

## **Interview with Richard Perle Conducted by Linden MacIntyre**

CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT INSPIRED “THE PROJECT FOR THE NEW AMERICAN CENTURY”?

I think it was a concern that naïve internationalism was developing that didn't take proper account of the threats we face and the ability of existing international mechanisms and to counter those threats. And hence the conclusion that some serious new thinking about how the United States could protect its interests and continue to play its role as the leading power of the world.

IT'S MY IMPRESSION THAT THE INTELLECTUAL ORIGINS WERE IN A DOCUMENT PREPARED BY PAUL WOLFOWITZ BACK IN THE EARLY NINETIES. CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT THAT.

Well as I recall Paul's work then, he was at the Department of Defence in the first Bush administration and Paul was seized with the importance of reflecting on how the world was going to look after the collapse of the Soviet Union. And it seemed quite natural to suggest that it was in our interest to discourage the rise of another power that might menace us as the Soviets had and that was one of the themes of that piece.

AND WAS THIS ALSO THE ORIGIN OF THE DOCTRINE OF PRE-EMPTIVE USE OF FORCE IN ORDER TO BACK UP THAT – THAT OBJECTIVE?

I think the concept of pre-emptive force has been around for centuries. If you know you're about to be attacked it's better in many cases, not in all, but in many cases it is better to pre-empt that attack by an attack of your own. So there's nothing new about the concept of pre-emption. I don't think it has been applied in a – in a general sense, that is with the – the idea that anytime we see someone else becoming more powerful we must try to pre-empt before they can become more powerful. It's rather more focused on specific threats.

IT WAS TOO RICH FOR THE BLOOD OF GEORGE H.BUSH OBVIOUSLY. HE SENDS IT BACK FOR A REWRITE. HOW DOES IT EVOLVE FROM THERE AND BECOME ESSENTIALLY THE INTELLECTUAL BASIS FOR THE PROJECT FOR A NEW AMERICAN CENTRE?

Well I don't know that it is the intellectual basis - although maybe it is. But the idea of the United States discouraging the rise of a super power that might be motivated to recreate a relationship like the Cold War relationship with the Soviet Union, and that idea is not only obvious but I think a very good idea if we could discourage a development that would be costly and create the kinds of anxiety that existed during the Cold War, we would be wise to do that. That doesn't mean that in order to accomplish that we should launch pre-emptive wars. But we should do what we can to discourage the development of a new threat.

SO WHAT WAS IT ABOUT IT? I MEAN YOU'RE PORTRAYING IT IN A VERY BENIGN WAY WHICH IS NOT THE WAY MOST OF THE WORLD ARE INTERPRETING IT.

I think it's been misinterpreted by many people.

EXPLAIN THAT.

Well for one thing ah I have heard it characterized many times as ah suggesting that the United States considers under adoption of pre-emption it is free to attack any one at any time for any purpose. And that statement and statements similar to it abound among critics of the policy. But that isn't what the policy suggests. The policy is a prudent regard for the relative position of the United States and others who might be hostile. It commends policies that would discourage the emergence of a hostile great power which need not be military action, indeed, unlikely to be military action. Take China, for example. I think the jury is out on what kind of relationship we ultimately will have with the Chinese. We don't know. I don't think the Chinese know at this point. But China is a large and growing power. One of the ways that we might seek to avoid a hostile relationship with China and the emergence of a new Cold War in which China replaces the Soviet Union is through diplomacy and interaction or engagement as it is sometimes called and I favour that. I think the right way to deal with China is politically and diplomatically and economically.

THIS DOCTRINE HAS AS ITS ESSENCE A VERY POWERFUL MILITARY CAPABILITY IN WHICH FOREIGN POLICY BECOMES AN EXTENSION OF MILITARY POWER AND I'M WONDERING IF YOUR DISTINCTION IS REALLY GOING TO BE OF MUCH COMFORT TO THE CHINESE OR ANYBODY ELSE WHO MIGHT BE LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE OF SOME SIGNIFICANCE IN THE WORLD.

For some years I worked on Capitol Hill for a senator. And one of the lessons I was taught was that senators, whenever they can, raise a lot of money when they're up for re-election because they hope to discourage opponents from running against them. They hope to create an obvious reaction. If he's got all that money, he's all ready to go, I can't win. So I won't even try. So military power appropriately managed can be a discouragement to hostile action. I won't even try. I won't challenge. I won't threaten because those guys are so far ahead of me I'd be foolish to do that. It's a form of deterrence, if you will. And if indeed it does discourage hostile actions, a pretty good investment.

WHAT DID THE GROUP AND YOU - BY THIS TIME ARE A PART OF IT BECAUSE YOUR NAME IS ON THE DOCUMENT, -EXPECT TO GET OUT OF THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION?

Well we certainly didn't expect the scales to fall from their eyes. But ah we really thought in a way we were filling a vacuum because the loyal opposition, the Republican

Party, was asleep at the helm. They simply weren't engaging on foreign policy issues. They weren't raising the kinds of questions that we thought it was important to raise. Normally you would have expected some leadership and it simply wasn't there.

SO YOU WENT TO CLINTON.

So we wanted to begin a debate. We thought these issues deserved – deserved discussion and one way you precipitate debate in this country is by trying to engage an administration that is making the policies.

SO HOW MUCH CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT THE MEETING THAT YOU AND YOUR GROUP HAD WITH SANDY BERGER, PRESIDENT CLINTON'S NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR - ON THIS WHOLE QUESTION?

We thought it was important that we get behind the opposition to Saddam Hussein. People who wanted to remove Saddam and replace that regime with a benign regime, a decent humane regime, a democratic regime, one that would renounce weapons of mass destruction, one that would encourage a peace process in the region. In short, everything that Saddam's regime wasn't. But they couldn't do that by themselves. They needed help; they needed support. So we went there principally to urge support for the opposition to Saddam and we didn't get anywhere at all. Berger was dead set against it.

WHAT COULD HE POSSIBLY HAVE HAD AGAINST A PROJECT LIKE THAT?

Well he seemed obsessed with the image of the Bay of Pigs - the Cuban exiles in 1961 or '62. And he had been listening – maybe he inspired General Zinni a former Sencon commander who seemed to share the view that anything we did for the opposition would invariably result in a catastrophe like the aborted effort to unseat Castro.

HE MAY HAVE BEEN RIGHT.

Well I don't think he was right, in part because judgement about how much support there was for Castro at the time was clearly wrong. But I'm confident about the abhorrence of Saddam's regime among Iraqis. So that's the first obvious point of difference. But beyond that, one of the reasons why the Bay of Pigs was a fiasco was that we never gave support of the kind that we had promised and that was wholly within the ability of the administration to control. If they decided to get behind the Iraqi opposition they can support them, if they chose to do so obviously. If they were going to cut them loose at the first sign of trouble, that's not much of a policy.

ONE OF THE PEOPLE AT THIS MEETING WAS THE PRESENT SECRETARY OF DEFENCE – DONALD RUMSFELD. HOW DID HE REACT TO THE REACTION OF MR. BERGER?

Well my recollection is that as we were leaving, while we were still on the White House grounds, he said ah to the rest of us who were at that meeting: Did you notice that every time Sandy Berger addressed this issue he did it in terms of how the policy we were

recommending would look and not in terms of what its consequences were.

HE WASN'T VERY HAPPY WITH THAT?

He was not happy with that meeting.

NOW IT HAS BEEN SUGGESTED THAT GIVEN ITS OWN TIME THE CLINTON-GORE ADMINISTRATION WOULD HAVE DEALT WITH IRAQ. THEY WOULD HAVE PERHAPS DONE IT IN A DIFFERENT WAY, IN A MORE SUCCESSFULLY MULTILATERAL WAY.

I don't believe that. They had 8 years to do something and they didn't do it. I just don't believe they would have done anything. They were so risk averse and there was – I don't know what it means to say in a multilateral way.

...A MORE SUCCESSFUL MULTILATERAL WAY.

Successful even more. Look, there's some people you can deal with and there are other people you can't deal with. And Saddam Hussein is a thug and there was no way you could get a reasonable resolution of our concerns out of that thug, especially if you believe, as I do, that the principal concern was his continuance in power. No international institution was going to talk Saddam out of being dictator of Iraq.

BUT IS IT NOT POSSIBLE THAT – THAT A MORE DEFT, A MORE SENSITIVE DIPLOMATIC APPROACH TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY THROUGH THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE SECURITY COUNCIL WOULD HAVE WON INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT THAT YOU ULTIMATELY WANTED.

Well international support is fine. But you can't separate the – the value of the support from the objective to which it is devoted. And if all you could do was get support for remonstrations that isn't worth much –

OR CONTAINMENT.

Containment doesn't work in this situation because the containment policy says as long as Saddam stays within his own borders that's okay.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH IT THOUGH? I MEAN WHAT'S WRONG WITH THAT FROM AN EXTERNAL POINT OF VIEW?

Because if what he's doing inside those borders is building weapons of mass destruction, for example, at the point at which he decides he no longer wishes to be contained, he is now in the position to undertake aggressive policies of the kind that we might not be able to deal with. So you cannot adopt this geographic concept in this world. Now, and this is part of the problem with the United Nations. United Nations was set up basically to stop invasions across national borders and containment has a role to play in that. The concerns now are not simply invasions across national borders. The

concerns now have to do with things like ah is a reckless regime in the process of acquiring nuclear weapons and what is that going to mean for us later on? North Korea is a good example.

BUT YOU'RE NOT IN NORTH KOREA NOW. YOU'RE IN IRAQ WHERE THERE IS NO EVIDENCE OF ANY – ANY POTENTIAL FOR DEVELOPING NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN – IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

Let's withhold judgement on that until we're in control of Iraq. But there certainly without question is a capability for chemical and biological weapons. That's been documented by the United Nations and there was every reason to believe that that work was continuing and if you look back to the change of administration from Clinton to Bush, every reason to believe that the sanctions that Clinton had relied upon were unable to be unravelled. So we were faced with the prospect of the end of sanctions with Saddam emerging triumphant while he had active programs for chemical and biological weapons and I believe work on nuclear weapons as well. But we'll see when the evidence is in.

YOU HAD A POLITICAL CAMPAIGN IN 2000 THAT DIDN'T SEEM TO MATTER. ... NOTHING ABOUT FOREIGN POLICY OR IRAQ IN THE RUN UP TO THE ELECTION.

No, that's not so. There's tough language on Iraq in the Republican platform and some tough references in speeches by then candidate Bush.

BUT IT DIDN'T REALLY TRANSLATE INTO MUCH IN THE FIRST MONTHS OF THE MANDATE.

In the first months there was a review and the review was met with ah the normal resistance one expects when a significant change in policy is on the table. The bureaucracy that was happy with the Clinton policy was still largely in place and it resisted a serious review. And I'm sorry to say were doing rather well in that regard until September 11<sup>th</sup>.

SO WHAT DID SEPTEMBER 11 INJECT INTO FOREIGN POLICY THAT BLEW THE RESISTANCE AWAY?

An understanding that you can sometimes wait too long. You can dither, you can review and if while you're dithering and reviewing you get hit, you have to face the question of whether you waited too long. We waited too long to go after Osama bin Laden. Everybody now would agree with that. Everything we did after September 11<sup>th</sup> to deal with Bin Laden and the Taliban could have been done before September 11<sup>th</sup>, with one important difference. If we had done it before September 11<sup>th</sup>, we'd have gotten the whole shooting match all in one place because they were all there together in the camps. And if we acted decisively we probably wouldn't have Al Qaeda to deal with today. Now we're going to have to chase them all over the world and possibly for years because they're dispersed. We waited too long.

SO AFTER SEPTEMBER 11<sup>TH</sup> AH PRESIDENT BUSH SEEMS TO HAVE ADOPTED ALMOST AS A WHOLE THIS POLICY THAT HAD BEEN EMERGING IN THE THINK TANKS SINCE THE EARLY NINETIES DRIVEN BY THE IDEAS OF PAUL WOLFOWITZ. IS THAT AN ACCURATE PERCEPTION?

I think the president after September 11<sup>th</sup> was much more receptive to a much tougher policy. I think he's quite tough minded to begin with and I believe he would have ultimately have arrived where I think he now is. September 11<sup>th</sup> accelerated the process.

HE MADE A VERY IMPORTANT SPEECH SHORTLY AFTER SEPTEMBER 11<sup>TH</sup> IN WHICH HE – HE DECLARED THAT THE ENEMY WASN'T JUST THE TERRORISTS. THE ENEMY WAS PEOPLE WHO GIVE COMFORT AND PROTECTION TO TERRORISTS. HOW SIGNIFICANT WAS THAT SHORT PHRASE IN HIS IMPORTANT SPEECH?

You know he actually said that first on September 11<sup>th</sup>. And the words were, “ we shall not distinguish between those who committed this act and the states that harboured them”. And it was of enormous importance, probably the single most important sentence of his presidency because it reversed the policy of all previous administrations which had regarded terrorism as a matter to be dealt with by police forces and intelligence forces. What this president was saying is that we are going to take this war to the terrorists where they live, where they work, where they plan, where they conspire, where they organize and to the governments that give them the help on which they rely. This is an issue that had been debated for a long time. But no president until this president was prepared to adopt that strategy for combating terrorism. And I think the reason is that the cost of terrorism was seriously underestimated. People simply didn't imagine an attack on the scale of September 11. They should have, not least of all because there had been previous efforts to bring down the World Trade Center. But most Americans, most American officials believed that our approach to terrorism which was largely one of law enforcement was about right. The money we were spending to deal with terrorism was about right. The intrusion in people's everyday lives was about right. And if you suggested the measures we now use at airports before September 11<sup>th</sup> the public probably wouldn't have tolerated it. So attitudes have changed about what we should be prepared to pay in order to manage the threat of terrorism. And one very important change, the most important change is the willingness to go after governments that harbour terrorists.

WHICH WAS AN OBJECTIVE THAT THE REST OF THE WORLD ACCEPTED WITH APPROVAL.

Right up until we put it to the test.

BUT IT'S WHERE YOU PUT IT TO THE TEST THAT CREATED A PROBLEM FOR MUCH OF THE WORLD.

Well they – people accepted it with respect to Afghanistan.

YES.

And my guess is that that's about the only place they would have accepted it. If we had said Iran harbours terrorists, Libya harbours terrorists, Syria harbours terrorists, they would have said, oh no. And they've said the same thing in many cases about Iraq. So, I'm afraid that it was the nexus, September 11<sup>th</sup>, the Taliban regime and Al Qaeda that led some people to say, okay, we understand, go after Afghanistan. But once you got beyond that immediate connection with September 11<sup>th</sup> the international community wouldn't hear it.

WAS THAT BECAUSE THERE WAS NO CONNECTION WITH WHAT YOU HAD PLANNED AS CHAPTER 2.

It's because we are so accustomed to thinking in terms of the sovereign rights of countries that do not cross borders with military forces. It's because the whole post-war security structure is oriented toward the elevation of sovereignty to the highest value. The UN is built on sovereign states and because the only admissible crime in the UN system is an invasion across a national border.

IT SEEMS TO ME THAT - THAT HAS BEEN CENTRAL TO HUMAN MANAGEMENT SINCE THE EMERGENCE OF THE NATION STATE, NOT SINCE WORLD WAR TWO. AND ALL OF A SUDDEN WE ARE VEERING OFF IN THIS NEW DIRECTION.

Yes that's true it goes back to the emergence of the nation state at least in the post-war organization of nation states of the United Nations. But from time to time we have judged that it was right to take military action even where an invasion wasn't involved across national borders. We did it in Kosovo to stop ethnic cleansing. We took some action to stop slaughter in Bosnia. We had a right to do that. I think we should have done something in Rwanda which would have been yet another instance. I think the world is coming now to recognize that there are situations other than invasions across national boundaries that can and should be responded to by the international community. So I think the time is right for rethinking the role of the United Nations and I think rethinking the Charter of the United Nations. The idea that the charter of the UN should remain unchanged 60 years after its creation, even though the world has changed so dramatically, makes no sense to me. I hope we have a serious debate now about amending the UN Charter.

NOW I'M INTERESTED IN THE ROLE OF TONY BLAIR AND GREAT BRITAIN IN HELPING OUT WITH THIS NEW DOCTRINE. YOU HAVE A SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT IN BRITAIN. YOU HAVE A REPUBLICAN CONSERVATIVE ADMINISTRATION IN WASHINGTON. YOU HAVE A DOCTRINE THAT COMES OUT OF WHAT THEY CALL NEO-CONSERVATIVE INTELLECTUAL CIRCLES. HOW DID ALL THIS SORT OF GET MARRIED UP?

Well it's an interesting question. Neo-conservative intellectual circles have elements of

classical liberalism, as does Tony Blair's thinking as I see it. Blair is not simply a ... socialist. I think he's way beyond that. He's been influenced by a lot of other things including Margaret Thatcher. Ah neo-conservatives are classical liberals in many ways. And in particular in the depth of their commitment to individualism, individual rights and freedoms and therefore the strong intervention of the nation on behalf of those boundaries. There's a Wilsonian tinge to neo-conservatism and I think there's a Wilsonian tinge to Blair's thinking as well.

WHERE DO YOU THINK THAT BLAIR AND GEORGE W. BUSH SORT OF RECOGNIZED IN EACH OTHER THIS KIND OF COMMON VISION?

My sense is that they hit it off at the very first meeting at Camp David, at least the accounts I heard from people who were there was very positive. I think both men may have been surprised by that. I must say that whether you like him or love him Tony Blair has been heroic in this. He's risked his political career for something he believes in. That doesn't happen very often and when you get a leader like that, he deserves real respect in my view, even if you disagree with what he's done.

BUT IN THE REAL WORLD WHEN YOU HAVE TWO PEOPLE WITH THAT MUCH POWER SITTING DOWN TALKING TO EACH OTHER THERE'S GIVE AND TAKE. GEORGE W. BUSH NEEDED SOMETHING FROM TONY BLAIR. WHAT IS YOUR ESTIMATION OF WHAT IT WAS GEORGE W. BUSH NEEDED FROM TONY BLAIR?

Well I think people will stand back and say he needed the legitimization of having allies, partners in this ... and that may be true. What I can't tell you about but what is almost certainly more important and we'll just have to wait for some memoirs to judge that is, is the chemistry, the reinforcement of each other in the remarkable situation where two leaders are prepared in their own way and for their own reasons to risk everything. It doesn't happen very often. And when you're out on a limb of that sort, it's very nice to know that you have the support of someone who's in a similar situation. And I think that psychological bond is an important one.

WHAT DO YOU THINK GEORGE W. BUSH OFFERED TO TONY BLAIR IN ORDER TO WIN HIM TO THE POINT WHERE HE WOULD – IT'S ALMOST A TILL DEATH DO US PART COMMITMENT.

Well I don't think there were trades. I think that both of them saw not only the danger of Saddam Hussein but I think both of them were minded from the beginning to think in terms of liberating Iraq. And it was ill advised to say that in the view of some people because the whole structure of international law and traditional diplomacy was prepared to recognize compliance with UN resolutions as a reasonable demand and disarmament as a reasonable demand. But the moment you talked about regime change, suddenly you're beyond the limits of traditional thinking in the United Nations context. But deep down I think that President Bush understood the necessity to remove this tyrant from power and I have a feeling Tony Blair did too but he is a better spokesman for his own view than I am.

I'M CURIOUS ABOUT HOW MUCH INFLUENCE YOU THINK TONY BLAIR HAD IN PERSUADING PRESIDENT BUSH TO WORK THROUGH THE UNITED NATIONS FOR AS FAR – YOU KNOW, FOR AS FAR AS HE COULD GET.

Well I suspect that was Tony Blair's view. I know it was the view of our State Department. I'm sure it was the view of the Foreign Office. But what I don't know is whether the argument was, look work this through the UN because I need that in order to maintain sufficient support at home.

WHICH WOULDN'T BE AN UNREASONABLE SPECULATION.

No, not unreasonable. But there's an alternative, which is work, it through the UN because I believe it is vital to save the UN and I believe in the UN. And they're two quite different approaches and I don't know which approach applies in Tony Blair's case.

KNOWING TONY BLAIR IT COULD HAVE BEEN EITHER ONE.

Or some combination.

BUT KNOWING GEORGE W. BUSH HE WOULD NOT BE INCLINED TO AUTOMATICALLY EMBRACE THIS CONCERN FOR MULTILATERALISM OR THE UNITED NATIONS.

I think there were some – I think there were overwhelming practical considerations. One is we weren't ready so the argument that you've got nothing to lose by going to the UN, you know, it may take a week or two or six or eight but we're not going to be ready for 8 or 10 or 12 weeks. So you've got nothing to lose. Second, there's a high probability that you will get the approval of the United Nations and in that case you'll be in a much stronger situation politically. So why not go to the UN?

BUT IF I WERE SPEAKING AS AN INTERNATIONALIST AND A UNITED NATIONS SUPPORTER, I'D SAY THAT'S A VERY CYNICAL USE OF THE UNITED NATIONS. IT'S ALMOST TREATING THE UNITED NATIONS LIKE A RUBBER STAMP.

Well, the United Nations has from time to time been a rubber stamp. In this case it was clear it wasn't going to be a rubber stamp. No it's treating the United Nations as a source of legitimacy, if you can get it to go along with you. And when you can't then you have to deny that it is THE source of legitimacy. And it isn't THE source of legitimacy.

WELL WHAT IS IT?

It's a structure set up in the immediate aftermath of World War Two by diplomats who had seen the ravages of aggression across international borders and drafted a charter to

try to discourage that from happening again.

ONE THING YOU DID WRITE RECENTLY ABOUT THE UNITED NATIONS IS THAT - “ THE CHATTERBOX ON THE HUDSON WILL CONTINUE TO OPERATE. WHAT WILL DIE IS THE FANTASY OF THE UN AS THE FOUNDATION OF A NEW WORLD ORDER.” WHAT IN THE ABSENCE OF THE UN WILL THE FOUNDATION OF A NEW WORLD ORDER BE?

I think there are two possibilities here. One is the re-engineering of the United Nations, a re-launching in product terms but with a different charter, a charter that recognizes that it is not simply aggression across national boundaries, that the international community has to join to, to contend with. It is also the development of weapons of mass destruction in the hands of regimes that are capable of using them defensively and aggressively or in the hands of regimes that might disseminate, distribute, sell weapons of mass destruction to terrorist groups. We now know that hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of people could be killed by a single incident of terrorism. And we have never conceived of that as a threat of the magnitude that we now understand and we don't have mechanisms for dealing with it. We have police departments and we have intelligence organizations but there is no international structure that tries to coordinate the world that is willing in effectively managing that risk.

ESSENTIALLY WOULD THE REAL FOUNDATION OF THE NEW WORLD ORDER BE THE STRENGTH AND THE VALUES OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA?

The answer is yes if you include other countries that share those values and who will add their strength to ours. Yes, I mean that is what a coalition of the willing looks like. And one of the problems with the United Nations is that it includes not only countries that respect democratic values but it includes dictatorships. It includes some of the worst dictatorships in the world.

BUT TWO-THIRDS OF THE WORLD AT LEAST, DOESN'T REFLECT THE VALUES OF THE CULTURE THAT WE SEE AROUND US HERE IN THE WEST AND AREN'T PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN EMBRACING IT. WHAT ABOUT THEM?

Let's keep them at a maximum distance while trying to bring them around to our set of values. I certainly wouldn't suggest that we change our values because you have people who are unfortunately burdened by dictatorships who don't share them.

I MEAN THERE'S A LOT OF TALK THESE DAYS ABOUT IMPERIALISM AND YOU COULD DESCRIBE THIS VISION AS A KIND OF BENEVOLENT IMPERIALISM. HOW WOULD YOU REACT TO THAT?

Well the term imperialism has always been understood to involve the taking of territory and holding the territory and we haven't done that. We're not going to do that in the future. So imperialism can't be the term to describe even the most disparaging view of

American policy. We certainly exert a lot of influence in the world – economic, political, military, cultural and there are people who resent the notion that too much of all those powers are in the hands of the United States although much of that power is administered not by the government, it's an outgrowth of what Americans do, what they produce, the goods they produce, the technology they produce through the entertainment they produce. But I don't believe that any reasonable definition of imperialism can be made to apply to the United States. You've got to get a distorted definition of its imperialistic – too many people in too many places are munching on McDonald's hamburgers.

AND FREEDOM FRIES.

And freedom fries.

SOMEBODY TOLD ME AN ANECDOTE IN WHICH YOU SPOKE ELOQUENTLY ABOUT YOUR CONCEPT OF A CITY ON A HILL. WHAT DOES THAT PHRASE MEAN TO YOU?

Well it's a phrase that Ronald Reagan used to describe a world of freedom, a world that was a beacon to others. Unless you believe in more than one world you can't have a world that's a beacon to others but you can have – you have a nation that's a beacon to others or a group of nations.

AND THAT NATION WOULD BE THE UNITED STATES.

Sure, sure. We're not alone in believing in the fundamentals of individual liberty, representative government, free markets, free speech. Other countries share that view. So we're all on that hill together, those who share that view. But neo-conservatives and even some Labour party leaders may believe that those values are so important that we should be fighting for their extension, not by invading people, although occasionally by liberating people.

SO I MEAN AS PART AND PARCEL OF THIS WHOLE VISION IS LIBERATING PEOPLE. AND I MEAN TO LOOK AT IT FROM YOUR POINT OF VIEW AND FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THIS ADMINISTRATION, YOU'RE IN THE PROCESS NOW OF LIBERATING THE PEOPLE OF IRAQ.

I have no doubt that that's what we're doing. When this is over the people of Iraq will be far better off.

IF I MIGHT ASK, WHO ARE YOU GOING TO LIBERATE NEXT?

Well I think that this act of liberation may well inspire some people to liberate themselves - which is of course the best kind of liberation. Iran is a good candidate for that. There's already very widespread dissatisfaction, as you would imagine in a country where a group of mullahs dictate every aspect of people's lives and effectively countermand the efforts of reform by government officials.

WHAT WOULD YOU THINK OF THE NOTION OF GIVING A LITTLE PUSH TO MAKE IT HAPPEN SOONER THAN MAYBE THE PEOPLE ARE PREPARED TO..

Should we give moral support to that? Absolutely we should. When the president talks about Iran as he does that's exactly what he's doing. And every time he does it a cheer goes up among Iranians who want to be unburdened, who want to be rid of these dictators who are dominating their lives.

A CONGRESSMAN TOLD ME JUST A COUPLE OF WEEKS AGO THAT IRAQ IS NUMBER ONE, IRAN IS NUMBER TWO. HE WENT ON TO SUGGEST PROVOCATIVELY THAT THIS THE BEGINNING OF A WAR OF CIVILIZATIONS. HOW CLOSE IS HE TO THE MAINSTREAM THINKING OF THE ADMINISTRATION?

It is not a war against a civilization, not at all.

BUT APART FROM THAT - IS IRAN THE NEXT DOMINO THAT MIGHT FALL?

I think there's a decent chance that the opposition to the government in Iran which I would reckon to be about 80% of the people, maybe more, will be encouraged by the toppling of the tyrant of the size of Saddam Hussein.

AND THEY WILL TAKE MATTERS INTO THEIR OWN HANDS.

I think you will see a lot of pressure on the mullahs to grant some of the liberalization that Iranians thought they were voting for when they put a more liberal regime in power. But it's a regime that has had its hands tied. If that doesn't happen then I think the pressure will mount and ultimately they will bring down this awful government.

THE MULLAHS, AS YOU KNOW, BELIEVE THEY'RE ACCOUNTABLE TO GOD. THEY DON'T LISTEN TO 80%, 90% OF THEIR PEOPLE. THEY DON'T LISTEN TO AMERICANS PARTICULARLY. WHAT CAN AMERICA DO TO MAKE THEM LISTEN?

Well I don't know that we can make them listen. They may be accountable to God but they're paid by Iranian taxpayers.

WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER MEMBER OF THE AXIS OF EVIL, NORTH KOREA WHICH ... WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN VIS A VIS NORTH KOREA?

Well it's a society on the verge of collapse. It can't feed its people. It's probably the largest prison in human history. Virtually every citizen of North Korea is a prisoner. They have no future, that's clear. It's a question of when they collapse and how much damage is done as they collapse.

A YEAR OR SO AGO, I WOULD HAVE SAID YOU'RE DESCRIBING IRAQ AS A BIG PRISON, IT'S IN CHAOS, THE LEADERSHIP IS UNSUSTAINABLE, HOW LONG IS IT BEFORE IT COLLAPSES UNDER ITS OWN WEIGHT.

Bad as Iraq was and has been it never reached the depths in terms of starvation and totalitarian rule that North Korea has achieved. Saddam rules by terror which is very different from the institution of totalitarianism in North Korea. But there's a separate problem with North Korea that has nothing to do with, with what an awful place it is for North Koreans and that is its potential to crank out nuclear weapons and sell them possibly to terrorists and that poses a threat of such magnitude that we must find a way to deal with them. I can't tell you now what that will be, what approach the administration will take to dealing with it but it cannot be ignored. It is another case of where it is dangerous to wait too long.

EXACTLY. I MEAN IF WE TAKE SERIOUSLY THE DOCTRINE OF PRE-EMPTIVE USE OF FORCE FOR PARTICULAR ASSIGNMENTS WHERE IT'S WARRANTED, IT SEEMS TO ME THAT CERTAINLY NORTH KOREA IS ON THE SCHEDULE.

The problem with the use of force against North Korea, even though it could be highly tailored to destroying the reprocessing facility at Yongbyon for example, is that the North Koreans are in a position to do a great deal of harm to civilians in South Korea. They wouldn't last long in a military engagement but they can certainly shell those portions of the city of Seoul that are within artillery range in the demilitarized zone. And so a decision to use force against North Korea would entail a risk. I happen to think not a very large risk but a risk nevertheless of retaliation against innocent civilians and we are naturally reluctant to consider a military action for that reason.

THANK YOU

(END)