

**"Midstream on the War on Terror"**  
**Mr. Charles Krauthammer**

15 September 2009

**Dr. Krauthammer:** Thank you very much. Thank you for that kind introduction and for bringing up my checkered past. [Laughter]. People sometimes wonder what I really was, whether I'm right now a retired physician, a one-time doctor. I'm actually a psychiatrist in remission. [Laughter]. And doing very well, thank you. I haven't had a relapse in 25 years. [Laughter].

I'm sometimes asked to compare what I do today as a political analyst in Washington with what I used to do 25 years ago as a psychiatrist in Boston, and I tell people it really isn't that different. [Laughter]. Don't get ahead of me here. In both lines of work I deal with people who suffer from paranoia and delusions of grander. [Laughter]. With the exception that in Washington they have access to nuclear weapons. [Laughter]. Which make the stakes a little higher and the work a little more interesting.

I'm not going to be dealing here with military hardware, with strategy. There are so many other people more highly qualified to speak to you about that who already have, and who will. My role, as I understand it, is to try to give you a sense of the political side of Washington. In the end, all the orders come from the Commander in Chief. We've had a very significant presidential election. We've had a remarkable transition of power, not just in a sense generational, not just one party to another, but I think in very many ways a shift in consciousness, a shift in approach, and more than anything else, a shift in the conception of what America's place in the world ought to be.

Whether or not one would argue that the Obama administration has a wide mandate to enact that vision I think is a matter of debate. We see that question about mandate raised in the health care debate, whether or not the margin of Obama's election, the fact that his party won the House and the Senate, whether the sense in the country last November of repudiating the Bush administration approaches to a large number of issues would justify the notion that this administration was elected to do X, Y, and Z. Whatever you think about the mandate, it's clear that the Obama administration has a sense of that mandate. The congressional leadership has a sense of that mandate. And they want to act on it. It's very obvious how they're acting on it on domestic issues. They want to enact health care reform, energy reform, and education reform as their

major projects and hopefully from their perspective achievements. But it's less clear what the overall understanding and vision is in terms of foreign policy and America's standing in the world.

What I'd like to do is give you my thoughts about what I think animates the Obama administration. It is a major remarkable, from a historical perspective, a major shift in command, in perspective of command, and in perspective about America's role in the world.

So let me start by sort of outlining the debate, one of the major debates, among the foreign policy establishment in the Bush years and actually preceding it, and that is the debate which I know all of you heard about, read about, which is between hard and soft power. The critique of the Bush approach and even going all the way back to the Reagan approach. Let's call it the conservative approach of the last generation has been that it's exclusively hard power, relies too much on the military, war is a blunt instrument, and our objectives are more delicate and discreet and can't be approached exclusively from that perspective. That's the critique.

The champion of the alternative view is Professor Joseph Nye at Harvard who came up with the notion of soft power which essentially is the default of all the other instruments at the disposal of the United States. Economic and diplomatic, even cultural. And using those instruments to achieve our ends.

Now the major critique that we heard last year during the election campaign from all the Democratic candidates - from Obama, Clinton, Edwards and others - was that the Bush administration was wedded to hard power and that was their exclusive mode of operating in the world and it was a very ineffective, very expensive in terms of treasure and blood instrument.

But the Obama administration fancies itself, that's a slightly prejudiced word but you'll hear a few of those along the way, fancies itself as rising above the debate between hard and soft power, and has arrived at something new and unique, they think, namely smart power which is the deployment of all these instruments at the same time.

Now I'm not impressed by the originality of that idea and I'm not impressed with the critique that was leveled at conservatives over the years of their exclusive embrace of hard power. Obviously the Bush administration all the way back to the Reagan administration and beyond has tried to use all possible instruments in negotiations. Diplomatic power, economic sanctions being used against lower level adversaries in the world. So I think there's really a

national consensus and always has been that you use all instruments of power. I'm not sure what the great innovation is.

I actually think that what the Obama administration is hinting at when it speaks of smart power is less a discussion of tactics, meaning what instruments do you use in facing challenges, and more a conception of what America's role in the world is. I think it's more about ends rather than means. I think a more accurate description of the current administration's view of America's role in the world is as a smaller power.

By that I mean that the real critique of the Bush foreign policy, and again going way back to the early 1980s, is that conservatives and Republicans when they've been in power, have been wedded to a conception of American dominance of something that I called in the late 1980s unipolarity, where America acts as the hegemon in the world, as the policeman in the world, as the primary power in the world, and that is a role that we ought to at least reexamine. That I think is the crux of the liberal critique of the last eight years, and really of the last 30 years. And what I see the Obama administration doing, and here's my interpretation if I take into account all of their actions on a variety of fronts, is trying to revise downward to somewhat constrain and limit our conception of America's role in the world to be more questioning of our moral standing in the world, to reexamine the magnitude of the struggle we're facing in the world, what the Bush administration had called the war on terror, and therefore to reexamine what ought to be the correct magnitude of the effort that America ought to be expanding in asserting its own interests and securing its own safety.

So this I think is a reexamination of who we are and how much of a hegemonic power we ought to be.

The first ratcheting down that I see coming from the more liberal interpretation of what America ought to be doing in the world is the ratcheting down of the very idea of the war on terror itself. As you all know, the administration has now abolished the term. It's no longer used except inadvertently if the press secretary slips out by habit and uses it and then has to retract it the next day. But it's pretty clear that the global war on terror no longer exists. So you sort of ask yourself, did we win it? Did the other side call it a draw? Did they leave the tennis court? I'm not exactly sure how that happens. But as you know, it's no longer the global war on terror. What we have in Iraq and Afghanistan are overseas contingency operations. A pretty odd choice of words.

The Homeland Security Secretary speaks about terrorism, which is a perfectly good word, and in different terms it's now called manmade disaster. Also a curious elocution. But in the very diction, in the very choice of words of the administration, you get a sense of their changing idea of what exactly we're up against, what exactly happened on 9/11, what exactly is the best way to understand who our adversaries are and what we're doing.

The fundamental change, I think, is that we are reverting under the Obama administration, to the view of terrorism, or manmade disasters, that the Clinton administration exemplified, I think rather well in the 1990s, and it is the more, if you like, liberal view of the world which is that we are in a struggle against discreet terrorists, not a kind of worldwide movement of Jihadism of which there are several arms, wings and fronts, but discreet terror groups, very lethal, dangerous, cruel, et cetera. But discreet, and that the way to deal with them primarily, primarily, is as a law enforcement issue and not as a matter of war. Hence the abolition of the term the war on terror.

Now there are a lot of examples on this that I could cite, and a lot of them you've read and heard about in the news. For example, the administration has appointed a special prosecutor to look at interrogations by the CIA and even more important than that, it has now determined that interrogation of high level al-Qaida or other operatives will no longer be done by the CIA as had been done for the past eight years, but will be now done, will be now housed in the FBI and supervised - it's not exactly clear what the lines of command here are, but in a sense supervised by the National Security Council.

So we've gone from the CIA as the instrument for interrogation to FBI. We have the promise to close Guantanamo. We have the effort on the part of the administration to want to shift as many of the detainees in Guantanamo to civilian courts. The great skepticism that Democrats have had about the military tribunal system which was instituted by the Bush administration. And I would even point to something that is rather benign, I don't want to over-emphasize this, but in the spring the President signed a bill which establishes 9/11, the date of September 11<sup>th</sup> as a day of remembrance and of service, which we sort of saw playing out last Friday.

Now I have no particular objection to a day of service, but it seems odd to me that we should be commemorating the worst attack on America since Pearl Harbor as a day of community service rather than something different. I'm old enough to have remembered the informal observance of Pearl Harbor Day as a child, and it was not a day of service. A day of service is what you institute when you have a

gigantic natural disaster - an earthquake or a flood, and it's literally a tragedy. The very use of the word tragedy applied to 9/11 I find incongruent and I think inaccurate. It's not a tragedy. In the parlance of the Homeland Security Secretary, it's a manmade tragedy. But that means it's an act of war. That means it's an attack. That means it's something rather different.

So I think you can see in sort of the language - Pearl Harbor Day is not a day I would imagine you'd want to go out and paint houses in a community project or do habitat work. That's all okay, habitat work, painting houses and service is a lovely idea, but I don't see its connection to 9/11 or to Pearl Harbor.

So I'm trying to give you a sense of what I think how they see the world and they speak of bringing the miscreants who attack us to justice. That I think is a secondary objective. The main objective is to disarm and disable them. Justice is nice. It comes later. But justice is what you mete out after the war is won. The main objective is to secure our security by disabling or killing the enemy.

Now to some extent Obama is constrained in how far he can go toward the law enforcement model. I think there are elements that he has maintained in dealing with terrorists that are very much continuations of Bush administration policy, adopted I would say somewhat reluctantly by the Obama administration, but out of necessity. I'll give you a few examples.

Towards the end of the campaign last year Democrats in the end acquiesced to a rewriting of the wiretap laws, the FISA laws, and Obama actually signed on at the end to what is essentially the Bush policy which included immunity for the telecom companies who helped out in the immediate months and years after 9/11 in helping to track down terror communications. So that was one example.

A second is the maintaining of rendition which the Democrats had denounced when the Bush administration was doing it, but now has been adopted by the Obama administration as a matter of necessity.

Also the very idea of indefinite detention, meaning those terrorists whom we cannot release for obvious national security reasons, for example Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, but whom we could not put on trial in a civilian court because the kind of evidence obtained would probably not hold up and we'd be faced with either imposing double jeopardy on him or simply throwing him into prison after an acquittal.

So the idea that some detainees will have to be kept indefinitely, which again a year ago the liberals had been

denouncing as a rape of the Constitution, an undoing of our moral standing in the world, and something that Americans don't do, we obviously have to do and we've done it in every other war. The German and Japanese prisoners who were captured in World War II were kept until the end of the war.

Now the other side argues, well, this war isn't going to end. Osama bin Laden is not going to sign on the battleship Missouri. To which I say, that's his problem. If they want to end the war they're welcome to do it tomorrow and perhaps we would release the prisoners. It isn't as if we are insisting on a war without end. So their insistence. So it seems to me that the principle we've always had in every war - Civil War, World War II, every war, which is you will have the right, the moral right, not only the legal right, to detain indefinitely until the end of conflict ought to apply to the war on terror.

So to summarize, the Obama administration has a conception of this as much less a war than it is a matter of law enforcement, the same way the Clinton administration did in the late 1990s. I thought it was completely mistaken when the Cole was attacked in 2000 that the response of the United States government was to send FBI agents to Yemen to do the interrogating. This was not a burglary. This was not a break-in into an Air Force base or a Naval base. This was a classic act of war and you respond to an act of war accordingly. But I think that model, which one would have assumed would have been abolished or abandoned after 9/11, I guess after eight years of safety people assume that we are pre-9/11 in terms of our enemies, are now thinking much more in terms of law enforcement.

That's number one. No longer a war, but we've kind of returned to the '90s. Al-Qaida here, a few of their wings over there, we have to keep them contained, we have to attack them where possible. But the idea of a global jihad which is an existential enemy of the United States, sort of a successor to the existential ideological worldwide enemies that we had in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century namely Fascism, Nazism, and then Communism which was the conception of the Bush administration about the meaning of the war on terror. All that I think has now been swept away, and we have a far more constrained and narrow view of what the conflict, if you like, is about.

So that idea of what the conflict is about has operational consequences. That means that the new administration also wants to ratchet down the worldwide strategic engagement that we undertook in response to 9/11, in response to what the Bush administration saw as a worldwide threat to the United States, in response to what it saw as an existential ideological enemy with elements all over the world.

In particular I think for the Obama administration, that means a reduction in our footprint in the two major theaters of war.

The first obviously is Iraq. The Obama administration has not acted precipitously. It has not done what the candidates of the Democratic party in 2008 had advocated. Remember in 2007 Obama would have had us out of Iraq entirely in March of 2008, which I think would have had really terrible consequences as I'm sure even Obama and his party recognize. They have not ordered precipitous withdrawal. They are going generally along the timetable of the Bush administration in the two agreements it signed with the Iraqi government at the end of the Bush administration's term.

Nonetheless, there is a very distinct sense that whereas the Bush administration objective was to win the war in Iraq, and I'll define that in a second, the Obama administration and Obama's speech talk about this, it's always about ending the war. He spoke about this even last week. He was promising that we will end the war in Iraq rather than win the war.

When I say win I'm talking about establishing a relationship with a self-sustaining Iraqi government which is a friendly one and which gives us a tremendous strategic advantage in the region.

Now we can argue about whether it was worth all the lives and all the funds and all the suffering to achieve this goal, and that argument will be endless. I would only say that that argument seems to me to be about the same kind of argument and as indeterminate as the argument as to whether the 36,000 dead in the Korean War, that the fruits of that war would justify a toll in American life which was almost ten times as much. Those are really difficult questions and I'm not sure they'll be answered with finality for decades.

But that question aside, the fact is that we did lose thousands of Americans. We did spend an enormous amount of our treasure. And we did achieve something. That achievement is the overthrow of a brutal enemy regime which was extremely aggressive and caused wars with all of its neighbors, and its replacement with a reasonably representative, we think self-sustaining government which seems to want friendly and perhaps even allied relationship with the United States. If we can achieve that in the heart of the Middle East, which is what Iraq is, a country with incredible economic and strategic potential, I think it would be a significant achievement. The question is do we have the patience to stay the perhaps year or two or three

which might be required to secure that, or whether we insist on sticking to the timetable or perhaps even an accelerated timetable that the Malaki government appears to want. You know they're going to hold a referendum I think later in the year as to whether we should be out about a year before we had agreed.

The Malaki government has a habit of overestimating its power, its reach, and its military prowess. It had that in Basra which ended up as a successful attack, but only because we and the British were there to bail them out. I think he took a lot of those victories which he won, and also in Sadr City as an indication of his own strength, which might be somewhat overestimated. At least that's what I hear from our people on the ground in Iraq.

So the question is, is the Obama administration committed enough to establish a long term relationship with Iraq, which incidentally is embodied in the second of the two agreements. People tend to only focus on the first agreement which is the withdrawal of our forces. But there was a second agreement on strategic cooperation which I think right now is the more significant one because it will determine the future relations between us and Iraq and in a sense it will determine whether or not we really did have a victory in the war, whether we do come out of the war with a strategic advantage, unlike any other that we've had in that part of the world.

So I have a sense that with the Obama administration, they want to stick to the letter of the agreements, they're not offering any pushback when the Iraqis want to increase it, and they want out regardless of what is left behind.

I think we may regret that, given the fact that after so much sacrifice and heroism, we had fairly much, we have right now within our reach, the possibility of a kind of strategic relationship, not quite like our relationship with say Japan or South Korea, but nonetheless, a relationship with a fairly friend allied country in a fairly hostile part of the world that would serve us well.

So on Iraq, I see the administration as wanting out at almost any cost, along the timetable.

On Afghanistan, there's a curious ambivalence the Obama administration position. On the one hand it's clear they're not comfortable with escalation. From what I understand the political advisors in the White House are very very much opposed to increasing forces. They think this is LBJ, a President with great promise and great domestic agenda in his grasp who may squander everything by getting bogged down in a far-away, unwinnable counter-insurgency. That's how they see it. That's the advice the President is getting.

Now from the military he's getting different advice, that this war perhaps, there's nothing assured about it, but from my discussions with some of the people in the military who know about this, some of which are on the ground, I have a sense that they feel we're somewhere near where we were in Iraq in 2006 where the public opinion was that the surge could not possibly work. The generals had a sense that it could work. It wasn't a sure thing, it would require almost perfect execution and some luck, but in fact the surge was an astonishing \_\_\_\_ and one might also say political success in Iraq

The one thing that clouds the situation right now is that the assumption had been that the Afghan election would be clean and clear and give legitimacy to the government. That's all part of whatever strategy we're going to have in Afghanistan, is to connect the people with the government and ultimately with the Afghan National Army and Police, who will have to take over policing from us and that was very much hindered by the obvious eruption, at least in part of this election.

So there's a big of a setback there that they sense, but nonetheless, my sense is that the commanders on the ground feel that this can be done but it will require a bridge. In the same way that Iraq, the surge in Iraq provided a bridge of a year or two and halted the downward spiral, in the absence of which the Iraqi Army could never have taken control. It needed the U.S. with a surge of forces and a new strategy, population protection, to earn the trust of the people to be able to gather intelligence, and as a result to conduct a successful counterinsurgency. That broke the downward spiral of chaos and violence in Iraq, produced a virtuous cycle where the U.S. was able to work more and more effectively, and provided a bridge to a situation a year or two later in which the Iraqi Army could not, as it does now, operate reasonably effectively in policing its own country. That's obviously the strategy for Afghanistan.

Now Obama's got a real problem because he told us in a speech a couple of weeks ago that Afghanistan is a war of necessity. It's hard to be the Commander in Chief, to declare a war a war of necessity and then a few weeks later advocate withdrawal wither with a fig leaf or without a fig leaf, and those are the choices Obama is facing.

I'm a little bit suspicious about the Democrats' commitment to the war in Afghanistan from the beginning. I'll read you a passage written by Robert Schrum who was a top advisor to Bob Kerry in the 2004 election, who was a long-term Democratic aid to Ted Kennedy. He is a very important member of the Democratic establishment. This is

what he wrote in December of 2008 after the election of Obama.

He said, "I was part of the 2004 Kerry campaign which elevated the idea of Afghanistan as the 'right war', elevated it to conventional Democratic wisdom. This was accurate as criticism of the Bush administration but it was also reflexive and perhaps by now even misleading as policy."

What Schrum is saying is that while we were trying to oppose the Bush administration on Iraq we inflated deliberately, for political reasons, the importance of the war in Afghanistan. Remember the Democrats were calling it the central front in the war on terror. But simply as a way to attack the Bush administration for, as they would put it, taking their eye off the ball, the ball being Afghanistan and being distracted, et cetera.

So I had always had a sense that the Democrats' attachment to the war in Afghanistan during the Bush years was political cynicism. And what Schrum is writing rather openly and honestly, is that in fact it was a political maneuver.

There's a problem, because when you do that and you do it as a political device, and then you win the election, and then you're in charge and then you're Commander in Chief and then you have real flesh and blood under your command that are going to go out there and some of them are not going to return, you've got to be serious about this war and it's not clear that Democrats, many of them, were serious about Afghanistan ever, except as a club with which to beat the Bush administration on Iraq.

So now they're stuck. And what I think, and I really don't know which way Obama will go, and I'm sure a lot of people are wondering as well. What I suspect will happen, I can't imagine him adopting the George Will view. I'm sure a lot of you have heard about a column George Will wrote a few weeks ago essentially saying we should get out of Afghanistan and conduct our operations entirely off-shore with Predators, cruise missiles, et cetera. To me that's not a serious proposition. You cannot conduct a counterinsurgency in the FATA areas of Pakistan or in Afghanistan off-shore. It's a non-starter. It's a fig leaf. You're either in or you're out. What that essentially is, it's a fig leaf for essentially abandoning Afghanistan and Pakistan.

If you're going to conduct that kind of war you have to be on the ground or you don't know who you're attacking, you don't know where you are. You have no intelligence, and you have no synergy with the forces on the ground.

So the question is do you get out or do you stay in? If you stay in, do you escalate or do you do it, you sort of muddle through at the level we are now?

I suspect that what Obama will do, and I don't know how deep his commitment is in his heart of hearts, but having declared Afghanistan a war of necessity, I think he will not leave, and I think there is some indication that perhaps he's trying to encourage the generals, McChrystal and others on the ground, not to present him with a recommendation for a large increase in forces.

What I suspect is going to happen is that McChrystal will present him, and Petraeus will present a range of options and that Obama will choose somewhere in the middle range as a way to delay in a sense, the inevitable decision of in or out.

But again, there's obviously less enthusiasm in this administration than there was in the past administration for these kind of large strategic engagements that we have in Afghanistan, that we have in Iraq. As a reflection of the fact that they don't see this as the great worldwide threat that the Bush administration had portrayed.

I also want to say almost as an aside that we can see this sort of shrinking of the strategic ambitions, if you like, of the United States, in a few other policies adopted by the Obama administration. I don't want to get into, but it's very clear. For instance on missile defense, it's obvious that the Obama administration is looking for a way out of Poland and the Czech Republic. It's reducing the buy I think \$1.4 billion the funds for missile defense. Lowering the number of interceptors we're going to have in Alaska, et cetera. There's no enthusiasm. The Democrats have been against missile defense since and because Reagan had proposed it in the 1980s. I'm old enough to remember the original arguments and debates at the time. And as our technology has improved, the Democratic arguments have not, the arguments against it. But they have become more and more surreal and almost religious in their opposition. I think Obama shares that religion.

We see it also on the area of space, the manned space flight. The Bush administration had proposed a return to the moon by 2020. I'm sure the Obama administration through the Augustine Commission is going to find a way to put that off.

We used to say in the '80s for a liberal, they always wanted the next defense system, the one that didn't yet exist. When the B-1 was around they said oh, we had to cancel that because the B-2 stealth is the way to go. Then

steal arrived and they said oh no, that's old Cold War stuff we have to go to even higher sophisticated technology. It's always new technology that doesn't exist yet.

So one of the things I saw about the Augustine report is that it's going to recommend visiting asteroids or Mars. I guess the moon is too easy. Is that why? I'm not exactly sure I understand.

But these larger, the Kennedyesque vision of America. We go to the moon not because it's easy but because it's hard. It's not there. That's just a different conception of what America is and what America ought to be, and whether it's hubristic to think in those terms of whether it's realistic. I think the new administration thinks of it as hubris, overreaching, that we cannot afford.

There's one further element of this constricted view of America, and that is not only do they see the world as less hostile, therefore requiring less American assertiveness, both strategically on the ground, in our weapon systems, et cetera, but there's also a sense I think, and this is a little more speculative and a little more ad hominem, I might say, but here I am. My excuse is that I'm a psychiatrist so I'm allowed to do this because I still am licensed. [Laughter].

I think they see that we not only need to have a light conceptual footprint in the world, a light strategic footprint, but I think the Obama administration and American Democrats in general want us to have a lighter psychic footprint in the world. Let me explain what I mean by that.

I think they're questioning the primacy that we achieved really by historical accident. We didn't seek to be the leader of the world. The European, great powers committed suicide in the two great world wars. That left us and the Russians. The Russians adopted a system which was entirely dysfunctional, anti-human, and quite limited in time and they disappeared overnight in 1991. And without ever being the kind of imperial power that the French or the British or the Spanish were, or the Russians who sought empire, we ended up with empire as a default hegemon in 1991. That has not sat very well with some Americans who see us as a rather modest republic where imperium is a threat to the values of our republic.

I think you see a lot of that in the Obama administration. They don't think either that we deserve this primacy and hegemonic position we have in the world, or that we have earned it.

The major critique of the Bush administration generally from Democrats had been that it was arrogant, unilateral,

presumptuous, and therefore alienated the rest of the world, alienated our friends and antagonized our already existing adversaries. What the posit, and you've seen this in every speech Obama has made on foreign policy. What the posit is an approach to the world, a sort of posture of the United States that is modest and apologetic, and that grants a kind of moral equivalent between us and many of our adversaries abroad.

I have been just struck again and again that every time the President goes abroad or even here at home it turns into an apology tour. I have tried to make sort of an inventory of these. But at one point in Europe he apologized, and these are his words, I think, "our arrogance and dismissiveness towards Europe" and not appreciating their role in the world. I think that's kind of easy to under-appreciate the role of the Europeans in the world considering that they have lived off us and behind our protection for 50 years without many great shows of gratitude. The exception here is Eastern Europe where they really are grateful for what America has done and because their liberation came later, they still remember what we did. Whereas "old" Europe, that term that was once used, seems to have forgotten who it was that liberated them from the Germans in the 2<sup>nd</sup> World. War.

So you've got the apology to Europe for not taking them seriously enough. The apology that Obama offered in Cairo for the 1950s re-coups in Iran which occurred in the Eisenhower administration, which is quite a stretch. And it was posited as well, we did the coups and you've done some unfortunate things in the last 30 years. I don't think there's anything near equivalence in those and I think reaching for that was a very unnecessary step when the Obama administration first made its pronouncement at a summit very early on its administration. The Vice President went, I think it was to Munich for a conference and he offered an olive branch to Iran. The Speaker of the Iranian Parliament responded, echoing a demand made in Tehran that they would not agree to meet with us. There was a pre-condition on their part, unless we apologized for the coups in '53. So when Obama apologized or at least mentioned it apologetically in Cairo, I thought it was a concession that was quite remarkable and unnecessary.

But to go through the litany, he mentioned Hiroshima at one point as something that we regret. Torture, Guantanamo. And the one that struck me the most was something he alluded to in his inaugural address and said in the Al Arabia interview, the insufficient respect for the Muslim world. Now that, to me, is simply astonishing.

What power in the world has sacrificed blood and treasure to go to war to liberate the Muslim countries of

Kuwait, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kosovo, Somalia unsuccessfully, and ultimately Iraq? Of all the countries on earth we have shown the most remarkable humanitarian impulses, particularly in the Balkans where we had zero strategic interest and committed ourselves in wars that turned out to be not costly, but you never know that in advance. Committed ourselves to combat in places where we did it purely and entirely to save the Muslims, again in Bosnia, in Somalia and in Kosovo.

So I find these apologies quite a stretch, but it reflects, and this is the point I'm trying to make, not my reaction to it but what I think might help you understand where the administration is coming from, it reflects their sense that America has a lot of amends to make with the world. We have not quite justified our position of primacy in the world because we have had many sins, many of which in a sense balance out the sins that have been committed against us, so therefore we end up with a foreign policy in which the major verb is what? To reset. To reset relations with the Russians, for example.

Now the moral equivalent implied in that is simply staggering. The reason that relations with the Russians went downhill is largely because they attacked a complete helpless Georgia a year ago to detach two of the provinces and absorb them into Russia to reestablish their primacy on the Black Sea, to threaten Ukraine. They went about dismantling their own democracy. Pressure on Ukraine, pressure on Poland, pressure on the Czech Republic. Resumption of the bomber flights. Naval maneuvers with Venezuela. And unrelenting anti-American rhetoric in their media and in their pedagogy. I mean, it seems to me that when you say blandly, well let's reset relations, as if somehow we have committed offenses to the Russians equivalent to what they have done, and therefore the past should be simply swept away, is remarkable. It's that notion that we should simply reset that I think tells us a lot about the Obama administration approach to America's standing in the world, our moral standing in the world, what we can justify doing because we in the past have considered ourselves a city on the hill.

And let me just end by telling you one example of this that I find quite remarkable. Obama was asked, I think it was in Cairo although it could have been in Turkey in the question period about American exceptionalism. I don't know if any of you have watched or seen the transcript of that. What do you think about American exceptionalism? His answer was very interesting. Clever, as always, and interesting.

He said yes, I believe in American exceptionalism, but I can understand how the British believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks in Greek exceptionalism.

Well, if all exceptionalism are equivalent, then none of us are really exceptional.

In other words, yes, we might have a prejudice for ourselves, but it's really a prejudice in the sense that all nations have a sense of their own superiority.

Well, Reagan would never have answered a question like that. Clinton I think would never have answered a question like that. Kennedy would never have answered the question like that. He would have said yes, we are exceptional. We are the only great power not founded on blood, on race, but on an idea. We are the only republic in the world dedicated to liberty above all. And we are the one nation on earth that has sacrificed more, taken more risk, engaged in more conflict, to liberate more people on earth than any in the history of the planet. That's a pretty good summary of American exceptionalism and all of it is true.

The fact that Obama would put it in the context of other nations again tells you how they see America. That I think, I'm trying to convey, are the ideas underlying the policies that have already occurred and that I think you will see occurring over the next three to perhaps seven years - not if I can help it, but I'm just a pundit.  
[Laughter].

I think you ought to carry that when you watch them in Iraq, when you watch them in Afghanistan, when you watch them on missile defense, when you see how they deal with terror interrogation and all that. A construction of diminution of the war on terror which in itself is a reflection of the restriction, the diminution, the constriction of a notion of what our conflict in the world is about. And lastly, that's in service of a construction and a restriction and a diminution of what they see as America's rightful and legitimate role as, if you like, accidental hegemon in the world.

So I hope that's helpful in understanding what's happening in Washington, and I'll be happy to answer your questions. Thank you very much.

[Applause].

**Moderator:** Thank you, Dr. Krauthammer. I have lots of questions. We've got question cards. If you'd fill them out, I've got at least three dozen here already.

Like the presentation, the questions are also not for attribution.

The first question is a composite of a number of questions. That is, the first actions of the administration seemed to be to get closer to some of America's adversaries or potential adversaries - Iran, Venezuela - and at the same time distance relations with Israel, Colombia, and it seemed like there was not an understanding of the threat of particularly Iran posed to the United States. Would you comment on that in the character of the rest of your presentation?

**Dr. Krauthammer:** I agree with that entirely. In fact who ever asked that question will think that I'm plagiarizing them when they read my column on Friday, because that is what I talk about.

I would add to the list of friendly countries who have badly used, Colombia, Israel, I would add to that Honduras. We are on the wrong side of Honduras. It makes absolutely no sense even as a matter of international or Honduran law. We are on the wrong side here, apart from our strategic interests here. I think we've done badly with the Poles and the Czechs who went way out on a limb in order to show their association with the United States. These missile defense installations are not going to help them. It's a way to join themselves to the defense of the West. And leaving them hanging out on a limb, implying that we are going to undercut them under Russian pressure is a way of saying that whereas we might have thought that with the collapse of the Soviet Union Eastern Europe is no longer in play, it was actually liberated. Well, it's somewhat in play. It can only act within the limits of what the Russians will allow. A bit like Finland in the Cold War days. That's a very bad step.

Again, I think on the other side of that, the outstretched hand to Iran. The response that the Iranians gave last week to our demand for negotiations is one of the most disgraceful pieces of paper I have ever read. The contempt they had for our demand for negotiations for some restraint on their nuclear program is astonishing. They said the nuclear issue is closed but we will talk about the environment and other issues with you. And we then said yes. So we'll be meeting with them in the context of the other five powers next month.

Again, as you say with Venezuela, and with others.

I'm not sure it's because, yes, I think in part it's underestimating the threat, but I would also put it under the category of the last thing I talked about which is an uncertainty about our moral standing in the world and whether we really are blameless in relations with Iran, blameless in relations with Russia, blameless in relations

with Venezuela. Obama always harks back to our colonial imperial era. We had a very very brief one. We were not a colonial power like the European powers. In fact we were extremely anti-colonial in the mid part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

So I think there's kind of a lack of moral self confidence, apart from just underestimating the threat. And it's the former which I find more disturbing.

**Moderator:** The next question is also a composite, but those of us that study and are students of national security understand that a strong military is underwritten by a strong economy. And we look at an Air Force that's the oldest of any time in its history, and at the same time we see a guns and butter debate that is missing; we see increased public spending. The result of which is going to be inflation, there's going to be higher interest rates, and there's going to be pressure on defense budgets.

So what do you see for us in the military going forward in terms of a picture of --

**Dr. Krauthammer:** I think that's a very acute point. Look, the Obama administration says that the military has to make tough decisions. So it has a very minor almost inflation level, increase in the defense budget which essentially means no increase. At the same time it is dropping tens of billions of dollars essentially from a helicopter, sprinkling over the country. Particular areas of the country like Ohio and Michigan, which are Democratic; union areas, et cetera. But apart from that they are pumping hundreds of billions of dollars in stimulus and in other areas, yet the only area of the budget where you have to keep and make choices is defense. There are no choices being made on education. The budget is going through the room. On infrastructure the budget is going through the roof. Choices only exist in the military which essentially means that you're going to have to cut and you're making these choices of which systems are going to be cut and which are retained.

Now you can argue the merits of one or the other and you can say well this is wasteful. But as an overall proposition it's clear that the only constrained budget in the government is the military and that relates again to this conception of the threat being a lot less in the eyes of this administration than the previous administration had thought; that the reaction was an over-reaction; that the war, one war was entirely unnecessary and the other war, well, perhaps there's a way to minimize its impact; and I think it reflects a very instinctive - It's not an anti-military feeling, but a sense that the military has a job to do, it's a restricted job. We deploy smart power. We're

not a hard power power. Smart power means a lot of diplomacy, economic sanctions, et cetera. I don't see any diplomacy succeeding yet. I don't see any economic sanctions having any effect on Iran, North Korea. Reset on Russia has brought us absolutely nothing except an announcement a little earlier that Russia is going to be helping Venezuela on a nuclear program. So I'm not sure what the strategic logic is.

But I know what the underlying assumptions which lead them to this are, and that is again the moral uncertainty about our footprint in the world and the sense that the threat is less than we had imagined, and I think they're wrong on both counts, and I think that it isn't only the military that will suffer, but it's the country that will suffer.

**Moderator:** The next question is in the nuclear arena. We've approached relations with the optimistic start of a zero option, going down to zero nuclear weapons in the world. It's without even beginning negotiations.

What do you see coming out of the Nuclear Posture Review and where we're going to go with our nuclear posture?

**Dr. Krauthammer:** Where do I start? So much error, so little time.

The speech Obama made, I think it was in Eastern Europe somewhere, the Czech Republic, in Prague, I think he made it on nuclear disarmament, was, if it had been a high school essay I would have flunked it. The idea that we're going to live in a world without nuclear weapons I think is simply childish. The Pandora is out of the box, it's been done, you can't undo the knowledge. If we were somehow, although this would never happen, to disarm ourselves, does anybody imagine that the bad guys in the world are not going to keep, hide and deploy nukes? It's ridiculous.

What's kept us safe is deterrence. That's why we have to have ours.

I find this mania that liberals have had for 40 years with levels of nuclear weapons to be detached from reality. The fact is, except for some details the level of weapons is entirely irrelevant. All that matters is who's in control of the weapons?

When the Soviet Union collapsed in December of 1991, the number of nukes in its possession did not diminish overnight but the threat vanished overnight. It was because these large numbers of weapons were in control of a communist government for more than half a century which saw

itself in an existential life and death struggle against us. That we worried about an attack in the '40s, '50s, in the '50s, '60s, '70s. Why I would hide under my desk in the '50s in school, why we had the Cuban missile crisis.

But with the fall of the Soviet Union, with the end of communism, what we have with the Russians is a great power rivalry. It is inconceivable that there would be a nuclear war between America and Russia, and the idea that the Obama administration should want to focus as its first item of business on a new START Treaty with the Russians seems to me to be kind of whacky. It makes no difference. We could reduce by a third, we could slightly alter the composition of our forces. It's not going to matter either way.

I would say to the Russians, all treaties are suspended. If you want to build nukes, go ahead and ruin your economy, bill your way into bankruptcy as you did in the '60s, the '70s and the '80s. I wouldn't care one whit.

But the Democrats have this conception that the level of weaponry is key and that its reduction will bring us safety. In fact if you study nuclear theory as I know a lot of you have, even if the numbers are lower, it's the second strike capacity which is what keeps you safe. So it's the composition of the forces that is the key to safety and not the numbers.

So this whole idea of nuclear disarmament as a major objective of this administration I think is nuts. And in fact, if I can say as an aside. I'm on a roll here, aren't I? [Laughter]. I've been on a roll since inauguration day, I understand. [Laughter]. My wife has to scrape me off the ceiling some nights.

The President is going to preside at a meeting of the Security Council next week. This is the first time it's ever happened in our history. He's going to sit at the table. A, it elevates the UN to a level that it shouldn't have. But B, the President gets to choose, the President of the Council, chooses what the topic is going to be. So what's his topic going to be? The meeting will be about nuclear disarmament. But we were very careful to say, but not related to any specific countries. So it's not about Iran, it's not about North Korea, which are the only two that count. Everything else is irrelevant. Who cares how many nukes the French have? I don't know how many and I don't care. I don't live in fear of a French nuclear attack. The French have other vices. But a nuclear attack on us is not one of them. [Laughter].

So it's a reflection of this kind of Utopianism which I think is childish. You could afford it in the '90s, our holiday from history, between the fall of the Soviet Union

and 9/11. But that holiday ended on 9/11 and we do not have the luxury of such childish fantasies.

**Moderator:** I have to get this one in. We're over time, but I've just got to get this one in. The author of this note was very clever. This is almost a yes/no answer, and it's a little cute.

Do you think the administration czars have a better chance for success than the czars of history?

**Dr. Krauthammer:** It's a very odd name you'd want to choose for precisely that reason. I think, a colleague of mine said the White House has more czars than a Romanov wedding. [Laughter].

Look, I've attacked them for an hour so I'll take a pass on this one and say that the jury is out on the czars.

Thank you very much.

# # # #