I really think this report is an extremely dangerous and irresponsible document. I think it is a call for war. But before getting to the truly wrong-headed, let me pass by the merely idiotic. What astonishes me about the context of the report, by which I mean its sponsorship by the various left liberal foundations, though you have kept rather quiet about this, left liberal social democratic governments, the Nordics, Holland, the Canadian government, are the easy slaps at the U.S. in the report. Of course, anyone familiar with the rhetoric of the governments in question will be familiar with this approach. So let me be as clear as I can: I am not somebody who thinks that the issue of American military involvement is to be laughed at with cheap jibes about those cowards in the US Air Force who chose to fight the Kosovo campaign at 15,000 feet. First of all, I think anybody in this room who has not been under fire should be extremely careful about that thought, and when in doubt, put it out of his or her mind. Because it is not a joke to fire a rocket at any height, and it is not a joke to be fired upon. Let the authors of the report try it sometime. Frankly, I think the easy dismissal of the US military’s concerns is an intellectual solecism and a moral disgrace.

It is also so hypocritical as to be beneath contempt. These same social democratic governments whose views dominate the report that talk about the necessity, indeed the moral obligation of humanitarian interventions, are the very governments that consistently cut their military forces. The Canadian government, for example, which has taken the lead in a number of these issues, is a government that has basically pared its forces to the point that those of us who lived in Bosnia during the war, as I did, remember how often we would pass Canadian battalions — and very nice fellows, all of them — and see them fixing their broken-down 1960s armoured personnel carriers by the side of the road. That is, when they were not cleaning their other antiquated weapons.

So before complaining endlessly about how the Americans don’t sign this or that international treaty, and implying — and yes, politely as the wording is — that is the clear implication of this report, that the Americans are either cowards or have not understood that putting on a uniform implies risk. I hate to sound like that old Kipling poem, but when the shooting starts, it’s the American Army that is expected to do the heavy lifting, and there is no evidence despite all the pious talk emanating from the
European capitals, from Ottawa, et cetera, of Europe, let alone poor Can-
ada changing its fundamental military configuration on any of these is-
sues. Which means that for the foreseeable future, the kind of humanitar-
ian war this report champions, if it is to be engaged in at all, is going to be
engaged in by the United States Army and Air Force. So have a care.

Now, for what is really wrong with the report. As I read it, the report is
generally for humanitarian military intervention, though somewhat dis-
guised as a critique of the Kosovo operation. I read its subtext as an effort
to provide the legal, moral and historical rationale for a regime of interna-
tional military intervention in last resort faced with substantial – or to put
it in old fashioned terms, extraordinary – human rights or humanitarian
violations. That is what is worth arguing about. But of course the report
makes all kinds of historical and political claims about Kosovo and even
Bosnia. Many of these are highly questionable; others represent the tri-
umph of hope over experience taken to an absurd degree. And they need to
be challenged if we are even to begin to think clearly about any of these
matters. A call for humanitarian intervention as an international norm
based on a misunderstanding of much of what has happened in the South
Balkans is surely like building an amphitheatre on quicksand.

Let me get down to cases. The account in the report of the history of
Kosovo is extremely – how should I phrase it – optimistic. Implicit in the
entire account is that fundamentally things all went really wrong in 1989.
Of course, I agree entirely with Judge Goldstone that the Balkans are a
place where everyone wants to say, oh, yes, that date, but I have an earlier
date to tell you about. In that decision, at least, the Commission was
clearly entirely correct.

The problem is that by using 1989, there is an implicit assumption, and
one that I think is actually borne out in some of the text of the report, that
basically things were okay until 1989. And I simply don’t think that was
the case.

I also think that the report, rather like the policy of various international
actors towards the Balkans, tends to rather misdescribe Kosovo as if it
were Bosnia. The fundamental difference, at least to those of us who were
in the Balkans during those wars, that we – and let me be blunt – unlike
the authors of this report, experienced on the ground, is that whereas in
Bosnia people basically got along, in Kosovo it was basically a zero-sum