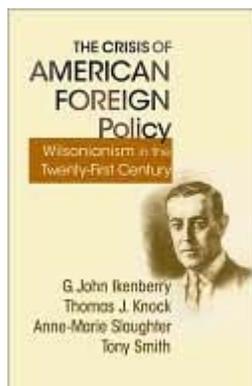


## The Crisis of American Foreign Policy: Wilsonianism in the Twenty-First Century

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### Introduction

**JOEL ROSENTHAL:** Good evening. Thank you for coming, and welcome to this conversation program with Anne-Marie Slaughter. Professor Slaughter will be discussing the contents of a new book, just recently published, entitled [The Crisis of American Foreign Policy: Wilsonianism in the Twenty-First Century](#).

It's too often a cliché to say that we stand at a pivotal or defining moment in history, but today, the day after the [inauguration](#) of our 44th president, I think we can get away with it. In foreign-policy terms, the pivotal question of the moment is, what sort of internationalism is the new administration inheriting, and what does it mean for the course it is planning?

The point of reckoning is inescapably Wilsonianism. [Woodrow Wilson](#), the architect of [liberal internationalism](#), left a legacy that featured at least two big ideas. The first idea was making the world safe for democracy. The second was building the institutions of international law and organization that would promote the rules and norms necessary for a stable and just world order. For all of its grandeur and resonance, the meaning of the inheritance of our 28th president is not exactly clear. As [John Ikenberry](#) asks in the first sentence of this book, was [George Bush](#) the heir of Woodrow Wilson?

My old friend, the late [James Chace](#), liked to joke about this ambiguity, often referring to the 43rd president as "Woodrow Bush."

Clearly, the Bush administration's freedom agenda had echoes of Wilson. Yet, as Anne-Marie Slaughter points out, the rule-oriented part of Bush's version of Wilsonianism was not as apparent as one might expect from a true Wilsonian.

What will happen next with the Wilson legacy will in part be determined by our guest this evening. Anne-Marie Slaughter is one of the most important voices in American foreign policy today. As a scholar of international relations and U.S. foreign policy, she has written some of the most important works of a new generation of American thought leaders, covering essential topics in law, security, and world politics. As Dean of the [Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs](#) at Princeton, shaping the thought leaders of tomorrow, it is fitting that her two most recent books before this one have the Wilsonian titles of [A New World Order](#) and [The Idea that Is America: Keeping Faith with Our Values in a Dangerous World](#).

Friday, Professor Slaughter will head to Washington, D.C., to put these ideas into action.

So, Anne-Marie Slaughter, we are most fortunate and grateful that you can be with us this evening, at this most exciting time in your personal and professional life and in the life of our country. Thank you so much for coming.

### Remarks

**ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER:** Everybody wants to be Wilson's heir, or at least everyone in the last decade. As Joel said, [Philip Zelikow](#), who was one of the top advisers to [Condoleezza Rice](#), outlined the Bush foreign-policy doctrine as "pragmatic idealism," by which he meant "tempered Wilsonianism." Of course, Wilson was never quite as idealistic as we now see him. No one could be president of Princeton, governor of New Jersey at a time when New Jersey politics were even less savory than they are now, and president of the United States, and have been a complete airhead. But he, of course, set forth great ideals. And so Philip Zelikow talked about "pragmatic idealism."

[Frank Fukuyama](#)—you'll remember Frank Fukuyama's [The End of History](#)—talked about pragmatic Wilsonianism. Again, Frank Fukuyama more, at least originally, on the [neoconservative](#) side.

Then John Ikenberry and I and many others think of ourselves as classic liberal internationalists, and we know we are Wilson's heirs. I hope I'll demonstrate that. I hope that along the way I will demonstrate the relevance of the debate, that it is not just a group of academics fighting over labels, or a group of academics and policymakers fighting over labels, but that, instead, it really does touch on something quite fundamental about the nature of American foreign policy and about a debate that is a perennial in American foreign policy. We will now see where our new president comes down in that debate.

This book actually grew out of a panel at the Woodrow Wilson School, where I was very rudely attacked. As dean of the school, sitting on the panel, I was not expecting this. A very lively debate ensued. I would like to give you a little flavor of the attack, so that you can get the context for this larger project.

My attacker was one of the coauthors here and an old friend. [Tony Smith](#), at Tufts, turned and looked at me on one side and John Ikenberry on the other, and he said, "You call yourselves liberal internationalists, but you are, in fact, neoliberals and you have enabled the neoconservatives. In fact, it is because of you that we are in Iraq."

That's a lot of jumps in logic, in my view. But the argument went something like this. He said, "You liberal internationalists"—again, he calls us "neolib," so it's like "neocon"—"you have been writing for the past decade and a half about the democratic peace, about how liberal democracies do not go to war with one another."

That's right. That was the underpinning of [Bill Clinton](#)'s foreign policy.

He said, "And you have come up with the idea that there are great junctures in history at which great men could turn the tide of history"—again, an argument about Bill Clinton's view of what could happen in terms of post-communist states, newly democratized, that they needn't take decades and decades, that it was possible, with the right policy and the right leaders, to actually spread democracy.

Then he said, "And you have this doctrine that you call the [responsibility to protect](#) that basically licenses intervention. What it says is that when a state commits grave human-rights violations against its own citizens, it is permissible to use force against them. Now, if you put that all together and you believe that the world is better off when there are more liberal democracies in it, and you believe that leaders can make important decisions that will spread democracy, and you believe that it is possible to intervene by force in a state that has committed great human-rights violations, well, then you have Iraq."

So that was the argument, and it is actually an argument that we have seen quite a bit, at least in the pages of various intellectual journals, arguing that, effectively, the Clinton people, the people who thought they were standing for a world of what John Ikenberry and I have called liberty under law, a world of multilateral institutions, of liberal democracy, of human rights, were the enablers of Iraq.

Again, you might have said, well, this is how academics have fun. They attack each other, and then you hit back. I certainly defended myself with lots of citations that I will not go through this evening.

But there is a deeper issue here. It is not a question of neolib and neocons, but it is the question of whether America can stand for its principles, its values, can stand up for liberal democracy in the world, and can also take an activist approach to standing for and ensuring human rights around the world, without inevitably sliding down that slippery slope toward forcible intervention. He was attacking us based on Iraq, but his attack would have been much more powerful if he had talked about [Kosovo](#), because with respect to Kosovo, there was very little dissent. That was a situation in which we saw another round of [ethnic cleansing](#). We had seen this movie before in [Bosnia](#) and even before that in [Croatia](#), and we were determined to prevent it. That stance led to forcible intervention.

So it's a classic slippery slope. If you are [Henry Kissinger](#)—I'm not, but if you are Henry Kissinger—and you are a classic foreign-policy [realist](#), then you think in terms of the balance of power and you think in terms of what our interests are and how we are going to defend those interests, and it does not matter whom we need to ally with or whom we need to give aid to. All that matters is that we pursue our interests.

Our founders thought that was old politics; that was European politics; that was not American politics. Woodrow Wilson is the greatest symbol in the world of America's standing against that old politics. Of course, Woodrow Wilson went to [Versailles](#) after World War I and said to the European politicians, to [Clemenceau](#) and [Lloyd George](#), "We're not going to play this game the way you play it. We don't want to punish Germany profoundly and sow it with salt so that it cannot rise. We want self-determination. We want a just peace. We want to stand for our principles." And the Europeans said, as they still say, "These silly, naïve, idealistic Americans. We'll handle it diplomatically," and in the end, the [Treaty of Versailles](#) looked more like what they wanted than what Wilson wanted.

But Wilson is the symbol of standing for something that is distinctively American in the way we think of our foreign policy. I don't think it's exceptionally American or uniquely American. There are plenty of other countries. Start with France, which, at various times in their policies, has also championed universal [human rights](#) and [liberal democracy](#). But it's what is most associated with us.

So Bill Clinton thought he was Wilson's heir, and he talked about the [democratic peace](#) and he talked about standing for human rights and liberal democracy, as far as he could. George W. Bush then said he was Wilson's heir, he was the heir to this tradition, and he was standing for all these things. Go back and read his [second inaugural](#). He talks about spreading liberty around the world. Both of them rejected that realist, power-based, interest-based position. The claim that is made by some members of the left against other members of the left is that you can't stand for these principles and not recognize that they are going to lead you down that slippery slope to forcible intervention, and that's Vietnam and that's Iraq. In many ways, that's Kosovo, in the sense that it's still not done, and Bosnia is still not done, in the sense that these are not stable liberal democracies. If it were not for the [EU](#), we don't know what we would see there.

So then the argument comes that the realist point of view is the prudent point of view. It is the lesser evil. It is the path that avoids the use of force to change a government, to plant a democracy. But that ultimately leads to the tarnishing of our principles, to our withdrawal, and often to the failure of the goals we seek.

So that's what's at stake in this book. It is really an argument about whether, intellectually, you can stand in Wilson's shoes, you can champion his principles, and still have a prudent, sensible, and effective foreign policy.

I'm going to give you a chance to ask me questions on lots of details, but what I would like to do is sort of cut to the chase.

You are not going to be surprised to hear me answer, yes, you can draw this distinction, there is a middle ground, there is a principled ground, and I think that the United States, at its best—under [Roosevelt](#), under [Truman](#), at times under [Reagan](#), at times under [Clinton](#)—has, in fact, found that balance. I hope very much that [Barack Obama](#) will also find that balance.

I should just say, before I give my view of how we should think about this, I heard Henry Kissinger give a [lecture](#) last Thursday in Washington, and he framed the debate over Afghanistan in exactly these terms: Are we going to stand for liberal democracy? Are we going to try to help the Afghans get a stable, rights-regarding government? Or are we going to cut our losses and understand that we just have to look out for our own interests—and that's preventing terrorist bases—and what kind of government Afghanistan has is up to the Afghans? So we are seeing this debate right now, and we are going to see it over Afghanistan, over how we get out of Iraq, and over other countries.

How do we do this? The first thing that we do is recognize that the world of the 21st century, even though we started it back in the Balkans, just like the beginning of the 20th century, has changed fundamentally in the way we look at international relations. Wilson's world was a world of states, of states as unitary actors. He talked a lot about [self-determination](#), but he didn't mean individuals and individual rights—the individual right to vote, to determine their government. He meant a people—the Poles or the Hungarians or the Romanians—being able to determine their own fate, whereas previously they had been under empire. So he's thinking about unitary states, and the rights in the world are borne by states, not individuals.

The 20th century, as historians look back, in international law and in morality, was the century in which individual rights got recognized against states at the international level. So it isn't just a government's business how it treats its own people; it is, under the [UN Charter](#) and lots of other law, the business of everyone in the international community, if the government is sufficiently egregious.

All governments commit violations of human rights. Just look at some of our prison conditions. Look at the civil rights struggle. Look at the triumph yesterday, but look at what went before it. Generally, that should be left to a people and its government. But when those violations are so egregious—[genocide](#), [crimes against humanity](#), sustained and severe eradication of entire groups of people—then it is the concern of the international community. That is a principle now of international law, and I would say you have to modify Wilson's emphasis on self-determination to now see that it's not just about a people deciding to govern themselves; it is that the government they choose derives its legitimacy in the international system from at least the minimum protection of its people. If it fails in that minimum standard—and it's not a high standard, again; it has to commit genocide or crimes against humanity or sustained and serious human-rights violations—then it is the business of the international community to take action—not one country to ride to the rescue, but the entire international community.

So that's the first point. As I said, you move from self-determination to the responsibility to protect.

The second point actually turns on Wilson's domestic agenda. I just want to read you something. You may find this

particularly interesting now, given the inaugural address and many of the hopes for Barack Obama. I have been talking about Wilson as an internationalist, but listen to what he did domestically.

Under Wilson, we had "[tariff reform](#), a federal income tax imposed, the [Federal Reserve System](#) created, the first federal [antitrust](#) laws, child-labor laws, federal aid to farmers, and an eight-hour day for railroad workers" and others. That's the progressive doctrine. That program recognized that a strong democracy rests on a strong economy and a strong society—in other words, on the very basic social and economic foundations of a society. That's what he and others set about putting in place in the United States in the beginning of the 20th century—basic protections for workers, basic social security, an economic system that didn't allow unfettered competition, that actually regulated competition—lots of issues that we are actually returning to today.

But the principle there is very important, if we think about what I would call supporting democracy abroad, not promoting it, because it recognizes that you have to build liberal democracy from the bottom up, that you have to build it from those social and economic foundations. That says you are never going to succeed by simply removing a government and putting another in place. It's impossible. Our very history—and not just our 19th-century history, but our 20th-century history—says it's a long, slow process, and we start with aid and development and the support of civil society groups, the support of competition, of the kinds of forces in a society that create greater liberty for individuals, and gradually create the conditions under which they can sustain a liberal democracy.

So the second principle, I would say, if you are going to claim Wilson's mantle in the 21st century, is that we should support democracy worldwide, but this is how we support it: through the social and economic institutions and foundations. Using force, overthrowing governments, simply won't get us there.

Third, and finally, Woodrow Wilson believed in what he called "common counsel." I often think about common counsel in New Jersey politics. I can't believe there was a lot of it. There probably was at Princeton. Princeton is a genteel place and was even more genteel then. But the idea was that people can come together and deliberate collectively, and they will produce a better outcome. It wasn't about including everybody just for the sake of inclusion; it was a genuine belief that you would get better outcomes. That's really how he tried to govern. He believed in including many different parties and having them deliberate together. There again, President Obama seems to have taken a page from Wilson's book.

If you apply that principle internationally, it argues that we should work through international institutions, not just because that's the law or because we think other countries will like us more if we do, although the legitimacy part is important, but because we will actually get better outcomes. We would have gotten a better outcome in Iraq if we had really listened to other countries in the United Nations. There were many countries, many of them our allies, telling us that there were not [weapons of mass destruction](#), or at least that we should look much harder before we decided that there were. In fact, if you go back and look at the debates, it is striking just how accurate many of the opponents from other countries were.

The argument, particularly when we are facing global problems, problems that none of us can solve individually, has to be that we work within multilateral institutions because we will actually get better outcomes.

Now, you need a lot of reform of a lot of the current institutions to get there. I'm not going to talk about that just now. But I will say that the principle that you need to work through those institutions and that you really have to accept their constraints because they are in your interest—Woodrow Wilson said openly to Congress, "You can't believe that the United States can just go its own way." Those constraints are in our interest. If you accept that, then Wilsonianism in the 21st century says that states derive their legitimacy from the way they treat their people, and we and all other nations have the right to intervene in extreme cases.

Second, however, we should not expect to build stable, rights-regarding governments without taking the time and the money and the effort to build those social and economic foundations.

Third, we should be working through international institutions.

That is not a recipe for unbridled intervention. That is a recipe for a foreign policy that is entirely consistent with American principles, but that is also prudent and pragmatic enough to solve actual problems.

Thank you.

## Questions and Answers

**QUESTION:** The *New York Times* [reported](#) this morning that the U.S. military in Afghanistan has been successful in persuading some of the Central Asian republics, as well as Russia, to allow supplies through Russia and through those Central Asian republics to our troops in Afghanistan. Now, if we had done what you are suggesting with regard to promoting dissident movements and so on in Russia, do you think it's likely that [Putin](#) and [Medvedev](#) would have agreed to allow U.S. supply lines to go through Russia? If they hadn't, where would that have put the U.S. military initiatives in Afghanistan right now?

**ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER:** It's a good question. My answer is, we are supporting all those groups in Russia. In fact, they only exist courtesy of the [Ford Foundation](#) and [George Soros](#) and a number of other American donors. They have been cracked down on. But we are actively supporting them. I think, actually, we are responsible for what remaining active dissent there is.

So it hasn't stopped Putin. What it has done is, it has allowed Putin to gain strength by talking about how the United States is interfering in Russian affairs, to create a nationalist movement, and to taint those groups we support. When that happens, we have to then find better ways to support them. Often, getting a grant from George Soros is not the way. But there are plenty of ways to give money so that you can actually be doing that without a label.

But it's not stopping what I think is a very positive development.

**QUESTION:** Part of the neoconservative Wilsonian argument was that we have to act, that the United States has the responsibility to act because of these values. Your prescription could also be, if the resources aren't available easily for the nation-building part and if generating multilateral coalitions, institutions, behind a position isn't easy, it could be an argument for inaction. How do you judge that? When do you act and when do you not act? How long do you wait?

**ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER:** That is probably the hardest practical question out there. [Darfur](#), of course, is a great example. But I have to say, as someone who has campaigned for more action in Darfur, who is very aware—and I have been since the very beginning—of what's going on there, as much as I would have liked to see the United States intervene, just to stop the killing, I couldn't tell a good story after that. I could not tell a story about how, once we had sent troops in—we would be able to stop some killing, but not much. Darfur itself, that part of Sudan, is the size of France, and we certainly weren't going to try to occupy it. What were we going to do then? And we were then going to be responsible for the continuing atrocities if we were there to try to make peace.

I didn't see any way that we could actually achieve what we were trying to achieve, and I could see a lot of ways in which the Sudanese government would be greatly strengthened, not only with its own people, but also in Africa, if it could say, "The imperialist United States has landed a force against us."

So I don't think unilateral intervention works, even though you think there would be immediate action. I'll make an exception for [Rwanda](#), because I think there you could have done something very quickly and you could have gotten back out. But in Darfur I don't think so.

I think what you have to do is work through international organizations, make it much easier in those organizations to legitimate intervention. That's part of the reason why the change in the law is so important. Previously, the United States would push for intervention and other states would say, "You can't intervene. That's against the UN Charter." Now they can't say that anymore. Now they have to say, "Well, the crimes aren't so heinous." That's progress. You keep pushing the law and you keep pushing the arguments.

But I do think you also have to have a fallback strategy. There are two ways to do this. One is, if you absolutely can't get action and it's clear that action is being blocked for political reasons—Russia or China is protecting oil or some other reasons—then you go to another collective organization. [NATO](#) is 19 countries, and we don't often agree on a lot. If you could get NATO to agree to that—and I'm not sure you could have in Darfur—that's at least the multilateral set of constraints that you need. You have to get a lot of agreement.

The other alternative would be that you go, but you come back to the [Security Council](#) and you ask for post hoc approval. If you know you have to do that and you really are committed to doing that, that will be a real constraint on what you think you are doing and how well you think you can do it.

**QUESTION:** De facto, the United States forces in these multinational operations turn out to be 80 percent of the game most of the time. I think that's also—while approval, obviously, is to be sought and to be revered, we are the leading light of moving forward in that regard.

But one thing I think we could do, even today—I don't know if many of the people here saw the first executive orders by President Obama. They set very high ethical standards for his staff and for lobbyists. I think we can lead by ethical and moral example which extends to these operations, either under a UN or WTO or NATO flag.

Would you agree with that?

**ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER:** I do. I don't agree with your first point, though. I do agree that most Americans think this is true, and I do agree that it's true when we are driving the intervention. So when we invaded Iraq the first time, we were definitely the lion's share of the troops. There were many other countries, but we were the primary source of troops. There are other interventions where we have wanted to make something happen, and we send our military. But the United Nations has tens of thousands of peacekeepers all over the world, and the

United States barely contributes. They are doing important work. In fact, we are very pleased to have them there because we don't want to be there.

The European Union has 70,000 troops in Afghanistan and in Africa and in the Balkans. Seventy thousand troops is a lot of troops. If they didn't have those troops there, we would have to have our troops in many more places.

So I actually think it has been little noticed, but the United Nations, and the [peacekeeping office](#) of the United Nations, has actually become much more effective. They are not perfect by a long shot. They have lots of problems with soldiers' behaviors, but they also have ways to correct for that. But they are actually doing lots of jobs that we need done. I think we would do better to recognize—if you want to invade a country and you want to occupy it, you need our kinds of forces, but there are lots of other kinds of forces when we don't want our forces there and many, many other countries are contributing. They would like us better if we recognized that.

In [Zimbabwe](#), there should be Nigerian troops and other African troops, as there were in [Liberia](#), as there were in [Sierra Leone](#)—far more effective than American troops.

**QUESTION:** Before coming to NYU, I was for 22 years a member of Congress. I may be making a point now that I may have made here before, so forgive me. In my last four years in the House, I was the majority [whip](#). That meant that every other Tuesday I would join Speaker [O'Neill](#) and the Democratic leaders of the House and Senate for breakfast at the White House with President [Carter](#) and Vice President [Mondale](#)—all Democrats. We talked politics and policy.

Given that we have a new president and a Congress controlled by his own party, and given your new responsibility, don't you think this would be a good idea for President Obama to resume that practice?

I yield back the balance of my time.

**ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER:** I think it sounds great. I should also say that what I think on that issue will have zero effect, if he turns to me for foreign-policy advice. But it does make a lot of sense.

**QUESTION:** Your list of Wilson's domestic accomplishments is the traditional list. I'm always fascinated and puzzled by the fact that it omits the fact that one of Wilson's first official acts was to reinstitute [Jim Crow](#) in the federal government, including federal office buildings. I don't know whether it was his first executive order, but it was certainly among the first. The fact that he was a southern racist is omitted in most of the history books used at Princeton that I read and most other places.

I'm puzzled by the fact that there isn't even a footnote to that, just as there is no footnote in the Declaration of Independence to "all men are created equal."

**ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER:** Just for the record here, we also did hold a panel at the Woodrow Wilson School on precisely this subject. Believe me, you can't be a school that is 30 percent minority and named for Woodrow Wilson without the subject coming up often.

**QUESTIONER:** [Not at microphone]

**ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER:** I understand. We have changed radically, and for the better.

I actually think this is very important in terms of the way I was saying it has changed. I have a sentence that refers directly to Wilson's racism. The reason I put that in actually goes again to my point that Wilson thought in terms of states' rights, not individual rights. If he had really thought, as we do today, in terms of individual rights, human rights, against government, he could not possibly, intellectually, have held those two positions.

I'm from Virginia. I'm from right over the mountains from where he was born. He was a product of his time. He was also a good politician, and he understood that he needed a set of southern votes. Many Democratic politicians since then have made similar compromises.

I think you are right to raise it. I think it should always be part of his legacy. I should have mentioned it as well, but I was focused on the positive side. But you're right.

**QUESTION:** My understanding is that Wilson was inclined, in forming the [League of Nations](#), to insert a racial equality clause, but that he was talked out of it by Lloyd George, who didn't want Australia, then a part of the empire, to see hordes of Orientals coming in. That was the great fear.

**ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER:** I don't know about that, although, if he did, my guess is that he would have been thinking much more about the Eastern European races than African-Americans. But I don't know that story.

**QUESTIONER:** I think you can make a direct connection that the Japanese ultranationalists who took Japan down the road into militarism said, "Look, here we've modernized. We have a constitution, more or less. Now the

Western world isn't accepting us. They do not accept racial equality." That's a step toward World War II.

My question really is, though, how would your kind of Wilsonianism in principle two, where you emphasize economic and social development—how would you apply those to Myanmar, Burma, or to North Korea? Burma doesn't seem to rise to a heinous level of horror. But, still, if you give them aid and hope to help the people, you are really helping the government, aren't you, a bad government?

**ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER:** You are helping the government, but you are also helping the people. If you don't try that approach, if you use a coercive approach—which sometimes you do have to do also for domestic politics—you are also hurting the people and you are not hurting the government.

My view, at least initially—if you look at a country like North Korea, starving people do not make revolutions. They are starving. They are going to starve again. The nutritional deficits, from people who have been there—they talk about seeing people who are tiny because of the nutritional deficit they have already had. There is no way that you are going to get to the kind of government that you might want to see without doing everything you can simply to get food to those people. Yes, it means that the government is going to skim off money and is going to continue the kind of corruption, but at least you would be getting people the minimum they need.

I spent last year in China, on sabbatical for a year. What you saw above all in China were the ways in which economic prosperity didn't lead to an automatic desire for political liberalism. There is not a one-to-one equation. But there is a one-to-one equation between a desire for more personal space, a desire to have your voice heard—plenty of people in Shanghai were starting to organize and demonstrate against the continuation of the maglev train or of electrical lines. Once your basic needs are taken care of, you start looking around to ensure your quality of life. There again, a longer-term economic strategy, I would say, coupled with very intensive diplomacy on behalf of individual prisoners—I'm not saying that we will just defer human rights until later—I do think is the more effective strategy.

**QUESTION:** Nation building and fighting terrorism in Afghanistan seem to be inextricably linked with one another. Yet, if I understood correctly, you seemed to suggest that we should consider cutting our losses and concentrating on fighting terrorism.

Applying the Wilson principles in the modern fashion that you mentioned, what would that exactly mean? How would it work? Could you elaborate on that, please?

**ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER:** Yes, I can elaborate. I'm going to clarify. I did not say that we should do that. I was paraphrasing Henry Kissinger. It's very important.

But it is the way the debate is going to be framed and is being framed. This was a big public lecture. The argument is, exactly, that fighting terrorism and nation building in Afghanistan have become intertwined, but they needn't be intertwined. We can untangle them and let the Afghans be Afghanistan, and if the [Taliban](#) come back into government, well, the Taliban come back into government. All we care about is that they are not hosting [al Qaeda](#). That's the argument. That's the realist—what do we care about what happens in Afghanistan, as long as they are not hosting people who bombed New York? If they are going to take another three or ten centuries to have women go to school, too bad.

The counterargument is no, and certainly when we are responsible for upholding the government that is there now. I used to be a law professor. It's a dirty-hands argument—or in this case, probably a clean-hands argument. But we can't just pull back out.

Where you strike that balance is going to be a critical, central debate. We are going to see it in the next couple of months. I don't know where it will come out. But I think I know where the Obama administration starts in that debate, and it's not the pure interest-based approach.

**QUESTION:** One of the other big ideas that you have helped be the architect of is that of the [Concert of Democracies](#), the notion of democracies acting in concert and in league and so on. This has provoked some pretty lively debate. Our colleague [Tom Carothers](#), for example, at our sister institution in Washington, I think, listed two large objections. One is the notion that democracies are kind of a fractious community and they may be difficult to bring into concert and march. Second, the definition of a democracy may be a problematical one, given certain elected governments.

Briefly, about ten years ago, I was also at another Carnegie, the [Carnegie Corporation](#), involved in the [Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict](#), that in some ways, really, I think, deserves some credit for the whole responsibility-to-protect evolution, so to speak. On that commission, there was significant opposition to the idea of a league of democracies, from the point of view of it being an elitist Western-centric concept of preaching to others. So there seems to be a lively debate going on.

I guess my question is, as you head off to Foggy Bottom, whether the concept of the Concert of Democracies?

**ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER:** Let me answer the last question directly. My writings about a Concert of Democracies represented entirely my own personal academic views. I'm probably leaving them behind in this instance, but for, I think, good reason.

John Ikenberry and I had a view of a Concert of Democracies that I still believe, which was that the attraction of being a member of that club is very important. We have seen that in the EU, of course. It has been the greatest force for democracy we have seen. Over 10 former communist countries became and were strengthened as liberal democracies because they wanted to be members of the EU. They wanted the economic benefits, but they also wanted that stamp.

The second-largest country in the world is a liberal democracy, and very proud of it. It's not perfectly liberal nor perfectly democratic, but it certainly, I think, merits the overall definition. You would have no group of democracies in the world that wouldn't include India.

The Indonesians just hosted the [Bali Democracy Forum](#). I think that's great.

John and I suggested from the beginning that it could never come from the United States, that any kind of global Concert of Democracies had to come from countries like Brazil or India or Indonesia, that any effort by the EU and the United States to try to create it would look clearly like an imperialist or other nasty venture.

The Indonesians are very proud of being in a democracy. They hosted other countries throughout East Asia and Southeast Asia to the Bali conference on democracy, and they invited China. They invited China because China spends a lot of time talking about how to increase popular participation. They didn't have this membership criterion, but they definitely set it up as a group of democracies, with one very large nondemocracy who was there, I think precisely because it does have a real value in terms of affirming a set of principles.

I would say, if it is coming from countries like India or Brazil or Indonesia, the United States would be crazy not to support it. I don't think we should go create some exclusive club that we run and where we determine who else is a democracy or not.

**QUESTION:** What is your opinion of the validity of the theory of the democratic peace? [John Norton Moore](#) has backed off from it a little.

**ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER:** I'm a strong believer in the [democratic peace](#). It's as strong a finding as we have in social science. If you just look at Europe, the idea that stable liberal democracies are far less likely to go to war with one another—it doesn't say they are less likely to go to war; it just says "with one another"—I think is a very strong finding.

The corollary, however, is that democratizing states are often more unstable and more warlike. It's like the old joke in Maine: You can't get there from here. Along the way to this lovely world of peace, you are going to have a lot of war, which means that if your policy is based on the idea of spreading democracy because you want peace, what you are doing in the immediate term is inviting exactly the kind of nationalist or ethnic conflicts we have seen, because you are destabilizing situations and you don't have the institutions of a mature liberal democracy.

So I'm not sure that finding is the best guide to policy, but as an academic, I do believe in the finding.

**QUESTION:** You stated your views on the need for multilateral actions to justify an intervention, particularly if there was a wholesale abuse of human rights. Then you appeared to make an exception for a case like Rwanda, where, from a practical point of view, it appeared that we could get in quickly and get out quickly.

My question is whether that's solely based on a practical consideration or whether there's some normative principle that supports taking that action without multilateral support.

**ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER:** My instinct was practical, but I think if I pushed on it and we debated it for a couple of hours, we could come up with a normative point. I think it goes most to my answer to your question, that that's a situation in which you should act first and ask for approval later. If you are right that this is clearly genocide of terrible proportions and immediate action actually can stop it, then you should be prepared to go to the Security Council after the fact and say, "This is why we acted. This is why we acted when we did. We need approval." Again, knowing that that's what you are going to have to do means you don't intervene the way the Vietnamese [intervened](#) in Cambodia—yes, to stop the genocide, but, yes, also to establish a Vietnamese puppet government—or at least it has as much constraint as international law ever has.

I would have to think further about what exactly that principle is, but I think there must be something there where if the crime is so terrible and the possibility of averting it is so seemingly small in the face of the crime, and you are prepared to ask after the fact, then it should be justified.

**QUESTION:** I wonder if you would spell out the connection between intervention on behalf of democracy and multilateralism in Wilson. In the case of Wilson himself, the intervention, even by military force in Mexico, for example, to teach the Mexicans to elect good men preceded any interest in multilateralism. So I'm not quite sure what the connection is, and I would appreciate it if you would spell it out.

I have a second question: What is the fundamental justification for democracies to intervene in other countries, to some extent subverting their governments, when we don't acknowledge that as a universal principle? After all, when [Stalin](#) directed communist parties to intervene in other countries, we opposed that.

What is the difference? What is the principle that gives consent to democracies behaving differently from other governments—other than power?

**ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER:** The Wilson experience in Mexico taught him, in his own words, that intervening to convince or persuade or force a people to choose a particular kind of government was foolhardy. I actually talk about that incident in terms of arguing for how he became quite a staunch anti-interventionist, in the sense that you are talking about—that you intervene to establish a democracy. So I don't think there is a connection between his multilateralism and intervention. In fact, his claim, the famous, "The world must be made safe for democracy"—[John Milton Cooper](#), who is probably the greatest scholar on Wilson today, emphasizes that Wilson was an extraordinarily skilled writer and used words very precisely, and he used the passive voice. He did not say, "We must make the world safe for democracy." He said, "The world must be made safe for democracy." Again, if you look at his theories—that's the conversation we were having—he has a view of building democracy from the ground up.

So I don't see a case in which Wilson wanted to intervene for democracy.

I am not saying that democracies have license to behave differently than other countries. I am saying that the right to govern yourselves is a recognized right under international law. [Boutros Boutros-Ghali](#)—we have forgotten about Boutros Boutros-Ghali—originally had an [agenda for peace](#) and then he had an [agenda for democracy](#) under the UN Charter. So we are talking about universal principles and we are talking about universal laws.

What I was talking about was that the United States has a distinct history that was forged against the realpolitik/power-politics view of the world. In practical political terms, no American president can reject that heritage for very long. That's one reason the neoconservatives gained the support they did, because they fought against Kissinger. They wanted to invoke the great American tradition of standing for American principles. I'm saying there is a way to stand for those principles that is, in fact, consistent with current international law, with good sense, and with our own history.

**QUESTION:** Russia, when they moved troops into [Georgia](#) and into [South Ossetia](#), made the argument that they had to intervene to protect a midnight attack on a civilian center and also in defense of people who historically had been citizens. How do you see that mirror image, perhaps, of our argument here played out?

**ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER:** The Russians were at least very candid. They told us that if we recognized Kosovo's independence, that's what they were going to do. Honestly, as an international lawyer, there were clearly differences, but we really were pushing the boundaries in ways that we should have known were going to be exploited by others. So if we were going to do what we did in Kosovo, then we had to expect that that was going to happen and we had to prepare for that happening.

There are some realities of power. No one thought that we should intervene in [Chechnya](#). No one thinks we are going to intervene forcibly in [Tibet](#). This is where the principle and the pragmatic simply have to merge if you are actually making decisions.

That said, what I would have done was have an international commission to determine the actual facts of what happened that night. There are many conflicting versions. I am on the Georgian listserv and I certainly know the Georgian view of what happened. But I also know that there are credible accounts that Georgia's actions with respect to those minorities could well have been provocative.

I would have actually asked for an international commission. If you had found that there was a pattern of the use of force, severe human-rights violations against those minorities, then Russia has an argument. It doesn't have an argument that it gets to use force and drive tanks all the way to Tbilisi. It doesn't. But you do have to at least acknowledge, if you can establish it by an international commission, that Russia has an interest in protecting its minorities in the same way that we would argue for minorities we favor.

**QUESTION:** Let me ask you, from an academic perspective rather than from the future perspective you are going to be talking from, isn't there an irony in democratic peace theory, and doesn't it push you to a realist's assessment because the upsets that will occur in the process of democratization—they are okay in Central America or Greek colonels or ten states, former small states, in Central Europe. But what about Russia? What

about China? Do you really want to undergo that kind of upset in a multipolar world and push democracy in relationship to those? In terms of the other powers in the world, isn't Kissinger right?

**ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER:** We couldn't end on that note.

The first part of your question I agree with. As I said, I lived in China for 10 months. I don't speak Chinese, so there was much of the experience I was missing, although by the end, like any good immigrant parent, my 12-year-old was able to speak to cab drivers and waiters, and we relied on him completely to do that.

But certainly absorbing Chinese history and the terrors that have been unleashed on the Chinese people when there have been periods of chaos gives you an entirely different appreciation of the value of stability and of the reason there is such popular support for this government—not that it might be the ideal government that all Chinese would want, but that it has provided the stability that has allowed economic prosperity. I would not want to see a democratic revolution in China tomorrow. I would not, not in its current state. I don't think it would succeed, and I think the chaos would be devastating.

But does that mean that the United States shouldn't support democracy over the long term? Kissinger would say, "No. It's none of our business. We just deal with the Chinese government."

I would say no. I would say, A., you certainly do a lot of private diplomacy—I think Kissinger would agree with that—with respect to individual human rights. You also, though, support economic policies. You support China signing on to international institutions that have all sorts of rules that will force greater social openness, that will force less corruption in various ways, ways that will enable individual Chinese to have more of a voice. You support [Google](#). I would make the compromises Google made, because just the fact that Google is there and that we would support that is providing vast amounts of information to the Chinese—although I will say that you can't get [Wikipedia](#), and my sons decided that they couldn't go to a school where you couldn't get Wikipedia.

But I think my second principle holds. If you think the foundations of real liberal democracy are economic and social microfoundations, in this society as well as theirs, then supporting democracy really means taking a longer-term view and pushing steadily on those levers that you think will gradually produce—it's not economic prosperity and then, immediately, political liberty, but gradually opening the society and building the institutions that I think then will allow the Chinese and any other people to rule themselves.

**JOEL ROSENTHAL:** Anne-Marie, thank you very much.

**ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER:** Thank you.

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