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BILL KRISTOL:

Hi, Bill Kristol here. Welcome back to *Conversations*. I'm very pleased to be joined for the second time by Bob Kagan, Robert Kagan, the extinguished historian and commentator on foreign policy and other matters. We did a conversation, Bob, in 2019, shortly after... Well, you wrote that book, *The Jungle Grows Back*, short book in 2018, and the long article, "The strongmen strike back," in 2019. I've got to say, I look back at both the conversation of the short book and the article, and they stand up very well, unfortunately, in 2023. The jungle has continued to try to grow back. I guess we're pushing back a little bit and against the jungle and the former Putin.

But anyway, we're here to discuss that a little bit. But more importantly, Bob's new book, *The Ghost at the Feast, America and the Collapse of World Order in 1900s and 1941*, a magisterial history of those 40 years. It's the second volume of Bob's history of American foreign policy, the first *Dangerous Nation* from the beginning to 1900. And Bob Kagan is also a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. Bob, thanks for joining me again.

Bob:

Great to be here, Bill. Thank you.

Bill:

So, everyone should read the book, and we couldn't go through it in all the detail and so many interesting stories and perspectives in it, but I thought maybe I just begin by asking about the title, which can get us into an interesting discussion of World War I and post-World War I and Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy. But *The Ghost at the Feast*, that's an elegant title for foreign policy history.

Bob:

Well, I got it from the Great British diplomat, Harold Nicholson, who was present at Versailles in 1919 and helped negotiate the ultimate peace treaty. But what he records in his memoirs is that for everybody who was participating in those talks, there was one great fear which he referred to. He basically said the notion that the American people might not abide by whatever commitments Wilson made, he said, was the ghost at all our feasts. Basically, the idea that the Americans would ultimately not fulfill its responsibilities under the treaty was very present in their minds, and of course, turned out to be true.

Bill:

Very British to have a diplomat making allusions to Shakespeare, Macbeth and all. I guess it was more of a phrase, my four minutes of Googling suggests it was a well-known, used as a

phrase in Britain as to capture this, the shadowy character who's not there, the thing that's going to disrupt the happy feast or whatever, right?

Bob:

Right. It's a little bit off, as usage, it's obviously a reference to Shakespeare when Banquo's ghost in Macbeth and Banquo's ghost is of course haunting Macbeth. What's haunting British diplomats is the fact that the Americans are unreliable.

Bill:

Yeah, I don't think that's off, that's actually pretty interesting. That's interesting to me, and we'll get back to this theme also, but thinking about history, how much they thought about this, they were thinking about this right at the time. My vague impression from other history books is, that was like, oh my God, the Americans didn't ratify the League of Nations, and that was a surprise, but they were... They were thinking so much about the American public as important, to not just American foreign policy but to the international order, and therefore the importance of domestic politics and American domestic politics in terms of the international order. Say something about that, both about what happened and why they were worried about it, and so forth.

Bob:

I mean, what happened was when the war came to an end somewhat unexpectedly in November 1918, and then of course Wilson was preparing to go off to Paris, and everybody already knew that he had this idea for a league and America's role, and immediately both Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge start talking to both the British and French diplomats and governments, telling them to reject whatever Wilson was going to propose. The Europeans were acutely aware of the fact from the very beginning that there was opposition in the United States to any kind of commitment. And of course, while were negotiating, the debate was occurring in the United States. The debate over the league is occurring, and a treaty is occurring precisely at the moment that they're negotiating the league and the treaty.

They're acutely conscious that there is opposition in the United States, which is one reason the French are very dubious about the League in Article 10, because they feared that the United States would either not come in the case of German aggression or would come too late, which of course was what happened in World War I. There's a lot of skepticism, and a lot of Wilson's behavior domestically when he's arguing for the treaty, is driven by his knowledge that the French are highly suspicious of the American commitment, and that's the problem in terms of controlling French behavior after the peace has been set up.

Bill:

And why are Roosevelt and Lodge, Teddy Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge are among the more internationalists of the Republicans, right? Why are they... It's striking that they're the ones who right away are in opposition. I hadn't, I guess, realized that actually before your book.

Bob:

Yeah, well, it's all politics. They have just won the midterm election. The Republican Party has just won the midterm elections of 2018, taking control of both the Senate and the House, and they are obviously focused on reversing what they regarded as the freak democratic victory of

1912, which came about because Roosevelt ran against his own party's nominee, William Howard Taft, and then Wilson won again in 1916. Roosevelt, in my view, feels personally responsible for Wilson being in office and is very determined to see him removed. For Lodge and Roosevelt, beginning in certainly 1918, everything is about 1920. I know that's shocking to Americans today to think that politicians might be putting politics ahead of the interest of the nation, but that does happen in American history and it certainly happened here, and it's really one of the great reversals.

BILL KRISTOL:

It's so striking that…

BOB KAGAN:

Yeah.

Bill:

At the end of this massive big war, not as big for us as for Europe, but the greatest war, long, long, long, long time that somehow you wouldn't come together in the aftermath of that war for a few months or a year or two, and maybe you'd end up disagreeing with Wilson, but the idea that it really is driven by... They so disliked the Democrat's domestic agenda? Or they—whatever.

Bob:

Well, they so disliked not being in power. The domestic agenda had something to do with it, but if you look at their hostility to Wilson's foreign policy, which resembled nothing so much as their foreign policy before the war, it's a little bit hard to explain it in doctrinal terms. It's clearly political, although this fact has escaped most historians throughout history, for reasons that escape me.

Bill:

Yeah. Well, they don't maybe... Well, let's talk about this now, even the degree to which the international relations world and the history of American foreign policy world, both of which have intelligent people in it, obviously. Somehow the domestic politics is viewed as this occasional intrusion, but not as integral to the writing of the story. Is that right? I'm very struck reading your book how integral it is to... In your view, both in the first volume actually in the 19th century, and then now to understanding our foreign policy and therefore sort of understanding international politics generally.

Bob:

Yeah, international relations theory, as you know, which developed, I don't know, beginning in the 1940s, let's say, maybe even earlier, but was very much focused on treating the nation state as a unit with rules that governed the behavior of nation states, irrespective of the people or the nature of the regime, et cetera, but nothing could be clearer in the case of the United States that domestic politics are the driving factor in foreign policy, and that it also has something to do with... And we can get into this, the optional nature of American foreign

policy because very little of what the United States does can be described as necessary. It's always a choice, and then you have to justify the choice, and so that gets you into this.

But I also think historians of foreign policy, they're intellectuals, they like ideas, which is good, but they tend therefore to take a little bit at face value, the ideas expressed by politicians as if some politicians are somehow coming up with a foreign policy doctrine, and usually it's just domestic politics framed in a certain way that's beneficial to the party rather than being some kind of doctrine.

The historians treat the Wilson, Lodge argument over the league and the treaty as a doctrinal dispute between Wilson's, quote unquote, idealism and the realist Lodge. And it has nothing to do with that. In fact, in my view, and what I argue in the book is that Wilson's approach is the most realistic approach, actually, and it was also Lodge's approach prior to Wilson adopting it. It's just not a doctrinal dispute, and I just think historians have been at pains to treat all of American foreign policy as a battle of ideas, which obviously to some extent it is, but that is not the explanation for individual acts. You really have to embed these things in the political context.

Bill:

Yeah, that's so interesting. And certainly in the 19th century, you make this point about slavery being such a driver of these foreign policy decisions. People know that a little bit more in the Mexican war and stuff, but it is striking how little they really think that through, how little they understand how much it really was driving so many of those debates and decisions, not just the debates.

Bob:

Right.

Bill:

That decision is really important. It seems to be what's striking about your book, one thing is, everyone understands World War I is extremely important. Everyone understands the thirties was very important after the Depression, and then the appeasement, and then Hitler comes to power and so forth. But you really focus on that, the importance of that. I guess what should we call it, 1919 to the early twenties that a lot of the die is cast, our cast, whatever the right way to say that, is at that point. Is that a fair statement?

Bob:

Yeah, I would say I'm trying to focus more attention than most histories do on the 1920s, that the general consensus among historians is that American diplomacy in the 1920s was based on economic policies, and was in some respects, very effective. In the immediately aftermath of World War II, everybody looked at the twenties and thirties and said, "Oh, those isolationists are responsible for this." But the twenties have been resurrected by historians wrongly. And so yeah, my argument is that at the end of World War I, the United States' capacity to shape an international environment that was conducive to America's interest in a global, and particularly a European peace, was very substantial. In fact, greater at that time

than at any other time, including after World War II. The dominance of the United States combined with the lack of any real strong opponent. Russia, the Bolshevik Revolution, Russia is divided, and in civil war, Germany of course, is defeated and on its back, and the other powers in the world, they all owe the United States billions of dollars, and the American economy is the only healthy economy.

So there really was an opportunity to use that to create a stable balance in Europe as the United States ultimately did after World War II in much more difficult circumstances. And so the failure to do that was a critical failure. That's the charge against the United States in terms of what it didn't do. But there were also things that the United States did do in the 1920s, which had a very disastrous impact in Europe, and chief among that was the insistence that the French and the British pay back their war deaths, which amounted between the two of them to about $8 billion, to pay it back with interest, as if it had been just a straight business transaction.

Coolidge famously—allegedly famously—said, "Well, they hired the money, didn't they?" And that was not the spirit actually in which the money was lent during the war, so the United States insisted on full payment with interest, which put pressure on the British and French to demand maximum amount from the Germans, which made difficulty for the German economy, et cetera. The degree to which the United States is taking an already very difficult situation and making it much harder by pure financial selfishness was really quite extraordinary. And then there were some critical moments, which we can discuss if you want, when the United States had to decide, for instance, whether to try to intervene diplomatically to prevent the French invasion of the Ruhr Valley in 1923, which had a devastating impact on German politics, and really in some ways sowed the seeds for the later Nazi takeover.

The United States did nothing in that regard. It's an important lesson, I think, for all time, that usually the peace is lost at a time when the threats are not obvious, and the need to do something is not obvious. But unfortunately, if you don't take the necessary steps in that period, then you wind up in the 1930s. And one of the things that I am pushing against is this notion, which I think is very common, that everything was fine until the depression hit. And so it's really the exogenous event of the depression. But what I argue in the book is that the steps taken during the 1920s, even before the depression, had already undermined any hope for a stable, liberally oriented international order.

Bill:

No, that's right, that's so many interesting things, questions. And this is why you say Wilson who's allegedly portrayed grandiose streaming idealist League of Nations making the world safer, democracy, is actually the most realistic figure or a real reasonably realistic figure in that moment of 1919, 1920.

Bob:

Right. Well, he was trying to solve a very real practical problem, which was basically how do you create security in Europe, and particularly between France and Germany, without committing the United States basically to an alliance, which is what ultimately we did after

World War II. The League of Nations and the Article 10 provision in the League of Nations which said the league could agree that action had to be taken. This was all a kind of halfway house between a real alliance commitment and nothing. Wilson was not wrong to think that that was the only possible solution. The United States had become the critical factor in European security, and the question was then how do you keep the United States playing a role without driving the Americans away for fear of overcommitment? And ultimately, he did not succeed in convincing the American people. Lodge did.

Bill:

And how close was that? That road not taken, was it almost taken or could have been taken or never really possible, given the American public opinion?

Bob:

Right, and I explore that and it's a very interesting question. I have to say, I come out 51-49. I do think that one thing is clear, when Wilson first came back with the treaty and the league, the general assumption was that it would pass—

Bill:

And this is in 19—

Bob:

In 1919.

Bill:

19 still, yeah.

Bob:

1919. And so even Lodge understood that the majority of Americans, if you said to them, we can keep the peace, they were in favor of keeping the peace. And that was true probably of the majority of Republicans as well. He had a huge job to turn that all around, which he did brilliantly. It's one of the more impressive bits of legislative leisure demand that you can ever see. He used all the tools that were at his disposal, which by the way, were at his disposal because of the Republican victory in 1918. I think in the past, I kept saying 2018, but 1918.

Bill:

No you said 1918. Yeah.

Bob:

So, he was both chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and Senate Majority Leader, and therefore was in complete control of the pace and manner in which the treaty was considered, and he used that to find as many enemies of the treaty as possible, give them their platform, et cetera. And then he also came up with a brilliant legislative strategy, because the one thing that he knew and said was that if there was an up or down vote on the

treaty, just treaty or no treaty, the treaty would've passed. So, he had to come up with a way of letting pro-treaty Republicans vote for the treaty once before voting against it.

In a sense, it's an old trick, but his amendments to the treaty allowed him to hold the Republican Party together and defeat a treaty, which they could not have defeated on an up or down vote. We've seen this a hundred times, obviously, on all kinds of legislation. Lodge had done the same thing to William Howard Taft, who had negotiated an arbitration treaty with Great Britain back in 1911, and he defeated the treaty doing that too, by adding so many amendments designed to undermine the treaty, that ultimately Taft rejected it. He hoped Wilson would also do the same. Wilson Stubbornly insisted on a vote, but Lodge had locked things in sufficiently to defeat it.

Bill:

And so by 1920, by the presidential election of 1920, we're not in the League of Nations?

Bob:

We're never in the League of Nations—

Bill:

I mean, it's decided—

Bob:

But it's also been voted on— right.

Bill:

Right.

Bob:

It's been voted on, I think at that point in one way or another, at least three times. And so it has been decisively defeated. Wilson, who is sort of out of it, he's already, by this time, had the stroke and is sort of debilitated as president. But nevertheless, he's looking to 1920, 1920 will be the election where the American people get to express their support for the League. And of course, Warren Harding wins with the largest landslide in history. And the one thing that everyone can agree on is that the vote was against Wilson. Wilson and the League, but also against Wilson himself. He had gone from being one of the most popular presidents in history to one of the most reviled presidents in history in a very short period of time because of the League loss.

.Bill:

Having won the war. I mean, it's kind of—

Bob:

Having won the war.

Bill:

Kind of astonishing. Yeah.

Bob:

Yeah.

Bill:

And so, say a few more words about the 20s, you do stress that much more in the book than I think a typical histories or I've read or skimmed or whatever do. I mean, there were moments when despite not being in the league, we could have done more to construct or prop up an international order or that die was cast already

Bob:

No, there were times throughout the 1920s. But as you mentioned earlier, that most of the damage is done basically in the first three or four years because that is the time when Germany is trying to get back on its back. But it has these onerous reparations payments to make. Not that they couldn't have made them, they could, but the pain, the political pain required, put so much pressure on a young government that did not really enjoy such deep support in Germany to begin with, to ask them also to cut the spending, increase taxes, et cetera. All the things that would've been necessary was a lot to ask. But as I said, the United States would not budge on when Americans wanted to be paid back. So the Europeans could not cut the Germans any slack. And the Germans were either not able to pay or were not paying just deliberately, which led in 1923 under the terms of the Versailles Agreement, lead France to punitively intervene in the Ruhr, seize German factories, force workers to produce.

Of course, the German workers didn't want to work for the French under a gun. So then the German government basically had to pay them not to work, which led the German government to start printing money, which produced this famous hyperinflation, which had people shopping with wheelbarrows full of cash, and which wiped out the savings of the German middle class. So all that happened as a result of the French intervention in the Ruhr, which the United States could have prevented easily. Right before that intervention, every American ambassador in Europe and every major European nation, the British, the French, and the Germans, all of them begging the United States to intervene diplomatically and come up with a resolution to this problem. And the Americans refused even to take part in diplomatic activity. Now they ultimately come up with the Dawes Plan, which is basically a private American banker's loan to Germany.

And that created its own problems, which we can get into. They're complicated, I get into them in the book. But these decisions, which as I say it's one thing to look back and say, you could have done this, you could have done that. That's counterfactual history. But what I discovered to somewhat to my surprise was that American ambassadors in Berlin, in Paris and in London were saying, "We're going to lose everything right now." There was a wonderful ambassador who was a Republican appointee, his name was Alanson Houghton, he was basically one of the heirs to the Corning Glass family. He owned Corning Glass in upstate New York. The Houghtons had been running things up there forever.

Bill:

Yeah, I knew, I guess—

Bob:

He warned—

Bill:

The grandson. Great-grandson. I wouldn't know who was a congressman.

Bob:

Amo Houghton.

Bill:

Yeah. When we came to Washington.

Bob:

Right. No the Houghtons— big dynasty up there. Anyway, but he was a very reliable Republican and he wrote a fantastic cable back to Washington saying, "Look, these nations are all stuck in the ruts of history, and there's only one power that can get them out of that rut and that's the United States." And he writes, "God has been good to us. We have lots of money. It's time for a little enlightened self-interest here, and let's come in and do that." And the same kind of cables were coming from Paris. And the State Department was like, "Yeah, we know, but we can't do it." And that to me, were some very critical decisions of a minor variety. Sometimes people say, "Well, Americans wouldn't go to war again in Europe." Well, nobody was asking them to. The question was, could we do a few low-level things that would really make a difference?

And the irony is, is that we couldn't do the low level things because we were afraid of the deeper involvement. And this is something I think that recurs in American foreign policy over and over again. It's very hard for Americans to engage in what you might call maintenance at a low level because there's always the camel's nose in the tent and the slippery slope. And if you get involved at this level, you'll be dragged in at this level, et cetera. The result being that the most powerful nation on the earth, which really with a few minor moves could have maintained the peace in Europe, did not do so, and ultimately paid the price for that.

Bill:

Yeah. As you say, it's so hard to get people to do the preventive maintenance or to act when there's not the obvious threat. And then when you see the threat, the price you pay is so much greater. But it's interesting when people saw that. Well, you're saying, I think this is an important theme of yours in the book a little bit. People saw all of this at the time, more than we realize it's not just second guessing 100 years later, right?

Bob:

I find that happens a lot. You always think that—

Bill:

Yeah, talk about that a little. Yeah, yeah.

Bob:

You always think that, oh, well, how could they know what was coming around the corner? We don't know what's coming around the corner. But of course, right now, there are people saying, "This is what's coming around the corner." And someday we'll look back and say, "Gee, they were right. They saw it." And that's certainly true of this period. Ambassador Houghton, who I talked about, in 1923, said, "Congratulations, you've just given us the next world War."

Bill:

Wow.

Bob:

That's how much it seemed obvious to people at the time, but which we have smoothed over and forgotten. And it's just not part of our understanding of America's role at that time.

Bill:

I mean, even Churchill, famously in his World War II memoir or history, both, I guess says something... "This is one of the most preventable wars." I think, in world history. And I think he's thinking more or seems to be talking more about the failures of European nations to stop Hitler in the 30s. But I don't know, I don't know how much he focused on the US situation actually.

Bob:

Well, he at that point is already taking for granted that the US is what it is. I mean, he had an interesting reaction actually in his memoir, in his account of World War I, which is also a great series of volumes that he produced. And he addresses this question of the United States directly and in a way, sort of typically insightful Churchillian way, which is on the one hand, he says, "If Americans had only realized that they were going to have to enter the war in 1915, for instance, after the sinking of the Lusitania, how many lives would've been... How many millions of lives, how much destruction..." And so he says, "That was a terrible missed opportunity by the United States." On the other hand, he says, "But who can blame them?" If you look at the British who are 20 miles from the continent, they spent the 1920s and 30s hoping that whatever happened on the continent was not going to be their problem.

So imagine a country that is 3000 miles away from the continent and has no history of involvement, unlike Britain, which had an extensive history involvement in Europe to ask the Americans to do that. Churchill understood that would've been asking a lot. In the inter-war years, I think at first there's a lot of outrage at the Americans, both on the debt question where there are a lot of bitterness in Britain and France over that. But then on the general obvious insistence on the United States of remaining aloof from any conceivable crisis, by the 1930s, they're practically not thinking about the United States anymore. So it's sort of taken for granted that the United States won't do anything. I think Churchill sort of incorporated that. But I do argue in the book, because now if you get ahead to the 1930s that when Chamberlain's decision to appease Germany has a number of roots.

But one of the driving factors was his understanding that the United States could not be relied on, nevermind to join the conflict, but even to supply money and weapons to Britain. Because by that point, we've passed the Neutrality Acts, which prohibit aiding either belligerent in a conflict, again, based on the so-called lesson of World War I. So Chamberlain knew that it was

just going to be them and World War I had demonstrated that Britain and France, and even Britain and France and Russia were inadequate to balance German power, you needed to have the deus ex machina of the United States to do that. So why is it surprising that Chamberlain and the French chose appeasement when they were told on no uncertain terms that the Americans were not going to help them if they got into a conflict? So I see the American role in this, obviously in the 20s we talked about, but going all the way through into the 30s.

Bill:

No, that's so interesting. And I mean, it's a little bit, maybe contrast isn't quite right, but it strikes me that your first book argued against the conventional historiography, that we were always a "dangerous nation." That because we were liberal and based on the Declaration and so forth, there was always a... We would always undermine the autocracies and that we sort of knew this and they sort of knew this and that that's something that's been underrated. But now it seems like we're both a dangerous nation and then a very reluctant to get involved nation. I guess they're both true, right? I mean it both—

Bob:

Yeah. I mean—

Bill:

Liberal and 3000 miles away, I guess.

Bob:

Right, and that's the thing. Isolationism implies something else but being 3000 miles away is its own explanation to some extent. And the difference between the 19th century, especially the early 19th century and then the late 19th century and on is that by the late 19th century, the United States really is invulnerable in a way that it was not obviously throughout much of the early 19th century. And so a certain amount of engaging with the world was necessary because the world was threatening to the United States.

By the 1890s, the great... The German... I didn't really think he was great, but the German American statesman, Carl Schurz said, "Look, in our continental little safety area over here, we can't get into a war unless it be of our own choosing. We're safe." And that was true. But then Roosevelt makes a statement, Theodore Roosevelt, after 1900 he also points out that because of America's power and geographical location, the United States has also become the balance of power in the world, by which he meant that literally because of course, in a European struggle, the United States was the determiner of that balance of power.

So, on the one hand, you have a country that's invulnerable, but also so powerful that every other great power in the world has to deal with it. And it almost invariably comes involved in the global conflict in that way. And so those are the two things that are tugging at Americans throughout this period. I think that the fact that America ultimately winds up at war in Europe, in World War II again after winding up at war in Europe in World War I demonstrates the fundamentally non-isolationist aspect of American foreign policy. Really, the United States has insisted since basically the end of the 19th century on what you might call a kind of liberal hegemony or at least a liberal balance of power in the world that favors liberalism.

They fight World War I for that. They fight World War II for that. They fight the Cold War for that. We're dealing with that kind of question again. And the only thing is that because of

America's also desire to be left alone and feeling that none of this necessarily matters, we go through these wild oscillations between complete neglect and complete hegemonic involvement. So, the larger reality is that Americans will not tolerate a real serious assault on liberalism in the world writ large, but they are perfectly willing to ignore what's going on until that challenge appears unmistakably and they feel they have no choice. That's sort of the paradox of American foreign policy.

Bill:

No, that's great. And that's really helpful. It does strike me though in the 30s, we ignore it for a long time. We wish to ignore it for a long time. We put off dealing with it much longer. I mean, I'm still struck when I speak occasionally on a college campus or something, students don't really... They know of course about Pearl Harbor and that that's where we got in the war, but they haven't really quite focused on the fact that we didn't get in '39 or '40 or '41, and not only didn't we get in, there was a lot of opposition to even helping the British even after the fall of France and stuff. So I mean I guess I am struck by the degree to which we wanted to avoid facing up to reality in the 30s.

Bob:

Well, there's a whole... And we can understand this today, there's a whole intellectual environment. It's not just that Americans are sitting there coolly calculating at every step of the way. Do we need to get in? Do we not get in? What's going to happen? The result of World War I is an astonishing sort of repudiation of the idea of international involvement. And it goes well beyond, as I say, any kind of analytical understanding of what's happening in the world. It's really about America and the disillusionment. And I would say irrational disillusionment after what, as you rightly point out, was a victory in World War I is the best way of explaining this, because in the 1930s when people are making the case for abstention and neutrality and non-intervention, it is all about the alleged lessons of World War I and the belief, which is I think astonishing in retrospect, that World War I was a disastrous decision for the United States.

So I mean, honestly, sitting here today in 2023, it is possible to understand how a reaction to what is regarded as a failed war can have a long and powerful impact on the way Americans view foreign policy decisions. I mean, obviously I'm talking about Iraq, which was a war that Americans fought in 2003 to 2008 or nine, however you want to count it. And here we are 20 years later and Iraq is still front and center. So that is what was happening. Only it was World War I, not Iraq. We are in the equivalent of 20 years later, the same period after, and we're still affected by Iraq. And I think that's what, in order to understand what's going on in the 1930s, you have to understand that huge, that overwhelming consensus that World War I had been a terrible mistake.

Bill:

And World War I was so massive, I mean, compared to Iraq, and of course in terms of... And the destruction of the entire, yeah—

Bob:

Losses.

Bill:

…Losses in Europe and even ours. And then the Russian Revolution in the sense that it had just totally destabilized, destroyed a golden age of progress and liberalism, it's little mystifying that Iraq, whether or not it was advised and certainly was poorly fought and so forth, has had anything close to that effect.

Bob:

But again, I think in both cases, yes, World War I was much more costly to the United States than Iraq was. Although the United States benefited... I mean, the American economy was the great beneficiary World War I, but we did lose something like 100,000 soldiers.

But it was more... Especially for liberal intellectuals like the Walter Lippmanns, the Reinhold Niebuhrs and others who had gone into World War I with enormous enthusiasm and saw it as an opportunity to really revolutionize both the international system, but also the American domestic system. They had hopes that it would sort of push progressive policies further this sort of national unity in war, et cetera. So when disillusionment set in after the peace agreement, those liberals, I think, felt personally responsible and guilty. And their response took one of two forms. One was, I made a terrible mistake and I was completely wrong, and now I don't believe in liberal internationalism anymore, and I'm going to become a realist, or I'm going to become a communist, or I'm going to become a conservative, et cetera.

That was one. But the other very common reaction was I was tricked. I was misled. Who misled me, who told me? There's the historian Harry Barnes, who became a famous revisionist historian during the war itself. He wrote what effectively was pro-war propaganda. And then he turns around and he says, "Who tricked us in this way?" So again, these may seem familiar to you now in the present environment, but what needs to be remembered is that by the 1930s, there is no one making the case for American involvement in any party. The internationalists have been effectively silenced and the only permissible internationalism is Kellogg-Briand pie in the sky, international peace treaties that require the United States to do nothing. And it's amazing how you couldn't even say anything else if you wanted to have any viability.

Bill:

And I guess—this is sort of as maybe a foolish question—and how much of this is bottom up, the public just doesn't want to hear any of this, and so everyone else adjusts, the politicians and even I suppose the intellectuals? And how much of it is sort of an intellectual story that it could have been different with real leadership and real people saying, "Wait a second, you realize what we're doing here?" If Ambassador Houghton’s cables had been echoed by major, I don't know, editorial pages and people who were somewhat well known at the time?

Bob:

I mean, you hate to blame massive decisions in the history of the United States on one guy's political goals. But I have to say that if I had to blame, if I had to pick someone like that, it would be Lodge. And that's the way of answering your question. I don't think that this was a ground up... It wasn't because popular demand was so powerful that it was irresistible. I do believe it was the debate at what we would call the elite level. I don't know what elite means in the United States, honestly, but certainly among intellectuals and foreign policy types. And then the politicians who for their own reasons went in one direction or the other. I would say they led more than they were pushed by public opinion.

I think public opinion, it's a mistake to think it's infinitely malleable and that a good president can always turn it around. And I would say there's no greater proof of that than Franklin Roosevelt, who I think was the most skillful politician probably we've ever seen, and who dealt with this problem very well, but was acutely conscious of the fact that he could only go so far in terms of what public opinion would permit. But that having been said, the overall tone I think was set by politicians and intellectuals and followed more. And then it becomes sort of so basic that you then need to lead the public out of that. And that's what Roosevelt and events of course did in the late 1930s.

Bill:

Yeah. So let's talk about that. But I'll just say... I mean the current context, it is a little bit... Yeah, I've often wondered if President Obama in the second term had decided I am going to intervene, as I had said I would with the red line in Syria. And we can't have chemical weapons be used. And we maybe just waited a little late in 2013, but after watching the Arab Spring fall apart in 2011, but still and then and [inaudible] called in McCain and Romney, the two most recent Republican presidential candidates, they presented a united front.

How different do things then look of with respect to Putin and to other things for the rest of that decade? It's hard, there's a lot of American war weariness, I guess you'd call it, an international leadership weariness. On the other hand, they've also been told... They would've at that point, been told somewhat, or have now been told repeatedly, of course for both parties, the nation building begins at home and we can't do any good in the world. And you get the sort of left wing version of this and the Trump version of it, which does seem like weirdly a bit of an echo of the twenties, right?

Bob:

No, it is. And again, it's this interplay between is there such a thing as a pre-existing public opinion or do politicians take a public opinion and shape it? Obviously Obama... He saw running against that foreign policy as a winning formula, and you can't argue that he was wrong. He pursued the foreign policy he did and got reelected. And then Trump ran clearly on what he was going to do and he got elected. So you can't just say it was those two guys. On the other hand, a president has a choice once in office of just going where he said he was going to go or trying to balance things, rebalance things in a certain way.

And it's pretty clear that Obama personally felt that American power was mostly a combination of incompetent and immoral, and therefore he wasn't going to try to push in that direction. It's interesting, Biden, I think, who has certain similarities to Obama, but I think has a little bit more tendency to say, "America does have important responsibilities in the world." I'm not sure that Obama really felt that that was the case. So he pushed it further than it had to go.

Bill:

Yeah. And I suppose the Republican development, just take another a minute on the current, and then I don't want to come back to the thirties and talk about Munich and other things, Republican Party does show that the description you have of Lodge is so interesting because you can have a preexisting, 60% of the Republicans are pro-Ukraine basically, and look at the votes, and last year earlier... Well, I guess last year in Congress and Mitch McConnell and blah blah, Mike McCaul, but the dynamic within a party can move these things pretty fast. I mean, that certainly is what happened after World War I, right?

Bob:

Right. And I mean, on Ukraine, when the war first broke out, there was almost no distinction between Democratic and Republican voters on what to do. But after several months of Republicans leaders pushing in an anti-Ukraine direction, you've seen the polls have shifted dramatically. And that is what happens. The American people, it's not their job to figure out what every detail of American foreign policy is going to be. That's a full-time job. They have full-time lives of their own. And so they're... I think especially on foreign policy as opposed to pocketbook issues which directly impinge on them, and they really do pay close attention to it. On foreign policy, they're more inclined to follow whatever their party leaders are suggesting. And so I think on foreign policy, it may be more than on domestic issues, the party leadership has a stronger role in setting the tone.

Bill:

You stress the importance in the book of Kristallnacht in November of '38, you have a chapter about it, the headline about Kristallnacht. Munich, you discussed at some length, but actually it's like it's a rare book on foreign policy that has Kristallnacht in a chapter title and not Munich, I guess. So say a little bit about that. '38's a very important year, obviously, but Kristallnacht is not normally central in the foreign policy discussions of that year, I would say.

Bob:

Yeah, I was struck by that when I was doing the research for this period, because of course, we tend to think of Munich as the turning point, and of course as a genuine strategic matter, it was the turning point. When Hitler got a hold of the Sudetenland, then basically Czechoslovakia, it opened up strategic opportunities for him that he didn't have until then. So it really is a turning point. And at the time, I think some people saw... Franklin Roosevelt and his advisors were privately very unhappy that Chamberlain had given away the store and the French had given away the store, and Roosevelt privately referred to them as Judas Iscariot. Publicly, however, he said, "Great. Peace in our time. I'm all for it." And that was sort of… if the president is saying that, who in the United States is going to say otherwise?

But then almost, I guess it's about a month or so after the Munich agreement, you have Kristallnacht, which was the worst pogrom in modern history, basically. It was a horrific event. And of course, it's not as if anyone was surprised that there was antisemitic acts occurring in Hitler's Germany. They knew as soon as he took power that it was not good news for the Jews. But the degree to which people were shocked, I think it had something to do with the fact that in this period, people are sort of taking Hitler seriously as a statesman. We need to remember that he wasn't always regarded as the monster that we now see him as. In the same way that I think we once regarded Putin as a statesman, and now I think maybe we have a slightly different picture of him, but in Hitler, that was the case, so—

Bill:

Or if not a statesman, at least a kind of a rough guy, but you can work with him and check him.

Bob:

Pragmatic and not driven by wild impulses. And I think that the extremeness of Kristallnacht, the national element of it, and the degree to which it was clearly driven by the government. Hitler had been pretty careful, interestingly, before this, because when he thought Germany was still very vulnerable and going through what he regarded as his critical period, he was

always waiting for the democracies to just come in and crush him. He sort of downplayed the antisemitic part, and he certainly himself acted as if he had no responsibility for it. So Kristallnacht is a situation where it's unmistakably, the government is driving it. Anyway, the result in the United States is sort of paradoxical. On the one hand, anti-Semitism in the United States goes up through the roof. There's a lot of latent antisemitism, obviously. And the more Hitler does to the Jews in a way, the more antisemitism rises in the United States in certain quarters.

But the overall, I would say the majority response was horror. And Roosevelt says, "We can't imagine that a civilized country would do such a thing." And by the way, that itself is in the indicative of the fact that they still sort of regarded Germany under Hitler as a civilized country. But that shock really had a huge impact on people. And you can look at individuals again, like Reinhold Niebuhr, who had disillusioned by World War I become briefly a communist, become a realist and saying, "We shouldn't be involved in anything that's happening in Europe." But it is after Kristallnacht that he flips and Walter Lippmann flips. And I think a lot of other... Especially liberals, were particularly horrified by this. And I find that even though the effect is not obvious and immediate, I think that in some ways is more of a turning point in terms of American attitudes than Munich was.

Bill:

Even after that, one of the striking things about your book is... I mean, everyone knows that communism was very strong during the Depression in America, among American intellectuals, not among the public particularly. And that works itself out, and it's still strong in the wars because Stalin's an ally. Maybe it goes away for a year, with the Hitler-Stalin pact and then it's strong after the war until people wake up in '48 or whatever. But the degree to which anti-communism morphs into a sort of acquiescence in fascism, let's call it, if not pro-fascism on the right, is something striking in your book. I had not realized that. I mean, everyone knows about America First, but people think of it as fringy and sort of just isolationism with an unfortunate anti-Semitic streak or overtone. But the strength of accommodation and rationalization of fascism among conservative, both intellectuals and politicians in the US is pretty... I found that pretty interesting from your book.

Bob:

Yeah, it's one of those... It was a bit of a revelation to me as well that the way, even in this period, the way Americans looked at the world depended on how they looked at what was going on at home. So for Republicans at the time and conservatives, they were obsessed with the idea... And I can never tell how much they really believed it and how much it was a good... It just made for good politics. But in any case, they acted as if they believed that Franklin Roosevelt was actually leading the country to communism, like literal communism, and that all of his New deal programs were aimed at that. So from their point of view, again, whether it was genuine or political, their argument was America was in danger of going communist. Robert Taft frequently said that the risk to the United States from overseas is nothing compared to the risk to United States domestically from Roosevelt and his gang.

Bill:

Yeah, that's amazing. And that's late, right? That's Taft saying this in—

Bob:

'40. Yeah.

Bill:

Yeah. Literally after World War II has begun.

Bob:

After the fall of France. After the fall of France, the argument is still that it's the fear of domestic subversion or domestic communism in the person of Roosevelt and the Democratic Party that you really have to worry about. And insofar as you do believe that, then as you look at the world, well, Hitler had always presented himself as a bulwark against communism in Germany and then in the world. And so, if you think the number one threat in the world is communism, you're going to have a different attitude toward Hitler and Mussolini and the others who are overtly fighting communism in their way than if you are not so afraid of communism. And the same was, the sort of mirror image on the other side. Roosevelt Democrats feared, genuinely feared the rise of fascism in the United States. Sinclair Lewis writes this, "It could happen here." They of course, are thinking of what you might call corporate fascism.

It's the capitalism that leads to fascism on the left. They weren't thinking so much about the Bund, but nevertheless, there is a Bund. And what I noticed was that after 1936 and after Roosevelt's failed court packing scheme, and the Republicans pick up some seats in the elections of '38, it's a time of conservative reaction in the United States, which is one reason that liberal Democrats are sort of in a panic. So, as they look out at the world, they see the fascist governments, which are treated a little bit too nicely by their fellow American conservatives who they also fear are fascists. And so, as they look at the Soviet Union and even Stalin's Soviet Union, except as you say, during the period of the Nazi-Soviet pact, they see a check against the fascists. And so, it's never the case, I think, that Americans, as an international relations theorist might say, they take a look at the world and this is how strong Hitler is, this is how strong the Japanese, this is what... No, they see things as people tend to do through the lens of what their original worldview and concerns are. And not to keep bouncing back and forth between the past and the present, but we could see that that's very obvious today as well with Republicans, at least a wing in the Republican Party being at the very least soft on Putin and tending to regard him as a kind of ally against the liberal world that they're fighting against. And similarly, on the other side, liberals regard Putin as the greatest menace, and his menace is connected to the domestic menace. So just welcome to American foreign policy.

Bill:

And I guess the world [inaudible] with the left and Europe famously didn't really react against Hitler as they might have, certainly in Germany. It's just sort of worse form of capitalism fascism. It's not qualitatively different. There was a little bit of that on the Marxist left, that [inaudible] on the right. This was literally true in Germany in '32, '33. These are allies that we can't really fight because they're too popular anyway. They're useful in the fight against communism. So, no one actually focuses on the— neither side is quite focused on the magnitude of the threat, I suppose. So, talk about '39 and the book goes to '41, not just to '39. So let's talk about, those are very important years, '39 to '41. I'm struck that America First gets going in mid, late 1940s as I recall. I always assumed and when that it was like something from the thirties, and of course it's going to fade away once Germany invades. And then once there's the Battle of Britain... France falls, and then the Battle of Britain. And surely no one's like saying we can't support Britain by late 1940, but that's not the case at all. So anyway, talk a little bit about the American situation there.

Bob:

Yeah, no, I mean the America First appears as a response to what its supporters realize is a real push that may lead the United States into war. I mean, I'm sure they felt there was no need for an America First really in 1937 and '38… By the way, Roosevelt sort of sees where things are going at the very latest by 1937. He gives his famous quarantine speech in which he talks about the three bandit nations without naming them. And so now the response to that speech from his point of view is a disaster. And he winds up at that moment saying to one of his advisors, "It's terrible to lead and look over your shoulder and see that nobody's following you." So, he can see it in '37, but he doesn't feel the country is anywhere near that.

Bill:

And is he calling for dramatic action at that point, or just sort of—

Bob:

No. In fact, that's a very funny—well, it's funny in retrospect—episode because he uses the word quarantine. So of course, the press jumps all over him and says, "What do you mean by quarantine?" And they say, "Does that mean sanctions?" And he says, "No, it's outrageous that you even mentioned sanctions. They're out the window." And they're like, "Well, does it mean hold a conference?" He said, "No, I'm not going to hold a conference. That's out the window!" So he says, "We have a theory and we're in search of a plan." So anyway, that's what's happening then. But then after Munich, there are people in Europe at that point, American officials like William Bullock, who are saying, that's it, we're heading there. So, at that point, Roosevelt sort of sees where things are going, but no one thought really at that moment that Hitler could defeat France, because France looked pretty tough in that period. They had the Maginot Line, which was— nobody didn't think was going to work, and France was very powerful. So anyway, long story short, you get to 1940 and the fall of France. So obviously Roosevelt at that point is going to kick it into high gear. He already had kicked into gear to some extent after the invasion of Poland in September 39, but now after the fall of France. And so that's when the America First people say now is when we really have to have a fight.

The fact is they're too late if they ever had any hope of succeeding. And by the time they organize America First, and it's a huge and effective, effective in terms of product. I mean, they send out hundreds of thousands of mailers. They're doing all the things that a great public diplomacy campaign would do. But even as they're doing those things, the polls are going in the other direction from their point of view. So they never really grab hold. They're kind of fighting a losing battle by precisely because after the fall of France, it's harder to convince people that none of this matters. But it is interesting as you say that it is precisely when they can... And this is important in a way because at that point everyone knows what we're talking about. We're talking about a world in which Germany, Nazi Germany, is fully in control of Europe, either with Britain in some kind of subordinate peace or conquered.

And you also are seeing that the same is going to happen in Asia where Japan is going to become the hegemony. So, they really do have a debate about how will we feel when the two sort of most important strategic theaters in the world are dominated by aggressive militaristic dictatorships? And the anti-interventionists, the America First people say we'll be fine because they can't invade us, which I think was arguably true. They will have to trade with us. They need our markets, which I think would turn out to be not true in the case of Germany. But nevertheless, it was a reasonable argument. And so, does this directly affect our security? The answer is no. And I think the people who were making the case for intervention agreed.

Henry Luce, who's the famous interventionist, writes in February 1941, that he agrees this is not about the homeland security of the United States. It's about something larger than that. And that to me is the interesting part of the debate. We tend to look back and say, oh, those idiot anti-interventionists, didn't they see that Hitler was a big threat, et cetera, et cetera. It's like, no, no, no. They had a debate knowing everything that they needed to know, and the debate was does this affect us or can we live with it?

And honestly, we don't know what the answer was because the Japanese attack Pearl Harbor and we get into the war. So that's why I say, most people would say, if you talk about wars of necessity and wars of choice, I actually think that that's a meaningless distinction. I don't think there's any such thing as a war of necessity, but if anybody thinks there is a war of necessity, they usually think it's World War II. And my argument is it wasn't a war of necessity. The Japanese didn't attack us out of the blue. They attacked in response to actions that we had taken to try to blunt their aggression. And similarly in the Atlantic and in Europe where we were clearly on the side— one side in a war. So, it isn't as if we were just sitting here minding our own business and those guys hit us out of the blue, which is the way most Americans felt. But that was not the reality.

Bill:

Yeah, I guess 1940, I mean, would it have mattered if... I mean, it's sort of flukish that Willkie gets the Republican nomination over Taft, I guess, right? I mean, how much that-

Bob:

Well that's a sign of ultimately their weakness, right? I mean the fact that they—

Bill:

The isolationist weakness, yeah.

Bob:

I call them the anti-interventionists, but right. Yes. The anti-interventionists could not... They didn't even control their own party ultimately, which by the way, not that we need to get into this, but there's always this contrast being drawn between Wilson's alleged incompetence in dealing with Congress and Roosevelt's alleged brilliance dealing with Congress. But the political situations were like night and day. Wilson faced a hostile Congress, which the opposition party controlled both Houses and the Republicans knew who they wanted to nominate, and they were not going to nominate Elihu Root, who was an internationalist. They were going to nominate someone they could trust to be anti-interventionist. Whereas Roosevelt has got complete control of both houses. And the anti-internationalist Republican party can't even nominate their own guy for the White House. So, in that respect, I think Roosevelt had a better situation, but it also reflected, I think, the majority view of what was happening in the world. So, there was some sort of logic to it as well.

Bill:

And it gets us back to the importance of domestic politics and the parties and just who controls them each and so forth as a matter of... It's not just Wilson. So much of the foreign policy stuff, I think, is written from the point of view of the importance of the president, which is not foolish of course, but a little bit forgets.

Bob:

But overdone, I do think that we tend to divide our history into segments based on who's in the White House at any given time. And I think that leads to a lot of misunderstandings on our part, because usually what differentiates presidents more than anything is what actually happens while they're president. It's not as if you rarely have on foreign policy completely black and white differences between the presidents. I mean, the difference between Romney and even Obama is not night and day. It's just 10% here and 10% there.

Bill:

Yeah. That's so interesting. Could you say a word about Japan, just since they attacked us at Pearl Harbor, and we've been very Europe focused in this. What about Japan and Asia in general? Was that something we were also equally standoffish, so to speak there?

Bob:

Yeah, I really do hold American policy significantly responsible for what happened in East Asia too. And that's a long story, but the short version of the story is that after World War I, the Japanese, as is their tendency, were really prepared to accommodate significantly to an American led liberal world. That they had accommodated themselves to a British led world, and they were going to accommodate themselves to an American led world. Japan went through a period known as Taishō democracy, which was one of its most democratic periods. They had a civilian leadership for the first time. They were cutting the military budget, but they were having difficulties in China, which was a vital importance to them because of course you have at this point, you have the Chinese Revolution in 1912, and then the sort of warlordism that follows that. And Japan, of course, has huge financial interests in China.

And they looked to the United States in the 1920s as the sort of senior partner in the relationship and wanted America to work with them to deal with the China problem. And I think for understandable reasons, but also for reasons that were similar to the sort of irresponsibility in Europe, the American attitude was, no, we don't do anything. We don't have anything to do with what's going on in China. We don't care what your problems are. And I think that, again, in little ways around the margins, there was always a fight in Japan between what you might call sort of pro liberal, pro American... I don't like to use this word, but people would say a more modern version of Japan versus the more traditional imperial, focus on the emperor and hostile to Western ways. And that balance is always tilting in one direction or the other.

In the 1920s, it's tilted in a Western direction until Japanese frustrations with the West grow. And it begins to strengthen the traditionalists who ultimately triumph. And the signal of that is the invasion of Manchuria in 1931, which Americans are very unhappy about, but about which they decide to do nothing other than generally support criticizing Japan at the League of Nations. And so that sends another signal to the Japanese that not only are the Americans not helpful, but they're also not necessarily standing in our way.

And so, a lot of what happens after that is the Japanese sort of pushing this as far as it could go, and they ultimately invade China mainland in 1937 and try to conquer the whole thing. And then again, I feel like this is something the United States does to other countries all the time. By the time the Americans are saying, whoa, whoa, whoa, wait a second, you can't do this, and we're going to start using our enormous economic leverage, the fact that Japan is completely dependent on the United States for oil and steel and a million other things that they need, we're going to start using that leverage to try to constrain them.

The Japanese are now faced with a choice. They can either back away from everything they've been doing for the last eight years to put themselves in the position that they've dreamed of being in, after being mistreated by the Americans. So they can sort of say, forget all that, knuckle under, join the Anglo-American liberal world order and just go back to being what they referred to as “small Japan.” Or they could take the chance and press forward and hope that they can pull it off, et cetera. And this is a trap that America is repeatedly pulling great power, other great powers into, giving the impression that we're indifferent. You can do what you want. We might get mad at you, but we won't do anything. And then they start going down this route towards acquiring regional hegemony. And then the Americans say, "Hey, wait a second. What are you doing?"

And then all of a sudden we're in a conflict and neither of us in a way are ready for it. But that's what happened with the Japanese. I must say, I came out of my work on this with much greater sympathy for the Japanese than I thought I would. I really do think we led them down the garden path to some extent and bear a great deal of responsibility for the decisions they made. Now, the presumption underlying that judgment is that it's our job to do that. And it definitely did not feel that way to Americans at the time.

Bill:

And the other intermediate step is that our not doing stuff strengthens the people. And this is very clear with Hitler, obviously, within the government and within the nation, the politicians and political forces that want to be aggressive or adventuristic or whatever you want to say.

Bob:

And you'd be amazed—

Bill:

So you get a vicious cycle, right? And then we look up and the government's worse than it was five years before. And the public's all whipped up and then we're say saying, “wait a second,” right?

Bob:

But as you know, Bill, you'd be amazed at how often we act on the opposite assumption, which is that if we're tough, we strengthen hardliners. If we're soft, we strengthen soft liners. And that is one of the explanations for why we don't put more pressure on them. But I think the effect is exactly what you say because the hardliners are saying, "We can get away with this. It's going to work." The argument of the soft liners is always, "You're going to get us killed." And so, if the Americans are basically saying, "No, no, no, we're good." Then the hardliners say, "You see? They're not going to do anything." And that does happen over and over again.

Bill:

Maybe last question. This has been a great discussion, frankly, and I think one reason we've made clear sort of in passing almost how different your account is — revisionist one might say — compared to the more conventional accounts, and different versions of conventional accounts ranging from sort of left wing to kind of Kissingerian and realist, whatever. But did you go into this sort of a decade ago thinking you were going to be revisionist? Did you have hunches or you said once or twice that you were surprised by things you found? I'm just

curious about your revisionist historiography here. How much of it was intentional or suspected ahead of time, or you discovered these things or what?

Bob:

I mean, I start with a sort of prejudice about America's role in the world, which I'm sure it's not so much necessarily that your prejudice then dominates the book, but it brings a way of looking at things that might be different. So my prejudice is — was — that the world really does depend tremendously on what the United States does. So I was more — looking if, for instance, in the 1920s — than others might have of evidence that the United States could have done more, or to what degree were we responsible. And I would say generally American historians write about American foreign policy. And when they write about America's behavior in World War I and after, they write it very much from an American point of view. What I tried to do was look at also from the European, various different countries point of view. And when you put that picture together, it's a little clearer.

I spend a lot of time in both volumes looking at how do others look at the United States? The title of the first volume is *Dangerous Nation*. We didn't think we were a dangerous nation, but the other countries in the world did think we were a dangerous nation. And we didn't think we were the ghost at the feast here. But that's the way others viewed us. So, in some respect, that brings it different. But as you say, a lot of the things that I wound up writing about, which revise, were a surprise to me. I didn't expect to find Wilson being as reasonable, I think, ultimately as he is. His speech rhetoric sort of begs to be overread because he was a great speech... He was too good in a way. But if you look at what he actually does on a day-to-day basis, it makes a lot more sense than these wild idealistic notions that he talked about in his speeches. So I assumed that there would be some revision, but it actually was more substantial than I expected.

Bill:

No, I found it that way too, which is all the more reason people… fine as this conversation has been, they can't be satisfied with it, and they have to read the book because there is so much... It's very rich in terms of the stories and the anecdotes and the people and the incidents. And then I think the lessons too, which people can make their own minds up about. But we've touched on here I suppose, and the current relevance is pretty striking. Just on Wilson for one second. I had this sort of prejudice against Wilson. Teddy Roosevelt was the kind of internationalism I was for and Wilson is this kind of liberal utopian stuff. But one wonders how much of that is reading a few of McCain's speeches and more dramatic statements. We were all Georgians now in 2000. Say, oh, come on, McCain.

But then he's this kind of utopian human rights guy and so forth and shaped by his own personal history, presumably, and loving the rhetoric. But then it turns out he's kind of right about a lot of things, right? In a very practical way about Putin and stuff. So I had that thought reading the book. But anyway, people need to read the book, *The Ghost of the Feast*. Then you can go back and read the first 500, 400 page volume *Dangerous Nation*. You should read the short books too about *The Jungle Grows Back*. Are you taking a little break here after this long book, or are you working on something?

Bob:

Yeah, I'm taking a little break and writing about our current political predicament, but from a historical perspective and going back to the foundings and look at the origins of our present situation in that. So, I'll see how that goes.

Bill:

Something else to look forward to. Bob, thanks for joining me today. This was very interesting.

Bob:

It was my pleasure. Thank you, Bill.

Bill:

And thank you all for joining us on *Conversations*.