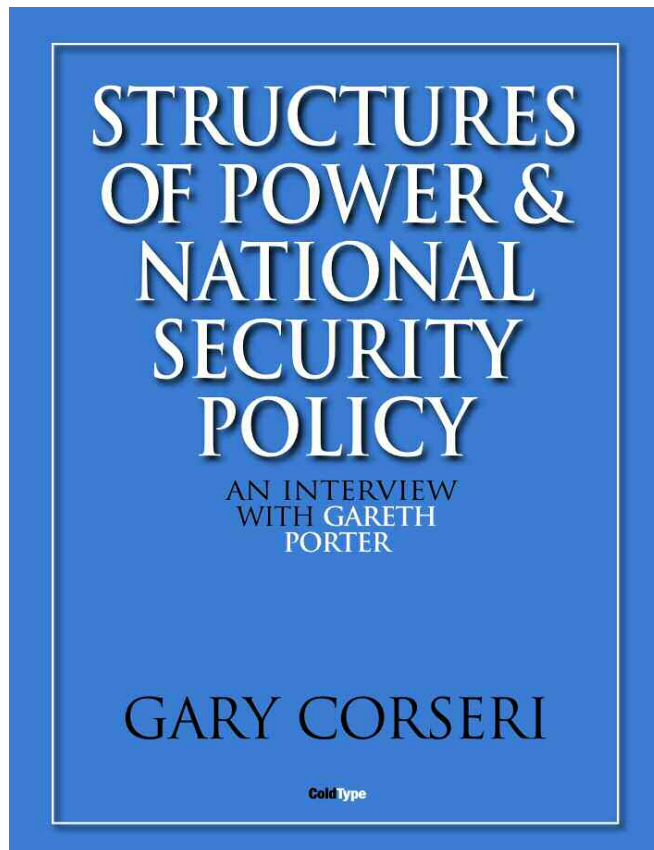


# STRUCTURES OF POWER & NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY

AN INTERVIEW  
WITH GARETH  
PORTER

GARY CORSERI

**ColdType**



**Gary Corseri** has had articles, poems, fiction and dramas published by The New York Times, Village Voice, Philadelphia Inquirer, Miami Herald, CommonDreams, Atlanta-PBS, OpEdNews, PalestineChronicle, TelesurTV, IslamOnline. His books include *A Fine Excess* and *Manifestations* (edited).

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**G**ARETH PORTER IS AN INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATIVE HISTORIAN AND JOURNALIST SPECIALIZING IN U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY. HE WRITES REGULARLY FOR INTER PRESS SERVICE AND FOR THE AMERICAN PROSPECT MAGAZINE, AND HE HAS A BLOG ON THE HUFFINGTON POST. HE HAS A PH.D. IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS AND SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES FROM CORNELL UNIVERSITY AND HAS WRITTEN FOUR BOOKS ON VIETNAM AND THE U.S. WAR IN INDOCHINA. THE MOST RECENT OF THOSE BOOKS, **PERILS OF DOMINANCE: IMBALANCE OF POWER AND THE ROAD TO WAR IN VIETNAM**, WAS PUBLISHED BY UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS IN 2005. HE WAS INTERVIEWED FOR COLDTYPE BY GARY CORSERI.

**Gary Corseri:** *I want to focus on your book, **Perils of Dominance: Imbalance of Power and the Road to War in Vietnam**, with its exposition of policy-making during the Vietnam War – and we’ll consider how that process applies today. I’ll ask you about current world crises – Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, Israel/Palestine. But first, I’d like to know how you come to have the authority to write about the policy-making process?*

**Gareth Porter:** I don’t know that I have the authority – that’s subjective. I think I have the right background, though: the curiosity of the historian to figure out what actually happened – to solve mysteries or puzzles – in terms of American policy, specifically, policy towards war; and then, International Politics. I have an interest in policy on a theoretical level. I studied under Hans Morgenthau at the University of Chicago. Morgenthau had turned against the Vietnam War by then. I considered myself a realist, taking the idea of the Balance of Power seriously – that nation-states act in terms of power relationships. That was really the only way to understand the behavior of states in international politics. Obviously, that played a role in the way I

looked at, in retrospect, the Vietnam War.

**Corseri:** *Perils was published in 2005. Would you describe the theme, or themes?*

**Porter:** There are really two interrelated themes. When I began my research, I understood that power relations had something to do with the road to war in Vietnam. But, it seemed, the pertinent literature had ignored that. I had a strong sense from my reading of Cold War history, specifically of Vietnam, and particularly my editing of a two-volume documentary history of the Vietnam War back in the late 70s – I had an intuition that the Communist world was much weaker than had been reflected in the history of the Vietnam War, and the Cold War. I began my research convinced that was a key to understanding how and why the US stumbled into war. That was my first theme: that power relations matter, that there was not a real balance of power between the US and Soviet Union during this critical period from 1954 to 1965, but, rather, a profound imbalance in which the US strategically dominated the Soviet Union. It's clear that the Soviet Union was very much on the defensive. And the US, on the offensive, had a freedom of action the Soviets didn't have. And that played a key role in shaping US decision-making on Vietnam.

The second theme, which I discovered as I read the documents, is that there was a big difference in the responses to Vietnam between Johnson and Kennedy on the one hand and their national security advisers on the other. I go back to Eisenhower and I concluded that he was totally opposed to intervention, but that a number of people in his administration were pro-military intervention. So, there was a conflict there as well.

**Corseri:** *But Ike handled it better?*

**Porter:** Eisenhower was very strong dealing with national security issues, very self-confident. He was able to quash any pressures for war. But, in the case of Kennedy and Johnson, there were inexorable pressures from the key national security officials of their administrations to commit US forces in Vietnam.

**Corseri:** *What accounts for this difference between the perspectives of the president and his own advisers?*

**Porter:** National security advisers define their role as managing US power. That's the main thing they do, whereas the president, inevitably, has a broader range of issues. He has to put the advancement of US power interests alongside other issues. He's much more sensitive to the costs of committing forces.

**Corseri:** *And the president is always balancing his own perception of domestic politics.*

**Porter:** That, of course, is true, and it can cut both ways. In fact, what I conclude with both Kennedy and Johnson is that domestic politics was part of the pressure on them to make an accommodation with their national security advisers in taking steps towards war.

**Corseri:** *Your book depicts the tension between policy-making on the one hand, and “reality” on the other. I’m not talking about the kind of reality some Bush administration hack told reporter Ron Suskind that the U.S., as an empire, had the power to define; rather, about the kind that can bite us on the ass when we’re not paying attention. For example, after 14 months of struggle with his own advisers, Johnson agrees to bomb North Vietnam. But, in the interval, two new realities had emerged which would change the outcome. Can you tell us what happened?*

**Porter:** Between the beginning of the bombing and the build-up of ground forces, the Viet Cong had become much stronger than the national security advisers had anticipated; they were able to advance much farther and faster against the South Vietnamese army. Our advisers had assumed that the Communist forces in the south were not strong enough to advance dramatically without help from the north.

Second, when the U.S. began its build-up of ground forces, the assumption was that the threat of even heavier bombing, including the threat of the use of nuclear weapons, would deter the North Vietnamese from countering. That again was a profound under-estimation of the determination and capabilities of the North Vietnamese. Basically, there were two fundamental miscalculations, based on the notion that US supremacy, at the strategic and at the conventional power level, would ensure that the United States could fight a low-level war and keep it from getting out of control.

**Corseri:** *Others have written about the bureaucratic nightmare that endures through changes of administration and/or party. But, I don’t think anyone has documented the twists and turns as well. Your 403-page book has over 120 pages of notes, bibliography and index. And I think the vital role of your book lies not only in helping us to understand that murky and parlous era, but in providing a template for understanding our present crises ... Can you talk a little more*

*about how politics enters into policy-making? I'm thinking about the notion of collective responsibility.*

**Porter:** Right. That's an idea I feel strongly about. The assumption that diplomatic historians of the US have shared – I would say almost universally – in writing about Vietnam is that the Constitutional power of the president is absolute in making war. The idea that the president does not make the definitive decision to go to war is so outside the realm of possibility that it's dismissed. I think there's a perfectly logical explanation for that: diplomatic historians write within a paradigm in which it's assumed that policy-making is guided by the Constitution, that there's a logical relationship between legal responsibilities on the one hand and political reality on the other. That's why it's so difficult for them to imagine that the president is really not the critical force in powering the US towards war.

In 1962, before the Cuban missile crisis, but after Kennedy had failed to take strong action against Castro and the Soviet Union when it was discovered that there were Soviet military personnel in Cuba, the Republicans then mounted a very politically effective campaign, through the media and through Republican spokespeople to attack Kennedy for being soft on Communism and weak in the face of this alleged threat from the Soviet power on our doorstep. And, there's no doubt that Kennedy was chastened by this. And that played a role in his taking such strong measures in the Cuban missile crisis, in a sense to risk nuclear war (although we now know that he had taken steps to make sure that would not result). Kennedy felt strong political pressure, he felt his presidency could be weakened by Republicans in a situation where they could attack him on a key issue of national security. I think that caused him to feel he had to have his own national security advisers fully on board to impress the public that he was not making any policy moves to avoid the use of force in Vietnam that did not have the full support of his top national security advisers. The same thing was true, even more so, for Johnson because he was even deeper into a situation where choices were either to face the "Who lost South Vietnam?" syndrome, or to send troops. In that situation, he felt the need, even more than Kennedy, to have his top national security advisers – the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff – at least neutralized if not supporting him.

**Corseri:** *That's how politics works vis-a-vis the two-party system. But, you describe another phenomenon – the way politics are internalized inside an administration, so that Kennedy had to worry about his own people; you cite examples where Averill Harriman, for example, was practically sabotaging some of Kennedy's efforts to open new channels of communication with the North Vietnamese. So, I wonder if you could focus on the role of the national*

*security bureaucracy. Where do they come from? What are the origins, the operation and evolution? Most Americans do not perceive that our government works this way. How did it happen?*

**Porter:** This is the reality that dawned on me as I was researching this book. We have been virtually unaware of the extent to which the national security bureaucracy has taken on a crucial degree of power over policy; in effect, over issues of war and peace. It's both military and civilian in character. Both are extremely important to the power we're talking about. They're both able to maneuver, to use methods to pressure the president, to narrow his options so it's more likely he'll accept their options.

We know that there are historical cases where the military leadership has been against using force – more so than civilian leadership. But in the case of Vietnam, it's very clear: the military leadership, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Pentagon, the top officials in the State Department and National Security Council officials were all leaning towards military intervention. The question is precisely the one you ask: What's the character of this political entity which developed during the Cold War, which has sprung up as a major power center that did not exist before the Cold War and which exercises so much influence over policy? My key concern is that the national security bureaucracy does not act in the abstract interest of the US, or the American people – although I think it believes it does – but, rather, in ways that further the personal and institutional interests of the advisers themselves.

**Corseri:** *The implications of which are enormous, illusion-shattering ...*

**Porter:** It means that the military services are concerned with maintaining and adding to their missions in a war; and when there's an opportunity to fight a war where they feel they can accomplish those ends, they will do so. For individuals who are heads of bureaucracies – the State Department, the Defense Department, the National Security staff of the White House – they have a personal agenda to advance or expand the power of the US and to thereby add to their own status, their own prestige, their own political positions, their career c.v.'s, and various personal interests. That causes officials to push American power forward.

**Corseri:** *We think that we have a balanced system, that we have checks and balances between the three branches of our government. But, in fact, the balance within the executive branch, which has become the most powerful, the most important in this age of the imperial presidency – that balance is very tenuous.*

**Porter:** Very tenuous, indeed. And, this is one of those occasions when we can skip forward, and note how the relationship between the president and his key national security advisers under the Bush administration represents a caricature of a president who is under pressure from his advisers to go to war. Now, Bush, of course, is not Kennedy and he's not Johnson. He's much more willing to be manipulated. He's a man who has no experience in foreign policy, who knows nothing about foreign policy and is really not interested in learning; therefore, he leans on his advisers far more heavily. So, even though Bush is ideologically attuned to the neo-conservatives, he is subject to the manipulation of these officials who have their own agendas. And, we see in the case of the neo-conservatives the clearest example of a group of national security advisers who came into office with their own idea of what they wanted to accomplish – a very ambitious goal. And we have an exaggerated version of the kind of dynamics that I describe in our march to war in Vietnam.

**Corseri:** *I'd like to continue to probe this bureaucratic nightmare, this meta-government. You said this began with the Cold War. I might put it back even further in the Roosevelt Administration; but, a long time ago I read that Truman had established the National Security State, and that we were no longer a republic. Do you care to dive into that?*

**Porter:** I think it's true that the beginning of a policy of exploitation of a power advantage began in the Truman Administration. It was not so self-evident as it was during the Eisenhower Administration, where I show that in the first Indochina crisis of 1954, Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles were acutely aware of the great advantage that they had over the Soviet Union and China, and very clearly exploited that to pressure the Communist side – the Soviets, Chinese and Viet Minh – to accept a settlement at the Geneva Conference of 1954 that certainly did not reflect the local power balance within Indochina. But, I would say that it was during the Truman administration that we had this huge military build-up which put an enormous distance between the US and Soviet Union. It was that obvious power gap that gave the US an incentive to act more aggressively.

I think what you're referring to is that the institutions – the military structure, the military bases network – existed essentially by the end of World War II, that we were already in most of these bases, particularly in East Asia. So it was a result of that war that the US was able to exert the kind of power it did – particularly in East Asia, where the Pacific Ocean became virtually an "American Lake". I agree that the problem began even before the Cold War, but then it was exacerbated as soon as the US carried out the first major military build-up before the Korean War, which accelerated during that war.



## **STRUCTURES OF POWER & NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY** | GARY CORSERI

**Corseri:** If the process you describe is correct, concerning this government by bureaucracy, what does that tell us about our democracy? Is our president anything but a figurehead?

**Porter:** It depends on the individual. There's no doubt that individuals who end up in the White House, because of their background in becoming politicians, have been, since Eisenhower, individuals who are more readily willing to accommodate these institutions – particularly the military. Given their incredible power – again, I refer primarily to the military services – without somebody who is extremely determined, with a firm idea about how to prevent these institutions from being able to implement their own agendas, the president is not going to be successful in holding out against them. I think Eisenhower was the last president who was even partially successful in resisting the pressure of the military. And, of course, the military services were associated with a very powerful industrial lobby which worked through Congress. You have not just a military-industrial complex, but a military-industrial-Congressional complex. And when Eisenhower uttered his famous injunction about the military-industrial complex, he was not talking about some abstract principle; he was talking about something he had personally experienced. They had tried to force Eisenhower to go along with their own preferred national security policies, in terms of budget and programs, and Eisenhower had rebuffed them. But, they attacked him mercilessly. The representatives of the air force, in the Senate, particularly, were very critical of Eisenhower. They accused him of being soft on Communism and soft on the Soviet Union. And he never forgot that, and that was an expression of great bitterness on Eisenhower's part.

**Corseri:** *The final speech, the –*

**Porter:** The January, 1961 speech.

**Corseri:** *He gave that – wasn't it the day before he left office?*

**Porter:** It was either the day before or two days before. It was his final word as president.

**Corseri:** *His parting shot ... But he was safe when he made that statement –*

**Porter:** (Laughing.) Yes. He made that from the safety of an almost-finished presidency.

**Corseri:** *Okay ... I'd like to transition to WHERE WE ARE NOW! Of course, there's always an ebb and flow between past, present and future, but, it seems to me, the Kennedy Administration is transitional in various ways. For example, you write that Kennedy was planning "a strict timetable for withdrawal of US troops" while maintaining "a public rhetorical stance of staunch opposition to withdrawal." He was saying one thing while planning another. Kennedy, like Johnson after him, feared the political consequences of being accused of losing Vietnam. So, I'm wondering: What games are they playing with our heads now? Must we not take everything that Bush, Cheney, Gates, Rice say with a mountain of salt? Concerning our policies in the Middle East, of what should we be especially doubtful?*

**Porter:** I would go even further than that, to say that it's almost inherent in the nature of national security policy that any time a government becomes involved in asserting its power, regardless of its ideological bent – whether extreme right, centrist, or in the case of Lyndon Johnson, even centrist-liberal – you must assume that there will be a huge gap between what is being presented to the public as the rationale for policy, as well as the intentions for the policy, and what is actually being done and the reasons they are being done. I believe that this is of the essence of any government involved in a worldwide assertion of power and is maintaining the kind of military presence and effort to exert political dominance that the US has tried to exercise in the last several years. And, I have every reason to believe that assertion of power will continue in the next administration – which will undoubtedly be Democratic. So, I'm saying we should anticipate that it is virtually inevitable that the next administration will be far more similar to this administration than different, and that these administrations are involved in the exercise of power abroad leads inevitably to the need to lie to the public. Because the president and his advisers have a mixed agenda: on the one hand, they have what they would actually like to accomplish; and they find that they can't do it, and they can't admit it. Then they try other things, but still in the guise of doing the thing they promised to do originally. And all the while, they have to invent rationales which are never quite what the real reasons are.

**Corseri:** *And our entire system of political campaigning and primaries and so forth – it's not a very effective way to measure these guys and how they're going to interact with the bureaucracy and with their own officials. It doesn't provide the public insight or access to the way the system is really operating.*

**Porter:** Well, you've given me the opportunity I was hoping for to talk about what

I think is the greatest challenge facing progressives in this historical era, which is the need for, but the absence of, an anti-imperialist movement. In order to have such a movement, there has to be a much higher degree of consciousness about the nature of the problem of imperialism – of empire – than there is today.

There is enormous antagonism towards the war in Iraq, and enormous anxiety about going to war in Iran. If you look at polling data, Americans are overwhelmingly anti-imperialist; they don't want to use military force to extend, or even to maintain, power abroad. They also favor a very sharp reduction in military spending. They want to shift the balance of US policy away from the military and towards diplomacy. But this polling data has not translated into an understanding of what needs to be done to turn around the US government and the US political system. And today, we're at the beginning of another presidential election cycle, and you have, in my mind at least, only the weakest sort of check on Democratic candidates – who at this point, whoever wins that Democratic nomination is odds-on favorite to become president. There is no present system to hold these candidates accountable on critical issues. Once in a while someone will ask, What's your position on getting out of Iraq, or going to war with Iran? – but we also need to know that a candidate understands the issues that go beyond Iran and Iraq. How are we going to prevent the next war? No one is asking. That's what concerns me about the political system at present: we have no instrument, basically, for holding political leaders accountable for having a program to prevent future Iraqs, Vietnams, and, I may say, future Irans, as well.

**Corseri:** *We want to hold them accountable. I also wonder about holding ourselves accountable. How can we train ourselves to be more perceptive readers and listeners? Obviously, books like yours help. I'm wondering: which authors do you read? Who have been your mentors?*

**Porter:** At the present stage of my life, what I have been trying to do is to continue to solve the puzzles of what is really going on beyond the façade of secrecy and lies that every consumer of news in this country faces. And that's a full-time job. So, if you ask me who I'm reading in terms of theory and explanation – I have read Chalmers Johnson's books, and found them useful, useful data. But, this is not something that's going to give us the key to unmasking the current developments in policy on the current wars; nor does it give us a clear path to what to do about the empire that Chalmers Johnson describes. So, my answer is that I don't think that we have the literature we need, that provides a guide to this problem. We're at Ground Zero intellectually. We need a new organization that seeks to

arrive at a common understanding of the basic problem as the basis for action. I think that's the beginning. I don't have any answer as to how that's to be done, but I do think that's what we need.

**Corseri:** *Okay, so –*

**Porter:** It could start small. It could start with a few dozen people – that would be great. But right now there's nothing, even at the smallest level, that is focusing – not on organizing demonstrations or writing articles – but on coming up with an analysis of the structural problem of these overweening, permanent powers which are really uncontrolled at this moment – and what can be done politically to address that.

**Corseri:** *And I very much respect your focus upon the structures and processes of power ... I know that you've had an argument with a friend of mine who stressed that what you're really perceiving is the way the Corporate State works – the corporate structure. And, what you call the imperial forces – he would ascribe that to corporatocracy. How would you explain your differences?*

**Porter:** This, of course, is an argument that I've had with a number of people, who do, in fact, hold to the traditional Left analysis which regards US imperialist policy as a function of corporate interest. I don't quarrel with that as an historical explanation of much – most – even all – of US expansion abroad in the 19th and 20th century. I do think, however, that the nature of the US national security bureaucracy has changed so radically since the beginning of the Cold War as to force us to re-evaluate the relative importance of corporate interests on the one hand and bureaucratic interests on the other – insofar as the use of military force is concerned, and the maintenance of political-military positions abroad. As military power becomes the central issue in national security policy abroad, that inevitably brings into play the self-interests of these bureaucracies – which, I do insist, have autonomous power. The military bureaucracy does not take its cues about policy in the Middle East or in East Asia from Wall Street. They have their own agenda, which is very clear – all you have to do is read all of the documents that come out of the Pentagon and the military services. Each of the military services has its own distinct agenda, and then they have something that represents a compromise among them. And their interests are to assure that they will not have to shrink, that they will continue to grow in terms of budgets and programs, but, most important, that their missions for fighting wars will grow. That's their busi-

ness! Their business is to be prepared to fight the war. In some circumstances the military has an interest in fighting war; in other cases, where the war that is being proposed is not one where their mission fits, they're probably going to oppose it.

I think this is the kind of analysis we have to make to seriously address the power and autonomy of these institutions, and to devise strategies to deal with them.

**Corseri:** *You're actually moving now in the direction of my closing questions; especially when you talk about the military branches each having their own agenda, and having an overall agenda – and that being separate from where Wall Street wants to go ... My final questions are about current events. During this Halloween month, I wanted to touch upon General Sanchez's recent comments about the War in Iraq being an endless nightmare ... In Perils you describe a metamorphosis that occurred between the mid-50s and mid-60s concerning the role of the Joint Chiefs of Staff – how they became much more political. And you've spoken about that politicization today. But, it seems to me, Bush has made a deliberate attempt to openly politicize our military; he's raised the ante and the level of danger in doing so – to use Petraeus and others to advance the administration's political goals. Has Bush opened a new can of worms?*

**Porter:** Bush hasn't opened the can of worms. I do think, however that he has ... well, once you become involved in a long, highly politicized war which has become unpopular at home, the generals in charge of that war invariably become political figures. I think you see this in the case of General Wesley Clark, who was politicized. These post-Cold War wars give rise to political agendas. Petraeus represents the highest evolution of that phenomenon. The degree to which Petraeus and his underlings in Baghdad are directly tied by a political umbilical cord to the White House is unprecedented.

Equally interesting is the conflict within the military leadership. You have on the one hand the Petraeuses/Odiernos in Baghdad directly doing the bidding of the White House – not only in Iraq, but their take on Iran. On the other hand, you have the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Commander of CENTCOM (the Central Command), Admiral William Fallon, who have asserted a degree of independence from the White House, particularly in light of the threat of war against Iran, but also on the Iraq surge, as well. So, clearly, the President cannot completely control the military leadership, although he has tried to put the people he wants in place. Fortunately, in this case, Robert M. Gates put into position of CENTCOM commander Admiral

Fallon, who is really very independent-minded and is much more known for his emphasis on diplomacy rather than on war-fighting. Now you have both an unprecedented degree of responsiveness by the command in Baghdad to White House direction, and, on the other hand, an unprecedented degree of resistance to the main lines of White House military policy on the part of both the Joint Chiefs and the key field commander. That's a very important set of terms and I don't know where that ends up. My analysis is that both Petraeus and Fallon and the Joint Chiefs can exert a degree of influence in the areas that they directly control – Petraeus on Iraq and Fallon on Iran. You can't carry out a war against Iran without Fallon's okay; and there's a real question as to whether he'll give it. In effect, we're dependent on military leadership to hold off a significant threat of war with Iran – which would be the worst possible disaster this country and the world could face; I think the most serious disaster since World War II in American foreign policy.

**Corseri:** *I agree ... So, it's encouraging to hear that there are some rational heads in –*

**Porter:** It is encouraging that we have some rational, uniformed, military leaders. But it's discouraging that we're dependent on the military to restrain Bush and Cheney rather than being able to depend on an opposition party – which has utterly failed in that role.

**Corseri:** *Our situation reminds me of that classic movie, Seven Days in May ... Burt Lancaster, Kirk Douglas – where the nation is – it's a McCarthyesque, paranoid atmosphere; the movie takes place during the Cold War – and they're looking to the generals to save them. So, it's setting up something very dangerous ...*

**Porter:** It is dangerous. And I think we must be very conscious of the need to do something in the coming years to re-establish the reality of a civilian, domestic set of restraints on the executive power to make war.

**Corseri:** *Three final questions about current events ... You talked about Iran. In that same part of the world, Turkey is a major, regional power. Since we always have to look for the hidden motives of our political actors, one wonders what they're up to now. I'm in favor of the genocide against the Armenians being labeled genocide, but why now? This seems an especially idiotic act of a craven and idiotic Congress. Is this how our Congress wants to end our involvement in*

*the Middle East – by sabotaging our ally?*

**Porter:** I, frankly, am not on top of why Congress has acted this way. Of course, I feel strongly that there is an important principle at stake in acknowledging the genocide against the Armenians. I find the Turkish attitude towards that as odious as the American attitude about refusing to recognize its war crimes in the past.

**Corseri:** *Or genocide against America's Original Peoples?*

**Porter:** That – and, even more recent crimes of war. So, you're right that the timing of this is suspicious. I know that under the Republican-controlled Congress, this same measure was repeatedly rebuffed, with the Turkish interests giving support to key members of Congress, including Republican Speaker of the House, Dennis Hastert, to make sure this would never pass.

**Corseri:** *You're saying they made a deal with Hastert?*

**Porter:** Hastert and others were lobbied by Turkish interests. No doubt this took the form of very handsome pledges of political support. Turkey plays a two-faced role in the Middle East today. On the one hand, they continue to be a US ally – with strong military ties; on the other, the government is now an Islamic government, and no longer responsive to American direction. Therefore, the Turkish government is in a position to play a much more independent role now. This is not your father's Turkey!

There are different policy issues here where Turkey may exert important influence, one being whether Turkey will take military action against Kurdistan, which the US would strongly oppose and whose influence on the overall situation of the US occupation of Iraq is not clear. The other side of it is that the US has wanted Turkey to support its policy towards Iran, and I think the two sides are diverging. Turkey's interests are not America's in militarily pressuring Iran, much less using Turkish airspace or territory to launch an attack against Iran. Turkey is going to play a role that is at least in part cutting against the militarist, expansionist interests of the government now in power in the US.

**Corseri:** *Another Janus-faced nation is Pakistan. I should mention we're talking the day after Benazir Bhutto's return to Pakistan after eight years in exile – her return greeted first by jubilant crowds, and then an explosion that at last count*

*had killed and wounded over 500 people. What's your prognosis for that troubled, nuclear-armed nation?*

**Porter:** First of all, I think one must ask the obvious question, Cui bono? The likelihood that there's a connection between that bomb and the military interests who want to prevent Bhutto from returning to power is obvious. I think the interesting question about Pakistan, in terms of US policy, is why the Bush administration was so cozy with the military dictatorship for so long – long after it was clear that the Pakistani military was playing footsy with the Sunni extremists in Waziristan, the pro-Al Qaeda, pro-Taliban religious parties on the Afghan border. That became very clear after Al Qaeda's leadership was forced to flee from Afghanistan into Pakistan, and they quickly found comfortable locations under the protection of not just the local extremists but the Pakistani Intelligence Service as well. This has been known to US Intelligence for a long time. So, the question of why the Bush administration continued to cover for Musharraf for so long is one that I'm looking at and trying to answer. And I haven't yet.

US interests in anti-terrorism, as well as democracy in Pakistan, should have led to being much less cozy with Musharraf, and putting pressure on the government to move back to some degree of competitive politics. After all, it's exactly those religious parties that hold sway in Waziristan who have been the main political allies of the military in elections in Pakistan. Our natural allies in Pakistani politics, in terms of our anti-terrorism and anti-Al Qaeda interests, regardless of the weaknesses of the Pakistani civilian political elite – they are the natural allies of the US and not the military.

**Corseri:** *Are we seriously interested in democracy, or is it an interest in ostensible democracy?*

**Porter:** I think it's an ostensible interest. I don't think any US administration, except for the Carter Administration, has ever really been interested in democracy as a separate priority – not serving another power interest. And again, I think this was Carter's own predilection; we know the national security bureaucracy was generally opposed to that. Again, the national security bureaucracy does not support democracy in and of itself, does not support democracy for democracy's sake. It supports it when it thinks that it can advance another power agenda in so doing.

**Corseri:** *Last one, or two ... You've spoken about your feeling that we're going to*



*have a Democratic President in 2009 and that the Democrats to a man, or woman, are saying that they won't commit to troop withdrawal from Iraq and that they're not going to take any cards off the table vis-a-vis Iran – a nuclear option included. On the other hand, you also mentioned your belief that we have rational people in uniform – Fallon, in particular – who are grasping all the dangers and are a real counterforce for any stupid actions. So, what's your prognosis for Iran?*

**Porter:** I go back and forth, and I believe that it isn't useful to speculate whether it's more likely or less likely that this administration will attack Iran before the end of its term. For the following reasons: I don't think Bush has made up his mind; it's still an open question. And, at least in theory, we all ought to exert our utmost force to prevent this from happening, rather than regarding it as inevitable either way. I don't think it is inevitable either way at this time.

**Corseri:** *What would you like to say about Israel?*

**Porter:** It comes in as another vested interest in the political system which has now supplanted, for the Democratic party, the traditional military-industrial complex as the primary force impelling the Democrats to go along with the use of force, both in Iraq and against Iran. I don't believe that any of the three major Democratic candidates are saying that all options must be on the table because they're beholden to any military-industrial interests. It's very clear that this is solely because of being beholden to AIPAC, the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee. This becomes a factor that skews the political debate, one that skews even the future of US policy. And we know that, not AIPAC per se, but the interests of pro-Israeli neoconservatives have seriously skewed policy under the Bush administration. So, you have two related problems, both having to do with the extraordinary influence that pro-right-wing Israeli interests have played in influencing US foreign policy. This has become an issue that rivals the national security bureaucracy that I've focused on. It would be irresponsible to deny or ignore it.

And, I must say, I've noticed over the past couple of years, a rapid rise in bitterness in this country toward the Israeli lobby. It has become a major political phenomenon not to be ignored or minimized. Potentially it has a side to it that could become anti-Semitic, even though the analysis that points to the dangers of the degree of influence that these pro-right-wing Israeli interests have had is indisputable. But, looking at the population of the US – 300 million – you're going to have a lot of people who

have found out about this Israeli lobby who will express in their own way and from their own background the kind of bitterness that cannot be healthy for this political system. I think we're going to have both a rise in consciousness on the part of those people who are reasonably objective about this, and, also, you're going to have inevitably – because of the degree to which AIPAC has been so powerful in Congress and the neoconservatives were so powerful in the executive branch, there is going to be a backlash which is not going to be much fun.

**Corseri:** *I agree. And I think that's one thing that people like you – acute critics and analysts ... that's a role ... and I think one of the aspects of that role is to make it clear about the differences within Judaism, within the Jewish community in the US ... about the spectrum of ideas and views. Because you find extremely progressive, internationalist-thinking people within the Jewish community, and you also find the Zionists and the crazies. I've come to be suspicious even of that term, "anti-Semitic." I think we have to be very clear that it's anti-Zionism, it's Zionism that we're talking about, and constantly stress that.*

**Porter:** Absolutely, and I think that it's so important to have progressive Jews who are in the forefront of this, who can speak very clearly about this – and I know some are, obviously. That's really what needs to happen – more and more political partnerships in which progressive Jews are in the forefront of making that kind of distinction. What I'm saying is that we might as well face the inevitability: there are going to be plenty of people who will not make that distinction – unfortunately.

**Corseri:** *I agree ... And I thank you for an enlightening interview.*



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