Interpreting the Jackson Legacy in a Post-9/11 Landscape

By Peter Beinart
About the Foundation
Since its establishment in 1983, the Henry M. Jackson Foundation has been dedicated to helping nonprofit organizations and educational institutions in the United States and Russia. The Foundation’s grants provide essential support and seed funding for new initiatives that offer promising models for replication and address critical issues in four areas in which the late Senator Henry M. “Scoop” Jackson played a key leadership role during his forty-three-year tenure in the United States Congress: International Affairs Education, Environment and Natural Resources Management, Public Service, and Human Rights.

About this Publication
On the occasion of its twenty-fifth anniversary, the Henry M. Jackson Foundation hosted a dinner and conversation at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. Journalist Peter Beinart was invited to share his thoughts on the Jackson legacy and the Foundation’s commemorative publication, The Nature of Leadership, Lessons from an Exemplary Statesman. Foundation Executive Director Lara Iglitzin served as moderator for the discussion that followed his remarks.
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It is truly a great honor and more than a little intimidating to have been asked to speak about the legacy of Senator Jackson to so many people who knew him well when I didn’t know him at all. I was only a kid when Senator Jackson died. I really came to him in the months after 9/11, which was perhaps, for people of my age, a little bit like what Pearl Harbor had been for him. It happened when I was a young man trying to understand what intellectual history there was, what one could draw on in terms of the history of American liberalism and how American liberals had struggled against totalitarian enemies to guide us in this new, very uncharted time.

I am struck again and again by how relevant today are the things that Scoop Jackson spent his career fighting for, from the profound to the small. For starters, perhaps the most important political strategist of this decade has been a Norwegian American, Karl Rove, which I would imagine Scoop Jackson might have taken a certain degree of pride in, even if he didn’t agree with everything that Karl Rove has done. We are in a presidential race between a Democrat who was raised in Hawaii and a Republican vice presidential candidate who is the governor of Alaska, two states that exist in significant measure because Scoop Jackson fought for their statehood. So
that is also, in a way, his legacy. Very often today you hear people say, “We need a Manhattan Project on energy to become energy independent.” Well, Scoop Jackson was talking about a Manhattan Project for energy independence in the mid-1970s. The environment has become one of the central issues in American politics, particularly with global warming. And as you all know better than I, it was Scoop Jackson who was responsible for the fact that we have environmental impact statements. American foreign policy is centrally focused on the Middle East and the question of America’s relationship with Israel. Of course, Scoop Jackson had a deep and abiding friendship and relationship with the state of Israel.

The question that one can’t help but think about when one thinks about Scoop Jackson today is the W.W.S.D. question. What Would Scoop Do? What would Scoop think? How would he have responded to these very difficult circumstances? And there have been those who have actually written on this subject, particularly on the political right. Even before 9/11, people like the Weekly Standard’s Bill Kristol, the noted neoconservative, have asked, “Who will be this era’s Scoop Jackson?” When neoconservatives ask that question, they mean that were Scoop Jackson alive today, he would be mostly aligned with the foreign policy of the Bush administration in its response to the war on terror, its invasion of Iraq. And it’s understandable why people would come to that conclusion. After all, many proteges of Scoop Jackson have ended up being very influential in Bush administration foreign policy from Richard Perle and Paul Wolfowitz, to Elliott Abrams, to Doug Feith, and Frank Gaffney. And, indeed, not only people who worked for Scoop Jackson, but two other associates of Scoop Jackson, people with whom Scoop Jackson had an important relationship, have always been important intellectually in the Bush administration’s conception of the war on terror. One of them is Bernard Lewis, the Princeton
professor of Middle Eastern studies, who Scoop Jackson used to talk to a lot about the Middle East. It turns out, Lewis had a very important influence on Dick Cheney and to some degree George W. Bush and Donald Rumsfeld and their thinking about the Middle East after September 11th. Another person who turns out to have been a very important influence on George W. Bush and his thinking about the Middle East is Natan Sharansky, who Scoop Jackson developed a relationship with when he was struggling to free dissidents from the former Soviet Union.

So it’s not an outrageous idea to answer the question, “What would Scoop do? What would Scoop think?” To say, “He would be where George W. Bush is. He would be where John McCain is. He would be where Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle are.” But it’s not the only way, it seems to me, to think about that question. And while it is obviously presumptuous for me to suggest that I could possibly answer the question of what he would think about the post-9/11 era, I’d like to suggest that, at the very least, it’s a bit more complicated than assuming that he would be in lockstep with George W. Bush and John McCain.

First, Scoop Jackson has a domestic legacy. It’s not talked about as much as his foreign policy legacy. And one of the reasons for that is that many of his important disciples—Wolfowitz and Perle, Abrams, and even Jeane Kirkpatrick—really spent their lives only in foreign policy. They had no persona on domestic policy. They only did foreign policy. We don’t know whether they agreed with Scoop Jackson on domestic policy. But they fundamentally decided that domestic policy was not as important to them as foreign policy was. Even Senator Joe Lieberman, who is often mentioned as today’s Scoop Jackson, a domestic liberal who has very hawkish foreign policy views, has clearly, with his endorsement of John McCain, made a decision that, for him, foreign policy hawkish-
ness is more important than his domestic policy liberalism.

As I read the career of Scoop Jackson, it is not self-evident that he would have made that same decision. In fact, Scoop Jackson did not endorse Ronald Reagan in 1980, even though he and Reagan clearly saw eye to eye on many foreign policy issues. There’s a story in the biography of Scoop Jackson in which he’s essentially offered a cabinet post if he will endorse Reagan. And he says, “I still believe in the New Deal.” And, in fact, in his last campaign in 1982, Scoop Jackson campaigned against Reaganomics, against Reagan’s view of social security, Reagan’s view of the environment. This is a part of the Scoop Jackson legacy that is not as often discussed.

In fact, if you go back and look at the positions that Scoop Jackson held, there is a pretty good argument to be made that he was not only more liberal than George W. Bush and John McCain, but that he was even more liberal than Barack Obama and Bill Clinton. Think about some of the policy positions that Scoop Jackson held: wage and price controls and a massive government public works program were things he championed for many years. He was a passionate supporter of labor. There is a story that he would not even cross a picket line to go to a close friend’s son’s bar mitzvah. Scoop Jackson wanted a nationalized health insurance policy modeled to some degree on the policy they had in his ancestral home of Norway. And, in fact, one of the reasons Scoop Jackson did not like Jimmy Carter was that he thought he was too conservative on domestic policy issues. He was more in line domestically with Ted Kennedy than Jimmy Carter. I think it is a very important part of Scoop Jackson’s legacy that does not lend itself to the familiar narrative of Scoop Jackson as the father of the neoconservatives.

But even on foreign policy, I think it’s a more complicated story. It is true that Scoop Jackson and Ronald Reagan agreed on a great deal in foreign policy. Yet I think it is interesting to ask how
much Scoop Jackson and Ronald Reagan would agree with George
W. Bush and Dick Cheney. Of course, the Bush administration has
portrayed itself as the natural inheritor of the Reagan foreign policy
legacy. But I think this story is actually more ambiguous than it
seems. Ronald Reagan, after all, was extremely cautious in the use of
military force. In fact, I think there is a pretty good argument to
make that Ronald Reagan was more cautious in his deployment of
American troops overseas than any of the presidents that have fol-
lowed him: George Bush, the elder, Bill Clinton, or George Bush,
the younger. It is, of course, true that Ronald Reagan armed anti-
communist guerillas in Nicaragua and Afghanistan and Angola. But
he refused to send American troops to Central America, something
that he was criticized for by the right. He refused to send American
troops to overthrow Manuel Noriega in Panama, which is something
George Bush’s father promptly did once he took office. Ronald
Reagan sent American ground troops into battle only twice—once in
Grenada, which was a very low-risk operation, and the other was a
peacekeeping operation in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1982 and 1983. And I
think it’s worth dwelling on that intervention for a moment to sug-
gest perhaps a place where there may be a difference between
Ronald Reagan and Scoop Jackson and the neoconservatives of
today. When neoconservatives today talk about the Lebanon inter-
vention, they usually criticize Reagan for having pulled out because
they believe that it showed weakness that then emboldened terrorists
in the future. But that’s not the way Ronald Reagan saw it. Ronald
Reagan believed his great mistake was sending American troops to
Lebanon in the first place. There is a story that Reagan’s last words
in the Oval Office were, “I should never have sent those troops to
Beirut,” where several hundred marines were blown up in an attack
by Hezbollah on the barracks in the fall of 1983. And the Powell
doctrine of caution in the use of military force, which was at first
the Weinberger (Casper Weinberger) doctrine really comes out of the aftermath of that Lebanon intervention. And Scoop Jackson was very much in line with that position. Scoop Jackson opposed the intervention in Lebanon from the very beginning. And so I think there is reason to believe that he shared some of the caution about the deployment of American troops overseas that I think Ronald Reagan shared and that we now tend to associate with Colin Powell.

Secondly, Scoop Jackson, like Ronald Reagan, believed in containment and deterrence. They both believed in an aggressive form of global containment and they both wanted to supplement deterrence with national missile defense. And this put them to the right, certainly, of many liberals and many in the Democratic Party. But it is still worth reiterating that they believed in containment and deterrence. And George W. Bush, in some of his most important statements as president, explicitly said that the doctrines of containment and deterrence no longer apply in the post-9/11 world. So while he has portrayed himself as the intellectual heir of Ronald Reagan and Scoop Jackson, in terms of the strategy that he has employed, it’s actually been, as he himself has acknowledged in his very important 2002 West Point speech, a dramatic move away. And it’s not just that George W. Bush has said containment and deterrence don’t apply to non-state terrorists like al-Qaeda. I think most people would agree that you can’t deter a group like al-Qaeda which has no state to protect. But he also argued that deterrence and containment could not work against rogue states with weapons of mass destruction like Iraq and Iran. I think there is reason to question whether, in fact, that would have been Scoop Jackson’s view.

There were those in the United States, in the late 1940s, who wanted to launch a preventive war—what George W. Bush would inaccurately call a preemptive war—against the Soviet Union before it got atomic weapons. There was a certain logic to this. Once they
got atomic weapons, they would become much more threatening to us. Why not launch an attack on them before they did? Scoop Jackson thought that idea was crazy. In the debate during the Korean War between Harry Truman and General Douglas MacArthur, when Truman wanted to pull back and simply fight for South Korea, a war of containment, and General McArthur wanted to continue Korea as a war of rollback, to go to Pyongyang, to reunify all of Korea and indeed to expand the war into China, Scoop Jackson came down very clearly on Truman’s side, on the containment side of that debate between containment and rollback. So I think, at the very least, it is not obvious that Scoop Jackson would have responded in the post-9/11 environment by supporting a doctrine of rollback, regime change and preventive war as John McCain and George W. Bush both have.

Thirdly, George W. Bush, early on after 9/11, defined America’s enemies in the war on terror very broadly, not simply as al-Qaeda, which is, of course, the group that had attacked us, but also the “axis of evil,” the rogue states of Iran, Iraq, and North Korea. He defined them very broadly and ideologically and essentially said we should take them all on at the same time. He had a very important decision to make early on in his presidency because there is evidence that Iran—remember, this is Iran before they elected Ahmadinejad, when the more reformist Khatami was still the elected president, came and said, “Look, we have interests in common with you. We don’t like the Taliban in Afghanistan. We don’t like Saddam. We certainly don’t like al-Qaeda. Why don’t we have something of a rapprochement?” And the Bush administration said, “Thanks, but no thanks. We would rather have you as an enemy. And we will take you on at the same time that we take on the Taliban, al-Qaeda and then eventually Saddam.” I think there is evidence—again, we’ll never know for sure—that Scoop Jackson might not have seen it that way.
One of the interesting things about Scoop Jackson’s career is that although he was a very dedicated and fierce anti-communist and opponent of the Soviet Union, he was a very consistent supporter of American rapprochement with the People’s Republic of China, even though the government in Beijing was, of course, a communist government, and not one that respected human rights. But Scoop Jackson believed that it would be too much for the United States to take on both the People’s Republic of China and the Soviet Union at the same time. So he was quite a forceful advocate, throughout the 1970s, for a close American relationship with China as an effort to check the ambitions of the Soviet Union, which I think reflected a recognition that America’s power was limited, that just as America had to ally with Stalin during World War II to defeat Hitler, we might need to ally ourselves with Communist China to contain the Soviet Union during the Cold War, that America was not omnipotent, that we could not take on all countries that did not share our values at the same time. Now, my readings may be wrong. Scoop Jackson did support Israel’s 1982 attack on the Osirak nuclear reactor, which even the Reagan administration condemned. So there is some evidence, maybe from that, that he might have been supportive of military action against Iraq and Iran. I would not claim to know. But I lay all this out to suggest that one should really beware of simple analogies and simple projections across time. It is particularly important with someone like Scoop Jackson because it is hard to understand what exactly his ideological legacy would be, where his staunch Cold War anti-communism would have left him in the post-9/11 debate.

It is easier to understand what his legacy is, not in terms of ideology, but in terms of temperament, not in terms of where he came down on the issues, but in terms of what kind of man he was and how he tried to make decisions as a politician. And the thing
that strikes me as so remarkable is that everybody recognized him for his principle, for the determination that he felt when he had made up his mind on an issue, even when it meant he might have to give up the chance at the presidency. I mean, Scoop Jackson lost the Democratic nomination—particularly in 1976, you could argue—because he was too conservative for a Democratic Party that had moved to the left after Vietnam. There were many Democrats who moved with the wind as the party shifted in the 1970s. He could have done that. It might have given him a better chance of winning the nomination. But he didn’t. He was willing to lose the Democratic nomination for president, willing to endure enormous scorn and ridicule, be heckled on college campuses, even heckled at Democratic gatherings in his home state of Washington because he would not budge from his beliefs. And yet, he was also someone who was willing, on profound questions, to change his mind. That’s one of the other things that comes through from the writing about him, was that this was someone who wanted to hear from all sides and who could be convinced even by his critics.

Scoop Jackson did not begin his political career as an internationalist. He began as an isolationist when he was elected first. He opposed Lend-Lease, the effort to help the British in early 1941. And he changed fundamentally after Pearl Harbor. He supported the Japanese internment and yet came to be a champion for the statehood of Hawaii, a statehood that many opposed because there were so many Asian-Americans there. He became a great supporter of civil rights and of civil liberties, taking on Joseph McCarthy.

And it seems to me it is that dual legacy that is most precious today, that too often in our politics we are forced to choose between principled ideologues who stick to their guns by sealing themselves off in locked rooms and not listening to dissenting points of view at all, versus political weathervanes who move with the latest breeze.
And those choices, which I think some Americans believed were their choices, for instance, in the presidential election of 2004—whether they were right or wrong—are both a betrayal, it seems to me, of the legacy of Scoop Jackson, which is that you can be principled and determined and even fierce in your convictions and also willing to listen to your critics and to recognize that sometimes you might be wrong.
Following Peter Beinart’s presentation, moderator Lara Iglitzin invited members of the audience to ask questions.

Q: When you talked about Senator Jackson’s domestic position, and stated that he was one of the most liberal, you’ve got it right. He was right there with Ted Kennedy. In fact, we were campaigning together in Auburn in 1982, and by noon, I said, “Senator, you just committed about $30 billion.” And he said, “I’m just getting warmed up.” He was extremely liberal I think because as a young man he was raised on New Deal politics. I had such great faith in Scoop because he did his homework. One thing he believed in was you’ve got to get the experts. You’ve got to talk to people. And you can’t just assume that what you’re being told by the government is correct. He was the man who could challenge people because he had the facts. He’d bring in scholars and get the facts. And he had an extraordinarily good staff that helped him prepare all that. Now, I would like to think that on the question of Iraq, that he would have questioned the intelligence. The big flaw in this was that we were misled. The Congress of the United States was misled in the intelligence. But there were a lot of people, including myself, who listened to George Tenet and to Dick Cheney who had been a colleague at the White House. Scoop and his staff could well have challenged the intelligence because there were enough people outside of government who had major questions about whether they had nuclear weapons and whether they presented the real threat that was being portrayed by the Bush administration. But I think Scoop, with his incredible intellect and his ability to probe, might have been able to present a different picture of this to the American people. And he is one person, I think, who could have stood up and said, “Wait a minute. This intelligence is flawed. We’d better not do this,” and possibly he would have had the credibility to stop it. Can you react to that?
PB: It’s a very interesting point. I think obviously one can’t know. I should say, frankly, that I supported the Iraq war myself and have come to have regrets about it. I do think that one of the important things that you mentioned about that moment when America went to war in the fall of 2002 was that it was a moment of congressional weakness. We had a vice president, in particular, Dick Cheney, who has made a career-long project of strengthening the presidency at the expense of the other branches of government. Because of 9/11, he had an enormous opportunity to do that. Many in Congress had a lot of anxiety because the president was extraordinarily popular, and as a Republican president, he had an advantage on national security that Democrats could probably not hope to match. Think about what a powerful institution the Senate was in the 1970s, made up of people like Scoop Jackson and Bill Fulbright and Frank Church. In some ways, that’s what Dick Cheney was rebelling against. Dick Cheney was so unnerved by the strength he saw in Congress in the mid-1970s—when he was working for Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford—that he never wanted it to be that way again. When you look at the fact that the Congress was not strong enough and did not ask enough questions—not even ideological questions—you’d want to ask even if you believed that eventually America might have to do something about Saddam, just questions about the evidentiary basis and the planning, you can see that the very powerful Senate of the 1970s really served America quite well and that we would be better off if we returned to more of an equilibrium between legislative and executive power.

Q: Peter, you mentioned Natan Sharansky in your remarks. He was actually out in Seattle a month or two ago, and he lauded Senator Jackson, as he has in writing before, for his moral clarity in terms of recognizing Soviet repression and the treatment of Soviet Jews among others in the
Soviet Union. Do you think that moral clarity is possible today and is it manifest by any of our political leaders?

PB: Well, I think it’s extraordinarily important, but it’s also important to recognize that moral clarity and foreign policy strategy are not the same thing. The passion that Scoop Jackson had for the plight of people in the Soviet Union and in other parts of the world who were suffering is really a model for us, particularly for liberals. There has been a little bit of a tendency in the past few years, because George W. Bush has spoken so much about freedom in the Islamic world—and of course most people on the other side of the aisle don’t like George W. Bush—to feel like they should shy away from that kind of language, because it’s Republican or neoconservative. I think that’s really a pity. The passion that Scoop Jackson had for people who were suffering is one that both liberals and conservatives should aspire to. I think the testimony that you have from people like Natan Sharansky about the way in which that strengthened them and enabled them to endure the hardships they went through is a very important lesson. Even if such language doesn’t bring immediate benefits, it can still have an effect that you might not be able to see for many, many years. On the other hand, as passionate as Scoop Jackson was, he recognized that America could not simply go in and overthrow the Soviet Union. As tragic as it is, sometimes the policy that one has to take toward truly despicable regimes has to be a policy of patience. The policy of containment was, in fact, a policy of patience. It would have been wonderful if we could have invaded and overthrown the Soviet Union during Stalin—what a monster he was. But part of the tragedy of international affairs is the recognition that we have only limited power and only limited wisdom. That is the balance, to have his moral passion and clarity and also to have the recognition that our power is limited.
Q: In your book, you quote political analyst Bill Schneider, saying that the higher the political office, the more important the vision is. Can you reflect on that?

PB: Bill Schneider, who wrote for The Atlantic, was making a point about the generation of Democrats that followed Scoop Jackson, the neoliberals elected in the class of 1974. He suggested Michael Dukakis as a kind of representative. He argued that one of the problems they might have had in pursuing the presidency as opposed to legislative office was that they were very technocratic. They were good at detailed questions, but often had difficulty sketching out a larger vision of the country. I think what’s impressive about Scoop Jackson is that, as many here would attest, he was remarkably diligent about the details, yet he also had a command of the big picture. One of the important things we’re reminded of again and again about the presidency is that it is not a prime ministership. It’s a symbolic office. It's an office in which people need to be able to see themselves reflected in you and have a comfort level. It’s not simply that they’ll agree with you on seven out of ten policy positions and vote your way. It also has to do with their comfort with people, a feeling that you could sit down with them, and they would feel comfortable with you—something that Democrats have not always projected. There’s a story in Robert Kaufman’s biography about Senator Jackson going into a union hall and challenging everybody there to an arm wrestling contest. How many Democratic presidential candidates could have pulled that off in recent years? So it’s that kind of comfort, but it’s also a sense of having a larger story in which you can house the current debates—this is where we’ve been as a country, this is where we should go—a story that is bigger than simply a seven-point list of policy proposals. That’s something he was able to do. It’s crucial for anyone who wants to be president.
Q: With respect to the relationship between the executive and the legislative branches as to the conduct of foreign relations, Henry Jackson believed in the centrality of the president as a person and the institutional presidency as an operation. It goes back to studies he did in the 1950s on the subject. At no time—and I worked there at the time—am I aware of the fact that he thought that the deterioration of executive authority toward the end of the Johnson administration or especially toward the end of the Nixon administration, especially as aided and abetted by the behavior of the United States Senate, was in any way in the interests of the nation and world peace. I think this sort of ersatz glorification of the role of the strong Senate at that time is more than a little bit misleading. It’s kind of dangerous. My question has to do with what Norm Dicks said about the possibility that Scoop might have opposed the war. And let’s assume that be did, and let’s assume that be continued to. What form do you think his opposition would have assumed? In other words, do you think his opposition to the war would have resembled the opposition of the Democratic Party to the war as it developed? Do you think it would have been couched in the same kind of vocabulary? Or do you think he would have conducted the argument in a different way?

PB: I take your point about his view on executive authority, and I defer to your knowledge on the subject. Whatever he believed, theoretically, about presidential power, his own role in the debates on the ABM and the SALT I and SALT II treaties were exhibitions of powerful senatorial power. In the case of, Richard Nixon—as Henry Kissinger and Jimmy Carter would both attest—he was someone who made their ability to conduct foreign policy by themselves much more difficult. So I defer to your point. But in practical terms it does seem to me that he was playing a role, at least on the issues that he believed in, that suggested a certain amount of senatorial power.
Q: Everything that was undertaken during the Soviet-American negotiation was done for the purpose of enhancing the bargaining power of the president, never to weaken it or to substitute some vague position of his own at the time. So I think that part of it shouldn’t be described this way. On these other points about what he might have thought about the war, I think that’s a different point. And I think it’s perfectly legitimate to argue that he might well have been against the Iraq intervention for all I know. But my question, once again, is what form do you think his opposition to that war would have assumed?

PB: I have no idea. I think that there are obviously people who were close to Scoop Jackson who were very important in supporting the Iraq war, like Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle. There were others, like Jeane Kirkpatrick, who had grave suspicions about the Iraq war. She was someone with whom he identified very closely. There may be others in this room who can answer it better, but given his passion for human rights, I don’t believe that Scoop Jackson would have given a speech about Saddam Hussein that did not stress the barbaric nature of his regime. He would never have done anything that provided even the slightest question about his deep solidarity with the American troops who fought. One of the real political wisdoms that comes through in reading some of the things that Scoop Jackson said, particularly when he ran in 1972, was his real understanding that the Democratic Party and liberalism was at risk of alienating itself from average Americans because, rightly or wrongly, they had a sense that the Democrats did not cherish the symbols of patriotism. They were not at ease with the symbols and rituals of patriotism as Republicans were. So I would imagine he would have told Barack Obama to put on the flag lapel pin and don’t quibble about what it means to various people. Don’t distance yourself from the symbols of patriotism. Now, I think many Democrats express
their opposition to the Iraq war in different ways. Some of those ways were more high-minded than others. We have lived through a pretty bitter partisan period, maybe not quite as bitter as the Vietnam years, but pretty bitter, nonetheless. And I think there are people who have things to answer for from both parties in that regard. I’m sure Scoop Jackson would not have taken the low road.

Q: I think that relates to another issue you’ve written about, which is the different images of America that liberals and conservatives project. You’re saying that some liberals are reluctant to take a hard-line foreign policy stance, that in a certain way, they may be a little apologetic for their views. Obviously in the old days, they might have been apologetic about the Soviet Union, and maybe today, not willing to embrace a strong anti-terror message on its own terms.

PB: There is a great dilemma between recognizing that America is not perfect, that we can do bad things, that we’re not angels, and that if we don’t abide by the rules—by our own laws—we can slip down a slippery slope into Abu Ghraib, for example, or other things that happened earlier like the domestic spying on Americans during the Vietnam era, the internment of the Japanese, or the terrible things Woodrow Wilson did during World War I. Yet where Scoop Jackson differed from George McGovern and where he thought McGovern was making a very serious mistake was in allowing people to believe that that was what he thought was the essence of America. I’m not sure that’s even fair to McGovern. There were many people who came to believe that McGovern saw the essence of America as its immorality in Vietnam—not just its mistakes, but its immorality. I think that for Scoop Jackson, pride in America was very, very important and something that had to be centrally recognized. That is an area where liberals in the 1970s went wrong by sometimes making it
seem as if they saw America as no better than the Soviet Union, as a force for evil around the world, that the world would be better off if America were not a great power. I don’t think that’s true. The cost for liberals and Democrats of giving that impression was very, very high. If they give that impression in the future, the political costs will again be very high.

Q: During the post-9/11 period, there was a tremendous surge in citizen engagement and involvement. And yet that quickly dissipated. Do you think we had a missed opportunity?

PB: You know, George W. Bush gets criticized a lot for not asking more of Americans. And I can understand that criticism. Although to be fair, there are some speeches where George W. Bush did talk about Americans volunteering. I don’t honestly know how much of it was his failure and how much of it was the fact that, as a culture, we have become too individualistic, perhaps too materialistic as a society to really be willing to sacrifice. Although one could argue that it was not as obvious to see how you would sacrifice in this war as, say, in World War II. One of the things that I think is quite hopeful about Barack Obama and John McCain is that both have made national service and service to country a plank of their platforms. It’s something on which they really agree. John McCain has been a leader on this for a very long time, even at a time during the 1990s when it wasn’t so popular among Republicans. So maybe there will be a rebirth of this during the next presidency.

Q: You mentioned Jackson’s willingness to listen to other people and ultimately to change his mind as an example of the true nature of his leadership. I’d like you to comment on whether such an evolution is possible today. Would Jackson have been branded a flip-flopper and discarded along the way, or is that one of the reasons why leadership is in such short
supply, that we don’t allow people to change their minds?

PB: That’s a very good point. Anyone who’s been in politics for a long time should have changed their mind on important things. Now, it’s sometimes difficult to know whether someone has changed their mind based on principle and a consideration of the issues or whether they’ve simply done so because they believe it will get more votes. And, of course, that’s the way it’s always portrayed. But I think it’s really unfortunate. It would be nice if politicians, instead of trying to prove that they’ve always been consistent on the same position, would say that they changed their mind. In Barack Obama, you have someone who hasn’t been in politics long enough to have changed his mind on many things. But in John McCain you have a really fascinating story of someone who’s changed his mind a lot. Much of it has been his conviction. John McCain was not that hawkish on foreign policy when he came to the United States Congress in the 1980s. He was also against the Beirut intervention. He was even skeptical at the very beginning about the Gulf War. He was skeptical about intervention in Bosnia. Yet in the later 1990s, he moved to a much more hawkish position. He moved from being a very conventional conservative on economic issues to—for a period in the later 1990s—working with Democrats on a whole series of issues that left Republicans aghast. Now he seems to have moved a bit more back to where he was. In McCain, actually, you have someone who has changed his mind quite a lot, but often it has been as a result of conviction and the willingness to learn, and I think that’s to his credit.

Q: To some extent, you could relate that comment to Senator Jackson’s changing view of China, at first hawkish and hostile to China, in perceiving it as part of the Soviet bloc, and then when we fully appreciated the Sino-Soviet split be completely changed his view on the appropriateness of
engagement with China. Can you apply what you have learned about Scoop to how he would deal with China today?

PB: It would be hubristic for me to suggest that I could answer that question. It does seem that he not only believed that there was a great strategic advantage in being associated with mainland China, but also had a great kind of personal affinity and affection for China. My own view, and I can’t claim that it would be Scoop Jackson’s view, is that to try to take the policy of containment against the Soviet Union and apply it to China would be very problematic, that China is not a totalitarian power, that the original idea, George Kennan’s idea behind containment, was that because the Soviet Union was totalitarian, it needed conflict with external enemies to legitimize its rule at home. That was the only way in which it could possibly survive domestically. So there was no point in America trying to have détente with the Soviet Union in the late 1940s and have a working relationship because the Soviets needed to demonize the United States. That was the only way they could stay in power. That isn’t necessarily true of the leadership in China. They have enormous problems, but they actually are producing and offering something to their people, not political freedom but rapid economic growth, and they don’t have to have us as an enemy. We may end up becoming their enemy because we have conflicts over things, but we shouldn’t think of this as inevitable. China is not a revolutionary ideological power that sees the world order as illegitimate in the way that the Nazis did or the Soviet Union did during the Stalin period. It wants to make its way in the world, get rich, maybe have a little bit more of a sphere of influence than it does today, get access to the natural resources it needs to grow and maintain stability. Those are the kinds of things that one should be able to bargain with China about, to come to some kind of understanding. Many of
the big problems in the world today like global warming and pandemic disease will not really be solved unless China is part of international cooperative efforts. So to close that door and go back to the kind of containment that America had of the Soviet Union, particularly in the pre-détente period, would be a real tragedy because we would miss out on the opportunity to work together on key things.

Q: I’ve noticed in the current presidential election, John McCain has called himself a Scoop Jackson Republican. And one of his strongest supporters, Joe Lieberman, calls himself a Scoop Jackson Democrat. On the other side, Barack Obama probably hasn’t mentioned Scoop Jackson once. Are there issues or positions in which the Democratic Party believes that Scoop would not have adopted today?

PB: That’s a very interesting point. I don’t know to what degree Barack Obama’s unwillingness to link himself to Scoop Jackson is simply based on the fact that he wasn’t around when Scoop Jackson was around and most people he would be speaking to don’t know who Scoop Jackson is, but you may well be right, that because of the prominence of Scoop Jackson’s proteges in the so-called neoconservative movement and in the Bush administration, many Democrats have also come to the view that Scoop Jackson is the intellectual godfather of the Iraq war. Journalist George Packer, in his very good book *Assassins’ Gate*, suggests that perhaps the Iraq war was hatched out of Scoop Jackson’s office. Many Democrats may themselves believe this and may not be entirely aware of or downplay the significance of Scoop Jackson’s domestic agenda. As I tried to suggest, the interesting thing about Scoop Jackson’s domestic agenda is that it is arguably challenging to the contemporary Democratic Party from the left because Scoop Jackson was not concerned about deficits in a way that Bill Clinton or Robert Rubin was. He supported a much
more expansive government role than today’s generation of Democrats does. The Democrats may take that position as well, but it doesn’t necessarily mean they’re right. I don’t think most of them have investigated the issue very carefully. As I tried to say, nobody can know for sure, but it’s possible that both Republicans and Democrats could be wrong in believing that they know where Scoop Jackson would stand today.