

# CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

## Conversations with Bill Kristol

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### Table of Contents

**I: Great Power Competition 0:15 – 34:11**

**II: Geopolitics and Multipolarity 34:11– 1:16:51**

**I: Great Power Competition (0:15 – 34:11)**

KRISTOL: Hi, I'm Bill Kristol. Welcome to Conversations. I'm very pleased to be joined again today by Steve Rosen, old friend, roommate, distinguished professor here at Harvard for quite a while now, right?

ROSEN: Since 1990.

KRISTOL: Wow, almost three decades. Winner, I believe, of all three major teaching prizes at Harvard, which is fantastic.

ROSEN: Very proud of that. Thank you.

KRISTOL: As well you should be. And I think one of the courses you teach is called “War and Politics.”

ROSEN: Yes.

KRISTOL: You've always taught that course actually.

ROSEN: Yes.

KRISTOL: And it's a popular course. So let's talk about that as we discuss international relations and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in general. But maybe we should begin with war. Is that still – that seems like a Cold War type course, you know. And it was, I guess, when you began as the Cold War was ending.

ROSEN: Right.

KRISTOL: Is “war and politics” the right way to think about international relations?

ROSEN: Well, it's the right question to ask, especially now, because there hasn't been a big conventional war among great powers since 1945. This is really the longest period of peace defined in that way in modern history, maybe even in world history. I mean, the Roman Empire was literally at war all the time, and the average period of peace was like 18 months. So this is kind of an odd period. The question is maybe this is the end of history, maybe there's been a fundamental transformation.

But you can't address that question unless you at least try to answer the question, "why?" "Why this long peace? And could it break down?" And I've actually been working on that, because I think people have an idea about what the reasons might be, and it might be right, but it might need to be readdressed at that.

I mean, you ask most people why is there no big wars? It's kind of obvious: there's nuclear weapons. Nobody wants to see the world destroyed. But if you go through and you look at what we can now see from the declassified histories of the Cold War, the United States and Soviet Union actually came fairly close to war on a number of occasions and the peace was kept by the United States taking actions to demonstrate to the Soviet Union in real time that if things got out of hand and moved up to war, the war would go very, very badly for the Soviet Union. So it was a very concrete, not abstract fear of war, but For example –

KRISTOL: Give an example. Yes. Because people would normally say "mutual assured destruction." Both sides step back from the brink.

ROSEN: In 1954, the United States overflew Moscow with seven B-47 bomber on the day before VE Day, on the day before May Day. You wanted to demonstrate to the Soviet Union that the Soviet Union could not defend itself. If there was a war it would be this. And the Soviet Union did not have the ability to respond at the time.

In 1972, this has just come out, so it's kind of interesting, the United States in April, May, mined the harbors of North Vietnam at Haiphong. And we now know from Soviet sources and American sources the Soviet Union sent out three nuclear submarines to attack the American aircraft carriers off the coast of North Vietnam.

And we detected that, an American submarine commander out in the Pacific detected the trail of the submarines, set messages back to Washington, and the United States mobilized every available attack submarine in the Pacific to send them to the Gulf of Haiphong.

And Henry Kissinger and Nixon were in Moscow and Kissinger was able to go to Brezhnev and show him a map, he says, "Here are our aircraft carriers. Here are your submarines. Here are the 28 American nuclear submarines that we've mobilized to surround your submarines. If you move a muscle we'll sink them." These are very concrete demonstrations.

KRISTOL: And the Soviets backed off?

ROSEN: And the Soviets moved the submarines. We tracked them. '72 is also the time when there was that big offensive that came down from North Vietnam into South Vietnam. And Nixon wanted to do something to show the Soviets that you can't do this. And he could have done a number of things, but he chose to mobilize hundreds of B-52 bombers. And he said I want the Russians to see what I can do to a country if I get angry. And he called a nuclear alert.

In other words, deterrence was a matter of very active management by the United States to send very observable, concrete militarily meaningful indicators to the Soviet Union: if you start a war it's not going to be mutual destruction, the war is going to be – you're not going to be able to do all the things you think you need to do in a war.

And that breaks down in the 1970s. The Soviet Union has spent a fantastic amount of money on its military capability, builds it up. And they reach a point where they in fact do think that they've reached parity with the United States. There is this moment where, okay. And that's the time at which the Soviet Union appears most dangerous to us. You and I remember the 1970s, it's at the end of the Vietnam War,

the Soviets invade Afghanistan, they're very aggressive in Africa. They appear to feel unconstrained, because they were.

The situation had changed. And it's Ronald Reagan, well, actually Jimmy Carter at the end of his administration, and then Ronald Reagan who said, "this is a world which has become much more dangerous." Parity is in fact something which the Soviets feel enables them to take more aggressive actions elsewhere.

We need a strategy. This is actually a Carter administration, a strategy which shows the Soviet Union if you launch a war, what you think is most important is going to fail. What you think is most vulnerable is go to be attacked. And this is not a Reagan, "crazy Right Wing thing," this is Jimmy Carter. It's called the countervailing strategy. What do you care about, Soviet Union, most? You care about yourself.

KRISTOL: Yeah. Regime, preservation.

ROSEN: Regime. They built these underground bunkers at the cost of trillions of rubles and they built special subway systems to get the leadership out there. But the critical factor was you had to detect American missiles coming across and have enough time to get to the bunkers.

So the United States actually put in place a number of programs which could attack the Soviets before they could move the leadership to the bunkers, and the Pershing Two was one of them. Some of the American submarine missiles were others.

And we now know from the espionage that we conducted during the Cold War which is now released, they noticed and they were very, very worried and afraid.

And it created a situation in which, and we know this from the end of the Cold War with George H.W. Bush, the Soviet military leadership got together with George H.W. and said, "We give up. We give up. We had you Americans penetrated, we had spies, we knew everything you were doing. And we still couldn't beat you." And they gave us a map, Akrame [phonetic], the head of – gave George H.W. a map. "He said this is the map of where all your submarines were, we knew where they were and we couldn't do a damn thing about them. We give up."

The idea was, which was inculcated by lots of very, very smart people, Tom Schelling and others, that nuclear weapons means that everybody will avoid war because everybody knows they'll be destroyed. And the more we dig into this, it was the United States had the ability to deter an aggressive adversary by demonstrating to that adversary, "if you go further, you will lose."

And when that ability to make that kind of threat credible was lost, the international environment got more dangerous.

And the reason why this is pertinent now is clearly the Chinese are trying, and the Russians are trying to get to this, again back to this position where "it's safe for us, the Chinese and the Russians to do dangerous things because you Americans think that we'll all die if we escalate."

KRISTOL: So that's, I mean, that's very interesting. So I guess for people like me, I mean, one has this vague sense of 1949 to '89: the Cold War, the nuclear stuff, that was just kind of mutual assured destruction. And then there were these conventional conflicts, some of them very serious, like Korea and Vietnam, and setbacks. And then Reagan had the great Reagan Doctrine and "help the dissidents" and we helped the Afghans.

But you're saying the nuclear stuff mattered. I mean, that actually the actual balance of power, whether we were dominate or seeming to be equal really was a huge difference.

ROSEN: Yes, and this goes against everything that's taught in American universities and everything that people even in the policy world, now people think about. The Cold War was not this uniform monolithic period with mutual – as soon as you get bombs everybody knows that people will get blown up.

In the 1950s the United States had very clear and demonstrated nuclear superiority, which we utilized in the Cuban missile crisis in very dramatic ways. And that was preserved until the middle, late '60s. And then, as I said, there was this shift at which point the Soviets got more aggressive and we have, we had to re-gear and re-tool to build up.

And the reason why it's not better understood is a lot of the efforts to gain this kind of credible superiority were of necessity very highly classified. And they were very operational. And there were various reasons why the American government, the American military was not releasing this information, but we can see that was the case.

It's also a success story. We all kind of know that the Soviet Union was good at spying on the United States. It's a totalitarian state. That's what they do, they spy. It turns out that we work extremely hard to understand what was going on in the Soviet Union and some very heroic people within the Soviet system gave us information which was critical to understanding what their weak points are, how to attack them, what their vulnerabilities were.

And in the period after the fall of the Berlin Wall and what we thought was "the end of history," we lost that seriousness: that the peace is kept by the active management of your forces, the active effort to achieve the kinds of capability which the adversary sees as flouting his abilities. And we were relaxed.

KRISTOL: So people would say that, so let's say in the 70 year period, 1945 to 2015, let's just say, more or less peace, or certainly great power peace, the first 40 years is the Cold War, you've discussed that. I suppose what most people would say is the next 30 years we had overwhelming dominance. We did intervene in Europe to make, to establish the principle, you know, no wars in Europe and Milosevic.

After 9/11 we did intervene in the Middle East to make clear that we weren't going to be easy going about terror threats, and certainly with terror threats combined with weapons of mass destruction. So we did, in fact, appreciate people might say the importance of our power and of – and in keeping that peace.

ROSEN: People saw the benefits of having that kind of power. But the assumption was we had that kind of superiority as a matter of natural right –

KRISTOL: Because we are the U.S.

ROSEN: Because it was called democratic triumphalism, which our system is so much better than the other system, just by virtue of who we are and what we do, we will be superior. And that was not the case.

It was also the case that the Russians were in a period of collapse and decay and that was something which made the world less dangerous because of them, although in some ways they were more dangerous, because of that.

The Chinese were interesting because they very deliberately, again we now know this from good academic scholarship as well as policy studies, they wanted to encourage us to think that we were safe, they were not a threat. Deng Xiaoping's famous 24 character strategy, hide capability and bide your time.

We now know, again from further research, "don't do anything that leads the Americans to reactivate that massive effort, which they had at the end of the Cold War, which the Chinese saw defeat the Soviet Union. "How do we make sure the Americans can't do to us, the Chinese, what they did to the Soviets?:"

And what was different about the Chinese, and fascinating in many ways, was that they were even more than the Soviets masters of the art of information warfare and intelligence management. “How do we make the other side think what we want them to think in ways that are favorable to us?”

For example, deception. Deception has always been a major part of Chinese strategy and was for the Chinese in the 1960s and 1970s. The Chinese started building nuclear weapons. The CIA says “Don’t worry” – this is 1967, ’68 – “If the Chinese start to build nuclear ballistic missiles, we’ll know about it. We’ll know about it five years before they put them in the field. We’ll tell you where they are and how to deal with them.”

In 1973 they published, again this all declassified, they published another estimate, “We’re sorry, the Chinese have nuclear armed ballistic missiles. They’ve had them for about five or six years. We didn’t see them. We didn’t see them because they built them in these caves, which didn’t have all the usual characteristics we associate with missiles. And so we don’t know where they are now in many cases.”

So the use of deception and concealment to hide, try to escape abilities is a big part. And the Chinese wanted to encourage us to think, “You’re worried about this global terrorist threat, so are we. You’re worried about global warming, so are we.”

And they enjoyed what they saw as our preoccupation in the Middle East. They call it the period of strategic opportunity. They wish – they thought again after September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, they thought it would last for about 20 years. The United States would be busy managing the problems of instability and chaos in the poor areas of the world and would encourage the Americans to think about that, because as long as they worried about that they’re not worried about us.

Donald Rumsfeld in 2001, right after he became the Secretary of Defense for George W. Bush, was planning to reorient the American Defense Department towards dealing with the emerging Chinese capabilities. And all of that is ended by the war on terror. Which is obviously not generated by the Chinese, but which is exploited by the Chinese to keep us focused on these problems of what Robert Kagan correctly calls the jungle growing back, which is not a problem that we can ignore.

KRISTOL: Right.

ROSEN: But it does again divert us away from the central task I think of the American military, which is guaranteeing the countries that are strongest, and hostile to us because of the nature of their systems, don’t think that they have the safety that deterrence gives them, which enables them to conduct the aggressive operations which cripple us and defeat us.

KRISTOL: And I suppose one could just say that, look, you could spend an extra percentage point or two of GDP on defense and deal with both the terror threats in the Middle East and the big Great Power threats. It’s not as if this is insurmountable.

ROSEN: And that’s what people like me said for many years. And in some sense we were just politically naïve. We said, the American political system with capable leadership will see that with a little bit of extra spending you can do both. What has happened in practice is that we have prioritized one at the expense of the other and we have not done both. The Trump administration –

KRISTOL: And even the first one, incidentally, we backed off from. So it’s not as if we thoroughly carried out the policy in the Middle East. We got out of Iraq –

ROSEN: No, this is what we talked about –

KRISTOL: We under resourced Afghanistan and so forth.

ROSEN: Last time when you and I got together – at the moment of victory where we actually had created a stable domestic environment in Iraq, we walked away from it. Which was – and we mentioned this book, *The Unraveling* about how things fell apart. So we got the worst of both worlds. We took the problem of terrorism seriously but not seriously enough to take it to its logical conclusion.

And we neglected the problem, which the Trump administration has now re-identified of Great Power competition, which has not gone away. People like me used to say, well, you know, nation states still are the most powerful way of aggregating power and threatening the United States. And people would say, “Steve, that’s kind of a 19<sup>th</sup> Century way of looking at things and it’s kind of – Now this is the age of the internet and social media. This doesn’t matter anymore.” But it does.

KRISTOL: Well, so as we speak at the end of, after Thanksgiving, in 2018, now it’s 73 years with no Great Power war and for all the annoyances of Putin doing thing in the Ukraine and Chinese building little islands, I guess one could say isn’t this alarmist? Or, I mean ,why can’t we have another 10, 20, 30, 40 years of the post-, let’s say the post-1945 situation or maybe better to say the post-1991 situation, of us dealing with threats and not being asleep at the switch and so forth? But are we really in some new moment? Or why can’t this continue? I mean –

ROSEN: The way things are going now are not favorable to the United States, and I don’t think it’s alarmist to say so. What is the nature of the situation? Because the United States doesn’t have this kind of military superiority, which we enjoyed for a number of periods, the adversaries feel that they can make incremental gains against us because we won’t escalate.

KRISTOL: And do you think we won’t escalate because we don’t have the superiority? Or we don’t have the mindset of being willing to do things with our superiority?

ROSEN: In large part it’s we won’t escalate, because we think it’s dangerous. People will say, “Well, we don’t like what the Chinese are doing in the South China Sea. We don’t like what they’re doing elsewhere. But you don’t want to fight World War Three, do you? You don’t want to take steps that might escalate and get out of hand.”

Whereas the Chinese say, we want to be in a position where we dominate the escalation ladder. We have war dominance and therefore we can do what we want because the Americans won’t take the chance that by opposing us things might ratchet up.

Why is the Iranian government now able to get away with so much, which is clearly not favorable to American interest and ability? Because Americans, “Well, it might get worse. It might get out of hand.”

And they encouraged that belief. The world has been made safe for revisionist aggressive policies. And it was –

KRISTOL: As long as they don’t go too far, too fast, maybe.

ROSEN: As long as they don’t kind of – People have learned, if you stick your finger right in the eye of America and you kill Americans, the American system gets mobilized. People saw what happened after 9/11.

The Chinese were surprised by that. “We thought the United States was suffering, all these problems of internal lack of cohesion and political divisiveness. And we walk down American streets and we see people putting American flags out. This is not good for us. We have to stop short of that. But there are a lot of things which involve killing *other* people, or threatening *other* people’s interests. We’re doing things that are trying to adjust the situation in the Sea of Japan. You Americans don’t let these ‘Japanese militarists’ draw you into something which may get out of hand. Don’t let these ‘Taiwanese independence fundamentalists’ get you involved.”

And so what they do is they use this fear of escalation to thwart the moderate, reasonable measures that we would take if we were not deterred from escalating. That's the way in which superiority makes a difference. They have made us afraid of escalation, which makes us back away from lesser measures that we could take which could be effective. Whereas they feel free to take the measures below the level of open warfare, which advance their interests.

KRISTOL: Could we, I mean, is it – I guess, this is sort of another way of saying the same question, how much of this is psychological on our part and can be fixed with just better leadership? How much of it requires, you know, pretty major changes of policy, increases of spending, increases of intelligence spending, increases of changes in nuclear posture, cyber, etc.?

And how much of it doesn't, I mean, how much of it is just we can manage the current situation for quite a while? I mean –

ROSEN: In principle it could be, you could affect a psychological shift. To some extent Reagan did that. But again historical research suggests – Presidents are serious people. They'll go to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "If I do this, and the other guys respond, will I be able to handle – Will you be able to handle that?" And they pay attention to the answer.

And in the past, again we said, "If they do this, we can do that to them, and they know it." So the material capability, the physical capability, to match and over match the military capabilities of their military was part of the internal discussion which let us [say] "okay." And that is not simply a matter of will, of being kind of sufficiently bold.

KRISTOL: And you're saying in the real world, so to speak the real – the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs or the CIA Director, when they come to the President now cannot confidently assure him of our superiority in quite the ways that one might like them to be able to, or maybe that they could 20 years ago?

ROSEN: Certainly. Certainly not in the ways in which I've described. Look, when Richard Nixon was in Moscow in May of 1972 the military commanders said, "If the Soviets attack us we will sink all of their submarines." Now there is uncertainty and doubt because of the decline in American capability which is a result of spending a lot of money on the war on terrorism, which was necessary, but necessarily diverted the money away from other things.

We have these studies which have come up headed by Eric Edelman and some of our other friends saying, "No, we don't have confidence that if there is a confrontation which does lead to an engagement with our two major adversaries that we will be able to prevail."

KRISTOL: I suppose the flip side though would be to say, well, but "Welcome to the modern world, we're not as much bigger an economy than China as we once were." I think we're about to hit the same number actually in terms of, not per capita, but in total GDP.

ROSEN: Yes.

KRISTOL: And we've got all these other adversaries, and this is the world we're going to have to live in, much more parity, much more multi-polar.

ROSEN: We're not going to be able to solve the problem by means of economic dominance and superiority. We didn't understand how much economic superiority we had relative to the Soviet Union, but we did. Now clearly it's multi-polar, China's roughly comparable in size to the United States. What does that mean?

Well, there are two possible answers. One is, get used to it. The United States is going to have to accept a lot of things which previously it seemed unacceptable. Or the other response, be more skillful in the use of the capabilities which your economic power does give you.

What does that mean? Instead of simply being bigger and stronger than the adversary you need to be more aware of his vulnerabilities and his sensitivities to make use of them so that the military force and capabilities that you have gets the most amount of leverage. We knew that the Soviets, we talked about this before, the Soviet leadership was most sensitive to and cared most about protecting the Soviet Communist Party leadership. Okay?

The Chinese Communist Party leadership is similarly worried, but they're not afraid as much of a military attack on them, they're afraid of domestic loss of control. If you want to know what people are worried about look at what they spend their money on. If you're afraid of burglars you buy a burglar alarm. What are the Chinese spending their money on? We're told from Chinese figures they're spending on the people's armed police, the internal security force is about as big as they're spending on the regular military.

This whole great firewall of Chinese, this whole massive effort to control the internet, this effort to use modern information technology not to disseminate information, empowering individuals, but to make people think what you want them to think and to monitor their behavior so that you can isolate and suppress them. That's because this is a regime which is fundamentally afraid of its own people. And it's fundamentally hostile to them.

If want to act on their fears, so that you can say to them, what you fear most will occur if you push us in ways that we don't want to be pushed, that is what you go after. And people say, well, so you're after regime change? Isn't that dangerous?

And the response to that is they think we're engaged in the process of regime change right now anyway. They have published party documents. "Your so-called non-government organizations, your so-called interest in human rights, this is all part of your effort to bring us down. We know, we're not stupid." So it's not as if you're going to make them think you're doing things that you're not doing now. They already think that.

The question is are you going to be able to act in ways which constrain them from doing the things that you least want to see happen both externally and internally? Do you want to see the Chinese put a million people in concentration camps in Xinjiang which is what they're doing right now?

So that may lead you in non-military areas as well as military areas, if the Chinese are worried about losing control of information flows within China. "You know, there are very smart people in the United States who could go to work making sure that the great, the firewall of China doesn't function."

The Chinese are worried about the safety of their own leadership. In the 1960s and 1970s they spent half of the state investment budget building a set of underground bunkers in Sichuan Province which would survive a nuclear attack. It crippled the Chinese economy. The Chinese people were desperately poor. They were spending half of the investment budget building underground missile factories.

They do worry about this. "Okay. If you do things that we don't like, you're going to have to do more of that."

KRISTOL: And I suppose those things, as with the Soviet Union, if you put more and more pressure on you could get some version or other of regime change, either gradual or sudden or whatever.

ROSEN: We again, there's this interesting farce going on in the academic world right now which is, "Well, the Soviet Union collapsed because it had a bad economic system and it was going to fall apart anyway."



The military buildup under Carter and Reagan had nothing to do with that.” Where we have the direct testimony of the senior military leaders of Soviet Union [saying] “We give up. We just can’t keep up. This Star Wars is breaking our backs. We don’t have kids growing up with computers. We don’t have people who are generating the innovations in IT. We can’t keep up. We need a truce.”

And in the case of the Chinese we say, look, we don’t want to bring you down, we don’t want to fight a war, but we don’t want you reaching into the United States to affect our electoral policy, we don’t want you using our money to corrupt our system, which is what you’re doing now. We don’t want you harassing, threatening and kidnapping Chinese Americans.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

ROSEN: That’s the thing. Okay, live and let live, you know, let the people have different systems, we can’t – we learned our lesson from the Middle East, we can’t impose American values on them.

In the world as it is now you can’t disentangle yourself in other countries. The Chinese see our efforts in the United States to spread information about Tibet as directly threatening the regime in China. And so they reach into the United States to suppress the publication of academic articles on subjects that they don’t want. They give money to centers, academic centers, so that when the time comes that “We’d rather you didn’t” – you can’t adopt the strategy of live and let live.

KRISTOL: Do you regard the takeover, the concentration of power by Xi Jinping as also a big moment in the sense of movement away from collective authority, which presumably is a little more cautious and conservative –

ROSEN: I’m not a, I’m not a Chinese language speaker, I don’t read the text, I’m not a full time student of it, but I noticed that there is debate now going on. There is one group of people saying Xi Jinping is different from Hu Jintao in the way that you describe. He’s maybe, maybe he’s more bold and forceful, but he’s also more autocratic.

There is another school of people saying Xi Jinping has concentrated more power in his own camp or his person, [but] the *policies* he is pursuing are not demonstrably different from the policies they followed before. What does that mean? What about the hyper nationalism that now everybody sees in China? When did that begin?

It began with Deng Xiaoping after the Tiananmen uprising. He said we have a problem, our young people now are not politically indoctrinated sufficiently as to prevent them from thinking that it’s a good idea to build something that looks like the American Statue of Liberty. This has to stop. So he begins the patriotic education program, starting in – it kicks in and bites later on. But he’s the one who does that.

The strategic policy of developing Chinese military power in ways which keeps the Americans from being active in East Asia so that China can establish hegemony there. And building on that Eurasian land mass made China – That again goes back to Deng and Jiang Zemin.

Look, what has American foreign policy been for all of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century? It is a very dangerous thing for one autocratic power to be able to dominate the Eurasian land mass. That was why we opposed Wilhelm [II] in Germany. That was why we said we opposed Nazi Germany. And that was the foundation of the Cold War towards a containment strategy. Can’t have the Soviet Union control Germany and Japan because, you know, too much power in an autocratic –

What is the objective of the Chinese One Belt, One Road project? It is to integrate the Eurasian economy into one framework, which is dominated in information and logistical terms by the Chinese.

KRISTOL: It’s not just to be a regional powerhouse.

ROSEN: The railroads that they're building terminate in West Europe. One of the reasons that the Europeans now, the French in particular, are more receptive to Americans talking about the Chinese threat is they see the Chinese buying up French companies or trying to buy up French companies, trying to dominate French high tech, subverting and undermining political opposition to the Chinese.

So it is focused first in East Asia, Southeast Asia, most approximate, most easily accessed, but then building outwards through the south, southern and northern tiers, into Central Europe and then into West Europe.

The Department of Defense conducted a summer study, which looked at the pattern of investment that the Chinese government is engaged in and the amount of money flowing into West Europe and the amount is staggering. And I think reflective of an overall desire to be dominate in that central land mass. Which would leave the United States kind of in the Western Hemisphere with about 30 percent of the world's economic product, with China dominating the other 70 percent.

If you think the United States can live safely and modestly in those reduced circumstances, you might say, okay, we'll be a Western Hemispheric power and no more. If things are going the way they have been going for the last 20 years, China will wind up being the preponderant power, both in terms of economic power, international institutions, and military power.

Who is going to oppose China militarily on the land mass of Eurasia? The West Europeans have gotten out of the business essentially. This is one of the reasons why President Trump for all his overblown rhetoric is right. The allies are, the Western European allies are not doing what they would need to do to be serious independent sovereign militarily safe countries.

Russia has nuclear weapons and only nuclear weapons. Putin is making a very good case. He's playing a bad hand very well. He's making it seem like he has lots of fancy stuff up his sleeve, but he doesn't. The price of oil is going down. The price of natural gas is going – Russia is going broke. The Chinese are the last, the only people who will be fielding first class military technology in amounts that are significant of absent American participation in that system.

## **II: Geopolitics and Multipolarity (34:11– 1:16:51)**

KRISTOL: So our discussion of the world has become a discussion of China, which is fine, and I want to come back to it even, because it's so interesting. But just to – what about the more I'd say – So the other hawkish argument one hears, I make it actually quite a lot, is a little more generic.

I mean, we had a world order for 70 years that depended on the U.S. being its keystone, the guarantor of peace in many parts of the world: an alliance structure, a liberal economic order, with trade and relatively free movement of capital. And that was I guess – this is Bob Kagan's metaphor, which is George Shultz's – we kept the jungle fairly well mowed or what have you, the lawn fairly well attended to, in most parts of the world.

And what the real danger here is the jungle grows back. And it can grow back in the Middle East in the form of autocracy and terror. It can grow back in East Asia in the form of China. It can grow back elsewhere. In Israel you see what's happening. And that it's more of a Roman Empire problem: that if we retreat, bad stuff happens all over the place, which is an argument for American strength, benevolent hegemony as Bob and I called it, I suppose, but it's a little less China-focused.

Do you think that's also true but less important than the China question? I'm sort of asking: how much is the issue of international relations China? And how much is the issue of international relations America needs to be strong or a lot of random bad stuff could happen all over the place?

ROSEN: The argument you're submitting and that Bob Kagan has made, is true and is valid and would exist even if China did not exist. The problem of refugee movement in the Western Hemisphere is not the result of Chinese action; it's the result of criminal gangs dominating small states.

KRISTOL: Syria non-intervention.

ROSEN: Syria is not the result of what China's done.

KRISTOL: Right, and that can be pretty destabilizing.

ROSEN: And therefore it's a problem, and if you don't want to build walls and tear gas people at our borders, you do have an obligation to make conditions minimally livable in countries where people already exist.

However, it would be unwise to ignore the ways in which hostile great powers can take advantage of the instability in these regions to make our life more difficult. If I were a Chinese planner and I saw Steve Rosen and other people say, "We need to be more vigorous to resist the Chinese, and we need to be a power in Eurasia and we need this escalation of dominance."

"You know what? I don't like what he's saying. I don't want him to be able to convince people to do that." People like him started to talk like that in 2000, 2001. The Middle East made them kind of focus on that.

KRISTOL: So, let's help her out a little, and let's –

ROSEN: Or even closer to home, I would say. You know what? If China does a little bit in Venezuela, the Americans get really hot and bothered.

In other words, they can apply the logic that I was arguing for to us. So one or two visits by a Chinese aircraft carrier to Venezuela would mean, "We can't let that go unchallenged." We have to focus more resources on the defense of the Western Hemisphere. We can get the United States to stay home by creating, or taking advantage of and exacerbating –

So the problem of global instability exist independently of the Great Power threats. Great Power threats can take advantage of it. And the Great Power threats in some ways *prevent* the United States from taking effective action to stabilize those regions. Why is Syria as bad as it is now? In part it's because we don't want to go head-to-head with the Russians.

KRISTOL: I want to go back to Russia in a minute because that's the other kind of thing. I guess thinking about it in the terms of the Cold War, we did both. We checked the Soviet Union, by your account dominated them even in key moments, and we had some general sense that we should prevent the world from falling apart and we dealt with that through various diplomatic and economic ways but also we had military interventions elsewhere and not only focused on Soviets and Soviet proxies, though mostly, I guess.

But we did have a general sense of, "Let's foster a liberal world order and let's help democracy in East Asia" even if it didn't help particularly against the Soviet Union one way or the other, I suppose. I suppose it was Society focused now that I think about it.

ROSEN: It really was.

KRISTOL: I guess what I'm saying is in practice it seems to be the U.S. benevolent hegemony argument probably goes hand in hand with the U.S. being serious about the great power argument. I think they cut against each other in some practical ways: if resources go here, they don't go there. But I suspect in

terms of political psychology and how the country thinks of itself they go together more than against each other.

ROSEN: Yes.

KRISTOL: I can't imagine the U.S. being real tough on China and "we don't care at all about the rest of the world." That seems a little unlikely somehow.

ROSEN: Right. And it's also the case as you recall as you just mentioned, the United States sold economic development programs like The Marshall Plan not on the basis of altruism but on the basis of, "If we don't do this, the Soviet opposition is going to be able to capitalize it and West Europe will fall into the hands of the Soviet Union without a shot being fired." The Marshall Plan in its monetary size was equal to the defense budget and it was sold to the American Congress on, "If you don't do this, the Soviets will win World War III without fighting."

Similarly the development efforts in the Third World – what was the Third World, it was the world that was in between the Western world and the red sphere of influence, the Soviet sphere of influence. Now people like John F. Kennedy would say, "Mao Zedong says we will win the battle for the world by surrounding the cities of the world with the countryside of the world." That was Mao's theory.

And as a matter of justice, if I was going to an American voter and I was saying to them, "You need to pay more taxes, receive less benefits in terms of job training or healthcare to finance the national security establishment." And they said, "Why? Isn't the first obligation of the American government to protect me?" And if you cannot tell a convincing and credible story, that no this is about protecting Americans, then the Americans won't be willing to support this. And probably rightly so.

And we have, again in the Cold War we paid attention to this, and we now need to explain to the American people that this is not a matter of altruism.

This is why people reacted against the Obama-era foreign policy. "We're all citizens of the world. We have this "Responsibility to Protect," RTP. And people are dying any place in the world, we have to help them." And an American citizen, "No! You're supposed to protect me. You're the American government. The United States is based on consent of the governed: I give you power and money in return for which you do things which I have agreed that you should do."

Well, if you cannot explain to the American people why it's in their self-interest not to have the Chinese dominate the rest of the world, then you've failed to do your job.

KRISTOL: You don't need China. You can also explain to the American people you don't want more 9/11s and therefore we have to be engaged in the Middle East.

ROSEN: Or the non-political aspects of it. It's not as if global pandemics will be containable simply by building a wall around the United States. Ebola now is no longer under control in Central Africa and that is a global problem. There was set this false opposition between globalists and unilateralists, or nationalist and internationalists. You cannot be an intelligent defender of the American national interests without taking into account global phenomena to which the United States must respond if it wants to protect itself.

I'm hoping, and I've seen some signs, that this may in fact lead to a new bipartisan consensus. I've been talking to people who are Bernie Sanders supporters. They've said, "Bernie Sanders. I believe in socialism. But Professor Rosen, millions of people have been killed abroad and Chinese are putting people in concentration camps." I said, "Yeah. Right."

KRISTOL: The U.N.'s not stopping it.

ROSEN: The Saudi Arabian prince is ordering the dismemberment of opposition. Right? What are you going to do about that? I said, "We have to oppose it." What do you do about that when people say, "We're going to stop you from meddling in our affairs." What happens when you send in people to help poor people make their lives better and the local thugs shoot those people?

But shouldn't we do better than we did before? Yes. People like you and me, I thought the war in Iraq was necessary. We have to do a better job of – what did we get right and what did we get wrong? And how do we do it in a way which is A, is more effective, and B, is visible to the United States people as an effort which is good for them or necessary for them?

KRISTOL: Yeah, so we thought, I think that 9/11 was such a wakeup call, one that was sort of obvious that we couldn't allow dictators that had a history of developing weapons of mass destruction – take the Iraq case, just go on their merry way. We didn't explain it very well. And of course the WMDs weren't there.

ROSEN: I won't speak for you, I'll just speak for myself. There was a little bit of the afterglow of the fall of East Europe which is you kick the props out from the dictatorship so it falls out, the people rise up, they self-organize it into a bourgeois democracy. We even had experts of Middle East who said Iraq used to have a middle class, it could revert. And we were wrong. We neglected the debilitating effects that generations of torturing autocratic rule has on the national personality and psyche.

KRISTOL: It turned out in Russia too.

ROSEN: Turns out in Russia to be kind of the sudden shock therapy turned out to be, politically as well as economically, dysfunctional. What do you do instead is not at all obvious. And that's again, a matter for serious thought by people who are professionals are thinking about it. To turn your back on it one way or another, to say, "We'll build a wall and just kind of live at home." is not gonna work. Or that we're going to be able to achieve global military dominance and just kind of tell people what to do. That's not going to work either.

KRISTOL: Or hope that the U.N. works better.

ROSEN: Or to hope, as president Obama did, that the arc of history change in the right direction, that sort of things will work themselves out because that's human nature, technology. Steven Pinker, a brilliant man who points to many things, he's, "Well, people are sort of more and more reasonable and therefore they'll be less inclined to engaged in violence and more included to engage in productive activities." As if we didn't live through the 1930s in Europe: the best educated, most wealthy country in Europe becomes the most horrible regime in the history of Western civilization.

KRISTOL: Or 1914, where after many decades of relative peace – I guess you could argue that was the other long peace. There were some wars in the middle there, 1870 and so forth, but they had a long peace of modern times, but then it crashes in 1914.

ROSEN: This comes back to the first thing: reason and the Enlightenment approach to life works when people feel safe. If you feel as if your life or your family's life is in danger, you become very primal. You become very visceral in your responses. Therefore, if you are strong enough to feel safe, you are better and more likely to be an Enlightenment actor.

I also taught this course on the ethics of the conflict of war, which is very interesting, we had these debates. But one of the lessons that you come to is that ethical behavior is the luxury of the strong, because all countries, democracies and non-democracies, when they're threatened with their survival, will do anything. Will do anything. They'll carpet bomb cities. The United States was willing to engage in

gas warfare for the invasion of Japan because we just – ethical behavior, restrained modern behavior is the luxury of the stronger.

So the kind of strength that we were talking about at the beginning gives us the luxury of acting in more restrained, moderate ways, such that we can allow the art of history to unfold. It only unfolds under the umbrella of national strength. Maybe someday there will be an international institution which produces it, but that doesn't exist now.

The hostility to nationalism that existed before the Trump administration was: "nationalism is evil, preference of your own to others is evil." Ignoring the fact that nationalism also is the engine that generates the power which permits countries to be benevolent if they are so inclined.

Not all countries are so inclined. We are. President Obama kind of smiled indulgently and said, "Yes, of course. Americans think they're exceptional. Everybody thinks they're exceptional." No. We are unique in our combination of massive power and benevolence.

KRISTOL: Or at least enlightened self-interest presumably.

ROSEN: Right. Look around. Maybe that was the result of the American continental security in the Western Hemisphere. Maybe it's the result of the Founders and the low ratio of people to space. I don't know, but just empirically, look at it: is there any other case of a nation amassing as much power as the United States did and using it not perfectly, not always in enlightened ways, not always in ways that were not self-interested, but on the whole beneficial to other people as well as to ourselves?

KRISTOL: I want to come back – I was going to say, going forward, we can't amass that amount of power again. That was a bit of maybe a phenomenon in post-World War II and China not yet being part of the international system you could almost say.

Just to footnote on Putin since he's so much in the news these days, do you think ultimately that's not a threat like the Chinese threat obviously, or not a competitor like a Chinese competitor? I suppose the question is: can a failing state that has nuclear weapons and a ruthless guy running it still cause a lot of damage and destruction?

ROSEN: He's certainly causing a lot of headaches but I think as I said, my assessment is, and I'd be happy to be shown incorrect, is he has a very weak hand, militarily, economically and institutionally in terms of political institutions at home. I think what he thinks about every morning when he wakes up is: which one of the oligarchs is going to try to knock him off, and will one of the oligarchs be able to put together a domestic coalition which says, "This guy's costing us money and he's making our lives difficult, and maybe someone should put something in his coffee."

Ultimately, he's not going to live forever and he may not die a natural death. And when he dies, Russia will revert to being an unpleasant place for people who live there because it's poor but not much of a threat to the global community.

Whereas China has been chugging along now for two generations, and it has a well-educated, talented populace and it's mobilized and it's going to continue to generate wealth.

KRISTOL: Along the same sort of line as the question about Putin: what about Iran v. Saudi Arabia, India v. Pakistan? How much at risk are we for sort of just chaos, leading to mass destruction, and loss of lives, and ultimately spilling over to things we care a lot about? We care about that too.

We could be in a great power competition with China and that's very dangerous for a lot of reasons. North Korea, which is a pathetic little power, could also conceivably develop nuclear ballistic missiles with nuclear capability and the millions of people that got killed by that doesn't count less because it's not

done by a Great Power, because it's done by a rogue small power, or by proliferation from Pakistan or by spillover of an Iran-Saudi conflict.

ROSEN: Two separate categories of problems, both of which are important as you just mentioned. One is these rogue despotic systems may still be able to do a great deal of damage if they acquire weapons of mass destruction. Should we worry about that? Yes. Ongoing efforts to engage in counter proliferation should be sustained and reinforced.

I think the Obama administration thought, "We don't have much leverage and we have to allow the Iranian program to continue. Maybe it'll gradually ameliorate." [unintelligible].

I don't think that was the correct approach. I think you do need to maintain the military capabilities to neutralize that nuclear infrastructure as effectively as possible. That will also be a very powerful aid to your negotiations and your diplomacy.

I think now we can objectively say the Obama administration underestimated the efficacy of unilateral U.S. economic sanctions on the government of Iran. That coupled with the declining price of oil, which is the result of fracking. The Iranian government is on many accounts very, very fragile right now. It doesn't have nuclear weapons as far as we know, therefore the dominance threat is the second category, which is: what do you do about the chaos which may follow the dissolution of those political systems?

And to that I think we don't have the answer but it will have to be something like a multi-national peace-keeping consortium, which we have not even yet begun to explore. The Trump administration has done some good things. One of the things he conspicuously neglected is building the political basis – If there is chaos in the Middle East, Europeans will be affected by it more than us; you don't want a replay of the Syrian outflow. What are you going to do to help stabilize that region to make it livable?

With regard to North Korea, we're not home yet, and our main problem there is the Japanese are coming to us and saying, "You Americans seem to be kind of happy that the North Koreans have stopped building missiles that could reach the United States. They still got a lot of missiles that can reach us, and if you don't take care of that, we're going to be in the soup. What are you going to do about it?"

And I think we need to focus on that and I hope we are. But the problems of the jungle as we talked about before, exist whether or not there are these Great Power issues. And because the United States doesn't have the surplus capacity to build peace and prosperity around the world, we will have to engage and involve our partners.

To the credit of the Japanese, the Abe government has already said, "We need our own OBOR [One Belt, One Road]. We need a Japanese OBOR to reach out to Southeast Asia and other places. Those countries want railroads, they want airports. They need them, they should have them. If we don't want the Chinese to finance them, somebody else has got to do it. Japan is a rich country. The United States is a rich country. Maybe we should talk about that." And I think that's an excellent thing to talk about.

Germany, countries of West Europe, you don't want Middle Easterners coming in? You have money, you have technology, you have engineers. Again, easy to say, hard to do and it'll take a generation of institution building.

Again, but it's an area where the debate has been: "You guys are hawks, you favor military force. And you guys are doves, and therefore you're against military force and you want these instruments of peaceful diplomacy and economic development." Any reasonable person would see obviously you need a combination of the two.

KRISTOL: But you come back to China as the fight? If someone said to you, "Next 30 years –" You have students who are 20 years old, and you have grad students who are 28, and protégés who are 35, in

middle level positions, state department, defense department, CIA. That's what they've got to fundamentally think through, in your view, of the great power composition?

ROSEN: As in the past, it's the combination of a hostile political regime system with concentrated power which creates the need for American focus. And the Chinese is the country, is the actor, that does that.

KRISTOL: And when you think about the focus we had on the Soviet Union, which combined a pretty massive military buildup – that was sporadic with intervening periods of lull and non-buildup – and massive public diplomacy, spying, and misinformation operations and all that. We're not even close to thinking about it in the same way. Is that true? Of course, we weren't thinking about it in that way I guess in 1946 and 1947 before we got sort of a wakeup call there.

ROSEN: But there was a wakeup call: the Soviet nuclear weapons and the Korean War. And by the 1950s, we were pretty active. There was a demographic difference. You had a generation of people coming out of World War II in 1945-1950 who understood the reality of just what a hostile tyrannical government could do. Nazi Germany was right in their faces. And they knew about building organization to deal with it because World War II is really the place of birth of intelligence organizations, which we utilized in the Cold War, the military infrastructure.

We're not coming out of World War II now, we're coming out of the global War on Terror and the long peace so a lot of our institutions are not as strong as they were in 1945.

KRISTOL: And we don't have a sense of urgency about strengthening them, or re-creating them, doing what Truman did in so many ways.

ROSEN: And to come back to our world, my world: the university world. You go to any reasonable undergraduate student taking any course on international relations at an American university. The lesson is the Cold War was the result of political paranoia, led to foreign policies which were counterproductive, led to wars which at best were stalemates or at worst, disasters. We have nothing to learn from the Cold War except to not do what we did then. Whereas kind of the subtext of what we've been talking about here, the Cold War was a success.

KRISTOL: I'd say there's a more moderate view – so you've characterized the maybe leftwing-dominant view in universities – the more moderate view, that I would say characterizes a lot of decent people around Washington would be kind of, "Well, that was reasonable. We had to fight that. That was the Soviet Union. That was a different war. But that's different. That's the 20<sup>th</sup> century." And as John Kerry likes to say, "This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century."

And, basically the nuclear stuff, we have to worry a little about proliferation, but the kind of all-in confrontation we had in the Soviet Union, that just can't happen somehow in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Or we're not up to it. Or we have to at least hope that it doesn't happen. I don't know quite what people if you pushed them whether they would say, "It can't happen", or, "It shouldn't happen and therefore –".

I don't know, but I am struck that you don't have to be that leftwing retrospectively on the Cold War to be very, what you and I might regard as passive or fatalistic about our inability to really do what we did then, which is really what you're saying.

ROSEN: Yeah. I think your description of the opposing point of view is correct, which is that we just don't do that anymore, kind of thing. Yes, it is observable. But I don't find it convincing and if I don't find it convincing, perhaps by presenting it openly, by presenting the opposing case openly, you can engage in discussion. At the end of the day, that's why I'm still in the business that I'm in.

KRISTOL: Practically, it sounds to me like of course, you'll be for all kinds of things, and as you say they're not mutually exclusive and we're a wealthy country, we can afford to spend – we did spend on the



Cold War eight, nine, 10% of GDP on defense, as well as diplomacy and intelligence. We're a lot wealthier now. We're spending four percent. I guess one of your messages would be we need to be serious and being serious means doing a lot more things across the board.

In particular, are there elements that you think are particularly dangerous or underappreciated? Is it nukes or cyber? Is there sort of a modern technological element? Do you look at the U.S. government and say, "Jeez. Some of these things would be good to have but they're not like necessary next week. It'd be better to have public diplomacy." But other things, I'm really worried we're just falling way, way, way behind kind of thing.

ROSEN: I'll stick with my opening position. The conventional military capabilities of the United States atrophied in very alarming ways during the global War on Terror. It doesn't look bad because we still have a lot of airplanes and a lot of tanks, but the airplanes were falling apart. The amount of money for realistic training is not there. The amount of money for exercises to actually get people to the place where they could do their jobs – and it meant in cases simply buying equipment to replace F-15s that are falling apart or ships as necessary. I made the statement that the nuclear dimension is important. That's the hardest sell.

KRISTOL: I agree with that.

ROSEN: And even people in the American military said, "Look, nobody's ever going to use those nuclear weapons and therefore let's spend the money on stuff we actually need to use." And it's expensive. On the other hand, we started this conversation, "Why was there the long peace? Was it because of nuclear weapons and the American nuclear margin of superiority or it wasn't?" These intellectual historical arguments turn out to be of first practical importance.

KRISTOL: What about, so I did a Conversation with one of your colleagues – as far as Harvard Law School and Harvard College consider themselves collegial institutions – Jack Goldsmith, who's very interested in cyber security and you've talked to him about this.

How worried are you about that whole side of sort of the modern technological challenge? Can we sort of laugh it off? Not laugh it off? But North Korea causes a billion dollars' worth of damage to Sony and there's some spying, and there's this and that, but we do seem amazingly complacent about what presumably, if you look at it, I know nothing about it really, but things that could shut down the entire U.S. economy, banking system, electric grid, screw up all our communications. It seems like this is something one might have the answer towards that the U.S. government had in the '50s toward nuclear safety and nuclear deterrence.

ROSEN: I did not see Jack's podcast, I don't know if it's online, but I would tend to the more extreme version of that. It is a major problem. We got some hint of that when there were these news stories about just how much of the basic core operating instructions of Microsoft and Apple may have been compromised.

KRISTOL: Yeah. That was interesting.

ROSEN: And people said, "No, no, no, no." We have some indications that – where do most of our integrated chips come from? Taiwan. Mainland Chinese Communist Party of China is very much involved in Taiwan. Is it beyond the wit of man to put some designers in there so there's some aspect of the hardware that is incorporated there which is compromised by our adversary. I would say at a minimum the American *military* should not be using IT hardware which is not produced in facilities that we *know*, because we built it from the ground up and we vetted everybody that goes in there, are safe.

The problem will then remains: that's very expensive and you had to do that. The rest of American society's going to run on the IT equipment that's cheapest. All these home security cameras, which are

made in China and which kind of used to report back to China, check in to make sure the software's updated.

You're going to think I'm paranoid and crazy, but what do the Chinese do? The Chinese hacked into the United States government Office of Personal Management files so they know who everybody in the United States who works for in the American government,

KRISTOL: Yeah, we're in those files.

ROSEN: Security clearances, everything we put in our background investigations about that. Now they know who we are, where we live, they can follow where we live and they can monitor our cell phones, and our home security systems. And if all of a sudden you wanted to make us less of a political problem for China, you would have all of the data you would like to have to take action. That's kind of, "They would never do that, would they?"

KRISTOL: They would never do that except – I know you're being rhetorical, but again, I am struck and again, I haven't followed it much in detail – but the use of their willingness to construct Orwellian surveillance state domestically and their use of AI and so forth domestically doesn't suggest that, "Well we're willing to do it on our own people, but we'd never do it abroad." Well maybe practically they'd be a little wary of doing it abroad because there could be snapback, but they obviously have no compunctions about this kind of intrusion, you might say.

ROSEN: It doesn't even have to be intrusion. Fake news. There's from time to time stories about just how easy it is to create fake videos which are very, very convincing to be realistic. If I wanted to discredit any political figure, all I would have to do is use the background information I have to create a completely verifiable story about what that person was doing with drugs or whatever.

KRISTOL: One might argue that there's been surprisingly little of that it seems. We don't know entirely, of course, but they're deterred because if they start doing that with us, we'll really go after them.

ROSEN: Yes and no. Again, going back to my favorite subject of Cold War history: it turns out there were a number of KGB wet operations in the Cold War in which political figures were compromised and neutralized. And that was in the era before cyber capabilities. You just spied on people, and trailed them around and all of a sudden people who were nuisances sort of weren't nuisances anymore.

KRISTOL: And at some point they may not think we can actually penetrate their system. Or they might be willing to take the risk and sacrifice some of their people, in turn for doing a lot of damage here and so forth, right?

ROSEN: If you think it is important to have a deterrent capability so they don't do that kind of stuff to us, then you better get to work building it. And again, people have shied away from that. "We don't want to start an arms race." As if it's not already going on. "You don't want to provoke them into taking action to us because we're more vulnerable than they are. People in glass houses shouldn't throw stones." And that kind of thing, as if they've not already penetrated our system and aren't collecting and using information in that way.

KRISTOL: So far, as it failed to go further, we talk ourselves out of responding to the lower-level stuff because we don't want to have an escalation ladder to use an old Cold War term.

ROSEN: And I think the rungs of the ladder are linked, and so therefore if you are serious about confronting them, you have to be serious about building strength at each of those levels.

But yes, cyber, I'm just not knowledgeable enough to comment about meaningfully, but I think it's as serious as you say.

KRISTOL: And I would say, to maybe close on this discussion, which has been worrisome, I hope educational and necessary obviously. It does seem like the political system is going in the wrong direction in the last decade.

ROSEN: Ours?

KRISTOL: Yes. That is, the left has become less hardheaded. I think it's fair to say in Obama's second term was much less so than the first, much less worrying about letting things get out of hand vis Syria, and the Iran deal and so forth.

And on the right obviously you go to a Trumpy America First to – whatever its flaws a Bush with basically some sense that we're the world power and we have to use it; less focus on the Great Power I'd say, and more on the jungle. But you might have been focused, as you say, would have wanted to focus on China, at least. But we don't have that now.

I guess Trump has some version – he's anti-China in some ways so parts of the Trump administration are probably moving a little more in that direction, the direction you would like. But it seems pretty – if you're going to focus on trade balances that's not a – it may be a very serious way of dealing with the problem.

Anyway, it seems that you have more isolationist, protectionist, Republican party, and more – I don't know, a Democratic party that's more and more leery at the use of force, post Iraq and so forth. And who's the Truman, and the Vandenberg, and the Eisenhower, and Kennedy and so forth?

ROSEN: Two things. First, as I said, there are pockets of people doing the right thing and you should build on your strengths. There are people on the left who are seriously concerned about the humanitarian disasters that are occurring, and if we really are serious about doing something, what is necessary? And that will inevitably lead them to reconsider their relationship with the American military.

There are people in the Trump administration who said, "We need a national manufacturing policy", not because only we want to make more jobs but because we can't build military systems if we can't trust the stuff that goes into it. We can't be dependent on sources of supply which the other guys can turn off. We can't be confident that our tools of economic coercion will stay intact unless we build these financial networks and so forth.

So, start with what you've got. Off on the left and the right, kind of a bottom-up approach.

And the second approach, again maybe because of the business I'm in, is teaching. I think our biggest ally is reality. Why do people have a different attitude towards China now? Because they look out the window and see what's going on. Why do people take seriously the problem of massive migration refugees and things, beyond the simple humanitarian impact? Because they can see what happens to political systems when we get overwhelmed by masses of people which are not prepared to integrate.

Reality, if we're doing our job, we're making arguments that are based on facts, and as more facts come in, our arguments should look better. So we should built on [that].

As for the next Truman, or Reagan or whatever, that's more your line of work than mine. And I think again, what you might need to do, and I'm sure people are doing is to trawl very broadly, which is you don't know which guys you're going to come from.

KRISTOL: Right. I agree with that.

ROSEN: And you shouldn't count on the normal pipelines to generate them because sometimes they will, but you never know. Abraham Lincoln kind of was an oddball candidate. And programs like this do serve the function of making those kinds of people more broadly visible.

KRISTOL: Yeah. The "mugged by reality" side of it is both good news and bad news, I totally agree. If you're right, reality is the way the world works. People eventually – you can only deny and wish away things for so long.

On the other hand, the "mugged by reality" line also implies you have to get mugged. And the late '40s was such a mugging, I think is fair to say between Berlin, and Korea and the H-bomb. You hate to sort of have to go through – 9/11 was a version of that you might say and we did respond.

ROSEN: I regard learning from trauma as a failure of my professional obligation. My job is to keep us from getting beat up. On the other hand, if you do get beat up, our job is to learn as quickly as possible from that, because you can get mugged and still go on to do stupid things.

KRISTOL: Not be murdered, to put it simply in the metaphor. I very much agree with that.

Just to close on this, on the China question, on the one hand, the really facile 20-year-ago "economic liberalization will lead to political liberalization, it's all going to be wonderful, end of history," that does not I don't think obtain – that's not even the conventional wisdom anymore.

People are alarmed and spooked. If you're more liberal, then you're more alarmed by the kind of humanitarian side of what's happening with the Uyghurs and the Orwellian surveillance state. If you're a more hardheaded national interest person on the right, you're alarmed by just the military buildup and the willingness to use power to get their way, and in the Third-World – can we still say "the third world"? – in Africa, and elsewhere and Venezuela, as you say even in this hemisphere, to say nothing of their [China's] region.

But people do have a pretty good capacity to put off the day of reckoning and not be serious. When you look at how little it would take in some ways, to really do what you and I think is necessary. It would take a fair amount of money, but also it's a re-orientation intellectually and psychologically almost.

But to do a sort of medium amount actually doesn't take that much. That's what I'm struck by. We're not even doing anything. We have the State Departments, CIA, I mean there are pockets of the government that are doing serious things, but overall we are just chugging along in a pretty mindless way, I've got to say.

ROSEN: I think we've got a lot of work to do. I think the only realistic way of acting which doesn't give in to despair is to say, "I'm going to find these pockets and I'm going to do everything I can to try to reinforce and strengthen them." But also, again, be mindful of just how slow we were to learn in the past. The famous example people give: the law to renew conscription passes the House of Representatives by one vote in 1940, right on the eve of war.

KRISTOL: And it wasn't the eve of war for us, quite, because it was 18 months away. I always liked if the Japanese had not made what was I think a mistake really of attacking us, it's not clear whether they had to do that for their own purposes in the Pacific, but I'm not an expert on that. It's not like we were about to enter the war in Europe. I'm not sure what happens then in Europe. I guess Britain survives to their great credit, the Battle of Britain and maybe there's a standoff or something, but what does that start to look like?

ROSEN: That's right. But again, looking back, it was not left to chance. Churchill understood that his primary *strategic* obligation was to get the United States involved to help with the war against the Nazis, and he sets up an agency based in Rockefeller Center in New York City: the Bureau of Security

Coordination, which is basically a clandestine effort to make sure that all the political levers at the disposal of the British are used to bring the Americans into the war. And there are many American supporters of this.

In other words, it was not, “Well, it’s important for the United States to become involved, and maybe events will lead to it and maybe it won’t.” There was a very active campaign to generate that.

And I think we shouldn’t be looking to get involved in wars that we don’t need to get involved in, but we should be reaching out to build alliances so that people are empowered.

KRISTOL: Yeah, and FDR, whatever other criticisms one might make of him, did push very hard to renew the draft there in 1940 and it was a very close call. I wouldn’t say we’re doing the equivalent today, whether it’s walking away from TPP or military one-year buildup. And now the Trump administration, which is sort of a pro-military administration on the surface, is going to propose a reduced defense budget for next year. It just doesn’t seem that we’re even at the level of America in 1939-40, let alone America in 1941-42.

ROSEN: It’s more like 1934-1935 if you want to stick with that metaphor. Or it’s like 1974 or ’75 rather than – or 1980. But if you want to be cheerful about it, it only took five years to go from where we were in 1975 to Ronald Reagan.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that is a very important thing that I recall occasionally to cheer myself up. Should we end on that cheerful note? Let’s do that.

ROSEN: Probably as good as we’re going to get.

KRISTOL: The one cheerful note of this discussion. No, but this has been very, very educational, genuinely, and thought-provoking. And I really appreciate you taking the time to do this, Steve.

ROSEN: Thank you. Thank you for inviting me. It was a pleasure.

KRISTOL: It was great to be with you.

And thank you for joining us on Conversations.

[END]