

DISCUSSION SUMMARY – 9/18/2012

Tyler, Dick and Rick led off with three brief presentations on foreign policy and then on military policy which opened up into a broad ranging discussion. Dick proposed the basic premise that military policy should be a tool to implement foreign policy. Tyler took note of a different view advanced in the Andrew Bracevich book, the Limits of Power, which is one of several published in recent years that criticizes what the author says is the tendency to let facilitating the forward projection of military power itself become a goal of foreign policy. Bracevich goes as far as to say that the focus of military policy on overseas engagement actually left the homeland undefended in 2001.

There was spirited discussion about whether Bracevich is correct in thinking that America cannot continue to afford an aggressive use of military power and deployment of large scale military operations in forward areas. Others felt that a \$750 million military budget within a \$16 billion gross domestic product is not unaffordable if the public believes expenditures are managed wisely and efficiently.

One participant proposed the idea that the real debate is about tax policy -- how to raise the revenue to pay the bill rather than how much can be afforded. Another called attention to the premise that a large military organization tends to encourage its own use.

Rick introduced the “Black Swan” concept, as developed in a book of the same title by Nassim Taleb. His premise is that unforeseen random events (in foreign policy such as the 1950 Korean invasion, the 9/11 attacks in 2001, and the Arab Spring violence culminating in last week’s death of the U.S. ambassador to Libya) often make such a significant impact that logic and planning are overwhelmed.

Another member proposed that the Korean War was the major turning point in the direction of U.S foreign policy, permanently redirecting the nation from the last vestiges of isolationism to a culture of permanent military force projection.

Several members offered thoughts on how foreign policy is made and argued that it has been mismanaged because we lack the necessary cadre of experts and expertise about the broad range of nations in which we have vital interests. One proffered a series of basic questions that should be asked about policy issues that arise overseas...What is actually going on? Does it affect us? What can we do about it? And, Can we be effective?

Several participants noted a corollary idea that many of the people overseas whom we are trying to help through the promotion of democracy and our concepts of freedom have very little understanding of what those concepts are. They cited many of those interviewed in the streets of Egypt and Libya while protesting the recent perceived insults to Islam. While proclaiming their own right to dignity and self determination, they castigate America for not limiting what we consider freedom of speech.

In closing, one participant noted that very little of our discussion addressed other than commercial and military issues. She mentioned Human Rights and Women's Rights in nations that our foreign policy affects as concerns of many Americans.

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