

the time, it looked like the Afghans were very willing to give up Osama Bin Laden. According to Milton Bearden, the CIA station chief in Pakistan, the Afghans were desperate to give up Bin Laden, the al-Qaeda leadership. The US had a series of meetings with the Afghan leaders, the Taliban, to discuss giving up Bin Laden, and Afghans just wanted to do it in a way that would save face, like giving him to the Islamic Council, rather than just to the United States. But the United States could not even hear or understand what they were calling for. So the US invades and initially overthrows the Taliban. That was the easy part.

But they did not get Bin Laden, who escaped through the mountains. Then the United States mission starts to change to nation building which turned out to be a disaster. However, in the aftermath of the invasion, all of the Neocons came out of the woodwork, and started to talk openly about American Empire. Whereas before that they would never admit such a thing as the American Empire, now they talk about nothing but American Empire, and they're all coming out, to the point where on January 5, 2003, the New York Times Sunday magazine cover for January 5, 2003, read, "American Empire: Get Used To It."

At that point, Krauthammer comes out with a new article saying that he underestimated American strength in 1990, when he talked about 'Unipolar Moment', adding that this is actually 'the Unipolar Era' which could last indefinitely in the future, for hundreds of years. Well, that's in 2000 to 2003, when the United States invades Iraq. The situation, however, very quickly turns to chaotic and it was clear that the United States had not planned anything for it: Whoever they put in charge didn't know what they were doing.



Timothy A. Clary (AFP)

Powell addressed the UN in New York on February 5, 2003, to make the world believe Saddam was running a biological weapons program.

■ ■ Then Iraq becomes a quicksand of sorts!

Right! The situation unravels quickly. The head of the Arab League soon says something like "all hell has broken loose in Iraq." It becomes a magnet for Jihadists from all over the planet as they all fled into Iraq to combat the great Satan, the United States. By 2006, even Charles Krauthammer admits that the Unipolar Era is over and the Unipolar Moment is coming to an end. So the United States have been greatly weakened by this. Not only that, but it cost \$6 trillion.

■ ■ Some new sets of questions have been surely raised, then.

Of course. It depends on how we're going to deal with this new era: Are we going to deal with it wisely

in terms of realizing that this is a multipolar world, that there are other countries with their own definition of security and their own economic and political interest? Or are we going to allow this to be a kind of struggle that's already developing?

■ ■ So, my impression is that we should talk about the demise of the US Empire, the funeral process, and the grieving, right?

I don't think it's going to happen that easily because the United States is not going to give up the control that it exerts. The United States has an empire of some 800 bases spread out over the world. The United States has the ability to end life on the planet by itself. Even if a small fraction of current nuclear bombs is used in a military confrontation, we as a species would cease to exist.

■ ■ You said that Americans were reluctant to admit that the United States was an empire. Why being so shy after all those things the American government has done over the years?

Americans don't like to think of themselves in that way. It is the heart of American exceptionalism. From the time Americans are old enough to watch television and go to school, they're taught that the United States is unique in the world, that all other countries are motivated by greed, territorial acquisition, geopolitical domination, but that the United States is different, because it only wants to spread freedom and democracy, that the United States, you know, believes in doing good in the world, that the United States is unlike all other countries in that way. It's an absurd idea.

■ ■ And there is a history to it.

It goes back to 1630, in Massachusetts Bay, when the Puritan founders said, "We will be as a city upon a hill, we will set the moral standard for the rest of humanity." Americans believed that, and it was not even really questioned until Vietnam. So for almost 30 years after World War Two, it was a 'good guy vs. bad guy' Manichaeic world: The United States represented everything that was good in the world, freedom, democracy, prosperity; and the Soviets represented everything that was evil in the world, dictatorship, repression, cruelty, anti-religion sentiments. So that was the way Americans were brought up and taught to think. You know, I was part of that generation that was inoculated with those views.

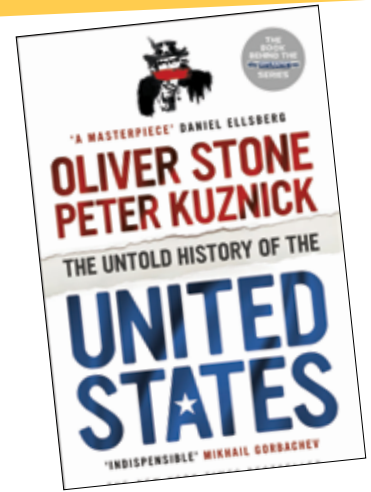
■ ■ What changed your views?



Bettmann Archive (Getty)

Anti-Vietnam War protestors march on Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, D.C., November 27, 1965.

Vietnam opened a lot of our eyes, then we began to study history of American foreign policy, and trace it back to the 1890s when the United States started to become a global empire. That's how we realized that the history is very, very different. So the United States does not want to think of itself as an empire. However, it was right to that point that all these neo-conservatives started to come up with these grandiose fantasies. Wesley Clark, for example, said that we've got plans after we finish in Afghanistan, to take over Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Sudan. That was the Neo con fantasy that was going to be played out. However, the world did not play according to America's wishes, fantasies, and rules. And so, in March of 2021 when the two Chinese foreign policy officials meet with Blinken and Sullivan in Anchorage, and Blinken



starts off with a 2.5-minute critique of China's policies, the Chinese come back with a 16.5-minute diatribe against the US, effectively saying that "you can't talk to us from a position of strength and moral superiority anymore, look at what you've done all over the world." This is the way the United States had not been talked to, but things that are changing at this point.

■ ■ In regards to the rise of the Big Tech companies in the United States, some scholars argue that they represent a new version, or maybe an extension, of American Empire.

Well, the American Empire has always been closely aligned with American corporations. It was Eisenhower who, in his farewell address, talked about 'the military-industrial complex'. The bankers and the corporations have always exerted an outsized influence in American foreign policy determinations. This is laid out very, very clearly in a secret memo that George Kennan, the architect of the Cold War, wrote back in 1948, in which he said "the United States has 6.3% of the world's population, but it controls more than 50% of the world's wealth. So we cannot avoid being the object of hostility from the rest of the world, but the challenge before us is to maintain that position of disparity." His solution? "We can do so through idealistic slogans and talk about freedom and democracy." That's what really defined the US: When we talk about the pursuit of democracy, but our goal is to maintain its position of economic hegemony. And if we look at the role the corporations play now, well, I think America's defense contractors are America's oligarchs and kleptocrats. Between World War I and World War II, military munitions manufacturers were known as the merchants of death. That's what we should call them again. These people benefit from wars, death, bombs, and drones. These are the lowest of the low on the planet, in many ways. That's the situation we face: The corporations which have a lot of influence in the United States, being able to exert a lot of pressure on American politics, lawmaking, lobbying on policy decisions, mostly behind the scenes and not talked about very much. We used to talk about them as 'the establishment'. But whatever name you want to give them, these people are 'the national security state'. And they think in terms of military solutions to problems that have no military solution.

■ ■ What's the problem and the solution, then?

On a global scale, we have serious problems. One is that we need to eliminate nuclear weapons because they pose a major existential threat to the planet. Secondly, we've got to deal with the climate crisis, the global warming which poses a long term existential threat. Thirdly, we've got to deal with pandemics which pose a threat to people all over the world. Fourth, we've got to deal with the gap between rich and poor. And fifth, we've got to deal with all these hotspots that threaten new wars across the planet. Therefore, we need to have real, serious, balanced, global, peaceful, green development. And that's got to include the United States. It's got to include Iran. And we've got to see our common interests as a human species take precedence over the narrow, parochial, sovereign, nationalistic interests that dominate the planet now.