

No More Presidential Wars
Remarks to the Committee for the Republic

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I'm Chas Freeman. In 2003, I helped found what became the Committee for the Republic, which I continue to chair. The founders of this group were of disparate political persuasions. But we shared a fear that the excessive militarization of American foreign policy would threaten constitutional government in our country. Exploration of the impact of promiscuous interventionism on the traditions and civil liberties of our republic has remained the Committee's core function.

I am proud that participation in the Committee has grown as it has. I am prouder still that our participants have retained our political diversity. The Committee has become one of the very few institutions – sadly, now maybe the only one -- in Washington with a firm claim to trans-partisanship. I congratulate all present on this.

Among us there are members of the far left and the far right and everything in between. There are fervent internationalists and isolationists, supporters of both major and most minor political parties, proponents of industrial policies and of laissez-faire, veterans and citizens who declined to serve, free traders and protectionists, proponents and opponents of the Iran nuclear deal, boosters and detractors of the president-elect, and so forth.

But we all believe in civil discourse. We meet in dignified dispute. We are united in our belief that the root of our country's greatness is our tradition of respect for our Constitution, its checks and balances, its Bill of Rights, and its insistence on the rule of law and due process.

The Committee's members have watched with horror as our political system has evolved to facilitate legislative evasion of accountability for wars and other belligerent activities launched

by successive presidents on their own. These wars have killed, maimed, and orphaned many thousands of Americans. They have murdered millions of foreigners and generated increasingly savage blowback against us and our allies and friends. They have burdened our posterity with previously unimaginable levels of debt. They have built a turnkey garrison state and handed the key to an Executive that asserts powers beyond those assigned it by the Constitution and the laws.

Our president and members of the House and Senate have all sworn oaths to uphold the Constitution and the laws. We believe they must finally be held to their oaths. Tonight we ask all present to help us organize to re-empower accountable government in the United States. We urge you to insist that members of Congress force the president to comply with our Constitution by living up to their own responsibilities under it.

Arguments about who is to blame for the demise of accountable government in the United States just enable continuing partisan rancor and political inaction. They divide rather than unite Americans. We all have our views on what happened, why it happened, and how, but if we are to fix government in America we must set these aside, look forward, not back, and work together to end this most consequential of all aspects of dysfunctional government. We must ensure that future wars are not launched by secret councils in the Sit Room, that the purposes, costs, and potential benefits of using American military power are forthrightly debated in Congress, and that the people's representatives in that body can no longer hide behind the president and evade their constitutional responsibility to authorize or veto proposals to take Americans to war with other states and peoples.

The existential threats of the Cold War and the imperial temptations of the post-Cold War “unipolar moment” are both blessedly behind us. But the politics of expediency that both engendered live on. The collusive evasion of responsibility by the legislative and executive branches of our government must now end. To preserve our liberties, we must restore constitutional order to the United States, beginning with the restoration of the war power to the Congress, where the Constitution wisely assigns it.