

Shaping a Foreign Policy Agenda for the 1990s

By Senator Malcolm Wallop and Midge Decter

Burton Pines: Good afternoon. I am Burt Pines, Senior Vice President of The Heritage Foundation — and I welcome all of you here this noon. We're going to talk about foreign policy.

I would have thought that had we scheduled today's discussion eight or ten months ago we'd be here as part of a victory celebration. We should be celebrating our outstanding victory in the Cold War. Yet America's Cold War victory celebrations seemed to end just as they were getting started. Where have been the victory parades? Where were Europe's grateful crowds cheering America's GI's as they began heading for the ships to take them home? Where was the peace dividend? In a profound sense, we have been cheated of all this.

What should be a time of triumph and exaltation for American foreign policy makers is in fact a time of confusion and drift. Instead of troops coming home, they're being sent to the Saudi desert. Instead of the well deserved respite for this country, after its half-century fight against totalitarianism, America once again is manning the ramparts.

Now with the armies of nations gathering literally at the gates of Babylon, the world seems almost as forbidding as it did before the Berlin Wall fell and the Soviet empire crumbled.

Also fading as soon as they appeared — and thank God for this — are last year's putative profound truths: that military power no longer is terribly important, that America no longer is predominant, we're just one among several big nations, that economic power is replacing military power, and that history has ended, whatever that was supposed to mean.

Well, good riddance to such truths!

Ad Hoc Foreign Policy. Yet, what do we have today to guide us? Bush, Baker, and Scowcroft have yet to lay down the principles of an American foreign policy.

Instead, they conduct foreign policy ad hoc. The problem with ad hoc foreign policy is that without the guidance of underlying principles, it is a lottery — depending for its success on lucky gut instincts, lucky timing, and other good fortune such as the good fortune of public support.

It reminds me, as more and more of Washington now does, about the advice of a great American philosopher, Yogi Berra. We seem to be conducting foreign policy according to what Yogi said: "When you come to a fork in the road — take it." That is what this Administration seems to be doing.

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It is our search for principles that brings us to our panel this noon. We'll start with Senator Malcolm Wallop.

Malcolm comes from a Wyoming pioneer family, so authentic in fact that he actually comes from a place called Big Horn, Wyoming. He served in the state House of Representatives and the state Senate before being elected to the U.S. Senate in 1976, and that makes him the senior Senator from Wyoming.

Deep in his closet, he has hidden, however, that he is a graduate of Yale, along with other Yale graduates such as George Bush, William Howard Taft, and Gerald Ford. Malcolm chairs the Senate Steering Committee, serves on the Armed Services Committee and on the Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

I feel extraordinarily privileged this noon to introduce Malcolm because it gives me a chance to say publicly what I have long wanted to say to him: Malcolm, thank you, thank you very much. Thank you from us here at Heritage, thank you from America. Thank you for your courage and your integrity; thank you for standing up for a strong America, for supporting SDI.

Thank you for daring to be tough with the Soviets. Voltaire told us, "It is dangerous to be right in matters on which the established authorities are wrong" — and Malcolm consistently has been right even when the established authorities opposed him.

And to quote yet another Frenchman, it was Tallyrand who said, "I'm more afraid of an army of 100 sheep led by a lion than I am by an army of 100 lions led by a sheep."

Well, as our leader, Malcolm is a lion. I give you Malcolm Wallop.

Senator Wallop: Thank you. I am convinced of absolutely one thing about modern American democracy — and that is, the people who most misunderstand or shy from politics are American's politicians. They seem to forget two things: one, that in a democracy words have meaning, and two, that democracy is the art of forcing choices. The public, the American public in particular, is really very good at choosing once given options formulated by their leaders. Their leaders are always desperately timid about being put on the record as to what constitutes a choice.

And these two failures represent at a minimum, equivocation — and I will recall to you the Boland Amendment which was a series of amendments, all of which were designed to let everybody who interpreted them interpret them to their own lights, and ultimately it was done by the press and the opposition to the government in hand.

Choices never forced are decisions never made. And I will point out the most obvious one in this century: Vietnam. Nobody ever said what it was that we had a choice to do over there, and by avoiding that, both Presidents and Congresses ultimately brought the American people to say they could no longer tolerate a circumstance in which there was no reason for the presence over there.

It was not a military failure, it was a political failure — but more about these later.

As Burt said in his opening statement, foreign policy requires a certain set of principles. Let me begin with the premise that foreign policy is an absolute neuter; it's a eunuch in the absence of the ability to defend it, and the ability to assert it and the ability to project it.

In other words, foreign policy needs its twin brother — military capability — to go along with it. Because diplomats have nothing to offer by diplomacy if they haven't the strength to achieve anything that comes from it.

Policy Vacuum. By the same token, a military capability cannot be sustained in the arena of democracy absent a reason for it. You have watched that over the last couple of years; we have not defined what our military is for, we have not defined indeed what our foreign policy is for — and so the debate on what takes place is principally a debate conducted by those who have the most seniority.

A Pat Schroeder can have the same level of relevance as a Malcolm Wallop or anybody else, but she has a little higher level of relevance, being in the majority party and having been around to chair a committee.

So what you see is, in the vacuum of policy, that the military debate has not been about the design of the military, but on the defense budget, the defense of local economies, not the defense of the needs of the United States or the policies which it asserts.

And you see its lack of existence today because no one — not the President, not the Secretary of State and not the Secretary of Defense — has defined or contemplated the U.S. role or what the U.S. interests are. And it shows in the defense budget which meets nothing of its needs, as is terribly obvious by the circumstances we confront in the Middle East today.

And I would say this: Blame Congress for sure, but not entirely. Because who asked it to do anything differently? Certainly not the Administration. In other words, choices have never been placed in front of us.

I met with the President in March of this year, with Scowcroft and others at my request, and I asked that he consider convening the historic meeting between the Secretaries of Defense and State that took place in 1949 and resulted in NSC 68, the policy of containment which was more or less the policy of the United States articulated in a variety of ways over the course of nearly a half century.

New World. They rejected it out of hand, suggesting to me that the reason for that meeting was to have some kind of purpose as to where we were going since the Russians had just exploded a nuclear weapon. I responded that they have in essence exploded the “new nuclear weapon” — there is a new world out there in case anybody has stopped to notice it, and we are not winning any battles about the defense budget, nor are we winning any battles about foreign policy, because nobody knows what U.S. interests are.

And so what I hoped they would do was define what American interests are, at least for the next quarter of a century, and the defense needs for the next decade. But the new thing that they are coming up with called “the new world order,” which basically says, “Let George do it.” But it's not our George they're asking to let do it.

You know, we're having to ask the Soviets for permission for American boys to go to war and we're having to buy our purposes out of the U.N. consensus.

So, “George” is the U.N. and “George” is consensus and “George” is unknown to Americans — and that's the most important point to make. The decisions about the lives

and deaths of Americans rest on multilateral decisions in the Security Council, purchased with American concessions.

Classic Interests. And so what are the U.S. interests? Well, briefly, they're classical characterizations: We are an island nation who needs access to the air and sea; we are a trading nation who needs not only stable partners in that trading world, but access to them; we are an industrial nation which needs access to strategic minerals, and we are a democratic nation which must be prepared to make judgments about the existence of democracy in the world.

And so what do we have to watch out for in foreign policy? What threatens foreign policy? The thing that threatens it the most is our own tendency as a nation not to think things through.

The second is cowardice or fearfulness. What if someone is going to think it's wrong? What if some ally doesn't quite agree with it? What if Congress won't go along with it? What if, what if, what if... ?

And in the process of that timidity, you never get a choice to make as a nation, nor do you ever get a statement of purpose as a nation. So you see the failure to define, and the failure becomes a failure to justify.

Now I'll just point out to you that the problem the President has today in the Middle East is that he has not made it clear to anyone, let alone his own administration, what it is that he is there for — so how can he justify it?

There are plenty of decent reasons, there are plenty of adequate reasons which, in essence, sustain our being there, but none of them go to what it takes to produce success in those regions.

Bush has focused our objective as Kuwait. So what happens if we succeed just there? The situation in my view, would be if anything, worse than it is at the moment. Kuwait will exist at Iraqi sufferance and so too would all the states in the region if Iraq were to remove itself today and say it was all a terrible mistake.

Controlling Oil. They will find the Democrats in Congress and the press in the nation only too willing to make the statement that since the Iraqis got out, the U.S. should be satisfied. And so the Iraqis will have the essential control over the oil that they sought by blackmail, by threat of blackmail.

If you think that we've had a difficult time restraining their reach into nuclear technology with what has existed before, wait until you see what they can do with the ability to threaten, to withhold, to withdraw, or to reduce the amounts of oil that would be available to France or to Germany.

So Americans have not yet heard what the U.S. vital interests are; they have not yet heard what requires 400,000 troops there. For a little while we were debating going to a congressional resolution, in essence nothing but another Boland Amendment, which would have allowed everybody who voted for it not to be held accountable for its consequences.

And I told the Secretary of Defense and the Minority Leader and the President that I would not be a party to such a resolution. I would seek to strengthen it so it said what our

purpose was, and failing that, I would seek to oppose it — because I will tell you one thing, I will absolutely be damned if I'm going to ask anybody to risk their life and have the courage to go to battle if the politicians haven't got the courage to say what the battle is for.

That's what got us into trouble in Korea; it got us in trouble in Vietnam; it got us in to trouble in Beirut — and it must not get us into trouble where we're going.

So we've gotten to the point where everything depends on this multilateralism, and that gives us a tendency to chase illusory goals and gives credibility to those who want to wait until the sanctions work without having to be asked what constitutes "working." No definitions required. Make a wish and if the wish comes true, wouldn't it be swell?

But the politicians aren't in any way responsible for what happens if it does not come true.

Sustaining A Threat. And I would say that there is another illusory goal that we are trying to chase, and that's in the Soviet Union. We are as a matter of this ad hoc policy sustaining the one entity in the Soviet Union that continue to pose a threat, namely Mikhail Gorbachev.

Boris Yeltsin has said that the Russian Republic has no need for missiles and would give them all away. Other republics have said the same thing.

The one who has not been willing to give up Russia's might is Gorbachev. Everybody now says that Russia — or the Soviet Union — is no longer a threat. And the same people who say that are also the ones who say "but it is critically important for us to make certain that Gorbachev survives."

Now I ask anybody in this room to tell me why. If they're no longer a threat, who gives a damn who's in charge? What they're saying is that the threat is there. And our policy, strangely, is to sustain someone who can threaten us.

And it leads to the acceptance of equivocation. I mentioned the Boland Amendment, I mentioned the fact that Congress was to be asked to reflect the U.N. amendment so that everyone can interpret it to their own end, and the public becomes rightfully confused.

Need for Accountability. Congress must be held accountable. Congress is complaining the President hasn't called them in to ask for a Declaration of War. The Congress can call itself in. Each side of this political equation is blaming the other for the lack of courage to bring us to the table.

And so there is no way to fix accountability — and the press won't do it, because the press either misunderstands it or prefers to while we're in the "make a wish" syndrome that the rest of the policy reflects.

And so what you're getting now is no real reasons for Americans to be abroad anywhere but in the Middle East. Nobody has made a case for us to be in NATO, and the House — without complaint from the Administration — passed a foolish thing that said if the Japanese don't pay 100 percent of our presence in Japan, we're going to start bringing our troops home.

And I will tell you this — in a democracy, if they pay 150 percent of the presence, unless a case is made for U.S. interests to have them there, you will not be able to sustain the political case to keep them there.

NATO, Japan — no argument is made, because it's the new world order and that will do it for us. And my guess to you is that it will make us in the long run poorer, it will make us in the long run, less free and make us in the long run much more likely to shed blood unnecessarily.



Mr. Pines: It is a great pleasure to turn to our second speaker. Midge Decter is executive director of the Committee for the Free World and a member of the Heritage Board of Trustees. But that doesn't tell us very much about Midge Decter.

I think that the developments and the gains of the 1980s would be impossible to understand without Midge Decter. Midge helped put neoconservatism on the map. She exposed consistently the fallacies of the 1970s. When Richard Nixon was talking detente, and when Jimmy Carter was sending Cyrus Vance to appease Brezhnev, Midge was sounding the alarm. When America seemed to be on the verge of being suckered in by radical feminists, Midge was sounding the alarm again. When America's schools and other institutions were abandoning traditional values wholesale, Midge again sounded the alarm. Her books include: *The Liberated Woman and Other Americans*, *The New Chastity*, and *Liberal Parents, Radical Children*. She is as many of you know a very accomplished editor. She edited George Gilder's *Wealth and Poverty*. She is executive editor at *Harper's*; she was a senior editor at Basic Books. She is on the advisory board of Radio Marti and a founder of the Coalition for a Democratic Majority. And if I quoted Frenchmen in introducing Malcolm, I think I'll quote from Aesop to introduce Midge.

There is a fable about the animals sitting around arguing about which animal has the largest litter. Some bragged about twins, and some bragged about triplets, and some even bragged about a litter of dozens. Finally they turned to a lioness, who had been sitting on the side without saying anything. "Well, what about you?" To which the lioness replied quietly, "Oh, I have only one -- but that one is a lion." And so is Midge Decter.

Midge Decter: I want to talk about something slightly different from Capitol Hill, about which — since I live in New York — I happily know much less than the rest of you.

I want to talk about other groups who are participating in this great new debate about foreign policy. To begin with, there are those whom I would call without the least bit of disrespect intended, but for the sake of brevity, the Endowment for Democracy Party.

These are the people who say we must consolidate our ideological and political winnings and push forward in a campaign to bring the blessings of democracy and the free market. (Have you ever noticed how funny it is that even to this day people are a little bit inhibited about using the word "capitalism"? So now we talk about the free market.) We must continue the effort to bring democracy to those ever-growing masses of people who are clamoring for it.

On the other side there are the isolationists, whose classic formulation from as far back as the country's founding has let us perfect ourselves and let our impact on the world, if any, be that of a model for envy and emulation.

And there are radical libertarians who are prepared to say that the rights of government should be so circumscribed as to make impossible any commitment beyond the literal defense of the country's own territory.

Ungrateful Allies. And somewhere along this spectrum, representing what I suspect is the largest constituency at this moment, are the party of the "Fed Up." Call them for short, the Pat Buchanan Party. Their view is one that no matter how much you disagree with it, it cannot fail to touch the nervous system and pluck the heartstrings. For more than 40 years, runs this argument, we pursued a policy which enabled our allies — not to speak of our World War II enemies — to get on their feet and then prosper mightily. And all the while as they depended on us to defend them, they hamstrung us, undermined our policies, in some cases like Nicaragua, supported our enemies outright — and above all, subjected us to a continuing moral attack.

And now, more than a quarter of a million of our boys and girls are being forced to suffer the heat and tedium of Saudi Arabia, forbidden, as it were, to show their faces or fly their flag, in order to protect the supply of oil and the economies of these allies.

Meanwhile, with the always honorable exception of Margaret Thatcher — and let us now hope of Prime Minister Major — they wring their hands in uncertainty as to how far they feel we should go in dealing with Saddam Hussein.

Who can read the newspapers, at least some part of each week, without finding some reason or some occasion to say "the hell with the whole lot of them"? Emotion however, is not a policy nor does it even give guidance to it.

The fear of nuclear weapons is no doubt a perfectly legitimate emotion. One of the prominent policy suggestions it gave rise to, however, that the world would be a safer place if the United States had no nuclear weapons, does not even qualify as legitimate nonsense.

It will be objected that I have left out of this list so far the position, everybody's favorite in this town, of the hard headed, the national interest school — those who say that all foreign policy decisions are properly made only on the basis of a realistic calculation of the country's interests.

The people who assume this position naturally believe themselves, and are able to behave as if they are, wiser, more worldly, more sophisticated than those who over the years earned for themselves the designation of anti-communist ideologues, like Senator Wallop and like a few other people in this room.

Circular Position. There is a problem with the position of hard headedness however, and that is quite simply that it is entirely circular. For how can you hard headedly say what is the national interest at any given moment — especially should it be a moment of crisis — without some prior notion of what your belief is about and what your ambitions for the country are? And in addition, how you read the real and moral nature of the world?

For someone like me, who takes none of the positions I have just described, though I feel great emotional sympathy for all of them at different times — it seems that the first thing that has to be said on the subject of America's role in the world is that when you are the richest and most powerful nation on earth — and despite the best efforts of many of our social philosophers, educators and policy bureaucrats, we are still, and are likely to remain,

the richest and most powerful nation on earth — when you are that, it is pure fantasy to imagine that there is such an option for you as withdrawal from the affairs of other countries.

There is no such thing as “non intervention.” If you decide to sit out some crisis, that is as much a form of intervention as sending troops. And in some cases, that can in the long run be even more dangerous.

If the 20th Century has not taught the United States that lesson over and over in at least five different ways, then we are as a nation doomed forever to be casting around like a blind creature.

The question therefore, is not should we or shouldn't we intervene — but how. Now obviously there have been and will continue to be many crises in the world where it makes no sense for us to mix in. We might at any given moment differ about which these are or should be and why.

Prudent Answers. That is what is called among serious people, trying to arrive at a wise application of a policy. Should we try to help settle civil wars in Rwanda and Liberia? The prudent answer, at least for now, would seem to be no. And there are some conflicts — and I would say the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of those — for which there is simply nothing to be done by anyone but sit tight and wait for history to erode what are some of the key heated-up issues.

There are few assertions more specious, however, than the declaration that because we cannot or should not intervene in this place or that place at any given time, the obvious conclusion is that we must not intervene at all.

Indeed, this kind of argument is not only specious, it's rather cheaply specious. Given the consequentiality of American conduct in the world, whether we will it or not — how should we understand that role now that 40-plus years of the organizing principle for American foreign policy is coming apart?

Quite simply, history — or, if you will, fate — has ordained that we must play a key role in keeping international law and order; we must because there is no one else to do it.

I don't, in this auditorium of all places, have to say that the United Nations as an instrumentality for maintaining international comity has for almost the very first moment of its existence if not before that, been a farce.

Worst Policy. History may decide that the very worst policy of George Bush, in fact, is that he gave a new shot of energy to the United Nations.

And no more than on the streets of Washington or New York City can criminal conduct in the international arena be controlled without the belief that the authorities have power and are prepared to wield it.

It is always to be hoped that the power and the readiness to use it will by themselves act as a deterrent. Often they do; we tend to forget that.

Sometimes, on the other hand, they don't. Then what? We can choose to ignore criminal acts. Again, if it is necessary to spell out the point in answer to those who say we cannot be the world's policeman, let me say that the criminal acts of which I speak are those that

threaten the peace and security of whole neighborhoods in the world and ultimately, if not immediately, our own neighborhood.

These crimes against the international order: we can ignore them, we can tell lies about them, we can deny to ourselves that they are taking place. Actually, we along with our Western allies at different times, have done all of these things — ignore, deny or just plain lie.

We and our allies have done these things in particular because, as the late C.P. Snow once put it: “There is that in democratic peoples which hates the bearing of arms. It is a virtue and a dangerous weakness.”

And whenever we have denied or deceived ourselves, we have paid dearly. “Hitler had a legitimate right to a bit of *Lebensraum*,” said our forbears in the 1930s. “Let him have the Rhineland, and later, the Sudetenland, and he will be satisfied.”

Bloody Costs. There are many examples of this kind of highly costly sloth and self deception. To be sure, none so bloody or scarifying in outline as the British and French failure to deter a still weak Hitler in the 1930s. I don’t have to belabor the point.

As for our presence in the Persian Gulf, if I felt I knew with any degree of certainty just what the Bush Administration has in mind there — and I don’t think Mr. Bush himself knows any more by now — it would be easier to discuss this in such a context.

But one thing is certain; we are there because a crime has been committed, a crime of the kind I described. Not only the invasion and rape of a small oil-rich kingdom on the Persian Gulf, but the threat of disruption to a whole already badly battered system of nations.

In a region vitally important both to the peace and the economic welfare of the world, it is being said constantly by the isolationists, the libertarians, and the fed up that we, the United States of America, have no serious interest there, that if our allies, for instance, need oil, let them see to their own problem, and so on and so on.

All very appealing and very tempting things to believe. But oil is an issue for the entire world economy, and that includes us — and that means women and children all over the world, in poor countries as well as rich ones. Never, never again should we let anybody make the remark that our troops are in Saudi Arabia to make the world safe for gas guzzlers.

There is nothing more cynical that anyone can say than that.

And there is another problem here. The invasion of Kuwait was an act for which we as Americans bear some indeterminate but not small amount of responsibility. Did not the American ambassador, certainly speaking for the United States Department of State (for ambassadors, after all, do not say such things on their own), tell Saddam Hussein that the United States would take no interest in the matter of an Iraqi invasion of Kuwait?

This assurance of our nonintervention was a highly consequential factor. How could it be otherwise? There is indeed no more poignant evidence that for the U.S. nonintervention is a mirage than the role we played in inciting the invasion of Kuwait.

So we have no choice but to play for now the central role in channeling the tides of world order. What we do have a choice about however, is whether to play this role on purpose or inadvertently.

Iraq is the perfect example of playing it inadvertently, and we may not yet get out of it without a serious loss of life. I freely admit that without the organizing principle of anti-communism and the so-called "Royale Politique" notwithstanding, it was anti-communism that held our policy together — and that brought its most notable successes, I might point out.

Pax Americana. Without this principle, it will not be so easy to formulate an encompassing doctrine. Nevertheless, I for one am prepared to say that such a doctrine when it arrives, will bear a powerful resemblance to something called "Pax Americana."

I know that term is one that is usually uttered only with a sneer; let me remind you, so was the term "free world" always spoken with a sneer.

This role will require us to be powerfully armed, a requirement about which we are already going to have a bitter political battle, but that will, if we are going to live in an even minimally peaceful world, may be more urgent than ever now.

Part of being powerfully armed is of course, being powerfully defended, a requirement receding further and further from us every day. I was recently at a meeting where people were speaking and cheering about SDI, and my heart was breaking because SDI was sailing off into the sunset before our very eyes.

We cannot have the wisdom to know at every moment what to do, and we will make mistakes of course — but these mistakes will not be fatal, as long as we are prepared to acknowledge the real weight of our responsibility. And one thing more. Let us carry the burden of that responsibility with confidence, and this not only refers to Congress, this refers to all of us. All of us who attempt to influence public opinion.

Pax Americana will not be some dark imperialist conspiracy; the further we carry the force of the American political culture and spread the influence of American political institutions, a better place the world will be.

Russians know that, Ukrainians know that, Poles know that. Why don't we know it? Once again, the main job of convincing people about the legitimacy of American aims will be here at home — and that job is up to us.

