

# On the Hill: Terrorism, Defense, and Iraq

**T**he Cato Institute has been holding a series of Capitol Hill Briefings for congressional staffers. Two recent briefings concerned current foreign policy issues. At “From Homeland Defense to Nation Building: A Foreign Policy for a Constitutional Republic,” senior fellow Doug Bandow and Ted Galen Carpenter, Cato’s vice president for defense and foreign policy studies, discussed foreign policy principles and their current application. Ivan Eland, director of defense policy studies at Cato, spoke at “Would Attacking Iraq Increase or Decrease U.S. Security?” Excerpts from their remarks follow.

**Ted Galen Carpenter:** It is imperative that we understand the proper nature of our war against the people who committed the September 11, 2001, atrocities. We need to keep our eye on the prize. The adversary is Osama bin Laden’s al-Qaeda network and its Taliban allies. That war is not even close to being finished, though we like to pretend that it is.

Al-Qaeda and the Taliban have been badly damaged: they have been deprived of their base in Afghanistan. But there are al-Qaeda cells in numerous countries, and there are significant concentrations of al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters in Pakistan. It is one of the bitterest ironies of this war against terrorism that we seem to be willing to do almost anything—go to war against Iraq, send training missions to the Philippines and Georgia—but discomfort our noble ally in Pakistan, the military dictator of that country, General Musharraf, by going where the Taliban and al-Qaeda are now located. Such a military campaign needs to be the next stage.

We must not allow the war against the September 11 attackers to become an amorphous war against terrorism per se. There are lots of insurgent movements in the world, and most of them, from time to time, use terrorist tactics. But they have adversaries other than the United States. The Irish Republican Army may still be a problem for Great Britain. The Basque separatists

may be a problem for Spain. The Kashmiri insurgents certainly are a problem for India. The FARC rebels in Colombia are a problem for that country’s government. But those insurgents do not generally attack American targets. They are not necessarily our adversaries. If we declare a war on terrorism per se, we make other countries’ enemies our enemies, and I would argue we have enough enemies of our own. We don’t need to acquire others needlessly.

In addition, the war on terrorism should not become a pretext for such things as settling old scores against Saddam Hussein. A war against Iraq would be a dangerous distraction for the United States. If we go to war against Iraq, the happiest person in

ic instances. Strategic independence is a restrained unilateralism, in marked contrast to the kind of muscular, belligerent, imperial unilateralism advocated by some neoconservatives and others in the United States.

Strategic independence rejects the role of America as the world’s policeman, and it equally rejects the role of America as the world’s social worker. It would husband America’s great economic, political, and strategic advantages—and we have them beyond anything any other great power in history could ever imagine. We ought to exploit those advantages and not waste them frivolously.

I would also argue that strategic independence is the only foreign policy consistent with the values of a constitutional republic. That is a very important point. The Founders did not design America to be an empire, and America is not well suited institutionally to being an empire. If we try to play that role, we are going to transform this country domestically as well as internationally, and do so in most undesirable ways.

The reality is that mobilizing for war, always staying mobilized for war, and waging wars incessantly will have crucial domestic consequences. That kind of mobilization means that, inevitably, regardless of anyone’s

intentions, power flows from the private sector to government. Within the government sector, it flows from the state and local levels to the federal level. And at the federal level it flows from the judicial and legislative branches to the executive branch. That is not healthy for a pluralistic society.

We ought to make the distinction that Secretary of State John Quincy Adams made back in 1821 (his principles are just as applicable today as they were then). He emphasized that America did not go abroad in search of monsters to destroy, that it was the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all, but it was the defender and vindicator only of its own.

Those words have been quoted on a



**Doug Bandow and Ted Galen Carpenter discuss U.S. foreign policy at a Capitol Hill Briefing on September 13.**

the world, assuming he is still alive, would be bin Laden, because we would take him out of the cross hairs and focus on Iraq and Saddam instead. And we would move one step closer to transforming this war from a war against the murderers of September 11 into a general struggle between the West and the Islamic world. That is exactly what bin Laden wants.

The United States needs a new foreign policy of strategic independence, with one basic principle: don’t get involved in other people’s fights unless America’s own vital interests are at stake. In the security realm, that generally means unilateralism rather than multilateralism, but it does not necessarily foreclose multilateralism in specif-

## “U.S. leadership is inevitable. Real leadership means using our attributes with discernment, carefully weighing costs and benefits.”

number of occasions, but Adams had something more to say. And it showed that his principles and the principles of the founding generation and the next generation were designed not just for a weak America but for a strong America as well. Adams warned that if we ever abandoned that distinction, America might become the “dictatress of the world”—it was potentially that strong—but it would no longer be the master of its own spirit.

That is an absolutely fundamental consideration when we adopt a foreign policy. We don’t want to transform America into the new Rome—and I mean the Roman Empire not the Roman Republic—and yet—I think we are in grave danger of doing exactly that.

**Doug Bandow:** U.S. leadership is inevitable. We have the largest, most productive economy on earth. We have a globally dominant culture. We have a political philosophy that is enormously attractive abroad. This country is going to be a superpower almost in spite of itself.

Real leadership means using all of those attributes with discernment, carefully weighing costs and benefits. It does not mean jumping into every conflict, every dispute, every source of instability and trying to “fix” it. It is particularly important to recognize that 280 million Americans have no monopoly on the knowledge and understanding necessary to try to resolve conflicts around the globe.

The danger of this kind of “fatal conceit,” which Friedrich Hayek talked about, is readily evident when it comes to domestic social engineering. It is even more problematic when we go international. Indeed, if you start looking around the world at America’s attempts at nation building, it is very hard to find successful examples. When we point to Bosnia or Haiti or Kosovo or Lebanon or Somalia, where are the great successes?

In Bosnia, we have an artificial state that two-thirds of the people would like to leave immediately, a state which exists only because we have imposed a high representative who makes decisions about what the flag will look like, who decides what the national anthem will be, who decides on the cur-

rency, who has the power to throw out elected officials that he doesn’t like, and who demands that the media run video clips of the American secretary of state. Well, that may be democracy, but it is more Boss Tweed democracy than anything I would care to see.

We managed to move Haiti from military dictatorship to presidential dictatorship. In Kosovo we saw a quarter of a million Serbs, Jews, Gypsies, and even non-ethnic Albanian Muslims ethnically cleansed after we were technically in charge. Lebanon was a wonderful success; 241 marines were blown up at the U.S. barracks. Somalia remains in chaos. Where are the successful examples of nation building?

About the only places where one can argue that nation building worked in any sense are Germany and Japan. But those countries had been totally defeated in war, and their political leaderships had been completely discredited. There were significant reservoirs of legal, cultural, and economic traditions there that could be called upon. Those ethnically homogeneous societies were in fact real countries that had had real governments, in contrast to most of the places around the globe where we are trying to build nations. Very few failed states have even one of those characteristics, let alone all of them. To point to Germany and Japan as examples of what America could do in Iraq or in Afghanistan points very far afield.

Today the argument is that we need to nation build to stop terrorism. That, of course, is the issue in Afghanistan. We look at Afghanistan and say, this shows why we have to nation build; look at what happened there! But Afghanistan actually shows the *limits* of nation building. There is, of course, the charge that the United States made a major mistake by “abandoning” Afghanistan after the Soviets were forced from that country. But it is not at all clear to me what Washington was supposed to



**Ivan Eland responds to a question at a Capitol Hill Briefing on September 20 as senior defense policy analyst Chuck Peña and director of government affairs Susan Chamberlin listen.**

do once the mujahideen had driven out the Soviets. Put in a major military force to impose a central government—rather like the Soviets had tried? That didn’t seem to work very well. Simply hand out more money to the same groups that we funded to actually drive out the Soviets? That would have put more money into the hands of radical Muslims who today are terrorists. What policy could we have conceivably followed at the end of that war to build Afghanistan? It’s very hard to imagine.

Indeed, Afghanistan’s problems result from far too much outside intervention: a coup d’état, Soviet intervention, Pakistani support for the Taliban, and America’s funneling of aid to the worst and the most radical elements there. The problem was not that we didn’t intervene enough. The problem was that the United States and other outside powers got involved and destroyed the domestic political process.

Terrorism can arise in two different circumstances. The first is a situation of chaos, where there is simply no central power—no power to stop terrorists from being active. The second is where you have government support for terrorists, as we had with the Taliban. But of course, these are very different circumstances. In the case of chaos, yes, terrorists can operate in that environ-

*Continued on page 10*

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**POLICY FORUM** *Continued from page 9*

ment, but they are also uniquely vulnerable. Without state support, the best answer is military action against them. Take them out. Quite bluntly, kill them.

Where you have government support, the best response is to focus on the government with a policy of deterrence. The ruling elites in societies that support terrorists should understand that they will no longer be ruling elites. Certainly that's the lesson of Afghanistan: if you're the Taliban and you harbor terrorists, you will no longer rule the country. And that is a lesson we will apply to other nations.

Unfortunately, nation building as a solution may be far harder than trying to stop terrorism. Nor is nation building likely to be sufficient to stop terrorism. Consider

the fact that al-Qaeda is estimated to be active in 68 different countries in one form or another. Are we going to nation build every one of those? And how about the 42 other terrorists groups that are active in various countries? How many candidates for nation building do we want to take on?

I would far prefer to focus on stopping terrorism than on nation building. What we want, frankly, is victory and deterrence; we don't want nation building. If nation building is really necessary in a specific instance, let's do it. But that is not the goal; it's the means. The goal has to be to stop terrorism.

**Ivan Eland:** An invasion of Iraq could destabilize several countries—Turkey, Jordan, Egypt, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. The radical Islamic groups in those countries could put pressure on the governments because the United States would be invading another Islamic country. The analysts at Cato strongly supported the war in Afghanistan because we felt that the United States had been attacked and that we needed to take robust military action against al-Qaeda. And there was no backlash in Afghanistan because, even in the Islamic world, people believe that countries do have a legitimate right to self-defense. In the case of an attack on Iraq, which has no demonstrated link to September 11, 2001, many people would say that it is not self-defense, and I think you would see an Islamic backlash throughout the region.

The United States put a lot of pressure on Pakistan to round up Taliban and al-Qaeda members, and justifiably so. But the leader in Pakistan is hanging on by his fingernails. Being allied with the United States is not conducive to his survival there. If the United States attacks another Islamic country, I think he is going to face even more pressure. I think we should actually worry more about Pakistan than Iraq, because Pakistan is very unstable and *already* has nuclear weapons. And we could have an Islamic radical state with nuclear weapons if the United States destabilizes the Middle East and the Central Asian region through an invasion of Iraq.

A U.S. invasion of Iraq would not be a “preemptive attack.” The president is using

that term to sell the policy, but it would be a *preventive* attack. A preemptive attack is what the Israelis did against the Arabs in 1967: they detected that an Arab attack was imminent, so they attacked first to get the advantage. In this particular case, the United States would be launching a preventive attack, an attack to defeat a country before it becomes a threat. That policy is contrary to what the Founders envisioned. They envisioned a country that would engage in self-defense, not adventures around the world.

The U.S. military, if you read between the lines of newspaper stories, has never been enthusiastic about invading Iraq—first, because of the possible use of weapons of mass destruction against our troops and, second, because of the potential for high casualties in urban fighting. Urban fighting is very difficult, because ground forces have to take built-up areas block by block, house by house. One sniper can hold up whole units in urban areas. It is sort of like fighting in the mountains or in the jungle—the defense has a tremendous advantage.

In the urban areas, Saddam is already putting his command-and-control facilities and military units among civilians, near schools and hospitals. There is going to be a lot of pressure in the United States to hold down casualties of Iraqi civilians; that may be difficult to do with airpower alone. So I think we may have to go into urban areas on the ground, and we have to ask ourselves if we are willing to do that.

Now, we hear much about Iraq's support for terrorism. And, yes, Iraq does support groups that are on the U.S. terrorist list. But that list includes many groups that do not really focus their attacks on the United States. Iraq has sponsored terrorism against Iraqi opposition figures overseas and also against groups that operate in the Middle East. If we are talking about state sponsorship of terrorism, the number one culprit is Iran, followed by Syria. In fact, in a number of the Bush administration's indictments, Iraq doesn't even bubble up to be number two. For example, North Korea probably already has the fissionable material to build two nuclear weapons, and it has a much more erratic leader than Saddam.

## Cato Calendar

### Telecom and Broadband Policy After the Market Meltdown Sixth Annual Technology & Society Conference

Washington • Cato Institute  
November 14

Speakers include James Glassman,  
Robert Crandall, and Tom Hazlett.

### New York City Seminar

Waldorf-Astoria • November 15

Speakers include Robert Novak  
and John McWhorter.

### San Diego City Seminar

San Diego Marriott & Marina  
December 11

Speakers include Dinesh D'Souza  
and Michael Robertson.

### Los Angeles City Seminar

Westin Bonaventure • December 12

Speakers include Dinesh D'Souza  
and David Fleming.

### 15th Annual Benefactor Summit

Naples, Florida • LaPlaya Beach Club  
& Resort • February 26–March 2

Speakers include Gov. Gary Johnson  
and Walter Williams.