

egf

NONE OF THE ABOVE



A PODCAST COMPANION

brought to you by the Eurasia Group Foundation



NONE OF THE ABOVE

SEEKING NEW ANSWERS TO AMERICA'S FOREIGN POLICY QUESTIONS

A PODCAST COMPANION

Mark Hannah, Ph.D., Host
Senior Fellow, Eurasia Group Foundation

Caroline Gray, Producer
Research Associate, Eurasia Group Foundation

Allyn B. Summa
Executive Director, Eurasia Group Foundation

Luke Taylor, Editor

Zubin Hensler, Mixer and Composer

Keenan Ashbrook, Summer Research Assistant, Eurasia Group Foundation

Clara Brackbill, Graduate Research Intern, Eurasia Group Foundation

Steve Maroti, Graduate Research Intern, Eurasia Group Foundation

Fidahussain Yamani, Graduate Research Intern, Eurasia Group Foundation

Gabriella Turrisi, Graphic Designer

Jessica Frampton, Graphic Designer

**Eurasia Group Foundation
Board of Directors:**

Ian Bremmer (Board President)
President and Founder, Eurasia Group.
New York, NY

Gregory Boyle, Partner, Jenner & Block LLP. Chicago, IL

Mohamed A. El-Erian, Chief Economic Advisor, Allianz. Laguna Beach, CA

Sallie Krawcheck, CEO & Co-Founder of Ellevest. New York, NY

Betty Liu, Founder/CEO, Radiate, Inc. New York, NY

Richard Lorenzen, CEO, Fifth Avenue Brands, New York, NY

Maziar Minovi, CEO, Eurasia Group, New York, NY

Mary Pang, Global Head, Private Client Practice, Cambridge Associates LLC, San Francisco, CA

Niko Pfund, President & Academic Publisher, Oxford University Press. New York, NY

Joe Schoendorf, Partner, Accel Partners. San Francisco, CA



ABOUT THE PODCAST

As the United States confronts an ever-changing set of international challenges, our foreign policy leaders continue to offer the same old answers. But what are the alternatives? In *None Of The Above*, the Eurasia Group Foundation's Mark Hannah asks leading global thinkers, journalists, and activists, going beyond your usual foreign policy suspects, for new answers and new ideas to guide an America increasingly adrift in the world.

www.noneoftheabovepodcast.org

FOREWORD

Greetings,

We're glad you found us! If you pay attention to foreign policy debates on the opinion pages or cable news, you likely hear many of the same arguments being made again and again. It often seems the most pressing questions about America's role in the world are met with tired shibboleths and stale orthodoxies.

In almost Orwellian fashion, international "engagement" becomes synonymous with military action and "leadership" is invoked in making the case for the coercive use of might, not the exemplary display of right. At EGF, we wanted to open up the conversation while making geopolitics and national security debates approachable for everyone.

We sought out a diverse group of guests from inside and outside traditional foreign policy organizations. *None Of The Above* features scholars, activists, former government officials, journalists, and artists with a wide range of experiences and opinions on American foreign policy. We also aim to provide a platform for voices of those chronically underrepresented groups in the foreign policy community.

This book presents some highlights of our podcast's first season. We debated the costs of the war in Afghanistan, better understood the protests in Hong Kong, and investigated the limits of American power. We learned from some first-rate thinkers and some rising stars of the foreign policy field.

We created this book to collect in one place some of our favorite excerpts from our first season. We hope you enjoy it, but nothing can replace the immersive experience of listening to these wide-ranging conversations for yourself. So if you like what you see, you can find these and future episodes on our website: noneoftheabovepodcast.org. And, as always, please rate and review, and subscribe wherever you get podcasts.

Help us find new answers to America's foreign policy questions. Join us in amplifying fresh voices and contributing to these important debates about the future of America's role in the world.

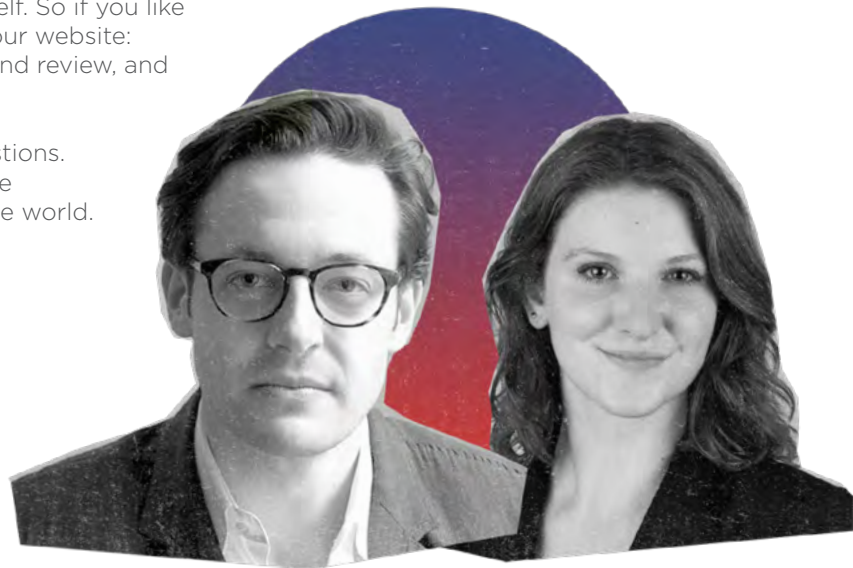
Thanks for reading, and thanks for listening,



Mark Hannah, Ph.D., Host



Caroline Gray, Producer



CONTENTS

THE PROBLEM OF OUR POWER 2

Chris Preble on American Military Dominance

THE GERMANY OF ASIA? 4

Sue Mi Terry on Nuclear North Korea

ENGAGING THE ENEMY 6

Chris Kolenda on Negotiating with the Taliban

THE ART OF THE (IRAN NUCLEAR) DEAL 8

Trita Parsi on Tensions with Iran

A FITTER FORCE 10

Kayla Williams on Misconceptions of Military Service

OF HELL AND HEGEMONY 12

Stephen Walt on the Follies of the Foreign Policy Elite

POWER PASSING 14

Kori Schake on the Stability of the International Order

FOREIGN POLICY ADRIFT 16

Brian Katulis on What Voters Want... and Aren't Getting

TOTALIZED WAR 18

Rosa Brooks on Ambiguity In and Of Wartime

DEPLOYING EMPATHY 20

Michael Ventura & Justin Bokmeyer on Perspective-Taking in the Armed Forces

THE FOOTPRINT OF INDUSTRIALIZED WAR 22

Murtaza Hussain on How War Contributes to the Climate Crisis

PROFITING FROM WAR 24

Bill Hartung on the U.S.-Saudi Corporate Connection

CHINA RISING PART 1 26

Isaac Stone Fish and Stephen Orlins on How the U.S. Should Respond

MAXIMUM FLEXIBILITY? 28

Joe Cirincione on Nuclear Restraint

HOW TO END AN EMPIRE 30

Kate Kizer on a New Direction for Progressive Foreign Policy

PEACE, THE NORM. WAR, THE EXCEPTION 32

Andrew Bacevich on Stopping the Search for Monsters to Destroy

CHINA RISING PART 2 34

Jacob Stokes & Ali Wyne on Whether America is Manufacturing an Enemy

CHANGING THE STATUS QUO 36

Kal Penn on the Power of Cultural Diplomacy

PRIMARY SOURCES 38

How New Hampshire Voted on Foreign Policy

NAMASTE, TRUMP 40

Dhruva Jaishankar & Aparna Pande on US-India Military Ties

THE BURDEN OF AMERICAN POWER 42

Peter Beinart on Hubris, Humility, and War

THE WASHINGTON GAME 44

Kelley Vlahos on The Afghanistan Papers, The Blob, and Conservatism

WHAT DO HONGKONGERS WANT? 46

Wilfred Chan & Joshua Wong on the Fight For Democracy

THE TRUMP DOCTRINE? 48

Alex Ward on the Dualism of President Trump's Foreign Policy Legacy

ON PEACE (AND PANDEMIC) IN AFGHANISTAN 50

Peter Bergen & Kiana Hayeri on America's Longest War

AIRSTRIKES IN EAST AFRICA 52

Catherine Besteman & Amanda Sperber on U.S. Militarism in Somalia

EPISODE 1

THE PROBLEM OF OUR POWER

Chris Preble on American Military Dominance

April 2019

None Of The Above's first episode confronts the paradox of America's military might. As Chris Preble sees it, exorbitant spending on national defense actually makes America less safe. We examine the historical roots and potential consequences of America's outsized military industrial complex.



Christopher Preble is the co-director of the New American Engagement Initiative at the Atlantic Council. He is the author of *Peace, War, and Liberty: Understanding U.S. Foreign Policy*.

MARK HANNAH: You've written that American military dominance makes us less safe, less prosperous, less free. That's the subtitle of your first book *The Power Problem*... People could say, well, it's not necessarily proportional to the threats we face, but how does a strong military make us less safe?

CHRIS PREBLE: What [the military is] able to do is quite breathtaking sometimes, but that doesn't mean that the military can solve every problem or even that [it] should try to solve every problem. The reason why our power can make us less safe is because if it gets us involved in disputes that we are not able to easily resolve, then there is the danger of blowback. Blowback on the United States. We've seen this tragically happen a number of times.

HANNAH: Can you tell our listeners what you mean by blowback?

PREBLE: That is, people retaliating against the United States precisely because we've gotten involved in their disputes. This is a delicate topic for a lot of different reasons, and Americans are uncomfortable hearing this. I especially want to emphasize that it's not the military's fault. The military is asked to do things that it shouldn't be involved in in the first place. In *Peace, War and Liberty*, I'm proposing an alternative to U.S. foreign policy as it has been practiced at least since the end of the Cold War. And in some respects, going back to the end of the Second World War.

HANNAH: You served in the Navy and Operation Desert Storm during the first Gulf War. What makes you think we're doing this wrong? What makes you advocate for a more limited military footprint?

PREBLE: I got to see how well the Navy as an organization could deploy resources, assets, and people quickly, on a few days' notice. It's really a remarkable thing. But again, that Navy I was serving in was designed to fight the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union also had a navy, a navy that was in nearly as many places as the United States Navy. And so it was logical to me that the U.S. Navy would get smaller in the 1990s.

Equally important, that other countries' navies might get a little bit larger because they had grown dependent upon the United States. And it was not unreasonable to think that they might want to do more to defend their vital interests. But that's the part that the United States actually worked pretty actively to discourage. It was to our detriment ultimately.

HANNAH: What kinds of military spending do you find most wasteful?

PREBLE: The part of the military that is most wasteful is that there is so much money, period. We're talking about a massive sum of money.

The very latest statistics that we've seen are that the president's budget requests will come in at around \$750 billion. That is for the Pentagon alone. We have to also factor in things like the Department of Veterans Affairs, which is in the \$130 to \$140 billion range. Homeland Security. There's a whole range of things.

“What [the military is] able to do is quite breathtaking sometimes, but that doesn’t mean that the military can solve every problem or even that [it] should try to solve every problem.”

- CHRIS PREBLE

When you really talk about national security spending in the United States, it approaches 1 trillion dollars a year, which is just staggering. It’s really hard to get our head around that precisely because there is so much money. There inevitably will be a lot of waste because it’s easy to spend money wastefully. There is very little pressure on the military to spend money wisely because, well, there’s so much of it.

I see it more in where I live. I live in Northern Virginia, Loudoun County, and many of the people who live in Loudoun County work either for the Defense Department, directly work for a contractor that sells to the Defense Department, or they work as a contractor or person in the intelligence community. Now, any one of them could point to what it is that they’re doing and say what I’m doing is essential to U.S. national security.

So, what we really need to push back on is the rationales for why they’re doing this. Not what they’re doing, but why they’re doing it in the first place. That to me is the more important discussion.

HANNAH: The argument for a more limited military, a more restrained foreign policy, goes back to Dwight Eisenhower, who warned of a military industrial complex. Why

do you think that nobody has been able to right-size the military?

Once that military was stood up and was at the disposal of the President of the United States, then he could use that power and put U.S. forces into harm’s way and effectively dare Congress to cut off the money, which they would not do. The founders never intended for the president of the United States to have this much power at his disposal.

PREBLE: The fact that the United States did not have a permanent armaments industry for most of its history meant that we were less likely to become involved in foreign



EPISODE 2

THE GERMANY OF ASIA?

Sue Mi Terry on Nuclear North Korea

April 2019

President Donald Trump and Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un have a complicated relationship. Former CIA analyst Sue Mi Terry makes the case for reunifying the Korean peninsula, and helps us understand what's at stake in the ongoing U.S.—North Korea talks.



Sue Mi Terry was a senior analyst on Korean issues at the CIA and then a member of the National Security Council. She is now the Korea Chair at the Center for Strategic & International Studies, and a contributor to NBC News and MSNBC.

MARK HANNAH: So you wrote a very famous article in *Foreign Affairs* back in 2014 making the case for a unified Korean Peninsula. Can you talk a little bit about what a unified North Korea would look like?

SUE MI TERRY: Well, a unified Korea would have a lot of challenges... German unification cost 1.9 trillion dollars. There is no agreement on how much this was going to cause except the fact that the Korean unification is going to cost so much more than German unification. So who's going to pay for that?... I do think that a unified Korea has the potential to

emerge as a Germany of Asia. I truly do. Because these Koreans are the same people...

China is fearful of unification, but China really needs to have a re-think about this. China is South Korea's largest trading partner... Right now, China has to just continually give, give, give to North Korea. It's just kind of a perennial, one way street. China could benefit economically and even security-wise. All of these U.S. troops that they don't like - Chinese don't like U.S. troops in South Korea - guess what? Maybe we'll take them out. This missile defense that's in South Korea right now. Guess what? If there's unified Korea, we don't need that. So I think China needs to reevaluate this. But I think that we're a long way from China agreeing to unification.

...

HANNAH: What is the best decision and the worst decision Donald Trump has made with respect to [America's] relationship with North Korea?

TERRY: When he pursued maximum pressure sanctions, that was OK, because we finally saw China doing more in terms of implementing sanctions on the ground level. I didn't like the fire and fury rhetoric, calling him "a rocket man on a suicide mission" and "totally destroying North Korea," that kind rhetoric. President Trump likes to say "wow, I got a North Korean leader to meet with me."

But actually, in reality, North Korean leaders

have always wanted to meet with U.S. presidents. Under President Clinton, President Bush, and President Obama. They've always requested it. We, the United States, never said yes, because that would be normalizing the leader of North Korea, a dictator, human rights violator, and so on. That would be giving a legitimacy to the North Korean leader; not only to the international community, but to his own people. So, we've always said, no. It was President Trump who just decided that it was the right time to meet with Kim Jong-un.

HANNAH: Other presidents who have relied on a strategy of isolation, whether it's George W. Bush or Barack Obama, they failed to curb Kim's nuclear ambition to the point where he was at 95 percent capacity when Donald Trump took office.

TERRY: Yes. But, I would also say that it was not only an isolation policy. We tried multilateral talks, bilateral talks, isolation, high-line talks. You can argue that we tried almost everything. North Korea would never realistically give up their nuclear weapons program. And it's not even a North Korea issue. How many countries voluntarily give up their nuclear weapons program?

HANNAH: Because they see it as their ultimate deterrent [against U.S.-led] regime change?

TERRY: Absolutely. North Korea believes that even a country like the United States would not dare attack North Korea if North

“It’s very difficult for the United States to go on record saying that this is fine, that North Korea can possess nuclear weapons... But in reality, we are living with a nuclear weapons power... We can’t realistically do anything about it”

- SUE MI TERRY

Korea is armed with the ultimate deterrent. That card is nuclear weapons.

HANNAH: What do you think the likelihood of North Korea using nuclear weapons offensively is?

TERRY: It is very, very low. Kim Jong-un, we’ve always said, is a very rational actor. He’s not ideological, he’s not suicidal. His utmost goal is regime preservation. If he thinks his regime’s survival is at stake, at that point he could use it. But he won’t just willy-nilly attack the United States. I don’t believe that.

HANNAH: So, if every smart person, analyst in the intelligence community, think tanker, has tried to come up with a new idea for deterring nuclear weapons in North Korea, and you’re confident that North Korea has no intention to use its nuclear weapons for offensive purposes, should the U.S. just tolerate a nuclear North Korea?

TERRY: It’s very difficult for the United States to go on record saying that this is fine, that North Korea can possess nuclear weapons. North Korea could get more confident and even more arrogant with that acceptance. For exam-

ple, when North Korea sank a South Korean Corvette that killed 46 sailors in 2010, those kinds of activities could continue. Cyber attacks, asymmetrical warfare, that would continue.

HANNAH: But, you said something that was really telling. You said it would be difficult for the U.S. to go on record and say that it accepts [a nuclear North Korea.]

TERRY: Basically, the United States cannot rhetorically say we accept North Korea as a nuclear weapons power. But in reality, we are living with a nuclear weapons power. North Korea has up to sixty nuclear warheads. It is a nuclear weapons power. We’re living with it. It’s a different thing to say that this is okay, than to just live with it and try to reduce the threat that North Korea is posing to us.

HANNAH: But your point is that a nuclear North Korea does not present a major national security threat to the safety, security, and prosperity of the United States, right?

TERRY: I do think nuclear North Korea presents a threat to the United States. Not that North Korea will attack us with a nuclear weapon, but it has all of these side problems. Like the potential for regional proliferation, and the potential for North Korea acting more rogue. All of those [threats] are very real. However, we can’t realistically do anything about it. That horse left the barn a long time ago.



EPISODE 3

ENGAGING THE ENEMY

Chris Kolenda on Negotiating with the Taliban

April 2019

As the U.S. seeks a resolution to America's longest war, we're joined by Chris Kolenda, the first American who fought against—and then engaged in diplomatic talks with—the Taliban.



Christopher Kolenda is founder of the Strategic Leaders Academy, adjunct senior fellow at the Center for New American Security, author of *The Counterinsurgency Challenge*, and former senior advisor on Afghanistan and Pakistan at the U.S. Department of Defense.

MARK HANNAH: The Afghan government right now is assumed to be in a position to back any agreement that is reached by the U.S. government and its negotiating partners. How stable and strong is the Afghan military right now? Is it able to maintain order and stability after the U.S. goes home?

CHRIS KOLENDA: The strength of the Afghan government is a very important question. [And] it's important to understand how we got in this position. In 2001, the Taliban were among the most reviled entities in the

world. I would say they're probably among the top five. When you ask Americans what images come to mind when you hear the word Taliban, first is, of course, the 9/11 attacks and Osama bin Laden. Second is the blowing up of the ancient Buddhist statues in central Afghanistan. And third is the executions and stoning of women in the Kabul soccer stadium.

As the new Afghan government came in, they were replacing one of the most incompetent and reviled regimes in the world at that time, and all they had to do was to govern just a little bit better. And you know what? They wouldn't do it. The Afghan government grew into a predatory and kleptocratic regime that drove people back into the arms of the Taliban. The result is where we are now.

HANNAH: Isn't this a pattern? When the Soviet Union invaded [Afghanistan] in 1979, there was a lack of legitimacy. Then the Mujahideen took over with CIA sponsorship and they were largely seen as illegitimate. And then the Taliban took over and they were seen as illegitimate. Now, there is the Afghan government which has been supported by the international community, including the United States, and they are having a hard time with establishing their legitimacy. Where do you find hope?

KOLENDA: Well, the hope is in the peace process. The only way to deal with some of these chronic problems like corruption and

kleptocracy, the poppy trade, black market, is through a peace process where all of the major Afghan parties agree on a system of governance. They're going to have to sort that out. You can't legislate it from outside. Afghans are going to have to sort out a way to live together. Ultimately, Afghans are the only ones who can decide the political future of Afghanistan.

HANNAH: How long do you see [the U.S.] being there before we can bring our troops home?

KOLENDA: Therein lies the rub. The United States would be making a strategic error in agreeing to a fixed timeline for troop withdrawal with the Taliban.

HANNAH: Ashraf Ghani, the current president, said once that timetables concentrate the mind. Don't you think that if the government is having some difficulty staying focused on the prize, that it also lends some urgency?

KOLENDA: Right, and that was the theory that the Obama administration had when they wanted all troops out in 2014. All it did was concentrate the kleptocratic behavior to such a high degree that the United States found that they couldn't leave because the government probably would have [otherwise] collapsed at that point.

The timetable will create incentives for the Taliban to just simply run out the clock and

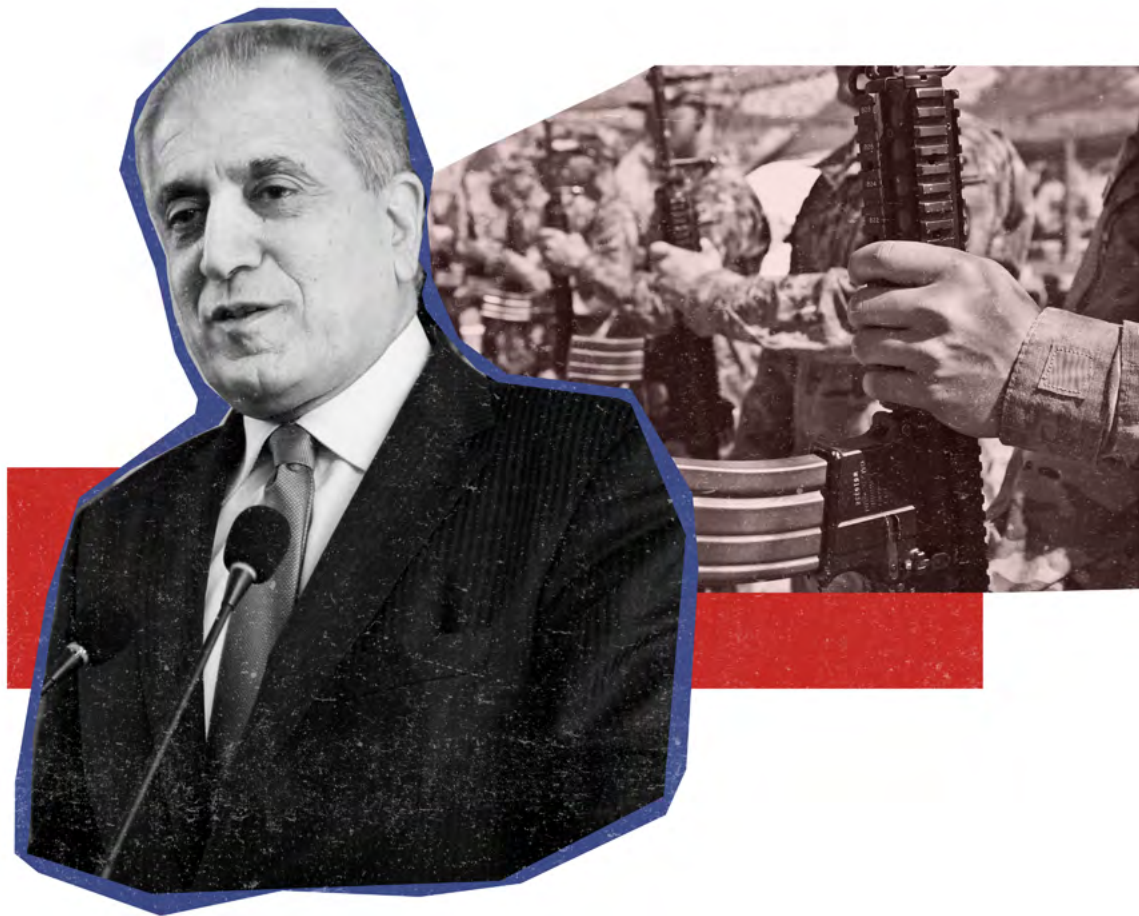
see if they can get a U.S. troop withdrawal for free. A better approach, a more productive approach, would be to tie troop withdrawal to achievements, political achievements, in the peace process. How long will we be in Afghanistan? It's hard to say. I'm hoping it's based on these political milestones. This is a peace process that is not going to be quick. Afghans have been fighting one another for 40 years now. They've been at war for 40 years. There's a lot of scar tissue. This peace process is going to take a while. Having some sort of international troop presence that is able to keep all sides honest and prevent a security vacuum seems to me to be an important component that has a durable outcome.

HANNAH: Afghanistan is this place where people say empires go to die. It's a difficult place... Is this a governable territory?

KOLENDA: Afghans have governed themselves for thousands of years. I don't think that's an issue. They certainly don't need outside help. In fact, when outsiders get involved, it creates these kinds of frictions and these conflicts. So this is a huge problem, and the Afghan government and Taliban negotiations are one part of this puzzle toward peace in Afghanistan. The other part that hasn't been addressed to date and needs to be addressed is this international dimension. These regional actors have been amplifying conflict in Afghanistan for the last 40 years.

“Ultimately, Afghans are the only ones who can decide the political future of Afghanistan.”

- CHRIS KOLENDA



EPISODE 4

THE ART OF THE (IRAN NUCLEAR) DEAL

Trita Parsi on Tensions with Iran

May 2019

After the Trump administration withdrew the U.S. from the Iran nuclear deal and imposed the toughest ever sanctions against Tehran, it seemed to many that the president was seeking a pretext for war. Trump threatened “the official end of Iran” if it provoked the U.S.. The Iranian foreign minister condemned such “genocidal taunts,” and accused the U.S. of escalating tensions. Trita Parsi, the author of several books on U.S.-Iranian relations, helps us make sense of this fraught relationship.



Trita Parsi is the executive vice president of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft and the founder and former president of the National Iranian American Council. His latest book is *Losing an Enemy: Obama, Iran and the Triumph of Diplomacy*.

MARK HANNAH: Trita, you have Iranian background but have lived in the United States for a long time. You are a fierce advocate for diplomacy between these two countries. What motivates you to take on this topic?

TRITA PARSI: Well, the thing that made me passionate about diplomacy between the United States and Iran was seeing how conflict really sets back the pro-democracy movement in Iran. As long as tensions be-

tween Iran and the outside world, particularly with the United States, were as intense as they have been in the past, it really made it very difficult for the country to internally move in a democratic direction.

HANNAH: How real, how robust, is that pro-democracy movement in Iran?

PARSI: It is immensely robust. One of the few countries in the region, I would say, that actually have all of the building blocks of democracy, but unfortunately doesn't have a democracy. You know, you have to keep in mind that the pro-democracy movement in Iran goes back more than 100 years. Iran had a constitutional revolution [in 1906.] It was a big push to have a constitution. They adopted one that was based off of the Belgian one.

There were actually Americans back then that were involved helping them. One of them actually gave his life for the cause of

democracy in Iran, Howard Baskerville. And he's very highly regarded in Iran. But then there's been plenty of ups and downs. And unfortunately, the United States played a very negative role later on when Mohammad Mossadeq was overthrown by a CIA coup in 1953.

...

PARSI: Contrary to this political idea that sanctions is an alternative to war, sanctions far more often lead to war. What happens when you go down the sanctions path is that you are escalating tensions and sooner or later you lose control over this and you end up in a military confrontation.

In the case of Iran, the official narrative is that sanctions put so much pressure on Iran, the Iranians came to the table and begged for a deal. That's complete nonsense. If that was the case and the Iranians were there to capitulate, the negotiations would have taken half an afternoon. The reason why they took more than two years was because the two sides were essentially of equal strength in diplomatic terms.

HANNAH: It's often the case that regime change policies of the United States actually perversely accelerate a race toward nuclear weapons because leaders in these countries think that they need them as a deterrent against regime change. Do you think President Trump doesn't realize this or do you think he's being influenced by his advisors?



“Contrary to this political idea that sanctions are an alternative to war, sanctions far more often lead to war.”

- TRITA PARSI

PARSI: I think several things are happening at the same time. Trump thinks that this is a good negotiating strategy. That he's just going to put a lot of pressure on them and eventually they're going to come to the table and he's going to be able to strike a deal that is better than the previous nuclear deal.

John Bolton, Mike Pompeo, Prime Minister Netanyahu and the crown prince of Saudi Arabia see it very differently. They think that,

yes, let's sell this to Trump as a negotiating tactic. But in reality, their aim is to make sure that the sanctions eventually lead to a military confrontation. And they are essentially manipulating and outsmarting Trump at this point.

HANNAH: And John Bolton has been on record well before Trump's presidency is wanting war with Iran.

PARSI: He literally wrote the op-ed saying bomb Iran in 2015, just three months before the nuclear deal was struck. He said “To Stop Iran's Bomb, [We Have To] Bomb Iran.” That was the title.

HANNAH: Do you think that Israel and Saudi Arabia are calling the shots when it comes to America's foreign policy?

PARSI: Well, if you ask Netanyahu, he would say yes. He's already taking credit for a lot of these different decisions. And why is that? Because ultimately it has nothing to do with ideology and frankly has very little to do with the nuclear program. If the United States and Iran resolve their tensions, that is an acceptance that the balance of power in the region has shifted. And it's an end to the American strategy of containing or isolating Iran. That means that the balance has shifted in Iran's favor and to the disfavor of Saudi Arabia and Israel.

HANNAH: And that was the explicit policy of the Obama administration, right? That they didn't want to continue isolating Iran. They wanted to maintain a balance of power in the region so that they could get out of the Middle East and focus more on other parts of the world.

PARSI: I think so. They may not have articulated it in those terms. But when you take a look at it, Obama recognized that the Middle East had lost a tremendous amount of strategic significance and the U.S. was over-extended there.

The only issue that actually could force him into another regional war was the Iranian nuclear issue. He felt that unless this issue gets resolved, the political pressure is going to be too strong for military action. So instead, [Obama] doubled down on actually trying to get it resolved.

EPISODE 5

A FITTER FORCE

Kayla Williams on Misconceptions of Military Service

June 2019

A new generation of military veterans who fought the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq confront new challenges. News reports emphasize the trauma and loss associated with military service. But Kayla Williams, who served in Iraq and is now an advocate on veterans issues, explodes these myths and misconceptions as she shares both her personal experiences and professional expertise with war and its aftermath.



Kayla Williams served as an Arabic linguist in a Military Intelligence company of the 101st Airborne Division in Iraq. She is the director of the Military, Veterans, and Society Program at the Center for New American Security.

MARK HANNAH: You finished up college, if I understand correctly, when you were 20 years old and then you went straight into the military.

KAYLA WILLIAMS: Not straight into the Army. I do everything a little bit backwards, I guess. I wanted to go to graduate school, but had no idea how I was going to pay for it. I also had grown up in a family of very modest means. We'd been on food stamps a few times when I was a kid. I felt like I owed something to the society that had invested in me when I was a child.

Military service presented itself as an option that would scratch all of those itches at once: take me outside of my comfort zone and provide me with access to the G.I. Bill so I could continue my education. They were also willing to pay me to learn a foreign language instead of me having to pay somebody else to teach me one. All these motivations coalesced and I joined the Army in 2000.

HANNAH: You said that it wasn't going to be easy, [that] you wanted to challenge yourself. I don't think you realize how much you were going to challenge yourself, because like you said, it was 2000. This was before 9/11. And you were just kind of coincidentally learning Arabic. This is a language you chose just by chance.

WILLIAMS: I [actually] did not choose. It was the needs of the Army, a random computer generated number that I ended up in Arabic as opposed to Korean or Chinese. So, on 9/11, my entire class knew that our mili-

tary careers were going to be very different than we might have otherwise expected.

...

HANNAH: I want to spend a little bit of time just talking about things you don't think most Americans would know or appreciate about the veteran experience.

WILLIAMS: Women make up about 16 percent of the total force. So, still a significant minority. This is also a challenge in the national security community and the foreign policy community writ large: [the] underrepresentation of women.

If you have a pure focus on getting the mission done [and] you are not taking advantage of the full talent pool, you're losing out on a lot of creative thinking and [the] ability to assess problems from different directions, come up with different solutions sets, and even identify problems.

When I was in Iraq as an Arabic speaker in 2003, I could talk to local women... somebody like my husband is not going to have the same access that I did, both because I'm visually less intimidating and because in a predominantly Muslim country, there were ways in which it was culturally easier for me to talk to women.

HANNAH: You were probably still intimidating with all your gear on.

WILLIAMS: Maybe...

HANNAH: No, but I take your point and I think it's also inspiring to little girls.

WILLIAMS: I think it was also inspiring to little girls because I mean, I have very clear memories of when we're driving and slowly little girls would register that I was a woman. They could see maybe my bun beneath my Kevlar. They could somehow pick up on the fact that I was a woman and their eyes would get huge and you just click with them. That I was different. And when we would go out and about, little kids were more willing to come up to me, which could sometimes get annoying. But, you know, I could talk to women.

So, that ability to draw on a full talent pool and engage with folks abroad thinking about things from different angles, having higher performing teams because diverse teams are more effective, even if it's harder to get there, right? The process of working as a diverse team is more challenging, but the end results are better according to lots of research. So we're missing out on that. And then, as you know, as a feminist, I also believe that just inherently it's better for women to have full opportunities available to them.

If you read the reasons that women weren't supposed to be in the military or then in combat arms units and lay those alongside arguments for why black people shouldn't be in the same positions and now transgender people shouldn't be in the same positions. The arguments are eerily similar.

We have seen improvements in how well our military functions. As we have broken down these barriers, we will get a fitter force when we don't assume that every single man is automatically qualified just by virtue of being men. While no women are just by virtue of being women.

Set high standards, hold everyone to the same standards and we're going to see a more successful military. And again, especially in today's era when only one in four young people is qualified to join the military, randomly saying that any of those folks can't [join] just because of how they were born, when it has nothing to do with their qualifications, is horribly misplaced. The army did not meet its accession goals last year, and we really need to stay focused on how to attract and retain the most talented people for our military.

HANNAH: If you had 30 seconds to speak with a young woman who wanted to go into the military but who had concerns, what would you tell her?

WILLIAMS: The advice that I give anybody who's planning to join the military or wants to join the military is that when you cry, cry in the bathroom, don't sleep with anyone in your unit and seek to succeed based on *your* talents and abilities.

“If you have a pure focus on getting the mission done and you are not taking advantage of the full talent pool, you're losing out on a lot of creative thinking and the ability to assess problems from different directions.”

- KAYLA WILLIAMS



EPIISODE 6

OF HELL AND HEGEMONY

Stephen Walt on the Follies of the Foreign Policy Elite

June 2019

For decades, America has pursued a foreign policy of liberal hegemony: the idea that the U.S. should use its power to spread values like freedom and democracy, often by using military force. America's foreign policy elite, whether in government, think tanks, media, or academia, have largely supported this strategy. But Harvard University's Stephen Walt thinks America's expansive global reach has harmed our national security—and our elites have not been held accountable for their preferred foreign policy's devastating failures.



Stephen Walt is the Robert & Renee Belfer professor of international relations at Harvard University. He is the author of *The Hell of Good Intentions: America's Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of US Primacy*.

MARK HANNAH: Where would [the United States] be today had we not invaded Iraq?

STEPHEN WALT: We would be in much better shape, obviously. First of all, the war is going to end up costing the United States somewhere between four and six trillion dollars. And I can think of lots of interesting ways that that money could be used other than Iraq. Secondly, the United States would have maintained some of the illusion of American invincibility that we had. Third, of course, you wouldn't have had the creation

of ISIS, which is a direct outgrowth of the invasion of Iraq as well.

You [also] would not have Iran in quite the position of influence it's in in the Middle East now. The great irony now is the same people who wanted us to invade Iraq want us to confront Iran. [Take] the case of Mike Pompeo [who] is in favor of regime change. They're now trying to get us to solve a problem that they helped create.

HANNAH: Do you think people like Mike Pompeo have learned from their mistakes? Do you think these are teachable [moments for] people who are finding ways to come up with remedies for mistakes that were made?

WALT: Sadly, no. There's a chapter in the book about accountability, which really has two parts. One is whether individuals are held personally accountable, whether peo-

ple can keep getting reappointed no matter how often they screw up. But there's also the problem of whether the general foreign policy establishment learns the right lessons from past mistakes.

HANNAH: Why do you think [America is] so bad at ending wars? What is the main problem here?

WALT: There are many layers to this, but the central problem is that these wars don't in fact affect the American people in any sort of direct way that they can feel and appreciate.

First of all, we have the all volunteer force now. Just imagine if we still had a draft, what the situation would be like on college campuses today. Second, we pay for these wars by basically borrowing the money and running deficits. We never ask the American people to pay more taxes so they don't feel that this war has cost anything. My grandchildren will end up paying for a bunch of these. And finally, we've gone to great lengths to try and keep these wars on page 17 of the newspaper, not as headlines. Whenever they show up on page one, it's usually because something bad has happened and public support drops.

One final part is you have to keep casualties low. And we therefore adopt extreme measures to protect our troops, which is a good thing. But we also rely very heavily on air power, on drones, on things that don't put Americans at risk. And the problem

is that those turned out to be tactics that don't lead to success. At the end of the day, these wars will end, and the United States will come home and those societies will be dealing with the consequences of what we've done there.

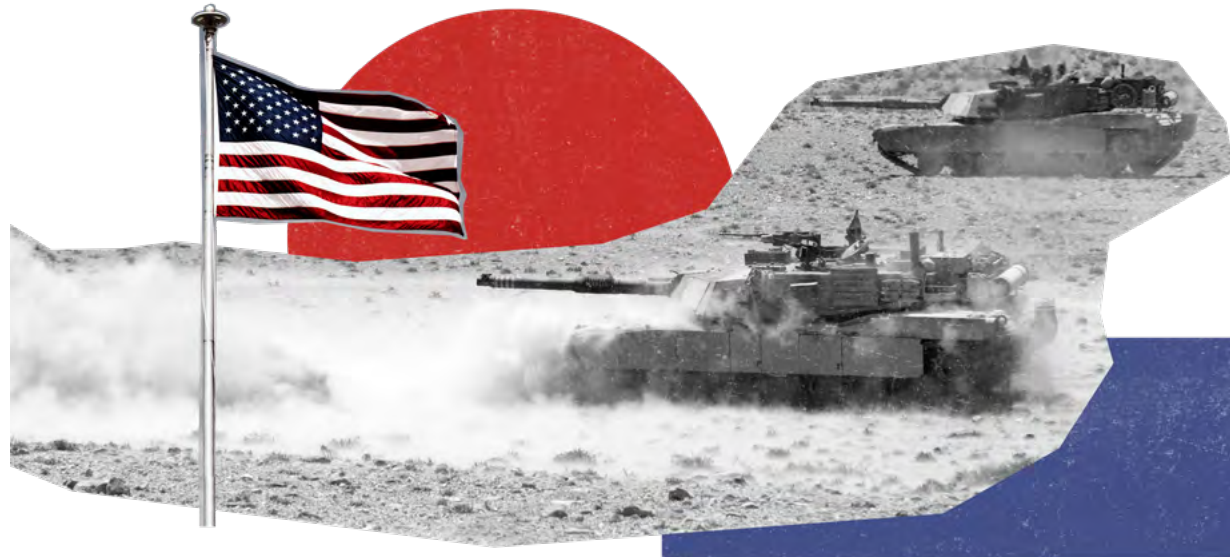
There's a wonderful book by John Tirman, who teaches at M.I.T. called *The Deaths of Others*. It basically looks at American history and says, you know, in all of our wars, we've cared a lot about the Americans who were dying. We've generally not cared very much about the other people who were dying. I don't think Americans are unique in that regard. But I think greater knowledge of the suffering we have imparted might not have all that much effect on us.

HANNAH: Why do you think that is? I'm literally playing devil's advocate here. Why do you think that's a bad thing?

WALT: Well, first of all, there is this humanitarian issue. We should care about the humanitarian consequences to other societies when a very powerful country like the United States gets deeply involved in their politics, particularly using violence, using force. We should care about the consequences of economic sanctions when we slap them on another country. It doesn't affect the regime at all; it affects the ordinary people. We should care about that, for moral reasons.

Secondly, we should care about it for strategic reasons. When the United States damages another country, all right, it's not like the people in that country forget about it. Osama bin Laden made it very clear that he was coming after the United States in reaction to things he regarded as tragedies inflicted upon the Muslim world by the United States and others.

When we go do something that harms others, somewhere, that can come back to



“I think greater knowledge of the suffering we have imparted might not have all that much effect on us...*We should* care about that, for moral reasons [and] for strategic reasons.”

- STEPHEN WALT

haunt us later. And if we don't know about it, we'll think it's unprovoked aggression. We'll think these terrorists are coming after us for no reason or because they hate our values because they're fundamentally anti-American. It's simply not the case.

HANNAH: There's kind of an irony somewhere built in here, right? We go in trying to promote liberalism and freedom and opportunity and all these kinds of things that we as Americans enjoy. But what we're really bringing is death, destruction, grievance, resentment, recrimination, and future threats to American national security.

WALT: Basically. The strategy we've been following for the past 25 years is a highly revisionist strategy. We should know from our history and from the history of democracy in the West that creating a democracy takes decades, if not centuries. And it's a contentious process.

There are winners and losers. The losers will often take up arms to resist what's going on. So to believe that the rest of the world just couldn't wait to become like America, and all we had to do is nudge them a little bit and then they would embrace all of these values we were generously giving them is just completely delusional on our part.

EPISODE 7

POWER PASSING

Kori Schake on the Stability of the International Order

July 2019

The United States and the United Kingdom have historically had a special relationship. Can this kind of enduring alliance be replicated, and if not, why not? As American hegemony wanes and China's international influence rises, Kori Schake argues that shared values can propel common national interests and goals. And that these can endure even as countries' relative power rises and falls.



Kori Schake is the director of foreign and defense policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute. Her most recent book is *Safe Passage: The Transition from British to American Hegemony*.

MARK HANNAH: What do you mean by hegemony?

KORI SCHAKE: The hegemon of the international order isn't necessarily the strongest power militarily or economically. It is the state that sets the rules of the order and has to be willing to enforce the rules of the order.

HANNAH: Do you anticipate China becoming a hegemon in the foreseeable future? Do you think it will try to remake the world in its image, if so?

SCHAKE: Typically, great powers do that because that's the DNA of its leadership, right? How you navigate the acquisition and dispensation of power domestically become the reflexes by which you engage the international order.

If you think about the U.S. as a rising power, by 1917 the U.S. with Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points and his expectation of how the international order should be different, [with] transparent interactions between states, self-determination to create states, those elements were America's natural reflexes. And you begin to see them as soon as the United States begins to be strong enough to try and shape the order.

You can already see in China's behavior attempts to shape the international order in ways that reflect its domestic political compact [too]. For example, in the Belt and Road Initiative, contracts that China is signing with developing countries to provide loans and construction of infrastructure, they want those countries not to appeal any disputes

to international arbitration tribunals. They want instead for those countries to agree as a condition of getting the loan that they will allow China to determine nationally what these solutions should be without recourse to international arbitration.

HANNAH: That's somewhat similar to the United States when it was striking up free trade agreements with different countries, making those agreements contingent on things we value like environmental protection or labor protections. Is that not the case?

SCHAKE: That's exactly right. It's just that values matter hugely. The values of your domestic political compact get written large in the international order that a power strong enough to dictate the rules of the order would create. To answer your other question, will China try to supplant the United States as a hegemon... I'm deeply skeptical of that and think it could only happen under two conditions.

The first is the United States becomes so solipsistic and dysfunctional, that we stop caring about shaping the rest of the world. I think that's unlikely. In fact I think you already see even amidst our febrile domestic politics the one subject on which there appears to be widespread bipartisan agreement in the United States is that China isn't playing by the rules and the United States needs to force compliance with those rules because we are not going to like an international order where China gets to intimidate

and compel compliance by countries on its periphery that are not as strong as China is.

HANNAH: But, if you ask most Americans about whether they care about the stability or the shape of the international order, their eyes will glaze over.... Do you think people [care]?

SCHAKE: Of course nobody's going to run out with banners that say "preserve the liberal international rules based order." But if you ask your mom should China be able to profit from stealing the technology of Google and Apple, what would her answer be?

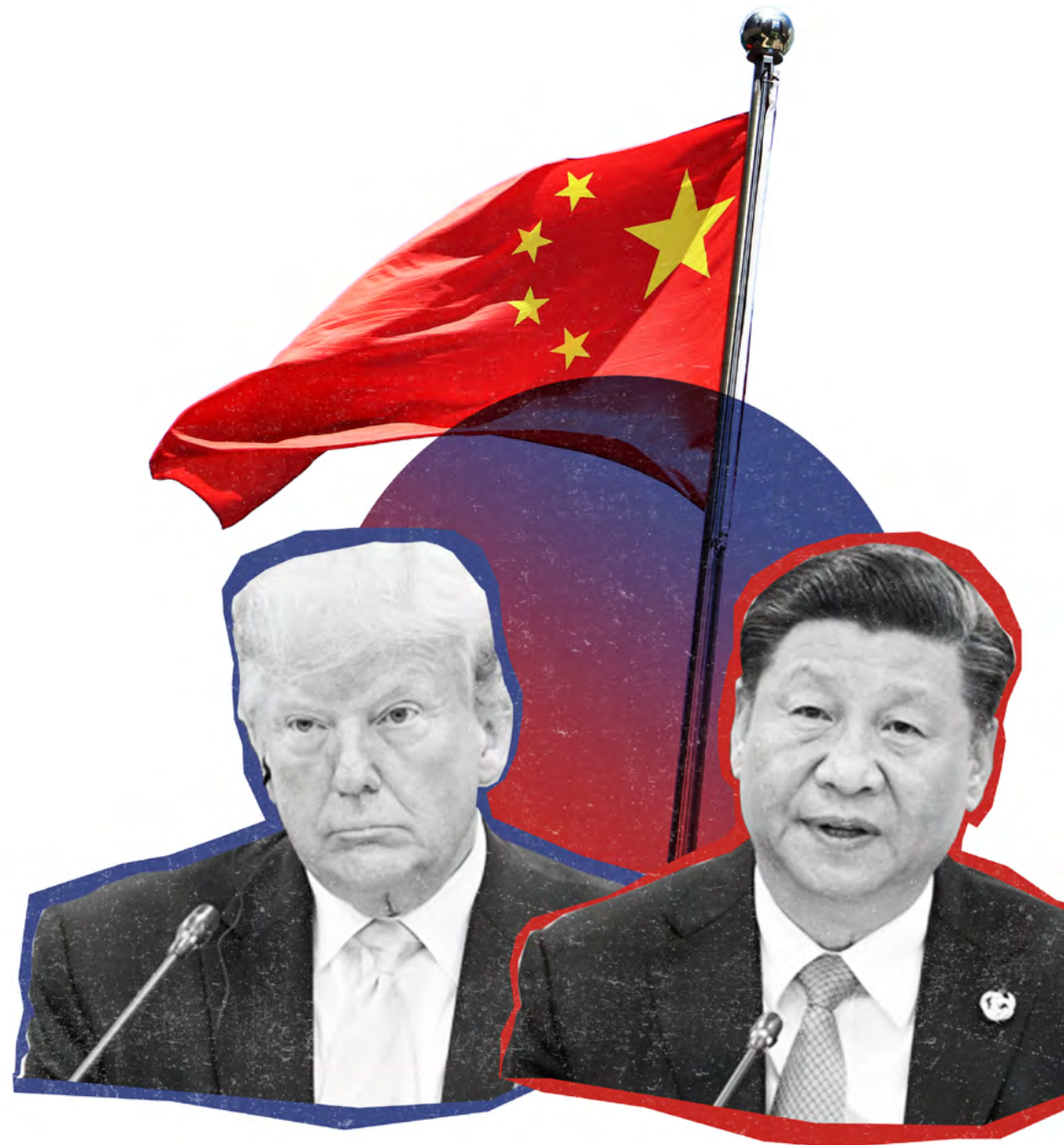
HANNAH: Probably not. I would say certainly not. So, what is the other condition, Kori?

SCHAKE: The second condition is that the middle powers, the liberal powers who are by and large America's allies--so Germany France Australia Japan, India, which is not overtly an American ally but is a democratic free market country--that all of them would have to cease caring about the existing order, and permit China to change the rules.

I also see counters to that occurring. The rules of the order actually really matter. Transparency in contracts matters to the Japanese because their public expects them to conduct business in ways that can bear public scrutiny. So, I believe I see all sorts of different permutations of the middle powers realizing that it is so much in their interests for international institutions to be courts of arbitration, for rules to not just be generally acknowledged, but to be consensual.

“You can already see in China’s behavior attempts to shape the international order in ways that reflect its domestic political compact.”

- **KORI SCHAKE**



EPISODE 8

FOREIGN POLICY ADRIFT

Brian Katulis on What Voters Want... and Aren't Getting

July 2019

What do the American people think about America's role in the world? Many foreign policy experts assume the public just doesn't care very much about international relations--or that average citizens are so uninformed that it's not worth paying attention to their views. Brian Katulis upends these assumptions, discussing his new research that shows the public really does have important things to say about foreign policy.



Brian Katulis is a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress. He is a co-author of the report "America Adrift: How the U.S. Foreign Policy Debate Misses What Voters Really Want."

MARK HANNAH: What made you want to embark on this project? What makes you want to understand the public opinion of voters as it relates to foreign policy?

BRIAN KATULIS: Two main reasons. One, some of the most painful meetings I've been to in the last 10 years or so, are the ones with foreign policy wonks who are saying, "this is what we should say to voters about foreign policy." It's actually smart stuff when it comes to policy, but in terms of language and where people are at, it didn't seem right.

And second, many moons ago at one of my earlier jobs I worked for a guy named Stan Greenberg, who is a pollster.

HANNAH: A famous pollster in the Democratic party, right?

KATULIS: Yeah. And my co-author, the lead author on this, John Halpin, he and I met at that firm. We actually put our heads together and with our colleagues said, "we should get out of our little bubbles here, and see where the public is at two and a half years into [the Trump administration]." [Trump has] had an impact probably, was the hypothesis, on how people think about the world. And the world has changed too.

HANNAH: What kind of responsibility did you feel was being lost by your colleagues in the foreign policy world, when they were creating these narratives without being grounded in public opinion?

KATULIS: Well, one of the biggest things was this failure to communicate from our end.

We started out this research with qualitative, which is in open-ended focus groups, but then also in-depth interviews that went on for a few days with individuals. One of the things we tested was the language I use, that other foreign policy wonks use.

I remember sitting in the focus groups watching. The moderator was asking the respondents, "What do you think of phrases like liberal international order?" Blank stare. Nobody actually knew what that meant. Some people chuckled. "There's nothing liberal about the world and yadda yadda yadda." American exceptionalism. Nobody really knew. One woman guessed saying, "I think America is exceptional. It accepts a lot of things in this country like foreigners."

So the very language and the concepts that we use, and part of what we were missing, I think in this brainstorming, was that Trump has a narrative that pierces, and it's as simple as this: foreigners are taking advantage of our country and I'm going to keep bad ones out and make them pay more, and better trade deals and things like that.

For the last two, two and a half years, the foreign policy commentariat have had a lot of important criticisms that are accurate. But they don't have a competing narrative. And this is similar to problems we had, I think,

under the George W. Bush Administration, when he had a narrative like, “We’re going to expand freedom to defeat terrorism.”

And he ran the table for several years politically, and really I think captured a lot of folks. Trump has a much narrower base for what he supports, but he’s got a narrative and a narrative defeats no narrative all the time.

HANNAH: There’s a Mark Twain quote... [something like], don’t argue with fools because they’ll drag you down to their level and beat you with experience. Do you think on some level by trying to come up with a progressive analog for what Donald Trump has effectively done, Donald Trump’s opponents and people who put forward an alternative vision of the world are going to become what they despise?

“I remember sitting in the focus groups watching. The moderator was asking the respondents, “What do you think of phrases like liberal international order?” Blank stare. Nobody actually knew what that meant.”

- BRIAN KATULIS

KATULIS: They need not. And there’s a way to connect policy smarts with smart communications. And we’re not there yet. This research, this “America Adrift” report, is basically a survey of the landscape as we see it, and we tried to as neutrally [as possible] ask questions, and not press particular messages. The next phase is to actually craft what I would call a centrist internationalist argument, and test what might be palatable and acceptable but connected to our good ideas. It’s not like we’re testing ideas to figure out what our policy priorities are. It’s just to understand where people are at.

Key thing I’d say, and we highlighted it [in our report] is that the whole landscape has changed. The terms “neocon” [and] “liberal interventionist” mean nothing anymore politically.

...

HANNAH: Do you think there’s a condescension among people in the foreign policy community in their regard for the American public?

KATULIS: Yeah, I mean, among some. But what’s interesting is, especially after Trump’s election, this, you know, wake up call, and this

project is one of many that people are doing to step out of our bubbles and try to listen, and I think that’s a healthy thing.

If we treat it in this sort of artificial sense that we just need to every once in a while go out and listen to folks, it’s not organic enough. What I think needs to happen is that especially elected leaders, and especially those in Congress, need to connect the so-called domestic issues with foreign policy issues and this issue of competition, and America’s competition in the world.



EPISODE 9

TOTALIZED WAR

Rosa Brooks on Ambiguity In and Of Wartime

August 2019

What happens when the distinction between war and peace starts to disappear? Rosa Brooks, a law professor and former top Pentagon official, explores the causes and consequences of this alarming trend, and discusses its antecedents in other cultures. As the seemingly never-ending War on Terror is used to justify increasing government power and intrusions on civil liberties, are we sacrificing too much freedom in the name of security?



Rosa Brooks is the Scott K. Ginsburg professor of law and policy at Georgetown University and the author of *How Everything Became War and the Military Became Everything: Tales from the Pentagon*.

ROSA BROOKS: One of the most fun things about researching my most recent book was delving into the anthropological literature on how different societies have tried to make sense of war and what it is and how you define it. Virtually every society had some mechanism that was pretty important to them of delineating the boundaries between war and not war. Almost without exception human societies have found it important to police that line.

MARK HANNAH: You mentioned specifically Native American tribes who divided

authority between peace chiefs and war chiefs. And when the tribe would transition from war to peace the power would shift. We don't have that though in our government. Should we? Should we have a Secretary of Peace, should we have a way of, you know, distinguishing when we're at war and not at war?

BROOKS: It's not necessarily a terrible thing that we have trouble applying our categories -- war, peace -- in a neat way. We can get really hung up on what we're calling things, and here's the problem: we have these binary categories, war-peace, military-civilian, and we have institutions and laws that are structured around these binary categories and legal frameworks for wartime and for conflict is very different in terms of the degree to which it protects individual rights, the degree to which it restrains state coercion, and the use of lethal force.

And since you have legal frameworks that are permissible and praiseworthy in war-

time, are impermissible, unlawful, immoral in peacetime, a lot hangs on your ability to say "Aha this is, this is in the war basket, this is in the peace basket." The problem is not that the world is blurry. The problem is that we have this rigid, and at this point, in some ways, antiquated set of categories and institutions that don't work very well in the current geopolitical environment.

HANNAH: You're a lawyer and a law professor and so you understand these legal categories. I mean there might be some things that Americans' rights or enjoyments that Americans are willing to sacrifice in moments of emergency or war time that they might not be comfortable...

BROOKS: ...doing forever.

HANNAH: Doing forever.

BROOKS: That's the more important question to ask ourselves.

We've ended up in a situation where three presidents in a row have tended to err on the side of putting more in the basket labeled war. And so a whole set of restrictions -- restrictions on individual freedom, and expansions of the power of the state -- which most people would be perfectly fine with on a temporary basis, have come to be extended and extended and extended so that the state of emergency becomes the norm. That, I think, is the dilemma and that's both a legal problem, but it's also an institutional

one, in that we have these institutions and roles for them that sort of stopped making sense when those categories get blurred.

Take U.S. drone strikes for counterterrorism purposes. If a U.S. drone strike against a suspected terrorist target in Yemen or Somalia or Libya or Syria... if we think that person is a combatant in an armed conflict, or even a civilian who is actively participating in hostilities during an armed conflict, well then, a U.S. drone strike against that person is morally and legally identical to an American soldier on the beaches of Normandy shooting at a German soldier. You don't have to have a court, you don't have to have a judge, you don't have to have a warrant. You don't have to have evidence. You get to kill that guy because you think he might be the enemy. End of story. Simple.

On the other hand, if we're not sure [whether] that guy is a combatant or we're not sure that we can call this a war, well, then we're in a totally different moral and legal universe in which the U.S. is going around the world murdering people. Which is not cool and most of us really want to be on one side of that, not on the other side of that.

Having said that, I don't think that should be the end of the story. I think that all of our instincts about "Well you can't have a court on the battlefield," or something, that makes sense on the beach at Normandy as a statement. It makes no sense with regard to most counterterrorism drone strikes which are planned weeks, months, sometimes years in advance, where you absolutely have time for due process and so forth that you wouldn't have time for in a stereotypical World War II battlefield.



“Three presidents in a row have tended to err on the side of putting more in the basket labeled war. And so a whole set of restrictions..., which most people would be perfectly fine with on a temporary basis, have come to be extended and extended and extended so that the state of emergency becomes the norm.”

- ROSA BROOKS

EPISODE 10

DEPLOYING EMPATHY

Michael Ventura & Justin Bokmeyer on Perspective-Taking in the Armed Forces

September 2019

Chances are, empathy is not the first thing you think about when you consider the ideal mix of skills and attributes of American soldiers. Yet the military is beginning to appreciate how their officers need to understand the interests, values, and experiences of people up and down the chain of command, and of their foreign partners as well. Justin Bokmeyer is a graduate of West Point Military Academy who, after serving in Iraq, returned to help the school develop the next generation of military leaders.

He summoned Michael Ventura, who was employing a concept of “applied empathy” to advise corporate clients and officials in the Obama administration. The two were a bit of an odd couple — the straight-laced former cadet and the long-haired creative agency executive. But together they saw an opportunity to educate military officers on how to deploy empathy on the battlefield.



Michael Ventura is the CEO of Sub Rosa, a strategy and design studio which he founded in 2009. He is the author of *Applied Empathy: The New Language of Leadership*.



Justin Bokmeyer works in elite talent development for the NBA. A former captain in the US Army, he previously worked in performance and innovation in the athletic department of the West Point Military Academy.

MARK HANNAH: Empathy is a sort of muscle that you're working, that would have helped, I imagine, your relationship with your platoon as well as probably the relationship with the locals and the host country. Is that fair to say?

JUSTIN BOKMEYER: Yeah, absolutely.

We lived on an Iraqi army base for a while. That partnership with them was crucial to understanding the locals. If we are able to understand ourselves, understand our

team and our unit, then everybody's on the same page about what we need to do and learn to understand the local population and what they actually need. Instead of coming through it with a lens of 'this is what's best for us,' which at times for safety has to be done.

But there are things that if we think through different lenses, different ideas, go through different thought processes, we kind of overcome our own bias and we can see what's best for the local population instead of just building all these schools or putting all this money out. We start to think strategically about what's best and I think at a lower level, learning empathy is a skill that a lot of soldiers could benefit from.

HANNAH: You went back to West Point as an employee and tried to give these students, these cadets, the education that you wish you had had. What was the end game?

BOKMEYER: What I wanted to get at was: how do we create more dynamic thinkers and problem solvers?

HANNAH: This brings us to Michael Ventura. His firm specializes in using empathy to achieve all kinds of goals in both government and business.

...

VENTURA: When you graduate [from West Point], you are within a few months of being

deployed and responsible for up to 40 lives as a 21 year old. Well, I remember what I was like at 21. I was lucky I made it out alive on my own. So, it's amazing to think that these young men and women are preparing for such a significant life shift, right?

So part one was we were governed by the civilian population and we need to understand them if we're to do our job well. And also, sometimes we might need to know that kind of understanding because we might need to push back or we might need to challenge an opinion because we have a different view and we might have to debate that a little bit. And, if we don't understand the other side, we're at a disadvantage to have that type of discourse.

The second reason he said that [empathy] is important is because he said most military cadets who graduate from here will go do a couple tours at most. And then they will probably go into the private sector. He said one of the things that I've learned in my experience is that the best leaders I've ever worked with, either in the military or outside

of the military, were leaders who modeled empathy in their leadership style.

And particularly for these young cadets at 21 years old, with forty people in their command, those forty people are going to have come to them from very different walks of life. You might have some folks who have a GED level education and have enlisted. You may have some folks who have a four year degree and have enlisted. You may have some folks who come from very different socioeconomic statuses. And while, yes, there is a command and control environment that exists in any military structure and of course, in combat, there isn't a lot of time for debate and perspective taking. There's also a lot of planning and a lot of leadership and a lot of preparation that occurs before and during and after that, empathy does have a role to play.

HANNAH: And a lot of downtime during deployments where having, presumably, a rapport with the people under your command is quite valuable.

VENTURA: There was an example someone gave about that. They said most of our battles now don't happen in some far flung field away from civilian populations, they happen in towns and cities and more rural settings. And we still have that downtime.

And so are we training the type of soldiers who, on downtime are walking down a street in a city in a far flung part of the world and just kind of blindly walking through and, you know, in their fatigues and their hulking gear and all of that and looking very different and very foreign? Or are we training the type of officers that when they walk in, they might see a teenage kid in front of their parents market looking at them in a strange way that they'll stop and say, do you know why we're here? Do you know what we're here to do? What do you do? What's your life like?

Maybe they get invited in for tea and maybe they have a conversation with the parents and maybe they actually get to know the landscape in a different way that saves someone's life down the line. And that perspective really shifted the way I thought about empathy in the military.



“For these young cadets at 21 years old, with forty people in their command [who] are going to have come to them from very different walks of life...and of course, in combat, there isn't a lot of time for debate and perspective taking.”

- MICHAEL VENTURA

EPIISODE 11

THE FOOTPRINT OF INDUSTRIALIZED WAR

Murtaza Hussain on How War Contributes to the Climate Crisis

September 2019

The Pentagon identifies climate change as a threat multiplier and links climate change to rising instability and insecurity around the globe. But what about the inverse? Murtaza Hussain, political and national security reporter for *The Intercept*, explores the forgotten costs to America's endless wars: climate change. How does warfare contribute to and exacerbate the climate crisis? What are the ecological and health effects of industrialized war, and what can American society do to curb the climate emergency?



Murtaza Hussain is a reporter for *The Intercept* whose work focuses on national security, foreign policy, and human rights. He is the author of "Industrialized Militaries Are a Bigger Part of the Climate Emergency Than You Know."

MURTAZA HUSSAIN: Rabindranath Tagore was an Indian philosopher and polymath during the 19th and 20th centuries. He was quite an incisive critic of the new industrial civilization which was coming about around the world and recently in India at that time. He had very stark warnings about the ecological impacts of industrialization generally and industrial warfare in particular.

He warned about a century ago during the period of World War I, that if this process of industrial warfare continued escalating, it

would result in very serious impacts on the global environment which could potentially make human life impossible or lead to some self-destructive cataclysm among human beings. This would either be due to direct violence against each other or by undermining the environment upon which all of our lives depend.

So, it seems that over time, his warnings, which were couched in sort of general philosophical terms, have become more material. We can see what he was talking about. He and others, when they were warning that, were we not to change the way that we created modern society, changed the way that we fought, and fought less perhaps, we will be heading for a crisis which none of us can manage collectively.

We have had a tendency to bucket climate change under the category of environment, and in reality it's something which is not in any category separate from the rest of our

lives. It's at the core of anything that's valuable to humans, the stability of our climate. It's an all encompassing category.

As time goes on and as the crisis becomes more acute, we have to look at politics, culture, national security, all within the climate frame. And when we talk about endless war, we should talk about it in the same category as endless consumption, because we are not recognizing the limits on our ability to have certain things.

MARK HANNAH: It sounds like a criticism of the military industrial complex, but also a criticism of modern industrial life more generally.

HUSSAIN: Well, it is not a criticism of modernity generally, because, of course, it has brought us many good things which we value. And Tagore, who I quote, was not a wholesale critic of modernity, but he did perceive a potential downside to it if it was not modulated by certain other human impulses to constrain and to compromise.

And, I think about it in terms of the wars. We've been fighting a war in Afghanistan for 18 years now, and there does not seem to be any conclusion in sight. Yet, we're continuing to fight them now. To no particular end, just in the hope that some sort of better solution at some point will come about. In the meantime, we're killing a lot of people, we're dying in great numbers as well, and we're causing irreparable harm to the Af-

ghan environment. At some point we have to factor in the full range of costs of going to war.

HANNAH: The environmental cost is something that came from a relatively recent Costs of War Project report on military and carbon emissions from Brown University. Can you talk about that report and what you learned from it?

HUSSAIN: The Brown University Costs of War study is one of the first attempts to quantify DOD's CO2 emissions over the last two decades, roughly, of war.

They found that the emissions of the DOD, if the DOD was a country, they'd be a bigger emitter than most countries in the world of CO2. And it's a more CO2 intensive activity, specifically, warfare. So the study, it kind of tells us something that could have been suspected, but it's valuable because it gives us a figure, and the figure is in the hundreds of millions of tons of CO2 emitted over this time in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“We’re killing a lot of people, we’re dying in great numbers as well, and we’re causing irreparable harm to the Afghan environment. At some point we have to factor in the full range of costs of going to war.”

- MURTAZA HUSSEIN

And these wars, they have not been popular in the United States because there's a feeling they haven't brought any benefit, they've reduced American prestige. They haven't achieved any specific goals for the most part. And when we talk about the cost, the human cost and lives lost and the money spent, but

then also more money is going to be spent, more lives will be lost in the climate crisis to which this is a not insignificant contributor.

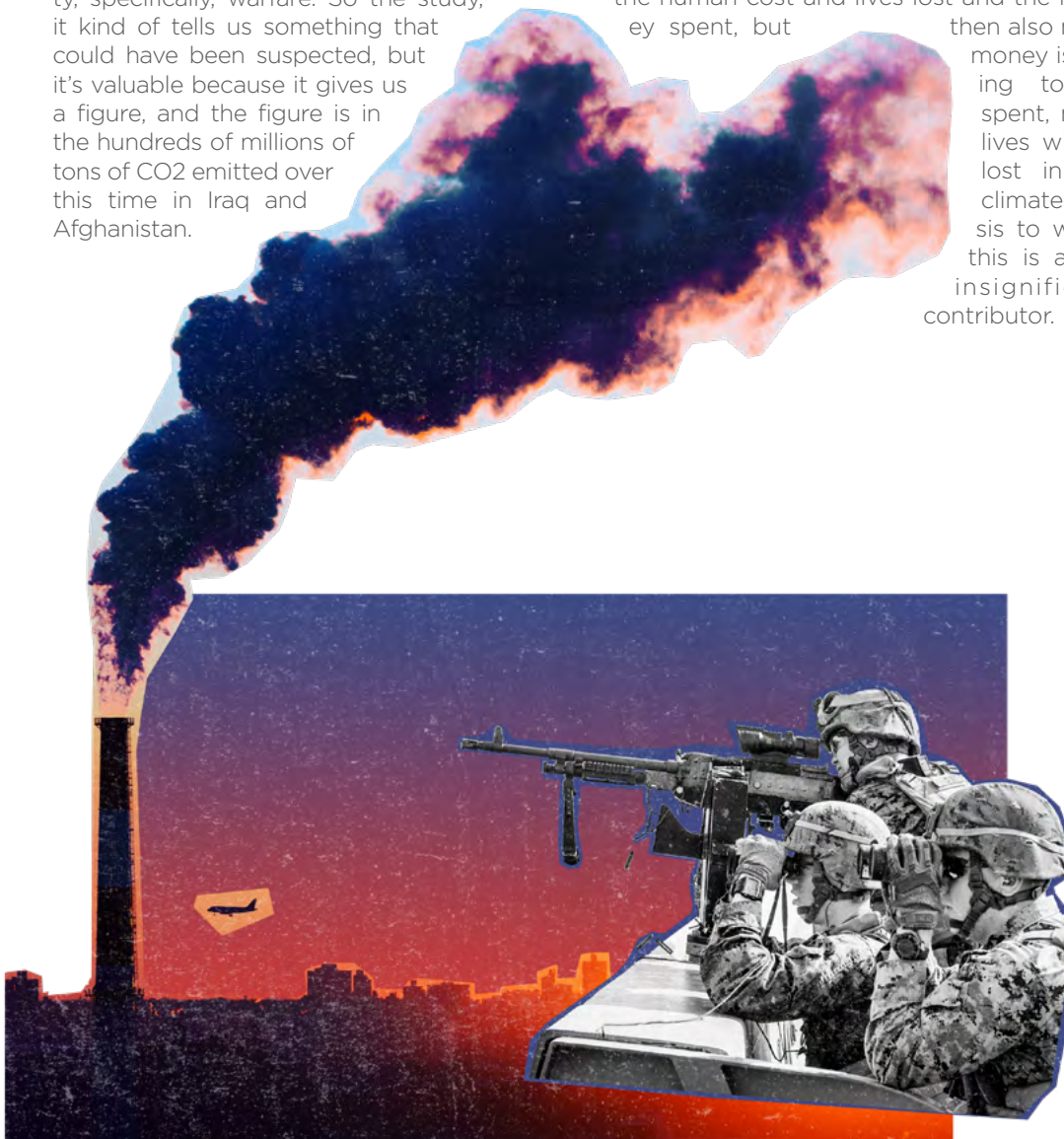
HANNAH: Are there any other specific sorts of ways in which you see this problem crop up?

HUSSAIN: One of the other big examples in Iraq is the use of depleted uranium munitions.

As it turns out, these munitions were used in the recent bombing campaign in Syria as well. Although the DOD had indicated at one point that it wouldn't be. Now, these are very highly radioactive munitions. They're used typically for armor piercing purposes in combat. And yet they have a great impact after the war is over, after the fighting is done, because they have an impact on local populations with high levels of radioactivity in people's hair and blood and teeth which are elevated.

There was the Battle of Fallujah during the Iraq war, the U.S. occupation of Iraq, where depleted uranium was used quite intensively and it was found later that there was a very high rate of cancer incidents in Fallujah. Elevated rates of birth defects. It certainly had an impact. A generational impact on Iraqis well beyond that time of the battle.

When you're imposing generational costs on people who weren't freshly born in the time the war began, it's a very serious cost of war not added into the death tolls that we typically consider.



EPISODE 12

PROFITING FROM WAR

Bill Hartung on the U.S.-Saudi Corporate Connection

October 2019

America continues its unwavering devotion to Saudi Arabia, despite the gruesome murder of Jamal Khashoggi and the humanitarian catastrophes in Yemen. What is behind this resolute support of America's undemocratic ally in the Middle East? Bill Hartung dives into the history of the U.S.-Saudi relationship, U.S. arms sales, and just how much the arms trade actually benefits America's defense companies.

How is the war in Yemen being supported by America's arms dealers, and are U.S. defense contractors really benefiting the American economy as President Trump insists? Bill pushes us to evaluate this relationship, and the costs taxpayers are willing to accept for the benefit and profit of the American arms lobby.



Bill Hartung is the director of the arms and security project at the Center for International Policy. You can read his recent report titled "U.S. Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia: The Corporate Connection."

MARK HANNAH: Can you tell us about the history of the US-Saudi relationship and why America seems to always be at the beck and call of this Middle Eastern country?

BILL HARTUNG: Initially it was built around oil and the notion was keep the oil flowing and we'll protect you. It was almost like a

protection racket, a quid pro quo. Over time, the Saudis used their funds in support of U.S. foreign policy. In many cases, things we shouldn't have been doing, like arming the Mujahideen in Afghanistan, who somehow became the base of al-Qaeda, shipping money to the Contras [in Nicaragua.] And then they were viewed as kind of a moderate force in the Middle East, particularly compared to Iran after the Khomeini regime. There was this notion that they also provided intelligence, but, there was also funding from Saudi entities that were supporting violent extremists.

So, then the net really didn't work out so well in terms of whether that was a good balance of the relationship. But anyway, a

lot of those things have changed dramatically. But it's almost like, for some people at least, the policy is on autopilot.

HANNAH: Before we keep going down this road, let's just establish right from the outset that Saudi Arabia is not exactly a democracy. They're famous for their repressive tactics in suppressing human rights. And yet they're still our [partner], despite our stated mission of promoting human rights and democracy around the world.

HARTUNG: Yeah, it's almost like the policy is sold as a necessary evil. There's no prospect of the current regime democratizing. And there's long histories of human rights abuses, torture, beheadings, throwing independent journalists and other activists in jail.

HANNAH: So, what motivated you to write this report?

HARTUNG: Well, partly I was curious how much of the U.S. arms trade with Saudi Arabia, which has been well in excess of 100 billion dollars over the last 10 years, went to the big companies. So, I looked at Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, General Dynamics, and Boeing, which are the top four U.S. defense contractors in terms of sales to the Pentagon, and also major arms exporters. It ends up that they were involved in one way or another in 90 percent of those deals [to Saudi Arabia.]

President Trump always talks about how great this is for our economy. He almost puts that above all other issues. Even after the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, he was said, well, we don't want to give up these deals for our wonderful companies. But, in fact, the benefits are pretty narrowly concentrated. That was one thing I wanted to look at. Of course, these companies also lobby to try to make it easier to keep selling these things and not having human rights restrictions that will stand in their way of making profit.

HANNAH: You mentioned this figure of \$138 billion in arms sales to Saudi Arabia. That's an eye-popping figure. But it's actually a small fraction of these companies' sales around the world.

HARTUNG: I think for the ones that are most dependent, I think Raytheon has said that about 5 percent of their sales are related to

Saudi Arabia. If you consider a company like Lockheed Martin gets 40 to 50 billion dollars a year straight from the Pentagon, even before they do foreign sales, mostly other companies make 10 or 20 billion or more. They've already got a pretty substantial business base even before they start pushing arms out the door to foreign clients.

HANNAH: So, there's a proxy war going on in Yemen between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

HARTUNG: Well, initially, the war was initiated by Mohammed bin Salman, who is now the crown prince [of Saudi Arabia,] back in 2015. The theory was they were going to bomb the Houthi rebels who had taken over large parts of the country into submission. More than four years later, that has not happened. But what has happened is thousands of people, civilians, have been killed in airstrikes carried out by the Saudi led coalition using U.S. and U.K. aircrafts.

They've done things like bomb funerals, weddings, marketplaces, civilian infrastructure, water treatment plants, a school bus. So it's really been, what some people have said, is basically there are war crimes. And the United States has continued to supply the planes, supply the bombs that are being used. Bombs produced by General Dynamics, Lockheed Martin, Boeing and Raytheon have been found at many of the sites of these civilian strikes.

There's a moral component, backing this kind of civilian slaughter. And then the question is, well, what could possibly justify this? The things that are being argued either are, Saudi Arabia is a counterweight against Iran, the Houthis are an Iranian ally, or the oil question... or we're making big money and getting jobs from these arms sales. None of which, in my mind, really tip the moral scale against that huge humanitarian catastrophe that's been caused by our Saudi allies.

“The United States has continued to supply the planes, supply the bombs that are being used. Bombs produced by General Dynamics, Lockheed Martin, Boeing and Raytheon have been found at many of the sites of these civilian strikes.”

- BILL HARTUNG



EPISODE 13

CHINA RISING PART 1

Isaac Stone Fish and Stephen Orlins on How the U.S. Should Respond

October 2019

The foreign policy establishment sees America locked in a fierce and strategic competition with China. With the ongoing trade war, the protests engulfing Hong Kong, and China's rising geopolitical influence, are Washington's fears and hardliner policies justified? Two China experts, Isaac Stone Fish and Stephen Orlins, join *None Of The Above* to discuss and debate Washington's appropriate response to this rising power and offer new and divergent ways of thinking about the U.S.-China relationship.



Stephen Orlins is the president of the National Committee on United States-China Relations. Prior to that, he was the managing director of Carlyle Asia and the chairman of one of Taiwan's largest cable television and high-speed internet providers.



Isaac Stone Fish is a journalist, contributing columnist for *The Washington Post*, and a senior fellow at the Asia Society's Center on U.S.-China Relations.

MARK HANNAH: How can the United States show support for vulnerable populations in China, including people in Hong Kong, and the Uigher Muslim community, without getting entangled in a foreign military adventure with a rising military power?

ISAAC STONE FISH: The situation in Xinjiang in northwest China, where there are roughly 1 million Muslims in concentration camps, is just an absolute crime against humanity. It's really hard to call it anything else.

The question is both what the U.S. govern-

ment can do and what U.S. individuals who are concerned about issues of global human rights—about the way Muslims should be treated—can do. The first thing both for the government and for civil society and individuals is to not self-censor and to not be afraid of speaking out and condemning what Beijing is doing.

One of the things I mentioned in an article I wrote in *The Nation* with Daniel Bessner, a history professor, is the need for there to be images of the atrocities of these camps. The photos that came out in 2004 of Abu

Ghraib really helped crystallize the push-back against the American invasion of Iraq. From what we know, there are far worse things happening in China, and these images should come out.

...

HANNAH: The United States has invested heavily in the liberalization of China over the past 30, 40 years. Now we seem to be fearful of an enriched China, of a China that's more economically powerful than it was, when in some ways, we aided them in getting to the place where they are today.

STEPHEN ORLINS: Yes, we're unnecessarily fearful in my view. Within the Beltway, people who haven't lived in China, people who haven't dealt with the Chinese the way I have over forty two years, kind of need an enemy. There is a requirement, weirdly, in the United States, partly generated by the military industrial complex, partly generated by Chinese policies. We have an exaggerated fear of China, an exaggerated fear of China's economic prowess, an exaggerated fear of China wanting to be a hegemon in Asia.

In fact, we talk about China being a hegemon in the world. We just hosted the state councilor and foreign minister of China, who says we ain't interested in it. I studied Chinese history when I was an undergraduate at Harvard, and I've spent my life looking at Chinese history. China is not an expansionist power. It's not in its DNA, and the reason for

“The idea of [China] being a hegemon, they don’t want it. They’re not interested in taking on those responsibilities.”

- **STEPHEN ORLINS**

that is, today it has 1.4 billion people. The problems that the Chinese leadership needs to deal with are within China.

I always joke, talking with a national security adviser of China, he used to say, you have to think about China in these terms. When President Obama was president, President Obama gets up and the national security adviser briefs him about Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Venezuela, you name it. The problems are all outside of America. The president of China gets up and he gets briefed on Xinjiang, Sichuan, Guangzhou, Tibet.

The problems are internal, and those problems are so severe that every Chinese leader that I have met with over these 42 years talks about, how do we maintain stability in China? To the extent that there are foreign policy problems that wash back into China, they’re concerned. The idea of them being a hegemon, they don’t want it. They’re not interested in taking on those responsibilities.

For many years, we haven’t had an economic competitor and America has not been good at dealing with its own problems. The fact that we have not reinvested in our infrastructure, we have not dealt with the inequalities in our society, we have not dealt with social programs, we have not dealt with climate change, we have not dealt with all of these things. Instead of dealing with these, which we should be doing, we’re sitting there and we’re worrying about an enemy that doesn’t exist. It doesn’t exist.

HANNAH: Stephen, what do you see as the danger of this label “strategic competitor”? Do we run the risk of talking ourselves into a military conflict?

ORLINS: By branding China the way our National Security Strategy did in December 2017 as a revisionist power and a strategic competitor, it ignored the nuance that exists in China today, and it strengthened those who oppose the United States, [including] people in the [People’s Liberation Army] who think that a strategic competition with the United States is a good thing.

Why do they think it’s a good thing? Well, because it strengthens their budget. If the United States is saying we’re a strategic competitor, we need more ships, we need more planes, we need more ABMs, we need more this, we need more troops, we need this, that and the other. So, what we did is we strengthened the anti-American, anti-reform part of the Chinese government.

It also has the danger that because we have now characterized China as a strategic competitor and a revisionist power, every single policy we talk to the Chinese about, they say, it’s not about the policy, it’s about containing us, it’s about the strategic competition. Chinese policy in Xinjiang is unacceptable. But because we’re a strategic competitor, when we sit there and talk to them, they’re just looking for a way to keep us down and to have more terrorism in China as opposed if we say, we’re partners. You’re my partner. What you’re doing and Xinjiang is really unacceptable and you’re able to talk to them better. Same is true of Hong Kong. What is the Chinese narrative today on Hong Kong? It’s that it’s the black hand of the United States.



EPISODE 14

MAXIMUM FLEXIBILITY?

Joe Cirincione on Nuclear Restraint

November 2019

Nuclear weapons are the forgotten existential threat. They can alter the course of history in an afternoon. Leading nuclear policy expert, Joe Cirincione, joins Mark Hannah to discuss the dangers of policies geared toward maintaining, modernizing, and growing a large nuclear arsenal. According to Joe, proliferation of nuclear weapons in the U.S. makes us less safe as other countries rush to develop new nuclear capabilities as a deterrent against U.S. intervention. How can the U.S. scale its nuclear capabilities back, and what's at stake?



Joe Cirincione is the president of Ploughshares Fund. He is the host of *Press The Button*, a weekly podcast dedicated to nuclear policy and national security, and the author of *Nuclear Nightmares: Securing the World Before It Is Too Late*.

JOE CIRINCIONE: People understand that the Cold War ended, but they don't quite understand that the weapons remain. We've come way down. There used to be, during the heyday of the Cold War, about 70,000 nuclear weapons in the world, with most held by the United States and the Soviet Union. We've come down to about 14,000. Big strides because of treaties, because of policies that American presidents and Russian presidents have made together. There are fewer countries now that are seeking these weapons. The trends over the last several decades have been great. Except for now.

Since Trump became president, those trends have reversed. Every single nuclear armed country is now building more nuclear weapons. There were no talks about reductions. There were no talks about talks about reductions. There have always been those people who resisted arms control, who thought that we should depend on U.S. military might for our security, not pieces of paper. Even as I say it, it sounds strong, right? It sounds convincing. There has always been this debate. People who see compromise and negotiation as close to treason.

What's been different is that those people used to be in the extreme of U.S. policy. Now they are making U.S. policy. John Bolton, in his catastrophic 17-month tenure as a national security adviser, was instrumental in whipping down several key pillars of the international security architecture. New ones like the anti-nuclear deal we had secured with our allies to stop and roll back Iran's nuclear programs. Long standing ones like Ronald Rea-

gan's intermediate nuclear forces treaty that eliminated intermediate range nuclear missiles from Europe, he tore it down. And now there's a new one on the chopping block.

Right before Bolton left office, he put in front of the president a memorandum to get out of the Open Skies Treaty. This is the most benign pillar that you can possibly imagine. Eisenhower thought of this idea, he couldn't get it. George H.W. Bush got it. It's an agreement where the U.S., Russia, and 32 other nations do unarmed surveillance flights over other countries' territory, so they won't be caught by surprise. The information is shared among all 34 participants. But it's an international agreement, and there are some people who don't want international agreements. They think it's tying down America.

MARK HANNAH: What is Bolton's and others' argument against the Open Skies Treaty?

CIRINCIONE: That it's outmoded. This is a favorite one. As if, if you're old, you're no good. I'm old.

HANNAH: I think you're great, Joe.

CIRINCIONE: I think I'm relevant. It's this idea that it's from a different era. Well, we negotiated this treaty in 1992. It was after the Cold War. So the idea is, number one, that these no longer suit American purposes. But it goes back even further. It is this idea, and Bolton and others write about it, that the

US is the most powerful country the world has ever known. That is true in many dimensions, but they're talking primarily militarily. And so we need to have maximum flexibility and multiple options, and that is the way we are going to, one, secure our country from attack, and two, transform the nature of other nations to be more pro-American and less hostile. [They think] treaties will bind us down and strap us to this illusion of global norms. That's their argument.

HANNAH: This is an outgrowth of the 'peace through strength' quip, which is kind of a canard because our strength, while it might deter other countries from attacking us, it also sets a pretty bad example to other would-be aggressive nations, doesn't it?

CIRINCIONE: That's exactly right. Turkey is the most recent example of a country who thought that they are militarily dominant, so therefore they can determine what's going on on their borders. That the way to secure Turkey's borders is not through negotiations

or some kind of political or diplomatic or regional process, it's through ethnic cleansing. It's to get rid of the people that you see as a threat. You just go in, you take it over, you kill them. That's what great powers do. We are reinforcing that erroneous norm.

HANNAH: The United States is setting a pretty poor example by not maintaining a no-first-use policy. Can you explain to our listeners what a no-first-use policy is?

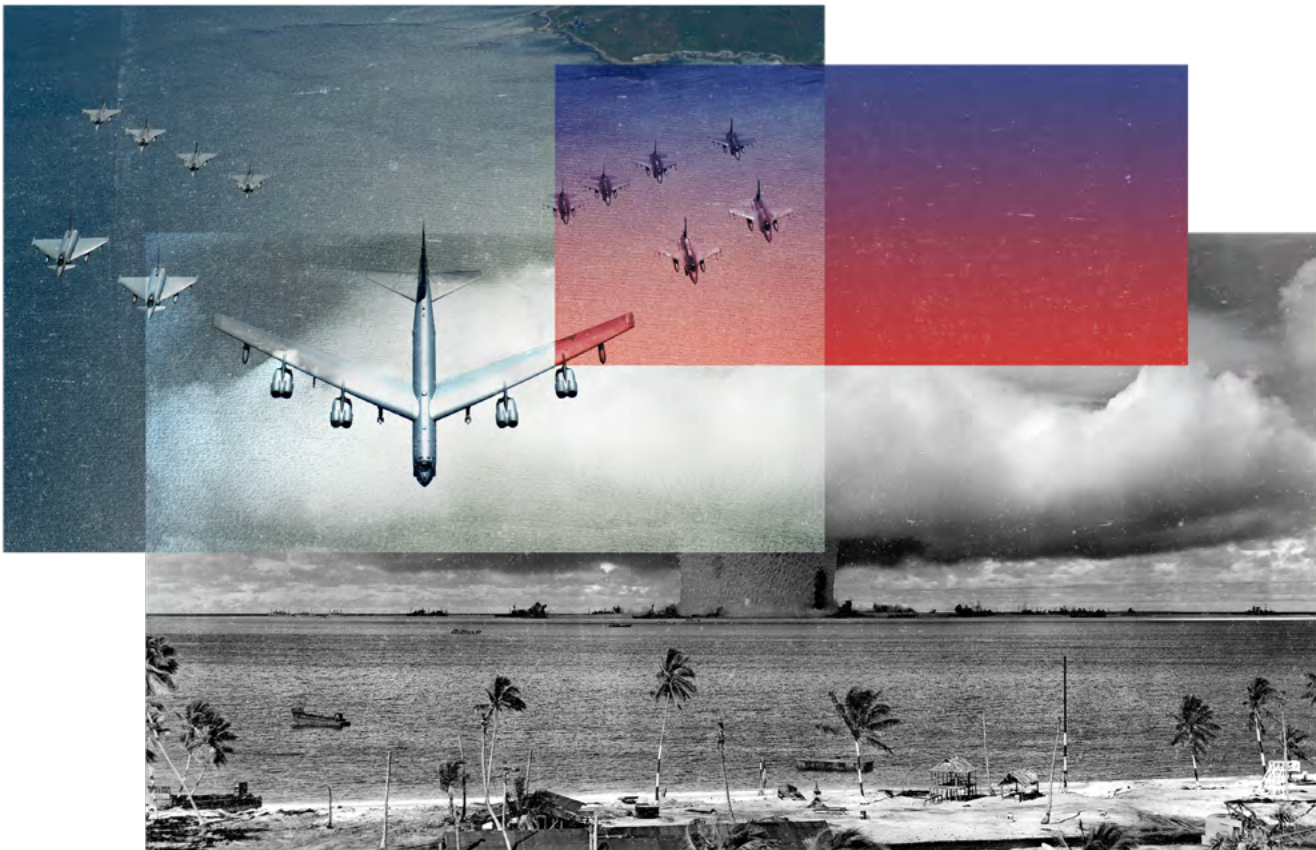
CIRINCIONE: This debate goes back 74 years to whether we should have been the first to use a nuclear weapon over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Did we have to do it? Was it the right thing to do? Was it morally right to kill hundreds of thousands of innocent ci-

vilians for decisions they had nothing to do with? But we did.

Since then, no one else has [used nuclear weapons,] which is kind of interesting. We've been in a lot of wars, we've lost a lot of wars, our allies have lost wars, people have suggested using nuclear weapons. No president has ever done it. Not just here. No leader of any of the now nine nuclear-armed countries has ever used a nuclear weapon since. A number of people, for example the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, Adam Smith, say the policy of the United States should be never to start a nuclear war. His bill is actually one sentence: "the policy of the United States shall be never to use a nuclear weapon first."

“Since Trump became president, those trends have reversed. Every single nuclear armed country is now building more nuclear weapons.”

– JOE CIRINCIONE



EPISODE 15

HOW TO END AN EMPIRE

Kate Kizer on a New Direction for Progressive Foreign Policy

November 2019

What does the end of the “American empire” look like? What are other tools America can invest in? Kate Kizer joins Mark Hannah to explore the principles which drive progressive U.S. foreign policy. Kate dives into what those principles look like in practice: a human-centered economy, ending America’s involvement in foreign conflicts humanely, and building policy around transnational, people-centered movements. How does America achieve this while maintaining its own national security? And what is the likelihood these policies will get implemented come 2021?



Kate Kizer is the policy director at Win Without War, a “diverse network of activists and organizations working for a more peaceful, progressive U.S. foreign policy.”

MARK HANNAH: Are our values a departure point for our foreign policy or their destination? Are we starting with our values or ending with our values?

KATE KIZER: I think it’s both. What is the world we actually want to see? Then what are the steps we can take in each of our engagements abroad, whether that’s with government or local actors or civil society or multi-lateral institutions, that we’re actually working towards making that world a reality? I’m not

going to say this is going to be easy. What I’m talking about is multi-generational change.

HANNAH: Can you tell us some of the things that are keeping that from happening?

KIZER: Part of it is this narrative that’s been constructed, particularly since 9/11, where it’s an us versus them mentality. Most things in national security rely on the dehumanization of others, particularly in the so-called War on Terror. And one great example from the post 9/11 wars is a lot of Americans think about if they’re even aware, that we’re bombing 17 other countries right now.

There’s no transparency over who we are actually killing, but there’s not a lot of attention to the fact that the Department of Homeland Security and the NSA got massive powers after 9/11 to surveil and militarize

our own society. Another example of this is a lot of the equipment that police forces use in the United States now come directly from the DOD through the 1033 program where the Pentagon is transferring military-grade weapons to police forces. And those forces are incentivized to use that equipment. That’s why you see tanks and machine guns on the streets of Ferguson when there’s unrest versus community policing and other strategies that could actually address the root drivers of conflict.

HANNAH: So you’re saying we should be more focused on domestic issues than foreign affairs, or...?

KIZER: I think the first step is we have to see the parallels between the two situations. It’s not only that. The Pentagon transferring these weapons to police forces here at home is militarizing our communities. It’s also that the United States is actively fueling conflict in this part of the world by sending so many weapons to the Middle East that then different groups get their hands on. You not only see this with ISIS, you see this in Yemen with UAE and Saudi backed militias who are ostensibly fighting on our side, but then fighting the government we’re saying we’re supporting.

One of the things that progressives are very keen to do is address the United States’ role in fueling violence around the world, wherever that happens. And so that, again, breaks

down that domestic and foreign policy divide, because these things aren't happening in vacuums. They actively reinforce each other. Because how we're operating abroad is mirrored back at home and vice versa.

HANNAH: A lot of Democrats are concerned that there's a national security gap. And if they're not perceived as tough on America's enemies and tough on national security, that they won't be viable candidates. Are you telling them that they should just not be concerned with being seen as tough on foreign policy, on national security?

KIZER: Well, I think this idea that national security can only be seen based on being tough is such a patriarchal view of what security is. It's not about what are the actual ways that we can build safety for the United States as well as other countries around the world, and what are the cross-cutting challenges that Americans face, that certainly are physical, but are also economic, are social and rooted in so many other things that the military can never solve.

For so long, this fear of looking weak on national security. Democrats have really bought into Republican talking points on this. And by doing that, what they then offer is kind of this like Republican-lite vision of what national security is. And it is my assessment that if someone's going to choose a Republican, they're gonna go for the real Republican, not Republican-lite. And I think what Democrats are failing to do, which

they used to do on domestic policy, but I think we've really seen a change in this on the domestic side is that, on national security, Democrats are offering a bold alternative to how the world could actually be.

What is the Democratic vision of how the United States should engage in a world and I think, you know, when we articulate that when some candidates and politicians articulate that, it gets people really excited because it doesn't mean isolationism. It doesn't mean bombing black and brown people to secure ourselves. It means actually lifting up others, leading with our values and actually correcting the mistakes of the past and not being afraid to say we've made a mistake and here's how we can change that.

“I think this idea that national security can only be seen based on being tough is... not about what are the actual ways that we can build safety for the United States as well as other countries around the world.”

- KATE KIZER



EPISODE 16

PEACE, THE NORM. WAR, THE EXCEPTION

Andrew Bacevich on Stopping the Search for Monsters to Destroy

December 2019

As the Cold War ended, many in the national security establishment thought history had ended: American-style democracy and capitalism were triumphant and terminal. What would be the implications for U.S. foreign policy? Andrew Bacevich, the president of the newly launched Quincy Institute, observes how America has attempted to remake the world in its image through coercion and excessive military power -- and continues to do so today. This policy, Bacevich argues, has led to a series of military interventions that are often unjustified and counterproductive. How did U.S. foreign policy fail to learn from history? And what are organizations such as the Quincy Institute going to do about this worrisome trend?

and the Soviet empire did pose a threat to the United States and more broadly to the West. Amassing military power to contain the Soviet Union, to prevent the outbreak of a third world war, made sense.

HANNAH: So the problem was defined accurately, even if the solution was somewhat muddled or misguided.

BACEVICH: When the Cold War ended, and remember that the end of the Cold War caught the American foreign policy establishment by surprise... It's not that all the smart people in Washington expected the Cold War to wind down. On the contrary, the smart people in Washington worked on the assumption that the Cold War was going to continue forever. The literature coming out of the Pentagon was still insisting, when Gorbachev is already running things in the Kremlin, that the Soviet Union was hell bent on an expansionist project and that it was, frankly, they argued, militarily superior to the United States. All that was hogwash.

But the point I want to get to here is that when the Cold War caught the establishment by surprise, by ending, that led to a radical misinterpretation of what the consequences of the Cold War ending were. What we concluded, what the smart people in Washington concluded, what the columnists for *The New York Times* concluded, was that we had won a great victory. To cite the famous essay by Professor Francis Fukuyama that history itself had thereby come to an end. What did

Andrew Bacevich is the president of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. He is Professor Emeritus of International Relations and History at Boston University and the author of many books, most recently *The Age of Illusions: How America Squandered Its Cold War Victory*.



States made many, many mistakes. Perhaps the worst of which was the Vietnam War, in which I participated. And yet, on balance, even in retrospect, you could make a case that U.S. policy during those decades was grounded in some sense of reality. That we did in fact pursue policies that were by and large, again with exceptions, consistent with the national interest.

HANNAH: And communism was actually spreading.

BACEVICH: In retrospect, I would argue strongly that the United States exaggerated the threat posed by communism and indeed by the Soviet Union itself, which was the principal sponsor of communism during that period of time. That said, there was a grounding in reality. The Soviet Union

MARK HANNAH: Why are you creating the Quincy Institute? What is the impetus?

ANDREW BACEVICH: The impetus is a fairly long record of foreign policy failures. One might ask, when did that pattern begin? I would date it from the end of the Cold War. During the Cold War, the United

it mean to say that history had ended? What it meant in Fukuyama's interpretation, and this is an interpretation that was embraced by many in the policy world, the end of history meant that there was now one sole surviving system. Some way to organize a society, and that was our way: liberal democratic capitalism. Further came the conviction that the Soviets gave up because they recognized that the superiority in military power that the United States had achieved, the Soviets could never catch up to.

HANNAH: Right. So this was the 'peace through strength' mantra of the Reagan administration, that somehow that had intimidated or cowed the Soviets into submission.

BACEVICH: But what followed went a step further beyond 'peace through strength.' It was redeeming the world through military power. In other words, if indeed history had ended and there was only one single way to organize society, and that's liberal democratic capitalism, we believed that the end of history left us in a position to bring history to its necessary culmination by putting our power to work.

Virtually as soon as the Berlin Wall went down in the fall of 1989, eight months later in August of 1990, Saddam Hussein invades and annexes Kuwait, leading to the first major military undertaking of the post-Cold War era. That's Operation Desert Storm, which seems to end, I say "seems" because I think



it was a bit of an illusion, in an unprecedented American victory. Operation Desert Storm seems to affirm that the United States possesses military power such as the world has never seen.

HANNAH: And we saw it on CNN, too. We saw the bombs going over Baghdad.

BACEVICH: Everybody saw it. Not too many people participated, but everybody saw it. Therefore, large numbers of ordinary citizens bought into the notion of American military supremacy. Now, the point I'm trying to get to here is the hubristic conviction that his-

tory has ended and we are history's agent combined with the illusion that the United States has achieved military capacity such as history itself had never seen, [which] leads to a pattern of behavior in which the United States sets out to bring the world into alignment with our own expectations and our values. Where does that happen? It happens more than anywhere else in the Middle East.

“[There was a] conviction that the Soviets gave up because they recognized that the superiority in military power that the United States had achieved, the Soviets could never catch up to...But what followed went a step further beyond 'peace through strength.' It was redeeming the world through military power.”

- ANDREW BACEVICH

EPISODE 17

CHINA RISING PART 2

Jacob Stokes & Ali Wyne on Whether America is Manufacturing an Enemy

January 2020

In October, two China experts joined *None Of The Above* to discuss Washington's response to the rise of China. Today's episode unpacks the very notion of great power competition, and whether America requires this strategic framework to succeed as a global hegemon. Jacob Stokes and Ali Wyne sit down with Mark Hannah to evaluate Washington's obsession with great power competition and the strategic purpose of America confronting a rival like China. Is America in the throes of a new Cold War? Or does the U.S.-China conflict distract from what will always be an entangled, complicated, yet necessary, relationship?



Jacob Stokes is a senior policy analyst in the China program at the U.S. Institute of Peace. He previously worked on the national security staff of Vice President Joe Biden.



Ali Wyne is an international and security policy analyst at RAND Corporation. He is a contributing author to *Power Relations in the Twenty-First Century: Mapping a Multipolar World?* (2017).

MARK HANNAH: Jake, you served in the Obama administration. You worked for Vice President Biden, and there was a lot of talk in the beginning about the pivot to Asia. What happened?

JACOB STOKES: The logic behind the pivot to Asia was that the United States, since the post-9/11 era, had become overinvested in nation-building wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and that ultimately the political, eco-

nomics and strategic future of global politics was really going to be decided in East Asia and in the Indo-Pacific region broadly.

It was both sort of a geographic pivot away from the Middle East, but also a substantive pivot away from a militarized foreign policy toward something that still had strategic elements but was as much about politics and economics and really the way that the governance structure was going to be going forward.

HANNAH: Over the last two decades, a lot of our resources and our attention have been focused on the Middle East. What work has been done to refocus on East Asia that we haven't been paying as much attention to?

STOKES: The first step in the rebalance or pivot was about freeing up American resources. You had to actually do some draw-down from Iraq and Afghanistan in order to free up those resources, both literally military forces, but also money and bureaucratic attention. You had a whole generation of people that were focused on Iraq and Afghanistan and counterinsurgency, so that was the first step. Within Asia, it was really about thinking about creating a framework not just for U.S.-China relations, but U.S. relations with Asia.

That involves some shifting of additional military forces to the region, changing a little bit of the basing structure so that U.S. forces had more access in different places, including things like Australia, and then thinking about an economic leg of U.S. engagement in the region that was done through the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which ultimately failed because it wasn't passed in the Obama administration and President Trump, of course, pulled out of the deal.

HANNAH: Ali, can you define what great power competition means?

ALI WYNE: If I were able to define the term succinctly, I'd probably be able to retire today. But my sense is that great power competition, at least as I understand it, refers to the notion that, by way of a little bit of historical context, in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, I think it's fair to say there was a certain triumphalist sentiment that suffused the U.S. commentariat, the U.S. policy making establishment. There was a sense that history, maybe it hadn't ended, but that history had perhaps slowed down a bit. That democracy and capitalism were, if not inexorably ascendant, then confidently so.

There was a sense the borders had become less salient, that nationalism and populism were on the way and so on and so forth. And I think that those assumptions largely obtained or observers felt that they obtained for some time, probably through to the global financial crisis. But then I think a big bellwether event was the invasion of Ukraine and then the annexation of Crimea in early 2014, and Chinese militarization of the South China Sea.

It's this notion that where we once thought or had hoped that competitive geopolitics would give way to a more pacific geopolitics, that hypothesis didn't obtain. We see a more revanchist Russia and a more resurgent China. On the surface, it's referring to a more competitive geopolitical space. But the concern I have about the construct is - leaving aside great power and what criteria we use to assign the great power status - when I hear the word competition, I think of a means, I think of an instrument, I think of a tool. I'm engaged in competition, presumably to do something.

It seems to me that there is a pretty marked gap between the prescriptive policy making



the United States that they indeed harbor such ambitions.

momentum that great power competition has achieved and the analytical interrogation that it's undergone. So the question is: what world order is it that the United States would like to witness? What world order would the United States like to contribute to? What role would China play in that system?

...

WYNE: It's interesting that especially in an environment of growing strategic distrust, rapidly growing strategic distrust, between the United States and China, the irony is, the more strenuously China disclaims pretensions to regional and/or global hegemony, the more likely the signal that is received in

Whether it is with the Belt and Road Initiative, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, China's investments in Frontier Technologies, I do think these are the crux of the competition between the United States and China. There are military dimensions that are growing and salient, certainly ideological dimensions that are becoming more salient, particularly with revelations about mass internment in Xinjiang and the repression of protesters in Hong Kong.

I would still say on balance to the crux of the competition is economic and technological. And that reality, if you accept that conclusion, poses a conundrum for galvanizing the American public and galvanizing American policymakers.

“The more strenuously China disclaims pretensions to regional and/or global hegemony, the more likely the signal that is received in the United States that they indeed harbor such ambitions.”

- ALI WYNE

EPISODE 18

CHANGING THE STATUS QUO

Kal Penn on the Power of Cultural Diplomacy

January 2020

In an era of intense political polarization, how can we bring people together and effect political change? This week, actor and comedian Kal Penn joins *None Of The Above* to discuss how he got involved in public service and public engagement. He shares lessons learned from working on comprehensive immigration reform in the Obama White House, reflections on his cultural diplomacy work, and the inspiration behind his new series *Sunnyside*, which features one of the most diverse casts on television.



Kal Penn is an actor and comedian, and also served as the White House associate director of public engagement under President Barack Obama. He produced and stars in the American television series *Sunnyside* on NBC.

MARK HANNAH: Can you talk a little bit about what cultural diplomacy means to you?

KAL PENN: To me, cultural diplomacy is the exact opposite of that poster that some people have with the aircraft carrier on it that says ‘ninety eight thousand tons of diplomacy’ or whatever. A lot of my Republican friends used to have them on the backs of their dorm doors. So, I’ve always been interested, but in seventh and eighth grade, when I first discovered my love for art and storytelling, I realized that it had the opportunity to bring people together.

At the time when I was a kid, it was realizing that the kids who would bully you or the kids who had no interest in the arts or the kids from different backgrounds could still enjoy the same TV shows or the same play that you were putting on and suspend their disbelief. And that, in a very round-about way, led to my love for art as a way of unifying folks or at least contributing to cross-cultural understanding.

The idea that we ultimately all want the same things for our families: a roof over your head, food to eat, good health. Whether it’s a book that you read or a TV show that you resonate with... as I started working professionally as an actor, I realized, there’s actually a term for this. There are people, Reagan and Obama were both very well known for “cultural diplomacy,” in very different ways. Cold War versus post - but it was of interest to me.

I had the chance to study it a little bit [too.] I did a grad certificate program at Stanford

at the Spogli Institute and focused on it to the extent I was able to. All of which is to say that the ways in which, oftentimes, non-state actors or at least nongovernmental actors can contribute to the types of cross-cultural understanding that lead us to not have to resort to military action or even not necessarily have to resort to governments needing to exercise their beef in one way or another is a beauty and a reference that I’d like to see more of.

HANNAH: Do you think the recent history of military interventions could have been unnecessary if we only understood each other more?

PENN: It’s a great question and it’s also a really broad one. So I would hesitate saying ‘Yes’ because of a lack of cultural diplomacy, we see more military intervention than we need to. But I do think what you just touched on, the idea of empathy, is something that we can always use a little bit more of, especially when it comes to people that we don’t necessarily communicate with.

The interesting caveat, especially for a country like the United States, which has billions and billions of billions of dollars worth of cultural exports, it’s not even an active decision by our government in most cases. Think about Hollywood. Think about sports, the NBA expanding the way it expands all over the world. In the last 10 years, those are all things that our government has relatively little to do with.

“Oftentimes, non-state actors or at least nongovernmental actors can contribute to the types of cross-cultural understanding that lead us to not have to resort to military action.”

- KAL PENN

When I was on President Obama’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities, we were the first delegation to go to Cuba after that presidential visit. And the purpose was cultural diplomacy. I remember meeting with my counterparts in the Cuban film industry and artists there, and it blew a lot of the artists’ minds who we met that our government literally does not control the movies that we make.

So, I pitch a show, even like this immigration comedy or the Harold and Kumar movies, which is about marijuana and would get you thrown in prison, especially when the movies came out. They had such a hard time understanding that you were not making these movies either because of or in spite of our government.

HANNAH: I want to talk a little bit about your time in the Obama administration. Your mandate was to focus on outreach to specific communities and to engage them. Presumably he saw in you somebody who could bring his message in an unorthodox or a creative or an outside-the-Beltway kind of fashion to a broader group of people. How do we get disenfranchised people involved in policy debates? What kind of strategies did you develop or insights did you have working in that capacity?

PENN: I’ll answer in two parts. I’m glad that you brought up the reasons why we were all hired, because the Office of Public Engagement under Obama previously was the public liaison office and varied in different administrations, but generally was a place where lobbyists and people who already knew how to access the federal government - that was the office they knew to go to. Obama retooled it in the sense that he expanded it.

There was a point person for every conceivable demographic group or issue. In the cases of most of us, we didn’t come from

political organizing or we didn’t come from the world of politics. They were obviously incredibly qualified organizers, having come from the campaign, but their background wasn’t the same old way of doing things.

We were tasked with almost the impossible, which is, you’re not there to wrangle votes for members on the Hill - the Hatch Act prevents you from doing that. But you also need to reach out to convey information to new groups of folks, and particularly at that time in history, people who previously may not have participated in government before.

So some of it’s the obvious - you reach out to organizations that cover them. You reach out to have conference calls and invite people into the White House and speak at their conventions and things like that. I think those are all the low-hanging fruit of how you do things. My big paranoia, by the way, for the first couple of days was, was I only hired because I’m an actor? Valerie Jarrett, who was my boss, said, Kal, I can assure you that you’ve been hired in spite of that. And I said, OK awesome.



EPISODE 19

PRIMARY SOURCES

How New Hampshire Voted on Foreign Policy

February 2020

The conventional wisdom in Washington is that the typical American voter doesn't know or care much about foreign policy. We questioned this. So we traveled to New Hampshire in advance of the 2020 Democratic primary to hear for ourselves what voters there have to say about foreign policy. The degree of knowledge and strength of opinions might surprise you, and help explain the primary victory of Bernie Sanders in that state. You'll also hear from New Hampshire-based political scientist Andrew Smith, who helps put this all in context.

Though Congress increasingly debates the limits of the president's war powers, presidents are, these days, mostly constrained by public opinion and its expression on election day. EGF recently released a study, "Indispensable No More? How The American Public Sees U.S. Foreign Policy," to better understand the foreign policy preferences of American voters nationwide. By and large, Americans desire a less aggressive foreign policy. In this episode, we see if that holds true in one of America's first primary states.

VOTER 1: We should get out of [wars] immediately. We should withdraw our troops. I don't know enough about foreign policy to know about the vagaries of how that happens. But we haven't had a successful entanglement for a really long time. I think that we cannot keep engaging in wars like this. I think that we should leave the Middle East immediately because it's not helping and people are dying. We are hurting people over there.

VOTER 2: I would say we do not have enough money to bomb Iran unless we have enough money to feed the homeless. So if you don't have food for the homeless, I am sorry. You need to tell your friends in the military that we cannot bomb Iran today or even build more weapons because we have people starving.

We have people homeless in the streets that need beds. We need housing for the homeless and for the chronically underemployed

people that can't regularly rent. We have so many problems that we could be solving at home, but instead we put 53 percent of our discretionary spending into the military.

CAROLINE GRAY (Interviewer): So, then, we're back where we started. If people have these really sharp critiques of our [foreign] policy, why don't they vote on it?

PROFESSOR SMITH: They care about foreign policy when they have to, and that is typically when there are bullets flying. When bullets are flying overseas, we pay attention to foreign policy, like in 2004 with the Afghanistan invasion and the Iraq invasion. Then we pay attention to these things. When those are off stage, even though those wars are still going on, we pay very little attention.

GRAY: Professor Smith said that New Hampshire voters don't care about foreign policy unless we're at war. And I was struck by that comment because, well, the United States is at war. We've been at war for 18 plus years. So why wouldn't New Hampshire voters care?

MARK HANNAH (Host): Unless they're a military family, it's not really touching their daily lives, or at least they don't perceive it as such.

GRAY: Maybe. But I think, at least for some people it's a little more than that. For some voters I think the distinction between foreign policy and domestic policy isn't quite so rigid.

VOTER 3: Oh, I mean, it's really scary what's happening in Iran. I really don't like that. I don't think we should be funding expensive wars instead of investing in education and combating the climate crisis. And yeah, I don't want us to spend trillions of dollars going into another war.

VOTER 4: I think that everything is connected. With every new policy that comes, I ask can we pay for Medicare for all? Can we pay for this? And meanwhile, we're paying for endless wars in the Middle East. It's all of this taxpayer money that's put into the military to solve a problem that the military really can't solve -- it's a problem of diplomacy. It's a problem of instability and climate change, everything is connected. And so for me, I want to see America's foreign policy move away from military force in places that are halfway around the world and places whose governments haven't attacked us. It's been terrorists, and I really would rather see dip-

lomatic solutions happening in the Middle East so that we wouldn't waste all our money just making Raytheon rich.

GRAY: I met this woman, Nikki [Nicolette], who is in her 30s.

VOTER 5: I'm Nicolette Berishelf and I'm here in New Hampshire canvassing for the Bernie Sanders campaign. We were in Iowa and now we're here in New Hampshire. And we're gonna go on. We're going to drive on to Nevada and then we are going to South Carolina and then home to California for Super Tuesday.

VOTER 6 (Nikki's husband): It's the most important thing we can think of to be doing right now. Nikki has cerebral palsy and she lost her medical last year for not meeting the California equivalent of the California branch of Medicare. She lost that last year for essentially no reason. She has a massive gap in

her health insurance coverage and there's no reason for that. We figured this was the most important thing we could be doing to help people like us who may be falling through the cracks.

VOTER 5: I think that for years, as long as I have been alive at least, we have lived under a government that thinks it's okay to take our money and spend it on wars and then tell us to stop whining for free stuff. For years now, years and years and years, the government and the president have been allowed to declare war without the say so of Congress, which in itself is a dangerous thing. But for years and years and years, I think our government has not connected engaging in a lot of foreign regime change wars abroad with the way things are at home. They have not connected the cost that it takes on all of us. And we're expected to bear that cost and hand over our tax dollars without a say on what they are being spent on.

“I want to see America's foreign policy move away from military force in places that are halfway around the world and places whose governments haven't attacked us.”

- **VOTER 4**



EPIISODE 20

NAMASTE, TRUMP

Dhruva Jaishankar & Aparna Pande
on US-India Military Ties

February 2020

On Monday, President Donald Trump and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi inked a new defense deal as violence escalated in response to Modi's controversial Citizen Amendment Act. Over 3 billion dollars' worth of American-made helicopters and military equipment will go to the Indian armed forces. What interests are being served by this defense deal, and how will India use this new weaponry? Mark Hannah sits down with two leading experts on US-India relations to unpack American and Indian security interests in the region, including shared concerns about a rising China in the Indo-Pacific. Is India a reliable security partner for the United States? And will we see any blowback in nearby Pakistan, China, or Kashmir, as a result of this deal?



Dhruva Jaishankar is the director of the US initiative at the New Delhi-based Observer Research Foundation. He is the author of the 2019 report, "Acting East: India In The Indo-Pacific."



Aparna Pande is the director of the Hudson Institute's Initiative on the future of India and South Asia. Her latest book is titled *From Chanakya to Modi: Evolution of India's Foreign Policy*.

MARK HANNAH: India is the world's largest democracy. There is a lot at stake for U.S. interests.

DHRUVA JAISHANKAR: There have been four different things that have been driving this U.S.-India relationship and sometimes some of these elements have been more pronounced than others. One is obviously the strategic logic of the relationship in the

Indo-Pacific. As you see China rising much more rapidly than many people anticipated, its behavior and assertiveness, now, being felt in many parts of the world. The U.S. and India increasingly see each other as an important partnership to balance against that and to hedge against that rise.

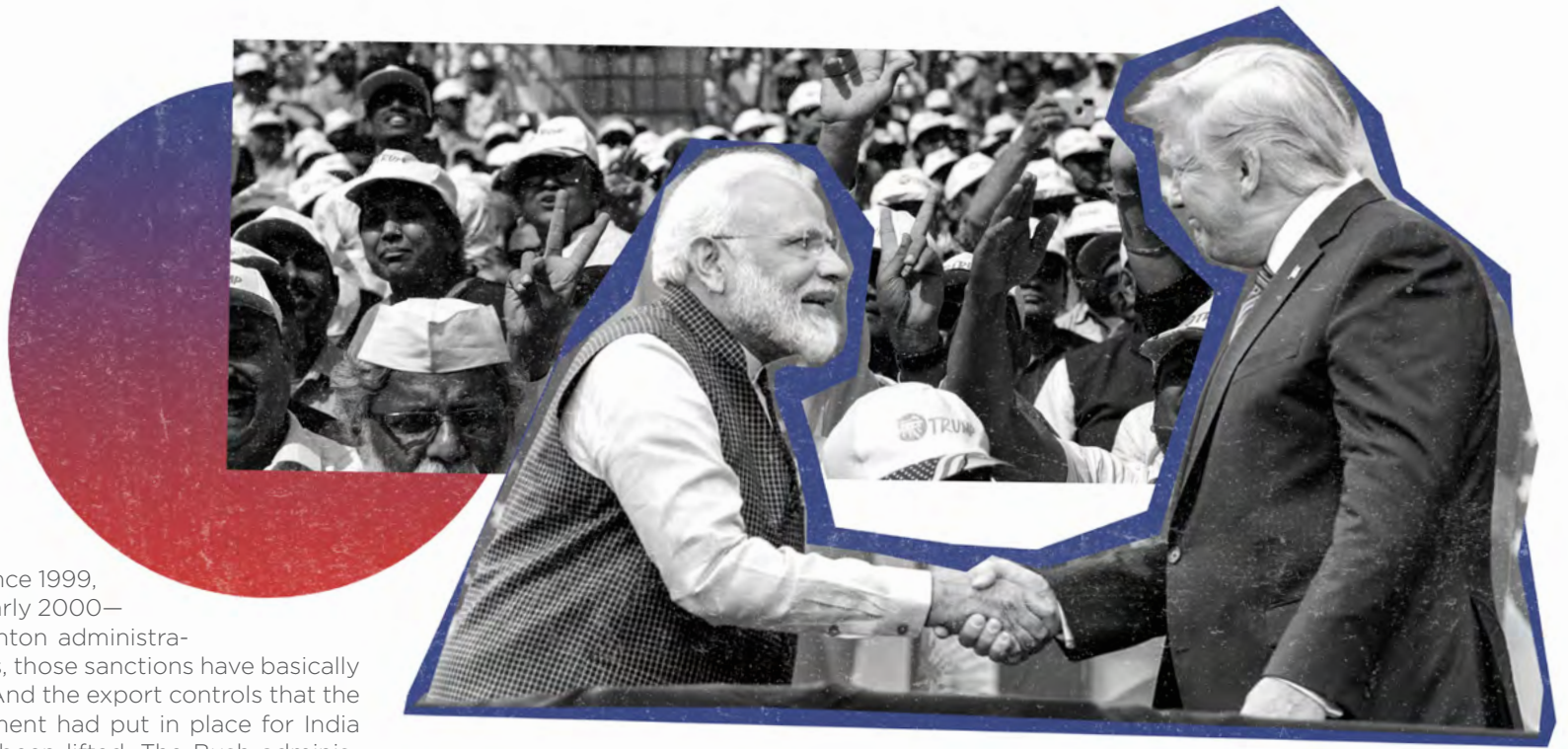
The growing trade relationship is another element of the economic relationship. Over

2,000 U.S. companies that now have a presence in India, have employees in India. There is a two way investment. The largest number of startups in the U.S.--billion dollar startups by foreign born people-- are by Indians. So, there is a growing economic component.

Two other elements, in one: I think this is less pertinent for the Trump administration, but for President Obama, it was really important that India was seen as key to finalizing a number of multilateral initiatives, including climate change, which is big, but also internet governance, and a number of other things. Finally, there is the Indian diaspora as well. A combination of these factors has played a role.

HANNAH: I want to turn back to this defense deal for a moment. Why did the American president and the Indian prime minister ink this defense deal? Obviously, Donald Trump has been hocking American weapons all around the world, to Saudi Arabia. What are India's motivations here? And do you think that it will be good for both India's national security interests and American national security interests?

JAISHANKAR: India has traditionally been heavily reliant on Russia for defense equipment. Basically during the Cold War and into the 1990s. It was almost predominantly Russia that was providing defense equipment, a little bit from Western Europe, and they had to do this for a number of [reasons]. The Cold War era, also U.S. sanctions related to India's nuclear program.



Over time since 1999, late 1999—early 2000—from the Clinton administration onwards, those sanctions have basically been lifted. And the export controls that the U.S. government had put in place for India have slowly been lifted. The Bush administration did a lot of it, the Obama administration went further. And Trump has actually taken that step forward. And this has basically opened the door for the U.S. to sell a lot of military hardware to India.

HANNAH: What has essentially changed here? What context led to this growing U.S.-India security cooperation that we're seeing today?

APARNA PANDE: From the American side, it is one, an economic imperative. You have a large market. You always wanted to send equipment and you want to sell it to as many countries as possible, especially countries you have as partners and allies.

In almost every American strategic partner and ally, what is the basis of the relationship? If it is Western Europe and the Atlantic, it is shared values plus economics plus defense. So economics and defense become part of it. Selling equipment to allies is a key part of the strategic relationship. Second, is India does need military equipment. Most of India's equipment is not just Soviet made, as you have mentioned, but most of it, about 60 percent or so, is old and obsolete. It needs to be upgraded.

...

HANNAH: Some observers might say, "well, India is getting a lot with this package," but other than cash, what is the U.S. getting? If it came down to it, would India really have America's back? Donald Trump is always asking this question of countries in Asia, Japan notably. He says 'we're protecting them, they're not protecting us.' But is India a reliable partner for the U.S.?

PANDE: Yes. The reason I would say is that it is India's backyard and it's India's sphere of influence, which India has always been concerned about, irrespective of whether the United States is going to be in the region or not. India has always viewed the Indian Ocean region and the greater Indian Ocean region, from the Straits of Malacca to the Persian

Gulf, as its neighborhood. Its neighborhood is where it would like to ensure that there is no other power which has preeminence and will interfere with Indian dominance.

American military equipment helps India boost its capability. But unlike American treaty allies, India does not need a security guarantee or a security provider. India would like to be the security provider in the region. It does not need any other security provider there. It will take care of the region on its own if need be, it does not necessarily need America. If people ask what [America is] getting, they're getting a country which actually views the region as its sphere of influence and will provide security in the region.

"If people ask what [America is] getting, they're getting a country which actually views the region as its sphere of influence and will provide security in the region."

- APARNA PANDE

EPISODE 21

THE BURDEN OF AMERICAN POWER

Peter Beinart on Hubris, Humility, and War

March 2020

Does American expansionism around the globe make the U.S. more powerful and influential? Does the U.S. gain by flexing its military muscle, or would it benefit more from preserving its resources? This week, Mark Hannah sits down with journalist Peter Beinart to discuss the limits of America's global role.

From Taiwan to Hong Kong, what price are Americans willing to pay to pursue stability and security around the globe? While some suggest the threat or use of military intervention promotes American interests around the world, our guest insists a lack of humility in U.S. foreign policy undermines America's values, credibility, and security.



Peter Beinart is a CNN political commentator, contributor to *The Atlantic*, and an editor-at-large of *Jewish Currents* magazine. He is the author of *The Icarus Syndrome: A History of American Hubris* and *The Crisis of Zionism*.

PETER BEINART: Starting at the end of the Cold War, starting in the 1990s and escalating after 9/11, the United States took on a whole series of commitments that in some ways ultimately turned out to be insolvent and basically checks that the United States was writing that we couldn't really cash. Afghanistan is a classic example. We have never had the power to defeat the Taliban and create a unified Afghanistan under the

control of a pro-American regime.

MARK HANNAH: People are going to say, that sounds awfully defeatist. What do you mean that we, the United States, the world's only superpower, can't defeat the Taliban?

BEINART: We can't defeat the Taliban at a price that ordinary Americans are willing to pay, which was exactly the same problem that we faced in Vietnam, the same problem we faced in Korea, the same problem we encountered in Iraq. America is a powerful nation, but America is not an omnipotent nation.

When we're talking about wars in far off countries where the threat to the United States is not obvious, there are real limits to the price that Americans are willing to

pay. In a democracy, that's the way it should be. Part of what I was talking about in that piece is if the United States withdraws all its troops from Afghanistan, the consequences for Afghanistan could be really rough. Things in Afghanistan, which are pretty bad as they are, might get worse.

One of the things that I think politicians need to grapple with is the consequences of America having bitten off more than we can chew, and we are going to continue to face those consequences. Think about the American relationship with Taiwan. We have a semi-de facto, implicit promise to protect Taiwan. It's ambiguous, but that's probably not something the United States can actually do.

The question that I really wish presidential candidates were asked in a very blunt way, because I think it's important to have these conversations in blunt ways, is: are you willing to go to war for Taiwan? Are you willing to potentially consider a war with China with all that would mean for a country that is much, much closer to China than it is to us, and in which China has a much greater investment?

There are tremendous, tremendous costs. I don't want to downplay them, to the idea that China would impose its will on Taiwan, which is a really, really impressive society. The point is that there's a certain way in which American foreign policy discourse doesn't grapple with these really hard questions, and the hard questions often have to do with the limitations of our power.

HANNAH: There are people right now who are saying, in the case of Hong Kong, that the United States should stand up to China. When I probe further and ask, what do you mean, “stand up” to China? Do you mean should we actually send in our aircraft carriers? They’ll often back off. America likes to think it can do anything. But, when you really think it through, maybe our power is more limited. Do you think the problem of American foreign policy is, what you cite in your book *The Icarus Syndrome*, essentially a delusion of grandeur?

BEINART: The point I tried to make in this book is that there have been moments in the last 100 years of American foreign policy where Americans’ sense of America’s ideological, military, and economic power and America’s ability to reshape the world has become hubristic. We have lost the sense that we are just one country among many countries, that we are a fallible group of human beings just like every other group of people in every other nation are fallible.

While America can do good things in the world, and while we can contribute to hope and moral progress in the world, humility and self-consciousness about our own flaws are really crucial ingredients in the mix of an effective foreign policy. I think that has been lost at great cost at certain moments, and I still think it’s not central enough to the conversation. Your point about Hong Kong was really important - there is a lot of moral preening that takes place in American foreign policy debates, which is divorced from a set of consequences.

What China is doing in Hong Kong is horrible. Anyone who cares about freedom feels an enormous sense of identity with the people in Hong Kong. Just as Americans felt with people who stood up in 1956 in Hungary against Soviet tyranny and in 1968 in the Czech Republic against Soviet tyranny, not to mention the absolute horrors that are taking place in Xinjiang in western China of Uighur Muslims, probably one of the greatest crimes of our

age. Not to mention North Korea, which is certainly the most evil regime on earth.

This is all absolutely true. But when one talks about American foreign policy, one has to ask the question, what steps can America take to alleviate these human problems, and at what price for Americans? The reality is that America’s ability to influence those situations is quite limited. Tragically, Dwight Eisenhower in 1956 and Lyndon Johnson

in 1968 were not willing to risk war with the Soviet Union, even though there was a tremendous moral case for identity and sympathy with people in Hungary and the Czech Republic.

We face our own version of those same tragic realities today, and it doesn’t actually help people in Hong Kong if we are not able to be honest with ourselves.



“While America can do good things in the world, and while we can contribute to hope and moral progress in the world, humility and self-consciousness about our own flaws are really crucial ingredients in the mix of an effective foreign policy. I think that has been lost at great cost at certain moments.”

- PETER BEINART

EPISODE 22

THE WASHINGTON GAME

Kelley Vlahos on The Afghanistan Papers, The Blob, and Conservatism

March 2020

In December 2019, *The Washington Post* obtained and published internal documents, now known as The Afghanistan Papers, from the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR). These documents revealed top political and military leaders systematically lied to the American public about the war in Afghanistan's progress, and continued its mission despite knowing victory was unachievable. Why do both Democratic and Republican administrations continue misleading us, and what is at stake? Mark Hannah sits down with Kelley Vlahos this week to discuss a culture in Washington which leads to a perpetual investment in unnecessary war. They discuss the military-industrial complex, military restraint, and where conservatism fits into it all. What is the conservative case against these wars, and how can we break the blob mentality which perpetuates America's troubling cycle of miring itself in unnecessary wars?

people inside the Pentagon. They'll be able to grease the skids for contracts.

You have the people from Congress who work on the Hill, who know how the budgets work, know all the members. All of this is all interchangeable. My issue with John Rood [the former Under Secretary of Defense for Policy at DOD] was that he had worked in the defense industry specifically for Lockheed Martin, on the F-35 program. Which continues to be funded by unbelievable amounts of taxpayer money, despite the fact that there are people in the military who would like the money to be shifted elsewhere. But because Lockheed has an army of lobbyists on the Hill convincing members that if they don't fulfill these contracts, you know, or re-up them every year, that they'll lose jobs in their districts.

MARK HANNAH: Is there some merit to that argument? Obviously, a lot of the lobbyists aren't really looking out for the individual employees as much as the profit margin.

VLAHOS: These defense contractors are smart. Basically, they have spread programs over multiple districts and states. So every state has some little piece of a program, whether it be the F-35 or Navy helicopters or whatever. You look at a map and I had one in my hand at one point where, yeah, you could say somebody, an incumbent, in Florida is up for reelection and his opponent wants to take some of that money and wants to end the F-35 program, for example.



Kelley Vlahos is a national security and foreign policy writer and columnist in Washington, DC and is the executive editor of *The American Conservative* magazine.

KELLEY VLAHOS: One of my biggest criticisms of the blob, which we call the military industrial complex, is that one of the reasons why you have this culture, this inculcated culture that's unquestioning, is because you have so many people revolving in and out of

government, the defense industry, the military. We call it the revolving door.

The Project on Government Oversight, the best group in Washington to follow on these issues, has done numerous reports on the revolving door. What you find is that the defense industry plucks people from the military. The Project on Government Oversight [did] a report just recently, they said they found 625 instances in 2018 alone of defense industry hiring top senior military officials right out of retirement for what are essentially influence peddling roles, like consultants, board members, because they know all the programs. They know all the

The congressman or woman could just turn around, say, listen, are you saying you want to eliminate fifteen hundred jobs in our district? You know, and of course, fifteen hundred jobs isn't a huge amount. But when you're fighting a tough reelection campaign in a localized election cycle? Yeah. Nobody wants to be known as the guy or the gal that wants to take away fifteen hundred livelihoods. And so these defense contractors aren't stupid. They're literally spreading these programs over multiple states.

I have a problem with the fact that our top military leadership at the Pentagon are all coming from places like Raytheon, Lockheed Martin, General Dynamics. And after they leave, they go back and then they come back. And, you know, our Secretary of Defense has cycled in and out of the defense industry and back again. How do we trust that their best interests are the American people and are our strategic interests and not the interests of industry?

HANNAH: In these failings you mentioned the Obama Administration and David Petraeus, but they really kind of continued

“I have a problem with the fact that our top military leadership at the Pentagon are all coming from places like Raytheon, Lockheed Martin, and General Dynamics.”

- KELLEY VLAHOS

whether there was a Republican or a Democrat in the Oval Office. I've asked different members of both administrations after I read the Afghanistan papers, did you know this was going on? Were you aware? You were in top level positions in the National Security Council. I got blank stares back. The question I have is, is this problem so chronic and so endemic that it almost doesn't matter what individual is sitting behind the desk of the Oval Office?

VLAHOS: It's all about politics and power. From my vantage point, as a nobody, as somebody who is on the outside writing for American Conservative and Antiwar.com

and places that nobody has ever heard of because I couldn't get into the mainstream, it was easy for me. I didn't care who was president. I didn't care who was in power. And our magazine doesn't.

When we came out, we had the hardest choice by going up against another “conservative” George W. Bush. But then we never shifted when Obama took over and started doing the same stupid things. We were right there. Unfortunately, not everybody in Washington is like that. So a lot of the Democrats who are like, “Go American conservative! We hate Bush, too!” during the Bush years, all of a sudden went dark on us. They had nothing to do with us. Some of our writers who had sort of toggled back between left and right publications about the war during the Bush years, all of a sudden couldn't get a phone call returned at different left leaning publications I won't mention.

There's a lot of superficiality in Washington. It's all about who's in power. They like to say that Obama came in and he was going to fight the good war in Afghanistan. When he started doing all this dumb stuff and then proceeded to help the invasion of Libya and start arming terrorists in Syria, they didn't want to say anything. Now that Trump is in office, all of a sudden he's doing all sorts of bad things. This is the Washington game. It's unfortunate, but I'm proud to be part of a magazine that has never wavered in its consistency of criticism against the blob.



EPISODE 23

WHAT DO HONGKONGERS WANT?

Wilfred Chan & Joshua Wong on the Flight For Democracy

April 2020

Since 1997, Hong Kong has been a special administrative region of the People's Republic of China. The freedoms China promised the people of this semi-autonomous region are slowly eroding. Throughout the year, Hongkongers have taken to the streets to protest mainland China's encroaching influence. The protests persist today, even amid the global COVID-19 pandemic. In January, as the coronavirus began its global spread, Mark Hannah traveled to Hong Kong to meet with a leader of the protests, and he returned to speak with another organizer from Hong Kong who is based in New York City. These two young activists offer different views on Hong Kong's political struggle, especially when it comes to the West's role in supporting the pro-democracy movement. What should Hong Kong be seeking, if anything, from the international community? And, does outside support strengthen or undermine the legitimacy of Hong Kong's movement?



Wilfred Chan is a writer and organizer based in New York City and is a founding member of the internationalist left publication *Lausan*.



Joshua Wong is a student activist and politician based in Hong Kong who serves as secretary-general of the pro-democracy party Demosistō.

JOSHUA WONG: Democracy is for everybody. Hongkongers deserve to enjoy freedom and rule of law. But now, it's not rule of law or even rule by law. It's rule by tear gas. How they used batons to target a high school student, how they fly uncountable canisters of tear gas just to crack down on

protests... What Hong Kong people are asking for, we are just asking to get a chance to vote in the election. To elect the administration of Hong Kong. And that's a simply humble demand and also the promise made by Beijing. Now China broke that promise. So, we must continue the fight.

The long term goal is to ask for free elections. The mid-term goal is to ask to stop police brutality. And the short term goal is to withdraw the extradition bill that violates our human rights. We successfully forced the government to withdraw the evil bill last September, which proved that lobbying by those senior politicians doesn't matter. And most important is how Hong Kong people took to the streets, showing the power of our people.

MARK HANNAH: How much of the solution has to come from the Hong Kong people rather than the Americans?

WONG: Hong Kong is an international city with the failure of One Country, Two Systems. One Country, Two Systems comes from the Sino-British Joint Declaration. That's the international treaty registered with the United Nations. So, when the constitutional system in Hong Kong faces such challenges and difficulties, it's not only a matter for Hong Kong, it's also a matter for the world, to recognize Hong Kong as a global city. I think maximizing bipartisan support around the world also matters to put pressure on Beijing.

HANNAH: While the [Human Rights and Democracy Act] supports Hong Kong, it also gives China another way to paint these protests as being generated by the United States. So, I wanted to get both Joshua's and Wilfred's opinion on the legislation. And if it was helping or hurting [the movement].

WONG: Lots of Hong Kong people recognize that we must seek international community support around the world. How Senator Rubio introduced the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act... he's ready to show his strong support for Hong Kong. I think the situation in Hong Kong is really unique and in U.S. politics, no one could imagine Ted Cruz and [Alexandra Ocasio Cortez] making the joint statement together, but they did it last year...

No matter if Republicans focus more on taking a more active approach on foreign policy or how for Democrats to recognize the importance of human rights or sort of free flow of information, freedom of speech, etc. It matters to support Hong Kong, no matter from which approach...

HANNAH: While Joshua welcomed the support, Wilfred was a little bit more cautious.

WILFRED CHAN: It's in China's playbook to smear Hong Kong's movement as the work of Western powers, that these are all Western-backed separatists. Now, the Chinese leadership doesn't actually believe this, but they know that it's effective in creating the kind of nationalist backlash within mainland Chinese people that will further put pressure on Hong Kong people.

“The Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act has some misleading elements. You have this bill that professes support for Hong Kong's movement and democratic ambitions. At the same time...it asks Hong Kong to do all sorts of things which aren't in line at all with what the movement is asking for.”

- WILFRED CHAN

It goes beyond simply fighting for democracy. It's about reconfiguring our position within this complicated system of capital and nation. And to do that, we need support from folks like workers in mainland China. We need support and understanding from people across the border. But I think the threat for this sort of Western alignment goes beyond the question of whether or not it affects support among neutral Hongkongers.

It gets to the bigger question, which is that it covers up the role that the West also plays in perpetuating Hong Kong's paradoxical and difficult situation. When we don't recognize that the reason why Hongkongers are denied democracy, the reason why we have such an absurd political system, is precisely

to maintain Hong Kong's usefulness to the powers that be in the West and in Beijing.

We're going to miss the bigger picture. That's the real problem with going to folks like Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz and asking for their support is they're actually helping to uphold the fundamental problem at the heart of all of this, which is that the, you know, the deal that's been given to Hongkongers is not a good one.

HANNAH: Do you think well-intentioned Western lawmakers are undermining the cause of democracy and human rights in Hong Kong by passing bills that are nominally about... supporting democracy and human rights?

CHAN: The Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act has some misleading elements. You have this bill that professes support for Hong Kong's movement and democratic ambitions. At the same time, you know, the bill is bringing Hong Kong closer and closer into the fold of U.S. foreign policy. It's asking the U.S. Secretary of State to make sure that Hong Kong is abiding by U.S.-Hong Kong extradition treaties, which is a kind of backhanded mention at Hong Kong's failure to extradite Edward Snowden back in the day.

It requires Hong Kong to comply with U.S. sanctions against Iran, which the U.N. and all sorts of European countries have agreed are killing ordinary Iranians. It asks Hong Kong to do all sorts of things which aren't in line at all with what the movement is asking for or democracy or human rights for that matter.



EPIISODE 24

THE TRUMP DOCTRINE?

Alex Ward on the Dualism of President Trump's Foreign Policy Legacy

April 2020

Donald Trump ran his 2016 presidential campaign on ending America's endless wars. But throughout his presidency, he has increased military deployments in the Middle East and threatened conflicts with Iran, Venezuela, China, and North Korea. And now, he has declared war on the coronavirus. Does this make Trump a hawkish commander-in-chief? Or, has he lived up to his promise to wind down wars and not start new ones? What kind of national security leader is he? This week, Mark Hannah digs into Trump's foreign policy legacy with Vox reporter Alex Ward. According to Alex, while Trump's foreign policy record may seem two-sided, there is an abiding ideology. In fact, Alex argues Trump's foreign policy legacy may even prove to be a political strength in the 2020 presidential election.



Alex Ward is the staff writer for international security and defense at Vox and co-hosts its *Worldly* podcast. He is based in Washington, DC.

MARK HANNAH: Donald Trump ran on America doing less in the world, being less beholden to other countries, and ending endless wars. But how has he actually governed as president?

ALEX WARD: I think we need to separate two things. There is Trump, the guy who does not like long interventions and American en-

gagement, militarily, especially in the Middle East. Then we have the guy who does not mind using American military force almost all the time and consistently. And in fact, more than the presidents in recent history.

HANNAH: It sounds schizophrenic.

WARD: That's a pretty good moniker for the foreign policy of this president. This is a guy who in three plus years has not put the United States into a larger war. He has not necessarily added thousands more troops. He has not furthered a greater conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan or elsewhere.

HANNAH: He hasn't gotten us involved in a regime change operation.

WARD: Right, in Iran or Syria or wherever. Some people were trying to push him, North Korea even. But he has escalated military conflicts elsewhere. He is dropping more bombs in a lot more countries. We are at war in Somalia. I think you don't really hear about that. We are at war in Somalia!

HANNAH: And as we're negotiating with the Taliban to reduce the troop presence there by half, in Afghanistan. Didn't he just announce 14,000 new troops to the Middle East and there was a pledge to send American service members in service of Saudi Arabia?

WARD: Exactly. We're sending more [troops] to Saudi Arabia to deter Iran, etc., etc., etc.. If you didn't want a foreign intervention, you're happy with this president. If you didn't want the United States to exercise its military might around the world, you're unhappy with this president. And that's the duality of Trump that everyone has to contend with.

HANNAH: Is it fair to say then that his outlook, his anti-interventionism, is less a product of a coherent and cohesive ideology than it is a product of a certain impulse?

WARD: No, I think it's part of an ideology. I really do believe he wants to use American resources more for things in the United States. You can agree or disagree with how he wants to use those resources...

HANNAH: Part of the economic populist platform.

WARD: Precisely right. And so he does not seem to mind using American resources to drop more bombs, to buy more military equipment, to get more defense deals, to combat terrorism wherever may be. But he does seem skeptical of using that for a ill defined, long term, massive foreign intervention.

HANNAH: Do you think it has been a political failure or will prove to be, come 2020?

WARD: No, I think it's actually a political strength. I can imagine the bumper sticker now: "no new wars, but the bad guys are defeated." Sounds pretty good. We didn't need to engage into a new Afghanistan or an Iraq, or go to war with Iran or Syria in order to put bad guys at bay. If I'm on Trump's team and I'm thinking about how to sell this, I'm thinking, Afghanistan deal: almost done; North Korea deal: on the way; Iran: deterred; Syria: no real chemical weapons used at the grand scale and whatever—it's not really our problem; trade deals: done; China: also kind of at bay. The more you look at what Trump can say, it sounds pretty good.



HANNAH: And by the way, the deep state is having an identity crisis and it's lighting its hair on fire.

WARD: Exactly. ISIS: defeated. All this, he can say that, regardless of what the intelligence community says, regardless of what expert class might say, he has actually come in and succeeded. He can make those claims. If you dig under the surface by an inch, you'll see that they're faulty.

HANNAH: But he's not going to support a militarized form of democracy promotion or regime change. And he neutralizes the "Trump claim" that he was opposed to the Iraq war and that impression that Trump claims to have had at the time of, though his record, I think is fairly neutral. Has Vox done

some digging on Trump's stance on the Iraq war? I know that this is kind of an ambivalent, ambiguous thing.

WARD: Trump has said more often than not that he was against it. There are some clips at the time that do show that he showed some support for it. And I think, in fact, he can't really claim to be against it 100 percent of the time. But he has been pretty clear about criticizing the intelligence community for getting the WMD stuff wrong, that Bush was wrong to go into the war, that these resources could've been used better elsewhere. I think on the whole, frankly, he has been more consistent on Iraq war bad than Iraq war good. But he has definitely said Iraq war good on occasion.

“If you didn't want a foreign intervention, you're happy with this president. If you didn't want the United States to exercise its military might around the world, you're unhappy with this president. And that's the duality of Trump that everyone has to contend with.”

- ALEX WARD

EPISODE 25

ON PEACE (AND PANDEMIC) IN AFGHANISTAN

Peter Bergen & Kiana Hayeri on America's Longest War

May 2020

In February, the Taliban and U.S. government signed a peace deal. The U.S. would draw down its troop presence and persuade the Afghan government to release Taliban prisoners in exchange for a ceasefire. However, since the agreement was signed, the Afghan government's release of prisoners has stalled and Taliban attacks on Afghan forces have surged. Now, coronavirus spreads from neighboring Iran to the war-torn country just as the prospects for peace dim. How and when will the longest war in American history finally end?

Peter Bergen and Kiana Hayeri weigh in on the U.S.' inconclusive and four-decade-long involvement in Afghanistan. They discuss whether the war was worth fighting and whether people in Afghanistan are better off today than they were before the U.S. invasion in 2001. What impact has American intervention had, and what new challenges does this country face as the coronavirus spreads across the region and world?



Peter Bergen is vice president at New America, a CNN national security analyst, professor, author, and documentary film producer. His latest film *The Longest War* is streaming now on Showtime.



Kiana Hayeri is an Iranian-Canadian photographer, focusing on migration, identity, and sexuality in societies dealing with oppression or conflict. View her latest work "Afghanistan's Next War" in *New York Times Magazine*.

MARK HANNAH: Peter, I want to ask you about Osama bin Laden. You interviewed him back in 1997, four years before the attacks of September 11th. This was before people really knew who he was. This was

the first televised interview with bin Laden. What were your impressions of him personally when you were sitting face to face?

PETER BERGEN: When we met with bin Laden, we had no idea [what to expect]. All you knew was that there was this guy with a lot of money who was financing Islamic extremist movements, according to the State Department, who I thought might have been behind the first Trade Center attack in '93, in which they were trying to kill as many people as possible. Luckily they only killed six.

We knew very little about him. I didn't even know what he was going to look like. And then in this interview, he'd made some bellicose statements in Arab language, but he hadn't done an interview with a Western English speaking network or he'd never done a TV interview. And so in that interview, he declared war on the United States. And he said it was about American foreign policy in the Middle East.

That was really the first time that he made those points to a Western audience. And the interview didn't get any attention, relatively speaking, until the embassies were attacked in '98. Well, then it was clear that these guys had no compunction about killing as many civilians as possible. They had the capacity to reach out thousands of miles from Afghanistan.

Blowing up one American embassy is hard. Blowing up two simultaneously, it's really hard. And from that point forward, it was clear that these guys were really a threat.

HANNAH: The U.S. has been in Afghanistan for nearly 20 years with a government that

is essentially a kleptocracy. There are very few clear signs of stability to show for our involvement there. Were we doomed from the start thinking we could bring democracy to Afghanistan? Or are there things the U.S. could have done differently to prevent what we're seeing now?

BERGEN: I think we could have put a lot less money into it. That turns out to be really a problem. By the way, much of the money that we spent there, we spent on ourselves. So when you hear all these conversations about all the money we've spent, the money wasn't spent on Afghans, the money was spent on contractors and paying our salaries and the like.

I'll tell you one thing that I think that we always really got wrong. We overvalued the idea of doing a deal with the Taliban and undervalued the idea of creating a functional election structure.. The idea that somehow we're going to flip a switch and everything, the peace will happen and, none of that made any sense.

[This peace deal] really came out of President Trump's desire just to wash his hands of the place. By the way, he's been telling his top

team now we should pull all American troops out because of COVID, which obviously is going to hit Afghanistan very badly because they have a terrible public health system.

...

HANNAH: Given the delicate position the Afghan government is in now, how has the [coronavirus] pandemic affected their ability to govern?

KIANA HAYERI: This may be a little bit radical, but one of the negative impacts the past 20 years has had on Afghanistan is that it has turned the government into this corrupt, dependent, and somehow a self-congratulating system that is now totally overwhelmed.

Foreign countries have been lending a hand, pouring money, millions of dollars into this country for the past 20 years. Then right around the time of the pandemic, they pulled out just like that. Now they have pulled out, they cut the funding, [and] a pandemic has arrived. The Afghan government is dealing with several voids: the void of funding, the void of support, security support, and the void of skills to treat and handle the pandemic.

...

HANNAH: Do you think people in Afghanistan think America on the whole has made things better or worse?

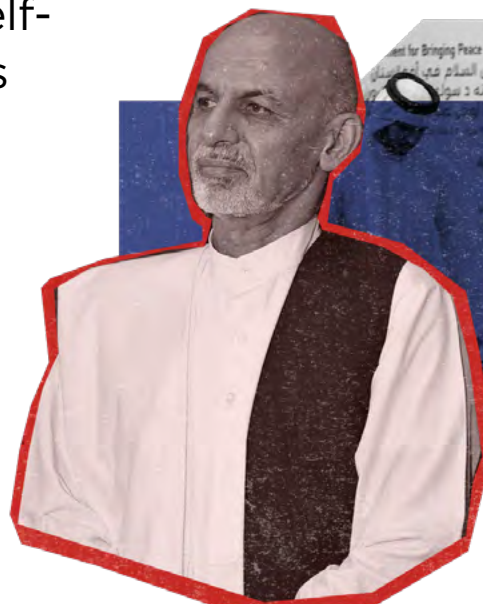
HAYERI: No. They've made things worse. Where in the world have Americans succeeded by invading a country or trying to set up democracy, whether directly by invading it, like in Iraq or Afghanistan, or through other tools trying to interfere with the politics? When did they succeed?

The reason I moved to Afghanistan in the first place, because when I came here in 2014, I was doing a story about young people. And I was amazed to see how this generation of youth, despite the war that was going on, when we were talking to them, they were so positive, so optimistic. They were hoping for a better future. They were going to build their country. Some of those guys that I was photographing eventually became my friends.

By now, six years later, unfortunately, some of them have been killed. And the rest, they all have left. Even the ones that told me they will never leave Afghanistan. They all have left.

“One of the negative impacts the past 20 years has had on Afghanistan is that it has turned the government into this corrupt, dependent, and somehow self-congratulating system that is now totally overwhelmed.”

- **KIANA HAYERI**



EPISODE 26

AIRSTRIKES IN EAST AFRICA

Catherine Besteman & Amanda Sperber
on U.S. Militarism in Somalia

May 2020

We conclude our season with a topic that gets far too little attention in the mainstream media: the history of the U.S. military's involvement in Somalia, a country deeply mired in terrorism, poverty, and war. Mark Hannah sits down with Nairobi-based journalist Amanda Sperber and anthropologist Catherine Besteman to unpack why the United States is waging an unofficial drone war in Somalia and explores the history and human costs of this conflict. They discuss the evolution of al-Shabaab (an affiliate of al-Qaeda), civilian casualties from U.S. airstrikes, and how Somalia exemplifies what many consider to be the strategic and moral failings of America's global war on terror.

ability of Somalis to lead more secure lives. In fact, the airstrikes seem to be doing just the opposite.

They're pushing people out of their home areas and into internally displaced prison camps. They're compromising the ability of farmers to continue to produce food for the country. They're enhancing the outrage of ordinary Somalis against the United States because the airstrikes are killing people, in some cases, it seems, indiscriminately. So, one wonders, why persist with this?

The only reason I can come up with is because it's something that we know how to do. It's something that exists in [America's] playbook. I think sometimes about Paul Krugman's idea of zombie ideas in economics; those ideas that economists keep pivoting to, to apply over and over again, despite the empirical fact that they don't work and that they may actually cause harm. So, I wonder if airstrikes, drone strikes, and bombing campaigns are zombie ideas, military zombie ideas that we pivot to over and over again because they're, so to speak, in our arsenal, even though they don't seem to be producing the effects that we hope they will be.

HANNAH: Amanda, when we're dealing with numbers and raw quantities, it can be kind of abstract. You have the benefit of either being on the ground, seeing some of the "collateral damage," or hearing stories from survivors.



Amanda Sperber is a Nairobi-based investigative journalist whose work focuses on Somalia and the consequences of U.S. drone strikes. Her most recent article is "Ilhan Omar Demands Answers on Civilian Deaths in Somalia."



Catherine Besteman is an anthropologist at Colby College whose work focuses on U.S. militarism in Somalia. She is the author of the upcoming book *Militarized Global Apartheid* (2020).

MARK HANNAH: One wonders why the United States has ramped up its airstrikes on Somalia in recent years. It's unclear whether there's any empirical evidence to suggest that al-Shabaab is threatening our interests in any acute way. Why has the Trump administration escalated its strikes on Somalia? If to some extent, as you mentioned, [the strikes are] stirring up resentment among the public in the region?

CATHERINE BESTEMAN: This is the signature question. Why is the U.S. engaged in an unofficial war in Somalia right now through the medium of drone strikes, airstrikes, that have dramatically increased in number over the past two years? It's a question I sit with and I think with all the time, because they do not seem to be having the intended effect, which is to reduce al-Shabaab's power, reduce al-Shabaab's scope, and enhance the

“[U.S. airstrikes] are enhancing the outrage of ordinary Somalis against the United States because the airstrikes are killing people.”

– CATHERINE BESTEMAN

AMANDA SPERBER: When I first started reporting, I talked to one man who lost a family member in an airstrike. And then after the airstrike happened, al-Shabaab returned and accused the man of being a spy for the Americans. He was then detained and tortured, and he had a really, really bad injury. He was shot in the leg a bunch of times so he couldn't walk. Eventually, he was released from detention.

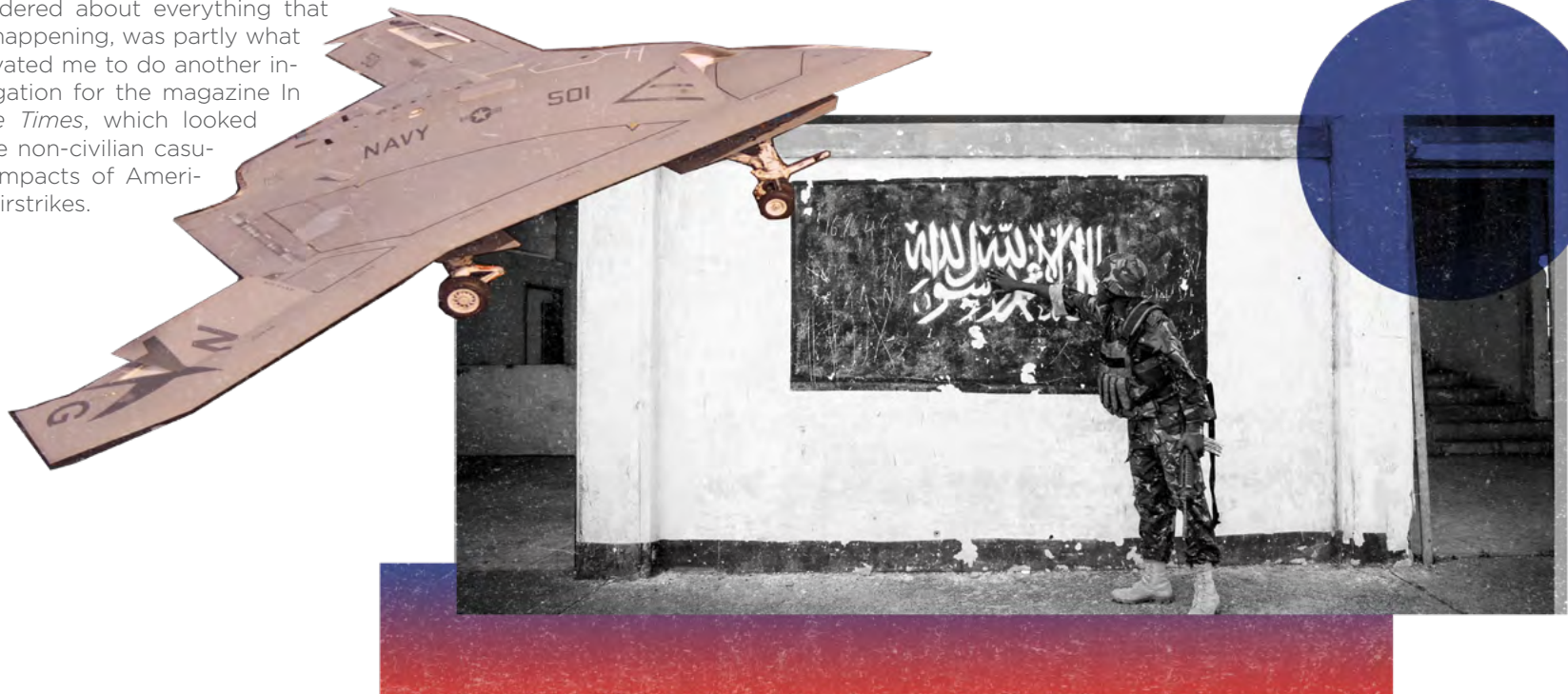
Talking to him was really painful. He seemed bewildered about what had happened. He was upset about a family member. And then he'd gotten detained, so he was caught between both sides. I reported on his story as part of my first article on U.S. airstrikes in Somalia for *The Nation*. His story, and a few others, but his story in particular, just because he was quite dignified butv seemed so bewildered about everything that was happening, was partly what motivated me to do another investigation for the magazine *In These Times*, which looked at the non-civilian casualty impacts of American airstrikes.

HANNAH: There are more and more reports coming out from your sources on the ground in Somalia, as well as from different NGOs, international NGOs, about civilian casualties. Is that right?

SPERBER: Yes. Amnesty International has done a tremendous amount of reporting on this as well and is continuing to follow this issue. More and more Somalis are starting to speak out on social media about this. There are also a lot of Somali analysts who are in Mogadishu who are speaking out about this on social media as well. So, it's becoming increasingly awkward that the picture that's been painted by so many different people is in stark disparity to the picture that's being painted by AFRICOM.

HANNAH: Do you think there is any appetite for elevating this as a political issue as we head into the 2020 presidential campaign? Do you think that there are implications, political consequences, either positive or negative, for the Trump administration for ramping up its fight against al-Shabaab?

SPERBER: No, probably not. I think like in the Middle East and in Somalia, Somalis are guilty until proven innocent in the eyes of most of the public. It would be a hard sell to get people excited about this. Also, I think in general, something I've felt as a reporter is that I will continue to keep reporting on what's happening in Somalia. But I sort of get the sense sometimes that the people who are going to know whether this is working or not already know. And it's understood in the foreign policy community, even among those that might be considered more hawkish and lean to the right... if you were to grab a drink with one of them, they would say that they know that airstrikes don't work or that airstrikes kill civilians. There are times that it feels like this audience is kind of saturated in terms of, “well, that's understood,” but we're on autopilot and going to do it anyway.





ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

EGF is a nonpartisan nonprofit organization which works to connect people to the geopolitical issues shaping their world. Fostering a greater understanding of the issues broadens the debate and empowers informed engagement. EGF makes complex geopolitical issues accessible and understandable.

www.egfound.org



NONE
ABOVE OF THE