

CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

Conversations with Bill Kristol

Guest: Charles Krauthammer, Author and Syndicated Columnist

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I: The Reagan Doctrine (00:15 – 24:45)

KRISTOL: Welcome to CONVERSATIONS. I'm Bill Kristol, and I'm very pleased to have with me today my friend, Charles Krauthammer. Charles, thanks for taking the time to do this.

KRAUTHAMMER: Happy to be here.

KRISTOL: So we first met, I think when I came to Washington 1985, you'd been here a few years, and you had just written a terrific piece that became a very important piece on the Reagan Doctrine, I think, both explaining it and defending it. But I remember someone saying to me, "That Charles Krauthammer guy he wrote that terrific piece, but he came here as a speechwriter for Walter Mondale."

KRAUTHAMMER: That's right. And people asked me, "How do you go from Walter Mondale to Fox News?" And the answer I gave them, and the answer I'll give you is I was young once. But I'm recovered from my youth. No, it's true.

"The Reagan Doctrine" is an interesting thing. I remember we were sitting around, I was working at *The New Republic* in those days, which was sort of famously liberal, but had a pretty aggressive anti-Soviet hardline foreign policy side, which is what attracted me to it.

And I did a lot of writing in foreign policy. And I remember saying in one of the editorial meetings, "There's something very peculiar going on." For most of our lives there were guerilla movements around the world, and they were invariably national liberation, and they were Communist or Soviet-supported, or Chinese-supported, Vietnam, Cuba. I mean, that was the norm.

And then I said, there's an interesting counter-development, we have anti-communist guerillas in Nicaragua, Angola, Afghanistan – of course, this was the Mujahedeen, and we're backing it – I wonder what it means? And one of the people at the meetings said, "Well, you ought to write that." I wasn't actually thinking of doing it. So I put that together.

And I basically came to the conclusion is what had happened, the Soviets had overextended their empire, and they were getting what the West had gotten with its overextended empire decades before a reaction, they got a rebellion, they got resistance. And the Soviets were now beginning to feel it, and the genius of Reagan, although I don't think they had a plan in doing this is he instinctively realized that one

of the ways to go after the Soviets was indirect, and that is you go after their proxies, you go after their allies, you go after their clients, or even in Afghanistan you go after them directly.

So that's what I called the Reagan Doctrine, it was sort of the opposite of the Brezhnev Doctrine, which was whatever we control we keep. And Reagan was saying, no you don't.

KRISTOL: I want to come back, not let you get away that easily from your migration from Walter Mondale Democrats who were Reagan defenders, let's just stay on the Reagan issue, it was so interesting. Did you have a feeling, you were there during those years, you were very involved, especially in foreign policy debates, writing, and on television, and everything.

When did you have the sense, or did you have the sense at the beginning that Reagan was right? Was there a moment where you thought, "A, he's generally right in his view of the world, but B, that it could actually succeed"?

KRAUTHAMMER: I thought he was right just about from the beginning. And what happened to me, I wrote about this in the introduction of my book, what happened to me was I still sort of remained a Democrat, still remained a liberal, a Great Society Democrat even through much of the 80s, but I had always been part of that, what people don't remember actually existed, the conservative wing of the Democratic Party, which existed in the 70s, it was rather important.

They went by various names, the Coalition for the Democratic Majority, people like Paul Nitze, Pat Moynihan –

KRISTOL: Scoop Jackson.

KRAUTHAMMER: Scoop Jackson, of course, was sort of my, my hero of the group. Scoop was famously liberal on domestic affairs, and really, really tough on – So that's sort of where I was positioned, and when I found, and my deep disappointment was there's something about being in power that makes you a little more reasonable if you're an ideologue than you would otherwise.

And the fact, the Clinton years were not distinguished, but surely after Afghanistan, Carter got pretty hard lined, he canceled the Olympics, they did the oil embargo, he began arming the Mujahedeen, he basically for whatever reason the policy has solidified, and people don't remember he's the one who decided to put nuclear missiles, American Pershing and cruise missiles in Europe, in Germany to counteract the Soviet advance in the late 70s.

Now as soon as the Democrats lost power, they lost their heads. They lost all sense of responsibility. They began to back the nuclear freeze, which would have effectively have cancelled the deployment, given the Soviet's victory, not that that was their intent, but they were sort of naive, and anti-everything, and in a panic over nuclear war.

And over Reagan's succession, they assumed he was a mad man, would start a World War, they backed objectively terrible policies. So for me the turning point, if there was one, was the huge argument over the freeze.

KRISTOL: Yeah I remember. That was what, '83?

KRAUTHAMMER: It was earlier, it was sort of '82, even '81. And if you ever go back to the presidential election of '84, the two contenders on the Democratic side Mondale and Hart were contending with each other to say who had been the first to support the freeze and oppose the deployments. But that to me was such an open-and-shut issue. I studied for – I sort of immersed myself in the literature of deterrence.

This was so slam-dunk what Reagan was doing with the support of Thatcher, of course, and Helmut Kohl. I think he was the Chancellor at the time.

KRISTOL: Yeah, I think so.

KRAUTHAMMER: The three of them stood up to huge demonstrations, people don't remember the biggest demonstration in American history was in New York City in the middle of the – a million people came out in the street to oppose the deployments, and to support the freeze.

That to me was a turning point, because it meant to me that the Democrats totally had lost their sense that this was a Cold War, this was a war worth winning, and thinking strategically instead of either emotionally or reflexively, nukes are bad so I will oppose nukes, which is sort of mindless.

Beginning with the freeze, where I ended up very strongly on the side of Reagan. In fact, I remember NPR covered the rally, the million-man rally, and they had to put me on the air to interview because there was nobody else that they could find who would oppose the rally.

KRISTOL: Right.

KRAUTHAMMER: That's how much this hysteria, remember the end of the world?

KRISTOL: Wasn't there some movie, ABC TV special? I can't remember.

KRAUTHAMMER: *The Day After*.

KRISTOL: That's right.

KRAUTHAMMER: About a nuclear attack on Lawrence, Kansas, and what they did throughout the country, they provided grief counselors for the people who were so upset by the movie, it never happened, of course. But to tell you how much the country lost its mind, and that to me was the beginning.

And then on every strategic issue after that, opposing the Soviets in Central America, the Reagan Doctrine, the defense budget, hard line on disarmament, offering the zero option, it's a complicated issue. But essentially it was Reagan saying, OK, we're going to put our missiles in Europe, we offer you a deal, you take yours out of Eastern Europe, which is what started this, and we will remove ours, which eventually, it was considered by the Left a fake offer, a phony offer. A way to deflect things.

In fact, it was a serious offer, and in the end about six years later the Soviet accepted it, and it was the abolition of a whole class of short-range nuclear missiles, which incidentally I would just add, Putin has now violated the Soviet, Russian – excuse me, Soviets are gone, they're not really gone.

KRISTOL: Right.

KRAUTHAMMER: The Russians are now redeploying them, and we have to think about a way to counter it, but that's the story of my change on foreign policy, and I refuse to accept responsibility. The cliché is I did not leave the Democrats, the Party left me. That is true on foreign affairs.

On domestic, I left them later on, but on consideration on how to deal with threats around the world. I don't think I really changed, it's the Democrats who sort of lost their heads in the early 80s, and I had nowhere to go.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that's interesting, because a lot of people put the kind of neoconservative pivot, and it was for an older generation, I suppose in the late-60s, certainly throughout the 70s, I think you're right, Reagan in power, and the Democrats going off the cliff out of power really were –

KRAUTHAMMER: It was the out of power, because the antiwar rhetoric, they were still the party of McGovern in the mid-70s, Carter had a very soft line the early years, you know "inordinate fear of communism," kind of wobbly, then Afghanistan happened, which without a doubt is a hinge point in his diplomacy, and his arming of the Mujahedeen was a crucial development in the Cold War.

At that point they were still in power, they realized we got to do something, they're on the march, remember we had Iran, we had Nicaragua, we had Afghanistan, even Grenada, this is the *annus mirabilis* for the Soviets, 1979. They were on the march, everywhere we were in retreat, Carter sort of said, "OK, we're going to stop them." But the minute they were out of power they completely fell apart.

KRISTOL: And when did you have the sense, just to stick on the 80s, because I got here at '85, and we got to know each other, and we were both as far as domestic policy mostly, but we all had similar views, and I think on foreign policy, I certainly did not expect to win the Cold War ten years after what seemed to be the Soviet's peak in 1979. Reagan seems to have been the only person who actually thought that was possible. When did you realize that could be happening? I think you were a little earlier than most on that.

KRAUTHAMMER: No, I wasn't.

KRISTOL: No.

KRAUTHAMMER: I was the last one.

KRISTOL: Yeah right.

KRAUTHAMMER: The day after the Berlin Wall came down I thought, "Oh maybe this is going to happen."

KRISTOL: Right.

KRAUTHAMMER: I mean, that was the most unexpected event in our lifetimes. And I don't know one person in my acquaintance, because I didn't know Reagan, personally, who thought that we would live to see the end of the Soviet empire.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

KRAUTHAMMER: I assumed it was like the sun rising in the east, you get used to it, we live with it, we have to manage it. I don't think there is anybody who thought. We lived through a time of Biblical wonder.

The idea that the greatest empire, land empire on earth would collapse without a shot fired, and just give up, and disappear – of course, Putin is a little upset about this, this explains a lot of what's going on a quarter of a century later – but that, to me, was the most unexpected event.

And it was sort of shocking in the sense that we wake up one morning, literally Christmas Day 1991, there is no Soviet empire, and I remember using the word *Biblical*, because this stuff is not supposed to happen in your lifetime, in the absence of a World War, for example. But you're right, it is basically a decade between the apogee of the Soviet empire, and then their rapid disintegration.

And the fact is they did it, I mean, if you look back sort of historically in the very long view, it was a system that could not sustain itself in the end, had exhausted itself. In the early years, even systems that

don't work can succeed on energy, mobilization, optimism, and force, oppression. But there's a sort of élan in these ideologies, then, you know, Hitlerism never had a chance to reach that stage.

But it was still in its apogee even when it was defeated, the defense of Berlin, when it was hopeless and it was over is astonishing. But with the Soviets it was hollowed because the elites knew that it was a fraud and a deception. There was nothing left to fight for, there wasn't a believer anywhere in the world. So they reached their apogee, in part because of the Vietnam defeatism on our part, and withdrawal on the part of the West. So it was sort of a historical accident, and then they were so overstretched the system is so sort of literally inhuman, and illogical that it collapses sort of all at once.

That none of us expected. I think the only person who did was Pat Moynihan. I remember him writing and arguing in the 80s, because he took a softer line on the Soviets, and I thought, you know, "Here's our hero from 70s." But he would argue that these guys are going to collapse, the CIA is overestimating their power, we just have to manage this, and he was right.

KRISTOL: Yeah, though authoritarian regimes can hang on a long time without the élan, if not pushed and challenged, I think there the Reagan defense build-up, the army of the freedom fighters around the world was so important.

KRAUTHAMMER: They were overstretched. Reagan understood it. He challenged them at the periphery, he challenged them on the arms race, he challenged them with that strategic defense initiative. He challenged them ideologically, and you put all those together, and they realized the gig is up.

KRISTOL: Now, to stay on Reagan for a minute, you met him though a few times, I think.

KRAUTHAMMER: I did, I did.

KRISTOL: What was he like? For younger people today he's like, you know, Franklin Roosevelt, even Teddy Roosevelt for us when you think about it. It's been quite a while since he was president.

KRAUTHAMMER: It is, it is funny when you meet younger people, he is to me like FDR, the legendary president, he won the Second World War, or Churchill. I was asked to have lunch with him shortly after I wrote "The Reagan Doctrine." I guess they got curious, who is this young whippersnapper who is able to give us our own doctrine?

KRISTOL: I mean, people should just understand, this was not, Reagan was reelected, he was doing his foreign policy. There were fierce debates about it, but there wasn't actually, the phrase didn't exist, I believe, until your piece.

KRAUTHAMMER: It didn't exist.

KRISTOL: People, I guess, were writing articles about what's Reagan up to?

KRAUTHAMMER: No, no, but it was more than just the phrase.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

KRAUTHAMMER: The idea, this idea that historically guerilla movements are anti-Western –

KRISTOL: That was the key.

KRAUTHAMMER: That was the key. I just sort of, I noticed kind of a pattern, and I was thinking about why this might be, and so I thought, "This is what we're doing," and then I thought, "Well, whether or not," – I have to admit this, so I'll do it here.

I didn't – I wrote "The Reagan Doctrine" trying to push them into pursuing the Reagan Doctrine.

KRISTOL: Right.

KRAUTHAMMER: I wrote it as, well, this is already existing, and I think it did. But I don't know that they were conscious of it, or they had this plan, or anybody had said, "Hey, there's a change in human events here. The story of revolution is now a flip story. So let's pursue this." Reagan was doing what instinctively would make sense. The Soviets are in Nicaragua, they're supporting him, there's a guerilla movement we're going to support it.

Of course, Afghanistan started with Carter, there was Angola, there were other places, but so I wrote this with the intent of creating it, and Reagan never used the phrase, George Shultz did, and Kagan was his top aide, Robbie Kagan.

KRISTOL: Right.

KRAUTHAMMER: Was his top aide and speechwriter – he was even younger than the rest of us.

KRISTOL: Right.

KRAUTHAMMER: He would call me and say, "This is an interesting idea." Shultz went around using the phrase because Shultz was a believer in the policy, and the idea of calling something a doctrine is that it sort of appeals to the people in charge, it flatters them –

KRISTOL: Coherence, grand.

KRAUTHAMMER: Yeah, a coherent strategy. So I would think it would kind of trap them into wanting to continue it. So, in a sense it was advocacy as well as identification.

KRISTOL: That's good.

KRAUTHAMMER: But the interesting thing is I had done this once before. I had created a concept in 1978 when I was a psychiatrist, I was doing the research on manic depressive disease, how often it happens, who it happens to, sort of the epidemiology, but in my research, I came across these odd cases where people would become manic, the high part of manic depressive disease without any psychological cause, but with certain diseases, and nobody had ever written about this.

So I began to think maybe there's a form of manic depressive disease, just the upside, and caused by illness or drugs. So I collected all the cases I did, I gave it a name, I created the criteria of when you have it, and when you don't. I published it in the *Archives of General Psychiatry*, and it lives to this day, every year people report 15 or so cases of this thing. But it's the power of naming, it's like the Bible talking about you name the animals, you control.

So I created, I identified a syndrome, but in fact, I created it so people began to look for it. So, I always had this idea that when you name something, and you create it, and you give it a coherence, a sort of phenomena, well, then you've actually, you sort of created the pressure to finding more cases, and to perpetuating it. So this was my second creation. A little bit different field.

KRISTOL: So you had written that piece, and the White House, Secretary Shultz was interested and actually spoke about it, but the White House was presumably –

KRAUTHAMMER: They never used the phrase.

KRISTOL: – pleased, but they invited you over to see the President or – ?

KRAUTHAMMER: They came. They invited me to lunch with Meg Greenfield, who was the Editorial Page Editor of the *Washington Post* and David Brinkley – and I still have a picture of it – with a couple of his aides. We ate in the lunchroom right next to the Oval Office. I'm sure you've eaten there often.

KRISTOL: Not often, but a couple of times.

KRAUTHAMMER: So you know the room. And I remember, because I had never been up close with him – so this is sort of 1985 – and I decide this is a place where I want to probe him on Nicaragua, see where he's going. He deflects all of my questions, and finally I ask him once more, and he gives me a very long tale about staying in the guest house of the Marcos, and in the middle of the night seeing there's a gigantic spider on the ceiling, and spending the rest of the night trying to figure out how to protect Nancy from him without waking her and scaring her.

This took maybe 15 minutes. He told it very well. I mean, he was great. But at the end of that I realized he's not going to tell me anything about anything. And but the interesting thing is I took Meg, I drove her back to the *Washington Post*, and I said, the first thing I said to her in the car is, "I don't get it. This is the most successful president of my lifetime, but he presents himself as a very simple man who is sort out of it. What's going on?"

It took me years to realize that that's how he preferred to present himself. And it was really a function of his strength. He had no need to show himself to be smart. He knew he had no need to tell me anything about, he didn't care or know who I was. A writer for the *Post* and for *Time* magazine, and he just wanted to tell stories, deflect me, and charm me.

And it was part of his persona that he was so self-possessed, so sort of sure of who he was that he never had to show himself to be the smartest guy in the room, which is sort of an affliction of presidents and contenders, and senators, and a lot of journalists too, as I know very well myself. And that was his great strength. You know there was a *Saturday Night Live* skit once that showed him playing really dumb in the Oval Office, remember? And then as soon as the press leaves, he gives 18 orders in a row, boom, boom, boom, boom to his staff. I mean, like an Eisenhower-sharp general.

Then the press returns and he plays the bumbling old man. And that's what I realized was his great strength. He didn't have to show anybody anything. And he played dumb. There was one experience in my life that reminded me of that. I occasionally would hang out with my dad, who was a real estate developer in Montreal. I'd go after school, and I'd hang out in his office.

I was once in his office, and he's negotiating with two guys over a land deal somewhere, and I'm thinking to myself, "You can't let them talk to you that way, or you know, where is the rebuttal?" I mean, he goes through the whole thing. And so when it's over I said, "Dad, I mean, why didn't you just respond in this way?" And he said, "No, I prefer that they think that I'm rather simple. It gives me a huge advantage." And in fact, the deal we worked out was extremely favorable.

He was so self possessed, that's why I couldn't be a businessman. I said to him, just sort of personal pride I would have jumped all over these morons. He said, "Yeah, that's why you're not going to be a businessman." And that was genius, Reagan's genius also. So what impressed me is that there was no need to impress. And I never saw, I saw him at a couple of other dinners, spent some time with him, he was always the same.

KRISTOL: Yeah, it really is amazing. That's a good point about businessmen, too, because it is the problem with our walks of life, which is you do well by impressing.

KRAUTHAMMER: Right.

KRISTOL: But you forget in every other – where there’s a bottom line, whether it’s financial, or in Reagan’s case winning an election, or succeeding in your policies that’s a very different bottom line, and sometimes it’s not wise to be the smartest guy in the room, or the cleverest formulation, or the –

KRAUTHAMMER: And it’s wise to be underestimated, that was part of Reagan’s great political talent.
KRISTOL: Since you mentioned underestimated, I’ll ask you about George W. Bush, the other President, I suppose, you maybe spent some time, I think he was fan of yours, and had you over occasionally, what was your sense of him?

KRAUTHAMMER: My sense of him was that he had tremendous inner strength, and he had some ideas that he wanted to pursue. And he was, I don’t know about how he personally reacted to the criticism, but he had tremendous courage to carry himself through. He was open, he would listen, I would be in meetings, I mean, you were in some of them, he’d take journalists in.

And he didn’t often bristle, even though he got asked some pretty tough questions sometimes, but what impressed me was not what came out of the personal meetings, it’s very hard to get anything at that level if you’re a journalist.

KRISTOL: Right.

KRAUTHAMMER: Because there’s a line to be crossed, I’m not an advisor. But, you know, this big, the thing that history will remember him best for is ordering the surge, and persevering in the surge, which was the increase in American troops, a new strategy in a failing Iraq War, at a time when everybody in the establishment, in Washington, in his party was telling him this is a disaster, you can’t do it. The Democrats pretended it wasn’t working even after it had worked.

We subsequently learned that Hillary Clinton had admitted that she had, when she said it wasn’t working she knew it was. Obama implied that perhaps he was saying it, too. But the way he stuck with the decision at the low point of his Presidency, because he believed it was right, and that I think was his strength. He had this sort of moral compass.

Now, he made mistakes, and I think part of it was his commitment to this idea of democratization, which Iraq was not a very fertile soil. But he did leave in the end having mostly achieved his objectives. So in that sense I admire him, and I admire what we he did at the end especially.

II: The Unipolar Moment (24:45 – 40:19)

KRISTOL: So you wrote “The Reagan Doctrine” in 1985, and christened or baptized, or whatever the word is the Reagan Administration’s policies. You say you were surprised by the collapse of the Soviet Union, but you pivoted, and I say this not to flatter you, because I really think it’s true much faster than most people in really trying to think through the new world.

And yesterday, I remember it was called “The Unipolar Moment,” that was written very soon –

KRAUTHAMMER: It was a speech delivered in September 1990 to the Henry Jackson Society.

KRISTOL: So less than a year after the Berlin Wall fell, before the Soviet Union disintegrated.

KRAUTHAMMER: And before the Gulf War, people attributed to the triumphalism of the Gulf War.

KRISTOL: That’s interesting.

KRAUTHAMMER: The Gulf War was in January 1991, the speech was given in September of 1990, it had nothing to do with the Gulf War. It appeared in *Foreign Affairs* in the Winter 1991 edition, but I remember sending it in a week before the Gulf War started, but we didn't know how it was going to end up.

Here's what happened. The Berlin Wall comes down, and I'm beginning to believe that this Biblical event is going to happen. And I'm trying to figure out what comes after. And this is sort of the easiest way to create an idea is simple opposition to what was conventional wisdom. Conventional wisdom of everybody was, if the bipolar world dissolves, which it was on its way to dissolving, it will give a rise to a multi-polar world, power will now be shared, and it was usually between the United States – remember Japan was in its apogee, everybody was afraid that Japan was going to purchase the entire United States.

We had a rising sun, the scare about Japan. So United States and Japan, and the joke at the time was, "The U.S. and the Russians held a Cold War, who won? Answer: Japan." So, the U.S., Japan, Europe was an entity of some sort, maybe a revanchist Russia, you know, one day, China, of course. So it would be like a five-power world, the kind of world people imagined might emerge from the Second World War, but didn't.

And this to me just seemed totally wrong. There was no one writing anything else. It seemed to me so obvious what follows a unipolar world, none of these other powers are real, Japan, China was remember still in the infancy of its growth, the Russians if they came back it would be a long time, Europe was a fiction. It was obviously going to be us.

And then I just looked around, and it turned out that the gap between the number one and number two power around 1990, and surely was going to get larger, as it did throughout the 90s, economically, politically, militarily, in every measure was the largest since Rome, not since the British.

The British had a number of rivals, the French empire, and then the Germans who were pretty nip and tuck. This was like number one, and then you know the rest of the field. So it seems to me blindingly obvious that we were going into a period of unprecedented dominance by one power, where essentially we would be the arbiters of all the conflicts in the world.

Andrei Gromyko once defined a superpower as a country without which no conflict in the world can be decided. Soviets were in some sense. You couldn't decide, you know, the Indo-China War, the big issues without them in some sense. They could be decisive, and they were going to drop out of that contest.

So there's going to be one superpower left, or actually it was a described, also superpower defined by, I can't remember the first name, last name was [Hedley] Bull, he was a political thinker. And he said, "A superpower is a country that can intervene, but cannot be intervened against."

KRISTOL: Oh, that's good.

KRAUTHAMMER: And that's who we were, we were the only one. So, I'm beginning to think, we're going into an unipolarity, it will probably get larger, the gap before it gets smaller.

The only two questions are, what are the implications of that? And how long will it last? So I remember writing, this is 1990, and I said, unless we destroy ourselves economically, unless we get, you know if we don't get our economic house in order, and we blow it, it will be sooner. But assuming we don't, which we basically had not, I said it is likely to last three decades or so.

Well, we're coming up on the end of the third decade. And my question was, are we going to accept this role? Many people thought, and I quoted here Jeane Kirkpatrick, who basically said, "We're done."

KRISTOL: Yeah, it was America should be a normal, wasn't that the phrase?

KRAUTHAMMER: A normal country in a normal time. And I tried to gently take her on, saying there are no such things as normal times. She was right in the sense that we deserved a rest, we'd been this great power, engaged in life and death, ideological, existential struggle since the early 30s, essentially non-stop. Of course, we didn't enter the war until the 40s, but the challenge was in the 30s.

And this is sort of 60 years, that's enough, and I think she was right. But, of course, it wasn't enough because there was no one else to carry on, we had to, so we had a responsibility. And then I had thought, what are going to be the threats in that age? And I said, it's going to be the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction by have-not revanchist, oppositional, small parties.

And what struck me was, up until that day, that era, the only way to challenge the world order was to be a centrally located, highly industrialized great power like Germany. It could challenge the world order, and it did. We had to now enter a world of unipolarity where the challenge could come from, for example, a smaller country Iran, on the periphery, without a great industrial base, but acquires the weapons of mass destruction, and the means to deliver them.

This was going to be the era of the weapons state. And as we have seen Iraq, its nuclear program in 1981, North Korea with its nukes, and now, of course, Iran, this is the great threat of our time. We don't have any way, we haven't conceptualized other than a non-proliferation treaty, which is now being utterly shredded, how we're going to deal with it. That's the challenge.

But the unipolarity, the dominance of the U.S. was obvious to me, and over time it became pretty clear. I was hoping for longer than 30, I just don't know, it depends if we can survive the current administration. They've been accelerating the end of unipolarity.

KRISTOL: Yeah, well, they wanted to, I think.

KRAUTHAMMER: They do, right.

KRISTOL: I mean, the Clinton Administration after a couple of wobbly years basically embraced, I mean, your theory, and its implications, which were not to relax, which were to be fairly aggressive, and –

KRAUTHAMMER: In the Balkan Wars, for example.

KRISTOL: In monitoring and policing, if you will.

KRAUTHAMMER: Yes.

KRISTOL: Or at least managing, you could intervene or not, case by case, but taking responsibility for unipolarity that was the argument.

KRAUTHAMMER: They did.

KRISTOL: As opposed to Jeane, I suppose, who was –

KRAUTHAMMER: Exactly, which was surprising. But in the Clinton Administration he used the phrase, "The indispensable nation."

KRISTOL: Yes, that's right.

KRAUTHAMMER: You know, it's not too aggressive, indispensable, what it really means is we're the arbiter. And that means you accept, and you maybe not be happy with, but you accept the responsibility of being the unipolar power, and you do what you have to do.

KRISTOL: I guess the biggest event, maybe I'm wrong, I would say after the fall of the Berlin Wall in our adult lifetimes in Washington, probably September 11th, 2001. I can't remember it, you subsequently called it a holiday from history, or is that actually in the – I associate that phrase with you, maybe you're quoting someone else, I don't know.

KRAUTHAMMER: I can't remember, I don't remember – It was not on September 11th.

KRISTOL: No.

KRAUTHAMMER: I wrote a column on that day, and the fury I felt, everybody else did would have obscured any calm, you know, sort of formulation –

KRISTOL: Were you as startled by it as some people, or, you had been more worried as you just said about terrorism?

KRAUTHAMMER: That was the coming threat. Yes, but I didn't expect that it would come in that form. But it is interesting how history sort of neatly categorizes itself, you know, the 30s, the 20s, they all mean something. This was a decade, you know.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

KRAUTHAMMER: The fall of the Soviet Union was, I believe, the day after Christmas 1991. Here's September 11th, 2001, you have a very clear decade, and it was a holiday from history because you could start with – in a sentence, an allusion to the Fukuyama piece, I mean, his idea was it, was the end of ideological history, and clearly had a liberal democratic experiment, exemplified by the U.S. triumph, there would be no challenges, and well, there had been a few. They're certainly on the march, the challenges right now.

But we did have that sense in the 1990s, because we were utterly invulnerable. There was no great power anywhere near us. We had basically the whole West behind us. We had no challenges anywhere else, the Russians were trying to figure out, they were a friendly power in those days, they were a mess, but they were relatively friendly. The Chinese were still weak and peripheral.

So, but we got to imagine that peace and prosperity come with the air we breathe, and that's always a mistake because those are – The essence of the unipolar article that I wrote in 1990 was we're going to come to believe that it comes with the air we breathe. But you have to understand that every period of peace is an act of will by some great power or powers exerting order on the world.

It is not the absence of the use of power. It has to be in order, imposed on. That was going to be our role, we don't like it, we don't deserve it, but we have to do it. Who keeps open the sea lanes, for example? The world of trade, oh, the world prosperity, the incredible lifting of people out of poverty. It's the result of the U.S. Navy. Simple, you got to have a Navy, and it keeps things open.

But nobody sort of appreciates that because peace appears to be in absence of some, you know, the famous definition of peace by Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*, "Peace, noun. A period of cheating between wars."

KRISTOL: Yeah, right.

KRAUTHAMMER: And that's basically what we didn't understand. And that's the reason that holiday from history, we got used to the fact that this was the way it is. September 11th happens, and we realize there's been no abolition of evil, there's been no abolition of this animosity to the West, and again historically, I mean, the last 500 years you're bred to accept that kind of thing coming from a great power.

Pearl Harbor you needed imperial Japan; Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of Russia, you needed a massive Third Reich. For it to come from a bunch of guys in loin clothes in a cave we didn't expect, but it's because of the nature that wasn't the weapons of mass destruction, but this – What the power that is multiplied by new technology allows smaller players, peripheral players, even non-state players, which we did not expect to pose a major challenge.

KRISTOL: Now, the Bush administration I think reacted, and sort of contained, beat back –

KRAUTHAMMER: Yes.

KRISTOL: And contained that challenge, I think it's fair to say, had it on the run, you know, not entirely, but in a fairly effective way. Iraq went badly, but then he surged in Iraq. Afghanistan could have been better, but it wasn't a breeding ground of terror at least, or they weren't exporting terror under Bush. Other parts of the world, well, it had the sense that being a jihadist was not a terribly promising occupation.

KRAUTHAMMER: Not a good career.

KRISTOL: Even Iran stopped its nuclear program for a couple of years.

KRAUTHAMMER: Accounting would be a better career.

KRISTOL: What's that? Accounting, yeah.

KRAUTHAMMER: Accounting or jihadism, look –

KRISTOL: But then we got tired.

KRAUTHAMMER: Yeah.

KRISTOL: Then what? I mean, was it just –

KRAUTHAMMER: No, I don't know that we got tired, but we elected a president who found the country to be fatigued, and this was the perfect opportunity to impose his view of the world, which is of America being non-exceptional, America not having the mandate of heaven, America having forfeited, if it ever had the moral authority to be the arbiter of the world, which is what we were, and thus a man who ordered a retreat.

KRISTOL: He took advantage of a certain weariness. But I think the country would have rallied if he had asked it, don't you think?

KRAUTHAMMER: Of course.

KRISTOL: He exaggerated the weariness to make it –

KRAUTHAMMER: But he also did not run on "I'm non-exceptional; I'm going to, we're going to allow these things to happen without us," but the country was ready for it, and it's what Rahm Emanuel said, "A crisis is a terrible thing to waste." I mean, he was able to pass an \$830 billion dollar stimulus, which is inconceivable at any other time, the largest spending bill in bill-atic history, on a country that was ready to do anything because it was in financial crisis.

So in that sense he found a country really world-weary, war-weary, and he decided he was going to do "no more wars" as if it's we're the ones who decide when wars end, where it takes two parties.

No, but I will give Bush the credit. After 9/11, there was no conceptualization of this whole struggle. They had to make it up right away – interrogation, Guantanamo, information, projection of power, how do you do it against a non-state actor? What do you do with Pakistan? Well, Colin Powell went to Pakistan, and he said, “You’re going to do X, Y, and Z, or we’re going to bomb you back to the Stone Age.”

That was a pretty convincing argument, and they cooperated. The problem that we had is we were very good at toppling regimes, and we can do it at very low cost, relatively speaking. But the real problem, and I don’t even think anybody has a good answer, what do you do when the smoke clears? And we tried to democratize places that are, it turns out are not easily democratized, or even to pat on this, so we decided, well, now all we really want to do is to pacify them.

And I think in Iraq we had some success. Obama himself on the day, I think, he ordered the retreat, the evacuation of Iraq, or perhaps on the day the last troops left said, “We are leaving behind with a strong and stable Iraq.” Which, in fact, it was. And then, of course, in the absence of any American influence, it fell apart.

III: Decline is a Choice (40:19 – 54:37)

KRISTOL: Now, you gave the talk, or another very well-known talk with a very evocative title, which became an article in *The Weekly Standard* in this case, “Decline is a Choice,” that was early also. So that was early in Obama’s first year, I think.

KRAUTHAMMER: Yeah, Obama’s first year.

KRISTOL: ’09 yeah.

KRAUTHAMMER: At the end of 2000 – I don’t know if he was a Nobel laureate yet, but it was pretty close. It was only 10 months, 11 months into his presidency, but it was very clear that what his objective was.

We were too big a power. See I drew distinction between Clintons sort of wobbliness, as you called it, and Obama’s retreat. With the Clinton, it was not a Vietnam syndrome thing on the Clinton part, their wobbliness it was a sense that power corrupts. We had gotten a little bit too big, too strong, so we blunder into Vietnam, we do these things, and we don’t want to be – So he signs a hundred treaties, sort of the Gulliver strings to restrain the U.S.

But he didn’t do it because he thought that we don’t deserve our position, and we’re not a force for good, he thought if we get too big it’s bad for us and the world. So it’s a power corrupts. Obama’s vision was, and I wrote this in that article for you in the, “Decline is a Choice,” is that we are intrinsically flawed. We are always a nation, he uses the phrase all the time, “trying to create a more perfect union.” Meaning we’re an imperfect union.

KRISTOL: Right.

KRAUTHAMMER: And the imperfection is what he hones in on, and what moves him. So for him it wasn’t that we had gotten too big, that power itself is the problem, there’s something intrinsically wrong with the United States domestically and abroad, and thus there never was a sense of exceptionalism. That had to be restrained because of the temptations of power.

So my feeling was, and here we were in a new age beginning of the second decade of the century, war-weary, the Bush Administration being in a sense repudiated by the elections of ’06 and ’08, a new President going around the world basically, if not apologizing, confessing our sins, offering open hands to our enemies. And basically wanting America diminished, come home America.

It's McGovernism warmed over. And to my mind this was being called by many observers – this is where conventional wisdom makes me so crazy that I'm compelled to write the opposite – America is in decline.

KRISTOL: Right.

KRAUTHAMMER: Right, this was the theme, we're a country in decline so we have to match our resources with our status. I think that's what Walter Lippmann called solvency in foreign policy. You become insolvent when you overstretch.

So here we are in decline, the economy is a mess, spirit is gone, we've overstretched, we misread our strategic interest, so we are in decline, and this is the policy that fits. And my point was this is preposterous. We are still the unipolar power. There is nothing intrinsic in our condition that dictates American decline. Decline is a choice.

You can choose to decline. You can choose to say, the mantle of responsibility of history was given to us after the Second World War, and once again at the end of the Cold War, which we did not really want, to use the phrase of Adlai Stevenson, "May this cup pass from my lips." Actually, I think Jesus is the one who said it. You never know who the originator of any quote really is.

So, we never wanted it, but we're stuck with it. And Obama is the one who came in and said, "We don't really want it." But it was a choice, and not a – Britain after the Second World War had no choice about decline. It was spent, bankrupt, two World Wars, utterly exhausted, within ten years the empire was gone. We are not there at all, we are still at the apogee, relatively speaking, and far ahead of any number two power. It's a choice, and this is the wrong choice.

KRISTOL: And how much though once the choice, once you start down that path, how easy is it to reverse?

KRAUTHAMMER: Very hard.

KRISTOL: Yeah that's what –

KRAUTHAMMER: It's not irreversible though, Reagan shows you.

KRISTOL: Right.

KRAUTHAMMER: Carter's last year shows you. He began to increase the defense budget. I mean, it can be done, but that's why the election of 2016 is so important. I mean, we're not at a point where we can't come back. It's easier to rebuild a defense budget, relatively speaking. You build up a lot of weapons, there's a delay in time, so you're behind a little bit, you know, you got to rearm at the beginning of the Second World War, we were a mess.

We did not have a lot of success in places because our Army, and our armaments were so depleted, but it takes a while. But America has the industrial capacity to do whatever it wants. So, in that sense, that's repairable. The harder to repair is the sense of American strength, the inherent deterrent power of knowing who we are, what we might do.

Regaining the respect of our allies, and the confidence of our allies, and regaining the respect of our adversaries that takes time, and it takes a kind of demonstration. You think of Margaret Thatcher, the moment was the Falklands, who would have expected that?

KRISTOL: Right.

KRAUTHAMMER: But she did something improbably, half-crazy, succeeded, and it restored the power of Britain. Not that she became all of a sudden a great industrial power or a great military power, but it was will. You show will then people listen to you. That's what it will take.

KRISTOL: And so the choice, there's a big choice coming up whether to continue, I guess, on the path of decline.

KRAUTHAMMER: And that's going to be a test of the country.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

KRAUTHAMMER: I really think so, although I can't even imagine that, say, Hillary Clinton, were she elected, would continue the Obama policy. I don't know where she stands on anything, I don't know if she does, but you go by her husband's administration, and by the mood of the country except for the hard Left, people do not like where we are in the world.

They have a sense that this is not the America they love, and there's something about our taking responsibility. We know one of the things, one of the prides of being an American, you know, you're for a country that's liberated more people, on more continents over a hundred years than any in the history of the world. That's a source of pride.

I mean, I think it was a line of one of World War II histories I read, you know, imagine that you're a family being liberated in Europe at the end of the war, I don't know you're Hungarian, elsewhere what army would you like to know is coming to liberate you? And it's unanimous, everybody even the Nazis would again on a little airplane fly to the American lines and surrender at the Americans, even though that's, everybody knows that we are exceptional in that sense.

And they don't like the fact that we're being made unexceptional by a President who doesn't particularly believe we are exceptional.

KRISTOL: I suppose just looking around the world the effects of American withdrawal and retreat, which I think were somewhat masked, in 2012 I always thought that was one reason that President Obama sort of skated by to reelection, it wasn't – Iraq wasn't yet, ISIS wasn't yet controlling a third or a quarter of Iraq, and Syria was bloody, but not yet this unbelievable catastrophe, and Putin hadn't invaded Ukraine.

I mean this last couple of years as we speak in 2015, I mean it's really –

KRAUTHAMMER: Well, that's the horror that I felt in 2009, because I knew the result of this would not be immediate, but clearly he was setting the premise for what he called – He had already done the reset button with Russia, which to me was such an obvious mistake.

And I remember the phrase that Obama used when he spoke about this, and he said, "We're going to reset relations, which have cooled over the last few years." As if there was sort of an even-handed cooling, the cooling was because they invaded Georgia. That's the reason they cooled, but he made it imply that we were somehow responsible.

And then you know the early signs, the cancellation of the missile agreement with the Poles and the Czechs, without even telling our allies and cancelling it as a way to clearly knuckling under to the demands of the Russians, clearly putting back in place the fate and status of Eastern Europe, which everybody had assumed had been settled at the end of the Cold War. So it was the beginning of the unraveling.

And you could see that happening. And, of course, it took the four or five years, and now we are right in the middle of the consequence of the decisions taken in 2009, the signals and the policy adopted, which

is essentially one of retreat and withdrawal without either understanding or caring that as nature abhors a vacuum so does geopolitics. And the Russians would come in, the Iranians would come in, the jihadists would come in, and they've come in.

KRISTOL: Well, he's certainly given a shot in the arm to radical Islam and to Jihadism in a way that, I think, was almost unimaginable five or six years, when they did seem to be in retreat –

KRAUTHAMMER: Yes.

KRISTOL: I mean, they had their ideology, and they were trying to propagate it, but one doesn't have the impression that they were having great success. And now?

KRAUTHAMMER: They're in Libya, they're in Mali, they're in Nigeria, they're in the Sinai, for God's sake.

KRISTOL: European kids are traveling to Syria to fight, I mean.

KRAUTHAMMER: Yeah. But, you know, I'm somewhat optimistic here because these things are very fragile, and these sort of eschatological movements, and there were a lot of them in the Middle Ages, there were a lot of sort extreme apocalyptic Christian sects. There's a great history of it written by Norman Cohen in *The Pursuit of the Millennium*.

And they would pop up every 20 years. They would take over a city, they'd go pretty nuts, they would proclaim the second, and they'd get crushed. But the reason, I think, they're much weaker than we think is they are rising on the élan of success – same way, of course, Nazism did – you keep conquering and people think, "Well, you are the future."

It's not just that you acquiesced to be on the right side of history, but you believe, there's again the mandate of heaven. These guys get kicked out of Iraq to create in Mosul, other places with fairly, in a humiliating way, once they're in retreat, and in their bunkers it's not going to be that attractive, and can collapse really quickly, because they depend like these radical, like Nazism early on, Communism, they depend on the élan, and the success, and the belief.

And success and belief are intimately tied up. They can be thrown back.

KRISTOL: And how about here at home? I actually agree with you that a little strength on our part, it wouldn't be that much even, and some sort of dramatic defeats for the Jihadists would go a long way to slowing down and reversing the recruitment, and the momentum they look to have.

KRAUTHAMMER: Absolutely.

KRISTOL: What about here at home? I mean, you've always been less pessimistic, I would say than a lot of people who are conservatives about American culture, or you've not been so alarmed as some about, you know, the decline of the West, and collapse of everything, and it was so much better in the good ol' days. I think you've had a pretty hard-headed view of the good ol' days weren't so great, and, you know, the country has a lot of strength.

What about on the American side? Because that really is the key, I guess, right? Are we up to doing what they were up to doing in 1948 or in 1981? Or even in 2001 really?

KRAUTHAMMER: I think so. I think what it needs is leadership, the country is ready.

KRISTOL: So you're not too worried about the culture and all the obvious problems?

KRAUTHAMMER: I worry because we may not get the leadership, and then we keep going where we're going. But, you know, we've had the turnarounds with Reagan. There was a period, it was Jean-François Revel's book *How Democracies Perish*.

KRISTOL: Yeah, right.

KRAUTHAMMER: It was a big bestseller, everybody was weeping in their soup, and gnashing of teeth, renting of clothing.

KRISTOL: I think I looked that up, I may be wrong, I think that came out –

KRAUTHAMMER: It might have come out early 80s?

KRISTOL: Yes, I was going to say, one thinks of it as a 70s phenomena, but it shows how strong that momentum was –

KRAUTHAMMER: That's very true.

KRISTOL: That Reagan was already President, and people still thought that.

KRAUTHAMMER: I think he had only done Grenada, which wasn't exactly the greatest success, or whatever it was.

No, and there was a retreat from Lebanon, I mean, rocky early days. Again, these things take five years, you do the hard line on the missile defense, we were still on the defensive, and the marches were in the streets in London, in Germany, in the U.S., you still had that. There was great resistance.

There was a very big overhand, but you know it's true, but there was a sense of American decline that was running right through the 70s, again the philosophy was, of the Democrats, "We have to accommodate our diminished position, and retreat." So you get a Reagan who reverses the narrative, and says stuff like, "Communism will be the ash heap of history."

Calls them "the evil empire," you know, unequivocally, and things begin to turn, but you do get these periods, and then you need leadership. The question is, it's not just a random thing, I mean, you basically get the President, the leadership that you deserve in some sense, I hate to be so pessimistic, but the country was ready for Obama in many ways.

And now we gave him an eight-year run. Now we'll see if the country is going to say – By the polls they don't want to go the same way, but it's hard to tell, we won't know. The country will determine that, but it does take someone to simply articulate. I do think there's a fundamental sense where Americans don't want to go, for example, to this European social democracy model, the multiplication of entitlements, huge debt, high taxation, high regulation.

We're still getting it, and it's progressing very powerfully under Obama, especially now as we are in the last two years when he's sort of unbound, unrestrained, and wants to his legacy which will be a rather baleful one in all of this. But much of this can be reversed, and it requires that the country decide one way or the other.

I do think the 2016 election could be a fundamental one in American history.

IV: The Sixties and Quebec (54:37 – 1:06:40)

KRISTOL: You grew up in Canada, this is a somewhat notorious fact, I think, but I think for us, for many of us we think of Canada as pretty much America, but maybe a little slower, you know, slightly funny pronunciation of a couple of words.

KRAUTHAMMER: More polite.

KRISTOL: More polite, of course. Is that your Canada?

KRAUTHAMMER: It actually wasn't, but it reminds me there's a very good way to distinguish between America and Canada. In the Canadian Constitution it defines its objectives, this is the British North America Act of 1867, that's our constitution, it said, "The purpose of this act" which was to make Canada one dominion, "was to provide for peace, order, and good government."

For us, it's life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. For them it's peace, order, and good government. That tells everything you want to know about it. But I didn't grow up in the peace, order, and good government part of Canada. I grew up in Quebec. And Quebec is an island unto itself, politically we all know about its different history, but the culture of Quebec, not just the language, but the political culture of Quebec is entirely different from the rest of Canada, and from the rest of North America. It is a European political culture.

For example, there are no general strikes in the United States. There are general strikes in Quebec. The politicization of the unions. Also, here we have centrist political parties, center-right, center-left. In Europe, they go goal line to goal line, here it's between the 40 yard lines. Europeans have real fascist parties, as did Quebec, probably still does. Real Communist, I mean, it's an ideological free for all, with a lot of different influences.

Far more radical than here, and it had one other overlay, it was in the middle of anti-colonial struggle. I mean Americans we had ours here, around in the 1780s, this is the 1950s and 60s they were still in it. Meaning that Quebec had been subjugated. It was essentially run by Anglos, which were a minority in Quebec, and I grew up exactly at the time when the French were rising, and essentially took over, took about 15 years, there was some terrorism, bombs in mailboxes, there was one outside my house. We were told never to go to a mailbox.

KRISTOL: Is that right?

KRAUTHAMMER: Yes. One that exploded a few miles from my house. So it had this anti-colonial edge to it, which, of course, is totally alien to here. It was called the Quiet Revolution, but it got pretty unquiet at times. So it had these other elements, which don't exist in America.

So I grew up in this culture. Now I was considered Anglo, even though my family is French-speaking, my father was a naturalized French, and my mother is a native of Antwerp, she's a Belgian. We spoke French at home. But because we're Jewish we were considered Anglos. In fact, Quebec had two school systems, and they were not English and French, they were Protestant and Catholic. They were all supported by the government, but that's the distinction.

And I remember the name, the big title outside of my school said, "United Talmud Torahs of Montreal: Protestant School Board."

KRISTOL: Is that right?

KRAUTHAMMER: Yes.

KRISTOL: The Jewish school fell under the Protestant?

KRAUTHAMMER: Jewish schools were Protestant school boards, because if you're a Catholic everybody else is a Protestant. So that was the culture you grew up in, a very sectarian one, anti-colonial, and sort of a European overlay.

And this had an interesting effect on me politically which was, when I was in college in the 60s here the big issue was the Vietnam War, it wasn't an issue in Canada, of course, it was not involved in the war. There wasn't a draft. The big issue was British colonialism.

KRISTOL: So that was at McGill in Montreal?

KRAUTHAMMER: At McGill, I was at McGill in Montreal. And McGill was this symbol of Anglo dominance, it was an English-speaking university, it was considered the best school in the Commonwealth, outside of the home island Britain, and it was considered an affront to French Canada.

And there was a movement at the time I was at McGill to turn it into a French university to serve the working class. So it was a combination of French nationalism and essentially communism of some sort. The reason it affected me was this, there were large demonstrations, it was called *McGill français*, it was sort of the rubric, there were other demonstrations over other issues, but the ones that actually happened on campus were over this.

And I remember at the tender age of – I went to college at 16, so I was probably 18, and a junior – and there was a giant demonstration to liberate McGill, and at the head of it arm in arm was the most radical Communist professor at McGill, a guy called Stanley Gray, arm in arm with a guy whose name I forget, the leader of the French radical nationalist, essentially a fascist party.

Extremely anti-immigrant, they didn't want anybody to come in because they wanted only French immigrants. They were marching arm in arm. Now, normally it takes till middle age to realize that Left and Right are essentially at the extremes, the equivalent, totalitarian, they have different words for them. You know that nationalism, extreme nationalist, extreme socialism they don't just meet in Berlin in 1933, they can meet at McGill in 1968, or whatever that was.

So I became very acutely aware of the dangers, the hypocrisies, and sort of the extremism of the political extremes. And it cleansed me very early in my political evolution of any romanticism. I detested the extreme Left and extreme Right, and found myself somewhere in the middle. Now, McGill in the 60s was pretty radical, I got involved with student politics, and a bunch of us who were in the middle overthrew the editorship of the newspaper *The McGill Daily*, which had fallen into the hands of Maoists.

You have to understand Stalinism was considered reactionary, but it sounds like a joke but the paper was unreadable. So we got rid of them. I became the editor because by default nobody else really wanted to do it, and the first article I ever wrote on the day I took over the paper was called "End of the Monolith," where I wrote the philosophy of this newspaper as of today is to pluralism. We are open to any idea. We are not bound by any one paradigm, that was the sophisticated word of the 60s.

Remember Kuhn's book, something shifting paradigms, I can't remember.

KRISTOL: Right.

KRAUTHAMMER: But, and I meant his ideology, and so that was – because I was a pluralist I was considered, of course, an irredeemable rightwing radical. But anyway, because of this peculiar political culture that I came out of, I was cleansed of romanticism very early on. And that's a gift because my – you know, then I went to Oxford, studied political philosophy, and I found myself not attracted to Rousseau, repelled by that kind of philosophy. Marxism, Hegelianism, interesting, but they were repulsive as a matter of human nature and how to live humanely.

And found myself attracted to John Stuart Mill, not exactly en vogue in the 1960s.

KRISTOL: No.

KRAUTHAMMER: So I'd always been this kind of Social Democratic, bleeding heart, liberally oriented, but a believer in liberty, and that is sort of what carried me through, and eventually I went from being sort of a Great Society liberal to more a small-government conservative. That was me changing over the years.

But that is what launched me in the right path. I never, I think I wrote in my autobiographical introduction to the collection that I wrote the other year that I never had a Marxist phase. If I did it lasted a weekend, and it must have been a hell of a weekend because I don't remember it.

KRISTOL: But that's interesting, because it is something, so I think the American equivalent of that is really a generation older, because I've met people of my parents generation who sort of, they saw up close in the 30s and 40s messianic political views on the Right and the Left, and they really decided there was much more merit than conventional wisdom ascribed to Mill, Tocqueville, Raymond Aron, you know, the kind of anti-romantic practical pluralist kind of liberalism.

Now, by the time I went to college, it was sort of, that was sort of boring, and even if you were – even if you didn't like the Left or the Right somehow that seemed less, you know, that was just taken for granted in a way, we read Mill, but –

KRAUTHAMMER: Right.

KRISTOL: But I think you're right seeing the European alternatives up close gives you much more of an appreciation for that kind of Anglo American –

KRAUTHAMMER: Exactly, so we had sort of a delayed historical experience in Quebec. But the interesting thing is you end up with this non-romantic, non-messianic view of human nature, exactly where the Founders started.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that's a good point.

KRAUTHAMMER: And that's what attracted me because growing up in Quebec in the Anglo school system, the Protestant school, I learned all of colonial history. I can name all of the Prime Ministers, I can tell you about Australia, South Africa, I can tell you about Britain, of course, the Wars of the Roses, I knew every damn monarch.

I didn't know a thing about America, that's all self-taught, that came later when I was in college, and when I was at Oxford. But the Founding to me as a result of that, the Founding documents were enormously attractive, it wasn't like I learned them rotely as a child, I discovered them later as an adult, and that's exactly the kind of, you know unromantic, unsentimental view of human nature, of the weaknesses, of the way you construct outside institutions to contain, to channel what is ultimately selfishness into creating a system that would balance itself, and moderate itself.

And you know, history is – the verdict is pretty clear, 239 years of continual, well a little Civil War in the middle –

KRISTOL: Right.

KRAUTHAMMER: But that's another story. There's a reason why the French are on their fifth republic, and we are on our first, and that's because we did not have a worship of reason at the beginning of the

Founding as the French did, and then discovered that the purity, the Rousseauian idea is simply not one for the real world, or not one that avoids the guillotine.

KRISTOL: And even the Civil War, you could say there was a kind of romanticism that took over the South in the 1840s and 50s that contributed to the kind of extremism in defense of – I mean, slavery was always going to be a huge problem, and a hugely difficult thing to remove, but I think it became, it was actually kind of a European sentiments almost, some of the Southern thinkers, you know.

KRAUTHAMMER: Right. The special institution, the aristocratic, and the –

KRISTOL: Right, there was kind of a –

KRAUTHAMMER: Yeah, yeah.

KRISTOL: You can compromise anymore.

KRAUTHAMMER: Yeah, if you want to explain it away, which I think, in part, is true, it was a result of a historical accident of the Founding.

Canada didn't have that problem, it didn't have slaves, the British had imposed that pretty early, this historical event. It didn't have to happen, but it did. And once it implanted itself at the Founding it couldn't be extirpated simply as a practical matter. They were practical men. And then it took, you know 60, 70 years, four score and seven years.

V: Political Philosophy and Medicine (1:06:40 – 1:21:51)

KRISTOL: Any professors have a huge influence on you or teachers, or other writers, thinkers, either in school or in college, Oxford?

KRAUTHAMMER: It was never the hands-on professorship. It was reading Mill, and then reading Isaiah Berlin's *Four Essays on Liberty*, two of which are about Mill that made me sort of understand why I was attracted to him. So it very starkly, in sentences that were a hundred words long, and Isaiah could go on and on, he was a very comma heavy guy. You were waiting to get to a period so you could breathe.

KRISTOL: That influenced your terse style?

KRAUTHAMMER: No, I think – Yeah, I write very short sentences.

KRISTOL: You do, I think it's very effective, yeah.

KRAUTHAMMER: But I mean, that sort of fleshed it out in a modern way. And I thought, when kids come to me and say, "What should I read?" I say, "Read Berlin, and then read the original, and Jon Stuart Mill, and then you read the Founding documents." And you're well on your way.

So that was the influence.

KRISTOL: That's interesting.

KRAUTHAMMER: In terms of professors, there was a wholly different story, but I had a professor of philosophy at McGill, who was a man called David Hartman, well known many years later for running the Hartman Institute in Jerusalem, which was an attempt to mold Judaism orthodoxy and modernity at the same time, which was sort of a noble endeavor.

But he taught Maimonides, and I took his course, and became sort of a disciple. I had been raised in an Orthodox Jewish home, I studied all of the text word by word, and I was living in the –

I was living in the trees. I never got a view of the forest. And all of a sudden there's the greatest of all Jewish philosophers, essentially an Aristotelian, so I already knew Greek philosophy, and I encounter Jewish Aristotelianism, what's this about? And it sort of renewed my commitment to Judaism.

I had felt it small, peripheral, sectarian as all sixteen-year-old college students do. I had discovered the world, and was going to leave all of this behind, because I was too sophisticated for it. And then in my third year I took Hartman's course in Maimonides, and I'm thinking this is pretty serious stuff.

KRISTOL: Impressive.

KRAUTHAMMER: It stands up to the Greeks, stands up to the philosophers of the age, and it gave me sort of a renewed commitment to and respect for my own tradition, which I already knew, but was ready to throw away. And I didn't throw it away as a result of that encounter.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that's terrific. And then you went to medical school, and I've noticed, I didn't know you then that clearly shaped, I don't know if it shaped you, or you had a sort of scientific interest, inclination, but certainly you can see that in your writing too, a kind of, sort of guided by the facts, experimental, I don't what the right way to say it is, but a kind of –

KRAUTHAMMER: My real interest in life is physics. I mean, apart from anything I've ever done, if – And the reason I didn't go to a career in physics is because, very simply I wasn't a genius, and I knew it pretty early, and there were geniuses, I saw some, and I read some.

And I remember a friend of mine who was very smart – we were the two best science students in my high school. In my high school, everybody ended up at McGill, everybody went. There were 28 of us in the graduating class; 27 went to McGill, the other was already pregnant so that was not an issue.

I wanted to be a physicist, he did too, and one day he said, "You know, we're not going to make it. We're the physicists who end up testing steel for General Motors." So I didn't see that as my future, so I gave up. But I loved mathematics and physics, that was always my interest.

But I didn't have it. So, I had this dual interest in science and interest in political philosophy, and I was very unable to decide. I was also young in college; I graduated at 20. So I wasn't sort of ready to make a life choice, under my father's influence I had taken all of the pre-med requirements, but I did that all in my freshmen year. So I didn't take another science.

KRISTOL: Is that right?

KRAUTHAMMER: I didn't take another science for the rest of my, I became, I switched over to political science and economics, and I never looked back. So, I applied to medical school again to please my father, and I'm from a family of doctors, and my brother became a doctor.

And you know, who knows? If other things don't work out, I can make a living. So I got accepted, but I said no –

KRISTOL: You got accepted without taking a science course since your freshmen year? That's impressive.

KRAUTHAMMER: Well, I did – They all accepted me –

KRISTOL: You must have remembered something for the medical boards.

KRAUTHAMMER: It was a time when they were looking for sort of quirky applicants, and I came in under the quirky quota.

They said, I was accepted to Harvard Medical School on the condition that I take – I was short, I never took a biochem course – so they said you got to take a biochem course. So in my senior year I signed up for a course, I never attended any labs, so I'm working out of 80 percent, and I studied the week before, and I got enough to get through, so I fulfilled a requirement, but that was it.

So, I applied to both, I got accepted to Oxford, I went and started political philosophy. I had a little John Stuart Mill crisis of conscience, he had one when he was 20, I had mine at 21, I thought, "What am I doing here? Abstraction. The world is happening out there." So I decided, all of a sudden I quit, I had a three-year scholarship, I quit after one year, picked up the phone, I called Harvard Medical School, and I spoke to the registrar, this is August, at the end of my first year and said, "I'd like to accept that – the deferred."

They said, "Well, you know, it's impossible, except for one thing we had somebody drop out of the class, it starts on Monday, if you're here Monday you're in." So I left immediately.

KRISTOL: Is that right?

KRAUTHAMMER: I took a toothbrush, I didn't pack, I went straight to Boston, I registered for the year, I woke up the next morning, and I thought, "Oh my God, what have I done?" Because there's no going back, you cannot, that was it.

So I was committed to this course. Now, in retrospect, I spent seven years in medicine, in retrospect it was a very good thing. But I knew from the beginning it was not for me.

KRISTOL: Is that right?

KRAUTHAMMER: But nonetheless, there are two things about it, the one you mentioned, you get a real appreciation for empirical evidence, for how to think through, you know differential diagnosis, how do you approach indeterminate knowledge? All of these things.

KRISTOL: Yeah, I was instructed the – You get a real location of the limits of what you can know, or the kind of –

KRAUTHAMMER: That's where –

KRISTOL: This is judgment calls and –

KRAUTHAMMER: Exactly. You're left in medicine in places where you have to make a judgment call. But you need to have, even the judgment call you have to ground it in empirical evidence.

So it influenced me, but it influenced me in a second way. I found that some of my friends who went from Harvard to journalism school to journalism hadn't lived in the real world. Now, I didn't intend this, and I don't think it's a heroic thing, but seven years in medicine, in hospitals, 24 hours a day, can toughen you up, and takes a bit of the callowness out of you. People are suffering, and they're all over the...and they're in every room you go into.

And you learn a little bit about tragedy, about limits, and also it cuts you down a little bit because you make mistakes, you lose patients. I mean, they die on you, or one actually killed herself, one of my patients when I was a psychiatrist, and it humbles you. And that living in the world of human pain, which

is not what you intend when you go to medical school, but that's what happens necessarily, I think, was a good thing in my later career, unintended, but nonetheless good.

KRISTOL: In psychiatry, what kind of psychiatrist were you? Were you a – I mean, Freud – Were people still Freudians then? I sort of lost track of when that started to fade from –

KRAUTHAMMER: One day – Somebody needs to write the history of the two great sort of psychological, intellectual derangements of the 20th century, Marxism and Freudianism. The degree to which people believed in one, you know 60 million dead in the Soviet Union, uncounted suffering all over the world, a hundred years practically. Seventy years in the Soviet Union, I mean, the legacy, and that people believed in it.

I mean, right now it sort of, it's like studying Etruscan, you know, it sort of, you have to get into the mindset to even believe that they believed it, except in English departments of the major universities, but outside of there it's a joke.

Freudianism had the same history. I don't quite remember it because I wasn't an adult in the 50s, but at its apogee in the 50s, I mean, it not only was considered something you had to do in the higher circles, but it influenced, you see it in film, in literature, in fiction. It was sort of so pervasive, and now it is gone, totally gone.

KRISTOL: Yeah, it's amazing.

KRAUTHAMMER: It leaves some residue in the language, things like the unconscious, or the idea that you have to let out your emotions, in kind of a bastardized way. But those are just ordinary psychological concepts, but the whole architecture, or the hydraulic theory of the person, which is the three parts, all that stuff was religion.

Now, I thought it was ridiculous from the day –

KRISTOL: Is that right?

KRAUTHAMMER: I never, I was never a Freudian, and I tried to avoid it as best I could. So when I chose, I chose to go into psychiatry, I had to choose the residency programs in Boston, which is where Harvard Medical School was, and I chose the least Freudian of them all, which is the Massachusetts General Hospital, which is very biologically oriented, and very interested in stuff, shock therapy, it revived it by doing it in a totally new way with unbelievably successful results.

Very narrowly defined. In sort of two ways, the whole revolution in psychiatric, what you call nosology, which is diagnosis, the DSN, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, the whole idea. If you look at the first and the second, which were written in the middle of the 20th century, and I think the last one in the early 60s they're all Freudian, the neuroses, the word *neurosis* disappears by the third.

And I actually helped to work on the depression section of the third, which was a break from the Freudian idea. So it was just beginning to cut loose. I was at a cutting edge in the place where it was very unimportant, but I've always been impressed by how a culture could be taken in by this sort of idea, and then within 30 years utterly discarded.

It's another way that I've sort of come to see the danger of the romance, of the attachment, it's really a rebellion against certainty. I would go in a room with psychiatrists, we'd be discussing a patient in Freudian terms, and it was just astonishing to me, as if they had a formula, which was made up, totally.

It was interesting, I think Freud won the Nobel Literature Prize, but he wouldn't have won anything in science because it was a confection, it was a construction. So I was never seduced by it, and I'm glad I wasn't.

KRISTOL: And Freud and Marx, I guess, both were really the, it was the glorification of theory, and then applying that.

KRAUTHAMMER: Exactly.

KRISTOL: And in Marx's case, you know, brutally, and in Freud's case, it could be brutal in individual instances.

KRAUTHAMMER: Yeah.

KRISTOL: To the evidence and to the individual rather than learning, so to speak, from the bottom up. So it is again that Anglo, sort of American, practical tradition that you're talking about.

KRAUTHAMMER: One of the reasons for the death of Freudianism is there was a movement at the time I was there to actually go back and investigate the actual cases because Freud pretended to be a scientist. He had these patients, he gathered the evidence, and this is what a theory. It was never that.

You go back to the cases there are all these distortions, you see what you want to see, you ignore what you want to ignore. The theory you can tell predated the evidence, and they made the evidence fit. And that's the reason that in the end, I mean, you could, it's really emperor's new clothes, you can make yourself believe this is going on.

But in the end, you know, truth will out. That's what it did with Marx, and economics in particular, and sociology, you know, how do you run a humane society that can sustain itself, and believe in itself? You can't with Marxism.

And with Freudianism in the end, it collapses, intellectually, and you can force it for a long time, but in the end – And then the coup de grâce was government health insurance. In the end what killed it was they couldn't produce real empirical evidence that it does anything superior to a placebo.

Now if you can't with a pill, the government is not going to put the pill on the list of pills it will pay you back for.

KRISTOL: Pay for, yeah.

KRAUTHAMMER: Medicare will cover. So I remember when I left Boston at the end of my residency to come down to Washington, I was working in the bureaucracy, working on the *DSN III*, which is the new – I was working in the Psychiatric Department at the Department of Health and Human Services to try to work on the new manual.

A friend of mine said, "Hey, you're going to Washington, you're going to be a federal employee?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "You can get the big tune up." At the time they would pay for you to be analyzed.

KRISTOL: Is that right?

KRAUTHAMMER: Yeah, they don't anymore. The minute they stopped doing it nobody got analyzed. I said, "I don't need a tune up, I'm well oiled." You get the idea, being analyzed was sort of an anathema to me.

KRISTOL: It's hard for people – We're old enough not to have gone through it, but to have known adults older than us who were –

KRAUTHAMMER: Exactly.

KRISTOL: You know, this was – It was a religion in a sense.

KRAUTHAMMER: They were enthralled by it.

KRISTOL: Enthralled by it. I remember being told in Hebrew school of all places by a liberal, you know, teacher who was trying to get me interested in Judaism that, “Well, you should be proud of being a Jew because the three greatest thinkers of the last century –” more than a century, maybe a century and a half at that point, “had been Jews.”

This is funny, on like six different levels. “Marx, Freud, and Einstein.”

KRAUTHAMMER: Ah, yeah.

KRISTOL: And they were sort of the holy trinity, another non-Jewish term.

KRAUTHAMMER: Of course.

KRISTOL: Of –

KRAUTHAMMER: In a sense Jewish, yeah.

KRISTOL: Yeah, right, good point, yeah. And of course, none of them were religious or pro – But Freud was in that same category, and it’s really –

KRAUTHAMMER: The best summary of the history of analysis was Woody Allen in one of his movies says, I think it was *Annie Hall*, “I’ve been in psychoanalysis for 17 years, I’m giving it one more. And then I’m going to Lourdes.”

KRISTOL: Yeah, right, that says it all.

KRAUTHAMMER: Yeah, Lourdes is actually probably better.

VI: On Judaism and Israel (1:21:51 – 1:43:54)

KRISTOL: You said David Hartman had a big influence in bringing you back from your early, flight is too strong, but moving away from Judaism, but you had gone to a Jewish day school, you were well educated in Jewish things.

KRAUTHAMMER: Yeah.

KRISTOL: So then you stayed interested and active in Jewish things, and certainly very outspoken on Israel and Zionism.

KRAUTHAMMER: Yeah, I had a very intensive Hebrew education. I went to a school where you studied secular studies half the day, and the rest of the day was Jewish studies, and it was done in Hebrew, so I had pretty good Hebrew. By the time I graduated high school at 16 I could write, we were asked to write our philosophy essays in Hebrew, and I could do it pretty well.

But it was more than that, my father wanted me to learn Talmud especially. So Talmud, which is, you know what it is, it’s the commentaries on the Bible.

KRISTOL: Right.

KRAUTHAMMER: Very complicated, written in Aramaic, there's no punctuation, lots of commentary on each page, but it's sort of the essence of Jewish scholarship.

So I had it at school, and then he said, "That wasn't enough." So I was in the extra Talmud class, for three days a week, everybody else is playing baseball outside I'm studying Talmud, that's my reward for being a good student? Not exactly Adam Smithian logic here. But that wasn't enough either, so he had a rabbi come to the house three nights a week.

KRISTOL: Wow.

KRAUTHAMMER: For extra, extra – I didn't mind that, except that he came Saturday nights.

You got to understand Saturday night was "Hockey Night in Canada," it was, that's when they had the one hockey game of the week, and if he came I couldn't watch it, this was not good. So Saturday mornings my brother and I would pray for snow, because that meant if there was snow there was no rabbi and better, we'd get to watch "Hockey Night in Canada." It was, you know a little bit sacrilegious, but what the hell? I prayed enough, I figured I was owed one or two.

So I studied a lot of that, and rather intensively. And I'm very glad, like I am about medicine in some ways, I didn't choose to do it, and I wasn't very happy doing it, but nonetheless I'm glad I did it because I know something. And I still remember it, and it is quite wonderful, intense, and rich material, tradition.

In fact, one of the things that I've come to appreciate from it is a lot of the Talmud is legalistic analysis of the Bible as a source of laws. Now, the Bible is a set of laws, which are a little bit out there, the genius of the rabbis was to adapt to their times. I'll give you one example, there are tons of things in the Bible that call for the death penalty.

Well, the rabbis decided that a Sanhedrin, that's the high court, that condemns one person to death in seven years is called a hanging court, and the other rabbis say, one hanging in 70 years. So, they were very much opposed, and what they did is you don't contradict the sacred text, they created conditions for judicial evidence, and findings that made it almost literally impossible to have a death sentence ever carried out.

The laws of evidence and all that. So they constructed these very elaborate structures, but always adhering to texts. Well, that's what Supreme Court does in the United States. And it makes me very comfortable from the very beginning, from a very young age reading opinions, I love to read, leaf through, I love to write about them because it's a recapitulation of what I did as a child, except in English it's easier than Aramaic. And the Supreme Court punctuates its decisions, that's also a lot easier.

KRISTOL: Don't you think, I think also just getting back to theme of sort of a certain practical appreciation of the limits of certainty –

KRISTOL: Yes.

KRISTOL: And theory, I mean, the thing I know very little about the Talmud, not to say my own taste, we differ a little – The world of the Bible, and I find the Talmud just so mystifying, I didn't study it when I was young, maybe it's hard to get into when you're older and all.

But the idea that the religious, the most fundamental books of the religion that every young person studies, that the rabbis study keep and preserve conflicting interpretations.

KRAUTHAMMER: Yes.

KRISTOL: That is a very, when you think about –

KRAUTHAMMER: Yes.

KRISTOL: Unusual and kind of extraordinary thing.

KRAUTHAMMER: It is, exactly. In a monotheistic religion, you don't find a lot of that.

KRISTOL: Right.

KRAUTHAMMER: And when you find, I hate to be – I'm not an Islamic scholar, but Shiites and Sunnis, they usually settle it on the battlefield, and that's what's happened.

But it is very striking because what the Talmud is, it's sort of a transcript of the debates of the academies, and there's a wonderful story in the Talmud, it isn't only legalistic analysis, it's legend, and it's also sort of transactional history. There's a point where the rabbis are arguing, and all they're arguing on one point of law, and there's only one holdout on the other side.

And the holdout says, "If I am right let the walls of the academy shake." The walls of the academy shake. And then the holdout says – And they say, "No, we don't care." So, "If the law is right let lightning come." Sure, there's lightning in the sky. At the end the rabbi said, "We don't care." When God gave us the Torah he said, "He's giving it to you as you live, and He let it out of His hands, into our hands. It's now in our hands, and we will decide, and He's got no say in this." Essentially, that's not how they put it.

But it shows a tremendous respect for disagreement, for either majoritarian decision-making, which is largely how they did it. Then, they have a wonderful phrase, where they have an argument, and they can't decide. And there's a locution in the Talmud, it's four letters, it's an anachronym called – not, acronym – TEIKU, and the interpretation of the four letters is "Tishbe, which is Elijah, the harbinger of the Messiah, will decide issues in question."

KRISTOL: Ha, that's great.

KRAUTHAMMER: In other words, we're not going to settle this in human time. We're going to live with the ambiguity.

KRISTOL: Yeah, it's really the kind of anti-fundamentalism of –

KRAUTHAMMER: It is, it's leavening, and it's also an understanding that ancient texts, you know, I guess, I don't know if they had the modern view, they probably didn't think in these terms, but I'll impose it on them anyway.

The way I would interpret it is the books were written in a different time, a more primitive time if you'd like, a time where you know the death penalty was pretty common, it was still in England in the 1830s you could get hanged for stealing a loaf of bread. So it's not like it was that, but they, it was pretty rough justice. A lot of Hammurabi in there, an eye for an eye.

So the rabbis read an eye for an eye, they immediately interpret it as the price of an eye for an eye. Meaning that you pay a compensation or a fine, but not have your eye removed. So they, what they were doing was taking a text that if read totally literally was sort of unlivable, and in fact, there was a faction among in the Jewish history called the Karaites, who refused to accept the rabbinic authority.

Did not accept what was called the oral law, meaning the interpretation in the academies, and lived entirely by the letter of the Talmud. They were not only ex-communicated –

KRISTOL: Of the Torah, of the Bible.

KRAUTHAMMER: They were kicked out of, and Jews are not big on ex-communication, they declared the Karaites non-Jews. They were never accepted as Jews.

They were actually sort of tossed out of the community of Israel, even though they were adherents to it. And they lived on for 2,000 years, especially in the Baltic states, I think there still are Karaite communities.

KRISTOL: There's a house somewhere in Jerusalem, I've walked past it in the old city, there's a Karaite Academy or something –

KRAUTHAMMER: A little bit, you might say a little bit anachronistic.

KRISTOL: Right, right. Anyway, so Israel, when did that become central to your interests?

KRAUTHAMMER: From the beginning of my consciousness. Growing up in the 1950s and 60s, this was the hope. And this was an – it's hard for us to remember now. But in general culture, apart from Jewish culture, it was considered a wonderful thing. Think about how Americans celebrated the movie *Exodus*, came out in the early 60s I think, and how they saw Israel as a fellow democracy, sort of intrinsic support for it. It was one of the great stories.

KRISTOL: Kind of miraculous after the Holocaust.

KRAUTHAMMER: Miraculous after the Holocaust. And the reason I think that people misunderstand Israel, and see it now in colonial, imperialist terms is because it's a unique event in human history.

The British colonization of North America, New Zealand, Australia, the Dutch in South Africa they came to places that they had never been to. That's colonialism. You put your people in there. You takeover, you marginalize the natives if you can, you may not succeed, in South Africa, that's colonialism. So they see the Jews arriving in what's called Palestine, and that's the parallel, the only one they understand.

They can't put their heads around the fact that this is a people returning to their home. That they never gave up title to. They never gave up their longing for. It was repeated in their rituals three times a day, it wasn't like once a year, let's remember the homeland.

KRISTOL: Right.

KRAUTHAMMER: This is sort of part – They're waiting for redemption, unable to redeem themselves, continual habitation, uninterrupted in the 2,000 years of exile, and what happened was other people moved into parts of the house while they were away.

So the obvious solution is you divide it, and that's sort of what Zionism has returned to, and it was prepared to do. The Partition Plans that the British had in the 1930s were accepted by the Jews, rejected by the Arab, the Partition Plan, and the founding of Israel by the UN, 1948, the Jews accepted it, the Arabs rejected it.

They launched a war to exterminate the Jews, they failed, this is just the force of arms that allowed Israel to survive. But that's the story, but because nobody can believe – I mean, every other people exiled in ancient times disappears, we can't even read the Etruscan language, and Carthage was reduced, sown with salt, you don't hear any Carthaginians are rising, saying, "You know, I'm a Carthaginian, and I want to do this and that."

I remember a Palestinian leader saying that he was a Jesubite, these are the people who proceeded the Jews, which is a farce. There are none. The story is in history when you get exiled you disappear, you

get absorbed. That's the story throughout all of human history, including the Ten Tribes of Israel, it's even the story of the Jews, half of them, the majority of the Jewish state, and there were two states at the time, was exiled in 586, 722 BC, and they disappeared in Assyria, were never seen.

Everybody is always looking for the Ten Tribes, because they assume if the Jews have survived, the Judean of 586, there's still two, you know when Lewis and Clark were sent West they were sent to Benjamin Rush in Philadelphia so they could learn certain things, and among the things that Rush was supposed to instruct them – this is in Jefferson's own hand – was the habits and the language of the ancient Israelites, thinking that the Indians could be the Ten Lost Tribes.

So, the point I want to make is nobody can understand. I think a greater miracle than the creation of Israel, which is a state succeeding a previous state 2,000 years later, which has never happened, is the revival of the Hebrew language.

KRISTOL: Yeah, it's amazing.

KRAUTHAMMER: There's never been a revival of a dead language. I hate to use the word, but that's the colloquial, Latin and ancient Greek nobody speaks it. And the idea that you could recreate, I mean Barbara Tuchman, the historian, *The Guns of August* historian, said Israel, "The Jews are the only people in Israel who live in the same land, worship the same god, and speak the same language as they did 3,000 years ago. Nobody else can say that."

And that, you know, the Chinese or Japanese you can't. This is the most amazing phenomena. And that's why when people want to, you know excoriated for its depredations they have to go to the fundamental point, it's a return, and that's what the Jews have been longing for, and they were able, in a miracle to pull it off against tremendous odds.

KRISTOL: And for you, so that was from the beginning, it wasn't like the '67 War woke you up or something like that or?

KRAUTHAMMER: No, I mean all of us would put our little coins in the box at school, and once a year we'd get a book, a coloring book, and you'd get little stamps, and the stamp, you'd buy a stamp for a half a dollar or twenty-five cents, it was pre-inflation, and you'd put a stamp in your picture book that was trees, and when all the trees had leaves, the leaves you stuck in with your little stamps, you'd send it off to Israel, they'd plant a tree in your name.

There must be a Krauthammer trees out there, I haven't seen one of them.

KRISTOL: Yeah, right.

KRAUTHAMMER: It was sort of part of our lives. And from my parents, who had come from Europe, survived the war, they were not in the Holocaust, and the families did rather well, there are very few losses, unlike most families. It's not driven by Holocaust, it was just, my father was a Zionist before the Second World War.

KRISTOL: Oh that's interesting.

KRAUTHAMMER: When the Second World War broke out, September 1, 1939 my father was attending a Zionist convention in Geneva. Some people say it's a compensation for the Holocaust, they know nothing, it began in the 1850s, it was always there, but as a political movement, a revival of Hebrew, a revival of nationalism.

And then going back to the land. It's at least a hundred years before. So, it was always in my family. My father was a religious Zionist. It was always part of our lives, and it was always considered a wonder, and

a blessing to be living in a time, you know there were a hundred generations in-between, where there was a Jewish state.

KRISTOL: I know, I was surprised – It's been so important to your life, both Judaism and Israel that I pickup *Politico*, or I go online, and I read, I think it was *Politico*, was it? It was just a few years ago, and there was a big headline, "Krauthammer: – "

KRAUTHAMMER: I don't believe in God.

KRISTOL: "I don't believe in God." Right.

KRAUTHAMMER: Yeah.

KRISTOL: Wow, that was fairly bold.

KRAUTHAMMER: It was fairly bold, a lot of stuff on Twitter, "Krauthammer is an atheist, I knew it." "That explains a lot, you know."

KRISTOL: Right.

KRAUTHAMMER: Mondale, all these things he's done in the past. Look, I called the guy and said, "You can't really put a headline like that because you know what the second half of the sentence was." The sentence, I said – He asked, "Are you religious?" I said, "I don't believe in God, but I fear Him greatly."

I said, "Without the other half, you really haven't sort of given the essence is that I'm sort of, I'm sort of uncertain." I believe in uncertainty, and surely have an uncertainty about theism. It would be like saying, "Churchill: Democracy is the worst form of government." Closed quote. You got to add, "except for all the others."

KRISTOL: Right.

KRAUTHAMMER: So, the point I was trying to make is I'm not, I'm not a sort of traditional theist. I can't say I believe in even the God of Judaism, or Christianity, Islam, sort of the – I'm not sure I can believe in a God of history, who is really interested in our little lives, and who listens to us.

But I'm not – I mean, the one theology that I reject more than any other – I'd be willing to accept a lot of others – is atheism. Especially the village atheist who is so sure there is nothing that he wants to prosthelytize, humiliate, and unfaith people of faith. That I find appalling.

For two reasons, intellectually, I think it's sort of the most illogical of all because there's so much in the real world, in the physical world that we cannot explain, and can never explain, and we simply have to confess that the human beings they are inexplicable. I'm willing to call them transcendent, I have no idea what they are, but I fear it, in other words.

People who say the universe has always existed. What does that mean? It violates every principle of our own logic causation. You look at the atoms of the table, the seats we're sitting on right now, well predate all of history, they go back to the big bang, so you're going to tell me that this sort of spontaneously happens?

And they say, "Well, it's the laws of quantum mechanics, they imply that this has to happen." Well, where do these laws – You always go back to the origin question? Where do the laws come from? The idea – So the feeling I have is I think it was Newton who once described himself as, I feel like a snail on the shores of an ocean, being charged with figuring out the tides.

A snail is not going to be able to figure it out. We clearly are not capable, no matter what we say or do, and how much wordplay we engage in can penetrate the mysteries. Einstein, of course, was the sort of, the great propagator if you want, or the great philosopher of this view of the deity, or of transcendence, or metaphysics. You know he said when he rejected quantum mechanics, he said, "God does not play dice with the universe."

What he meant, he didn't mean it was the God with the beard, who hands out commandments, he meant there's a beauty, there's an inherent logic, and a simplicity which is what always impressed him which sort of made him tremble to the universe, that is so impressive, and that tells you that there, I don't know if it's a being, it doesn't have to be a being.

But simply to say this is where our logic stops, and where you have to have respect for what's beyond it, so that's, I mean that's a long way of saying, "I don't know." It's sort of a complicated agnosticism.

But the other thing that goes with it is a deep respect for people of faith. My father was, and perhaps it's because of filial devotion that I've just retained that. It's not an act of will, I just always respected the way he lived his life, and the beauty of it.

Now, it turns out to me that faith is a gift, and I don't have it. And I don't think you can will it.

KRISTOL: Right.

KRAUTHAMMER: I'd sort of like to will it, it would make things a little more clear for me, but you can't will it, it either comes to you or it doesn't. So I don't have it, but it doesn't mean, and the other humbling thing is that some of the greatest minds in history, I think overwhelmingly were theists of one kind or another.

Who am I to say that Thomas Aquinas and Augustine, and Newton who was a believer were fools, like atheists do? So I have respect for them, in a sense I feel a certain absence in my life by not having it.

But I do find it hard to believe in a God of history, or a God who takes a personal interest in one. I respect people who do, and I'm waiting for the call. My line is always open, or maybe I'm thinking of it the wrong way. I should call Him? But I get a busy, I don't know what to –

He's busy.

KRISTOL: He's busy, but I'll say if He wants to call –

KRAUTHAMMER: He knows where I live.

KRISTOL: Exactly, He knows where you live.

KRAUTHAMMER: But there's a tradition, this sort of Jewish agnosticism. It's called Yiddishism, or Yiddish Guide, and you find it, these great Jewish scholars, especially in the modern times around the YIVO, the Yiddish Institute.

KRISTOL: Yes.

KRAUTHAMMER: These are people deeply committed to the tradition. The other thing is I feel an obligation to Jewish history, to carry it on, to respect the text, to study them, to transmit them. So in that sense I'm deeply Jewish, without the belief. It's not an easy thing to carry off, but it's very engrained in me because of my history.

But I was, it was a review of a concert, a Jewish concert, a cantorial concert where they quote is one of these Yiddishists, who was famously atheistic, but very involved in the tradition, great scholar. And he said, “Great is the God of my unbelief. I shall care for Him forever.”

And that was, the second half is a flip.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that’s fantastic.

KRAUTHAMMER: On a phrase from Psalms, where God looks after us, and he says, “My job – ” as sort of an atheistic Yiddishist, “is to look after God.”

KRISTOL: Of the tradition.

KRAUTHAMMER: To look after the tradition, the legacy.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

KRAUTHAMMER: The values, the ethics, you know the academies where they have real debates, and they’re willing to tolerate uncertainty. My job, you know it’s sort of a kind of arrogance, but it’s a huge, it’s also deeply humble.

KRISTOL: Right.

KRAUTHAMMER: The tradition is larger than me, and larger than my particular thoughts about God, and I should respect that, and I’m going to devote my life to keeping that tradition going.

KRISTOL: I think that’s a good note to end on. And thank you so much, Charles, for taking the time. This was really fascinating, and would love to do it again.

KRAUTHAMMER: Maybe I will have received the message.

KRISTOL: Yes.

KRAUTHAMMER: I’ll call you.

KRISTOL: Give me a call.

KRAUTHAMMER: As soon as I get the call, I’ll let you know.

KRISTOL: We’ll announce it on CONVERSATIONS.

KRAUTHAMMER: Yes, right.

KRISTOL: Thank you for joining us for CONVERSATIONS.

[END]

