



The Free Congress Commentary

The Next Conservatism #42: The Next Conservatism and Homeland Security

By William S. Lind

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One field in which the next conservatism will probably depart abruptly from current policy is homeland security. The departure will begin with foreign policy and national strategy. As previous columns have suggested, the next conservatism's foreign policy will seek to preserve a republic here at home, not build an American empire overseas. Logically, that will lead to a defensive rather than an offensive national strategy. In both cases, the next conservatism will not be innovating but returning to the policies our country followed through most of its history.

It is no accident that when we eschewed empire and followed a defensive strategy, our homeland seldom faced much of a threat. We did not need to be "security conscious" or fearful – when it was time to board an aircraft, you just walked out and got on – because there was little reason for anyone to attack us. Much of the "terrorism" threat we now face arises not from who or what we are, but in response to our country's policies in other parts of the world. Once we turn away from those policies and generally leave other people alone in their back yards, the need for homeland security should diminish. That, of course, is genuine homeland security: not constantly being prepared against an attack, but not needing to worry about being attacked.

There will, of course, always be some level of danger. But the next conservatism will attempt to meet it in ways consistent with conservative principles, which is to say locally. Our first line of defense should be local police. Because the only way to defeat “terrorist” attacks is by preventing them – once one has taken place, even “first response” is too late – police who know their beat, the neighborhoods for which they are responsible, are our most important defenders. Only they can be sufficiently aware to nip potential terrorism in the bud. The next conservatism should strongly favor programs such as the Police Corps, a police ROTC that specifically provides personnel for neighborhood policing.

If another line of defense is needed, the next conservatism might consider reviving an old American tradition: the militia. Because a militia is organized from individual communities, it too, like neighborhood beat cops, knows what is going on. Also like local police, a militia does not serve Big Brother, some vast federal power center that seeks to snoop endlessly in ordinary citizens’ lives. The militia I am talking about here would be a state militia, not a private one (private militias can be dangerous in a world of Fourth Generation war). One way it could be protected from being turned into an arm of Big Brother would be to have it report to the county sheriff, a local, elected official with substantial common law powers. Under no circumstances should it be controlled by Washington.

I am hopeful that the next conservatism will reconsider whether we need a federal Department of Homeland Security. The arguments against it are strong. It has already become Pentagon II, absorbing vast resources while producing very little. Programs intended to support local police have been cut to provide still more money for the federal behemoth. Worse, it is simply not possible for something like the Department of Homeland Security not to endanger our liberties. All its incentives work the other way. Like all other federal bureaucracies, DHS will seek more power, more money, more bureaucratic empire. Against those powerful inbred drives, what is it

to keep it from tearing up the Bill of Rights? Mere rhetoric – and the dubious protections offered by our courts.

Regrettably, from the perspective of the Federal Government, fear is a growth industry. The more the public can be made fearful, the vaster federal police powers can grow. The next conservatism should go after the heart of the matter, fear itself. If the rest of the world need no longer fear America, there will be less reason for Americans to fear the rest of the world. If the bulk of police power is local, not federal, Americans will not confront Leviathan when they face a law enforcement officer. It is far easier to approach the town mayor or council with an issue of abuse of police powers than it is to confront a faceless federal bureaucracy.

When isolated “terrorist” events do happen, as they will, the next conservatism might remind the public of an old virtue, one necessary to republics: courage. If we cast our liberties before anyone who offers to “protect us,” like pearls before swine, we will find in short order that we are neither safe nor free.

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