



What About "Our" Freedom?

In the early days of the Clinton administration, Vice President Al Gore was assigned the task of "Reinventing Government." That inspired that finest of columnists, Joseph Sobran, to ask, "What about reinventing freedom?"

He had a point. To create any kind of government was pointless, sort of like sending "snow to the Arctic." Freedom was what we needed to have reinvented or, more accurately, rediscovered. But Clinton and Gore were not about freedom and neither were their opponents, Bush and Quayle or Dole and Kemp. True, Kemp wanted to let you keep more of your own money. That is part of freedom, but not nearly the whole of it. But it was a lot closer to freedom than Al Gore would ever go. Gore was reluctant to let you keep your automobile.



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Yet in offering to "reinvent government," the Democrats were taking a page from the Republican playbook. Republicans are great for establishing commissions and panels to study and recommend ways to streamline government and make it more efficient. Given its design on our freedoms, a more efficient government is what we should fear with a great dread. As the late Milton Friedman often observed, were it not for its inefficiency, government would have left us no freedom at all.

Yet Republicans would have us believe the only thing wrong with our mammoth government is its inefficiency. They speak of eliminating "waste and fraud" almost as fast as they create more waste and fraud. As if honest and efficient government would not be burdensome. George W. Bush promised when campaigning for President that he would not "grow the government the way (Gore) will." As it turned out, he grew it larger and faster than Big Al could even imagine. Gore wanted to increase and strengthen the environmental guardians, also known as the "Swamp Police." Bush went to work on building a bigger and better national security state — a garrison state that will be our nanny, not because we need the helping hand of that "kinder, gentler" (and inevitably bigger) government that his father promised, but because we're all suspects. We all need to be under the scrutiny of the Total Awareness police, administering the Total Information Program, or TIP-as if O'Neill had not been bad enough.

You might say we had all this coming and it had indeed all been planned for us, needing only some cataclysmic event that would serve as the convenient excuse for bringing forward the programs and agencies to turn the "land of the free" into Garrison State America. That event was, of course, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Then, riding to our rescue, came the new Department of Homeland Security, with Tom "Heartbreak" Ridge, his color-coded crises and the Divisions of Duct



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Tape. Soon Congress passed, almost certainly without reading, the voluminous act called Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools to Resist, Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism or the USA PATRIOT Act. The Act allows the government to search your home, telephone messages, book purchases, and library records without your knowledge. It is a federal crime for your librarian or bookseller to tell you of the government's interest in your reading interests and habits. Alas, it was the Bush administration that "reinvented government." And minimized freedom.

And yet our elected officials tell us they are all for freedom, and not just here, but the world over. We invaded Afghanistan and overthrew the government there in "Operation Enduring Freedom." We invaded and conquered Iraq, making the world safe for "regime change" a year and a half later. That was "Operation Iraqi Freedom." A few more operations on freedom and it is almost certain the patient will die.

During the golden age of protest, when the war was in Vietnam, government agents infiltrated peace groups, because a devotion to peace has always looked suspicious to a government that thrives on war. Indeed, news of an authentic peace movement is regarded in Washington with a level of concern not unlike the news of a newborn king of the Jews was received in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago. It is subversive. As the title of a famous essay by Ralph Bourne declares, "War is the Health of the State." Peace is a communicable disease.

If conservatives were really concerned about the size of government, rather than which faction is growing it at any given time, they would be less enthusiastic about war. They would look at our trillion-dollar wars and our \$12 trillion national debt and say, "Can we afford this?" But no, they cry out against the debt and call for more military spending at one and the same time. As the late Senator Paul Douglas once said, they are "like drunkards who cry out for temperance in the intervals between cocktails."

But we are fighting for freedom and damn the "collateral damage." We're not killing civilians," the beaming Governor of Alaska said in all her charming, schoolgirl naivete last fall. "We're spreading democracy. We're building schools." Oh, yeah. Say it again, Governor. Tra la la. Ron Paul showed a far better understanding of what is going on when he said: "We tax the American people to bomb bridges in Iraq. Then we tax them to rebuild the bridges. Meanwhile, our bridges are falling apart."

Right. And we are not supposed to complain. Or if we do, we are supposed to do so in a "free speech zone," a mile or so away from whomever or whatever we may be picketing. Because there is a war going on. Or two or three. So just shut up and "support the troops" who are defending freedom overseas, while our government attacks it here at home.

It has been going on since long before 9/11. Remember the FBI killing at Ruby Ridge in the last year of the "Poppy" Bush administration. Think back to the siege at Waco, Texas, in, once again, the early days of the Clinton administration. Recall how that siege ended, with the wooden shacks that made up the allegedly dangerous Branch Davidian "compound" in flames that should be remembered as freedom's funeral pyre. Now try to think of any prominent Democrat or Republican who spoke up against that siege. It is members of Congress who supposedly write the laws of this nation, laws which were conspicuously broken by Attorney Generalissimo Janet Reno, who used tanks and guns to carry out a child welfare role never delegated to the federal government. It is the Congress that approves the funding for agencies like the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, what has rightly been called an agency of "jackbooted thugs" that has become virtually a law unto itself. So what did Congress do as the siege turned into a military attack on Americans by their own government and the BATF flag, the flag, apparently of a sovereign government, was planted over the ashes of Waco? The silence was deafening.



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Yes, there was a congressional investigation a couple of years later, after Republicans won control of both houses. But nothing came of it. The only good it did was to bring to light the mindset of a rogue agency like the aforementioned Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. "We're all that stands between the Branch Davidians and the American people," the chief of that agency told a House panel. He was apparently counting on the Congress and the American people to be as oblivious as he seemed to be to the fact that it was the BATF and not the Branch Davidians that was attacking and killing Americans. Did Congress reign in the agency? Did Congress cut its funding? No, because nobody stands between the American people and its rogue government.

And when Mother Waco, the aforementioned General Reno, ordered the Gestapo-style predawn raid on a defenseless home in Miami and captured the terrified six-year-old Elian Gonzalez at the point of an automatic rifle as the child was torn from the hands of family and friends by a government invader in riot gear, who spoke up against that outrageous assault on freedom, decency, and a six-year-old child? Jeb Bush, then the governor of Florida? George W. Bush, the governor of Texas and presidential aspirant at the time? The amphibious Newt Gingrich? Not that I ever heard or can recall.

Then President George W. Bush and his Attorney General declared that the President has the power and lawful authority to imprison anyone, including an American citizen arrested on U.S. soil, indefinitely, without charges, trial or any semblance of "due process," merely by labeling that person an "enemy combatant." What great defender of "Enduring Freedom" or "Iraqi Freedom" then stood up for American freedom? A few members of Congress — Ron Paul, Dennis Kucinich, Russ Feingold — raised a fuss. But they were easily drowned out by the dedicated silence of freedom's bystanders in Congress and the "mudstream" media, as well as the great tribunes of Fox News and "hawk radio."

Let us be honest: The only campaign related to freedom being carried out by the U.S. government is "Operation Freedom May Go to Hell." As Joe Sobran once asked, "Why is it always our planet Gore is trying to save? Why doesn't stay home and take care of his own?" Why is it always some other people's freedom the Republicans and Democrats want to defend? Why not ours?

"Why forego the advantages of so peculiar a situation?" George Washington asked in his Farewell Address, after listing the advantages of our location between two oceans, east and west with peaceable and friendly neighbors to the north and south. "Why quit our own to stand upon foreign ground?" Why, indeed? And who would have before the United States had been neo-conned?

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