



Written by [Jack Kerwick, Ph.D.](#) on March 13, 2013

John McCain, Lindsey Graham, War, and Liberty

Rand Paul remains the talk of the town after his 13-hour filibuster, and deservedly so. However, more talk should be centered on his colleagues and critics in the Senate, John McCain and Lindsey Graham.

Recall that, as was reported in a *Wall Street Journal* editorial, McCain, the Arizonan senator and former presidential candidate, said: "If Mr. Paul wants to be taken seriously, he needs to do more than pull political stunts that fire up impressionable libertarian kids in college dorms."

McCain continued, referring to Paul's suggestion that the American government would launch drone attacks against American citizens on American soil as "totally unfounded." In fact, "it is simply false," McCain asserted, to think that the federal government would target as "an enemy combatant" someone who "disagrees with American policy" and who "even may demonstrate against it."



Lindsey Graham seconded the idea that Paul and like-minded Republicans are hypocritical. George W. Bush had a drone program in place, Graham commented, yet "I don't remember any of you coming down here suggesting that President Bush was going to kill anybody with a drone, do you?" Graham then asked: "What are we up to here?" Finally, while castigating Paul and company for taking the Obama administration to task, he commended the president "for doing many of the things that President Bush did," "for having the good judgment to understand [that] we're at war." Graham lamented that, evidently, his own party "no longer" believes this.

McCain's and Graham's critiques are more telling than many of their Republican opponents appreciate. To put it bluntly, by way of both tone and substance, their attack against their colleagues makes it clear that the hands of these long-term Senate veterans are most decidedly not those into which Americans should entrust their liberties.

This is no hyperbole. No Republican of whom I'm aware — including Senators McCain and Graham — credit President Obama with being friendly to freedom. Given the latter's relentless quest to concentrate power ever further in the federal government, Obama is deemed not an ally, but an enemy, of liberty. Well, there is no greater sign that liberty has indeed reached a perilous state than when the president of the United States possesses the discretion — the power — to determine which Americans are and are not "enemy combatants," who can and cannot be killed by their government.

McCain and Graham see nothing at all objectionable about this. They even find it praiseworthy. Thus,



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they pose no less a threat to American liberty than that posed by Obama himself.

But there is even more to it than this.

At no time is the government of any society more of a threat to liberty than during a time of war. War is the ultimate crisis, and as Rahm Emmanuel, President Obama's former chief of staff, infamously, but correctly, noted, it is during a crisis that the government can get away with doing that which it wouldn't be able to do otherwise. Hence, we should "never let a good crisis go to waste."

Translation: Since people turn to their government in moments of crisis, it is during just these moments that government is permitted to expand its size and scope, i.e., its power. Yet when this happens, citizens lose their liberties. Anyone with any doubts about this should consider that it is during crisis that citizens are "asked" by their elected representatives to "sacrifice" for "the common good." And what are they expected to sacrifice? The answer to this question is always the same, even if it is never spelled out as such: their liberty.

Now, this "war" that McCain, Graham, and a whole lot of other Republicans insist that we are engaged in is a war without end. Neither its opponents nor its proponents deny this. But a war without end is a crisis without end, and when there is a crisis without end, the end of liberty looms on the horizon.

The McCains and Grahams of the GOP have turned off legions of Americans from voting for Republicans. They even account for why millions of self-identified Republicans have decided to sit out the last two presidential elections.

The sooner liberty-minded Republicans recognize what many seemed to finally realize last week — the party needs more Pauls and fewer McCains and Grahams — the greater the chances that the GOP's — and the country's — future will be brighter than its present.



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