily readable form what the U.S. government had done in Iran in 1953 and the consequences, the blowback, from that policy and what they did. And then he's got another book, his most recent at least on foreign policy, *Overthrow: A Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq*, which was just about as good as the Iran book, giving a whole summary of regime change operations as part of U.S. foreign policy from the time of the Hawaii takeover through the Spanish-American War and all the way up through Iraq. And so we tried to get Stephen to come last year and he was not able to make it, and we were ecstatic, we were really excited, that he accepted our invitation. It is a tremendous honor to have him with us today. Please welcome Stephen Kinzer.

**Stephen Kinzer:** That was great. Thank you. Thanks so much. What an honor to share a platform with such a remarkable figure and to be flanked by the portraits of such great figures. I think that one of the things that has happened recently in the last year or two is something that the Ron Paul campaign both reflected and helped cause, and I think that is the breakdown of the traditional right, left separation on foreign policy. That doesn't exist anymore. I've spent the last several days on Capitol Hill meeting

some of those members that Ron was referring to, and I too was told that the great bill we put in to try to halt the rush to war in Iran had to be deleted from a bill because it was too controversial.

And what it said was no war can be declared unless Congress agrees. That is now a controversial statement, and is so much so that it can't even be included in a law passed by the U.S. Congress. Now while I was up there I was really impressed to see that there are a handful of people up there very much opposed to the idea of our continued involvement in regime change operations, and we found some very conservative Republicans and some very liberal Democrats on that side. So I think the divisions in American politics are changing, new coalitions are emerging. I think if there could be one possible good benefit that came out of the Iraq war, it might be that for at least a time, which we can now take advantage of, Americans are beginning to realize that we can't control events in every part of the world and maybe this isn't such a good idea. So those of us that have always said nothing good can come out of the Iraq war might find there was one little exception.

Now I really enjoyed staring, when I could tear my eyes off Congressman Paul, at that picture of Thomas Jefferson, particularly for one reason. Thomas Jefferson is the author of the phrase that I take as my guiding principle, and it's the principle that has pushed me through all the books I've written. I actually had this up on my wall 20 years ago when I was a correspondent in Nicaragua, and I've followed it ever since. It's a line from the Declaration of Independence and it reflects my view. I don't consider myself a polemicist or an ideologue or a Bush basher, but I am reality based. I'm fact based. I like to deal with what's real, not with visionary fantasies of utopia, and in the Declaration of Independence it says, "Let facts be submitted to a candid world." That is all we are trying to do.

This is not a radical departure, the foreign policy that we are trying to promote. What we are trying to promote is actually the foreign policy that George Bush promised us in his first debate. If we're strong but humble they'll respect us. That's true, but what happened to that? It's the political process that Ron Paul talked about that sucks people into this Republican, Democrat combine, and that is the real difference on Capitol Hill. It's those in the large majority who are part of this Republican, Democrat group, and then there are the few outsiders. That's the real division, and I think the challenge for us is to make sure that those few outsiders don't remain a few.

We need to keep building up that group, and one of the ways I think we can do that is to show America that we now have an example going on every day in the Middle East of what our interventionist foreign policy brings. You don't have to look in the history books anymore. You don't even have to buy my books anymore. You can read it every day in the newspaper, and the tragic toll of this war is just the latest in a long series of episodes that have put us in to a position so different from the America that our

Founding Fathers imagined. When John Winthrop wrote “We shall be as a city upon a hill and the eyes of all people are upon us,” what he meant, as he explained in his other writings, was we’re going to create a great system and a great country here. And then if other countries like some things that we’re doing they can copy us.

That was what he meant, but at some point, somewhere in the nineteenth century, we abandoned that position and we decided that we’re not just going to set an example. We’re going to go out in the world and make everyone be like us. We decided that we’d found the magic key to prosperity and democracy and we were going to share that with everyone else. And not coincidentally, that kind of democracy that we envisioned meant the access of American corporations to the resources of the whole world on the terms that we decide were just for us. And a policy that used to be called the Open Door Policy, which I like to call the Kick in the Door Policy, was forcing ourselves on every country.

Now we’ve gone so far, to the point where in our last quadrennial defense review we have declared as the official policy of the United States that we are not going to tolerate even the beginnings of the rise of any country that could one day become a “peer” power, they call it. In other words, what we’ve told the world is we’ve decided that no other countries are allowed to try to increase their power.

Now if all the leaders of all the countries in the world read that and say, “Oh, I guess America doesn’t want us to increase our power so we’ll do it; we’ll just do what they say,” that would be wonderful. This is an example of the magic wand theory of government, I like to call it, but that can’t happen. In fact, countries logically want to increase their power, and that means they’re automatically going to come in conflict with the United States. This doctrine is a recipe for constant conflict, constant war, constant intervention.

And a couple of weeks ago in Chicago I had a debate with a prominent neoconservative columnist and theorist who was a great promoter of the Iraq war and now wants to bomb Iran yesterday. During my opening statement, I thoughtlessly used a phrase that really got him going, and I said, “The policy you guys are trying to follow is really the modern version of Trotskyism. It’s constant revolution.” And he took great umbrage at this. I hadn’t really thought it through, but actually a lot of these neocons are ex-Trotskyites from their college days, so he got very nervous about that. So I said to him, “Okay, okay, excuse me please. I didn’t mean to insult you. If you don’t consider yourself a Trotskyite, what do you consider yourself? What historical tradition would you place yourself in?” And he said, “Well, how about a Wilsonian?” And I want to ask, “What’s the difference?”

Now as you heard earlier, I've written a series of books about the history of American intervention. I wrote a book about how the U.S. overthrew the government of Guatemala in the '50s, and another book about how the U.S. overthrew the government of Iran, and I've also written a book about Nicaragua that talks a lot about American intervention there. After each of those books, I've really felt satisfied that I had told the whole truth. I-- People didn't know what had really happened in Guatemala, but I went out there and I ripped the veil of lies off and I told the whole truth and showed everyone what really happened and I felt very satisfied with myself, but that emotion never lasts long.

And after a while I began to realize that I really hadn't told the whole story. There was one thing that was missing. I came to realize that if you want to understand American intervention abroad and all of these coups and overthrows and interventions that we've carried out, you cannot consider them as a series of distinct, unrelated episodes. You have to look at them as a continuum that stretches out over more than a hundred years, and that's what I did in my *Overthrow* book, and during that process, writing that book, I began to see that there are certain patterns that reemerge over and over again.

They have to do with, for example, why we do it. Why do we do it? Well, usually there is a three-part process. The first part is that some big corporation finds that the government in a country where it's operating is giving it problems. The government of Country X is giving our big corporation problems-- they're taxing us, they're restricting us, they're nationalizing us, they're forcing us to obey labor laws-- and then the head of that corporation will go to Washington and complain. That's phase one.

Then while the intervention planning is working its way through the foreign policy process, the motivation suddenly changes; it morphs. We decide that we're actually intervening not for economic reasons, even though those are the only reasons why we're ever even talking about this country, but we're doing it for political or geostrategic reasons. We're doing it because the government of Country X is a threat. Now how do we know it's a threat? For one reason: 'Cause it's bothering this big American corporation. What more proof do you want? That means it's got to be anti-American, anti-capitalist, probably a tool of all of our enemies. But these countries in most cases are only trying to build the capitalist economies that they admire so much from us. What we want is to have a free capitalist system here but not allow anyone else in other countries to develop that. So there is the second phase, that the motivation morphs suddenly from an explicitly economic one to a so-called political one.

And then there is a third phase that happens after the intervention when it's time for our leaders to explain to us and to the world why we did it. And then you usually get a third reason that didn't even come up during the planning and execution of the operation, and that is we only did it to help them. Not

only did we not seek anything for ourselves, but we actually sacrificed ourselves in order to bring something good to other people.

I think that the American people are slowly, perhaps because of the events of the last few years, beginning to cast some doubt on this, and we're beginning to see the real reasons for these, the real motivations, the fact that these interventions only serve a tiny piece of the American public. They don't serve the interests of America. They serve the interests of a small clique of people who are making huge amounts of money from the outside world and see that the American military is prepared to serve as their private enforcing police force. That is the deal that has been made over generations between the private and public sector in Washington.

Now as we look around the world and see the forces that have shaped American interventionism and American foreign policy over the last half-century, I see three countries that have turned into obsessions for us. These obsessions have completely distorted our foreign policy and deeply shaped the errors that we've continued to make. They have totally shaken our psyche. The first of course is Cuba. It's kind of a laugh to look back now and see how pathetically meaningless Cuba is, but there was a time when we were told Cuba was this huge threat and Cuba was undermining American power all over the world. Cuba was inspiring the leftist revolutionaries all over Latin America; Castro communism was a great anti-American force in the world. So Cuba was one country that America became obsessed with and that caused America great damage.

Second, the huge overhang of the Vietnam War. The Vietnam War's impact on American life cannot be overstated. Most of us are old enough to remember what a huge trauma that was for the United States, and it set in motion forces that are still shaping us today. The so-called Vietnam syndrome is very much a part of the American political psyche. What it means is we got beaten by a bunch of peasants wearing B.F. Goodrich sandals and we have to show the world that that can never happen again, so we're going to go out and fight more wars and win more wars. That Vietnam overhang has pushed us into one intervention after another.

The third is our current obsession, and that is Iran. We are now using Iran as the great demon of the world and the next place where we can demonstrate how much money we can spend on bombs and planes to destroy a country, and then how much more money we can give to Halliburton to rebuild all the stuff we just destroyed.

Now what do these three countries have in common: Cuba, Vietnam, Iran? They were all decisively set on the course that they went off on by American intervention. All the trouble that we

suffered at the hands of those three countries is the result of our own intervention in their internal affairs. In 1954, the governments of Indochina and the governments of Britain, China, the United States met at the Geneva Conference to decide what to do about Vietnam. And an agreement was reached under which Vietnam would be divided for two years between 1954 and 1956, and at the end of 1956 there would be an election in the whole country and the winner of that election would then take over as the leader of a united Vietnam.

Now just before that election was to be held, President Eisenhower made a statement in which he said that, quote, probably 80 percent of the people of Vietnam would vote for Ho Chi Minh as their president. That was the beginning of our decision to abandon and override the Geneva Accord. We decided to ignore that, and that was the beginning of our involvement in Vietnam. There was a treaty that was going to produce a calm, peaceful result, but we decided not to obey that because we thought we could get a better result. Let's have America go in. We'll fix everything.

Now why did we decide we couldn't tolerate Ho Chi Minh as president of the united Vietnam? It's because we thought if we allow this election to go forward you're going to have a united Vietnam under a communist leadership. Now instead of accepting that, we went to war, we lost 58,000 American lives, something like a million Vietnamese were killed, a country was ravaged, and our country was psychologically disoriented forever, and what was the end result? A united Vietnam under a communist leadership, the same result that we could have had in 1956 without any of this bloodshed.

And the saddest or most pathetic aspect of this is that having a united communist Vietnam actually isn't so bad for us. We're getting along with them. Now we don't particularly like them, but we're trading with them; we have an embassy. It's not so bad. The world didn't end, but we had a sense that communist rule over this one country was going to be devastating for us. And I remember--I'm old enough to remember, as most of you are--the reason why we were told we had to stay in Vietnam, and that's because it's not just about Vietnam. China is behind all this. China's the big expansionist power, and Vietnam is just their little cat's-paw.

Now, like most other Americans, I didn't know anything about East Asia and that sounded like a reasonable theory, and I still remember my shock when just two years after the end of the Vietnam War, China and Vietnam went to war. I thought, wait a minute, I thought they were-- one was the cat's-paw of the other. Then I start reading and find out they've been bitter enemies for a thousand years, but facts were never presented to a candid public because our leaders were not candid with us.

Now let's look at the case of Cuba. It's another case of American intervention gone terribly wrong. When the United States decided in 1898 to send soldiers to Cuba to help Cuban revolutionaries overthrow Spanish colonial rule, the Cuban patriots were not so sure they really liked this idea. They didn't know if they wanted some thousands of American soldiers in Cuba, and they were very close to victory on their own. Well, the Americans were shocked at the cynicism of the Cuban patriots and responded by passing a law that was called the Teller Amendment. So with the force of law we promised Cuba that our troops are going to withdraw immediately after we defeat the Spanish and we are going to allow Cuba to become independent.

Well, once that was promised with the force of law, the Cuban revolutionaries embraced the idea of Americans coming. At the end of 1898, Cuba, after winning the war against Spain, was in a state of ecstatic preparation for what was going to be the biggest day in Cuban history, January 1, 1899. That's Cuban Independence Day. For the first time Cuba was going to become an independent country, but the United States changed its mind. We violated the promise that we had made with the force of law and decided no, we don't want Cuba to become independent. In fact, we're going to turn it into a protectorate and we're going to rule it directly by American military officers, and later on we ruled it through a series of pliant dictators. Why did we do that? It's because after the Spanish were chased out of Cuba and the Cuban revolutionaries were planning their new government, for the first time we looked at their political program, and we found out that throwing the Spaniards out of Cuba was not all they wanted to do. They actually wanted to do something for their country, and what did they want to do? The first thing they wanted to do is give land to starving peasants. Where is the land? It's all owned by half a dozen American sugar companies.

And then the other thing we noticed was Cuba wants to build up a manufacturing industry, and the way they want to do that is the way we did it: erect a tariff wall so that we can't be flooded by goods from other countries and we can stimulate domestic manufacturing. Well, 90 percent of all the manufactured goods that were on sale in Cuba at that time came from the United States, so suddenly we saw, wait a minute, this revolutionary government is not going to be good for our corporations in the U.S., so we decided to abandon our promise to Cuba.

Now flash-forward to 1959, 60 years later. That was the year of course that Fidel Castro came to power. During the time I was researching that book, *Overthrow*, I went back and researched that period, and I found a very interesting document. It was Castro's first speech as a leader of the victorious revolution in January 1959. He made it out in Santiago, the eastern city in Cuba where his troops first arrived from the hills, and it was a very vague speech full of kind of patriotic platitudes, but Castro made

one promise. He said, "I promise you that this time it's not going to be like 1898 again, when the Americans came in and took over our country."

Now that speech wasn't very widely reported in the United States, but if it had been I think Americans would have had two responses. The first would have been what happened in 1898? We forget these interventions, and we like to believe that the people in the countries where we intervene are going to forget them also, but these interventions have long-term effects. And the fact is that if we had kept our word to Cuba and not insisted on dominating Cuba for half a century, we would never have had to face the entire phenomenon of Castro communism and all the negative effects that had for America over so many decades. That is another blowback effect of our own intervention. We had created that phenomenon. It's just that it was a delayed response, so we don't automatically make the connection.

And I want to take a little more time to talk about Iran because that is such a very intense debate now in the United States. It's intruding even a little bit in to the presidential campaign. Now-- Just a bit. Here is perhaps the single greatest pattern that I notice after studying so many of these interventions. It is the inevitability of unpredicted consequences. We Americans have what some people call this can-do mentality, this great optimism, and it's a wonderful quality. It's what helped build America into what it is now. It can be very helpful when you're trying to confront obstacles that are posed by nature or by other people or by technology, but a can-do mentality can also be dangerous because it leads us to think that we can do anything. I think that was the idea that brought us into Iraq. Don't worry. There won't be any problems afterwards 'cause we're America. We're going to be able to deal with whatever comes up.

So this is a very dangerous approach to the world, and in Iran you see very vividly this law of unintended consequences coming back to haunt us, and we see that you cannot control the consequences of intervention. They ultimately wind up hurting not only the country where we intervene, but also us. So let me talk a little bit about what happened in Iran and how did we get to the position we're in now?

For the whole first half of the twentieth century, the dominant fact of life in Iran was foreign intervention, principally by Britain and Russia, to a lesser extent by France and some other European powers, and bitter resentment grew up in Iran against these intervening powers. Now during that period, the first half of the twentieth century, the only Americans in Iran were missionaries and others who came to help, people that built hospitals, and the American hospital in Tehran was the only place for decades where a poor person could get good medical care for free. There were educators. The statue of Samuel Jordan, the founder of Alborz College, which trained generations of the Iranian elite, is still a place that people in Iran go to pay pilgrimages to. They still remember the great American schoolteacher who was killed during the constitutional revolution in 1906. He was called the American Lafayette.



So America was seen in Iran as the great country, the perfect country, the idealized country. They were not intervening and trying to suck our resources out like the British and the French and the Russians. America was idealized even beyond perhaps what we deserved at that time, so America really was in the ideal position because we were only helping, and that help was coming from private initiative. It was not a government-to-government relationship at all.

Now after World War II the winds of nationalism were blowing through Asia and Africa, Latin America, and in Iran nationalism meant one thing: We've got to take back control of our oil. At the beginning of the twentieth century, through a corrupt deal with the declining Kajar dynasty, the British grabbed control of the entire Iranian oil industry, and even Winston Churchill, who was then first lord of the admiralty, said very accurately that this was a prize from fairyland beyond our wildest dreams. "Mastery itself is the prize of the venture," is what he said. So all during the first half of the twentieth century the whole British economy was fueled by oil from Iran. Every factory in Britain was powered by oil from Iran. Every car and every jeep was powered by Iranian oil. The Royal Navy, which projected British power all over the world, was fueled by oil from Iran. Britain has no oil, nor have any colonies that have oil. Everything was coming from Iran. By the period leading up to World War II, 90 percent of the oil being sold in Europe was coming from Iran, and all the profits were going to this one British company.

So you had this situation where a poor country whose miserable people were living in some of the worst conditions of any people in the world had an enormously valuable resource which was going to prop up the economy of a European country. So it was natural that when Iran emerged from World War II and became a real functioning democracy, the leaders of Iran would reflect this great public clamor. We've got to take back control of our oil so we can use the profits to develop our own country.

Well, naturally the British were in a panic when they heard this, and of course they didn't believe it. One of their first orders was to ask their ambassador in Britain to approach Prime Minister Mossadegh or one of his aides and find out how much money does he really want us to put in his Swiss bank account so he can forget all this foolishness. But it turned out it wasn't just Mossadegh, it was the entire Iranian people. It wouldn't have worked even if you could have bribed the prime minister because the entire people of Iran had grasped onto this cause. The British tried everything. They blockaded the port where the oil was exported from. They forced all their experts who could run the refinery to go back to Britain, and of course they had been very careful not to train any Iranians in how to run that refinery. They prevented agricultural and manufactured goods from getting into Iran. They took Iran to the United Nations. They took Iran to the World Court. None of this worked, so the British finally decided we're going to have to overthrow the government of Iran; we're going to overthrow Prime Minister Mossadegh. They began to plan this, but Mossadegh found out what they were doing and he did the only thing that he

could have done to protect himself, which was he closed the British embassy and he sent home all of the British diplomats, including of course all of the secret agents that were planning the coup.

So now the British were really in a panic. They were losing their most valuable, richest, most lucrative property anywhere in the world to who? Iranians? It was a huge shock. And then what happened was Prime Minister Churchill decided the only hope for us is we've got to turn to the Americans and see if we can get the Americans to do this for us. So he approached President Truman and Truman said, "No. The CIA does not overthrow governments." And that was true at the time, and the CIA had never overthrown a government up to that time. It was Truman's idea that it could be used for intelligence gathering but not for that kind of operation.

In fact, while I was researching this book in the Truman Library in Missouri, I found a fantastic phrase in one of Truman's letters when he was writing about the CIA. He was very worried about giving too much power to the CIA, and here's the phrase that he used to describe what he was afraid that the CIA might become. He said, "American Gestapo." So Truman was very unwilling to use the CIA this way.

Now the British were really in trouble. They had nothing. But then at the end of 1952 the British foreign office and the secret service were electrified by the news that there had been an election in the United States and a new group was coming into power. The new President would be Dwight Eisenhower, and the new Secretary of State would be John Foster Dulles, who had spent his entire life as the number one international corporate lawyer for big American companies. The roster of the clients that John Foster Dulles served is essentially just a list of all the giant multinational corporations of that era. So the idea that a country somewhere out there in the world was bothering a big, giant multinational corporation or a big British or American corporation was something that Dulles took very seriously. He didn't want that example to spread.

So finally the Americans decided we will do this. They-- President Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles-- reversed the Truman policy and they told the British, "Okay. We're going to do it for you. We're going to go over to Iran and we're going to overthrow Prime Minister Mossadegh." And in the beginning of August 1953 a very intrepid CIA agent crossed over into Iran with the assignment: Organize the overthrow of the government. And it's one of those wonderful quirks of history that the agent that was sent to Iran was Kermit Roosevelt, the grandson of Theodore Roosevelt, who had brought America into the regime change era back in the time of the Spanish-American War.

Well, it only took Kermit Roosevelt three weeks to organize the overthrow of the Democratic government of Iran. It didn't just mean the end of Prime Minister Mossadegh's rule. It meant the end of

democracy in Iran, and I think many people today don't even understand that Iran ever was a democracy. But in fact this is a country that's had a constitution for more than a hundred years, and in the early '50s it really was consolidating its democracy. If we had managed to keep our hands off Iran, we might have had a thriving democracy in the heart of the Muslim Middle East all these 50 years, and I can hardly wrap my mind around how different the world would look if we had only managed to keep our hands off.

Now I talked about unintended consequences. In the period immediately following the overthrow of Mossadegh, Americans were very happy. Kermit Roosevelt was welcomed into the Oval Office of the White House and given a secret medal in a private ceremony, and he briefed President Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles on how it had been done. Oh, it was so successful Dulles immediately went out and started doing this again. Within a year or less than a year, we went off and overthrew another government down in Guatemala, so the Iran operation seemed like a great success. We got rid of a guy we didn't like, Mossadegh, and we replaced him with a guy, the Shah, who would do everything we wanted, so it was a perfect outcome.

It doesn't look quite so perfect now. Let's try to trace very briefly what happened. So the Shah ruled with increasing repression for 25 years. His repression produced the explosion of the late 1970s, what we call the Islamic Revolution. That revolution brought to power a clique of fanatically anti-American mullahs who have spent the last 25 years bitterly and sometimes very violently working to undermine the American influence all over the world. That revolution in Iran also weakened Iran enough so that Iran's biggest enemy next door, Saddam Hussein, decided to invade Iran. We were so angry at Iran that we became military allies of Saddam Hussein. President Reagan sent a high-level special envoy to meet twice with Saddam Hussein and of course that envoy was none other than Donald Rumsfeld. I love that photo of Rumsfeld shaking Saddam's hand. It says it all.

We provided helicopters to Iraq to drop poison gas inside Iran. We provided Iraq with bombing coordinates so they could strike at targets inside Iran, so that not only shook that region but it also brought the United States into its death embrace with Saddam. That was the beginning of the spiral down in Iraq that led us to this present debacle. The turmoil of the Islamic Revolution also led the Soviets to be terrified that there would be copycat revolutions all along their southern front. That's what led them to invade Afghanistan, and their invasion of Afghanistan is what led us to go over to Pakistan and spend hundreds of millions and even billions of dollars to train huge armies of jihadis to go off and kill the infidel. We didn't realize that those jihadis we trained were going to become the Taliban, and the infidels that they wanted to kill would be us. All of that stemmed from three weeks in history in 1953 in Iran. Now to this day I think we're still living under the emotional overhang of the hostage crisis of 1979, and we just met a member of Congress today who said that I approached someone on the floor of the House and

asked him if he'd support a resolution for negotiating with Iran, and he looked at me and said, "No. They took over our embassy and seized our diplomats." We are still caught in this emotional prison.

Now I want to tell you a fascinating story that happened to me during a visit to Washington this autumn. I was on a panel discussion about Iran with several other people. One of them was one of the American hostages, one of those diplomats. Actually, it was the chief diplomat, Bruce Laingen. He had been the chief of the U.S. mission in Tehran at the time the hostages were taken. I had never met him but I knew that he'd become an advocate of reconciliation with Iran, and so I was eager to talk to him. I wanted to chat with him a little and later we exchanged some e-mails and he told me a fascinating story, which to my knowledge has never appeared in print. He said, "I was sitting in my cell in that embassy in Iran. I had been in a solitary cell for about one year, and one day unexpectedly the door opened and there is one of the hostage takers. One of my jailers is standing there and I looked up at him and one year of rage and anger and fury exploded out of me and I started screaming at him. I told him, 'You have no right to do this. This is totally cruel. This violates every law of God and man. You cannot take innocent people hostage and treat them like this.'" He said, "I went on for several minutes screaming at him and he just looked waited very patiently, and when I finally ran out of breath he leaned into my cell and pointed a finger at me and in very good English said, 'You have no right to complain because you took our whole country hostage in 1953.'"

What that story tells me is that the hostage taking, deplorable as it was, did not come out of nowhere. It was not just an act of blind hatred and nihilism. People who participated in that episode have now written about it and said it was all about 1953. What happened in 1953? We forced the Shah out of the country but CIA agents working in the basement of the U.S. Embassy arranged a coup and brought him back. Now it's 25 years later, 1979. The Shah fled again, same Shah. So what's going to happen? We're afraid the same thing is going to happen again: CIA agents working in the basement of the U.S. Embassy will organize a coup and bring the Shah back. We had to prevent that. If we had never done that in 1953, there never would have been a hostage takeover.

The lesson of all this is that when you violently intervene in the political development of another country, you're doing something like releasing a wheel at the top of a hill. You can let it go, but once you let it go you have no control over how it's going to bounce or where it's going to end up. American foreign policy has gotten off onto a tangent that I think our own Founding Fathers never envisioned and would be horrified to see. We've decided there is only one way everyone in the world should live, and it's the way we tell you you should live. This is the essence of the policy and the face that the United States is presenting to the outside world. We've decided that we've discovered something that other people can

never discover and we're going to force them to do it. This creates a kind of resentment that deeply undermines our security.

In the current age, you cannot win wars just the way people used to win them in the past, by having the biggest army and the best-trained army and the most modern weapons. That doesn't work anymore because the enemy that we're now facing in the world doesn't respond to that. We cannot pressure them that way. What is the weapon that we really need to revise our position in the world and improve our security status? It's information. We need to know what people are thinking, what people are saying, what people are planning, what people are doing. How do you get information? You get it from people. You get it from ordinary people, you get it from other intelligence agencies, but they don't share it with you unless they want to, unless they admire you, unless they want to help you. You cannot tell me that Osama bin Laden could be living all those years on the Afghan-Pakistan border if the villagers who live there admired the United States, wanted to help the United States. It's because of their bitterness and their anger at the way the U.S. behaves in the world that they're happy to give him sanctuary.

We complain about that, but that is the situation that we ourselves have created. Now, however, we seem incredibly resistant to learning this lesson. It's very difficult for Americans to assimilate the idea that there are things not only that we can't do, but that we shouldn't want to do even if we could. We developed a system of government that fit our culture and our needs. Let's let other people do the same thing. Let's not assume that our experience is the same experience of all other people in the world. Some people find the idea of individuals voting and having political parties to be a great idea. Other people don't like that. In some cultures they rely on consensus rather than conflict or on the wisdom of elders or on other ways of solving problems. Why is that hostile to us? Why should we be concerned about that, and why should the U.S. government be using its great military power and sucking up huge amounts of tax dollars to support that enterprise in order to go out and support the interests of a very small segment of the wealthy American population in ways that are devastating our own security posture? This is not about a giveaway to another country. It's only about thinking what is good for us. Let's just think about that.

I have no problem with America acting in America's interest, but let's think clearly about what is in America's interest, and that's why I turn to our other hero here, George Washington, who also had a line that I'd like to see us go back to understand, cherish, and appreciate. He said, "No country can be trusted further than it is bound by interests." Let's go back to thinking about our own interest as a nation, not serving a small group of corporations that need to suck up resources and need markets, not using the excuse of trying to help people who don't want our help. Let us look inside our country, see how much needs to be done here, and go back to the idea that John Winthrop first pronounced. Let's make ourselves a city on a hill. Let's make ourselves a truly great country that people will want to emulate. That's the way

we can change the world, not by force, not by intervention, not by military power. Thank you. Thank you a lot. Great. Thank you.

**Man 1:** We have time for a few questions.

**Stephen Kinzer:** \_\_\_\_\_ goes first please.

**David Henderson:** Hi. Hi. My name is David Henderson. I enjoyed your talk a lot, Steve.

**Stephen Kinzer:** Thank you.

**David Henderson:** Steve or Stephen?

**Stephen Kinzer:** Well, my mother likes Stephen so she'll be watching this so let's use that.

**David Henderson:** Okay. I'm wondering-- I remember-- By the way, just a little-- just quick background. I will get to my question, but I grew up thinking everything Buckley said was true so-- and he wrote about Cuba and he had this great article, great title anyway, Herbert Matthews, "I got—" or Fidel Castro, "I got my job through the *New York Times*." Herbert Matthews. So when Fidel Castro made that comment-- and I know Herbert Matthews was kind of pro-Fidel-- did he at least report that?

**Stephen Kinzer:** No, because Herbert Matthews was not yet in Cuba. He had been in Cuba during the time when Castro was still up in the hills. Then he came back later on for another return visit. But the controversial episode that Herbert Matthews was involved in-- For those of you that don't know this, Herbert Matthews was a famous *New York Times* correspondent. He went to Cuba and he wanted to find out if it was really true that the Castro movement had been crushed, and Castro cleverly organized this little theater for him where he had his 25 soldiers walk by in groups of 5 or 10 and then quickly sort of change their shirts and then walk by again and walk by again. And Herbert Matthews, with all of the insight of a *New York Times* correspondent, wrote that thousands of people were following Fidel. That episode happened during the war, and it says once in a while even Americans can get snookered.

**David Henderson:** Another quick one, and I don't know if you'll want to answer this, but the Congressman who wouldn't-- didn't want to negotiate with Iran because of what happened 27 years ago or-- no, 29 years ago-- Do you care to name him?

**Stephen Kinzer:** I'm going to be very honest with you and I'm going to tell you that I heard this story from another Congressman who approached him and he didn't tell me the name, and now I'm glad he didn't because then I'd have to tell you.

**David Henderson:** Okay, and just one other thing: What's so ironic about that is you remember what Jimmy Carter said, and Sheldon Richman quoted this once in an article, what Jimmy Carter said when the Iranians, when they took the embassy, talked about what happened in 1953, which was 26 years earlier, not 29 years earlier, and Jimmy Carter's famous two-line phrase that that was ancient—

**Stephen Kinzer:** Ancient history, and that really says it all because we like to think that our interventions happen, then they're over; they never have any long-term effects. It's like saying you can beat your child brutally every day for years and then once you stop beating him he'll be fine. There will be no effect. Everything will be perfect again. That's exactly the mentality we're following.

**Man 2:** Stephen, thank you. How do you get individuals, companies, corporations, actually specifically elected officials not to be so influenced by these major corporations every time they've got a problem? Because what you're saying-- what you're talking about is that we have to become a moral country. It was kind of like what John Adams had to say about this: In order to be self-governing, you've got to be a moral people.

**Stephen Kinzer:** Well, you've put your finger on a huge challenge for America. We have two huge lobbies. There is a great lobby of people that are making huge amounts of money off the war machine. It's a spectacularly profitable business. And then you have this other lobby made up of the corporations that want to go in right after the war and reap all the spoils. That combination is very, very effective. How do you break that? First of all, I think the worse our interventions go, like the one in Iraq, I think the more lights go on in the minds of more people. Second, I think part of it has to do with the political process and the public kind of influencing each other.

Now one of the things I found so interesting in the Ron Paul presidential campaign is that although Dr. Paul created a good amount of this enthusiasm, I think what he really did was to see something, not create something. He noticed that something was happening that no one else saw, and I don't even know if you even realized how big it was, but this shows that when there's a leader, when there's a way for people to show that they want another way, they grab onto that. So I'd like to see more people in the political process taking this course, but every time a new weapon system is promoted in the U.S. Congress and approved into law, the first thing that the defense contractors do is get a list of the 435 congressional districts and they want to find one factory in each district, or at least one in each state, to

make one piece of this giant war machine. That way they can go to every single Senator and every single Congressman and say, “You don’t want to cut this project ’cause you’re hurting jobs in your own community.”

There has got to be a way that this great country can support itself without having to have a constant war economy, but this has actually become a fundamental part of our economy. If we start pulling back from the world, if we stop the interventionist foreign policy, then we’re not only going to have lots of extra money to spend on other programs, but we might have lots of money that we don’t have to spend or raise at all.

**Man 3:** In a history class I took, your book, *Overthrow*, was used as a textbook and my former professor would like to ask you if Obama—

**Stephen Kinzer:** He’s your former-- Is he in a Guantanamo now?

**Man 3:** If Obama is elected, do you think his administration would break from the current imperialistic U.S. foreign policy, and if so what impact would this have? And my question would be has Halford Mackinder, his Heartland Theory, do you think it’s had more influence than let’s say the corporations and the oil?

**Stephen Kinzer:** Well, tell me again the first part of your question.

**Man 3:** Obama—

**Stephen Kinzer:** Oh, whether Obama would do it and then the Mackinder thing. Okay. Well, Shiite Muslims developed a practice in the early days after the split of Islam. They had to live in largely Sunni communities and they were being killed as soon as they were found, so they developed a process called taqiyah. Taqiyah means it’s allowed to pretend that you’re a Sunni or it’s allowed to hide your true beliefs in order to survive. Now in my fantasies political candidates are truly anti-imperialist, and then when they get elected they’re going to show it, but they just can’t show it during the campaign. Common sense, however, tells us that that doesn’t usually happen.

I must say I’ve spent most of my adult life living abroad, and that’s maybe one reason why I see America a little bit differently from some people here. I’m an expert on the politics of a lot of countries, but the United States is not one of them. My sense is that Barack Obama is a kind of a blank slate on which all of us are projecting various hopes, many of them very contradictory, and if I were advising him I



would tell him, "If you want to win, stay blank," and I think that's what he's doing. And he's making it possible for people to have all kinds of guesses and speculations about what he's going to do, but if there is going to be a radical break away from the idea of American interventionism, we haven't gotten any real hint of it yet.

Now if you were running for President and you believed in this policy and you wanted to get elected, maybe you wouldn't be so explicit about it. Nonetheless, there is no indication that our friend Obama is hiding this project in his mind, and it would certainly be something radically different for American politics. So all I can say is you can keep your hopes up, but watch your wallet. Okay. Thanks so much.