

Center for American Progress



SPECIAL PRESENTATION:

**“THE GOOD FIGHT: CAN LIBERALS – AND ONLY
LIBERALS – WIN THE WAR ON TERROR?”**

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MR. LAWRENCE J. KORB: – Center for American Progress and I'd like to welcome you to what I think will be a fascinating discussion of Peter Beinart's new book, *The Good Fight: Can Liberals – and Only Liberals – Win the War on Terror?*

In your packet, we have their biographies. I'll spend a few seconds talking about them. We also have in your packet our plan to get out of Iraq. A lot of times people said progressives or Democrats don't have a plan to deal with it, so we put out our own. And you're also welcome to take any of our other publications out there, and Peter's book is also for sale outside if you didn't have a chance to get it on the way in. Please turn off your cell phones, pagers, or anything else that might cause you problems. This session is being taped by C-SPAN and will be shown later today.

In the almost five years since the attacks of September 11th and the beginning of the war on terror, there has been a debate about what's the best way for the United States to prevail and Peter has tried to fill in that gap. There's also been a concern that the Democrats or liberals do not have any alternative; he also tried to address that in his book. And here what we'll do this morning is Peter will spend 10 or 15 minutes summarizing the book, though, as I told him, I don't think he needs to: everybody seems to have read it and commented –

MR. PETER BEINART: If only that was so.

MR. KORB: – on it. And then I'll ask Bill Kristol and Jeff Goldberg to spend five to ten minutes commenting on it. And we're really pleased with the panel we have today. We have people who are distinguished journalists and distinguished intellectuals, I think, who have really helped frame the debate that this country needs as it confronts this new threat to our security.

Peter right now is the editor-at-large of *The New Republic* and also a nonresident fellow at the Brookings Institution. I guess that means they don't give you an office.

MR. BEINART: Or much of anything else actually. (Laughter.)

MR. KORB: Okay. And he graduated from Yale and Oxford. And before becoming editor-at-large, he was senior editor and you've probably seen his op-eds in all of the major newspapers or have seen him providing commentary on CNN.

Bill Kristol is the editor of the very influential politically magazine *The Weekly Standard*. You've probably also seen him on *FOX News Sunday* and FOX News Channel. Before starting *The Weekly Standard*, William Kristol served in government for two very important posts, one, with Vice President Dan Quayle and Secretary of

Education William Bennett. Like Peter, he is also an author. He coauthored the *New York Times* bestseller *The War over Iraq: America's Mission and Saddam's Tyranny*.

Our final panelist is Jeff Goldberg, who's the Washington correspondent for *The New Yorker*. He also was a writer for the *New York Times* magazine, has won a number of awards for his reporting, particularly on the Middle East and the Muslim world. I told him that the article he wrote in *The New Yorker* about Brent Scowcroft was widely quoted in Europe when I was there last fall, particularly the line where Scowcroft said, "I don't know Dick Cheney." Everybody in Europe seemed to have read that. His book, *Prisoners: A Muslim and a Jew Across the Middle East* will be published in October of this year.

So thank you all for joining us and, Peter, I'd like to ask you to begin.

MR. BEINART: Thank you. Well it's a great pleasure to be here at CAP. This book had two unlikely inspirations. The first was George W. Bush and something he said during the 2004 presidential campaign that kind of haunted me in the days after John Kerry's loss and it was this line that he repeated over and over again, "You may not always agree with me, but at least you know where I stand."

And the second inspiration also came from a conservative, from Bill's ex-colleague David Brooke who said something along the lines of "You liberals are very good at talking about individual policies, but I don't know who you would put on your ties." At *The New Republic*, no one ever wore a tie, so that wasn't an immediate problem, but the larger issue – which was that liberals were good at talking about individual policies but not good at talking about first principles, not good at laying out a larger story about what they believed about the post 9/11 world – I think was something that I really was thinking a great deal about in the days after John Kerry's loss in 2004.

And I began to think that this intellectual weakness that exists on our side in terms of laying out a vision for the post 9/11 world was connected to a certain intellectual amnesia, to a lack of understanding of what liberal meant at a time when the term liberal was a badge that people wore with pride; a lack of understanding about how liberals – about our own intellectual tradition and how, in fact, liberals responded to the last new, great era in American national security, which was the beginning of the Cold War.

So I went kind of rummaging back through this history – the late 1940s, 1950s, into the early 1960s – trying to understand what the liberal story about how you protect America and make a better world was at that time. And so I want to start by saying what I think the conservative story is because I think you can find the roots of the conservative story actually in the a period as well, and then talk about the liberal story that I think we have forgotten to some degree. And then end by saying something about what I think it means for today.

Some people have suggested that the roots of post 9/11 Bush foreign policy can be found in the neoconservative movement, which really emerges in the early 1970s. But

what really struck me, reading the people who founded the modern conservative movement around the founding of the magazine *National Review* in 1955, was the remarkable similarities between the anxieties they had about the world and the kind of anxiety that you've seen from George W. Bush and Dick Cheney since 9/11.

The great fear amongst conservative intellectuals in the 1950s – William F. Buckley, Whittaker Chambers, James Burnham, most important foreign policy intellectual in the *National Review* orbit, was that America didn't believe strongly enough in itself. We might have more money than the Soviets, we might have more weapons than the Soviets but they had this iron will, this fanatical self confidence, this absolute certainty that they represented good and we represented evil, and that we lacked that same certainty. We were prone to moral relativism, to thinking maybe the Cold War was all a big mistake. And so the role of government was to restore this moral clarity, to strengthen America's will, to convince Americans that in fact we represented virtue, we represented good in a struggle against good and evil.

So if you look at conservatives – widespread conservative support for Joseph McCarthy based on the idea that McCarthy – finally, someone is coming along and drawing a clear line in the sand. McCarthy is saying, "Communists will no longer be tolerated in the institutions of American life. We're finally going to draw a clear line in the sand between American freedom and Soviet communism."

Again, after Vietnam in this deep, widespread, conservative sense that America has lost faith in itself, that America no longer believes in its virtue, that America is plagued by this self doubt and Ronald Reagan takes office and famously says, "The era of self-doubt is over." And then again a third time you see the story again after 9/11; this concern amongst conservatives after September 11th that America has become weak in the 1990s because under Bill Clinton we've lost our capacity for moral judgment. We've become a nation of baby boomer moral relativists and the great challenge for George W. Bush is not merely material, but it's kind of spiritual: it's to reestablish America's faith in itself, to eradicate this plague of self-doubt and moral relativism that has emerged under Bill Clinton.

And so George W. Bush in his 2002 State of the Union address famously uses this talismanic phrase "evil" talking about the axis of evil, referring back to Reagan's 1983 speech to the National Association of Evangelicals where Reagan talked about the evil empire. And Reagan himself is referring back in that '83 speech to Whittaker Chambers' 1952 book *Witness*. And so you see this trajectory of conservatives arguing that one of the key roles of government in a threatening world is to eradicate the self-doubt that plagues the United States. And this leads to a particular view of criticisms that the United States is not living up to its own standards.

Again, if you see our Achilles' heel as our self-doubt, our lack of belief in our own virtue, nothing is more dangerous, nothing is more sinister than a suggestion that in fact America is not living up to its own principles around the world. And so when George W. Bush and Dick Cheney are confronted about Guantanamo Bay, for instance –

this represents America not living up to its own standards on human rights and democracy – there is an immediate rejection, a sense that this is a sinister attempt to undermine our faith in ourselves and Bush and Cheney both say in various different words, “this is absurd, everyone knows America spreads freedom around the world.”

The liberal story, and I think again if Burnham is the most central figure for this conservative story, I think that the central liberal figure – my candidate for the tie would be the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, who has enormous influence amongst American liberals in the ‘40s, ‘50s, and ‘60s – influences people as diverse as Arthur Schlesinger, George Kennan, Martin Luther King. And Kennan’s argument is exactly the opposite. Kennan’s argument is the right kind of self-doubt is actually America’s great advantage over its totalitarian foes. The right kind of self-doubt is actually the key to our deep strength as a society; that’s it’s precisely America’s recognition that we are not inherently virtuous, that we are not destined to be good that leads us to do the things that make us an exceptionally great nation. And this has enormous implications for American policy at the dawn of the Cold war.

If you think about where America is at the end of World War II, we represent 50 percent of the world’s GDP, Western Europe is on its knees, and you think about how Dick Cheney might have responded to that set of circumstances. But what the Truman administration does is they make a self-conscious effort to embed American power within powerful international institutions, NATO but also the UN the IMF, the World Bank on the assumption that if we give weaker nations some influence over our power, they will see that power as legitimate and our power will endure. George Kennan says the Soviet Union is an empire and empires always crack from the periphery, but if we build an alliance system in Western Europe and also in East Asia that is not imperial, that is based on persuasion and consent, not command and brute force, our alliance system will prove flexible and it will endure. And, indeed, as early as 1953 the pole started rising up against the Soviet Union, but because America has convinced people in Western Europe that our power benefits them and not only us, our alliance system endures.

This also has enormous implications – this Niebuhrian idea – for domestic policy. Liberals I think have been confused to some degree about how to respond to George W. Bush’s soaring second inaugural address where he takes up the Wilsonian mantle and talks about spreading freedom around the world. But Bush tends to talk about American democracy as a kind of a fixed model for the world. We’ve crossed a kind of democratic finish line and we stand behind this finish line waving at the benighted countries of the rest of the world, urging them to kind of get their act together and become democracies as well. That’s really not the way the Cold War liberals I write about in my book talked about American democracy.

What they said would inspired the world was America’s democratic struggle to become a better nation, America’s struggle against its own capacity for injustice to become a greater, freer nation. That’s why civil rights and anticommunism were so critically interlinked; not liberals saying in 1953 that America was good enough as it is because we were so superior to the Soviet Union – even though we were – but saying that

what would inspire the world, or would inspire freedom around the world was in fact America's struggle to overcome segregation and overcome McCarthyism, precisely because struggling in your own society to become more democratic is hard while sermonizing to other countries is easy.

Chester Bowles, who as Kennedy's deputy secretary of state said, "The world will see us as no better than we really are." And one of the things that really struck me when I was researching for this book was a quote by the Jordanian journalist Romi Hori (ph) where he says, "If you want to understand what inspires people struggling for freedom in the Muslim world today, don't look at George W. Bush's speeches, look at the civil rights movement between 1956 and 1964 because that was a time when people saw the United States, the most powerful country in the world, struggling to become a more just, more free society itself." And it's this sense of complacency since 9/11, this increase stringency we have about how other countries govern themselves, about their human rights records and our increased complacency about ourselves – this mismatch – which I think has led to some of the deep cynicism and anger that we've seen in the Bush era.

Critical to this idea as well is the idea that unless the United States become stronger at home, we can't bear the burdens of freedom around the world. In Kennedy's first debate with Richard Nixon, he gets the first question and it's a debate entirely on domestic policy. And Kennedy said, "I know this is a domestic policy debate, but I want to start by saying that Nikita Khrushchev is in New York tonight and everything I'm going to say about domestic policy bears on our ability to be a strong enough nation to compete with and defeat the Soviet Union and spread freedom around the world," and then he talks about the poverty he saw in West Virginia and he talks about black children not graduating from high school at the same rates as white children. And I think this idea about America becoming a stronger nation because the world will not be able to rely on us for much if we are not strong at home is also critically important to the liberal story.

I think if you look at this era, one of the things that we've seen is that America has been hollowed out. America has become weaker at home at the very time that we have defined this extremely extensive vision for what America is going to do abroad; not only macroeconomically, not only these large, upper-income tax cuts that will hit just when the Baby Boom retires and send America into fiscal crisis and make it very difficult for us to sustain the military spending, the homeland security spending, not to mention foreign aid spending to do something about education in the Muslim world, but microeconomically as well.

One of the reasons the United States could be so generous in the Marshall Plan, spend such a lot of money trying to rebuild Western Europe, or even Kennedy's Alliance for Progress, which is really an astonishing amount of money by today's terms, was because life was getting better for working-class Americans. Standards of living go up dramatically for working-class Americans between the last 1940s and the early 1970s, and one of the things I think liberals have to integrate in to their foreign policy story is this recognition that the breakdown of the American welfare state compact in which people used to rely on employers to provide them with healthcare and defined benefit

pensions but now those employers increasingly no longer do so, and so life has become much, much more uncertain and risky and economically difficult for middle class Americans that they have held their heads afloat largely because women have entered the work force in vast numbers allowing Americans to maintain a middle-class standard of living, but at the cost of the average two-parent family working 12 more weeks per year than it did in 1969, with all the enormous pressure that puts on the raising of children – that unless liberals respond to that domestic reality, we will not be able to be generous around the world. Americans will continually say, “Wait a second. Why are you doing this for Pakistan – trying to help Pakistan build a public education system as an alternative to these madrassas when you’re not helping me at home?”

In the liberal Cold War story, generosity around the world was also based on a generous society at home and the rebuilding of the welfare state compact has to be integrated in to the liberal foreign policy story, just as Kennedy tried to integrate it in in that 1960 debate.

So let me just end by saying something more specifically about what I think this means for today. What the liberals of the 1940s and ‘50s recognized was that America was interdependent. This idea of interdependence is really near the core of the liberal story; the idea that we cannot secure our security or our prosperity alone. They had seen depression and fascism emerged in Western Europe and imperil the United States. But this reality of interdependence is so much greater today, I think it’s one of the things that Tony Blair recognizes and tries to keep saying over and over again, but the Bush administration really doesn’t – that there are so many more ways that what happens inside other countries can threaten the United States, from jihadism in a backward country like Afghanistan to a bird flu emerging in rural China, to Thailand’s banking system collapsing in the late 1990s and almost plunging Russia – half way across the world – into recession.

In such a world, it seems to me the great liberal challenge is to help other countries better govern themselves because if other countries better govern themselves, if they are more democratic, if they can provide public health, if they can regulate their financial systems, if they can secure their loose weapons of mass destruction, then we are less likely to be threatened at home. That is the great liberal challenge.

But the great Niebuhrian insight which I think is the corollary to this is that America cannot do it alone; America lacks the capacity. But more than that, if America takes it upon itself to be a transcendent moral law of its own, to say we are going to tinker under the hood of other countries and decide how you govern themselves by ourselves, we start to look like an empire – just what Kennan feared we would – and we lose our legitimacy. And in the liberal story, legitimacy is power.

And the answer to this conundrum, what Blair keeps on trying to talk about and I think Democrats in the United States have to pick up as well, is the only answer is the answer that liberals came forward with in the late 1940s: powerful international institutions in which we embed American power so we can act more aggressively in the

world. The paradox is that the more powerful we want to act in the world, the more aggressively, the more proactively, the more powerful these international institutions have to become.

But international institutions are based on reciprocity. They're based on the idea that the United States is also held to a higher standard; not the John Bolton idea that we should make increasing demands of how other countries govern themselves, but we reject any suggestion that we should be held to a higher standard ourselves on human rights or on the environment. And I think that the great challenge for liberals in the coming years will not be the kind of neoimperial project that the Bush administration has set out on since 9/11. I think its days are over. I think we can already see that in the way the Bush administration has retrenched on Iran, for instance.

The great challenge I think for liberals will be the growing isolationism that emerges in the wake of the deep pessimism and exhaustion that we have seen with American foreign policy in recent years; this growing sense that, you know what, we took our best shot at creating better world after 9/11. It turned out the people of the Islamic world want nothing to do with us. The people of the world more generally would like us to simply pack up and go home. The most dangerous periods in the twentieth century were those periods were America tried to do that. And what I hear from non-Americans when I talk to non-Americans is not that at all. It's something actually very different and whenever I hear it really stops me in my tracks. It's something much more akin to "When do we get America back? When do we get back the country that by struggling to become a better society at home, by holding itself to a higher standard inspired people around the world to go home and remake their societies in a more free way?" So that seems to me the great liberal challenge of the coming years, and it's that challenge that I wrote this book to address.

Thanks very much.

MR. KORB: Thank you very much, Peter. You can see why Joe Klein in the review in *New York Times* called it a brave and crucial book.

Bill?

MR. WILLIAM KRISTOL: Thank you, Larry. It's good to be here at the Center for American Progress, always fun to be the conservative skunk at a liberal garden party. (Laughter.) I seem to do a lot of that these days. I was at Brookings and none of the conservatives were talking to me because of my position on Rumsfeld having to go or on immigration. I get invited to Brookings. I'm going through a magazine launch later today for some new liberal quarterly called *Democracy*. But I do this because I'm in favor of think-tanks, having been associated with a couple myself. I'm in favor of small magazines that lose money. I'm in favor of encouraging wealthy donors to support them on both sides of the aisle and if the price of having a good conservative think-tanks and magazines is to have some misguided, wealthy liberals supports liberal think-tanks, that's okay with me, so it's good to be here.

I also come mostly to praise Peter, not to bury him, which is much to his unhappiness. He desperately needs criticism from the right and I'm not going to satisfy that need of his. Peter should just release his inner neocon instead of fighting it. You're really a lot happier when you just embrace what you really are instead of resisting it because it's not quite politically correct, or isn't acceptable in certain social circles.

Now, Peter has written an interesting book, I agree with some of it and disagree with some of it. What's not to like though, really, in a book that the core of which praises Truman's foreign policy and indeed Reagan's foreign policy. I thought the section on Reagan – I'm older than Peter and he wasn't really around for the Reagan years, but the fact that liberals cannot basically acknowledge that Reagan was right is a very big deal. This was the fundamental debate of the last 30 years, prior to 9/11 certainly, the last 25 years prior to that, on American foreign policy. It was an extremely bitter and divided time. Reagan put all his chips on the table based on a certain view of the world, of the U.S., of the Soviet Union, of what would work and I do think he was right and was vindicated and that is an important fact.

And this is not a matter of telling narratives or telling stories, it's just a fact. Liberals made certain predictions as to what the effects of Reagan's foreign policy would be and conservatives made other predictions, and I think we conservatives were pretty much vindicated. I would say, frankly, that Peter's account of Truman's foreign policy is a little bit of a sanitized account. You know, it's Truman without Hiroshima and without the Korean War. I mean, literally without the Korean war, I think, although Peter didn't write a history of American foreign policy so he doesn't have to discuss every incident, but that was kind of a big deal – a very difficult war, bitterly criticized by some in Truman's party; ended up in the subsequent presidential election both presidential candidates really ran away from it – ended in an unsatisfactory deadlock.

I would say – the way I would put my friendly challenge to Peter is, can you be for Truman's foreign policy without being for Korea? And if you're for Korea, why do you now desert on Iraq, because a lot of the same criticisms were made and could be made of Bush in Iraq as were made against Truman with respect of Korea, including the fact that the war did not have by any means an entirely satisfactory outcome, as we know for 50 years of horrible North Korean tyranny and now an actual nuclear threat from that regime which we unfortunately had to leave in place in 1952–1953.

So I would just – on Truman just another minute, Max Boot, my colleague at the *Weekly Standard* wrote a review, a little essay – op-ed on Peter's book and the *Los Angeles Times* a couple of weeks ago making the point, which I think is true, that Peter's account that Truman's foreign policy is often multilateralist – it didn't look that way at the time. I mean, obviously the United Nations was founded, but it's also obviously the case that Dean Acheson, Truman's secretary of state, scoffed at the idea that the way to solve this or that problem is to leave it to the United Nations. They did use the UN in 1950: the Soviets happened to be boycotting the Security Council and they got UN authorization for the use of force in Korea, but Truman committed troops before he got

that authorization and made perfectly clear that we would've committed troops regardless of whether the Soviet representative would have shown up at that particular Security Council meeting.

Truman committed us to helping Greece and Turkey in a unilateral way. The Berlin Airlift was unilateral. NATO was a great achievement, and I'm a strong supporter of this – I think we entirely agree. I'm a strong supporter of alliances; if that makes me multilateral, I guess so be it. I think the Bush administration has at times actually neglected alliances. It could have used NATO more effectively, certainly, after 9/11, though to be fair to the Bush administration, in Asia I think they've actually been pretty strong on the Japan alliance, very strong on India. They're not nearly as unilateral as the cartoon version of Bush has it. After all, this is a guy who has deepened our alliance with Japan, not an unimportant country; has basically creative a de facto alliance with India, not an unimportant country; has endorsed and presided over the further enlargement of NATO, not a trivial matter. NATO is now deployed out of area for the first time in Afghanistan. I mean, it's not the case that Bush sort of runs around the world committing U.S. forces without regard – without trying to work with other nations. And indeed in North Korea and Iran with the Six-Party Talks and the current diplomacy – we'll see if they work, but they're certainly plenty multilateral.

In any case, Truman was more unilateral than Peter's account would lead one to believe. NATO is a consequence of his decision to commit U.S. forces to staying in Europe and to defending Western Europe and to containing the Soviet Union. It wasn't a cause of it, and that was a good way to do it. But if for some reason a communist government had gotten elected in France in '48 and NATO hadn't been able to be put together as quickly, I don't think that would've changed Truman's mind about the fundamental character of U.S. obligations and U.S. leadership.

One word on Iraq, which Peter has a whole chapter on and can speak for himself on his decision now that he was wrong to have supported the war. I would just say that I don't agree with – I mean he's certainly entitled to come to that conclusion – plenty of Americans have, I think mistakenly, but not entirely unreasonably, given how difficult it's been – but the reason he gives which is that if it had been basically a UN-authorized invasion it would've had much more legitimacy, it would've gone much better on the ground, I really don't think that's true empirically. And the fact is Bush got a lot of UN support right after the war. He reached out to the UN. Unfortunately – Sergio de Mello was there. Unfortunately, there was the bombing and he got killed and the security situation became too difficult for the UN or anyone else much, frankly, to do a lot. That's our problem because we didn't secure – we didn't do a good job on the security situation.

The idea that the Iraqis in the insurgency would've cared whether it was a UN sort of blessed occupation or a coalition of the willing I just find that a little hard to believe. People can look at his chapter six. It's not fair to – you can read the book and make your own judgment. I just don't think that is really at the heart of the decision on Iraq. And I would say in that respect I think Al Gore is right. Al Gore came out against

the Iraq war in September of 2003 when Bush had announced we were going to the UN and when no one knew whether we would or wouldn't succeed in getting – we did succeed in getting one UN resolution, incidentally, in November. We didn't succeed in getting a second one in March.

The fact is if Iraq was a mistake for various reasons – it was undoable, we could've contained Saddam, the cost isn't worth the benefit, et cetera, et cetera – if that's the judgment, that's the judgment. It doesn't matter whether we could've twisted arms and gotten the UN Security Council to agree. Conversely, if Iraq was necessary and right, if you couldn't leave Saddam in the middle of the Middle East with his terror ties, with its capability to restart the weapons of mass destruction programs in a post 9/11 world, then that's the right judgment and it doesn't really matter whether you have 30 countries or 50 or 60 countries with you. So I just don't think it's the fundamental – I mean, I think Gore is – I hate to say this, but I will say it: Gore was right. He was right to be against the Iraq war. He wouldn't have changed his mind, incidentally. What if we had gotten the second resolution? If you thought it was a strategic mistake, a geopolitical mistake, then it's a mistake. And if it's not, it's not. And it's just not clear that the UN just analytically can bear the weight that Peter gives it in his account of Iraq.

One other just small point, I think one thing that's important to his judgment on why Iraq was a mistake is that it was a mistake for the Bush administration to be state centered – as he puts it, state centered in its analysis of terrorism. And he embraces – this is a brief part of the book around pages 143, 144; sort of this account of these terrorist networks in which the states are much less important than they used to be. I don't buy that, and this is just an analytical question. States remain incredibly important. Terrorist groups that can find safe harbor under the protection of regimes in countries are much, much, much more dangerous than scattered terrorist cells that have to be on the run. They can of course communicate by the internet and of course can pull off maybe a Madrid or a London, but that's very different from training camps, it's very different from having the peace and quiet, so to speak, to do serious research on acquiring weapons of mass destruction or developing them. I think the old-fashioned view that regimes matter most and nation-states matter most remains true in the 21st century, but this is a broader debate. It's not really a conservative/liberal debate I wouldn't say, but I just make this sort of point analytically.

Finally, near the end of the book – again, you can't criticize people for books they didn't write and he didn't write a book about what we should do now about the whole world. I would say that it's not clear where the implications of Peter's kind of liberal internationalism, slightly more multilateral version, I would regard it, of the Bush doctrine – you know, kinder, gentler neoconservatism, whatever it is. I'm just trying to heap on you more troublemaking adjectives and nouns here for you. It's not clear where that would lead you in dealing with current threats. And he mentions North Korea and Iran on page 201, 202 and says that we conservatives – people like me – are very impatient with their nuclear program, very worried that things will just keep getting worse, and that the liberal tradition by contrast counsels patience: pursue diplomacy, try

to limit their arsenals, convince China for that matter to avoid brash action. Don't fear a long standoff.

The liberal narrative: America can be patient because time is on democracy's side. Well, I'm happy to have an empirical, analytical debate about whether patience is really the right way to go with respect to Iran and whether letting Ahmadinejad get away with what he is getting away with is the right course or not, but it does not seem to me clear that that's the right answer. And I would further make the point that Sudan, a country Peter mentions in the context of terror in the '90s, but not in the context of the current crisis there – I mean, do we think patience has been on the side of stopping the killing there? Do we not think that a more aggressive U.S. policy would have been wise? I think the Bush administration deserves some credit for being pretty aggressive, but I myself would have done more. Peter's magazine has argued eloquently for doing much more there. You can't get UN Security Council approval because – (unintelligible) – of China, and therefore you would have to do a version of a coalition of the willing and to be serious you would have to send in some troops. And to be serious, in my view, you would have to at least think about whether you wouldn't want to have as your goal regime change in Khartoum and not just try to stop some of the killing in the various provinces of Sudan where there's been so much killing.

So I don't believe we have an easy solution on Sudan; I'm just saying that the notion that Bush has been impatient and the conservatives are impatient and we liberals have this much more sober view in which we can be patient in dealing with the world's problems – I'm just very dubious that that's in fact correct analytically.

In fact, I would step back and just close with this thought: I mean, has the problem of the last 60, 70 years since the U.S. became a great power – let's say the last century just to go back to before World War I, has the fundamental problem of U.S. foreign policy been impatience or too much patience? Did we intervene too early in World War I or World War II or the Balkans in the early '90s or in Rwanda in '94 or with respect to the terror threat in the late '90s in Afghanistan? Or have we in fact been too slow, too timid in responding to threats around the world and then we had to fight later when the threats were greater or more dangerous, or we didn't fight and lots and lots of people got killed?

I don't think patience is the right counsel for U.S. foreign policy, frankly. There are all kinds of tactical errors that the Bush administration has made, but I think in Bush's fundamental sense that we had to err on the side of action, not inaction; that absent strong U.S. action the world would get more dangerous, that it wasn't a stable situation, that the good guys sort of wouldn't win if we held back – I think Bush's fundamental sense that this world post-9/11, and I would argue pre-9/11 as well, required more U.S. leadership and stronger U.S. leadership, of course soft power but also hard power. I think Bush's fundamental sense on that is right.

MR. KORB: Thank you very much, Bill. It will be interesting to see what the reaction is to your endorsement of Al Gore. (Laughter.)

Jeff?

MR. JEFFREY GOLDBERG: Thank you very much. I just want to note how interesting it is to be on a panel at the Center for American Progress in which the most liberal member is a former official of the Reagan administration. I don't think it happens every day. I also wanted to note – Peter is too modest to say this, but in addition to selling his book he's also selling his newly designed Reinhold Niebuhr tie in the lobby. He'll give you a discount if you buy them together.

I'm a reporter and I'd prefer not to opine unduly, and I usually don't succumb to the temptation to opine for about two or two and a half minutes in these sorts of things. But what I'd like to do very briefly is try to refract Peter's thinking through the prism of my recent journalistic interest, which is in – I guess you would call it – successful red-state Democratic politicians and the voters who love them, including among those voters the sort of dissatisfied Democrat or former Democrat: the people who have left the party over the last 26 years and whose return would be necessary for the Democrats to take power in this country again.

One of the things that's interesting to me about this is that while – and I know this is tragic for Peter, but very few dinner table conversations in the Midwest or the South or the West center on Peter's elegantly wrought history or thinking.

MR. BEINART: Not yet.

MR. GOLDBERG: Not yet, it's only a matter of time before his neo-imperialist plans for book domination take hold. But one of the things that's interesting is that his, I hate the word, but his robust understanding of what a Democratic foreign policy could be clearly resonates with many of the sort of people that I've been speaking to over the last three or four months, particularly his fighting faith, if you will – his assertion that American power can still in fact be used for the good. This has a great resonance in most of the country even among most center-seeking Democrats.

I should say most of my reporting in this area has been in Missouri, in Arizona and New Mexico and in Central and Northern Florida. That's on the level of the voter. I have been speaking to Democratic politicians who have succeeded in traditional red states and many other states beside that.

I just want to make three quick observations. The first concerns baseline patriotism I guess you would say. I don't think that Iraq has shaken the basic faith of moderates in Missouri in the basic goodness of America or its ability to do good in the world. What it has shaken, of course, is people's faith in the ability of the Republican Party to do good in the world, and this of course is the Democratic Party's opportunity at the moment. The field is open in a way for Democrats to convince Americans that they, too, will defend their country and international interest in ways that the field has not been open maybe since the rise of Ronald Reagan.

But the field is open to Democrats who can convince voters on some almost inchoate, chemical level that they believe the following – that the candidates believe the following: that America is a force for good – and here I’m borrowing, by the way, the language of the Les Gelb from the Council in Foreign Relations – that America is a force for good in the world; that sometimes America messes up in trying to do good, but just because it messes up doesn’t mean it should not stop trying to do good or doesn’t mean that America can’t fix its mistakes. What I’ve noticed among voters, and particularly the dissatisfied Democrats – if that can be conveyed to voters then these Democrats have a fighting chance of winning even in the toughest states.

It’s very interesting, Barack Obama said something very interesting to me. He said that the lesson for voters in his state of the last five years, especially downstate he said, is not that America is an evil hegemon. For this comment, by the way, he got criticized by Paul Krugman, which tells you where the splits are. And I think that’s true, and that’s true doubly or triply in, let’s say, areas that are rural white areas, places like Missouri where the Democrats have to succeed in order to gain that state back.

A second observation: voters are not – the voters I spoke to at least, and this is all anecdotal, they tend to be relatively unbothered by the rationale for the Iraq War and the launching of the Iraq War. In conversations that I had over the past several months, very few people talk about questions of illegality or legality or multilateralism versus unilateralism. There’s a belief among many people I spoke to that George Bush was not incorrect to suspect that Saddam Hussein was up to no good and to take action. What upsets people more than the launching of the war is that we seem to be losing the war. In other words, the debates that we have in Northwest Washington or in the Upper West Side or in West LA about this war are not the debates that people are having in Springfield, Missouri. What I noticed among these voters is a certain American pugnaciousness, if you will, that, okay, you started a war: the least you can do for us is win it.

There is an interesting corollary on Iran and I wanted to read you a comment. This is from a woman named Claire McCaskill, who was running for Senate, running a strong race for Senate as a democrat against Jim Talent in Missouri. We were driving one day around St. Louis and I asked her about Iran and her comment was both non-canned, which is unusual in itself, and heartfelt and also very surprising to me. When you cover politics, that trifecta is not found too often. She said, “We need to be the strongest country on the planet, so I view our problems as, what do we have to do to maintain our strength? In Washington there is this hyper-dissection of Iran, all these layers of complication. What’s going on with China and Russia and so on? For Missourians, the issue is Iran is thumbing its nose at us. If we’re so strong, why are they thumbing their nose at us? The reason is because the president is letting it happen. If he’s so tough and smart, how did he let this happen?”

In other words, what I’ve been hearing is a desire on the part of Democrats, both voters and candidates, to have their party sound a more fighting kind of argument. That’s

why last week – and here I’m about to, I’m afraid, opine a bit. That’s why last week the comments of Congressman Murtha struck me as so out of – well, maybe in character for a wing of the Democratic Party, but certainly not the wing of the Democratic Party that hopes to regain power in America. When he was talking about the Bush administration’s unwillingness to change course, and he said, “But the thing that disturbs me and worries me about this whole thing; we can’t get them to change direction. And I said over and over in debate if you listen to any of it. In Beirut, President Reagan changed direction, in Somalia, President Clinton changed direction, and yet here we are with the troops out there every day suffering from these explosive devices.” The fact that a Democratic politician would invoke Mogadishu and Beirut as a teaching moment for American foreign policymakers – teaching moments in a positive way, not do the opposite of what Reagan and Clinton did – and this strikes me as both not very logical and not grounded in history, and also not much of an argument when you’re trying to reach disaffected moderates who are worried about your ability as a party to defend America and its interests.

The clear observation, and this is even the observation that I made at numerous JJ dinners with Democratic stalwarts is that, yes, many Democrats – the majority of Democrats would like to leave Iraq. And when you push a little deeper on this question, what they were saying was that they’d like to leave Iraq, but they’d really like to win Iraq also. They would like to figure out a way to win and they’re looking for a party and leadership that will present to them a way of winning this as well.

A final, quick observation, and this is a frightening one and it doesn’t help people like Peter who are trying to call for greater engagement. People I spoke to, including Democratic elected officials, local Democratic officials, have a great deal of fatigue about the world. You know, if you ask them are we spending too much or too little on democratization programs, on NDI and IRI and all the host of USAID-funded projects, most of them would say too much. Of course, we all know that we spend a piddling amount on these, but for many people it’s too much.

And this is the thought I’ll leave you with: their fatigue is not born of the idea that who are we to lecture other people around the world because we have this deeply imperfect democracy and we torture in Guantanamo Bay, et cetera, et cetera. Their feeling – and this was said to me and various epithets were used in describing these feelings, which I won’t share because C-SPAN is a family channel. Their idea is, the world isn’t good enough for us. Why should we bother? Look at the world: we went to Iraq to try to help these people and this is the thanks we get, so why should we be engaged at all? And this problem you could lay at the feet of the Bush administration, which did an inadequate job, I guess, of explaining to the world the importance of engagement on both the hard and soft power levels. And when the people are tired, the danger comes in of real isolationism, and I’d like to hear Peter on this. Peter is incredibly worried about not only in the Democratic base, but in the party at large.

And I’ll leave it there. Okay.

MR. KORB: Thank you very much. Before turning over to the audience I'd like to give Peter a couple of minutes – just a couple – to respond to any of the points raised. And I think in particular, obviously, whenever you present a framework, it's great at think-tanks, but when you get in to the real world exactly what do you do? Bill has commented about the Korean War. You have changed your position on the war on Iraq. And how does Vietnam fit in to this whole thing? We sort of passed over that and I know you devote quite a bit of time in your book.

MR. BEINART: Let me start by talking about Korea – Korea then, not Korea now, though maybe I'll come back to Korea now. I actually think – although I don't talk a lot about it in the book, Korea perfectly illustrates the case I'm really trying to make. I mean the differences between Korea and Iraq are an ocean. First of all, they attacked us in Korea. We did not launch a preemptive war in Korea. There were voices – sometimes we forget, there were voices for preemptive war against the Soviet Union when the Soviet Union was rushing to get a nuclear weapon in the late 1940s. The logic in some ways was more powerful than the logic for – we say preemptive; really for preventive war against Iraq. There was a school of conservatives in particular who argued for preventive war against the Soviet Union before they got a nuclear weapon. There were also some other people who made the same argument about China in the early 1960s.

Korea was a war about containment. There was a divide between the North and the South. The north rushed across that divide. The conservative position – the Bush position was really in some ways the MacArthur position; the position that you're not just going to reestablish that boundary, you're going to go north of the Yalu River and bring in the Chinese, which – you know, and Truman's great recognition in Korea was, yes, to fight. The containment is based on the statement that you will fight if a certain line is crossed and you will fight by giving aid to the Greeks and Turks in 1947 when they were being menaced by communist rebels, and you will put American troops on the ground to fight to defend South Korea as well. But it was really the conservative, or what I see as the ancestral Bush position, that says you don't just reestablish the North and South; you go north of the Yalu River, or in fact – we forget that Truman was under some real pressure at a certain point to even drop nuclear weapons in Korea. There were people who were – John Lewis Gaddis in his new history of the new history of the Cold War has this terribly frightening kind of counterfactual where he talks about nuclear weapons being used in Korea. So Korea was really it seems to me a war about restraint and a war about containment; very different than the war in Iraq.

I would say parenthetically about giving up on the war in Iraq that my position is not a timetable for withdrawal in Iraq. My own personal view would be that if that government in Iraq in which we have placed so much faith – and that government is our really only hope there – does not want to set us a timetable, then we should not set a timetable. But on my position on Iraq – so my saying that I got it wrong on Iraq, and I did – someone said to me, “How could you have gotten something so big so wrong this early in your career?” and I said, “Well, I've always been precocious, it takes some people well in to their fifties and sixties to make such a big mistake.” But the reason I think I was wrong for supporting the Iraq War, and this goes to Bill's point, it's not just

that we didn't have UN approval; it's the reason we didn't have UN approval. And probably the single biggest reason we didn't have UN approval was because of what the international inspectors were saying by March, 2003, where there was mounting evidence that the guy does not have a nuclear weapons program.

It may have been reasonable to assume in the fall of 2002, as many people did – not everybody, but many people did, that Saddam had a nuclear weapons program given what we knew of his history. But that was really based on certain assumptions we were making looking at satellite intelligence without much sense of what was going on at the ground in Iraq at all, having not been there on the ground between '98 and 2002.

I think my failing was not in recognizing that that assumption was being disproven by the international inspectors who had very good access. George W. Bush deserves enormous credit. I mean, his policy on Iraq is a stunning success if you cut it off at December 31st, 2002 because he has moved the ball by threatening military force back to a situation where we have inspectors with a lot of good access. But then the inspectors come back and are telling us in fact, Saddam's capacity to build a nuclear weapon has dramatically degraded. The infrastructure has dramatically degraded and in fact there is no evidence that he has one. The inspectors were saying, give us a short amount more time and we can conclusively say that in fact he has no nuclear weapons program. That's a big part of the reason we couldn't get support for the UN resolution, was because the evidence on which we were basing our case for war was being undermined by the facts on the ground.

And in that circumstance I think I should have realized, and people wiser than me did, that going to war in March, 2003, was a big mistake; that a war launched to prevent Saddam Hussein from building a nuclear weapon when he was not – and the other weapons of mass destruction stuff for me was always really peripheral. Chemical weapons from Saddam Hussein were never really going to threaten the United States or even really threaten – have much military value at all offensively. But going to war, justifying a war based on preventing Saddam Hussein from threatening the United States with a nuclear weapon when he has no nuclear weapons program it seems to me is a recipe for war that looks illegitimate in the eyes of the world. And the illegitimacy – Bill is right: there were enormous problems that we would've had in Iraq even under the best of circumstances, but the war's illegitimacy in the world did harm us in Iraq a great deal.

One of the things that comparative studies of occupations tend to show is that one of the keys to the success of any occupation is convincing the population that you will leave – that they will get their country back. You say, "Look, put up with us for a while. We're going to try to do some stuff for you, but we're going to leave." The Iraqis very early on did not stop believing that about the United States. By the fall of 2003, the polls showed they thought we were there for the oil and we were there basically to make them in to a 51st state. The reason that Sistani would only talk to the UN and never to talk to the U.S. was not because they thought the UN was this fabulous organization, but because they knew the UN would leave. They knew the UN lacked the capacity to become a colonial power in Iraq and that's why the UN would've been very valuable.

But the reason we didn't have the UN was precisely because the whole rationale for war had collapsed by March, 2003. I just didn't see that.

Let me just end by making a – Bill had a lot of interesting points – on this patience point, what I meant by that. I did not mean that the United States should sit back and not act in all circumstances and things will get better. The point I was making about patience had to do with the ideas of containment and deterrence; which is to say, we recognized during the Cold War that we had a Soviet Union that had nuclear capacity and we had China that had nuclear capacity. We deterred and contained them both. And the basic understanding of that that starts from Kennan was that we can outlast these dictatorial societies because as long as we regenerate ourselves at home and we maintain our alliance system, as a democracy we have regenerative strength that these dictatorial societies don't; that sooner or later they are more likely to crack from within than we are to crack from within as long as we solve internal problems at home.

And I think this is a lesson when you're dealing with countries that are pursuing a nuclear weapons or they have a nuclear weapon. It seems to me that one should not get into the situation of panicking because of thinking that somehow the balance is always going to tip more and more against the United States. The lesson of the Cold War is that the deterrence worked very, very well, even against Stalin, when Stalin looked like a lunatic, and even against Mao when Mao looked like a lunatic.

There may be cases where you can make an argument that deterrence will not work, but the logic of the last seven years is actually that deterrence has worked very well and that American has in fact been able to be patient in the containment with a policy based on patience. And I think that when you look at situations like North Korea and Iran where in North Korea, where America's military options are basically zero, and Iran, where I think America's military options are very, very, very poor and potentially would be catastrophic – certainly catastrophic to our potential for success in Iraq, I think then you have to start taking this logic about America's ability to be patient and to deter and contain its enemies in the rationale that in the long term they are more likely to crack from within that us as a good idea, a good theory about how you deal with these very difficult problems.

MR. KORB: How about Vietnam? Doesn't that show that the Truman liberal doctrine – Kennedy – I mean, I remember talking to Gaddis Smith after I came back from Vietnam and he said if Nixon had been elected in '60, we never would've gone.

MR. BEINART: That's interesting. You know, I talk about this in my book and it's a little off point, but basically I think the problem – and this was a problem – a kind of embedded problem you could say in Cold War liberalism, was this fudging about whether communism could be nationalistic as well. There was this assumption that was made and Acheson famously said that basically a communist movement can never really be a nationalist movement. A communist movement is by definition something which is imported from outside by the Soviet Union. And that may have been true to some degree

in the European context – to some degree – but when you were dealing with the post-colonial world I think this assumption became a blindfold.

And so Kennedy, who actually speaks quite articulately in his 1957 speech about Algeria for instance, about the importance that America not try to stop nationalist movements in the Third World, recognizing that we have to be on the side of nationalist movements, becomes a kind of blindfold in the Vietnam context where Americans can only see Vietnamese nationalism as basically something controlled from Moscow or Beijing when in fact it's not really controlled by Moscow or Beijing at all.

What's happened is that the Vietnamese anti-imperialist, nationalist struggle has been tragically captured by a communist party that has become the embodiment of Vietnamese nationalism. And actually that it was this lack of recognition that nationalist communist movements had to be responded to differently than communist movements directed from the Soviet Union that I think was the original analytical flaw that leads through this situation in Vietnam where you think you can contain Vietnamese nationalism based on fortifying a country of South Vietnam, which is a completely artificial creation which was not meant to even exist through the 1950s and was only created to kind of sustain French colonialism. And that was basically the original mistake behind the Vietnam War. But actually to their credit, many Cold War liberals that I write in my book, like Niebuhr and Schlesinger actually realized that by the mid-1960s and saw Vietnam as a mistake.

MR. KORB: Okay, good. All right, well thank you all very much for your comments. I'd like to turn it over to the audience. What I'd like to ask you to do when I recognize you is first of all wait for the microphone and identify yourself and your organization if you would. So, yes sir, you can have the first question. Here comes the mike.

Q: Nick Berry, Foreign Policy Forum. Mr. Beinart, why do liberals or democrats have to come up with an alternative to Bush and the Republicans? Can't they take a page from Eisenhower and Nixon and just talk about the incompetence of the administration, the fact that there is a tremendous deflation of American power around the world and use mainly a negative and by that way setting themselves off by suggesting an alternative.

MR. KORB: You mean like Nixon's secret plan?

MR. BERRY: Yes, or Eisenhower saying, I will go to Korea. That's not terribly explicit but it resonated, mainly because it said that Truman was over his head, had no idea how to resolve the problem.

MR. BEINART: I guess my answer would be because I think that we have a difference or certainly I have a difference with the Bush administration not simply on practice, but also on theory; not simply that they have bungled things in the execution, but that their ideas about how they understand the world are wrong; that the story that Blair is telling about the world, that he did most recently in his Georgetown University

speech, which I wish it had gotten more attention than it did, is really a different story about the world than the one George W. Bush is talking about.

First of all, it is a story which says that non state actors increasingly represent the greatest peril to the United States, whether they come in the form of pandemics, of financial contagion, of loose weapons of mass destructions, or of jihadism. Secondly, that the answer is that America has to help other countries govern themselves much more than we have in the past because our security depends on their better governance. But – and this is where you see the critical diversion – again, look at John Bolton. John Bolton was writing in the 1990s that the great threat to American power is this emergence of international law and international institution-building that's coming out of Western Europe – the great threat to the United States.

What Blair is saying by contrast, which I think, which I see is in the Truman-Roosevelt tradition, is in fact that it is only by building – it is because the international institutions of the 1940s had atrophied and we have not built successor institutions, powerful institutions through which we can act and help other governments, hold other governments to a higher standard, recognizing – and this is what's so critical – recognizing that they will hold us to a higher standard, too, which is completely different from the Bush-Cheney-Bolton position which says that basically that American sovereignty is sacrosanct and that the United States should never enter any international institution or treaty in which we are required to change our behavior in order to bring it to a higher standard around the world. That is a really very, very, different vision.

It doesn't mean – to go to the point that Bill was making – that you say you have to go through the UN on everything and it certainly doesn't mean that you defend the UN in all particulars as it is today. What it means is that you draw a picture of a different UN, a more powerful UN, one that can have greater purchase not just on the internal affairs of other countries, but in fact can make greater claims on the United States – exactly what John Bolton doesn't want to do. And you simultaneously build up other international institutions like the Community of Democracies for instance or like NATO in partnership with regional organizations so you have alternatives to the UN so if China or Russia does veto, you can do what Bill Clinton did in Kosovo, which is you can find other vehicles for international legitimacy so America can act in the world aggressively but not be seen as imperial.

That's very different than coalitions of the willing. The whole point of coalitions of the willing is that America doesn't have to change its behavior whatsoever in order to satisfy other countries; that basically we have a one-way conversation in which we persuade other countries to change their behavior, but we are never persuaded ourselves to have to change our behavior and that, it seems to me, is precisely why we've had this enormous sense of hypocrisy and double standards that have emerged in the last several years in particular.

MR. KORB: Bill, do you want to comment?

MR. KRISTOL: Just one – yeah, just a political point. I mean, look, Democrats could do fine this year if Bush is unpopular and if the Republican Congress is unpopular and they may well do well in the off-year elections, but in a presidential election it is a choice. It's not simply a referendum on the in party the way it can be when you've had one party controlling the presidency and Congress for the last four years, at least, in the way – the last six and in the case of the Congress, the Republicans for the last 12.

Look at the instances you mentioned, which are very relevant, because in '52 and '68, the two elections where the out party came to power when American troops were deployed abroad in difficult wars and in both cases, similar to this time, the incumbent did not run for reelection in those two cases – chose not to run for reelection. Bush doesn't have the choice this time. I guess Cheney could always volunteer to step up. (Laughter.)

I made a joke about how, you know, Cheney is not going to run this time; Bush won't be on the – the Bush administration won't be on the ballot, but I said – this was about a month ago – I was talking to a liberal audience in New York, I said the – you know, that Cheney – yeah, maybe Cheney – I was talking with someone on Cheney's staff and maybe Cheney will rethink and decide to run and a nice elderly woman in the front row keeled over and needed medical assistance – (laughter) – so I stopped making this joke in certain audiences.

MR. KORB: (Unintelligible.)

MR. KRISTOL: But Bush won't be on the ballot. The Republicans running are not going to be particularly closely associated with Bush – McCain, Giuliani, Gingrich, Romney, you know, whoever they are, Allen – they're all whatever they are, but they are not Bush spokesmen or surrogates. And think of those two elections – '52 and '68; Nixon and – Eisenhower and Nixon were thought to be the more hawkish, I think it's fair to say, candidate. I mean, not exactly in their speeches, but certainly, you know, Eisenhower against Stevenson, if you think you want a strong America, a general who knows how to get us out of a war that we're not winning, but also defend America against real threats. '68, Nixon and Wallace got together – what? – 57 percent of the vote.

I think it is very – just a pure matter of practical political advice going to the country when American troops are engaged in a war either directly as I think they will be in Iraq in '08 or indirectly in the sense that there's an ongoing war on terror with actions in Afghanistan and threats on the New York City subways and bombings in Europe and all of that going to the country on a sort of anti-war platform has not worked in modern American politics. It might and people should obviously say what they believe. They shouldn't go into the country based on what they think might work politically, but as a practical matter, I think the Eisenhower-Nixon analogy is not helpful to those who think that an antiwar candidate will do well in '08.

MR. KORB: Jeff?

MR. GOLDBERG: Two quick observations about this. You hear a lot of Democratic pollsters argue the point now that the Republicans have lost all their credibility – their national security advantage, their credibility. They're down to 30 percent approval or something on – there're different numbers – on national security, and what they're using that number to argue is that the Republicans and Democrats are equal now in the public's eyes in terms of the approach to national security. What they are not recognizing is that is that's only because of Republican deflation, it's not because the Democrats have gone up in people's estimation of their ability to handle tough national security issues. In '06, that might be enough; in '08, I doubt it.

On the question – just on Peter's point about the United Nations – and I say this just from having conversations in various different places – I doubt that it's a winning – if you're trying to win a majority, which means regaining disaffected Reagan Democrats and national security voters in general, it's probably not the greatest idea in '08 to go out talking about empowering the United Nations as part of your Democratic platform. You might want to do it, it might be a wise thing to do, but it should not probably be the central argument or a central argument in your approach to national security voters who are already dubious about your party's national security credentials.

MR. KORB: Okay. Yes, sir?

Q: Yes, Michael Hager, Education for Employment Foundation. We've heard a very interesting discussion, but one issue that really hasn't been addressed that is certainly on my mind is why are we in Iraq? What rationally are we gaining from this war? If we take Peter's point, which I totally agree with, that the beginning was illegitimate, that the start was for a purpose that was quickly proved to be non-fulfilling – weapons of mass destruction – and now the issue has segued into terror, let's hear some discussion about what we're doing in this war that is making us any safer –

MR. BEINART: Okay.

Q: – because I think there's a lot of evidence to the contrary.

MR. BEINART: Okay. Well, I'm sure Bill or Jeff might have their own take on this. Here would be my reason for why we're in Iraq. The first would be that if the United States were to leave, that Sunni Iraq could be a safe haven for jihadists who would use it and already been using it, but would use it in a way they used Afghanistan in the 1980s, which is basically to form networks and to train together and, in fact, to go – to plot – as we know Zarqawi was already doing – to send people back to their home countries, be they to Europe or the rest of the Middle East. And we saw what happened in the wake of the Afghan alums in the 1990s: they through Algeria and to a lesser degree Egypt into total chaos in the 1990s largely because of the networks that had been developed in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

I shudder for Saudi Arabia – because I think there's evidence a fair number of those guys are Saudis – what they would do once they went back to Saudi Arabia, if – or

we're able to go back easily and forth between Saudi Arabia in a kind of a safe haven in Sunni Iraq after we had left. I think that would a very, very dangerous situation, not only for American national security, but for the national security of Europe and large parts of the Muslim world.

I think – and I would make – let me make a second point. I think we have a – we went in there and turned the country completely upside down, overthrew the regime on the good advice of people like me. We told those people to vote; they did. They risked their lives to vote. I mean, many Americans don't take a cab – you know, don't drive ten minutes to go to the polling booth and these guys risk their lives to vote. They elected this government. The government is all that stands between us and the deluge in Iraq. I mean, if that government falls, you can just kiss it goodbye basically. The country will collapse into civil war, perhaps bringing some of its neighbors in. It seems to me we have a moral obligation to that government.

I think it's, for me, a question of national honor that America is not the kind of country that goes in and turns countries completely upside down and then when they have a democratically elected government – the government of Iraq is not the government of South Vietnam. South Vietnam was a fictitious country with a government with no legitimacy. The government of Iraq has enormous, enormous problems, not the loveliest group of people in the world, plagued by internecine conflict, but it was a government elected by the people that has done it's best to try to bring all three communities into the government and they actually are represented in that government. If that government says – that government is extremely well aware of how we delegitimize it by our presence there. They know that they look like lackeys to some degree because they are relying on American troops, but if that government still says that its best chance for survival and success in dealing with the militias and bringing the country together is, in fact, for America to stay a while longer, I don't think it's right for us to turn around and leave.

MR. KORB: Bill, do you want to add anything?

MR. KRISTOL: No, I agree with that.

MR. KORB: Jeff?

MR. GOLDBERG: I agree with Peter and I would return to Mr. Murtha's comments of last week as an example. I mean, we can't – we can't yet again leave a place – we've done it twice; we've left Beirut and then we left Somalia. Each time we left those places, we empowered jihadists. It seems to me that you cannot – eventually we learn from these mistakes and that – and that the thing we have to learn is that we can't leave the Sunni triangle or greater swaths of Iraq to this sort of people who kicked us out of Beirut and then kicked us out of Somalia.

MR. BEINART: Let me just say something. If a government – I would just say, you know, to give – to tip my hat to the withdrawal position – if the Iraqi government

believes that their best chance for success is, in fact, for us to set a date certain by which we would leave, then I think given that they know best what is likely to give them the best chances of surviving, I think we should be respectful of that, but I think that the withdrawal position has to be framed, it seems to me, in terms of how they're arguing that a withdrawal is our best chance of allowing that government to succeed. It seems to me that the success of that government should be the cornerstone of our policy in Iraq.

MR. KORB: Okay.

MR. KRISTOL: The only – I'll tip my hat to the other positions. I mean, I'll just say – we don't have a Vietnam debate – but I would say that, in fact, the failure to assist South Vietnam, which was in fact a rather representative government by '72 and which had fought off a conventional invasion from the North, not unlike the North Korean invasion of South Korea. I mean, Peter distinguishes Korea and Vietnam – we don't have a long debate, but of course, Korea, we had no alliance relationships with them; Acheson had said they're outside our security perimeter and they didn't attack us – the North Koreans – they attacked South Korea just as North Vietnam attacked the South. In any event, having achieved a Korean outcome in Vietnam basically – almost literally – by the end of '72, it was dishonorable in my view not to have helped South Vietnam in '74, so I will give Peter some running room here by staking out the position to his right that not only would it be dishonorable to withdraw from Iraq now, but it was dishonorable not to assist South Vietnam in '74.

MR. KORB: Okay. Yes, in the back there – the gentleman.

Q: Job Henning from Hicks and Associates. Peter, I want to thank you. I think this is a fabulous contribution to the country and to the party at this juncture. I want to suggest a couple – two related things. One thing, you talk about the postwar liberals and the first principles and you're suggesting that the modern Democratic Party could benefit from rediscovering these. Isn't it one thing to talk about these principles – these first principles within a context of the overarching superstructure of good and evil as defined in the context of the Cold War and isn't it a very challenging and a different thing now that we face without that superstructure?

I would suggest that this is more than moving from a think-tank to the real world. I think if these first principles are to mean anything, they have to mean something concretely. And in this vein, secondly, wouldn't the modern debate benefit from recognizing the conservative contribution – and I say this as a liberal – of rediscovering the moral autonomy of the individual, rejecting a lot of the structuralism of the 19th century, and isn't that something that is at the root of the superstructure of good and evil in that narrative of the Cold War? How do we translate that into the 21st century?

MR. BEINART: Wow, there's – there's a lot there. Let me just respond by – look, principles are not the same as policies, but part of the meta-argument of my book – and I do talk in my last half about what I think some of the policies would be today. Obviously, we are in many ways in a radically different environment, but I think that in

some ways where liberals have been weaker is on principles and understanding how their policies actually feed into principles.

For me, the principles which I think are still relevant today are several-fold. Let me just say what I think they are. The first is that legitimacy is power; that critical to American power is American legitimacy and thinking about ways of making American power legitimate in the world, convincing people that our power, our primacy in the world is their interest is an extremely important part of America remaining the world's lone superpower and that that is why international institutions are so important, because international institutions are vehicles for making American power legitimate. And I think, as Robert Kagan, Bill's colleague, has pointed out that this tremendous decline in American legitimacy is one of the grave threats to American power and that one of the ways we became legitimate, that we did what the Soviet Union never could was become legitimate in the 1940s was precisely by building international institutions that gave weaker countries some influence over our decision-making and held us to a higher standard.

Second liberal principle, I think, is that economic opportunity is critical to the success of freedom around the world, that the conservative story – you see this in the Cold War where conservatives get basically reject any kind of root-cause arguments about Communism. No, no, no. Communism comes from the evil that resides in individual people's hearts and liberals are much more open to the idea, in fact, that there are social-economic roots to the reason that people turn to Communism – poverty, economic despair.

And I think again since 9/11, you've seen conservatives – a lot of conservatives; not all, but a lot – reject the idea that economic despair and economic stagnation is part of the story behind the rise of jihadism, but I in fact think that if you look at what Blair says or you look at what the Arab Human Development Report, which was written by Middle East scholars, talked about, what they talked about was a (unintelligible) notion of development as freedom, as the recognition that – which was central to the Marshall Plan. The Marshall Plan was based on the idea that if democracies don't provide for their people, democracies often fail.

You know, the Bush administration tends to talk about democracy as a kind of a finish line, but countries like Pakistan, Nigeria have been yo-yoing back and forth between democracy for decades partly because democratic governments have not provided for their people and that the story of the Middle East in particular has been a story of tremendous economic stagnation at the time of vast population growth, leading a country like Saudi Arabia to see a dramatic decline in standards of living. And this question – this issue of education in the Muslim world, which the 9/11 Commission tried to talk about, and bring in the Muslim world into the world economy in ways other than simply oil I think is a critical part of this effort to promote freedom and democracy around the world, which I think has not been sufficiently understood by the Bush administration.

So I think those are two kind of key principles. You can talk about the exactly right policy kind of ends and ways to instantiate them in policy today, but I think there are two very critical principles that differentiate the liberal story from the conservative story as I see it.

MR. KORB: Comments?

MR. KRISTOL: Well, just very briefly, yeah. I mean, I don't agree that legitimacy is power. Legitimacy is helpful to power, but power is power, of which legitimacy is an element. Look, when the United Nations – the wonderful United Nations – passed a resolution delegitimizing the state of Israel – the Zionism is racism resolution – at a request of a terrorist organization in 1975, it probably hurt the authority of Israel and friends of Israel. It certainly helped those who just wished to destroy Israel and wished to legitimate terror. That's why it was important that under John Bolton's leadership – since he's been mentioned a couple of times – that resolution was repealed by the United Nations in 1990.

So what happens in the United Nations, these kinds of things are not trivial. But I think at the end of the day, as in fact the story of Israel shows, if you – you know, you can't make everything hinge on the United Nations deciding in 1975 that you're illegitimate and then say, "Oh," in 1990, "Okay, well, okay, you guys have a right to exist, I guess," you have to, you know you have to have a serious – if you're a serious country that's threatened, you have to have a serious foreign policy, which includes hard power as well as the desire for legitimacy. Peter doesn't disagree with that in the abstract; we will disagree, I guess, on the mix of those elements, but that gets to the second point which I think a couple of the questions maybe Larry actually has stressed.

I sort of want to make a point against theory or against ideas too much. I mean, at the end of the day foreign policy is about real choices in the real world and I do think it's important that – and the debates have become much too abstract and theoretical and I feel slightly guilty about this because people decided we had a theory in the neoconservative project, which is all nonsense mostly. I mean, we had an analysis of the world that was right in a certain respect; I'm sure it was wrong in certain respects in the '90s and after – before and after 9/11. It was an analysis of China, it was an analysis of the Middle East, it's an analysis like all analyses that has changed some over time. And that's what drove us – me, personally; I'm not going to speak for anyone else – to advocate certainly policies and be uncertain about certain areas of the world and to disapprove of certain other policies that either Clinton or Bush has followed. But it is important to talk about real choices in the real world in real time.

In the case of North Korea, it may be that we don't have military option now or no choice (other than to contain them?), but it's important really to go – to say was Bill Perry right in 1994 when he came to President Clinton with a military option to stop them from moving ahead with their nuclear program. I don't know that he advocated it, but he certainly was serious about it. Was Clinton right to go forth with the diplomatic agreement which North Korea subsequently broke and now seems to have nuclear

weapons and may be testing one today for – testing its intercontinental ballistic missile now for all we know.

That's not an easy thing to answer and I don't even know exactly what I would have advised if I had been fully familiar with the facts in '94, but I mean, these are the real choices in the real world. What about Iran? What about – and what is the effect of our intervention in Iraq?

You can't simply say, I don't think – it's just not empirically clear whether we have – at this stage, despite the difficulties, I would still make the case that the intervention – its effect elsewhere in the region if we stay it will be for the good in the sense that it has stimulated an awful lot of liberalizing and democratic elements and has shown an American willingness not to be the weak horse as Osama bin Laden put it, not to flee against terror. Maybe if it goes terribly wrong, it could end up being like Vietnam, and in which case it will not only have the direct damage, obviously, to our interests and of course the loss of life and – which is the most important thing, but also it could have bad effects especially elsewhere in the region. But these are concrete decisions that have to be made based on the facts at the time and the facts that are knowable at the time. A lot of them are very difficult decisions obviously.

But I sort of agree with the notion that at some point one can get awfully theoretically in these discussions and in fact in 2008 both candidates, neither from the incumbent administration, are going to have to stand up and say what they would do about Korea, what they would do about Iran, what their stance towards Saudi Arabia is, and what their stance towards Russia is and all these real countries in the real world which present difficult choices.

My general instinct is that the right answer will not be that America has been too bellicose, too imperialist, too unilateral, to willing to throw its weight around. If anything, the right answer will be that maybe we've done some of these things unwisely, but that basically in this respect the Bush analysis, which I think is the Truman-Reagan-Bush analysis, is right.

MR. KORB: Let me pick up on Bill's point for a second about coming up with concrete solutions. As was mentioned – Lebanon, when I was in the Reagan administration, I think it was the right decision at that time given the situation we had gotten ourselves into. And if I can be so bold as a liberal from the Reagan administration to quote Bill Buckley, Bill Buckley has argued, and I think quite right, that had we not gotten out of Vietnam when we did, we wouldn't have won the Cold War and if we don't get out of Iraq now, we're not going to win the war on terror. And as I mentioned, in your packet we put together our plan for getting out and notwithstanding all of the criticisms, the fact of the matter is that right now the United States is putting its overall national security interest in the hands of the Iraqis and this is something in my view when you look at concrete situations a great power like the United States should never do.

A question over here? Young lady.

Q: Thank you, sir. Great. Thank you. Margaret Vanderhye. I'm with the Truman Project and with the Virginia government in Richmond, Virginia. I want to go to Peter's point first about the idea of legitimizing societies and governments. I think you're referring to what perhaps Fareed Zakaria talked about a bit in his *Future of Freedom* book: that you don't necessarily have to have pure democracy in place to declare victory; what you really need is to get the underpinnings of a society that will work and create legitimacy for the people. I think Friedman – Tom Friedman refers to it as the anguish of the sitting around guys with nothing to do and so there's this constant angst and foment that undermines the society. And it seems to me, going to Jeff's point about 2008 in what different groups are going to need to do, is that we talk about timetables when it seems to me perhaps we should be talking more about milestones.

What can we do? What does the society or the government structure look like before we can begin to stand down or withdraw or transition from one form to a next; not purely in Iraq, but in other places as well? To the extent that countries or leadership in those countries is invested in making those milestones move forward, we look legitimate. They take on for their own selves and we're able to move on and be part of an international community as opposed to be seeing as either just preeminent isolationist or working unilaterally without any additional support. So just a comment.

MR. BEINART: I completely agree with that. I think that one of the great challenges – I mean, the first challenge for people to make with this Iraq as a backdrop is to actually make the case that nation-building and peacekeeping can work, that there is this enormous fatigue obviously, but in fact, if you look at James Dobbins's studies – study out of Iran and there's actually – there have been a lot of peacekeeping successes in the 1990s. And I think that for me one, of the great tragedies is that the world – the United States, but also the UN – got better at this over the course of the 1990s. We actually learned things from our failures in Somalia and other places and we were doing it better and that there was – there was a gradual body of knowledge of best practices that were emerging about how in fact you help societies move from conflict and gradually, very gradually – not an easy process at all, but gradually not slip back into conflict and move towards more legitimate governments that ultimately become democracies where you have a government with some legitimacy amongst all its people.

And one of the things that the Bush administration I think tragically has really not done – even as it got us into this vast and enormous nation-building project in Iraq as well as Afghanistan – is really think about how the government builds up that capacity. How we build it up at the State Department, for instance. It can't all be at the military. I mean, in some ways the military has been asked to do all of this, but the State Department has not nearly been transformed in the ways it needs to, it seems to me, to build up this capacity and also for us to recognize that we need to invest in the UN learning how to do this as well.

The UN will never be good at projecting force. There's no question about that. The UN is not going to send militaries abroad to overthrow a government, but the UN has

actually a pretty good success record coming in at the end, as they've done in Kosovo, and doing some of these peacekeeping and nation-building efforts. And they actually learned how to do it pretty well even though they were dramatically under-resourced and that we should be helping them to develop their own expertise to do that as well.

MR. KORB: Comments?

MR. KRISTOL: I just want to add a word on legitimate. I mean, the Iraqi government is the most legitimate government by any normal standards of legitimacy in the Arab world. It's the only one that's a product of a genuine democratic election and it's one that's gone to great efforts to actually include all communities of the few major communities in the country, which is a heck of a lot more than any other neighboring government. And, indeed, it's recognized by its neighbors and indeed our occupation of Iraq is authorized by the United Nations after the war. The problem in Iraq isn't legitimacy. I'm not quarrelling with Peter, I'm just making this point and people can tell themselves that that's the problem as a way of avoiding the hard truth. The hard truth is we have terrorists and a Sunni community that's unfortunately more hospitable to those terrorists than one would have hoped because they don't want to be the minority in Iraq and it's a military fight. It's an insurgency and a counterinsurgency. We fought the counterinsurgency badly in the sense of overall national strategy and a failure to commit troops early and a continued desire to get out.

It may be at some point that Larry will be right, that national interest will require us or we will think that it will require us to get out of Iraq. We shouldn't kid ourselves that we're doing anything in that case but losing to a brutal, terrorist insurgency. It's not because we weren't legitimate or the Iraqis didn't step up to the plate, as some of my conservative friends like to say. It's all nonsense. You couldn't have asked for more from the Iraqi people really and, you know, even the Iraqi political class, whatever its problems, does not compare badly with a heck of a lot of other political classes that we've had to work with in nations coming out of 30 or 40 or 50 years of dictatorship. So losing is losing in my view. Here I disagree with Larry: losing isn't winning. And if we lose in Iraq, it will be a blow to us and I think a blow to prospects for – in the Middle East.

MR. GOLDBERG: Let me make just one quick point off of both your comment on Lebanon and Bill. In the recent past, I spent quite a bit of time with the leaders of Hezbollah and also the IRGC in Iran and especially in particular with the Hezbollah leadership in Beirut. Not a conversation goes by in which they don't make clear that their understanding of America was shaped by the actions of their "martyr bombers," as they call them, against the Marine barracks in Beirut. From their understanding – their understanding is its cause and effect: we blow up the barracks; they run. And that understanding has stayed to this day and it's not just the understanding of Hezbollah, it's the understanding I think of the Sunni insurgency.

And I think Bill is right in this case. I think that no matter what you call it – a redeployment, a scaling-down of the American presence in Iraq, a timetable certainly – it

will only be interpreted by America's enemies in one way, which is that if you kill enough Americans, they'll go away. And I also think – and to put it back in the context – put it back into the topic that I'm supposed to be addressing here (unintelligible) come 2008, that's a relatively simple argument the Republicans can make. If they can argue that the Democrats have not learned from Beirut, that they have not learned from Somalia, and that they have not learned from Iraq, the Democrats will have a hard time convincing the voters they need to get 50 plus one that they're tough enough to lead America, especially in the Middle East.

MR. KORB: Well, I think we can have a whole other panel on that. I mean, I would just – in conclusion, I'll say a couple of things and I'll ask the panelists if there are any final thoughts.

The United States got itself into a civil war in Lebanon. People forget we went in so the Israelis could withdraw and the PLO could withdraw. Our problem was not going in, it was going back the second time without a clear policy of what we were trying to accomplish and of the fact that we didn't know which side to choose.

Now, President Reagan within two months after the bombing – and the study was done, we didn't wait, you know, years or anything – recognized that, took responsibility, and then worked to withdraw. Does it – sure it has – obviously there are plusses and minuses to anything that you do in the same way I think with Vietnam. I mean, that's why I think Buckley was right. Was it a good thing for us to do? No, it was 58,000 people were killed in that war and you know, several hundred thousand wounded, but the fact of the matter was that your bigger goal was winning the war against Soviet communist expansionism, but I think that would be a subject a whole other panel.

I will give each of the panelists time to make a few concluding remarks and then we will adjourn.

MR. BEINART: I warned Larry beforehand that he had a constructed the rare Center for American Progress panel in which I was the person furthest to the left and – and was going to be criticized more from the right than from the left.

Without getting into Lebanon, I guess I would just end by saying about this question about practical implications, which I think has come up several times. Bill is absolutely right that there are large numbers of countries in the world and they present all kinds of disparate problems and that foreign policy is about the art of the possible in very practical ways, but that whether you recognize it or not, you have certain frameworks that guide your vision of the world. You can't escape the fact that we see things through certain intellectual prisons. Even if you think you're being a pure pragmatist, in fact, there're certain ideas based on history in particular that inform all of us and how we approach certain circumstances.

We tend to work by analogy and I think if conservatives have in some ways been overinformed by a certain historical story, a kind of myth that you might say exists about

how conservatives kind of brought the country out of the depths of Vietnam, elected Ronald Reagan, gave America its pride back, won the Cold War, and now are going to do the same thing again after 9/11. I think liberals have really been intellectually underequipped by our own setting, our own history, our own – even our own myth you might say about our own history and about our own principles, and I think these types of things are very important to discuss at the level of principle when you're talking about practical situations like North Korea and Iran.

I mean, this bizarre thing in some ways about the debates about Iran, for instance, is that we have still not had a debate about deterrence. We had an idea that basically guided our policy. Ronald Reagan kind of defected from it a little bit in the 1980s when he said he didn't believe really in mutually assured destruction and so that's why we were going to build a nuclear missile shield, but through Democratic and Republican administrations starting in the '40s you basically have this idea that a clear threat of American nuclear retaliation will prevent even very, very bad governments from launching their nuclear weapons. That's what deterrence was. It actually worked pretty well.

Now, I'm open to people saying if for various reasons this theory does not work anymore, it does not – it worked against Mao and Stalin, but it won't work against Ahmadinejad, but you're going to have to make the argument and it seems to me the argument is not really being made by people who want to use military action in Iran. Again, you might be able to convince me, but you got to really need to take on the theory of deterrence, which has been a theory that has been – that has structured American foreign policy for a very long time and explain why in this particular case the theory doesn't work. And, again, you may be able to do that. Ken Pollack tried to do that to say that Saddam could not be deterred, for instance. But that these theoretical questions are actually extremely important in structuring how we begin to think about this particular cases, and I think that's the debate that I would urge that I think the country needs to have is to go back to understanding what was the theory about something like deterrence.

That's why I said I think patience – democracies could afford to be patient because we believed that, in fact, we could deter other countries and eventually they would crumble from within before we did. I think that's the kind of debate that we need to have and we can't have a practical debate about a place like Iran or North Korea unless we have that theoretical debate.

MR. KORB: Bill?

MR. KRISTOL: I think we are having that debate. I mean, I don't know, we published – you know, (unintelligible) had a long piece exactly trying to explain why deterrence was not a ridiculous – or containment not a ridiculous idea about Iran, but why when you really want to try to understand Ahmadinejad and what he's up to, he comes down – (unintelligible) comes down reluctantly on the side that deterrence and containment can't be and shouldn't be the core of U.S. policy. (Unintelligible) had another cover piece on *The Weekly Standard* on Ahmadinejad and what is to be learned

from the letter he wrote and his claims to lead the entire – the Islamic world and sort of a renewed jihadism.

That is the debate we're having. It's a mixture of theory and practice. The theory of deterrence always assumed that the country to be deterred was basically a status quo power or at least a rational power that wasn't going to put its citizens in a major way at risk for the sake of foreign policy goals and that's in fact I think the debate we're having on both – on Iraq, on Iran, on North Korea. It's probably more a debate about whether – how certain we can be that they can be contained in the sense that not spreading fissile material around the world, but I think we're having that debate actually quite vigorously including within the Bush administration so far as I can tell on both countries.

So I think we'll have that debate and we'll see – we'll hopefully make the right judgment and one won't know in some respects until later on, but these things are, of course, are just contingent judgments based on – again, whatever the theory, it's based – the ultimate judgment here is probably not a great theoretical dispute about deterrence. If a country is a – if you have Brezhnev's Russia, containment and deterrence work pretty well, but still to win the Cold War you still needed Reagan's containment and deterrence plus. If you have Stalin's Russia, and I was at a very long discussion when people try to think this through and (as a point?) liberal of the Clinton administration veteran made is you really got to think about what you're taking about when you contain and deter. You're talking about the first 15 years of the Cold War; you're not talking about Brezhnev's Russia. You are talking about Stalin's Soviet Union and you're talking about a Cuban Missile Crisis, potentially, with Iran and what that means in that region in the world. And an Iran that is aggressively claiming to be the leader of a movement – ideological movement that itself is trying to recruit people and stimulating competition in a way from the Sunni side of that movement in other countries. So it's a – you know, that's the real debate.

One point in addition, I don't know what politically, frankly, is better or worse at this point for Democrats or Republicans. It's a very complicated political situation, certainly will be over – who knows what will happen over the next two years. There's a striking passage in Peter's book that I think is based on a poll done by this organization – the Center for American Progress – in part, which does show interestingly the differences between Democrats and Republicans in understanding America's role in the world. Peter's right about this, that debates about the American foreign policy are in part debates about America and what is striking to me, and I think this has some implications for the nomination fights of both parties, is the degree to which this wasn't true so much in the Cold War, I don't think – the early part of the Cold War. That the party have sorted themselves out by their general views of American assertiveness in the world and I think in the poll done in early 2005, conservatives mentioned destroying al Qaeda and denying nuclear weapons to hostile groups or nations as the two top priorities of American foreign policy. Liberals' top priorities were removing – withdrawing troops from Iraq and stopping the spread of AIDS.

Perfectly reasonable different sets of priorities and obviously all of them in some level or other are desirable, but that is a pretty different view of what the real threats, the most urgent, the most immediate threats in the world are. I've got to think that will be at the core of the 2008 presidential election and I think we will have actually a pretty healthy, pretty vigorous national debate on this regardless of who the nominee of each party is. And we might have a very interesting and vigorous debate within each party on this.

MR. GOLDBERG: Just one point about the theoretical debate. I mean, the theoretical debate for the Democrats is surpassingly important, but it's also important to meet the American people where they are. I mean, poll after poll shows that about one out of every five American self-identifies as a liberal; one out of every three American self-identifies as a conservative. If the Democrats are going to win – by the way, I think I'm to the left of Peter actually, but – (laughter) – we'll have that out later. I'm not taking a position on 2008; Peter, I think, is. Obviously, with his book he'd like the Democrats to regain the majority in this country and I think in order to do that you have to recognize where people are and one of the things that I was surprised at in my travels in my – doing my David Broder impersonation – is the limit to which Iraq has affected people's understandings of American assertiveness or desire for American assertiveness in the world.

For the people the Democrats need in order to win, meaning that Jacksonian Americans, national security – people who are preoccupied with national security and American honor, the issue on Iraq is not whether the idea was fatally flawed, the issue for people is the incompetence of the execution of a reasonable idea and I think that Democrats would probably do well when they're campaigning in the 32 or 33 states they have difficulty in to remember that.

And one final point: fecklessness is a hard sell and it's going to be an interesting thing in 2008 if the Democrats are associated with timetables and withdrawals and the next Republican candidate can get up there and say, you know: "You might not agree with me, but you know where we stand" It will be as if the Democrats haven't learn anything in the last four years.

Thank you.

MR. KORB: Okay. Well, thank you all very, very much. I thank Peter and Bill and Jeff. Thank the audience and thank Antoine Morris and his crew, who worked so hard to put this together. Thank you all. We look forward to seeing you again.

(END)