



Written by [Patrick Krey](#) on April 26, 2009

The Pro-War, Pro-Torture “Conservatives”

Newt Gingrich, who has been working hard to place himself at the forefront of the conservative movement, recently bemoaned President Barack Obama’s foreign policy for not being aggressive enough. In an interview with Greta Van Susteren on [Fox News](#), Gingrich mocked Obama for shaking hands with Venezuela’s President Hugo Chavez.



Well, the president recently bowed to the Saudi king. He has been friendly to the Iranians, despite their 7,300 centrifuges making nuclear weapons. He’s basically backed off on his threats to the North Koreans. He has made life easier for the Castro dictatorship in Cuba. Why not embrace or at least be cheerful and friendly with Hugo Chavez?

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Recent news of President Barack Obama’s reversal on [possibly pursuing legal action](#) against those who sanctioned torture has also gotten mainstays of the beltway conservative movement in a tizzy. Radio and television host Sean Hannity [claimed](#):

I think he is systematically weakening our nation’s defenses. You know, look, he goes on the apology tour. Look at the friends he sees — becoming friends with the Holocaust denying Ahmadinejad. He wants to — he’s meeting with Hugo Chavez and the Castro brothers, and sitting through a diatribe of Ortega, apologizing for the country.

The sad irony of these critiques of Obama is that the president has been a very aggressive internationalist when it comes to war and torture. President Obama is [escalating](#) the Afghanistan conflict, expanding the war into [Pakistan](#), maintaining the [occupation](#) in Iraq, allowing prisoners to be held indefinitely without charge at [Bagram Air Force Base](#), and maintaining the CIA [rendition program](#) that allows torture by other nations.

Still, with the media-designated leaders of the modern right all rushing to glorify aggressive war and torture, it would be wise to reflect on what those who came before in the conservative movement had to say about such matters.

Russel Kirk, the author of [The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Elliot](#) and the man considered by many to be the father of the modern conservative movement, [said](#):

Presidents of the United States must not be encouraged to make Perpetual War for



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Perpetual Peace, nor to fancy that they can establish a New World Order through eliminating dissenters. In the second century before Christ, the Romans generously liberated the Greek city-states from the yoke of Macedonia. But it was not long before the Romans felt it necessary to impose upon those quarrelsome Greeks a domination more stifling to Hellenic freedom and culture than ever Macedon had been. It is a duty of the Congress of the United States to see that great American Caesars do not act likewise.

Senator Robert Taft, known as "Mr. Republican," speaking about an activist foreign policy [said](#), "Nothing can destroy this country except the over-extension of our resources."

The conservative most deified by the modern right, President Ronald Reagan, [said](#), "The defense policy of the United States is based on a simple premise: The United States does not start fights. We will never be an aggressor."

One could imagine the reaction from the mainstream right to the preceding sentiments, if uncredited, would be claims that they're "anti-American" and "weak on national security." It would seem that the our nation's Founders would also find themselves villified by the beltway right for their foreign policy views.

Benjamin Franklin stated, "There never has been any such thing a good war, or a bad peace — all wars are follies, very expensive and mischievous ones."

Thomas Jefferson said "war is an instument entirely inefficient toward redressing wrong, and multiplies instead of indemnifying losses."

James Madison, the man widely regarded as "The Father of the Constitution," [warned](#) about war centralizing too much power in the executive:

War is in fact the true nurse of executive aggrandizement. In war, a physical force is to be created; and it is the executive will, which is to direct it. In war, the public treasures are to be unlocked; and it is the executive hand which is to dispense them. In war, the honours and emoluments of office are to be multiplied; and it is the executive patronage under which they are to be enjoyed. It is in war, finally, that laurels are to be gathered, and it is the executive brow they are to encircle.

President George Washington [warned](#) against an interventionist foreign policy.

Excessive partiality for one foreign nation, and excessive dislike of another, cause those whom they actuate to see danger only on one side, and serve to veil and even second the arts of influence on the other. Real patriots, who may resist the intrigues of the favorite, are liable to become suspected and odious; while its tools and dupes usurp the applause and confidence of the people, to surrender their interests. The great rule of conduct for us, in regard to foreign nations, is, in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little political connexion as possible.

It is a truly tragic turn of events that neoconservatives who have taken control of the Republican Party seek only to "conserve" a war-mongering foreign policy and torture. The proud traditions that conservative leaders of an earlier generation fought for — preserving the U.S. Constitution, individual



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liberties, and the rule of law — are anathema to these neoconservative leaders. Yet the media portrays them as the leaders of the conservative movement while marginalizing traditional-minded conservatives.



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