

# The Middle East in U.S. Global Strategy (full transcript)

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In-Depth Reports

**O**n May 19, 2000, Leon Fuerth, national security adviser to Vice President Al Gore, and Robert Zoellick, a foreign policy adviser to Texas governor George W. Bush, jointly addressed The Washington Institute's annual Soref Symposium. The following is a full transcript of their discussion. Read an [edited transcript \(templateC07.php?CID=177\)](#) or a [summary \(templateC05.php?CID=1340\)](#).

ROBERT SATLOFF: This is a special occasion for us. We are very honored and delighted that Leon and Bob would join us for this, which is really a conversation, a conversation between two eminent practitioners of foreign policy. I don't think we could have two finer representatives of these presidential camps. I know that what Bob is saying is not the words of George W. Bush, and perhaps what Leon is saying is not necessarily the words of Al Gore. But I think it's important now that we are entering the general election campaign, even this moment before the conventions, that we can begin to talk seriously about foreign policy. And for that I am thankful to both our speakers.

This is a conversation; this is not a debate. The idea here is for both of these gentlemen to engage each other and with you about the priorities in the Middle East for America and where the Middle East fits in America's global agenda.

So let me begin with that. Leon, where does the Middle East--where do Middle East issues--rank on the order of American national security priorities?

LEON FUERTH: I think they rank close to the core. I believe that in many ways we are still disentangling ourselves from recollections of the Cold War. And those of us who lived through it still--every once in a while--slip and say "Soviet Union" when we mean Russia. And in our minds there is still a map where the center of the world is the Fulda Gap in Europe. But that's gone. And if you ask where might the center of the world be in the 21st century, a not unreasonable answer would be "in the Middle East." You could place other coordinates there, but certainly the Middle East is going to be way up there. Why is that?

First of all, for the obvious reason that it is still a flashpoint for war. Clearly no longer, at least for the time being, a flashpoint for war between ourselves and the Russians, but definitely a flashpoint for war between the regional combatants. And until that's settled, our security interests will never be entirely straight in the area. It attracts our attention because of our relationship with Israel. That is a relationship that is not based on economics but on shared values and principles. It also attracts our attention because of resources. That's too obvious really to go into. It also attracts our attention because therein is the Arab world, and in the future of our relationship with the Arab world as a whole there is much that affects the destiny of the United States. This is, after all, a world full of people who are struggling to reclaim a sense of place and glory in the world, who have great talents, great energies, and who in Pakistan have nuclear weapons unfortunately, and through whose territories crisscross the paths of many of the most dangerous terrorists in the world. So for all these reasons I think you can safely place the Middle East if not necessarily at the top of the list, but coequal with one or two others at the top of the list.

SATLOFF: Bob, would you agree with that?

ROBERT ZOELLICK: Generally. I think the part that I would think is most important is to have priorities. And one of the points that Governor Bush made at his speech at the Ronald Reagan Library is the vital aspect of the United States deciding with all its power what it is going to focus its energy on, and have some sense of strategic interconnection. At the start of that speech he focused on identifying five priorities, and one of them was to defend America's interests in the Persian Gulf, to try to advance the process of peace in the Middle East based on a secure Israel. And in that one sentence I think there are a number of points, some of which overlap with what Leon said. For different reasons we have different interests in different countries in the region. In the case of Israel it is moral, it's philosophical, it's democratic as well as security.

There are other countries like Saudi Arabia where the United States may not be in sympathy with the form of government, but for reasons of energy and for reasons of security against threatening states, we have various security commitments. Other countries like Jordan, we're partly related to Israel's security and partly related to a sense of cooperation against other more risky states.

And then there's the danger that in this region that is perhaps most forthright of all, which is weapons of mass destruction and missiles. And so I think in all those respects there are a series of U.S. interests that come together.

Now, where perhaps we may or may not differ--these may differ a little bit on analysis--is how those are integrated and sit together. In my view, the U.S. position with Iraq has been substantially weak, and I think the coalition has basically come apart. I think the Gulf States are looking for leadership. I think in the case of China and Russia and their relation to this issue that we have not been emphasizing enough the role that they could play constructively. In Iran we are at a point of flux. I am somewhat concerned about whether our policy is taking the right steps on weapons of mass destruction. I know Leon has personally been interested in this. So for a number of reasons I think the question is not just talking about a priority, but how you integrate your policies. And on this I was struck by some excerpts of something I saw not long ago that the former Israeli ambassador to the United Nations made about-- comments about the "strategic envelope" of the Gulf for the Middle East in terms of the peace process, and how these issues affect one another. So while I think--at least I hope--we probably have a general agreement about the nature of the Middle East peace process and the need for these decisions to try to promote peace based on Israel's own sense of security and ultimately Israel's own decisions, perhaps where there may be some differences is in the question of the overall environment and what this does to U.S. power and imagery and influence.

SATLOFF: Leon, do you want to add to that?

FUERTH: I think our assessments are quite similar when it comes to identifying the reasons for attributing immense significance to the Middle East. And we also agree that Iraq and Iran represent X factors. Iraq because it is coiled and looking for a way to escape the containment in which Saddam Husayn finds himself; Iran because it is deeply conflicted and presently unstable perhaps, and in any event involved with terrorist groups who operate in the rejectionist mode and who may yet spill blood in Lebanon in their effort to foil a peace accommodation and to interfere with an orderly Israeli withdrawal.

With respect to Saddam Husayn, I think we have come to the same understanding, which is, so long as he is in power he is a menace. He is, however, to be fair, a legacy bequeathed to us by the last Bush administration, which had a sword at his throat at the end of the Gulf War but elected not to use it. Now, once there was a peace, and once we moved onto the post-Cold War period, there were many constraints upon our freedom of action, things which I think all of us, both of us as practitioners, understand in terms of the attitudes of the other members of the coalition, the attitudes of countries in the region upon whose cooperation we depend, for example the Saudis. These things have tended to place some limits on the extent to which we might otherwise exercise power.

So we have said we look forward to the time when the people of Iraq are free of Saddam Husayn, and we have said

that, at that moment, Iraq's relations with the United States would begin to change for the better. We have continued to maintain the box in which they are--we fly missions, we attack them when they attack us. We struggle with some of our best friends to maintain the sanctions. And we have also begun to work more and more closely with the Iraqi opposition as an administration. And I know the vice president has written to the opposition recently saying that he looks forward to meeting with them, and we are working on that, given the need to get the men from where they are and the need to get him in the same place at the same time. But it will happen before much longer.

With Saddam Husayn the issue will be settled in time with persistence and determination. He is well hedged in terms of the protection of his position and power. It would take an unusually cruel assault on Iraq as a whole to dislodge him by use of pure military force. So we will have to bide our time and work toward circumstances in which in my opinion he ultimately conspires to bring about his own downfall. But I think we do agree that the peace is not safe while he is still in power.

As for Iran, as all of you have been following this know, there is a special moment in the history of that country where one does not know from one day to the next whether the forces of repression are going to attempt to frustrate the will of the people, which has been so clearly expressed in their last election, and whether the patience of the students will break, bringing them out into the streets and provoking a showdown and the spilling of blood. So it is really a time for intense scrutiny. We have tried to prime the pump with actions we recently took. The ball is in their court. Now we have to see what happens.

SATLOFF: I would like to pursue a couple of the items that were brought up in some depth. Leon just noted on Iraq for example that both the Bush and the Clinton administrations tried different strategies, different ways to deal with Saddam Husayn, but he is still there, and that it will take time, persistence and determination to out-wait him, until he makes the big enough mistake that will eventually lead to his downfall. Do you agree with that, or is there some new and better strategy that is out there for the United States to try in dealing with Saddam?

ZOELLICK: First, I wish that, after seven years in office, the administration would finally take responsibility for its own foreign policy instead of blaming it on us. I very rarely hear them refer to things like the end of the Soviet Union and freedom of Eastern Europe and other things that they also inherited--NAFTA or the Uruguay Round, a whole series of things. But the basic fact is our policy toward Iraq has been a debacle. The coalition--and everybody in this room knows it--is almost gone, if it isn't gone. The inspectors are out, and have been out for 18 months. The sanctions regime is barely existing. It is totally frayed. Don't take my word for it; take the Clinton administration CIA Director Deutch's word back in 1996, that said Saddam Husayn has gotten stronger over time.

Now, if our policy is going to be to wait and see and wait out, I am afraid I don't like the trend line, because what I saw was a policy where Saddam Husayn kept taking steps to strengthen himself, and he kept getting more and more ground. In 1993 he --

SATLOFF: Well, what's the alternative?

ZOELLICK: I will come to the alternative, but I first want to outline what I think have been the flaws in the policy, because to understand the alternative you have to understand what was done wrong. And there was a lot done wrong. Leon went on for a little bit on this, so will I.

In 1993, Saddam Husayn tried to assassinate President Bush, and there were a few lousy cruise missiles sent in the middle of the night. In 1994, he moves forces to the South. You want to know what I would have done differently? I wouldn't have just met forces; I would have taken out his forces. Because instead, the imagery that was sent in the region was that he could move and he would come out stronger.

Leon refers to a letter that Vice President Gore has sent to the opposition. He sent letters to the Kurdish opposition as well--until 1996, when they got wiped out. That had major effects in terms of people's sense of our role in the region.

Then we started this whole circus about the inspection regime, with the event in Columbus, Ohio, which if anybody would have seen was an embarrassment for the United States in terms of use of force. And then, secondly, we actually have aircraft in process--and I don't know, perhaps I read the vice president was for having them actually deliver their attack; but then they get pulled back in the process, which is an embarrassment. We have the secretary of defense hold up a bag of sugar, and say that this amount of biological weapons could destroy large amounts of people, and therefore we have to take it out, and we didn't.

Now, we have now been left in a situation--I'll tell you the legacy, whoever gets elected, whether Vice President Gore or Governor Bush, where people in the region are starting to make plans on their own--and our allies are starting to make plans on their own, and the Russians are going ahead--because they are assuming at the end of the day Saddam Husayn will be around. That is, I think, the risk of the policy that Leon outlined.

So, the direction you have to go--you have to reverse the momentum. This is not going to happen overnight, but it is going to have to be done with an administration that has some sense of power, has some sense of reliability, and some sense of credibility. And that is where these things around the world actually fit together.

The Iraqi opposition are part of this. Everybody knows they're weak, everybody knows they're divided. But they are going to have to get some substantial political support. Congress, over the objections of the administration, allocated about \$97 million in 1998; \$5 million of that has been drawn; \$60,000 has been spent. That doesn't exactly strike me as an overwhelming force. But beyond that, I think the reality is at some point we know Saddam Husayn will move further. And at that point, as opposed to letting him get an additional step, I think for one step forward he has to get two steps back. And what does that mean to me? To me it means that we eventually have to undermine his position within his own country, also with the Russians and French and others who think that he is going to be there at the end of the day. And that means slowly taking away pieces of his territory. And we have started to do that in the North. I believe we could do that in the South. I believe that in part this involves air power--it might involve more.

But the danger is--and there was a report in the London Sunday Times about this, about a defector that talked about chemical weapons and a chemical weapons exercise. If you wait and this guy gets chemical weapons, we have seen--or if he has them now, and he marries them with missiles--we have seen what this man is about. And that's where the danger lies in a wait-and-see strategy.

SATLOFF: Yes, Leon?

FUERTH: Well, it's easy to see what you have been practicing.

ZOELLICK: No, I've been thinking --

FUERTH: Let's go back over the realities. I am sorry you don't like the exchange rate that we figured out for former President Bush and the number of cruise missiles. But the number of cruise missiles we sent demolished a portion of their intelligence establishment, and we thought that was a clear enough message--perhaps you would have wanted total war.

The realities are as follows, folks. There is no country upon whom we depend for access to that region that wants us to undertake the kind of approach just described. The reality is that the members of our coalition are not prepared, and have not been prepared, to support the levels of violence that are implied by your comments. So you do diplomacy sometimes, and you do foreign policy sometimes within the limits of what you can engineer. And together we have gotten out of friends and allies, we have applied maximum torque. And when you get to the point where you sense that anything further will damage the position of the United States and enhance Saddam Husayn's running room, then you call it a day, you take what you can get, and you do what you can with it. That doesn't satisfy us, but it is the reality.

I can tell you that there are certain moves that he could have made that might well have brought us in looking for much more severe consequences. He has been clever enough to avoid taking those steps. And we have been intelligent enough to avoid letting him provoke us into a posture that leaves us isolated and us the focus of censure.

As for the Kurdish opposition, I notice an old friend of mine in the room--I am hesitant to address you by name--but it seems to me that the Kurds are alive and well, and in large part because of things that we have been doing consistently in the area as close partners.

Now, how to get rid of this guy.

SATLOFF: Not the guy in the room?

FUERTH: No--(laughter)--not the guy in the room--he is a colleague, and we are talking about a legitimate range of difference over a very tough issue. Ultimately Saddam Husayn is going to make a mistake. He is going to make a mistake that plays into our hands. The art of it will be to be poised, to respond to that mistake when it occurs, because that mistake will confer upon us the legitimate right to deal with him. Possibly the Iraqi opposition will be in a position to help that process along, but they are far from being internally united, far from being in a position to effectively use all of the money that the Congress made available, far more prone to attacking each other and to concentrating on how to deal with their common enemy. So we are working with them, trying to encourage them to unite and to focus on what needs to be done. And we have begun to use some of these funds. But we need to see that they are ready to employ them with a degree of wisdom. And we are encouraging that.

SATLOFF: Can I ask, Bob, just to conclude with this group of questions that focus on Iraq, you implied in your answer to a question the use of air power and something more. Almost all simulations that I have played or been involved with on Iraq, when you go down that route you have to at least be willing to entertain the possibility of U.S. forces to finish the job. Is this something worth U.S. fighting over? Should we be sending troops back to finish the job in Iraq?

ZOELLICK: Well, let me both try to answer your question and Leon's point--and this may be--it is a good point to draw it together, because it may show a difference of view.

I believe very much you need to shape your environment. I believe there is a record where frankly I've seen that happen in the Middle East, I've seen it happen in Europe, I've seen it happen in Asia. And while I understand that there are limitations that even a country as powerful enough as the United States faces, I do believe that if the United States points in a direction and shows that it is serious, that a lot more can happen than sometimes people think. And that is one reason why I think, as Leon points out, you don't have support in the Gulf. Well, how would you expect to have support in the Gulf after you went through the litany that I just mentioned, because the Saudis today for example are looking to Iran. Why? Because they think Saddam Husayn is going to be around. We all know these are very hard-headed, cold-blooded, practical people. And so in terms of trying to shape the environment--that's why I say that actually I think it would take time to show that your basic position is to reverse the momentum. And as to your specific question, as opposed to allowing him to determine when military force gets used, which is what we are in right now, where he turns on a missile defense site or an air defense site, we strike it.

I believe that at a point where he makes a move that you have to seize control of parts of his territory with air. And to go to your specific example, my own view, we did it in the North with a relatively small number of battalions, okay, at the end of the Gulf War, a combination of air power and small battalions, and serious support to the Kurds.

We now have a situation where, frankly, the Kurds have gotten very badly bloody, and right now they too expect their future is going to be very related to Saddam Husayn. Do I think you can turn that around? I believe you could. Would it be easy? No. Does it depend on relationships with the Turks? Of course it does. But I have also had conversations with Turks where, if they believe the United States is serious about this.

Now, I don't mean to underestimate--and Leon is quite right, this is a very critical issue. The reason, however, that it is good that it be brought up in this fashion is that, you see, I believe that this also relates to the world of the Middle East peace process, because I believe that if people in the larger region see U.S. power waning, and they see Saddam Husayn developing weapons of mass destruction, getting further control, they see the Iranians developing weapons of mass destruction, it will inevitably have an influence on the environment that we created with the end of the Gulf War and Cold War, which helped relaunch the Middle East peace process.

Just to give you one story to drive this home, and it is a bipartisan story, in 1990, after the invasion of Kuwait, when Dick Cheney went to see the Saudis, one of the first questions he was asked, when he asked for permission to bring in troops, was, "How many are you going to bring in?" And he said "100,000 troops as a start." And as everybody in this room who knows Prince Bandar--his complexion--he turned completely white, and that is not Prince Bandar's normal complexion. But then he smiled and said, "Well, at least we know that you are serious." And he also said something else. He said, "If this were the United States of the Carter administration that sent F-15s at the time of the Iranian revolution and announced in flight that they were not armed, we wouldn't do this." But in a bipartisan fashion he also said, "If we were the United States of Ronald Reagan that put troops in Lebanon and then decided to pull them out after one engagement, we wouldn't do this too."

So this is where aspects of power and credibility are going to be fundamental for this exercise. And a lot depends if you believe that Saddam Husayn can remain cooped up--in a box, I think, was the phrase Leon used. And what I am urging people to think about is that we often fall into these phrases like "in a box," or "cornered," or so on and so forth. Let's really see the position that they are in. And the position that I think he's in is one where he is getting stronger; the inspectors are gone, and he is going to develop weapons of mass destruction, if he doesn't have them already kept. And I believe that could change a dangerous dynamic, and so I think we have got to take the course that I've outlined.

MR. SATLOFF: Some say there is very little that we in the United States can do to affect the ultimate outcome in the battle between reformers and hardliners. We can affect it on the margins, but the ultimate outcome is among the Iranians themselves.

While all this is going on, Iran is still trying to achieve a nuclear capability. I know you have been very involved in trying to prevent this. But let's think about the next administration. What should the United States do if the Iranians succeed? How would Iranian acquisition of the bomb affect American interests in the Middle East, and what would we do about it?

FUERTH: Their acquisition of a nuclear weapon would have a very serious impact on our position in the area. So it's not just been a question of our concern for the security of Israel, but it's been a concern for our own position in the region that has caused us to try intensely to convince the Russians to take ownership of their policies and their behavior, and to close down the drift of ballistic missile and nuclear technology towards the Iranians.

I am not going to answer your question about what we should do if they get a weapon, because quite frankly since I am not a private citizen, when I leave this room I don't think it would be a responsible thing for me to speculate about that. But I could certainly respond to the first end of your question, which this is not an event that we should be welcoming. I think that the Russians have profoundly bet their own safety and future security upon a mistaken premise. The premise is that they could buy long-term Iranian friendship, and that Iran would not make trouble for Russia in the vulnerable parts of its former range; and that in places like Chechnya Iran would back off; and that they also had common concerns with the Iranians about the Taliban and so on upon which they could concert action.

For that, if you want to call it strategic, reason, I think they have had an interest in making sure that the Iranians felt that Russia would be sympathetic to their requirements.

Their stated policy is flawless. Russia is opposed to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. It is the execution that is the problem. Now, we have worked with them persistently. We have a degree of progress in the area of ballistic missile technology with things left to be done. We have ongoing and serious concerns on the nuclear side. And these are matters that Sandy Berger was pursuing in Moscow, and that the president will pursue when he sees President Vladimir Putin.

In the meantime, there are two other things that we are doing. One of them is to work intensely with Israel on the Arrow anti-missile system in order to put in their hands the means to frustrate delivery systems, not only Iranian but others; and the second is to open the subject of a national missile defense for the United States. And for that purpose we have been prepared to put on the table the entire question of whether or not we shall be able to reach agreement with the Russians on strategic nuclear weapons reductions. It is that important.

So, one of the interesting things to speculate about is if there is a sudden shift in the course of Iranian history as a result of the conflict which is now in a way in front of us. And if it is, the modernizers who win will they eventually work their way out of a frame of mind that insists on pursuing weapons of mass destruction and insists on engaging with state terror, and instead fully rejoin the family of nations with more responsible behavior. They might. One would have to see. And if we see an opening in this direction, one would certainly have to encourage it.

So, to summarize this, we have been working over an extended period of time to awaken the Russians to the risks of what has been going on, to specify actions that we wanted to see from the Russians, to leverage our assets against Russian behavior in this regard. We have varying degrees of success--some of it good, some of it much work to be done. We have worked to hedge this problem through the Arrow system and through the architecture that we are putting forward for national missile defense as a possible response to the problem.

SATLOFF: And the Iran track, is there a different strategy we should be pursuing or how does it fit into our overall sense of priorities vis-à-vis the Russians, which I know is an area of special concern of yours as well?

ZOELLICK: Well, again, I'll try to return to a point that I think is vital for the United States, which is seeing how these inner issues are interconnected.

Our position is made a little bit harder by the fact that we are helping the North Koreans build a nuclear plant that is the same sort of nuclear plant that is being built in Iran. You may not want to get into North Korean policy, but I think that was a mistake.

On the question of Russia, Leon says the right things. What I see in the paper, however, is that President Clinton seems to me to be rushing to try to have a final photo op summit with President Putin. And I am frankly worried about that, not only for this issue but for a series of other issues, because I think both he and Tony Blair are fundamentally misperceiving what sort of person Putin is about. And you don't have to be a genius in terms of looking at Putin's background to understand that this too is a cold person who will focus on his interests. He will try to take it as far as he can, unless he has clear lines of what are the bases for conflict and cooperation. And I don't frankly think we have to be in a rush to embrace them, because he's the weaker party.

Now, I think that the key elements of that more broadly are: Don't mess around with your neighbors, which his neighbors are quite worried about. A second one, and the one that I think is equally important, is support for weapons of mass destruction and missile proliferation. And he is trying to get a hold of his own system--well, this would be a good place to demonstrate where he's got to start. So, I also think--we could get into this if you want--there are some areas where there is potential cooperation with the Russians, but the worst danger we could get with the Russians actually is a repeat of the past where we create an imagery of a good feel, new young leader, going to have a good relationship, and then when the crunch point comes and we hit the wall and all of a sudden we have to react, people say, "Well, gee, we weren't told, or we didn't know." So I honestly think that more broadly this fits into how we

should be dealing with Putin.

The second point, which Leon didn't mention but I would expect would be implicit in his remarks, is allies. I think again this is partly a fact that our allies are somewhat uncertain about Iranian policy. They clearly want to engage Iran for their own economic and other reasons. I believe if the United States put a real focus on a few key areas, like weapons of mass destruction and terrorism, you could get some support. I don't want to overstate how much support you can get, but I think as we get additional intelligence about what the Iranians are developing you could get additional support on that.

I am honestly very pleased that Leon is supporting missile defense. I am glad that he supports the Israeli system. I wish that he and his bosses were a little bit more excited about supporting our systems. And, frankly, I do not understand how the system that they are talking about in Alaska is going to be able to help us in the Mediterranean. That would of course have to deal with the ABM Treaty that allows mobile systems, which of course allows naval systems, which is what most people on my side think might actually be a more effective system for allies as well as for us. But perhaps I am hearing a new point.

I also think--and Leon touched on this--but I do believe it's important for the United States to have contingency options in the event that this goes forward. I am not in a position to know exactly what we could use and what tools that we have to use, but I think we should be making those plans. He's in a different position; he can't say--maybe agrees.

The last point, however, goes to what is going on in Iranian society. And on this one I know there has been a spate of excitement about the transformation in Iran. But actually as I look at it I am a little bit more worried, because it strikes me that the people who are trying to hold back the change are still very much in control of the tools of security influence; and indeed when they are hunting down Muhammad Khatami's own family, to say nothing of the action against Iranian Jews and the anti-Semitism and things, I don't see things moving in such a good direction. What that could suggest to me is that turmoil may build in this society. I do not have confidence that those who want to open up this society are necessarily going to be on the top of that turmoil, because I think that the people in control right now have taken a different path. That might lead the United States also to think about ultimately if it continues in this direction actions that might support ultimate turmoil.

Now, I don't want to go too far, because the Clinton administration apologized for things like this in the past--in Iran and many other places of the world. But I think that this threat, if it is the current regime with a nuclear weapon and missiles, is a very dangerous concern that needs this full range of possibilities.

FUERTH: I like your point about the interconnection of things. It's important. It's also useful, since it appears to permit you to hopscotch out of one subject into another. But that is the way in which the world was organized--one thing does relate to another.

So let me begin back one step and then do a little hopscotch of my own. An interesting and artistic point about North Korea--the Russians have made that point to us. They said, why should we not sell the very same kind of technology to Iran that you are preparing to provide to the North Koreans? And our answer is that the reactor that we are preparing to provide for North Korea is part of a deal to stop their nuclear weapons program while the reactor that you Russians are building in Iran is a part of their effort to create a nuclear weapons program, and therefore it makes all the difference in the world. We are attempting to stop an extremely dangerous development, and you are abetting it.

Now--this of course lands us squarely in the domain of Russian policy on this and many other matters, and the nature of our relationship with them. I really don't think that President Clinton is interested in a last hurrah so much as he is interested in attempting to do something solid in the interest of the United States in the time that remains in

his administration. But given the fact that we have a new president of Russia who is vigorous and who is going to be around for quite a while by every indication, it is clear that our president should meet with him; and it is clear that he should try to establish what the horizon line might be for what can be accomplished. And that is what is taking place. But there isn't going to be a grab here for effect. There will be a look for solid accomplishment.

Now, the interesting question about Russia really is where Putin will take her. And I suspect we have a similar concern here, and that is it's not clear that President Putin's desire to restore respect for the Russian state and his interest in starting a genuine economic rebirth in Russia are compatible. We know that genuine economic growth goes hand in hand with political freedom. It remains to be seen, as his design for economic growth appears, whether that design will be thorough or whether it will be marred by a resort to state methods.

Our sense is that there is reason for concern because of his background; but, on the other hand, in every contact that we have with him or that has been reported to us, he appears to be a fast learner on a steep learning curve, who may well reach conclusions that are not typical of the experiences of his youth. And we just have to wait--and not just wait, we have got to open a gate. We have to see what we can do that's reasonable and prudent if the Russians are interested in our assistance at this stage of the game. That's why this meeting is taking place. That's why we are still having working-level discussions about simple things, but important things for the future of the Russian economy and its relationship to the West. That's why we are talking to them about the details of that relationship, like their tax code, their land laws, their legal treaties with the United States--a thousand details that are still unfinished after all this time because of the turmoil in Russia, which might be put in place by Putin if he decides on his priorities, and which would leave in position a better platform for designing U.S.-Russian relations, regardless of who wins the election.

I think where we might differ on the question of Russia is over the question of aspirations. From the beginning, from the very first days in the administration, we thought we had a once in a thousand years opportunity. That opportunity was that the Russians themselves were trying to do something without precedence in their own history: they were attempting to become a democratic state, well governed and market-oriented. And if that happened then the course of all history would be changed, and we thought the probability of this was hard to reckon. Our ability to influence it is never going to be more than at the margins.

So should we stay on the sidelines and play it safe and see what happens, or should we get in there and see how much we can get done? We opted to get in there and see how much could get done, on the simple basis that if we played it safe and stayed on the sidelines, with our hands in our pockets, then in later years we might have much to regret. So we have gone after accomplishments. I think we have quite a few. And it's on the basis of that interaction with them over these years that we have the standing to go in and say, "We need for you to take action against your enterprises that are engaged in proliferation. We are asking you to take definitive steps that are observable to end this problem. We have a list of particulars which we will share with you, and we want to see follow up on these problems." It's standing, and we are using it for everything we can do with it.

ZOELLICK: Can I --

SATLOFF: Sure, also I wanted--before we go to Q&A I wanted to get back to one--the Middle East--internal Middle East issue. But go ahead, Bob --

ZOELLICK: I'll be brief--because there is a pattern here, and it may represent a difference, and I have heard this in some of Vice President Gore's comments. It's kind of "you're isolationist or you're internationalist, you are black or white." And let's just take a couple of these. Leon said that the choice was to send a cruise missile in the middle of night to one intelligence building or to go to total war. I really suspect there was something in between in terms of use of force.

Leon talks about the fact that we are going to--he has the North Korean regime, by having this plant, that they won't develop nuclear weapons. There might be something in between having the plant and not stopping them developing nuclear weapons. They may actually have some nuclear weapons now, and I wish I had more confidence in the nature of the North Korean regime. My worry actually in the case of North Korea is again--I'm sorry, Leon, if integration is the trouble--it's the way I think, and it is probably not a bad way in thinking about foreign policy--I worry that in the case of North Korea we created the dynamic where every time they make a threat we respond, and at some point this dynamic is going to come to a point where we don't respond, and will they know it? So it actually could lead to a more dangerous point.

Leon talks about aspirations for Russia. I think we all had aspirations for Russia. But where did your policy lead? We have a Russia that is today frustrated, resentful, humiliated, distrustful. That's a reality. Now, we could debate how that happened and whether there might have been different courses. And, you know, I understand none of these are easy. I do have some criticism about how the administration approaches aspirations. My point is that today of course one would like to see Russia move in further the direction of democracy. I don't really see that happening when he's cracking down on media, most newspapers. I don't see it in his most recent statements against central authority. And I think we have to be very careful that his attack on corruption, which we all know is a cancer in the society, and you would know from the work with the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission, is something that if you try to attack corruption without having a rule of law in a system it could easily slip into attack on enemies of Putin or enemies of the state. And so this notion of "Well, there is one way or there is no way"--I just think is not a very practical approach to this.

Now, in terms of the final part with Russia, on the question of Iran, you make a very strong case about how the relationship you develop with Russian leaders gives you the ability to accomplish things. So accomplish them. Stop the flow of things to Iran. Stop the flow of missiles and nuclear technology. But you kind of can't have that one both ways. If you have sacrificed to develop this good relationship, well then use it, because I think we probably agree that there is still information and resources and dangerous aspects of a proliferation program going to Iran.

SATLOFF: One minute, and then I want to get into the peace process for a quick moment.

FUERTH: By the way, it wasn't one cruise missile. I know the number is classified, but it was one hell of a barrage. But I digress.

It seems to me that the defining characteristic of your approach is an assertion that it is based on greater realism. I don't happen to think so. I happen to think it's based on greater pessimism, and on the pessimism which you might argue is based on the facts but which I would say tends to shape your fundamental attitudes toward the facts and toward the range of options that is appropriate for the United States government to undertake.

We have felt that we were in a period when fundamental changes might be accomplished in the world. We have come close to peace in Ireland because of that attitude. But for an assassin's bullet, we might be much closer to peace in the Middle East. And we are again painfully close to a possibility of peace in the Middle East because of that attitude.

We have engaged problems, and engaged problems we selected because we believed that they were pertinent to American interests and principles--and we can debate that. It's just so we can expand the topic limitlessly beyond the framework of this discussion.

Returning to the Middle East, we see the painful choices that Israel is confronted with making. Our record in the region is I think matchless in terms of our support for the state of Israel, and not just under Barak and not just under Netanyahu and not just under Peres, but under Rabin. And we did that because we accepted as an axiom that the security of this state said something about our own definition about who we are, in addition to any reasoning that we

can make about how it affected our material interests in the world. And we have acted on that, and we can be counted upon to continue to act upon it.

If we don't quite make a peace, then it falls to the next administration, whichever, to pick up the process. If we do make a peace, it falls to the next administration to have the imagination to figure out how to build on that, how to take it beyond signed pieces of paper to a reality. And that will require that you have aspirations, and those aspirations always will open you up to criticism, because you never will be able to quite attain the limit of what you try to do. But you should try to do it.

SATLOFF: Let me ask you, as you look back on eight years of the Clinton stewardship of the peace process, what do you take away? What did they get right and what did they get wrong?

ZOELLICK: Well, I think probably Leon and I would agree, and his final point I think is important again--whoever wins this election--is that the peace process has never been a Republican or Democratic issue at its core. Presidents since Truman have supported Israel's security, and at least since Secretary of State Henry Kissinger have worked to try to deal with Israel in trying to achieve both its security and its peace.

I think that there are some core guidelines that guide that. And on this, you know, I think, number one, it's been--I believe it's been true for the Clinton administration, and I think it would be true for any of them that follow--Israel's security is first and foremost.

Second, I think that the world needs to know that the United States sees Israel as a strategic partner and would work with Israel on the questions that it faces. At this point in time--and as Leon mentioned--Israel faces some particularly difficult choices. And I think for Israel to make these choices it will be better able to do so if the United States is associated with those choices and works closely with Israel in that process.

Ultimately these decisions have to be ones that are made by Israel, because they deal with Israel's security. And there has been criticism of the Clinton administration just as there was of earlier administrations about how the U.S. plays that role. And I am not going to get into that, because--I mean, I have seen, and I know the people involved, and I have a great confidence and trust in them, and my sense is that in terms of the peace process itself people may make mistakes, but I believe that their intentions, in where they're trying, are good or sensible, and related to Israel's peace and security.

I do believe that the question of how U.S. power is seen in the world and how it is conducted influences that process just like it does all others. And Leon has talked about aspirations. I mean, please recall I was one of the people who had enough aspirations to try to break down the Soviet Union and end the Cold War when some were willing to accept that as a constant state of life. So on the aspiration game, it is going to be a hard one to trump for a few decades--or to achieve German unification in NATO, or to move NAFTA in the Uruguay Round. So, I don't know, I've got a record--you can talk about aspirations all you want; to me reality is based on having a plan, a strategy, some sense of power and how you are going to get there.

Now, my worry in the past--and I can't say how Vice President Gore would handle this--my worry in the past is that everybody in this room knows that the people in the Middle East are a tough crowd. And if you don't have the sense of power and use of power I think you are going to get in trouble. Tom Donilon is here--he worked with Warren Christopher on the many trips that they went to Syria. I think that was a devoted process. I would ask myself--but he perhaps has an answer--if twenty-odd trips to Damascus was necessarily the right way to send a message to Hafiz al-Asad about whether he had the move or whether we had the move. But you'd be in a better position to answer.

I would say--while this is a tactical point, I was deeply troubled as an American to see President Clinton go to Geneva and get stiffed by Asad. Now, at times the United States gets stiffed--I understand that. But frankly, to be honest, that's one of the roles of a secretary of state, not the president of the United States. That should have--I was honestly

surprised he went to that meeting without knowing what he was going to get. And maybe, you know, the answer is, "Well, we have to try." Yeah, but that's what Secretary Madeleine Albright's job was. Now, there is a reason why Secretary Albright isn't doing that job, and everybody in this room knows it--she's been discounted in terms of power and in terms of trust and influence.

So at the end of the day I think we are probably going to share a basic sense of where this process goes, and if there is peace achieved there's going to be aspects related to drawing in Europe and others. My concern is, as I have tried to make clear today, is you can't just take these problems and look at them case by case. You can't just look at the Middle East peace process and not look at what's happening in the Gulf or what's happening with Iran. You can't look at them without looking at Russia. And you sure as hell can't look at it without having a sense of how U.S. power is perceived in the world, because for all the aspirations in the world, if you are not seen as a powerful player I am afraid you are going to have a hard time achieving it.

SATLOFF: Leon?

FUERTH: I'll pass over the remark about Secretary Albright.

ZOELLICK: I don't mind, go ahead.

FUERTH: Good. I really will. I think it's at a level substantially below what you have otherwise presented here.

As for the meeting in Geneva, what makes you think the president didn't know what was supposed to know? What makes you think that it wasn't Asad who for his own reasons flipped signals at the last moment at the point of no return? And I am not sure exactly how to deal with that problem if one is told that a thing is going to happen and proceeds because the signal is clear. It's one of those things that happens, as you say.

ZOELLICK: It never happened twice to my boss.

FUERTH: Yeah, well, I was interested in your list of accomplishments--but that's precisely the point--granting you full credit for bringing down the Berlin Wall, ending the Cold War, destroying the Soviet Union--and those would be your accomplishments. And the question the nation is addressing is not you. It is the credentials of the next president of the United States. So if we want to lay those credentials on the table, I think the contrast is interesting and dispositive in the sense that, in this dangerous part of the world, in a world so complex and so interconnected, one would like to have a president who understands all of that. And there is a very certain way of obtaining such a president.

ZOELLICK: Well, in a word of credentials, let's remember what happened this week. Governor Bush came out for China PNTR [permanent normalized trade relations], where your boss hedged with the AFL-CIO, making it much harder for your ultimate boss, the president, to get the Democratic votes, which by the way are going to be much fewer than the Republican votes. So in terms of action now--or let's take a second one. You were in very serious trouble in Kosovo in this vote promoted first by Senator Robert Byrd, a Democrat, and Governor Bush did help to pull your irons out of the fire. So you may question his credentials, and I may ask some things about the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission and all its wonderful accomplishments. But I personally think that the record in terms of that and his position on other issues--plus the fact that whenever you have a governor this question will come up--it came up with Clinton, it came up with Reagan--and the question is, "What do you see about the person's character, his sense of governing, his sense of record in terms of power and accomplishment, and what did he say on the issues?" And those are obviously where the voter will ultimately decide.

FUERTH: We welcome the governor's statement of principle about the separation of powers. The fact remains, however, that had it been up to him, the people of Kosovo would still be settled in camps by the hundreds of thousands around the periphery of that country. We also welcome Governor Bush's support of PNTR, and I will note

that at the height of the campaign for the president, Clinton and Gore decided that they would support NAFTA, an important accomplishment of the Bush administration, contrary to interests, at a moment when it might have cost them victory in the election itself, because of its impact on the industrial states, because they concluded that this was in the best interests of the United States. I know this, because I was present at the debate within the campaign that settled this issue. And I hope among other things that, if President Clinton does succeed in getting a really good arms control agreement, that Jesse Helms's threat that it's dead on arrival, no matter what it is, will not be the last word. One would like to hear something about that from Governor Bush too.

SATLOFF: Gentlemen, we have moved in this world of interconnectedness from downtown Tehran to Jesse Helms. This was originally conceived as a conversation on the Middle East and America's global strategy. I think we have moved from the Middle East to America's global strategy and the overlaps and differences between Mr. Gore and Mr. Bush. I really thank you very much for being so candid. I hope this is just the beginning of the set of conversations that we can have as we approach this election, because as we stated at the outset, the Middle East is at least near the core, if not at the core, of the challenges that the next president will face; and therefore it deserves a lot of attention over the next six months. Thank you all very much for joining us. Thank you for joining us for this year's symposium.

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