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THE ALLURE OF NORMALCY: AMERICA'S LEADERSHIP IN THE WORLD AND PRESIDENT OBAMA'S FOREIGN POLICY

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. TALBOTT: Good afternoon, everybody. Welcome and a particular welcome to the members of the Brookings International Advisory Council, who are here in the auditorium and beginning what we hope is going to be a good couple of days with them.

This is a precedent-setting occasion here in two respects. I'm pretty sure this is the first time that we've done a joint event with *The New Republic*. And partly as a result of the representative of *The New Republic*, Leon Wieseltier, who is the literary and geopolitical editor of *The New Republic*, this is the first time you will see no ties on the podium. (Applause)

Kim Churches, who is vice president and director of sartorial affairs here, is not clapping, I might add. (Laughter)

I think you've got a box of or some stacks of the latest issue of *The New Republic* outside. And those of you who are digitally minded can go on the web to NewRepublic.com and read what I regard, having read it, a magisterial essay by Bob Kagan. And I think all of you know that Bob Kagan is a senior fellow in our Foreign Policy Program. The title that he gave it, or maybe Leon gave it, is "Superpowers Don't Get to Retire." The subtitle, Bob, that I have added to it is, "Especially When a Former Superpower Comes Out of Retirement to Challenge and Disrupt the World America Made."

Now, as you can tell from the title, and you will certainly see when you read the piece, it's very, very timely. But that's always true of Bob's writing, not just because of the intellectual heft that he brings to what he writes, but because he's always, I think it's fair to say, writing, in one way or another, about the role of the United States in the world now and through American history. He's hard at work on the second volume of

a magnum opus called *Dangerous Nation*. At some point in the conversation you might even explain why you picked that overall sobriquet.

Also, what Bob calls the world weariness of the American public is not just something that he's picking up, but it is reflected in a lot of the polling that we have seen recently, suggesting that a stunning number of Americans would really prefer for the United States to mind its own business and let other countries take care of their own problems.

And there's another reason, I think, that this piece is coming out at the right time, and that is that the direction, the scope, the efficacy of American foreign policy, diplomacy, security policy is struggling with a number of challenges in the wake of the catastrophe in Syria, China's growing assertiveness, and, of course, Russia's mauling of Ukraine.

And the last reason that this timing is just about perfect is that President Obama himself is concerned about the doubts and the criticisms that are coming his way and in the direction of the administration's foreign policy. In fact, he is going to make an effort tomorrow to allay some of those criticisms and questions from the bully pulpit at West Point.

We're going to proceed as follows: Bob is going to lay out his thesis and then Leon and he will engage in a conversation to be moderated, and I hope also participated in, by Fred Hiatt, who is the editorial page editor of *The Washington Post*. Fred has some pretty strong views of his own and writes about these issues himself. And, of course, Fred will find a way of bringing as many of you as possible into the conversation.

So, Bob, over to you.

MR. WIESELTIER: Well, I need to say I've been instructed to tell you all

that anyone -- I've never said this before in public, if you intend to Tweet throughout this, you have to use #usleadership, I believe. And also to say that there will be questions at the end, and when you ask your questions, please stand up, identify yourself and your affiliation, and ask a question and don't make a speech. And that concludes what I was asked to tell you. (Laughter)

MR. TALBOTT: And one other thing, since you couldn't hear anything that Leon just said, we're going to mic them now. (Laughter) But thanks, Leon.

MR. WIESELTIER: Well, you are the (inaudible).

SPEAKER: Well, then hashtag anything you want. (Laughter)

MR. TALBOTT: Hashtag Dangerous Nation (inaudible).

MR. KAGAN: At least two-thirds of us up there, and this does not include Fred, have almost no idea what any of that meant, so just, you know, you're looking at a couple of major dinosaurs. Fred's very with it in all other respects.

We first of all, Strobe, thank you very much for that kind introduction. I want to thank my old friend, Fred Hiatt, for being willing either to be a moderator or a questioner or a discussant today. And I particularly have to thank Leon Wieseltier, who is the literary and geopolitical editor of *The New Republic*. The places where you can publish a 12,000-word essay -- yes, I said 12,000 words -- are growing smaller, smaller, and smaller. One of them is at *The New Republic*, where Leon is a crucial editor and has been for many decades. He's also been a wonderful friend, so thank you for existing so that this fading breed of people who want to write at some length have a place to do so and I'm very grateful.

I'll just make a few opening comments and then open it up to discussion.

You know, there's a fine book out right now by an old friend of all of ours named Steve Sestanovich called *Maximalist*. And it's about -- one of the themes of that

book -- and I do recommend your reading it, it's an excellent history of American foreign policy from the beginning of the Cold War to the current administration -- one of the themes is that America goes through cycles of global activism, interventionism, which are invariably followed by periods of retrenchment. And I think it -- and if you look at the Cold War, from the very beginning, you began after World War II with a great desire to bring Americans home, to cut defense budgets -- American soldiers home and cut defense budgets, and then you can follow a cycle of very high interventionism followed by a bit of a retrenchment. And certain presidents wind up being in the position where they are retrenchers. And, you know, you don't want to be too deterministic about it, but a lot of it has to do with circumstance. And I think that, you know, if you want to look at American foreign policy in that pattern, I think there's a lot of support for it.

And you can go back before the Cold War, by the way. You can go back I would say at the very least to the late 19th century and see this cycle.

Now, the question that -- and I must say I've always been somewhat deterministic about this cycle sort of perpetuating itself, partly because -- and this is sort of my explanation as to why I call America "a dangerous nation," is that Americans are not isolationists at all by any reasonable definition of that word. Their ideology, their national ideology leads them outward because it's a universalistic ideology. Their love of commerce, their love of individual aspiration has always drawn them out into the world in search of markets, in search of riches. And their sort of democratic openness, I would say, also tends to sort of make them open to penetration by other societies and open to learning about other societies, their sort of free approach the world.

So the notion, you know -- as I say, Tokugawa Japan was isolationist. America has never been isolationist and it's wrong to see it that way. But Americans who have, like, ventured out into the world for all kinds of reasons have often found

themselves weary of that activity, especially since they became a great power.

And Americans like to think of themselves as people who are just sitting here minding our own business. They don't have an image of themselves as globally involved, which is, you know, a source of much confusion to the rest of the world sometimes. But this sort of basic dichotomy of a people that naturally ventures out into the world, but also naturally thinks of itself, Americans think of themselves, as being sort of isolationist with Washington's farewell address, a much misunderstood but hallowed in American rhetoric. It would make sense that they would head out and then get tired and come back, then get upset with what's happening in the world again and head out, then get tired and come back, and that this cycle could go on. And I guess I would have said, if you'd asked me a few years ago, that this cycle was going to perpetuate itself and I don't rule out that it is going to perpetuate itself.

But in recent years I have begun to wonder, especially over the past maybe two or three years, whether, in fact, that cycle is not going to continue and whether we may, in fact, be heading into a period that is not just the kind of sort of shallow and pretty temporary retrenchment that we saw during the Cold War, but is actually a much deeper and much longer retrenchment of the kind we saw after World War I.

You know, to make the comparison we talk these days about how Americans are war weary and it's really about Iraq and Afghanistan, and, of course, there's a great amount of truth to that. But if you look at wars that actually cost Americans much more dearly, both Korea and Vietnam, well, the period of retrenchment after both of them was neither very long nor very deep. I mean, Eisenhower still kept upwards of a million troops deployed overseas after the Korean War; you know, was, in many ways, was overthrowing governments left and right. You know, it was very, in

many way, activist. And then it didn't take very long before Jack Kennedy could run against him for not doing enough in the world and got himself elected on those grounds.

And then even after Vietnam, you know, it isn't long before even Jimmy Carter has to say, well, I misunderstood how serious the Soviet Union was or how dangerous it was and then you've got Ronald Reagan and his "Morning in America" and time to rebuild our defenses again. Those were not very long or very deep periods of retrenchment.

But the period after World War I was very long and very deep and really allowed Americans to go through 20 years, and particularly the last 10 years, in which not only did they not want to play a role in a world that they thought was relatively safe, which is how you might characterize the '20s, but as the world got increasingly more dangerous as anything resembling a world order began to fall apart everywhere, both in Europe and in Asia in particular, and you've got people like Hitler and Mussolini rampaging around, the American response in the '30s was the worst it got, the less they wanted to have anything to do with it. And it was so engrained the so-called lessons of World War I, what a mistake it had been, they thought, to get involved, that even as things became really bad and even after Hitler conquered France, a majority of Americans didn't want to get involved.

That's a cautionary tale for us. And I sort of wanted to go back in a way because I've been studying this period working on the second volume of my history, and say, well, those are the American, too. Right? American people are capable of taking that view.

And so as I try to sort of bring this story forward, I basically begin in the 1920s and take the story up through the present. And I think, as I see it, this is pretty much what happened. Americans had decided that the world didn't matter to them, that

things could go very badly in Europe and Asia and it wouldn't really affect the United States, and that view was held by people who I think you might call realists today. They called themselves realists.

America was immune from attack, they believed, from either Germany or from Japan. They really were very clear on that point. The American economy was mostly self-sufficient and, therefore, it really didn't matter what happened in the world. Some very prominent people, very respected people said we can trade with Hitler just as well as we can trade with Britain, you know. What difference does it make? People have to trade.

And so they allowed themselves to move into that. They allowed the world order to collapse along three lines.

And then, of course, they found themselves in a world war as a result of the Japanese attack. And then, of course, there was this great rethinking of everything. And the rethinking was led by Franklin Roosevelt and his advisors, and they basically came up with a new grand strategy for the United States which was different from what had come before and it basically put the United States at the center of the international system in a way that it had never been before. And most importantly, and I think this is the key thing, it redefined Americans' understanding of what their national interests are.

I mean, a normal nation's national interests are protection of the homeland, protection of access to, you know, an economy that allows them to be prosperous, the ability to maintain their sovereign independence, and that's pretty much it. That's what normal national interests look to.

But it was Franklin Roosevelt and others of his era, Dean Acheson and many others, decided that it was precisely that narrow definition of national interests which had allowed the United States not to act when it should have acted, and they

redefined American national interests to include, really, to sort of subsume the national interests of many other peoples around the world. And, in fact, Acheson was very clear on this early on when he says that Americans have to adopt a new pattern of responsibility that goes beyond their own national interests.

Now, I want to make it clear, this was not because Americans are uniquely unselfish or altruistic. They're not. But because of America's own peculiar and sort of special, almost geographically exceptional position in the world, America had the capacity to do something that no other nation had ever been able to do, which is basically to keep the peace in both Europe and Asia simultaneously. And it has a lot to do with geography. I can get into later, but a lot of it is just obvious. America was always secure at home, which allowed it to take the bulk of its forces and deploy them overseas and provide a solution of a kind to two regions of the world that had always been engaged in almost constant warfare, both Europe and East Asia.

Americans' willingness to do that, however, required them to see beyond narrow national interests. It made it their special concern to keep the peace in a region of the world thousands miles away and to deal with threats that might come to the United States maybe eventually, but much longer after they affected everybody else, and to make those America's primary responsibility.

It was Americans who took on the role of supporting an international economic order, obviously supported by others, as well, but to make itself the center of an international economic order, and also to make itself the center of an international political order. And I think the thing we need to understand is, yes, we defined those things as our national interests, but that was a very unusual definition. It was an abnormal role for a nation to play. And Roosevelt at the end of the World War II, as World War II was coming to an end and he was in his last days, was very worried, based

on his own experience, that the American people would not be able to sustain that role. That was not the American people that he knew from his experience in the 1920s and 1930s, and that was his big concern.

Well, something took care of that concern and it was the Soviet Union and Communism. Because rightly or wrongly, and I think you could say both rightly and wrongly, Americans came to regard the Soviet Union and international Communism as a kind of dire threat, not only a security threat, but an ideological threat. I mean, it's hard to remember, but maybe some in this room can remember a day when we thought that -- well, I wasn't thinking this; I wasn't even born -- that maybe Communism could take over in the United States; that the very democracy in the United States could be threatened. Americans had that paranoia, as they are wont to do now and then.

This fear of Communism and legitimate concern about Soviet power basically solved the problem was to whether Americans would be willing to sort of stay the course on this global involvement. And it did it in a way by suggesting, and, again, I think probably wrongly, that everything that happened in the world, anything that had any possible Communist involvement was a vital national security interest, so that even David Halberstam in 1965 could declare that what was happening in Vietnam was a vital national security interest.

And this sense, again, not always correct sense, but nevertheless powerful sense, provided a floor under which a president even during a period of retrenchment could not go. So that even in the Eisenhower period, as I said, you could have a million troops deployed overseas, you could be spending upwards of 10 percent of GDP on defense at a time of retrenchment because Communism sort of justified anything that you did anywhere. And even Jimmy Carter, who came to office warning, I think not entirely unreasonably, about an inordinate fear of Communism, as soon as the

Soviet Union invades a country that not two people out of a million in the United States could possibly have found on a map, nevertheless that was enough to turn him around. And that's the power that the feeling of Communist threat had.

So what would happen once Communism disappeared and the Soviet threat disappeared? Would people go back to the original grand strategy that lasted about two years? Because it's important to understand about the original Roosevelt strategy. It was not aimed at any particular threat. The people who fashioned that strategy beginning during the war thought the Soviet Union was going to be a partner in the post-war period. They really did. A difficult partner perhaps, but a partner. You know, Roosevelt had this idea of the four policeman: China, Britain, and the Soviet Union. So the strategy was not aimed at a particular threat. It was aimed at upholding a certain kind of world order. It was aimed at preventing the threats before they emerged.

So the question was, after the Cold War ended and after the Soviet Union fell, would we go back to the original grand strategy, the original sort of not threat-based, but order-based grand strategy? Well, initially, the answer seemed to be yes. That is the reason that, if you go back and read the memoirs of George H.W. Bush and Ben Scowcroft and you see what the real reason was that they decided that they had to push Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait, it was not because American vital interests were threatened. Realists thought it was unnecessary. Kuwait's oil wasn't that important. What did we care who was selling us the oil anyway? Or at least draw the line at Saudi Arabia. But Scowcroft and Bush both believed that they had a job, that America had a job to uphold a world order in which this would not happen, and that was the ultimate reason that they sent 500,000 troops to knock a tin pot dictator out of an even tinnier pot, a place like Kuwait.

And it was really -- you know, that, in a way, set the tone for much of the

next 25 years. And if you ask me what -- America undertook numerous interventions in that period, in the 1990s in particular. Once, I counted it up, once on the average of every 17 months, you know, beginning with the invasion of Panama in 1989, obviously the Gulf War, then, you know, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo. Relatively frequent deployments of American force, some of which in actual battle, some of which at least and theoretically were prepared for battle. All of those interventions were world order-oriented, again, rightly or wrongly. You can disagree with them or not agree [*sic*] with them, but their motive was in support of a certain kind of world order. They were not about American national interests.

But I think as we look on that period it was clear even at the time public support for this activity was always a little tepid. The polling before every one of these interventions was essentially negative and each successive President sort of went out there on a limb, went against the polling, in some cases went against many in Congress, undertook these interventions and generally the American people applauded if they didn't turn out too badly. But the support was tepid.

So it isn't surprising, I guess, as we look back on it, that if you now have two wars that did not end well, that proved much more difficult than people expected for whom, you know, the rationale for one of them proved to be nonexistent, that this would put a major crimp in what was already fading American support for this world role. But what I would like to argue, and I'll end on this note, is that this is not just war weariness.

Iraq and Afghanistan may have been the catalyst, but what is has mostly exposed, I believe, is that Americans no longer, at least many Americans no longer, remember or understand what in the world we're doing out there. I'm not sure Americans understand why we have all these alliances. And I haven't seen the polling lately, but I'd be worried about asking the American people if they remember that we have an Article V

commitment to defend Estonia or Lithuania, much less Japan and the conflict over the Senkaku Islands, much less other commitments that we've made to defend rocks in the South China Sea. There was a time when they could have understood it if it had something to do with the Soviets and the Commies, but now I wonder.

And, therefore, what we are facing perhaps is not so much, again, war weariness, but world weariness and a sense that why have we taken on these vast responsibilities? Can't somebody else do it? Or why does it need to be done at all?

I think it's been a long time since anyone has bothered to explain to the American people why America plays this role in the world and attempted to justify it. I sort of hope President Obama will do that tomorrow. Because my own view is that America has the capacity to continue playing the role that it's played in the past. I think that reports of American decline not only were wrong at the time, but have proven even more wrong as the American economy improves and other once boom-boom economies have faded. I think America's capacity, both militarily, politically -- and I say politically because if you look around the world, the one thing that the world wants from the United States is not less America, but generally more America. America has the capacity. The question is does it have the will and does it have the understanding?

I think Americans tend to take this world order that America created for granted. They take the benefits for granted and are unhappy about the costs. And I think, therefore, that our politicians, not just President Obama, but members of both parties, if we care about sustaining this world order, have a real hard -- and it's hard -- a hard job to do solving the problem that Roosevelt was worried about, which is convincing Americans without an obvious threat, like the Soviet Union, to continue supporting a world order with all the costs, both financial in terms of human lives and also the moral costs, of doing so. That's my question mark right now and that's basically what this

essay is addressing.

So with that, thank you and I look forward to our conversation.

(Applause)

MR. HIATT: Thank you, Bob. As somebody who read the essay before Leon butchered it down to 12,000 words, when it was really the right length, I can commend it to all of you. But let me take you back for a minute to where we are now.

I think I remember in a *Washington Post* column you wrote at about 800 words, when Obama was coming in, you kind of cautioned his more dovish supporters don't expect a huge change from President Bush because people run for office, but then there is a kind of coming to a central place for U.S. foreign policy and he's likely to go there. But then you say now in the last two or three years, you've become more concerned.

And so my question would be -- I mean, the *Post*, we've been very critical of a lot of his foreign policy decisions, as has Leon at *The New Republic*, but I think they can make a very strong case that they're far from isolationists. Right? They're negotiating major trade treaties both with Asia and with Europe. They intervened in Libya to unseat a dictator there, so that's maybe not once every 17 months, but it's, you know, one a term. He increased the troop presence in Afghanistan. He's been on the phone a lot with European leaders to try and come up with a response to Crimea. We have trainers in Africa. He's leading negotiations to keep Iran from going nuclear, even though I think most people would say the first target of a nuclear Iran is probably not the United States.

So, you know, where does that fit in your worries about where he's heading and where the United States is heading?

MR. KAGAN: Well, it's a good question. It's also unfair to bring up

pieces that I wrote in your newspaper, you know, to attack me. (Laughter)

MR. WIESELTIER: There was clearly not enough space to say what you wanted to say.

MR. HIATT: Exactly. A simplistic 800 words.

MR. KAGAN: I mean, you actually asked me --

MR. WIESELTIER: Eight hundred words, right.

MR. KAGAN: You actually asked me two questions, I think. One was why have I changed my mind about where Obama was going to be and the other is, is it even true that they are withdrawing? And as far as --

MR. HIATT: Or is he really -- is he '20s/'30s or is he something else?

MR. KAGAN: Right, right. And that is -- and, again, I'm not confident I know the answer to that. But the first thing I would say is they were very active in the '20s, too. In fact, if you go back and read the historians, the more recent historians of this period, they don't call them isolationists anymore because they were trading and they were using American financial muscle here and there. What they were was anti-interventionist. And this is where, you know, this is where things get, you know, a little dicey because I actually believe that, whether we like it or not, it is, at the end of the day, although there's so much more to the world order than military power, at the end of the day all of this is undergirded by American military power and particularly American guarantees to act in certain circumstances.

And I think that that is what is now in question, not will we send some people to train Africans to look for, you know, people who have kidnapped, not will we try to have trade agreements? They had lots of trade agreements in the 1920s. And, in fact, they believed or hoped it would be true that they could accomplish what American objectives were in the world without having to use force, just having to use all these other

tools, and that has become a very popular concept in the United States. It's all about soft power, it's all about using economic leverage to the degree that we have it, et cetera, but it's not about hard power.

And what I think has happened is -- so let me now get to the two parts of this question come together if you go back to what your first question was, which is, you know, why have I changed my view about Obama? My basic view about Obama, by the way, because there's a lot of theorizing around, you know, he's a Chicago leftie, you know, he's got all kinds of attitudes towards the United States. All these things may or may not be true. I think you really never know what's in a president's head. I think a lot of those things could have been said about Jimmy Carter, too, in terms of his attitude toward the United States. But presidents generally find themselves attempting to do what they think the majority of American people do. It's very rare that presidents push hard against what they think the majority wants to do.

And my reading of Obama from the beginning has been he's always going to look for the dead center, in a way, on foreign policy, which he doesn't really care about, I think. So on foreign policy he's going to look for the dead center of where the American public is. And I think he tried to find that dead center in his first two years.

And I think he decided that although he personally was going to pull out of the wars that the Americans didn't like, I think his sense was he couldn't pull out too rapidly in the case of Afghanistan. He had to prove that he was a tough guy in Afghanistan. He saw the need for the use of force in Libya, but he was also pushed into it in a way that Clinton and others had been pushed into it. And that was his read of the American public.

And I think what has happened is, as he has gone through this process, I think what he sees in the American public more and more and more is that they don't

want to do any of these things. Now, he's also encouraged this to some extent with the speeches that he's given, but, again, presidents don't tell Americans what they don't want to hear generally. Roosevelt didn't for four or five years. It was only when he went into a panic that he started pushing against it.

So I think what has happened is that in this kind of dialogue between Obama and the people, he has discovered that he really doesn't have to do anything.

He's about to give a big speech on American global leadership. And on the day before, he announces that we're going to have all troops out of Afghanistan by the time he leaves office. He doesn't see there's a contradiction in those things, you know.

MR. HIATT: Well, let me push you on that. One more and then I'll ask Leon something and give you a break. Because you also wrote in *The Washington Post* that even though Obama may be doing what the polls seem to say people want, they also don't seem all that happy with the results. And there's this kind of paradox where Americans, you know, of course, are reluctant to send troops to countries they've never heard of, but they also kind of like the idea of America being a leader, if I could paraphrase.

MR. KAGAN: Yeah.

MR. HIATT: And so I'm curious about whether, in fact, you think he has been giving Americans what they want. And to make it an explicitly second question, as you look at the Republican Party today, what lessons do you think they're drawing? Because it seems to me, at least at this moment, as though the Rand Paul strand is falling a little bit back and maybe not a John McCain strand, but a somewhat more activist point of view is emerging, you know, if only because Republicans seem to be thinking that's a more fruitful way to criticize the President. And is that true and what

does it say if it's true?

MR. KAGAN: Right. You know, traditionally, opposition parties have always had two choices, depending on what the President is up to or, more importantly, what world events had given him, which is attacking him from the sort of anti-interventionist, you're doing too much. And Republicans criticized Clinton in the '90s for doing too much. Or, if you have the opportunity, attack them from the other side, from the more hawkish. You're not doing enough. You're weak.

Now, obviously, I think my answer to the polls, which may be wrong, once answer to the polls is the reason they're not happy with him is they still think he's doing too much. That is a possibility and I think that that thought may have occurred to some people in the White House, but I don't know for sure. But the other interpretation is that even though he's doing what they want, they don't enjoy doing it. I mean, as I wrote in the piece, you know, no one ever is proud of the leader that's leading them in retreat even if it's necessary to go in retreat. Nobody ever says thank you, we worship you for leading us in retreat, but they may still feel that retreat is necessary. So, I mean, there is that element.

Then I was about to say something else and now I got myself screwed up.

MR. HIATT: Well, are the Republicans decided that --

MR. KAGAN: Oh, Republicans, right. So the Republicans, first of all, some of them genuinely believe that America has an important role to play, but I wouldn't say that that was like an overwhelming majority of elected leaders. I'm not sure most of them really have a very deep sense of that. Some of them do.

They are flirting, I would say, with the idea of being able to run against Obama from a more hawkish, you're not doing enough, you're making America look weak

position. I think it'll be interesting to see how far they push that. My sense of things is that while Rand Paul himself may or may not be a viable candidate, the views that Rand Paul expresses are very popular views about America and the world, and not just among the Republicans, but also among Democrats.

Now, so far, Republicans have been saying you're weak, you're this, you're that. I have yet to see them really fight, for instance, to increase the defense budget. I have yet to see them call for any serious option in places where -- I mean, some of them have. Obviously you say McCain. I don't think the party's where McCain is. You know, even when you talk about, you know, let's give small arms to Ukraine, what does that mean? They don't need small arms to fight the Russians, if that's what it's going to be.

So when I see Republicans making what I would call possibly risky suggestions about really bringing America back in the terms of power and the willingness to use power, I'll be more convinced. Right now, I think there's a certain amount of drive-by shooting and also a certain amount of sort of testing the waters to see how far they can push it. And I won't say that about everybody. Some people are sincere. But for the rest of them it's like, yes, can we sell this he's weak idea?

MR. HIATT: Without really buying in --

MR. KAGAN: Right, without getting the American people mad at us.

MR. HIATT: Mm-hmm. It'll be interesting to see, also, how Clinton positions herself in that debate.

MR. KAGAN: Indeed.

MR. HIATT: That's also tricky. Leon?

MR. WIESELTIER: Oh, I mean, I have a number of things that I would add. I mean, everyone here knows that what you have before you is the full spectrum of

foreign policy opinion from A to C. (Laughter) But there are a couple of things that I wanted to add.

The first is I want to say something that may be a little heretical in Washington, which is I think we may be talking about polls too much right now. I think not only because the job of the President is, if you pardon the expression, to lead and to persuade and so on, and the damage that the emphasis of the worship of polls has done to leadership is well known to every sentient human being, but also because we need to talk about the substance of various crises and what would be the right solution. And I don't think the President should be allowed to hide behind the conformity of his policy to American public opinion if one comes to the conclusion that the policy may, in fact, be incorrect or even disastrous in certain places. And I think one has to get beyond this.

I mean, people used to make this argument 10 years ago about the Supreme Court. All Supreme Court justices, you have to understand, are political. And I think to myself, well, that's very nice, but they should be, et cetera, et cetera.

The second thing I would say, and this is echoing something that Bob referred to a little obliquely, I think that the economicist [*sic*] analysis of foreign policy, like the economicist [*sic*] analysis of life, is inadequate to describe it. In other words, I think that one cannot understand descriptively or prescriptively American foreign policy unless one thinks strategically beyond the economic needs of the United States and unless one thinks morally. I think that it is -- I believe that the discussion of values are an intrinsic part of American foreign policy deliberations.

And I should add that I think our values are also strategic assets. I do not think that just bringing -- discussing moral values in the Office of Foreign Policy is some sort of head in the clouds, idealistic sort of discourse. I think that if you believe that, historically speaking, the friendship of peoples is more important to the United

States than the friendship of regimes and if you believe that the spread of democracy or democratization -- and obviously, you know, democratization is not an event, it's an era. It takes a very long time. It goes in fits and starts. We have to keep our heads and so on. But if you believe that these things redound to our benefit, then the moral analysis or the analysis in terms of values, as I say, becomes absolutely essential.

I mean, there are certain places where it's hard to see our interests and very easy to see our values. Rwanda would have been a place like that. But anyone who sees where Syria is on a map, I mean, Syria should move the most stony-hearted realist into action only by looking at a map and seeing what the strategic consequences of its collapse would be regionally and beyond. So I think that the discourse has to be thickened by that.

The other thing, and this is the reason I published Bob's -- one of the reasons I published Bob's essay, is that, you know, for a very long time now we have heard about the problem of American overreach. And it's understandable after Iraq and Afghanistan. Whatever you think about the wars, and people can hold different views, they were a prodigious projection of American power. And, again, not as prodigious as other ones, but we're now a much more spoiled, consumerist, materialist society. We're not accustomed to taking hits and losses, and so these things loom larger. But they were, by our standards, a very large exertion. And we've been dealing with the problem of American overreach.

I think it's important to understand that the other -- that there's also a problem of American under reach. I think that under reach actually is something that also has unsalutary strategic consequences for the United States; that it isn't the case that the only relevant question is, are we reacting or are we responding too much? And if one wants to look even in a coldhearted, realistic way at the possible damage to our interests,

never mind to our moral leadership in this system that Bob described, there is the question of are we doing too little? That is a perfectly legitimate question.

And when Obama was elected, he was elected insofar as foreign policy even mattered to that election -- actually it did because of the war in Iraq. It was one of the few elections where it did. He believed that the war and that Bush's policy has seriously, even unprecedently damaged America's standing in the world because we had put ourselves too far out and in too many people's faces. And we're now in this incredibly ironic situation whereby Obama's response to overreach, Obama's under reach, seems also to have damaged America's standing in the world in that, you know, when friends of mine come back from visiting almost any region of the world -- East Asia, the Middle East, Ukraine, Venezuela, Japan -- they come back and they all report the same thing, which is everybody asked them where are the Americans? I mean, I've been hearing this for two years now. Where are the Americans?

And I think that we have to understand that doing too little can also be a huge historical delinquency and damaging to our interests. And Americans have got to learn we've got to think about that and recognize it as a strategic problem.

MR. HIATT: Yeah. But I think that's a good, but let me turn it back to you, Bob, on that and say is it also possible that -- I mean, you said in America you don't buy the decline and we still have the capacity. But one of the things that's different between now and when Roosevelt was looking at the world is it is more multi-polar. You know, he looked at a world where Europe had been destroyed and the Soviet Union was close to destroyed and there's nobody in Asia. So, you know, now it's a great thing. Thanks a lot, in large part, to U.S. leadership, we're only 25 percent of the world economy, not 50 percent of the world economy. And presumably, if things keep going well, that 25 percent will go down. China will keep growing and India will keep growing.

Given that, is it realistic to keep thinking about a world in the way Franklin Roosevelt did or is Obama right, and I'm using him as a sort of archetype here, that, no, you've got to do it differently? You've got to let global rules apply in a way that they didn't use to.

MR. KAGAN: I mean, I don't think so. I mean, first of all --

MR. HIATT: Okay, next question. (Laughter)

MR. KAGAN: I mean, the irony about Roosevelt, of course, is that, yes, he saw a world -- he could foresee a world in which many of the other countries would be devastated, but he also thought the United States would have to do much less than it wound up doing. He had this idea of the four policemen. And he really thought, because who knew that the British were going to go out of business effectively, that he could say that Britain and Russia, you handle Europe, and China -- I don't know where he got that idea at the time, although it turned out to be prescient eventually -- you handle this and we'll handle the Western Hemisphere and we'll all work all this stuff out together. It was only when it turned out -- and this didn't happen on his watch, it happened on Truman's watch -- that the British were out of business, the Soviets were uncooperative, and China was engulfed in the revolution that they hadn't anticipated and the wrong guys won, that they said okay, and as Acheson said, we have to be the locomotive at the head of mankind and the rest of the world is the caboose, as he so -- Acheson was a great multilateralist, as you know. (Laughter)

Now, if you ask me are we in a more difficult position than we were from the beginning of the Cold War on, I would say we are in a better position than we were then. I mean, multi-polarity is not the -- the fact that there were many powers out there -- I've never understood this. Kissinger makes this argument. Power's more diffuse; therefore, we have a harder time. Why? It's good that power is diffuse. That means if

you have a lot of power, everybody else has less.

Were we better off when the Soviets controlled half of Europe? Were we better off, you know, when you had a China that was under Mao and you had the Soviet Union controlling half of Europe than we are now? Of course not. And the shrinking part of our GDP share of global GDP? Good, you know. If India has a bigger portion of GDP, if Brazil has a bigger portion of GDP, that's all redounds to our benefit in the same way that Japan and Germany grabbing 20 percent of what we once had redounded to our benefit.

If China has a huge GDP, and I mean I think I would focus on per capita GDP, which is a different story, but anyway, if they are much richer and are able to translate it into military power, that's a problem. But it's not the whole world.

I think that, in many ways, the world is more democratic, which means we have more natural allies, even if they don't always behave like allies. But prior to recently, you know, Putin and the Chinese were relatively isolated. Now, what I'm concerned about is, yes, now we're creating a more difficult multi-polar world by sort of giving Putin this opportunity to live out his dream in ways that will make our life eventually harder and harder. But it's currently still manageable, but we have to want to manage it.

And let me just answer one other thing that you said before you turn to Leon. I mean, answer actually something Leon said, which is I don't want to be poll-driven either and I want to give presidents their due, both good and bad, their ability to shape, and I get that. But, you know, there is a limit to how far any president is going to push. But more importantly, the solution to this may not just be let's get another president because I really do believe what the American people think matters. And what we really need from both parties is education, is reminding, because you're not going to build a foreign policy on the back of a public that doesn't understand or care why you're

doing it.

MR. HIATT: But that's exactly right.

MR. KAGAN: That would require presidential (inaudible).

MR. HIATT: And that doesn't take a certain view of American public opinion as a given.

MR. KAGAN: Right.

MR. HIATT: In other words, it's a malleable thing.

MR. KAGAN: Absolutely.

MR. HIATT: It's even fickle.

MR. KAGAN: Absolutely, right.

MR. HIATT: It's even worse than malleable.

MR. KAGAN: Right, right.

MR. HIATT: I mean, I think the thing about rules and Obama's idea of a world of rules, you know, rationalism is a wonderful thing, but not if the rationalist believes that the world itself is rational. That's not what rationalism is. And the world of rules only works if the whole world signs on to the rules. In other words, there's a wonderful -- you probably remember, I think it was in 1859, John Stuart Mill wrote a little essay on intervention or non-intervention in which he says that non-intervention will only work globally if everybody agrees not to intervene. If only some parties agree not to intervene -- meaning the idealistic, decent, pacific democracies, as he put it -- the wrong will be able to do the wrong, but the right will not be able to do the right.

And I think that whereas aspirationally, as we say now, Obama's idea of a world of rules and so on is admirable, I mean, Putin certainly should provide a rude awakening to the fact that when certain powers clearly don't play by our rules or have other rules or have no rules or have rules that are justified by mystical, jingoistic

nationalisms combined with all kinds of ideas of their own interests that we find even hard to understand, it makes no sense just to talk about the rules.

MR. KAGAN: Yeah.

MR. HIATT: I mean, I think this question of who leads or is being led is, you know, as you said earlier, I mean, American people didn't know where Quemoy and Matsu were, you know. And if a president stands up and says, oh, it's time for nation-building at home and we're war weary, people are going to say, yeah, I'm war weary. If they stand up and say you haven't heard of Aleppo, but here's why it matters, some people may respond. And I wonder whether part of the story that you're telling isn't that there was a generation that had a shared sense of United States being in real danger. Right? So Bob Dole and George Mitchell could disagree on a lot of things, but they remembered existential threats of Nazism and Communism, of course. And so the kind of vicious attacks that you saw by House Republicans against Clinton in the '90s, you know, when he wanted to do Kosovo or that Obama might fear if he wants to do something were probably a little bit different than -- I don't know.

MR. KAGAN: Yeah. Stimson has this great line which he used -- he was being critical of Roosevelt, but it applies to what you said, which is he said you can't ask the American people to tell you in advance whether they would follow you if you decided to lead. (Laughter)

MR. WIESELTIER: Yeah, right, right. Right.

MR. HIATT: And of course, you've written that it's very -- I mean, you can't take from what I just said that, oh, it was so easy back then and we all agreed. As you've written, you know, the fights over Vietnam and stationing missiles in Europe. You know, there was nothing easy about foreign policy just because we had a somewhat shared understanding of who the enemy was.

Why don't we see if there are questions? Yes, sir. I was going to say identify yourself and keep them brief, please.

MR. ROBERTS: Dan Roberts from *The Guardian*. This is a question for Bob.

You started off by wondering how much of this is a natural swing of the pendulum and how much, you know, by how deterministic it is.

MR. HIATT: There's a microphone behind you.

MR. ROBERTS: Thank you. Could you help flesh that out by imagining what an alternative might have looked like over the last five or six years? What would intervention in Syria or real opposition to Putin or an alternative to Iran, how would that have played out? I mean, is there a viable alternative or how much of this is natural and inevitable given where Obama started?

MR. KAGAN: Well, I think we know there was -- in the case of Syria -- and, you know, I don't want to make too much of all these. None of these things are like if only we had done this, the whole world would be entirely different. It wouldn't. And I think what the world has caught on to or at least what the world thinks it sees is a pattern of American action that looks like -- and they can read the polls, too, and there's all that. But Syria is one example.

Not only do we know there was a viable alternative. Barack Obama was prepared to undertake that viable alternative. He was ready to go ahead and use military force in Syria. It would not have solved the problem. We would not now be celebrating a new glorious democracy in Syria. But it would have tilted the fight in a different direction. I think that no plan that they were going to carry out and that I'm sure that they had in mind was simply going to hit chemical weapon sites. I'm sure they were going to hit other capacities. And I would have hoped that they would have hit particularly air capacity of

the Saddam -- of the Assad regime, which is now being used to, you know, kill innocents, et cetera, et cetera. And I know you all noticed that Freudian slip. So that was an option.

And you can't replay history and say what would have happened? But when he walked right up to the edge and maybe even beyond the edge of that and then pulled back, my view is the whole world kind of vibrated with that new piece of information. Because I think the world looking at that situation and watching the pattern of American behavior going back 25 years, if you think about Bosnia, if you think about Kosovo, Haiti, Somalia, what have you, this would have been a sort of obvious place where the United States would choose to intervene again, even if it's difficult.

By the way, those were all difficult, too. Everybody said Bosnia intervention couldn't possibly work. Kosovo almost didn't work, et cetera, et cetera. So there was nothing new about it's difficult. But the signal that was sent by not doing that, I think, turned out to be a powerful one.

Now, some people say that that even sort of figured into Putin's calculations. Maybe it did, maybe it didn't, but the impression that the United States may now have been moving out of a business that it had been in for a long time, I think that might have been, you know, the closest thing to a turning point.

We don't know what the end of the Iran story is. Right? I mean, it could be that that -- if Iran doesn't cut a deal that the President likes, that he'll go ahead and -- but doesn't it look less likely today than we might have thought a couple of years ago? So, you know, that's why the Saudis are panicking and the other Gulf states are panicking and even the French now have taken a further to the right hawkish position on Iran while they sell the Mistrals to Russia on the other hand.

MR. HIATT: Sir?

MR. WEIHUA: Chen Weihua with *China Daily*. I want to go back to the

talk about the rise of the rest and in your strategy how the U.S. is willing to let this rise of the rest take the leadership or is there space for their leadership? Or their leadership has to be endorsed by the U.S. or they only have a second row?

And the related question is, you know, we're talking about U.S. intervention every 17 months. Has that actually had some sort of an active impact? Because, you know, even some argue Russia's intervening in Ukraine is because the U.S. had been intervening in the last 20 years. And I would cite the Libya case, that China and Russia obviously believe a U.N. no-fly zone deal has been abused for regime changing. Now they're less willing to cooperate on Syria. Thank you.

MR. KAGAN: Well, it's a good question and it gets to this sort of basic problem in the international system, which is that different powers, especially powers that have different domestic ideologies or different governing practices, would like to see different world orders. I mean, the world order that's been shaped since World War II is a world order particularly suited to the United States.

As I say in the piece, is that God's order? It's not. Did the world vote on it? No. It's an order that's been imposed by a large collection of people on other people who might not want it that way. There's no just order in the system unless you believe, as I do, that the liberal order is, in fact, a more just order, but I can't prove it. You know, I can't prove it to China, for instance. They would prefer a different order. So --

MR. HIATT: Well, when you say "they," do you mean Chinese or you mean the Chinese regime?

MR. KAGAN: Well, I guess I mean the Chinese regime and I don't know what the Chinese people -- I can't honestly say I know what the Chinese people think. Right, fair enough.

MR. HIATT: I don't think any of us can, right.

MR. KAGAN: And, I mean, you know, if you want to be a true American and you believe in the principles of the Declaration of Independence, which I do, then you would say the people who don't think this is the right world order are wrong. But in any case, someone is going to be shaping the world order. And it is only natural and, I think, as I say, if you believe in the things that we believe in, it's better for the United States to be shaping that world order. And no, the United States does not have to say and now let's let the Chinese government shape the world order for a while. That's not something that I think we should do. I understand China's unhappiness that we don't let them do that, but, you know, that's the way the world works, at least until it doesn't anymore.

As far as sharing leadership with others, I wish others wanted to show more leadership. When I see a lot of these rising powers, these BRICs and what have you, Brazil and India, if anything they show every sign of not wanting to take responsibility. And by the way, I would say that about China, too. China acts like a country that would like to benefit in many respects from a certain kind of world order. They benefit economically, certainly, but they don't really want to expend a great deal upholding it. That's fine. That's their choice. But I don't see other -- I don't even see Europe sort of standing up and saying please let us share in global leadership. I wish they would, but that's not what's happening. And in a way, it's understandable for the reasons that I just got into in the article and I mentioned a little bit briefly here.

The United States is sort of uniquely situated to be able to do this. It's hard for everybody else. China, in particular, faces this big problem that the stronger it gets, the more scared everybody around them gets. That's a problem and China has not found a solution to that problem. And so long before China's going to be able to shape an order for good or for ill, they're going to have to solve that problem, that they scare everyone in their neighborhood and send them running off the United States for support.

MR. HIATT: Is there a connection with what kind of government they have internally? Are people scared of democracies in the same way, you think?

MR. WIESELTIER: I don't know how to answer that. I mean, I think that one sees in many regions of the world, I think, consistent and growing aspirations to democracy. I mean, I think that's an empirical observation.

You know, as I said, I think democratization is a very complicated and long process. And whereas it should be a part of something that American foreign policy supports, we're not going to have grand, climactic, transformative events. We didn't have it in Europe. It took 250 years for the Europeans to democratize and books were burned and people were burned. And after it succeeded, there were these two allergic reactions to democratic, liberal modernity called Nazism and Communism. I mean, so it's always push and pull and so on.

But, yeah, I do think, as Bob said, I think that -- you know, I was just in Kiev for a week and it was a very stirring experience in many ways. And I had discussions with Ukrainian friends and we were there, a group of us, to support -- to offer solidarity to their aspiration to belong to Europe. But I found myself in the very uncomfortable position of having to explain to them why the Europe to which they wish to belong doesn't seem to want to put itself out very far on their behalf, just as I found myself in the very awkward position of having to discuss with them the question of why is it that the United States to which they look, that the United States also doesn't seem to have any real appetite for any serious response to Putin as yet. So these are complicated things.

But unless -- if the United States -- one of the strong things about Bob's piece, I think, and he's right about this, that if the United States does not exert this kind of leadership, I don't see any other state that will, not just that any other state that can, but

any other state that will, for a whole variety of reasons. And what we have to then picture is what the world will look like or is beginning to look like in the absence of that American role. If you just pull that role out of the picture, what does the picture look like?

MR. KAGAN: Yeah, I know, it's (inaudible).

MR. HIATT: In the back.

MR. SKINNER: Hi. I'm Richard Skinner from the Catholic University of America.

And Bob Kagan opened his remarks by talking about the universalistic values held by Americans, but I hate to be another person pointing to polls, if you look at studies of American public opinion on foreign policy they give a fairly low priority to issues like democracy and human rights, particularly when there are tradeoffs, when you have to accept regimes that might be Islamist, that might be anti-American, that might be anti-Israel, or when it might involve wars that can lead to American casualties. So should American policymakers put their arguments to citizens in terms of these universalistic values or should they perhaps turn to more conventional realist arguments that maybe more Americans might be sympathetic to?

MR. KAGAN: Well, it's a good question. I want to make it clear that Americans had a universalistic ideology, but that has not kept them from being entirely hypocritical about executing it in foreign policy or at times being indifferent to it. I mean, that's -- but it does shape what they do and usually they feel guilty about times when they're hypocritical. But, of course, there's more going on than the promotion of democracy and I've never viewed the United States as a democracy promotion machine globally. We would have a very different policy if that were true.

You're also certainly right to point out that when Islam gets into the picture, Americans seem to be -- not just Americans, by the way, but the foreign policy

elite and the governing structures in both Congress and the administration seem to lose interest in democracy if it leads to the victory of Islamists.

Now, all that having been said, I do think -- first of all, I don't accept that there is this neat dichotomy between realist national interests and what type of regimes are out there in the world. I think if there's one thing that's clear is that America has a greater -- certainly has an interest in the greater number of democracies in the world.

And I also would disagree that the Americans are necessarily going to respond to these narrow national interests arguments. That's another thing that I get into. You know, if you tell Americans that they have a vital national interest in whether Japan and China get into a war, I'm not sure they buy that necessarily unless you explain the sort of bigger picture.

And realists these days, and for the past 20 years I would say, they have found very few vital interests that the United States needs to get involved in. They have theoretical vital interests in preventing the reemergence of a Soviet Union except when it turns out to be sort of Russia trying to reestablish a Soviet Union, and then they're not that interested, most realists. So I don't even know where this national interest thing gets you.

Roosevelt's argument, and I think the most successful argument made by a president selling an American policy to the American people, has been it is this whole bundle of concerns that we need to be interested in. It is whether the world is more democratic or not or whether we become a lonely democracy in an increasingly undemocratic world. It is whether this is a free trade world in which Americans can prosper. It is about whether there is a relationship between democracy and peace, which I think most people can argue there really is. Those are the kinds of broad arguments that I think if anything is going to appeal to the American people, historically those are the

things that appealed.

MR. WIESELTIER: And we've just conducted a kind of experiment in American public opinion in our Syrian policy, where for a long time and for most of the past three years humanitarian arguments haven't moved the needle at all. And then about six months ago, after Clapper's testimony and when things began to really look bad in Syria, there emerged this new possible rationale for action, which is the counterterrorism rationale, which is that Syria was going to become the new haven for al Qaeda and other sorts of -- but that hasn't moved the needle very far either. So it's very hard to know what to do except maybe to ignore the polls.

MR. HIATT: Yeah. Way back. I'm looking for women leaning in, I just want you to know. It's not me who's only picking men here, but I haven't seen any.

MR. WIESELTIER: Certainly not me, Fred.

MR. KOBER: Stanley Kober. During the Second World War, Judge Learned Hand gave a famous speech in which he said that the spirit of liberty is the spirit which is not too sure that it is right. As I listen to this conversation I find myself increasingly troubled by the certainty, the policy certainty, the moral certainty that if the American people disagree with us, the American people are wrong. They have to be educated. They have to be led. They don't understand the big picture. I'm not hearing any doubts. Would you disagree with Learned Hand or do you have doubts that simply have not been expressed so far?

MR. KAGAN: You know, of course there are doubts, but, at the end of the day, I don't know where doubts get you. I mean, I quote a lot of one of Leon's favorite people, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Niebuhr was all about talking about the doubts and talking about the moral complexity of all these situations. And you cannot look at American foreign policy and see an unbroken trail of good deeds. That's just not possible

and it's not possible for any human society to act in ways that are perfectly moral. And, of course, unless you have some kind of religious conviction, there's no way to be confident that you're always right.

Now, that can have one of two effects on you. One effect is that you can then say, well, I can't do anything. If you want to entertain your doubts to the point where you say, well, I can't possibly do anything, then that's one option.

The other is sort of Lincoln's option. You know, Lincoln in I think it was his second inaugural said, you know, both sides think they're right. Both sides think they've got God on their side and neither side can know for sure. And yet we have to fight this most awful of wars at the greatest possible cost. Those of us who believe that slavery is an evil have to move forward. Now, I don't know how much doubt you wanted Lincoln to express in that situation. He expressed the doubt. I don't know how much you would have wanted him to act on that doubt.

Of course the American people have a right to their view. I think that I'm right. They don't have to agree with me, but I don't know what I'm supposed to do. I've seen the American people do lots of different things. Are they always right? Is it your view the American people are always right? Obviously not. I mean, so you still are in the position of trying to say what you think is the right thing to do.

MR. WIESELTIER: I mean, the way this debate is often set up is that people who are for intervention are certain about their views and people are against intervention are decent, open-minded, skeptical, empirical individuals who eat doubts for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. (Laughter) Some of the most dogmatic people I have met in this debate are anti-interventionists, who are absolutely certain that they are correct.

None of us are correct. Each one of us has a solemn responsibility in a democratic society to form an opinion based on one's values and one's knowledge. And,

I mean, I think I'm right. Does that mean that I think I'm absolutely right? No, but the distinction between right and absolutely right is the distinction between a democratic order and something entirely different and intellectually and politically much less attractive.

MR. HIATT: And I'd add one more thing because given where I sit, I hear that a lot. And I think, you know, I mean, President Obama came in believing that he was replacing people who had acted with too much certainty and arrogance, and I think, you know, in a lot of cases that was true. And, you know, he says, and moreover, how can people who supported the war in Iraq and Afghanistan now come back and tell me what to do or, you know, be sure about your opinions? And I think there's a lot admirable about that caution and a sense of restraint.

I would only say that in not acting there are also consequences and that if you look at Syria, which Samantha Power now says is the worst humanitarian disaster of the decade, you know, it's probably not better because the United States was restrained. Can I prove it would have been better if the United States had acted? Of course not. You can never prove the counterfactual. But I just think you have to keep in mind that for the United States as the greatest power there are risks in acting and there are risks in not acting. And you're not going to do either with certainty, but either one is a choice you're making.

This gentleman right up here has been very patient.

MR. PATTERSON: Brent Patterson, former Brookings, former White House staff.

You've very dramatically put the question as overreach and under reach. I'd like to hear you three gentlemen discuss the future of the AUMF as an example of tangling with that question. Some say that's too out of date, some say the language is

too strong now. Obama mentioned he might repeal it. I'd like to hear you discuss how that may come out.

Bob, for instance, has anybody in the Executive Branch prepared a real draft of that? Has anyone in the Legislative Branch done so? Has any of the think tanks put one forward? Bob, have you written one yet? I'd be interested.

MR. HIATT: Okay, let's take that.

MR. PATTERSON: The Iran bomb, the Nigerian girls, you know, where are we on that?

MR. HIATT: Go ahead, Bob.

MR. KAGAN: Where are we? I don't know where we are on any of that. (Laughter)

I mean, if the question is, you know, before taking any kind of military action, no matter how large or small, does the President have to go back -- have to go to Congress and get authorization, you know, I sort of am where presidents have been since Thomas Jefferson, and the answer is no. You know, it is satisfying from a kind of, you know, American republic procedural point of view. It's very unwieldy when it comes to playing the role that the United States has played in the world and which all presidents have decided they don't want to hindered in that way.

I'm struck, as you raise that, Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt, of all people, the progressive Democrat, when the U.N. was being founded, he wanted to be able to respond to U.N. authorizations to use force without ever going to Congress about anything. He wanted the American representative at the council to be able to say, yes, we're going. He did not want to come back to Congress at all for that.

And, you know, as I say, it's a very -- it's satisfying from one perspective, but I think in terms of the role the United States has to play in the world it's not viable.

MR. PATTERSON: But it's been to Congress. There's a law on the books.

MR. KAGAN: Well, you mean the existing anti-terrorism?

MR. PATTERSON: AUMF.

MR. KAGAN: Yeah. Well --

MR. HIATT: I think the difficulty --

MR. KAGAN: But they don't go back every time they want to do something.

MR. HIATT: The difficulty -- I mean, President Obama has said, you know, we're coming to the end of an era of war. And so it puts him in -- I think, the administration in a difficult position. On the one hand, the AUMF is the longer we get away from 9-11, the less applicable it is. And, for example, when Zawahiri says that a certain group in Syria is not part of us, does that mean the United States no longer has legal authority to attack this group in the way that this administration still wants to do, drone attacks and other things, even when there's not an imminent danger in the United States?

Now, to go back and Congress and refashion an AUMF the way Senator Corker and some other people want would require -- you know, on the one hand, would acknowledge that the broadness of the AUMF as written in 2001 is no longer really applicable, but it would also require the administration to acknowledge that hostilities in some ways are not over and we're still in an era when the United States is going to have to be attacking. And I think they haven't -- you know, either because they don't really think they can work constructively with Congress or because they've been reluctant to confront that question, since his last speech on it, they really haven't done much.

MR. KAGAN: It's also -- I mean, one of the really tragic dimensions of

some of the policy perplexities that we face, certainly the humanitarian ones, those that do and do not have strategic dimensions, is the question of time. I mean, there are certain emergencies that unless you understand that if your response is not rapid, then you haven't really understood the problem. In other words, you know, there are certain crises to which we can apply traditional models of escalation and diplomacy and patience. And anyway, it's always going to run too slowly.

But one of the things that really strikes me now, and this has partly to do with the complexity of the machinery and other things, is that -- I mean, you know, in Bosnia it is not quite correct to say that we put an end to the Bosnian genocide. We prevented the Bosnian genocide from being much worse than it already was. We didn't put an end to the Bosnian genocide. We responded much too late.

And one of the things -- and I say this is a tragic dimension because I'm not sure what the solution is, but one has to at least conceptually recognize that there are certain problems that need immediate -- what did Carter use to call it, rapid deployment? And if you don't recognize that, then, as I say, you've misunderstood the nature of the problems.

MR. HIATT: The lady right there.

SPEAKER: Hi. I'm with the Women's Foreign Policy Group.

Mr. Kagan, you mentioned somewhat early in your remarks that you think that this period of retrenchment we're going to is going to be much longer than previous ones. But since that would lead to sort of a diminishing role in the world for the U.S. as the unipole, and Americans like so much to be the unipole, do you think that that would be a way to sort of pull us out of this retrenchment if Americans realized that we're not longer the big fish if we pull out?

MR. KAGAN: Yeah. Well, first of all, let me just say I'm not making an

iron clad -- I have doubts about where we're necessarily going. I'm more wondering whether the old model that I used to entertain of sort of the sine wave of American behavior is still applicable or whether we're about to move into something else.

But, you know, in terms of Americans feeling like they like being number one, you know, an interesting thing about the polls is that they no longer feel like they are number one. The number of Americans who now thing that either now or soon China will be number one, the number of Americans who believe that America no longer wields the kind of power that it wielded a decade ago, that's over 50 percent of Americans believe that now. I think they have been so persuaded by the idea of decline that they've really kind of ingested it.

Now, in the essay I express some I won't say concern, but, as an analytical matter, I feel like many Americans may be relieved by that. Because if you're not as powerful as you used to be, then you have many excuses not to do anything, which is what they would like to do. And so, in a way, good, let somebody else -- you know, there's a lot of this sort of let the rest of the world do what it's going to do. It's not for us, either because we don't have the capacity or because we shouldn't be involved.

So the straight answer to your question is I'm not so -- I don't know how much Americans are still wedded to the we're number one and, therefore, we have to do X, Y, and Z as much as they used to be.

MR. HIATT: Yes, right in the second row here.

MS. BICKS: My name is Jan Bicks. I'm a private citizen.

And I don't think I'm leaning in, but I am leaning against Obama's foreign policy. And the question I'd like you to discuss is the question of Egypt and whether or not it demonstrates the danger of Obama's inability to take action, whether military or simply sort of behind the scenes weight against whatever Morsi was doing when he did it,

and the decision by el-Sisi to mount his coup and now to get himself elected. And we're probably going to be right back at square one with another Mubarak.

MR. KAGAN: Yeah. Well, it's an excellent question and, I mean, I personally believe that our policy in Egypt is leading us toward a kind of disaster since I think that the Sisi regime is going to be a disaster and it's going to be a disaster funded by over a billion American dollars. And so whatever happens in Egypt is going to have "Made in America" on it.

Now, if you ask me -- you know, this is an area of policy where I wish I could say Obama was unique. I have felt all along, as you do, beginning with the very belated response to Mubarak's clear loss of authority to the then military's brief takeover in which they did all kinds of things that we shouldn't have approved of, to Morsi, and now to el-Sisi that a sense that we really should be or can't be effective in using our influence. When that country gets $1.5 billion of American assistance there is this sort of sense, which I think pervades this administration, that we just don't have the ability to do this. Look at what the -- you know, if the UAE pumps in $5 billion, what does our 1.5 -- well, what the Egyptian military cares about is the tie to the United States. And we've been unwilling -- now -- but there's many reasons for this.

First of all, this is not the first time an American administration has decided to back whichever, you know, military strongman runs a Middle Eastern country. Much of it is driven by Israel, which has lobbied heavily in the American Congress against a cutoff of aid because Israel's attitude toward democracy in the Middle East is they love it in Israel and don't want to see it anywhere else. And they certainly don't want any Islamists having any power. And so American policy has sort of redounded to we'll do what makes us -- A, we don't want to use our leverage because it's unpleasant and we don't think we have any; B, it makes Israel happy, so we'll just go along.

As I said, I wish I could say that Obama is uniquely to blame for carrying out such a policy. It's fully supported by almost everyone in the U.S. Congress, you know.

MR. WIESELTIER: But I would say the single most -- to me the single most heartbreaking thing of the last five years is the U.S. and Europe's response, or lack of it, to the Arab Spring. You know, if you look back to '89 to '91, you know, there was hesitation at the beginning. Bush told Ukraine don't make trouble. But pretty soon both parties, leaders of both parties said this is a great opportunity. You're pulling free. Let's really try using the full -- not send in troops, but the full leverage available to us. And if there had been a similar response to what, you know, might have been seen as a once in a generation opportunity beginning with a market seller in Tunisia, and the United States had rallied Europe, which admittedly was tired and so forth, you know, and said this is an opportunity, let's embrace, let's show what the benefits might be. There's trade, there's exchanges, there's book translations to be done. You know, maybe it would have turned out exactly the same, but what a pity that we didn't try for it (inaudible).

MR. KAGAN: Well, but in the Middle East Obama's accomplished something rather unique, which is there are presidents who offend the theocrats and the petrocrats, and they support the liberals and the Democrats. There are others who do the opposite. Obama has somehow found a way to anger everybody. I mean, so literally there is almost no one in the Middle East who trusts us right now.

MR. HIATT: Let's take one more. This gentleman here.

MR. AL-HASSAN: Thank you so much. My name is Al-Hassan. I'm from the African (inaudible). My question is a piggyback to the first question here.

You've painted a picture of intervention or non-intervention, you know, as -- you know, I'm wondering if we can find a middle ground in here, like the Syrian

example, you know. Can the U.S. use that gambit diplomacy, you know, when it gets to the edge having, you know, raised this fear and then seize the moment, I mean, with this leverage, and then use other soft diplomatic, you know, tools and, in this case, look at the effect or the impact of psychological warfare, for example? Use the media, feeding fear.

MR. HIATT: Let's let Bob answer this. Otherwise, we're going to have to end.

MR. KAGAN: Well, look, I mean, when a nation like the United States has a reputation for being willing to use power and other nations believe that the United States is going to use its power, it often doesn't have to because then the ability to use soft power, et cetera, comes into play. I mean, George Shultz, who was my favorite Secretary of State, who I worked for, said, you know, it's power and diplomacy; I need both. And I think John Kerry wanted to have power and diplomacy when he went off to negotiate about Syria with Lavrov, but he only had the diplomacy.

The problem is right now, and I think it's a problem that's metastasizing, is that America's increasingly developing a reputation for not being willing to use power, which means that the soft power tools are going to be less and less effective. I mean, you have to show that there's a certain amount of toughness and willingness to act in order not to have to act. And I feel like in a way we're now going to be in a situation, which we've been in before, which we were in after Vietnam, where right now the world thinks that we're kind of moving out of the game.

Unfortunately, at some point, we're going to have to demonstrate that that's not true. That doesn't have to be through intervention, by the way. I personally would like to see us move a few tens of thousands of troops that we took out of Europe back into Europe just to maintain that good deterrent posture. I would like to see us do more in East Asia to fulfill the promise of the so-called pivot. I would like to see greater

military capacity, which we may not even have to use. But, unfortunately, we've got the non-use, the cutbacks, the declining capacity, and the evident American unwillingness, both in terms of the public and the President, that is sending this very powerful signal to the rest of the world.

MR. HIATT: Well, I would like to commend The New Republic for publishing this piece, thank Brookings for having us, and recommend all of you to read it. It really is extraordinary and thought-provoking. So thank you very much. (Applause)

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