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Generation's End: A Personal Memoir of American Power after 9/11

Dawn Calabia: While we're waiting to get started I thought we could go around the table and introduce ourselves; I'm Dawn Calabia, Treasurer of the Women's Foreign Policy Group, and I'm delighted you could all be with us today, and we have a special friend of ours, Scott Malcomson. Many of you have seen his book or seen it reviewed at least, in *The New York Times* as I recall. I work in the daytime at Refugees International and I'm delighted you could be here. And of course we have Patricia Ellis.

Patricia Ellis: Thank you, I'm Patricia Ellis, President of the Women's Foreign Policy Group, and we're celebrating our 15th anniversary, so we're very happy to have Scott here to celebrate with us. [*Introductions continue around the room.*]

Ms. Calabia: Well thank you all so much, we're delighted you could be with us this afternoon. Scott, as you know from the program flyer, is somebody who has combined a long career in journalism, working at *The New York Times*, publishing numerous articles, writing several books, who also decided at one point in his career to take a leap of faith and go to work for the United Nations—a portion of his book I found very interesting because that's when I got to know Scott, when he was working at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights with Sergio Vieira de Mello and Jonathon Prentice, a trio you would never forget if you met them on the right day, or any day actually. [*Laughter.*] I think one of the wonderful things of having somebody like Scott coming today to talk to us and actually taking the time to write a book like this is—we certainly lived through a very turbulent last ten years, with so much of our lives impacted by what happened on 9/11, which is of course where his book starts, and the United States not even sure what the long-term implications of the changes in policies and programs and approaches that we undertook as a nation, led by obviously by a president who thought we needed to go to war in two places and then hoped that we would get out very quickly—something which unfortunately has not happened. Now I'm going to turn to Scott and ask him to tell us about why he did the book and what kinds of lessons he takes from the past ten years that could help all of us who work in international issues.

Scott Malcomson: It's a tall order and I'm going to do my best with Dawn's help. It's a little intimidating being next to her because I feel like she'll have better answers to some of your questions than I will, but I'm here to answer them. We had a good time, a good brief time together.

The book I started, as Dawn said, I really started on 9/11. It starts on 9/11 on that morning and that's pretty much when I started writing it. I initially found out what was happening, I was at home in Brooklyn and I got a phone call from my father-in-law saying that some planes had hit the World Trade Center towers. And I then went down and picked up my dry cleaning [*Laughter.*], came home, got dressed, and went out into the streets because by then I had gotten another call saying that the subway wasn't running and so I walked through downtown Brooklyn, which was already filling up with ashes and got to the Brooklyn Bridge and started walking across. I stopped to pick up a notebook and a pen and walked across the bridge which was closed except for the walkway which was filled with people walking from Manhattan into Brooklyn, thousands and thousands of them, with whatever they grabbed up out of their offices, all of them covered in dust. When I was about halfway across I saw, along with everybody else, the second of the two towers fall. We all turned around and then everybody continued walking into Brooklyn. I had a somewhat exalted idea of my importance editing op-eds at *The New York Times* foreign affairs op-eds, and so I decided I needed to get into the office. So I kept walking into Manhattan, deeper into this cloud. There were very few people walking in to Manhattan and almost all of them had pistols on their belts, except for me and one person I'll never forget who had obviously started out that morning to do his regular jog across the bridge and there he was going into this cloud of ash with his headphones on, jogging.

I got into town and eventually made my way up to the Village and up into Midtown, coughing a lot of the way because of all of the smoke and ash. When I got into the office, I had to sit down and start making sense of what had happened an hour beforehand, which was an event that didn't seem possible to make sense of. But that was my job, and even in those first few hours it seemed to me paradoxical and a little bizarre and potentially schizophrenic that I had to on the one hand live as a human being in a city that had been attacked where these things were happening—I happened to live across the street from a firehouse and the truck had gone out immediately when the call went out that morning. Most of the trucks anywhere near Manhattan all came into town. A couple days later the truck came back but all of the guys had been killed except one guy, Tommy, who had stayed with the truck and had just been injured. I talk in the book and I tell the story about those guys and what happened to them.

On the one hand, what I try and narrate in the book is this very personal story of what it's like to experience that and maybe some of you were in New York and I'm sure some of you were in Washington. The other story has to do with the significance of events, the attempt to make foreign policy sense of what had happened and to come up with sensible foreign policy reactions. My experience then and partly the reason I wanted to recreate it was that these two things, while they overlap, are not really commensurate. A lot of the foreign policy solutions or reactions tended in my view to be based on very strong emotional reactions which nonetheless were not things people could really talk about. They lacked the means to talk about them. I found in talking about my book and presenting it to different groups or reading from it—and I also hear from readers—that even at the level I'm writing about it in the book, it's actually very hard to

read again and you would think after nine years we would be able to integrate these sorts of very intimate horrors into our lives and move on and maybe we will at some point. I hope the book will help that process. But what struck me at the time and even strikes me still is the degree to which the emotions are actually quite raw. I think the controversy over the mosque at Ground Zero is partly an indicator of that. There's a kind of post traumatic stress syndrome or something to explain why after nine years people should react so viscerally, and in many cases so irrationally.

The story of the book proceeds onward from that period. It gets a bit less emotionally intense after I've talked about the first six or eight weeks after 9/11 and it starts to move into something slightly cooler. The next major turning point in the story for me is when I start deciding to leave *The Times* and quit editing foreign affairs op-eds. After about nine months I felt like I had gone through every single possible response and analysis of 9/11 and I was getting kind of tired of it. Also it was clear by that point that regardless of what sorts of arguments people got into on op-ed pages or elsewhere, the Bush Administration had made its own determination what the actual story was and what they were going to do about it and there was no real way to affect it. This is something again I describe in some detail in the book because it was a kind of presidential imperial—I don't mean imperial in the imperialist sense, but emperor is really what I mean—moment that I think we as Americans just need to remember just how much decision-making power and executive power Congress and the rest of us including the media just gave over to the president. I'm hoping we don't do that again but I think it's something that's beginning to be forgotten just how much as a country we allowed the president to determine the entirety of our policy. For me personally the big turning point was when Brent Scowcroft sent an op-ed into *The Wall Street Journal* saying that President Bush should not go to war in Iraq. I personally did not think President Bush should go to war in Iraq and I would be happy to explain why. I explain in the book. I wanted to do something similar. I ran after James Baker and eventually got him to make an argument more or less against war in Iraq. Once that was done and neither of these op-eds seemed to make the slightest impact on the president and the rush towards war, I decided to move on from editing op-eds.

At that time, Sergio Vieira de Mello had become High Commissioner for Human Rights and people I knew at the UN approached me to see if I might be interested in working with him. I didn't know anything about him, but I learned very quickly. He was an exceptionally charismatic person, very practically oriented. He combined an intense practical orientation and an intense antipathy towards what he very frequently called bullshit with a real deep sense of idealism about internationalism and international machinery and all the kind of idealism that goes along with the UN. I had a little more trouble combining those things, but then he had spent his entire career in the UN and I was just beginning to work there. So the second half of the book is about working with him and trying to, initially, trying to I was trying to get away from this sort of 9/11 head. I moved to Switzerland. I was tired of feeling just so sad when I'd look at the skyline. I was tired of the fear. I was tired of the anger. I was really tired of all of it. And I hoped to get away from it. And I also hoped to get to a place where I wouldn't have to be constantly thinking about the role of American power in the world because at that point it was all sort of spinning around in a not very interesting and quite harmful way. However, it was not to be. As we all know, American power is an inevitable part of world politics and world life and world culture

and that's just the way it is and there is no internationalist world that exists independently of it as anybody at the UN will tell you.

Then it turned out that Sergio was of interest to the Bush Administration. I met Dawn when she set up the series of meetings we had with the president and [Secretary] Rice and others here in Washington about a week or ten days before war began in Iraq in the beginning of 2003, March of 2003. That turned out, I didn't know it, but that turned out to be something of an audition. However, it actually worked out. When the war had begun and seemed to issue in a quick and satisfying victory for the United States and its few allies, they wanted to have a special representative of the Secretary General go to Baghdad to represent the UN. Sergio didn't want to go, but he was convinced to go and he was a good soldier, and so he went off and was there for close to four months—which was as long as he was supposed to be there was four months, he was there for I think just over three and we worked together at that time. I was in Switzerland on a number of different programs within Iraq, mainly aimed at ending the occupation as soon as possible and successfully internationalizing in a sense the occupation and bringing self determination back to Iraq. He was killed on August 19, 2003, along with 19 other people at the headquarters. Many more were wounded. The UN's role, while it didn't quite end, essentially ended at that point in Iraq.

The possibility of the Bush Administration's reaction both in Afghanistan and Iraq being integrated into some sort of international narrative that was coherent, that made sense to somebody who wasn't American, essentially—in my view—evaporated in August of 2003. The US was stuck with Iraq and stuck with Afghanistan and it's basically American actions, which they could continue or end as the case may be, but no significant portion of the rest of the world was going to go along with the United States. So in that sense I think that the distance between August 2003 and today is not all that great. I'm not exactly an optimist with Afghanistan or Iraq. I think essentially what we're doing is withdrawing which could have been done at any number of points but it happens that we're withdrawing now. So I think in many ways the story did end in 2003.

As far as the present goes, I was quite optimistic when President Obama was elected. I didn't know a lot about him. The combination of the international financial crisis and the election of Obama struck me as actually a good thing, in that the financial crisis, as you'll recall, was one of those rare moments that brought out a genuine if not slightly desperate multilateralism on the part of the waning Bush Administration and an embrace of the idea of the Group of 20. The UN of course was sort of missing in action during the financial crisis, but this Group of 20 organization struck me as a pretty good idea and it was something that the Obama Administration took over with a fair amount of enthusiasm from the Bush Administration. I think it did help greatly in minimizing the damage of the financial crisis. I could cite a number of points of Obama Administration rhetoric as well but I don't probably need to to this particular group. I do think that there is a moment for multilateralist renewal and American leadership for that. There seems to be interest and enthusiasm within this administration to do that. I don't think there are many forces, if any, within the United States that are actually against it, at least not articulate forces. At the same time, it's a very peculiar moment in world affairs and America's position in world affairs because on the one hand there seems to be a broad acceptance within the foreign affairs world that we're at a point when American leadership needs to necessarily

decrease somewhat, or American power needs to decrease somewhat, the power of the famous BRICs [Brazil, Russia, India, and China], or the so called emerging nations, needs to be integrated into new international structures or renewed existing international structures. However, as far as I can tell, and I'm hoping to be contradicted, there is not much progress on any of those fronts and I don't think there's a great deal of leadership really from this administration or even much less so from any of the European countries or elsewhere. That's kind of the paradoxical position that I feel like we're in right now. I'll leave it at that and hear from Dawn to do questions. Dawn disagrees with everything I said. [Laughter.]

Ms. Calabia: No, no I don't. One of the things you did in the book was talk about becoming aware of a Europeaness, which you probably never experienced in the United States, which I think a lot of the people who join the UN experience. I thought it was interesting how you tried to cope with it. Would you want to share that?

Mr. Malcomson: Well on the one hand, it was tremendously attractive. I had a friend from *The Times* who visited me when I was in Geneva and she said, "How do you find working at the UN?" And I said it was like upper middle-class socialism, it was a dream come true. [Laughter.] This seemed to be under essentially a European inspiration. It was immensely, immensely attractive. At the same time, there was a relationship both in terms of hiring and personnel, and also sort of psychically between an image that Europe had of itself that kind of culminated in the unification of Europe and saw a kind of European-inspired social democratic model as being something that was sort of *in utero* and the rest of the world would follow it. On the one hand I thought that was extremely attractive. On the other hand I didn't actually think that was going to happen, for the usual reasons: demographic reasons, cultural reasons, and so on. At the same time there was this, and as an American they seemed related to me, there was a kind of blindness to, within many parts of the UN, to the sort of fundamentally imperial way in which UN people were viewed and in which UN actions were viewed, to its cost. One of the nice things about Sergio was that he was, partly because he was Brazilian, even though he was essentially European because of where he lived all his life, he was able to be anti-imperial without being anti-American. There's a sort of European tendency, as you know, to see things that go wrong in international structures as always the fault of the Americans. I quickly realized this was a way to avoid doing much of anything and just waiting for the historical wheel to turn a little bit more, which I thought was a hopeless way to approach international politics but anyhow quite common in Europe. So I sort of took the good with the bad.

Ms. Ellis: Scott, we discussed this in New York but I do want to raise it again because I think there was more.

Mr. Malcomson: Did I give the wrong answer last time? [Laughter.]

Ms. Ellis: No, not at all but there seems to be, I mean this whole mosque controversy—you know journalists have to go to the heart of the matter here—and I would just like you to discuss a little bit about what seems to be a delayed reaction or what it is saying to us so maybe we never really dealt with the issue fully at the time or maybe it's because of where Afghanistan is today or whatever it is or the whole thing about Obama being a Muslim or whatever. I don't really

know what your take is but why has this blown up the way it has and how do you see it going forward?

Mr. Malcomson: Well I think there are a lot of different reasons for it. Some of it is sort of perfect storm kind of material. Initially—I talk about this in the book—what struck me after 9/11 was how little anti-Muslim sentiment there was. I think that was partly due to President Bush's efforts in that direction which were very strong and consistent and I've come to believe that it was partly just a deep American resistance to mixing religion and politics. I think also there was a real reluctance to—and this we dealt with at the op-ed page all the time, and it's delicate—but there was a real reluctance to, in the struggle to explain what had happened, to enter into the enemy's logic of explaining why the enemy had done what the enemy did. In other words, to blame Islam for the attacks, the only people who actually made that argument was al-Qaeda. There's a natural reluctance to even think that their justification could actually be true, that there was something in their religious belief that led one inevitably to try and slaughter thousands of innocent people. Finally, I think there is, among Americans, an inherent respect for religious belief. Maybe because we've never had religious wars, we tend to respect it and not to see it in a framework of conflict. I think all of those things have been weakened by nine years of war in pretty much all in Muslim countries, by the fact that al-Qaeda has not gotten appreciably weaker, that victory did not come quickly, that the result—fond to think about it now, but it was strong at the time—the result that Rice and others anticipated and the President anticipated—I spoke with both of them about this at the time though it's not news—they really felt that this was like the fall of communism, that if you removed a repressive government, then people will naturally do good things afterwards. That's exactly what did not happen. Part of that not happening has come to be blamed on religion, and maybe to some extent it should be. I think another major factor for some Americans, in terms of a growing hostility towards Islam, is that our allies in Muslim countries, like President Karzai and others, have not been much nicer to us really than our enemies in Afghanistan and Iraq. It's this sort of odd situation, just looked at as a normal citizen, why do we continue to fight in places for people who clearly on some level don't want us to be there at all? And then finally, the US has continued to be attacked, not in anything like the spectacular way that we were nine years ago, but nonetheless there are clearly people who keep trying—some of them Americans—who keep trying, in the name of their religious beliefs, to kill more Americans. Over time, that will wear down anyone's commitment to religious choice and religious freedom, I think. Well those are the reasons. That being said, I think there should be a mosque on the site, but anyway—

Ms. Calabria: Isn't it a cultural center?

Mr. Malcomson: A cultural center. It's becoming less and less mosque-y with each day which is probably a good thing. [*Laughter.*]

Ms. Calabria: One of the things you point out in your book is the power of fear and the fear that we've all lived with for the past ten years. I can remember going to visit somebody in New Mexico who wouldn't come out to have lunch with me because it was a Code Orange day. She was really sure—and this was four years ago—that she was really sure that something was going to happen that day. In your book, you talk about the duct tape, when we were told to go out and get duct tape and plastic and that was going to seal us off. Anybody who's ever dealt with any

war situation knows duct tape and plastic don't get you very far. [*Laughter.*] This feeling of fear and then also working on Capitol Hill, going up there, and an American legislator being surprised that we weren't popular, that everybody didn't love us. Your book talks a lot about the importance of facts, which I think almost everybody in this room is very committed to, but how do you convince people that your facts are our facts?

Mr. Malcomson: You're going to have to tell me more specifically about that.

Ms. Calabia: Well our facts about how there weren't any weapons of mass destruction and your concern that when you were asked as a speechwriter, or rather communications director, to try and pull together a position and when you try to investigate where the information came from, it's third hand or fourth hand and it wasn't very strong facts for you to build a strong case on. We all struggle every day to get the best facts we can. With the decline—I'm concerned about the decline in foreign news coverage—it's going to get harder and harder.

Ms. Ellis: Can I throw in the role of the media in all this?

Ms. Calabia: Yes, yes. I think this issue is quite relevant.

Mr. Malcomson: Well there are a lot of things. There's a lot in that. The question of the quality of information is a huge one and I actually don't see right now anything going in the right direction. Most governments spend steadily less on their diplomatic corps. I can remember when I started working abroad in the mid-eighties, you would see this kind of diplomatic presence in small capitals and that's steadily withdrawn. One of the reasons for ICG is in a sense to replace some of that capacity. Obviously the foreign news budgets have declined dramatically. The UN, I discovered to my horror once I got there—this is the passage Dawn's referring to—had a miserably bad information gathering capacity. Those places, while there were some parts of the bureaucracy that were good at it, there was no means, like for UNDP, there was very little means for sharing it among the different branches. As far as I know, that hasn't improved since. One of the scenes I talk about in the book was when Sergio went before the Security Council to present some information about Congo and I got a copy of what he was supposed to say about 24 hours beforehand and I started talking to the people who put it together and it was clear to me that this was not reliable information and did not come close to my standards as a journalist, which is saying things, because frankly journalistic standards are significantly lower than say legal standards [*Laughter.*] and hopefully even lower than the standards for going in and invading places. So that was horrifying. I expect that hasn't greatly improved. All the tramlines right now are going in the wrong direction. What can be done about that, I do think that ultimately the web has to be the solution—having already been the problem. There is no other way around this. How you ensure that the quality of information is good is extremely difficult. For some reason—I don't know why—I don't think people appreciate just how difficult it is. There are people in the intelligence world who appreciate it and there's been a fair amount of rethinking within that world but I don't know if the product has necessarily gotten all that better. I mean, I'm not in that world.

Gail Leftwich Kitch: I always face the risk of doing the same thing Dawn does by asking a question and cramming 18,000 issues in there. I guess I'm trying to get my hands around,

thinking about, conceptualizing, and wondering how to get it into a question that I'm trying to work through. I've got a couple of questions. One is of course one of the issues we've all heard about for a very long time is all about incorrect information but the consequences didn't matter. We always function this way, but it's just that now—and part of what it seems to me we are living with is—Uh oh, in America we're not as protected as we used to be from the consequences of that. Now on the flip side, having spent so long being protected from the consequences, it makes sense that Condoleezza Rice thought it would be like the fall of communism because she was a Russian scholar. I think what one of the problems was is that we had the wrong, we didn't even have the correct kind of metaphors to grab on to, the correct abstract ideas to even grab on to and so one may have wandered into some things because it was a failure of understanding. I don't want to sound like Sam Huntington [*Laughter.*] but I guess what I'm trying to get to is connecting this piece about how we didn't know what was going on before but that now that we do know and we don't even know what's right and wrong, is it one of those things we know that we weren't really all that happy before anyway? It's so complicated because there really are these conflicting cultures and understandings of how the world works, what's right and wrong, where you are in terms of the power struggle. So from that backdrop and trying to think of that from an intellectual standpoint, overlay that with the notion of America's continuing desire to be the sole superpower. While that may be true, in itself it has some complications. The demand, the drive we have to be the top dog but not even necessarily being able to even sustain that. Again this is just background but do you sort of understand what I'm getting at?

Mr. Malcomson: No, absolutely. I'm glad you talked about the fall of communism. In some ways I feel like the Cold War made us intelligent in some ways and really stupid in others. The information that was necessary in order to see the world as part of a Cold War struggle was very different than the information needed to see the world in terms of 15 to 20 major overlapping states and struggles of different sizes. We were never tooled up to do that. It's a symbol of human frailty, I suppose, that at the end of the Cold War when pretty much neither the intelligence people nor the journalistic people nor very many other people had the information right about what led to the end of the Cold War, that didn't lead us then to think we have really bad information, we need to think differently. It was luck that could turn quickly into self-congratulation and didn't lead to any change. I would guess that the world that we're facing now, that we're beginning to realize that there's some kind of long-term, more or less fine-grained way of understanding the rest of the world that we just actually will have to invest in and do because we don't really have any choice. As you say with Condoleezza Rice, there was a shadow of nice perhaps, but probably wrong assumptions about the nature of humans that we just kind of need to get over and move on. I hope we don't then turn into what my stereotype of the British Foreign Commonwealth Office which is a sort of set of ethnic stereotypes that become the basis for a completely calculating amoral form of policy.

Ms. Kitch: The kind of clash of cultures kind of thing.

Mr. Malcomson: And I don't think Americans would be really very good at that, beyond a certain point. Going forward, I think that is exactly where we're at. I don't know, to my knowledge people aren't talking about it in this way within the foreign policy community. In other words, sort of realizing there were sort of self-delusions about power in the world that

really settled in during the Cold War and we're only just beginning to pull out of them. The idea that we could retaliate against al-Qaeda and take this immense thing and put it back in the bottle, heal, and move on after a year. It looks ridiculous now but some smart people genuinely believed that at the time.

Question—Michael Higgins: Well a lot of smart people didn't. Putting your foreign policy editor hat back on, what do you make in retrospect of the fact that in the wake of 9/11, the power wielders, Bush and the neo-cons, were able to brush aside Brent Scowcroft and Jim Baker? The two pillars of the Republican foreign policy establishment—who had been that for years and the whole world regarded as brilliant, sagacious, and bright, typically—how is it that the power that was awash was able to just brush away people like that and let the crazies do whatever they wanted? Those guys are still around, still sagacious, still saying smart things, but they were absolutely brushed aside. How did that happen?

Ms. Calabia: Well it's the power of the presidency.

Mr. Malcomson: I think that's right. I think it's partly the power of the presidency. It's partly also the fact that foreign policy experts are not democratically elected and have no base. It is ultimately a professional thing.

The Bush Administration—I talk about this in the book—but September 10th was when *The Weekly Standard* had its cover with the picture from Gilligan's Island and the headline *Farewell to American Greatness*. No one thought that the Bush Administration was going to amount to much of anything, really. Even the people in it didn't really think so. Afterwards, Fred Barnes wrote a piece saying now the Bush presidency has a purpose, which implies a number of things. The first one being obviously that it didn't have one before. [*Laughter.*] Secondly, what kind of purpose is that? What does that mean? What purpose is that? Is it attacking our enemies, is it defending our country, what is it? I think, as Dawn said, it was presidential power that was hugely magnified by 9/11. At least the people I've talked to in Congress, and then statements the people in Congress were making, not only did no one know what to do but nobody wanted the responsibility. People like Baker and Scowcroft were more than happy to take on the responsibility but they had no base. They had no power except the power of their experience. With people like us it means a lot, but not to most people. Of course people within the Bush Administration, including the president and the vice president, were quite determined. They did not flinch at much of anything, including saying things that just weren't true. Just daring anyone to say otherwise. They carried everything before them, eventually, into some pretty disastrous policy. It's all worth remembering and going through all those steps again because, as I was saying before, the kind of emperor power that the presidency had at that point, it could have again. Things could have worked out differently. They didn't, but I have to believe they could have.

Question—Fred Tipson: Hi I'm Fred Tipson and I'm the director of UNDP here in Washington. I haven't read the book so I'm having trouble figuring out the take-aways from the book and maybe the take-aways are some of the richness with which you describe the issues. I'm also reading Andrew Bacevich's book right now. He's all about the power of the national security narrative that no president and no constituency seemed ultimately able to resist, the notion that

military power is somehow a solution to virtually all the problems we have in the world and the inability of the rest of us to resist that momentum once it gets going. What I wanted to ask you was, that 9/11 was really, and those who perpetrated 9/11, was really a reaction to the first Gulf War, a multilateral operation if there ever was one. If there ever was an international consensus for war it was that. They're objecting to that activity, to the presence of troops and Saddam Hussein's original invasion. Now we're dealing with people who are reacting not to the first Gulf War but they're reacting to the Iraq War and the Afghan War. They're people who are reacting to drone strikes. They're reacting to the impression that we do whatever we want in the world. Blowback is one thing for these crazy al-Qaeda guys, but who I fear are the people who are reacting much more generally and in a decentralized way to what they perceive to be immoral power, almost ungodly exercise of power. They may well be bombers, but they may also be cyberterrorists, who could do tremendous destruction to this country by messing up our computer systems. That's the blowback that seems to be really what we should be concerned about, not poor bin Laden sitting in a cave somewhere, but the other people who are reacting to quite different scenarios than what bothered bin Laden on 9/11.

Mr. Malcomson: Again there's a lot in the question. I think you're right. I've been interested and a little surprised that this administration has embraced the drone warfare and the sort of irregular warfare strategy.

Mr. Tipson: And the UN's been virtually inept in responding to those situations with missile strikes. Not that there aren't some arguments for them, I don't mean that. Multilateralism means nothing if there's no principle behind it. Sergio was the first to say that. He wasn't just defending the UN and multilateralism, he was defending what it was supposed to stand for. The viewpoint in my organization is that it seems to be virtually unable to convey what it stands for except to get together for General Assembly.

Mr. Malcomson: In terms of policies going forward, I do think that one of the most damaging things—and I do understand the reasons for it, I know people who have been responsible for it, but I still think it's wrong—is the giving over of non-lethal power to the military and the expansion of the military, both in terms of intelligence, but more importantly in terms of aid and development as sort of subordinate to the counterterrorism or counterinsurgency. We all know why that happens but I just think it has to be resisted and turned back to the degree possible by all of us because it's led to this. The military is always more efficient in some sense but it's just been disastrous. All of that soft power stuff is now perceived by so many people around the world as being subordinate to military goals and essentially as warfare by other means. That's been incredibly poisonous. I also do think that that's a place where—and it'll be a multi-year thing—where the United Nations can provide a place for renewing that separation and put the soldiers back in the barracks, so to speak. There are enough different countries that have an interest in making that happen who could do it within that venue. Not that I see it happening now, but that's what I would like to see happening. With regard to Andrew Basevich's argument, I think it's sort of true but also kind of not. I think again it's an instance of fighting an earlier war. I could be totally wrong, but my impression is that part of the lesson that Americans are drawing—right and left—from the experience in Iraq and Afghanistan is that you can't let national security imperatives just lead to a blank check for military action wherever. The momentum is towards withdrawal because we've seen that that was not effective.

Question–Dr. Grace Keenan: May I ask you, knowing what you know now, what we all know now after all these years, if you were in President Bush’s seat, knowing what you know now, what would you have done differently?

Mr. Malcomson: In President Bush’s or President Obama’s?

Dr. Keenan: Well I think we need to go back to Bush. I think it’s come forward to Obama, but to understand what happened then... I also remember then that 80% of the nation was for going in at the time. When they questioned some of Saddam’s top people, they themselves thought they had weapons of mass destruction. So there was a lot of confusion in a lot of places. Knowing what you know now, what should he have done?

Ms. Calabia: Well he never should have claimed that Iraq and al-Qaeda were related, which the facts clearly said were not. That illusion was made over and over again by Donald Rumsfeld and others on Capitol Hill, appearing on television, on Meet the Press, etc. So that comes full circle on those two issues.

Dr. Keenan: But, rather than going in there, what could have been done at that time?

Mr. Malcomson: Reconstructing the historical moment, as Hans Blix pointed out at the time, he said South Africa no longer has a nuclear capability, I don’t think. Under ideal circumstances, it still wasn’t entirely clear. What I’m trying to say is that things are inherently blurry and were blurry at the time. To me, the main reason I opposed the Iraq War was that, as a journalist looking at the ways in which it was being justified analytically and in terms of facts, I could just tell that they didn’t have the information they needed in order to come to the conclusions they were coming to. You can just tell when people are manipulating information in order to reach an end that ultimately the information they have doesn’t support. My children do it all the time. *[Laughter.]* Basically I think that was essentially what the vice president, and also to some degree the president, were doing. As Dawn remembers, Colin Powell and George Tenet both resisted this for a long time, which for me was a good indicator that it was probably worth resisting. We don’t need to go through the whole sort of details of the alternative intelligence capacity that was built up in order to essentially come up with the conclusions that the vice president and others just wanted to reach anyway. Putting myself in Bush’s seat, I would have tried to use my common sense to see that the people around me were determined to find a certain result based on bad intelligence, inadequate intelligence. That’s everything I wish President Bush would have done. You could go on. There should have been a second resolution. There were all kinds of things that were ongoing at the time. Nobody was abandoning Iraq. There certainly were policies in place and they were being changed. I don’t know how much further I should go.

Ms. Ellis: There was also a process. No one answered why, if this had been going on for 12 years, why at that point in time they were, you know...

Mr. Malcomson: Right, right. What I argue in the book is essentially there was a level of fear and an unexpressed sense of failure and responsibility that pervaded the White House to a degree that an expression of that was an inappropriate policy choice which was to invade Iraq. At no

point did I think they had the information right. We can go around the table and see how many people were convinced and at what point they did or didn't. I certainly never was and I haven't seen anything since to convince me.

Question—Kathy Burns: I had a question. As a journalist myself, what kind of resources do you have? Do you have an actual staff or do you have to depend on everything freelance. Do you get to borrow people from the regular foreign news desk? I think it is a crisis situation in terms of information. I just got back from a month in Australia and no matter how late the day was, I always looked at *The New York Times* because there was so little coverage of the United States. I had been there two years ago. Unfortunately the night I was flying over was when the market fell 800 points. The pilot announced we were in a midst of a crisis, and we're like, Ohh. With Bill Moyers retiring, there's been a tremendous loss with PBS. *The Post* also to me has become very much a tabloid rag. It breaks my heart. You're only one person, what do you do to provide that coverage. Your stories are very long, very detailed. I imagine you have a 3–5 month advance time. Where do you get your resources and your moral support? At the top are they helpful to this end? With online coverage, will they have to go back eventually and make people pay for it? They tried that once and it wasn't too successful but I imagine internationally it's very successful.

Mr. Malcomson: The support will last as long as there's enough money coming in. For now there is enough. *The Times*, while it's made a lot of missteps, nonetheless is a fairly commercially viable company—unlike *Newsweek* for example. [Laughter.] My resources have been cut back some, but not dramatically. I use a mix of *New York Times* correspondents, who are less expensive, and freelancers. Right now there's, as you would imagine, a glut of highly qualified people who really want to work and can't get jobs. From my perspective, that has commercial advantages for me because there's no lack of talent or willing people. I suppose over time if things continue as they are then, maybe with some exceptions, fewer people will enter journalism and then there would really be a crisis. But for now, most of the staff of *Newsweek* would like to write something any day as would many, many other people. The resources are there for us. Now whether they're there for the industry as a whole, I don't think they are. That's a longer-term thing. There are some bright spots. Reuters is doing quite well. Bloomberg is doing quite well. It's a different sort of product but it's not a bad product and sometimes it's a really good product. Then there are things like *Foreign Policy* and foreignpolicy.com that I think are very good and have really turned into sometime pretty awesome over the last year—not just because they sponsored my talk. [Laughter.]

Question—Allison Johnson: I know that for journalism, the current events and the current moments are so overwhelming that they actually occupy a tremendous amount of time, but I wanted to ask if you could allow us to have some historical metaphors and historical context in relaying your book the 9/11 narrative. I'm struck in your presentation of the events around that day—and then taking us up to today—how so much of our lives that we lived in those moments we feel are isolated. And yet what struck me in listening, was thinking about 1944–1945 and where the USA was in the fight with the Japanese, the enemy, to the point where we put them in concentration camps. They were such a threat that they made the decision, sort of like that decision to go against Iraq, that they deserved the atomic bomb—not the Germans, not the Europeans, but those in Japan. I'm very struck by how in the moment there's this frenzy around

the threat. There are these extremists around the world. So you go back to World War II and you read and you watch the documentaries about how the Japanese were portrayed in World War II, so venomously, so evilly that blowing them up with the atomic bomb was justifiable. If you and I had been alive in 1944–1945, that was the rhetoric. Where are we today as Americans, as an American society, that history never seems to teach us?

Mr. Malcomson: Right now we're at a point basically of withdrawal or of the status quo. There is very little momentum towards renewing the existing international institutions or building new ones, whatever the case may be. It's not just this country. No country is leading this process, including China, and including the EU. That is the point we're at. I think the danger is one of just a gradual sort of falling apart of older systems of cooperation and progress to be replaced by I don't know what. One of the things that's really struck me over the last year is that people barely even talk anymore about the fact that NATO doesn't really quite exist. NATO was a big thing after 1945 for a number of decades. Whether there is an international alliance system anymore is unclear. Looked at with the tiniest bit of distance, that's an extraordinary development. I don't think anybody's going to be using nuclear bombs against anybody else, I hope. To me the situation we're in now is one of a very slow but very perceptible collapse of international ties, alliances, and international systems. That's what needs to be dealt with.

Ms. Calabia: We have time for one more question and then I wanted to say that Scott has agreed to stay. We have copies of the books available if anybody would like to buy them and he'd be happy to autograph them.

Mr. Malcomson: I'll personalize them any way you want. [*Laughter.*]

Ms. Calabia: For your whole family if necessary.

Tino Calabia: You just mentioned NATO and how irrelevant it's become. Now that the UN is convening again, there are articles about the irrelevance of the United Nations. You happened to work there for a while and you worked with a martyr for the UN cause. In fact I view him as a global saint. He was so successful out in the field in many places; he was the go-to guy. Looking back on that and the people that you met and were working within the UN, do you have any hope that there are those kinds of people there that will one day maybe rebuild the UN into something that people can depend on?

Mr. Malcomson: Wow. I want to say yes.

Ms. Calabia: But I think one of the things you pointed out is that governments built the UN. Well actually the United States and the allied victors of World War II built the United Nations. Stalin agreed to go along because Roosevelt thought it was so important. Churchill agreed as well. The Chinese went along. We had some attention at the end of Kofi Annan's period in trying to look at reform and rebuilding of the United Nations, reform of the Security Council, possibly getting countries to give up the veto, possibly enlarging the number of countries that had the veto. We had a whole spectrum of activities that looked pretty helpful but unfortunately, what happened? His term was over and war took over. 9/11 happened. The energy just sort of leaked out. Certainly the US interest was not there.

Mr. Malcomson: Well the theory is either it can come from within the existing UN system or it can come without it or forces without it like the G20 will serve to focus minds within the existing structures of reform. No one of those things is actually happening right now. The interesting thing about the reform process to me was the degree to which Germany and Brazil in particular, and India, were so active in it. Ultimately I think this president is uniquely well suited to see that and bring these allies along, make them into new allies to some extent, well, all have been allies to a degree—India is not for very long—but to take those countries and essentially bring them along into a renewal of the system. I think that it's the only way that it can work. But (a) this administration doesn't actually seem to be doing that, though it has imagined it in speeches, and (b) it's really hard. It's just really hard. Maybe the situation has to get bad enough to focus minds more. It was a dry run. It wasn't a bad dry run really. I am hopeful. As far as people within the UN, I don't know. I think it would tend to be more people outside actually. It's a very self-preserving group. Who did they just bring in?

Ms. Ellis: They just brought in Michelle Bachelet to head UN Women in January. She's very dynamic.

Mr. Malcomson: Yeah, she's great. She's fantastic.

Ms. Calabria: Well Scott, I want to thank you for taking this opportunity for us to talk to you and also for writing the book and for continuing to be our man on foreign affairs issues at the magazine. Please keep that section going strong. The books are outside and you can have Scott sign them.