



FOREIGN POLICY ASSOCIATION
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America Alone: The Neo-Conservatives and the Global Order
June 30, 2004

Moderator: John Lehman,
Former Secretary of the United States Navy

Speakers:

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Stefan Halper: Thank you very much John. Allow me to thank Kira Citron and Takako Fujiki for their kind arrangements on this event. I would just like to say to all of you that we owe a great debt of gratitude to John Lehman, who is serving on the 9/11 Commission, in one of the most delicate political jobs one can imagine. He does deserve great credit. John is a special friend. We have worked together since he was a staffer in the Senate Armed Services Committee and I was policy director for Bush's primary campaign against Ronald Reagan. John was an invaluable source of guidance on all things military and political. We remember a particularly remarkable July 4th in 1976 when the tall ships came to New York harbor, and I and my family were his guests on the battleship New Jersey. John at that time was the Secretary of the Navy. John Lehman built the largest Navy the world has ever seen as Secretary of the Navy, but it is his friendship and support that shines here, and where we have common purpose in Cambridge.

As you may be aware, "America Alone" the book we just completed, arises from the center-right. As a Republican who has served three presidents in the White House and State Department, and as a strong supporter of this president in the year 2000, we concluded at the start of the Iraq war that the administration's foreign policy had taken a detour -- that it was a policy that was dangerously driven by ideology rather than a clear understanding of American interests, and that the administration had failed to use the full

range of diplomatic, economic, political, and personal relationships before it moved to military intervention. And with our bitter post-conflict experience in attempting to reconstruct Iraq, it seems that the policies advanced by the neoconservatives do not appear to have served this administration or the nation to its greatest advantage. Those are some of the points we are covering in the book. We conclude that the effort to contain terror -- which is something that the 9/11 Commission is looking at very carefully -- we concluded that that effort of necessity competed with Iraq for resources, mainly military resources, intelligence, management time, including the time and efforts of senior National Security officials. It was our view in the book that the utopian objectives, that is to say the neoconservative strategy to remake an entire region, to recast an ancient culture and alter the social and cultural tenants of many millions of people, to reflect market democracy, that the objective could not be reached, at least not for several generations. And that the effort would conclude by demonstrating the limits of American power, not its capabilities.

Living in England and teaching at Cambridge we have also become very much aware of a sharp decline in American credibility abroad, even among those who are our closest allies who loved us as a people and wanted very much to support us but found increasingly that they were separating from the Blair Government's policies. So the book was written to provide definition and perspective to these developments to establish the terms of debate in hopes of restoring balance in our foreign policy. The book underscores the costs of the current policy in terms of men, and money, and credibility, and opportunities lost. The book underscores the critical importance of restoring the checks and balances in the policy process that may have been distorted by a small, well placed group. We urge a return to a risk sensitive, alliance-oriented policy that builds on the institutions that the United States has so painstakingly created over the past half a century.

It is a book of record, it has some fourteen hundred footnotes, and an extensive bibliography, and in that context let me recognize two of the researchers Leslie Halper and Ben Rider, who did a great deal of work on this in Cambridge. It looks at who the neoconservatives are, where they came from, what they believe, and how they assume such great power. It examines how the administration constructed a conditional reality and moved the nation to war against it, conditional reality being that Saddam Hussein might have weapons of mass destruction, might have links to Al-Qaeda, might have been involved in 9/11. It was a series of possibilities, which eventually became a reality that many people believe.

The book also looks at the echo chamber in which White House statements were echoed by Fox Television, Wall Street Journal editorial pages, even the Washington Post and other papers, and prominent talk radio, to create and leave impressions with the broader public, which we found may not be correct. It explores the rise of anti-Americanism, the dismay of our closest allies and what it means going forward. Finally, we looked at the failure of a range of American institutions in the run up to this war, and we ask, where were the learned journals, where were the articles by experts who questioned the assumptions and the administrations position, where were the tough questions in the media? How is it possible that the established political process, the Congress and the

Senate, went along with this entire policy, and it was left to an independent senator from West Virginia, Robert Byrd, and a largely unknown ex-governor from Vermont, screeching from the sidelines to bring this issue to the center of the political process?

We look at what happened with the National Security Council, possibly the weakest in living memory, and why it was unable to reconcile differences among the departments and agencies. We also look at the intelligence services, which themselves were subject to enormous political pressure and perhaps shaded their findings in ways they shouldn't have. The questions there are, why weren't the tough questions asked, and why didn't we get some answers? We conclude this book with a kind of a way forward, an analysis of what the future might look like, and what some of the solutions might be.

With that I am going to turn you over to my co-author, Jonathan Clarke. In introducing Jonathan let me say that this is a very old collaboration. We have known each other for 35 years, and we were at Oxford together in the Neolithic period. Jonathan went into the British Foreign Service, had a magnificent career finishing up as a minister. He served in Zimbabwe, Germany, and in Washington, and he is an Asian expert among other things, speaks Chinese and is a brilliant analyst and a very fine writer. It has been truly a great honor to work with him.

Jonathan Clarke: I suppose that is the sort of introduction Dr. Kissinger was after. In fact I woke up this morning to somewhat of a surprise, because there was a review of our book in the Wall Street Journal today, in which they called Stef and myself Kissingerian horsemen. So it is a wonderful opportunity to tell you what our book really does say. I would also like to thank Cambridge University Press and the Foreign Policy Association for hosting this event, and Mr. Lehman for taking time out of his highly important work to be here tonight. And I also just recognized someone who gave us considerable help in this book, Mr. Tom Twenten the former deputy director of operations at the CIA.

Really what I would like to say is why did I come to write this book with Stef? I think the key reason is, as a British Diplomat, is that I believe the United States really is the default force for good in this world. The United States does not have a perfect record, but if you take it out the equation it is going to be very damaging for those of us who believe in liberty and freedom. If those capabilities are in any way diminished, that tends to be the result. Looking back on the times I have worked with so many American officials, and trying to distill out the main reason why we emerged on top is that I think there was something you might call "moral authority." This sounds a little soft, but I think it was a very key element.

As Stef and I started to think about writing a book as the public discourse in the United States transitioned after Afghanistan, which was fully supported, and into a different direction, we thought this moral authority might be something was going to be put into play, and that was going to be something disadvantageous to the rest of the world. It seemed to us if the attack on Iraq happened this was going to be something of a detour from mainstream established American foreign policy, particularly conservative principles based on sober assessment of risk, and a sober assessment of the possibilities

of utopian reform around the world. So the book was not really designed to take issue with this or that aspect of Iraqi policy but to try and bring together an overall strategy. And as we looked how this came about really all the investigative paths led back to this group of people and ideas we now called neoconservative.

As we looked at them it was obvious this concept was something of a slogan put out there by the media, but no one really understood precisely what it meant. So what we were trying to do was demystify and to explain. I think where we came out is that neoconservatives are not a part of a conspiracy or secret society, they are a group of people who have very strongly expressed and articulate views about which they have written very fully. If you try to distill them down, there are four themes together. Firstly, that military power is the key determinant in the interaction between states. Secondly, that there is a binary quality in international relations between good on one side and evil on the other. Thirdly, that the United States acts best when it acts alone, unshackled by either international allies or international treaties. And lastly, that there is inside neoconservatism a very strong concentration on the Middle East as a region.

Now where has this left us? We look at some of the consequences in the book and what we come down to is a sense of imbalance -- the fact that the United States ends up with a preferred option, mainly military force, concentrated in a single part of the world. If you broaden out whether that really is an adequate explanation for foreign policy of a great nation, probably our conclusion is not. Obviously there are examples such as China, which is not standing still whilst we are preoccupied in the Middle East. If you think about this question of anti-Americanism, which we look very much at, we detect something that we call counter-Americanism, people getting out of bed in the morning trying to damage the United States, not just among our enemies, but also, I'm afraid, among our friends.

The other aspect we look at in brief are the economic aspects of some of these policies, and we come up with the overall description of the way ahead. I sense that some of you here may start to say, well you already used the word Kissinger, so what we're going to hear now is this old-fashioned realism, this old European approach to life, this is what we call defeatism. Now I'm not sure if that is a correct analysis. It seems to me that clearly 9/11 is an epoch changing event, but I think our argument is that it has not suspended all the laws of international relations and all the laws of history. That is what we would like to get back to, the sense that international balance and a broad range of issues need to be drawn on by the United States. The idea that American society shouldn't necessarily be overturned because of this one event, we need to remember why it is that we're fighting and why it is worthwhile to continue to fight.

I think coming back to the key aspect of terrorism and the challenge we face against terrorism, what we would like to say is there is a history here, other nations have confronted this problem and have confronted it in a number of ways. These lessons are worthwhile drawing on. If you look at the British experience in Northern Ireland, for example, I think it does have some implications for the United States.

So I think the message we would like to leave with you is something of back to basics type of explanation, is that the United States does have a long and distinguished diplomatic history, a history which is one of great success. If one can get back to some of those principles, our view is that the United States best days are when they are working with their allies, when it works with the grain of international opinion and international order. That is the debate we would like to rekindle and reinvigorate.