

TRANSCRIPT: Q + A Pt.1: Frank Gaffney and Tom Donnelly

Event: Defense and the Constitution: Saving the Military from Washington

Date: 9/21/11

Location: The Reserve Officers Association, Symposium Room One Constitution Avenue, NE Washington D.C. 20002

FRANK GAFFNEY:

Let me just close by saying a little bit about the Coalition for the Common Defense, which is the rubric under which we've come together. This is a new effort to help pull together a community of people in this town and across the country who actually think that the government's first responsibility is to provide for the common defense. And to do so in a way that doesn't throw money at the problem, doesn't do it wastefully, does it responsibly, but does it. And we've pulled together a statement of principles which brings us together. We're going to have a rollout of that statement of principles with, I hope, a very long and illustrious group of signers. As well as ordinary citizens who want to associate themselves with it.

On the 5th of October, I believe it's 3:30 in the afternoon over in the Capitol Visitors' Center, we'll do the event with, I'm hoping, some members of Congress who care about this as we do and who are working to try to take to heart the kinds of admonitions that you've heard this afternoon. The website for the Coalition for the Common Defense is forthecommondefense.org. It has a variety of resources. This is not meant to replace or stand in the way of the good work that those who have been making presentations are doing. Rather, it's a simple effort to draw more attention to that good work, facilitate it being communicated as widely as possible and to serve as a real resource for a debate which is urgently needed. As you can tell. We will have on that website forthecommondefense.org, the briefing that we've given today. The slides that those of you who have been joining us by phone, unfortunately, haven't been able to see. But we want very much for you to have access to that as well. And the writings of the various people who are participating in this effort like Colin, like Tom Donnelly, and the others. Let me just add to that that what we are seeing in this public opinion data, what we believe at our core is true. Is that the American people have the native common sense to recognize what we are talking about. To recognize that the world is dangerous and getting more so. To recognizing that their equities will be imperiled if we actually, by our actions or inactions, make it an even more dangerous world still. And that those equities are unfortunately, are not simply to be borne by us. Of the present generation. But of those in the future, our children. Our grandchildren. If we get this wrong. And again, I've said at the very beginning, we've seen this movie before. When it goes wrong, it goes massively wrong. In some instances. With millions of people losing their lives. And the particular worry is that today, as you all know, and as I think the public has indicated and particularly John McLaughlin stated, the means by which to make sure that millions of people lose their lives in any future conflagration are now widely available. And becoming more so.

So the danger is even more serious than it was when we made these mistakes in the past. We're talking about Democratic voters, we're talking about Republican voters, we're talking about independent voters. We're talking about Tea Party voters, who fall into all of those categories. We're talking about the little people, I think Bob described them, we're talking about regular folks. They get this. And I believe they will hold accountable those who, ostensibly on their behalf, seem not to get it. And worse, seem to be taking steps that will make all of them and their children and their grandchildren more in danger. Let me conclude—we'll be happy to take some questions if you have any. People on the call, I think, can unmute their phone, but I'm not sure how that's going to work if there are large numbers of you on there. But we'll try to make this work. We've got an extraordinary team here that will be happy to try to answer questions. Just in closing, we need your help. This coalition, the people who make it up, and I think the people for whom we're speaking, need your help. Every single one of you. In the room, on the call, the people you know, the people you're married to, the people you work with, all of them, need to be heard from now. Because, sadly, I'm afraid, politicians, as we've said several times now, of both political parties, currently are sensing indifference on the part of the public about these issues. Wrong as that may be, and as this data suggested, it is wrong, they need to be disabused of that misperception. Urgently. And I can't think of any better way to do it than to have the public in their town hall meetings, in their campaign events, in their offices, both at the district and state level and here in Washington, by e-mail, by phone, by fax, in any other way that can be done, Facebook, tweets, communicating that we expect them, in fact, to fulfill their oaths of office to defend and uphold the Constitution, including to provide for the common defense. Again, you can find more information about how to do that and with whom you can do it at forthecommondefense.org and with that, we'll open up the floor to those of you here in the room and, if we can, those of you on the phones, to share with us your questions. Here in the room, yes, sir? Please identify yourself and put your question, if you have one, to any particular individual.

RUSSELL KING:

Yeah, I'm Russell King [UNCLEAR] employee, I was a retired reserve Naval officer [UNCLEAR] Naval patrol shipping officer. I'd like to direct this question to you, Mr. Gaffney. But it's something about what Ralph Reed said about the Navy, the number of ships diminishing since the Reagan Administration. But it also has diminished since the September 11th attack. And at the same time, the People's Republic of China has expanded its navy and I believe using the strategy of Alfred Thayer Mahan [UNCLEAR] strategist and they have a strategy called String of Pearls in the Indian Ocean. They have a close relationship with Iran. And I'm wondering if you think that we—our navy should be a neo-mahanian navy as opposed to a post-mahanian navy. And should be structured to defeat major countries like the Russian Federation, China, and so forth. As opposed to cooperating with other nations for common threats. Are there specific maritime choke points or sea lines of communication that you think could corner and control the hostile power under certain situations?

FRANK GAFFNEY:

I imagine that that very thoughtful and articulately asked question couldn't be heard by anybody, so I'm going to just paraphrase it. And I think I'm going to ask Tom to join me in answering it. Maybe, Tom, if you don't mind coming over here and we'll huddle by the microphones. I will tell you one of the proudest moments of my professional life was I was given a watch by the Navy League of the United States, awarding me with the Alfred Thayer Mahan Award. You probably have one, too. I'm a great admirer of Mahan. It is, I believe, true today as ever that the United States relies on control of the sea lines of communication, maritime power, to protect its economy as well as its people. In fact, this is one of the ironies of the debate we're having right now, is as I mentioned, some Republicans insist that we simply can't afford a strong national defense. We have to get the economy strengthened before we can get back to having a strong military. I believe that's exactly backwards. You will not have a strong economy if you cannot insure that your economic activities are protected worldwide. And they are worldwide. So as to whether we must gear our military and equip our military and have a strategy that is explicitly at, say, communist China, which unmistakably is pursuing a counter-strategy. Mahanian, if you will. To our naval supremacy. Or whether you simply say, we want to make sure we can do that and all of the lesser included cases, including protect our shipping from, you know, the Barbary pirates of our day of Somalia and the like. I'm agnostic. I just know that we can't do what we need to do in the world with a two hundred and eighty ship navy at best and at worst it's going to be a lot **smaller**