

Heritage Lectures

No. 1093
Delivered June 3, 2008



Published by The Heritage Foundation

July 17, 2008

In Defense of Liberty: The Relationship Between Security and Freedom

Victor Davis Hanson, Ph.D.

NILE GARDINER, Ph.D.: Good morning. Welcome to the Heritage Foundation and the fifth Margaret Thatcher Freedom Lecture.

The Margaret Thatcher Lecture series began in September 2006, with a major speech by former Soviet dissident Natan Sharansky on the subject, “Is Freedom for Everyone?” It was followed by lectures on economic freedom and religious freedom by Hernando de Soto and Michael Novak, and by Ambassador John Bolton’s lecture “Does the United Nations Advance the Cause of Freedom?”

Our distinguished speaker today is Victor Davis Hanson, who will address the theme, “In Defense of Liberty: The Relationship Between Security and Freedom.”

Dr. Hanson is a Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University; Professor Emeritus at California University, Fresno; and a nationally syndicated columnist. He is also the Wayne and Marcia Buske Distinguished Fellow in History at Hillsdale College, where he teaches courses in military history and classical culture.

Dr. Hanson has served as a visiting professor of classics at Stanford University and as the Visiting Shifrin Chair of Military History at the U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis. He received the Manhattan Institute’s Wriston Lectureship in 2004 and the 2006 Nimitz Lectureship in Military History at U.C. Berkeley.

Victor Davis Hanson is the author of hundreds of articles, book reviews, scholarly papers, and newspa-

Talking Points

- The Western military tradition assures Western states that they could, if they so wish, become almost immune from foreign attack.
- Why is the U.S. reluctant to speak honestly and freely about particular issues, especially when it comes to radical Islam that fuels much of the world’s terrorism in the present post-9/11 landscape? One cause surely is contemporary postmodern ideologies, such as multiculturalism, utopian pacifism, and moral equivalence.
- Consensual governments can, *in extremis*, craft security legislation consistent with constitutional principles that will protect citizens without eroding their rights.
- However, government has no remedy once citizens voluntarily begin to abandon freedom of expression out of fear, guilt—or misguided ideologies designed to deny the singularity of their civilization.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
www.heritage.org/Research/WorldwideFreedom/hl1093.cfm

The Thatcher Freedom Lectures

Produced by The Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom

Published by The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002-4999
(202) 546-4400 • heritage.org

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

per editorials on matters ranging from Greek, agrarian, and military history to foreign affairs, domestic politics, and contemporary culture.

He is one of America's most distinguished classical scholars, and has written or edited thirteen books, including *Warfare and Agriculture in Classical Greece*; *The Western Way of War*; *The Wars of the Ancient Greeks*; *Carnage and Culture*; *An Autumn of War*; *Ripples of Battle: How Wars of the Past Still Determine How We Fight, How We Live, and How We Think*, and, most recently, *A War Like No Other: How the Athenians and Spartans Fought the Peloponnesian War*, which was named one of the *New York Times* Notable 100 Books of 2006.

Victor Davis Hanson was awarded the National Humanities Medal in 2007 and is one of the premier military historians of our time. We are honored to have him with us today to deliver the Margaret Thatcher Freedom Lecture.

—Nile Gardiner, Ph.D., is Director of the Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom, a division of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies at The Heritage Foundation.

VICTOR DAVIS HANSON: There cannot be freedom without security nor true security without freedom. The Greeks from the very beginning understood this symbiosis between the two, and framed the nature of the relationship—and occasional antithesis—between these necessary poles. The historian Thucydides, for example, makes Pericles, in his famous funeral oration, talk in depth about the nature of democratic military service and sacrifice that are the linchpins of the freedom of Athens, and how any short-term disadvantages that may harm an open society at war are more than compensated by the creativity, exuberance, and democratic zeal that free peoples bring to war.

Because, like all democratic leaders, Pericles knew the charge that liberal peoples were prone to indiscipline and incapable of collective sacrifice in times of peril, he made the argument that consensual societies *in extremis* fight as well-disciplined as closed, oligarchic communities, and yet still enjoy the advantages that accrue to liberal societies.

We throw open our city to the world, and never by alien acts exclude foreigners from any

opportunity of learning or observing, although the eyes of an enemy may occasionally profit by our liberality; trusting less in system and policy than to the native spirit of our citizens; while in education, where our rivals from their very cradles by a painful discipline seek after manliness, at Athens we live exactly as we please, and yet are just as ready to encounter every legitimate danger.

In contrast, authors as diverse as Herodotus, Xenophon, and Aristotle remind us that the king, tyrant, and autocrat live insecure lives, since their reign is based on fear and instilled terror, and thus they dare not ever lessen their grip for an instant, lest both the people and the military turn on their despised government.

The long history of Western civilization—the Persian War, the Punic Wars, the Napoleonic Wars, World Wars I and II, the Cold War—often suggests that free peoples, if slow to confront enemies on the horizon, nevertheless have been able more often than not to defeat their autocratic enemies. That is why today the West is defined by consensual governments rather than something more akin to the Napoleonic, Hitlerian, or Stalinist modes of rule.

In other words, the Western tradition of civilian-controlled militaries erred on the side of openness, with the assurance that, when war came, the advantages of free speech, expression, and informality would more than outweigh those of discipline, rote, and authoritarianism that their dictatorial enemies embrace.

The Balance of Freedom and Security

The key for Western societies in times of peril has been to calibrate the proper balance between personal freedom and collective military preparedness and readiness. Often authoritarianism—Rome in the imperial period, Medieval monarchies, France under Napoleon, the fascism of Italy and Germany—has sacrificed personal liberties in preference for security concerns and militarist cultures.

Other Western societies, often in reaction to recent bloody wars, have erred in the opposite fashion on the side of disarmament and appeasement, and lost their liberty as a consequence of not being able to provide security for their own peoples. Here

one thinks of the fate of Athens in the age of Demosthenes or France of 1940.

But more often the dilemma is not so black and white. Abraham Lincoln, and later Andrew Johnson, suspended *habeas corpus* in some border states to detain pro-Confederate sympathizers, and later Ku Klux Klan organizers. In World War II, the United States censored news from the front, hid information about military disasters, tried and executed German saboteurs in secret military tribunals, and wiretapped the phones of suspected enemy sympathizers—and yet preserved the Constitution while fighting a global war with a military of over 12 million.

Since September 11, 2001, Western societies have struggled with this age-old tension between freedom and security concerns, and a number of dilemmas have arisen.

With passage of the Patriot Act, the establishment of the Guantanamo detention center, court-approved wiretaps, renditions of terrorist suspects abroad, and systematic surveillance, some Americans have often casually alleged that the Constitution has been sacrificed to unnecessary security concerns. But it is far more difficult to calibrate this supposed loss of civil liberties than it is to appreciate the absence of a post-9/11 terrorist attack. That said, is there a danger that, in fact, we have lost much of the ability of self-expression—not through government zealotry, but a certain laxity on its part to protect free speech—as a result of Western public opinion that itself is willing to sacrifice unfettered expression, either out of good intentions or sheer fear?

The Nature of Freedom

In this regard, we can ask a few rhetorical questions about the nature of freedom and security in the public realm. Take a variety of contemporary genres of Western expression.

Film: Is it now safer for a moviemaker to produce a controversial feature-length film attacking the President of the United States (as in Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* or Gabriel Range's *Death of a President*, which offered a dramatic version of an assassination of George Bush) or a short clip questioning radical Islam, such as Gert Wilders' *Fitna* or Theo Van Gogh's *Submission*?

Novels: Is a Western writer more in danger for writing a novel contemplating the assassination of a sitting American President (such as Nicholson Baker's 2004 Alfred Knopf-published *Checkpoint*) or one, in allegorical fashion, caricaturing Islam (such as Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*)?

Journalism: Is a Westerner more constrained from caricaturing a sitting American President in print (such as Jonathan Chait's 2004 *New Republic* article, "The Case for Bush Hatred," with its first sentence, "I hate President George W. Bush") or drawing editorial cartoons mocking Islam (such as those initially published in 2005 in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*)?

Religious Expression: Is a Western religious figure more in danger issuing a CD damning the United States (such as Rev. Jeremiah Wright calling the United States "The USKKK of A," urging his congregation to "Goddamn America," and suggesting that the United States deserved the 9/11 attacks) or referencing the historic relations between Islam and Christianity (such as Pope Benedict's quotation of a 14th century Byzantine treatise about a letter from a Manuel II Paleologus to leaders of the Ottoman Empire)?

Public Dissent and Expression: Would a citizen of London or Amsterdam feel more secure in violent public protest of Israeli foreign policy or in peacefully criticizing Islamic Sharia law and its contributions to terror abroad and repression at home?

Government Bureaucracies: Is it more likely for an American or European government agency to prohibit the use of particular descriptive phrases, such as "Islamic terrorism" or "Jihad," or insensitively to demonize all Muslims in its public proclamations?

Each age has its demons of either laxity or authoritarianism. But our age has fostered a novel menace in a peculiar form of self-censorship that far exceeds anything dreamed up by the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI, or the Pentagon. The only mystery about our reluctance to speak honestly and freely about particular issues is our eagerness to give up on free expression, especially when it comes to radical Islam that fuels much of the world's terrorism in the present post-9/11 landscape.

Other than fear, one cause surely is contemporary postmodern ideologies, such as multiculturalism, utopian pacifism, and moral equivalence. What these notions have in common are particular views of radical egalitarianism and Western culpability for the inability to achieve it.

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism—whether found in Edward Said’s *Orientalism* or “black liberation theory” or various indictments of European colonialism of Africa and the Americas—grew up in an age of postwar affluence, characterized by Western guilt over past colonialism, imperialism, and global dominance. It argues that the sins of humankind—slavery, sexism, racism, and imperialism—were uniquely Western rather than simply innate to all cultures. Therefore, we could hardly use our own arbitrary standards of “freedom” or “equality” to judge other cultures, a practice that in the past had led to the subjugation and oppression of others under dishonest banners such as “civilization.”

In its most radical manifestation, multiculturalism would argue that Westerners could not arbitrarily define what distinguishes the methodology of a contemporary Islamic terrorist from, say, the revolutionary generation of 1776 or a B-17 bombardier over Dresden or an American G.I. at Hue. Or, more broadly, the multiculturalist alleges that the West has neither the moral capital nor the intellectual deftness to condemn foreign practices such as suicide bombing, religious intolerance, female circumcision, and honor killings, and so must allow that these endemic practices and customs are merely “different” rather than repugnant across time and space.

The practical consequence is that millions within the West have been taught not believe in Western exceptionalism and thus insidiously convey that message to millions of immigrants who seek to enjoy the benefits of European and American life, but feel no need to assimilate into it, and, in some cases, thrive on being as antithetical to it as possible—albeit without forfeiting the undeniable material benefits that residency within Western borders conveys.

Many Westerners are now hesitant to condemn something like Sharia law in abstract terms as an enemy of freedom, or to say Islamist suicide bomb-

ers kill barbarously for a uniquely evil cause. Because of multiculturalism, many in the West either don’t think jihadists pose any more threat than does their own industrial capitalist state, or, if they do, they feel that they simply lack the knowledge, or have previously lost the moral capital, to do anything about it.

Utopian Pacifism

Utopian pacifism was always innate in Western civilization, given its propensity both to wage horrific wars and, in response, to seek trans-national legislative means to prevent the reoccurrence of such catastrophes. From classical times, there has been a strain in Western letters and thought that a natural human, freed of the burdens of an oppressive civilization, might find a blissful existence without war, hunger, or the stress of the nation-state—should he be properly educated and replace emotion with reason.

In revulsion to the carnage of the European 20th century, and given the respite at the end of an existential threat from a nuclear Soviet Union, these old ideas about the perfectibility of human nature through education, and energized by a vast increase in national income, have again taken hold. Sometimes we see these hopes manifested in world government, such as those who advocate surrendering national sovereignty to the United Nations or the World Court at The Hague.

Sometimes they are more pedagogical and more ambitious, such as establishing “Peace Studies” programs to inculcate our youth that with proper study and counsels war can be outlawed, as if the resulting carnage is a result of misunderstanding rather than evil leaders knowing exactly what they want and planning how to get it. At other moments, diplomats delude themselves into thinking leaders of autocratic states—a Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran or Bashar Assad of Syria or North Korea’s Kim Jong-il—either have legitimate complaints against the West that explain their hostility or have been misrepresented in the Western press and appear bellicose largely through misunderstanding and miscommunication. In fact, the utopian believes that such autocrats no more wish to harm us than we do them, and resort to armed threats largely as a legitimate reaction to the military preparedness of democracy.

Like multiculturalism, utopian pacifism has had the effect within Western societies of defining difference down, and deluding Western publics into thinking that problems with radical Islam are as much of our own making as they a result of aggressive jihadist doctrines. In practical terms, utopianism, like multiculturalism, translates into a public that does its best to convey the message that Western and radical Islamic cultures are roughly similar—and that any differences that arise can be adjudicated through greater understanding and dialogue. Therefore, novelists, filmmakers, journalists, or politicians who believe otherwise should not express their sentiments out of concern for the greater ecumenical good—or at least exercise prudence in curtailing free expression, in recognition that their naked expression may evoke a counter-response quite injurious to the Western public in general.

Moral Equivalence

A third postmodern tenet that has curtailed free expression is what I would call moral equivalence, or the inability to discern Western and non-Western pathologies. As a strain of multiculturalism, moral equivalence seeks to do away with any notion of calibration and magnitude and places impossible burdens of perfection upon Western societies.

Sometimes the Western misdemeanor is defined down as equivalent to another culture's felony. Abu Ghraib, for example, where no Iraqi detainees perished, is the equivalent of either a Nazi Stalag or Soviet Gulag, where millions were starved to death or executed. After all, all three were penal camps and therefore roughly equivalent in ethical terms.

Context becomes irrelevant. The invasion of Iraq—approved by an elected Senate, argued over at the United Nations, intended to remove a genocidal dictator and leave a constitutional government in its wake—is no different from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the result of a Communist dictatorship's desire to crush an anti-Soviet neighbor, waged ruthlessly against a civilian population, and resulting in the installation of an authoritarian puppet government.

Standards of censure are never equally applied: We worry whether an errant bomb killed Iraqi civilians; silence ensues when Russians nearly obliterate

Grozny and kill tens of thousands of civilians. The mishandling of the federal government's response to Hurricane Katrina, one of the five worst natural disasters in the nation's history, in which 1,836 Americans were killed, is singular evidence of American racism and incompetence; nearly 300,000 were lost in an Indonesian tsunami, a Burmese hurricane accounted for 100,000 dead, and a Chinese earthquake took 50,000 lives—and few remarked either on the incompetence of these governments in reacting to such a staggering loss of life or the failure of such states to provide safe and adequate housing for their populations in the first place.

Despite the veneer of internationalism and caring, moral equivalence is predicated on the arrogant and condescending notion of low expectations—that an educated and affluent Western society must not err, while the “other” is apparently always expected to. Once the doctrine of moral equivalence is adopted, it becomes impossible to abide by any standards of censure. We circumcise infant males, so why should not the Sudanese “circumcise” female infants? We have bombed civilians, so why should not suicide bombers do the same? Timothy McVeigh was a religious, right-wing terrorist, so why are the thousands of Islamist terrorists deserving of any special censure?

The aggregate result of multiculturalism, utopian pacifism, and moral equivalence is that philosophically and ethically the Western public becomes ill-equipped to condemn Islamic extremism. In Western consensual societies, this so-called “political correctness” likewise permeates the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. For a variety of reasons, we voluntarily restrict free speech and expression. But in the cases in which we otherwise would not, we do not expect our governments to have the intellectual and moral wherewithal to protect the safety of writers, filmmakers, intellectuals, and journalists who chose to express themselves candidly and incur the wrath of radicals abroad.

The Embarrassment of Riches

One question remains. Why have these particular harmful doctrines become so popular in our own era? In the general sense, the wealthier, freer, and more leisured a society becomes—and none is

more so on all three counts than is 21st-century America—the more its population has the leeway, the margin of error, so to speak, both to question and feel guilty over its singular privilege. Abstract doctrines that allow one to vent remorse over our riches, without denying our enjoyment of them, satisfy a psychological need to reconcile what are intrinsically irreconcilable.

Second, with the collapse of Communism and the rise of globalized capitalism, Marxism as a formal doctrine was formally discredited. But its underlying and more vague assumptions that the state must enforce an equality of result among all the citizenry remains attractive to many. One way of forcing Western societies to redistribute their wealth both at home and abroad is to argue that it was not earned or the results of practices not at all unique from, much less better than, those found in non-Western societies.

False Consciousness

The Marxist corollary of false consciousness, that the deluded masses must be enlightened by well-meaning elites to recognize their true interests explains why the utopian insists on the substitution of his version of reason (pacifism) over the mob's superstition and emotion ("war-mongering"). And to justify the use of state coercion to stifle the individual, the old Marxist doctrine equates its own brutality merely as remedy for original oppression and exploitation.

The Western military tradition assures Western states that they could, *if they so wish*, become almost immune from foreign attack. Consensual governments can, *in extremis*, craft security legislation consistent with constitutional principles that will protect citizens without eroding their rights. But government has no remedy once citizens voluntarily begin to abandon freedom of expression out of fear, guilt—or misguided ideologies designed to deny the singularity of their civilization.

Questions and Answers

QUESTION: You mentioned those three ideologies. But we're conservatives—I am. Why aren't those voices as strong as they might be to counter the ideologies that you've outlined?

VICTOR DAVIS HANSON: Let me speak now as if I were on the Left. They would say something like the following: that you are influential in the sense that the muscles of the United States—the corporation, the workplace, the government, the religion—is all conservative. But we on the Left—I'm not a member of the Left, but I've heard this argument from members of my own family for years—only have certain avenues of expression. These happen to be intellectual, they happen to be journalistic, so we have the foundations, we have the university to try to counter this.

This is very prevalent in the university. The university has come up with this dogma since the 1960s, that it openly does not have to be balanced. They say that we don't because we only have students for four years and then they're going to go out in the wider world and be subject to the coercion of the family, of the religion, of the government, so we have to sort of indoctrinate them and prepare them.

I think that's pretty much where we are, that we in the conservative community feel that a lot of our talent does not go into the same types of fields. We don't have people as interested in journalism, in foundations, in the university, because they tend to be drawn off more in government or in business.

You can see that in antiquity a great deal. In antiquity, if you were a person who was suspicious of radical egalitarianism in Athens, then you might be a Plato or you might be a Socrates or you might be a Xenophon, but you were not going into an Athenian hedge fund. There was not that avenue for business. Indeed, business was considered less than noble. But I think what's happened in our own life is that the law and business and the military especially—we have brilliant minds in the military—has taken a lot of the talent, and we haven't made the investment as a conservative community to fight that intellectual struggle.

QUESTION: Dr. Hanson, in your discussion of security and liberty and the contrast between the two, you didn't say a great deal about where this struggle is playing itself out in recent years, namely, in the legislatures and in the courts. And this is coming—especially in the last 30 years—to be a very burning issue with the struggle by the lawyers

and the law professors, in particular, in the name of liberty to impose a judicialization of warfare. This is something that concerns many of us, and I wonder if you would say a few words about that.

VICTOR DAVIS HANSON: Well, that's a very good question. That controversy was prominent in the 1990s, and there was a backlash against the World Court at The Hague, the appropriation of U.S. sovereignty, say in the U.N. I think that the problems in Iraq have now re-ignited that danger.

In other words, the utopian mind, the multicultural mind, the moral equivalent mind, suggests that given the nature of the United States or its history, it needs to be watched, and it needs to be subject to international law.

Where does this idea come from? It comes from a vision, I suppose, to paraphrase Tom Sowell in *The Anointed*: Once one adopts a cosmic view of the brotherhood of man or the egalitarianism of the individual that provides all sorts of advantages to the person who holds those views. They don't have to worry about intricacies; they don't have to worry about legal decisions; their motives are never checked or questioned. So then a judge in California can suggest that gay marriage does not have to follow a plebiscite or a legislative act, due to his superior wisdom and morality and ethics and due to all the wonderful things that can accrue. If Plato were to look at that, he might say this is a classic authoritarian. The authoritarian on the Left is not subject to that baggage because his motives, as we all know, are unimpeachable.

That is, I think, the great danger that we're seeing with the trampling of civil liberties by the courts and the coercion put on the United States to make it subject to the World Court at The Hague or the United Nations—this idea that the people who are doing that are doing it for these wonderful motives.

We see the same thing with radical environmentalism. Once you accept the idea of the messiah, that he wants the best for us with his greater wisdom, it's a very Enlightenment idea as well, that we don't want to be bound by this sub-civilized wrangling, these people who have captive or parochial notions of guns or property because we have a much better intent, a much better mission for all this.

I think that's always the danger of the utopian. That's why I'm very worried that, as I said, I think we're losing the enlightenment as we speak. None of us are sure what we can say or should say, and it's not being questioned because the people who are doing this have such unimpeachable motives. But I'm very worried about that, especially, as you mentioned, in the courts. After all, we got enormous criticism from the Europeans about the trial of Saddam Hussein, which, however one feels, there was a constitutionality and a rapidity to it. But there was no rapidity and there was really no constitutionality to the trial of Milosevic, which went on and on, and was never resolved until he died in captivity. And yet in Europe, that's considered a model of jurisprudence because their motives were so much better than ours—or so they profess.

QUESTION: There's an increasingly widespread notion that there's a whole slew of words that we ought not to use. In various institutions and agencies, we should replace the word "jihad" with the word "extremism," and we shouldn't use words like "radical Islam." My question is, how does that fit in with what you're talking about, and can you comment on that at all?

VICTOR DAVIS HANSON: Well, euphemism, as you know, is always employed for utopian purposes. Think what we've lost—and this is something I could've easily added to journalism and film had I been given more time. Think that we started this war by saying we were going to go to Afghanistan, and we were going to conduct, I think it was "infinite justice." And then somebody said, "Uh-oh, that's insensitive, because only Mohammed or Allah can have infinite, so we're going to change this to 'enduring freedom.'" And once you devolve down that road—worrying about what the enemy thinks rather than demonstrating that you don't care, which is always wise to do in war; I don't think anybody in this country worried about using the word "Hun" in World War I, for example—we very quickly found out that we can't use the word "war on terror," or we can't use "Islamic fascist," or, as I understand now, the military has excised "the long war." We can't use, as you said, "jihadist," "Islamic fascist."

The problem with all these things is that war is primordial. As George Patton said, you can't refine it, or, as William Tecumseh Sherman said—something to that effect. It's a horrible, dirty business that should be gotten over as quickly as possible. But when you start to do that—refine it and make it something it's not—all you do is convey to the enemy that you're sensitive to his needs. I see there is really an enemy; it's not just simply public opinion within the Arab world.

One of the things I think is a great tragedy in the war in Iraq is that if you were to collate everything that's come out just in the last six weeks, if you look at Lawrence Wright's *New Yorker* article or Peter Reuben writing in *The New Republic*, or you look at the CIA's estimate of the relative difficulties that al-Qaeda is experiencing, or if you look at the Pew poll about the radical decline in approval for Osama bin Laden, radical decline in approval for suicide bombing, and if you came from Mars, you might suggest that that might have something to do with Iraq. When you have a battlefield, a third battlefield that's not within our grounds but in the heart of the ancient caliphate, and people were coming all during 2003 to 2004 to be victorious martyrs, and then word got out that if you went to Iraq, it's synonymous with humiliation, death, and defeat, and that the United States before the world stage showed the Muslim world—indeed, the entire world—that it could: a) learn how to conduct counterinsurgency, and b) do it in a way that won the hearts and minds.

Well, inhabitants of that very region, shared kindred spirits of the same religion: a) could not win an insurgency; and, more important, b) lost the hearts and minds of its own communities it was trying to sway. And it seemed to me that that would have a very, very powerful effect on the phenomenon that all these writers were describing. Yet no one dared mention Iraq; it had no role to play at all in this radical turnabout in Iraq.

And it's part of this effort in the West that you don't want. That's a very good example of the tenet of utopian pacifism—that you don't want to say there's any utility or efficacy out of military. I'm so tired of people saying there is no military solution in Iraq. In fact, there is. It's not a military solution in a conventional sense; it's something that General Dav-

id Petraeus is doing by so changing the complexion of the battlefield that gives it critical space, critical time for the Maliki government to gain support, prestige, and to win the hearts and minds. But that can't be done if security is not given by the U.S. military through its own actions and training to allow Iraqis to enjoy freedom.

QUESTION: My question to you is how you think the founding fathers would view the balance between security and liberty we have today after 9/11? Would they think that we've gone too far in the direction of security and away from liberty? For instance, Ben Franklin's quote about if you trade liberty for security you end up with neither.

VICTOR DAVIS HANSON: Well, I don't know what they would say about the Civil War; I think they would have been very worried about the protocols that the Lincoln Administration adopted, and especially those by Andrew Johnson. I think they would have been shocked at some of the things that Woodrow Wilson did: arresting Eugene Debs and pretty much putting him *incommunicado*, or statutes against the teaching of German. I think they would have been shocked, perhaps, by what we did in World War II, especially with the internment and especially with the military tribunals.

But I'm not sure that there is anything that we've done since 9/11 that they would be at all surprised about. I keep hearing that the Constitution is shredded, but one is pressed to find absolute proof of that, or even meager proof of that. It's very hard for the individual.

Now, you can make the argument, "Well, I'm being tapped, and I don't know it, and at some future date that will be used against me," but so far, if we talk about the traditional freedoms—the freedom to worship, the freedom to express ourselves openly, the freedom to do almost anything—I think you can see there's almost no worry. Remember what the Wilson Administration did in World War I, when they passed a statute that said it was a felony for anybody to criticize a government official in a time of war that could have a bad effect on the effort. I can't think today, so far have we come, that if you were to say to Woodrow Wilson, "We're going to fight a war essentially a century after you're gone, and in the middle of that war authors are going to

write novels about killing the President, filmmakers are going to make movies about killing the President, and nobody cares,” I think he might say, “Well, this is very dangerous.”

I’m not suggesting when I cited those examples that we need more coercion or that we need to chastise Gabriel Range, the filmmaker—I think it’s wonderful that they have that freedom of expression. But I think to suggest at the same time that they’re voices of the oppressed or the coerced is absolutely lunacy. Not at all! I can’t think of a society in history where major intellectuals and journalists even in a caricatured way advocated hating or killing a President with absolutely no social disdain. It wasn’t even there wasn’t a statute—which there shouldn’t have been—but there was not a lot of criticism of them. Alfred Knopf is probably the most prestigious publisher in New York, and they felt perfectly fine with publishing *Checkpoint*.

QUESTION: I was just wondering if you thought there was a solution to overcoming these ideologies, and if so, how do we do so without engaging in some sort of counter-censorship with, as you said, academia or others?

VICTOR DAVIS HANSON: I think the answer is history, history, history. These are the symptoms of a historically ignorant society that has almost no knowledge. You can see it with Iraq when people say, “This is the worst fill-in-the-blank—fiasco, blunder—in our entire history.”

I just got back from leading a group to battlefields in Europe. How could the United States have planned the Normandy invasion and lost almost 730 people in training exercises up near Scotland by a German boat and nobody knew about it? How could you marshal yourself in such a way that you had a brilliant, successful invasion where you knew the grains of sand, the direction of the water current, the air temperature, and then nobody ask a simple question, “How do you get through the bocage?” Then for the next seven weeks you lost 80,000 American dead, wounded, and you went only four miles—in probably the biggest blunder of that war.

How could you try to break out during the Cobra Offensive and use B-17s and bomb your own people because they flew perpendicular rather than

parallel? And then in a burst of acrimony say you’re going to do it again, and then do it again and bomb three days later and kill more Americans, including three-star General McNair—and then have a private, censored funeral where nobody would know about it? This is what this country had to do. It’s made blunders that made the lack of armored Humvees seem ridiculous.

But I think the answer is that we, for all our talk about the mortgage crisis and fuel prices, by any definition are the most privileged generation in the history of not just America, but Western society.

Out of that, if history is any guide, there becomes a certain mentality that we’re like the proverbial picker in a plum orchard that always goes for the plum out of reach that’s shiny, and then lets rot the one right before it. This overreach, this utopian notion that we can have no bad choices, that the war is not between bad and worse, but simply between always better or perfection—and so then we tear and demonize and destroy our leaders who make mistakes that by any historical barometer pale in comparison to something in the past—I could sum it all up by historical ignorance. History is the most important of all disciplines, and yet look at one of our presidential candidates, when he was asked about education, what did Mr. Obama say? We need more oppression studies, more stories—and then he named about six particular victim groups. That’s exactly what we don’t need. We need more history.

QUESTION: Do you think in the selling or the preparation of the war on terror to move into Iraq, the Bush Administration emphasized enough the fact that Saddam Hussein was paying and supporting the surviving families of suicide bombing terrorists? I heard from Muslims that that was a tremendous debate among all types of Muslims, whether that type of support was appropriate. But don’t you think that from the United States’ viewpoint, they should have strongly emphasized that and even perhaps made that the major emphasis for the motivation to go to war?

VICTOR DAVIS HANSON: Not only do I agree with you, but I wrote something in the *National Review* Corner today, and I made that argument *ad nauseam*, because not long ago I made that argument and somebody wrote me two letters *ad nause-*

am, meaning “Okay, we heard it already.” But the point is that, of all the supposed “lapses” of the Bush Administration, every one of them in some sense was a judgment call. When you get into Iraq, should you have more troops or less troops? Remember that people said that we should’ve had more people who had written books about the first Gulf War saying the Pentagon always exaggerates a threat and we put too many in.

These were all judgment calls. Disband the Republican Army, you might get chaos. Keep it, and you might get Ba’athists in a trench. But there was one lapse, and I think it’s what you’re alluding to, that was absolutely, clearly a mistake. And that was in the run up to the war. Contrary to popular journalistic option, we didn’t rush to war. We had nine months of discussion. We went to the United Nations. But most importantly, on October 11 and 12, 2002, the Congress—especially the Senate, but also the House of Representatives—gave the President a gift, so to speak, and gave us, the American people, a gift: They voted for 23 writs of authorizations, I should say, to go to war. One of them, as you said, was subsidies of \$20,000 for suicide bombers that were attacking the Israelis, but another one was the carnage inflicted against the Kurds. There was mention of the Shia; there was the Oil-for-Food scandal.

One of the great speeches, remember, was Harry Reid’s, when he said, “This is academic. They broke the 1991 accords. We’re in a de facto state of war.” There was the difficulty of the no-fly zones, there was the attempt to kill George Bush. They haven’t changed. WMD (weapons of mass destruction) may have changed, and it may have been a mistake, but the other 20-something haven’t changed. If the Administration had just said, “We’re going to go to war because the Senate, in their infinite wisdom, has outlined a case for it that’s overwhelming, that’s predicated on 23 principles,” then when one principle had misled them, they wouldn’t have been in the jam that they’re in. They would have had legitimacy.

Remember what people are like. We’re a pretty reprehensible species. We have no strong views.

Twenty percent wanted to go to war, 20 percent did not want to go to war. Twenty percent wanted in 1861 to go to war. The great majority of people predicate their political views on the pulse of the battlefield. That’s why if I wanted to embarrass pundits this day, I could take 10 pundits at random and suggest that for all their anti-war opposition, they wrote strong editorials at some point in 2001 to 2003 about going into Iraq. I suggest that if the thing calms down, if there’s a constitutional government, if Nouri al-Maliki gives a great thank-you speech to the Senate, they will come around and say they were always for the war. That’s what people do.

The problem is that when the Administration predicated all the eggs in one basket on WMD, and that did not turn up, that was a get-out-of-jail card, so to speak. It was a way for people, when the insurgency started, to abandon the cause. They can say, “Bush lied; thousands died.” They could not have said Bush lied, thousands died if he had said, “Wait a minute. We’re here because this man tried to kill a former President; this man has destroyed the Shias; this man tried to practice Holocaust; this man broke the 1991 accords; this man destroyed the ecology of Marsh Arabs; this man was giving bounties to suicide bombers; this man had \$50 billion Oil-for-Food.” I think that really hurt the cause in Iraq.

The odd thing about it is that with the brilliance of General Petraeus and what we’ve accomplished so far, you’re starting to see these other issues of why we went to war be addressed. We’re starting to address the Marsh Arabs. We are addressing the freedom and security of the Kurds by the very fact that a constitutional system seems to be legitimate and seems to be working.

The greatest irony of all is that the original 23 reasons that we went to war will be solved by the success of the Maliki government, but yet it’s fallen on deaf ears. WMD became the narrative—you win or lose by that narrative. Unfortunately, it had terrible effects on public opinion, and especially on the poor soldiers who were over there when this radical change of opinion took place and they were orphaned.