

# *A Values Based Foreign Policy in a Dangerous World: An Interview with Anne-Marie Slaughter*

Anne-Marie Slaughter is Dean of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University, a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and serves on the board of the Council on Foreign Relations. Her recent books include *A New World Order* (2004) and *The Idea That Is America: Preserving Our Values in a Dangerous World* (2007). She was the convener and academic co-chair of the Princeton Project on National Security, a multi-year research project aimed at developing a new, bipartisan national security strategy for the United States. The Princeton report, *Forging a World of Liberty Under Law: US National Security in the 21st Century* (2006) was co-authored with G. John Ikenberry. In November 2006 she was picked to chair Secretary's of State's Advisory Committee on Democracy Promotion. The interview took place on 12 June 2007.

## **Part 1: Family and Intellectual Influences**

**Alan Johnson:** I would like to focus our interview on three of your publications which have been concerned to preserve progressive and democratic values in a dangerous world: *A New World Order* (2004), *Forging a World of Liberty Under Law: US National Security in the 21st Century* (2006) and *The Idea That Is America: Keeping Faith with Our Values in a Dangerous World* (2007).

But, first, can you tell me about the most important familial experiences and intellectual influences that have shaped your world-view?

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** I'm half Belgian and 100 percent American, which means that I grew up between a fairly normal upper middle class suburban childhood in Charlottesville, Virginia and a far more cosmopolitan Brussels urban experience – lunches in the middle of the day, wine and crystal with my francophone grandparents. Going back and forth between those two worlds shaped me deeply. I came to understand my own country better in relief, became acutely aware of cultural differences and learned to admire European culture. When I'm in Europe I defend America and when I'm in America I defend Europe. Still, overall I feel deeply American; it is a country that I love. I grew up in Virginia and then spent 20

## JOHNSON | An Interview with Anne-Marie Slaughter

years in Massachusetts – the cradles of America. The book I’ve just written says ‘My country has been hijacked and I want it back.’

**Alan Johnson:** How about books? What would you say were the most important books that shaped your mind?

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** I was deeply influenced by a small book called *The Cuban Missile Crisis* written by a man that became my mentor, Abram Chayes. He was a great Harvard Law professor and was deeply committed to the power of the law. He had been the legal adviser for the Kennedy administration and had devised the idea of ‘quarantine’ rather than a ‘blockade,’ which was very important legally in terms of getting OAS support for the Kennedy administration’s handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis. He was committed to multilateralism even if it takes longer. And yet he was also the man who represented Nicaragua when the Nicaraguan government sued the United States for mining its harbours, a case that I worked on with him in law school. After serving as his government’s highest lawyer, he then represented another country against his government to hold his country to its own highest standards.

**Alan Johnson:** So he is a kind of model for the kind of patriotism you extol in your new book, *The Idea that is America*?

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** Absolutely. I read his book in college and was so taken with the model he offered of how international law could work, even in a politically charged environment, I went to Harvard Law School to try to work with him. He became my mentor and I worked for him for 4 years after graduating. Later, at Oxford, I was influenced by Hedley Bull, as a thinker on international relations.

I’m a pretty classic liberal, not in the European free market sense, but in the genuinely Lockean enlightenment sense.

### Part 2: *A New World Order* (2004)

**Alan Johnson:** In your book *A New World Order* (2004) you argued that we live in a new world of intense economic and security interdependence that has outgrown ‘command and control’ models of governance. Fluid transnational networks – a dense yet decentralised global maze of judges, regulators, and legislators – are now vital to contemporary international relations. The book maps the ways in which

global governance is being transformed as governments work together through these transnational networks in response to the challenges of interdependence. Can you give the readers an example of a 'network,' so we are clear what we are talking about?

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** Let me give a few examples, because networks take different forms. One would be the international competition network which is a global network of anti-trust officials (or 'competition officials,' in Euro-speak). They come together, exchange best practices, harmonise policy, and anticipate problems. Another would be the International Network for Environmental Compliance and Enforcement (INECE). It was founded by the American EPA and the Dutch EPA. And the best known example is the Basle Committee of Central Bankers, which is powerful and problematic – problematic exactly because it's so powerful! A lot of financial regulation is done through the Basle Committee and networks such as the International Organisation of Securities Commission (IOSCO). And the final example I would offer is the European Association of Constitutional Judges which meets on a regular basis. When we think about the EU legal system we tend to think of hierarchical structures – the European Court of Justice, the Court of First Instance, and so on. But I would argue that much of the work of making EU and national law mesh is actually done through this network of constitutional court judges who know each other, exchange cases, and interact with the judges on the EU courts as well. In fact, there is even a global network of constitutional judges, but it's not formal.

**Alan Johnson:** Let's explore the potential of these kinds of global networks. In the book you talk about the fact that globalisation has produced a 'governance trilemma' but that transnational networks can be part of the solution. Can you explain?

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** The problem is that on the one hand we need much more global capacity to solve problems that transcend any one nation. On the other hand, we don't want a centralised world government. I've never been in a country where people say, 'Yes, we'd like a world government.' So the response has been 'Well, let's have policy networks open to anybody interested in an issue.' So, if you're interested in global warming as a scientist, or an activist, or a government official, or a foundation official, or an NGO, you can all just get together and work on it. The problem with that solution is that you can't figure out whom to hold to account. And the people who are most interested in something are not always

## JOHNSON | An Interview with Anne-Marie Slaughter

terribly representative. You don't want the most ardent environmentalist making decisions for you because almost by definition that person is probably far more willing to make compromises than the median voter. So you have a 'trilemma': (a) you need global capacity; (b) you don't want world government; but (c) neither do you want amorphous gatherings to make unaccountable decisions.

I argue that networks are part of the solution to the trilemma because while they give us global capacity they also give us accountability. They are not a centralised world government or a policy network of everybody, but a network of government officials who can be held accountable and who can form the spine of a larger network bringing in NGOs. It's not that you don't want lots of other people to be involved but you need someone you can hold to account.

**Alan Johnson:** You've said that government networks are under-appreciated, under-supported and under-used when it comes to addressing the central problems of global governance. If we took one of those problems – say, counter-terrorism, or post-conflict transition or nation-building – can you give us a sense of how enhanced network capacity would transform our ability to address the problem?

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** Well, let's take nation building. What we are lacking globally is what the EU uses when it has a candidate member. A country is actually socialised into the EU. It is supported to help meet EU standards through the engagement of all the country's officials, pretty low level ones included, in EU networks. The EU operates through these networks involving every government official imaginable. Of course, that is the deluxe model, and not something I think you can replicate except on a regional basis. But imagine if we had had a sort of working model able to plug into Iraq. Of course there is terrible violence and insecurity, but right now what you're also hearing out of Baghdad is that a lot of the problems involve lack of technocratic competence. The people who used to run the state are no longer there, the new people who run the state are not trained. There would be both political and technocratic benefits if we could have extended the EU networks, tacked on the US, tacked on Turkish officials, tacked on some Indian officials, some Jordanians, and so on. If we had these networks, properly funded and developed, we would have a web that we could then plug into any country that desperately needs ongoing help for a decade or more. But we don't have that. What we have instead is ad hoc help. The US or the UN parachutes in a bunch of officials and they work 6 months and then they go back home. They can do

temporary things, but what they can't do is support a fledgling government on an ongoing basis.

**Alan Johnson:** What do you think the main obstacles are to the development of that capacity at the moment? What's stopping it?

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** It is genuinely a failure of conceptualisation. Imagine if after 9/11 George Bush had gone before the world and said 'After the cold war we face new kinds of global threats. Terrorism is a global networked crime, as is arms trafficking and nuclear proliferation. And, as we did after 1945, the United States is going to lead the way to create a new set of global institutions for this new era to meet these global threats. We will create the global justice network, the global health network, the global environmental network. Those new networks will work with existing international institutions to strengthen world order.' But politicians find it very hard to understand that networks are institutions. Networks are the institutions best fitted for the conditions of the 21st century because they're very flexible, they operate much faster, and they use national resources rather than international resources. Politicians still think 'institution' means a big building in Geneva or New York or Nairobi with a bureaucracy and a letterhead.

**Alan Johnson:** How can we avoid the danger of elite capture of transnational network power?

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** Well, when you're talking about regulators you always have the danger of elite capture. All liberal democracies struggle with that as a domestic matter. On the one hand we seek to empower our ministries, or, in our case, executive agencies. They all have to be able to operate quasi-autonomously. On the other hand, we need to hold them accountable. Global networks just amplify that same issue. Regulators meet with their counterparts and shape policy. You have to decide whether to give them instructions *ex ante* as to what they can and can't do, or to let them do what they think they need to do and come back and justify it. These are standard questions for regulation. It's up to each nation to decide what authority to give to representatives and networks. But these are second generation problems – we're not there yet in terms of using these networks effectively.

**Alan Johnson:** Do you envisage global networks having an enforcement capacity, eventually?

## JOHNSON | An Interview with Anne-Marie Slaughter

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** There are enforcement networks right now. Take anti-trust networks. We have legislation that says our Justice Department can talk to the European Commission and the Australian competition authority and the Canadian competition authority and the Japanese competition authority to coordinate enforcement. The same thing is true in bankruptcy, for instance. You now have networks of global bankruptcy judges. You have to – they're dealing with global bankruptcies. In the terrorism area the great successes in fighting terrorist networks have come precisely through counter-networks, largely in the US and Europe, but by no means exclusively – you get a lot of co-operation in Singapore and Indonesia and the Philippines.

**Alan Johnson:** What about those global civil society networks that have emerged explosively 'from below?' How do you see the evolving relationship between networks formed 'from above' and 'from below?'

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** Corporations, NGOs and criminals are all organised in networks because networks fit with the speed, decentralisation, and communications technology of the 21st century. Governments are the outliers. If you create government networks you will empower civil society networks because you will give them valuable interlocutors. Take the environmental arena. Right now, if you are an environmental NGO you can go to the UN, or the UN environmental programme in Nairobi, or lobby the WTO, or lobby individual national governments, but you don't have one address where you know you are getting the people who are making the key decisions. If you have a global environmental network of the environmental ministers and they meet a couple of times every year, then civil society knows who is meeting, what decisions are on the agenda and how to influence them.

We need global norms about the transparency of these entities. And they have to have a website! Networks become real when they become virtual. If they are not virtual they're just 'I know somebody who knows somebody who knows somebody.' The minute you put them on the web you get specifics – here's the members, when they meet, and what's on the agenda. It would *empower* civil society if you formalised these global networks enough to enhance their capacity and their accountability, but not so much that you turn them into big vertical bureaucracies that are just like the ones we've already got.

**The problem with 'global covenants'**

**Alan Johnson:** You have admired but, ultimately, been unpersuaded by David Held's cosmopolitan blueprint for a 'global covenant.' Why?

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** I truly don't think there is the kind of global community that must exist to create a global covenant. He's really positing a global polity and we are very, very, very far from that. So his starting point is 'If we had this, then...?' Well, yes, but we don't have it, and talking about it will, in many countries, push us further from having it. In the United States when you start talking about a 'global covenant' you empower the sovereigntists – people who (for some legitimate liberal democratic reasons) already see their ability to shape their own futures being eroded. If you want to get to the place Held wants to get to you'd be better off working through national officials, and taking heed of people's fears at every step, rather than positing something that looks like world government.

**Alan Johnson:** This suggests you think we are in a transitional era. A couple of contrasting phrases in an article you wrote recently struck me forcefully. The first was oriented to the future: 'the global community should create a capacity to be able to...'; the second to the present: 'But absent that capacity...'. Perhaps much of our present difficulty in formulating strategy and policy is because we must do politics on this difficult transitional terrain. Policy must be guided by (a) our knowledge that we need capacity, and (b) our knowledge that we lack it. My question: how should political theory and political practice act on that transitional terrain?

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** There are two ways in which that terrain is very challenging. First is the conceptual challenge: we need new blueprints. Our situation is akin to that faced by the various framers of liberal democracies back in the 18th century, and, as my colleague Robert Keohane has written, particularly akin to that of the American framers. We need new forms because we're not going to get there with our current conceptual frameworks and our current intellectual technology. So we're muddling through.

Second, there is the political challenge. The new terrain demands we do two-level game politics (to use political science terminology). In other words, we have to play on the domestic front and on the international front at once. And it is triply complicated because international players can see your domestic front. That can help you if, for instance, your foreign partners know your congress won't pass things so don't ask you to give them up. But it can also hurt you if your domestic

## JOHNSON | An Interview with Anne-Marie Slaughter

opponents can take things that are happening in the international sphere and make them a domestic political issue. The new politics requires people who are much more politically attuned than classic diplomats, or classic foreign ministers even. It used to be that our world of 'foreign policy' was always a post-election world. The elections were always run on bread and butter issues and then when somebody came into office, he or she could appoint the foreign minister and that person would work with the diplomats. Well, no more. You really have got to be paying attention to what sells domestically, and at the same time know how to take that little political space you've got, intercept it with the political space of 191 other nations, or at least the nations of a region, and create something that will actually fly!

This is one major reason I wrote *The Idea That Is America*, which is aimed at the ordinary American voters rather than at the foreign policy community. These days you have to be able to do foreign policy at that level if you're going to be able to create the political space necessary to do some of the things we need to do.

### Part 3: Forging a World of Liberty Under Law: US National Security in the 21st Century (2006)

**Alan Johnson:** One effort to face these conceptual and political challenges was the Princeton Project on National Security. You were the convener and academic co-chair of this ambitious undertaking, which involved experts working collaboratively over a long period to develop a new, bipartisan national security strategy for the United States. Your report, co-authored with G. John Ikenberry, *Forging a World of Liberty Under Law: US National Security in the 21st Century*, was published in 2006.

When the report was launched you said, 'We set out to write a collective 'X' article ... We went looking for something like containment. We went looking for that one magic phrase that would capture American national security policy in the 21st century in the way that containment did, at least apocryphally, in the 20th century. About halfway through, we realised that was impossible.' Why was that?

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** In the 20th century, at different times, it was easy to identify a primary threat – the one threat that, if you didn't get that right, it didn't matter what else you did. In the early part of the century you're talking about rising powers, then you're talking about fascism, and then you're talking about



communism. What is truly different in the 21st century is that although you do face terrorism as a major threat, it is not the only one. No one could argue that terrorist networks are a greater threat than, say, nuclear proliferation. Of course there's an intersection between the two – nuclear proliferation can result in the terrorists getting a nuclear weapon – but even absent that, the spectre of suddenly having a nuclear Iran or a nuclear Saudi Arabia is a nightmare. Similarly with climate change – if we don't tackle this we're not going to have a planet, while in the shorter term there will be security issues that are going to result from nations trying desperately to counter the effects of climate change. The Princeton Project participants realised that looking for an equivalent to containment presumed one overarching threat. But we are in a world of multiple threats, and at least 5 of them – terrorism, nuclear proliferation, pandemics, climate change, the implosion of the Middle East – are equal in gravity. And there are two major challenges: the rise of India and China and the challenge of managing globalisation. So you have to have a strategy that can respond in multiple directions at once.

**Alan Johnson:** Some have said the Princeton Project did not offer a strategy so much as a laundry list of threats. At the foreign policy blog, TPM café, one critic wrote, 'The point of a grand strategy is to prioritize, and [the Report] simply refuses to do that.'

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** And that, as far as we're concerned, is old thinking. If that's your attitude you are not going to be able to shape a strategy that can work. This was a *collective* conclusion, after a lot of thinking by a lot of great minds. A Grand Strategy group led by John Ikenberry and Frank Fukuyama came in and said 'we're not paying nearly enough attention to the rise in India and China' – and in geopolitical terms that in itself is the major issue. In classic geopolitics, where you're looking at relations between states, the issue of accommodating rising states is huge. America must focus on what's happening in Asia – the threats that are not being faced and the opportunities that are being lost. And we had other experts writing on nuclear proliferation, terrorism, bio-threats, climate change, and energy security.

The demand that we prioritise is part of the problem. The Bush administration has decided the successor to Nazism and Communism is 'Islamofascism.' We think that's both counter-productive in its own terms and an example of 20th Century thinking trying to cope with a 21st century world.

## JOHNSON | An Interview with Anne-Marie Slaughter

**Alan Johnson:** Nonetheless, you and G. John Ikenberry did propose one overarching concept to sum up the strategic framework you proposed: ‘liberty under law.’ What does that concept seek to foreground?

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** A large part of what we are getting at with that concept has been American policy since Jefferson – that for moral and instrumental reasons a world of mature liberal democracies would be a better and safer place. That’s Kant and Jefferson both. When he was national security adviser, Tony Lake developed the strategy of ‘enlargement’ – i.e. enlarging the community of democracies. But what we really sought to foreground, as you put it, is an end-state of liberty under law, meaning countries governed by the rule of law, where the law itself safeguards individual liberty consistent with the obligations of the community as a whole. Democracy, if by that you mean representative government, is one part of that world, but only one part, and is anyway a much more complex system than just representative elections. Our founders understood that. Our history, and the history of any liberal democracy, is as much or more about building the institutions that create accountable governments and rights-regarding government as it is about popular government. That was a huge part of what we were signalling.

We were also signalling that you have to have rules at the international level as well as the domestic level. A *world* of liberty under the law is not the same as saying a world of liberal democratic states, although that’s part of what we’re talking about. It’s saying liberal democratic states should be subject to international law.

**Alan Johnson:** What are the central differences, and what are the elements of continuity, if any exist, between ‘the Bush doctrine’ and the ‘grand strategy of forging a world of liberty under law’ that you propose?

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** Tell me what you mean by ‘The Bush Doctrine.’

**Alan Johnson:** Let’s say a fairly aggressive strategy of promoting democracies, a willingness to use military force as one, at least, of the tools to achieve that, and a refusal to be put off from using that force because you haven’t been able to put an international alliance in place. Plus the idea that the root cause of the threat is the stagnation – politically, economically and culturally – of an entire region, so the only serious response is to promote political change in that region.

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** The Bush administration at its best looks long term at a lot of problems. Terrorism is the most obvious. The Bush administration sees terrorists as a symptom and thinks that to defeat terrorism it will require social and economic and political change to empower individuals to make the most of their lives. And that's the concept of liberty – the liberty to flourish as human beings. And in *that* sense the Bush administration is continuing the policy of the Clinton administration, which is continuing the policy of the Reagan administration, which is continuing the policy of the Carter administration. You really have to go back to Kissinger before you get a break. A lot of what's happened since Kissinger was in reaction to a purely 'realist' foreign policy. So there is continuity there. We agree that long term democratisation is the best hope of creating a safer and better international environment for all of us. And that does involve thinking about political change. Similarly, we also think there is great value in liberal democracies being able to bolster one another. So we propose a 'concert of democracies' – which has gotten a lot of heat – the Chinese and some Democrats are equally furious. (laughs)

**Alan Johnson:** Well, don't be put off.

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** Oh, we're not. But we differ from the 'Bush doctrine' on a number of grounds.

First, regarding the willingness to use military force. That's the biggest difference between the neo-cons and John and me. We share a lot of ends but we really disagree on means. We are far more sceptical of the ability to achieve long term change with what inevitably has to be short term means. Throwing troops at a problem is a short-term solution.

Second, we are far more humble about how pro-active a role the United States can really play. We see a huge role for a community of liberal democracies to support new democratic forces in different countries. And we see a role for economic change. And we talk a lot about PAR (popular, accountable, and rights-regarding governments) and believe that a large part of getting accountable government is fighting corruption, making things more transparent, making it clear where the money goes, and building courts and checks and balances.

Third, we think it's a much more *complex* and *longer term* process than the Bush administration, which has had the hubris to think 'Gee, we can just set things in

## JOHNSON | An Interview with Anne-Marie Slaughter

motion and they will take it from there.' In my book I use this great quote from Jefferson where he says, 'The ball of liberty is now well in motion and will roll around the world.' Well, it's not that simple.

### **The Domestic Politics of Foreign Policy**

**Alan Johnson:** Some have said the foreign policy proposed in Liberty Under the Law is too clever by half, as we'd say over here. These critics say that a complex policy will always lose out to the simpler policy, whether it's 'containment' or 'war on terror.' How do you respond?

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** In two ways. First, the book I just wrote, *The Idea That Is America*, has a lot of the same ideas in it as the Princeton Project but is written in a much simpler way. Second, the real question is whether you can convince American voters that 'Islamofascism' is 20th century thinking and that as reluctant as they may be to accept a more complex messy world, that's the world they're in. I think you can. The 'war on terror' frame is leaving us unprepared for a whole lot of things that individual voters can see with their own eyes. They can see the rise of China economically, they can see the dangers of nuclear proliferation, they can certainly see climate change, and they can see the vital importance of energy security.

The Pentagon itself tried to change the GWOT (the global war on terror) to the GSAVE (the global struggle against violent extremism) recognising that it's not a war, that calling it a war is counterproductive, and that it really is a struggle against violent extremism. Of course they got overruled by the White House, which refused to give up the political value of being 'at war.' I understand the problem of delivering a complex message, and I certainly don't think you engage median voters with the Princeton Report. That would be ridiculous. But can you deliver the message in a way that people will get? Yes.

### **Neither Kissingerian Realism nor Neoconservatism nor Liberal**

#### **Internationalism. What then?**

**Alan Johnson:** Let's turn to the underpinning philosophy of the Princeton Report. You are no Kissingerian realist, that's for sure. Indeed you point out that it was the 'backlash against Kissingerian realism – against the very idea that U.S. foreign policy would not be guided in some way by American values ... [that] fed the neoconservative movement in the first place. You have described yourself as a 'muscular Wilsonian' seeking to 'break out of the corner that the neocons have

boxed us into.’ But you are also skeptical of the efficacy of an overly idealistic liberal internationalism, and so you call for ‘an intermediate position that is neither liberal internationalist (much less neo-colonialist) nor realist, but that integrates important elements of both.’ At the level of foundational ideas, what are you seeking to preserve from liberal internationalism and from realism?

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** What I take from liberal internationalism is what it had to begin with but then lost, and which the neo-cons helped bring back. If we go back to Kant, it was assumed that what you could do internationally depended on the types of nations you had domestically. It was never just about multilateralism for its own sake, which it is often understood to be. In its weakest form liberal internationalism became the dogma that you had to work through international institutions, everything has to be done through international institutions without paying attention to the types of governments who are in those types of institutions. But when you get very diverse governments in those institutions – autocracies, oligarchies, theocracies as well as democracies – they are going to water down any effort to distinguish between governments based on domestic regime type. They’ll treat a genocidal dictatorship the same way as they’ll treat a liberal democracy. And I reject that.

Kant was the first to grapple with what we now call the ‘trilemma.’ He knew ‘world government’ was not going to work but he also knew you needed some kind of global governance capacity. His solution was a federation of free states. (He also imagined that relations among the states in this federation would be magically harmonious – I doubt that, but the issue is not absence of conflict, but absence of *violent* conflict.) So, that’s the first point: liberal internationalism is not just about multilateralism, but also promoting (or standing for, a better term) liberal democracy as best you can on a global level.

I accept realism in two ways. One, you have to deal with governments that don’t look like you. To say that your vision of the world is a world of liberal democratic states where all human beings have a roughly equal shot at governing themselves and determining their life chances is not to say that you’re not going to talk to or work with governments that have a very different view, both formally and informally. Two, the best of the realist tradition reminds us of the value of prudence. You can’t for a minute believe that Reinhold Niebuhr, for example, is not deeply committed to liberal democracy, but he’s also deeply aware of the dangers of missionary visions. And I accept those cautions. I write a lot about the critical importance of tempering

## JOHNSON | An Interview with Anne-Marie Slaughter

any vision with humility and a sober grasp of the realities of politics. And, in that sense, the way we now have to play two-level game politics is probably healthy. Nothing brings you down to earth faster than thinking about how on earth you're going to sell something to the voters.

**Alan Johnson:** One critic has argued that far from integrating pre-existing perspectives the Princeton Project 'suffers from an unresolved ambivalence about two very different approaches to US engagement with the world – global internationalism and democratic multinationalism.' He continues:

The former aims above all to mute the strife of ideologies; to preserve and establish peace and international law; and to establish cooperative frameworks for addressing truly global problems of public health, population growth, resource management and environmental preservation and restoration. The latter is an inherently revolutionary program that seeks to place the United States at the head of a liberal democratic Internationale bent on pursuing political transformation around the globe. While the authors seek to construct an intellectual framework in which these two agendas exist in harmony, and see these cooperative systems as embedded in concentric circles, the two approaches are actually destined to collide. If we pursue both at once, neither will succeed. It is necessary to pick one.

How do you respond?

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** Frankly, it points to an almost wilful denial of what is actually happening in the world. Particularly when it comes from Europeans it drives me crazy. Because what do you have? The EU is a huge force in global politics and is explicitly a community of liberal democratic states. If you take aid from it you have to do a lot of things that are designed to move you in that direction. It is not 'missionary,' in the sense that it is looking to go out and convert people, but it stands for a set of values and it is promoting them in lots of different ways. And the EU is deeply engaged in the UN, which is a global internationalist venture. So the idea that these two things can't co-exist seems to me wilfully blind. Even if you look back and study what liberal internationalism was in the past, we find it was both. It was certainly both under Wilson and under Roosevelt and Truman – who created the UN on the one hand and NATO and the Marshall Plan on the other.

**'Why are we so lousy at foreign policy?'**

**Alan Johnson:** Nicholas Kristof wrote an article in *The New York Times* asking 'Why are so lousy at foreign policy?' Thomas E. Ricks' remarkable book, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (2006) is the latest to catalogue the catastrophic failures – military, political, intelligence – of the US effort in Iraq. These are failures that, as Anthony Beevor says on the cover, 'almost defy belief.' Larry Diamond writes in TNR: 'The US is in a quagmire in Iraq because it rushed to war, and then to occupation, without a plan or even a realistic assessment.' To study the build-up to the Iraq war is to face a question – is American foreign policy making, and inter-agency relations more generally, now dysfunctional? In a word, busted? And if so, why?

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** You can't underestimate the incredible hubris at the top of the Bush team. They had a complete certainty not only that they knew what was right but that everything done before them, or by people who disagreed with them, was wrong. Remember when Bush comes in the attitude is 'ABC, Anything But Clinton.' As regards Iraq, people who knew better got dismissed time and again, from Gen Shinseki who told them they needed more troops, to the State Department planners. But there is a second reason and it gets overlooked: the quality of the people in our government has changed. The entire Kennedy generation are retiring. Kennedy inspired masses of people to go into the government. But, beginning in the 1970s, we have now had three decades of wailing about government – 'government is the problem not the solution,' talk of 'wasteful bureaucracy,' attacks on 'Washington,' and all of that. And there has also been the development of really exciting civil society alternatives to government service. The result is that many of my smartest students who really want to change things, who are savvy, who speak multiple languages, who have spent time abroad, are not going into the government. They are going into NGOs. They are more likely to go to Iraq with the Red Cross or CARE or Doctors Without Borders than to the State Department or the Pentagon. Now add on top of all that the Bush administration loyalty tests that go all the way down – so you get these 23 years olds who know nothing but who have worked for the Heritage Foundation – and you get complete dysfunctionality.

**Democracy Promotion**

**Alan Johnson:** Democracy promotion has a bad name after Iraq. *Liberty Under Law* seeks to address this. The report calls for 'a much more sophisticated strategy of

## JOHNSON | An Interview with Anne-Marie Slaughter

creating the deeper preconditions for successful liberal democracy – preconditions that extend far beyond the simple holding of elections.’ What are these ‘deeper preconditions’ of democracy? And what would a ‘more sophisticated strategy’ of democracy-promotion look like?

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** Our world is interdependent and information-rich. It’s not as if each country just develops in its own way. What happens in other countries has a *huge* effect. Just think about the Orange revolution and what that spawned very quickly. Or look at the East Asian tigers and the fact that one country’s successful move from a dictatorship to democracy had a big impact on other countries. So part of what we need to do is develop a global strategy, or at the very least a regional strategy.

I argue in my new book is that America’s founders never thought that we were going to be *exceptional* in being a liberal democracy, they thought we were blessed to be able to be the *first* – to demonstrate that government by the consent of the governed was actually possible. They thought that America was just one example of a country putting universal values into practice and that there would be many other countries that would put those values into practice and each country would have a different trajectory and different institutions. The US needs to be far more sensitive to the very many different ways these same values have been realised. We must be much more open to different countries’ approaches to how you get there, rather than insisting on an American template or on the other hand just washing our hands and saying ‘let people develop on their own.’ We ought to be working for regional and global institutions.

I would love to see a concert of democracies able to support institutions and individuals that are pushing for liberal democracy in individual countries by giving them aid and by creating networks of support. There is a tremendous amount to be done there. We’ve also called for a Global PAR Index (a popular, accountable, rights-regarding government index) which would be very helpful. Imagine if Freedom House came together with NGOs in twenty countries from different civilisations and developed such an index. Everybody reads Freedom House’s Freedom Index as a ‘US’ affair – the US government deciding who’s up to par or not. Well, let’s have a genuine PAR index and we could all be rated.



**Lilies That Fester?**

**Alan Johnson:** After our experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, and after the fruits of the elections in the Palestinian Authority, there is a growing awareness that promoting genuine democracy is an extraordinarily difficult and long-term process. Let me offer two examples. The first example is Robert Conquest writing in *The National Interest*: “Democracy” did not develop or become viable in the West until quite a time after a law-and-liberty polity had emerged. Habeas corpus, the jury system and the rule of law were not products of ‘democracy,’ but of a long effort, from medieval times, to curb the power of the English executive. And democracy can only be seen in any positive or laudable sense if it emerges from and is an aspect of the law-and-liberty tradition.’

The second example is Anatol Lieven and John Hulsman, who in their book *Ethical Realism: A Vision for America’s Role in the World* (2007) are sceptical about ‘democracy-promotion.’ They call instead for the slow and long-term promotion of the institutional and cultural conditions for the organic growth of democracy via social and economic transformation and long-term institution and capacity building. Without this, they argue, we will only get more pseudo-democracies that will be even more dangerous than the openly non-democratic states they replace. Lieven sums his thought up by quoting Shakespeare: ‘Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.’

I am torn between thinking these kind of warnings (a) correct (b) a recipe for passivity, when we don’t really have the time to remain passive. What did you make of Lieven’s Ethical Realism?

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** Honestly, what I worry about with Lieven’s kind of ‘realism,’ particularly in the Unites States, is that you already have so many forces that are going to push you in the direction of compromise. One thing the Bush administration has gotten right is to say that part of the problem is that in the Cold War we basically said if you were on our side we would just turn a blind eye to whatever you did, you could imprison people, you could torture people, you could pretend to have elections and have them be completely fixed, you could deny your political opposition any rights at all and we would just not pay any attention. And that was for both geo-strategic and business reasons, by the way. The biggest lobby against pushing for democracy typically, or human rights generally, is business. If you don’t have a policy that is very clear that where possible you really are going to support pro-democratic elements in different countries, and you are going to insist

## JOHNSON | An Interview with Anne-Marie Slaughter

on adherence to a set of universal human rights, then the overall political forces push you back toward inertia. Look, whatever your policy you will have to make trade-offs at every turn. But if you start with that ‘realist’ policy, I fear there’s going to be a lot of realism and little ethics.

### Locking in values: the need for institutional innovation

**Alan Johnson:** The Princeton report, *Liberty under Law*, takes a refreshingly sober approach to the system of international institutions that the United States and its allies built after World War II. You say the system is ‘broken’ and you call for a new architecture of global governance and security to meet the new challenges. Your model is the Truman administration’s response to the Cold War which you characterise as ‘imagination and leadership in creating institutions to lock in a set of shared goals and values.’ So, let’s examine two of the practical proposals *Liberty under Law* makes to lock in progressive values: Security Council Reform and a new ‘Concert of Democracies.’

### Security Council Reform

**Alan Johnson:** The reform of the Security Council, you write, is the ‘single most important issue’ if the UN is to live up to our hopes. Why?

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** First, everything else is just nibbling around the edges. The Security Council was the most important institution in the UN when it was created. It absorbed the biggest amount of time and effort of the original negotiators because that’s where the power is. To talk about real UN reform without overhauling the power structure is just not serious.

Second, I just don’t think anyone can believe in 2025 that decisions about global security are going to be taken by *countries that won the Second World War!* It would be as if you’d said in 1945, ‘OK, Concert of Europe time.’ It’s just not credible.

We’ve never tried to overhaul the Security Council when the US was really willing to put political capital behind it. We’re the single largest contributor to the UN and if we said to the world, ‘OK, we may be the first power in history to recognise we’ve got to cede power, but we recognise that for the Security Council to work in the 21st century we’ve got to make room at the table,’ we’d get a tremendous response. Countries like India and Brazil obviously would be overjoyed, and we could insist there be a Muslim country and two African countries. The formulas exist to get

there; what's been lacking is the political will. I honestly think you either do this or accept that you are condemning the UN to increasing irrelevance in large parts of the world.

**Alan Johnson:** How would you tackle the question of the veto on the Security Council?

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** In expanding the Security Council you develop a system of weighted voting. In the run up to the Iraq war, let's say the French had vetoed but nobody else had and the majority of votes had gone for the US. The view of the invasion would have been very, very different. We are likely to move to a world where even though you have the veto, the veto doesn't carry decisive weight if it's only one. More important will be the configuration of countries backing a policy.

#### A 'Concert of Democracies'

**Alan Johnson:** Rather than put all its eggs in the basket of UN reform the Princeton report proposed a 'Concert of Democracies' be created in order to 'signal that the world is not stuck forever with old institutions if they cannot be reformed for a new world.' Who would be the members of a Concert of Democracies, and what would its powers and purposes be? Is it a goad to ensure UN Security Council reform, a pressure group within the UN, or an alternative to the UN Security Council? And is there a danger it would become 'the West versus the Rest?'

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** Well that last question is important. The concert of democracies must be *global* – if we can't do it without India and Brazil and South Africa then I don't think we should do it, at least not now. If the United States and Europe were to create this alone, it could be counter-productive. It is critical to demonstrate that liberal democracy is not a *western* construct but a universal construct and that there are many developing countries equally capable of having liberal democracies that work. That doesn't mean that every liberal democracy in the world has to be part of it but it does mean that some major non-western powers have to be part of it from the beginning. Politically, Europe won't do it if it's just Europe and the US. And, to be honest, right now, if it's seen as 'Made in Washington' *nobody* will join because it will be seen as a blind for US power.

I see the concert of democracies as ideally operating to push UN reform. Once the UN is reformed I see it as a caucus within the UN – another entity that can

## JOHNSON | An Interview with Anne-Marie Slaughter

help liberal democracies concert their action to support liberal democracy. The term ‘concert’ is carefully chosen. It’s not an alliance or a global NATO. It allows countries to concert their action in more organised form but it is not a formal alliance. That would be the ideal. And creating it will enhance the chances of UN reform because it will signal you can’t wait forever. Right now, the Security Council powers have very little incentive to make room at the table. Only if they think that there could be alternatives – and this would by no means be the only alternative – do they have the incentive to do what’s necessary.

As regards the question of who is a member of the concert of democracies, we tried to design a formula that would make it like the EU – every member would have to agree to sign a treaty with an incoming member, a non-aggression treaty that also commits you to upholding the values. That way you would have a lot of checks on who comes in.

**Alan Johnson:** Anatol Lieven has criticised the idea of a Concert of Democracies in debate with you. He said: ‘In particular parts of the world [it] would in fact turn into backing some nations against other nations which would actually make international relations and the promotion of democracy a great deal harder and even more violent.’ How do you respond?

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** This idea that the concert of democracies is going to ‘back’ countries is not at all our conception. We want a place where liberal democracies can concert their action. And look, *that* is going to be hard enough to achieve. It’s not as if liberal democracy is a prescription for harmony. Look at US-EU relations. Yes, they are better over the long-term than US relations with any other nation because we start from some common starting points and in the end we manage to pull together. But there is a huge amount of disagreement. Add in liberal democracies from other parts of the world and there will be even more disagreement! If it comes about the concert of democracies will be a loose untidy fractious organisation that nevertheless can offer incentives for governments to move towards liberal democracy (you can imagine having ‘candidate members’ as the EU does) and provide real support for fledgling democracies – not just financial support but technical support, the creation of networks to bolster transitional democracies, and so on. So this is not about aggressively backing some nations. Quite the contrary. It’s about supporting countries that are trying to become democracies and supporting groups within democracies that are trying to achieve democracy, but via mechanisms that

have a multilateral stamp of approval so they are not seen as puppets of the US or of any one other country.

### Fighting Terrorism

**Alan Johnson:** You have written, 'We are losing the war on terror because we are treating the symptoms and not the cause.' What in your view are the 'causes?'

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** The deep causes are a combination of lack of opportunity and cultural humiliation. You have a particular concentration of Muslims in the Middle East who are very conscious of their backwardness relative to many other parts of the world, while they are simultaneously aware of a great heritage. They are then easily manipulated to feel hatred of the United States and the West more generally as being responsible for that humiliation. Poverty is relevant but that's not what is driving terrorism. It's much more about a sense of humiliation and inferiority and a desire to be able to fight back. So when you see Osama Bin Laden getting support from a lot of people who would never actually do what he is advocating, they are saying 'Here is someone who is standing up to America and the West.' We need to find ways to integrate these countries into the global system in ways that create opportunities and offer a very different account of what Islam was in the past and can be again. This is not something the West can do alone. It's a struggle within Islam and if you look at the struggle within Christianity, it could be a long fight.

**Alan Johnson:** You have argued that we should define terrorists as criminals, not soldiers. 'Terrorism,' you have argued, 'is only one of at least five crimes committed by global criminal networks.' You reject the idea that Islamism is an ideology with many similarities to previous totalitarian ideologies-cum-political-movements. Liberty Under Law states: 'In an effort to combat radicalization in Middle Eastern states, the United States should make every effort to work with Islamic governments and Islamic/Islamist movements, including fundamentalists, as long as they disavow terrorism.' It goes on: 'Framing the struggle against terrorism as a war similar to World War II or the Cold War lends legitimacy and respect to an enemy that deserves neither; the result is to strengthen, not degrade, our adversary.' In rejecting 'the Paul Berman view' – if I can give it that designation for shorthand – surely it can't be decisive that that view boosts the enemy (let's bracket whether it actually does, for now). There must be reasons for believing it untrue as opposed to merely unhelpful or dispiriting. What are those reasons in your view?

## JOHNSON | An Interview with Anne-Marie Slaughter

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** I think it is untrue now. I worry that we could make it a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is possible for me to imagine the Muslim world roused, or controlled, on the scale that Fascist and Communist countries were. It's certainly not out of the question that we could in fact face a group of radical Islamist states that defined themselves in terms of providing an alternative to western civilisation in much the way that the Soviet version of Marxism did. But that is very avoidable and I worry deeply that the way we are handling things strategically is making matters worse not better. But you are quite right to say that *as of now* this is a serious threat. No question. It is a hybrid between a military threat and a purely criminal threat. We call it a global insurgency in the Princeton Report and we say you need to fight it with law-enforcement, intelligence and special operations. I recognise there are situations in which traditional law-enforcement does not work. But the threat comes from what is still a relatively small sect among Muslims that completely rejects some very important Islamic tenets – the purposeful killing of civilians, most obviously. Indeed, I would wager that one of the reasons the British police seem to have very good informants in Muslim networks is that there are an awful lot of Muslims who are horrified by what is happening.

We would do better to think about the enemy as a group of mass murderers or twisted criminals who need to be fought on a global basis, but by methods that are closer to the ways we take on arms and money trafficking than to those we use in all-out war. It just isn't war, in my view, and the consequences of calling it war are counter-productive, and in the US it has led to some very bad domestic political choices.

**Alan Johnson:** But we must be able to openly discuss Islam in relation to the terrorist threat. You have written: 'Since 9/11 the Bush administration has sought to convince ordinary pious Muslims around the world that America seeks no quarrel with them. The best way to start is to take Islam itself out of the equation.' However, in a Pew Opinion Poll 6 percent of British Muslims said 7/7 was 'fully justified' (which translated into 100,000 British Muslims). Surely we have a cultural crisis within Islam-in-modernity, rather than a criminal conspiracy? As Salman Rushdie says, 'There is a problem with Islam.' In the failed Glasgow airport terrorist attacks in 2007, when the terrorist (who has since died) was a ball of flame and the police were trying to apprehend him, he was still throwing punches, shouting 'Allah! Allah!'

I guess the challenge for us is to find a way to acknowledge that part of the problem is that a great religion, Islam, is struggling to come to terms with modernity and

individuality – as all the great religions have had to do – without framing that basic blunt truth in such a way that it sounds like we believe there is a ‘war of civilisations’ going on. It’s a difficult political argument to make and some of the Bush administration have really struggled to make it.

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** Right. And one of the difficulties has been the ‘war on terror’ frame. You know, Bush’s initial instincts were great. He went to a mosque and was very embracing of American Muslims. We need to rely more on inter-faith efforts. In the US we have had a separation of church and state in foreign policy on a global level. There are meetings of global religious leaders but we have not sought to integrate these into how we make foreign policy. Yet we are going to have to do just that and for just the reasons you said. If you try to pretend it’s not connected to Islam you get written off as a fool. You put it very well. But it is a fringe group, an extremist group, and our job is to keep it that way. Because if we don’t do this right we may see a credible claim that there is a ‘war against Islam’ and in ten years it will look a lot more like the existential threat that the administration says we face today.

#### Humanitarian Intervention After Iraq

**Alan Johnson:** In 2004 (*Foreign Affairs* Jan/Feb) you proposed, with Lee Feinstein, a corollary principle to the principle of ‘the responsibility to protect.’ You proposed ‘a collective “duty to prevent” nations run by rulers without internal checks on their power from acquiring or using WMD,’ and you identified the existing rules governing the use of force, embodied in the UN Charter, as ‘inadequate.’

But in June 2006 the website Sudan Watch posted an item about your views entitled ‘Staunch American liberal interventionist rethinks Darfur after reading David Rieff’s *“Moral Blindness: The Case Against Troops for Darfur.”*’ In that article, David Rieff had written: ‘The idea that, after Bosnia, Rwanda, Kosovo, and Iraq, intelligent activists can still speak of humanitarian intervention as if it were an uncomplicated act of rescue without grave implications is a testimony to the refusal of the best and brightest among us to think seriously about politics. Is this what the marriage of human rights and American exceptionalism has led us to? If so, God help us.’

Have your views on intervention been reshaped by the experience of Iraq?

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** The responsibility to protect is the single most important shift in the definition of sovereignty since the Treaty of Westphalia itself.

## JOHNSON | An Interview with Anne-Marie Slaughter

Remember, it took 300 years for us to fully identify and appreciate the importance of that Treaty. Today, we stand right at the outset of a new era. The responsibility to protect is the first intellectually coherent account of sovereignty that integrates Westphalian sovereignty with universal human rights and I strongly support it. Governments have to be on notice that they have a duty to their people and if they become the enemies of their people, or of a significant group of their people, the international community has the right to intervene.

But the decision to intervene must be a multilateral decision. That means a UN decision, or at least a decision supported by a broadly representative regional organisation. That is very hard to get. And in some ways it's good that it is hard to get. That means that you really do have to think through the consequences and you can't just go in and stop the killing without a plan. And this is where I rethought Darfur. I still support intervention of various kinds but I no longer think that it is OK just to send a bunch of troops in to stop the killing without a plan for what next. We ought to have a no-fly zone, and ought to create a situation in which many Darforis feel safe to go back to their homes but we'd better have a plan after that. If you go in and then pull out – and publics will get very tired of supporting the troops – failing to leave people with some longer-term regional settlement, or at least a settlement within Darfur, you are just setting people up for another round.

I am strongly supportive of shifting the norms to allow for intervention but I also think that you need a prudential brake through a multilateral decision-making process to avoid any one country from using the humanitarian justification as a disguise for its own power ambitions. Equally important, you need multilateral decision-making to ensure you have really thought through what you are doing so you don't make matters worse or just very temporarily better.

**Alan Johnson:** But there is a danger. Reiff's argument might become a recipe for inaction in the face of genocide. He was once one of the most important advocates of humanitarian intervention, but I wonder if his rethink, while initially valuable, is not now in danger of tipping over into the careless rewriting of recent history. Rwanda, after all, teaches us nothing at all about the dangers of humanitarian intervention, though it teaches much about the tragic costs of inaction. As for the interventions in the Balkans, flawed as they were, they were examples of US-European partnership, not 'US Exceptionalism' – and they ended Serb imperialism and ethnic cleansing to boot. There is a danger of over-reacting to Iraq, lurching from a naively optimistic interventionism to an absurdly pessimistic isolationism.



Given that some intervention may be vetoed at the Security Council, while regional powers may resist action for all kinds of self-interested reasons (or just lack of capacity), can you envisage situations in which an ongoing genocide might have to be stopped unilaterally?

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** I can, but then you have to do what Abraham Lincoln did when he overrode habeas corpus. You do it, but then you go back and ask for approval. And that in itself – knowing you are going to have to justify yourself later – makes you think harder about what you are doing and plan more effectively. And because you know you will have to prove it was indeed a humanitarian intervention, you will shape what you do on the ground accordingly. But look, if you go back to Rwanda, any nation should have been able to go in if they could have stopped the killing, including my own. But then you have to be prepared to face international judgement and you should invite it.

**Part 4: *The Idea that is America: Keeping Faith with Our Values in a Dangerous World* (2007)**

**Alan Johnson:** President Adams said that the best thing America could do to promote democracy was to preserve the power and magnetic pull of the successful example. Would it be fair to say that your latest book – *The Idea that is America: Keeping Faith with Our Values in a Dangerous World* – is very much a post-Iraq book in that it seeks to tell a story about US history, character and values in order to understand why that power and magnetism has been so badly diminished – you said in an interview that ‘policies that have our name on it are now dead on arrival’ – and how it can be restored?

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** I wrote the book because I felt strongly that we had lost our way in the world. Internationally, we have squandered a great deal of our moral authority. This is horribly agonising for someone like myself who – while clear-eyed about America’s many mistakes – grew up believing, and continues to believe that, at our best, we use our power for good. I wrote the book to do what I could to help us find our way back.

I wanted to tell a very different story about American history and American values, one that is patriotic in the sense of cherishing the values and feeling proud of much of what America has achieved as a country while at the same time being honest about our failings. I review many of the darker moments in our history, but I also identify

## JOHNSON | An Interview with Anne-Marie Slaughter

our willingness to identify the gap between our founding rhetoric and our current reality – and to force the government to close it – as an important mechanism of social change. We talked about ‘all men are created equal’ but we had slaves. So abolitionist groups and freed slaves themselves such as Frederick Douglass said, ‘You are complete hypocrites! You talk about equality but look at my world!’ That insistence, over time, and at the cost of a great war, gradually forced the abolition of slavery. A hundred years later Martin Luther King did the same thing with the absence of civil rights – not rejecting the Constitution, but calling on all Americans to make it real. It is because we are committed to a set of founding values that critics can get purchase. And those critics are the soul of patriotism.

**Alan Johnson:** So what is ‘the idea that is America?’

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** The title is taken from a letter sent by Capt. Ian Fishback to Senator John McCain in 2005. Fishback is a West Point educated soldier who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. He wrote to McCain begging that standards be enforced governing interrogations in Iraq. He argues that a nation only shows what it is made of when it is tested and says that for his part: ‘I’d rather die fighting than lose even the smallest part of the idea that is America.’ If we abandon our values to extract information from terrorists to provide for our security then we have destroyed ourselves. Here was one military man writing to another, denying there was a contradiction between our values and our power. I used that title because of the overwhelming importance of that message.

The idea that is America is the idea of a country that is bound together not by blood or geography, or even common experience, but by a commitment to a set of values. That is what our founders envisaged – that you can tie a very diverse group of people together by a commitment to a set of universal values: liberty, equality, democracy, justice. (Any American, if you wake them up in the middle of the night and ask them to name the values the country was founded on, will come up with those). I add tolerance, humility and faith, and I argue that these are the seven values we were committed to at the founding and that have shaped our history. But the book is organised as a set of stories about struggle: we have fallen short of those values, and Americans – from poets to clergymen to Presidents – have insisted that we do a better job of living up to them.

**Alan Johnson:** You write of ‘universal values.’ Reading that, some seem to have heard George W. Bush while others have heard John Locke. Who is right?

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** It's John Locke! And I find it deeply depressing that Americans can't get that, particularly Americans on the left. I find it incredible that I am being criticised for making the case that our founders were motivated by universal values. Read Daniel Webster on the fiftieth anniversary of the battle of Bunker Hill. He says, 'We've done it! We've done it!' What he means is that we had shown it was possible to have a government based on the consent of the governed. We had proved the Enlightenment thinkers were right. The expectation was that many other countries would follow suit, and many did. Today, we have gotten into our heads that these are *American* values. This is wrong in terms of our own history and it is counterproductive. They are 'American' values in the same sense that they are 'French' or 'British' or 'Japanese': the citizens of any liberal democracy value this body of universal values.

**The critics (i): Against 'progress'**

**Alan Johnson:** There has been a cluster of very sharp criticisms of *The Idea That Is America* from liberal intellectuals. Some oppose the talk of 'progress' and others oppose the talk of 'values.'

David Reiff was typical. He told us he 'exploded in bitter laughter' at the book – which he thought an 'exceptionalist fantasy of America held by Americans,' and a 'progress narrative.' Indeed, the book was nothing less than 'a penumbral translation of the ur-Biblical progress narrative.' Your 'romantic and self-loving vision of the political and moral essence of the US' had missed the real roots of US success, which he said lay in 'mineral and agricultural wealth, slavery, immigrant cheap labour and capital accumulation.' Of course that kind of criticism could be applied to Martin Luther King's famous Lincoln Memorial speech of 1963 when he spoke of 'a promissory note' which America (you might even say the Idea of America) had extended and which the civil rights movement now sought to cash.

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** Absolutely.

**Alan Johnson:** Have you been disappointed by this reaction?

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** Well, I spent a long time at Harvard Law School and I am no stranger to critical left denunciations of progress narratives. I spent most of my academic career before I became a dean fighting that very fight. My response is always that in the end this is a nihilistic view that would convince any activist to stop

## JOHNSON | An Interview with Anne-Marie Slaughter

fighting and to go and sit in a café. I've not much use for it. I have use for critique of course – and no one who has read me over the last ten years could think I don't know that America needs a lot of criticism. But this is different. It is a rejection of the very idea of progress. Look, I grew up in the American South in the time of segregation when the idea of an African-American Secretary of State would have been unthinkable. Yet we have just gone from a woman Secretary of State, to an African-American Secretary of State, to a woman who is also an African-American as Secretary of State! So don't tell me there is no progress.

There is a deeper problem here. The American left – not all but a lot of it – has real difficulty talking in the language of patriotism in any way. This is politically damaging as it is the language of American politics. But it is worrisome in a deeper way. Can you not reconcile a commitment to the values our founders did espouse with an ongoing liberal progressive critique that is clear-eyed about what is wrong with us? To me you have to be able to do that, and our greatest Presidents and activists have been able to do that.

**Alan Johnson:** Jean Bethke Elshtain says Iraq has caused undigested bits of 1960s left common sense to come back up, albeit in a lite version. One is this notion of 'Amerika' – the view of America as wholly malevolent. And this is a disaster politically as it goes against the American grain.

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** It's also part of a fashion: you dress in black and you hate America. And I say this as someone attuned to the European intellectual tradition and café society who often defends Europe when I am in the US. But what we have now is deeply self-indulgent, and at its worst destructive, and not just to liberal prospects here in the US. When young activists from South Africa or Latin America come here to study, hoping to figure out how to do in their countries what Martin Luther King did in ours, and instead we tell them, 'Oh, don't be silly, that is an unsophisticated progress narrative,' we are not helping.

### The critics (ii): Against 'values'

**Alan Johnson:** Another liberal democratic critic, Ezra Klein, rejects the book precisely because it seeks to base foreign policy on values. He writes: 'It is the acceptance of idealism as a viable rhetorical basis for foreign policy that will allow [wars] to be wrapped in an agreeably gauzy cloud of paeans to democracy and calls for liberty.' The neoconservatives got away with Iraq, he argues, 'because

Paul Wolfowitz was effectively allowed to keep the conversation based on values ... rather than consequences.' He wants a more prudential approach and worries that a values discourse can open the door to a careless foreign policy.

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** There is something in that, but look, we seem to have arrived in a place where 'values' is taken as code for 'values of the right.' In the book I make the point that we are all values voters. We should not counterpose values and pragmatism in this way. We need a synthesis – a far more sophisticated and serious effort to establish what our values are and how they have been attained in the past and can be attained now. Don't cede values to one part of the political spectrum and don't assume that because values have been misapplied, or used to duck the hard work, that they don't still have a really important place not just in your rhetoric but in your goals.

It seems to me the reverse is true. If you pretend that your policy is not based on values but is purely pragmatic and prudential you will have to smuggle values in by the back door. Indeed, the secret of the neoconservatives' strength was exactly the ability to say that 'détente' and 'openings to China' were value-neutral – in the end Americans just won't stand for that.

**Alan Johnson:** I think most electorates are idealistic but they want their government to be prudential about how they pursue those ideals. That is where the majorities lie for progressive foreign policy. To finish, can you tell me what are you working on now?

**Anne-Marie Slaughter:** I am taking a ten-month sabbatical in Shanghai starting in August. My husband and I are taking our two little boys, who are 8 and 10, and we are putting them in school in Shanghai until May. In that time I am planning to do two things. First, read voraciously, and more widely and deeply than I have been able to do in recent years – I need to recharge my intellectual batteries. Second, take the message of *The Idea That Is America* to Asia. This book was written half for the domestic audience and half for a global audience. If it is published abroad I hope that the foreign title will be *The Idea That Is America: Reintroducing Ourselves to the World*. I will be looking for chances to debate the book in Shanghai and elsewhere in Asia.

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