

# CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

## Conversations with Bill Kristol

**Guest: Eric Edelman, Hertog Scholar at the Center for Strategic Studies; Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (2005-2009); U.S. Ambassador to Turkey (2003-2005)**

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### **I: Gathering Storms (0:15 – 40:17)**

KRISTOL: Welcome to CONVERSATIONS. I'm Bill Kristol, and I'm very pleased to be joined today by Eric Edelman, Hertog practitioner at Johns Hopkins SAIS. You teach there, other places, think tanks galore. A major figure in the Washington foreign policy community. Foreign Service Officer for, what – 30 years I think. Ambassador to Finland and Turkey. Undersecretary of Defense in the George W. Bush administration. So, a huge amount of experience, and also a PhD, if I'm not mistaken?

EDELMAN: Correct.

KRISTOL: You kind of suppressed that. You hide that in your résumé there, from Yale, right?

EDELMAN: Misspent youth.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that's okay. Yeah, that other school, right. No. So one of the most thoughtful, I really mean this, observers of – having been a practitioner and a student, and one of the most thoughtful observers of foreign policy, we had a conversation a year ago as I recall, that stressed a little more on your background, your history, your stint in Turkey in particular. But let's talk about the world today. So, how worried should I be?

EDELMAN: Well, I think it's fair to be worried because the international border is under enormous strain. It's under enormous strain in part because of developments that have been ongoing for a number of years. The rise of a Revanchist Russia. In Europe, the rise of a China that although people hoped would rise peacefully, has, as one would expect from the history of the international system, been more disruptive than people anticipated.

The continuing problems we have with terrorism and the emergence of a new nuclear power in North Korea, potentially with the ability to reach the United States and the potential that Iran will become a nuclear power at some point down the line. All of which has stressed the international system enormously.

But the other element of stress, which was already present when we were talking a year ago, but has become even more accentuated, has been the role or lack thereof of the United States under President Trump. The international order that the U.S. created after World War II, basically had two major elements to it.

One was a system of alliances which were engineered by the United States at the end of World War II: the multilateral alliance in Europe, NATO; and the bilateral alliances we developed in East Asia, which was sometimes described as a hub and spoke system with the U.S. as the center of the hub. And then a series of special relationships with countries in the Middle East, all of which had provided some measure of order.

And an international economic system underpinned by the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, which was meant to provide a kind of lubricant for the international economy to prevent the kinds of things that happened before World War II, – the Great Depression, which had not only disastrous economic effects, but knock-on political effects as well. That's the sort of gist of the international system.

I think a lot of people think it just runs on its own, but it doesn't. It requires management, and particularly management by the U.S. But because President Trump has been from the very beginning a skeptic to say the least, about the value of alliances and has chosen to attack our allies publically, the alliance system has been enormously roiled and the use of tariffs has also roiled the international economy.

And so, the system which was already moving in a negative direction because of all sorts of developments, and there were some developments in the Obama administration as well, that undercut U.S. leadership of that system, a year on from where we were last year, the system I think is under more stress.

The question is, has the system sustained so much damage that it is beyond repair, or is it possible still to repair the system? That's an open question in my mind. I still think that there is potential to restore some elements of the system. But there are others, like Robert Kagan, who think that it's now pretty much over.

KRISTOL: Yeah, people I think here talk about the system, and they maybe think, oh, this is too abstract in general. But I think it's important, at least, because I think there's a way in which the typical discussion which focuses on this threat or that threat – a little bit they don't see the whole, which is more than the sum of the parts. And of course these individual threats can be terribly dangerous, and they can in itself destroy the whole system I suppose. But the system as a whole seems to have more – I don't know, there's more to it than just managing this thing competently and preventing this thing from happening here.

EDELMAN: And it's a bloodless abstraction when we say the liberal international order or the international system. I mean it sounds like academic international relations theory. But what we're really talking about is what's preserved the peace and prosperity of the world and the United States over the last 50 years or 75 years.

But if you think about the period since the end of World War II, first the reconstruction and the economic miracle in Europe. And then if you think of the period since the late 1970s, the rise of East Asia as an economic force. All of these things have been empowered and enabled by the system that was created.

So it's not about some abstraction, the NATO treaty, or the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs, it's about an incredible increase in global wealth and prosperity that has been underpinned by these arrangements. And that's what's really at stake.

KRISTOL: And fewer wars. I mean obviously if you compare it to the first 50 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, I mean.

EDELMAN: Yeah, there's been no shortage of conflict, but –

KRISTOL: A startling contrast.

EDELMAN: Yeah. But not the kind we saw in the First World War and Second World War

KRISTOL: Yeah. And people really don't – they sort of do assume, I'm struck talking to young people today. They grew up – we grew up in the system too, but we had parents who remembered and fought in the Second World War or knew of that older – you know, it was a living memory, I would say, when we were growing up, that there was an alternative to the American-led liberal international order. Whereas I do feel now that people just take it for granted and assume it'll coast along. I think it was very true of Obama, as well as his kind of world view.

EDELMAN: Absolutely.

KRISTOL: As well as – but Trump's a little different because he's in a way more hostile to it, and President Obama was a little more just, we can lead from behind and there'll be no great consequences.

EDELMAN: Although it's really quite interesting. If you go back and read, for instance, President Obama's interview with Jeffrey Goldberg, what I like to call the Goldberg Variations, it hits many of the same themes and leitmotifs that President Trump has. "Our allies are taking advantage of us, they're not pulling their weight; trade has not been as beneficial as people –" There are a lot of overtones. And in some sense I think that President Obama gave a sort of laissez passer as it were – a pass, to President Trump, to say things in a much more aggressive and direct manner. I mean, Obama was clearly more nuanced about all this.

KRISTOL: Right.

EDELMAN: But there is a big – there are elements of this that are a continuity, not a big radical change. And that's not altogether surprising, because when this system was created, there were critics on both the right and left of the system. They had slightly different critiques, but there was a conservative critique, because the Republican Party before 1945 had been largely, as President Bush used to point out to us that worked for him in the Bush '43 administration, xenophobic, protectionist, and isolationist.

Isolationism is perhaps a little bit of a strong term. I mean if you look at Republican foreign policy in the '20s and into the '30s under Coolidge and Hoover, what's actually striking is how engaged the U.S. was in the international economy. But there was a real reluctance to take on political obligations and responsibilities for the security of either Asia or Europe.

And as the security of Asia and Europe came under attack from authoritarian national socialist and fascist governments, militarized governments, the U.S. stood back and let this happen. And on trade, the Republican Party had largely been protectionist. They had been the party of Fordney-McCumber, and Smoot-Hawley tariffs.

And after the Second World War, there was a big sea change and the party changed its view, both on trade and on the value of alliances. But we tend to, because we've all grown up in the alliance system, as you were just saying, to assume that that's the natural course for Americans.

Actually, if you look at our history, there was a big hostility to undertaking political responsibilities, going back to the founders. And President Washington in his farewell address said we should have no

permanent alliances. Thomas Jefferson in his first inaugural says we should have no entangling alliances.

So it's really been kind of, well, an unnatural act for Americans to take on these responsibilities. But there were critiques of this. There was in the Republican Party a critique, largely embodied in Senator Robert Taft, which was kind of suppressed in 1952.

There was a critique from the Left from Henry Wallace, claiming that these responsibilities put us on the side of imperialist governments and on the side of global capital, and not the side of the worker. So there was a different sort of gravamen to the argument. But both Right and Left dissented from this role that the U.S. played. And the Democratic Party and the Republican Party both suppressed those views, essentially.

And those views are now coming back. And you see it both in Bernie Sanders, and you see it a little bit in Obama, and you certainly see it in Donald Trump and Rand Paul and others.

KRISTOL: Do you buy the argument that – Of course the liberal international order was created against someone or something: the Soviet Union, might not have been fully created if the Soviet threat hadn't appeared so soon after we disposed of the Nazi and Japanese imperial threats because we were in pretty much of a pell-mell withdrawal –

EDELMAN: Rapid demobilization.

KRISTOL: – mixed, I suppose, from '46 – '45 to '48. '49, there was some sense that we needed to have this new order combined with some desire to get back to normalcy and therefore to pull out.

And then, of course, the Soviets in a way – But do you agree with the argument that I hear so often that the end of the Cold War really was the kind of beginning of the death knell for this? Or would you say, I guess I'm more inclined this way, that actually under Clinton and George W. Bush, I don't know, Americans actually seemed to, I don't know embrace, but they were quite cognizant of the – you couldn't just walk away because the Soviet Union had gone away, and really the moment of change at some point starts to change more under President Obama, and maybe especially in the second term. I don't know – I was just curious.

EDELMAN: No, I agree with that. I think, first of all, the institutions that were created still had a lot of durability. The GATT moved into the WTO which was an institutionalization of the trade regime.

And NATO retained its role, both as a potential hedge against Russian revanchism, which unfortunately did become a problem. But also as a way of integrating the newly independent countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union into the economic and security institutions of Europe, both NATO and the European Union. And look, there's a lot that one can criticize about NATO and the EU for that matter, but they had helped create a more peaceful environment for Europe.

I think it's true that both President Clinton and President Bush continued to share the fundamental outlook of the importance of the order. I think President Clinton found it harder to actually galvanize the American public, for instance in the Balkans, where there was a threat to order in Europe. In part because of the phenomenon you're describing, in the sense that "the Cold War is over, time to take a peace dividend." They did take a peace dividend from the defense budget, even as the operational tempo of the military was increasing, in order to preserve order in places like Haiti and Somalia and the Balkans.

President Bush's situation was slightly different. He probably would have faced the same headwinds had it not been for 9/11, which created a kind of sense of national emergency and galvanized support for an activist foreign policy.

KRISTOL: But don't you think, it does seem today, the Balkans seem like ancient history. For us it was a very live thing, and a big debate within the Republican Party, and you were in government and involved in debates and how to mobilize, how to get your – anyway, complicated issues of getting the alliance to join us in reacting, or getting us to join the alliance and reacting in some ways, since we were slow.

EDELMAN: Yes, we were slow.

KRISTOL: And then 9/11 obviously very much living history for us. But of course I'm struck by how much those seem like a different world.

Something happened with President Obama and then President Trump. And I don't know if it was that the first term of President Obama still had I think Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State, and Panetta and Gates. Gates and Panetta at Defense, and then at CIA and then Defense. And I don't know, it felt more like a continuation where you and I sort of would have had criticisms of things that would happen, but he actually sent more troops into Afghanistan, albeit with the promise to pull them out.

Something happened. I don't know if it was the pullout from Iraq in 2011, or the red line in Syria in 2013. And after that it just seemed that we were much more in the business of washing our hands of the world.

The momentum for free trade, which sustained itself through the first term of Obama, collapsed, and both parties collapsed on that by 2016. The pride in a sense, in both parties, that, you know, this had been an achievement of America for 50, 60 years, to help produce this more prosperous and peaceful world – became a very – at best kind of "it's a burden, we have to bear it." And at worst "it's a burden we don't have to bear it."

I don't know. Historians I guess will look at this and look at what the key inflection points, or maybe it was just a gradual process that was going to happen anyway.

EDELMAN: There were several forces at work. And first of all, I think the Great Recession had a big impact in 2007 and '09, in refocusing people on the importance of focusing on the domestic economic situation and getting the economy – first staunching the bleeding and preventing a complete meltdown of the international economy. And then, sort of rebuilding the U.S. economy, and jumpstarting it.

There also was, I think, was/is still, a palpable sense of fatigue with the long drawn-out efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan which appeared to – and there admitted is a long complicated history to how these things played out. But I think there was a sense that these wars have not been successful, so that the United States was sort of trapped in perpetual war and there was a fatigue with that.

And a sense that, and certainly in the Obama administration, we don't want to do that again. And I think, you know, this is not the first time we've seen these kind of pendulum shifts over time in U.S. policy. But I think even a lot of folks in the Obama administration would say that they overlearned the lessons of non-intervention that they thought they had learned from the Bush 43 experience. And that there are consequences to overreacting to things. There are also consequences to underreacting and not taking action, and you touched on many of them.

KRISTOL: Though Syria, it's amazing, I mean just as a debating point, where people would say to me, Iraq was tough. And I'd say it was tough and we made a lot of mistakes. And people would suggest maybe we shouldn't have gone in, if we had maybe wouldn't have if we had known there weren't the weapons of mass destruction. But what about Syria? That's the case study of the non-intervention. But that's not even in the debate today it seems to me in the public – do you know what I mean? It's an interesting –

EDELMAN: Well, it's – so, the argument that was used against intervention, from the time the civil war broke out in 2011, was that there is no military solution to the civil war in Syria. As we sit here today, it looks like there is a military solution, it's just not one that we helped provide. It's one that the Russians and Iranians and the Assad regime have applied, because they've used essentially force and violence to reconquer the country, and perhaps bring an end to the conflict. Although I'm doubtful they'll be able to completely do that.

KRISTOL: Right. And so, 500,000 people dead in the meantime; incredible disruption in Europe because of the migrant crisis. Much more disruption in sight. Whatever the problems of Iraq, it didn't really destabilize anything much else. I mean, the rest of the Middle East looked sort of the same at the end of 2008, as it had, once the surge had succeeded and things were reasonably quiet in Iraq. And maybe it actually led to, helped lead, inspire the Green Revolution in Iran, which is a good thing.

I do think you start to look back at 2011, the Arab Spring, our failure to try to help manage that to a good outcome and just sort of a couple little interventions. Libya and then getting totally out of that. No Iraq. If you think back to it, I think 2011, I tend to focus on 2013 with the Syria red line, which I think when you traveled abroad, I mean you do more than I, that really was a shock to world leaders. But maybe it began in 2011 with the desire –

I mean, when you think about it, huge events are happening in a very important part of the world. It was clear that the Arab Spring was a big deal. And really for the first time, or maybe not the first time, but we decided sort of we're not going to be able to, or try to, manage this. And that's a pretty astonishing thing for the superpower on which the world order's always been thought to depend, to just kind of stand back and say – I don't know.

EDELMAN: The result of this is when the United States doesn't lead, when it doesn't provide a framework for action for others – which is what we had largely done up until 2009 – the international system has no guiding authority, other than the most powerful actors in the system. And if the United States doesn't provide leadership, people will help themselves. And a lot of times they'll end up doing things we don't like.

I mean, I think people underestimate the degree to which alliances, the alliances we have, and the special relationships like with Israel and Egypt and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the UAE to some degree. Those are both a way of sort of aggregating military capability – that's the classic role of an alliance – but they also serve to constrain people. They're pacts of constraint.

In fact, if you look at our alliances in East Asia, Victor Cha who – my former colleague in government in the Bush 43 administration and very briefly the apparent nominee to be Ambassador to South Korea in the Trump administration – has written a very good book about the growth of the U.S. political commitments in East Asia. And they were very much meant to both provide a kind of security guarantee, but also to restrain. The government of Syngman Rhee in Korea, the government of Chiang Kai-shek in Taiwan, and also of course to be a restraint on Japan so that Japan would not once again kind of roil the waters in East Asia.

So, these alliances both – they provide a lot of different geopolitical benefits. And it's one of the reasons why the President's desire to have a cost calculation that very narrowly focuses on the, quote, 'burden sharing', I mean, yes, all the Allies ought to step up and do more, that's right. And I think it's a good thing that the administration is getting more commitment out of the Allies to spending.

But that's not the be-all and end-all of alliances. They provide lots of other benefits to the United States. They provide us geographical access to key parts of the world, from which we can operate militarily. They provide us with a certain measure of legitimacy to our international actions, including on occasions when we can't get the imprimatur of the United Nations because of China or Russia getting in the way.

And they also allow us to exercise some restraint over activities of our allies that we would otherwise find problematic. And this is, I think, something that people have not recognized. And it's one of the reasons why the world seems more disorderly over the last few years, as our leadership has retreated. People are doing things on their own. A lot of time they're going to do things we don't like. A lot of times they're going to do things that may not be well-considered and which are going to create more violence and turmoil and a much less-ordered world.

KRISTOL: You know, and we both have been critics of President Trump, but I've got to say – I was just thinking back to the Obama years. I mean, you advised Mitt Romney in 2012, and I remember this, when Joe Biden said to Paul Ryan in the Vice Presidential debate – well, when President Obama said to Mitt Romney, "Russia, you just want, you know, the '80s back," or whatever the –

EDELMAN: Yes. "The '80s are calling, they want their foreign policy back."

KRISTOL: Yeah, ho, ho, ho. But Biden also said to Paul Ryan, "Well you just want to send troops into Afghanistan. We need to do nation building here at home." President Obama, I think, he used that phrase back in 2010 perhaps, when he was even ordering the surge of troops, that this could be very limited, we're going to bring them back.

And I remember saying to someone I knew slightly in the Obama administration, you're just – I mean, I've spent 25 years fighting Pat Buchanan and Ron Paul and people like this, and you're just unleashing things. When you start saying "nation building begins at home," that suits your domestic political agenda and your anti-Bush, anti-neocon, anti-interventionist agenda right now. But you are laying the groundwork in both parties for something that you don't want, and I certainly don't want.

And I do think that did turn out. I'm not saying the Trump people had to be inspired by Obama, but you ended up in both parties with a sort of soft consensus against assuming the burdens of world leadership.

EDELMAN: This, again, you know, this has echoes historically. You'll recall in 1972 George McGovern giving his two o'clock in the morning acceptance speech in Miami at the Democratic Convention saying "Come home, America." And "Come home, America" is nation building at home, as opposed to sustaining the U.S. role internationally. And George McGovern, although I think he in the end voted for Truman in 1948, was a delegate to the 1948 convention that nominated Henry Wallace.

So there's a continuity – there are continuities here that are extremely striking, and not altogether surprising. But it takes leadership in both parties to, I think, to reassert what Arthur Schlesinger called "the vital center," the notion that both sides have to support.

KRISTOL: And McGovern lost. And I do think it's fair to say probably from '48 on – but really you could say from '40 on, certainly with Franklin Roosevelt, though he didn't differ with Willkie much or Dewey – we never elected – we always elected the more – not the most interventionist candidate, but a reasonably internationalist and interventionist candidate, in a general election. They might – people might win primaries, like a McGovern, but not the general.

And so in that respect, the selection of President Obama, and then especially, of course, of Trump. That's three elections in a row where you could say the voters rejected pretty clearly the more traditionally internationalist candidate. They may have had other reasons for doing so, they undoubtedly did, actually, most of them. But that is going to have effects, it's going to have effects.

EDELMAN: You know, that is exactly right. And you know, you see this in discussions with government officials, among our allies, and in other countries. The question they have is, is this a permanent change of direction for the United States, or is this just – is this a transient phenomenon that is going to pass?

I was in Paris in early June talking to a group of think tank and government officials, and that was the first question they asked us. After eight years of Obama, who “We,” as they said, “we didn’t feel he really liked us Europeans very much.” And now, a couple of years of Trump, you know, is this a permanent change, or is this something that’s going to rebalance itself after a period of time?

I think my and my colleagues who are trying to speak for the – not speak for the United States, but represent an American point of view, weren’t quite sure ourselves what the answer to that question is. I don’t think we know.

KRISTOL: So what about people who would say to us, well, you’re nostalgic for something that was fine, maybe you guys were right, that 70 years was a good run for this order, but it’s too hard to do it, it’s a new world. It’s technology. Forces have been unleashed – also not just in technology, but nationalism and ideology. And this is a kind of – it’s not doable.

I mean, what would you say if someone said that to you? I mean, what’s your – going forward, is it practical, manageable to – does everything have to be rethought? I mean, you can’t just put things back together and pretend the last ten years didn’t happen?

EDELMAN: Well, it’s a fair point. And certainly there’s a lot of elements of the system that need to be renovated and brought up to date. No system can stay in a world that’s changing as rapidly as ours is and particularly with the pace of technological change that we have lived through. You can’t just keep it in a kind of glass case, a museum: “so this is the international order and it should stay like this forever.”

I still am somewhat optimistic that these things can be reformed, changed, updated to meet the current demands. I was just traveling as a tourist over the last couple of weeks in France, Italy and Spain.

KRISTOL: I should say we’re now – we’re speaking in mid-August.

EDELMAN: Mid-August, so it was –

KRISTOL: So God knows, by the time we release this in September or October, who knows what will have happened? But anyway, just to be clear.

EDELMAN: And just to be clear. But in my conversations not with government officials but just with everyday folks who we encountered in our trip, I still think there is a sort of – people take Trump as Trump. As someone told me in Italy, “Well, we had Berlusconi, so this is not all that unusual for us; we don’t see the – yes, Trump’s a little bit, maybe extreme, but we’ve had some experience with this ourselves.”

KRISTOL: Of course now they have a slightly crazier government, so Berlusconi turns out to be the forerunner or something.

EDELMAN: Even a little more sinister. But the point is that they discount the Trump factor to some degree. But what they really are concerned about is the larger issue we’ve been discussing, which is the U.S. role, and whether the U.S. is ready to play a leadership role with Europe and beyond.

And I mean, look, I’m not naïve. I recognize that the minute we start to provide leadership, they’ll start grousing about U.S. unilateralism, and how we’re throwing our weight around and all of that. But it was really quite palpable this concern, a fear really, about if the United States doesn’t step up, who will? Because there doesn’t seem to be any other country that is prepared to pick up the role of international leadership.

I mean, it’s interesting to look at Turkey as a case in point right now. Obviously U.S./Turkish relations are at probably a low ebb, even lower than when I was Ambassador.



KRISTOL: Yeah, congratulations, you're off the hook.

EDELMAN: Exactly.

KRISTOL: You were Ambassador in what –

EDELMAN: 2003 to 2005. I like to point out that U.S. standing in the PEW Charitable Trust Global Poll was at its highest point at the time I left, than it has been since. Although I don't think there's a – it's a correlation, not a causation.

But if you look at Turkey, it's going through, while it's having this crisis with the United States, also going through I think on the cusp of a major economic crisis. Will Russia bail out Turkey? Somehow I doubt it. The Russians I think are quite happy to take advantage of the contretemps we find ourselves in with Turkey. And if they can sell things to Turkey or take advantage of it, they will.

But will China bail out Turkey? Somehow I doubt it. I mean, they might provide some loans to Turkey, but they won't be on particularly favorable terms. Just as you see the loans they're providing to a lot of the countries in the so-called Belt and Road Initiative, which Christine Lagarde, the Executive Director of the IMF, had been warning people. This is going to saddle these countries with big debts.

The only option for Turkey ultimately is going to be the IMF, where we have a very large voice. But this, I think, is sort of indicative of, is the United States going to play a leadership role in the world or not? And if it doesn't, other people start fending for themselves.

KRISTOL: And how urgent do you think like the problem is? So, let's assume we make it through two years here without great disasters. I don't know, these things can always be – you never know what's going to happen when. And the next President comes in and says, "well, 'I'll make a good speech that you'll help write for me, that reasserts American leadership, responsibility, to the international liberal order.'" But then what do we do? I mean, what are two or three things you would focus on first? I mean you can't do everything at once obviously.

EDELMAN: Well, it's going to take more than speeches. And it's going to take a while to actually convince people. They'll be looking both for words and deeds. Words will help. But I think in the first instance there has to be an effort to repair some strained alliance ties.

Look, some of our alliance ties have actually, in fairness, have improved under President Trump. The relationship with Israel is extremely positive. It was in a very negative place under President Obama. That's all to the good. Similarly, some of the relationships with the Gulf States have improved under President Trump.

But even with the improvement, there is a sense that the U.S. is not providing the kind of role it did in the past. So you see, for instance, Prime Minister Netanyahu is a very frequent visitor to Moscow. He goes to Moscow much more than he comes to Washington. You see, that the Gulf States there are doing things on their own independently in Yemen. They're also engaged with the Chinese and with the Russians, et cetera.

So there's going to have to be a greater level of activity, a greater level of energy in U.S. diplomacy. And it's got to be institutionalized. It can't be just at the level of the President. It's got to be at the level of the Cabinet officers – the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense – but also empowered officials below that level. Because these relationships, as George Schultz, for whom I worked in the early '80s, used to say, require constant – it's like gardening: it requires constant watering and attention. And we're going to have to do a lot of gardening to get those alliance relationships back into a more healthy state.

And then I think we'll have to look at how much damage has been done at that point to the international economy and the trading order, and see what can be done to address that. Again, I think it's fair enough to say that, in particular, China has been engaged in a lot of predatory economic activity. Chinese economic statecraft has been an enormous problem, and it needs to be addressed. And even the threat of tariffs, if appropriately wielded, could be, play a role in all that.

And some defenders of the Trump administration, proponents argue that this is really sort of a very sophisticated, eleven-dimensional strategy here. I'm hoping that that's right, but I have my skepticism as to whether there's really a strategy here, or there's really more of a kind of impulsive President not terribly well-educated about these things, who is acting on whim and impulse rather than strategy.

KRISTOL: It does seem to me, I've always sort of been inclined to towards this argument, though, that the most important thing is to accept the premise that we need to take this responsibility, and then think about how to exercise it best and around the world. You need to kind of cross that bridge before you can – who knows if Putin will be more or less of a threat, what's going to happen domestically in China, the Middle East. I mean, you could imagine any of these places being a flashpoint, or all of them. But if you don't have the right –

And that would require real domestic – don't you think – I mean an actual debate here at home. I've sort of come to this view much more in the last year or two, that once you lose, if you want to put it this way, once the less interventionist candidate wins three elections in a row, there needs to be some public reckoning *here* about the price we're paying for that. Otherwise it just can't sort of fix itself quietly.

EDELMAN: I agree. And then, you know, I think it's very easy to sort of say, "Oh, it's Obama's fault. It's Trump's fault." I think it's, to some degree, and I include myself here, it really is the fault of the foreign affairs commentariat if you will, or the political class. The people who are both folks who move in and out of government, who've got experience in international affairs, and also the career officials. I think it's to some degree our fault, the think tankers, et cetera.

Because when the Cold War ended, as you pointed out, Bill, that there were these forces that were clearly resurgent. Which is, you know, "why are we doing this anyway? What do we get out of this? Shouldn't someone else – it's someone else's job." As Secretary Baker said about the Balkans, "We don't have a dog in that fight; it's really a European, it's the hour of Europe, let them do it."

So there's been plenty of temptations since the Cold War ended to pull back. And the problem is, rather than actually having a big debate about this, and having a big discussion, it just became a lot easier for people to sit here in Washington and say, well, look, we're just going to do this quietly, and we're not going to really talk about it, and not really debate it. And I think that's been a big, big mistake.

And I think we need political leaders, in the Congress in particular, to be making this case to their constituency.

We benefited from this system. Has it been perfect? No, of course not. There's no perfect system. Have we had to bear some costs because if you play this leadership role, you bear some costs. Have we benefited enormously? Yes, because as the leader of the international system and the holder of the world's reserve currency, we have what the French Foreign Minister once called "the exorbitant privilege" of running the system. And it's been to our benefit. And we need to have people making that case back home.

I think when the systems start to break down, people start to notice. So, including in areas where President Trump did very well electorally, rural areas, for instance, you know, having China not allow U.S. soybeans to come into the country, is creating some consternation and some concern.

Steel manufacturers who haven't been able to get exceptions to some of the tariffs to be able to import – or not mainly the steel manufacturers but manufacturers who require steel products as part of their manufacturing process, who can't get exceptions to some of these tariffs and are seeing their costs escalate dramatically, and perhaps putting them out of business. People are offshoring some of their production to have access to other markets because of tariffs.

All of this is going to come home to roost. But we need to have folks connecting the dots and making people understand that the reason these things are happening is because the system is in decline and is coming a bit unglued.

## **II: Restoring American Leadership (40:17 – 1:16:56)**

KRISTOL: How much do you find when you talk, especially to foreigners or people abroad that, I mean, they look at it and think we're sort of in decline in terms of our willingness to throw our weight around, certainly, or maybe our ability to do so skillfully.

Others of our allies aren't in great shape in this respect, very internally – Britain is focused on their own internal issues, Brexit and so forth. And that Putin is doing pretty well, Xi is doing pretty well, Erdogan, until this very recent economic crisis, looked like he was doing pretty well. Both well in the sense that they're politically strong, everyone said, "You can't do that. This autocratic path is going to be a mistake." And they seem to be doing fine. And actually, economically even, until fairly recently.

Iran gets a pretty good deal in the JCPOA and the regime seems, maybe again this was a bit of a short-term thing, seemed strengthened by that. So I don't know, how much do you worry that this kind of a – once that becomes a widespread view, it has its own implications, you know.

EDELMAN: Again, there are historical antecedents here. It certainly was the case of Britain in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the "weary titan" phenomenon, which did become self-fulfilling after a while.

And the British had the luxury of being able to at least share a little bit of the burden where the country, as Churchill said, that was divided by a common language. But after the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century shared a lot of common interests with Britain in maintaining order in Europe and Asia.

We don't have the luxury of anybody else we can easily pass those responsibilities to. The question of decline has been around for a very long time; and we've had waves of this in our own history since we took on these responsibilities. In the late '40s you see this, and you see it in the late '50s, and in the '60s during Viet Nam, and then in the late '70s under Carter before Reagan came in.

I mean, we've always been extremely resilient. We've always been able to, after periods of retrenchment, reassert a stronger leadership role and to set more maximal goals, as my friend Steve Sestanovich has written in his book, *Maximalist*, which has argued that we frequently have achieved most when we've set these big ambitious goals for ourselves.

So, I start from the proposition that it's not – we're not fated to decline. Are we going to decline relatively speaking? Yes. We're going to not be as powerful as we were in the past. I think we still have the ability to be the most powerful actor in the system. But I am worried that there are some challenges that we are not rising to that could make this, as you were saying, a kind of self-perpetuating, self-fulfilling prophesy, and make it impossible for us to come back.

And those things are, first of all, getting our domestic house in order. That, I think, is a huge problem. We have a huge long-term debt problem looming. And if we can't figure out a way to get after it, because entitlements, both revenue and entitlements, are going to be a part of this problem. And unless we have a center-right and center-left that are capable of facing up to the fact that this is a problem we have to

solve, and reaching some kind of consensus on how we solve it, and compromise in order to get there, we will find it increasingly difficult to generate the resources for defense.

We have over the years had a huge margin of qualitative superiority to any potential adversaries. Secretary Hegel in the Obama administration said that this was rapidly declining, our qualitative edge. And now I think in some areas we're seeing Russia and China actually move ahead because we have, over the last decade, gone through a period of budget cuts under President Obama, and then the self-inflicted wound of the Budget Control Act, and the budget caps on Defense, and the sequestration of Defense funds, periodically punctuated by short-term, two-year budget deals that have kind of been more palliative than a solution to the long term problem.

If we can't figure out a way to reverse that, to solve the problem and reverse the cuts and make sure that we maintain our military primacy in the world, then we will have a lot of trouble making the system work, or resuscitating the system. And then I would have to reluctantly conclude that my friend Bob Kagan is right.

KRISTOL: And what about the way the U.S. Government operates? I mean, you've been in it in so many different areas. Is it – how much of big rethinking does there have to be about the State Department, intelligence agencies, Defense procurement, and all that? Or is it more a matter of some reforms and some tweaks?

EDELMAN: Well, I think there are a number of things that suggest themselves in the context of what we've been discussing, which is how do we kind of renovate all of this to make it suitable for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? Look, diplomacy is a lot different today than when I started in my career on January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1980.

When I served in Moscow in the late '80s, we still as government officials had sort of privileged access to what was going on in the U.S./Russia relations. Our friends in the journalistic community would call us and say, what's going on, explain what's happening? But now we operate in this environment of 24/7 all-news, all the time, seemingly all-Omarosa all the time.

But that changes the nature of what you do in diplomacy. It doesn't change the fundamental requirements of diplomacy, which are still representing U.S. interests abroad, providing understanding of the host country to your government, and providing consular services to American citizens overseas. Those fundamental functions stay, remain the ones that you have, but it's in a very different context.

And we need to think more about how we use information technology in diplomacy. The State Department has had antiquated information technology for years, and has been starved of resources. Secretary Mattis is fond of saying if you're not going to fund diplomacy you need to buy more bullets. But we've been starving the State Department. In fact in the Trump administration, they have enacted what I would say are draconian cuts on State, which unlike Defense has not got big programs and big ticket items. It's essentially buildings and personnel – buildings and grounds and personnel. There are some programs, but they're small, relatively speaking. So clearly we're going to have to change a lot about how we think about diplomacy, how we execute our diplomatic efforts.

The way we organize the government, it has got to change. Because if you think about the challenges that we face in competition with Russia and China, a lot of these challenges are in areas that are not in the competency of the Department of Defense purely, or the Department of State – they cut across these lines and they cut across the seams of our government.

And this is an area where Russia and China, in particular, have been very adept at taking advantage of our difficulties in organizing the government. Of course, if you've got an authoritarian government where one figure really is in charge, as it is in Putin's Russia, or increasingly Xi's China, and certainly Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Turkey, it's a lot easier to have a whole of government effort: one person's directing it.

But we have to get better at working across those seams in our government. And that probably means we're going to have to change some things about legal authorities, and oversight, and all sorts of other things. But it's first, to get back to your point, you have to accept the proposition that we're going to play this role. And from that you can say, okay, what do we need to do to make ourselves more effective in playing that role?

KRISTOL: If we were here ten years from now, what sitting here today do you think, what most worries you? I mean, 25 nations with nuclear weapons, or cyber competition out of control? I guess I have two questions. One is sort of a what *kind* of thing worries you the most about the world? Or just refugees everywhere and sort of mini-genocides and so forth, on the one hand.

And then in particular countries. I mean, Russia, you have Putin, you have Xi, we have Iran, we have so many. I mean is there one or two – Are there one or two that you think, “Okay, that’s kind of manageable. Or a short term headache, but not really a threat the way the others ones are?” You can answer in whichever order you want, or don’t answer either, but I’m just curious. This is, of course, so hard historically to forecast these things.

EDELMAN: Yeah, I mean, Bob Gates used to say that when we try and predict the next war we have a 100 percent record – we get it wrong all the time.

KRISTOL: Yeah, it’s amazing, isn’t it?

EDELMAN: So, these things are extremely difficult to predict. But I still worry about weapons of mass destruction. And not just nuclear; I worry a lot about bio in particular. Because I think the barriers to entry are going to increasingly be lowered, and the danger of someone using these things is enormous.

Nuclear is still a very big problem, in part because we no longer live in a world where people seem to appreciate the gravity of these weapons, how dangerous they are. I think there are only a handful of people now who’ve ever seen actually an atmospheric nuclear test. And so people are very blithe about making threats, particularly President Putin about the potential use of these weapons. Not just Putin, but a lot of other Russian officials as well. And I think that’s extremely dangerous and worrisome.

And then I do worry as well about technology. I mean, the role that artificial intelligence is going to play, both as a disruptive force economically both here and in other countries; but also when it starts to get applied to weapons systems. The intersection of AI, robotics, unmanned underwater and aviation systems – there is tremendous potential danger here.

And our attitudes towards this are, I think more – we tend to be more worried about these things. If you look at the Russians historically, interestingly, and you’ll recall, both of us are of an age to recall the movie *Dr. Strangelove* where they talk about the doomsday machine. And the Russians, actually towards the end of the Cold War, actually created something like that, the so-called dead hand, or perimeter systems. These were going to automate their nuclear forces so if they were ever hit in a first strike they would automatically fire.

They still seem to be willing to do this. They made public, President Putin a few months ago made public something that had already kind of leaked which was the existence of this high speed nuclear armed torpedo, that is essentially a weapon of vengeance. It has no real military purpose, but would be used – it has a very dirty warhead – and would be used essentially against U.S. ports to make them essentially uninhabitable, unusable for a lengthy period of time.

The Russians – we don’t know what China’s attitude is to all this, although they’re saying that they want to become a world leader in AI – so, I worry about all of these things. In terms of countries and having a lot of nuclear powers, President Kennedy gave a very famous press conference in 1963 in which he was asked what kept him up at night, and what was the thing that worried him most and he said it was a world

of 20, 30 or 40 nuclear powers. He said this in 1963. And he was saying it prospectively for the end of the decade, 1970. Well, here we are, 50 years on, or 55 years on, and we have 9 nuclear powers in the world. So we've done pretty well actually when you think about it.

KRISTOL: It's an amazing achievement, really.

EDELMAN: It's an enormous achievement. It is the single –

KRISTOL: That no one gives the American led international order any credit for. I mean if you had predicted this, as you were just saying with Kennedy, everyone thought that you can't contain this genie in a bottle.

EDELMAN: Yeah, and it is the single greatest achievement, I would say, of arms control. The others I think are all pretty evanescent and haven't really contributed very much. But that has contributed a lot.

KRISTOL: A lot of that is because we told people they – if they wanted to be in an alliance with us, they couldn't go down this path, or they didn't need to go down this path, or we would –

EDELMAN: You were anticipating my next point, which is that we have had a grand strategy, as Frank Gavin my colleague at Johns Hopkins SAIS says, we've had a strategy of inhibition against people getting these weapons. Part of that has been because we've offered them an alternative – positive security guarantees, that we would undertake to provide their security.

This is what convinced Germany and Japan – [not] to have nuclear weapons. I'm incredibly concerned that now in Germany there's beginning to be a debate: We can't rely on the Americans, we need our own nuclear weapons. I mean, the potential here for this accomplishment to be undone is quite great and we've made some missteps along the way, with North Korea and with Iran.

But I think, you know, if we get to the point where Iran becomes a nuclear weapon state, I think then that's when the system will be at its greatest stress. Because in North Korea and Iran, a retreating America, it's only a matter of time before South Korea, Japan, maybe Taiwan, others start to develop their own nuclear capabilities, and similarly in the Middle East you'll see what people have been worried about. It may take a while, but you'll see a cascade of nuclear powers, and that will be a very uncomfortable world. And I think the odds of these things being used in anger for the first time since 1945 goes up exponentially when you start having that number of nuclear powers.

KRISTOL: And the sort of threat of Islamic terrorism which was so central to your own work in the last decade when you were in government and the Bush administration. And we all focused on it on the outside too. I mean, does that – I guess one has to fight all the fights one has to fight. There's Putin, there's Xi, there's – but I'm just curious how you sort of rank them in your mind. Or what you would sort of, if you had five minutes with the next President, what would you tell him, think first about this?

EDELMAN: Well, I think –

KRISTOL: Or is that the wrong way to think about it, and the first thing you need to think about is us dealing with all of them?

EDELMAN: Is what role do we want to play? I mean, if we're going to maintain a system, we have to deal with all of these things. There is a real temptation to say – and I understand it, which is to say it's really China. Russia is declining. Leave them alone; eventually they're going to –

KRISTOL: Middle East is a mess. Let's pivot to Asia.

EDELMAN: Let's pivot – exactly. The problem is, what happens in the Middle East doesn't stay in the Middle East. And so it's a temptation which I think we have to resist.

Now, can we do everything everywhere all the time? No, of course not. That's why we need allies. And we need allies to shoulder more of the burden and that's for sure. And I think President Trump is right about that, and it's been a persistent concern we've had with our allies that they're not doing enough. And it's an ongoing challenge to get them to do enough. But if we step back, it's guaranteed that others will not do it in the way we would like to see it happen. And that I think is the thing that we have to be focused on.

I think the great power competition is very important. And I think the national security strategy and the national defense strategy, which accentuate that, are both correct. That's the right thing to be worried about, because those are the things that are really ultimately existential for the United States.

The emerging nuclear powers, very important for the reasons we just discussed. The terrorist threat is also one that we can't just wish away. And the problem is becoming more complicated now, because of the migration crisis, because of all the disruption in the Middle East because you've got large refugee populations in Europe that are going to be susceptible, if they're not integrated well, to radicalization.

So there are enormous challenges here and we have to try and figure out how we can deal with all of them, working with allies, to try and get them to manageable proportions. We've had some enormous successes in the counterterrorist fight. We have not had another major mass casualty attack in the United States.

If I had told you on September 12<sup>th</sup> that you and I would be sitting here, 17 years later, which as I pointed out earlier is about the same amount of time from the end of World War II to the Cuban Missile Crisis when you think about the timespan – that we would be sitting here and saying there hasn't been another mass casualty attack in the United States, most people would have said, "Oh, I don't believe that," because the shock of the attack was quite troubling to people, and rightly so.

We've also, I think, been able to take away the physical caliphate that ISIS developed in Syria and Iraq. But just today I was seeing in the press that both U.S. and U.N. reports are suggesting there are still 20,000, 30,000 jihadist fighters who've gone to ground in Iraq and Syria. Some of them go other places, some of them are going to continue to plot from there. So, it's not something we can ignore or pretend is going to go away. It's going to be an ongoing fight.

The area where I think we haven't engaged that fight very successfully is on the plane of ideas. And in the Cold War we not only had the military, the nuclear deterrent, the conflicts we engaged in on the periphery to prevent the spread of Communism, for better or worse, and covert action and the other things we did. We also had a very big effort, both overt and covert, to provide alternative points of view.

We tend to forget that although we look at this from the result, because history is lived forward but written backward. So we look back and say, oh, well, Communism was such a terrible idea, it was bound to fail; really, nobody really needed to do very much of anything, just contain them and it was all going to collapse.

That's not the way it looked to the folks who came out of World War II. Communism came out of World War II with enormous prestige. The idea that Communism was the wave of the future was something widely shared in European circles. And it took a big effort for the United States to create platforms for people to have and express views that were at odds with that, that favored open societies, free markets, and alignment with the West, when other people were getting pretty lavish subventions from the Kremlin.

So, we have to get back into that business, because this is what was then called and now called political warfare, because our adversaries are doing it. And they're doing it much more effectively than the Soviet

Union did it during the Cold War. Russia has been extremely effective with its efforts at political warfare, as have China.

We've tended to focus in the United States on Russia because of the efforts in the 2016 election, the investigations that have flowed from that, et cetera. China is equally engaged in this kind of political warfare. That's beginning to get a little bit of attention. The role of the Confucius Institute, et cetera. But I'm telling you it's getting a lot of attention among our allies in Asia, particularly in Australia and New Zealand, where these Chinese efforts are really striking. I don't know if you've seen the show *Secret City* on Netflix?

KRISTOL: No.

EDELMAN: This is a great Australian television series about Chinese influence in Australia. It's really worth watching because this is a really serious problem. And we used to be engaged in political warfare in the Cold War. We did it better or worse, but with some effect. But like many other things, we've forgotten about this part of our history and we're going to have to rediscover it in order to be able to compete effectively.

KRISTOL: Yeah, we barely even think about it, it seems to me, in either party or in Congress or whatever. And there's obviously a lot we could do, since we have a good story to tell about markets bringing billions of people out of poverty and so forth, and free government.

But one wonders also how much the little things – a friend of mine was in town last week, talking with people in the administration about Afghanistan, a place no one really talks about any more. A difficult war, people have kind of, I think internally sort of almost wishing it away.

But what happens if we, and the President clearly wants to get out; H.R. McMaster I think prevailed upon him to stay for a while, but we'll see what happens in the next year or so. But if you lose the original 9/11 war, I mean if we really do get out, and it's not an acceptable outcome. As even Iraq sort of has been, but just a real disaster, and the Taliban takes over again, what signal does that send around the world? Or certainly in the Middle East, certainly to Al Qaida itself and to ISIS and to others on the ground?

I mean, I just – people probably underestimate some of these less visible conflicts that – the impact. As you say, nothing – the one thing I learned traveling around a little bit is, how much people all around the world look at other parts of the world.

And the Syria red line, I think I may have talked about this story, when I was in Japan, a few months after, the main topic of conversation, I kind of couldn't believe it. Because I mean, Japan they have all these other issues: China, the South China Sea, and all this stuff. And [they asked] "What happened in Syria?" And I said, "What are you –" I mean, I tried to explain, but then I said, "Well why are you asking me? Why is this so much on your mind?" "Well, because if America can't – if the President of the United States draws a red line and then doesn't enforce it, what does that say about us? What does it say everywhere? And we have to rethink things."

These were pro-American people of course, wishing to be reassured. Which I tried to do a bit, though after we then cavalierly pull out of a trade deal that would have helped us, would have helped Japan, would have solidified further the relationship, would have – and they've stuck their neck out for it. I kind of wonder how – anyways, it's a long ways –

EDELMAN: And which leaves China as the economically dominant force in the region.

KRISTOL: Right. So the degree in which they see us. And you said this earlier, that's just kind of cavalier and unserious about our responsibilities. That can become a real, its own dynamic.



EDELMAN: I had the same experience, Bill. I mean, Japanese, Koreans talking about the red line. I think it was a – I think historians will look back on it as a very important moment in which people began to really doubt the reliability of U.S. commitments. Which, as much as I think Presidents would like them to be seen in kind of stovepipes are in fact interdependent, seen as interdependent by others, at least that's my experience.

And that it will be, I think, seen as a major inflection point and a contributor to this unraveling of the international system. And the point at which, I mean, I think it's not by accident that after that the Russians drew the conclusion that they could intervene and intercede as they did in 2015, to change the whole nature of the conflict and make themselves the arbiter of the outcome. Which they are, and we are now outsiders looking in on the process.

KRISTOL: They also went into Ukraine in 2014. I think you could write a little history of 2013 – maybe 2011. The Chinese look over and say – well, I guess we can start snapping up these little –

EDELMAN: Building these islands.

KRISTOL: – islands, which are a trivial and presumably – each one is trivial, but the net effect of letting them, of them being able to do that is not –

EDELMAN: It's the frog boiling in the pot phenomenon. Because the Chinese militarized one island and put missiles on it – what should we do? Should we go in and take out the missiles and have a military strike? Well, that seems pretty aggressive. Maybe we wait until there are two. Well, okay, do you do it with three or four or ten or what about 100? What about we wait until they have now created an air defense information zone and excluded you from being able to fly or sail through the area? You know, it's a huge problem for us to wrestle with.

KRISTOL: Final, maybe, question. You spend a fair amount of time talking to members of Congress, younger members in both parties. Or, not just members of Congress, people who might serve in administrations of both parties who are in and around Washington or elsewhere. What's your sense? I mean, how hard would it be to get people focused on the challenges we've been talking about?

Are people sort of dismissive of it, checked out, just haven't really been alerted to it and would rise to the occasion? I thought after 9/11, there was a real sense after 9/11, not just of responsibility, but of pride that we were going to do various things in the Middle East. Some of them were probably over-promised or weren't as simple as we hoped, but we did do some things. I don't know, I think, I am just curious what your sense of that is.

EDELMAN: You know, I think there are a number of members who are, who I think have been really terrific. I am most familiar with, of course, the Foreign Affairs and the Armed Services Committees. And I'm most familiar with the Republican members of the committees, who I think are really, there's some terrific people, and particularly some of the younger members.

I mean, I think there are two, for instance, junior members of the Armed Services Committee, Liz Cheney and Mike Gallagher, who are really terrific and very engaged in these issues. But my observation has been over the years that it used to be that all the members of those committees were pretty engaged.

And I think the number who have become engaged has gone down. I mean, there is some tremendous, on the Senate side, some tremendous folks in the Armed Services and the Foreign Affairs Committees. I'm thinking of Marco Rubio and Tom Cotton and Dan Sullivan and Joni Ernst. I mean, there are some – and I've got to be careful now that I don't leave out some, and –

KRISTOL: That's okay.

EDELMAN: – [unintelligible] others by invidious comparison.

But there's some tremendous members on those committees who are very engaged and working very hard on those issues. And then a lot of other members who are just are more or less showing up.

Ben Sasse on the Armed Services Committee as well, and on the Intel Committee. So there have been some members. But my sense is fewer proportionally than was the case in the past.

In Turkey, which I follow pretty closely, it has been great to see Senator Lankford, Senator Shaheen, because it is bipartisan, take up concern about Turkey and try and put some pressure on the Turks over some of the things that they have done that have been most egregious: the use of hostages, hostage diplomacy against the United States. And the procurement of the S-400 air defense system, which may put at risk the security of the joint strike fighter, the F-35, because Turkey, as a tier-one member of the F-35 international consortium effort. So I think it's great that they have raised this, although that's a very tricky problem. Because since Turkey is involved, it could involve cost to the system and delays et cetera.

But one wishes that more were seized with these issues and more engaged. You know, domestic politics always has a kind of primacy and it's only at rare moments where you, like in the era after World War II, where you get people really focused on – or after 9/11 – where you get people really focused on international affairs.

I hope we can get folks to do it before there's some horrific event like a Pearl Harbor, or a 9/11 or a Task Force Smith in Korea in 1950 to get people to focus on these issues. And look forward and try and proactively deal with them, rather than wait until something terrible happens.

KRISTOL: Yeah, I'm struck that a lot of the young people I meet are interested in foreign – have a sense that this is a very dangerous prospect out there. And also, a new one and a challenging one and an interesting one intellectually. It's not like our generation has to deal with cyber. It's not like we had to deal as much with all the implications of what's been happening with Russia.

And the Soviet challenge had its own interesting aspects, and its own not so interesting aspects. It was just a matter of waiting, containing it and waiting it out.

This is a different kind of challenge. I do think that people are right about that. It's more of a challenge of chaos, and of lots of authoritarian actors, and not one big bloc. And it has its – there are parts of it that are harder, perhaps, to deal with.

I feel like people with the right rallying call, that they would, people are studying – I don't know if people are studying languages the way they used to or not. I guess maybe, but not so much. But I run into people who are, and who really think this is going to be something important to work on for the next 10, 20, 30 years. Anyway, it's hard to tell, I guess though, until you really –

EDELMAN: We probably do need something like the equivalent of the National Defense Education Act after Sputnik. Again, we tend to take for granted our qualitative, technological superiority over other societies. But this is under threat now, particularly from China, but not just China.

We have to make a major national effort. When we were talking about effectively competing with China, I was talking about across the different government agencies. I didn't even really touch on perhaps the most important thing, which is education.

I mean, if we think about it, if we're going to compete effectively with countries like China and Russia, particularly high-tech and the effort they're putting in, it's got to be based ultimately on our education system. And I think a lot of us are concerned about the decline of primary and secondary education.

KRISTOL: And immigration.

EDELMAN: Yes, and immigration.

KRISTOL: I mean, did we win World War II without people who weren't educated in the U.S. coming here and helping us with the atomic bombs and then subsequently, of course.

It's funny how you have a whole immigration debate, and there's occasional reference to what we should, people who get PhDs from MIT, we should let them stay. But that's usually even framed more in the sense that they'll invent a better app for the iPhone, not in the sense that it's actually a national security imperative for the U.S. to try to have as much human capital, to use that term, as possible.

EDELMAN: We've been the ones who have set all the standards for the future of technology. If China, which aspires to do this, becomes for instance the one that sets the global standard for 5G, so much relies on our mobile phones. I mean, my iPhone 6 crapped out over the weekend and I had to go get a new one. I mean, for about 48 hours I was totally paralyzed without –

KRISTOL: At least you're here – that's good.

EDELMAN: I might not have gotten here. So yeah, so I got a new phone and told me how to get here. But if we allow the Chinese to become the center of this. I mean, in space, China has become a space-faring nation. They are launching satellites constantly and are engaged in an effort in space that is worrisome to me that we are letting them get a lead on this.

And again, education is the fundamental, on which all the rest of this rests. And we've got to focus on this as well. I think there's a lot we need to think about in terms of how we face this future that go way beyond the sort of traditional political divides that we've had in this country over the last 30 or 40 years over big/small government taxes, et cetera.

I think we have got to look at this in a sort of different way. I used to be a Democrat, I became a Republican. And now under President Trump I like to tell people I think I am now a Whig. And I say that advisedly because the Whig Party believed in internal improvements and an active executive to build roads, turnpikes, canals that essentially made the United States the economic powerhouse in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that it was. We need to invest in infrastructure and in education now to do the same thing for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

KRISTOL: Well, on that note I want to thank you, Eric. And no, that's a good reminder that you discuss these individual little foreign – not little, foreign policy problems and then you've got to step back and think about the – For us to deal with them, we have to be a certain type of nation, with certain capabilities and skills, and also a certain attitude towards our responsibilities and opportunities in the world.

So thank you for this broad ranging and informative discussion. We'll be back in a year to see --

EDELMAN: See how we did.

KRISTOL: How much worse things are. [Laughter]

And thank you for joining us on CONVERSATIONS.

[END]