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FOREIGN POLICY AND THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION: A POST-DEBATE  
ANALYSIS

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## P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. INDYK: Good afternoon. Thanks very much for joining us today. I'm Martin Indyk, the director of the Foreign Policy Program at Brookings. We are here to do a post-mortem on the presidential foreign policy debate of Monday night. We are very proud and happy to be able to do this in collaboration with that other foreign policy institution, foreignpolicy.com. Susan Glasser, the editor-in-chief of *Foreign Policy*, the magazine of global politics, economics, and ideas, has kindly agreed to moderate this session.

My job is just to introduce everybody, which I will do in a moment. But, unfortunately, one of our panelists, Suzanne Maloney, has been called away with a family emergency and so, just at the last moment, hasn't been able to turn up, and so I'm going to have to try to -- I can sit in her chair, but I'm going to have to fill her shoes, which will not be easy, but I'll do my best.

As I said, Susan is editor-in-chief of *Foreign Policy*. She was a long-time foreign correspondent and editor for *The Washington Post*. During her tenure at *Foreign Policy*, the magazine has won a number of awards for its innovative coverage, including three digital national magazine awards, and was recently honored for online general excellence by the Overseas Press Club.

Joining us on the panel is Bob Kagan, author most recently of *The World America Made*, a bestseller referenced by President Obama in his State of the Union speech. He is also author of a number of other best-selling books, and in particular his first volume on the history of American foreign policy called *Dangerous Nation*. And we are eagerly awaiting the second volume.

MR. KAGAN: Thank you, Martin.

MR. INDYK: Yes. (Laughter) Next to him is Ken Lieberthal, who is a senior fellow in the Thornton Center on China. Ken was just until recently the director of the Thornton Center and before that a distinguished academic from the University of Michigan. He's also spent time in government, particularly as senior director for Asia in the National Security Council during the Clinton administration, and has written a large number of books on China. His most recent monograph, which I highly recommend, is on strategic mistrust in the U.S.-China relationship, a volume which he wrote with his Chinese counterpart, Wang Jisi, which has got a lot of attention both here and in China.

And then there's Bruce Riedel, senior fellow in the Saban Center for Middle East Policy, had also a position of senior director for the Middle East in the National Security Council under President Clinton and President George W. Bush. He was director in the NSC under George H.W. Bush. So he's served through three administrations in the White House. But on top of that, he served as deputy assistant secretary of defense and he's had a 30-year career in the CIA, which means he probably started there when he was about 10 years old.

MR. RIEDEL: It's a secret program. (Laughter)

MR. INDYK: And the author most recently of *The Search for Al Qaeda* and *Deadly Embrace*, about the relationship between the United States and Pakistan.

So, without further ado, Susan, the microphone is yours.

MS. GLASSER: Thank you. And thank you, first of all, for hosting

all of us. I can't think of a better group. Now that Martin has intimidated you with all of their credentials, I think we can take them out on the field and have them show their stuff. There's so much to chew over, I think, from the other day and I promise you that we will try to get into bayonets and horses and, you know, all the important new information that we've learned about American foreign policy in the digital 21st century. (Laughter)

We won't confine our conversation, of course, just to looking back at the debate that I'm sure you all watched, but also just more generally, you know, I think we've had now a real interesting resurgence of foreign policy in the midst of this campaign in a way that we perhaps didn't expect it to be front and center in October. That might have been the October surprise actually, it's just that we're even talking about foreign policy now in the campaign. And so, you know, we're going to try to have a real conversation and also to make time to get to all of your questions later in the conversation.

And I thought I'd start out actually with something we're about to publish on [foreignpolicy.com](http://foreignpolicy.com), which is a great quiz. I suggest all of you take it. Fifteen quotes from the two candidates, you decide which candidate said them. (Laughter) And I think you'll find if you go through the exercise that there's a sort of "Obamney" thing going on here in this campaign. And there's been a convergence, a meeting in the middle, if you will. I think it was Bruce here who wrote in a piece after the debate looking at what did the two candidates actually have to say about the war in Afghanistan, that there was a stirring defense given the other night of Barack Obama's Afghan policy. It was given by Mitt Romney.

MR. RIEDEL: It was not only a stirring defense, it was a more passionate defense in some ways than we've heard the President give and certainly far more passionate than the Vice President has ever given on the policy in Afghanistan. (Laughter)

MS. GLASSER: Well, he actually just changed the policy in the vice presidential debate, right, so. Now, I promise that we are going to start the conversation actually not talking about the Middle East and Afghanistan, but on China. And, Ken, because as you probably gathered the other night, and we did a content analysis of this and it's absolutely true, most of the rest of the world gets pretty short shrift in the American foreign policy debate these days, and it's pretty much all Middle East and Afghanistan all the time. I think the number one country that was referenced with 38 different mentions was Iran the other day. So we're going to try not to do that and start out with the one other country that the two candidates have been clashing over, China. Although actually they weren't clashing the other night, were they, really? They were actually more fighting to out-saber rattle the other.

MR. LIEBERTHAL: You know, I had agreed to write a blog for fp.com that would appear right after the debate. Given the time constraints I actually wrote the blog before the debate. (Laughter) But I was prepared to modify it --

MS. GLASSER: True confessions here.

MR. LIEBERTHAL: -- after the debate and 10 minutes, you know, picking up a phrase here, a phrase there to make it look like I was just a very fast

writer, you know, after the debate. I went back and what I wrote, you know, frankly, the two candidates have had very clear positions on China that they've been very consistent on. I went back and looked at it right after the debate and I had to rewrite almost the whole thing because most of it was on what Romney said and Romney said none of the above in the debate. He said the opposite. So this was a -- it wasn't only a repositioning on detail, it was a fundamental repositioning of how he would approach China and what he sees as the future with China. So I'm not quite sure what to say about Romney's policies other than that they are flexible. (Laughter)

MS. GLASSER: The answer is which ones, right?

MR. LIEBERTHAL: Yeah, exactly. But I think -- but let me make two comments about kind of what Romney has been saying consistently and that you saw some hint of here. One is on the economic side his view has been, and I think remains, that China is a bad actor economically; that they will become a better actor economically if we show them that there's a new sheriff in town. Because they export to us five times as much as we export to them, we are so critical to their future that if we kind of hit them hard or make clear that something serious has changed, they will change their behavior. And his particular way of doing that, for starters, is to declare China a currency manipulator on day one. Right? That's the opening gambit in the belief that the Chinese will improve their behavior if he does that. I think, frankly, that is a fundamental misreading of what will happen.

It's a fundamental misreading because, first of all, a lot of

countries, dozens of countries, use governing capability to influence the values of their currency. We have never designated any country anywhere as a currency manipulator. So this is a unique act.

Secondly, four years ago or five years ago that would have potentially made enormous sense. China ran a current account surplus of over 10 percent of GDP, absolutely wild by international standards. It's now down to 2.1 percent of GDP. And our own policy globally is anything under 4 percent of GDP shouldn't be considered a matter of real international concern.

But thirdly, and very -- and thirdly, by the way, you declare them a currency manipulator and all that requires is that we engage them in a discussion of currency, and we've done that every day for years. So there's no there there substantively. It's purely symbolic.

But perhaps most important, the Chinese are electing a new leadership almost the same week that we are. And the new man coming in, Xi Jinping, has a huge set of domestic problems that he needs to focus on and he needs to build his credibility in China domestically after he gets into office. In China, you don't campaign for office publicly and say what you'll do. You campaign after you've already been given the office and then build your capacity to get something done. And coming in -- therefore -- if we declare them a currency manipulator on day one, Xi will retaliate very strongly. And he will for two reasons: one, to teach the new U.S. President that this is the wrong way to get cooperation from China, but even more importantly, he cannot come into office and be seen in his initial days in office as caving to U.S. pressure and hope

to have credibility to implement the domestic changes that are his real agenda. So this is a wrong assessment and risks getting off to a very bad start; worst case, escalating into a real trade war because I'm almost sure the retaliation would be on the trade side.

The one other thing I would raise is on the -- Governor Romney has proposed repeatedly, repeated in this debate, that he would make a 4 percent of GDP standard the minimum for what we ought to be spending on defense. In the past, not in this debate, he's linked that very directly to the U.S. pivot to Asia, and the fact that we seem to be too hollow on the military side of that pivot, not really credible. You know, regardless of that, I think raising -- positing a 4 percent of GDP expenditure on military equipment and capability actually runs the risk of making us less credible in Asia. And there's a lot of doubt in Asia about how credible we are over time. Why, ironically, would this make us less credible?

First of all, the big question in Asia, as the big question everywhere -- and I, frankly, am delighted both candidates ended up saying this - - is whether we get our domestic house in order because getting on top of our domestic problems is absolutely crucial to America's long-term capabilities internationally. And so that's what people in Asia are looking for. And committing to a large increase in defense expenditure without saying where that money is coming from doesn't sound credible in Asia.

And then secondly, everyone in Asia worries about a U.S.-China confrontation across the region developing where they would have to make a



choice between one or the other. They love playing off the low-level tensions between us to their benefit. They want to participate in China's growth and have the U.S. there to cover their back, you know. All that's fine, but if you move toward real confrontation, you're getting deep into the discomfort zone of everyone in the region, friends and allies and those that we're less close with. And ratcheting up defense expenditures, talking about it in terms of because we've got to counter China and Asia, is pushing the wrong button in terms of getting enthusiastic support for our judgment in the region. So those would be my two concerns about Romney.

I think Obama has generally followed a pretty good China policy. I, frankly, have some problems with his critique of Romney's investments in China or Bain's investments in China. You look at the rules, you look at the market, and those investments are good investments. You know, you want to change that, change the rules or change the prices in the markets, but I wouldn't -- you know, personally I can see the political value of criticizing those investments, but in the real world I don't think that criticism is very valid.

MS. GLASSER: So I think one of the tricks, right, about this debate the other night is that we talk about having a pivot to Asia, but in reality events keep sucking us right back into the conflicts that we've already been enmeshed in over the last decade and the challenges of the broader Middle East. So I want to get everybody to sort of weigh in on that and whether we really even have a pivot to Asia.

But first I want to ask Bob, you know, among your many credits

Martin did not mention that you've also played a role at various points in advising the Romney campaign. So I'd like to ask you not in any official capacity, but just to give us your own context and analysis for what is the foreign policy view of Romney that we heard in this debate? And more broadly, from your sense of it, what kind of a foreign policy President will he be? What were we meant to hear out of that debate the other night? And do you really think his positions are quite as flexible as all that?

MR. KAGAN: So as an official advisor you'd like me to tell you what the truth is as opposed to what he said. (Laughter)

MS. GLASSER: Well, you know, we do have a large audience here, but, you know, I mean --

MR. KAGAN: Yeah, I'm sure this is all off the record, so it's fine. (Laughter)

MS. GLASSER: Pay no attention to those TV cameras, please.

MR. KAGAN: Right, the cameras and all that. No, but, I mean, the truth is I think that -- and this is the truth -- that the Romney you saw in this last debate is closer to the real Romney. You know, as we all know, there was a -- you know, campaigns tend to emphasize for much of their time, it's normal to emphasize, you know, vast distinctions. But the truth is I believe that Governor Romney is, in fact, very pragmatic, very non-ideological in his approach to things. If you look at his background and what he's done his whole life, it's usually about, you know, trying to come to agreement with people and trying to analyze a lot of data, which he's very good at. I think one of the things that was impressive about

his debate was that, you know, he has a good mastery of issues. And so I think that the Romney you saw in that debate was very much the real Romney.

And I don't quite accept a lot of what's being said. I mean, I know it's an Obama administration talking point that somehow he changed his approach to things. I think that's not true. On China, you know, I think that what Ken's referring to is the fact that he said we have to work with China, we have to cooperate with China. He never said anything other than that. He spoke -- he's been consistent in terms of his desire to, you know, try, as he says, to make China play by the rules economically, but never indicated that he didn't think we also had to work with China and learn how to cooperate with China. And so I don't think that was new.

And by the way, in terms of the attitude towards, you know, how to deal with what China's doing with American businesses and other problems that we have, this is the complete bipartisan consensus. I don't think that President Obama disagrees at all about it. And there may be tactical differences about how to approach it, but I think there is broad agreement, including, as we're figuring out gradually, by American businesses themselves who are feeling increasingly pressed in China.

So, you know, I think -- and let me just pick up -- can I say one word about the Navy issues? I mean, it's certainly true that you have to strike a balance between frightening everybody and reassuring everybody. And I know that it's this administration's view that what a lot of these countries out there that are worried about China want to see is some visible American presence, and the

issue of a naval presence is obviously critical to this. So you have to be able to strike a balance where you're providing the reassurance without being overly provocative.

I must say I thought that while the bayonet line was a great laugh line, especially if you're an Obama supporter it was like a hysterical laugh line, but I thought it was mistaken. Because as it happens the U.S. Navy is not asking for bayonets and horses, but it is asking for more ships than it currently has. And the problem with the pivot, and it, frankly, is a problem, Ken, that you've identified yourself, is an inability to come in behind it with any real increase in American capabilities, which I think the region is looking for. So in that sense, again, I feel like, you know, Romney's approach is a practical answer to a very practical problem. And I think the fact that he also combined all this discussion with a statement that the United States does need to cooperate with China and work with China to a degree as possible, it struck the right balance it seems to me.

MR. LIEBERTHAL: Could I just add a word?

MS. GLASSER: Sure, and then I want to bring Bruce in actually to get at this question of whether Obama --

MR. LIEBERTHAL: No, absolutely. I know the rest is going to be on the Middle East, so just --

MS. GLASSER: No, no, no, absolutely. Absolutely.

MR. RIEDEL: Let's talk about China.

MR. LIEBERTHAL: There is no one in the foreign policy spectrum in the U.S. who says that we should not engage with China. There's no one who

says we shouldn't worry about the downside, which I am prepared for that. But there are vast differences in balance and those differences are consequential. And Governor Romney, I think, quite clearly shifted his balance substantially between those two, you know, kind of what your body language and what it is you choose to talk about as top priority. He shifted his balance very sharply from saying there's a big downside with China and, boy, we've got to step up to the plate on that, we can do it economically this way and militarily that way, to starting off saying, you know, we can have a terrific partnership with China. He was more effusive than Barack Obama's ever been on that. And then said -- you know, never mentioned the military side, but said, you know, on the economic side, you know, we have to do what -- basically he said what Barack Obama said.

So I agree with you, the economic challenges from China, their unfair practices are serious, they're real and they're serious. But still, there are significant differences across that continuum. And I'm sorry, I think Governor Romney shifted quite a bit in how he positioned himself, you know, during this debate.

MR. KAGAN: Well, I don't agree, but I think you should be pleased at where he is instead of worrying about where you think he was.

MR. LIEBERTHAL: I just hope he stays there.

MS. GLASSER: Okay, so for the record, I think Bob is saying he didn't change his position, but, even if he did, he changed it in your direction.

MR. KAGAN: That's not what I said, but. (Laughter) For the

record, that's not what I said.

MS. GLASSER: Okay, fair enough. Bruce, did Romney change his position on Afghanistan, do you think?

MR. RIEDEL: Yes, he did a little bit. Let me step back for a minute. Not to dispute anything Bob said, but I think the governor came into this debate with two very important objectives in mind. First of all, he did not run as a foreign policy candidate. Foreign policy was not an issue in this debate. He is, by definition, very much in a difficult situation going head-to-head with the President of the United States when the President of the United States is commander in chief, and he has no real foreign policy experience. He doesn't claim that he has any foreign policy experience.

The level playing field that you saw in the first two debates when they're talking about the economy and he can say, yes, I'm a businessman, I know how to make jobs, didn't exist here. So the first thing he wanted to do was establish that he was in the play field. That he knows what he's talking about. I think you saw that classically in his comments on Pakistan. He gave us a short little tutorial on Pakistan. I was very pleased because I think most of the talking points actually came from my book, so it reinforced my self image, of course.  
(Laughter)

But he said things like Pakistan has the fastest growing nuclear arsenal in the world. It will soon surpass the United Kingdom in terms of number of nuclear weapons it has. It has an intelligence service that's out of control. It has a very difficult internal balance. He was, in essence, saying, look, I know

what I'm talking about. I'm capable of doing this. I think that was very important.

Subpoint of that was, don't make a mistake. The one thing that could have killed Mitt Romney in this debate was if he'd mispronounced someone's name or if he didn't know the name of the president of Pakistan as George Bush didn't know back in 2000. Then he really looks like --

MR. KAGAN: And look what happened to him. (Laughter)

MR. RIEDEL: Yeah. Well, he lost the popular vote. (Laughter)

The second thing I think he wanted to do was show he wasn't George Bush and that he wasn't going to engage the United States in more military conflicts. And he did this on Afghanistan, and that's where he did change his position, but not a whole lot. He said in the past that he thinks the 2014 deadline was a mistake to announce in advance, but he accepts that we're there now and that NATO has agreed we're on a 2014 date.

What he did this time was he more enthusiastically embraced it. He said not only is the 2014 date the right date, but it's going to be a successful date. We're actually going to get out of Afghanistan in a successful way by then. At that point I found the look on President Obama's face fascinating because I think President Obama was saying: "does he know something about our Afghan policy I don't know that he's this confident it's going to turn out this way"? (Laughter)

I think in the end we can go back and forth on all of the substance. I think on the two critical issues that the governor had to do -- establishing that he knows what he's talking about, that he's done his homework, that he's read his

briefing book, and showing that he's not a George W. Bush waroholic eager to get us into another war in the Middle East -- I think he came out pretty well. And for him, that's perfect because he wants the debate to go back to it's all about the economy.

MS. GLASSER: Yeah. I want to go to Martin on two more Middle East issues, which are both the Iran conversation that happened in the debate and also the one that didn't, and then why we didn't hear more one way or the other about Middle East peace, which seems to be this sort of great vanishing issue of this foreign policy in the election year. But further to Bob's point, he certainly is right on the bayonet thing. And not only that, but I believe the *Wall Street Journal* has looked up the numbers and proven that we actually have over 400,000 bayonets now currently in our military, which is more than we had.

MR. KAGAN: And we need more.

MS. GLASSER: Yeah. So apparently we have plans to acquire a hundred thousand more, so I'm not really sure what we're after for that.

MR. INDYK: How are we going to pay for them?

MS. GLASSER: Maybe things aren't going well in Afghanistan.

MR. KAGAN: And the horses are next.

MR. INDYK: But how are we going to pay for them? I guess it's on the website. (Laughter)

MR. KAGAN: Tough crowd here.

MS. GLASSER: I've read that website.

MR. INDYK: It doesn't work. No bayonets.



MS. GLASSER: Iran.

MR. INDYK: Well, anyway, yes.

MS. GLASSER: Romney really didn't mix it up, yeah.

MR. INDYK: Well, first of all, on Middle East peace, because that's all I really care about.

MS. GLASSER: How's that going?

MR. INDYK: Not good and part of the reason it's not going good is the President decided to shut down any American involvement, I guess about 15 months ago. And lo and behold, it's Governor Romney who mentioned the words "Middle East peace," which I was quite stunned about, but that fit with what Bruce was saying. It was the other side of not wanting to appear a warmonger was that Romney also wanted to appear as a peacemaker or at least talking about peace rather than war. So in his prepared final statement he mentioned peace three times in his first two sentences, and I think that was very deliberate gaming of an audience that he was trying to effect, which is women because he needs to close the gap between Obama and himself on women. And so I think that that's what the focus groups told him and that's where he was.

But it's not the only time that he's talked about Middle East peace. In his speech, his last foreign policy speech at the Virginia Military Academy, he also suggested that Obama had been a failure when it came to promoting Israeli-Palestinian peace. And with a new President, he said, will bring a new day. I don't know what he meant by that, but it kind of seemed to imply that he might want to engage in peacemaking.

Of course, the President, we heard nothing about that on his side. It was all Israel all the time because he had a constituency that he needed to address, and that is Jewish voters in Florida, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. And it wasn't just that Iran was mentioned how many times, 34 times?

MS. GLASSER: Thirty-seven, yeah.

MR. INDYK: Thirty-seven times. Israel was mentioned 22 times, but mostly by the President because that was part of his gaming of the debate.

Now, on Iran, again, what we saw was something that is not new to this campaign, that the President and the governor are actually really essentially pursuing the same approach to how to deal with the challenge of Iran's nuclear weapons aspirations, which is crippling sanctions and negotiations. And what you saw in the debate was a reiteration of that. Of course, Governor Romney challenged the President saying that, you know, yes, they are crippling sanctions, but Iran is further along today than they were four years ago. The President could have said, but didn't, that that whole centrifuge program started under the watch of a Republican President, George W. Bush. But, in essence, they both agreed there should be crippling sanctions and Governor Romney suggested a few more things that could be done.

I know that the Obama administration has in mind some other things that are going to be done. There really was not much difference. The issue of whether Romney was going to oppose Iran acquiring a nuclear capability versus Obama saying he won't allow Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon seems to me to be a nuance of not great significance unless one or other of them is going

to define what they mean by that. And neither of them has an intention of doing that precisely because they don't want -- they both understand that the American people are weary of wars in the Middle East. Obama wants to be the President who ended wars in the Middle East on his watch and Romney doesn't want to be the challenger who's talking about starting new ones.

And so notwithstanding Bibi Netanyahu's intervention in this campaign with his, you know, insistence on a red line, which was kind of an invitation to his friend Governor Romney to draw a red line, the governor did not do so. And that's for the reasons I've already suggested.

MS. GLASSER: Well, I think you bring up really an important point, which is that this isn't just a debate that's aimed, as much as we would like to think it is, at the foreign policy community here in Washington, but more than anything it's a debate about domestic politics because, in the end, candidates only talk about foreign policy to the extent it can help them do the one thing that is their job at that moment, which is to win an election.

And, you know, there's such a long history, as we all know, of candidates saying one thing and very, very quickly doing another when it comes to foreign policy. And that's almost inevitable, right? The inbox intervenes, reality collides with, you know, grand plans. Barack Obama, of course, in 2008, was going to engage with Iran and North Korea. That hasn't really happened yet. George W. Bush campaigned in 2000 and said he was going to absolutely, positively get rid of Bill Clinton's naïve and idealistic embrace of Boris Yeltsin and the personal in Russia, and he was going to have a very hardheaded, calculating

policy towards Russia. And then he went and he met Vladimir Putin and he looked into his soul and, you know, the rest is history as they say.

So, you know, I --

MR. INDYK: And all of them were going to move the embassy to Jerusalem.

MS. GLASSER: Absolutely, absolutely. You know, there's no bigger friend of Israel than any American presidential candidate. (Laughter) And so, I mean, this is sort of a delicate question, but I want to actually ask all of you, so how seriously, given this well-documented history, and we have to reasonably expect that whether it's Obama or Romney a fairly significant percentage of what we're hearing on the campaign trail may bear little resemblance to what the actual foreign policy is of the United States over the next four years, so, you know, how do we put this conversation in that context? Which part do you think they're going to throw out the window as soon as January comes around?

MR. KAGAN: I think that, you know, if I had my way the presidential candidates would do as little as possible to lock themselves into any particular policy when they're running for office because, as you say, they invariably can't do what they say they're going to do and they create expectations that are mistaken. And I think that what they ought to run on in general are basic principles that they believe in. And by the way, since I also happen to believe that most presidents share the same basic principles in their approach, that doesn't necessarily mean you're going to get the biggest gap that you might want.

And I actually think that within some reason, I mean, there are a few things that both people have said they promised to do, I think they have left themselves some flexibility. And I think, you know, Martin, whether it was politically motivated or not, the benefit of where they are is that they've left themselves room. And let's just add to the rest of the agreement that I think Governor Romney was very clear that he also is, you know, interested in negotiations if that seems like a possible route, and he wants a diplomatic solution for Iran.

So that, you know, whoever is President come January, they have the options to look at these issues again, and I think that's very beneficial for everybody.

MR. INDYK: I would just add one thing, though, on Iran that I should have mentioned before, which is that the President said something in the debate last night which he hasn't said before, which was that the clock is ticking on these negotiations.

MR. KAGAN: Well, that's a good point, yeah.

MR. INDYK: And that he's not going to allow the Iranians to just play out the clock.

MR. KAGAN: But he may have been sending that signal to the Iranians as much as anybody else, although he also wants to -- as much as Bruce is right that I think the governor wants to reassure people, I think that President Obama has been wanting to make sure that he looks tough.

And let's not forget, I mean, just as long as we're on this topic,

we've been talking about Romney a lot, but I find the way President Obama has decided to run this year is also interesting, especially given people's expectations of Obama when he was elected. He basically has run as someone that you can count on to kill, you know. And let's face it, Americans want to hear that. And if they didn't want to hear that, he wouldn't feel compelled to say it. I think it's another thing that distinguishes, if I may so, Martian Americans from the Venusian and much of the rest of the world. But, you know, that he is willing to pull the trigger, kill Osama bin Laden, kill other leaders of Al Qaeda, use force has been his big message. So you've had this kind of ironic -- the convergences come from one guy who's trying to prove he can kill and the other guy who wants to reassure you that he's not going to be profligate and use the force.

MS. GLASSER: No, that's absolutely -- I mean, can you imagine coming down from, you know, Mars and 2008 Obama was replaced with 2012 Obama when it came to the subject of drones --

MR. KAGAN: Yeah, I actually thought Obama's very lucky that he didn't have to debate Obama.

MS. GLASSER: Himself, right, exactly. (Laughter) Okay, Bruce, I know you want to get in.

MR. RIEDEL: I think I largely agree with that. I would, however, point out one fact. In 2008, Obama campaigned very strongly on the point that if he had information that Osama bin Laden was in Pakistan --

MR. KAGAN: That's true.

MS. GLASSER: Yeah, that's right, very important.

MR. RIEDEL: -- he wouldn't hesitate to pull the trigger. I think, A, he lived up to his campaign commitment, which was extremely controversial at the time. It was attacked by his now secretary of state. It was attacked by John McCain as reckless and risky. But he lived up to it.

I think one of the things that's very interesting about this is that we are increasingly moving towards a foreign policy abroad which deemphasizes boots on the ground. We may have more bayonets than we've ever had before, we may have more boots, we may even have cavalry, but we don't really want to use them. And I think that that is at the heart of why we're not really that eager to go to war with Iran. We don't want to get into another war which could end up with boots on the ground. People don't like to say that about Iran, but wars have a way of getting out of control. So we've pivoted.

And Bob is right, we've pivoted to a new kind of warfare: drone warfare and cyber warfare. Both of these are brave new worlds. They're also covert programs. So it's a little difficult for presidents and their challengers to talk about a covert program without getting themselves into pretty sneaky and deep water.

Now, we have kind of collectively in the United States decided that the drone program, although technically covert, is now no longer covert.

MR. KAGAN: Well, certainly that was decided at some level at the White House.

MR. RIEDEL: At some level it has been decided. The President now threatens future dates for his daughters with a Predator flying over him, so I

think we've eliminated that the Predator is a secret.

MS. GLASSER: Well, it was never a secret to the people in Pakistan who were listening to the drones flying overhead.

MR. RIEDEL: That's right. That's right. And the President has certainly demonstrated a willingness to use it: over 300 lethal drone strikes in Pakistan; around 50 lethal drone strikes so far in Yemen; and I think we can anticipate lethal drone strikes in Libya and Mali in the not too distant future.

It's the cyber one, though, that I think is actually much more interesting because we now know, thanks to David Sanger from *The New York Times*, that we've engaged in a major cyber war with the Iranians in the last couple of years. And we now know, or we now have pretty good reason to believe, the Iranians are fighting back and going after our soft underbelly, which is our Arab Gulf partners, including especially the Saudis and the Qataris and their natural gas and oil installations. We're getting into an area which is really dicey and could lead to some really -- you want to know a surprise in 2013? What if the Iranians shut down the Saudi oil industry? Just shut it down, it doesn't work. What are we going to do about that? Are we going to shut down the Iranian? And then if we are, how are we going to get to Brookings in the morning and at what price is gasoline going to be?

This is a very important and significant new area. But because it is still a covert program, we're not having a really serious discussion at the public-government level about it. Fortunately, we're having it in some think tanks, but we're not having it laid out by our leadership.



MR. LIEBERTHAL: This might be an appropriate place to point out that not only are we not discussing these "covert programs" in the debates and that kind of thing, we aren't discussing most of the world and most of the issues that we're confronted with. That debate was -- you saw it in the outline of the debate agenda beforehand. This was two minutes for your world view and then Middle East for the next 80 percent of it and we'll end up with China and we're out of here. Right? No global climate change.

MS. GLASSER: That's right.

MR. LIEBERTHAL: You know, no global economics on any serious kind of -- I mean, nothing. So this is a very attenuated foreign policy agenda that's being brought into this campaign even on the margins.

MS. GLASSER: Yeah. Well, that's a perfect pivot point actually to wanting to bring in your questions to this conversation as well. Although, by the way, you will not be penalized if you ask a Middle East-related question.

MR. KAGAN: Why should you be different from everyone else?

MS. GLASSER: Exactly. So yeah, raise your hands. There are microphones, I believe. And please do give us your name and who you're with and make it a question. Thank you.

MR. KAGAN: And who you're voting for. (Laughter)

SPEAKER: Nobody because I work for Swiss television. I'm one of their correspondents. (Laughter)

MS. GLASSER: You're neutral on the wars. (Laughter)

SPEAKER: Well, we allegedly have Romney's money, but.

MR. LIEBERTHAL: But still, which state are you voting in?

SPEAKER: Switzerland.

MR. LIEBERTHAL: Which state are you voting in?

MS. GLASSER: Switzerland.

MR. LIEBERTHAL: It doesn't make any difference where you're from.

SPEAKER: But that would be a solution to the governance of the world if everybody gets to vote for the Americans' elections, but never mind. (Laughter) Anyway, the one question about the part of the world that wasn't mentioned, Europe, and do you think the Europeans should be sad/worried about this? And do you see any change in the relationship with Europe if Romney becomes President? Thank you.

MS. GLASSER: Good question.

MR. KAGAN: Well, I always feel for the Europeans it ought to be at least a mixed blessing because -- with an emphasis on the blessing. I mean, there's a reason why. One reason why Europe is not on the agenda is because Europe is not a dangerous place. It is not a place that is at war. Europe is at peace in a way that was unimaginable, you know, 60 years ago, 100 years ago. And so, you know, believe me, I don't think Americans are talking about the Middle East because they love the Middle East, so, you know, in a way I don't think Europe should be too troubled by it.

Now, the downside, of course, and this is real, is that American presidents and the American foreign policy community for that matter I think

wrongly, but does not any more look to Europe as the sort of *sine qua non* of foreign policy; that, you know, even though it's literally the case that if we want to do something in Libya we do it with the Europeans, if we're going to do something in Syria we're going to do it with the Europeans, that is not sort of in the front brain of American policymakers. And so that's the bad news.

And, you know, partly that's the Europeans' fault and partly it's a mistake on the part of American calculations, which is, you know, we're bogged down in the Middle East and we're fascinated by Asia. And it has led us to, I think, undervalue and forget, you know, a very vital set of partners.

MR. LIEBERTHAL: But indicative of the reality that big issues are not being addressed. Ironically, Europe and developments in Europe have run the risk of doing more damage to the United States than developments almost anywhere else in the world over the past year, and that continues into the future, and it didn't even get a passing mention.

MR. KAGAN: Well, that's because I'm sure neither candidate has the smallest idea of an answer from an American policy point of view.

MS. GLASSER: Well, but it also goes to what we think of as a threat, right? And if it's a threat, it's something that can be addressed with a bayonet, right? It's harder to talk about an amorphous euro crisis as a threat.

MR. RIEDEL: I think that's part of it, but I think both candidates realized the American people don't like to be told that the future of their economic wellbeing and the value of their home may be determined by what happens in Greece and Spain, and that their President really has nothing to do with how that

crisis is going to play out. That's not -- if you go up on stage and say I want to lead the world and I want to lead America except that on the thing that really matters to you -- how much money you have in your pocketbook -- I'm kind of irrelevant, I wouldn't vote for that guy. (Laughter)

MS. GLASSER: All right. So more questions. Here we go. Here you go, ma'am.

MR. APPS: Pete Apps from Reuters. And I'm a Brit and apparently you guys don't like it when you guys when we try and tell you how to run your country anymore, so I won't. (Laughter)

MR. INDYK: Any more than you like it when we tell you how to run the Olympics. (Laughter)

MR. APPS: That's okay. We thought they'd be a disaster, too. (Laughter)

Looking at the idea of American energy independence, I was really struck by the fact on Monday night both candidates were pretty keen on America having a forceful say in all areas of the world, even if they didn't put boots on the ground. And I'm not sure the majority of the American people necessarily feel that way anymore. If the U.S. is less dependent on the rest of the world for energy, is there going to be a rising isolationist argument and might it win?

MR. KAGAN: Well, this is our favorite dialogue.

MR. INDYK: I don't see any evidence of that. I'll let Bob talk about the history of American engagement in the world, but I do think we're going

through a phase here which we've seen before where war-weariness produces an unwillingness to support military intervention. And that phase passes, as Bob will tell you, when some new threat emerges and the all-American public turns around and supports intervention again. But, you know, one can expect that over the next 5 to 10 years there's going to be a resistance to that that the candidates reflected. I mean, even Romney when he talked about Syria, and in his speech he had said that he would arm the opposition in Syria, he kind of didn't really reiterate that, but he did reiterate there'll be no boots on the ground in Syria. So he's reflecting, I think, a sentiment there and that will affect him or Obama, whoever's the next President.

But having said that, I think that what we're seeing is not a neo-isolationism, but a tension between the need to actually pivot away from the Middle East to Asia where the greater opportunities lie and the greater threats to American interests lie. And the way in which the Middle East somehow is like a quagmire that keeps you -- sucks you in, sucks you down all the time, and Obama is more aware of that danger I think than Romney is. Romney seems to want to develop a whole new policy for shaping the Middle East and shaping views in the Middle East. Well, Obama tried that with his Cairo speech and that didn't work out too well. And if Romney tries it, he'll discover the same thing, I'm sure.

But the idea that energy independence means that we're no longer dependent on imports from the Middle East of oil or gas is something that is only just registering, not just amongst the American people, but I would say

within the foreign policy community, we're only just coming to terms with what that might mean. And by the way, it's not just only beginning to register here. It's only just beginning to register in Delhi and in Beijing, where they are going to be a hell of a lot more dependent on Middle Eastern oil in the next five years. We're going down to zero in the next five years; they're going up to 65 to 70 to 80 percent dependence. And our Navy and our American taxpayers are going to be paying for our Navy to secure their line of supply of oil from the Gulf to their industries. That, of course, does serve our interests.

But at some point in the next four years, the President, whoever it is, is going to adjust to those realities. One, that we do not import any oil or gas from the Middle East, even though our allies depend on it. And two, that the American people won't support going back to war in the Middle East with the exception of Iran, but that's about nuclear proliferation rather than about our interests in the Middle East. And those things, I think, will have an impact on policy, especially because we come back to what Bob and Bruce and Ken were saying, that we've got two candidates here who are pragmatists, who are not ideologists. They're not pushing an ideological policy. One's more realist, one's more progressive, but they're both pragmatists. And so I think those two realities are going to shape a lot of what they do.

And I believe over time there will be a shift of attention to Asia and that's partly because of the assertiveness of China and the nationalism that's growing there and in Japan and other places. But it's also because we will come to understand that we have an interest in the Middle East that does not require

the expenditure of blood and treasure in the way that we have expended it in the last decade.

MS. GLASSER: We're almost out of time, so I want to make sure we get at least one more question. Let me see here. Okay, in the very back there, standing up, sir.

MR. NIKURADZE: Thank you. My name is David Nikuradze. I represent Georgian television station Rustavi 2 here in Washington, D.C. I have a question to Mr. Kagan. Do you believe that there will be any changes in U.S.-Russia relations and in the reset policy if the Republicans will come to power? Thank you, sir.

MR. KAGAN: Yeah, it's good that you mentioned that because if ever there was an area where it seemed most likely that there's going to be shift, it would be in the nature of U.S.-Russian relations. Now, that's partly because, you know, President Obama made the reset such a core element. It was one of his great successes. He felt it was one of his great successes and he has clung to it, in my opinion well beyond the point at which it is continuing to deliver because I think U.S.-Russian relations are fundamentally on a more downward trajectory. But there's no question that a President Romney feels no similar attachment to the idea of good -- of, you know, the reset and that he's likely to take a somewhat more skeptical view of Russia than Obama.

Now, that having been said, I don't think that U.S.-Russian relations are going to be delightful even if Obama's reelected. I think that they are in for -- we are in for a period of real tension, partly because Putin himself is

making anti-Westernism a core element of his domestic political approach, you know, and so he drives it to some extent. So I think we're in for rocky times anyway, but I don't think there's any question that Romney is much more likely to take a kind of bottom-up review of U.S.-Russian relations across the board. And particularly, I would guess, President Obama has a great enthusiasm, it's one of the things I think he really believes in, on arms control agreements; may be willing to make a deal on missile defense, which is what Putin is concerned with, I would say probably more readily than Governor Romney is likely to.

MS. GLASSER: Okay. A final question right here in the front?

MR. FINAHKMA: Anton Finahkma. I was intrigued by the fact that Governor Romney mentioned Latin America. In fact, he mentioned it kind of as something as important as China in terms from an economic point of view. Was this something -- and it hasn't had much attention in the last couple of years -- was this something in your mind new or is this just something, okay, a candidate likes to say something fresh? Was this based on, you know, actually real plans? Maybe Bob has an insight into that.

MR. KAGAN: Well, I mean, again, often American presidential candidates mention Latin America. It's kind of -- it's like the last time they mention Latin America is in the -- but I think that there is actually a growing consensus, including within the Obama administration and certainly in the foreign policy and economic community, that, after all, the Western hemisphere is a tremendous economic engine right now, including on issues of energy given the growth of Brazil and others that, you know, this isn't a throwaway line anymore. I



think that actually in the new world that Martin is describing I'm not sure we'll actually pull out of the Middle East, but if Middle East is a little bit on the downward trend, I would bet that Latin America's on the upward trend. So I think in this case Romney's actually reflecting in a way a broad policy consensus.

MS. GLASSER: So I want to thank everybody for this conversation, which clearly could go on all night. And I think there's a million great questions out there. I do want to go back for a final lightning round to all of our panelists just to give everybody a sense and some takeaways in terms of will there be a difference between Obama's foreign policy the last four years and what might come of a Mitt Romney foreign policy? And what do you think their biggest difference will be, maybe aside from Russia, if we can agree on that? Bruce?

MR. RIEDEL: I can't help but say one last thing about Latin America. Every President's first foreign trip is to Canada, and in most cases that's also the last time they go to Canada is their first week or two weeks in office. (Laughter)

I think the biggest problem they have and that we actually had a follow-up question on the debate is what do you do in Afghanistan if the plan doesn't work? What's Plan B? How do we continue to put pressure on Al Qaeda in Pakistan if Afghanistan is collapsing around us? How do we avoid the imagery of an American strategic catastrophe in Central Asia, which will make the pivot look like a retreat, if not a rout? That's the question that both of them wisely decided not to answer, and that's the question I think they're really going to have

to deal with a lot more than we heard on Monday night.

MR. LIEBERTHAL: I'd make a couple quick points. One, in foreign policy Presidents find that they're extremely constrained. The world out there happens and you react to it, on the whole, so that it's very difficult to anticipate, frankly, whether they would react differently.

Secondly, if you look at Governor Romney's foreign policy advisors, they really run the spectrum from kind of Rockefeller Republican to the far right. And it's just very unclear who would be in his administration and who he would be listening to.

Thirdly, I think that -- I mean, I guess it was Bob mentioned earlier, a comment I very much agree with, you get in trouble during a campaign when you get very specific as to what you would do instead of more broadly in principle. And my worry about China is the one thing he said that's very specific is I'm going to name you a currency manipulator on day one. I think that would be a big mistake. My guess is he would back off from that, but if he doesn't, then I think we're on to a rocky path.

Broadly, it may be that there would end up being a distinction without a difference between these two men in foreign policy.

MR. KAGAN: Well, let me just end by responding to the neo-isolationist question, again that Martin also addressed. Because the real question is, are Americans willing to support this sort of unique role that the United States has played in providing public goods, you know, to the world? Which if you look at it in a narrow cost-benefit analysis, it never looked like a very

good deal. We've often been providing security to others without any obvious payoff. And so, you know, when you raise questions about the fact that the allies are the ones who are going to be benefiting from oil, not us, in the Persian Gulf, nevertheless that is the kind of bargain that the United States has made over the years. So the question is, are they going to stop being willing to make that bargain in various places around the world?

I'm going to say that there's not a lot of evidence yet that they are unwilling to make that bargain, broadly speaking. And if you looked at those two candidates, and I think we all agree up here that these guys were not out there to say things that they thought were politically unpalatable to the American people, Barack Obama repeated the phrase of Bill Clinton and Madeleine Albright that we are the indispensable nation; Governor Romney talked about, you know, what, for lack of a better word, is the exceptional role that the United States must play. There were candidates out there suggesting a different course, people like Ron Paul in the Republican Party and Dennis Kucinich on the Democratic side. And their support was like, you know, in the .5 range. These are the two candidates.

So if this is reflective of American opinion in any way, then I think there's reason to believe that there's still life in this approach to the world.

MR. LIEBERTHAL: I know we're at the end of the thing, if I can just add one quick comment that I had meant to make and I think is quite important. Five years from now or four years from now, the thing that will make the biggest difference in our role in the world is which of these men if elected will

do better on addressing our domestic economic situation.

MR. INDYK: I think, Susan, the primary difference between the two of them will be that Obama is more likely to use force to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons than Romney is. And that may sound a surprising conclusion, but, as Bob alluded to, Obama really does care about the nonproliferation regime and he really does care about preventing a nuclear arms race from developing in the Middle East. And he was the one who took containment off the table, even though Romney has endorsed that position, and basically left himself in a situation in which either he exhausts the negotiations and produces a decision by Iran to give up on its nuclear weapons aspirations or there's only one option left, which is a military option. And he's made clear, as we've seen in other contexts, that he's prepared to use force for a cause that he believes in.

I think Romney, because he's a realist, more a realist than a progressive pragmatist, could more easily live with the containment of Iran and classic deterrence of a new nuclear power than I believe that Obama can live with that.

MS. GLASSER: Provocative stuff and a good note to end on. This is a great conversation. I want to thank all of you for the smart questions and for listening, and for the great panel. Thank you. (Applause)

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