

CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

Conversations with Bill Kristol

Guest: Stephen Rosen, professor, Harvard University

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I: A New Geopolitical Reality (0:15 – 32:03)

KRISTOL: Hi. I'm Bill Kristol. Welcome to CONVERSATIONS. I'm very pleased to have as my guest today, Steve Rosen, Professor of Government at Harvard University, formally Master of Winthrop House.

ROSEN: Can't say that anymore, but –

KRISTOL: Yeah, as we speak in December of 2015, I think that term is about to be retired. Did people object to that term when you were Master of Winthrop House a few years ago?

ROSEN: No. People would kind of giggle about how old-fashioned Harvard was, but there was never any discussion of racial or slavery echoes of it, so it was kind of odd. Masters have people who live in the residence to help them with their social obligations. Those are called elves. So I don't know when they're going to get around to renaming those.

KRISTOL: I'm sure there'll be a big anti-elf movement here at Harvard soon. You know?

So, international relations, American foreign policy, that's what you've studied and taught and written about with great distinction for many, many years. Let's begin with the world. I mean, it's a striking moment when we're 25 years after the end of the Cold War. Where do we stand? Is it sort of what you would have expected? You got into this when the Cold War was still going. And then we'll look ahead and say, what's going to happen?

ROSEN: Well, the nature of the world that we live in now, and where we're going is, is changing and – but it's more the kind of changes that take place gradually over time so that you get caught by surprise when you step back and say, "How did we get here?" or "Where are we now?"

I mean, it's – everybody knows that Asia is growing economically more rapidly than the United States, but when you actually look at it, the United States has been the predominant economic power since – in the world since 1880, and for the first time the United States is not going to be the largest economic power in the world. And it's not just China. China's a big part of it. I mean, India is growing more rapidly than China now.

So the United States, relative to the rest of the world, is not going to have the same kind of economic weight. Its allies are growing more slowly. Europe and Japan are stagnating relative to the rapid growth in other parts of the world. So in terms of just the basic fundamentals of power – economic strength – the

United States is going to wind up being not able to deal with a lot of problems on the basis of superior strength. I mean, we have a lot of other virtues and stuff.

KRISTOL: You think that's kind of built in? I mean, that's not – it's not just if we had, you know, stronger Presidents or better policies that we could sort of be the way we were in 1920 or 1960 or 1990?

ROSEN: If you take Jeb Bush's promise – "I'm going to raise the growth rate to 4 percent per year" – even if you do that, unless there's some kind of cataclysm in China and in India and places like that, yeah it's kind of – not locked in, but it's a foreseeable part of the future. And the big part is that it's just so different from the world that we have lived in for a century. So –

KRISTOL: Let's talk about that since that I think people our age probably think – I don't know, you always expect it to kind of be the way it was or to go back to the way it was. So why is it really that different? I mean, what are the core things you tell your students that are not like the world of 1950 or even 1990, I suppose?

ROSEN: Well, I mean, two obvious things. One is nuclear weapons. Now, people talked about – in the 1960s, President Kennedy said, "Well, in the next 10 years, there may be 15 nuclear powers," and that didn't happen, and people said, "Okay, so we really exaggerated the degree to which other countries want nuclear weapons." But it has happened. I mean, North Korea does have nuclear weapons. Pakistan does have nuclear weapons. India does have nuclear weapons. Israel is thought to have nuclear weapons.

And we're on the cusp of a change in the world where people are looking at the world and saying, "The agreement you signed with Iran – the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action – basically says it's okay for Iran to get nuclear weapons after 10 or 15 years." And friends all over the world, the Japanese and elsewhere, are saying, "We're not being alarmist, but we have to think about what we would do." And a world in which people have nuclear weapons in that new way is a world in which the United States is constrained.

If you look at what actually has happened in places in the world where people do have nuclear weapons, they get much more cautious about what they do to intervene, coerce, put pressure. The Chinese-Soviet relationship, the India-Pakistani relationship, the Arab-Israeli relationship shifted, and what the United States did almost reflexively in Afghanistan and Iraq in the 90s and the oughts is going to be not impossible to do, but people are going to have to think much more carefully about it.

So, there's going – there's a shift of economic power, which gives other countries more power. There's a shift in nuclear power, which may spread quite rapidly if the North Koreans do some of the things, which they now appear to be doing. The North Koreans, by the way, are – have restarted their whole nuclear weapons complex. They are capable of producing something on the order of 10 to 15 nuclear weapons with programs that are now being activated. And we know something about the character of the North Koreans, which is they – they're in the business of making money by selling things to people who are willing to pay for them. So there's this kind of additional danger of the more rapid spread of nuclear weapons as a result of that.

The third thing that's happened – economics, nuclear stuff – is what the United States could do in 1990 or even in 2000 militarily with non-nuclear capabilities is now a fairly widely distributed capability. We had drones in 2000. Very few people – Israelis maybe had drones. Nobody else did. We had very precise long-range weapons, which could reach out 100 miles and kill targets, and that was great. We could do all kinds of things. And that – a lot of countries from around the world are buying them from the Russians or buying them from the Chinese and so forth.

I'm in favor of an American military role abroad, but we are going to have to take into account the fact that there's a combination of factors, which is going to make it much more difficult for us to do it,

especially the ways we have done it. The other thing, which is a result of this change, which is we had a fairly impressive cyber capability in 1990. We actually did a lot of interesting things in the Cold War that are now being declassified. Now, everybody's in the cyber business, and people think, "Well, you can kind of steal my data." That's just a trivial part of it.

People ask, "How do the Israelis get into Syria to bomb the Al Kibar reactor?" They flew through all kinds of – well, you put false data into someone's air defense system, and you can make things disappear. You can make people think you were places that you're not. Other countries do that now – not just the United States.

So the role of the United States in the world should be, in my view, more active militarily than it is, but it would be a mistake to assume that we will be able to use the conventional elements of power, which we have had overwhelming superiority in for at least the 50 years between 1950 and 2000, and Republicans, Democrats, liberals, conservatives, activists, recidivists, or revisionists all have to kind of come to terms with that.

And the part that makes it even more interesting and difficult is that other countries around the world have learned how to counter American military power because they've had to confront American military power. You know, we bombed countries in the Vietnam War, we intervened in the Middle East, and other people are hostile and intelligent, and they figured it out. You dig tunnels. You hide yourself in civilian populations. You engage in other kinds of forms of concealment.

We never had to do that because we were always stronger. So at the game of neutralizing the kinds of capabilities that the United States is strongest in, other countries have basically a 30-year head start. We're going to have – and now we're in the game of learning how to deal with other people who have the kind of capabilities, which until recently we had exclusively.

So we're kind of playing catch-up. And we're doing some very interesting things, and I'm not pessimistic about it, but it's – we have grown up and become accustomed to a world in which we can exercise *force majeure* and we just can't do that. And this is not a matter of ideology. This is not a matter of ethics. This is a matter of a change in the character of power and the distribution of power.

KRISTOL: People have sort of worried about this or even predicted this for a long time and I'd say maybe people like me have therefore discounted it because it didn't quite happen as much as people said. You know, whether it was in the – I mean, the – you know, the end of bipolarity was written about – I don't know – when we were in grad school, it seems to me. And then, you know, the French were talking about it, and then after 1989, of course, that was going – the whole world was going to change, and we turned out to be stronger than ever and didn't retreat really.

I guess the nuclear thing strikes me as very interesting. So, I mean, you know, as you say, for decades the fear of nuclear proliferation didn't quite happen. It happened a little, step by step in India, Pakistan, and North Korea, but sort of manageable. It does seem like that is something that hits the tipping point though, right? I mean, you could keep going one country every 10 years, I suppose, or 15 years, but one sort of has the feel that if Iran is sort of legitimized in its nuclear program and North Korea gets away with doing what you described, why won't five or 10 other countries in the next decade just decide it's crazy for us to sit around without nuclear weapons? I mean –

ROSEN: The United States and the other great powers have proven by demonstration that you can operate a full-scale nuclear weapons production cycle in North Korea and nothing happens.

KRISTOL: Yeah. We've proven by not doing anything.

ROSEN: Right. We've proven by demonstration that it is not sufficiently injurious to our interests that we'll actually take any kind of military action. And there are all kinds of interesting, good reasons why – the

consequences for South Korea would be serious. They would have to get involved. But other countries said, “Okay, we’re not going to pay attention only to your nominal policies. What have you actually done? Nothing.”

In 10 – 10 to 15 years, we will see what happens with Iran, but already we have the statements of senior figures in the Saudi administration – Saudi Arabians saying, “We’re telling you right now if the Iranians go ahead, we’re going to want everything that they have.”

KRISTOL: And Egypt and Turkey –

ROSEN: Egypt and Turkey, and there were statements made by senior German Ministry of Defense officials saying that the Turks have built a nuclear civilian power production cycle where the Turks have gotten foreign systems but they retained exclusive control of where the uranium comes from to go into the system and what happens to the fuel that comes out of the system. The two crucial parts that can be used for making weapons or could be turned off if you don’t want them to make weapons. Those – they made sure that they have national programs, which on the key elements of what you would want to make sure you controlled if you’re making nuclear weapons. I don’t think it’s an accident. I think it’s an indication of, okay, they’re buying hatches.

We are at a tipping point. If it is in fact possible to demonstrate that neither North Korea nor Iran is capable of moving beyond where they are now, it’s conceivable that you can say, no, it hasn’t gone further. The United States has taken action, and therefore, the world doesn’t – it’s not a self-help world where we’re left to our own devices to build whatever we need to build to counter it.

And a debate about should we actually do that is something that ought to be part of the current debate at this most – at the highest levels of discourse about American foreign policy. It’s not the most – it’s not salient now. You don’t really see people addressing that. So – and if it were to happen, you would have to create a basis of public and elite support for it. People would have to say, “Okay, we understand why this is – ”

KRISTOL: The *it* being pretty strong action to prevent nuclear –

ROSEN: Which carries with it some risk.

KRISTOL: Right.

ROSEN: Because you are dealing with countries, which may already have nuclear weapons though you don’t know about it, and you go to do something about their other capabilities and all the sudden you’re facing something, which is a lot more worrisome than you expected.

KRISTOL: And they certainly have conventional capabilities and terror capabilities, which could be unleashed, I suppose, in response to –

ROSEN: Yeah, especially in the case of the Iranians although I think people have taken the measure of that and know how to deal with it. But I mean, the question that you originally put us at, which is people have cried wolf through the 70s and 80s. The United States has to kind of pull back. Stanley Hoffman and other people would write about the United States has to get used to a more modest role in the world. And then Ronald Reagan came and all the sudden the United States – and the Soviet Union collapsed. And – so why isn’t this environment like that environment?

KRISTOL: And then in the 90s really, it was the unipolar world and actually the problem was America was too strong. So – but you’re really painting a picture of a real big change. I mean, the economic, the dispersion of economic power, nuclear proliferation, cyber even, the kind of relatively greater or equal distribution or wide distribution of power around the world.

ROSEN: Right. That plus the fact that our traditional allies are receding in their relative capabilities. Partly for economic reasons, but partly in the case of West Europe at least, a really fundamental shift in their understanding of what their national identity is and what their national self-interest is. You know, Great Britain, which was our most reliable ally, is now thinking very differently about what kind of military role and so forth.

KRISTOL: I saw Henry Kissinger recently – and gave a brief talk at a sort of private dinner though – and he – he said – I mean, he’s, of course, from Europe and very much a traditionalist in this way – really lamenting. I think he couldn’t quite internalize the notion, as he put it, that Europe would not be the center of world history in the 21st century. That seems to be pretty obviously true as an analytical statement, as much as predictions could be true or false. I mean, it’s a very likely prediction – likely to be a true prediction – but he just sort of was lamenting it. I mean, I’m not – he’s extremely smart and he was – he was willing to acknowledge it might be the case, but he sort of thought it was very important to try to resist that. I don’t know, but it strikes me as maybe that horse might have left the barn already, you know. I mean –

ROSEN: Yes. In some ways, it’s sad, and I regret it, and America –

KRISTOL: It is a big deal. I mean, Europe has been the center of world history for how long, I don’t even know.

ROSEN: Well, at least since this 18th century, maybe 17th century. And there was this explosion of a European military power, which enabled Europe to conquer South Asia, North America, large parts of East Asia, and in some ways that was a historical anomaly. The distribution of global power today is going to look more like what it was in 1500 or 1600 than what it looked like in 1900.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that’s interesting.

ROSEN: And – now, this is not – I’m not – I’m not a determinist. A global power doesn’t follow simply from GDP. But it does mean we have to think about developing and projecting power in ways that are different, in some ways that we’re very good at doing. I mean, the United States has instruments, which we did develop and deploy during the Cold War to wage ideological warfare – to wage a war of ideas.

We’re less adept at it now than we were then, but the – our ability to engage in discourse in Poland in the 1970s was more important than American nuclear weapons capabilities for the outcome of the battle in Poland. Solzhenitsyn had more of an impact and the American role in help working with him and supporting people like him. We’re naturally good at this. American labor unions were part of the force, which helped liberate Poland. We – American labor unions helped teach Solidarity how to do this. We know how to do that.

KRISTOL: Right, but communism maybe was easier for us to expose than to do deal with it. Sort of a, you know, a deviant Western system. And so if you’re an American liberal, you can sort of understand how to make the – or conservative – make the arguments against communism. I wonder if this new world that’s a little more mystifying to us how to deal with Islam or with just, you know –

ROSEN: Yes and no. First of all, the Chinese Communist party still governs China and people say, “Well, they’re not really communist,” but if you look at the way the country is run, it’s run as a Leninist dictatorship of – run by the Communist Party. The instruments of control, the – this is – the Chinese are reviving the study of Marxism because they, they believe that they have to have an ideological foundation. Economic growth is not going to give a legitimacy to the Party so they have to go back to their roots.

So in some ways there is an echo back to the Cold War. And the Christian churches are growing very rapidly, and they are seen as being at the forefront of the human rights movement. The Catholic Church was active in Poland. The Catholic Church is playing a very careful, but very serious role in China and the Protestant churches are growing even more rapidly. All of these are things that we're not encountering for the first time. We understand it.

And then you look at the efforts of Chinese money to buy influence abroad, they're very serious and in some ways very influential, but the war of ideas is something that Americans have to engage in as part of their normal life. We always are debating, so we're not bad at it.

KRISTOL: We have an advantage, maybe.

ROSEN: With the Islamic world, we have a very difficult – different kind of problem, which is we have this notion about separation of church and state and the American elites regard religion as sort of old-fashioned and – and so therefore to have a serious theological battle with Islam in which you engage in discussion of texts and interpretations, that is different. But there are people in the American religious communities who can do that.

As I was saying, it's not – the fact that we're engaged in war of ideas should not make us despair. We were born as a result of the war of ideas.

KRISTOL: Yeah, I mean I think the thing that makes one – if you're like from my generation, at least – worry about that future that you've painted, which seems plausible to me, I mean, as an analytical matter. I mean, why isn't this just a world of chaos and war and extremism, not being checked as effectively as perhaps we were able to do it in the Cold War or as effectively as powerful European nations were able to do it in the 19th century? And with nuclear weapons, are we talking about actual nuclear exchanges? I mean, what is this going to look like for the next 25 years?

ROSEN: A world which is simply more chaotic – not a world in which we're challenged by other strong powers – but a world in which they resist, kind of a replay of the Thirty Years' War in the Middle East or worse, is sort of the road that we're on now because the United States is under President Obama, but even the fact earlier on was a world in which, "Gee, we're suffering from war weariness." It's not clear who the *we* is that's suffering from the war weariness, but "We just can't solve the problems of the rest of the world. And it's too bad that people are dying there, but it's their problem."

For better or for worse, we're seeing what the consequences of that stance towards the rest of the world is, which is, even less than in the 1930s, can the United States say, "Look, the world's a mess. We'd rather it was not in a mess, but it's not our problem, and if we – our best policy is just to stand back," because what happens is in the areas within which there is chaos, people become brutalized.

They do horrible things to each other, and things they'd never would have dreamt of doing all of the sudden seem – we never – we thought poison gas was a thing of the past, right? Even the Nazis didn't use poison gas in battle. They used it against Jews in concentration, but even the Nazis renounced and even the Soviets didn't use. Well, now we have the repeated use of poison gas.

I think it's not long before we will see that use again. If you're killing hundreds of thousands of Syrians in Syria, why will you blink an eye about killing other people? And the internalized mentality, which is these people are vermin, these people are less than human, is the rhetoric that we saw in other places in which mass murder was conducted, and is the rhetoric that we're seeing now. And in a world in which the Internet, international air travel, mass migration, really makes state borders somewhat less relevant under current conditions.

Now, so what do you do about this? Well, there's two things. One, "build walls." You know, the world is chaotic. It could spread to our part of the world, so build big walls and a lot of them. Build a wall right at

the edge of the Middle East. Build a wall in the middle of the Atlantic. Build a wall at the coast of the United States. And build walls inside the United States to stop people from moving around more easily, just like we say, you Europeans, you should stop the easy movement to people within Europe. Build lots of walls.

KRISTOL: Are you recommending that or saying that that's a natural human reaction?

ROSEN: That's a – that is reaction which is observable – the Israelis to some extent, they have to live there. They have to some extent mitigate the extent to which people can come into their country and hurt them. They've built walls. We have built walls that are not so visible for helping to reduce the chance that nuclear weapons get into the United States, which is a pretty serious issue, which I, I think we should worry about. But it may come to, you know, walls that anybody can recognize.

Plus everybody knows that if you just sit behind a wall, people dig under walls or they figure out ways to get around. So you launch raids into the territories of other people to keep them off-balance. This is what the former Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence, Mike Vickers has said. You have to kind of step up the pace of raiding into ISIS territory and into Al-Qaeda territory. Make them run and fear you so they don't have the time and freedom to organize to come and figure out ways of getting around or over your walls. So it's a combination of the two. That's one.

KRISTOL: And is that doable you think? Is it general proposition? I mean, how daunting is that task?

ROSEN: It won't be cheap. It will require a garrison mentality. People say you shouldn't do this because it turns the United States into an illiberal country –

KRISTOL: National security state.

ROSEN: In which – in which the natural free movement of people and ideas is actively obstructed. We're no longer open to the world. You know, it's not – giving that up is a lot, and I'm not personally in favor of it. I mean, it may be necessary, but there may be alternatives. What is the alternative? The alternative is create in the environments abroad, which are otherwise moving towards chaos, worlds in which ordinary people can live decent lives.

I mean, this is what Ben Carson said, while you're worried about Syrian refugees, you really ought to think about doing something to make life livable in the Middle East. Well, the problem with that is that that is a non-trivial task and in some ways it looks like an imperial task in which you go in because – because order is not naturally emerging in these areas, you have to either impose order or work with local people to help them create, but you're creating order where there wasn't one before. And that we know – we know full-stop – that that is a mission that lasts about 50 years. Because we've done it. We've gone places – Europe, Korea, you know – we can do it, but it just takes two generations.

KRISTOL: And you have to really internalize sort of a Roman almost attitude that we, you know, because we want to be able to defend ourselves, we need to be active abroad. And because we start being active abroad, you have to really sort of start shaping institutions abroad. And suddenly you're running maybe a liberal empire instead of a Roman empire, but you are running something that looks sort of like an imperial structure.

ROSEN: And President Obama at one point, about four years, gave a speech that ours is not the way of empire. We just don't – that's not who we are. That's not – we don't. And there obviously is a large element in American political identity, which says, we were born as an anti-imperial nation, and therefore, it's just not what we can do. And when we try to do it, we do it very badly because we're ambivalent about it. You know, we feel guilty about being an imperial power because that's who we are.

It – the third way, which people are looking for, which I don't believe is viable, is to find somebody else to do that for us. I think at bottom President Obama is hoping that Iran will play some sort of stabilizing role in the Middle East. I think it's a mistaken view. I think the reaction to Iran will make conditions there worse, but really it's a coherent view, and Israel might be one of the partners that we work with.

But I think that unless the United States is really willing to reconsider the fundamental character of its role in the world, we are going to world – move to a world – a world of walls.

KRISTOL: And now I suppose, could you argue that the U.S. on the continent of America has in effect, I mean, in effect went through the process you described. I guess it was never really an instinct to build walls, it was always expansionist from the beginning. But basically it wasn't – it's not like the United States of America was always the whole continent or the whole Atlantic to Pacific continent, short of Canada, between Canada and Mexico. And in a way there was a sort of, not just a logic, but I mean, an actual ideology that said, "No, we have to keep – we should kick the French and Spanish out. We need to deal with the Indians pretty brutally, and this is kind of ultimately safer and better for us and really for the world." I mean –

ROSEN: Yes, I mean it's a debate that we sort of lost sight of historically, but the real debate between the Hamiltonians and the Jeffersonians were that the Hamiltonians said, "In order to preserve the Republic, we have to create the conditions in our hemisphere, which will allow us to maintain republican liberties." The Jeffersonians said, "If we get too strong, we will suffer the temptations of all great powers, to go and play a role in other people – fight other peoples' wars."

Albert Gallatin, who is Jefferson's Secretary of the Treasury, said what we should aim for in North America is a multi-national North America in which there's a Spanish component, there's a French component, there's a British component, there's an independent state of Texas that is – you know. And he said, the reason we should do this is that that's healthy for American republican institutions because otherwise we will be an empire – we'll be a continental empire. And that is antithetical to liberties because all empires seek expansion. All empires tax and oppress their own populations so they can expand outwards.

It turned out that that argument was wrong. The creation of a continental empire was healthy for American republican institutions. It – say – it gave us this liberty or this freedom from threat, which we sort of say is a fact of nature, is a fact of the geography of North America – it's not.

KRISTOL: Yeah, if you read *The Federalist Papers*, they're very worried about the threats from next door. I mean –

ROSEN: There was a Spanish empire on the West Coast and down in Mexico. There was a British empire in the North. There were independent – there were fructiferous tendencies – you know, Texas starts as an independent republic, Oregon – so the list is long and obvious. It was an act of political creation, which gave the United States the freedom from external threats, which helped American political liberties thrive and develop.

KRISTOL: But presumably, we're not going to bring in all these other countries in the chaotic parts of the world as states the way we were able to do in the U.S. We're not going to treat other people, properly so, as the way we treated the Native Americans. So I guess the question is, is there a form of this kind of liberal empire or commonwealth that's sort of a something between creating the United States of America and just – let's just say, building walls? And it doesn't feel like the old-fashioned NATO and alliances with, you know, like-minded partners quite works anymore.

ROSEN: No, but there are visible some of the elements of this process in embryo – I guess is the word I'm looking for. What is the United – what is the relationship of the United States with the Kurds?

KRISTOL: Yeah.

ROSEN: What we're trying to do is be an imperial partner of the Kurds, which is, you're not strong enough now to kind of create a state, but we will work with you. We did this with, obviously, the South Koreans back in the 1950s. There – in places like Azerbaijan, which, again, are trying to develop some sort of pathway towards – again, what we would regard as a minimally decent form of domestic society. And they're not ordinary nation-states. They're not traditional allies. They're fragments of states very often. Given the conditions in the Middle East, the people you're going to be working with are fragments of states.

So it requires some adaptation and a willingness to tolerate messiness and a willingness to say, "We really would have rather kept Iraq intact." There are all kinds of good reasons why you'd want to do that. It's not working so what are the ways in which we can provide this imperial umbrella within which other states can develop and preserve – develop and preserve their own autonomy and liberalism?

And we should I hope learn the lessons that – of our mistakes from the past, which is in our earlier efforts to safeguard Europe. We did tend to be too much of a heavy-handed big brother, which was to say, "You don't worry about this. The United States will take care of it." Which deprives those countries of the ability to go through the experiences where they learn what they need to do to take care of themselves and develop the institutions that they need to take care of.

So in some ways – and I use this word carefully and not pejoratively – we infantilized some of our allies so that now that we want to turn more of the role of protection over to them, they're like teenagers who have never been given responsibilities. They just have – they have a long learning path in front of them. So I hope we learned a lesson from some of our mistakes. We have other countries that will be able not to take over from us, but play – India wants to be more involved in the areas on its periphery. That's not unreasonable. Japan wants to be more active. Well there's all kinds of problems and issues, but – sorry.

II: The Challenge from China (32:03 – 50:32)

KRISTOL: No, but – I mean, do you regard – so that's sort of the chaos side of the equation. I guess I'll come back and ask you, ultimately do you think – how successful could we be, will we be? That's maybe a discussion about America a little bit more also.

But what about the China side of the – I mean, are we dealing with sort of a chaos problem or an alternate great power problem or challenge or both at once? And I guess that's – maybe that's a little daunting, too, because usually it's one or the other, you might say.

ROSEN: There are two problems that they obviously interact with each other. They do make the whole task as a whole more difficult. The kind of national security capabilities that we build to deal with the Middle East is not going to help deal with the problem of China, which is much more of a traditional great power, areas of influence, stabilizing regional balances of power. In some ways, I'm more optimistic about that actually because it's a problem that we're comfortable with.

It's hard. China's going to be very wealthy so it's not going to be cheap, but if you want to stop China from exercising maritime dominance in East China Sea to South China Sea, you send fleets out. Well, we know how to do that.

KRISTOL: We have allies.

ROSEN: We have allies that once we're willing to kind of accept different roles from them – this is the Japanese – are actually saying, "We'd like to help you. You know, we'd like to do more please." And our instinct has been if you're going to do more that means you have to have more independent capability.

We're more comfortable with the United States holding all the trump cards so that you have to ask us for permission.

For the most obvious example, it would be very interesting if the Japanese had a fleet of modern nuclear submarines. The United States government says, "We kind of like it that we're the ones that have the sophisticated submarines and no one else does." So it's – but we have to – we're thinking about them, and we're considering different ways.

But the China problem is a real problem, but the China – look, again thinking structurally, what's the problem that China poses? Chinese economic reform got started in 1979. Indian economic reform really didn't get started until the mid-1990s. So the Chinese are benefiting from a 15-, maybe 20-year head start. Now the Chinese – the Indians are growing about as rapidly as the Chinese – sometimes more rapidly – but they're locked into this position which is, they didn't get started.

So, what the United States has to do is play enough of a role in Asia to constrain China while other countries catch up. Japan is not economically backward, but militarily we kept it backward and you can't snap your fingers and turn a dependency – a military dependency into an independent military actor overnight. They have to develop the institutions, learn – our job is to keep the Chinese from exploiting this momentary decade-long period of opportunity for them.

KRISTOL: And how hopeful are you that – getting back to the war of ideas you mentioned – it seems to me China is the most obvious analogy to the Soviet Union in that respect – I mean, it is communist, as you say, authoritarian regime, which like the Soviet in some ways has lost its true belief, maybe, in the communist future and is now more of a kind of a classic authoritarian oligarchy, sort of elements of state capitalism and so forth.

I mean, shouldn't that be susceptible – I mean, is it crazy to say that we should really think about having a democratic China in 30 years? Wouldn't that make life a lot better for everyone or some form of liberal democratic China, trying I suppose to –

ROSEN: It's not only not crazy, it was the implicit – in some ways the explicit – goal of America's strategy in the 1990s and – the idea was, "We will trade with China. We will give – we will engage China as an economic partner so that China becomes a middle-class country because when China becomes a middle-class country, it will become a democratic country," and President Clinton would, more or less, say things like that.

In the beginning of the 21st century, the Chinese would say, "Yeah, give us some time. We can't be democratic now. We have too many poor people to – but, you know, 10 years," but then in the oughts, the line of the Communist Party would change which is, "No, our system is better than your system. Our system can solve problems that your system can't." And to our shame, many people in the West say, "Yeah, you guys make the trains run, you guys can implement economic reform, which doesn't require developing difficult domestic political constituencies. You just tell people what to do and it happens."

Now, we're seeing what the consequences of that are. If you push economic growth without regard to the interest of local people, you wind up with policies, which make people rich but which pollute and poison the landscape, which create massive deprivations. But look, the question is what should our vision of the future of China be? That depends on what China is. I made the suggestion that China, at the leadership level, is still at sort of a Marxist-Leninist state, and I think there's some element to that.

There's another way in which the model that helps us understand China is more alarming, which is just a highly nationalist state in which the state owns the capitalist sector. It's – in other words, it's nationalist socialism and that has very uncomfortable echoes, which are way worse when you read the elite discourse about the character of Chinese identity. What do they teach in the patriotic education classes?

That we are the victim of Western oppression. That we are the victim of imperialism. That what we have lost is the true Chinese way –

KRISTOL: That is a little German-sounding, you know.

ROSEN: And then you, you push a little bit deeper. Okay, well, nationalism. Well, what is nationalism? And what nationalism is actually Western invention. Imperial China had no nationalism. Where do they get their ideas of nationalism? Well, they got their ideas of nationalism from the Japanese, which emerged as a national state in the 19 – well, where did the Japanese get their ideas about nationalism, which were then translated into Chinese? They got it from the Germans.

So what they imported was a 19th-century version of social Darwinism in which races of the fundamental basis of nationality and there are very – when you hear Xi Jinping and other Chinese leaders talking about cultural pollution, when you talk about the natural affinity of all Chinese people wherever they are, you begin to worry that there is this submerged, and sometimes not even so, some racist component.

KRISTOL: And what about – so that's itself a challenge, and I guess you've argued, I think Gary Schmitt and others also, that if you ever got – I mean, the regime now depends, it seems, partly for its legitimacy and for popular support, on the just 6%, 8%, 10% economic growth. And you could have a sort of French – France in the 1780s-type situation, presumably, which was only where if you had a recession and at some point everyone has to have one or they've overbuilt and it's a bubble and it bursts and you get a really nasty reaction, the regime is sort of delegitimized.

Maybe it then plays a nationalist card or a xenophobic card or a "let's invade Taiwan and invade our neighbor" card to keep popular discontent under control. The French didn't succeed in – the French monarchy didn't do that, and as a result got toppled in 1789, but you still ended up with Napoleon so maybe they skipped the toppling and just go right to Napoleon, you know. Is that – it's not a crazy scenario it seems to me.

ROSEN: No, and you know, it's what Napoleon the Third did in the 1870 wars. He deliberately sought a crisis with Prussia and got one and it worked out very badly, but his idea was "I'm a Napoleon. Why does Napoleon get to rule? Because he wins battles." Well, so you have to win a battle, and he went out on a horse to lead the French force, even though he had kidney stones and was, you know, a remarkably painful exercise – he had to pull back.

There – I don't think it's an accident that we see the Chinese leadership making these kind of respectful remarks about Putin. Putin is doing this.

KRISTOL: Yeah, so let's talk about Putin because he's the other big character. What about Russia? So how do you understand that? Is that a serious big-power problem? Is it just a kind of thuggish, you know, regime that's – with a decadent – kind of decaying country underneath it? Or I guess maybe these aren't mutually exclusive, of course.

ROSEN: Yes, it is thuggish, and yes, the country is decaying, and the country – the society and the economy is decaying more rapidly as the result of the predatory policies adopted but – which leads to sanctions, which lead to wealth flowing into the hands of kleptocrats rather than into productive investments. So, it's moving – it's riding for a fall.

On the other hand, it's also both inherited and invoked a large and powerful xenophobic popular movement. It's literally the case that Western liberalism is being blamed for the problems of Russia, and right behind the Western liberalism are the Jews. And so it's – this is fostered by Putin, exploited by Putin, but also draws on some very powerful latent tendencies within Russia.

So the idea that, “Okay. Putin and his crowd are arrested and put in jail, and then we’ll have a happy ending,” is probably not adequate. It’s – we’re going to be – we are afflicted with a Russian society, which as a result of 100 years of tyranny and which as we saw in Iraq, societies are mortally wounded at the level of their souls by this kind of tyranny.

On the other hand, the physical capacity of Russia to make life difficult is – has peaked.

KRISTOL: Yeah, they do have a lot of nuclear weapons, to get back to our earlier conversation.

ROSEN: And that is – that I – people don’t talk about it but, you know, Putin made a lot of nuclear threats associated with his movement to Crimea. The director within the Ministry of Defense that is responsible for nuclear weapons is active in Crimea. They are said to be building nuclear weapon storage sites in Crimea. Because they’re going to use nuclear weapons? No, because if they put nuclear weapons there, they think nobody will dare challenge them there because it would – it risks escalating to a nuclear war.

I’m worried more about just the statistical odds of something going wrong. When you – when you – as more countries have nuclear weapons and deploy them in positions, which they think are useful for the purposes of deterring and intimidating the neighbors, the more you have local commanders with nuclear weapons and things can go wrong.

KRISTOL: I mean, it seems like we take so much for granted. What, 70 years since the use of – since we used two nuclear weapons against Japan and it just – you sort of want to vaguely assume, well, I guess, the next 70 years will be like that, but I don’t know.

ROSEN: We’re profiting and suffering from that phenomenon, which because the United States, in fact, has been very active in preventing states from getting to the point where nuclear weapons might get used, we haven’t seen their use. And we sort of, “Well, nuclear weapons haven’t gotten used, and therefore we don’t have to worry about it.” We forget just how vigorously the United States got involved in the South – in South Asia in 1987 and then again in 1999 when we saw countries moving towards the brink of nuclear weapons use.

In 1999, there was a real danger of this, and we put a lot of pressure on other people, and we reassured people like our – like the Israelis that they didn’t have to do things. And now we say, “Well, people like you, Steve, are just kind of always screaming about nuclear weapons that they don’t get used,” but they didn’t get used because the Israelis bombed the Osirak reactor. But we did go – because the Israelis bombed the Al Kibar reactor, which was a carbon copy of the North Korean nuclear reactor in North Korea, which – being built in a place, which had no use for electrical power or which had no electrical power lines. It was obviously a weapons factory. Again, we occupied Iraq after the 1991 war. And the reason why we took Saddam Hussein’s nuclear weapons program so seriously, we found more nuclear weapons-related activity in Iraq when we went in than we expected. So we said, “Well, we better err on the side of caution the next time.”

So we stop a lot of activity, which could have led to a more dangerous world, but now we say it’s, it’s a law of nature, and therefore we shouldn’t engage. The same thing also is true by the way for non-nuclear interstate war people say, “Ah, interstate is a 20th century thing, it just doesn’t happen anymore.” You have civil wars, you have insurgencies, you have terrorism. Well, that’s because the United States has been in the business of providing security against interstate attacks.

What’s the one thing that everybody in the world is pretty sure the United States will intervene to stop? If you take a tank column and go across somebody’s border and obey –

KRISTOL: And even Kuwait in 1990, a country we had no treaty obligation to.

ROSEN: We said, “The borders within the Arab world are a matter for the Arab states to settle themselves. We have no dog in that fight.” But there is something visceral in the American political psyche. If you send an army to invade another country, that’s wrong. You know?

KRISTOL: And also dangerous because of what it’s lock-on effects would be, invitation effects, whatever they call them.

ROSEN: So we are credible on that –

KRISTOL: But now Putin has done it, that’s pretty striking, don’t you think? Sort of.

ROSEN: But he did it in ways, which, okay little green men, people not in uniform –

KRISTOL: Only a little bit of a country.

ROSEN: Plausible deniability. These are not Russians, these are – So that, that is the legacy that we have passed onto the world, which is countries can’t invade overtly, and therefore they look at other ways. Which is not good, but in some ways somewhat more manageable. Russians are withdrawing from the Ukraine now because you sent a small ambiguous force in, it’s easier for the locals to kind of fight them. You don’t need a big expansive tank army. So, Putin is a problem. As I said, part of the earlier discussion of China, you want to stop China from taking advantage of the current situation in which it has no strong powers around it.

One of those powers that might kind of come back is a Russia, which is less pathologically governed than the current Russian regime. Which pays more attention to fairly simpleminded understanding of Russian national interests, like we don’t want to lose Russian territory in the far east of China. And the Chinese are demographically kind of moving into these far eastern areas.

So again, what you could see is the emergence of a fairly stable, more natural array of countries – India, Japan, Vietnam, Russia, which together are quite impressive. But it won’t emerge automatically. My brief against the realists who say countries balance, countries don’t expand is that it doesn’t happen by itself. The role of a balancer has often been important, and the recent military powers has often been necessary.

So I think, again, the message, the fundamental message, these problems, I think, are amenable to American policy responses. It’s not like – look, we’ve lost. This in some ways was the Kissinger response. America is in decline. Nothing really we can do about it. The best I can do is cut the best deal we can. And live out our retirement quietly. I don’t think that’s true.

We can’t play the same kind of dominant role, but we can and should play a role in creating this new world order in which people in those regions take more responsibility for defending themselves, but where we play a crucial role. And if we don’t do that we are more at risk of losing our republican liberties than if we undertake the tasks that are associated with this more forward posturing.

You will not want to live in America. You will not want your grandchildren to live in an America where you have all the internal national security controls that you will need to deal with this world of walls. Because in a world of cyber warfare, in a world of infiltration, in a world in which immigrants can be used to mask the movement of terrorists, you are going to have something that looks more like a police state than we’ve ever had before. And you don’t want that. I don’t want that.

I am willing, and I think Americans should be willing to pay the price to create a livable world. Not a liberal world, not a copy of our systems, but a world in which people don’t run away by the millions to avoid horrible death.

KRISTOL: Right.

ROSEN: And this is something that people on the Left and on the Right in the United States, I think, can find some way of agreeing on – for different reasons they’ll come to it, but the humanitarian impulse which is so admirably on display in Samantha Powers’ speeches about Syria in the United Nations is a reflection of this, which is the occasional outbursts which quickly get suppressed from Secretary Kerry, which is, you know, “This is horrible. Mass murder in the Middle East is horrible. As human beings we should do something about that.” And we say, but as Americans does that mean we have to take them all into America? Well, the alternative to that is no, we can help them live decent lives in their own countries.

KRISTOL: So it remains up to America, but in a different way than 50 years ago, yeah.

ROSEN: Yes, we have to use different tools of statecraft, different sets of our obligations, and one hopes an end to this partisan acrimony in which the object is not to figure out what we do next, but to make sure we keep blaming the other side for what they did in the past.

KRISTOL: Right, right.

ROSEN: “You Bushies, you gave us this world, it’s your fault.” “Obama, you pulled out of Iraq, it’s your fault.” As if that’s what counts. What counts is, what do we do to avoid a world in which either millions of people die while we stand-by and sort of hope we’re okay or a world in which we have this kind of endless chaos?

III: Can America Still Lead? (50:32 – 1:15:46)

KRISTOL: So I guess given this scary and challenging world we face, slightly different in the character of its scariness and the challenges than 1960 or 1990 perhaps, or 1890, what is our capacity? I guess sort of a question about America, and you’ve given a lot of thought to that and written about that. So, are our institutions up to it? Is our political culture up to it? Are our elites up to it? Talk about that.

ROSEN: Yes, I think we’re up to it. The questions of institutions is an interesting one. The United States, despite the efforts of people like Hamilton, was not really set up to function as a European-style state with the concentration of instruments of power in the federal government. The interesting thing, I think, is though our institutions really have never been well-suited to playing this kind of active role in the world, we have done it.

So we’ve been able to amend or work around our institutions. And therefore the question is not do we have the institutions? We don’t have the institutions. The question is, what has it taken in the past to make our institutions function well enough to deal with the problems at hand? And what that has required, or what that has involved is the enthusiastic mobilization of American national elites. Because –

KRISTOL: Give an example or two, what are you thinking of?

ROSEN: The United States in the 1930s faced the rise of fascism in Europe. It was clearly hostile, it was clearly on the road to menace the United States. The United States national security establishment was quite weak, focused on continental defense. People forget that the B-17 bomber was procured as a weapon for coastal defense. It was procured as a weapon to bomb enemy fleets. It’s called the flying fortress because it was supposed to replace the fortresses on the coast of the United States.

We had an isolationist foreign policy. Franklin Roosevelt was campaigning on he hates war. Everything was wrong. A number of American financiers and industrialists said, “Hitler really is building a military machine, which could well dominate Europe, might conquer Great Britain, we have to get ready. What will we need?” Well, one of the things we’re going to need is a really big Air Force, fairly straightforward.

The American aircraft industry was set up to build 10 or 12 aircraft at a time. Somebody wants an aircraft, how many? Oh 12, okay, I'll build – it wasn't setup to mass-produce airplanes. So a guy, a financier, named Robert Lovett said, "This isn't just not going to work, I have to get the guys who know mass-production to talk to the guys who build airplanes."

So using private finance and private networks, which came from the banks because the banks in those days were a white man's waspy club, and everybody knew everybody, said, "The guys from Douglas Aircraft have to sit down with the guys from Ford Motor Company. So that if things get bad, we can use mass-production techniques pioneered by Ford to mass-produce airplanes," and they did it.

The reason why when Pearl Harbor happened the United States was able to gin up and mass-produce millions of weapons in about a year and a half is because the private sector had been ahead of the federal government in getting itself ready. Why was the Council on Foreign Relations set up? Again, it's a club of rich men, because they had had the experience that that elite was able to get things done, the federal government for all the reasons that are associated with democratic politics and the institutions of the federal government was totally incapable of handling.

And you read the early manifestos, we have the job of teaching the American political system what it ought – we have to be ahead of – the Committee on the Present Danger back in the 1970s was the federal government for a bunch of reasons was over affected by the Vietnam War, the pathologies and pain associated with losing that war.

You remember, I remember, people were saying, "We just kind of have to hold the line," and the Council – sorry, the Committee on the Present Danger assembled some of the best minds in American across parties and said, "What would you do if you were serious about dealing with the Soviet aggressive threats?" And they built a network of people, a series of analytical studies, which kind of laid out, utilized, as you discussed before, labor unions, the Catholic Church to wage the war of ideas.

So what was necessary to deal with a problem, which appeared to be overwhelming and daunting to the federal government in which the federal government was not politically able to respond to because of divisions is that you had the mobilization of the American political elites on the Left and Right.

And the thing which is demoralizing, now, is that there's not – it's not obvious that the American political elite is interested in this, it may even be hostile to this.

KRISTOL: Right.

ROSEN: Which I think is an overreading of the situation. There is a very clear way in which the American political elite is hostile to some of the kind of conversations that we're having now, but the thing which they're hostile to is not a role for Americans in the world, what they're hostile to is American nationalism.

KRISTOL: Yeah, they want us to be an international – they love going to climate change conferences, I mean there's no shortage of elite interest in that.

ROSEN: There's no shortage of interest among smart ambitious undergraduates to do something about the world. They go work for Paul Farmer to help provide medical services around the world. This is totally admirable, and that requires considerable willingness to accept hardship. I've had students go, what are you doing after graduation? I'm going to help create orphanages in Africa.

KRISTOL: Micro-investments.

ROSEN: I'm going to help empower women in South Asia by teaching – So it's simply not true to say that the American educated elite, at least as it's visible in an Ivy League university, is uninterested in the world, but their idea is that the use of American power to make the world better has failed. It's made the

world worse. Plus, there is the danger that the use of American power encourages chauvinism in the United States. It shifts political power to the people that we like least in America.

KRISTOL: Right.

ROSEN: In some ways, it's an elite versus populist. Meaning, all the uneducated people will become important because they're the people who are mindlessly pro-American. So there's also a political – this by the way has happened before. If you look at the progressive movement in the early part of the 20th century it was the same thing. We need to build a cosmopolitan America because –

KRISTOL: International institutions.

ROSEN: No, no, at home.

KRISTOL: Yeah, right.

ROSEN: Because they were living in a period, again, in which we were assimilating huge numbers of immigrants. And the Jewish Americans who had moved in made cause with the old-line Boston Brahmins to build a cosmopolitan America, built on the exemplar of the universities.

See, we all went to college, we lived with Jews, we lived with Armenians, it was much more interesting than the staid, proper Brahmin political culture, which was kind of old and washed up. But if the Theodore Roosevelt progressives waged their imperial wars what you'll do is you'll mobilize American nationalism, American nationalist says, "Americans are good, foreigners are bad," and how can you have a multicultural America if you have people going around saying, "Foreigners are bad"?

So what you need now is a form of nationalism, which is clearly and recognizably not chauvinistic. A form of American nationalism which buys into universal principles, but believes the best, the way best to serve the world is to make America strong and capable of pursuing the interests of these universal ideals, which is not an old idea. It's Cold War liberalism. Okay.

What discredited Cold War liberalism? The Vietnam War. What discredited the newer version of this, which was we'll encourage the development of democratic ideals in previously tyrannically governed countries in the Middle East? The Bush Doctrine. Well, if the war in Iraq had gone somewhat differently, better, but my party and people like me didn't do the job we did and the war wound up, at least, ambiguously. Some people say it clearly failed. People say, "No, the Surge redeemed it." Which I kind of think it did.

But if the Surge had occurred in – if the activities associated with the Surge had occurred in 2003 we would be making, we would be having a different conversation. So, talking to my children, talking to my students, they said, "Dad, you seem to be a nice guy, you want the right thing, but just look at the world. America has screwed up Afghanistan, America has screwed up Iraq." And because we screwed up Iraq we're living with Syria, we're living with – And it's, "Don't do stupid stuff," if you can't figure out what to do, don't do stupid –

It's not, it's not a withdrawal from the world, it's a reaction to you need to figure this out better.

KRISTOL: Well, some of it is that, but there's also a real kind of deeper multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, you know, anti-American exceptionalism, or whatever you want to say, certainly on college campuses, and maybe among liberal elites generally. Conservative elites have a different problem, which is probably more of a fortress America problem, but that does make it harder. I mean, you need that kind of Teddy Roosevelt nationalism, or even John Kennedy nationalism to sustain this American role, don't you? Among elites, though, and so it's not popular among elites.

ROSEN: Yes, you're – there is a genuine coherent cosmopolitan ideology, which is very dominant among American, well-educated people because they see what is true. The ideals of people who believed in the free exchange of ideas, it's something that's shared by the ancient Greeks, by Whig Englishmen, by French liberals, by –

It's not an American invention, and we are citizens of the world in that way, and we're proud of it, right? We're not chauvinistic, and that's true. What has been lost is two things. And again, it's the result of both of success and failure. We've lost the sense that American power can be used effectively to serve those ideals. People who saw the liberation of Europe from fascism had no doubt that American power could be used. People like you and me who saw the end of the Soviet Union, said, "Well, you know what? This could work." But people have seen Lebanon and Iraq and Afghanistan are legitimately going to ask, maybe the world is different.

We're also the victim of success. Because we have successfully protected ourselves and most of our friends in Europe against our foreign threats, we've gotten the idea that there is no threat because the threat has been kept at bay. So why do we need all of these ancient institutions and practices and habits because we haven't –

Well, September 11th made people think, well, well, maybe there is a threat. And San Bernardino again is making people think there are people here who are bad people. Now, what does *bad people* mean? It doesn't mean they're not Americans, or they're not white people, or they're not Christian people. It means they are people who are fundamentally hostile to the principles of liberal government. You can't tolerate people who are intolerant towards tolerance.

KRISTOL: And are people willing to say what you just said?

ROSEN: And that's what we're working our way up towards now, and the problem with America is that it's good to be cosmopolitan at home. We are a multicultural society at home. We are the creation of immigrants. We have to – what you and I learned in elementary school, and what is still taught in a different way, which is all these differences that you see among the people in front of you they're superficial, they don't matter. You should do everything you can to make those differences recede into the background.

KRISTOL: But that's not what's thought today, do you think? Now we have multiculturalism, celebration of differences.

ROSEN: But again, look beyond the surface. Gay people are people just like you and me, transgendered people are people just like you and me – rainbows, people of different ethnicities. It does and can – it can and does shade into, and the power structure, which denied this fundamental equality is all bad.

KRISTOL: Right.

ROSEN: And what that does is throw the baby out with the bathwater, which happens periodically in American history. Our teacher Sam Huntington said every 50 years, or so, the United States goes through this fit of social frenzy in which you insist that your institutions be perfect. That they be perfectly just and perfectly egalitarian, and if they're not, you must tear them up and start all over again.

Which means you throw the baby out with the bathwater. And after a while people realize that that's not the best way to take care of people's freedoms and pursuit of equality, it hurts them. Urban riots don't help anybody. So at home there is this tendency for some people to take advantage of this impulse for political purposes, which is the guys who have been running the show are bad people, we're the guys who should run it, and why? Because the people who have been governing you are fundamentally illegitimate.

It's what Lincoln said in the Young Men's Lyceum speech, "Some people who really are members of the family of the Eagle, tribe of the Lion will tear up societies for the opportunity to rebuild it." Okay, that is not necessarily part of the equation, but you have to tell an alternative story.

KRISTOL: Right.

ROSEN: You have to tell a story, no, the American foundation was the best thing to happen for human liberty in a millennium. Yes, slavery was implicitly unacknowledged, but the Declaration of liberty – this is again Lincoln – declares that all men are equal. And I would make sure that American Civil War history is – 600 – Now its estimated 750,000 Americans died to end slavery.

750,000 people fought to preserve the Union and keep it on a course where slavery wasn't the course of eventual extinction. That is sort of World War I levels of casualties. It's huge.

White boys from the North fought and died so that slavery would be put down the course of extinction. Not that slavery was justified, not that this wipes out the sin of slavery. Lincoln never would have said the sin – that slavery was anything other than a sin, which would stain our soul for as long as we existed. But we made acts of contrition and expiation, and we paid for it in blood.

So the story of American institutions is one of institutions, which are capable of self-rectification and progress. American institutions are capable of extending this to other people. And the moment – what we're going through now is, of course, a national civic education. Look at the countries where Americans are not present and where this chaos that we discussed earlier is.

Who are the people that are being oppressed? Minorities, religious and otherwise, women, children. The rights of gays, in countries where these monsters are operating, are not being safeguarded. Being multicultural doesn't mean staying out of areas where multiculturalism is being ruthlessly murdered. I mean, literally and physically annihilated. And it doesn't require an elaborate propaganda mechanism to push a message out.

But it does require – people confront it. Anti-Semitism was pushed back in the United States when people saw what the concentration camps looked like in Germany and Poland. People see what the – people – Americans, both civilians and military, who have been to Iraq and Afghanistan who have seen the face of the enemy have no question in their mind. We may have done it in the wrong way, but we were on the right side.

KRISTOL: And this is an intellectual challenge, and you seem pretty optimistic about cutting through a lot of, presumably, some bad teaching and obfuscation, and people seeing that fundamentally. And then there's the kind of – I don't know what you call it – the challenge of spirit, or will, or ability to sort of mobilize to do it. You can imagine a world in which people do see this – it's not that they're idiots – but they kind of end up lamenting our inability – you know, you have to also have a certain kind of self-confidence, maybe almost excessive self-confidence of a Teddy Roosevelt or a John Kennedy type to really get the country to do these things. That does seem to be pretty far from where we are now.

ROSEN: It is, it is. You have to have the confidence. And then along the lines of the examples from the 30s and 70s that I gave before, you have to build ad-hoc institutions, which will create the pathway, which the federal government could then follow.

And that's an act of creative leadership and institution-building, but it's – Tocqueville said, "American is a nation of self-organizing local groups." So we do that. People that you and I work with do that. And we're at the moment now where I think people are beginning to say, "This, this not doing stupid stuff is not working."

KRISTOL: You don't think there's so much self-forgetting, sort of, in terms of the history and –

ROSEN: Yes there is.

KRISTOL: – that you don't have the resources to draw on, conceivably, the people did back then in a way.

ROSEN: You and I are in the business of helping people learn from books the lessons that they should learn from history so they don't have to learn from life. Well, we failed in our job, we didn't teach people with books what they should have learned, so they're learning from life.

KRISTOL: You think they are learning – or they're capable of learning, the educational institutions don't throw up such a fog, you know, so much smoke and fog that people don't see through it at some point, reality hits, I guess.

ROSEN: What do people think about ISIS? They think that they're monsters. Well, you know what? They are monsters.

KRISTOL: But they're not willing to do very much about it at this point.

ROSEN: Because they have not presented with what people in leadership positions are responsible for doing. Tell me a plausible way in which I can take action, which this doesn't wind up badly, because the last time we tried to do it, it wound up making things worse. Well, that's a very fair question.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

ROSEN: And the outlines of the answers are actually –

KRISTOL: Well, the question is, is it a real question or is it kind of an excuse for just never doing anything?

ROSEN: Both. Look, it's not always useful to question people's motives. This is called an ad hominem attack. But there are some people who want not to have an activist foreign policy because that diverts attention and resources away from dealing with the problems that they want to focus on at home. People have said – and I believe it's true, because it's obviously practical – the more we worry about San Bernardino and ISIS, the less time on television is for black youths in American inner cities being killed by cops. You're driving that off the screen.

Well, that's bad because black lives matter, and people aren't going to do anything unless they're focused on it, and the more we talk about ISIS the less – not that people forget about the other, but life is a practical matter and you have to – there's only so much time you can spend and so forth. And there's a sort of a political impulse to say, "Let's just kind of push this other thing down in the weeds."

And it could continue. But if I'm right, or half-right, reality will be such that you will see that the more you ignore this problem, the worse it gets. So do we have the capacity, and I think the answer is, the impulse among American young people, and across institutions like the United States Army, which is a very egalitarian organization which grows from people who don't usually get the opportunity to go to Ivy League universities, as well as the Ivy League, want to play a role in their country and in the world in which they make people's lives better. I mean, it's a fundamentally human impulse.

I can pile up money after money, and after a while, I realize that my life is completely empty. The more people read about these personal lives of people who are super wealthy, the more they hear these people say anybody who thinks that money can buy you happiness has never had money. Right? That famous Larry Ellison quote. It's true.

And there's a number of a different ways it could go. It could go into religious movements, one way to serve, you know higher ideals. Another one is national service. I stand with retired General Stan McChrystal, he's talking about something right when he's talking about national service.

The United States' political system is set up such that national service is not that likely. But ways in which American youth can participate – now what does this require? At bottom is requires that people create, first, informal non-government institutions, in which you combine the skills that you need to intervene in useful ways here and abroad, which we have in non-governmental organizations, Peace Corps, plus the American military, I mean even that is a fundamental part of it.

KRISTOL: So you're less – that's interesting, so you're really less pessimistic than a lot of conservative friends of mine about sort of the potential for America to throw out its traditional sources of strength.

ROSEN: It's not a question of pessimism or optimism, it's the question – if we don't break our heads and our hearts to figure out what to do, we're going to lose.

KRISTOL: Yeah, well it's, I mean –

ROSEN: And we're going to lose to people who are really seriously bad people.

KRISTOL: Yeah, I guess the sort of answer to that, I mean among – if you pushed people to answer, it would be, "Well, they'll you know, we'll just have to hold them off. They can't – the 21st century is not really going to be defined by kind of a barbaric form of Islam, or by Putin's kind of thuggishness, or Chinese xenophobia." I mean, I think that's wrong, but I think it is hard to get people to maybe see things with the urgency in which you see them, or maybe not, and that's an interesting question.

People are pretty able to avoid facing things. God knows they did in the 30s until you really, really, really have to face them. And we – I mean, I always think, when we talk about the 30s and you talked interestingly about the Council on Foreign Relations, and all these very impressive efforts to get the Air Force ready, it still is jaw-dropping to me that we didn't intervene actually though until we were attacked. I mean, you read about Churchill, it's fantastic, you know June 1940, we're helping a tiny bit, but we're nowhere in June 1941, incidentally, you know, we're not in until December '41, it's kind of amazing the degree to which people can tell themselves, "We can't quite, we don't want to get involved, we shouldn't get involved, we can't get involved, it's too difficult. It'll kind of work out anyway, so. The Soviets and the Nazis will take care of each other."

ROSEN: No, no, no, and, and the middle-late Cold War, it's not until the Soviets are in Afghanistan they are actively subverting the political system in West Europe, where you kind of gloss over that part of it.

KRISTOL: And the Iranians take hostages.

ROSEN: And the Iranians take hostages, and the United States is being pushed around all over the world, that we kind of modestly up our game. There's nothing, there's no possible way in which I can disagree with you, the only thing I would say is that it's possible that both propositions may be true, but in part, which is as Churchill said, "Democracies always do the right thing after they've tried everything else."

And I think there's – there has to be kind of a shock to the system to do that. But that doesn't remove the obligation to lay the groundwork ahead of time so that when this event does occur, and people are mobilized by an external event, people don't have to waste time –

IV: What Should We Read? (1:15:46 – 1:27:58)

KRISTOL: So let's talk about that. So you've been a professor all these years, and as you say, we've in a way failed in our teaching, maybe, but I think you've had many successes, but what would you – so if people wanted to say, "Okay, I want to kind of be ready for a chance to participate and to do something useful, I want to understand the world we're looking at, I want to understand America in a way, and how one does what you described," I'm curious apart from watching this conversation and reading your fine work and other friends of ours, but what books – if someone said, "I don't know, I'm 20 years old, I'm somewhere, I don't know any good professors, that's hopeless, they're teaching IR theory or God knows what. What should I read? What should I read?" Both about –

That's two categories, at least in my mind, though there are many more obviously: the world, just sort of understand what the world could look like, either current stuff or old stuff that gives you a vision, a glimpse into international politics more broadly, and then on the sort of America question, what you – you're drawing on such a wealth of knowledge that you used very effortlessly, but most people don't know anything about – much about what you've been talking about. So what would your two categories be?

ROSEN: On the world, I was thinking about this, and I said what drew me to think about these things, because you know I grew up a teenager in a Long Island suburb in the 1960s, and I was going to be a scientist, because in those days if you were a smart kid people gave you chemistry sets, and you were supposed to go off and become a scientist –

KRISTOL: Sputnik, kind of.

ROSEN: Post-Sputnik, and it was just the thing to do. But I didn't wind up doing that. And I don't know how it happened, but somehow I read the first volume of Winston Churchill's history of World War II, *The Gathering Storm*.

KRISTOL: Is that right? Before you got to college?

ROSEN: I was about 15 or 16.

KRISTOL: Wow.

ROSEN: And we've all read it, but most of us have read it decades ago. You forget, it's like reading *Lord of the Rings*, in fact, we now know that Tolkien based the *Lord of the Rings* on the events of the 1930s and leading up to fascism.

What it is, what's the story? A story of good and decent men and women trying to do the best they can, against an enemy who is devious and deceitful and clever and evil. And they tell themselves every story possible about why this is not our problem, why the problem will solve itself, why we'll only make things worse if we try to – in other words, the constant story of how to act with the world.

And how it is that a small number of brave men, mostly men, but some women, got involved and they struggled and they failed, and they struggled and they failed.

KRISTOL: Led by Churchill, yeah.

ROSEN: Led by Churchill. If you want kind of a more academic, there's a book by an author whose name I can't recall now called *Dangerous Young Men* who talked about –

KRISTOL: Yeah, I haven't read that, but it looked interesting, though, yeah. It's Churchill, but the young men who sort of were his followers, right?

ROSEN: It was about them, but what it's really about is the ruthless way the British political establishment tried to wipe them out because there was huge amounts of German money coming into England, and

their characters were assassinated, private information about them was leaked, stories were – you know, this – press campaigns were – It was vicious, vicious politics. But the story that Churchill tells, leaving out all the nasty stuff, was they prevailed. They prevailed, but at the last possible moment.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that's for sure.

ROSEN: And then they fight and the rest of the series is about fighting this glorious, but very painful and difficult war, coming to the brink of success, and then losing it again because of the failures to see the next problem.

KRISTOL: The Soviets.

ROSEN: The Soviets.

KRISTOL: I think the Churchill thing is just endlessly instructive, and of course, so wonderfully moving and entertaining – entertaining is, I don't think, quite the right word, what should we say? Gripping, you know, it's such a drama and he's such a dramatic figure, and many of the others are too much more than we appreciate today.

No, I always, I try to quote Churchill a lot. I saw recently someone who was ridiculing me for like – I quoted Churchill, or referenced him like 25 – I don't know how many numbers of times in the last two years in various editorials and what not, but I do it partly because I do, in a very mild, minor way hope to get people to go back and read either Churchill himself or about him, and there are obviously many good biographies and studies of the period.

Okay, what else? So that's a very good start.

ROSEN: The thing – Sometimes I read your columns and I see these references to the 30s, and the thing that sticks in my mind from Churchill, not from his books, but is his one account where he's observing – he's at the Parliament, and he says, "A long limousine drew up in front of the House of Commons. The Prime Minister's car had arrived, the door opened, and no one got out."

KRISTOL: Yeah.

ROSEN: They're talking of Stanley Baldwin. And somehow I think of current events, sometimes with, okay, so that's an old book, or an older book.

KRISTOL: What about the world –

ROSEN: But a newer book, which speaks to some of the same issues that we're talking about right now, is written by a woman named Emma Skye, S-K-Y-E, called *The Unraveling*. She begins life as an English anti-war activist. She's studying anthropology, she's studying Arab societies. Somehow through a long chain of events, which might otherwise have never happened, she winds up in Iraq working for the United States Army, and it's a story of how she finds the U.S. Army to be the heroes in a saga, that despite all of her previous impulses, and her previous positions, these are fundamentally decent men and women. And they're trying to do what is right, and they struggle and they make mistakes, but they want to learn and they want to – and they actually do something worthwhile and then –

KRISTOL: We give it away.

ROSEN: They give it away. It's called *The Unraveling*. It's a story of how she both succeeds, but how people on both the Right and the Left, Republicans the Democrats – kind of implicitly conspire to lose what the lives of these American men and women, not only Americans because there are people like her who are British and other nationalities there have –

So it's a tale of our times. And it's a tale which speaks to people who are more like the people whose minds we're trying to reach. This is not just about an old Tory politician fighting for empire. This is about an anti-war activist who wants to do something for the world.

KRISTOL: No, I remember meeting her in Iraq the one time I was there and she was funny in terms of like, you know, here I am with all the people like you who I spent my adult life kind of assuming were on opposite sides, and she does make a – people have said her account of it is maybe kind of a liberal internationalist account, but that's fine, as you say that's an important aspect.

What about America? I think people – My other sense is that people just don't know American history in the way they might, the American regime, the American political culture, what two or three things would you recommend there?

ROSEN: Right, and this is I think part of the answer that I would give about why we failed to reach people through books, which is the American academic literature on American political institutions and history is, is not of the kind which seeks to find the lessons of the kind we're talking about. It's more muckraking or it's people don't matter, socioeconomic forces matter. All the tendencies and stuff like that.

So again, what helped me kind of and this is probably not useful because it's not easily accessible, but reading Lincoln. I refer to the Young Men's Lyceum speech and the Lincoln-Douglas Debates –

KRISTOL: Well, that's easily accessible.

ROSEN: It's accessible –

KRISTOL: I think the books on Lincoln by now, obviously.

ROSEN: But, because they're not written in a way that speaks naturally to current sensibilities. The rhetoric is a little bit old-fashioned and, and he's beautifully eloquent and erudite, but he uses lots of words that are hardly in common usage.

KRISTOL: But for me I'd say Harry Jaffa's book on the Lincoln-Douglas Debates, one of the reason it had such a power is that it begins with the actual practical political fight. So if you like politics you kind of think, "Wow, this is really fascinating." It's not just wonderful speeches, you know.

ROSEN: Well, look this is not about foreign policy. This is about American institutions, but it is relevant, because what is he talking about? He said there's something of a tendency on both the Right and the Left, the American people are ignorant, the American people need to be led, they have to be told what to do in foreign policy, anyway, because there's this kind of fundamentally anti-democratic, what's his name? George Kennan says, "The American people are like this beast, like a dinosaur." Which is contemptuous of the American people. Which is really despicable.

Lincoln starts with the people, the American people can be spoken to in the same way you would talk to somebody who was your intellectual equal and they'll get it. They're adults, and they care about it because this is important stuff. And second, there are popular democratic impulses, which are natural, but not helpful. A lot of what he writes about is what do we do about lynch mobs, on both sides, right?

KRISTOL: Also a desire to avoid having to confront problems –

ROSEN: No, but how do you avoid the bad side of democracy? What we would see now – the impulse like Donald Trump's impulse to go out and arrest every Muslim? Why the – but not only this is bad, it's easy to say it's bad, but how do you bring people to accept the fact that they must exercise republican self-control? If you want to govern yourself as a republic, you must govern yourself as an individual. You have to control your own impulses before you can control the political impulses of your society.

My family, my children make fun of me for being kind of a Lincoln psycho fan, but he is the one figure in American political history who eloquently and brilliantly wrestles with the problems of democracy in the service of the best elements of democracy.

And from that you kind of draw some – I mean, I've done more esoteric – I've read all of the Hamilton's essays on – just public memos on the Publius and Pacificus memo, and kind of an academic would do that, no person in the real world would ever do that, but he's wrestling with the same problem.

KRISTOL: But reading biographies of these Founders and of statesmen I think is really important, and it's a good – I wish more people taught it, in addition to you, at Harvard and other institutions but –

ROSEN: In my course on war and politics, I give one lecture, which really is a lecture that leads up to the rhetoric of the Second Inaugural Address, as the second founding of the American republic through an act of both of war, but also of rhetoric. So, and because it teaches us lessons about how to work within a democracy when you're engaged in a long and difficult war.

KRISTOL: Okay, this is great, we'll have to – we'll have you come back and we'll discuss, just really, we'll discuss Churchill and Lincoln, that would be itself a worthwhile conversation, but at least you're giving people, I think, a taste of how to think about these things, and whom one could study and whom one could read. Steve, thanks a lot for taking the time today.

R: Thank you for inviting me.

B: My pleasure, and thank you for joining on CONVERSATIONS.

[END]