



PROJECT *on* Middle East Democracy

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Wilson International Center for Scholars
An American Grand Strategy for the New Era
1300 Pennsylvania Ave NW, 25 September 2008, 4pm

The Wilson Center hosted **Stephen Van Evera**, Ford International Professor of Political Science at MIT; **Robert Kagan**, Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; **Melvyn Leffler**, Edward R. Stettinius Professor of History at the University of Virginia; and **Jeffrey Legro**, Compton Professor of World Politics at the University of Virginia, to discuss the new anthology, *To Lead the World: American Strategy After the Bush Doctrine*. The event was moderated by **Robert Litwak**, Director of International Security Studies at the Wilson Center.

Melvyn Leffler, co-editor of the book along with Jeffrey Legro, explained that the various chapter authors were asked to write a basic national security paper for the incoming president. They were to identify threats and specify foreign policy goals, and assign priorities to each. He stressed the importance of creating a hierarchy of national security threats and challenges, as the solutions all have wildly divergent resource and strategy implications.

Steve Van Evera began by noting the urgent need for a new foreign policy strategy to match the threats of the 21st century. He said the model for today's international system is 1815, when the five great world powers agreed that the biggest threat to their regimes was revolution from below, rather than from traditional international conquest. They formed the Concert of Europe and agreed to suppress revolution anywhere in Europe. **Van Evera said the same situation applies today, as the threat from other great powers is very small, and threats from below—in the form of WMD and terror—present the largest national security challenge to major nations. He said we are losing the fight to limit both proliferation and control of WMD, and the coming advances in bioscience will give vast potential power to small groups and individuals.** He also discussed the relatively new phenomenon of terror groups which combine religious millenarian doctrines with political ideology to seek killing on a massive scale.

He said that securing cooperation among the major states against these threats is easy due to the absence of serious points of conflict between them. It is also necessary, because no current international problem can be solved unilaterally. **Van Evera believes the traditional era of great-power competition is over because of the levelling effect of the nuclear threat.** He noted that any nation that is serious about maintaining a deterrent cannot be conquered. Further, today's knowledge-based global economies cannot be appropriated through invasion and occupation in the way industrial economies of the 20th century could.

Van Evera called for the formation of another global concert of great nations, focused on East Asia, Europe, and MENA, to contain the threat of terrorism, WMD proliferation, as well as to manage global commons issues such as energy and climate change. He urged the

U.S. to build its global legitimacy by avoiding preventive wars, seeking alliances for engagements abroad, and to make peace, or at least conciliation, among the major states of the world. He said the U.S. should allow for a traditional regional sphere of influence for Russia and China. He ended by noting that the domestic impediments to his idea are very strong, and probably decisively so.

Robert Kagan disagreed with Van Evera's characterization, and noted that it is not a common world view that the overriding international threat is terrorism and WMD. **He said the prevention of terrorist attacks will be a priority for the new president, but it is not a sufficient organizing paradigm for U.S. foreign policy strategy.** He sees in the world the return of a very traditional great-power competition model. **National tactics are once again governed by revanchist ambition, pride, resentment, and jealousy. He said the great powers all have their own sets of interests and threat priorities, and they often conflict with those of other nations.**

Kagan said the problem is we have no shared understanding of what the international system should look like, or how humans should organize themselves politically. **The U.S. can no longer convince other great powers that all of our interests are shared, and what is good for America is good for the world. He said that each power will look at each discrete world problem and calculate its best move, irrespective of any appeal to our common shared interests.**

Kagan noted that the 1815 Concert of Europe split because of subsequent tensions between the democratic and autocratic states, and such tensions still govern international relations. **He said we will continue to have complicated relationships with the other powers on multiple levels, working in concert on some issues and in conflict on others.** There is no easy solution in a grand confrontation or a grand alliance.

Jeffrey Legro then discussed the points of consensus between all the book's contributors. These include the desirability of U.S. world leadership, U.S. military superiority, an open global economic system, and international collaboration. **All agreed that the promotion of liberal values and democratic ideals is imperative. He noted that all countries at least mimic a democratic performance, and most accept in theory the supremacy and legitimacy of liberal democracy. He said that U.S. public support for democracy promotion is not great, largely because it is identified with the war in Iraq.**

Legro then listed the major points of disagreement between the contributors. These include the differing prioritizing of threats, the importance of U.S. standing in the world, the type of international institutions needed, and the role of the U.S. military. **He said there was broad disagreement on the urgency of spreading democracy and freedom. The book contributors differ on how fast to move and which aspects of democracy to emphasize. Though they agree on its desirability, they differ on its place of importance in a new national security strategy.**