

Demetri Kofinas: 00:00:00 Today's episode of Hidden Forces is made possible by listeners like you. For more information about this week's episode, or for easy access to related programming, visit our website hiddenforces.io and subscribe to our free email list. If you listen to the show on your Apple podcast app, remember you can give us a review. Each review helps more people find the show and join our amazing community and with that, please enjoy this week's episode.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:00:31 What's up everybody? I'm Demetri Kofinas and you're listening to Hidden Forces, where each week I speak with experts in the fields of technology, science, finance, and culture, to help you gain the tools to better navigate an increasingly complex world, so that you're less surprised by tomorrow and better able to predict what happens next.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:00:54 My guest this week is Stephen Walt, a Professor of International Affairs at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. Dr. Walt is a highly regarded foreign policy professional whose independent thinking on matters of international relations has often run counter to the expansionary ambitions of the American foreign policy establishment and Beltway consensus.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:01:19 He is the author of numerous books, the most recent of which is, *The Hell of Good Intentions, America's Foreign Policy Elite and The Decline of US Primacy*. My objective during this conversation is to explore the origins of American foreign policy since the end of World War II, with a particular focus on how the development and detonation of atomic weapons first by the United States in 1945 and then by the Soviets only four years later helped shape a new paradigm of conflict known to us today as the Cold War and characterized by four decades of geopolitical tensions populated by proxy wars and policies of containment and deterrent who's sudden conclusion in 1991 created the conditions for a peace that ended almost as unexpectedly as it began.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:02:14 Where did the Americans and the Russians go wrong after the fall of the Berlin Wall? Will historians point to the internal conflicts of post-Soviet Russia as the culprit or was NATO expansion the primary cause? And did the Bush administration's 2003 misadventure in Iraq, mark the beginning of the decline of American hegemony, bringing an end to the short-lived dream of a new world order dominated by American military supremacy, representative democracy and globalization?

Demetri Kofinas: 00:02:47 As always, subscribers to our Hidden Forces Patreon page can access the overtime to this week's episode, which includes a discussion about where the Trump administration falls on the spectrum of American interventionism. And if the forces that propelled Trump into office in 2016 namely a wave of populist anger at the Beltway establishment or its Bosch wars and Generous Wall Street bailouts will dominate the field in the next election cycle and what that means for his Democratic contenders in 2020. And with that, let's get right in to this week's episode.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:03:29 Professor Stephen Walt, welcome to Hidden Forces.

Stephen Walt: 00:03:31 Great to be here.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:03:33 I was telling you that I read your first... Well, it's not your first book; the first book of yours that I read was the Israel Lobby back in 2007, which a very controversial book at the time.

Stephen Walt: 00:03:44 It was indeed. It got a lot of attention, and some of it very positive, some of it rather critical.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:03:49 You co-authored that with John Mearsheimer

Stephen Walt: 00:03:51 John Mearsheimer. Dean, University of Chicago.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:03:56 Yeah, and that was a time where I think it was much more controversial to write a book like that, because let's say at the tail end of the Obama administration, given the conflict that the US was having with Netanyahu's administration in Israel, it would have probably been "less of a thing" to publish the book like that.

Stephen Walt: 00:04:13 Well, it was a funny situation because what we were saying was not particularly original and it actually was something that was well understood by almost anybody who worked in Washington. If you talk to people on Capitol Hill, talk to people in the State Department, they would tell you that obviously groups like APAC and others were extraordinarily powerful. In fact, they were so powerful that a lot of people didn't want to point this out.

Stephen Walt: 00:04:33 And the thing we did was try to break the taboo about talking about this interest group. So, we wanted people to be able to talk about the Israel Lobby the same way they would talk about the Farm Lobby or the NRA or Big Pharma or any of the other interest groups in the United States that have a big impact on

the various areas of policy that they're interested in. And I think we succeeded in that. It's now become pretty easy to talk about it.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:04:58 You took Israel out of the closet. Well, because it's very easy to be labeled anti-Semitic. And that was often a charge that was used by the lobby to taint critics.
- Stephen Walt:** 00:05:07 Right. And it's intended to silence people-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:05:09 Right. Exactly.
- Stephen Walt:** 00:05:09 ... to intimidate them from pointing out anything critical about Israel or the US-Israeli relationship. And it's unfortunately still, I think somewhat effective. I think it's less effective as a charge than it used to be because it has been applied to people like me who for whom it was completely inaccurate. But it's one of the tactics that groups use when they're trying to keep people from being taken seriously.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:05:31 As a Spock said in Star Trek VI, "Only Nixon Could Go to China." So-
- Stephen Walt:** 00:05:37 I don't recall him saying that.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:05:40 He did actually, it was the captain Kirk was the one that had to make peace with the Klingon and escort the Klingon ambassador through the demilitarized zone, et cetera. So, your latest book is called The Hell of Good Intentions, America's Foreign Policy Elite and The Decline of US Primacy, you refer to the elite as of a blob throughout the book. That's also the Beltway consensus. Right? And we'll talk about that. Go ahead.
- Stephen Walt:** 00:06:05 Well, I was going to say the blob is a term that Ben Rhodes, who was Obama's deputy national security advisor coined and he in particular was talking about sort of the Washington think tank world, sort of punditocracy that floats around in Washington. I use it occasionally in the book I use, I think interchangeably the term foreign policy elite or foreign policy establishment basically to focus in on those people in the United States for whom foreign policy is their business. It's what they do 24/7. Some of them do that in government either permanently as part of the civil service or temporarily as a presidential appointee.
- Stephen Walt:** 00:06:42 But it also includes people at think tanks at interest groups on Capitol Hill, in universities and people in the media who cover

foreign affairs as well. So, it's a fairly large community and I argue that within that community there's actually been a quite powerful consensus.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:06:59 During the Bush years, foreign policy experts were a bit of superstars. That was a really a great time to be a foreign policy expert.

Stephen Walt: 00:07:07 Well, that's been true at various points in the past. I mean, although Americans don't pay as much attention to foreign policy as they should, Henry Kissinger was sort of a rock star-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:07:16 Big time, yeah.

Stephen Walt: 00:07:17 ... when he was-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:07:17 Lady's man.

Stephen Walt: 00:07:17 ... the Secretary of State, bit of a ladies man by reputation, a reputation by the way he went to some links to promote and encourage this idea that he was out there seeing lots of women.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:07:28 Barbara Walters included I think.

Stephen Walt: 00:07:29 Quite a number of others. I had Jill Saint John I think was rumored to have dated him at least. So, there've been other periods in our history where people doing foreign policy, were very much in the limelight. It's not surprising in one sense because in fact foreign affairs has been very important to the United States for a long time and therefore the people in charge of it deserve to get a certain amount of attention and should also get a lot of critical scrutiny.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:07:55 So as I said, again, I read the book, it's a phenomenal book. All your books are great that I've read and you have great reputation in general and I think this book in particular is great for anyone whether that person is familiar with us foreign policy or whether they have zero experience with it whatsoever. I think it's a great book. It's very detailed and it's deep. After reading it, and given the fact that our most recent guest was Secretary Carter, I thought a little bit about what I'd like to talk about today or how I wanted to structure the conversation.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:08:24 And one of the things I kept coming back to was there is need to try to break down the assumptions that have been layered on top of these debates over the decades, and try to get to some sort of foundation for how Americans began to think about the

world and about grand strategy, foreign policy, America's place in the world, American hegemony, all this stuff since World War II. And, I broke it down for myself in terms of presidencies or presidencies of importance. You know, Dwight D Eisenhower, the JFK, LBJ period, Nixon... I kind of glossed over Ford and Carter and then went straight pretty much to Reagan, Bush... Well, Reagan and Bush 41 were one sort of conglomerate and then Clinton and Bush W 43 and then Obama and now Trump. Can you help us get a sense of how the current thinking on foreign policy evolved?

Stephen Walt: 00:09:20 Yeah. I'll do my best. I mean, first of all, in the period after World War II, there was in fact a pretty substantial debate immediately after World War II over what the United States, his role in the world was going to be. Traditionally the United States back in the 19th century had been pretty much in isolation as power. We were busy expanding across North America, shoving the other major powers out of the western hemisphere, part of the Monroe doctrine. But we were not trying to get to actively involved in other people's problems.

Stephen Walt: 00:09:49 And, there were big debates over say whether, or not to take the Philippines as a colony after the Spanish American war. Then in the first half of the 20th century, up until 1945 or so, the United States was actively involved in world affairs, but we were somewhat reticent. We were on offshore balancer, a term that I use in the book. We paid attention to European politics and Asian politics, but we thought we would let them take care of the balance of power security issues. And the United States got involved in World War One and World War II when the balance of power broke down. It looked like one country might take over, Germany in both world wars and Japan in Asia, in World War II. And at that point the United States gets actively involved to re-write the balance of power as well.

Stephen Walt: 00:10:37 But just remember the United States was the last major power to enter World War One and World War II. We got in late, we didn't actually do a lot of the fighting and dying. Other countries did a lot more than we did, and we were in a great position at the end of those wars as a result. Well, after World War II, we now had to decide are we going to go back to that old policy? We'll just withdraw from the rest of the world-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:10:58 De-militarize.

Stephen Walt: 00:10:59 De-militarize. And that was the first instinct of many Americans. You know, we've been through this before and now it's time to bring the troops home, demobilize go back to civilian life, and

we'll only do that again if we have to. We've pretty quickly figured out that we couldn't do that after World War II because the Soviet Union was in fact too big, too powerful. And other countries, particularly in western Europe, were so damaged by World War II, they couldn't stand up to the Soviet Union by themselves.

Stephen Walt: 00:11:27 So the United States had to do something we'd never done in our history before. In permanent alliances like NATO, we stationed hundreds of thousands of American troops in Europe and also a substantial body of troops in Asia, and we keep them there as part of the Cold War, really for the next 40 years or so. And in places like Japan and South Korea and obviously throughout Europe, the United States is fully engaged there to contain Soviet expansion. And that's true of the Eisenhower administration, Kennedy, Nixon, Carter, Reagan, et cetera. Now, interestingly enough, in that period, the United States also discovers it has a strategic interest in the Middle East and that's of course Middle East oil, but the United States doesn't deploy troops to the Middle East in substantial numbers.

Stephen Walt: 00:12:12 From 1945 to 1990 we had security ties there. We had various relations with different countries, we cared about the region. We even created the Rapid Deployment Force after the fall of the shot in 1979, but we didn't park it in the Middle East, we kept it out and we didn't use it there actually until the first Gulf War in 1990-91. We were an offshore balancer in the Middle East because there was no country threatening to take over. We didn't have to intervene and so we didn't. So, I see the Cold War. There are differences between the different presidents along the way, but the Cold War is a period of great continuity where the focus is the Soviet Union, the United States is seriously committed to formal alliance treaties in Europe and in Asia.

Stephen Walt: 00:12:57 And the one other thing I will add there is that the United States and the Soviet Union also engaged in a pretty stupid competition throughout the developing world where they tried to spread communism and we tried to spread anti-communism and that led to things like the war in Vietnam, some of America's interference in Central America. Some competition in Africa. I think was part of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, which didn't work out any better for them than it's worked out for us.

Stephen Walt: 00:13:25 So we do very well in our relations with most of the developed world, Japan, Europe, et cetera, not so well in dealing with the developing world in that period. Nonetheless, throughout the

Cold War, we had so many advantages vis-a-vis the Soviet Union that eventually we outlasted them. They collapsed, and we ended up in this remarkable position of primacy beginning in the early 1990s. And that's where my book really takes off, which is what the United States decides to do after the Cold War, after that period where we've been all over the world trying to contain communism and prevent the Soviet Union from taking over.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:14:04 And I definitely want to talk about that. When Truman handed off the executive branch to Dwight's administration, and also, I'd probably would say during that period when the war was coming to a close, when the Paris peace conference talks were concluded, what was the body of literature and thinking that already existed around these ideas that policymakers and politicians went to in order to begin to formulate a strategy?

Stephen Walt: 00:14:31 Actually, surprisingly little. I mean we didn't have a really well developed extensive international relations community. You didn't have international relations programs and lots of American universities. So, in a sense we were kind of making it up. We did, the council on foreign relations had been created in the 1920s, there were some experts as well outside of government, there were scholars in various places, but we're trying to figure out what America's role in the world, and you can see this debate in a variety of ways. So, George Kennan famously writes the famous X article-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:15:05 The sources of Soviet Conduct. The long telegram.

Stephen Walt: 00:15:07 The long telegram from Moscow, which he then turns into a extremely influential article laying out his vision for what containment should be.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:15:15 Tell us a little bit about who George Kennan was and why that was significant.

Stephen Walt: 00:15:17 George Kennan was a Foreign Service Officer, educated at Princeton who had become a Russia expert and had spent time at the embassy in Moscow and I believe was either in Moscow or nearby in one of the Baltic states and at the early Cold War. And I think in 1946 he ends up writing what is known as The Long Telegram, sort of 10,000-word telegram that is sent back to Washington. And it's at a moment where the Truman administration is trying to figure out what to do about the Soviet Union. Is it an ally? Probably not. Is it a die-hard enemy? Maybe? Is it something in between? We've got to come up with

a policy here, and they don't know yet just how dangerous Stalin might be, just how aggressive, et cetera.

- Stephen Walt:** 00:15:59 And Kennan writes this long telegram based on his analysis and basically says, "Given the nature of the Soviet system and how internally insecure they are, they need to create enemies. No amount of accommodation is ever going to make them feel secure. The only solution is containment. All we have to prevent them from expanding anywhere from grabbing other areas that are powerful enough strategic importance. And if we do that for long enough, eventually the Soviet system will mellow. We will essentially deny them a lot of foreign policy victories."
- Stephen Walt:** 00:16:33 So he recommends that the United States adopt this policy of containment where we basically keep the Soviet Union where it is and don't let it expand in any of the directions. And it's a classic case as Ken and himself later recalled, sort of having an answer at a moment when everyone is asking the same question. And he had a very well argued, well written persuasive answer. It was published as an article in Foreign Affairs magazine and made him famous. And over the next three or four years, this doctrine of containment gets well established, but, and here's the big but, when he publishes this, Walter Lippmann, who was probably the most well-known American foreign affairs expert columnist for the New York Herald Tribune, I think very influential, public intellectual had been for many years going back really to World War I, highly respected.
- Stephen Walt:** 00:17:22 He writes a series of articles later put together in a little book challenging Kennan's argument saying it's too aggressive. It's going to create a cold war. It's going to make relations worse than they need to be. So, you have these two influential figures taking opposite positions at the very beginning of the Cold War. And I would argue it takes five to 10 years for that debate to play itself out before it really gets embedded in the foreign policy establishment.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:17:52 The idea of containment.
- Stephen Walt:** 00:17:53 The idea of containment and containment done in a particular way. One of the other ironies in all of this is Kennan later claimed that he'd been misinterpreted, that the Truman administration and the Eisenhower Administration had overly militarized containment. That he intended to be mostly a diplomatic strategy. We would rely on a variety of tools with some armed force in the background, but that as soon as the Korean War happened that we had ramped up defense

spending again, we began deploying American troops in Europe and Asia. We fought the Korean War, and he felt himself later that it had been overly militarized. And that's of course what Lippman had warned about as well. My point simply being, by the early to mid 1950s a more militarized and global view of containment had taken hold, which is not exactly what Kennan originally had in mind.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:18:45 How soon after the dropping of... Well, the surrender of the Japanese and the defeat of the axis power, how long after that did the foreign policy community and the politicians and people in Washington sober up to this new threat? Did they ever really even have that postwar euphoria that so many other Americans had?

Stephen Walt: 00:19:07 Oh, I think they did. I mean if you look at how rapidly the American military demobilized after World War II, that was a sense of that Americans have had 10 million people under arms. We've had troops all over the world. It's time to bring them home and there was enormous pressure actually put on the Truman administration. Did he mobilize very, very rapidly, because families wanted their husbands back. Mothers and fathers wanted to see their sons back from the war, and I think it does take a while and I think the critical moment actually turns out to be the sort of simultaneously the Soviet detonation of an atomic bomb and-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:19:41 Is it 49?

Stephen Walt: 00:19:42 '49, 1949, which is sooner than we expected, although we knew they were working on one. And then secondly, the Korean War, the North Korean invasion of the south, which was interpreted in Washington as virtually identical to what Adolf Hitler had done. Unprovoked aggression by a communist power. We thought that basically the North Koreans were taking their orders from Moscow. Moscow had ordered them to do this. Nobody in the United States at that point understood that this was actually much more of a civil war between the regime in the south and the regime in the north. And yes, it was unprovoked aggression or largely unprovoked, Russian by the north, but it was not a grand communist plot to start taking over the world. That's how it was interpreted in Washington. That's how it was sold and that became the way in which we sort of ramp things back up to wage and all out cold war against the Soviet Union.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:20:37 Also, do I remember correctly that FDR had positive hopes about Stalin and his relationship with Stalin. Right? And it wasn't

a big part of this also the passing of FDR and the takeover by Truman.

- Stephen Walt:** 00:20:50 Yeah. I would actually tend not to think that, you're absolutely right that FDR felt that he had our relationship with Stalin. He could manage him. That was something he could have done, but I think if Roosevelt had lived, he would've had the same problems dealing with solid, that there were basically incompatible objectives between the United States and the Soviet Union. There were, first of all, they were going to be the two most powerful countries in the world, which means they were going to eye each other with a certain degree of concern and wariness.
- Stephen Walt:** 00:21:20 Second, we didn't like what they were doing in eastern Europe, imposing a communism on various countries that didn't necessarily want it. We understood that the Soviet Union was a military power and it was right next door to western Europe, which we felt needed to remain independent, become democratic in places that weren't like Germany and become part of the Western economic system as well.
- Stephen Walt:** 00:21:45 And it, most importantly, it'd be very bad if all of that industrial and economic power in western Europe got taken over by the Soviet Union and they could use it to strengthen themselves. So, for that reason, I think there were real contradictions between what the Soviet Union wanted to be secure and what we wanted to be secure. So even if FDR had lived, I think there would've been real trouble with the Soviet Union.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:22:08 What are the prospect of nuclear war on a global scale become more of a thing for the foreign policy establishment. And assuming it was at some point during the Eisenhower administration?
- Stephen Walt:** 00:22:21 Again, one of these things, if you think back to in 1945 the world suddenly discovers that there's this thing, the atomic bomb, and later in the 1950s the hydrogen bomb is a weapon of unprecedented destructive power. And we'd never seen anything like that. And people begin trying to think, "Well, what does this actually mean?"
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:22:38 So we didn't even know what it was going to look like until we dropped it, right?
- Stephen Walt:** 00:22:40 No, that's right. We had some idea-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:22:43 We had somebody idea New Mexico, right?

Stephen Walt: 00:22:44 Right, but-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:22:45 Famous Oppenheimer quote.

Stephen Walt: 00:22:47 Yeah. Exactly. But so, you know, you have people like Bernard Brody who was at that point, I believe at Yale, wrote a little book in 1946 called The Absolute Weapon, where he tries to figure out, "What does this mean for the world?" And one of the things he points out is, at this point the purpose of weaponry is to avoid wars. Now we can't fight with these weapons. They're so powerful, you can't actually use them. And these notions of deterrence, right? That in fact, nuclear weapons have to be used basically to deter others from using them against you. When you think about it, this is an idea-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:23:23 It's fascinating.

Stephen Walt: 00:23:24 It takes a while though. What I want to suggest is that, even throughout the 1950s into the 1960s, experts in the field don't have complete consensus. You could argue, we still don't have complete consensus over exactly what these weapons can do, how they should be used, are they useful for blackmail, etc. It's a revolutionary technology and human beings don't figure out exactly what that means overnight.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:23:50 Well, MacArthur, during the North Korean War, wanted to use nuclear weapons on the North Koreans.

Stephen Walt: 00:23:55 That's right. A number of other-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:23:57 He's like, this is our new weapon. It's the best weapon we've got. Let's use it.

Stephen Walt: 00:24:00 Even Eisenhower, well, I think in general had a very sober view of a lot of these things said at one point, "Well, we can use it like the way you'd use a bullet, like-"

Demetri Kofinas: 00:24:10 That's fascinating.

Stephen Walt: 00:24:11 Right.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:24:12 It's absolutely... No, no, no. I just mean it's fascinating. I just want to reflect on this a moment. Two things. One is this, trying to put yourself into the mindset of people living at that time when the bomb had just been discovered, it had just been

tested, it had just been used against the Japanese and I mean a weapon of massive destructive capabilities. We've never, since that time discovered or created anything like that, we are still living with nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons are still the most destructive weapons that exist and nothing like that existed before. So that's fascinating. And then this other point that you made mention of, which is we had strategies of war. Wars were fought in very particular linear ways and now you had this introduction of this weapon and now it was all about how do we avoid war?

- Stephen Walt:** 00:24:58 Well, but it's more complicated than that even, so you have a long debate in the sort of field of nuclear strategy between those who believe that basically these weapons are useful for deterrence. You can deter an attack on your own homeland and you don't need very many weapons to do that. In other words, if you know that if you attack me, I'll be able to put 50 bombs on your 50 biggest cities, you're going to be deterred.
- Stephen Walt:** 00:25:21 I don't need very many. I just need to have 50 survivals. I may need even less than that. That's sort of one view, sometimes called the minimum deterrence view. And by the way, it's been the view say of countries like China, countries like France-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:25:34 North Korea.
- Stephen Walt:** 00:25:34 Yes, North Korea today who don't have enormous arsenals. But there was a second view and it's the view that prevailed in the United States and I believe also in the Soviet Union, which is that in order to deter, you actually have to have the capacity to fight and win a nuclear war. And that means that every time you build another weapon, I need to build a weapon to be able to destroy the weapon you just built, right? And you have to have elaborate strategies for using them. You have to have highly accurate weapons so that I can hit your hardened missile silos. It's one of the reasons, of course, we then start putting ballistic missiles on submarines so we can hide them in the world's ocean so they can't be destroyed. So, the other side knows that we'll have the ability to retaliate if they start anything.
- Stephen Walt:** 00:26:19 As a result of this competition to each try to get an advantage over the other because we thought that would give us leverage. We thought that would allow us to deter, say, the Soviet Union from putting pressure with conventional forces on our allies, things like that. By the height of the Cold War, the two superpowers had over 65,000 strategic nuclear weapons combined. When you think about what one of those weapons could do on New York, on Los Angeles, on Moscow, on Paris, on

Tokyo, which is one of those weapons can do, and we had 65,000 of them.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:26:55 What year was that? I don't remember.
- Stephen Walt:** 00:26:56 Right, around when... Maybe I'll say roughly 1970.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:26:59 1970. So, you're saying as a result of this competition to try, and win a nuclear war, the United States and the Soviets created so many nuclear missiles that created the conditions for mutually assured destruction?
- Stephen Walt:** 00:27:11 Right. Although mutual assured destruction... There was a famous study I believe done at the Rand Corporation or in the US Defense Department, that basically showed that in order to destroy any country as an effective society, like the modern society, like the Soviet Union, you needed between 400 and 600 large bombs. Because once you've used them, you've hit all the major population centers you've hit the... It is kind of crazy.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:27:40 Yes it is. So dark.
- Stephen Walt:** 00:27:41 The more you think about it. And yet we had tens of thousands of these without really quite thinking through why we needed them or why they were absolutely essential. Now it's worth also noting that we're down substantially from the numbers that we had at the height of the Cold War, 65,000. I've haven't looked in a while what the arsenals are, but the United States has maybe three or 4,000 nuclear weapons now, still far more than we would need to destroy any other country. And then Russia has not, I think quite as many, but roughly on a par with us. And that's been regulated of course by an arms control treaty now because eventually the two countries realized that they had levels of over killed that were completely unnecessary.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:28:23 Wasn't it Kennedy that got elected off of the claiming that there was a missile gap?
- Stephen Walt:** 00:28:27 Right.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:28:28 Right.
- Stephen Walt:** 00:28:28 There-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:28:29 We had thousands by then.

Stephen Walt: 00:28:31 Well, and he campaigned on that even though the Eisenhower administration was starting to discover that there was no missile gap. We had begun various forms of aerial reconnaissance that was intelligence information that Kennedy did not know about, in the campaign, suggesting that we weren't facing any kind of significant gap. If anything, it was quite the other way. In fact, what Kennedy discovered when he became president was that the United States at that point had a substantially larger, more reliable, more sophisticated nuclear arsenal than the Soviet Union did.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:29:02 What were military budgets like at the time during the 50s? Because one of the things that is fascinating during that period was Eisenhower's concern about the Soviet threat seem to be equaled by his concern about the threat of bankrupt in the country by overspending on military hardware and equipment and et cetera.

Stephen Walt: 00:29:21 Eisenhower was a fascinating figure in lots of different ways. He understood that the Cold War was a marathon, not a sprint, and that the United States had a superior economy, but it shouldn't do anything that would jeopardize the strength over time and therefore if you screwed up the US economy building, too many weapons, that actually might cause you to lose the Cold War. You could argue at a big macro level that of course what happened was that the United States had a superior economic system. We had much more powerful wealthy allies and one of the reasons we won the Cold War is precisely-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:29:55 And I can turn that on his head. Exactly.

Stephen Walt: 00:29:56 We did in fact, we were able to outspend the Soviet Union without working as hard. They had to work three times as hard to keep up with us. So, you're absolutely right. Eisner was also the one of course who famously warned us in his last speech as president, about the so-called Military Industrial Complex that focusing so much attention on national security, focusing so much attention on protecting ourselves against any possible danger was going to create institutions and elites who would then want to stay in business and they would have political influence, they would control lots of money, they could use that money to in some ways to make sure they got more money. And if you go back and listen to the Eisenhower Military Industrial Complex speech, it is really quite pressing.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:30:38 Chilling and pressing.

Stephen Walt: 00:30:40 It's just pressing. He sees and remember he's a five-star general, right? One of the two I think we've had in our history who knew more than anyone else, just what war was like, just how important national security was. But he also has understood that, that wasn't the only thing that mattered.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:30:58 There's a great documentary that deals with that speech and the larger Military Industrial Complex, which I think it was called, why we fight.

Stephen Walt: 00:31:06 Eugene Dereck?

Demetri Kofinas: 00:31:07 Yes, it came on 2000, what?

Stephen Walt: 00:31:09 Yeah, it's a terrific film.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:31:09 Six or something.

Stephen Walt: 00:31:10 I think it's about 2006 or so.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:31:12 Something like that.

Stephen Walt: 00:31:14 It's in the shadow obviously of the Iraq war as well, but it shows some of the continuity in these ideas.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:31:20 So another thing that I have come across when I've studied these various periods is that there always seems to be some level of reaction or ebb and flow from one administration to the next. Eisenhower, as you said, was very sober. Kennedy of course, challenged NASA to go to the moon and LBJ poured money into the great society, initiated a war against Vietnam. What accounts for that? I mean in some sense that there was more of an idealistic mentality in the JFK and LBJ administrations than there was in the Eisenhower administration. Right?

Demetri Kofinas: 00:31:54 And Nixon of course then that was the period of detente and real politic. And it felt like they were really trust trying to, again, wind down the war in Vietnam, keep the world together in a way that I felt somehow similar to how Barack Obama transitioned from the Bush administration. Is there any truth to that? Am I picking up on something?

Stephen Walt: 00:32:14 Well, there's often a tendency for sort of these pendulum swings in American politics, and that's partly because of course, aspiring presidential candidates tend to run against whoever the incumbent is. It's kind of hard to challenge the incumbent

by saying, "He's done a great job. I really admire everything he's done as president, but you should vote for me instead." Right? So, Kennedy runs against the Eisenhower Administration, Nixon's obviously the opponent, but he was Eisenhower vice president. And by saying that they've gotten slack, they're not being ambitious enough, we need a new generation...

Demetri Kofinas: 00:32:48

Right.

Stephen Walt: 00:32:48

And that's, I think, sort of familiar in any kind of two party system. You're going to see that oscillation. What I'm though equally struck with though is the amount of continuity that you see across these administrations, and that's partly because there is a permanent civil service. We'll keep doing what it has been doing unless it's-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:33:05

A deep state.

Stephen Walt: 00:33:07

Well, something like that.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:33:07

Something along those lines.

Stephen Walt: 00:33:10

Something along those lines and also the American system of governance, in my view, is hard to move, right? It was designed by the founding fathers to be a slow-moving beast most of the time. Lots of checks and balances, lots of veto points. Things can get tied up in Congress. Presidents can veto what Congress does. The courts can stop Congress or the president from doing various things at various times, except when there are emergencies. And what's interesting about the United States is when you get a real national emergency, then this is a country that can move with remarkable swiftness.

Stephen Walt: 00:33:46

Think of the Patriot Act after 9/11 and launching the global war on terror without really much discussion. Think of the Manhattan Project itself, right? Which happens in World War II. You know, Pearl Harbor happens suddenly the country is ready to go to war and a vast set of industrial programs creating an enormous army, navy, air force building the world's first atomic bomb, something that's a vast project that nobody knows about. It's all being done in secret bubble.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:34:13

Remarkable.

Stephen Walt: 00:34:14

All right? So, this is a country that can move quite energetically when we feel threatened, which unfortunately means that people in the foreign policy world, they're always tempted to

pretend as though a minor problem is some enormous danger because that's the only way to motivate people. It's only way to mobilize the country to do anything, almost anywhere.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:34:35

How different... I mean, we live now, in the past three generations have experienced what Schlesinger called the Imperial Presidency. The powers of the executive have grown tremendously from what they were pre-FDR. How different is this world that we live in today? How exceptional is it in terms of the powers of the executive branch versus what we had a hundred years ago?

Stephen Walt: 00:34:58

Oh, I think it is quite considerable. I mean there's been a steady accretion of executive power, especially in the realm of foreign affairs. You know, one example, if you go back just in the 1930s, FDR wants to get the United States more actively involved in the run up to World War II. He really wants us to be doing more to prepare...

Demetri Kofinas: 00:35:20

Before Pearl Harbor.

Stephen Walt: 00:35:20

Well, long before Pearl Harbor by the middle of the 1930s, but the country is very isolationist still, doesn't want to get involved in Europe's problems or Asia's problems. Congress is not in favor... He can't get much. In 1938, he finally gets a big naval program. He gets a big increase in spending on the navy to rebuild the navy, which had been falling down in various ways. But there's still an enormous amount of resistance in ways that you really haven't seen in the post-World War II period. And certainly not in the post-Cold War period where presidents have been able to do pretty much anything they wanted in foreign affairs without facing a lot of resistance from other parts of the body politic.

Stephen Walt: 00:36:06

And the other part of that is that over time Congress has by and large abrogated its responsibilities. You know, we're not supposed to go to war without an authorization from Congress. Congress has given the right to declare war. Well, first of all, presidents don't declare war anymore. And second of all, they take things like an authorization to use military force and they stretch it to the breaking point and beyond. And nobody much cares. So, all of the military actions that the United States is undertaking right now, the places, the drones we are using, the forces that are deployed chasing terrorists or possibly say confronting Iran down the road, that's all being justified by the authorization to use military force that was voted after 9/11, right. And it allows-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:36:52 It was in 2003 there for that-

Stephen Walt: 00:36:56 No. It's 2002.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:36:56 2002, sorry. 2002.

Stephen Walt: 00:36:57 May have even been 2001, because it was originally voted to authorize going after Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Right?

Demetri Kofinas: 00:37:03 When everyone knew that it was really about a rock.

Stephen Walt: 00:37:05 No, not at then. No, not then. No, that was originally justified as going after terrorists. And going after Al-Qaeda-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:37:12 We're not talking about the authorization to use military force against Iraq. That was a separate reason, that was a separate-

Stephen Walt: 00:37:17 Right. But now of course we can define almost any problem as somehow connected to Al-Qaeda or somehow-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:37:24 Oh, we kill people in Yemen and we're not at war with Yemen, it's a good example. Right?

Stephen Walt: 00:37:28 Right, right. And now the interesting thing about this, the Obama administration understood this was a problem, right? And they actually wanted to go to Congress to get a new authorization. It would be worded differently. It might put some constraints on them, but they thought it was time to have a new legal justification for what they were doing in various places. And Congress wasn't enthusiastic about doing it.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:37:50 They didn't want to put their names on it.

Stephen Walt: 00:37:51 Exactly right. The congress did not want to take responsibility for doing this. Now there are other reasons why I think, presidents have more power and authority than they used to. The secrecy is a big part of it. They can keep secrets from us and even to some extent from Congress and that allows them to do things if they want and also just the amount of money involved, right? When you're the Executive Branch and you control a budget of 600 to \$700 billion, which is what the Pentagon currently controls, you have an ability to staff problems and throw people at problems that the congress doesn't have.

Stephen Walt: 00:38:29 So I know somebody who used to work for the Senate Intelligence Committee, which is supposed to have oversight over the intelligence community, and he likes to say that he

was, one person who was a Senate staffer whose job it was to keep track of all of the intelligence agencies. I think we have 17 of them and they have a combined budget of say roughly \$100 billion or so, and he's the one guy on Capitol Hill who's supposed to mind the store and keep track of them. Obviously, there's some other people doing it involved, but it conveys to you just how difficult it is for Congress to keep track of what's going on, even if they're trying to do a good job. Because there's no way that any individual or even a team of individuals could provide the right kind of oversight.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:39:13 The point about this desire not to take responsibility was something that I asked Dr. Carter about on our last episode. In the context of the public, the public after 9/11 understood that there were threats that were significant that could be levied against the public. At the same time, we have a constitution and a bill of rights. No one wanted to give up their personal freedoms, but at the same time, they also didn't want to die in a terrorist attack. And this tension, I think led many people to basically take the position of, "Okay, I want my civil liberties, but I'm not going to look while you go and let's say drop some bombs and do some extra judicial killings in this part of the world."

Demetri Kofinas: 00:39:57 Is it a problem that we haven't really opened this up to a conversation and to really put into law and be more clear about how we want to proceed in this new century where we have individuals who are empowered with technologies to conduct attacks against society that are on par with a nation state?

Stephen Walt: 00:40:20 No, I think that the terrorism is a perfect example of this problem of trying to calibrate what the right response is to something that we acknowledged as a problem, but the magnitude of the problem is difficult to measure at any particular point in time. I think it's pretty clear that in the 1990s we knew Al Qaeda was out there. We knew it had done some things to American military forces and diplomatic installations, so we knew it was a problem and we were paying attention to it to some degree, but we didn't know how serious a problem it was.

Stephen Walt: 00:40:51 I would argue that after September 11th we then went too far the other way. We began to see Al-Qaeda under every bed. We began to assume that they were magical, that they had thousands of willing martyrs out there who were clever and that there were all sorts of dastardly, horrible things that were going to happen to us. And therefore, we overreacted to it and we exaggerated just how serious a problem it is. So, terrorism is a

problem. In my view, it's a relatively minor problem for Americans compared to some other ones we have. The difficulty, I think for politicians has been that they live in deadly fear of another terrorist attack happening on their watch and someone saying, "You do enough to prevent it." All right.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:41:35 And that was the big fear of George Bush.
- Stephen Walt:** 00:41:36 That's right.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:41:37 Of course Jr.
- Stephen Walt:** 00:41:38 George Bush Jr. But it was also, I think a concern that Barack Obama had. It's going to paralyze our administration if another attack comes through, even though number of people who might be affected by it was relatively small. So, if you look at the number-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:41:53 It's a political problem.
- Stephen Walt:** 00:41:53 It's a political problem. And this is I think, been a failure of political leadership in the United States where beginning with the Bush administration, they decided that they were going to magnify the name.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:42:04 They were going to feed the hysteria.
- Stephen Walt:** 00:42:05 That exactly right. And that was a way of getting latitude to do things they wanted for-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:42:10 The politics of fear.
- Stephen Walt:** 00:42:11 Politics of fear, and it worked, right? Americans got very scared. You could have imagined a different president taking a very different road. Well, being sober about it and saying, "We now face a new challenge. We're going to address this challenge, but this is not an existential threat. These are not groups that have the capacity to end our way of life. Yes, we are going to face other attacks, but these attacks are going to be relatively modest and compared to other dangers that we face. You know, for example, a danger that we all face from being shot by guns in the United States." Far More Americans are killed by guns owned by other Americans who aren't terrorists in the course of various things going on in this country that are affected by international terrorists.

Stephen Walt: 00:42:52 I forget what the number is now, but you know the number of Americans who've been killed by terrorists since 9/11 is a few hundred whereas every year between 20 and 30,000 Americans are killed by guns here in the United States and yet we don't have gun control, but we have billions of dollars being spent on counter-terror operations all over the world and that suggests that the political system isn't calibrating these problems properly.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:43:19 As a behavioral psychology issue there as well. Let's go to where the book begins now, which is after the end of the Cold War and we can revisit some of these other administrations if we have time. I did want to ask you for example why the Nixon administration in the public mind doesn't get as much credit perhaps as it deserves for its foreign policy and also why at the same time Kissinger is such a superstar in the foreign policy community. Then also Reagan, which is a really interesting time. I mentioned him briefly about the spending that he enacted and how that was so different than Eisenhower, but where did we go wrong after the end of the Cold War?

Stephen Walt: 00:43:55 Uh, well I think again, the central argument of the book is we did, I think where we went wrong was we didn't in a sense give ourselves a high five, take a victory lap and then begin to move back towards a more restrained grand strategy, more restrained foreign policy. When the Cold War ended, we decided that this was now the unit polar moment and it was the opportunity for the United States to spread our system of government, our set of political values around the world, everywhere, if at all possible. And what I and some others have called the strategy of liberal hegemony.

Stephen Walt: 00:44:30 And it's a liberal, not in the sense of being left wing but liberal because it's trying to promote the sort of classic liberal values of democracy, human rights, rule of law, market economies, things like that. And when the Soviet Union collapsed, we really thought that this was now our moment to make this a global system. We were going to spread democracy into eastern Europe-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:44:53 A New World Order as H. W. Bush called it.

Stephen Walt: 00:44:56 And by the way, I call it liberal hegemony, the hegemony parties. It is all going to be led by the United States.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:45:01 American Empire.

Stephen Walt: 00:45:03 Well, it's not empire in the sense of conquest. It was rather that we were going to spread our values everywhere where-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:45:09 But we were going to stay top dog.

Stephen Walt: 00:45:10 Absolutely.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:45:11 And we were going to make sure that no one else came close to thinking that they had a chance to challenge us.

Stephen Walt: 00:45:17 That's right.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:45:18 Which is what that full spectrum dominance idea was.

Stephen Walt: 00:45:20 That's right. But also, we were going to use all of this power, both military and economic and diplomatic and political to basically remake the world in America's image. Every country was going to be become a democracy. Every country would respect human rights.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:45:33 It was the end of history.

Stephen Walt: 00:45:34 That's right. So, two famous books of the 1990s from Frank Fukuyama's book, *The End of History in The Last Man* suggesting that there are no great ideological questions any longer. The world has converged on liberal democratic capitalism. That's the only mop. And if you also look at Tom Friedman's book, *Lexus in the Olive Tree*, same argument that there's basically one formula that works in a globalized world and it's the formula that the United States has been perfecting, market economies, rule of law, powerful political institutions, et cetera. Full engagement in the world, et cetera. And by the way, in Freedman's case he also talks about American military power underwriting, this whole globalized world.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:46:13 Where was Sam Huntington's clash of civilizations getting traction during that period? Was that for people that were taking a more negative view?

Stephen Walt: 00:46:21 Yes. And for people who are looking at some parts of the world where there were sort of conflicts that looked like what he was talking about, clashes in the Balkan states between Serbs and Croats and others. So, and a sense that the United States was at odds with say the Muslim world. And this looked like a clash of civilizations as well. But the '90s of course for this period of great optimism where we really think, democracy is spreading, markets are spreading, the US economy is doing well, Iran has

no nuclear enrichment capacity. Iraq is being disarmed. And the reason we adopt this very ambitious strategy of liberal hegemony, spreading American values, transforming the world, is we actually think it's going to be easy. History's moving in our direction, right?

Demetri Kofinas: 00:47:05 Everyone's on board.

Stephen Walt: 00:47:06 Everybody's on board and there's just a few pesky little dictators out there, the Gaddafi's, Saddam Hussein's of the world who haven't gotten the memo yet. But once they are out of power-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:47:16 Exactly, they hadn't gotten the memo.

Stephen Walt: 00:47:19 ... their time is numbered, and fortunately they're not very important. And we believe by the way, back in the 90s of course, that this is going to happen to China too. That we're going to engage with China. It's becoming part of the world economy and it's inevitably going to become wealthier. It'll have a middle class, that middle class will want political voice. It will become a democracy just like us. And that'll be great because you know democracies don't fight each other. So, we're going to-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:47:42 Which there's no evidence for whatsoever.

Stephen Walt: 00:47:44 No, there is evidence but it's not in controvertible evidence and we've never lived in a world that was all democratic, so we really don't know what that would be like. Anyways, that's the optimism of the 1990s that fuels this tremendous attempt to transform the world, I think rather gently under Clinton, NATO expansion, dual containment in the Persian Gulf democracy promotion in various parts of the world, much more energetically by the Bush administration and no most notably with the invasion of Iraq, which was-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:48:18 The first Bush or second administration.

Stephen Walt: 00:48:20 I'm talking about the second Bush administration, and what people often forget is that the invasion of Iraq was seen as step one, right? This was intended to transform the entire Middle East, solve the terrorism problem because once all these countries in the Middle East become democratic, there won't be any unhappy people and therefore there won't really be any terrorist that we have to worry about. And so, we're going to

take care of Saddam and then we're going to reload and go after Iran or-

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:48:45 Syria was on that list too.
- Stephen Walt:** 00:48:47 Syria was absolutely on that list as well. It was really a remarkable degree of Hubris that we had-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:48:53 Remarkable levels of ambition and nation building.
- Stephen Walt:** 00:48:56 Right. By the way, you get to the Obama administration and you think, well, Obama ran against this whole set of ideas, but in fact, Obama does many of the same things. He continues the war on terror. He expands the use of drones.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:49:09 He invades Libya.
- Stephen Walt:** 00:49:10 He invades Libya to promote democracy there. He tries to push Bashar al-Assad out in Syria. We are involved trying to topple Assad after the uprising there, and of course he continues doing nation building in Afghanistan. He sends more troops to Afghanistan in his first year in office. Not in my view because he thinks it's going to work, but because he thinks he cannot do it without seeming like he's going to be a weak foreign policy president. He gets pushed into doing this in my judgment.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:49:41 The politics and the optics and the Blob.
- Stephen Walt:** 00:49:43 Right.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:49:43 I want to go back a little bit. Just to focus on something and let it stew and then we can move forward. And that is again, the 90s. There are a lot of people who are now very successful members of the Economic Community who don't remember that period. You know, they're not old enough to really properly remember it, at least politically. I'm born in 1981, in 1990, 91 I remember the cover... That was about the first time I ever had any sort of political memory. I don't really remember the Reagan administration, but I do remember seeing a copy of Time magazine and seeing what I remember to be a soldier or a girl crying as her boyfriend, her husband was going off to war.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:50:25 There was a lot of fear that the Gulf War, one was going to be another Vietnam and Bush, was famously on television saying, "This is not another Vietnam..." I can't remember how you said it exactly, but to use a modern expression, we crushed it in Gulf War One. Huh? We exercised the demons of Vietnam and then

we went into this decade of the 1990s where we had a transformational technology, the Internet layer protocols. We had Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin laughing together on the White House lawn. Movies were coming out like Independence Day where the Russians and the Americans were working together to defeat the aliens that were invading from outer space. It was a transformational period. It's easy when you live through it to appreciate how Francis Fukuyama wrote The End of History, how everyone was so euphoric.

- Stephen Walt:** 00:51:14 Absolutely right.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:51:16 And it's, I think it makes it even more devastating when you see how that period turned. No one could have imagined. Very few cynical people could have imagined that we would have squandered that opportunity.
- Stephen Walt:** 00:51:30 Bill Clinton was incredibly lucky in the following sense that he did a lot of things as president, that the negative consequences came home to roost after he was president, so he didn't really get blamed.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:51:42 Like what examples?
- Stephen Walt:** 00:51:43 I'll give you several. First of all, he pursued pretty aggressive financial deregulation, right? Which then plays a role in the financial crisis of 2008.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:51:51 Right. Ending Glass-Steagall, for example, granddaughter.
- Stephen Walt:** 00:51:54 That's the most obvious examples of that. But the point is, it doesn't happen until long after he's president. So, he doesn't really get blamed for that. You adopted this policy in the Persian Gulf called Dual Containment. The United States was going to contain Iran and Iraq simultaneously. We committed ourselves to preventing either of those countries from causing any trouble, even though those two countries hated each other. Right? So, in a weird way, instead of letting them balance each other and staying out, we just said, "No, we're going to do both." But that requires us to keep a lot of military power nearby and we have to keep troops in Saudi Arabia in order to make dual containment credible. And of course, that becomes one of the reasons that Osama Bin Laden decides to attack the United States on September 11th, the presidents of those so-called Infidel Troops on Saudi Soil.

Stephen Walt: 00:52:41 But it happens after Clinton has left office as well. Third thing, NATO expansion. Clinton administration moves away from the policy that the Pentagon initially wanted. And by the way, my colleague Ash Carter was initially in favor of, which was called Partnership for Peace, a military cooperation arrangement with Eastern Europe that included Russia, that didn't exclude Russia. We instead opt for NATO expansion, which immediately begins-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:53:09 What drove that? What drove NATO expansion?

Stephen Walt: 00:53:11 I think it was idealism as much as anything else.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:53:13 Humans.

Stephen Walt: 00:53:13 Yeah. Well, it was idealism in the sense that we, first of all, a lot of your eastern European countries wanted in. We thought that by extending NATO membership we would help consolidate democracy in these countries. And I think we also believed that essentially membership in NATO was a check we would never have to honor. It was a check that would never get cashed because once you are in NATO, no one would ever attack you-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:53:37 Just like the expansion of the EU by the way. Same principle, the EU over-expanded in the same way that NATO over expanded.

Stephen Walt: 00:53:42 That's right. It would just keep solving. And so, people used phrases like, an open-ended zone of peace in Europe that would just keep extending eastward. And it would almost be like oil on troubled waters everywhere NATO went would become tranquil. And of course, the consequences of that came home to roost in 2008 with the war with Georgia and Russia. And then with the whole conflict in Ukraine when finally, Russia said no far enough, you're not going any further eastward because the United States was in fact pushing to bring Ukraine and Georgia into NATO as well.

Stephen Walt: 00:54:18 My point is, these are three things that happened in the Clinton administration in that wonderful unipolar moment where we thought we could do anything and that it would be easy and cheap and had no real risks involved and Clinton got lucky. The consequences were visited upon some of his successors, not upon Clinton himself.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:54:37 It is fascinating to understand and reflect on this because I mentioned the EU. You had these institutions. The EU was of course originally formed as the European Coal and Steel Community I think in... Was it 1956? '57?

Stephen Walt: 00:54:50 Yeah. '55, '56.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:54:51 I can't remember exactly when it was, but it was the European Coal and Steel Community was meant to check German aggression. It was meant to create a union of the European Coal and Steel Economies in the Rhineland and eventually after the Cold War was over, these institutions like the European Union, the European Monetary Union, the European Community, NATO, these basically almost lost their compass, right? We didn't have the Cold War. We didn't have the Soviet Union anymore. What was really the purpose of NATO if there was no Soviet Union and it just become a makeshift costume for American hegemony?

Stephen Walt: 00:55:29 I don't think so. Although, there's an element of that, until we began to try, and figure out a new role for NATO, and it was intriguing. The United States liked NATO because as you suggested, it was a tool of American influence in Europe. It encouraged Europeans actually to remain relatively militarily weak, which is something the United States, I think probably secretly thought was good. Because if they're relatively weak, they're not going to stop us from doing anything and we'll be able to push them around where necessary.

Stephen Walt: 00:55:57 The United States has always been a little bit ambivalent. We sort of liked the Europeans to do more to defend themselves, but we're worried they might do too much. It's also worth noting that in the 90s in particular, a lot of Europeans were worried that the United States would come home, would in fact say, "Okay, we're done. Cold War is over. No Soviet threat anymore. Your folks are on your own. You're wealthy, you're prosperous, you're democratic. You've got the EU, which is linked your countries together with a set of institutions as well. We think you're in good shape, job well done, US."

Stephen Walt: 00:56:26 And Europeans were worried we would do that and that it would allow nationalism to come back in Europe in various ways. Funny, it was Europeans actually almost suggesting and they needed the United States there to keep the lid on things, to keep things quiet-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:56:41 And keep the scorpions in the bottle.

Stephen Walt: 00:56:42 Yeah, something like that. Exactly. Right, and that is, by the way, not a completely foolish argument. I don't think it-

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:56:48 Well, that goes back though... That brings us all the way back to how the US got to World War II. Right? They were sitting by hoping that there wasn't going to be a scorpion that was going to get out of the bottle. Right?
- Stephen Walt:** 00:56:58 Or if there was a scorpion that the other animals around would be able to deal with it and the great shock, if you want to go into history here, the great shock of course is when Germany defeats Britain and France and the battle of the low countries in 1940, the real beginning of the major part. And there's been already the war in Poland where Poland has been divided up between Germany and Russia, but now Hitler goes west and people believe that's going to be a replay of World War I. It's going to be a long, costly, bitter fight and instead France collapses in basically six weeks. The British flee at Dunkirk, and this is a shock to everyone. It's a shock in Washington. Oh my God, Germany could win this whole thing, could dominate all of Europe.
- Stephen Walt:** 00:57:43 It's a shock to Stalin who thinks it's great when Hitler heads West away from Russia, right? And now he suddenly realized that Hitler's won easily, he's very powerful and he knows where Hitler might be coming next. He might be coming back east, which is exactly what happens as well. So, people are worried, now fast forward to the 1990s they're worried that yes, if the United States removes itself from Europe militarily that you might get a replay of the 1930s. I think that's an illusory because I think the Europe of today is very different than the Europe that we had in the 1920s and 1930s. You don't have any country that could potentially dominate it militarily. None of them are strong enough to do that. Now you do have the functional parts of the European Union as well, and I'm not as worried about the Russian dominance as some people.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:58:39 Interesting. I was going to say that's the primary concern. The primary concern is Russian influence or alignment with certain populous far right parties in Europe, ironically far right parties. Right?
- Stephen Walt:** 00:58:50 Yeah. It's quite ironic. I mean, I do think the resurgent nationalism we see here in the United States in the form of populism and Trump and things like that, and what you see in various parts of Europe is all part of a similar set of phenomena. But the question is whether, or not, sort of an American military commitment to NATO is the solution to that set of problems. I'm not as worried about Russian military domination, because I think Europe, western Europe or the European members of NATO have the wherewithal to protect themselves against

Russia if they choose to. And I don't think its American's job to protect them if they choose not to.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:59:27 So to bring it back to the 2000's and this point about we had the euphoria of the nineties really the best time, the greatest decade of the postwar history, arguably. And then you had the very early 2000's. It's understandable how that euphoria existed in the 90s. It's still hard for me to understand how on earth the Bush administration managed to take us to war with Iraq. Most people may not remember this, but there were many people in the United States, 2002 and 2003 who didn't actually believe we're going to go to war. I wasn't sure about it. I mean I was taking a foreign policy class, had a great professor at NYU. His name was David Denoon. That was how I first learned about US foreign policy and he was laying out the case for why going to Iraq will be a catastrophe.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:00:12 This was the fall of 2002, this was before actually, so it was the semester before the invasion of Iraq in March and he was talking about how we're going to fracture the country. The Kurds are going to go off on their own. The Sunni's and the Shias are going to duke it out. There's going to be a civil war. It's going to completely destabilize the Middle East. It's going to be a quagmire, a catastrophe. He wasn't the only one that was saying it and so are our allies. Our allies were saying the same thing. France was actively campaigning against it. Sharrock was against it and yet the Bush administration managed to align itself with Tony Blair's UK and put together a coalition of the willing and invade Iraq and I remember when it did happen, I remember first of all that it felt like a tremendous amount of energy was contrived in order to make it happen.

Stephen Walt: 01:01:06 Well, I mean you and I see this one similarly. I thought the war was a terrible idea of what I first started to emerge as proposal series of possibility and I wrote a couple of articles explaining why it was a bad idea and helped organize an ad that appeared in New York Times where 33 international security scholars published an ad in September of 2002, quarter page ad on the Op-ed page with the headline war with Iraq is not in the US national interest. And we then laid out a set of bullet points about why it was a bad idea, which again if you go back and look at those bullet points, I'm sorry to say they were surprisingly accurate-

Demetri Kofinas: 01:01:42 I'm very sorry.

Stephen Walt: 01:01:42 ... about what was going to happen and how we were going to find it almost impossible to get out and also very, very difficult

to win. And now looking back in it, I do share your sense that you know, we were somewhat delusional here. We convinced ourselves of a whole series of things that should not have stood up to even a modest-

- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:02:01 But even public opinion was what? 60%? It wasn't like invading of Afghanistan. It wasn't like the war on terror.
- Stephen Walt:** 01:02:07 No, by the time the war happened, public opinion had swung around in favor of it and I think that tells you a number of things. First of all, it does show you the latitude that presidents have to conduct foreign to use force when necessary. It also shows you all of the tools that they have to manipulate public opinion.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:02:26 That they were drumming up support by scaring the shit out of the public. Condoleezza Rice famously said that we don't want to be the... What was it?
- Stephen Walt:** 01:02:34 The smoking gun could be a mushroom cloud. Oh, there was a quite deliberate and conscious campaign by the Bush administration to convince the American people why this was going to be necessary and why it was going to be cheap and easy to do. It was partly the WMD businesses. Saddam Hussein has weapons of mass destruction. That infamous briefing that Colin Powell gave to the UN Security Council-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:02:56 That destroyed his political career.
- Stephen Walt:** 01:02:57 That destroyed his reputation in many respects, and deservedly so it seems to me, but also there was this campaign of course, to link Saddam Hussein to Osama Bin Laden, even though they were-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:03:09 Completely incredible.
- Stephen Walt:** 01:03:10 Exactly, and the point is that if you repeat the same set of lies often enough, enough people are eventually going to believe them.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:03:18 And Fox News was instrumental during this period in driving public support.
- Stephen Walt:** 01:03:21 And again, remember that average ordinary people do not have access to intelligence information. They can't get on a plane, go to Baghdad, drive around and say, "Hmm, do I think what I'm being told really fits with what I see here around me?" They

have to take what they read in the newspapers, what they see on television, what the public officials are telling them and if the public officials decide they want to deliberately deceive the American people in order to justify a policy, they're in many cases going to be able to get away with it.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:03:55

I remember the Intifada was also happening. The Palestinian Intifada had started shortly after 9/11 or right before 9/11 and the youth organizations in the United States, we're using that footage constantly to draw of anxieties about terrorism.

Stephen Walt: 01:04:07

So in a sense, on the one hand we can understand how the Bush administration was able to sell this particular war. What's, to me, still a little bit baffling is why some relatively smart, well educated people convinced themselves that it was going to work. Because I don't think the Bush administration, if they'd known what they were getting into, George Bush would never have gone to war in Iraq if he'd known what he was going to lead. And finally, and this is against a theme that I mentioned in the book, what's even more striking is although there were some skepticism outside Washington and in academic circles in places in direct opposition, in the case of a few of us, most of the inside the Beltway foreign policy organizations were either silent or in favor of the war.

Stephen Walt: 01:04:53

Foreign policy people at the Brookings Institution at the American Enterprise Institute at the Carnegie Endowment at a lot of the major sort of intellectual centers inside Washington at the council on foreign relations were strongly in favor of the war. You did not hear voices coming out opposed to it. I think in some cases it's because they had kind of drunk the cooler. They'd bought a set of these arguments. I think it was also that people could not believe that the United States could lose something like this, and very importantly, we haven't mentioned this yet. The initial phase of the Afghan war was actually critical here.

Stephen Walt: 01:05:29

United States is attacked on September 11th, we asked the Taliban to give up Osama Bin Laden. The Taliban refused and we go in mostly with special forces and other people align with a bunch of Afghan warlords than so-called Northern Alliance and we route the Taliban in a couple of months, right? Now, remember before that war, lots of people were saying, "Wait a second, Afghanistan graveyard of empires don't go there, bad for the British. Bad for the-

Demetri Kofinas: 01:05:56

Zbigniew Brzezinski and Jimmy Carter, it was a quagmire for the Soviets.

Stephen Walt: 01:05:59 Exactly. We don't want to go there. And those voices looked silly when the Taliban were routed so quickly and therefore when now the Bush administration is talking about going into Iraq, how do you argue that we not going to be able to stop Saddam? We beat him easily once in 1990, '91, he's weaker now in 2003 for a variety of different reasons. So, this is going to be a cakewalk and of course people like me who oppose the war understood that, that militarily removing him from power was not going to be difficult.

Stephen Walt: 01:06:34 The problem in Iraq as it was also in Afghanistan is not our ability to remove regime from power. It's what you do afterwards. It's how do you recreate an effective set of political institutions in either of those places and that we were clueless on and remain clueless on to this day. Because foreign powers, particularly occupying military powers, are rarely good at creating political institutions for societies they don't understand. And that's what we were committing ourselves to do. That's what the Bush administration didn't realize.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:07:09 And you know, one of the most just ridiculous, unfortunate, disappointing outcomes, one of many of the failure in Iraq was the way in which many neoconservatives in particular justified the failure to themselves by saying, "Well, this was the problem with the Coalition Provisional Authority was the disbanding the Iraqi army. This was the fundamental mistake. We didn't manage the occupation well, we could have done it better. This was the problem. We didn't have a plan."

Stephen Walt: 01:07:35 Right? And my view-

Demetri Kofinas: 01:07:37 Which shows more humanity.

Stephen Walt: 01:07:38 Yeah. And my view is you run this experiment 20 times and you fail 19 out of 20 you might somehow get lucky. But the central problem is, remember when you topple the regime, and this we saw this in Libya as well. When you topple a government, even an awful government, a despotic, horrific tyrannical regime at still a regime that has a set of institutions that work, they don't work well, they're not fair, they're not just, there is nothing admirable about them, but they are the way in which that society is organized and run. You remove that set of institutions. Now you have no rules at all, and they're going to be some winners from that process, and they're going to be a lot of losers from that process.

Stephen Walt: 01:08:17 The people who used to be in good shape and the losers are not going to be very happy about it. And if they're in a position at all

to resist, if they're in a position to try, and regain their former positions of prominence and power, they're going to do it. So, in almost all circumstances, you're likely to face a violent opposition to what you just did, right? And unless you're willing to blanket the place with more troops than we actually had, and then stay there forever, you're not going to be able to guide the politics of the place after you've toppled the regime. It was delusional for us to think that you could take a bunch of Americans and put them in Afghanistan or put them in Iraq or put them in Libya and they could run the place. You know, I sometimes like to say as soon as we figure out how to run the state of Illinois, or for that matter New York City really, really well, then we can go off to Anbar Province or Kandahar province and we'll figure out how to run them.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:09:16 We couldn't handle New Orleans after Katrina. Right?
- Stephen Walt:** 01:09:18 Right.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:09:19 I mean this was the great irony. The Bush administration, which invaded Iraq, couldn't solve a natural disaster in our own state, in one of our oldest, most beautiful cities. Right?
- Stephen Walt:** 01:09:30 Yeah. And remember this gets back to our part of... What the United States was committed to doing was in fact a vast project of social engineering even in the Clinton years, right? This idea of spreading democracy all over the world that you're doing social engineering, you're changing the systems of governments in lots of different places, including places you don't know very well., you don't understand particularly well and that's going to have lots of interesting and unintended consequences that you can't necessarily anticipate in advance.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:09:59 Professor Walt, I want to take us to the overtime where we can discuss some of the more contemporary features and landscapes of foreign policy because you hear our current president. So, for regular listeners, you know the drill for new listeners, you can gain access to our overtime segment as well as a transcript of today's conversation as well as a copy of this week's rundown, which has always just full of interesting pictures, links and here I have a picture of Ronald Reagan/Han Solo in Star Wars and you can get an access to all of that on our Patreon page at patreon.com/hiddenforces. So, Professor Walt, thank you so much for being on Hidden Forces.
- Stephen Walt:** 01:10:43 Thanks for having me.

Demetri Kofinas:

01:10:44

And that was my episode with Stephen Walt. I want to thank Dr. Walter for being on my program. Today's episode of hidden forces was recorded at Creative Media Design Studio in New York City. For more information about this week's episode, or if you want easy access to related programming, visit our website at hiddenforces.io and subscribe to our free email list. If you want access to overtime segments, episode transcripts, and show rundowns full of links and detailed information related to each and every episode, check out our premium subscription available through the Hidden Forces website or through our Patreon page at patreon.com/hiddenforces. Today's episode was produced by me and edited by Stylianos Nicolaou. For more episodes, you can check out our website at hiddenforces.io. Join the conversation at Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram @hiddenforcespod, or send me an email. As always, thanks for listening. We'll see you next week.