

A Conversation with FREDERICK W. KAGAN

Director of the Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute, Fred Kagan is a foreign policy strategist and military historian. In this conversation, Kagan and Kristol discuss the strategy for the troop surge in Iraq in 2006/07, which Kagan helped devise. The two also consider the state of the U.S. military today, including how it operates in wartime, how it educates its cadets, and how it interacts with civilians.

On Bush and “The Surge,” Kagan says: "It was an amazingly courageous decision...Bad as things are now, it would have been devastating had we allowed ourselves to get run out of Iraq in 2006 in the way that we were going to be run out. Basically, we were going to be driven out because it was going to be a contested withdrawal, and it was going to look like a rout of American forces. And that would have been a serious calamity."

On soldiers and civilians, Gingrich says: "Most Americans...don't really feel comfortable interacting seriously with the military. And they either are very suspicious, without being able to articulate the suspicion very well, or they're very trusting without really being able to challenge the military in a good way."

On a West Point Education, Kagan says: "No one graduates from West Point without having failed multiple times and badly because it's designed to make them fail. And then to have them see that you can recover from that and to build the muscle memory for how to recover from failure and how to react to it so that they're generally much more resilient, much less fragile."

On how to beat a Napoleon, Kagan says: "The anti-Napoleons—the guys who defeat him...were all pretty mediocre generals actually...What they had in common was that they were very cautious and very conservative and they never made a mistake that Napoleon could take advantage of."

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