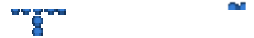


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William Kristol, one of the most influential neo-conservative thinkers in Washington and a proponent of what has become known as the Bush Doctrine, is the editor of [The Weekly Standard](#) and chairman of [The Project for the New American Century](#). From 1989 to 1993 he served as chief of staff for Vice President Dan Quayle. He tells FRONTLINE that the significance of President George W. Bush's State of the Union address in 2002 (the "axis of evil" speech) is too easily forgotten -- that it was a rare moment, "the creation of a new American foreign policy" -- and that Bush deserves credit for realizing very quickly after Sept. 11 that his presidency would be judged by how he handled the post-9/11 threat of weapons of mass destruction. This interview was conducted on Jan. 14, 2003.

It's [February 1991], and the "strong right hook," or whatever it is, has happened. And Powell has driven across the bridge and he's in [Kuwait City] and [talking to] the Oval Office, and he says, "Mr. President, let's not take anymore young Iraqi lives, or any young American lives. Let's end this thing now." Where are you at that moment? And where are people who will ultimately become your compatriots at that moment? And how do you feel about that decision?

Well, I'm the vice president's chief of staff, and I have nothing much to say about that decision. Paul Wolfowitz is number three in the Defense Department, and I think tries a little bit to weigh in against stopping short of removing Saddam, or particularly weighs in once the rebellions begin a couple of weeks later.

The [key moment] in 1991 was not the decision to stop the war after 100 hours. I think that was defensible, and perhaps reasonable. It was the decision a couple of weeks later not to aid the rebels who had risen up against Saddam, and whom we had encouraged to rise up. You know, the president urged Iraqis to rise up. There was a huge rebellion. We had

"The danger is American withdrawal, American timidity, American slowness. ... The danger is not that we're going to do too much. The danger is that we're going to do too little."



helicopters right there and forces right there, obviously. We allowed Saddam to suppress the rebellion as our forces stood by.

That was a key moment. I know that Paul Wolfowitz was very unhappy at that moment, and had argued that we should intervene. ... It was more than that we hadn't removed Saddam; [it was] that we had stood by and watched people we had encouraged to rise up against Saddam, we stood by and watched them get slaughtered.

Why? What happened?

Well, I think President Bush and Brent Scowcroft and Jim Baker talked themselves into the view that we had done what we had come to do. We had a huge interest in stability in the Arab world. Our own coalition partners did not want us to be an imperial force. They really wanted to get back to finishing up the Cold War. People forget the Soviet Union hadn't disintegrated yet, and there was always a sense that the Iraq thing was a sideshow. It was very important for you to establish the principle that you couldn't invade another country and get away with it. But once he had been kicked out of Kuwait, and we were able to get inspectors into Iraq, they had a sense, at least, that that was enough.

It fits in with the general view of the world, where you don't change regimes unless you absolutely have to. It puts a high premium on stability. It put a high premium on accommodating our Arab friends. They had a big interest in stability, since they didn't like the idea that people might get used to changing regimes and all that. So I think it was just part of a general worldview of Bush and Scowcroft and others.

The way we always dealt with that part of the world was, we don't want to know. As long as it doesn't flair up, let's keep it to itself. The oil was good. Our relationship with Saudis, and even Egypt, is OK.

Absolutely. I think the Saudis are really important there. Once the Saudis saw that we were hesitant about going, they decided, "OK, we can live with the status quo. But we don't want to establish the principle [that a] regime should just be removed by America or by popular uprisings, for that matter."

It's interesting what the Bush administration did after winning the war against Saddam in 1991. They turned their attention to the Arab-Israeli peace process. In that respect, I do believe that the first President Bush and Brent Scowcroft really believed the argument that we can improve our relations with the Arab world, and decrease tensions in the Arab world, by getting Israel to be more accommodating in terms of the Palestinians, even though, obviously, Saddam's invasion of Kuwait had nothing much to do with Israel and the Palestinians. Still, they very much believed that that was the best way we could advance our interests in the Arab world. That's been a very strong strain, obviously, in American thinking and American diplomacy for the last 10, 11 years. It remains a strain; you still see it in the State Department.

I do think the current President Bush really broke with that way of thinking in June when he made his speech on the Middle East. He clearly believes that you've got to fight these dictators developing weapons of mass destruction. That's the top priority. Obviously, we should help the Israeli-Palestinian peace process along if we can. But the notion that Saddam would be less dangerous, or bin Laden would hate us less, or the Saudis would

export Islam less if the Israelis changed their settlement policy -- I don't think George W. Bush really believes that.

At the moment that this decision is made, back in 1991, are you and Wolfowitz and others [saying], "Hey, guys, let's make a pact that we're going to go get Saddam some day, some time." Or is it something else?

Well, none of us expected necessarily that we would be at all involved in, or spectators to, a second war with Saddam Hussein. ... But it is the case that people like Charles Krauthammer, myself, Paul Wolfowitz, I think, thought right then that we probably had made a mistake when we failed to aid the rebels against Saddam. A couple of weeks later, we were pretty certain we had made a mistake. It's not as if we spent the next 10 years thinking only about redeeming this mistake. But I do think, after Sept. 11, they really found there was an opportunity to do the right thing in Iraq.

This Defense Planning Guidance that was written up [by Paul Wolfowitz] over at the Defense Department, in the waning days of the first Bush administration, and which was leaked to *The New York Times* [and caused] much Washington fearfulness about a [policy of preemption] -- set the stage for me, and tell me about the reaction, and what was up with all that.

I remember the day that appeared on the front page of *The New York Times*. I was Dan Quayle's chief of staff. I went to the White House senior staff meetings, I usually did, at 7:30 in the morning. Brent Scowcroft, the national security adviser, attended that meeting. Though he was always very close-lipped and taciturn about his thoughts, it was clear there was unhappiness at the highest levels of the White House about this document. And, of course, the White House ordered that it be walked back. ... They sanitized it, and ended up putting out a much milder version of it, I guess.

Wolfowitz was ahead of his time, beginning to try to think through the post-Cold War era. But it was not a conclusion that most of the Bush administration was comfortable with. Wolfowitz saw very early that the fundamental choice was American leadership, or increasing chaos and danger. Bush didn't really want to think about that in 1992. He had a very difficult reelection coming up. We were staying out of Yugoslavia. We didn't want to get back involved in Iraq. We didn't want to get involved in Africa. Bush was very reluctant to send troops into Somalia.

There was a certain view of the world -- that we had won the Cold War and that was great, but now it was time to come back to normalcy and to retrench quite a bit. We would still be a great power. We would still fulfill our NATO obligations and that sort of thing. We couldn't be a world policeman.

Wolfowitz's view is very different. I think Wolfowitz is now vindicated by history, but it took a long time to get vindicated. And, obviously, the Bush realists ... what might be called the minimalist realism of the first Bush administration, was followed by a kind of, I would say, wishful liberalism of the Clinton administration. It really wasn't until 9/11 that Wolfowitz's paper -- which by that time was, what, nine years old -- came to be seen as perhaps prophetic.

You talk about the "wishful liberalism of the Clinton administration." What does it mean?

... I think you could characterize Bush I, the first President Bush's administration, as guided by a view of the world and of American foreign policy called "minimalist realism." Very hardheaded. Do what we have to do, but don't do more than we have to do. Thus, the reluctance to get involved in Yugoslavia, the reluctance to go further in Iraq, etc.

Clinton, to his credit, in a way, wanted to do more. I think he thought America could do more good in the world. But the way in which he thought we could do good did not involve, usually, the use of force -- or there was great reluctance to use force, though ultimately he did in Bosnia and Kosovo.

[Instead, Clinton showed] a great dependence on multilateral agreements, arms control, and always at the end when the crunch came, a wish that some agreement could work things out, as opposed to being willing to make the tough call. I think that's true about North Korea. It was certainly true in 1998, when we had the crisis with Iraq. Clinton made a speech in mid-February 1998 that was as bellicose as anything George W. Bush has said. It was a terrific speech at the Pentagon. "We can't let Saddam develop these weapons of mass destruction. We can't trust him."

But then Kofi Annan worked out a deal, a face-saving deal, and Clinton decided -- this was, of course, the middle of Monica -- that he would take the face-saving deal, and backed away from using force. So there was a kind of wishfulness, I think, to Clinton's worldview. He hoped that these multilateral agreements and bilateral agreements could replace the exertion of U.S. force. And I don't think they do. ...

The theory that's in operation, to the extent that there's political theory involved, is this idea of containment during the Clinton time. You guys -- how do we describe "you guys?"

There's so many different phrases, it's hard to know.

What do you like?

I don't care. Kagan and I wrote an article in 1996, trying to lay out this worldview of foreign affairs. We called it "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy." So I would take "neo-Reaganite," "neo-conservative," "hawk," "American imperialist." There are lots of different phrases.

So you guys, true Americans that you are, out of power at the time, what do you do? What do you formulate? How do you act? What are you thinking about?

A couple of things should be said about the 1990s. I think Clinton deserves a fair amount of criticism. But it's not as if Republicans were united in advancing a Bush Doctrine-type approach. Republicans were very badly split. The Republican Congress was quite isolationist. They were spending much more time opposing Clinton on Bosnia and Kosovo than encouraging Clinton to be tougher on Iraq. We were spending time worrying about American over-extension around the world, very nervous about the commitment of U.S. troops. Even in the Somalia debacle, Clinton deserves some criticism, and Republicans in Congress, their type of criticisms tended to be, "Why are we there in the first place?" Not, "We've got to go in and punish the people who just killed some Americans."

So the Republican Party was split. People like me at the magazine I edit, *The Weekly Standard*, or the Project for the New American Century, which I'm chairman of, argued strongly for what we call "the neo-Reaganite foreign policy." We had allies, Wolfowitz and others who had served in the previous administration, Senator McCain, I would say especially, in Congress. But I wouldn't say that we spoke for the majority of the Republican Party at the time, or the majority of the conservative movement.

So the opposition to Clinton was fragmented and split, as much of it was kind of neo-isolationist as was neo-Reaganite.

So in this struggle, tussle, inside the Republican Party, the neo-conservative wing, of which you are a card-carrying member, is struggling, arguing, aiming for what?

Well, we're arguing against Clinton's policies as being weak -- letting dangerous things go on in various parts of the world, giving a sense of American weakness, not spending enough on the military. We're also spending a fair amount of time arguing against other Republicans and conservatives who have a much more limited view of what America should do, whose criticism of Clinton is often that he's doing too much, not that he's doing too little. That debate continues right through the Bush campaign.

Bush gave speeches that we could have written, and the fact that we did help write, or friends of ours did help write, a very strong speech on distinctly American internationalism -- it goes into Reagan Library in late 1999 -- but he gave other speeches in which he said, "We have to be humble. We're over-extended. We don't need to spend much more on the military." The criticism of Clinton sounded more like the criticism of the Republican Congress, kind of neo-isolationist criticism, than the kind of neo-Reaganite criticism we hoped the president would engage in. He ended up balancing these two strains pretty well during the campaign. Foreign policy wasn't, in any case, that big an issue.

But if you recall the 45 minutes of foreign policy debate -- was it the second debate where they focused on foreign policy? Bush's criticism of Clinton and Gore was as much from the neo-isolationist side as from the "We need to be stronger and tougher and spend more on defense" side.

Let me ask you to back up a tiny bit. Was George Bush your guy, Governor Bush?

No. I mean, I had nothing against Governor Bush. ... I was inclined to prefer McCain. The reason I was inclined to prefer McCain was his leadership on foreign policy. People forget this; what started the McCain boomlet in 1999, and then he'd be one serious challenger to Bush, was his leadership on Kosovo. He took an unpopular position in his own party -- not only supporting Clinton's intervention, but urging Clinton to be much bolder and more decisive ... and chastising Clinton for taking ground troops off the table. McCain really showed leadership in foreign policy, as he had on Bosnia, as he had on Iraq in 1998.

So my support for McCain -- I think this was true a little more ... than people realize -- a large part of it was grounded on foreign policy. You know, campaign finance reform somehow got more press, and people associated McCain with that, understandably. But I think McCain's initial emergence in the Republican field was that he spoke to a kind of assertive patriotism about America, both at home and abroad.

So once it becomes clear that McCain is out and Bush is the guy ... and the Republicans came in ones and twos down to Austin and prepared him, did you prepare him? Did guys from your group prepare him? Wolfowitz was there for sure.

I wasn't there. I was editing a magazine, so it wasn't appropriate, and I didn't do that. Certainly, I knew people who were parts of these groups -- both part of the inside group, and all kinds of experts were brought in. It seems to me the campaign did a pretty good job of balancing the kind of advice that then Governor Bush got. He heard from neo-Reaganites and he heard from neo-isolationists. I think he basically took some of each during the campaign.

Foreign policy wasn't a huge issue anyway. He was pretty good on foreign policy during the campaign, but nothing really distinctive. There was one very good speech, the distinctly American international speech. But I wouldn't say that if you read Wolfowitz's Defense Planning Guidance from 1992, and read most of Bush's campaign speeches and his statements in the debates, you would say, "Hey, Bush has really adopted Wolfowitz's world view."

If you read Condi Rice's articles on foreign affairs in 1999 and 2000, she was clearly the main adviser to Governor Bush. She was skeptical about a lot of these claims that the U.S. really had to shape a new world order, that we had to engage in nation building, that we might have to intervene in several places at once. She was much more, I think, kind of a cautious realist than she is today.

So when neo-Reaganites were sitting around in 2000 ... looking at this guy. What's the goal?

I'll give you an instance. ... When Milosevic was toppled by the sort of student uprisings in Belgrade in, I guess, the fall of 2000, September or October 2000, this was we thought a great accomplishment for American foreign policy, and for the people, obviously, for Serbia and Yugoslavia. ... As I recall, Dick Cheney then made some very grudging comment. "This did not prove that Clinton had been right to use American force in Kosovo." Bob Kagan and I wrote an op-ed criticizing Cheney, and sort of saying, "It's the Republican position that we don't celebrate a Democrat achievement here in the Balkans. We're such hardheaded realists and such skeptics about American engagement anywhere, and such skeptics about nation building, that we're going to deride a democratic popular uprising..."

So we spent a fair amount of the fall of 2000, those of us at least on the outside, being moderately unhappy about the Bush/Cheney campaign and its pronouncements on foreign policy. I'm a Republican, and we still prefer -- most of us, I think, almost all of us probably -- a Bush/Cheney to Gore. But we didn't have great hopes for Bush as a foreign policy president. Indeed, once he became president, we were pretty critical of him in those first several months. No big increase in the defense budget. No change in Clinton's China policy. A lot of talk about pulling troops back from around the world. No evident change in Iraq policy. I think you could make a case that on Sept. 10, 2001, it's not clear that George W. Bush was, in any fundamental way, going in our direction of foreign policy.

But there was something about Cheney being picked as the vice presidential candidate ... and then his selection as head of the transition team, and then his

placement throughout the government to the extent that he did the placing of a key number of people, not only who were in your crowd, but also "Blue Team" guys who were literally everywhere. It was almost like a government that maybe George Bush didn't know he had came into power.

I don't know how much he knew. Cheney is a complicated figure, and obviously a very cautious and reticent figure, so it's hard to know what he thinks in his heart of hearts. I think he had feet in both camps, so to speak. But you're right, his selection of [Lewis] Scooter Libby as his chief of staff ... [and of] Wolfowitz to get the deputy defense secretary job, suggested at least an openness to a neo-Reaganite point of view.

I think, incidentally the selection of Rumsfeld as secretary of defense was, obviously in retrospect, a very important one -- a pretty conscious attempt to balance Powell, and a pretty conscious decision that some of the other candidates that were being thought of as secretary of defense weren't of enough stature to stand up to Powell. I do think that's why they went to Rumsfeld. Obviously, in retrospect, that now turns out to have been a very important move. I think that was, in large part, Cheney's recommendation to Bush.

But it's also the case that -- I don't know, I'm a doubter. Whenever people tell me that Cheney's caused X to happen, or Condi Rice caused Y, or Karl Rove caused Z, I'm always a little bit of a skeptic. I think Bush runs his government and his administration a little more than he lets on, and a little more than we sometimes think.

I suspect Bush had a pretty good read on Powell, respected him, liked him, and wanted him as part of his administration. But that it was Bush who said, "I want someone that can stand up to Powell. I don't want Colin Powell making my foreign policy. I want a debate about foreign policy. Let's get someone of stature who will have the stature, also the guts, to stand up to Powell." And that, I think, led to the selection of Rumsfeld.

And Wolfowitz didn't have the stature?

Probably not. I mean, the level that Powell was at. Wolfowitz was very much respected. More of a scholar. His highest position had been number three in the Defense Department. I think he probably needed someone like Rumsfeld to fight the inter-agency battles with Powell. ...

Help me understand, when Bush takes over, when the change happens -- there he is with this team in place -- where is Iraq in the bigger foreign policy picture at that time, in the early going of the Bush administration?

Well, plenty of people were saying this is a problem. There haven't been inspectors in there for, at that point, two and a half years. We need to have a new Iraq policy. The sanctions are falling apart. The State Department starts to develop "smart sanctions" as its alternative. Some people in the vice president's office and the Defense Department try to advance something more like what ends up happening, a regime change alternative.

But it seems to me that the debate on Iraq, as on so many things in the Bush administration, was pretty much stalled before Sept. 11. You had bureaucratic gridlock. The president hadn't seen much of a need to focus on the issue. State and Defense were at loggerheads. You didn't have much in the way of a new policy, or even in the way of resolving policy differences.

Is the doctrine that ultimately becomes the Bush Doctrine in somebody's bottom drawer somewhere? Has it been pulled out and dusted off and is sitting there waiting for something to happen?

Look, all doctrines, or all foreign policy doctrines, or governing agendas, parts are always around beforehand. Very few people come into government and invent something out of whole cloth. I think we at *The Weekly Standard* and the Project for the New American Century -- and many other people, Wolfowitz way back in 1992 -- had articulated chunks and parts of what later became the Bush Doctrine: the focus on regime change, the focus on democracy promotion, possibly the preemption, in this new post-Cold War world, of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Certainly there was a lot out there that could be stitched together into the Bush Doctrine. But certainly, even people like me were kind of amazed by the speed and decisiveness with which the Bush administration, post-9/11, moved to pull these different arguments together and to construct arguments into a pretty coherent document.

So take me through the evolution of it from 9/11 on. What happened?

Well, just on the public side, it seems to me by Sept. 20, only nine days after Sept. 11, obviously, the president speaks to Congress and says, "We're not just targeting Al Qaeda; we're targeting all terrorist groups of global reach. And we're not just targeting terrorist groups; we're targeting any nation that sponsors or harbors terrorism." That's already pretty bold.

It was necessary. I mean, I approve of it. But he could have just said, "These people killed 3,000 Americans. They deserve retribution. They're going to get it. A country that has harbored them, Afghanistan, and any other country that's helped them deserves to be punished or will be forced to change their ways." But he didn't have to frame it in quite as global a way as he did. It's to his credit that, in a sense, 9/11 made him start to rethink things. But the first stage of rethinking was really to declare the war on terror.

The second stage of rethinking really only comes in November and December. I think Nov. 7 is the first mention by the president, post-Sept. 11, a substantial mention, of the threat of weapons of mass destruction. He gives a speech to a conference, I think, in Poland or something, by video, teleconference, and talks about the threat of dictators developing weapons of mass destruction, and the possible link to terrorist groups.

That is then talked about much, much more in November and December in various ways, and comes to fruition, you might say, in the State of the Union address. The president lays out really two objectives side by side as equally important -- fighting the war on terror, and fighting the war against dictators developing weapons of mass destruction, which he links, of course, because of the possible handoff from the dictators to the terrorist groups. But they really are two separate, though linked, efforts. And suddenly Iraq, and Iran and North Korea, and the "axis of evil," become as prominent as Al Qaeda, really, in the State of the Union address.

I supported that. I argued for that. We sent a letter, I think, a couple of weeks before the State of the Union, urging the president to pretty much make this move. But it's a pretty bold thing for him to have done. It's only four months after Sept. 11. That's a rather quick move -- from a much more restricted effort to a much broader effort.

That switch from terrorists to tyrants, as you suggest, that is a huge change. It's not only a big change in nine days; it's a massive change to get to the "axis of evil" from that. ... What happened? How did it happen? Who argued for it? Who argued against it? I know Powell is on one side, and I guess Rumsfeld was on the other, but what was pulling Bush in that direction? What do you think worked?

I do think [the president] really was shocked, honestly, as we all were, by 9/11, but to his credit, really started rethinking his view of the world, and what the real dangers were. And when you're president of the United States, that becomes a kind of personal thinking, in the sense of, "What do I want people to say about me when my presidential term is over in 2005, or 2009?"

When people on the outside, therefore, started to say, or had been saying really for quite a while, "Hey, look, if we don't start doing some things here in the world, you're going to have people like Saddam Hussein or Kim Jong Il with nuclear weapons. What happens if they start dealing those to terrorists groups?"

I think Bush really focused on that as sort of the fundamental challenge of his presidency. We're going to win the war on terror, I think, in the narrow sense. Al Qaeda is not going to defeat the United States of America. It could kill a lot of people. But Bush, to his credit, wasn't willing to say, "That's enough." He didn't want to give over the presidency, at that point in three years or seven years, to a successor who would inherit a world where lots of really bad dictatorships had been able to move ahead with the development of weapons of mass destruction and the possible export, proliferation of those weapons to either other rogue states, or to a bunch of terrorist groups.

So Bush really somehow focused on that. I know Cheney focused on that. Right after 9/11, Cheney supposedly said that very day, "This was terrible. But imagine what would have happened if those planes had had nuclear weapons on them." Condi Rice, who had been ... ambivalent in the battles between the -- let's call them the neo-Reaganites and the Powell team -- I think swung over pretty decisively after 9/11.

So I think you had Bush, Cheney, and Rice, all lined up together. I do think they drove policy after 9/11.

And Powell's role in all of this?

Powell was secretary of state, and he had plenty to do being secretary of state. He obviously fought some of this, and didn't like some of the broader implications and the more ambitious agenda that Bush articulated. But, look, I think what Bush has proven is that he's president, and he will override cabinet secretaries if he has to.

When he flew into Camp David from New York, where he had his arm around the firemen, and then he flies in, and waiting for him in the room the next morning, for the council of power about what to do, is Wolfowitz, Cheney -- and they're lined up in the picture. It's amazing, there they are; it's Wolfowitz, Rumsfeld, and Powell, kind of in a row all ready. And, I think, Bush is surprised, they're not sitting there arguing about Afghanistan and the Taliban and Al Qaeda, and how do we go get them. They're saying, or at least some of the people in the room are saying, "Right now, right now is our opportunity to take Saddam." Shadowy figures like Al Qaeda, you get them, you don't get them -- we can take this chance now to get [Saddam]. Where is that argument coming from? And how did it happen?

Well, obviously, the case of Wolfowitz and some others, it was an argument they had believed strongly for four or five years -- publicly for four or five years. They were perfectly happy to consistently continue to make it. They've made it before 9/11; they were going to keep on making it afterwards.

Obviously, the sense of the threat, the sense of possible links between dictatorships and terrorist groups was much, much greater after 9/11. But it was Bush [who] rejected the immediate effort to get him to go after [Saddam]. So they believe there really was a serious effort to put Iraq way up there with Afghanistan as a priority.

In December of 2001, the first series of pieces [by Bob Woodward] appeared in *The Washington Post*, which later became the basis for the book. And in those pieces, there's a description of Wolfowitz trying to make the case for going after Saddam at Camp David, and Powell rolling his eyes, I think, to then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Shelton. ...

The conventional wisdom in Washington, at least in December 2001, was that Wolfowitz had lost, that Powell had mostly won, that we had done Afghanistan and we would take a fresh look at Iraq policy and other things. But it wasn't at all clear that Cheney and Rice had swung over as decisively as they had, and it wasn't at all clear that Bush had swung over as decisively as he had. We now forget how big a deal the State of the Union speech was, and how much it turns out Bush had privately made certain decisions that he had not communicated publicly at that point.

From that moment, do you know the Bush Doctrine exists, and it's the kind of thing you had on your wish list for a long time?

I wrote a piece in the *Post* two days after the State of the Union, saying -- I can't remember exactly -- something like, "We've just been present at a very unusual moment, the creation of a new American foreign policy." So yes, I thought this was a very big deal. ... It took a while for people to catch on to how big a deal the State of the Union was. It wasn't just a speechwriter throwing in the "axis of evil" phrase; he really had a notion of American foreign policy that was going to drive policy. It wasn't just a matter of speeches.

Did you know at that moment that Iraq was in the gun sights, crosshairs?

Yes. There's no point saying "axis of evil," saying, "dictators developing weapons of mass destruction," if you weren't going to begin to do something about them. And of the three nations that were mentioned, Iraq was the obvious candidate for going after first.

So the process, if you're president of the United States, or if you're Paul Wolfowitz, or if you're William Kristol, is to begin to what, educate the American people about why we're going? What happens next then?

If you're president, two things have to happen. You have to get your own internal mechanisms of government working, and that takes a while. It took a while, and there have been various hiccups there. But in retrospect, Bush, clearly, and Rumsfeld, in particular, have spent a year getting the Pentagon geared up to do this very major thing.

It's really about educating the public right. You have to move ahead and explain why it's a new world.

Bush gives the West Point speech on June 1, and they put out the National Security [Strategy] in September, I think. ... But basically they've done a pretty good job of trying to explain to the American people and to the world that it really is a new moment.

I think, deep down, Bush's view of the world is that the post-Cold War decade of the 1990s, a decade of peace and prosperity -- that decade ended on Sept. 11, 2001. We're not at peace, and we may not, unfortunately, have quite as much prosperity as we thought we had. It's a new moment. That, I think, is a very deep belief of Bush. It's certain that he now thinks this is what will shape his presidency, and the success or failure in this war is that by which his presidency will be judged.

In his 2000 acceptance speech in August at the convention in Philadelphia, Bush said something like, "You know, our parents' generation faced these great challenges, the Nazis and communism," obviously thinking of his father. "You know, we face more modest challenges, but they're very important also." That sort of introduced the discussion of education and faith-based initiatives, a more caring and compassionate society. And one forgets how much the 2000 campaign was all about that, of course.

In September 2001, Sept. 20, when he spoke to Congress, Bush said something like, "In our anger and in our grief, we have found our mission and our moment." He's speaking for the country, and it's an eloquent line. But he's really speaking about himself, too. I do think shortly after Sept. 11, George Bush decided compassionate conservatism was important -- I believe in it, faith-based initiative, education, that's all very nice -- but my mission and my moment is winning the war on terror, and at least beginning to deal with the problem of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Okay, so across that spring, that summer, clearly the West Point speech, there seems to be this momentum going, and along comes Brent Scowcroft's piece in *The Washington Post*. What was that all about? Did it really knock them off their slats? Was it momentous at all? And if it was, why?

Well, this is an administration that combines an impressive sort of discipline, and a sense of where they're going in the big picture, with a certain ad hoc character in the tactics. So they sort of know where they're going, ultimately, but I'm not sure they've always figured out exactly how to get there. That was certainly true in late summer when there were big debates on whether to go to the U.N. and all of that. ...

I don't think Bush will be constrained by the U.N., and I don't think he feels he needs U.N. acceptance. But to not even try to get U.N. support was always a reach, and always probably something Bush was not going to do. It didn't hurt to tell people ahead of time, on the other hand, that we don't need U.N. support -- that we're considering not going to the U.N.

So I think a lot of that was sort of a kabuki dance by Bush and Cheney. They felt, correctly, that they would have a much better chance of getting U.N. and congressional support if they made it clear that they didn't feel they needed U.N. support, and they put a huge amount of pressure on the U.N. to support that. They can go to Congress and say, "See, we have gone to the U.N. Give us our authorization."

I mean, I don't think it was a done deal that they were going to go to Congress before the election. I certainly urged it publicly, and others had, as well. But I think the president, in thinking through the timetable, decided his best shot was to go give the U.N. speech,

make clear that we were going to at least try to work with the U.N., and then go to Congress and say, "Look, I want this authorization now." Then come back to the U.N. with a congressional authorization and say, "Hey, I've got a congressional authorization. We're doing this either way, frankly, but we most prefer to do it with the U.N. Security Council." And he wins the U.N. Security Council vote.

How much of that is Powell's formidable -- internal, in the Oval Office -- arguing and debating skills?

I don't know. I think Powell wins a lot of technical arguments, as he should. He's the one who talks to all the allies, and to some not-so-allies, as well; you've got to care about those if you're president of the United States. But I would still say it's ultimately Powell's tactics in the service of Bush's and Cheney's and Rumsfeld's and Wolfowitz's ends, that we're going to have used effectively, and I hope, won a fair amount of support by going through the U.N. But it's ultimately for a cause that Powell doesn't believe in, and a route that Powell wouldn't have recommended. ...

I guess my general view of this administration is that we all like talking about Rumsfeld and Powell. It's very interesting. They're both impressive and formidable figures, and it's not often that you get a clash at this level between secretary of defense and secretary of state. It's fun to report.

But if you ask me, if I can go make a case for just a couple of people in the administration about something I really care about, foreign policy, who would I make it to? I wouldn't make it to either the secretary of state or the secretary of defense. I'd go talk to Dick Cheney, to Condi Rice. I think a huge amount of Bush's own decision making is made [in] very small groups in the White House. Two people he immediately trusts in the White House on these kinds of matters are Cheney and Rice.

Bush respects Powell and Rumsfeld. He uses them. He listens to them, what they have to say. But I think Cheney and Rice are the key advisers to Bush.

And who do Cheney and Rice trust?

They're both very cautious, and keep a lot of their own thoughts to themselves.

They seem to be listening to your pals now.

Well, a little bit more. ... Bob [Kagan and I] edited a book called *Present Dangers*. It came out in October 2000. At the time, it seemed alarmist; the world didn't seem that dangerous. The book should have been called *Present Opportunities*, not *Present Dangers*, many people would have said. Maybe it turned out after Sept. 11 that a point of view that sees the dangers of a world that lacks American leadership, and where America withdraws and steps back -- that is just too dangerous to put up with. I do think Cheney and Rice really came to that view pretty quickly after Sept. 11.

Can [Bush] walk back now from this?

Well, you can, and one could speculate about ways in which he could. But I think he's pretty determined to remove Saddam Hussein one way or the other. Having said what he

has said, I don't think Bush could say his presidency succeeded if Saddam Hussein were in power, and it was not absolutely clear that he had been stripped of all weapons of mass destruction and crippled from rebuilding. In fact that condition of Saddam's staying in power, but stripped of the ability to build any weapons of mass destruction, is not really a plausible condition. The upshot of that is that Saddam has to go.

The notion of taking Iraq as a kind of demonstration project, as part and parcel of a secondary goal, remaking the Middle East, planting democracy ... and that all of that is part and parcel of the doctrines articulated by Wolfowitz et al -- your sense of the logic of this?

The case for removing Saddam stands on its own. ... [The] great danger is in his ability to develop and use weapons of mass destruction. Having said that, I do think Bush also went beyond the particular case of Iraq in his thinking after Sept. 11. The way I would reconstruct his thought process might be something like this:

If he really looked to the Middle East, and he said, "Look, we live in the 21st century in a world in which the Middle East continues on the path it's been on for the last 10, or 20 years; which, despite all of our good efforts on the Arab/Israeli peace process, and despite our close, or allegedly close relations with the Saudi ... and Egyptian governments, the big picture story in the Middle East has been increased extremism, increased anti-Americanism, increased support for terrorism, dictators developing weapons of mass destruction. And you can't just sit back and let that go on."

And I think Bush has made the fundamental decision, therefore, that in addition to Iraq, which is the most immediate danger, we need to rethink our general Middle East policy and get serious about trying, with all the limitations that, obviously, one has to accept, about beginning to remake the Middle East.

Now, I don't think the administration has thought through all the implications of that; so they don't really want to see all the implications for now; this is too daunting. What does it say about our relations with the Saudis over the long run? But I do think the administration is committed, and Bush personally has a sense that he can't just sit back and let it go the way it was going. We tried that. We made good faith efforts on the Arab/Israeli peace process in the 90s. We made good faith efforts in all kinds of ways to help the Middle Eastern countries in the 90s. But, we weren't serious about fighting terrorism, didn't crack down at all on the export of extremist Islam. We've seen the dictators developing weapons of mass destruction and getting away with it. And the effect of that was really disastrous. That has to be reversed.

Is this bigger than that, though? ...

It's bigger than Iraq, and it's bigger than the Middle East, though the Middle East is an extremely important and dangerous part of the world. We would all sleep much better if we at least had it moving in a healthy direction over the next 10 years, rather than in the direction it's been moving in.

But as we see now with North Korea, of course, East Asia is a huge problem. Again, when we look back in retrospect, look at the fact that Pakistan went nuclear -- none of us really paid any attention. Clinton didn't pay much attention. Republicans didn't pay much attention. We didn't pay that much attention [at] *The Weekly Standard*. And the implications of having Pakistan as a nuclear power, dealing with China and North Korea, almost the collapse of the [nonproliferation] regime in the late 1990s. Now the price we're

paying for that with North Korea, we need to try to get serious about that. That's also a very daunting challenge in East Asia. So, no, it's a very, very big challenge. Bush has put us on the road to dealing with it, which is very much to his credit.

I'm not sure that even the Bush administration has quite faced up to how big a challenge it is, and I don't blame him. I think governments don't like to think -- you know, they want to do one thing at a time, and they'd like to think that things can be done in bite-sized chunks. ... So you don't necessarily want to think about the fact that when you finish Iraq, you've got North Korea to deal with; you've got defense needs to deal with; you have a very problematic situation in Pakistan to deal with, and what's happening in Venezuela.

I mean, the world is a mess. And I think it's very much to Bush's credit that he's gotten serious about dealing with it. But Iraq's not going to be the end of it. ...

Obviously, there are exercises of American power that could be unwise, and where we could be too hasty, and we could be hubristic. We're against that. ... But on the biggest question, is the great danger too little an exercise, too mean an exercise of American power, or too great, too forward-leaning an exercise of American power? I think that's an easy question to answer. The danger is American withdrawal, American timidity, American slowness. ... The danger is not that we're going to do too much. The danger is that we're going to do too little. ...

I think when historians look at the last several decades, they'll say there was the Cold War period from the late 1940s to 1989 or 1991. There was the 1990s, the decade of peace and prosperity. And then there's now the post-9/11 period; we'll see what it gets called. But it is a new moment, and Bush believes it's a new moment.

Obviously, it's utterly indeterminate how it's going to turn out. But one can imagine an unbelievably dangerous world five, 10, 15 years from now, or one can imagine a much more hopeful world. An awful lot of it depends on what the U.S. does, and how successful America is. And that, in turn, depends on what the Bush administration does, and how successful George W. Bush is.

One of the things that really strikes me is -- it's one of these ironies of history and it happens, I guess quite often, it happened to Harry Truman -- George W. Bush runs to be a domestic policy president, compassionate conservative, and now he's going to be judged by history for his vision and his execution of foreign policy, something he hadn't particularly prepared for, and certainly didn't expect.

It's very much to his credit that on Sept. 11, very quickly, very quickly after Sept. 11, he came to that understanding. I don't think it was quite as inevitable as it now seems that he would understand that this was the defining moment of his presidency, and perhaps of American history for the next 10 to 20 years. But he came to that conclusion very quickly.

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