

Convocation Keynote Address
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“Fixing Foreign Policy: Structure, Process, and People”

Thank you very much for this honor. I am very moved to have received it and will admit that there were times over the last 51 years since my graduation from Fletcher, obviously as a child genius, when I would have said it was inconceivable. I think you know that after joining the Foreign Service in the summer of 1957, and soon meeting Robert Oakley and deciding to marry, that I was required by custom to resign from the Foreign Service. (Bob has always teased that women, after marriage, couldn't keep their minds on their work!) I was out for 16 years; allowed to rejoin in 1974, my career took curious and surprising routes, assignments with USIA, AID, the spokesman's office, and finally Assistant Secretary for Population, Refugees, and Migration, and Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research. I would not have changed any of it.

Now don't worry. I am not going to go through every year and assignment and what I important lessons I have learned. As Elizabeth Taylor said to her husbands, I will not keep you long.

You all know, I am sure, that there is a new growth industry in Washington, not a new series of "belt-way bandits", but the production of policy papers for the new Administration. You can well imagine the scope—climate change, energy policy, nuclear nonproliferation, the future of NATO, the emergence of China and India, not to mention Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Israel and Palestine, and Russia and the "near abroad", especially Georgia, etcetera! What to do, who to hire (authors of the papers), and how to react when the telephone rings at 3:00 AM on the morning of January 21. It is quite an enterprise!

Within the beltway some attention also is being given to another aspect of American Foreign Policy—the structure of our foreign policy establishment and how it has been working. In a nutshell, it hasn't been working well—some call it dysfunctional while others say, more diplomatically, that it has proven incapable of enforcing integrated action by departments and agencies. In giving you a few highlights of the problems I used two major studies.

The first is a Congressionally mandated study, the Project on National Security Reform, which released preliminary findings in July, with the final report expected in October, just before the election. The second, which I worked on, is a report on America's Role in the World from the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy of Georgetown University.

What is done by a new Administration in acknowledging the problems spelled out in these reports and others, and setting out to address them will have great bearing on this country's posture and success in the world. It will under-gird efforts to carry out the expected vision of whoever wins the November election. For this world is different, more complex, with power more diffused, than what the United States faced at the end of World War II and the creation of the National Security Council Structure in 1947 under President Harry Truman.

I trust that many of you know quite a bit about this structure or will after a year at Fletcher. It is, of course, dependent on the managerial style of each president, and on the whole it worked reasonably well during the Cold War. There was no permanent NSC staff, and aside from the director and deputy, most of the members of the National Security Council staff were career people borrowed from other agencies. Bob Oakley served on the staff twice, directing the Middle East division. But over the past decade it has proven incapable of enforcing integrated action by departments and agencies. The

most glaring failures have involved nation building in Iraq and Afghanistan. But there are many more issues with national security applications, such as global food shortages, climate change, and disease, in a multi-polar world with new powers such as India, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, Iran, to say nothing of China, all within the realm of rapidly expanding communications, that cut across many United States cabinet departments and agencies.

The Clinton Administration was beset and bedeviled, in my view, especially at the beginning, over what to do about humanitarian intervention and nation building. One need only recall Somalia, Rwanda, Haiti, and the indecision over what to do about the Balkans, which finally resulted in the war in Bosnia, the Dayton Peace Accords, and the NATO intervention in Kosovo. How we worried over whether or not it was legal in international law, whether just air power would be effective, and what the role of US peacekeepers would be. After Somalia, the US troops were often called “turtles”, because they didn’t stick their necks out. This was a policy driven by domestic politics.

Although the Clinton administration was never known for “management”, over time certain experience and lessons learned developed into a body of practice, formulated in Presidential Decision Directive or PDD 56, which was to serve as a guideline for the future. It did not change the NSC structure, but spelled out how it should work better

in the future. Notably, it specified the appointment of a single official at the sub-cabinet level, sometimes at the State Department and sometimes at the White House, to oversee all the policy aspects of any military intervention.

One of the first acts of the Bush administration, on February 12, 2001, was to issue its own National Security Directive which essentially did away with the structure established in Clinton's PDD 56, and returned the NSC structure to what it had been before.

Maybe this would have worked if the world had proceeded as one thought when George W. Bush was first elected, with the clear indication that he would do less humanitarian intervention and nation building. But things changed with 9/11 and so did US foreign policy. United States policy became much more aggressive, emphasizing greater use of American military power and the willingness to take unilateral action.

In the beginning, especially with the invasion of Afghanistan and the installation of a new government through the Bonn process under Hamid Karzai, things seemed to work out reasonably well, in spite of no one—not from State, Defense, or the NSC staff—in charge. Because there were no major policy disagreements, the way ahead seemed clear.

All this changed, of course, with IRAQ, and the deterioration of the Afghan situation. Initial successes were followed by a “payback” period, with major difficulties with many of our friends. It became clear that the United States was badly overstretched and less able to influence events. I am not going to belabor what the problems have been as I think they are evident and well covered by many writers—Fiasco by Tom Ricks comes to mind, as well as a new book by the new nation-building expert, Jim Dobbins, called After the Taliban. We now seem to have two pro-consuls in Baghdad, Ambassador Crocker and General Petraeus. They work together very well, but where is the locus of power in Washington?

What I would point out is that I think it is surprising that no efforts were made to think about changes in the NSC system and tee-up recommendations for a new administration, whether Republican or Democrat. It is even more surprising when you think that George W. Bush is the first President with an MBA, which I always thought included a lot of attention on structure and management.

There are two areas where the Bush administration did make major organizational changes:

The first was Intelligence—with the creation of the Director of National Intelligence position and his office in 2005, which came out of the famous 9/11 Report. Students of government will ponder for years why this was the result of the 9/11 report, because they had no mandate to make such recommendations but the authors clearly wanted to leave a legacy. It became a political issue in 2004, when Bush said he would take some of the recommendations, Kerry upped the ante by saying he would take more, and then Bush saying he would take them all!

I think everyone recognized that the job of CIA director, running both the agency and the Intelligence Community, or IC, was too much for one man, and the growing influence of the Defense Department, with both money and a new intelligence office, was a problem. Changes did need to be made, but was adding another organization or layer, the right way to go? What about the changes in Congressional Oversight which were also called for, but have never been addressed?

The second major change was the creation of the Department of Homeland Security. I will leave it to you to judge the results—security check-lines at airports; a new ICE to handle illegal immigrants in the country as well as student visas taking over from INS, or going from bad to worse; and FEMA, and the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Are we still on orange alert? According to the Washington rating sheets on government

effectiveness, DHS ranks last. A recent Op-Ed piece in The New York Times by Gail Collins said DHS “had refocused the nation’s intelligence-gathering and crisis-response agencies into the important mission of around-the-clock bureaucratic infighting.”

The question is where to go now: how to fix the lack of capacity of the United States to defend the nation and manage its role in the world.

If I had been Mistress of the Universe, or President of the United States, I would have begun working on this problem about two years ago, in as bipartisan a way as possible, with a few clear ideas of where I wanted the interagency process to go within the constraint that it would not be possible to reorganize the entire executive branch of the United States Government. I would have appointed a board to run my reorganization process, working with Congress, with required hearings and discussion throughout the country, and recommendations ready between the time of the election and the inauguration of a new President. I would certainly have made a home somewhere for interagency strategic planning, which the NSC system has never done well. Maybe all this wouldn’t have worked, but it might have had a chance before new people were in place and protecting ‘turf’ (I won’t give up a dollar or an inch of my agency!) became in the name of the game.

The Georgetown study talks about the fundamental choice of a new President about whether to build civilian capacity in the US government for the types of tasks the US Government had been undertaking since the fall of the Berlin Wall—Somalia, Haiti, the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq—or to continue shifting responsibility to the Department of Defense.

Choosing the first option would require redirecting a measure of authority, interagency leadership, and above all resources to the State Department and other civilian agencies. As my old boss, Secretary George P. Shultz used to say, “Follow the money.”

I found the initial recommendations of the National Security Reform Project rather vague, but I understand there will be more concrete proposals in the final report expected in October. Their conclusions focus on leadership, building a collaborative national security team, flexible and agile organization and management, long term planning, and oversight and accountability.

Recommendations are also coming from all over—Secretary Gates talks of the “creeping militarization of foreign policy” and in a recent speech called for more funding for the State Department and other civilian agencies, which have been “chronically undermanned and under-funded for far too long.” David Ignatius

writing in the Washington Post says that after the election Gates should be charged with running a commission to fix the NSC structure so that it is designed to deal with today's "soft power" challenges rather than the old Cold War problems, and to fix the "half-baked reform of the intelligence agencies."

Within the Intelligence Community or IC, in my view, a very effective Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has helped cobble together a working coalition of old friends from the military to be the DNI, run the CIA, and DIA in the Pentagon, but this is an arrangement dependent on personalities. I understand there is still rivalry over who will brief the Presidential candidates.

Richard Clarke, well known as an NSC staffer in the lead-up to 9/11 and his criticisms of the Bush administration, has written a new book called Your Government Failed You which has long descriptions of the problems in government, especially dealing the foreign policy, and longer lists of steps that need to be taken to fix it all. At a book party I asked him out of all the recommendations he makes what was the most important.

I was surprised at his answer—he said shorten the list of political jobs in the US government that are awarded to the party faithful without regard to experience and

knowledge. He went on to explain that the list of jobs available for political patronage has grown so long that many jobs that used to be filled by professionals or experts on a non-partisan basis are now filled by ideologues and neophytes who want to get a toe hold in government. Clarke contrasted this with what used to happen in filling staff positions, in the State department, Defense, the NCS staff, or even the Justice Department—when experienced and able people were picked without thought of party affiliation and on the basis that they could do a good job for the senior positions that would be political. This even includes giving advice that a course of action might be wrong or would bring unintended consequences.

We could now face a Democratic backlash to Republican appointment policies—with hordes of newcomers and “wannabes” arriving which would continue many of the Bush appointment policies. I do not have any idea what the personnel pool is upon which McCain might draw. I believe this issue is addressed in some of the expected recommendations on National Security Reform.

Before closing, I want to raise one more issue that will need to be addressed, and that is the issue of American arrogance. (I always think of the phrase, the arrogance of power used by Senator William Fulbright, which I understand was suggested by Seth Tillman, one of my classmates who went on to work for the Senator after

receiving his Fletcher PhD.) My friend and State Department colleague, Ambassador Chas Freeman, likened recent American behavior to that of the “ever-self-congratulatory Mr. Magoo—wandering destructively through a reality he misperceives and wreaking havoc he determinedly misinterprets as success.” I find that a splendid image!

Of course it did not begin with this administration. In the last days of the last century, then Secretary-of-State Madeleine Albright described the United States as “the indispensable nation.” “We stand tall,” she claimed, “and we see further than other countries into the future.” Freeman continued that he didn’t think she had sought the views of foreigners on either point and we certainly don’t know if anyone agreed with her. That is what comes of being the sole surviving superpower and taking that position to heart.

I have understood that Roman emperors had someone behind their chairs, whispering in their ears, “You are only mortal.” I think we have had the modern equivalent of this phrase in Iraq and Afghanistan. In other words, we have made mistakes and it is time to reassert a renewed American diplomacy based on realism, capacity matched to actions, and some humility after we have relieved the helmsman Mr. Magoo of his duties. I believe the rest of the world is waiting.

I am sorry that my generation has left all of you an America not as the shining city on a hill in a prosperous and democratic world, but in a dangerous, competitive, and changing environment, with global warming, poverty, and terrorism high on the agenda. It is over to you to make it better.

So as a name well-known at Fletcher, Edward R. Murrow, used to say, "good night and good luck."