The Heritage Foundation

Lessons in Foreign Policy and National Security

Edited by David Adesnik and the George C. Marshall Fellows Class of 2012

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Contributors

2012 George C. Marshall Fellows

David Adesnik, *Research Staff Member, Institute for Defense Analysis, Department of Defense*

Lindsey Alazaraki, *Student/Researcher, Missouri State University*

Leslie Bolz, *Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of Representative Doug Lamborn (R–CO)*

Peter Doran, *Research Fellow, Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA)*

Jonathan Hiler, *Policy Adviser, House Republican Conference*

Brady Howell, *Staff Associate, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Europe and Eurasia*

Justin Johnson, *Legislative Director/Defense Policy Adviser, Office of Representative Todd Akin (R–MO)*

Robert Moore, *Legislative Correspondent, Office of Senator Jim DeMint (R–SC)*

Diem Nguyen, *Defense Market Analyst, The Avascent Group*

Drew Nishiyama, *Military Legislative Assistant, Office of Representative Trent Franks (R–AZ)*

Morgan Roach, *Research Associate, The Heritage Foundation*

Benjamin Runkle, *Professional Staff Member, House Committee on Armed Services*

William Salley, *Student/Researcher, Missouri State University*

Kimberly Shaw, *Professional Staff Member, House Committee on Armed Services*

Hunter Strupp, *Staff Associate, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade*

Rebecca Ulrich, *Legislative Assistant, Office of Representative Jeff Duncan (R–SC)*

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The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002
(202) 546-4400 | heritage.org

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Abstract:
Future foreign policy leaders need more than expertise in particular policy areas. They also need the ability to appreciate and synthesize America's traditions, values, and worldwide challenges into a grand strategy. Among the many lessons that emerge from the interviews in this report is that certain personal and intellectual qualities enable one to succeed when the chance arises, but making good policy depends on having solid principles. What, precisely, are those principles? Does conservatism provide a framework for success in foreign policy and national security? Even the best principles bring with them enduring questions about their application, especially the need to distinguish between pragmatic compromise and unprincipled concession. In the end, there are no easy answers to be handed down from one generation to the next. Instead, there is the constant imperative to learn and debate in order to have the best chance to find the right balance between prudent hesitation and decisive action.

The George C. Marshall Fellows Program

Future foreign policy leaders need more than expertise in particular policy areas. They also need the ability to appreciate and synthesize America's traditions, values, and worldwide challenges into a grand strategy.

The Heritage Foundation's George C. Marshall Fellows program is intended to provide exceptional young conservatives with the opportunity to appreciate this unique and essential component of American strategic leadership: the capacity to act as a grand strategist. In 2012, its first year, the program introduced participants to the skills, knowledge, and attributes required to formulate American grand strategy by engaging with some of the nation's leading conservative thinkers.

The program strives to provide a comprehensive overview of national security principles and to explain the application of those principles in real-life situations. Today, many top-level staffers and other professionals around Washington, D.C., are educated in one specific aspect of national defense or foreign policy but have very little sense of where their expertise fits into the larger framework of national security that must reflect the vision of this nation's Founders. A comprehensive overview of national defense and foreign policy is vitally important because those who are charged with making important decisions must be able to do so under the guiding light of this nation's first principles.

The program places major emphasis on imparting to our fellows the practical information needed

to make correct decisions in national security matters. Knowing one's principles is vital, but it is also necessary to know how major decisions are made. This year, the program brought in experienced practitioners who provided detailed descriptions of how strategy is actually implemented. They explained the many obstacles encountered in working in a bureaucracy, the interplay between the executive branch and Congress, and how strategy is constantly changing in response to daily events taking place around the world.

The immediate goal of the program is to prepare Capitol Hill staffers and other Washington, D.C., professionals for careers in strategic leadership within the national security and foreign policy arenas, but through this education, the program also has a larger purpose. By going back to the basics and giving participants a comprehensive overview of national defense and foreign policy—information that, regrettably, is no longer taught in many places—it is helping the fellows to advance their careers by making them much more marketable to future employers. Down the road, this could lead to a host of committed conservatives being placed in high-level staff positions from which they could move American foreign and defense policy in the right direction.

In short, the program is intended to create a solid core of Capitol Hill staffers and other select young professionals who comprehend and advance conservative views of foreign policy and national defense. Through the fellowship, participants are able to familiarize themselves not only with the policy work of Heritage experts, but also with the experts themselves, allowing them to build a strong network of conservatives to whom they can turn when seeking answers to tough foreign policy and national defense questions.

Introduction

The inaugural class of Marshall Fellows owes a debt of gratitude to The Heritage Foundation and specifically to Dr. James Carafano, who conceived of the fellowship and brought it to life. In the spring and summer of 2012, the fellowship provided us with extraordinary opportunities to interact with and learn from prominent leaders in the fields of foreign policy and national security. Dr. Carafano also challenged our class to design and execute a project that would crystallize the lessons we learned as part of the fellowship. This publication is our answer to that challenge.

Once a month, the fellowship hosted an informal, off-the-record dinner discussion where fellows could ask questions of the evening's featured guest. While some of our guests' more piquant answers remain off the record, the fellows came to realize that much of the wisdom being shared deserves a wider audience. For young professionals, candid advice from the most accomplished leaders in their fields may be difficult to come by. Thus, we asked several of our guests to sit for on-the-record interviews, enabling us to capture their advice and to explore some key issues in greater depth.

We hope this publication will pass along a measure of what we learned through the fellowship to others in Washington and across the country who want to know how they can best prepare themselves for public service. As the following pages illustrate, our guests have served at the highest levels of government, where they directly advised Presidents and members of the Cabinet. We especially hope this collection of interviews will be useful to future classes of Marshall Fellows, who will have the opportunity to compare and contrast what they learn with the insights that we derived.

One of the first and firmest lessons that emerged from these interviews is that there is no clear-cut path to professional success in foreign policy and national security. The unpredictability of politics and policymaking will frustrate any effort to plan a reliable route to the top. In the words of former Attorney General Edwin Meese, "Every job I've had has been kind of an accident." The patience to wait for happy coincidences is easier to cultivate if one is already satisfied in one's current position. Dr. Stephen Cambone, who served most recently as the first Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence, advises, "You have to know yourself to know what's going to make you happy. You've got to seek out those opportunities where you're going to find pleasure in the work that you do."

While there is no "right" job or education for a young professional, there are personal and intellectual qualities that enable one to succeed when opportunity knocks. On the intellectual side, one should learn to wrestle constantly with the assumptions that govern both one's thinking and Washington's conventional wisdom. Eliot Cohen, the renowned scholar and former Counselor at the Department of State, endorses the academic habit of "asking childlike questions, like 'Why will this work?'" since governments often rush to execute their plans before thinking through their consequences.

On the personal side, the lessons may seem obvious, perhaps because they tend to be honored in the breach. Professor Cohen says, "It's all about trust. It's really all about ... being good humored and not taking yourself terribly seriously and being respectful of others. It all sounds like kindergarten, but it's true."

William Inboden, a professor at the University of Texas at Austin, also observed the importance of cooperation while serving as Senior Director for Strategic Planning at the National Security Council. "I don't care how brilliant you are," Professor Inboden says. "[Foreign policy] is just not a field for lone wolves. It is just not a field for people who need to be isolated because they can't work with others." As Dr. Cambone notes, "Everyone is trying to get a job done, and everybody needs help. To the extent that you end up helping others get to where they need to go, it's more likely you'll get where you need to go."

Whereas personal success may depend on strengths of intellect and character, making good policy depends on having solid principles. But what, precisely, are those principles? Does conservatism provide a framework for success in foreign policy and national security?

In keeping with their own advice, our guests did not hesitate to question fundamental assumptions about the role that values and ideology should play in defense and foreign affairs. Professor Inboden suggests, "The more vigorous foreign policy debates are actually within each party rather than between

the parties." Even though there is a sharp divide between Democrats and Republicans on key foreign policy issues, Professor Cohen argues that President Barack Obama "is still basically operating within the same framework of American foreign policy [that has existed] since the end of World War II."

At the same time, our guests often invoked the example of President Ronald Reagan as a commander in chief who achieved success—in spite of ferocious criticism at home and abroad—because of his commitment to two basic principles: First, the United States must have the world's most potent armed forces. Second, the United States must leverage the moral imbalance between itself and its adversaries.

Even the best principles, however, bring with them enduring questions about their application, especially the need to distinguish between pragmatic compromise and unprincipled concession. Attorney General Meese recalls how President Reagan "used to say, 'Well, I'll take half a loaf. That's all I can get now, then I'll go back and try and get the rest.'" In contrast, Meese notes, "There are some people who wouldn't change under any circumstances, who wouldn't compromise on any issue.... There's some people who are so rigid they would take a defeat unnecessarily rather than having some sort of reasonable compromise." Similarly, there are those who are too eager to compromise for its own sake. Meese includes in their number the current leadership of the House majority.

How should one learn the art of knowing when to accept half a loaf and when to stand on principle? "The main thing is trying to get as much information as possible and not being unwilling to entertain almost any option," says the former Attorney General.

One of the difficult lessons the Marshall Fellows learned from our distinguished guests is that there are no easy answers to be handed down from one generation to the next. Instead, there is a constant imperative to learn and debate in order to have the best chance of finding the right balance between prudent hesitation and decisive action.

—The George C. Marshall Fellows Class of 2012

Interview with Stewart A. Baker

Assistant Secretary for Policy, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2005–2009

If grand strategy is a pattern of behavior taken by a government that emerges over time—for example, defeating Communism during the Cold War—what was the U.S. grand strategy before and after 9/11?

That question implies that the defeat of international terrorism is the current objective of the U.S. government's grand strategy. Prior to 9/11, the United States used a criminal lens to marginalize and prosecute suspected terrorists. This criminal approach to prosecuting terrorists was tossed out after 9/11 and replaced with a "war model." However, the criminal model is now coming back under President Obama—largely because the political appointees in the Justice Department are familiar with the criminal model from the 1990s.

Is terrorism a grand strategy problem, and if so, how does it fit in with U.S. foreign policy?

Terrorism is not necessarily a grand strategy problem, but it does require a strategy. For example, we have other challenges like China—and not limited to the cyber domain. Right now, the impacts and effects of the U.S. counterterrorism strategy are not completely known. For example, we don't know how effective the initiatives to win "hearts and minds" are. We're still debating the appropriate strategy.

One of the ways to defend U.S. soil is to go on the offensive and put the enemy on the defensive. How do we accomplish this?

Afghanistan is a perfect example of putting the enemy on the defensive. Afghanistan is no longer a safe haven. For potential safe havens, that is something for Special Operations Command—keeping terrorists on the move. The real nightmare for U.S. security is the threat of homegrown terrorism where terrorists leave the United States, achieve substantial training, and then return to attack the homeland.

It boggles the mind to think about the billions of taxpayer dollars that go into preventing terrorist attacks each year and the countless layers of government bureaucracy, not to mention Transportation Security Administration agents, scanners, and even bomb-sniffing dogs. A front page article in al-Qaeda's *Inspire* magazine boasts that it costs the United States billions to defend the homeland while terrorists can wage an attack for as little as $5,000. How should the U.S. be more proactive rather than reactive in countering terrorism?

The man who wrote that article for *Inspire* is no longer alive. Clearly, the cost of conducting terrorism was a lot higher than he expected.

The U.S. is spending too much money on screening technology rather than on figuring out who's getting on airplanes. That would be intelligence that actually identifies who is a threat. The United States needs to reduce this sort of infrastructure in a sensible way. We need to ask, "Are we getting a reward out of what we're spending?" If we're going to decrease or cut costs, that would also mean accepting costs of a different kind—for example, allegations of discrimination at airports and the like.

Over time, the attitude toward the evolution of war has changed. Society has become more politically correct in how we address our enemies. In your book *Skating on Stilts: Why Aren't We Stopping Tomorrow's Terrorism*, you point out the extent to which terrorists' civil liberties are protected. Does this affect national security, and if so, how?

Political correctness is a huge problem. Political intelligence in the military is continuously beleaguered by political correctness. The Department of Defense often retreats when there is bad press. 9/11 occurred because the FBI maintained walls rather than tracking terrorists. That was a transformative realization. There is a price we pay in terms of security in order to be politically correct on civil liberties issues. The U.S. government is putting security at risk when it kneels to civil liberties enthusiasm without a demonstrative need.

Since 9/11, there have been over 50 foiled terrorist plots against the U.S. How do you think the U.S. should respond when the next 9/11 occurs, and how do you think the U.S. government will respond? Where do you think the U.S. is most vulnerable?

It's unlikely that we'll see planes flying into buildings again. However, the most worrying 9/11-like attack would come in the form of nuclear or biological weapons. It's unlikely that al-Qaeda would be able to pull something like that off at this point, but nuclear weapons in countries like Pakistan are not as secure as they should be. Furthermore, biologi-

cal attacks are within the capacity of about 15 well-organized individuals. The United States needs to be prepared to use all tools ... similar to its response to 9/11.

In the introduction to *Skating on Stilts*, you suggest a sense of remorse for your work in the National Security Agency. You specifically refer to the "walls" that you helped to create that block the sharing of information between the law enforcement and intelligence communities. Once in government, you attempted to correct this with such initiatives as passenger name record (PNR). Do you think the breaking down of these "walls" has been adequate? How far do you think we should go?

The breaking down of walls is working, but they creep back in another form. Bureaucracy tends to hoard info in some areas. We could see the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act court reasserting itself in intelligence.

President Dwight Eisenhower once said, "Plans are worthless, but planning is everything." When you started at the Department of Homeland Security, the agency struggled with the creation of plans and policies. As DHS has matured, it's now struggling to implement these plans. How do you think the department should effectively go about achieving this?

In my view, DHS suffered from too many plans rather than too few. Most of those plans were required by Congress, but planning only has value if it is driven by a decision maker pursuing a clear goal. That usually means top-down planning with the involvement of leadership. Without leadership involvement and a clear goal, plans are simply documents written with a view to satisfying bureaucratic constituencies.

In your book, you refer to the lengthening of the "stilts" of U.S. security, particularly with the advancement of technology. How do we shorten them?

Without overreacting, we need to soberly recognize the threat posed by new technologies. If we prepare for new attacks that use weapons like computer code or anthrax, we can greatly reduce the impact of such attacks.

Someone once said that entering government is like "drinking from a fire hose." How do you keep from drowning?

Save some time during the day or the week to do a little thinking or reading that is not presifted by your staff. You'll get a little perspective on the job that can't be gained from the press of meetings and the blizzard of briefing papers.

Interview with Dr. Stephen A. Cambone

Under Secretary for Intelligence, U.S. Department of Defense, 2003–2007

Could you describe your educational background? Did you feel that it prepared you for serving in government, or were there aspects of leadership you couldn't learn in the classroom and that you felt were better learned on the job?

I got to graduate school in January of '74. I finished all of my course work by '79 or '80. We had meanwhile undertaken to establish a foundation, which we called the Claremont Institute. It's still there. It publishes the *Claremont Review of Books*. In any case, we started that back in '78 or so. I was working there for the most part, more or less full time, and was maintaining my all-but-dissertation status at school. In large measure, it was because there was no good reason to finish because there were no jobs to be had.

In early '82, a friend who had been teaching at what was then Claremont Men's College had found his way to the Los Alamos National Laboratory. He called and asked if I would like to go work in the office of the director of the laboratory.

The director wanted to have a handful of people on his staff who were not themselves physicists or engineers but who had a broader view of the political landscape and could give him some help in thinking about those issues and in turn help others at the laboratory with thinking about them. It was an eclectic group. It was primarily oriented toward policy issues, but one had to appreciate the role that technology played in the origin of whatever was being addressed.

While I was there, in 1983, President Reagan announced the Star Wars initiative, or SDI (Strategic Defense Initiative), as it was more properly called, and I got involved in that as well: How does it work? Can it work? How long would it take to make something useful? Later, I joined a contractor who had a fairly large SDI business. Because I knew as much as I did about it, I was a good fit for them. I spent four years with that contractor focused on SDI. That in turn was the springboard when the first Bush Administration came in. It was looking for people to help do the policy issues related to SDI, so I was asked to take the job as the director of the missile defense policy office.

So you see there's a common theme here. It all had to do with policy and technology and how you get those two things to come together.

After the 1992 election, I had to make a living because I had been a Schedule C political appointee. I was offered a position at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and also did a lot of consulting on the side. I later moved to the National Defense University, immersed in the same kinds of subjects (but no consulting).

Along the way, I served as staff director for two congressionally mandated commissions—one on the ballistic missile threat to the U.S. in 1998, then one on space organization and management in 2000. Those efforts brought in another element I was obliged to consider beyond policy and technology, and that was intelligence. Secretary Rumsfeld, who chaired both of those commissions, then asked me to come over and help him get up and going at the Pentagon in 2001.

Is there any advice you wish you had received when you were younger, before you started on this career path, or any advice that you would give to anyone else regarding their education or their first few jobs?

It is important to try, to the extent that you can, to pick your boss—who you are going to work for. And if you cannot pick your boss, at least choose an environment in which you know you can do well and prosper. I wasn't sure, for example, in the mid-90s that for me, the right environment was the defense industry. You have to know yourself, to know what's going to make you happy. You've got to seek out those opportunities where you're going to find pleasure in the work that you do.

Now, moving more specifically to your duties and responsibilities within your government positions, I'm curious about your perceptions of the Department of Defense when you went to work there. Which did you find were true of the department and which were misconceptions? Has the department changed, or did it remain constant during the years you worked there?

Bureaucracies, by design and intent, don't change very much over time, and in a democracy, that's really pretty important. They do lend a certain amount of stability, and quite honestly, they create a certain amount of desirable friction because the country can't be whipsawing itself every which way every time someone—or a new Administration—comes in

with a bright idea. So the need to persuade and lead people who are most expert at a particular element or component of an agency's mission, whatever it may be, I think is a good and important thing.

The bureaucracy that grew up in the Pentagon, I think, came to be a reflection of the Cold War itself (especially after the Cuban missile crisis), which was at bottom a risk-averse and conservative undertaking. No one wanted bad things to happen, so the tendency was not to take more risk than we thought was needed. The exceptions, of course, were those things which were done, if you will, in the black world or done to allow for rapid development of an essential capability of one kind or another. There grew up a certain view of how things ought to be done that very much matched the tenor of the times. So in that sense, it hasn't really changed at all.

On the other hand, the end of the Cold War and, more recently, the acceleration of the pace of events leaves the department—and all the other agencies in the government—struggling to keep up sometimes. But because things happen so fast, ironically, you still don't want to be whipsawed. A $500 billion enterprise can't be redirected very quickly and certainly not in response to fast-moving events. On the other hand, you've got to be able, when circumstances require, to act with some dispatch. I think that's why we have seen a lot of interest in the Special Forces teams, the quintessential move-quick guys, the Rapid Equipping Force and ad hoc organizations.

In the current environment, therefore, what is required is that the leadership in the department, down maybe as deep as the Deputy Assistant Secretary level, must be more attuned to what's taking place in the world. If you're the official that has the Northern Africa desk as part of the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, you probably should have been thinking for a while now that something like what happened over the last 10 days in Benghazi was going to happen. And if it did, what were you going to do about that?

It's hard to carve time out of the day-to-day grind of the Pentagon, but that said, I think that's the biggest and most significant change—that is, the need for having those kinds of contingency plans prepared down to a fairly low level of responsibility. That implies the capacity to move quickly, assuming the plans have been briefed to senior civilian and military officials and adopted.

Is having a substantial degree of managerial skill a critical component of moving tasks and managing the people in the Department of Defense? Or is it about just knowing where to manipulate the process?

There are some people who try it that way, by manipulation, but they have limited success, because sooner or later they are caught out, aren't they? But you do need to know where to expend your energy. It's very easy to think that the rock you're pushing on is the right one when indeed it is not. So one has to know how things actually get done instead of what the flow diagrams tell you.

You also have to be able to establish personal relationships, alliances, and that sort of thing with people, because everyone is trying to get a job done and everybody needs help. To the extent that you end up helping others get to where they need to go, it's more likely that you'll get where you need to go.

There is a certain amount of attention that needs to be given to the people who are the long-term in-place professionals and their relationship with the oft-changing political leadership. There are a variety of ways people try to approach that relationship, and I don't know if there is a right way to do it. It's going to depend on the personality of the people who are trying to lead and that of the professionals who they are trying to lead—and the urgency of what they are trying to accomplish.

So, yes, it takes a certain amount of skill—whether it's managerial skill, people skill, bureaucratic skill, or some mix of all those things. That's all surely true.

Another feature unique to the Pentagon is that there is a civilian bureaucracy and a military bureaucracy—three of the latter, really: one in the Military Departments, another in the Joint Staff, and a third in the Combatant Commands. Balancing those relationships adds a certain degree of difficulty, shall we say, to the management tasks and the skills you have to bring to the table to do it relative to an all-civilian agency. And it takes a while to learn. Most civilians, and I was certainly one of them, are not steeped in the culture of the military. You can observe it and participate in activities with members of the military, but that's not the same thing as, every day, coming to work and side by side trying to figure out how to get things done when the military may do things in a way that, from a civilian point of view, may be completely unfamiliar.

Where did you find constructive criticism in any of your positions? Did it come from above? Did you seek it out from people working for you?

I did after a while figure out that most criticism was useful. A small fraction of it you had to dismiss for whatever reason. The vast majority of it, if you just understood that it was being generated for a reason, was valuable. You might not agree with the reasons why it was being generated but should accept it for what it is—which is a response from someone or some organization that for some discernible set of reasons didn't like what was being proposed. It took a bit to finally figure that out, but once I did, it was a lot easier not only to deal with criticism of all sorts, but to profit from it.

At a certain point, of course, you had to press forward because you couldn't satisfy everybody on any given point. In my experience, as long as allowance was made for enough interaction and opportunity for proposing alternatives, even those who may have disagreed were usually accepting of a decision that was made.

When you served in government, particularly during your time as the first Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence, did you apply conservative principles to the making and implementation of policy?

I'll tell you the story, and you can make your own judgment. I was urged to declare the position of the Undersecretary as a senior member of the intelligence community, which would have been the equivalent of the directors of the various intelligence agencies. I was insistent that, not only was I not going to do that, but that it was inappropriate.

The job of the Defense Secretary's staff is essentially to oversee on his behalf the execution of his directives given by virtue of his responsibilities for authority, direction, and control over all of the activities of the department. The staff positions are nondirective positions in the sense that staff can't give orders to people or components to do things. What you do is, you set up frameworks and decision processes on behalf of, or prepared for, the Secretary of Defense to make. Based on his decisions, staff promulgates policy which the components implement.

It was very hard during my tenure to persuade people that the secretariat wasn't there to *do* intelligence but was there to manage the people and the processes and to manage the acquisitions and procurements, requirements, and all those many other things essential to the success of execution by a component. Staff, especially in the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence, are not in place, in my judgment, to direct, operationally, intelligence matters.

Did the Secretary look to his Undersecretaries, including the Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence, to advise him on what he was being asked to do operationally? Certainly, but it wasn't an operational job, and that was sometimes a distinction that was difficult for some to understand. So if you're asking if that was a conservative undertaking, the answer is yes, and it was so because in my judgment the office would not have been able to function successfully otherwise.

I guess that's a long way of saying, yes, we did act conservatively.

That said, of course each successive Undersecretary—responding to the direction and need of the Secretary of Defense he supports—is going to do things somewhat differently. Leadership brings a personality to a job, and the job evolves a bit in light of that personality and that of the Secretary being served.

Interview with Eliot A. Cohen

Counselor, U.S. Department of State, 2007–2009

Were there any courses that you took, either as an undergraduate or while pursuing your doctorate, that particularly influenced your ideas about international relations or grand strategy?

It wasn't courses. It was teachers and books. I remember when the new translation of Clausewitz came out, which was in 1976. I just spent that summer really reading it very carefully, and I said, "Wow!" I had fantastic teachers who each in different ways helped shape the kinds of questions I learned how to ask and who set a certain kind of model for what intellectual discourse is all about.

How do you think your education prepared you specifically for a career as a policymaker?

I think I was fortunate in that I got a degree in political science at about the last moment when it was possible to get the benefit of social science, which is a certain kind of rigor and conceptualization, while still being firmly grounded in history and in reality. I think that moment is gone.

I didn't get into the policymaking world until relatively recently. I think there are academic virtues which apply. One of them, actually, is the way which academics have of asking childlike questions like "Why will this work?"—which is a very valuable question. Government very quickly drives you toward action items. It's useful to be able to step back and say, "What's the big picture? What's the big issue?"

In terms of learning the people skills that academia might not provide you, what are the best ways to do that?

Doing it! But I think being attentive while you're doing it. One of the short books I always tell people is really worth reading and thinking about is the *Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*. He's a mature man. He's the emperor when he's writing this, and he's clearly reflecting on what he's learned from different people. I think there's a lot to be said for getting in the habit of trying to learn from other people's behavior.

Do you think there are any lessons you only get when you see an organization from near the top, like a senior executive or even a Cabinet-level position?

I think one of the most important things to realize about organizational life is to understand that it's going to look different seen from the bottom, the middle, and the top the same way that individuals look very different to you seen from below, seen from above, and seen sideways. No one should ever be in an organization and be complacent about thinking that they fully understand it, because it's an organism—it's always evolving—so no matter where you are in it, you've always got to be trying to learn more about it and how it operates.

I was wondering about when you were at the State Department, to what extent you found seeking knowledge or particular facts a key part of the job, or did you feel the facts were brought to you by the appropriate people?

No, no, no, no, no, no. You're always fighting for information, particularly if you're in a position of power or responsibility. You very quickly realize information does not come to you. You have to go out and look for it. Always. You can never assume—never ever—that the information is coming to you. You always have to go look for it. The more you rise up in the bureaucracy, the worse it gets.

In your experience, do some departments do a better job of developing their younger action officers?

Defense definitely does because of the military culture. The military culture is to develop your subordinates. But, you know, the big variable is human beings. The big variable is, do you have a boss who thinks that part of the job is to develop people, who thinks it's a good thing if their subordinates get promoted out of their positions, or not. The smart bosses always want to see their subordinates do well and go somewhere even better.

How would you characterize the role of entrenched bureaucracy in the development of grand strategy or the execution of foreign policy?

First, I don't believe there's such a thing as grand strategy, and I don't think you can generalize about it. Most of the time, policy is made by between five and 50 people and usually the same five to 50 people. Sometimes it's even fewer than that.

Then there's a lot of routine systems maintenance that needs to be done. One of my great teachers was the late Jim Wilson, who taught a wonderful course called "Bureaucracy." One of the books he made us read was a very difficult, poorly written book called *The Functions of the Executive* by Chester Barnard.

One of his points is that most of an organization's energies have to be spent simply on keeping it alive and doing what it's doing. That's true, and I think that's actually pretty important stuff.

Why do you think all the talk of grand strategy is sort of an intellectual hobbyhorse for so many people in Washington? *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*—in so many places, everyone says, "If we only had a grand strategy...."

One of these days I'm going to write something blowing up the whole notion. It's frustration. It's a desire for order and regularity in a universe where it doesn't exist. I think people have a lot of trouble confronting, really confronting, that there's a lot of randomness in the world and that personalities are hugely important. So they fall back on this chimera of grand strategy. The Greeks never would've fallen back on that. You won't find the words "grand strategy" in Thucydides or Aristotle. There have just been so many shocks that nobody could've anticipated, that the idea of a grand strategy is just ludicrous.

I was wondering about your mentality going into your most recent assignment at the State Department, if there was anything you particularly thought you were going to achieve, if there's a particular achievement that stands out in your mind as the most important, and also if there's a failure that stands out.

First, I would say, as a critical objective, you should have "I don't want to do any harm. I don't want to really screw things up." Now, you shouldn't be too defensive. "I want to leave whole. I don't want to compromise who I am or my standards. I don't want to do something awful." That is, for me at least, the first thing. I didn't go in with any expectations. I very deliberately went in with no expectations. Going in the last two years of an Administration that was very much on the defensive and under a lot of pressure, I just wanted to help, do what I could do.

The things I was proudest of? I think my boss felt I gave her good advice even when she didn't take it. I think some big things I had the lead on—we had this North Korean nuclear reactor in Syria. I had the State Department lead on that. I was part of a very good interagency process that gave the President three good choices. He made his decision. I thought it was an exemplary process. Actually, I wasn't all that happy with how the policy turned out, but I felt that was constructively done.

Probably the main thing I'm proudest of, I was able to convince Secretary Rice and others that things were not going well in Afghanistan and to begin setting the predicate for a lot of the changes that were made, actually begun in 2008 and continued over into 2009.

How did you and the colleagues you worked with manage to avoid some of the typical pitfalls of policymaking, such as groupthink or developing—especially in early 2007—the bunker mentality from the fierce criticism the Administration was under?

The Syria crisis was different because that was just a curveball from outer space. The thing that made us effective is that we knew each other or quickly came to know each other, were respectful of one another, were friendly to one another. We could disagree amiably. Everybody would get heard, and all views would be presented. It's all about trust. It's really all about that, having that level of trust and comfort. A large part of this is being good-humored and not taking yourself terribly seriously and being respectful of others. It all sounds like kindergarten, but it's true.

By the way, in terms of my failure, I very much regretted during the 2008 Gaza war, I should have told the Secretary, "Send me to Israel to figure out what the Israelis are up to," because she had a very negative view of the Israelis, which I thought was a little bit more than was warranted. It was partly because the Israelis were not doing a very good job of communicating what they were planning. Some of our people weren't communicating things the Israelis had told them. I wish I had pressed that on her.

What is the role of actors outside the U.S. government, such as Congress, the media, or academia, in the formation of U.S. policy, either as a contributing factor by providing outside perspectives or as a limiting factor?

People are very much aware of the media buzz out there, and don't believe them if they tell you they don't read the newspapers. Most of the time, though, government is a machine that talks to itself. There are certain outsiders that you listen to because you think they are wise.

The person who caught all this was Kissinger in the first volume of his White House memoirs, where he says that academics come in and immediately want to start advising on tactics—which they are never competent to do. People in government turn to historians for some reason and expect them to have

answers to complex policy problems, and that is the last thing that you want to ask a historian. They are not going to give you answers to anything. My friend Hew Strachan at Oxford says that what a good historian can give you is good questions, not good answers, which is absolutely right.

Would policymakers benefit from reading the leading academic journals on international security?

They don't have time. It's genuinely academic. In government, at that level, you don't have time.

What about think tanks, people who may have been in a similar position before?

Some of them do grind out useful work; all of them at some point do something useful. But you are getting a culture now where people are in government, they leave government, they go to a think tank, and then they spend the rest of their time with their noses pressed up against the glass waiting for their next shot at government. That is why I feel very fortunate I'm not at a think tank; I'm a professor.

Do you feel that when you were in government, you were applying conservative principles to what you did, or are they too much in the ether to connect to what you were doing on a day-to-day basis?

Too much in the ether. I'm not even sure what "conservative principles" means.

You are free to define it as you see fit. A Condoleezza Rice State Department is presumably very different from what a Susan Rice State Department would have been.

I think at some point you stop thinking, "Am I conservative?" or "Am I a liberal?" I think that the big ideas that animated me were, first, the United States being the country that it is, animated both by its ideals and its interests. Those will often coincide, but sometimes they won't, and when they don't, you have to deal with it on a case-by-case basis.

Do I believe in the essential goodness of the United States? I don't know if that's a conservative principle, but I do. Do I think it's incredibly important that it be predominant? Yes, although there are a lot of liberals who probably agree with that too, or would have in the past. Do I think that ultimately ideas matter? Yes, but some people say that is not a conservative view of foreign policy.

In their histories of American foreign policy, Walter Russell Mead and Walter MacDougall assert that there are uniquely American schools of foreign policy. Do you think it is possible to define such a thing?

You know, I am really struck by how much variation there is in the history of our foreign policy. Look, I'm the Robert Osgood professor at the School of Advanced International Studies. Osgood's big book is *Ideals and Self-Interest in American Foreign Policy*. I think he understood very well that it's both the intersection but also the tension between the two that's the story of our foreign policy. We have resolved it in different ways at different times, but they have always both been there. Just about every President who tries to tack too far in one direction finds himself being pulled back more to the center.

Do you think it might be more useful if people talked in terms of instincts or dispositions rather than categories like realism and idealism?

Absolutely. Most of those categories don't mean anything. There is a certain kind of political science simple-mindedness that kind of drives me crazy because it tries to reduce everything to labels. It is the same reason I hate the term "neocon"—because it is just not clear to me what it is supposed to mean. Most of those labels are really pretty worthless.

One of the more interesting things in your new book *Conquered into Liberty* is the sense of how a nation's geography determines much of its strategic character. Do you think that the experience of the American frontier made us uniquely sensitive to threats to our security?

I would not say uniquely, but sensitive in a different way. One of the points I tried to make is that the United States has always been engaged internationally, has always been part of an international system. The idea that we just kind of burst on the world in 1917 or 1940 is kind of cuckoo. I think you end up being shaped by a combination of your geography, your domestic politics, and your foreign policy. I think this is true of pretty much any country.

Do you think that the variances in foreign policy between George W. Bush and Barack Obama—where there are variances—speak more to the importance of personal experience?

Yes, but even Obama, if you step back, he is still basically operating within the same framework of American foreign policy that has existed since the end of World War II. Even he will use the language of American primacy. Yeah, he will cut the defense budget more than I want to, but is he perfectly happy

to order the world's largest campaign of assassination? Yes. Would a British prime minister be willing to do that? I don't think so.

Is "the national interest" a useful framework, then?

No.

Why not?

Because there is no single national interest. We have a lot of different interests, and the challenge of statecraft is trying to harmonize them. It is important to understand that the country wants to do different things and needs to do different things, and it is not the case that all good things come together. Good things are often opposed to one another. The art of statecraft, I think, is much more figuring out how to balance and harmonize than look for the Holy Grail.

This gets us back to why I don't like grand strategy. If there was a single national interest and you found that Holy Grail, then you could have *the* grand strategy that would tell you where to go, but that is not the world we live in.

Interview with William Charles Inboden

Former Senior Director for Strategic Planning, National Security Council
Former Member, Policy Planning Staff, and Special Advisor, Office of International Religious Freedom, U.S. Department of State

If you had to give advice to young people in national security or foreign policy, what types of concepts and principles are critical for those who will be leading in this field in the future?

I am a big, big fan of students studying history. I worry that most students these days who want to go into foreign policy work end up majoring in political science.

While political science as a discipline has much insight and much to offer, my concern is that it privileges these very precise types of quantitative models and theories that I find do not allow much room for human personality, for ambiguity, for a lot of the messiness of the real policy world. Meanwhile, the problem with many history departments is that they are not teaching diplomatic and military history anymore like they used to. Part of the solution to this is for more students to demand of their universities to give them history classes that teach diplomatic and military history rather than some of the other more trendy, politically correct social histories that are being taught.

The last point, I would say, is it's very important to read biographies and to study the lives and thought of great leaders and great thinkers. They often show us how individuals can rise above their circumstances, cannot be trapped by the big patterns of history but instead can make a decisive difference—particularly at important crossroads.

We often hear people try to apply lessons learned from historical events to current-day situations, but oftentimes the lessons learned vary among individuals. Thus, how far can you take the study of history when making current-day decisions? What is the best method for using the skills learned from history in a policymaking role?

That is a great question and actually touches on a pet peeve of mine. You're exactly right that history, when it's invoked by policymakers these days, is more often than not invoked in inappropriate ways or misapplied.

For example, the two historical examples that get invoked all the time, no matter what the circumstances, are Vietnam and then Munich in World War II. When looking at current foreign policy challenges, the question asked is too often, "Is this another Munich in World War II, or is this another Vietnam?" Munich in World War II and then Vietnam are both interesting and important episodes, but if we let those two be the only analogies or precedents we draw on, we're almost always going to mislead ourselves. That is part of what a deeper knowledge of history will do; it will liberate us from the trap of narrow thinking that assumes a current situation is just like one in the past.

A lot of people who want to progress professionally wonder whether or not a master's degree or a PhD is necessary or useful in the field. It depends, of course, on what each person is doing, but with your experience, what would you advise?

This comes up a lot with my master's and PhD students here at the University of Texas. With very, very few exceptions, I've rarely seen a circumstance in foreign policy where there is one particular academic background that is required. I've seen very successful people in foreign policy who are tremendously professionally accomplished who "only had a bachelor's degree" and, let's say, their bachelor's degree was in biology or a non-foreign-policy-related field. I sometimes will bring that example up to assure younger professionals and students that, just as getting a PhD or master's will not guarantee you a certain foreign policy job or success, not having a PhD or master's in a foreign policy-related field will not necessarily prevent you from ever attaining professional success.

The second part, though, as I think about all the foreign policy professionals I've worked with, I do think that all things considered, having at least a master's degree can be very helpful. If you have a choice between having a master's and not having a master's, it is better to have the master's for two reasons: First, the credential it brings will sometimes open some doors. Second is what you actually learn in the program.

This is purely anecdotal, but if I were to think about all of the mid-level and higher foreign policy professionals I've worked with over the years at the

State Department or National Security Council, I would roughly guess that for maybe a quarter of them, their highest degree was a bachelor's degree. Fifty percent of them, their highest degree was probably a master's degree or maybe a JD, and then the remaining 25 percent of them had PhDs.

There are always going to be tradeoffs in life. Say someone has a bachelor's degree and is offered a pretty good job promotion, or they're offered a full scholarship to do a master's or PhD. I would generally advise them to take the job and continue gaining more professional experience. Ideally, you do both, but I give slight preference to more professional experience than to further education.

Turning away from the classroom, were there things you learned while you were working that made you a better policymaker that you didn't necessarily learn in school?

There's one big thing that comes to mind there. This is something I've observed firsthand in a million different ways and I've also heard other retired policymakers comment on. Most recently, I saw an interview with Bob Gates, the former Secretary of Defense. He stated this in very clear terms, how essential it is to develop interpersonal skills and character.

These are things that are not taught in graduate school. I don't care how brilliant you are, how many languages you know, how much history you've read, how many advanced degrees you have; if you're not the kind of person who can get along with your colleagues, who can persuade other people to work with you, who is just the type of person others want to work around, you're going to have a severely impeded professional career in foreign policy. It is just not a field for lone wolves. It is just not a field for people who need to be isolated because they can't work with others.

It's almost impossible to think of any major foreign policy issue area or development or initiative that did not involve teamwork and group work and being able to understand another person's point of view, being able to build collaboration, being able to persuade others to work with you, being able to persuade them to follow your lead, just being the sort of person that other people want to be around.

I could give you countless examples of potentially good foreign policy ideas I've seen go by the wayside because the person pushing the idea was an unpleasant person whom no one wanted to listen to. And then other times, a person who may not have been the most brilliant person or may not have known a whole lot about a particular issue was able to end up being fairly influential just because they had such good people skills.

What advice do you wish someone had given to you before you began your last job in government?

I was actually given the right advice before I started that job at the NSC, and I didn't listen to it enough. I was told by actually a couple people, look, the minute you start there, your inbox is going to be overwhelmed, you're going to be drinking from the fire hose, you're barely going to be able to keep up. Don't let all the day-to-day, ticky-tack stuff so consume you that you lose sight of the importance of working on two or three really big issues and initiatives where you are taking the initiative, where you are spending months on a really big project that will have a much more lasting legacy rather than just managing your inbox every day.

That sounded like good advice to me. I remember thinking, "Okay, that probably makes sense." Then I started the job, and probably a year went by where, with a couple exceptions, I was barely keeping up. I was drinking from the fire hose. I was overwhelmed by my inbox. I realized, "Oh my goodness, I've been in this job a year now, and I've not taken the initiative on things; I've not done a couple of the really big projects I had wanted to do." I forgot or neglected the advice I was given.

I was then able to make some course corrections and do one or two bigger initiatives in my second year there which ended up going fairly well. One initiative I did a lot of work on in my second year at the NSC became known as the Asia Pacific Democracy Partnership. This was something I worked closely on with a couple colleagues at the State Department and that President Bush announced and launched in 2007 at the APEC summit in Sydney.

This involved forming a coalition of democracies in the Asia Pacific—India, Japan, Australia, the United States being the bigger ones, but also some of the smaller ones like Mongolia, the Philippines, and New Zealand. The idea was that Asia is the most dynamic and important region in the world today, yet its regional architecture is fairly anemic and fairly limited. Asia is also one of these emerging democracy success stories if you look at the number of democracies in Asia now as compared to, say, 30 years ago. Yet there is no regional mechanism or organization bringing together the democracies of the Asia Pacific.

So we said, "Let's change that." Let's put together a coalition of Asia-Pacific democracies who can cooperate initially on promoting democracy and human rights in the region, but also eventually develop solidarity on other issues as well and send a message to some of the autocratic non-democracies in the region—China especially—that the dynamism and the future in Asia is around countries that embrace democratic values.

Developing that idea, traveling to the region, persuading different countries to sign up for the coalition, and then having President Bush launch it was a great learning experience. It was an honor to be a part of it. Unfortunately, after President Obama came in and downplayed the idea of democracy promotion, the Obama Administration seems to have let the coalition fall by the wayside. Hopefully, some of the groundwork that the Asia Pacific Democracy Partnership laid can be resurrected.

How would you define conservative foreign policy?

I see more agreement and more bipartisanship in areas of foreign policy and national security policy than I do in domestic and economic policy. In the main, I think that the broad outlines of the Obama Administration's foreign policy have continued a lot of the Bush Administration's foreign policy. This is certainly the case with the counterterrorism framework of preemption, of drone strikes, of understanding that it actually is a war we're in and not merely a legal matter.

That said, there are some conservative distinctives. One would be a real commitment to a normative sense of American exceptionalism, understanding that the U.S. is unique in history. I don't believe in capital "P" progress in history, but I do believe the United States has been on the right side of history and in American power being an unambiguous force for good in the world.

Another conservative distinctive would be a willingness to talk about and act on values, to understand that our foreign policy is not just about material interest in the narrow sense, but understanding that as a free-market democracy we want to privilege the protection and promotion of free-market democracies and universal human dignity in our foreign policy. We are not cultural relativists. We are going to favor countries that affirm those values.

Another distinctive would be an unambiguous commitment to American strength. We don't need to be apologetic about it. It's a good thing for America.

Keeping with the idea that there's a little more bipartisanship in foreign policy, do you think it's because there is a continuing tension between realism and idealism so that neither party has been able to create a coherent theory for itself?

One could say that the more vigorous foreign policy debates are actually within each party rather than between the parties. Republicans have their own internal debates between the more realist-oriented ones and the more values-oriented ones, between the more isolationist-oriented ones and the more interventionist-oriented ones. Likewise, Democrats are beset with all of their internal divisions and debates.

Another thing, I think, that might account for some of the bipartisanship is that Presidents want to do what works. This is where, to be admittedly a little biased here, what has been more successful for American foreign policy has been when American foreign policy follows conservative principles.

For all the criticism that Reagan came under when he was in office during the Cold War, the reason that a lot of Democrats and liberals have now come around to saying, "Ah, maybe Reagan wasn't so bad," is that he was right! He was right about the moral component of the Cold War. He was right about the imbalance between capitalism and Communism, between democracy and tyranny. He was right about the importance of American military strength and power projection. Now, a mistake that all of us can easily fall prey to is trying to refight the Cold War or taking the Reagan template and applying it to every new situation that comes along.

Another more recent example: For all of the criticism that the George W. Bush Administration came under for its counterterrorism policies, they worked. After 9/11, there was not a single other major terrorist attack on American soil. President Obama, as a candidate and a Senator, was viciously critical of those policies. Then, once he came to office, he realized that, campaign promises notwithstanding, he wanted to pursue policies that were going to work.

Interview with Edwin Meese III

Attorney General of the United States, 1985–1988

To begin with, we want to get your thoughts on how your education prepared you or influenced you. How did the study and practice of law shape your general approach to politics? Of course, our particular interest is how it might have shaped your perspective on national security.

I went to law school on a fluke. I joined ROTC in 1949, when there was no thought of any war. I graduated in '53 with a commission as an artillery officer, and I didn't go on active duty until '54. I was in the reserves during the intervening year, so I had a year when I couldn't do anything.

I applied for law school, got in fortunately to the University of California–Berkeley, which is my home area. While I was on active duty, because I'd had one year of law school, I got all the legal assignments in our field artillery battalion—training recruits in the Uniform Code of Military Justice and being a trial counsel in special courts-martial, which didn't have lawyers in those days. I really liked the trial work, so as a result, I went back to law school.

I think there's no question in my mind that for any kind of work in which you do a lot of decision making, and particularly in policy work, where you have to look at a lot of different aspects of a particular issue, a law school education is extremely valuable. In my career, which is now a little over 50 years old, I've spent around half my time in strictly law and legal-type jobs and about half the time in various kinds of executive jobs. In both, I found that the law school education has been extremely helpful because you identify issues, you look at options, you look at arguments on both sides of an issue.

All of those kinds of skills help you, so I think for me a law school education was extremely valuable, even though I didn't plot this out. Nor did I plot out the work I was going to do. Every job I've had has been kind of an accident in the way that something happened that caused it without my necessarily planning it that way.

The next question is about what you can't learn in the classroom, especially when it comes to leadership.

I think the best way to learn leadership is to be in the military and preferably in the Army or the Marine Corps. The reason for that is that the Navy and the Air Force are primarily technical in their orientation to a much greater extent. In the Army and the Marine Corps, all of your work is leading troops.

The political skills, probably, it's hard to learn out of books; you really have to learn it by being on the staffs of other people and being able to watch people in action. That was the way I learned, certainly by being able to follow the example of Ronald Reagan, working closely with him as I did for eight years when he was governor of California. On-the-job learning is probably a better way to learn political skills, although, again, background reading and being well-versed is also very helpful.

I think the key to being successful is to continually learn from what you're doing and what you're able to see around you.

Critics often deride the government as bureaucratic and slow-moving. Is that fair?

I found at the Department of Justice that people were willing to be very efficient and would respond to leadership. People seemed to work very well with new ideas to improve the management. We did things like create for the first time a Justice command center so that there was a single point of contact with all the executives. So I found that government doesn't have to be bureaucratic and inefficient. I think many departments are well managed.

A lot of times, Congress is responsible for some of the inefficiencies in the executive branch because of the way they write laws or the limitations they put on departments, the budget process. How can you have an efficient department today when you don't know what your budget is going to be three years in a row and you operate on the basis of continuing resolutions?

How would you characterize the quality of people you worked with in government?

I've got to say the people I worked with were really very good. The people I worked with were lawyers primarily and law enforcement officers. I think it really depends on the quality of the leadership and the clarity of setting up procedures and directives so that people understand what is required of them. Overall, I think that the people who work in government who I had experience with are very hardworking people and effective people.

What do you consider your most important achievement in government? What do you consider your most significant failure?

The most important achievement was probably the development of the drug policy, which I was involved in at the White House and then, of course, as Attorney General. I became, as Attorney General, chairman of the National Drug Policy Board, and as a result of the President's strategy, which combined law enforcement, international cooperation, prevention and education, treatment and rehabilitation, and research—a five-point strategy—we actually reduced drug use in the United States by about 50 percent between the peak (at the start of the '80s) to the beginning of the '90s.

Greatest failure? I would say, probably, in the White House it would be the inability to reduce the size and cost of government more than we were able to. One year, for example, we reduced the total non-defense employees by 75,000 by having a chart at every Cabinet meeting showing how many had been reduced, mostly through attrition, retirements and other vacancies in each department. But I would say it was hard to maintain that kind of thing because other crises kept crowding out some of the management-type activities. What we did do was slow the growth of the federal government, but we didn't make an awful lot of progress in actually reducing it.

Henry Kissinger said that high office consumes intellectual capital; it doesn't create it. Did you find that to be true? Did you locate new sources of intellectual capital?

One of the things we did in the Justice Department was we worried about people getting captured by the inbox. Some people say the urgent overcomes the important, so we developed a series of seminars and research programs for our top leadership there. We would bring in people from the outside. In the White House, we did the same thing: brought in people on communications issues, brought in people from the advertising community. So I don't think that high office necessarily stifles the development of intellectual capital.

High office is often said to induce a "bunker mentality." Where did you turn for constructive criticism of your work? Think tanks? The media?

I think you have to avoid the bunker mentality, and we did turn to think tanks. That's how I got to Heritage, the close relationship I had from working with them while I was in government. We brought in Ed Feulner, for example, who was then the president of The Heritage Foundation, on a 90-day contract into the White House just to look at things we were doing and make recommendations during our first year there.

So we had regular contact with a lot of people on the outside, but it is easy to get that bunker mentality, particularly when there's some crisis. I think that the supreme example of that was the Nixon Administration in regard to, first, the war and, second, Watergate.

In what ways are conservative principles distinctively conservative as opposed to simply pragmatic?

I know from my standpoint, conservative principles also make common sense, so they are pragmatic. Sometimes, it would not be pragmatic to be so conservative that you would, as Ronald Reagan used to say, go off the cliff with full flags flying as opposed to saying we can only go so far; we can only get this much. As he used to say, "Well, I'll take half a loaf. That's all I can get now, then I'll go back and try and get the rest."

Do you think we're facing that problem now, where some members of the Republican Party want everything and are willing to risk everything to get everything?

I see more that the Republican leadership in the House, for example, is almost too eager to get a deal, and I thought they did a very poor job of making their first offer, which should've been the last. I think that right now, both the President's victory in the election and the constant drumbeat of the press are causing them to be in some ways unrealistically weak in their negotiating posture.

I think if you don't operate on the basis of principles, then it seems to me you're just wandering all over the place and you respond to what happens to be in the newspapers today or what your opponents are saying. You have to have some sort of principled framework for what you're doing; otherwise, you might as well let the other side dictate what's going to happen.

On the other hand, there is such a thing as being too ideological, and the question is where does ideology stop and principle start? Ideology is what you call the other guy's principles. There are some people who wouldn't change under any circumstances,

who wouldn't compromise on any issue. There's a difference between compromising on principles and compromising on particular issues. There are some people who are so rigid they would take a defeat unnecessarily rather than having some sort of reasonable compromise. So you have to make the decision: At what point would it be giving up a principle as opposed to compromising on an issue?

Are there any general lessons you would have on where to draw that line, when you're going too far in compromise, or is it something that is just so wound up with the particulars of a situation that you can't offer a general rule?

It's hard to say. For example, I would say an area where it would be very difficult to compromise would be—for a conservative—to accept Congress ceding to the President the power to borrow money, as he suggested. That would be a violation of a constitutional principle. Ronald Reagan for example, in 1982 did agree to a compromise to raise taxes, a compromise that was three dollars of reduced spending for every dollar of taxes. The lesson learned there was that you got the dollar of tax increase and you didn't get any of the spending reductions.

How do you know when you're being too idealistic or not enough? In your career, how did you go about identifying the middle ground that made sense? What advice would you give to other people looking for that middle ground that's so hard to define?

I guess the main thing is trying to get as much information as possible and not being unwilling to entertain almost any option. If you exclude an option, it ought to be so far out from your principles that it's pretty clear to everyone in the room. Ronald Reagan was always willing to consider any option. Even though he might discard it, at least he'd take a look at it. That was his way of dealing with Gorbachev as well.

So I think, on the one hand, if you won't even consider something or take a look at it, I think that's being unduly idealistic or in some ways just plain stupid not to at least consider something to see if it might be worthwhile looking at. On the other hand, if you have no principles or you're willing to compromise on really basic principles, then I think you're allowing pragmatism sometimes to overcome good sense.

The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002
(202) 546-4400
heritage.org