

# LATELINE.

## Francis Fukuyama discusses US Foreign policy post-Bush

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**Vocal political scientist from the United States, Professor Francis Fukuyama, joins Lateline.**

### Transcript

TONY JONES: Francis Fukuyama, is one of America's best known and most controversial political scientists.

The author of the widely read but evidentially wrong, "The End of History", got a wake up call on September 11, 2001.

After the attacks on New York and Washington, he signed a letter, as one of 40 prominent neo-conservatives who counselled President Bush to make Saddam Hussein a key target of a global war on terrorism.

Soon after the war in Iraq, he left those old friends to the judgment of history. He's now a vocal critic of neo-conservatism, the Iraq war, the Bush administration, and the current direction of US foreign policy.

Professor Fukuyama is in Australia as a guest of the United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney, where he will be giving a public presentation tomorrow night, and he joins us now in the studio.

Thanks for being there.

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA, POLITICAL SCIENTIST AND AUTHOR: Thank you.

TONY JONES: As I said, after the September 11 attacks when it became obvious that history hadn't ended after all, you joined a high powered neo-conservative push for regime change in Iraq. So let me begin by asking you this, do you accept any moral responsibility for the outcome?

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA: Well, first of all the idea of changing the regime in Iraq I don't think there's any problem with the UN adopted this principle of a responsibility to protect because there are regimes that do terrible things to their people so. The objection I had to the Iraq war was really not about

TONY JONES: I don't think that existed at that time, did it? The responsibility to protect?

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA: It was something that was developing through the Balkan wars in the 1990s because the truth of the matter is that unless powerful countries actually act on principle at times, people will be vulnerable. So the problem was not the principle of getting rid of Saddam Hussein. My objections were really in terms of whether the United States was actually prepared to follow through in an intervention and do what was necessary to actually turn Iraq into, you know, into a decent country and unfortunately the United States has not had a good track record in the stick-to-it-iveness that's necessary to bring about that.

TONY JONES: That's evidently the case, but at the time you were advocating war surely, regime change in Iraq advocated to President Bush at that time and as we know, immediately after September 11 from people who are insiders in the White House, like Dick Clarke, we know from them that Bush was very influenced by these ideas and almost immediately thought of Iraq as the key target.

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA: But then as we got closer to the actual war, and I started thinking about the arguments that the administration was making, I found myself very unpersuaded that they were actually ready to carry through on this in a responsible way and I think, in general, if people aren't allowed to change their minds in light of evidence

and thinking about things, you know, you're in trouble in politics.

TONY JONES: Evidence was very interesting thing because your advice in the letter, you and I have to be fair, 40 others, or including 40 co-signers all of whom were prominent neo-conservatives basic Yale said this is the important thing about the letter I think. It called for regime change in Iraq even if evidence does not link Iraq directly to the September 11 attacks.

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA: That was, I think that was a mistake and then as the discussion deepened, as we approached the war and it was clear that there was not a connection, I think that it was perfectly reasonable position to say well that doesn't make sense then to attack the wrong target.

TONY JONES: Okay, but a year after 9-11 on the anniversary in fact you were still strongly supporting the Bush doctrine of pre-emptive war fare.

TONY JONES: No, that's not true. On the anniversary of September 11 I wrote an article in the Washington Post that I said if they're going to do this they better get the permission of the Security Council if they move ahead because this is a very serious matter. So I was not a strong advocate at that point.

TONY JONES: You did write in that op-ed piece Americans are right to insist there's no such thing as an international community in the abstract, that nation states must look after themselves when it comes to critical matters of security. That was widely interpreted as support for pre-emptive doctrine.

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA: I don't think I said that in that particular piece because what I was saying was if the United States didn't get broader support on this issue they really ought to think twice about going to war.

TONY JONES: So when exactly did you see the light?

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA: It was in the year before the war, between September 11 and March 2003. I spent a lot of time in Europe actually arguing about American foreign policy and I think, you know, there was a lot of arguments domestically as well and just in reflecting about, as I said, you know, it did seem to me that my familiarity with American involvement in this kind of conflict there really is a problem in the underestimation of the difficulty of transforming Third World countries and I just thought that the administration was really downplaying how difficult a process that that would be and that that was, you know, that was the real problem in going forward.

TONY JONES: And they were being driven, ideologically by a group of people who you would think of as old friends, neo-conservatives the co-signatories of that letter in the New York Times you famously identified, this is what later, famously identified neo-conservatism with Leninism, what did you mean by that?

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA: Actually it wasn't my, it wasn't me that came up with this but in a certain sense I do have a Marxist view of history in the sense that I think there are these broad social and economic processes that lead to modernisation that ultimately drive countries to becoming democratic or adapting democratic institutions. And I think what my neo-confriends wanted to do was that wasn't good enough for them, they wanted to speed up the process by using American power to drive things forward. So that's the difference between Marx and Lenin. Lenin wanted to use power to bring the revolution closer and I think that the original Leninism didn't work very well and I think that the new American Leninism was a similar disaster.

TONY JONES: So Donald Rumsfeld effectively surrounded himself by a group of dangerous Bolsheviks?

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA: There is an element of Bolshevism, in thinking that power can achieve these ambitious goals of social transformation and I think one of the things we've learned in the 20th Century is that that kind of ambitious social engineering really brings a lot of unanticipated consequences and incidentally something that people have forgotten is that one of neo-conservative legacies was actually making that argument in the context of domestic American social policy because they warned about, you know, the impact of poorly thought through social engineering and they simply did not apply this to this case of Iraq.

TONY JONES: So why was it that Rumsfeld, Bush, Cheney, all these powerful figures pragmatists for the most part, came under the sway of such a powerful, radical, ideological movement?

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA: Well first of all, I think it's completely wrong to say they came under the spell of, you know it's not as if this was an alien spore that floated down to the United States and took over the minds of these people. I think Cheney was committed to doing something like this ever since he was defence secretary and found out that the intelligence community had underestimated back in 1991 how advanced Saddam Hussein's nuclear program was and I think he decided at that point he was never going to be made a fool of again and this was a real problem that needed to be taken care of. So I think that the idea that but for this influence of outside neo-conservatives, the administration would never have done anything like this is simply wrong. They really, you know, it helped them build the case rhetorically with the American public but the actual decision was made by the principals and the administration for their own reasons.

TONY JONES: Do you think Bush was himself thinking along these lines or was he at least in the sway of Dick Cheney?

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA: Yeah, I think he is, Cheney was the most powerful American vice-president and played a very unusual role in this administration given the relative inexperience of President Bush and so I think there was a case where the President, you know, was very much driven by the advice he was getting.

TONY JONES: In 2004 you argued that after Iraq America would have to be much more careful and selective. I think those were your words, when he entered into nation building projects. Let's bring this concept up to date. How long do you think it would be before another US administration at any time in the future is prepared to undertake a nation building project?

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA: Well, it's going to be a very long time before we do something like Iraq where just out of the blue we invade a country and try to transform it. Unfortunately a lot of the nation building projects thrust themselves upon us, so for example, if North Korea were to collapse tomorrow for reasons that we had nothing to do with, there would be this big power vacuum and it would be a country that needed a lot of re-building and the United States would have to, I think, play a certain role in that. And so you can't always anticipate where the need for this. One of the problems of our world right now is we have a lot of failed and weak states where this power vacuum invites terrorism, drugs, you know, all sorts of bad things happening and I think that's why nation building, unfortunately, is very difficult but is probably part of the tool kit that has to be part of American foreign policy.

TONY JONES: You say regime change is off the agenda because as you say there are plenty of opportunities out there. There's countries like Burma and Zimbabwe where some form of democratic change is sorely needed

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA: No one would object to regime change that is spontaneous and occurs within the society. If the Iranian people rise up and threw the Mullahs out everyone would cheer. But it's kind of a red herring. I think the United States even in the case of Iraq we didn't invade Iraq simply to democratise that country we did it because we thought there were weapons of mass destruction. Mistakenly, you know, ex post. So that kind of thing I think is off the table. Certainly regime change in a bad regime if Robert Mugabe stepped down and you had a real democracy I think that would be a wonderful thing to have happen.

TONY JONES: I don't think many people would argue with that. You argue now for engagement rather than confrontation with Iran, so you obviously side with Barack Obama on that issue?

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA: I think that the time for a real deal with Iran is unfortunately passed. They signalled a real willingness to do this right after the Afghan invasion back in 2001, 2002, the characters you've got running Tehran right now are much less tractable but in general I think you cannot count on regime change as your way of dealing with a problem like that. You have to talk to people and I think in the case of Iran, you know, the idea that you wouldn't talk to them pragmatically is kind of absurd.

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA: What if Iran defies the international community and develops nuclear weapons, and I'm thinking this could potentially happen, you know, still in the time of the Bush administration, do you think they will attack Iran's nuclear facilities?

TONY JONES: I think that there are people that would like to do that, I think the President feels that this is a really important issue but I think that he is actually quite constrained among other things by the fact that they're fighting

two really big and costly wars in other Middle Eastern countries. I think it's going to be very difficult for the United States to do that.

TONY JONES: You've written in the long run the rise of China will be far more important for global politics than Middle Eastern terrorism and presumably than these other two wars

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA: That's right.

TONY JONES: What do you think the merging Chinese superpower will look like and how will it behave?

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA: Well that's the question everybody would like to answer. I think right now it's different from the former Soviet Union or Nazi Germany in the sense that it doesn't have a universalistic ideology, it's not trying to impose its system in distant countries. I think they basically want to make money and they want to have a certain amount of respect in the international arena. The big question is once you become more powerful, sometimes your ambitions change and so the long-term trajectory of China will be quite different to what it appears to be at the moment.

TONY JONES: Especially when you consider the competition for resources which can only, and for sources of power and energy which can only get hotter as they become scarcer.

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA: That's right. But, you know, I think China like many other great power before them is going to find that that's a pretty perilous path to be on. You look at what's happened in Darfur, they made this very comfortable deal with the regime in Khartoum to have access and break the sanctions the West have imposed on Sudan but now they're getting all this backlash in terms of people opposing their support for this regime and they've had to back pedal as a result of that. So I think it's complicated. They're going to be regarded as colonialists where in previous ages because if you behave like an ugly, you know, colonial power you're going to generate a fair amount of knock lash.

TONY JONES: What if China ultimately refuses to rein in its growth by reining in carbon emissions which is going to be one of the big issues of the future. We still don't know yet exactly how China could do it anyway but what if they simply refused to because it will hurt their economy?

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA: Well, it's pretty much what the United States, the position the United States has taken.

TONY JONES: So they have the perfect argument/

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA: Yeah.

TONY JONES: That's what you did.

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA: Yeah, what can we do about it or what can the outside world do about it? Probably not a whole lot. I think you've got these carbon emissions trading schemes where you can basically pay China not to emit carbon, how cooperative they are with that, you know, I think remains to be seen, but I think that's probably the only hope of actually getting them to accept any real cutbacks in carbon emissions.

TONY JONES: Final question, who do you think is the best placed in the presidential candidates to deal with this range of international issues coming into the future?

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA: Well, I must say I personally voted for Obama because I do think that both McCain and Hillary Clinton bring a lot of baggage with them. McCain in a, you know, I think that he is still too heavily reliant on military power as a source of American influence in the world and Hillary Clinton, you know, I think is going to have a hard time creating a new consensus because there's a lot of things in America that really need changing and need a new kind of politics and I think Obama's probably the one that promises, you know, of the three to do that. Whether he can actually deliver we'll have to see.

TONY JONES: Francis Fukuyama the first Obama Republican we've met on the program. Thank you for coming in and joining us tonight.