

UNITED STATES ENGAGEMENT  
WITH THE WORLD IN THE WAKE  
OF CONFLICTS IN  
IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

BY

THE HONORABLE JOHN D. NEGROPONTE



THE SEVENTH  
ANGIER BIDDLE DUKE LECTURE

*New York City  
November 9, 2011*

# *Our Mission*

The National Committee on American Foreign Policy (NCAFP) was founded in 1974 by Professor Hans J. Morgenthau and others. It is a nonprofit activist organization dedicated to the resolution of conflicts that threaten U.S. interests. Toward that end, the NCAFP identifies, articulates, and helps advance American foreign policy interests from a nonpartisan perspective within the framework of political realism.

American foreign policy interests include:

- preserving and strengthening national security;
- supporting countries committed to the values and the practice of political, religious, and cultural pluralism;
- improving U.S. relations with the developed and developing worlds;
- advancing human rights;
- encouraging realistic arms control agreements;
- curbing the proliferation of nuclear and other unconventional weapons;
- promoting an open and global economy.

An important part of the activity of the NCAFP is Track I½ and Track II diplomacy. Such closed-door and off-the-record endeavors provide unique opportunities for senior U.S. and foreign officials, think-tank experts, and scholars to engage in discussions designed to defuse conflict, build confidence, and resolve problems.

Believing that an informed public is vital to a democratic society, the National Committee offers educational programs that address security challenges facing the United States and publishes a variety of publications, including its bimonthly journal, *American Foreign Policy Interests*, that present keen analyses of all aspects of American foreign policy.



December 2011

Dear Reader,

On the occasion of the Seventh Angier Biddle Duke Lecture, and in view of inquiries about this series, it is only appropriate for me to recollect why he has been honored by the National Committee on American Foreign Policy (NCAFP).

Angie, as he was known to us, hails from an old distinguished family—Duke University was named in honor of his family. He served our country with distinction as ambassador to El Salvador, Spain, Denmark, and Morocco as well as serving as chief of protocol for Presidents Kennedy and Johnson.

Angie was associated with the NCAFP almost from its inception in 1974. His presidency of the organization was interrupted when he accepted the appointment as ambassador to Morocco in 1979. While there, he stayed in touch with the Committee and welcomed an NCAFP fact-finding mission that culminated with the king of Morocco receiving him and the delegation.

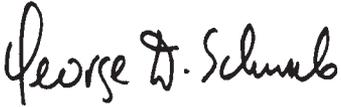
On his return to New York, Angie once more became active in the organization. Because of his background and reputation in the diplomatic community, he played an important role in welcoming and participating in the NCAFP's efforts to resolve the conflict in Northern Ireland, which effectively began with the NCAFP obtaining from President Clinton a 48-hour visa for Gerry Adams, head of Sinn Fein, to attend an NCAFP-sponsored conference at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York at the beginning of 1994.

In 1980, a founder of the NCAFP and first chairman, Professor Hans J. Morgenthau, the leading theorist of political realism in foreign policy, died. In the wake of his untimely death, the NCAFP established the Hans J. Morgenthau Award for distinguished contributions to U.S. foreign policy. At a meeting of the members of the NCAFP's Executive Committee, they unanimously voted to honor Ambassador Duke for the services he had rendered to his country and to the NCAFP with the first Morgenthau award—which was presented to him at a gala event at the former

Fifth Avenue Duke Mansion in New York in 1981.

Following Angie's tragic death in April 1995, the NCAFP's Executive Committee unanimously voted to establish the Angier Biddle Duke Lecture Series. The seventh presenter of this distinguished series was Ambassador John D. Negroponte, the 2006 recipient of the NCAFP's George F. Kennan Award for Distinguished Public Service.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "George W. Schwab". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "G" and a stylized "W".

George Schwab  
President



# THE SEVENTH ANGIER BIDDLE DUKE LECTURE

November 9, 2011

## UNITED STATES ENGAGEMENT WITH THE WORLD IN THE WAKE OF CONFLICTS IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

*By Ambassador John Negroponte*

The United States has just traversed a very convulsive and difficult decade. The events of 9/11 led us into two major conflicts, neither of which has yet been fully resolved. At the end of the decade, our country and much of the world entered into a financial and economic crisis which raises fundamental questions about the United States position in the world. Whereas in the 1990s we were often referred to as the “sole remaining superpower,” today commentary abounds about the United States decline and loss of power in relation to certain other nations of the world.

In my remarks tonight, I want to examine what I believe is happening in terms of our role on the world stage and offer some thoughts as to the way forward for U.S. policy. I make these comments from the perspective of a former diplomatic and national security practitioner. I have no new “grand strategy” to offer, though this is not to say that one might not be needed. Rather, I want to analyze what I consider to be the practical consequences of recent events on our ability to engage abroad and some of the inevitable implications for our posture in the world in the years ahead.

There have been both positives and negatives in our military experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan. I won't rehearse here the pros and cons of our involvement in each conflict. Was one conflict a “bad war” and the other a “good war”? Was one a war of choice, and the other of necessity? These arguments have been thoroughly explored and debated and I suppose it comes as no surprise that we don't yet know how history will judge these matters. Much will depend on outcomes as yet unknown. What kind of Iraq will emerge once we have definitively withdrawn our forces at the end of 2011? Can a solution be found for Afghanistan that survives the test of NATO withdrawal at the end of 2014?

We cannot know the answers to these questions with any degree of certainty. What we do know with greater certainty, as in the case of all wars in which our country has been involved, is the domestic costs. How many thousands of military lives lost? How many wounded and disabled with attendant long-term implications for the

care of our veterans? How many billions of treasure each year to maintain the frenetic operational tempo of our military forces?

One of the true positives of our recent national experience has been the demonstration of the extraordinary courage, capabilities, and competence of our nation's military. As United States Ambassador to Iraq in 2004 and 2005, I was able to observe on a daily basis the commitment and professionalism of our military, a commitment and professionalism that is also appreciated at home and reflected in the very high esteem in which our military institution is held by the American people. Contrast this situation with the difficulties and lack of respect suffered by many of our veterans returning home from the Vietnam War.

Notwithstanding whatever positive entries on the ledger there may be, the costs have been great. Consider just these two sets of facts: U.S. killed in action 4,400 in Iraq and in Afghanistan 1,800. In operating costs alone, the cost in Iraq and Afghanistan has been in excess of \$1 trillion. The long-term cost of treating our veterans is estimated to be in the same order of magnitude. In addition to those figures, there have been deeper, underlying costs as well. For example, the way in which we have kept the size of our military small, while deploying forces, regular and reservists alike, almost constantly to these two far-flung countries. The social costs for our military and their families have been extremely high.

And the way in which we have funded the "War on Terror" and our military engagements abroad through the routine adoption of emergency supplemental appropriations has contributed to the terrible fiscal disorder in which the country finds itself.

This brings me to what is perhaps one of the central points of my remarks this afternoon. Let me put it this way: absent a contingency of catastrophic proportions, the United States will not deploy an expeditionary force of the size we sent to Iraq or Afghanistan for at least a generation.

Although the Vietnam conflict and the current one are incomparable in many respects, the one way in which they are similar is that the American people do not want to repeat the experience any time soon. I say "at least a generation" because, as we often like to remind ourselves, the word "never" really is a very long time. But, if you ask me, I think the time frame involved here could go well beyond just the next generation. It may well be that the era of U.S. military expeditions, so much a feature of our history in the late 19th and

entirety of the 20th centuries, is drawing to a close.

While the costs in terms of blood and treasure are probably decisive factors in making this a likely eventuality, there are a number of other important factors mitigating against large deployments for combat abroad, many of which have to do with the questionable long-term effectiveness of external military interventions. Nationalism and asymmetric warfare are factors contributing to the higher cost of foreign interventions and, as a general rule, encouragement of and support for the development of local capabilities have proven to be more cost effective and durable approaches to dealing with conflicts where we believe we have a national security interest. Alternatively, the deployment of UN Peacekeeping missions can play a useful role in promoting security when international action is called for.

So, if we are not going to deploy abroad in large numbers in the future, the question presented is just what kind of overseas interventions by U.S. forces can we reasonably expect. I think we are already beginning to see the shape of our response to that question. Take, for example, the increased use of drones and other air assets against terrorist targets in countries such as Pakistan or Somalia. There has also been a concomitant increase in the use of Special Operations Forces. As time goes on and as the withdrawals of ground forces from Iraq and Afghanistan are completed, we are likely to witness a growing reliance on technology such as drones and on Special Operations Forces. Indeed, an argument can be made that the SOF operations against Al Qaeda in Iraq so ably led by General Stanley McChrystal are what helped develop those forces to the extraordinary level of capability and effectiveness that they now seem to have achieved.

Recent developments in Central Africa have given us a glimpse into the future that I am talking about. On October 14th, President Obama announced that the United States was deploying 100 Special Operations troops to Central Africa to train and assist local forces in their fight against the so-called Lord's Resistance Army, a vicious paramilitary force that operates in the region.

It is worth observing that U.S. public reaction to this development has been muted. It certainly has not been critical and this suggests a level of public confidence that we will not allow this modest special operations and training deployment mushroom into some kind of future commitment that we will come to regret.

In suggesting that future kinetic activity of our ground forces will be

on a more limited scale and with more modest deployments, I do not mean to suggest that we are about to embark on a revamping of the various treaty commitments we have around the world, especially to NATO, South Korea, and Japan. We have significant forces deployed in support of each of these alliances and must remain prepared to use them. However, probability of conflict in those areas is lower than the likelihood of the brushfire situations which may arise in other parts of the world.

I suppose that talking about the nature of conflicts we will confront without talking about the surrounding diplomacy is a bit like putting the cart before the horse. Certainly, our move into Iraq in 2003 was the apex of the doctrine of pre-emption and perhaps the most unilateralist period in our recent diplomacy. Our action in Iraq, whether right or wrong, certainly carried with it a high political cost on the international scene. And, as we all know, the absence of a second UN resolution also created divisions over Iraq within our own body politic. We have paid a steep political price for not having obtained the legitimating imprimatur of the Security Council for our military intervention there. While we cannot entirely rule out future actions of this kind, whether unilateral or by coalitions of the willing, clearly our unilateralist appetite was diminished after George W. Bush's first administration. And, interestingly, even though we went into Iraq without a UN mandate, virtually every significant action we have taken with respect to Iraq since the invasion has enjoyed some measure of UN Security Council review and approval, including legitimization of the Multinational Force that was operating there.

It was left for Mr. Obama, however, to accentuate multilateralism on issues involving international security. And, in the recent action on Libya, our initial posture was so self-effacing that it gave meaning to the expression: "Leading from behind." Whatever else is said about the Libya action, I think it is indicative of our likely posture in future situations of this kind. By that I mean, where international peace is threatened and a military response seems called for we will, where possible, formulate multilateral responses and not always insist on playing the lead role.

The Libya experience, among others, does raise the question of whether it is really possible to "lead from behind" as a matter of policy. Just because we have lost our appetite for large-scale foreign expeditions and just because we are in a relatively weakened economic state, does that imply relegating ourselves, as a matter of policy, to a sort of behind-the-scenes support role in international

affairs? Well, as Mark Twain famously said: “The report of my death is an exaggeration.” First of all, by most measures, we will remain the largest economy in the world for the foreseeable future. We also have by far the largest military budget of any country in the world and an extensive global network of military alliances and relationships. And, although not often commented upon, we have a very favorable demographic situation as compared to other advanced industrial countries. We are today the third most populous country in the world; and that is likely to be true in 2050 as well. And, our population pyramid is being well replenished from the bottom.

Provided we can put our fiscal house in order, I see little obstacle to our continuing to play a strong leadership role in international affairs. Though we at times live through moments of self-doubt, I always find it interesting how other countries continue to look to us to play a strong leadership role whether in political or economic affairs. This is true whether within the UN system from the Security Council on down or in international financial and economic institutions.

Because leadership in this century will more than ever involve partnership with other countries, we can expect to see even more attention to and emphasis on multilateral institutions. Certainly the United Nations. Probably also the various international financial organizations. There are also fora such as APEC and, perhaps most importantly, the G-20, where critical issues of the day will be debated and consensus developed as to how to deal with them in concert.

There are of course many questions with regard to multilateral organizations and fora, especially relating to whether they are sufficiently representative and whether they have effective decision-making capabilities. At the very least, these institutions provide a useful platform for harmonizing national actions; at best, they sometimes result in useful collective decisions. Having served as our representative to the Security Council for almost three years, I was struck by the considerable number of consensus resolutions which we did succeed in passing, notwithstanding the controversy over our invasion of Iraq.

Whatever we may think of international organizations, one certainty is that in coming years we will be challenged to improve their representativity and effectiveness. First among these challenges will be the issue of eventual United Nations Security Council reform, which has eluded us for years. As new powers and populations rise around the globe, this imperative grows steadily. Likewise, the absence of sufficiently strong and inclusive regional institutions in

the Asia/Pacific Region has been frequently noted. Work on this issue is moving forward on various fronts, with the United States joining the East Asia summit as a formal member for the first time this year.

In a similar vein, an important trend in our bilateral relationships has been a shift towards greater emphasis on dealing with emerging powers such as China, India, and Brazil. Perhaps no bilateral relationship has changed more in my adult lifetime than our relationship with China. From being a vice consul in Hong Kong in 1961, to visiting China in 1972 with Dr. Kissinger, and finally to conducting our strategic political dialogue with China in the last two years of the Bush administration, I have been able to personally experience the trajectory of U.S./China relations. This relationship will no doubt be one of the most important focal points of our diplomacy and national security strategy for decades to come.

While our future military engagements around the world will likely be fewer and farther between, this new era of “mutual indispensability,” as Leslie Gelb terms it, will put an even greater premium on the efforts of our diplomatic service. No longer “the sole remaining superpower,” it will behoove us to cultivate relationships around the world more assiduously than ever before. Diplomacy and diplomatic representation, far from being outmoded, can and should play an instrumental role in promoting the peace and prosperity around the world to which our peoples aspire.

So as our political leaders contemplate the future standing of the United States in the world, I sincerely hope there is sufficient appreciation for the role that U.S. diplomacy and our diplomats abroad can play in promoting the security and well-being of the United States. If anything, that role is more important than ever.



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