

Anders Fogh Rasmussen Lecture

Anders Fogh Rasmussen has been at the center of global politics for several decades. He served as Prime Minister of Denmark from 2001-2009, President of the European Union in 2002, and Secretary General of NATO from 2009-2014. Rasmussen's lecture at the Clough Colloquium was focused on the need for American global leadership. His argument consisted of three points. First, the world is better off with American leadership. He believes that America must be a global police force, protecting democracy across the world. His next point is that the United States must gather an alliance of democracies. These allies will assist America like deputies in its global police efforts. Finally, he argues that the United States should reinstate the Freedom Agenda as seen under President Bush. He states that implementing democracy elsewhere will strengthen democracy where it already exists. Rasmussen claims that "the world is on fire". He cites conflict in the Middle East, humanitarian and refugee crises in Europe and Africa, and Russian aggression in Ukraine to illustrate this idea. He claims that these events are largely the result of American reluctance to fully use its power. Rasmussen argues that it is America's obligation to use this power. America is the last superpower and "superpowers don't get to retire". Rasmussen believes that it is in our best interest to be a global police force. America must uphold the world order it helped create at the end of the Second World War. He fears that if America does not maintain its global standing, then the autocracies of China and Russia will take its place. This would be a leap backwards for democracy.

The audience mostly disagreed with Rasmussen's argument. Out of the fifteen or so questions taken, around ten were critical of his views, with two questions being quite hostile. Most of the questions centered around America's involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan. Rasmussen defended this topic multiple times in his lecture. Several audience members asked questions concerning the global benefits (or lack thereof) of eighteen plus years of intervention. One audience member even accused Rasmussen of taking part in illegal regime change in Iraq. He

wondered where the United States and NATO get “a God-given right to enact regime change wherever they please”. Some other questions focused on the idea of America being the global police force. They asked about the United States violating the sovereignty of other countries, or why America should fight someone else’s war. Rasmussen tried to defend his argument saying that “being the world’s police force is not popular”. However, it was clear that some of the audience opposed his views.

Analyzing Rasmussen’s argument is difficult. There is a large amount of bias. Many of the topics he discussed were a direct result of decisions he took part in making. Nevertheless, I do not believe that America must be a global police force. We should not be getting involved in every conflict in which democratic institutions are under risk. Our involvement often complicates the situation. Also, it is sometimes in a countries best interest to fight their own battles. However, America must focus on the big picture. I agree with his argument that the United States must maintain its role as a global leader. After World War Two, the United States occupied an important role on the world stage. We flexed our global power countless times. We were a superpower and like Rasmussen said “superpowers don’t get to retire”. The United States cannot forfeit its position as leader of the free world. If we do, Russia and China are waiting to fill the void. This is a significant threat to the liberal world order. To counter this threat, we must gather, and then lead an alliance of democracies. We must repair the damage we have done to the relationships with some of our closest allies. If we do not embrace our leadership role, the near century of global democratic progress could quickly be erased.