

The Real History of the Forever Wars | Prof. D. Gibbs & Col. L. Wilkerson

Col. Lawrence Wilkerson joins Prof. David Gibbs and Pascal Lottaz to examine major American decisions after the Cold War. Drawing on his work with Colin Powell, Wilkerson recalls the Gulf War, George H. W. Bush's diplomacy, and proposals to integrate Russia into European security. Gibbs questions the motives behind NATO expansion and intervention in Yugoslavia. Their discussion explores competing interpretations, the rise of neoconservative strategy, institutional rivalries, and the military industry's influence over the direction of United States foreign policy. David and Lawrence's Links: David Gibbs — University of Arizona: <https://dgibbs.arizona.edu> Lawrence Wilkerson — Quincy Institute: <https://quincyinst.org/author/lawrence-wilkerson> Neutrality Studies Links: Neutrality Studies Substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Support Neutrality Studies: <https://neutralitystudies.com/donate> Neutrality Studies shop: <https://neutralitystudies.com/shop> Time Stamps 00:00 An oral history of American power 01:51 The Gulf War and April Glaspie's meeting 05:02 Powell, sanctions, and the decision for war 11:36 Bush's motives and the United Nations 16:36 Russia, NATO, and a lost security partnership 32:10 Wolfowitz and the strategy of global dominance 43:56 Yugoslavia and European peace efforts 56:02 NATO expansion and the arms industry

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies. Today, with the second part of an oral history series called "What Really Happened in the Balkans," I've got with me Professor David Gibbs of Arizona University and Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson, a former Chief of Staff to the United States Secretary of State Colin Powell. Larry, David, welcome. Thank you for having me, for hosting this. Well, thank you for doing this. David, I'm going to hand it over to you because you actually prepared a couple of questions that are unanswered, I think, to the historians out there. Please take it away.

#David Gibbs

Well, thank you again, Pascal. Colonel Wilkerson, I've never met you actually, virtually or in person, but I've heard your podcasts many times, and I really appreciate your commentary on contemporary issues. But as a historian, I'd like to go into your involvement in some key historical events, notably the ending of the Cold War. During the period 1989 to 1993, you were a top aide, I believe chief of staff, if I'm not mistaken, to Colin Powell, who was chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, the U. S. top military officer at that time. And so you had a somewhat unique perspective on what was going on.

And I think I'd like to be—I mean, I have a number of areas I'd like to explore on that—but I'd like to begin with the first Gulf War, the U.S. involvement in Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm during 1990-91. This was, of course, the largest deployment of U.S. regular military forces since at least Vietnam. And it was a major event, obviously, in defining the post-Cold War era. Now, an important aspect of that war was that 10 days before Saddam Hussein invaded and occupied Kuwait, there was a very strange and never adequately explained meeting that took place between the U.S. Ambassador April Glaspie to Iraq and Saddam Hussein.

Saddam Hussein had summoned Ambassador Glaspie to his office, again, just before he attacked Kuwait. And we now have the transcript of that meeting, or at least parts of it. And he basically said to Ambassador Glaspie, "I'm thinking of attacking Kuwait. How does the United States feel about that idea?" And bear in mind that the U.S. at that time had relatively businesslike relations with Iraq, which was not yet a defined enemy. April Glaspie responded—I'm pretty closely paraphrasing here—"We do not have any opinion on these inter-Arab conflicts." Which I, as a historian, would take as, if not a green light, at least a yellow light. I would take that as an instance of Saddam Hussein, in effect, asking permission.

And it would at least be speaking on behalf of the U.S. government that Saddam Hussein has America's permission to go ahead with this operation. I know this has been discussed many times, and there have been many efforts to explain this event, but I myself don't find any of them really adequate. I'm wondering, how do you see this event? Let me just be very frank here. Let me frame it. I wonder—and again, this is a question mark, not a statement—I wonder if there was an effort by the United States to trick Saddam Hussein into war, into an invasion, and thus give the U.S. a pretext to engage in a war it otherwise wanted to do anyway, as an advertisement for American power after the end of the Cold War. Your thoughts? Yes.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

That's a lot to unpack. Yes. Let me say, first of all, that my position with Powell was not as his chief of staff. I would have been very, very busy at that, doing administrative, as we used to say. What I was was a fresh-caught lieutenant colonel, just out of the Naval War College, having finished their senior course as well as their junior course, the best war college in the entire panoply of U.S. war colleges at that time, much better than National and far better than any of the service ones. And so I was primed to be a strategic advisor to him. That's what I had studied. That's what I had made my end-all and be-all in the military.

He made me his speechwriter too, which gave me some real insight into his thinking. On every weekend, virtually, I spent every weekend, Saturday and Sunday, at his quarters at Fort Myer, talking with him about a whole manner of things. Now, let me tell you how that happened in my experience. Here we were sitting in his office one day, and we get a CIA warning that something untoward is happening on the border. We didn't have any information from the State Department

about a meeting between April Glaspie and Saddam Hussein. Powell may have, but he didn't uncover it to me. If he did, it probably would have been, as you suggested, just an incidental meeting and not all that important.

There was no warning from the CIA or anyone else, for that matter, that there was beginning to be a massing of troops for a military operation or for an exercise or whatever. When it came down from the president, it came down in a very mild way to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Remember Goldwater-Nichols? You can talk to the chairman. You don't have to go through the secretary, and the chairman can talk to you, and you don't have to go through the secretary. Now, anybody knows that you back-brief or you simultaneously brief or whatever, because you don't want to get in trouble. But it was a very mild day. Not much was happening. And then all of a sudden, the invasion occurred.

Now, whether that was really a surprise to the president and to the secretary of defense—the secretary of defense didn't always share information with Chairman Powell—Richard Cheney, of course, is anybody's guess. Certainly, I don't know. I'm not even sure Powell knew. But the next thing we knew, we were apprised by Brent Scowcroft, the national security adviser, of the action. And we were told that sanctions were going to be the principal instrument that the president engaged in to punish Saddam Hussein or to check him in some way. Powell then picked up the phone and called the very powerful chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Georgia's Sam Nunn, who himself was contemplating a run for the presidency.

Powell knew that and told him, essentially, "Senator, I'm giving you a heads-up." Let me back up for a moment and footnote this. Powell had a very, very powerful and strong interest in fulfilling both of his responsibilities, which often stumped some four-stars. But all of them had this responsibility, particularly the chairman and the service chiefs. They have two bosses. The Constitution says they have two bosses: the president of the United States and Congress. So he was keeping Congress apprised of what was going on. I'm not sure that he had told Dick Cheney he was going to do that, but he did that.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

So Sam Nunn begins in the Congress to solicit support for sanctions and is caught completely off guard by what is coming next, as was Powell. We are in his office talking about a completely different matter, and we always kept CNN on up in the corner of his office. And he said to me, "Hit the volume. Turn the volume up." And the president was saying, "This invasion will not stand." And Powell looked at me and he said, "I think I just got a different order." Picked up the phone, called Brent Scowcroft. Sure enough, the impression I had was that the president had a long discussion with Brent, that Brent had convinced him that this needed to be different than sanctions.

It needed to be force. And so we were going to war. And that's what Powell said to me. He said, "I think we're going to war." He didn't have a chance to pick up the phone and call Nunn. He had to

get ready for what he was doing, is what he said. I didn't know exactly what he had said to Sam, but I assumed it was something based on the previous interpretation of what the president's decision was. Subsequently, just as a footnote here, Nunn ruins his entire career with that because Nunn is seen, by his immediate advocacy for sanctions, as being against the conflict because he couldn't just then back off sanctions and say, "Okay, I'm for the war now."

So he was still pushing the sanctions against the White House's wishes. He was a Democrat, but nonetheless a powerful Democrat. So Sam really fought it, and he was very angry about this later. He was angry at Powell because he thought Powell had tricked him. And when Powell goes up for his second confirmation hearing, for his second two-year term as chairman, it is a very testy hearing. Now, that's another story, but it is very testy. Powell almost quit right there and walked out. But all to say that he was caught by surprise. Certainly Nunn was caught by surprise. The building, the Pentagon, which had been looking at the TV too, was caught by surprise.

We were going to war, and we knew it. And so we started war planning at that point. So that's how it happened. And I can't tell you who changed H.W. Bush's mind, except that the indication was strongly that it was Scowcroft. And since I knew Brent a little bit and knew his way of thinking, I suspect that was the major influence on it. It might have been some Cheney influence, too, but I think it was probably mostly Brent. So that's how we got started down the path to conflict rather than sanctions. A really bizarre start. I'll never forget being in the office and, "Turn that up. This aggression will not stand," he said. "That's my marching order now."

#David Gibbs

Let me give you an interpretation of what you just said, and you can comment on it. One way of looking at what you just said is that initially, the Bush administration, beginning with the president himself, did not see this invasion and occupation of Kuwait as a big deal. Sufficiently so, they did not immediately contemplate military action, but rather sanctions, the milder response, one might say. But then obviously somebody changed Bush's mind, whether it's Scowcroft or Cheney. The mind clearly was changed, and we did go to war. We know that, obviously. The question is, why the change? And here's a theory for you.

The theory is that, again, initially it wasn't seen as that big a deal, but there was a need to have some kind of big display of military force at that point in history to demonstrate that despite the ending of the Cold War, the United States was still going to remain a major power. It was not going to have a fundamental change in its strategic stance internationally. And a war in the Persian Gulf, which would be easy to justify on account of this act of aggression later condemned as such by the United Nations, was the perfect opportunity to do so. And they did not want to lose that opportunity to showcase power in this fashion. And so it had, shall we say, a showcasing function more than anything else. What do you think of that? Yes.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I don't disagree with you, except I put a different connotation on it because we had subsequent conversations with H.W. Bush. And he was ardent. And I've got to fast forward a minute to when we brought H.W. Bush to the Marine Corps War College after his term was up. And we had him in General Van Riper's dining room because the ice storm had knocked out all the power. And the general was the only one that had big diesel generators to keep the power going. And Bush was on crutches with, you know, he'd had a skiing accident. So it was a difficult deal for the Secret Service and for the president to get into the place without falling on the ice again.

We had him there for about four hours in the general's quarters, my whole seminar in the Marine Corps War College and all the rest of the people who wanted to come along because the president is there. And he talked about this. And so it was reaffirming for me what I had suspected from the beginning, from snippets of conversations I overheard. He was very interested in getting the United Nations imprimatur and proving to the world that the United Nations could work if it were used properly. And that's one reason why he put together about 625,000 troops from all manner of different countries, and we worked on that and so forth.

But I thought that, and he emphasized that to my Marines and airmen and sailors and the others who were in the seminar at the Marine Corps War College, in that very long, detailed conversation and question-and-answer period that he conducted with them. I mean, we were snowbound. We were icebound and snowbound at the general's quarters. So I think there was that. Maybe there was what you said, too. That's a little more realpolitik, if you will. Well, he really seemed to have this almost religious desire to prove that the United Nations could work if it were used properly, which is one reason why he insisted on getting a U.N. Security Council resolution. It's kind of like, remember Justice Jackson said about Truman and the presidency: when the president acts against the wishes of Congress, he may succeed in the moment.

But in the long term, he's far more powerful and reinforced in that power if he acts with the consent of Congress. And that's kind of the way Bush seemed to think about the United Nations. In addition, he didn't think it had ever lived up to its potential, and this was an opportunity to let it live up to its potential. One of the aspects I think that people don't understand, that I think I got vivid insights into with H.W. Bush over the times that I was in his presence, was he did have an almost Eisenhower-like affection for international law and had respect for international law. And so I think this might not have been his primary reason, but I think one of the things he wanted to do was prove that the U.N. could work and reestablish and be reaffirming of international law.

Now, of course, we all know that international law, as Mao Zedong said, comes out of the barrel of a gun, and the United States had the biggest gun. And so, you know, we can do it because we are going to make it work. But that was a part of it, just as it was part of his opinion about Russia and Gorbachev and Shevardnadze, when he essentially was instrumental, he and Baker both with Helmut Kohl, with Shevardnadze, with Gorbachev, in convincing all the interested parties, Mitterrand as well, Major and Thatcher as well, that you could reunify Germany and you could keep it in NATO. You

could, Helmut Kohl, afford the 80 billion U.S. dollar equivalent it was going to cost you to reunite the Germans. It actually cost twice that.

That's what Kohl was mainly worried about, was how much it would cost. And the promise, as it was couched at the time, that if that all occurred, NATO would not come one inch further east was just that. And for Bush, a gentleman's agreement between leaders was just as binding as a treaty. That's not true anymore, for sure. And that's one reason we haven't approved a treaty in God knows how many years. We wouldn't bring up the Law of the Sea Treaty. We wouldn't bring up the CTBT because we knew the Senate wouldn't get a two-thirds majority. So we haven't done a treaty in so long, I'm not even sure we know how to do it anymore. But Bush was of the old school. He believed in treaties, and he believed in a gentleman's word.

#David Gibbs

You know, here's another interpretation. I want to come back to you in a moment. But with regard to the promises made about not expanding NATO, is it possible that a more cynical interpretation might be justified? That Bush was essentially trying to publicly show great respect to Gorbachev, trying to be as gentle as possible in overseeing the death of the Soviet Union, not to overplay things and destabilize the situation. But really, underneath was an effort basically to trick the Soviets into complacency, trick Gorbachev into complacency. And then, once the task had been accomplished, to then begin the process of expanding NATO. Or do you think, or do you believe that's an overly cynical interpretation?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I think it is. And I'll tell you this: Bush was not an advocate of expanding NATO. He became interested in it only in his last year. And he became interested in it, I think it's fair to say, because we in the Pentagon, and Powell in particular, were talking about it: a new European security identity. We were going to build a 3,000-person brigade, and that would be exclusively for NATO use. It would not call upon any of the assets of the alliance. It would not be a part of the alliance. It could take independent action from the alliance. It went along with the concept we were developing called—you probably remember this—but it started in the Pentagon. It didn't start in the White House, European security, and it didn't start at State: the European security identity.

And that was part and parcel of the plan to bring NATO—or to bring Russia into NATO, into the political councils, and eventually bring it into the military aspect of the alliance as a full partner. And that was... late '91, early '92, before I walked into Powell and told him, "We better get worried. That bumpkin from Arkansas looks like he's got Israel's support, and he just might win this." Powell told me, "Oh, you're crazy, Wilkerson." I even wrote him a memo. I classified it. I wrote him a memo that said, "This bumpkin, this draft-dodging, groupie-woman-chasing bumpkin, because I'd studied the dude from Arkansas, just might beat our president." And he didn't want to hear that. He didn't want to, but come August, he did. He wanted me to bring my memo back out again. But...

A lot of things were happening, generated in the new powerful Pentagon, because Admiral Crowe—I knew Admiral Crowe, worked for him in the Pacific. Great man, Princeton PhD. He would not implement Goldwater-Nichols to the extent that he had the power to do so. And I think it was because he was a sailor. I mean, at the end of the day, Princeton PhD or not, he was a sailor. And sailors don't disturb the water. And Powell came in and implemented Goldwater-Nichols forthwith. And within a year, we had the best military general staff in the world, in my view. We had the top 10% of the officers from every service by mandate. And so that staff was just a whirlwind staff. In some respects, I was thinking of the German general staff. Man, that's going to get us in trouble.

Congress probably never should have allowed us to do this. But it was just a quality staff. One of the first things we had to do for Bill Clinton, for example, was pull his ass out of the fire over Don't Ask, Don't Tell. I mean, we created Don't Ask, Don't Tell, but it was after Clinton called Powell and said, "Get me out of this," because Nunn told Clinton, "Over my dead body will you do this." And Sam was a little angry about that. So, all to say that they were very imaginative. Usually, the thing lacking most in a military staff is imagination. They were very imaginative, and they were coming up with all kinds of things. And we had historians who told us, you know, Russia has tried since Catherine to be a part of Europe and always been rebuffed.

#David Gibbs

Which historians did you rely on? I'm just curious.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

There are guys on the staff who have degrees in history. We also had Brigadier General Armstrong on the Joint Staff, Joint Staff Historian, who was very good on these things, too. But we were looking at it. Okay, this is good. This is going to work. We're going to bring Russia into the alliance slowly but surely, ultimately with full membership in both the political and the military aspects, with troops contributed, and Rand McNally's map will be right. From the Urals to the West, at least, will be Europe. And it fell apart. It fell apart immediately upon the assumption of office by William Jefferson Clinton.

#David Gibbs

I'm sorry, do you want to say something?

#Pascal

May I jump in just with maybe a theory or an observation? So if I understand you correctly, Larry, then what you're saying is that the intentions there in the early '90s were pretty honest from the circle that you could judge yourself. Would it then be fair to say that within the 1990s, within that span, what we saw was rather a change of personnel that had different ideas? I mean, just as the

president changed to somebody who didn't have all of those heartfelt kind of ideas, convictions to international law, we then saw a change of personnel that would then abandon the idea of bringing in Russia and, on the contrary, start using U.S. force much more unilaterally, as opposed to trying to go to the United Nations, which would then culminate, of course, in 1999, the way that NATO went into Serbia without a UN resolution. Is that an interpretation that you could sign off on?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I think it is, but I have to caveat it somewhat by saying that as Jim Baker became Bush's campaign manager instead of Secretary of State, and as the consequences of the election looked more and more foreboding for the Republicans, Bush turned sour. And so, in the end, I don't think he was thinking so honorably about things. I think he was pretty frustrated. And people have told me—I don't know this for a fact—but people have told me that he began to take out that frustration somewhat on other leaders with whom Bush had been unbelievably diplomatic. I mean, he always was. As vice president for Ronald Reagan, he smoothed over more crap than you can imagine. He was a quintessential phone person.

He would stay on the phone with Mitterrand for two hours, or Kohl for two hours, or Gorbachev. He just talked to them all the time. He liked doing that kind of diplomacy. And generally, he had someone in there, maybe the chairman or the secretary of defense or the secretary of state, lots of times the secretary of state, and they'd be exchanging nods and so forth as they talked. And maybe he would put the speaker on the speakerphone, and then the others could hear. He was just good at that. And I remember something vividly that Powell told me after I had joined him at Fort McPherson in Atlanta in April of 1989. We were sitting down talking about what his main theme—Bob Gates had just called him and chewed on his ass.

I mean, really chewed on him. You can't be saying these things. You're a four-star general. You're not a politician. You can't be saying the Soviet Union is dead. You can't be saying, "What does a preacher do when the devil dies?" which is one of his favorite expressions at that time. You can't be doing that. And Powell told him to buzz off. Well, what he said to me then—I'm a fresh-caught lieutenant colonel, not going to say too much to this four-star general yet—he said, "You know, Larry, what's going to happen to Europe when all the people like Mitterrand and Kohl and Maggie Thatcher and John Major and all these people are gone that had their feet in the war? It's going to fall apart. It's going to completely fall apart."

And we're either going to go back to the 1930s again, or we're going to have an entirely different Europe. And I don't think I'm going to like that Europe. And I'm sitting there listening to him. Am I supposed to put that in your speeches? No, no, no. But we are going to keep using that phrase. And he did, over and over again: "What does a preacher do when the devil dies?" And he had been in St. Catherine's Palace with Gorbachev when Gorbachev came right up to him and put his finger in his

chest and said in English, "I know who you are. Underneath that suit, I know who you are. What are you going to do now that your enemy has died?" And so Powell took that message back with him, and that's really the reason why.

#David Gibbs

What year did that conversation take place, Colonel?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

It was when he was National Security Advisor to Reagan. '88, maybe?

#David Gibbs

'88, perhaps? Yeah, somewhere around that, '88 or '89.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

About the time of the INF Treaty. At any rate, it was a rare group of people. It was the most polished. You know, I taught this: 1945 on, I taught the National Security Council in the formal, 1947-created decision-making process, studied every presidency, every group that made the national security decisions. This was the best in all the entire sweep of time, almost a half a century. They just knew each other. They were collegial. They were competent. They could get along. Even Dick Cheney. I mean, I was surprised when I met Dick Cheney as vice president. Different individual. His paranoia had deepened and become far more profound. And he wanted to be president so badly, so badly that he got it. And he got it by a very circuitous route. But nonetheless, he got it. When he left the secretariat, he didn't even say goodbye to Powell.

He just left. Powell went up for the normal nine o'clock meeting, and Nancy Hughes said, "Boss, he ain't there." There was no Secretary of Defense to go up to. He just left. And you know what he left to do? He talked Jim Baker into touring the United States with him for about a month and a half to see if he could be president. And Jim Baker, at the end of that time, told him that there was no chance he could raise money. There was no chance he could be elected. Go do something else. So he decided to go to Halliburton. But he didn't give up his desire to be president. And he worked it out over time. And for four years, he was president for national security affairs. All to say that this termination of the old world that Powell described at Fort McPherson about Europe was happening in the United States, too.

And it happened on both sides of the political coin, if you will. Clinton got rid of Glass-Steagall. He turned our capitalism into predatory capitalism, took away all the oversight. And he said publicly he was going to do that. Go back and check his speeches. He said he was going to do that. He thought the Democratic Party was being beaten by the Republicans on the economic issues because they

weren't tied to capital. They weren't tied to the defense contractors. They weren't tied to all the money-producing people, the wealth-producing people in America. So he stripped all the remnants of FDR's program out and put the Democratic Party on the side of capitalism. Now we have predatory capitalism par excellence. Bush was not of that mind. I mean, he was a good Republican, if you will, and he'd been there for a long time.

I mean, the guy had been director of the CIA. They named the damn building after him after they swore to God and heaven above that they would never put anybody's name on that building. They named the building after him. That's because he'd been associated with the CIA for 50 freaking years, ever since he came out of the ocean in World War II. As vice president, he ran everything in terms of Cold War operations, kept Bill Casey from ruining Ronald Reagan's presidency, et cetera, et cetera. So this guy, he'd been our first real ambassador to China. He had been head of the RNC, director of the CIA, as I said, and vice president for eight years. Now he's president, probably the most competent man to take the presidency since World War II. And we rebuffed him.

#David Gibbs

Let me ask you for, shall we say, another side of the coin here, which is the role of the neoconservatives. You mentioned Cheney, but somebody I'd like to focus on a little bit more is Paul Wolfowitz, who was deputy secretary of defense, I believe was his title. And in 1992, the New York Times was leaked a partial copy of the Defense Planning Guidance of 1992. And it was splashed on the front page of the New York Times.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

It was a copy of it in my basement.

#David Gibbs

I'll bet you do. Yeah, I'm sure you took great notice of it. It has the note on it.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

It has the note on it: "Send this back to the crazies in the basement of the Pentagon." Handwritten by H.W. Bush.

#David Gibbs

Really? Interesting. I was going to say that my understanding is that this was either written directly by Wolfowitz, or it was written, shall we say, with the supervision and blessing of Wolfowitz, possibly by his protégé. One way or the other, it was Wolfowitz's product. And Richard Perle.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I'm sorry? Richard Perle.

#David Gibbs

Oh, Richard Perle. Okay. All right. Was he in the Pentagon at the time? I believe he was out—

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I think he was on the Defense Policy Board.

#David Gibbs

That's right. That's right. All right. So he had input into this also.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Yeah. He told me he did, standing out in front of his quarters.

#David Gibbs

I believe him. But, you know, as you well know, it was a very hyper-aggressively worded document. It talked about how, with the end of the Soviet Union, the United States was essentially presented with an opportunity no other power has ever had, which is essentially generalized global dominance without a peer competitor. And the major objective should be to discourage any country from even thinking about challenging us. And it emphasized not only the continuation of NATO, but the expansion of NATO into Eastern Europe. I believe that was anticipated in the document.

It talked about new potential enemies, including—and it did mention, amazingly—post-communist Russia and China, even though those were not officially acknowledged to be adversary countries at all. Russia was on its knees, as we know. It talked about the European Community, now the European Union, in somewhat negative, almost adversarial terms, as a potential challenger to NATO. This was a period when the European Union was considering an independent role, an independent foreign policy, and that was viewed extremely negatively by this document.

And also, and again, contrary to perhaps what was the dominant view in the Bush administration, it did take a somewhat negative view of the United Nations: that the United Nations had been useful, I think it said, in getting justification for the Iraq War, but it should not be allowed to gain any independent power that would challenge U.S. authority; that the U.S. should be the arbiter of world affairs, not the United Nations. Now, as a historian, I look at this document. It seems to me that despite the fact it was ridiculed at the time, and evidently George H.W. Bush didn't like it very much, I think this was an extremely influential document.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Oh, yes. It became the heart of the 2002 National Security Strategy.

#David Gibbs

I would say it was maybe the modern post-Cold War equivalent of maybe NSC-68 or something of that type.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Paul Nitze would have loved it.

#David Gibbs

Well, so how did it happen? That's true. Although Paul Nitze, you may remember, he became a bit dovish during this period. He was arguing against NATO expansion. So he changed his mind. Absolutely, even more so. That's right. So the question would be: how did it happen that, in spite of everything, this document became the preeminent document that framed policy for the post-Cold War era? How do you explain that?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

The only way I can explain it, and my students probably did a better job than I explained it, because I asked similar questions in almost every seminar on this particular case study, is that we got to the point where the neoconservatives in particular, but their allies in the billionaire class—and they have many allies in the billionaire class. And by the way, the same people were with Anatoly Chubais and others, Larry Summers, for example, raping Moscow at that time with the fire sales and all the percentage income they got out of it. What happened was these people became ascendant, and they became ascendant in the case of the 2002 National Security Strategy with a president who didn't know what he was doing in national security affairs and a vice president who probably was inclined to think neoconservatively, if you will, from time to time, but certainly I don't think was one.

What I call Dick Cheney is a hyper-nationalist, and his paranoia made him, in 9/11, deepen that paranoia and made him even more a hyper-nationalist. So he used them. He used them wherever he could find them because generally their views synced on national security. And what you had happen with Powell as Secretary of State—and this stunned me, because I had just read the National Security Strategy—I started writing the National Security Strategy along with policy planners in the Policy Planning Staff very, very quickly, right off the bat. Richard Haass was on top of that, talking to Condi every day. We submitted it. Condi said she didn't like it, so she said her staff would write it. Next thing we knew, she had contracted it out.

And we knew who they were contracting it out to, the usual crowd, you know, the usual suspects. And it came back the way it was, but it took a long, long time to get it back. I mean, all the way from the beginning to 2002. And when I read it, I walked into Powell and I said, "You like this?" And he said, "It's the same old garbage. All this stuff that goes out to the public, it doesn't mean anything. It's the same old garbage." Well, later I would remind him of our conversation. He tactfully forgot it. And he was, "Well, we are doing a lot of those things, aren't we?" I said, "Yeah, I suspect down the road we're going to do a lot more of them because we've given it carte blanche. And look at the people over at the Pentagon."

Do you know that when Richard Haass started policy planning talks, he went back and looked at everything Marshall had done. And one of the things Marshall did was start policy planning talks between the Joint Staff over on the Pentagon side and us. So he put me in charge as the only person on the policy planning staff with military experience. And I got to admit, he knew I was emailing the Secretary four or five times a day, too, because we had a private account. I'm glad they didn't discover that. Yeah. So, two meetings, two meetings with General Casey, who was the J-5, and his team, and my team from policy planning. First one was on China.

Casey made an ass of himself coming into a bunch of State Department people and saying, "Oh, we're going to deal with the CHICOMs today, huh?" We all looked at each other like, "Hey, we haven't used that phrase in a long time, General. CHICOMs?" But the talks went well. We had a colonel who was in charge of their part, and me, our part. They went well. Two sets. Then Rumsfeld said, "No more. Get out of the Pentagon. You cannot come in." He forbade me to come back to the Pentagon. I could not get into the Pentagon. We had a really good colonel, as I said. He said, "We'll meet in Crystal City tomorrow." So we resumed meeting in Crystal City. This guy, this colonel, I won't mention his name, came out on the brigade command list. So we went over for a third meeting in Crystal City.

We'd meet about every two weeks. And it was to vet the national military strategy before the national strategy came out. So my first question was, how can we do this? We don't have the national strategy yet. Oh, we're going to get a jump on it. We're not typical military, you know. So we're doing the graybeards that day, the old retired four-stars. They're commenting on what we've done so far on the national military strategy. Colonel comes up to me in the corridor, and he says, "Rumsfeld found out we're meeting here. I just came out on the brigade command list. I can't do this. I can't do this. I'll ruin my whole career." I said, "I understand." I said, "Will you continue to sneak me stuff?" "Nope. I can't do anything."

I'm sorry. He was full of apologies, but I knew what he was telling me. So we quit. We did not have any contact with the Defense Department from that point on, policy planning. And State had very little contact other than the principals, Rumsfeld and Powell. So anything I got, I had to sneak. They had to sneak for me. And it wasn't a very productive relationship. It was a terrible relationship. So all that to say that there was very little coordination going on between Rumsfeld and Powell, except at that level, Rumsfeld and Powell. And Cheney was like a shadow to Rumsfeld, and Rumsfeld a

shadow to Cheney. One didn't know who was what when one looked at them, who was VP and who was Secretary of Defense.

Remember, Rumsfeld was the one who brought Cheney into the White House to be a 34-year-old chief of staff. All to say, it was very dysfunctional, extremely dysfunctional. And when I pointed out to him, to Powell, I said, "Okay, I know Paul Wolfowitz fairly well. When Alan Bloom died, I picked up the phone and called Paul because I knew Bloom had been one of his real mentors, if you will. I knew their mind meld was pretty close, and talked to him for 45 minutes. I knew Paul pretty well because when I was in the Pacific, he was one of our 35 ambassadors. He was in Indonesia, and I would have said at that time, of the three top ambassadors in that 35-ambassador complex, he was one of the three. He was really good. I don't know what happened to Paul."

I think Israel happened to Paul, for one thing, and then some other influences around him. But by the time he got to be something different from ambassador to Indonesia, that is to say, all the days after that, he began to be a person I didn't even recognize. And then suddenly he's deputy secretary of defense, and I talked to him about Alan Bloom in that position, and that was it. I never talked to him again. We never shared a phone call. And I saw him and Richard Perle and the fingerprints of others like them all over what had become the 2002 National Security Strategy. But again, Powell didn't think it meant anything because he didn't have much truck for public documents. They were boiled down to trivia, he thought.

#David Gibbs

Let me circle back to what you said. Let me circle back to another topic, which is the breakup of Yugoslavia. The breakup of Yugoslavia began in June 1991, obviously during the very final phase of the Soviet Union, basically after the end of the Cold War, if it was all over. Initially, of course, the United States played a relatively secondary role. Germany played a leading role. But then in Bosnia—okay, my read on this, and again, I've written a book on the topic, is that a key element here is that the neoconservatives saw this as a possible test case for the defense planning guidance document, and that they wanted to demonstrate American power. And above all, they wanted to demonstrate the value of NATO and undercut the European Community. You see, the key arena here was to be Bosnia-Herzegovina, which seceded from Yugoslavia in early 1992. And this was the period when the United States began, for the first time, asserting itself on a significant scale.

At least it's my read of it. I'll see what you say in a moment. And at that time, the European Union wanted to demonstrate its ability to act as an independent force in world politics, independent of the United States, by mediating the dispute in Bosnia-Herzegovina and establishing ethnic amity and preventing war, and thus demonstrating the EU's—again, I should say the EC's, the European Community then—credentials as a major actor. The United States effectively blocked this by sabotaging the European negotiating effort. The former U.S. ambassador to Yugoslavia, Warren

Zimmerman, told the Croatian and the Bosnian Muslim factions not to sign the agreement that the Europeans had put forward, and that basically helped to trigger a war, an ethnic war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. We have many sources on this.

And I think the idea here by the neoconservatives was to use this as a test case to show the value not just of the U.S. alliance, but particularly NATO, which came later on in 1995 with Operation Deliberate Force, the NATO bombing campaign against the Serbs, and of course later on, on a larger scale, in Kosovo in 1999. And so I saw this basically as the first test case of the defense planning guidance document that we just discussed. They had a basic concept here. Sorry, I just knocked down the microphone. We had a basic concept here of what the world should look like after the Cold War, what America's role should be. And you need a test case to demonstrate the value of that concept. And Yugoslavia, and more specifically Bosnia-Herzegovina, was to be that test case. What's your assessment of what I just said?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I don't think it's very far from the truth. I would add that the way we developed this case study in my seminar at both campuses, George Washington and William & Mary—and let me be the first to tell you that my students taught me more than I taught them. That's the way these case studies went. And they used primary sources almost all the time. They went to the George Washington National Security Archive and Peter Kornbluh and the guys over there, who had just gotten a dump from CIA, which CIA tried to get back, even brought a court case against them to try and get them back. And my students loved it because they waded into those primary documents, and Peter allowed them to do it.

So my case study, as the students shaped it over time, 16 years, pointed at the major problem with that situation being the inattention of the Clinton administration to what was really going on. Now, that usually means what you just said, that those underneath the administration who are really running everything are doing whatever the hell it is they want to do, as nefarious as it might be, which is going on right now with Vought and Miller and Hegseth and others, Rubio. One has some difficulty ascertaining what the hell their purpose is other than making money, but I think the inattention to detail until it becomes an issue with Clinton—that I think he wanted to get Monica Lewinsky off the screen.

He wanted to gain bona fides as a warrior, all these different things. Did it turn into the kinds of things that they wanted it to be, that it was percolating along? It was going to be it. It was going to be what you described, for example. But it didn't really get to that point where kinetic energy was used, if you will, bombing for, what, 78 days and so forth, until Clinton got in this situation that they could exploit. And they exploited it much in the way that you described, though you didn't give me as much detail as I would like.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I guess it was because our focal point for teaching was from the president and from the National Security Council. And so, though we did from time to time talk about these often more powerful-than-the-National-Security-Council other sources of power, other sources of decision-making or influence on decision-making, we tried to concentrate on the NSC and the formal structure, even when they didn't use it, as happened quite often. You know, they developed side circuits in different ways. But the whole time, they were building what it eventually became, even though some of it wasn't statutory. It became the Interagency Working Group, the Deputies Committee, the Principals Committee, and then the formal NSC, which Bush put to exquisite use, and Clinton adulterated and screwed with, and other presidents afterwards, even President Obama, for whom I had some respect.

They didn't use that really exquisite formal process all the time, which is a pretty damn good process, having proven itself over all these different manifestations of it and such. And I don't know that I would say Clinton had a disdain for it, but he had other sources of getting his information and making his decisions, as most presidents do. But with Clinton, it was more extensive. And then you come along to George W., and it's just murdered. Most of the decisions were made outside the statutory system, and the orchestrator of those decisions was Cheney. And when the statutory system acted against his wishes, he just stalled, which he could do because Bush let him essentially run the principals.

#David Gibbs

One of the things I was wondering, again, with regard to Bosnia-Herzegovina, is when you were at the Pentagon with General Powell and Bosnia started blowing up, did you see any enthusiasm by people like Wolfowitz and Perle to use this as a laboratory?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Yes. Bush was advised by Powell, yeah. And Powell told him not to touch it with a 47-foot pole.

#David Gibbs

And at that particular time, Cheney went along with him.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

And we're talking only, you know, to the end of H.W.'s first and only term.

#David Gibbs

Did you see this enthusiasm specifically from Wolfowitz, or were there others as well? Enthusiasm for intervening in Bosnia-Herzegovina?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I think the people that I saw it most from, because remember, we were really, really pressed to deal with Clinton in that first year, and we were consumed for about six months by coming up with Don't Ask, Don't Tell for Clinton, who had told Powell in a meeting between being elected and being inaugurated, smoking cigars on a hotel balcony down in Washington, what he was going to do, and sort of told Powell, "You will do it." And Powell said, "Aye, aye, sir. You're the president." And then, you know, no intervention once he'd been inaugurated. And actually Clinton came back to him begging him to get him out of the mess. And that's how we came up with Don't Ask, Don't Tell.

So we were kind of consumed by that in a profound way for about three or four months. And by the time we got around to looking at what might happen with regard to that particular situation in terms of the Pentagon and the use of force or whatever, we were buried in Mogadishu, in Somalia. In fact, three days after Powell departed the chairmanship—you know, the chairman said outgoing stays in the building for a month or two; most people don't know that, but in case there's some emergency—so me and Powell went down to a room in the basement in the E-Ring, and we had one E-7 sergeant with us, Cammy Brown. And three days after we'd gone down there, Black Hawk Down transpired.

And Powell wrote a memo for Les Aspin. I have a copy of that, too. There's only one copy left in the world, as far as I know. And he recommended action to Les Aspin, and to Les Aspin's credit, because it was all Clinton's fault. Secretary of Defense had been begging Clinton to change the strategy, to change things in Somalia because Mohammed Farah Aidid was going to get us. And we knew it. And Clinton wouldn't do anything about it. He would—he just equivocated. He wouldn't plus up, and he wouldn't go down. And so we're sitting there naked in front of Aidid, who knew we were naked and knew we had a lousy command structure, a lousy UN command structure to go along with that.

And so Powell said in his memo very carefully to Les Aspin, "Here's how you should handle it." And Aspin, to his credit, said, "I'm taking all the blame." Didn't give any blame to Clinton. And of course, Clinton got rid of him, and he died very shortly after that. You could say that Powell was angry at the president. I don't think he was angry at the president. He was just trying to give Aspin a hand. And Shali was not up on it yet enough to do it the way Powell wanted to do it. So he let Powell send the memo up. But in any event, I can't answer your questions about the memo, particularly neocons, but I could feel them hovering all around all the time.

#Pascal

Gentlemen, as the keeper of the time—yeah, I got to run because I got another thing.

#David Gibbs

All right. Do you have time for one more question? Or if you have to go, that's fine.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Yeah, sure. Yeah.

#David Gibbs

All right. One more question.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I'll be very quick. For me—

#David Gibbs

Bingo.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Bingo, yeah. Got to sell F-16s to Poland. Can't stop the F-16 production line. We got to sell them to Poland. Got to sell them everything we have. We got to have a new market. We got to have a new market. That's what they were saying. And they, at that point, had gone down from some 90-plus contractors who did a billion dollars of business with the Pentagon on a semi-annual, annual, you know, whatever, every now and then basis, to six. And they told us, they told us when we did it, they said, "You know what you're going to get? You're going to get monopoly capitalism in the defense industrial base. You're going to get collusion. One of them will be the prime. The others will be the subs. You won't know it, but that's the way they are going to do it. And what you'll get is lousy products, late, maximum price." That's exactly what we got.

#David Gibbs

Well, this has been extremely informative, Colonel. I really appreciate your taking the time to do it, and thank you very much. Surely.

#Pascal

Larry, David, thank you very much. And Larry, have a good next meeting. See you next time. Thank you.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Bye-bye.