

The US and Global Security in an Evolving Non-Polar and Multipolar Order

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The Stanley Foundation

February 19, 2009

Delivered at College at Florham Library

Mr. Kraig started his lecture by reminding his audience about how the United States foreign policy has changed little since the days of the Cold War. This attitude has persisted in spite of the fact that the “evils” the U.S. faces today are not the Japanese Empire or the Third Reich of World War II, nor the U.S.S.R. and its Eastern European "Iron Curtain" satellites, or even Red China from the aforementioned Cold War. Nations like Iran and Syria have replaced these former enemies of the United States, and it is these outwardly-hostile Islamic countries, along with an old foil: North Korea, that keep us awake at night.

As Mr. Kraig so aptly put it, after WWII, the U.S. was given the keys to the world. This seems to have spurred the expansion of our nuclear arsenal. Whether there was a Ronald Reagan or a John F. Kennedy in the White House, the nuclear buildup was consistent and deliberate. This basically sent a clear message to our enemies: no matter what you come up with, we will always have more firepower than you, and we are prepared to defend ourselves against any aggressor.

Today the United States does not appear as invincible in the eyes of the rest of the nations that occupy this planet. And while we are busy fighting our own demons, which are proving to be more challenging than any other adversary we have faced, a rather heterogeneous group of nations is quietly rising as mid-range powers today. Two of these emerging powers have already become household names for the average American family: China and India. Other countries that Mr. Kraig places in this category are Turkey, Brazil, Malaysia, South Korea, Chile, South Africa, Indonesia, Canada and the Scandinavian countries. These nations possess the precious commodities of a large population as well as a bountiful supply of natural resources in some cases. What sets these nations apart from every other country in the world, however, and diametrically opposite from the United States, is that they approach international relations and conflict resolution quite differently. Kraig alludes to the fact that these nations want peace in the global community while creating their own voice, as they are not mere followers anymore, but rather significant players in international politics. In spite of the varied assortment of domestic problems these emerging powers might have, they are taking a direction that has nothing to do with the way the United States has previously dealt with its enemies. We are entering a new era, an era that Kraig refers to as a “Loose Network of Interactions,” where decisions fall not on one state but on several and where everybody cooperates. Although there are many positive aspects to these up-and-coming powers, Kraig also labels them "opportunistic." Just as we Americans did when we were given the keys to the world, these rising stars are "seizing the moment."

On the home front, Mr. Kraig also advocated for a better approach to National Security, which he suggests should start with the elimination of the paranoia that the U.S. often feels towards its perceived enemies. Our "Americanism" has to be redefined as we become more sensitive and sensitized towards other cultures and peoples. We have to behave differently with our neighbors and friends. And when we confront our enemies, we should do so as equals, and not act as if we were their parents, an approach that has defined our position before the world for the better part of the last 100 years. The United States is neither an elephant nor a flea on the world stage in the first decade of the 21st century, but perhaps more like a cheetah. Mr. Kraig praises both China and India, for example, on their efforts as peace ambassadors of the world- a role the United States has consistently played for more than a century now, but never without carrying our ubiquitous big stick. According to Mr. Kraig, there is no

room for this centenarian policy that dates back to Theodore Roosevelt anymore, and for the sake of our own survival, we need to change our ways.

Although Michael Kraig's lecture was an eye-opener for our students as well as for many others who attended the lecture, I for one was a bit disappointed with how little was mentioned about the relationship between the United States and its Latin American neighbors. In the 19th century, the Mexican-American War and the Spanish-American War were instrumental in the United States becoming a rising superpower. In large part because of the U.S. historically acting as a "bully" in the region is the reason why we do not have widespread trust from all of our neighboring states located South of the Border. And while Mr. Kraig does include Brazil and Chile as two of the emerging powers, he also claimed that Mexico's growth has reached its peak. In the meantime, however, he considers Canada as a middle power and places it among the rising nations. Mexico, who along with Canada and the United States is part of NAFTA, cannot be dismissed as an emerging power, given its healthy population and abundant natural resources, such as oil, which we need. Cuba is yet another country very close to the U.S. (geographically, that is). This island nation may not be an emerging power, but it has nonetheless remained the one country in the region that has not dealt with the American way of doing politics for the past fifty years. As Mr. Kraig indicated, communism was an attempt to break away from "business as usual," and Fidel Castro simply refused to give in to the old way of doing business with the U.S. With all its belligerence and by paying a very high price, Cuba has defied the United States and lived to tell about it, even if living conditions on the island have steadily deteriorated since it broke away from the U.S.' sphere.

In essence, Michael Kraig's ideas tapped into an unknown future plagued by a rapidly decaying global economy from which nobody seems to escape, and at a point where most Americans feel insecure about our future. It is evident that globalization has changed our lives permanently, and although the United States stayed on top alone for several decades, even more so after the disintegration of the former USSR, we must realize that we now have company, and that our guests are here to stay.

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