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THE JUNGLE GROWS BACK:
AMERICA AND OUR IMPERILED WORLD

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. TALBOTT: Good afternoon, everybody. I'm particularly pleased that you folks would come in from a sunny day (laughter) and to be indoors. And I'm sorry to tell you rain tomorrow. The weather around American politics and the state of the world is not very sunny either. We at Brookings are giving a lot of thought to what's happening and how, as citizens, we can see our way to better times, although much of the current public discourse, including what's going on today, isn't helping very much. That is not the case on these premises. We are into the business of civil discourse and I cannot imagine two better and more knowledgeable practitioners of civil discourse as Bob and Susan.

A word about Bob, he writes big, thick works of history, but he also writes crisp, spare books on the pressing issues of our day. His new book is in that category. It's physically little, but intellectually big and important. One more thing I want to say about Bob, his dad is here, Don Kagan, somebody I have admired for decades and learned a lot about and a lot from. And I'm hoping that Bob's daughter, Lainey, will get here. She is basically working on the promotion of democracy around the world, but she's going to try to get here before the end of this. And it's especially important I think for him having some of his family here because it is his birthday. (Laughter; applause) You can sign now or after.

Okay, come on up guys.

MS. GLASSER: Well, thank you so much, Strobe, and thank you to Brookings. I have to say I'm particularly grateful since I don't have to be the one to spill the news about Bob's birthday, because he was going to get mad at me for it.

What an apt thing to bring into the world, a book like this on your birthday. We're all missing not only a sunny day, but a Presidential press conference that

when I checked in on it the president had already claimed that even George Washington had skeletons in his closet. And many other interesting new and fun details were emerging also about the many false claims by many women that President Trump had been presented with, because he is also a very famous person. So I'm sure there will be a lot more news while this conversation is happening, but I didn't want to spare you from the news updates as they are flowing into this conversation.

But in all seriousness, you know, I'm very honored to be the person to talk with Bob this evening before we bring you in for your questions as well. I read the book; I highly recommend it to people. It is, as you might already have a little bit of an inkling, with a book "The Jungle Grows Back," not necessarily a super optimistic book about our times. And in all serious, it's the crispness and clarity with which Bob and his work has approached the challenge of the last few years that is what makes him stand out. And that is why I think he's able to write a book that is short, persuasive, and eloquent about the moment at a time when -- you know, I feel like I could write something that would be 10 times as long and, you know, 1/10th as clear. And it takes somebody who has really approached the challenges of the last few years of American politics and international politics with a kind of clarity.

I went back and looked at some of Bob's recent writings in the op-ed pages -- he's a columnist for the Post but he's also done some pieces for the Wall Street Journal and the New York Times. Here's a sampling of some of the titles that might give you a sense of where his head has been at: "The Cost of America's Retreat" -- which I think was the headline on an essay based off this book. "Trump's America Does Not Care" -- this cheery one. "Things Will Not Be Okay" -- that was a headline I liked. "There Is Something Very Wrong With Donald Trump." "Would Checks and Balances Stop Trump? Don't Bet On It." Republicans caved to him during the primaries and they're

caving to him right now. And this takes us back to May 18, 2016 where Bob was really the first person in a serious way to use the F word in American politics and to write this essay, which I just reread this afternoon, "This is How Fascism Comes to America." Which in some ways is the sort of intellectual progenitor of this book project. It is an extraordinary piece of writing, and I really do recommend that you go back and look at this. I bet most of us here wish that you'd been wrong about a lot more in that piece than you were.

And yet, I have to say, Bob, going back and looking at that and then looking at that and then reading the book, this book is not a polemic. This book is much more of a work of history than it is a polemic or a call to arms. Why did you take that historical approach with it? And tell us what is the jungle that you mean the title?

MR. KAGAN: Well, first of all, thank you, Susan, for doing this. I have such admiration for Susan's work, whether she's writing her pieces in The New Yorker, or if you see her on TV, there's no one who's more penetrating and does a better analysis of what's going on in Washington. And so it's a real treat for me. And we're also dear friends, so that also makes it even nicer.

And it's wonderful to have Strobe introduce because Strobe has been a friend forever. And, yes, it's wonderful to have my dad in the front row. The book is dedicated to my dad and so it's -- you know, I learned everything that I know that was right from him. The rest of it I came up with on my own.

I mean it's a very good question. The reason that this is really as much as anything -- it's obviously not a carefully full blown history, but is an effort to explain how the United States set out to create and sustain what we call this liberal world order in the first place. Because I actually think that more than anything is what Americans have forgotten. And the fact that they've forgotten why and how and under what

circumstances is a big part of our problem. I would be optimistic if you asked me a question like does America have the capacity to continue sustaining this international system together with its allies, because I think the answer is clearly yes. It is not bankrupting us, it is not undermining us as a democracy, it is not beyond our means. In order to do what we have been doing we could spend 4-4.5 percent of our GDP on the military, we could provide the foreign aid that we used to provide, and we could sustain this, especially because this alliance structure, this liberal democratic world that was created after World War II is still intact. And that is the biggest deterrent to a breakdown of the order.

So it's all within our capacity to do it. And what troubles me is that we no longer understand what the point is. And so you're constantly getting the question -- which Donald Trump now expressed at the United Nations, really, which is a first I think -- I don't even think the so-called isolationist presidents of the 1920s gave a speech like the one that Donald Trump just gave. The questions that Americans are asking and that Donald Trump is hammering on, is what's in it for us. You know, we're spending this money, we're expending these lives, we are involved everywhere in the world, and for what reason. And most people, I think, in America would say not a good reason. And so that is why I felt it was necessary to go back and recount this, because -- and I'll end on this before we keep going on -- what we've forgotten is not just why we did it, but what the world looked like before we did it. And we are so convinced, either because we've been living in this protective bubble of this remarkable order, we spend most of our time complaining about it -- and there's plenty to complain out -- but historically it's unprecedented. We spend so much time living in it that we can't imagine anything else. And we certainly can't imagine going back to the way things were before.

Today people -- you know, if you say Hitler or Stalin they seem like

esoteric strange beings from another planet, not like anything that could possibly happy again. And I think what we don't realize is the norm in human history was what led to Hitler and Stalin and Mussolini and the World Wars. That is where history was headed and did head until the United States change the direction and trajectory. But that is where it will go back to and that's sort of what the goal of telling this history is. I think it's the only -- I think -- that you can get Americans once again to understand that.

MS. GLASSER: Well, as I mentioned, this is not necessarily a super optimistic gloss on the moment, but you do make actually this I think controversial to people argument that essentially Trump is a product of where the American people are at, it's not just some external accident that we've ended up with a sort of blustery billionaire who happens to be more authoritarian minded than other American presidents. And sort of the no Trump, no problem school of thinking is not your school of thinking.

MR. KAGAN: Not on foreign policy. I think in terms of domestic politics he is more unique and he certainly as an individual is unique and unlike any other politician. I mean that in a very clinical sense. I'm not just like I don't like him. I think he has a personality defect, which plays out in our political system and now on the international stage. I think he lacks human empathy. And that's a big deal to have as the leader of the most powerful country in the world.

But in foreign policy I believe that he benefitted from an existing mood rather than creating it. And I think that Americans since the end of the Cold War have been increasingly asking this question that I mentioned, which is why are we doing this is and why are we spending this money. And, of course, it was accelerated by two wars that didn't end well, Iraq and Afghanistan. And, of course, it was further accelerated by the financial crisis and the aftermath of that. But when I think about what Americans went through the Cold War, Viet Nam was 10 times worse than Iraq in terms of cost, certainly

in lives. And in terms of tearing the country apart, it may have been more than 10 times worse. We suffered through tremendous economic difficulties during the 1970s, et cetera. And yet in the 1980s the United States rebounded and you could elect a president who said it's morning in America and we're back and we're going to increase defense spending and we're going to -- you know, whether you liked those policies or not, it was a reversal. I have a hard time seeing that happening now. You know, when people tell me that America hasn't changed that much, I say imagine electing Ronald Regan in 2020, or a Ronald type figure. It's almost inconceivable.

So Trump is part of a process that's been entrained. And unfortunately, as you note, after Trump is gone we will not be out of this problem. And so it's a much deeper issue than that.

MS. GLASSER: No, I was struck by -- there's a sentence in the book where you say -- you compare this actually to the debates in the United States in the interwar period after World War and then sort of what lessons people took away from what they saw as a sort of misleading case for war by Wilson. The debate up until 1941 in the United States was a very bitter acrimonious divisive one that was not only about America's role in the world, but how to perceive threats and what kind country it would be. And at any rate, you compare this moment to then in the sense that even if we had Hillary Clinton rather than Donald Trump, somebody who is a believer in this liberal international order, would she fare more successfully than FDR did from 1939 to 1941. So a very interesting argument.

MR. KAGAN: Yes, I mean we're used to, especially foreign policy experts are used to, thinking of a certain kind of America, and that's the America we've known since World War II. And so during that period from 1945 until even after the Cold War, if you looked at American foreign policy it moved like a sign wave. So you had

World War II and then they wanted to bring the soldiers back, but then they decided because of the fear of the Soviet Union, they couldn't. And then you had Korea, then you had a period of retrenchment under Eisenhower, then you're back to Jack Kennedy, then you had Viet Nam, and the period of retrenchment, and then back to Ronald Reagan. And so basically every action would lead to the next reaction. And that's the model we're used to.

So there's been this general assumption that as soon as things get really dangerous in the world again, if they do get dangerous, then the American people will once again rise to the occasion. But there is another model of American behavior, and we treat the Americans of the 1920s and 30s like they're some kind of idiots who didn't see what was coming, as well they should have. They weren't idiots, they're us. I mean or we're all idiots, or we're as much idiots as they are. They had no better understanding of the future than we do today. So someday people will look back on this period and say what a bunch of idiots, how come they couldn't see what was happening.

But that was a different America whose reaction to the deterioration of the international situation was rational in a certain sense. It was if things are getting so bad, that's even more reason we don't want to be involved. So it's possible to look at escalating crises and respond by saying definitely not, especially because as things get worse and worse the price of dealing with it gets higher and higher, until ultimately it's 1938 or '39 and people say well, what do you expect us to do, you want to send 8 million soldiers across the Atlantic and try to land on the beaches and defeat the Nazis. What are you, out of your mind?

And so that is unfortunately another kind of syndrome. And that's the one that worries me, that Americans could look at a world that even today is obviously in trouble. I mean Europe is in more difficulty now I think that any time -- I say this with

Timothy Garton Ash here, and no one knows better the answer to this question than he does -- but I think Europe is in some ways in more trouble that it has been since after World War II. And yet Americans are almost entirely unaware of that or couldn't care less. And so that's a syndrome that we're capable of.

MS. GLASSER: Well, you know, I want to probe into the varieties of our coming misery here, because I think there have been -- you know, these are the kind of debates that we have now that in and of themselves arguably are a symptom of just how grave a moment we're in. But you do mention a lot this question of America in the 20s and 30s. Is that the kind of moment it is, or is it many people think of it much more akin to the disruptions and the divisiveness of American society after Viet Nam in the 60s, and the convergence in particular of Viet Nam and Watergate as being in some ways the more apt analogy? I mean I think I know your answer, at least in part here, which is to say that the difference was the Cold War and that that was more unifying than we might have realized at the time. But did that really mean that you think we're repeating the mistakes of the 20s and 30s, or simply that the political consequences are that high?

MR. KAGAN: You know, I try in the book -- and I think it's important to separate the trends of American domestic politics from the trends of American foreign policy, because they are related, but they're not one in the same. So in American domestic politics I would say we have been here before, clearly. Although I must say I'm sorry, but I prefer the analogy with the 20s because for me the 2016 election looks like nothing so much as the 1920 election. Then you got Warren Harding and now you have Donald Trump, but the impulses and the almost revolutionary nature of the election were very similar. One, it was a tremendous reaction against internationalism, a perception that we'd gotten way too far involved. The results people decided, although I'm not sure I know why -- I mean I know why, but I don't agree -- but anyway, the results people

decided were terrible and so the war was a terrible mistake. And so we're out. You have that reaction. You also had a reaction against what had been a long period of increasing immigration and you had the most draconian anti-immigration sentiment ever and the most draconian immigration law passed in 1924. And you also had the beginnings of -- or the resurgence of protectionism in the United States.

So you had this sort of troika of America first all coming out of this 1920 election. And, as I say, in those days parties controlled who the nominee was. It wasn't a democratic process. Who knows who would have been nominated as president in the 20s and 30s if we'd had as democratic a process as we have today? Father Coughlin, Huey Long, who knows. But the parties in those days were in control and they didn't let things like that happen. The worst you got was Warren Harding, who was not good by the way (laughter), but this -- and also -- I'm sorry, I left out the racial and cultural things that were happening in the 20s. The Ku Klux Klan reached its highest level of membership in the early 1920s, partly as a response of African American movement north, the way people were suffering, the dislocations of moving from a farm economy to industrial economy. I could go on and on, but that to me is the great similarity. And I think it's fair to say that America goes through these cycles. America has a lot of dark, ugly elements that are always seething beneath the surface, and sometimes they're not beneath the surface.

That is a long way of saying, however, I am fundamentally optimistic that the United States, that American people also pull out of these periods. And that for me, the reason why they pull out of it is because of the essence of American nationalism despite what some people might want to believe remains the universal principles of the Declaration of Independence. And that is the only place where Americans can ultimately recur when they are looking for their essence, and that essence has driven the United

States forward through slavery, through segregation, through denial of rights to one set of people or another. And that has been a kind of Whig history in terms of the continual expansion of rights in the United States.

So I think the United States recovers. Now, if the United States recovers its sort of universalistic approach to the world rather than its narrow nationalistic approach, it would then I think be likely to recover in foreign policy, but here's the problem, it could be too late. The world does not wait for the United States to get over its craziness or getting over its demons. The world moves on, power shifts, and I fear that by the time Americans sort of regain their equilibrium as a people, you can get to the point where the world order is irrecoverable.

MS. GLASSER: Well, you know, actually a lot of your book is not so much about a roadmap forward inside the U.S. and its politics. The substance of it is actually really -- the jungle even that you describe -- is what does the world as it is actually look like. And it's a much more dangerous place out there in this telling of it than we commonly recognize. And so I want to ask about that. Clearly we're seeing a rise of new autocracies around the world. You write a fair amount about both Russia and China and some of our mistaken assumptions about how the course of their post Soviet history would go. Do you perceive them to be principle threats? Is that what we're talking about here? Or are you talking about the more general rise of, you know, all different kinds of autocracies? For example, the unraveling potentially of Europe and the rise of illiberal democracies in places like Hungary and Poland. Is that what you have in mind as well?

MR. KAGAN: I have all of that in mind. And you had asked me earlier what do I mean by the jungle, and I should answer that question. And what I mean is I think reasonably enough, because we're all of us here, all of us in the Transatlantic community, especially -- most of the Transatlantic community, we're all children of the

enlightenment and we have an idea of progress, and not just scientific progress but human progress. And, you know, what Frank Fukuyama articulated in his End of History essay was the conviction that I think is very common to us, that all things being equal, the human spirit wants freedom, individual rights, recognition of his or her rights. And that is the highest aspiration and that's why liberal democracy won and communism and fascism and authoritarianism lost.

Now, there is truth in that, but unfortunately -- and now Frank has another book out about identify. I haven't really read it yet, but I think I can imagine what the argument is. And the argument is that there are competing elements in human nature. There are the elements that seek those things, like freedom in individual rights, and then there are the elements that seek security in tribe and family and nation, and who seek strong leadership, especially in times of perceived insecurity. And I could name others. There's selfishness and greed and violence and hatred, et cetera. There are all these elements that are always part of human nature and they're always at war with each other.

And so on the one hand we shouldn't be surprised to see a resurgence of all this. Liberalism is a very new phenomenon historically. And it is an interloper in a way and it is -- by emphasizing those other qualities of the human spirit it is in a certain sense unnatural. And I think if you look at from the birth of liberalism two or three centuries ago, liberalism has always created its own antibodies. The enlightenment created a counter enlightenment. There were always those who said this is not what it's about, it needs to be about organic things like family and nation.

So it's not unnatural to have the jungle growing back. If you plant a garden, you know -- I'm not much of a gardener myself, but I'm sure there are those of you out there who are gardeners -- you know that you don't plant a garden and then just

sit back and watch it because the forces of nature are always trying to take it over. The vines are growing, the weeds are growing, and that's true of our liberal order too.

MS. GLASSER: Although you have this very provocative notion in there that perhaps we might have even not just gotten wrong this notion of inevitable progress and end of history when the Soviet Union collapsed, but maybe communism isn't as resilient or as durable of a foe as old fashioned authoritarianism. And I thought that was a really provocative idea, the idea that perhaps communism actually might have sprung from the same enlightenment family tree, as it were, you know, and had a notion of progress embedded in it in a way that authoritarianism doesn't.

MR. KAGAN: Yes, I was sort of looking at that --

MS. GLASSER: (off mic).

MR. KAGAN: I know. No, I had this realization that Jeane Kirkpatrick had it exactly wrong. You know, her argument was authoritarian governments will eventually become democratic because ultimately she was a political scientist and political scientists believe in modernization theory. And so authoritarianism is a stage on the way to liberalism, whereas communism is forever. Once a country goes communist, that's it, and it's frozen in place. So the only thing to do is go to war with them or overthrow them or what have you. Well, it turns out the opposite was true. Communism fell and it fell on its own weight. The Soviet Union didn't fall because we sponsored guerilla movement in it, it didn't -- I mean I would love to believe it fell because Ronald Reagan said it was an evil empire. But at the end of the day it feels precisely because communism and liberalism judged themselves and each other fundamentally along a very similar enlightenment measure. Were you delivering the goods, did people have equality and rights? And communism emphasized equality. Democracy and capitalism emphasized opportunity, but they were sort of fighting in the same struggle.

Authoritarianism represents -- and communism I think failed ultimately because it was doing even more violence to human nature than liberalism does, but asking people to give up property, to give up ownership, to treat other with complete equality, to have no government really. At least that was the theory, which of course never played out. Whereas authoritarianism -- Jeane Kirkpatrick's argument was don't worry about authoritarianism because it's organic, it's natural, it's part of the human evolution. And I think what I believe now is, yes, that's the problem, that's why it's more threatening, because it is organic and it is natural and it does appeal to these enduring elements of human nature that -- in a very powerful way. And if you look at what Putin is doing to the West right now, he is playing on the contradictions of liberalism, he is playing on the degree to which liberalism doesn't satisfy all these urges by supporting nationalism and tribalism and religion, which he's doing very cynically in some respects by coming into the United States and playing on racial divisions -- which is what the Russian bots do, they play up these racial tensions. He is exploiting the weaknesses in our system in a way that communism never could. And so I do think that we got that one exactly wrong.

MS. GLASSER: Now, let's go back to the sort of real world application of some of these ideas. You know, I'm struck by you talk about well, would Hillary Clinton have done any better. We had two terms of Barack Obama, you have been critical of Obama, the book is also critical of him, and yet you do acknowledge in the book that Obama was a believer in the liberal international order and, in fact, often was criticized by republicans when he took steps that could be seen as defending it in some way.

What are the lessons and the take aways from that? You know, he was a popular president who was reelected to a second term, eight years, and not only did he not hold these forces at bay, but he's doomed to see Donald trump as his successor. So

how much is that a through line, how much responsibility, if at all, does he bear for that?

MR. KAGAN: Well, again, I think that each in their own way Obama and Trump responded to a -- I'm talking about foreign policy again -- responded to a sentiment that clearly existed. Barack Obama felt he was elected to get us out of Iraq and ultimately out of Afghanistan and never to do anything like that again. I think he had reason to think that was true. If anything, he overestimated the degree to which Americans wanted him to be tough. And so he did things like increase troops in Afghanistan briefly because he thought he had to do that. I think he discovered in the kind of dialogue that presidents have with the people that the people didn't care about that either. And so he regretted some of the things he did early on, like Libya, which I think informed his decision later on Syria. So Obama I think was in the direction of where the American people are. And Trump, as he does on everything, just turned that and put it on steroids and said it in the most blatant way.

Now, you're right to point out the difference between Trump and Obama is a significant one. I think Obama thought he was trying to reorient American foreign policy to limit our involvement and limit our expenses, but in a way that would not damage the liberal word order and that would sort of adjust to what he thought was the new international system. We're constantly hearing about how we have to adjust the old strategy to new circumstances. I think that's what he was trying to do. I don't think he succeeded, but that's what he was trying to do.

Trump is certainly the first president we've had since World War II who wants to overthrow the liberal order. He wants to overthrow the liberal order. It's not that he doesn't accept it, doesn't want to expend a lot of money on it, he wants to defeat it. And you can see that in his choice of who he supports overseas. So throughout Europe he supports nationalist populist forces who are hostile to the liberal world order. In Britain

he doesn't even support Theresa May and the Tories, he supports Farage. In France he supports Le Pen, in Italy he supports the current government, he supports Victor Orbon. And so now you have a President of the United States who is allied, and not just objectively, but actually with forces that are seeking to overthrow the liberal word order.

So I don't want to overdo the argument that Trump is just a continuation, because I think the American people, if asked, would not say we love Marine Le Pen. But whether they have any objection to what he's doing is another question.

MS. GLASSER: So do you perceive those things in and of themselves to be threats to the United States of an existential nature? I mean will they create a new order to replace this old order? You know, you're a little inconclusive on that in the book. You talk about the rise of Russia and China, the fraying of what was, but what are the consequences? What if Donald Trump does blow up the world order?

MR. KAGAN: Well, you know, I do talk about Russia and China because, of course, they're the most obvious immediate threats, but I also talk about -- and I guess I would say this is what worries me more, what I fear most is the collapse of the Europe that we've known. Because Europe is the heart and soul and core of this international system. It was in a sense to right the imbalance in Europe that the United States fought two world wars and ultimately decided to leave its forces in Europe in order to solve that problem. And we kid ourselves if we think that Europe can't fall apart and if not repeat the past -- because the past is never actually repeated -- but certainly return to the problems of the past. I think the idea of returning to what we used to refer to as the German question is no long something that's inconceivable. If you look at the elements that turned Europe into a peaceful place where Germany and France could work side by side and you could have an open European economy and increasingly democratic Europe, it included the decision by the United States to guarantee European security, it

included the support for democracy so that there was a sense of common values and a common European home, it included an open economy so that countries could trade with each other and not exacerbate geopolitical divisions by moving into protectionism. And it included trying to transcend European nationalism, which is what the EU project -- which was what the European Community and European Union project what were about, moving past those dangerous nationalisms of the past. And that's what was accomplished.

Now, look at all four of those things today. Europe is renationalizing, democracy is faltering, the United States is leading a protectionist drive in the international economy, and the United States is looking like it is less and less interested in providing that security guarantee in Europe. So the four things that made this Europe possible are now being withdrawn and we want to believe that this will have no effect on Europe. I think we can see the effect it's having. You can never say how far are we, how nervous should we be. I'm always reminded of the fact that if we were sitting here in 1925 we would say the world looked pretty good. The American economy was booming, Japan seemed to be moving forward as a democracy, the Weimar Republic had recovered from the worst elements of what had happened in the early 20s, et cetera, et cetera. And 10 years later -- or even 6 years later, all that began to crumb. You know, I use this line from the Hemmingway novel, "The Sun Also Rises", which I think is apt here, which is one of the characters is asked how did he go bankrupt, and his answer was gradually, and then suddenly. (Laughter) And that is my fear about the world order, that you could say well, I don't know, things seem to be okay, and they do seem to be okay until they are absolutely not okay.

If I'm painting a dark picture, it is not because I think we are faded. I want to make that clear. I don't think we are faded, that the whole thing is going to blow

up. But I do think we need to realize what the real dangers are.

MS. GLASSER: When they make highlight reel of what it used to look like and what -- the liberal order coming to an end, I kind of feel like yesterday and the scene of an American president being laughed at in the middle of the United Nations, which the United States helped to create, seems like a way to put a visual marker on that.

MR. KAGAN: I'm sure that's true. I mean I'm sure that's unprecedented. But it's also unprecedented for an American president to say what he said at the UN General Assembly.

MS. GLASSER: Which part of it? (Laughter) No, actually, I'm serious. I mean which part of it. Because there are elements of course that have been very consistent of Trump's rhetoric. The idea of attacking globalism or looking inward is not necessarily unprecedented.

MR. KAGAN: It's not unprecedented for Trump, but it's unprecedented for an American president. I mean even when the United States was acting, as if often did throughout the Cold War, in a somewhat unilateral fashion, did American officials really put a lot of stock in the UN and the UN Security Council? No, mostly not. Dean Acheson thought the whole thing was ridiculous. But part of the compact that worked was the United States had to accept what other countries needed, which is some sense that the United States was not some kind of rogue elephant that was just going to trample, even though it had the power to do so and even though it did so sometimes. There had to be some sense that the United States understood that even if it was hypocritical, hypocrisy is the tribute that vice pays to virtue. It was an understanding that America had to at least look like it gave a crap. And so it really does matter, it's not just rhetoric when an American president comes out and says we really do not care, we are looking out for us, and you should look out for you.

And that, by the way, is a direct invitation to return to the first half of the 20th century.

MS. GLASSER: Well, okay, so what about in this jungle metaphor of yours can you envision a scenario where the U.S. is no longer -- you know, is now shed of its illusions of being the permanent good guy? What if we're the bad guy? Kids these days, they cheer for Darth Vader in Star Wars.

MR. KAGAN: I've written about this, and I think I even mentioned it in the book, I mean there is the concept of the rogue super power. I mean it was one thing for the United States to decide that it didn't want to play on the world scene in the 19th century, or even in the early 20th century, it was the richest country in the world, but the world had run without the United States. It stopped running without the United States, but it had run. But imagine a United States that is as selfish as it was in the 20s and 30s, or at least as self-interested and sort of solipsistic as it was in the 20s and 30s, only now it's far and away the strongest power in the world, it has shaped an international system around its power, and now therefore it has incredible opportunity to abuse that system for its own purposes.

And, by the way, to some extent that is what Trump is doing on the trade front. The United States created a system -- it was also a natural element of the system, but it also created a system in which other countries relied on the American market for their wellbeing. We made a compact with the rest of the liberal democratic world, the allies in Europe and Asia, that we would have a near monopoly of strategic power, but that economically we would not use that monopoly of power to throw our weight around and have a zero sum battle with every nation in the liberal world order. And that was the deal that everybody accepted. So now if you take a deal like that, gives the United States enormous advantages if we want to now exploit that. And so I'm not surprised

that Trump can win trade wars with Canada, with Germany, with Mexico, even with China, because the system is set up that we could always have done that. And we weren't suckers for not doing it, which is what Trump wants the American people to believe, we didn't do it because we were sustaining this order, which was so much in our interest.

And so the danger is a selfish power that is throwing its weight around. Not an isolationist America, but a rogue super power America.

MS. GLASSER: Do you believe that an isolationist variant of that is possible as well, or is that not realistic given how intertwined the economic and the security system have been?

MR. KAGAN: I mean I've never believed that Americans are -- I don't think Americans have ever been isolationists.

MS. GLASSER: So America First is basically a slogan to you, not necessarily a --

MR. KAGAN: America First is not about isolationism, it's about responsibility. It's are we accepting any responsibility or not. America First means we are not accepting any responsibility for anything that happens that isn't directly related to us.

So you look at Trump's policies, yes, we will do something about ISIS because they're trying to kill us. Yes, we will do something about North Korea, maybe, because they are trying to build weapons that can hit us. But the rest of everything, do we care about defending our allies particularly? The answer is no. And so it's not about isolationism, it's about taking responsibility.

MS. GLASSER: So I want to get to the audience questions in a second, but I want to go back just quickly to this question of "America Firstism" and what are the

risks inherent in it right now. You wrote at the height of the post 9/11 perception, that that was a different era in security, a book, which framed Europe as Venus and the United States as Mars. Do you want to revise and extend that metaphor at all? Does it turn out that actually liberal Americans were actually Venus all along as well? Should we be nostalgic for that simpler time?

MR. KAGAN: I mean, you know, there ought to be a statute of limitations on any statement like that. (Laughter) Or a sell by date or no good after date. But I've got to admit, I don't think it's wrong, even now. I think that even liberal Americans, if you will -- but everything is a battle in America and every war that has been fought has had opponents of the war. So you can't just take one slice of the country. If you look at the United States as a totality and you look at present day Europe, but maybe not tomorrow's Europe -- but the Europe I was writing about was the Europe that was still living after the trauma of two world wars, a Europe that had decided to eschew power and move into a different way of dealing -- it was not just -- you know, it wasn't a natural force, it was a decision they made while America still, with very different memories of World War II -- for instance, still believed in the use of force. I would say we're more likely to be the rogue super power than the pacifist super power.

You look at the way Americans treat the military and, yes, American's don't want to go to war, et cetera, et cetera, but no country reveres its military the way the United States does. You don't go to sporting events in other countries, in European countries, in other democracies anyway, and see the kind of reverence that we routinely as a matter of ritual have for our military. Any successful general is immediately talked about as a possible presidential candidate, going back decades. Do generals get elected in Europe? There was a time that they did, but not in post-World War II Europe. And so I just think that is something we -- it's just a reality of America, for better or for worse.

MS. GLASSER: All right. I'm sure there are lots of good questions here. I'm going to ask you to identify yourself and do make it a question if you are able to. I think we probably have microphones but -- there, great.

MR. STACEY: Jeff Stacey from Geopolicity. Just a question about the United Kingdom. But if we think about some of the big ideas you threw out there in some of your remarks -- Bob, you talked about the End of History being wrong, you probably would agree that the Clash of Civilization's argument was wrong. I don't know if you would agree that neocons and neoliberals are now indistinguishable, but you probably agree that if this president stays in the White House, by the time he has a second term the democratic peace theory will probably be wrong as well.

But a question about the United Kingdom. Normally, you being the historian that you are, you probably have noted -- I haven't read your book yet, I plan to -- but the UK and the U.S., if one is faltering, the other one is usually there, if we think back all the way to the early Pax Britannica and then later the U.S. was there when the UK was having trouble. I worked for Sir Edward Heath, the father of Europe and the UK, and of course they are looking like they're on their way out, administering their own giant self-inflicted wound, just like we have, and both of these reinforce each other. So we have kind of the death of the special relationship. But latent in the Clinton campaign, right before the election, several of her groups got together and we made a decision that had she gotten into office the very first thing she would do in foreign policy terms was hold an unprecedented summit in Brussels with all our allies that would basically be a joint EU-NATO summit, it would be declared in favor of democracy against Russia and all Putin was doing, and they would be pull-aside with Theresa May to give her a way to come back from the ledge.

None of this has happened. What do you think about the UK? You've

been focusing almost entirely appropriately on the U.S. because we're so much in trouble. But with one of my old Oxford teachers here in front, I'm interested to hear you pronounce on what's wrong there.

MR. KAGAN: I think would you be interested in hearing what he pronounces on what's wrong there.

MR. STACEY: That would be great.

MR. KAGAN: But since I'm on the hot seat I'll take a crack at it. I want to answer there's another element of that question, which is what should the United States have been doing all this time. But I think that one of the reasons I'm so pessimistic about Europe is the UK decision to leave, because the UK's role in Europe was so vitally important and it just accentuates the degree to which -- it just leaves us more -- it accelerates the return to the German question. Because Britain was a great balancer in a diplomatic and institutional sense, which in a way made everyone calmer, it made the Germans calmer, it made the French calmer. They had all the arguments that they had, of course, but the UK played a special role in that.

And, of course, my own view -- and it's easy for me to say because I'm about to say something which would probably not be popular in the UK, is that Tony Blair had the balance exactly right. He had the special relationship with the United States and he had the special relationship with Europe at the same time. And Britain at that time, therefore, wielded the most influence that it could possible wield. And so now it's got neither. It doesn't have a good relationship with the United States, particularly, and that's because at the very least Trump doesn't have allies, he doesn't have a feeling about countries that way, because he isn't feeling about the people even. And it also has now a breakdown in its relationship with Europe.

Now, part of my argument in the book is that we're seeing countries

return to old ruts. So if you pull back the lens and look at things from the broadest conceivable historical point of view, that Britain is pulling away from the continent is hardly shocking. I mean that is the traditional British approach, of which the post-1945 period was an aberration. But this is not good news, okay. And the difference though is that when Britain was apart from the common, it still was incredibly powerful, it still commanded this vast empire, it still had this hegemonic naval capacity.

Now, it's pulled away from the continent and it's comparatively weak as a world power. So the degree to which the United States relied on Britain not only for its military power but for its diplomatic power, for its wisdom, let's say, about international affairs, that's all gone. I mean I hope it's not gone forever, but it's gone now. And it's bad for everybody around.

Now, let me just get to your second part. I'm glad to hear that -- all the things that could have -- if only Clinton had got elected, all the things that would be happening now. But the United States made a terrible mistake in absenting itself from these discussions, because if you look at American behavior from 1945 right through the period of German reunification, the United States never thought that it wasn't its job to work out these kinds of difficulties in Europe. I mean when German reunification was happening, Margaret Thatcher was very nervous about it, Mitterrand was very nervous about it, and the United States had to say, don't worry, we're going to be here, they're going to be part of NATO, we're going to deal with this problem. So the United States didn't feel like it was not its business how that was settled. And it certainly was America's concern how Britain and Europe worked out their difficulties. So whether the United States should have been in early on, trying to broker the deal, but certainly they should be brokering the divorce, or at least helping to broker the divorce. And the fact that we're actually exacerbating is all the worse.

MR. CAMPBELL: Hi, Larry Campbell. I'll try to be brief with the question. You made a comment about the post war order built around the strength of the U.S. market, the U.S. economy. We're certainly still one of the strongest economies in the world. And while we have a president who seems to be fracturing Europe to -- I wonder if you could speak the rival model and the challenge of dealing with China in exporting the strengths of its economy, building on autocracy around authoritarian model with, as some have noted, with the rise of digital technology for (inaudible) liberty in the world exporting that as a method of authoritarianism and having a model that's built around the strength of the Chinese model. While in the U.S. and much of the western world the allure of the Chinese market seems to inhibit us as a country from speaking about what's going on in China and the threat, I think, at an existential level it poses long-term more so than Russia.

MR. KAGAN: I mean my basic feeling about China, although as we move into these new realms of technology and artificial intelligence and the manipulation of social media, that is a different dimension. Ordinarily I would have said, you know, in another period that I'm not that worried about China exporting its model of autocracy. But the fact that it's exporting the tools by which autocracies can control their populations, that's kind of a new element. But other than that, I would say our goal with China should be to deter it militarily and encourage it to pursue economic success. That has been the most successful element of American foreign policy.

I don't think we can do anything to prevent China from wielding economic influence in the world. I don't even know what that would look like, unless we were in a full-blown cold war where we were, you know, battling them on every front. And I just don't think that that's where we're going to go. So to my mind, if we can deter China from seeking their desires in a military way, if we can deter that, then we can find our way

through the evolutions that China is going to go through. I cannot believe -- I know it's been a while -- I cannot believe that china's trajectory is one straight upward path toward wealth. They have an aging population. If all countries are returning to their norm, China's norm is instability -- I mean at least certainly for centuries. And I think the possibility that Xi Jinping has in fact made a mistake in terms of stability by trying to consolidate power in this way, and that he may in fact be destabilizing China by doing that, we just don't know. I'm not making a prediction here, but I don't see just steady state progress going forward.

And the interesting thing is that Trump is squeezing the Chinese and putting them in a difficult position now. I'm not a big fan of trade wars in general. He would be a lot more effective if he had the rest of the world working with him rather than also going after all the other allies, but there's no question that he is squeezing China and forcing them, for instance, to halt the deleveraging that that they were doing with the banking sector that is heavily over indebted. And so that's why I feel like we can't solve all the problems that China creates. But if we can contain them militarily -- and that's the containment I would seek -- we have a chance to see how things play out in China.

MS. GLASSER: Okay. Timothy Garton Ash.

MR. ASH: Timothy Garton Ash, Oxford University. Bob, I'm very much looking forward to reading the book.

On the successors to Mars and Venus, since Emmanuel Macron describes himself as having a Jupiterian presidency maybe -- and Donald Trump, busy as he is, maybe Europeans are from Jupiter and Americans are from Pluto.

MR. KAGAN: You continue to make me regret every using that metaphor, but thank you. (Laughter)

MR. ASH: More seriously, about the only optimistic you said was that

the American people will get out of this, but it may be too late. And my question is what, if anything, Europeans, including the British, say or do to help the Americans get out of it before it's too late?

And I don't mean say to Donald Trump, because we know exactly how to speak to Donald Trump, you flatter the pants off of him. That's what Emmanuel Macron did rather successfully while, what the Poles have just done in saying that the new U.S. base in Poland should be called Camp Trump. And so they get a special mention in the speech at the UN General Assembly. But I mean speaking truly to the political nation.

And, of course, the model of this was Churchill's Fulton speech. I mean we have to remember that in '45 the United States was again tempted to draw back, go a step back from Europe and Churchill came and spoke directly to the political nation. So what's the new Fulton speech, who should deliver it to whom?

MR. KAGAN: Well, it's a very good question. And, unfortunately, I think Churchill had a special standing when he did that after what had happened in World War II. I've read a lot of British correspondence in earlier periods where the general British diplomatic position was, if we want the Americans to do something, the last thing in the world we should do is tell them to do it. And Americans do have this aversion -- as we've learned that the British also did -- I don't know how much good it did when Obama intervened in the Brexit discussion. Americans have this aversion to being told anything by foreigners.

So I don't know it's so much that. I would say -- and this is obviously harder than coming and giving a speech -- Europe has to protect its own democracies and be -- you know how we always talk about America being a model to the other nations -- well, it would be good if Europe could be a model to Americans. And it didn't help -- there was a synergy I believe between the Brexit forces in Britain and the Trump forces

here. It gave a sense of confidence to the Trump forces that the British were also moving in this direction. And there's been a lot of political synergy between -- I mean Thatcher preceded Reagan, Blair preceded Clinton, Brexit preceded Trump, so I would say let Britain recover and hope that it washes back across the Atlantic. How about that?

MR. ASH: I actually thought of that.

MR. KAGAN: Okay. (Laughter)

QUESTIONER: Hi, I'm Mitchell Monger; I'm a student in the Washington area. My question is how does the role of technology and the rate of change in technology affect your thinking about the international order?

MR. KAGAN: It's a very good question and almost by its very nature, the answer is I don't know. I would say historically, and I think there are indications that this is the case -- and in fact it may be more the case today than it was in the past -- that technology has a way of separating some nations from everybody else in terms of capability, particularly on the military side. That was the great revolution that allowed Europe to become the dominant force in the world. It was very much a technological revolution.

And I think when we start looking at the artificial intelligence issues, I am hardly an expert on this, but the people who are experts say at this moment there's really only two or three countries who are at the cutting edge of artificial intelligence. The good news is that one of them is definitely the United States. The bad news is the other one is China. And so we're in a race for that, but I think what we're likely to see is that technology once again is going to open a gap in capability on the military side, and probably not just on the military side.

So in that sense I suppose if your goal is to sort of maintain America's capacity to be the shaper of the international system, in theory at least, the technological

advances ought to make that possible. Now, that being said, if you bring in the jungle analogy, the problem with technology is that technology is a neutral phenomenon that will be filled by whatever humans seek to fill it with. And so I remember there was a time when Tom Friedman very intelligently said the internet is going to set us all free because it will be something government can't control. Well, lo and behold, we discovered that governments can control it, it doesn't set us free, and in fact it is now being manipulated as a tool against democracy. And we therefore have moved into the realm of what is truth. And in a way I sometimes think we've sort of moved back in time. You know, if you think about the way the world existed before there were sort of anything like an objective newspaper, if you were in Medici, Florence, there was no Walter Cronkite to tell you what the news was, the news was whatever the gossip was spreading around and whatever malicious gossip that was spreading around. You couldn't go to anybody for the news. And so the news was whatever your group thought the news was.

I feel like we could be back there right now, unless we sort of work very hard to strengthen those institutions that can be said -- the kind of institutions that Susan has worked for and does work for -- that can have some plausible claim to doing due diligence in the reporting of news. But otherwise, we move back to that period where everything is up for grabs in terms of what the facts are.

MS. GLASSER: Well, I'm glad we've moved back to the less -- I wouldn't want you to end on an overly optimistic note.

MR. KAGAN: On an optimist note, yeah. (Laughter)

MS. GLASSER: All right. Ladies, I need a question here. We're not leaving until there's a question from one of you, so. All right, well, I guess it's my stage, so I'll -- here you go, right here. (Laughter)

QUESTIONER: My name is Marcy Reed Simon, a retired American

diplomat. I spend most of my time in Eastern Europe, and most of that time promoting democracy and democratic institutions. And what we are seeing is an attack on those democratic institutions.

And I wonder if you'd talk a little bit about how it's not just in the United States, it's not just in Europe, it's other places too. And what are the forces behind that?

MR. KAGAN: Well, I try to look at those forces in the book because, again, I think those forces are always present. Liberalism is always going to create an anti-liberal reaction. And it's important to take note of this because there's a lot of well -- we did something wrong and that's why people are turning against liberalism, or it was globalization or it was television, or it was the American sort of ugly culture that's spreading, et cetera. Which, of course -- although that has a truth to it -- but I think what we have to accept is that a reaction against liberalism is as natural as anything. And so if you go back to the interwar period in Europe, you know fascism grew and democracies fell long before Hitler was on the scene. By the time Hitler comes to power, democracy has already fallen in at least a dozen countries in Europe that had become democracies after World War I. You can lose faith in democracy without anybody defeating it exactly. And I think we are in one of those moments where democracy doesn't seem to be delivering to people what they need. Sometimes that's economic goods, but sometimes it's this human desire for, as I say, tribe and nationalism and culture. People feel their culture is being insulted because of refugees or immigration and there's no answer. You know, we're like why haven't they solved this problem, and the answer is liberalism doesn't really have an answer to those problems. All it can try to do is do what it does and hope that it succeeds.

So I don't find any of this a mystery. And here's where I will try to end on a positive note. You know, first we had this view that democracy was inevitable and we

just have to sit back and enjoy the ride. And today every book that you read is the death of democracy, democracy is dying, and it's over and over. Can we just get over the determinism here? You know, this is a struggle. Democracy is neither destined to win and it's not destined to lose. And I think we have to remember that it came into being as a result of struggle, it has spread or been sustained as a result of continuing struggle, and the struggle never ends. There is no moment at which we can say okay, good, let's just go back to sleep. And that is the real lesson, that's what we're seeing in Eastern and Central Europe, that's what we're seeing in this country. In this country we have this belief -- we talked about checks and balances -- well, fortunately we have a system that prevents people from doing X, Y, and Z. The system doesn't do anything, we have to do it. The system doesn't snap into place for us, it's people doing things.

So that's my -- I don't know if it's optimistic, but that is my call to arms.

My call to arms is democracy is a struggle, we have to continue struggling.

The best I can do. (Laughter)

MS. GLASSER: All right. Bravo. (Applause) Books are for sale outside and Bob will sign them.

MR. KAGAN: I don't know whether they're for sale, but there are books.

MS. GLASSER: There are books.

MR. KAGAN: And I will sign them here.

MS. GLASSER: And he will sign them. Thank you so much.

Congratulations.

MR. KAGAN: Thank you, Susan. That was great. Thank you so much.

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