Women's Foreign Policy Group
Author Series Event
September 16, 2010
New York, NY

Scott Malcomson
Foreign Editor, *New York Times Magazine*

Generation's End: A Personal Memoir of American Power after 9/11

Daniela Kitch: We are going to hear Scott Malcomson on this book and this topic; I heard it was just published days ago. Very exciting. Just one quick word about the Institute: we are a large non-profit organization founded 91 years ago dedicated to international exchange and training programs. We've administered the Fulbright since its inception, which is probably how you've heard of us. Just one quick note because I know this talk is about American power after 9/11—one thing that we at the Institute found after 9/11 that was very interesting to us was that applications from Americans for Fulbright grants, both in terms of going abroad for study and also in terms of learning languages, rose dramatically after 9/11, especially Americans interested in going to the Middle East and Americans learning Arabic. Of course, there were a number of negative consequences of 9/11, but we have it to be a very positive one in growth of American students and scholars in really understanding that part of the world. So, thank you for being here and I turn it over to the wonderful Patricia Ellis, who is a wonderful woman leader, and thank you for doing this.

Patricia Ellis: Thank you so much, Daniela. We're just so pleased to be back here at IIE again. We have a great partnership going, and this is another exciting program that certainly could not be more timely following the anniversary of 9/11, and also Scott Malcomson's book just came out, so we're really excited. After he speaks in New York, he's going to DC to speak to us again.

Good afternoon everyone and welcome. We are very pleased to see you. I see a lot of new faces. I'm Patricia Ellis, President of the Women's Foreign Policy Group. We promote women leaders and primarily women's voices—but some men—on pressing international issues. One of our favorite series in New York, in addition to our programs on the UN, is our Author Series and it is a very active series. We're really excited about hearing from Scott Malcomson, and he'll be talking about his new book, *Generation's End: A Personal Memoir of American Power After 9/11*. So, a little bit about Scott: he currently edits foreign coverage with *New York Times Magazine*. He is an award-winning writer, journalist, and editor. His articles have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *New Republic* and, most recently and for anyone who wants to read a very recent article, he has had articles in *The Christian Science Monitor, The Huffington Post,* and *The Daily Beast*.

He has been a foreign correspondent who has worked all over the world dating back to the mid-80s, and he has worked and traveled to Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, Europe, and

Central Asia. In addition to this book, he has published three other books, and he is also a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, so please join me in welcoming Scott Malcomson. [*Applause.*]

Scott Malcomson: Thank you, Pat, very much. This is my absolute first speaking engagement about this book, so that's maybe not so good for you, but if you could help me hone my performance a little bit, that'd be great. And I only have 15 minutes, which is also good and then we have the question and answer part and then we'll take questions. I always prefer the question and answer part to the initial presentation part anyway. I want to talk a little bit about the book and why I wrote it and how I wrote it, because it says things about journalism and about foreign policy and about working in government, and since I figure most of you are doing or thinking about doing one of those things if not more then maybe it will be of interest to you. I started working on it, I realized later, later that day on September 11th. I woke up; my father-in-law called and said some planes hit the World Trade Towers; the babysitter was late; I decided not to take—no, I did take the dry cleaning in, and I went—and I see my colleague Gail, you'll appreciate this—I went and bought a fresh notebook, thinking something must be happening and started walking toward the Brooklyn Bridge. And by the time I got there, it was crowded; the roadways were blocked off, but the walkway was clear, and I'm sure many of you have been on that walkway and it was crowded with people, all covered in dust, walking into Brooklyn. There was still one tower left and then it went down when I was about halfway across. Everyone turned around, looked for a few minutes and then weirdly, silently, kept going into Brooklyn. Because I had an exalted idea of my importance as a *New York Times* op-ed editor, I decided I had to go into the paper and so I kept walking across the bridge. The only people walking in that direction, as far as I could tell, were not journalists; they all had handguns [*Laughter.*] They were going across—off duty cops, I assume—and one guy, who was the most amazing thing in a way, who had headphones on and was jogging into Manhattan right into this cloud of dust.

Anyway, I talk in the book about how I managed to get to work, and I mention all this because I think the reason I started writing the book was in a way because—and I don't know how many of you are New Yorkers or were here at that time, I'm sure many of you were—by the time I got to work by about 11 in the morning, my job was to figure out what had happened and to make sense of it, or more specifically to find people to comment on what had happened that morning. And even at that point, I thought, the experiences that I'm having, the experience of seeing the guy jogging into Manhattan, the experience of seeing the people with the side arms, and the various experiences I had already had in the first few hours of that day, I wanted to be able to not lose those. They became at least personally important to me, and at the same time, my job was to look at the different narratives of American power and of foreign policy and Islamic fundamentalism and not to mention all the stories we did on the physics of buildings and planes—these two things I had to do at the same time. There was something schizophrenic about it, but there was also something, at least to me, interesting about it, because both seemed important and yet each tended to crowd out the other one. My emotional reactions made it very hard to think sensibly about foreign policy, and my foreign policy thinking somehow sort of severed this process of intense engagement with the world around me, which was suddenly and horribly changed. So, I put a box under my desk and I basically clipped things out as they came in, and I printed out emails and all that kind of stuff, anything that seemed relevant, and I just

stuck it in the box. The book essentially came from that box and the boxes after it. [*Laughter.*] When I started writing, I had about ten of them where I had put all of this stuff.

The first half of the book basically is those two stories taking place on parallel tracks: trying to absorb the enormity of what had happened, the enormity of losses of people I knew, the enormity of all things we absolutely had not anticipated, and that we suddenly had to deal with as human beings in the city, and then the other was with the lines of American foreign policy trying, likewise, but in a very different way, to deal with the shock of the attacks, to react to them in an intelligent—hopefully—way. That's the first half of the book; it becomes progressively less personal after about six weeks after 9/11, but I really wanted to preserve that emotional sense because, ultimately—and I'll get into this later—we lost a lot of that sense, or rather we took that sense of what actually happened to us and bracketed it over here and then tried to be sort of sensible. I think, and I would say in some ways this is relevant to the Ground Zero controversy, I think the effort to be sensible and rational about what is fundamentally senseless and irrational tends to lead to bad decisions. I mean, at the least, bad policy decisions. I know it led to a lot of bad policy decisions in the Bush Administration in the two-year period that I talk about.

So, that sort of first-year period, those are the two narratives, and I talk a lot about the paper and *The New York Times* trying to come to grips with what was happening in its city and trying to do a good job of journalism and everything, which was also a mixed bag. And then after a year, and after about 140 pages of my book, it became very clear that the Bush Administration had decided what sense it was going to make and what it was going to do, and for a variety of reasons, we could only just kind of observe it—not that I didn't know people in the Bush administration or anything like that, but there was no longer a struggle among the people who had the power to start war over what any of it meant. They really felt like they knew and then they acted accordingly. For me, that made my job a good deal less interesting. In that summer of 2002 was when I started losing interest in my job because of this process, and I made one last pitch, I convinced James Baker to write an op-ed which I was hoping would somehow join Brent Scrowcroft's famous op-ed—in this obviously slightly narcissistic fantasy of the importance of op-eds—and would have an effect, and once it clearly wasn't, I began to look around for something else to do, because I didn't really want to sit there and watch this disaster unfold, at least not from that perch. And it was around that time—more or less by coincidence, though no job changes are ever by coincidence—Sérgio Vieira de Mello was named UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and he needed some people for his executive office and I knew some people in the secretary general's office, as I describe briefly in the book, I ended up switching from journalism into—if you consider the UN government work—government work. But anyway, that's the second half of the book, working with Sérgio for about ten months in 2003. I started at the beginning of 2003. My first big meeting was with President Bush, so it was kind of a rocketing career for about three weeks, and Sérgio and I and his assistant went and met with the President and met with Condoleezza Rice and various other people about a week before the invasion of Iraq. I had hoped, I had thought, I had fantasized that by going into the UN I could get out of this 9/11 head and not have to worry quite so much about American power and maybe worry about other countries' power, and things like that, and solving problems. And I did some, but Iraq and the US had a way of drawing us back in, sort of like how you can't leave the mob, I suppose. [*Laughter.*] So, after a few months, after the White House visit, the president and his advisors began to think that maybe once the invasion had been carried out—no

doubt successfully as they all believed—that they would need to have a UN presence there, and Sérgio seemed a good person to do that.

Before I get into that, I want to backup slightly and make a couple things clear because every time I read these passages in the book it strikes me again. When we were in Washington at the beginning of March 2003 about a week or so before the war, while Sérgio and I and Jonathan were all against the war, we could see that it was coming and we were all—and I was certainly—impressed by how excited and optimistic people were in the State Department and in the White House. I don't mean so much analytically excited and optimistic but just *really* excited and optimistic about what was going to happen in the course of the war. I just think, remembering what it was like on 9/12 and 9/13, I think there is something to be said for remembering the kind of dominant emotions at a given period when decisions are being made, particularly wrong decisions in my view, it was amazing how excited everyone was. Then, when Sérgio was named for a four-month period to be the Secretary General of the Special Representative for Iraq—I think that was in June—shortly before that he had me write an op-ed about the US and the UN in Iraq, and there are two points in the op-ed where it refers to the recent war as an uneasy peace. This is June of 2003, so at that point it looked like that was what it was, or at least we were being polite and calling it that. So, in terms of sort of being in government as well as being in journalism there is a real value in realizing just how wrong you can be, and so there are bits of that in my book for me to look at for years to come.

So, Sérgio went to Iraq. It was mostly a disaster from the beginning. He had really two goals: one was to have a strong UN presence in Iraq, which he kind of had succeeded at; the other was to broaden the political process within Iraq with the clearly stated goal of getting occupying forces out of Iraq as soon as possible. The date they began to talk about over that summer was January 2004 for there to be elections and then the occupying forces could withdraw. He succeeded to some extent at broadening political participation within Iraq by talking to the neighbors as well, and then on August 19th, as I'm sure some of you may remember, a truck bomb exploded. It was an al-Qaeda thing again, and he was killed along with 18 or 19 others and then there were many other people wounded. The UN presence and the UN—not just physically within Baghdad, but the UN presence within the occupation of Iraq and within the government in Iraq didn't wholly end at that point, but it mostly ended. My book basically ends there, and then I have an afterward about the latter point of Bush's second term and a bit about Obama, but to my mind—and all of these narrative structures are a bit—they're never as clean as writers want them to be, but it's sort of clean—the period between 9/11 and August 19, 2003, was a period when American power began to really assert itself in a particular way in the world with particular goals in mind, and when it was—and I don't use this as a curse word, although many people do—but it was basically unilateral, and what you see in my book is that sort of process in this emotional context, and you see that effort at the UN to be involved in it, an effort that essentially failed and more or less ended on August 19th when Sérgio was killed. That's pretty much the book and sort of why and how.

One other thing that I wrote about—again, I don't mean to entirely make fun of myself and it's a mode that comes more naturally in speaking, the book doesn't make as much fun of me as I do—but about a year and a half ago I wrote a thing in the Huffington post about President Obama, calling him the Roger Federer of international politics. [*Laughter.*] Which—I really, really was

wrong again, and a lot of that article had to do with the Group of 20. Obama's such an interesting president in many ways, but he was more interesting then in that his lack of alienation from international institutions and the idea of multilateralism and indeed even the shrinking of American power makes him very different and, at least on paper, should make him, in my view, quite appropriate for the times. What I can't figure out is where that person is in terms of the actual functioning of American foreign policy, and you see him sometimes in and out but there is no real coherent use of that narrative or that persona in current policy and I'm concerned by the number of foreign diplomats and politicians who will ask me—which is slightly a sign of desperation—who is actually making these policies in the Obama White House and in the administration, and I don't have an answer, and it shouldn't be like that two years into this term. I'm still optimistic in a way just because—as Condoleezza Rice used to say, "We'll only know if we were right in the long term." I sort of feel that way about the Group of 20. I mean, I think I'm right in the long-term, but this or something like it, there has to be a coherent institutional sort of restructuring to accommodate—and this is things all of you know better than I do—but the rise of middle powers and the BRICs [Brazil, Russia, India, and China] and so on. I wrote something about this the other day. It's this weird situation where there's such an international consensus—I mean, within the diplomatic and the political community—about these broad outlines of what is happening in the world, but yet there is no leadership at all. There's no leadership from the traditional Western places we look for it, there's no leadership from China, there's no leadership from Brazil. It's a bizarre situation where everybody knows what needs to happen, but nothing is really happening on any sort of serious scale. I personally think that that will have to end, though ridiculous international things have a way of going on for many, many decades.

The other thing I wanted to talk about a little bit because I've written about it a bit recently and everybody's interested in it is the Ground Zero mosque. And I guess I just wanted to make a couple points about that which I'm not sure have been all that widely made, one of which is—what really depresses me about the mosque, and I'm in a sense for the mosque, if you can be *for* mosques as general proposition. [*Laughter.*] You know, the way that I'm for churches and things like that. What disturbs me in a way about the mosque, and perhaps more so about the reaction against it, is that it's bringing—religion is starting to infect something that we've been living with for nine years now in a way that it hasn't before, and I don't totally understand that, and it made me look back and I do talk about this in the book, look back in those first six months when, on one reading, if a country is attacked by however many people who kill however many thousands of us and do it entirely in the name of religious ideology, you would think there might be a reaction against that religion, and what struck me, and I'm aware that there were incidents at the time, but what really, truly struck me most was how little anti-religious reaction there was at that time. Which isn't to say there wasn't any, but as these things go it was striking to me. I think it was partly because of President Bush's leadership, who took a very strong and consistent line on this.

I think a lot of it, though, really had to do with the unexpectedly visceral nature of the separation of church and state within American culture. Something like the separation of church and state is so much a legal fiction, it's so much a process of our legal and institutional history, that you wouldn't think it could become deeply embedded in your psyche, but I am convinced at least that the separation of church and state actually is deeply embedded in the American psyche, so it

almost constitutes an emotional reaction even though it doesn't sound like an emotional thing. And what disturbs me about the current situation is that that kind of reaction we seem to be losing, and I don't entirely understand why. I mean, I have a couple of things that I look to as possible explanations, one of which is that we've been at war for nine years against something, though it has become increasingly difficult to say exactly what that is, but we've been losing people, we've been spending a vast amount of money, all of our enemies seem to come up Muslim one way or another, and I think that nine years, while not that long a period of time, I think that has had a sort of deleterious effect that you start—I mean, if all of your enemies look in this particular way, after nine years you'll begin to think it must be the religion you're fighting, rather than the people who are misusing it. I do think that is part of it. I think part of it also is that—and it's particularly egregious in the case of Afghanistan, though maybe not all that less so in Iraq, and it's true in other countries as well—that our allies, our Muslim allies, tend to be only slightly nicer to us than our Muslim enemies in terms of what some of what many people talk about in their own case, in terms of any sense of basic respect for what it is that the United States is trying to achieve. It's kind of largely missing, and it's gone down steadily over the last nine years. I think that that has a dramatic effect because you begin to associate enemies and allies alike as being part of a basically hostile group. I think that also helps to explain what's happening at Ground Zero now. I don't mean to discount the always crucial importance of sheer political opportunism on the part of unscrupulous people within our system which, never to be underestimated, but I think maybe the other two things haven't been talked about quite so much. I think I'm going to leave it at that.

Ms. Ellis: Thank you very much. You put out a lot of things for us to talk about, and I'd just like to pick up on two and then we'll just open it up for questions. One relates to the support we're getting from other countries, because it seems like in the case of Afghanistan, lots of our so-called allies, and I'm not talking just about the Muslim world, but even the Europeans, are now leaving the fray. They were supporting us initially and everybody was kind of on board, so once again, even though it's very different from Iraq, the United States is becoming more isolated in its position and so I'm just wondering whether that is also a factor, that a lot of people are kind of getting fed up with the policy. It's getting more dangerous, more people are getting killed, countries are pulling out, so, we're not getting that much support around the world, so that's one area that I wanted to ask about. And the other, which is slightly different, but, you talked about the need for leadership. We now have a mutli-polar world with all these emerging powers, so what really do you see as the role of the US and the capacity which is now limited by the recession and the emergence of other countries. I'm wondering if you could start off by addressing those two small matters.

Mr. Malcomson: Yeah, like you said, they're just little. This should be quick. [*Laughter.*] And they're related too. I think you're absolutely right that—I mean, not to bring it back to my story, but once the UN building was bombed, there was—it was America's war, and it only became America's war *more* after that. The idea, the internationalizing of either of these conflicts was questionable at the beginning and only got weaker and is now virtually non-existent. Within British politics, they made a huge commitment and lost many, many soldiers, but within British politics today, this is pretty much universally thought to be, though you don't put it quite this way, an error. It is Tony Blair's error.

Ms. Ellis: They just had a big commission on the Iraq war and it was very tough.

Mr. Malcomson: Yes, the Chilcot Commission. And at some point, we're going to wake up and realize that we actually don't have any allies anymore, in the sense of we got used to from 1945 to a year ago, or four years ago.

Ms. Ellis: The Dutch have just pulled out, other countries—

Mr. Malcomson: Yes. Germany's cutting conscription, cutting its budget. It goes on and on. Before 9/11, when I started having foreign policy op-eds at *The Times*, it was considered a fairly unimportant job because we all knew that foreign policy was something that could just kind of tick over on its own in the globalization era and then nothing much would happen. But even in those days, the joke within the office was, "Well, shouldn't we do another piece on NATO expansion." Now, NATO comes and goes but as far as I can tell, NATO barely exists at this point. You don't even really read much about it. All these foreign affairs people rarely pay any attention to the fact that the leading alliance of democracies and industrialized powers on the planet just doesn't seem to have much life in it. It's not even being mourned. The lack of allies is, I think, over a longer term, will be seen as a key part of the last nine years. I think it's been really under appreciated as a result, partly because Obama's an appealing person, there's a lot of different reasons for it.

Ms. Ellis: Does it make the UN more important? Or higher expectations?

Mr. Malcomson: I mean, it should. I wish it would. I don't know how the expectations are. The last big push for Security Council reform, which is at some level what it all comes down to, didn't really go much of anywhere. And it was a pretty reasonably serious effort on the part of the Secretariat and the members of the larger powers. It needs to be done again. I don't know—on some level, you can't completely evade the existing institutional structure. You know, I would have hoped that the G20 would in some ways serve both as an alternative, and, in some ways, serve as a pressure group on the various major states and not so major states in order to lead to a process of UN reform, because having been inside the UN, even for a brief period of time, I certainly learned that reform will never be generated from within the United Nations or within the Secretariat beyond a certain point. It just won't. And ultimately, it can't be because of the way that power works not just within the UN but among the major member states. The G20 doesn't seem to be functioning now like that. The bright spots in terms of your second question are pretty tiny. Rhetorically, early in the early Obama Administration they were big, but rhetorical. This may be a wonky enough crowd where I can say that I was pleased with the redistribution of voting power within the World Bank, but that's not quite the same thing as even Bretton Woods, let alone San Francisco. There's a similar process taking place at the IMF. Again, like I was saying before, everybody knows this has to happen, there's just very little momentum towards it. Dominique Strauss-Kahn [at the IMF] and Bob Zoellick at the [World] Bank happen to be unusually intelligent and energetic people, and so kind of see the writing on the wall, which is awesome.

Ms. Ellis: So, let's open it up, but I have just one last thing that relates to that. If you were a key foreign policy national security advisor for the Obama Administration, you seem to have some frustrations—what would you be telling them that they should be doing now?

Mr. Malcomson: Well, and I won't end with this, but one thing I did learn in my brief period working for Sérgio was that when you're inside government you see things very differently, and people outside government don't actually know what's going on inside the government. Which was a little shocking to me initially, as a journalist, because I thought, "Wow, we really don't know anything; we thought we knew everything." And over time, I did modify my opinion. I mean, they do overlap a lot, but government operates within itself according to a system that is sort of weirdly without reference to the rest of the world. And so this is a long way of explaining why—I don't know what they're doing inside this government.

Ms. Ellis: Well, what would you like to see?

Mr. Malcomson: It's hard to say that they should do x, y, and z when they may be doing x and y and I don't know, but the—I mean, what I think they should be doing is not controversial nor all that original, but it's in the doing that it matters, but it's to take a leadership role and accommodating the roles of the rise of these middling powers into a structural reform and spinning it as a positive thing, rather than as—

Ms. Ellis: Fear.

Mr. Malcomson: Or as the post-American decline and even in 1945, or before 1945, but especially from 1945 until present, one of the strengths of the Untied States is that it can to some degree, or at least more so than in the older European powers, welcome the emergence of other strong powers, and it's sort of the geopolitical equivalent of welcoming immigrants. There's a certain level of non-fear, and that's a good thing. It's a good thing about the country, it's a good thing about the country's political traditions, it's something that can be built on, and it's something that I at least thought Obama was particularly well-suited, at least psychologically, to build on. But so far he hasn't done it so much. So, if I were going to join the administration, I would work the bureaucratic levers night and day in order to make this particular vision come into reality.

Ms. Ellis: Okay, great. Well, thank you. Who has a question? Yes. And can you just say your name?

Question: Sylvan Barnet, Rotary International Representative to the United Nations. I have a lot of questions [*Laughter.*] Let me lead off by saying I remember Pearl Harbor, and I was in the Navy at the time, and it shocked us out of isolationism the hard way. But we knew who our enemy was. It was absolutely no problem. We go to war, and we knew who we were going to fight. 9/11 was totally different. We were under attack also, but we didn't really understand where it came from, and I still don't think we have a real understanding of 9/11, why it came about and how it came about, or who our real enemies are. We're still trying to define that. In the process, you talk about no leadership and lack of allies. That disturbs me. I am going to give

you what Colonel Bacevich is saying: are we now an imperialist nation or are we now a neo-colonial nation? We're changing. Or have we always been an imperialist nation?

Mr. Malcomson: Not yet. I think that Bacevich is fighting the last war to some extent. I think there are real isolationist currents within unions, within different parts of society, and right now American politics is in a state of shock because of the Tea Party stuff and these candidates doing so well. They do have a foreign policy, and it's a foreign policy of basically not going abroad. It's the passport-less foreign policy. And I wouldn't underestimate those things at all. I don't think the US is becoming—I think it's becoming steadily less imperial to the degree that it ever was. One of the remarkable things to me about both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, and I speak as a non-Republican, but it was how non-colonial and non-imperial they were. I know they looked imperial and, for some people who were undertaking them I suppose that they probably were. For Max Booth they were imperial, but Max Booth wasn't actually making policy. I mean, I think for the major policy-makers or at least most of them, including the President and Condoleezza Rice, these were meant to be temporary operations. I think that's part of the reason why they did so badly, which is sort of one of Max Booth's points, except Max wanted them to be permanent, but which I think would have been a huge mistake. But the momentum is all toward withdrawal now. And as I said, the institutional structures like NATO in particular are basically getting hollowed out, and I think that's where we're going, I don't think we're going in an imperial direction at all.

Question: Are we perceived as an imperialist nation?

Mr. Malcomson: Yeah, in some places, to a degree, sure. I mean, every place I've ever gone has had some sector of society that sees the US as imperialist, even when it's not there. But I just don't think it's the case.

Question: Well, I guess I reacted very strongly to your sense of personal and emotional involvement in 9/11 in those first six weeks. I too set out to try and write a story and how could you possibly capture it, so I concentrated on the victims of the town in New Jersey that lost the greatest number of people. I spent a year and a half spending half of my time with them, so I became them. One thing that I was very interested in is, in a poll, in a national survey taken maybe 6 or maybe it was 3–6 weeks after the attack, New York was the least hostile to Muslims of any other part of the country, and as the poll went west it got more and more hostile, until you got to the southwest and it was really strong. So, I was very interested in your reaction about the mosque. You said you were for it, but concerned about the reaction. My initial reaction when I heard about it being built right at the edge of the crater was that of the families. I said no; I said that's not right; I know that legally it's okay, but this is a sacrosanct place. This is sacred ground, and if I were a family I wouldn't want the demonstrations which were obviously going to come. And somebody just burned Koran outside there the other day. And there were lots of people there on 9/11 on both sides, so again it becomes a place of tensions, a place of political acrimony. So, I have to say, I'm still, I'm not against in any—but you know the nine years have taken their toll on me, because I've interviewed a lot of the hostile, moderate Muslims and they see us as an occupier in Afghanistan and with the Palestinians and bang away at that. So, I was realizing as I'm hearing you that I've been changed by the nine years, and I was wondering if anybody else—

Ms. Ellis: Yes, does anybody else want to jump in on that?

Question: Hi, my name is Leena and I work here at IIE. I'm a little stuck on a word I heard you use early on which was "senseless" as a whole, 9/11 in general as senseless, and while my emotions tell me that, I think, going back to my grad school days, there are a lot of scholars and academics who don't understand terrorism as senseless, and that's where the rub is, and if anything, to me, it seems like we've become the senseless ones. I mean, Forbes just published an essay by Dinesh D'Souza where he is talking about Obama's Kenyan colonial roots, and how that impacts his socialism and to me, I don't understand what's happening here. I almost understand where that announcement came from as a US foreign policy issue, but I don't understand what's happening here right now, and I think the mosque, or the cultural center has to do with that. I don't think that anyone's really drawing points right now. Should any religion have claim to that ground, I don't know, but, part of me is wondering about how you feel about the media as complicit in wartimes or any media outlet or TV channel that is going to use fair and balanced as its, you know, every opinion is equal and how that gets disseminated.

Mr. Malcomson: I don't know quite how to pick my way through all of that, but what you're saying about the mosque specifically, I think—a lot depends on whether you assume that people who are building it believe that it would not be provocative. I personally think that they did not think it would be provocative, and I have to say, having heard Imam Rauf speak on Monday, I continue to believe that he didn't think it would be provocative, I think because he has slightly too-high an opinion of Americans, just in general, that he had thought it wouldn't be experienced as provocative. Now, if he'd asked me, I'd have said, of course it would be experienced as provocative, and I wish the whole thing had never occurred, but that doesn't mean that I wish that it would end now or that if it had to end now, I wonder what would be the right way for it to end. I mean, that's how I feel about that. I mean, as I said before, what bothers me the most is that religion is becoming part of this, and it's sort of—I mean, you used the words "sacred ground," and many others have, but it's really kind of interesting and revealing formulation, but it came up at this breakfast with Rauf the other day, I mean, strictly speaking, if it's sacred ground, where else would you build churches and mosques and synagogues. I mean, that's what you do. And it's, we almost reflectively use the word "sacred" to refer to a place where we think that God shouldn't be worshipped, almost, which is, on the face of it, slightly odd, but I actually think that part of it is, and this is again having to do with the separation of church and state, I think part of it is that part of us is, we literally want a sacred religion free space, and I know that seems purely paradoxical, but I don't actually think that it is. We don't want to see church hierarchies taking over a space that means that much; we don't trust them. It's part of not trusting government, in a way, and this is all way too complicated to appear in any of the media places you're talking about, including the one I work for.

Ms. Ellis: But Scott, just one follow-up, do you think that, I mean, evidently, there is a community center, where is it, not in Tribeca, in SoHo or something like that, if they had been building this someplace else but not that far away but not right nearby do you think that there would be all this hullaballoo? I just don't know what the answer to that is. It has brought out so many emotions and feelings, and maybe it, and it does relate to all these polls and perceptions of

Obama as a Muslim, and there are a lot of things that have been stirring that haven't necessarily come to the surface, but I mean, what is your perception on this?

Mr. Malcomson: Well, as I said, you can't really know. Rauf has had his own center mosque meeting place, whatever you want to call it, in Tribeca for I think thirteen years now or more. In a way, I think part of what you're getting at, is the way none of the facts matter. So, you can say, yes, there are betting parlors even closer to Ground Zero, so it's really not that sacred otherwise why don't we get rid of the OCB building, and it can go on like that, and you shouldn't sell lotto tickets within a hundred yards, but in the end, politics is like that. It's, one thing happens, I really don't believe they thought this was going to be provocative. They were just going through planning boards and doing everything right and everyone voted for it, but in the end it happened and it was latched onto, not initially by the mainstream media or even the non-mainstream media. The media landscape now is a little different in that you can have highly politically motivated media with declared ideology of objectivity report practically anything and then it can sort of virally make its way up the system, and that's been the case with this particular mosque and it's been the case with other stories I'm sure you're familiar with. But, yeah, I mean, media does sort of fan the flames, yes.

Ms. Ellis: Like with the coverage of the guy burning, you know, the Florida—

Mr. Malcomson: Yes. If you can't ignore a Florida pastor with 50 people than who can you ignore? I mean, I wouldn't send anybody down there to cover that.

Ms. Ellis: There was so much foreign media there because there were protests going on in Afghanistan and around the world.

Mr. Malcomson: And that brings up something that I think has been very interesting since 9/11, which is the reverse of the Ground Zero mosque thing, which is that you can have something of complete insignificance that's somewhat anti-Muslim in the United States and find it in media landscapes in other countries. This will be seen as "I told you, the other 240 million are just like Lt. General William Boykin." I don't know if any of you remember Lt. General William Boykin, but he said something about the war in Iraq being a crusade, and for like a year I would get queries from journalists about William Boykin. He's a nobody. He's the military equivalent of the pastor in Florida, and there is just this level of distrust, and now we're acting the same way in my view. I mean, there are slightly different circumstances, but to some extent, some of the reactions to the Ground Zero mosque. It's kind of like, this sort of shows that they're all incredibly hostile to us, and we're giving in, to some extent, to that mentality. One person made this point the other day about Rauf, where he said something to the extent of, "If I'm forced to move this mosque then it will inflame public opinion abroad and then, to make long story short, more bad people will want to come across and want to kill us like last time," and what was interesting about that to me was if you take it as a threat or not. And certainly, many people did, and they said he's using his people, so to speak, as a kind of army that he's going to call down on us if we don't give him what he wants. But if Giuliani had said that or if Bloomberg has said that or practically anybody had said it, they'd say, oh, this is just an analysis of foreign policy reality. And the words would be exactly the same, and I think to some degree when Rauf was attacked for that for being a threat, he was attacked for it as a threat because we were assuming

he actually isn't one of us; he's actually one of them, and therefore he's a threat. Whereas, if I were to say, "If we move the mosque, Arabs are going to be really mad at us because it will be taken as an anti-Muslim gesture," no one would think I was being disloyal, or that I was going down the Muslim hordes on the United States because they're clearly not going to do anything I tell them to do. But it was weird, and I would imagine he experienced it as weird, because it was essentially saying, you're not one of us. You came to New Jersey in 1965, so on and so forth and I'm sure you all know his biography, but you're not one of us. And I actually think it took him by surprise because it is actually an anodyne thing to say about the controversy.

Question: I'm not sure if I have a question, but one thing that struck me on the anniversary of 9/11 was that when the leading positions in Holland who has a strong right-wing platform came to 9/11 and spoke, saying that New York is New Netherlands or, you know, there's this link between the countries and we don't want New York to become the next Mecca. And what struck me, having lived in Holland and actually being here on 9/11 and then being here in New York, is how global this one building, the mosque at ground zero, has become, that in Holland this guy —

Ms. Ellis: Is this Geert Wilders?

Question: Yes, I guess I'm just trying to grapple with how global this has become for different platforms around the world.

Ms. Ellis: I think she raises a very interesting issue, because we've done a number of programs, we had a conference on Islam and one of the segments was on Islam in Europe. It varies in relations between Muslims and their governments, and it varies from country to country, but there really is quite a different approach to dealing with different groups, particularly Muslims, in a lot of European countries—from France, which has its own approach everyone is supposed to be French so you all have to look alike, to what's going on in Holland and Belgium and yet it's different in Germany, but you know, in Britain, in many cases the Muslims have been isolated. They haven't been integrated. We've had Muslims in this country for years, from Lebanon and other places. Any thoughts about that, about the global nature of this event?

Mr. Malcomson: I mean, I'd hate for the United States to become useful for anti-immigration politicians in Holland. The European situation vis-à-vis Islam is just very different from ours. It's not really my place, though I have some ideas, as to what the Dutch should do about their current situation. Likewise, I'm not sure I want Dutch politicians making suggestions about lower Manhattan. In that sense, I'm a Democrat, I think that countries come up with their own answers, and France's, Sarkozy's recent bill, which may or may not take place to ban the burqa—except it doesn't mention the burqa as you probably know, it says you can't go around with your face concealed. Not the way I'd do it, but he is the president of France. I don't—and somewhat more seriously, I think it would be a signal disaster if all the originality that the United States has brought to bear as a culture, legally, politically, historically, toward the ability of people of different faiths to live together, to work together, to give up their faiths, to take on new ones—I'm from California, we took one on every week while I was growing up. But to take all that and have it become subordinate to some sort of European defend-the-West-against-the-Muslims thing with references to the battle of Lepanto or Poitiers or whatever it might be, I think that would be a disaster. I think that is a geopolitical narrative worth undermining in every

possible way. Because, it's like I say, with 9/11, we didn't think of it as a religious war; they thought of it as a religious war. That's why they did it. We can't accept their logic. I mean, I think at some level, I think on some level that's why it wasn't seen in the US as Muslims attacking in quite the way that it is more now, because ultimately that's taking on the logic of the people who attacked us, and that's not even a slippery slope, it's a drain. Well, I don't have strong feelings about it or anything. [*Laughter.*]

Ms. Ellis: Well, we're at the Institute for International Education, and I started asking this question in a different way earlier before the program, but don't you think then that as Americans we do need to know more about Islam. I mean, I think there is there a lack of knowledge about it, and maybe the need for more dialogue and interaction. I know things go on, but if you talk about understanding then you need to have knowledge and information, and I think in schools and other places, I don't think we're certainly getting all that much information, not to mention what goes on in the media, but just from an educational perspective.

Mr. Malcomson: Well, no one can argue against education. It's just impossible. I really do take the point, and I don't know what the education materials are, I could develop an opinion on them, but—a few books ago, I wrote a book about right after the end of the Cold War about Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey and Uzbekistan, and the idea there was this was a sort of area where, at that time, a rising Europe, collapsing communism, rising sort of Islamist, this is the fault line for all of these things, so I traveled around all of those countries, but the latter part of it—in Turkey and Uzbekistan, you know, I read hundreds of books about Islam and the different aspects of Muslim history because I was trying to make sense of the resurgence of a collective religious identity at a time like 1990-91, when I was there, and early '92. What I did find was, verifying your point, was that there was an awful lot to learn, and the parts that interested me the most which is relevant to the Ground Zero mosque actually, were the variety of currents within Islam, not just between Sunni and Shiite but also the many activities that come under the loose groupings of Sufism. You know, if you ask a sort of establishment Muslim cleric about the history of Islam they will leave out that part, because it's sort of the counter narrative to this, to make things really simple, the counter narrative to the official church whether it's Shiite or Sunni. And all of that sort of unofficial, devotional, mystical stuff within Islam is, depending on where you are, sometimes a very big or sometimes the dominant experience you have with religion, and it's the sort of thing to which al Qaeda and Sophism and Wahabism is completely opposed. They are like the opposite poles in that. If it were up to me, that's the aspect of Muslim life that I would like to see better understood and written about, and which was an aspect of Rauf's mosque and his practice in Tribeca. The tricky bit, and I'll defer to any Sufi Muslims who are in the room, but the tricky bit is that it is, that kind of Muslim life is both so culturally specific in general and is not part of the kind of state Islam that you would have in the case of Shiism in Iran, or in terms of the Gulf states and so on. It's kind of hard to talk about. And that's an aspect of Islam that is just a fact, but I found it extremely interesting and I think, to the degree that Americans, and this is a big question, are actually willing to learn anything about Islam, that is something that I would emphasize. I mean, that's where a lot of the poetry of the religion, a lot of the dance, a lot of the music and so on all comes out of much more of that side of it than the official side.

Ms. Ellis: Thank you very much.