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THE CONSEQUENCES OF AMERICA'S RETREAT

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LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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THE CONSEQUENCES OF AMERICA'S RETREAT

THE MODERATOR: Our next speaker is Dr. Charles Krauthammer, an American Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist focused on foreign and domestic policy and politics. He will discuss the ramifications of reducing America's commitments abroad and what may lie ahead. The speaker will make his presentation and if time allows, we'll open the session up for a few brief questions at the end. Each of you should have a copy of his bio.

It's been my honor and privilege to introduce Dr. Krauthammer the last 2 years, so this will make 3 in a row. But I want to mention to all of you that he has a number one *New York Times* best-selling book out that is titled *Things That Matter: Three Decades of Passion, Pastimes and Politics*. I hope many of you have read that. Dr. Krauthammer, the stage is yours.

(Applause)

DR. KRAUTHAMMER: Thank you very much. Pleasure to be here again. Yes, thank you for mentioning the book. Be sure to have a commission sent to your Cayman Islands account.

(Laughter)

DR. KRAUTHAMMER: I actually -- the book came out last October. And around November I got a call from a *Newsweek* correspondent -- I didn't even know *Newsweek* still existed, but apparently it's got a posthumous existence online. And the reporter said to me, my editor wants me to do a story on your book because it's doing so well. He's asked me to write an article explaining its success. And I said -- you know, I decided I'm going to play humble and self-deprecating which is -- you know, doesn't come easy to me.

So I say, aw-shucks, you know, I don't really know, and you ought to ask other people and let me know what you find. So I didn't hear from her again. Two weeks later a friend calls and says, did you see the article online in *Newsweek* on your book, and I said no. He said, let me

read you the first sentence -- "Charles Krauthammer's *Things That Matter* is flying off the bookshelves and nobody has any idea why."

(Laughter)

DR. KRAUTHAMMER: It's the last time I play humble and self-deprecating.

(Laughter)

DR. KRAUTHAMMER: I'm really happy to be here today. There's a lot going on. The world is going to hell in a handbasket, but for journalists this is Christmastime because we do not lack for material. Now, the President said in the fundraiser a few weeks ago that the world is messy -- but it's always been messy. His secretary of Defense, Secretary Hagel, said a few days later that the world was exploding all over, which is a slightly different take on what's going on. I tend to agree with Secretary Hagel that this is an unusually messy time.

And what I'd like to offer today, at the risk of some simplification, is a unified theory of messiness. I do think there is a theme running through what's going on in the world today which explains much of it, not all of it. It doesn't explain the origins of many of the messes, but it does explain why they have become so acute and some of them out of control. And to put it very bluntly, most of what is going on, most of the exploding all over the world, to use Secretary Hagel's phrase, is a result or exacerbated by a deliberate American withdrawal of its power over the last half decade.

Now, that's a very large statement, and I'm going to spend the next half hour trying to defend it. But I have to start by going back to a very simple proposition about what American foreign policy is about and what has it been about since the Second World War when we became a superpower. And generally speaking, the way to define it would be to say that our major role in preserving the peace in the world has been to play the role of offshore balancer of last resort.

For example, in parts of the world where there are weak coalition or a number of weak, friendly countries, our role has been to play the balancer from the outside who is -- enables them to resist the pressures, the aggression, the expansion of a neighboring hegemon, would-be neighboring hegemon.

Classic example -- Europe after the Second World War. Soviet Union, victorious with huge land armies, is in a position to take Western Europe. And the United States steps in by creating an alliance, declaring its pledge to defend the alliance as if it itself was being attacked, places its troops in West Germany as a tripwire, and for half a century by making that commitment as the balancer from the outside to balance Soviet power, preserves the peace until the Soviet Union collapses.

Similarly in the Pacific Rim the American Navy, American forces had been the balancer of the, if you like, archipelago of allies from South Korea all the way down to Malaysia, to Australia, in fact, against the potential regional hegemon of China. Everybody understands that's the balance, that's what keeps the peace. In the Middle East we have also been the ally of the weaker nations against whatever bully-of-the-day arose, the classic case being the Gulf War of 1991 in which a regional hegemon, would-be hegemon, Saddam Hussein, swallows Kuwait, threatens Saudi Arabia, threatens to become the hegemon of the entire oil-rich Middle East.

And the United States steps in, becomes the balancer of last resort. Without the United States, Kuwait would today be part of Iraq, Saudi Arabia would either be a part of Iraq. It would be a satrapy; it would be a client of Iraq. But United States steps in, the President says this will not stand, and we reverse that. That's been our traditional role. And we didn't invent this. This is a foreign policy that the British had practiced throughout the 19th century. They are also an offshore power.

They didn't necessarily have to involve themselves in European affairs, but they decided that their safety depended on one faith, that a single hegemon should not emerge to control all of Europe because that would

threaten them and subordinate them. So British foreign policy throughout the 19th century was always to ally itself with the weaker coalition inside of Europe, add its strength to it, and thus create the balance that would preserve the peace.

Classic case, of course, is the British actions in the early 19th century to oppose Napoleonic France which was threatening to become and at one point was the master of continental Europe. It allied itself with Russia and Prussia and it defeated Napoleon and prevented that from emerging. It repeated the performance with the help of United States of course in the Second World War where it prevented Germany from becoming the hegemon of Europe. So after the Second World War we inherited the role of the British and the playing field was not just continental Europe, the playing field is the world.

I would argue that what has happened with Obama foreign policy is that that principle or at least the strategic idea that underlies that principle was abandoned. Obama was elected and he was very open about it, was very honest about it, and passionate about it. He was elected to end wars, not to start them. And he was -- in 2008 the country was very war-weary of Afghanistan and of Iraq in particular, and Obama became President -- he became the Democratic nominee because he was one of the few Democratic leaders who had opposed the Iraq war.

He defeated all the rivals, all of whom had supported the war in 2003. He pledged to end the war; he pledged to end the war in Afghanistan. And as a result, he acted in the way he had promised. But I think he misunderstood or at least he underestimated what would be the consequences of American withdrawal or at least of total American withdrawal. I think he had the strategic idea -- or I don't know whether he thought it through -- but the idea was we leave and things would go on as if we hadn't been there in the first place which would be the -- very nice because I would become an isolationist as well.

America is naturally not an interventionist power. The idea of America as imperial is really absurd. You know, real imperial powers go in and like taking other

people's territory. We are the only so-called imperial power in history that on the day we land on some foreign shore the first question we ask is, what's the exit strategy. I can assure you when the British arrived in India in the 1700s they were not looking for exit strategies. They were looking for century-long entry strategies.

We are not by nature imperial, and by geography everything would militate against interventionism. Bismarck was the one to sort of characterize this in the best way. He was comparing the geographical blessings of the United States with the pressures that European powers traditionally have to suffer as a result of being crowded together. He said America was uniquely blessed among the great powers of the world in having arranged to be surrounded on two sides by weak and friendly neighbors, and on the other two sides by fish.

(Laughter)

DR. KRAUTHAMMER: Now, when you have a geographic position like that, you don't have to have a foreign policy. And we essentially didn't have one until the beginning of the 20th century. But with modern technology and with imperial powers that are able to reach across the globe and now of course in the age of the missile and hypersonic transport of all kinds where there is no safety of living behind oceans, we are thrust into a world where there is no such answer as isolation the way there might have been in the 18th and 19th centuries.

So we had become a world power and we decided -- we tried between the world wars to conduct that kind of 19th century isolationism in this new environment and we know what happened. We did not cause the Second World War, but our isolationism certainly made it far more possible. And we decided after the Second World War that we would not do that again, which is why we created NATO, and why, as I said earlier, we established ourselves as the successors to the British as the balancers of last resort against possible Soviet expansion and aggression, against possible Communist Chinese expansion and aggression, and in the Middle East to preserve the weaker allies -- the Saudis,

the Gulf states, the Jordanians, and others who would not be able to withstand the pressures on their own.

The problem is that when you've done that for 60 years and then as a result of the fact that the country is weary, the country does not want to continue the involvements, and the country turns to leadership to promise its withdrawal without consequence, then you begin to see the consequences. And you don't see them right away. If you think of this as a kind of chemical or physical experiment, what you have is the pressure of a regional hegemon pushing outwards.

Traditionally we are on the outside pushing against it and that creates a kind of equilibrium instability. And when you take away our pressure, then the regional hegemon, the regional bully is unopposed and begins to expand. Or to put it in very blunt terms, we create the vacuum and the bad guys occupy the space. And this I would submit is what has happened over the last 5 years. And you can look anywhere you want. You can start by looking of course in a place like Libya where we led from behind -- we intervened and we left.

We left nothing -- there was no American effort on the scene -- you can argue whether or not we should have had one in the first place. But looking at this purely objectively from the outside and without judgment, you would simply say that in the vacuum we know what's happened -- the government is -- there is no government effectively. The Jihadists -- the various factions have taken over. We've had to evacuate our own embassy, not just of course our facility in Benghazi, but even the embassy in Tripoli.

And the place is now a no man's land and it's a haven for Jihadists and its effects have spread all the way through North Africa. In Syria we made a conscious decision -- the President did -- not to intervene. He did that against the advice of his highest advisors -- secretary of state, joint chiefs chairman, head of the CIA, secretary of defense, and decided not to intervene at a time 3 years ago when I think it was, one could say with some accuracy, that the Jihadists had not gained strength

yet, the opposition was very powerful, the government was on very, very shaky grounds.

You remember the terror attack that attacked the internal security agency of the Assad government, destroyed it, and there was talk at the time of Assad beginning to evacuate the family out of the country. And at the time the opposition was not controlled by Jihadists. But we decided not to intervene -- Obama was not elected, he said, to get us into wars. And also if you would look at Hillary Clinton's memoir where she talks about the sort of overriding strategy in the Obama White House was don't do stupid things.

And she said just a few weeks ago -- I think it was in an interview -- that not doing stupid things is not a strategy. It's not a world view. It's not an operating principle for a great power. But what "don't do stupid things" meant is don't repeat Iraq, don't intervene, stay out, we generally end up doing more harm than good. For whatever reason -- and I have my speculations about what underlies Obama's reasoning -- but apart from what you think is the cause of the reasoning, the policy, the strategic idea was clear -- don't get involved, don't take the risk, stay out, we will probably do more harm than good.

But you take out the vacuum -- create a vacuum in Syria and who rushes in? Iran, Russia, Hezbollah on one side supported the government and ISIS and the al-Nusra Front, the Jihadists on the other side. And the ones who get squeezed -- could be by now near to out of existence -- is the Free Syrian Army and whatever middle-of-the-road or moderate opposition existed at the beginning. There's very little left of it. We are now -- at a very late date made a decision to commit to them, to arm them, to train them, but it is very late. The reason is we created the vacuum and into the vacuum stepped in the bad guys.

When Obama was asked about this decision no more than about a month ago -- I think it was August 8th -- in an interview with *The New York Times* he ridiculed the Syrian non-Jihadist opposition saying that, you know, this was -- it was always a fantasy to think that they could do

anything, after all this was a bunch of doctors, farmers, and pharmacists. Now that he's adopted the policy of arming these people, I guess his new strategy is U.S. Air Force flying protection for pharmacists in tanks. We'll see how that works off the Syrian front.

But he added something in that answer which is very striking. He said, how could you have the doctors, the pharmacists, and the farmers going up against a government supported by Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah. But didn't the President see the very contradiction of what he just said? He was saying one side had outside support, particularly of Russia, a former superpower, still a great power, pouring arms and support, money, diplomatic support and protection for the Assad regime.

And he, Obama himself referred to it, invoked it as one of the reasons why the local good guys wouldn't have a chance. But doesn't he understand that the role of the United States since the Second World War has always been to oppose, to neutralize, to balance that kind of outside pressure? So you get the Soviets intervening here and there during the Cold War, and we would intervene on the other side or at least try to balance the commitment to the Soviets and not give the field without any contest to the Soviets.

And here is Obama acknowledging how outside pressure, outside help, outside assistance, outside reinforcements from Russia, and of course from Iran and of course on the ground from Hezbollah could actually turn the tide as it did in the Syrian Civil War -- which Assad was definitively losing 2 years ago and that now he is definitively winning -- and yet didn't see that the U.S. role could and should have been the same, could and should have been to influence the outcome, to counteract, and to diminish and to balance the outside pressure, support of the outside regime.

So that's one classic example of where the vacuum created by the United States had an effect. I think the fact that Obama decided to create a red light by chemical weapons and then flinched and didn't do it had a tremendous psychological effect on the other places where

the U.S. is supposed to be the balancer and gave a green light to people who thought, well, we can go ahead with our historic ambitions or even our current ambitions, we don't have to worry about a U.S. response even by proxy.

And it think that's had an influence, for example, in Ukraine and it's had an influence in -- with China. I mean in Ukraine we had the President saying last week -- if you watched the speech on the intervention in Iraq and Syria, the one he gave on September 10, a week ago today, after talking about Syria and Iraq, he had one sentence about Ukraine, and I found it rather stunning. President was sort of praising American action on Ukraine and saying, we had rallied the world to oppose Soviet aggression in Ukraine.

I mean does he really think that this has had any effect on the ground, that the issuance of statements of denunciations makes any difference whatsoever, that pinprick sanctions have deterred Russia from doing exactly what it's done? It swallowed Crimea without so much as a sprained ankle among Russian troops. It has now destabilized and exerted its hegemony over Eastern Ukraine. Yesterday the Ukrainian parliament passed two bills -- one is to ratify the agreement with the European Union.

But the other was to grant a radical amount of autonomy to the eastern provinces to the point where they will now be able to create and run their own police forces autonomously. There are still Russian troops on the ground, there's still fighting going on, and they -- the Russians are still poised, as we speak today, to take Mariupol, a strategic city between Russian territory and Crimea, which would create a land bridge and connect Crimea with Russia and give it a central control of all of Eastern Ukraine.

Now, for Obama to think that because we get a lot of statements issued denouncing all this makes any difference is simply staggering. Does he not recognize that in this particular instance we didn't cause the conflict, we didn't cause Putin to go in, but we certainly by our inaction, our declaration from the beginning that this was

not our fight and we would not get involved in any way -- forget about boots on the ground -- we said from the beginning that we would not be providing any lethal aid to the Ukrainians and that this could not be solved militarily -- it has been solved militarily.

Russia controls Ukraine -- controls Crimea. Crimea is now part of Russia, the first annexation of territory since the Second World War. Russia now essentially controls by proxy the eastern part of Ukraine, and in a position to expand and consolidate that control. And we get a President who declared in advance that he would not support the Ukrainian side with any -- at the beginning we didn't even offer them logistics. The Ukrainian President came over here 3 months ago, begged for weaponry to simply alter the costs.

There's no belief that if Russia has invaded in force, Ukraine could fend it off. But it can alter the cost that Putin has to calculate. Putin does not like having the green men, these soldiers without insignias, returning home in coffins to funerals which can't be announced, and families will begin to protest and to murmur and create some civil unrest. That's the last thing he wants. And yet Obama had declared -- the only thing that the President of Ukraine got when he came 3 months ago begging for aid were MREs. I've never seen a tank attack repelled with MREs.

We didn't offer them any tank weapon or antiaircraft -- we're not even talking about offensive weaponry. And in the speech Obama made about this just a week ago, he talked about supporting Ukraine with nonlethal aid as if there was something illegitimate about the United States supporting a weak ally. This is our traditional role to step in as the balancer to support a weak ally not with boots on the ground -- it's not a practical or doable thing in this situation, and it is outside of NATO -- but with lethal aid.

Even if you want to restrict it to defensive weapons, why would you not do that? And I think the message has been read and the East Europeans, as you know very well, are terrified by the implications of this because it means

that it gives Putin a freehand and that the next steps are entirely up to him rather than to a calculation he would have to make thinking about an American response -- forget about a European response -- the Europeans will never respond unless they're led by the United States.

And if United States leads from behind or doesn't lead at all, as in Ukraine, nothing happens. That's the second area where the withdrawal or the declaration in advance of no effective Western or U.S. action has had an important effect on allowing the aggressor to move with impunity. The third area, of course the obvious one, is China where they watch, they see this President very hesitant to do anything, and they have decided this is a good time as they develop their military.

The Chinese aren't reckless like Putin, and they aren't in a hurry. The Chinese have a 3,000-year history. They can wait a decade or two. And as you know, they are developing rapidly an enormous and sophisticated military machine on sea and in the air, and of course in space as well. But their sort of aggressiveness and their contempt for any countermeasures by the U.S. in declaring these zones of influence in the South and East China Seas have begun to frighten our allies on the Pacific Rim.

And their question is, where will America be if and when a crunch comes. And that's a question that is not answered favorably when you look at the United States actions in Syria, in Libya, and in Russia. But I think the most important one is what Obama did in Iraq. He was elected to end the war in Iraq, and he did have public opinion entirely behind him. But a President and foreign policy cannot always follow public opinion. In fact I would argue that the reason that he's now getting involved in Iraq and Syria is a direct response to public opinion, not to a change in the strategic relationship or a change in his own strategic thinking.

I'm very dubious of the current enterprise because I think that is a direct result of the radical change in the polls after the spectacle of these grisly and horrible beheadings of Americans. But the beheadings and the fact that they were captured on video did not in and of

themselves change the strategic equation on the ground. And yet Obama's policy radically changed after the spectacles and after the change in public opinion. But in withdrawing from Iraq Obama was following public opinion which is what I think he does in general on foreign policy. And that's why I think there was no real dissent or protest.

I must say that in the book -- that we still can't explain why it's sold -- there is a chapter I wrote in 2011 -- December 2011, on the eve of the withdrawal saying, "Who Lost Iraq?" and talking about the fact that we were creating a vacuum entirely unnecessarily because we could have negotiated a balance of strategic forces agreement with Iraq. They wanted it, our generals wanted it. It's what we've done traditionally in Germany, Korea, Japan, at the end of many wars. You leave a residual force behind -- 10,000 to 20,000 troops -- not that we're going to intervene and change the course of a war if it breaks out.

But that would have kept American influence in the region and would have had tremendous consequences in preventing the 3 years of terrible missteps that the Maliki government in Baghdad went ahead and did without the U.S. being there which created Sunni discontent, Sunni rebelliousness, and created the grounds for the intervention of ISIS and the support for ISIS of the very people in Anbar and the rest of the Sunni population who had expelled ISIS predecessor, al-Qaida, in Iraq, fought side by side with American troops, the infidel, just 5 years earlier in the surge.

But the day after we evacuated, on January 1, 2012, Maliki ordered the arrest of the Sunni deputy prime minister and then he withdrew the funding for the Sons of Iraq who were the Sunni militias who fought with us in the surge, won the war in Iraq with us, who were disbanded, defunded, alienated, many of them arrested, persecuted. And what we got in Baghdad as soon as we left was a highly sectarian government that became in many ways a client of Iraq, ran it as a Shiite government, alienated the Sunnis, and set the stage for what we saw.

You can't create counterfactual histories; we can't say for sure what had happened. But clearly had we kept a presence as we had in 2010, 2011 when we mediated among the factions, were able to moderate the sectarian tendencies of the Maliki government, were able to keep the Sons of Iraq, Anbar, and the Sunnis onboard -- all of that disappeared. And into the vacuum created by our total evacuation and a totally unnecessary total evacuation came Iranian influence, Quds Forces, and the reemergence of sectarianism among the Shiite -- in the Shiite government which we had worked very hard and very successfully to curb and to limit while we were there.

And that is the classic case of the vacuum created. We leave, and now we know what the result is. And the terrible tragedy is, the terrible irony is that we now have to go back, that whether or not anybody -- Obama White House has recognized it, we now -- what we're doing now is undoing the vacuum that we created. We are returning as the balancer of last resort, and this is the last resort. Now we have ISIS run wild, we have a -- we had a sectarian government in Maliki. We think that's changed -- we can't be sure. We have the worst of both worlds in Syria.

The country is essentially divided by Assad who is now a total client and puppet of Iran, Hezbollah, and to a lesser extent Russia. But Syria is now a client state of Iran, which I think ultimately is the largest threat in the region. So on the one hand you have Syria, a client -- part of Syria run by the Assad government, client of Iran and reinforced by Hezbollah, a terror organization that already dominates Lebanon. And the other part of Syria is run by ISIS who are composed of what I think we could all agree are the worst people on earth.

This is not a very happy proposition. And we are now in a position far weaker than we were 3 years ago when we wouldn't have to recreate a presence in Iraq, recreate influence over Syria. While we were there we got opportunity to have a base or two of operation. Now we're going to have to rebuild all this. So this is my unified theory. A great power cannot withdraw without consequences. And the only thought was -- at the

beginning of this withdrawal was we'll get out, our casualties will go down, there'll be less agitation and dissent in the country -- all of which are good things.

Nobody wants war, no one wants endless war. But the fact is that in Iraq in 2011 we had historically low casualties, we were essentially an occupying presence. We would have reduced it to a very small number. It would have been seen -- it could have been seen or changed into what we would call a peacekeeping presence. But the fact is we had no presence at all, and we have no influence in Syria. And we have left Libya. We have told Ukraine you're on your own, and we've seen what's happened.

The East Europeans, the Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians and the Poles are wondering what's going to happen, particularly in the Baltic countries when Russia stirs up their ethnic Russian populations and they begin incursions what are we going to do? Are we going to lag? Obama -- he makes trip and he says, yes, we're going to abide by Article 5 of the NATO Treaty, but these are words. When it comes to actions, to acting on redlines, you draw yourself (inaudible) hasn't done it.

So this creates vacuums, creates invitations to bad guys, and it creates uncertainty. And these are all delayed effects. That's why we're seeing it in year 5. This does not happen right away. These are very sort of tectonic influences. And sad to say we're in a position now where we have to regroup, recreate our presence in these areas, reassure allies who felt abandoned and who felt that they could not count on the U.S., reassure them that we're coming back and this time we are serious.

How serious we are about this new campaign in Iraq and Syria, I am not sure. I would simply say -- I want to close right here so we can do a few minutes of question and answer -- I would say that there is a major disconnect between the ends and the means. The ends being announced as degrading and destroying ISIS, and the means which involve as far as I can see, a broad alliance which consist of no one. You know, the French have said they may fly reconnaissance. Well, that would be very nice, so we'll get some pretty pictures. Perhaps they'll send us

postcards also of the Eiffel Tower.

There are no boots on the ground. We don't know of any air forces that are going to be involved. The Saudis will write a check or two, that always happens, that's not an issue. But is anybody going to be involved? Turkey has already said they're not going to allow the use of their airbases, which of course would be a key strategic asset that we would be using. We're going to have to recreate our own airpower in Iraq which we already had -- we're going to have to redo that. I don't see any allies. I don't see any boots on the ground.

Now, I'm not saying it's easy to do. It's very hard to do once you're left and you've come back and people are worried that you're going to come back again. Let me just end with one note. The only way the operation in Iraq and Syria is going to succeed is not going to be because of the Kurds -- all they want is defend their own territory. It's not going to be the Iraqi Army which is a disaster. And the parts that work are the Shiite militias who are not sort of national forces.

It's not going to be as I heard absurdly said last night on one of the shows, you know, arming the Christians and the Yazidis and the others. You know, pharmacists in tanks isn't really very good, and priests -- God bless them -- in tanks is not going to be an improvement.

(Laughter)

DR. KRAUTHAMMER: This is all going to hinge on one thing. And it's going to be exactly what happened in 2007 and 2008. The key to the conflict is the Sunni tribes. That was the key to the conflict in the Iraq War. They joined with al-Qaida in Iraq against us, and we suffered for the 4 years. Then George W. found his general, he found his strategy, he ordered the surge, and Petraeus managed to enlist these discontented Sunni tribes. And I can assure you they are as discontented today with ISIS as they were with al-Qaida in Iraq.

Although they joined them for tactical reasons because they thought the threat from the Shiites in

Baghdad, who had alienated, persecuted or arresting them was worse. We have to win back -- we have to get the Sunni tribes to flip back a third time -- pro al-Qaida in Iraq, anti al-Qaida in Iran joining the surge, now they join with ISIS as a reaction to the misgovernment coming from Baghdad. The key to this is going to be to win their allegiance again. The only way to win against ISIS is to get the locals starting in Anbar to rebel against them.

That happened already before. It's not impossible. That's how we won it, the surge in 2007 and 2008. But of course it's much harder now. They were abandoned. Now we have to go back and say we're not going to abandon you again, which makes it harder. But all of these are the wages of withdrawal. And I do think we have to keep that in mind. We will be tempted again in the future in our history when we get weary of perhaps this operation or weary of a war in the future that we can't even envision.

And everybody wants to go home and we should go home. But we learned a lesson after the Second World War that we had not learned after the First. If you think you can go home and leave the world to its own devices, that is no longer possible. History has thrust upon us this mission and this purpose. We didn't ask for it, we didn't want it. And I'm sure the alarming majority of Americans would join me in saying that if there were somebody else who could do it we would be happy to let the burden go.

But there isn't. British Navy is gone. Nobody else can do the balancing. Unfortunately, that is our job. I hope that we will have the courage and the vision to understand that we have to keep that for our own sake and for the sake of the world. Thank you very much.

(Applause)

THE MODERATOR: Again, as usual, a great presentation, Dr. Krauthammer. Thank you. I think I can summarize the 30 or 40 questions here into maybe one. Could you preview the midterm elections this year and lead up to the presidential elections in our country to see if there is any hope for candidates who might believe, as you do, that this vacuum has created most of these ills? Do

you see anybody on the horizon for this year or '16?

DR. KRAUTHAMMER: I'm not sure that people's -- leaders would change their views. But I do think there's been a radical change in public opinion, and they will be driven by public opinion. And whatever people feel -- leaders, political leaders, candidates feel deep in their hearts, they are going to be swayed by this change in public opinion. And it is -- it's quite remarkable the effect of just the visual. Those two beheadings are what did it. And again, you think about -- it didn't change anything strategically on the ground.

If they had been simply announced as it would have been 50 years ago with a press release, it wouldn't have had anything like the effect. But it's had this effect. And I think if you look at public opinion -- intervention in Iraq or do you think this is any of our business, all of those polls have changed quite radically. I think Obama was driven to change his policy by that. And therefore you take a candidate like Rand Paul. Rand Paul of course is a classic isolationist.

He doesn't like to use the word, he would say anti-interventionist. Okay, fine, I'll use whatever word he wants. But he doesn't think that we have any business in much of the world, and he thinks that as his father argued, that most of our troubles are as a result of our meddling, intervention, angering people, et cetera. And the father would include 9/11 in that, the war on terror, what were we doing in these places, that we have provoked these reactions, you know. So that's his view.

If you'd seen the papers last few days, Rand Paul's views on foreign policy have shifted rather interestingly. He's no -- he said we have no business in Syria about a year ago -- you can argue yes or no. I'm just trying to make the point that he thinks we might have business in Syria now. He's quite prepared to support the effort in Iraq. So I think this sort of -- there was a trend. When things are quiet, when we appear to be safe, when withdrawal does not yet have its consequences, then this kind of libertarian isolationism is very popular.

Everybody hates the NSA. Why are we doing this, you know, this intrusiveness. He wrote that, he wrote dissent to the violation of privacy. He wanted to make sure that we don't drone an American al-Qaida activist sitting at a coffee shop in Topeka, Kansas. He did a 18 -- 11-hour filibuster to make sure that would be our policy. I don't think we're going to be droning anybody sitting in Starbucks in Topeka. That would probably be a safe place. If you are an al-Qaida activist, they're not going to get you there. That was very popular and he was on the rise.

And all the stories were about the great division among Republicans, we're going back to the '40s -- the division between the internationalist and the isolate. That argument is over. The question now is among Democrats where there is left-wing isolationism, a little bit different from Conservative isolationism. People who were very -- the President is worried about -- the reason he's not going to Congress to ask for authorization for the action in Iraq and Syria is because the Democrats don't want to have to vote on that.

They're generally opposed or very ambivalent. And he knows -- he doesn't want to force a vote on them before the election. So what you have now is a split among Democrats to see who will come out in support of aggressive action in Iraq and Syria. I would say that the -- there will be no isolationist candidate. There will be some arguments depending on how this campaign goes. And look at who is the likely Democratic candidate -- it will be Hillary Clinton unless she has a medical issue that prevents her from running.

She will be the candidate, and she is far more interventionist than Rand Paul is, far more than the President is. She is the one who recommended intervention in Syria long before, 2 or 3 years ago. So in those terms I think we are going to see a far more changed atmosphere where foreign policy -- there's not going to be that many divisions even between mainstream Republicans and mainstream Democrats. I do think there is this thing that's been growing, and that is Americans hate war, as they should.

They don't like intervention, as they should. We are not an imperial power by nature, and by geography we feel why should we be. You know, the fish aren't going to attack us. But there is something about -- and it comes again -- the video was the crystallization of this. And I hate to go back to it because it was growing all -- up until that moment. And there's a sense of shame, I think, about how we've let some of our allies down. I mean we saw the fighting in Ukraine, we wouldn't even give them defensive weapons. We issued statements.

Secretary of state runs around Europe negotiating with Lavrov, who runs circles around him, and the Russians keep coming. I mean, that's not atrocities on the scale of what's happening in the Middle East. But there's a sense of, you know, we have this role in the world to protect the weak, to defend democracy, and to be the light of freedom -- from the Kennedy inaugural, you know, where we -- we're not being asked to bear any burden but we -- we're not even asking to bear any burden whatsoever, not even help them with weapons.

So we saw it in Ukraine, and we see it in our allies, we see it in the massacre of Christians in the Middle East, and we ask ourselves is this -- is America the standby country, is America the one that watches. Obama has said, we bear witness to these things. That's the role of Sierra Leone -- to bear witness.

(Laughter)

DR. KRAUTHAMMER: The role of a superpower is to do something about it or say we're not going to do it. But declare we care about A, B, and C, so what is it in the world that we will defend on principle and for strategic reasons, and defend them. And they sense that America's diminished. And it's also I think the contempt with which, for example, that Putin has treated American reaction sort of, you know, dismissing it as if it means nothing. And it does mean nothing in terms of Ukraine.

And the contempt -- apart from the cruelty and the barbarism of those beheadings, the contempt with which they do this proudly. They distribute this proudly on the

video around the world so the world can see this -- baiting, challenging, throwing the gauntlet down to the United States essentially saying, you know, we don't have any reason to fear you. Americans have a sense of there's a change in the perception. And you see it in the polls -- are we respected in the world and the answer is far less today than it was when Obama came into office.

So I think that's going to be -- interestingly, foreign policy has rarely been an issue except in the middle of hot (phonetic) wars. Since, you know, the end of the Cold War, has not been a major issue. But I think this is going to be an underlying issue going right through. And that's why I think that you will get -- and perhaps in some cases candidates competing with each other to reassert America's role -- not warlike way, but to reassert our role.

And as to how that plays out, I think Republicans are likely to win the Senate back. I think you won't see very much of the foreign policy coming out of there. But that will show a willingness of the -- without the Democratic control there'll be far more willingness in the Senate and the House to support whatever initiatives the President proposes. As for the 2016 election, it'll hinge mostly on economics, but it'll hinge a lot more on how we feel about America in the world and supporting our traditional role, the moral role in the world, as well as the strategic role. I think it's going to be a much more important factor than it would have been a year or 2 or 3 ago. Long answer to a short question. Thank you all very much.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Dr. Krauthammer.

(Applause)

THE MODERATOR: Thank you again for joining us on the eve of our 67th birthday as a separate Air Force. I know I express the feelings of many in here -- we appreciate you bringing your thoughts to public discourse. We need that in this country. We wish you well with your book. I think you've sold over a million copies -- that's remarkable in and of itself. So there must be something there, there.

So on behalf of our chairman and our elected leadership of AFA who are all sitting in the front row, thanks again for being here. We've worked ourselves into lunch. Please join the exhibitors downstairs for lunch and if anyone wants to come up and shake Dr. Krauthammer's hand, I know you appreciate.

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