

Interview with James Woolsey

Woolsey on idea of pre-emptive strike

“I think I would say that in the presence of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, particularly biological and potentially nuclear into the hands of states that work with terrorist organizations and are themselves proven aggressors ruled by terrible dictators, it would be highly irresponsible to wait and be struck first by those nuclear or biological weapons and then and only then to retaliate.

People ask for a smoking gun. A smoking gun in the case of a biological or nuclear weapon is a very terrible smoke indeed. I think the Bush administration is quite correct in the case of these rogue state dictators who work with terrorists and have at least some weapons of mass destruction to have a different policy. Different circumstances require different policies. “

Woolsey on U.S. military message to rogue dictatorships

“..... It is to communicate to the mullahs who run Iran and to Kim Jong-il and to Bashir Assad in Syria and Quadafi and the Sudanese government that the work they are doing, all of them on weapons of mass destruction, given the character and nature of their governments, puts them very heavily at risk. We want them to turn around and the North Koreans to stop thinking about beginning reprocessing at Yongbyon of plutonium. We want the Sudanese and Libyans and Syrians to back off in their work on chemical or bacteriological weapons....

You don't use 250,000 troops just to send a message. As the old saying goes, if you want to send a message use Western Union. This is substantively in my judgement the right thing to do. But it also has the added and I think with a positive effect of explaining pretty clearly to the four remaining rogue dictatorships working on weapons of mass destruction and working with terrorist groups in the Middle East plus North Korea, that they are embarked on a very, very dangerous ground from the point of view of the survival of their own regimes.”

Woolsey on Syria

“Well I very much hope that the other actions can be the result of speaking softly and having shown that one carries a very big stick indeed. For example, it should not take a lot of time and effort, I hope to persuade Bashir Assad in Syria that not only should he stand down his weapons of mass destruction program but he ought to get out of Lebanon. One doesn't need to make explicit threats or move American or British forces or anything else to bring that lesson home if we see, as I hope we will, cheering and happy faces in the streets of Baghdad and Saddam dead or captured and his regime destroyed. One doesn't need to say a word of threat. One merely needs to mention to Mr. Assad that his weapon of mass destruction programs are unwise and his continued operation of forces in Lebanon most unwise and he really should stop both.”

Woolsey on Iran ...

“The Iranian mullahs who run and control the instruments of power at the state have lost the support of almost all the young people and half of Iran is teenagers and younger. They’ve lost most of the women. They’ve lost the brave reformers who are in prison being tortured. And one by one amazingly they’re losing the grand ayatollahs. So I think if they have a brain cell working, they should look out on the horizon and they would see the storm clouds gathering and they should feel very much the way the inhabitants of say the Kremlin did in 1988 or Versailles in 1788. The storm isn’t here yet but it’s out there coming. “

Woolsey on dealing with political and religious fanatics

“Hitler and Torquemada both thought they were bettering the world from their point of view. They were fanatics just as the Islamists and I would say the Wahabis who support them are fanatics. And they cannot be appeased or accommodated. They need to be killed, captured or massively discouraged. Our greatest authority in this country I think on the Middle East is Bernard Lewis at Princeton. And he said after September 11th and before the Afghan war in late ’91 that we had two choices. We could either continue the policies we’ve had in the Middle East for some time and continue to be held in contempt as he said we were then or we can be both respected and feared. And unfortunately, as he put it, there’s nothing in between. Americans don’t like that. Americans want to go over and have everybody like them and like Canadians this way. Hey, my wife and I are here in town, want to see your temples. Is there a McDonald’s anywhere around? I mean you know, that’s what Americans want.”

Woolsey on the politics of President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair.

“I think that they are committed to doing what they think is right and not blowing with the wind. We’ve had other presidents who were not men of particular religious faith who had similarly strong convictions, Franklin Roosevelt, for example. But I think, you asked what some of the factors are and I think in the case of those two men their religious faith supports and sustains their commitment to democracy and their willingness to call it straight and do what they think is right even if other people are telling them what they’re doing is not popular. Appeasement is always popular. Appeasement was massively popular in the 1930s and staying out of World War Two was massively popular in the United States until December 7th, 1941. “

Woolsey on low priority of foreign intelligence in Clinton administration

“Well for the first two years of the first Clinton administration where the focus was very heavily on health care plan, on budget, on tax, on NAFTA which was a very important issue but wasn’t the kind of issue American intelligence has much to offer on, I would say that attention to foreign intelligence was limited. As a matter of fact, it’s rather widely known that in the fall of 1994 after I’d been on the job nearly two years, – when that little airplane crashed into the south lawn of the White House, the White House staff joke was that must be Woolsey he’s still trying to get an appointment. “

Woolsey on George H. Bush’s policy on Iraq

“Well I think that the single worst decision taken about Iraq by the United States government in modern times was the first president Bush’s decision to go along with the ceasefire agreement that permitted the Republican Guard to fly helicopters around, armed helicopters to move freely and they were thus able to massacre the Kurds and Shi’as who had rebelled at our instigation during the Gulf War and were succeeding in 15 of Iraq’s 18 provinces. Now the former Bush administration officials who talk about this issue always talk in terms of we didn’t think we should go on to Baghdad ourselves. Set that aside, that may have been the right decision not to go into Baghdad with the U.S. and allied armies but in terms of supporting even minimally the people who had rebelled at our instigation, we did not perform well.

Then during most of the Clinton administration the responses to various Iraqi acts of aggression were I thought pretty limited and if one goes back before that, in the Reagan administration the assistance limited but it was there, that was provided to Saddam during his war of aggression really against Iran that was I think in retrospect rather unwise. As a matter of fact, it may well be the case that now finally we are illustrating Churchill’s dictum that with respect to Iraq anyway, that the Americans always do the right thing but unfortunately only after they’ve exhausted all other possibilities. “

Woolsey on fostering democracy after Iraq war.

We have to win it. It will be at least years and I think it will probably be a decade or two anyway because what we have to do is, as far as I’m concerned, reshape the Middle East. Democracies tend not to fight one another. They fight dictatorships, dictatorships fight one another but democracies almost never really fight one another...I think we have to begin the process with Iraq and hopefully through influence, not military action, spread the notion of limited, decent, responsive democratic government throughout the Middle East. After all, it’s not as if this is a strange notion that has only taken root in North America and the former British Commonwealth. 120 countries around the world now are democracies.”

Woolsey on new U.S. foreign policy

“Now as far as this being reckless, we were not being like this before September 11th. Indeed one can say that our very limited responses to terrorism just, you know, addressing individual terrorists and prosecuting them within our legal system and occasionally launching a few cruise missiles or bombs from afar when something really egregious happened was a very limited involved in the Middle East. And what that produced was bin Laden being convinced that we were paper tigers and being convinced that he could get us out of the Middle East at least by attacking us. So it’s exactly the opposite of what these critics are saying. What we’re doing now is I think the only way that we are going to be able to change the face of the Middle East or start the process of changing the face and making ourselves safe. “

Woolsey on allegation US making grab for Middle East oil

“That’s nonsense. As far as the oil business is concerned, if we wanted cheap oil what we should have done was remove the sanctions on Saddam and let him modernize his oil industry and pump oil and the price probably would have gone down. And when we had a hand in conquering Europe in 1945 we didn’t go into Germany and grab Volkswagen and Mercedes and we’re not going to go into Iraq and grab Iraqi oil for the United States. We’re going to turn it over to the Iraqi people and let them profit from it. Hopefully they’ll pump it and it will help bring the cost down but we’re not going to steal it. The people who say that tend to be projecting their own views I think. For example, France is very interested in contracts for ‘Total Elf’ and so on. Russia is very interested. So since they are interested in getting control of the oil of Iraq, they tend to project that I think rather nasty notion on us. But it’s really them that think that way.”

Woolsey on UN resolutions

“I think anybody who believes that there should have been yet more UN resolutions is clearly someone who does not under any circumstances ever want to have used force against Saddam Hussein for whatever reason, either because they’re afraid of him or because they’re complete pacifists or because they want oil contracts with him or something. One more resolution wouldn’t have satisfied them and two more wouldn’t. If 17 won’t do it, 18 won’t and 19 won’t. So you know, 12 years and 17 resolutions seems to me to be plenty.”

Woolsey on US war effort

“This is not the kind of war for which massive numbers of troops are necessary. What’s necessary is very good technology such as we’ve seen with the smart weapons that both the British and American aircraft are using. It’s necessary to have enough lift capability to get your forces into a region like this. It’s necessary to have the command control, the communications, and the bandwidth. In Kosovo, for example, We and our allies used a

hundred times the bandwidth that had been used just a few years earlier in the Gulf War.

This war in the future is a war of intelligence, of special forces, of communications, of being able to reprogram Stealth fighter targets while they're in the air based on agent reports and so on and it's not something that going to require a draftee. That's one of the reasons why some of our European allies forces are still irrelevant. The French and German forces, for example, are well designed to defeat a Byelorussian armoured attack across the plains of Central Europe but that's hardly a very likely scenario. But they've not invested in the lift, they've not invested in the smart weapons, they've not invested in the technology and so forth that is necessary to fight these kinds of wars. Even if they had chosen to be supportive their forces would not have been particularly useful. “

Woolsey on the significance of September 11, 2001

“September 11th changed everything and whatever people might have done before September 11th and this administration was not real rabid in engaging the terrorist threat between January and September of '01. Any American administration within a very broad political spectrum would be I think in one way or another be responding in a somewhat similar fashion to that which President Bush is. I think President Bush has done it well. I think he's assumed leadership well. I think he's inspired the American people well and he's planned the war well and he may well have done it better than, than many others who might have had the job. But this country changed on September 11th just the way it changed December 7th of 1941. We are going to destroy our enemies. ...

...Well not just kill them. We want to convert as many as possible to being non-enemies. After all in – take the Cold War. We, except for Korea and Vietnam, in terms of U.S. versus the Soviets we killed very, very few of one another. What we did was over time convince the Sakharovs and the Solzenitzins and the Havel and the Walesas and Solidarities and so forth that we were on the same side, that this was a war of freedom against tyranny and we have to do the same thing with the decent and moderate Muslims in the world. “

Woolsey on the role of the United Nations

“I think the United Nations, as a place for countries to come together and talk at General Assembly will be around and with us for a long time. I think the UN service agencies, a number of them – I'm familiar particularly with their humanitarian relief work, - some of it's good and some of it's superb. And in those capacities I think the United Nations of course deserves and needs support. What's at issue is the role of Security Council. But since we have the five permanent members who are the five victors essentially, principal victors in World War Two now two of them are under completely different governments, Russia and China, and one for the better, one for the worst from the point of view in a sense of cooperation with the West. And France pursuing under at least a Chirac government - I think extraordinarily destructive role it has played over the course of the last few months.

I would say that the role of the Security Council is one that France and to some extent Russia and China have brought heavily into question. I think it may not be possible to use the Security Council to take the steps necessary to defend ourselves against rogue states armed with weapons of mass destruction and terrorism, especially if those rogue states are shrewd enough, as Saddam was, to have huge oil contracts with France and Russia. “

Woolsey on Iraq War and United Nations

“I think we will prevail there and it will be found that there are weapons of mass destruction as well as ballistic missiles and a nuclear program. I think the leadership that the President and Prime Minister Blair have exerted and Mr. Aznar in Spain will be shown to have been sound. Now what that means for the future I don't know. Will it mean that our French and Russian and Chinese friends will say the light has struck us, we were wrong, now we'll work with you? Somehow I don't think so. I think it will be coalitions pulled together on an ad hoc basis, sometimes maybe based on regional alignments, NATO or some other, sometimes based on other criteria that will deal with these rogue states and terrorist groups, probably not the Security Council. I think it has made itself right at the edge of being irrelevant. “

Woolsey on role of France

“I think France – the Chirac government in particular may have severely damaged three institutions that supposedly it cares a good deal about – the Security Council of the United Nations, NATO, and the EU. By taking the stance publicly that the countries who have recently been freed from communist tyranny and supporting the United States and Britain in wanting to free the Iraqi people from tyranny should thereby be denied membership in the EU I think and vetoing effectively assistance to Turkey when Turkey was under threat of being attacked by – vetoing NATO support. I think the Chirac government has dealt very, very serious blows to all three of those institutions, but whether any one of those blows is fatal or not remains to be seen. But all three: the Security Council, NATO and the EU are considerably weaker and considerably discredited today compared to what they were before France took those actions. “

Woolsey on Canada

“We and Canada have been through a lot together. We tried to conquer you twice, in 1775 and again in the war of 1812 and you defeated us both times and we learned our lesson. And we've been good neighbours and colleagues throughout the 20th century and the wars of the 20th century. In Mexico we had a war which we won and we grabbed Texas and California and so forth. But we've been peace with them for a century. And friends disagree on things from time to time. That's the way it goes. “