The Great Betrayal: How the Democrats became the Party of War | James Carden

James Carden discusses The Great Betrayal and his account of how interventionists displaced the Democratic Party's tradition of restraint. He traces competing foreign policy schools from Roosevelt and Truman through Kennedy, Carter and Clinton, emphasizing personnel, donors, think tanks and media. The conversation examines Russiagate, progressive attitudes toward Russia, American exceptionalism and Carden's concept of a pluralism gap. Carden also questions whether either major party can accommodate a multipolar world, arguing that advocates of restraint remain politically outnumbered in Washington. James's Links: The Realist Review: https://therealistreview.substack.com/ The Great Betrayal: https://orbooks.com/catalog/the-great-betrayal/ 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 The Great Betrayal: two Democratic traditions 04:04 The neoconservative connection 06:13 Carter and the triumph of the hawks 12:20 Who controls foreign policy 19:03 Culture wars and American exceptionalism 27:21 Russia, Russiagate and the limits of dissent 42:25 The pluralism gap and a multipolar world 48:08 Why Republican restrainers remain outnumbered

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies. Today, we have an update with James Carden, the author of the new book, The Great Betrayal, which is what we want to discuss today. So, James, welcome back.

#James Carden

Thanks for having me. I appreciate it.

#Pascal

It's really great that you're back here and that you wrote this book. So it's obviously about the parties in the United States. I mean, you're not just talking about the Republicans or Democrats, but can you walk us through the arguments in your new book?

#James Carden

Sure. It basically is a history of the foreign policy debate within the Democratic Party, mainly from 1945 to the Joe Biden presidency. And I wrote the book because over the past decade or so, especially during the Russiagate phenomenon, I was starting to ask myself: When did Democrats

begin to speak like John Foster Dulles or the ghost of Joseph McCarthy? And I was tempted at first to blame this on the Clintons. I thought that perhaps this was a phenomenon that began in the post-Cold War era and was then picked up with great fervor by Hillary Rodham Clinton, who, like her husband, ran to the right of her opponent on foreign policy.

People forget that Bill Clinton ran to the right of George H. W. Bush on foreign policy in 1992. Hillary Clinton did the same thing in 2016. So I was wondering, when did this actually happen? And what I found was that once Franklin Roosevelt died on April 12, 1945, his vision of a postwar world where great powers would act in concert, where there would be cooperation and reciprocity, you know, through the UN mechanism, basically vanished under his successor, Harry S. Truman. And it was Truman and Acheson who, because they were paranoiacs about the threat of Soviet communism, basically began a Cold War that I don't believe Franklin Roosevelt had any intention of waging. And so what I found was that from about 1945 to about 1992, within the Democratic Party, there were basically two camps.

I call the camps the Rooseveltians, people who took a more realistic view, a non-paranoid view, with regard to the capabilities and intentions of the Soviet Union, and the Achesonians, named after Truman's Secretary of State, Dean Acheson. And they were really supporters and creators of the national security state. And they were hawks, Cold Warriors. And ultimately, it was the Achesonian camp that came to dominate the debate within the Democratic Party. And of course, today, with a few exceptions, the Democratic establishment really are all Achesonians. They're hardline opponents of the authoritarian axis of Russia and China. And they are diehard supporters of the national security bureaucracy. And so I hope that the book is able to help explain that phenomenon.

#Pascal

How big is the overlap between what you call the Achesonians and what we usually refer to as the neoconservative movement?

#James Carden

Quite a lot. Actually, the neoconservatives began as Democrats under the tutelage of Dean Acheson. So among the earliest and most famous neoconservatives—names that you've heard before and all your readers have read about—people like Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle were early protégés of Dean Acheson. A lot of them, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, began to migrate from the Democratic Party into the Republican Party, but they were originally Democrats. So there's really quite a lot of overlap there, which explains why, during the debate, for instance, over the Bush-Cheney Iraq War in 2003, there were so many supporters within the Democratic Party.

#Pascal

Yeah, but would you say that there's actually a difference between neocons and Achesonians? What are the main differences that would help us make sense of these camps?

#James Carden

Well, I think political party is one. I think the neoconservatives, from about the mid-'90s till the Trump era, were mainly Republicans. I think hardline Democrats in the Achesonian mold today try to differentiate themselves from the neoconservatives by claiming that they are good multilateralists. And the neocons make no pretense about giving a damn about the United Nations. A lot of the Democrats do, but it's just talk. To me, the difference between a Hillary Clinton and a Paul Wolfowitz is basically a distinction without a difference. And you see this very clearly in the policy positions that they ultimately take.

#Pascal

Right. So did you then also trace in the book how the Achesonian camp managed to basically win the debate inside the Democratic Party? Because, yeah, that was a huge change. If we also look at the pre-war era, right, the fascinating thing to me is that the 1920s and 1930s actually were a time when there was this huge debate around—what was it called?—the Nye Committee, when the US population was shocked to find out that they had been duped into joining the First World War and that there were these merchants of death, right? There was a huge debate, and this debate was huge also inside the Democratic Party. And then that kind of got completely swept out and replaced by what President Eisenhower later warned was the nascent military-industrial complex. Does this discussion play into the victory of the Achesonians in the Democratic Party?

#James Carden

Absolutely. I'm a big believer in the maxim that personnel is policy. And as you know, probably from talking with me over the years, I'm less theoretically inclined than some of our friends and colleagues. I'm a big believer in the idea that it's the people who are appointed who call the shots. And what happened was that, quite tragically, our last Rooseveltian president was John F. Kennedy. And John F. Kennedy was murdered. And his brother was murdered. And then, after Robert Kennedy was murdered, you had the Nixon years and then the brief Ford period. And then you had the Carter years. Now, if the Carter years, beginning in January of 1977, had gone differently, we might not be having this conversation.

#James Carden

But Jimmy Carter had a choice to make. And he was basically an inexperienced Southern governor, governor of Georgia. He didn't have a big foreign policy portfolio there. And so Carter could have gone with Kennedy's Rooseveltians, or he could have sided, as he eventually did, with the

Achesonians in the debate. So at the beginning of the Carter administration, you had a secretary of state, Cyrus Vance, who was firmly in the Rooseveltian mold. Yet his national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, was firmly in the Achesonian mold. And so during the course of the Carter presidency, you had this debate between the two camps play out in real time.

During his presidency, Carter consistently sided with Brzezinski and the Achesonians. There were people urging President Carter to choose George Ball as secretary of state early on. George Ball was the undersecretary of state under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. And George Ball was one of the few in the upper levels of the government warning Kennedy and warning Johnson against getting involved in Vietnam. Ball was the definition of a Washington wise man. But Carter ignored Ball's advice. Carter brought Ball back into government in 1978 to get advice on what was going on in Iran. Ball presented his findings. He said that the Shah wasn't going to make it.

It was time that we pulled the plug on our support for him. Carter ignored that advice at Brzezinski's urging. The whole history of our involvement with Iran would have been different had Carter listened to Ball. To me, the Carter administration is kind of the hinge of history. And with Carter siding with Brzezinski, what you then had was a Democratic establishment during the Reagan years that was dominated by the alumni of the Carter administration, because that's how it goes, right? If you're out of power but you're an alumnus of the former administration, that's where the center of power is. That's where the influence is going to be. And so that's what happened.

So Bill Clinton, of course, by the time he got into office—now, that's after 12 years of Republican rule—basically all he had to choose from were Achesonians, because those were the last people to have actual experience within government. And so, from Carter on, the Achesonians dominated the Democratic foreign policy establishment. And that's where presidents pick their advisers. That's where they get the people they name secretary of state, national security adviser, and ambassadors, and so on and so forth. So the book takes a very close look at what happened during the late '70s. And it's a period, as we just talked about, when the neoconservatives really began their rise to power in Washington.

#Pascal

You know, it is a fascinating thing, because thinking of the decision-making bloc inside any of the parties as just one monolith is totally wrong. So the way that the decision-making process works, and where the centers of power are, is such an important question. And to me, we've seen how a relatively small group of people can actually decide much, much more than they should be able to. We saw that in 2024, when the Democratic Party had already made up its mind and chosen Mr. Biden in the primaries to run again. Well, it turns out he's already basically a vegetable up there. And then, just overnight, they were able to switch to Kamala Harris, right? So who are these power centers that are able to steer the party's course? Because it doesn't happen on its own, but it's definitely not just the base that makes the decision.

#James Carden

No, I would argue that the base very rarely has anything to do with the decisions that the foreign policy establishment makes. The foreign policy establishment is made up of a number of nodes. You have the donor class. You have the think tanks. You have Congress and congressional staffers. And then you have media figures. Those four nodes combine, in my opinion, to make up the Democratic and Republican foreign policy establishments. Of course, they have their own think tanks and their own donors and so on and so forth. But in the big picture, that's what makes up what we sometimes refer to as the uniparty.

#Pascal

So are the nodes inside the Democratic Party today like that across the board, or do we still have a pocket of resistance where you would say, no, they go back to the Roosevelt tradition?

#James Carden

I would say that there are vanishingly few Rooseveltians, if any, within the Democratic Party foreign policy establishment. I would say that there are very, very few. Some people, I think, mistakenly place Bernie Sanders and AOC in that tradition. I think that's wrong. In my view, Sanders and AOC and their, you know, disciples and protégés are very good on Israel and the forever wars in the Middle East. Beyond that, their views overlap quite easily with those of traditional Achesonians. Bernie and AOC are Cold Warriors as well. Now, it's one thing to have a position on Israel, which is, after all, a strategically unimportant country of 10 million people.

Now, they have outsized influence in the United States, and there's wide agreement on that. Some people think it's good. Some people don't. But Israel is one problem or one issue among a great many others. And to be honest with you, if you look at the comments that AOC or the Michigan Democratic nominee for the U.S. Senate, El-Sayed, have made, they are full-throated in their support for the war in Ukraine. And Sanders and Warren and AOC and other progressives are full-throated in their support for waging a new Cold War against what they constantly refer to as an axis of authoritarians.

#Pascal

Right.

#James Carden

And they place Russia and China and Iran and North Korea, et cetera, and on and on, in that grouping. Right. In my view, they're all basically Achesonians, except here and there where there's a difference on Israel and Gaza.

#Pascal

We do need to talk about Russia and where this obsession by the Achesonians is coming from. But before doing that, about a year and a half ago, a colleague of ours, Christopher Mott, who's at the Institute for Peace and Diplomacy, wrote a really nice piece that kind of ties in with what you were explaining. He goes further back and makes a distinction between the Washingtonians and the Jeffersonians. Basically, in this framework, the Washingtonians are those who, along the lines of Washington and Jefferson and Quincy Adams and so on, said, you know, the United States must be a country that doesn't go out looking for monsters. As in, we care about our domestic affairs. We make sure that we're fine.

And Mott traces that back to Washington's military experience, you know, with the need to understand the territory and your own homeland and then use that as an advantage, but not to go abroad and fight the wars of the great intellectuals. Whereas Jefferson was immediately hooked on the French Revolution, immediately, and was part and parcel of the people who argued that we need to advance the cause of humanity, you know, enlightenment and so on. So we need to go and help shape the world in our image and so on. And he then traces that and says, like, look, this just continues as a theme throughout U.S. history. And it would tie in with, you know, the Roosevelts and your idea of the Achesonians. Do you see that as well? Or would you make a distinction between that and what arose after the Second World War?

#James Carden

No, I think that's right. I mean, you know, Chris traced it back much further than I was able to. I concentrated more on the post-war era, mainly because of the similarities I see between the first Cold War and the second Cold War. But no, that's exactly right. You can trace a direct line from the Washingtonians to the views of the Rooseveltians, and from the Jeffersonians on through to the Achesonians. I think that's exactly right.

#Pascal

So the people today, AOC and presenters included, would still have this idea that, you know, the United States is overall a force for good. It makes mistakes, right? Mistakes were made, but we are a force for good and enlightenment and so on. And overall, you know, Russia is still the empire of evil, and it is our job to confront that evil. That's still the kind of mindset that is predominant in those quarters of the Democratic Party, isn't it?

#James Carden

Oh, yes. Almost certainly. I mean, as far back as 2018, I wrote a piece for American Affairs titled "The Cold War Culture War." And what you could see back then, beginning in the late Obama years, was that progressives were increasingly critical of places like Russia and Hungary and China because

those countries have different societies. They have different traditions. They have more conservative cultures. So it's very unlikely that something like gay marriage is going to be legalized in Russia anytime soon.

But instead of accepting that and also realizing that, as recently as the 1990s, Americans, by and large, didn't have the most progressive views on issues like that, you know, countries can pursue their own societal and cultural paths. And it's not really for us to say or for us to criticize. Well, no longer. You know, so progressives are, I suspect, very enthusiastic in their support for the war in Ukraine because they hate Russian society, and they hate it because it is more conservative. So that's unacceptable to them. And it's our job to go over there and fly, you know, rainbow flags and BLM flags alongside the American flags at our embassies.

I mean, that happened all the time during the Biden administration. So they have these culture war preoccupations that blind them to everything else. And I think that's dangerous. And I also think it's ridiculous because it lets us Americans off the hook, because we haven't always been the most progressive and farsighted society, particularly when it comes to the treatment of minorities or women, for instance. I mean, our enemies during the First World War had a wider franchise for voting than we did. No one seems to remember that. So, you know, they really are diehard believers in the myth of American exceptionalism. And that would place them very firmly, philosophically at least, within the Achesonian camp.

#Pascal

Yeah, and this messianic idea that, you know, it's up to America to bring this to the world, right? I mean, we need to liberate Iran, liberate the Russians, liberate the Chinese from their evil governments, which suppress their real tendencies, right? The tendencies toward freedom, liberty, and so on. And therefore, we need to hold the torch of that light, right? That's still very, very deep inside that camp. I'm just saying that it's not coming from a point of insincerity. On the contrary, it's the belief in these ideals that actually fuels quite a few of them. I'm not sure about diehard neocons like Clinton and so on, who are clearly creatures of power and cling to power. But at least the base, I would argue, is probably sincere about this kind of view.

#James Carden

Yeah, I think that they absolutely are sincere about it, and I think that that's what colors their view of the new Cold War. They're very enthusiastic sideline participants in that venture. And it is a repudiation of the way that Franklin Roosevelt and Eleanor Roosevelt viewed the world. I mean, in his final State of the Union address in 1945, Roosevelt said—I'm going to read it now. It's just a couple of lines. He said, “It's only too easy for all of us to rationalize what we want to believe and to consider those leaders we like responsible and those we dislike irresponsible.” Well, I think that's a perfect summation of the way progressives view leaders that they don't like, like Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping.

#Pascal

Yeah, and within their own societies, right? The depiction of conservative voices as irresponsible, as refusing to do the good work, is quite prevalent. And it's fascinating, right, that right now the conservative camp doesn't just flock to the Republican Party, but to the non-interventionist part of the Republican Party, around people like Trump, Tucker Carlson, or Marjorie Taylor Greene and so on, who explicitly say, "No, these shouldn't be our wars. We shouldn't do that. America should care about America, and that's it. We don't intervene." And that kind of approach has thoroughly left the Democratic Party, as we say, at least in '77.

#James Carden

That's exactly right. And I know you're aware of this: what you have in Washington is something that I refer to as "Realism and Restraint, Inc." There's a constellation of think tanks that claim to be anti-interventionist. And if you look more closely, they are anti-interventionist, and they are sensible when it comes to matters relating to Israel and forever wars in the Middle East. However, there are only a few people within that community who see the larger danger. And the larger danger is that America doesn't grow up and that America can't see that the world has changed, that we now live in a multipolar reality, and that we need to adjust our sense of who we are, what we are, and what we can do, because the world has moved on.

And they cannot seem to adjust to that new reality. And so they call themselves restrainers and realists, but again, a lot of them are completely on board with American support for the war in Ukraine, and they are diehard Cold Warriors. They are people who really believe in their heart of hearts that we should be fighting this authoritarian axis because the authoritarian axis is a repudiation of the progressive values that they hold most dear. I see that as a recipe for endless American meddling and intervention. And at some point, it's going to become clear that this group of people who fly under the banner of restraint are really not restrainers. They're nothing of the sort. And I think that as time goes on, that's going to become more and more clear.

#Pascal

Yeah, this is so interesting. But I do wonder about the self-conception of this group and where this rejection, especially of Russia, is coming from. Is it coming from the Soviet Union and the Cold War? You know, the Cold War itself was not an inevitability. Back in 1944, at Bretton Woods, you had Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union sitting at the same table. They were all discussing the post-war future and the order and so on. There was no idea in 1944 that you would create that artificial divide.

I had a discussion with Alexander Mercouris the other day at the airport, and he was making the point: look, it was also Churchill and the Brits who threw a huge wrench into things with the Iron Curtain idea and so on, which then created this reality of the split between the former allies. This

was not a given. But in the United States, this was, of course, picked up and then worked on. And it was worked on way beyond the Cold War, because, as you already mentioned, the Russiagate frenzy was quite an insane revival of earlier moments of this kind of McCarthyite idea of being infiltrated by Moscow. Can you make sense of that kind of sentiment that survived the Cold War?

#James Carden

Yeah, it never went away. And it became the dominant view then. Almost as soon as Roosevelt passed away—within 16 to 18 months of his passing—we had embarked upon a Cold War against our former allies during the Second World War. And this was noted famously by the Soviet ambassador in Washington, Nikolai Novikov, who wrote a memo to Stalin in September of 1946. And he said that after Roosevelt, U.S. foreign policy was now—and these are his words—"characterized in the post-war period by striving for world supremacy." So, you know, it was a really quick change. Part of it had to do with people of Truman's generation and Acheson's generation and their fear of communism.

There was this false belief that, you know, the communist world was a monolith, and they were coming for the capitalists, and you had better watch out. And so they had a tendency to see a Soviet or a commie under every bed and couch because they felt that the communist government in Russia had basically stabbed its allies in the back towards the end of the First World War. So you had that. And then, of course, as the Cold War went on, you had people at a lot of the higher levels of American policymaking who had just arrived in the United States from Eastern Europe and had bad memories of the war, of communism, of perhaps their families' experiences in Russia. And that colored their policymaking advice. And you see this over and over and over again.

#Pascal

Yeah, I mean, give a few of these examples. Brzezinski is just one of them, right? But we also had—what was her name?

#James Carden

Madeleine Albright.

#Pascal

Madeleine Albright, of course, yes. So many of them were Eastern Europeans who had bad experiences with the Russians, right?

#James Carden

Absolutely. And that's no doubt true, and that's an unfortunate thing that their families had to go through. However, I'm not a believer in using the United States government and the American taxpayers' hard-earned money to wage a covert or overt campaign of revenge against the Russians just because you or your family had unfortunate experiences in that region. But you see that over and over again. And a lot of the biggest hawks—neoconservatives, Democratic hawks—you can trace their lineage directly back to Eastern Europe or to the former Soviet Union. And there are many examples in the book.

And this was something that Emmanuel Todd also observed in his book: you have people like Victoria Nuland and people like Antony Blinken, you know, even the newest generation of Democratic policymakers. Their family histories trace back to that area, and there's something about the Russians that they hate. And so they're going to, you know, use the power of the United States government to wage a campaign to undermine the Russian government. I think that's highly inappropriate, but, you know, no one listens to me.

#Pascal

No, but it makes sense. I mean, in terms of power, right? That's what you do when you get to power. You get to realize your own understanding of the world. If your own understanding of the world is tainted by a rejection of anything Russian, then obviously that's going to be something that you carry into office. So the question is, why do these people then land in those offices and not others?

And there's this question, then, of fear. You know, this Russiagate thing also had something to do with fear of being infiltrated. But of course, it's coming from people who themselves already had a long history of using infiltration methods and regime change as a means of getting foreign policy done. I mean, Clinton, during Russiagate, had been in office long enough to have been in positions where she would know the machinations of what the CIA is up to. So is there projection within that fear as well? Because the idea is that others might use the same methods against Washington that the United States has used against others.

#James Carden

Yeah, in a sense, every accusation is an admission for these people. And I think Russiagate is really an important part of the story because it, in a sense, created a permission structure for these people to go absolutely crazy and revive the worst kind of McCarthyism from the 1950s and bring it into the modern day. And I don't think you can possibly overestimate the importance of Russiagate and the damage it has done to the Democratic foreign policy establishment, because there are no Democratic…

#James Carden

Foreign policymakers who come even close to expressing the kind of forthright opposition to America's involvement in Ukraine that we see from people like Thomas Massie. It just doesn't happen. So, on matters relating to Russia, the Democratic foreign policy establishment is arguably to the right of the Republican foreign policy establishment. I agree. I don't see any change in the offing, because even progressives agree that Russia is bad, Russia did what it was accused of doing in 2016, and we are in a civilizational battle to the end. Again, I think that's an extremely dangerous and deluded idea, but that basically sums up the way progressive restrainers here in Washington think.

#Pascal

It is fascinating how it happens, isn't it? Because the only high-profile US politician who was critical of the war in Ukraine was Tulsi Gabbard, and basically she had to leave the party. There was no future for her there.

#Pascal

So the system cleans itself as well, right? The ideology keeps itself kind of intact and makes sure that others must either conform or leave.

#James Carden

Yeah, and I think if you look at Gabbard's early career before she jumped into bed with Trump, it's kind of a tragedy in a way. I mean, in 2012, 2013, she was seen as an up-and-coming young leader within the party. She was praised by people like Nancy Pelosi. And then once she began to object to this sort of intense Russophobia that had begun to infect the party, she became enemy number one. And they set out to destroy her reputation, to destroy her career. And they certainly, in large part, succeeded. They were able to drive her from the party and from Congress. And, you know, they will brook no dissent when it comes to Russia policy. And, you know, a lot of us have experienced that here in Washington.

I mean, you know, I started writing publicly in opposition to our involvement in Ukraine as soon as I left the State Department, so in 2013. And if you do that, and if you have a long track record of doing it, you are basically persona non grata, even within the so-called realism and restraint community here in Washington. I mean, you can point to maybe three or four people at most within that world who have been forthright and brave in their opposition to the insane amount of Russophobia and the insane enthusiasm for a global conflict between the democracies and the authoritarians. And we know who they are. I'm not going to say their names because I don't want to embarrass them, because they're good people.

So to me, it seems there's a lot of misplaced enthusiasm among foreign policy types that, okay, the Democrats are going to capture the House. They're going to capture the Senate. You have this

young generation of politicians like El-Sayed, like James Talarico in Texas, and things are going to change. I don't believe that for a second.

#Pascal

Me neither. No, and we've seen too many times how policy toward Russia and Eastern Europe just continued plowing on under Democrats as well. And, you know, I mean, you laid it out correctly. They are believers. They're believers in the cause. And those who don't fit have to leave, or they have to override their instincts. And Gabbard wasn't willing to override her instincts there. But, yeah, it just leaves this conundrum, right, of how to have a progressive party that is not basically Russophobic by default. So that's just what 2026 is, right? And that's actually, I mean, you make this analysis in the book, right? It's just very deeply entrenched. Russophobia is maybe the wrong word, but there's this sentiment that interventionism is necessary to bring about a good world.

#James Carden

Yes, because they are first and foremost culture warriors. They don't think about the wider strategy, either because they're unwilling to or because they're unable to. And they certainly do not appreciate how much the world has changed. And I would have thought that they would have gotten the message early on after the Russian invasion in February of 2022, when the Global South basically said, "No, we're not going to get involved here. This isn't for us." And you've seen, you know, countries really hesitate to jump on the Western bandwagon. But they seem to either ignore that, or they don't get it, or whatever. But they just keep telling themselves that we've isolated Russia, that Russia's isolated from the world. Nothing could be further from the truth.

#Pascal

Yeah, that's where this camp still has a very, very strong colonialist mentality, period. It's like, “We are the world now. What's right is right, what's wrong is wrong, and obviously we are on the good side of history. Therefore, the others must be on the wrong side, and they don't get it, so we need to explain it more.” And that's the rhetoric. Let's take another five minutes or so to also discuss what you have on your Substack, right? Because you also write a beautiful Substack, the Realist Review, where you publish a lot. And you wrote here about the pluralism gap, and I think it ties in with this discussion.

#James Carden

Right. So the pluralism gap is basically shorthand for what you and I have been talking about for most of the show. And what I mean by the pluralism gap is that progressives in the United States, rightly, I think, value the concept of pluralism and diversity in our society. And they recognize that over the course of our history, we've had populations in the United States that have been marginalized unfairly, and progressives seek to redress that through the force of law and through

the force of elections and what have you. And that's totally fine. However, when you get beyond our borders into the great wide world, they are not fans of civilizational difference or civilizational pluralism because some civilizations happen to be conservative.

Or certain nations, let's say Russia, let's say China, have had rather chaotic experiences, particularly in the 20th century. And they've had to find their own path. So these places are different. They aren't good democracies. They're managed democracies. They're soft authoritarian systems. China is kind of a pseudo-communist, capitalist mix. I don't know. But that's totally unacceptable to them. So they become these cheerleaders of American exceptionalism when they look at the world outside of our borders. And that's basically what I'm talking about when I refer to the pluralism gap. They understand its value at home. They have no use for it abroad.

#Pascal

And that's what the neoconservative movement is able to latch onto, like little leeches on the brains of these progressives, in order to tell them, look, as long as our military is diverse and has gays and pink bombs, then throwing these pink bombs on people in Iran is going to help the people of Iran. I mean, they're going to love dying by pink liberty bombs, bombs of value and progressiveness, right? And for some reason, that works. For some weird, bizarre reason, that works. And the system actually is very good at doing that, using the current thing, wokeness, in order to support the military-industrial complex and keep plowing on.

#James Carden

That's one of the principal legacies of the Obama administration. They were, I think, quite brilliantly aware that you could harness the power of woke politics to further empower the national security bureaucracy. And that's exactly what they did. And we're living with the consequences now. Unfortunately, this blinds them, as I mentioned, to the biggest issue facing the United States in the 21st century. And the biggest issue facing the United States in the 21st century is not Israel, and it's not Gaza, and it's not even Iran. It is whether or not we can come to accept a reasonable place within the international system. Are we going to keep pursuing these hegemonic fantasies, or are we going to grow up and play nice? And that is the central question. Do we accept the reality of multipolarity, or are we going to fight it? I fear that both foreign policy establishments, the Republicans and the Democrats, are going to fight it. And that is going to be a catastrophe for my country.

#Pascal

Yes, yes, it is. I mean, the thing is that reality has this weird way of asserting itself. And so this is what it will bump into, right? So the question is: Is the reality that we are seeing a real reality, or is

it, as they see it, just an obstacle that can be overcome, right? If you will it, if you will it, it will become true. And that's where it has this very woke feel and flavor to it, right? If you will it, then there are 52 genders. It doesn't matter.

It's a question of will and whether you're willing to put enough effort into it and do the operation and do the things and whatnot, and then it will be the case. But this is extremely dangerous, of course, at a time when the state has all of these super-huge weapons to impose its will. What do you think, though, just in closing, about the countervailing force that does exist: the Washingtonians, the Rooseveltians, and so on, who have now flocked to the Republican Party? That party is split as well, right? But the restrainer camp is there.

#James Carden

There are remnants of it, but there aren't really that many. And I'm equally pessimistic about their future within the Republican Party. A number of years ago, I was asked to write an article, I think it was for The Spectator, about the so-called civil war within the Republican Party over foreign policy. And the more I looked at it, the more I came to realize that there really was no such thing, because a civil war kind of implies, you know, equality, right? Right. You could say there are maybe insurgents within the Republican camp who see things the way we see things. So, like a Thomas Massie, perhaps a Tucker Carlson, what have you. But even then, they are relatively few.

And let's not forget that this so-called groundswell of Trump supporters who voted him into office because he promised an end to constant American militarism and intervention have pretty much backed him to the hilt over his wars of choice. So personally, if you look at who holds the power on the Hill, who holds the power in the media, who holds the power in the American think tanks on the Republican side, and of course the donor class, which is uniformly pro-Israeli, you will see that the Republican Party is still the party of Bush and Cheney. And while I am thankful that there are voices out there who espouse anti-interventionism and realism and restraint on the Republican side or on the conservative side, they are outgunned and outnumbered. But to their credit, there are more of them on the Republican side than there are on the Democratic side.

#Pascal

I think that is right. We would be deluding ourselves if we thought the camps were evenly split. My personal estimation is that we're somewhere around the 30–70 mark, percentage-wise, with restrainers versus those who say, you know, “This is fine, this is important, this is necessary.” Which is why you get a system that overall, in the end, goes in and does it. It goes into Iran, and yes, it disagrees with itself, but overall, you still have a majority on board with it. Even though on individual wars you might not have it, overall, the approach has, I would say, roughly 70% support. And that's the same, by the way, in Europe. It's not the United States alone. This is a Western phenomenon.

Anyhow, James, this was fascinating. And just once again, you can be found at The Realist Review. And people can also find, of course, your book, The Great Betrayal: How the Democrats Became the Party of War. Where else should people go and find you?

#James Carden

Oh, that's probably about it these days.

#Pascal

Okay. Thank you very much. You're very welcome. Everybody, make sure you sign up for The Realist Review, and we will certainly have James Carden back again. James, thank you for your time today.

#James Carden

Thanks, Pascal.