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Showing Restraint Abroad

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I wrote a book right after Barack Obama got elected called *The Last Best Hope*. I was getting tired of hearing liberal bloggers, liberal editors, liberal talk-show hosts, and liberal elites coming on my show and talking about how the Republicans lost in 2008 because they were “too conservative.” Republicans didn’t lose in 2008 because they were too conservative. Republicans lost in 2008 because they were too radical. They were too radical when it came to spending, they were too radical when it came to foreign policy, and they were too radical in their rhetoric.

The most difficult of those to explain to conservatives—who have really seen the definition of a conservative foreign policy distorted over the past



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decade—is the need for Republicans to show restraint abroad. We also need leaders who are capable of arguing for restraint both to conservatives and to the American people. A recent NBC—*Wall Street Journal* poll indicates Barack Obama is upside down in his approval rating when it comes to the economy, when it comes to health care, when it comes to just about every single issue. But, when it comes to his handling of Afghanistan, he’s plus 18 percentage points. In his handling of Iraq, he’s plus 15 percentage points. When it comes to whether we should invade Iran, plus 14. Americans believe that if we think Iran is moving towards having nuclear weapons, we should invade the third Muslim country in a decade.

I would suggest one of the reasons why these numbers are as skewed as they are is that, in 2010, there isn’t much difference between

game. There’s no exit strategy. There’s no definition of success. We have no idea what the ultimate price is going to be. And there’s no answer to a very prescient question Joe Biden asked: “If Pakistan is the most dangerous country on the planet and the key to resolving the crisis in this area, why are we spending 50 times the amount of money in Afghanistan that we are in Pakistan?” This policy doesn’t make sense.

It did, to me, in 2001. It simply doesn’t any more in 2010. And if Leon Panetta is to be believed—that al Qaeda has been reduced to a quivering mass of a terrorist movement—great. Let’s declare victory and bring our troops home.

But, beyond Afghanistan, I think it’s important as we move forward to figure out what the conservative movement does, and where we have gone wrong this past decade. I started my chapter on foreign policy with a 2000 quote from George W. Bush: “We must be judicious in our use of the military. We will fight only when it is in the vital interests of the United States, when our mission is clear and when the exit strategy is obvious.” We conservatives need to ask why it is that the same cautious Republicans

who resisted Bill Clinton’s calls for military use in Bosnia, Kosovo, Haiti, Sudan, and Iraq adopt George W. Bush’s preemption strategy without question. Why did so few conservatives criticize Mr. Bush’s Wilsonian pronouncement that the United States of America would lead a global democratic rev-

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the Republican and Democratic views of foreign policy. This “anti-war” president has doubled the number of troops in Afghanistan to nearly 100,000 and, most critically, he’s continued the transformation of the Afghanistan effort from a counterterrorism mission to a nation-building mission. There’s no end

olution that would “end tyranny on the globe?” What exactly were we conservatives thinking during Mr. Bush’s second inaugural address, when he promised that U.S. troops would single-handedly export democracy and bring freedom and peace to all corners of the globe? And why did the same Republicans who quoted Colin Powell’s doctrine to justify a restrained approach to foreign policy in the 1990s attack Colin Powell in 2002 when he urged, before going into Iraq, that we adopt the same approach?

When we Republicans controlled the Armed Services Committee in the 1990s, we constantly lectured the Clinton Administration on the need for showing more prudence and restraint in foreign policy. We saw Bill Clinton’s use of military force as undisciplined and reckless, and as one *Foreign Affairs* article stated at the time, “The Clinton cabinet seemed to view foreign policy as an extension of social work.” We conservatives used our majority in Congress to attack that approach as unfocused, undisciplined, and Wilsonian.

For most conservatives the Cold War was a necessary evil. U.S. global involvement was the only option available to contain the communist threat. But after the Soviet Union fell, Republicans I served with in Congress believed that the United States should engage in less military adventurism and narrow our focus abroad. We were so cautious when we would lecture the Clinton

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Administration that Madeline Albright, then Secretary of State, angrily accused GOP leaders of standing in the way of humanitarian missions that she wanted our military to run. And she was right. We did stand in the way of it, and we were proud of it. No conservative I worked with on the Armed Services Committee in Congress was comfortable with Bill Clinton’s eagerness to dispatch troops to Haiti, Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. We were especially troubled by the Balkan crisis, believing that history taught us that you should never involve U.S. troops in a three-sided civil war. Conservatives repeatedly pressed Clinton administration officials who testified before our Armed Services Committee to state the overriding national security interests that justified risking U.S. casualties. They never could. I think the closest we got was Al Gore saying that if we didn’t send troops to the Balkans then our credibility within NATO would be damaged.

Obviously, prudent Republican concerns faded once the Democratic commander-in-chief left town and the Republican commander-in-chief arrived. We are not the

world's 9-1-1, as we said in the 1990s, and we regularly admonished Clinton aides who ignored our repeated warnings of an overstretched military. We would lecture Clinton officials on what we considered to be the Magna Carta of conservative foreign policy: the Weinberger Doctrine. After the suicide bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks at Beirut airport in 1983, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger got together with people in the Defense Department and argued that we really needed to narrow the focus of when we send U.S. troops abroad so that we don't repeat the mistakes of Vietnam and Beirut.

He had a young army man, Colin Powell, working with him. They came up with a doctrine stating that U.S. troops should only be deployed when (1) it is vital to U.S. national interests; (2) our troop commitment is full and overwhelming; (3) the objectives for our troops are clearly defined; (4) our leaders are willing to constantly reassess troop levels; (5) Americans support the war before the engagement; and (6) U.S. combat troops are sent in only as a last resort.

You can apply those criteria looking back to some wars we have gotten involved with and to George W. Bush's foreign-policy

pronouncements. But, more importantly for this conversation, we need to apply it to where we go in the future for Afghanistan. I would like Republicans and Democrats alike to tell me, at this point in 2010, "What is vital to U.S. national interests in Afghanistan?" And after answering that question, I would like them to tell me, "What

are the objectives for our troops?" Our "clearly defined" objectives? And, most troubling, we've been in Afghanistan for nine years. We still have not had a leader, Republican or Democrat, tell us what the end game is. Colin Powell says the key to the Weinberger doctrine is that

you never send troops in until you know what the trigger is to bring them home.

In the first Gulf War George H. W. Bush said our mission was to liberate Kuwait, and then bring our troops home. George H. W. Bush faced a torrent of criticism for declining to carry on to Baghdad. But he stuck to his guns. Our trigger for exit was liberating Kuwait. Once we did that, he brought the troops home. He showed discipline and thus avoided a lot of the mistakes his son made.

And you know what? Republicans have paid for what George W. Bush did when it came to spending



at home and foreign policy abroad. So I think it is very important that we look at how George W. Bush and the Republicans in Congress managed to lose their way, and how that should guide us as we move forward. Just as Colin Powell learned from America's tragic experience in Vietnam, we've got to learn from the mistakes of the past eight years. It seems to me that the central lesson to draw from the past eight years is that dogma and rigid ideology are the natural enemies of conservative foreign policy. We live in a world that is brutish and nasty, that cannot be fit into a neat, tidy ideological box. There are no easy-to-apply rules for international conflict. Most importantly, those who are still arguing, in 2010, that we can somehow export democracy across the globe, or rebuild countries on the other side of the globe in our image, are the people we have to call out today, tomorrow, and every day as the dangerous radicals that they are. History has proven them and their worldview to be dangerous and radical.

As someone who fought the Clinton administration for failing to show sufficient restraint in foreign policy, the great irony to me is that we conservatives are now being viewed as predisposed to militarism. That impression has to be changed. Conservative leaders once again need to be wary of ideologues. And, fiscally, we need to understand that this country has borne a disproportionate share of the

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world's security responsibilities for too long. We need to begin to show some restraint and back away from some of our long-standing military commitments. As conservatives liked to say to flustered Clinton administration officials during the 1990s, America can't be the world's 9-1-1. We can't go it alone anymore, and we've been going it alone for too long. We need to realize that the United States military is overstretched, we are facing crippling debt, our economy is in crisis, our people are war-weary, and America's days as the world's watchman are over.

In *The Conservative Mind*, Russell Kirk wrote, “Men not being angels, a terrestrial paradise cannot be contrived by metaphysical enthusiasts. Yet an earthly hell can be arranged readily enough by ideologues of one stamp or another.” You look back over the past 10 years—over the past century—and I think it is safe to say that the world has suffered through enough of those earthly hells. American conservatives should make it their mission never again to be party to an ideological war.



Recipient of the Milton Friedman Prize for Advancing Liberty: **AKBAR GANJI**

The Milton Friedman Prize for Advancing Liberty, named in honor of perhaps the greatest champion of liberty in the 20th century, is presented every other year to an individual who has made a significant contribution to advance human freedom. The winner for 2010 is Akbar Ganji, the fifth recipient of the prize, joining Yon Goicoechea, leader of the pro-democracy student movement in Venezuela; Mart Laar, former prime minister of Estonia; Hernando de Soto, Peruvian property rights crusader; and Peter Bauer, the late British development economist.

Draped in the color of Iran's Green Movement and standing beside his wife, Akbar Ganji accepted the 2010 Milton Friedman Prize for Advancing Liberty before a crowd of nearly one thousand. Ganji's acceptance, and the remarks that followed, capped an evening of celebration and speeches—a biennial event Cato has presented for the last eight years.

An Iranian writer and journalist, Ganji spent six years in a Tehran prison for advocating a secular democracy and exposing government involvement in the assassination of individuals who opposed Iran's theocratic regime.

This year's pool of nominees was deep, but Akbar Ganji stood out. He is best known for a 1999 series of articles investigating the Chain Murders of Iran, which left five dissident intellectuals dead. Later published in the book *The Dungeon of Ghosts*, his articles tied the killings to senior clerics and other officials in the Iranian government, including former President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

In his acceptance speech, delivered through an interpreter, Ganji said that “emancipation movements in the United States,” from the American Revolution to the civil rights movement, have inspired struggles for freedom

around the world. But he warned that the United States had sometimes supported authoritarian regimes in other countries and that in the Middle East “the tyranny of secular and corrupt governments, supported by Western countries,” had pushed their people toward the only visible alternative: religious extremism and fundamentalism.

In his own country, Iran, the shah was overthrown by the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Today, he said, after 31 years of “extremist Islamic fundamentalism,” Iran is “the only country in the region that if fair, free, and competitive elections were to be held, democratic forces that believe in the separation of religion from the state would be victorious.”

But this tentative hope in the face of fundamentalism is threatened, Ganji said, by calls from Western nations for further economic sanctions. These will “make the Iranian state-run economy even more contingent on the state and as a result make the current conditions even more corrupt and repressive.”

Akbar Ganji expressed his intent to use the award, which he called a “moral and ethical endorsement of Iran's Green Movement,” to “facilitate our struggle for advancing democracy and human rights in Iran.”

Help us “Liberate the Future”



This seems a good time and place to share a few thoughts about Cato’s role in combating the big government juggernaut—and how you can help.

Not since the New Deal have we experienced such a national crisis. Practically every day the headlines bring news of taxpayer-funded bailouts and government takeovers. If you think back over the last year or so, you will bring to mind the bailout of Freddie and Fannie, the stimulus bill, the takeover of the auto industry, and the seizure of one-sixth of the American economy in the name of health care reform. And then think of the bad ideas waiting in the wings—cap and trade, card check, and maybe another so-called stimulus.

As the debate swirls, Cato stands at the vortex. When folks want thoughtful analysis, not sound bites, they turn to Cato. While statisticians argue that the solution for every problem is more government, Cato’s scholars make the case for limited government and free markets. It should come as no surprise that Cato was ranked number 5 in the world out of 1,500 organizations in the 2009 edition of *Global Go-To Think Tank Ratings*, compiled by the University of Pennsylvania.

Cato’s vitality goes beyond the stream of books, articles, white papers, journals, and blog postings produced by its scholars—we are in the process of expanding our physical footprint as well. During 2010, we will undertake building renovations that will double the size of our beautiful Massachusetts

Avenue facility. Needless to say, a certain synergy is involved: that bigger building will house more scholars covering more policy areas.

At the awards ceremony for the 2010 Milton Friedman Prize for Advancing Liberty, George Will’s keynote address succinctly summed up Cato’s role: “*Given freedom, the American people will flourish. Given the Cato Institute, the American people will, in time, secure freedom.*”

So, we gratefully acknowledge that Cato could never have achieved such prominence

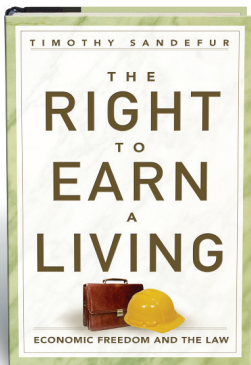


without your generous contributions. And we ask you to bear in mind that we will continue to need your help if we are to maintain our ability to shape the national debate. There are many ways to help: certainly, your annual contributions are critical. Perhaps you might consider making a bequest to

Cato or making us the beneficiary of a retirement plan. You might also get involved by attending Cato events or Cato University, Cato’s wonderful weeklong intensive seminar in libertarian thought. And over the next few months, you will hear much more about our building expansion plans and our capital campaign. We named those plans “Liberating the Future.” Perhaps you will wish to join us in this historic undertaking.

If you would like to discuss estate planning or gifting ideas, please feel free to contact [Gayllis Ward](#), our director of planned giving, at (202) 218-4631 or at gward@cato.org.

Books from the **CATO** INSTITUTE



The Right to Earn a Living: Economic Freedom and the Law

By Timothy Sandefur

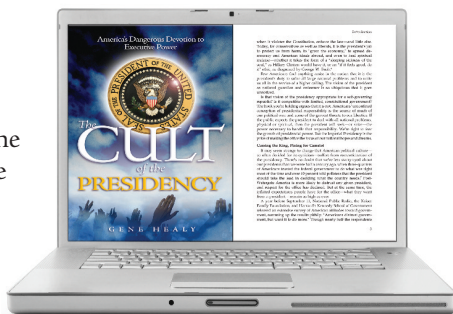
For many people, owning a business is the American dream, but that dream has grown increasingly difficult due to laws and regulations that interfere with an individual's right to earn a living. Timothy Sandefur, who has defended many citizens against government restrictions on their economic liberty, charts the history of this fundamental right and its prospects for the future.

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