



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on March 19, 2009

AntiWar.com's Garris: The Burden of Empire

The New American: *What is AntiWar.com? The name sounds leftist.*

Eric Garris: The anti-war position was more associated with conservatives until World War II. So it really has a long-standing conservative tradition, going back to the America First movement. The Anti-Imperialist League was both left and right.

TNA: *Which pretty much sums up Antiwar.com, doesn't it?*

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Garris: It does. We really need a new Anti-Imperialist League for the 21st century.



TNA: *What's the criteria for an article being posted on AntiWar.com?*

Garris: The criteria is that it's a well-written piece, but that it is also against U.S. intervention. It could be written from the point of view of the left or the right or libertarian. As long as it's not sectarian and as long as it doesn't advocate government force.

TNA: *Most of the people reading The New American are coming from the "right," and one of the fears I suspect readers would have about AntiWar.com is that it would be a pacifist organization.*

Garris: We're not pacifists. There are, of course, pacifists who support us, read us, and we sometimes run pacifist articles. But our primary focus is anti-interventionism. None of the people who are running AntiWar.com are pacifists. We all believe in self-defense. We all believe in the right to bear arms. And we believe in the right of the people to rise up against the government. But that's different than the government going in and overthrowing other governments.

TNA: *If you ask a politician, "When should we go to war?" they all say, "Well, we should only go to war to support our vital national security interests." Yet it seems like we have "vital" national security interests in almost every nation on Earth, according to politicians today. Why is that?*

Garris: One of the reasons we have vital national security interests in these regions is because we have military there. If we didn't have military there, they wouldn't be vital national security interests in terms of the military. In terms of the fact that we are affected by what goes on around the world, that's true. And we should have friendly relationships and free trade with everybody. But just because we have a national security interest, it doesn't mean we have the ability or the right to tell other countries what they can or cannot do. And in fact, when we have, it has backfired. For the last 50 years the United States has taken part in a series of interventions, none of which has accomplished their purported purpose.

TNA: *Give me an example of that.*

Garris: One of the best examples of it was our intervention in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union. And other areas where we were intervening in the Cold War. It resulted in our bringing forces like al-Qaeda, like the Taliban, to power in regions where they had been basically weak before. I would argue



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that our involvement in Vietnam led to a greater establishment of communism in Southeast Asia. We have never accomplished what we set out to accomplish. And even where we do claim accomplishments, they are never the accomplishments we pretended that we were going to war in the first place for.

TNA: *When we talk about “accomplishments,” for example, “we kept Thailand out of communism with our intervention in Vietnam.” The question isn’t what the end was, but what else could we have accomplished otherwise with that massive outpouring of money and blood? It’s the old economic concept of “opportunity cost.”*

Garris: Right. Exactly.

TNA: *Most Americans are aware of the fact that we have troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. Where else are U.S. soldiers based abroad?*

Garris: Well, we have some presence in over 100 nations. Most Americans don’t realize that. We have troops in, for example, Germany and Japan, left from World War Two. And we’re not talking about a few hundred or even a few thousand troops. We’re talking about tens of thousands of troops that remain in those countries that are no longer a threat to us. They now stay there to extend our reach of power to other nations. We have troops in South Korea that are continuing to build up a presence that is resulting in the continuation of the North Korean regime. These things always have the opposite results eventually, or severely unpredictable results. The Cuban embargo, for example, our aggression in Cuba has led to the continuation of the Castro regime way beyond what would have been its natural run of power.

TNA: *I can’t argue with you there. Castro was able to whip up a Cuban patriotic fervor against the “Yankee imperialist.”*

Garris: Pretty much everybody agrees about Cuba now. It’s just a question of inertia.

TNA: *America has — unfortunately — been moving from a republic to an empire. You talk quite a bit about empire on the website. What role does AntiWar.com have in the fight against empire?*

Garris: We see that the issue of war and peace is key to the issue of empire, and the issue of empire is key to the issue of big government and getting rid of individual rights. The more the U.S. is involved around the world the more excuses there are for doing any number of things at home. It’s the classic 1984 model that the government uses foreign threats in order to keep people under the thumb at home. And that’s the essence of empire, and that’s what Obama appears to be continuing. He has a slightly different flavor.

TNA: *That goes back to what you were saying before about Fidel Castro. Isn’t that how Castro was able to maintain power for so many years?*

Garris: Exactly. In a sense, it’s a mutual benefit society. It’s not that Castro and American presidents sit down and say we’re going to continue this to benefit each other. But in fact, that’s the result.

TNA: *Most Americans — right or wrong — agreed that the initial invasion of Afghanistan was warranted in order to go after the people responsible for the September 11 attacks. We’ve now been there nearly eight years. What’s the justification for staying there?*

Garris: The justification that you listen to is very vague. They talk about it in vague “national security interests.” But they don’t really talk in specifics. They say that they want to make Afghanistan and Pakistan safe against extremism. That’s a very vague thing and it’s impossible. It’s never been done.



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Nobody has ever conquered Afghanistan. Nobody has ever conquered the tribal areas of Pakistan, including the Pakistani and British governments.

TNA: *Or even Alexander the Great.*

Garris: Or even Alexander the Great or the Russians. Whenever they set about going into that hornet's nest, it always backfires on them. Afghanistan is the destroyer of empires. And the American empire seems like it is dedicated to jumping suicidally into that morass.

TNA: *The other side will paint those who are opposed to intervention in Afghanistan as being naïve, even suicidal in a lot of instances. But when you press them what the threat is, they always seem to come down to someone with a nuclear bomb in a suitcase. Where's the practical threat in that?*

Garris: What's that got to do with Afghanistan, first of all? There's been a lot written about whether there is something as a suitcase nuke. There may be something as small as a U-Haul truck nuke, but you are talking about something that's a little bit bigger than a suitcase. What's that got to do with Afghanistan and Pakistan? If there are loose nukes, I would look at the places that have the most and are the most dissipated around the globe, and that's Russia and the United States. This is the area that is the most scary in terms of nukes getting in the wrong hands. Pakistan is certainly not a safe proliferator, but it's certainly not the scariest in the world.

TNA: *Tell me a little bit about the history of AntiWar.com. How long have you been around?*

Garris: Fourteen years. We started in 1995 during the U.S. intervention in Bosnia.

TNA: *You were one of the co-founders with Justin Raimondo. Who else was involved at the time?*

Garris: In the first few years, it was just the two of us. And we were just hosting news and viewpoints, and not on a daily basis. And then in 1998, when Clinton started bombing Iraq, we started updating the page on a daily basis and getting more people involved. And the following spring was when the bombing of Serbia and Kosovo started, and that's when we really started moving into a regular daily routine. People started sending us money, we started paying a few writers to write for us, and it just kind of went from there. Then after 9/11, our traffic tripled overnight and we had to start really upgrading at that point. At this point, we have a total of 10 people working for the site.

TNA: *Most of the people who read The New American come from the political right. They support smaller government. Why would someone who supports smaller government oppose war?*

Garris: You can't have small government and war. When you have governments going to war, the governments get bigger quickly.

TNA: *You cover issues other than purely the combat area of war. One of the things that I love about AntiWar.com is that you cover the domestic impact of war pretty rigorously.*

Garris: We cover the "war on terror" because that is clearly tied to U.S. foreign policy now. The Patriot Act, where government has used the threat of war to crack down in so many areas: in the areas of civil liberties, free speech, the right to keep and bear arms. Those are all affected by the government's desire to go to war. You saw after 9/11 there were calls from traditionally sane voices for tearing up the Constitution. That's a really, really dangerous effect of war and it's historically what happens. When countries get involved in big wars, they start setting aside liberties pretty quickly.

TNA: *You hear from the other side, especially among Bush Republicans, that the war on terror has "worked." There hasn't been an attack on American soil since September 11.*



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Garris: But they can't point to a single example of a real attack that was thwarted. The government has never been able to say, "Here is a plot that was a real plot," not just some guys talking on the Internet who didn't have access to anything, but a real substantial plot. We were presented with a lot of scary things, like the shoe bomber, but these were not significant threats, certainly not threats that warranted the sacrificing of liberties that resulted. And most of these plots that we heard about continued for some time despite all these so-called "safeguards." I remember listening to one of the 9/11 widows, and she was saying, how is it that with the defense budget we had in 2001, we were unable to stop a plane hitting the Pentagon 25 minutes after the FAA knew they were heading to the Pentagon? How is it that such a tremendous defense machine that we had couldn't deal with that? Clearly, more money and getting rid of more liberties is not the answer.

TNA: I live in the Boston area, not too far from the "Big Dig" highway project. Government is not known in my area among the informed for being either efficient or safe. The depression of Boston's central artery is more than 600 percent over budget and counting, and it killed a woman when a three-ton concrete ceiling tile fell on her car. Only government would manufacture three-ton concrete ceiling tiles for a tunnel with inadequate adhesives.

Garris: That's an important thing to understand too. Conservatives understand that government does things badly, that they are the worst provider of services. The same goes when you are talking about real essential services like defense. Government is not the best provider of defense; they are the worst provider of defense.

For another segment of this interview, see ["AntiWar.com's Garris: More War Under Obama."](#)



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