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WHAT AMERICANS THINK ABOUT
THE FIGHT AGAINST ISIS

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. WITTES: Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. Thank you all for braving the Arctic Blast to join us this afternoon for this event which has been months in the preparation about what Americans think about the fight against ISIS.

For those of you whom I don't know, my name is Tamara Wittes. I direct the Center for Middle East Policy here at The Brookings Institution. And one of the things we do in the Center for Middle East Policy is we host our Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World and that project is the organizer of today's event.

The United States finds itself now just four months into what we're calling the anti-ISIS struggle, one in which our leaders acknowledge will probably take years to play out. And along with the attention to the horrific violence that this movement has wreaked on Syrians, Iraqis, and others. Questions of momentum seem to dominate a lot of the media coverage around this new campaign.

Has the United States and the anti-ISIS coalition halted ISIS's advance? Is the Iraqi military retaking territory? Are the Kurds holding Kobane? It's these momentum questions that seem to occupy so much attention, at least here in the United States, but a lot of the questions I hear amongst our coalition partners and out in the Middle East have more to do with the U.S. commitment to this struggle.

After a hard decade of war in Iraq, having only just ended the longest U.S. combat operation ever in Afghanistan, the question I keep hearing is whether Americans have the stomach for another war of indeterminate length and scope against an ill-defined enemy that can shift to new battlefields, as we saw yesterday to horrific effect.

It's important as we evaluate this question of American commitment to ask ourselves, how do Americans understand this threat? And then to think about how

this struggle might play out, not only on the battlefields of Iraq and Syria, but here in Washington as Congress reconvenes to contemplate potentially authorizing, for the long-term, American military force against ISIS.

What exactly are Americans willing to do on behalf of the struggle and for how long? And it's to try to get a handle on those questions that we've convened today and it's to get a handle on those questions that Shibley Telhami, together with his colleagues at the University of Maryland, and elsewhere, put together a wonderful public opinion poll which went out into the field last fall and the results of which we are launching today.

Now, the first part of that poll we launched here at the beginning of December. That was focused on American public opinion about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and American efforts to resolve it. The second part of that poll is what we are revealing today: what Americans think about the fight against ISIS.

And I am truly thrilled that Shibley is here to offer these findings to you and that he is joined to discuss the significance of these poll findings by two wonderful colleagues. Shibley, of course, is not only a nonresident senior fellow of longstanding here at The Brookings Institution, but also the Anwar Sadat Professor for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland.

He is joined today by Susan Glasser, the editor of POLITICO, who was also the founding editor of *Politico Magazine*, editor and chief of foreign policy, and before that a highly decorated journalist at *The Washington Post* and at *Roll Call*. And along with Susan, commenting on today's poll findings we have our friend and colleague E.J. Dionne of the Governance Studies Program here at Brookings; also, of course, a columnist at *The Washington Post*; and a professor in the Foundations of Democracy and Culture -- such a wonderful title -- at Georgetown University, my alma mater.

So, Shibley will be coming up to present the findings of the poll and then we will bring Susan and E.J. up for a panel discussion. I want to just highlight, before we start, a couple of things.

First off, as an additional collaboration between Shibley and POLITICO today -- just now has gone live at Susan's paper -- an article that Shibley wrote based on his poll findings called, "Are Americans Ready To Go To War Against ISIL?" That is up on the POLITICO website right now and I commend it to all of you.

And the other thing I'd like to note, for those of you who are interested in joining a conversation about the poll on Twitter today, during the event and following, please Tweet using our hashtag #ISISpoll.

So, with that, I'd like to invite Shibley up to the podium. Thanks very much. (Applause)

MR. TELHAMI: Thanks so much, Tamara. And thank you all for coming on this cold day. Let me just say a couple of things by way of introduction about the poll and then I'll go right to the results.

This was sponsored by the Sadat Chair at the University of Maryland in cooperation with the Program for Public Consultation. It was done in the middle of November and it was two parts, as Tamara said. The first was on the Israel-Palestine issue and the second was on ISIL and Syria, which we will review today.

There are a number of people that helped with it; please read their names. I'm not going to mention all the names, but they were at the University of Maryland, at Brookings, and at the Program for Public Consultation.

Also, we have a sample of 1,008. It's a probabilistic online survey conducted by GfK. The methodology you can find online for those who are interested in that aspect of it. The margin of error after the waiting is plus or minus 3.4 percent. But

let me go directly into what drove the questions. First of all, what is it we're trying to get at when we designed this poll?

First, I have been really surprised by the fact that the American public, which was said to be war weary, basically because of the Iraq and Afghanistan war, and had opposed even a more minimalist intervention proposed by President Obama after President Obama told the American public that Bashar Assad had used chemical weapons against his own people, suddenly, after a few beheadings, was pretty much open to approving a certainly much more expansive intervention that was initially proposed against Syria. And now some are even open to escalation of that intervention.

So I know that one of the easy answers in conventional wisdom is that it's all about the beheadings. But the beheadings don't really explain it because, on the one hand, if it's about the ruthlessness of the beheading, we talked about chemical weapons in the case of Assad and the public was still reluctant to do it.

If it were about Americans, think about our conventional wisdom in the past when American soldiers were dragged in the streets of Mogadishu in Somalia in 1990. That was conventional wisdom that that was exactly why Americans want to stay out of it, not to get into it. So clearly that doesn't explain it. We needed to probe more. So we designed this poll, in part to probe a little bit more into what the thinking is of the public, and I'd like to share some of the findings.

Let me start with a finding that we shared earlier, but it's important to start with it, which is when you ask people about what are the most important threats facing American interests in the Middle East -- and we have the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Iranian behavior, instability in Libya, rise of ISIS -- by far, the rise of ISIS is number one. I mean, 70 percent of the public say it's number one. And in some ways that brings down the sense of the Iranian threat or even the violence in the Israel-

Palestine question.

By the way, that doesn't mean that those issues are not perceived to be a threat to American interests by the public. It is just so focused on ISIS and we give them only one choice, that by virtue of the elevation of ISIS, everything else looks less threatening in comparison.

So clearly ISIS has emerged as the principle threat, as Americans see it, in the Middle East. And that seems to hold across party lines. And you'll see in the poll there are huge divisions across party lines, particularly between Republicans and Democrats, but on this issue there is very little difference. You have 70 percent for Democrats, 67 for Independents, 72 for Republicans, so it's pretty consistent across party lines.

Now, the next question is, what do Americans want to do about it? And obviously, normally, when you ask a hypothetical question, you have to understand that it's hypothetical because it's not something they have to deal with immediately. And so we posed the question, what if the current effort failed? You could see, if airstrikes aren't enough to stop ISIS, would you favor or oppose sending U.S. ground troops to Iraq to fight against ISIS?

So what we find is -- and this is hypothetical -- so you find 57 percent say they're not open to it. You have 41 percent who favor. You have 2 percent who refuse. I'll tell you that my own sense -- when I say hypothetical and I'm posing it that way -- if the President were to go to the American people and says tomorrow, the airstrikes have failed, I'm asking you to send American forces to finish the job, I suspect the opposition would be greater. That is my interpretation of the hypothetical because when it's a real, immediate issue, they are much more conservative in the way they react to it.

And here is the interesting divide across party lines, and I think this is

huge if you look at it. Only 36 percent of Democrats and 31 percent of Independents would favor sending ground forces even if current efforts fail, whereas you have a majority of Republicans -- 53 percent -- who say they would favor it. Now, that is really an important finding and, obviously, very important for the political process, particularly in the primaries where candidates are going to define their positions on those issues. And you can see it's going to be quite a difference.

We've seen a lot of difference, by the way, on the Israel-Palestine question. A huge divide, particularly between Republicans on the one hand and Democrats and Independents on the other. We see this a little bit here.

Which of the following is closest to your view in justifying the possible use of American ground forces? So, we went to those 41 percent of people who said "I'm prepared to use ground forces if airstrikes fail," and we tried to figure out what is it, in their view, justifies the use of ground forces. And so, look at this. Yes, the ruthlessness and intolerance of ISIS is, in fact, a factor; 33 percent give that as the principle reason. But the number one answer is that they really see ISIS as an extension of al Qaeda.

They see it as just another manifestation of al Qaeda with which we are still at war, an unfinished business. So in a way, it's very hard for them to look at it separate from the view of al Qaeda and I think that's one reason why they highlight it. And that -- obviously 43 percent say that, well above the worry about the ruthlessness of ISIS.

Now, two other things I want to say about this particular graph. Now, if you look at the number of people who say what's justifying in their mind, their openness to deploying ground forces, is that it's an extension of al Qaeda. They don't give the possible threat to our most vital interests as a number one answer. Only 16 percent basically say that they see it immediately as a -- or even "can," because the question was

potentially a threat to America's national interests. That's not what's driving them in this particular regard. And certainly not -- look at how small the number is of people who say it's a perceived threat to our allies. Only 7 percent think that's the reason why we should be sending ground forces.

Remember, this is among the people who are prepared to use ground forces, not the whole population. There's a bit of divide across parties, but not all that much.

Now, I want to go to a second kind of question because we have understood -- I think everybody who does polling understands that on issues like this, particularly when there's no immediate choice that the public has to decide on and you are formulating some scenarios and hypotheses, the public is often conflicted and there are all sorts of issues that come into play. So we wanted to push it a little bit more to see the extent to which the public is open to involvement.

So we have the following scenario: The U.S. should stay out of a conflict with ISIS. The U.S. cannot determine the course of war in Syria and Iraq. Our involvement would be a slippery slope going from airstrikes to military advisors and, ultimately, to combat troops. On the other hand, we must intervene at the level necessary to defeat ISIS. ISIS not only threatens our allies. If it succeeds in expanding and increasing its control of oil resources, it will become a greater threat to our interests. So we asked them which one of those views is closest to your view? So, basically, just to see where they lean, obviously, in this regard.

And remember, the majority have already said that they don't want to send ground forces, but look at this. So, when you put this additional hypothetical with no reference to ground forces, you still get a majority -- roughly the same percent, 57 percent -- who say we must intervene at the level necessary to defeat ISIS. By the way,

this is not unusual. We see it also on Syria where, on the one hand, the public wants to do something; on the other hand, they don't want to pay the price when you put a real serious option on the table for them. And we see that here, as well.

I just want to go quickly to a few other questions. Which is the closest to your view? Even if we commit a significant number of ground forces, it is unlikely that we can defeat ISIS in Iraq and Syria. If we commit a large number of ground forces, we can defeat ISIS, but as soon as we withdraw they or something like them will likely return. And the third is, if we commit a large number of ground troops, we can defeat ISIS well enough so that it is unlikely they or something like them will return soon after we withdraw.

And what you see here is essentially only 20 percent believe that we can permanently defeat ISIS. And that even those who think ISIS could be defeated, a majority -- 56 percent -- say they will return soon after we withdraw, they or something like them. And I think that is the reluctance. That is really the principle reason for public reluctance to commit more because they think we're going to be dragged into an indefinite war and I think that's been the experience. I think that explains it quite a bit and we see that to varying degrees across party lines, as well.

Now, I want to just transition to another set of issues, which is about how the public perceives broad support for ISIS, particularly among Muslims around the world. Now, obviously this is an issue that has become tragically relevant given the massacre in Paris yesterday, where obviously a lot of people are asking that question, if there's a connection, whether communities in Western societies will be dragged into it, whether there will be operations on Western soil. So while we obviously didn't anticipate this kind of attack, we know this has always been on the public's mind, so we asked questions specifically related to it, and I'd like to review some of those questions here.

The first one is, what is your impression of how Muslims around the world feel about ISIS: most Muslims oppose it, most Muslims support it, or most Muslims are evenly balanced? And so, what you find here is that only 14 percent of Americans believe that most Muslims support ISIS, but they're really evenly divided roughly between those who think most Muslims oppose it and that most Muslims are evenly divided on ISIS. So it's a mixed picture.

However, when you look at it again by party it's interesting. Just look at the last category, which is most Muslims support it: 22 percent of Republicans say most Muslims support it versus only 6 percent for Democrats and 13 percent for Independents. So you can see that there is some kind of difference in interpretation that carries itself through much of the poll, even though here it's not as pronounced as some of the others.

How worried are you that a significant number of Americans will join ISIS in the Middle East? Now, you can see that you have 40 percent say they're at least somewhat worried. There's 8 percent who say very worried and clearly a majority is not worried. But when you ask, how worried are you that a significant number of Americans will join ISIS and carry out attacks in the U.S., surprisingly, you get a bigger concern. And so you have -- Americans are evenly divided on this one. By the way, you get 101 percent here only because, obviously, when we have .5 we actually go to the next digit. So it's not a mistake, it's a reporting issue. But you can see that they're exactly equally divided among those who are worried and those who are not worried about it. And that's interesting in and of itself.

And you see, also, that there is a variation across party lines that, by and large, you find a little more worry among Republicans than the rest. Do you think that support among Americans for ISIS is likely to be greater than support for al Qaeda, less than support for al Qaeda, or about the same? Now, the reason I inserted this is

because, of course, we had this question about how does this compare historically? We don't have historical data on this, so I don't know how they felt about it before. So I put in al Qaeda to see at least we had some rough comparison, whether they see it as more or less threatening than al Qaeda in terms of Americans joining ISIS and their fear about Americans joining al Qaeda.

And what we find is slightly less worried. It's roughly the same. You see 56 percent say it's about the same and 25 percent say it's actually less than al Qaeda, 17 percent say more than al Qaeda. So I think this again reinforces this other issue about what is it that's driving this propensity to want to intervene is they're clearly combining ISIS and al Qaeda -- a large number of the public is combining ISIS and al Qaeda in their mind.

I want to switch to a few questions about Syria and ISIS. And so one of the questions we started with is, which is the closest to your view: if we expend enough resources to train and arm the moderate Syrian opposition, it could stand up to both ISIS and the Assad regime; the Syrian opposition is too weak and divided, even if we give it significantly more resources it cannot effectively stand up to both ISIS and the current regime of Bashar Assad? So, basically, which one is closest to your view?

And here is what we see. Clearly two-thirds say the Syrian opposition cannot stand up to both Assad and ISIS, no matter how much support we give it. And that is kind of a starting point for their attitudes on that. We then go and give them two scenarios to evaluate and see how much support those two scenarios have.

One scenario is, Assad has killed his own people with chemical weapons and is as bad as ISIS. There is no way to resolve the war in Syria without removing the Assad regime. Do you find this convincing or unconvincing? Now, look at this: a lot of people find this very convincing. You have overall 70 percent say very convincing or

somewhat convincing. But then we give them an alternative hypothesis, which is -- I don't have the full scenario, but we should not fight the Assad army and let it fight ISIS. We had built a scenario around that, as well. And what we find is that still a majority agree with that, even though obviously somehow it's juxtaposed with the previous hypothesis, but fewer people agree with it. So we have 60 percent find this argument somewhat convincing as opposed to the other one, which was 70 percent.

So then we go to the bottom line arguments. So now that you've had these scenarios, do you think the U.S. military should or should not fight Assad's army in Syria? And so what you have is a large majority -- 72 percent -- said the U.S. should not fight Assad's army in Syria, so clear reluctance. Part of it is based on ISIS, I think, but part of it is based on other factors, as well.

I just want to end with a couple of issues that I call linkage issues, in part because when we did this poll, we had two parts, one on Israel-Palestine and one on ISIS and Syria, and we want to see some connection in there. And it was at a time when, if you recall, Secretary of State John Kerry was criticized for suggesting that violence on the Israeli-Palestinian front played into the hands of ISIS, strengthened them, and enabled them to recruit more people and to focus more attention on the U.S. and Israel in their effort.

That was an argument that he made and he backtracked, in large part because he got a lot of criticism for it, so we actually wanted to see whether there's anything to this, how the public sees this issue. So we asked directly, which one of the following is closest to your view? We gave them two options. One option is the escalation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is likely to be used by ISIS to draw more support among Muslims worldwide and to focus more attention on confronting Israel and the U.S. And the alternative hypothesis, Palestinian-Israeli violence will not affect either

the support for ISIS or its strategies. Its aims are independent of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and it's unlikely to draw more supporters because of it. Okay? So very clear two options that I think summarize the debate.

Here's what we get: a large majority, two-thirds -- 64 percent -- say they think the violence on the Palestinian-Israeli front would be used to increase support for ISIS. And 30 percent say it wouldn't.

We further, just very quickly -- by the way, here's an interesting thing about the divide between Democrats and Republicans, that, of course, the Secretary of State came more under criticism from the Republican side on this issue, but here's the interesting thing: while there's a slight difference between Democrats and Republicans, actually more Republicans think there's linkage than Democrats. Seventy-one percent of Republicans think there's linkage, actually, between those issues.

One final note. I'm not going to go through all of the issues, but it turns out, also, that in our polling which asked whether the American public wanted the U.S. to lean towards Israel, lean towards the Palestinians, or to lean toward neither side, we ran some correlations across tabs to see whether those who want the U.S. to lean towards Israel had different views from the rest of the population, where there is issue linkage, in fact, in the minds of some people. And we find that there is.

For example, among those who say they want the U.S. to lean towards Israel, 73 percent say the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is likely to be used by ISIS to draw support, so surprisingly even more people think that among that segment of the public. And it also matters for how people want to -- those who want the U.S. to lean towards Israel tend to also be more open to military intervention, sending ground forces, specifically.

Look at this slide in particular. So where you have among those who

lean toward Israel, 61 percent say that if airstrikes aren't enough, the U.S. should use ground forces versus only 31 percent for the rest of the population.

Now, I just want to make one point to add and I'm sure we're going to have that in the conversation, this is not an indication of a causal relationship. Most likely, it is part of a connected worldview and ideological worldview of the same people who want to intervene also tend to be pro-Israel. We see that, for example, in the evangelical community particularly, in the Republican Party, and we're seeing it across party lines. So don't be too quick to create a causal linkage, but it's nonetheless interesting.

Thank you very much for listening. I invite the panelists to the stage.

(Applause)

MS. WITTES: Wonderful. Okay, Shibley, thank you for giving us the highlights. There is quite a bit more in the packets that were available on the table and, of course, more discussion in Shibley's article for POLITICO that I mentioned earlier. And we'll be able to get into a lot of what this means up here in a conversation with all of you.

Susan, let me start by probing the idea that Shibley mentioned just at the outset. Well, okay, Americans went quickly it seems from war weariness and reluctance to engage to readiness to support this new struggle. At the same time, what we see in the results that were just presented is that Americans are saying, well, we have to do what's necessary to fight ISIS, to defeat ISIS, but we can't win in a lasting way.

These guys are -- either we're not going to be able to defeat them or they're going to come back as soon as we leave, but we have to do it anyway. How do you understand that contradictory sentiment?

MS. GLASSER: Well, you know, thank you so much, Shibley, and to

you, Tamara. I think I'm glad you started with that because clearly there's a lot to unpack politically around what this means.

And, you know, in a way, I think there's the superficiality and the thinness of the support for what we're doing is reflected in the fact that, you know, this is -- first of all, it's a very amorphous, what is the "it" even that we're talking about? And so I think, you know, you have to consider we're basically talking about a war without a name and all the attendant kind of political consequences that come with that, which is to say I'm struck by the broad, but clearly not deep at all, support for whatever it is we think we're sort of doing.

The same thing with the bipartisanship. You have this, on the surface, very striking appearance of bipartisan consensus. You know, you have over 70 percent who appear to be absolutely fine with the policy we're conducting. And yet, at the same time, basically there's a complete cynicism around, A, the idea that it's actually going to accomplish much and, B, when you start to talk about, okay, well, if it doesn't accomplish anything, what should you do, you immediately open up that fissure that I think is going to be the fissure in American politics around foreign policy that we're talking for the entire arc of this presidential campaign that's about to begin.

MS. WITTES: Okay, great. And I definitely want to get back to that. It's Washington and we can't avoid talking about the 2016 race even though it's only January of 2015. But in many ways, I think that this poll has interesting implications for where that debate will go.

But first, E.J., let me ask you, maybe one way to understand what looks contradictory or what looks like a reluctant or ambivalent, I think, from Susan's description, commitment is that it's the hard-won lesson of the last 13 years, that, well, we're not always going to win. We're not always going to achieve our goals, but

sometimes we've got to get in there and get dirty anyway. Is that one way to understand this?

MR. DIONNE: I think that is and I think Shibley's poll includes a lot of material that suggests that even Americans who would be sympathetic to intervention think the results might not be good. And I think that is one of the lessons that people drew from Iraq.

I just want to sort of underscore what I see as a very interesting contradiction or ambivalence in the survey. And if you remember the numbers, I'll just repeat them. There were two different questions that produced two different answers.

If you asked the question, "If airstrikes aren't enough to stop ISIS would you favor or oppose sending U.S. ground troops," 57 percent opposed. That's a dovish majority. But when you asked, "Which of the following comes closest to your view: we must intervene at the level necessary to defeat ISIS," 57 percent say yes. That's a hawkish majority, which means something like 16 or 18 percent of the people in the survey gave answers on one question that did not seem to match the answer on the other question.

And I just want to suggest two things. One is I do think some of that is an Iraq hangover. But the other is that I think there has been a profound ambivalence about intervention from the very beginning. And I went back for something else I'm doing. I ran across this recently and I went back and looked at a Gallup poll before we intervened in Afghanistan. Now, this was a war broadly supported after 9-11. The Gallup poll found that --

MS. WITTES: This is a poll after 9-11?

MR. DIONNE: A poll after 9-11, in November of 2001. So this is when President Bush had a broad consensus in support of the invasion. And indeed, 80

percent said yes, 18 percent said no. But then Gallup went underneath the numbers and of that 81 percent, 22 percent were reluctant warriors. And they found those -- they classified them that way because they said they would not have supported intervention had 9-11 not happened.

So combine the 22 percent with the 18 percent, you're already up, even at the moment when Americans were most interventionist, you have 40 percent who are either doves or reluctant warriors. And then when you took apart the rest, there were only 22 percent they found who were consistent hawks, who would have been willing to intervene before.

So, you know, I think that when we look at American opinion there is this deep underlying reluctance to intervene even in circumstances when most Americans have a gut sympathy for the intervention.

And one other point, to go to your original questions, if you remember Shibley's slide, "Which of these comes closest to your view," 22 percent said flatly we're unlikely to defeat ISIS, but this is where Iraq really comes in, 56 percent said the U.S. can defeat ISIS, but they will return. Only 20 percent thought we could permanently defeat ISIS. So that the war, I think, the Iraq War, has created a kind of pessimism about the -- or let's put it another way, there is no longer an excessive optimism about what American power can achieve.

MS. WITTES: Interesting. Shibley, I want to ask you about E.J.'s comments on sort of a longstanding tradition of reluctant warrior sentiment in the American public.

MR. TELHAMI: Yeah. Well, first of all, on E.J.'s last point, which I think is key, is sort of, you know, how people assess the prospects because we have a lot of literature in IR separate from polling. Right? We have international relations theories

about why publics, why particularly the American public, suddenly says I've had enough. At what point do we say we don't want any more of this?

And a lot of theories have suggested it's actually a link to their assessment of whether you can win or not because you can pay a price, you're prepared to pay a price up to a point, and obviously the assessment is there's no real clear winning here. I mean, that's clear. That's obvious. Iraq is one case, but even Afghanistan I think people don't really see a particular win. So I think that's undoubtedly influencing the public mood.

But going back to the reluctance, undoubtedly, I think that, by and large, I think the American mood -- I mean, remember, particularly after the end of the Cold War, you know, I mentioned the Mogadishu case of 1990 when we had these soldiers dragged in a very ugly way. Remember, this is a time when we are the sole superpower. We're in the middle of celebrating that. The Cold War ends the year before, we are the mighty power everybody is -- you know, we could lead, right, and yet the public says, instead of saying let's go after them, says pull out. Because actually the public's instinct that the primacy of America wasn't to intervene more, but to look more at home. This is why Bill Clinton came here.

And so I think that instinct is, in the public not to intervene, is there, but then what happens is they assume that America is safe. And the minute they think there is a threat or they feel there is a threat, they're conflicted. And that's what we see, a lot of conflicted attitudes in the poll.

MS. WITTES: Okay. So it's very interesting because both of you are really talking about how Americans define America's role in the world, that we're not there to sort of tromp around and wreak our will. As long as we're safe, we should let things go. And 9-11 changed that not because of how we think of our role in the world, but

because of threat.

And here I want to come to what I found striking. Maybe it wasn't striking to all of you, but 40 percent of Americans are worried that a significant number of American citizens will join ISIS and attack the United States. Now, we're going to release a paper here at Brookings on Monday on the question of foreign fighters going and fighting in Iraq and Syria and the threat that poses to the United States and Europe, but we haven't seen a large number of Americans running off to fight ISIS.

Susan, where do you think this is coming from? Is this because the President talked it up over the summer because the intelligence community was out there and saying this was a real problem?

MS. GLASSER: Well, I mean, I think this goes -- this is really important. First of all, this is about the first mention of Barack Obama's name in this conversation, which I find very striking and I want to get back to that in a second. But just directly to your question, you know, the survey I think makes a fairly convincing case that across party lines people are, in fact, associating ISIS with al Qaeda. They do believe and they do see it as an extension of al Qaeda.

And my guess is, I don't have the historical data from Shibley's work, but my guess is that we also would see similarly high fears around the possibility of an attack inside the U.S. homeland from al Qaeda. In the post 9-11 era those numbers have been quite high even given the fact that there have not been many subsequent attacks.

So I see it as consistent with, you know, we're willing to have even what might be much harsher response to a perceived threat even if there's a very low risk of the actual perceived threat here at home, and that seems to me to be consistent with what we've seen from the American public. And clearly, people do believe that this is either an offshoot of al Qaeda or the logical extension of the radicalization of a small

segment of this part of the Middle East. So, you know, to me that seems very much connected with our anxieties around this faraway conflict that has managed, even in a small way, to manifest itself here.

Barack Obama. The thing I would say that's interesting to me about the survey is that it kind of reflects the inherent unresolved conflicts, contradictions in the administration's policy. In many ways, you could almost say that he is either representing and reflecting or has designed a policy that more or less, intentionally or not, reflects the ambivalences and ambiguities and uncertainties of how Americans see this situation. He's basically very much in line with, yes, we're worried about it, but we're only willing to do so much. You know, a wink and a nod, right, that's been what he has conveyed to the extent he's spoken, which is not very much, about this conflict.

More or less, the president has kind of made it clear, it seems to me, that he doesn't think that we're necessarily going to be defeating ISIS any time soon. He also doesn't think and he's also made it very clear he's not going to be going to war against the Assad government any time soon. And so I think that's just something interesting to reflect upon, too.

MS. WITTES: Well, I --

MR. DIONNE: Can I just say something --

MS. WITTES: Yes, yes.

MR. DIONNE: -- on your question.

MS. WITTES: And then I want to come back to Syria.

MR. DIONNE: Just briefly on Obama. I mean, I think Obama's position reflects pretty well where the country is, which is the country wants to act on ISIS, but it's reluctant to get too involved in the effort. And it also shows why the President didn't push ahead to get authorization to strike Syria when he wanted to or at least why the Congress

didn't seem -- we'll never know, but didn't seem prepared to give him that.

And when you look at the numbers in the survey on Syria, opposition intervention is enormous and it crosses party lines. There's almost no partisan difference on that.

But I was really struck, as you were, by that enormous number who believe that Americans are going to fight with ISIS. I mean, I was thinking of that old rock-and-roll song, you know, "Paranoia strikes deep. Into your life it will creep." And I would love to see some work within the survey about, you know, which Americans believe that. If one thinks that number is high, think of what that number might be like if you took the survey tomorrow morning after what happened in Paris.

MS. WITTES: Yes.

MR. DIONNE: And I just need to say I've been a journalist all my life, but I think anybody who cares about free expression has to be horrified and stand in solidarity with the people of that magazine. And we can perhaps talk about that a little bit, but murder doesn't settle arguments. It ends them, it ends lives.

But imagine Americans looking at that, and it does appear that the attackers were French, if I'm correct about the news, somebody correct me, or had a citizenship. You know, will that number go up? Will that increase our paranoia that is already very substantial? And on the one hand, I look at that number and say I don't share that view. I'm not worried and particularly when one looks at the history of the American Muslim community, which is a historically moderate community, a historically very successful community in American life.

So the odds of that happening in large numbers strike me as very small, but we look at a horror like this and I think people say, all right, do I have to check that view? Is there something wrong with that? But it was a very big number.

MS. WITTES: Yes, a striking number.

MR. TELHAMI: May I just --

MS. WITTES: Yes.

MR. TELHAMI: Yes, just on this because I think you're probably right if there is a poll today or tomorrow after the massacre in Paris, it'll probably go up. I'm not sure it'll go up a lot, actually, because I think in the American public mind they have generally differentiated between what's happening in Europe and what's happening in America.

MR. DIONNE: That could be right.

MR. TELHAMI: And that's one. But the second thing is that number is high, for sure, 40-some percent. But if you look at it closely, the number of people who say they're very worried is very small.

MR. DIONNE: Yes.

MR. TELHAMI: And, you know, you can attribute that almost to ideological because -- some of it, not all of it. The 8 percent I think is the only -- and, also, when you then have a rough comparison with al Qaeda, if anything it's slightly less than what they thought al Qaeda's capacity to recruit Americans was. So in a way, yes, it's high, for sure, and that does tell you something, but it's not as intense as -- we should be careful not to over-interpret it.

MS. WITTES: Okay. So in other words, we're not in the public opinion environment we were in that immediate post 9-11 era, where people were willing to contemplate a lot of things on the basis of their threat perception.

MR. TELHAMI: Right.

MS. WITTES: I want to come back to the point that Susan made a few minutes ago, which is that it seems that President Obama has actually done a pretty

masterful job of reflecting public opinion, at least as indicated in this poll, in his policy as he's triangulated the demands from the intelligence community, from allies in the region, from American public, and from Congress, in dealing with the question of ISIS and American military engagement in Iraq and Syria more broadly. So, okay, the American public says Assad is an awful guy. He's done terrible things, but the Syrian opposition can't defeat him even if we help them, so maybe we shouldn't overinvest in that. And the U.S. military shouldn't try to defeat him. That's not our priority.

So each of those three findings I think came out of different parts of your poll, Shibley. If Obama has, in fact, triangulated well, then, number one, where does that leave Congress as it tries to think about authorizing this fight? There are, of course, those in Congress who would like to authorize a broader fight, including against Assad, and there are those in Congress who want to tie this administration and the next administration's hands as much as possible, including on issues like ground troops where it looks like they'll have some support. So that's one question, it seems to me, is what does an AUMF -- an Authorization to Use Military Force -- look like if Congress is going to reflect it as public opinion?

Second, what does this say about the fight that is largely within the Republican Party over foreign policy between more interventionist views and more reticent, if you will? Rand Paul versus John McCain, if you want to put it in very rough terms. We have an ambivalent public. Does that favor Rand Paul? Does it mean that John McCain has already lost the argument with the American public? How do we interpret the way this will play out going forward?

E.J., you want to start?

MR. DIONNE: Sure. I think one of the paradoxes for President Obama -- and this was even more obvious before the election when his numbers were lower; his

numbers have recovered some -- where you seem to have Obama's policy matching public opinion pretty well and yet the approval of his foreign policy was way down. Now, I think there were a couple of things that were going on there.

One is Republicans would disapprove President Obama probably if he could change straw into gold and said there would be something wrong with the gold. And so there's just a deep partisan feeling against President Obama.

But the other thing is Americans want two things at the same time. They do not want a disorderly world. They do not want the rise of groups like ISIS. And they don't want us to do too much to get intervened in ways that are going to hurt again. It's almost -- what it reminded me of, looking at the survey, is this old piece of political science. Some of you probably know Free and Cantril's famous observation that Americans are operational liberals, but ideological conservatives. They don't like government in theory, but they actually like a lot of the stuff government does and some of the stuff government gives them.

Similarly, Americans are ideologically interventionists, but operationally cautious. And I think that's what these numbers --

MR. TELHAMI: And you see that right there. That's exactly right.

MR. DIONNE: So you see that right in our faces here.

MR. TELHAMI: Yes.

MR. DIONNE: And so for the President there is this challenge where the Americans want somehow for him to make the conflict -- these troubles go away, but don't necessarily will all the means that might require.

And the Republicans, clearly they are the group split most in this survey. "If airstrikes aren't enough, would you favor or oppose sending U.S. ground troops?" Fifty-three percent of Republicans favor, so a hawkish view still prevails --

MS. WITTES: Barely.

MR. DIONNE: -- but very narrowly, 46 percent opposed, which I think points potentially, if Rand Paul gets in the race, to a very interesting debate inside the Republican Party because there has always been a strong interventionist/libertarian/realist view within the Republican Party and Rand Paul is going to try to speak for that view. And it's probably the case that it's not a majority, but it's an awfully large minority.

MS. WITTES: Susan.

MS. GLASSER: Well, and the poll also points out, I totally agree with that, that there is an ideological component even within that fractured Republican Party where support for Israel is much higher. And it's higher, support for Israel, higher among evangelicals, which we were talking before the panel, which has gone up over time as a proportion of the most fervent supporters of Israel in U.S. politics is evangelical. And that complicates the election even further because I think you're talking about potentially candidates in the presidential race whose foreign policy views may or may not line up with the very strong evangelical support that's going to be required in places like Iowa, for example.

And so I think what we're looking at, number one, is that foreign policy is likely to be a bigger issue in the 2016 presidential campaign for these reasons, perhaps even than it was in the primary season in 2012, for example. And so I think that already seems to be how it's playing out.

Number two, the support for Israel, of course, is much higher across the board in American politics with Democrats and Republicans than it is in Europe, to get back to our previous conversation. And I think that's very important when you consider what the aftereffects are going to be of this horrific attack in Paris. They're very likely to

play out very differently among the European public, both in France and more broadly across the European Union, both because this is a neighborhood issue for our partners in Europe in a way that makes it a very different -- you know, it's much more comparable to something like this happening in Canada, you know, than it is to how our reaction to it is going to be.

And also, there is just a really different attitude towards the divisions and fractures in the Middle East that exist in American politics because of that really rock-hard support for Israel across the political spectrum. They have some fraying that's interesting, and we can talk about it separately, in the Democratic Party obviously in recent years about, you know, what our attitudes are. But, you know, talking about 2016, certainly I think that's, in many ways, a Republican story. Although remember that it was Hillary Clinton when she was Secretary of State who teamed up back doors with David Petraeus and worked and lobbied President Obama unsuccessfully at that time to do more both to support the Syrian opposition and to intervene in a way that Obama has never been willing to do.

And that actually -- my final point, right, goes back to this question of did Obama design the Syria policy that the American public wants? It may well be that he did so, but the American public would probably disapprove of itself if it was President.

(Laughter)

MR. TELHAMI: If I may just --

MS. GLASSER: Yes.

MR. TELHAMI: -- on this issue because, I mean, the consequences for the American elections and particularly the Republican-Democrat divide on foreign policy, which is striking across the board, I certainly believe that foreign policy will be a major issue in the campaign and not because it is for a lot of Americans. It is because I think

the President is relatively popular on other issues and if the economy continues to do it, his numbers are not very good on foreign policy and that's going to be one that will be picked on by the Republican side.

But that's going to change the dynamics because what we see is that while the Republicans are somewhat divided on some of the issues, including the intervention using ground forces in the Middle East, the gap between the grassroots Republican Party and the leadership in Congress isn't very wide. The gap between the grassroots Democrats and the leadership in Congress is wider on foreign policy, in part because the Democrats are playing to national politics and being put on the defensive by the Republicans. We see that on the Israel-Palestine question especially, where the more striking is that you have a completely different outlook among the grassroots of the Democratic Party and opposition that's been taken by the leadership.

So it's going to be very interesting to see how this is going to play itself out in the primaries, particularly the Democratic Party, but also the Republican Party. Before you aim for national election, I think it's going to be an issue.

But the final point I want to make, you've suggested or I think it was E.J. who initially suggested that maybe the policy on Syria was calibrated in some ways. It fits nicely with the public sentiment roughly, sort of, you know, the ambivalence about all the different components. I would say even the Iran policy is calibrated that way because one of the things that comes out of this poll is that because the public suddenly sees ISIS as the main threat, it lowered the --

MS. WITTES: The salience of everything else, yes.

MR. TELHAMI: -- sense of the Iranian threat. And it gives the president -- and, therefore, even the insinuation that Iran could be possibly helpful in dealing with ISIS, actually helps the president because that's where the public is. So in some ways,

that, too, plays not only to the sentiment of the Democratic Party, but even national priorities, including Republican. So it'll be interesting to see how the Republicans play that out in the elections.

MS. WITTES: Okay, so --

MR. DIONNE: By the way, my hunch is that the policy isn't -- and since I seem to have said this, it wasn't like the administration took a poll and pursued this policy.

MR. TELHAMI: Right.

MR. DIONNE: I actually think Obama won the election because the very ambivalence he feels is actually similar to the ambivalence that the country feels. But Susan is right --

MS. GLASSER: It's an organic link, not a constructive link, yes.

MR. DIONNE: -- that the public doesn't always like the results of the very policy they support. That's not -- I mean, that's happened before.

MS. GLASSER: Well, they're also skeptical that it will work.

MR. DIONNE: Yes, right.

MS. GLASSER: In fact, they're convinced that it won't work. That's what I think is interesting about it --

MS. WITTES: Yes.

MS. GLASSER: -- is that they support the thing that they don't think is going to do anything.

MR. DIONNE: Yes.

MS. WITTES: Although, you know --

MR. DIONNE: But they don't think the other thing will work either.

MS. WITTES: No, that's right.

MR. DIONNE: So they're pessimistic.

MS. WITTES: That's right. They don't like A, they don't like not A.

MS. GLASSER: Yes, right.

MS. WITTES: And I have to say, as somebody who worked in the first term of the Obama administration, that this is something that I think is very deeply engrained in a lot of the people who came in with the President. And it is partly an Iraq hangover, but I think it's partly much deeper than that, which is a keen sense of the limitations of American capacity to accomplish things, particularly, but not only, using force in the world; that we try. We may have good intentions, we may sink tremendous resources into it, but it often -- in fact, it mostly -- doesn't work. And I was struck over and over again by it while I was in the administration and since I've left, this sense of incapacity and the way that that constrains willingness to attempt. This is not dare and dare greatly.

It's also not, importantly, a caricature that I think many in the McCain camp of the Republican Party put out there. It is not sort of post Vietnam, America's a bad actor, it's a malign actor in the world. It's a belief that, no, America is a benign actor. It's just not a very capable actor. You know, we're not bad, we just suck. (Laughter) And I think that's a pretty powerful sense also among the American public, as these numbers reveal, and, therefore, something that I think that coming in sense of the Obama administration has only been reinforced by what they've experienced in office and by what the public is telling them as the problems mount and mount.

I want to just go to --

MR. DIONNE: Can I recast that just one section?

MS. WITTES: Sure.

MR. DIONNE: Because I don't think the public's ambivalence is stupid. I

actually think --

MS. WITTES: I don't mean to say that it is.

MR. DIONNE: -- the public's ambivalence is -- no, I know you didn't say that, but I think it's an intelligent ambivalence. And I would kind of recast -- you were in and I was not, but I'd recast the administration's view just a little bit, which is to say there are some things even a power competent power can't achieve even if they put in vast numbers of resources. And I think that is a lesson that a lot of people drew from Iraq, which is that if circumstances on the ground are not in a situation where an American intervention could then lead to X, Y, and Z happening and a happy result, then all the competence in the world and all the resources and all the human beings that we put in, including the lost lives, we still won't get the result we want, therefore, a certain amount of caution is in order. And I think that would be my sense of what the kind of --

MS. WITTES: Fair enough.

MR. DIONNE: -- ambivalent view of American intervention right now comes down to.

MS. WITTES: Fair enough. And also, I think an appreciation of how much more complicated the world is today.

MR. DIONNE: Yes, some things are really, really hard.

MS. WITTES: Some things are really, really hard.

Okay, I want to just get to one more point before I open it up to all of you. And Shibley, you mentioned this in your opening presentation that there is, especially on the right maybe, in those cross-tabulations at the end, the last couple slides, there's an ideological continuity across issues, whether it's Israel-Palestine, Syria, and ISIS. Can you help us understand a little bit what this constellation looks like? It's not neoconservative.

MR. TELHAMI: Right.

MS. WITTES: It doesn't seem to be partisan. How do we understand it?

MR. TELHAMI: No, it's really, really interesting because we see it in the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. And when I probed on the Middle East specifically, it's interesting what you get. I mean, on the Republican side the most intensely held views on foreign policy that tend to be conservative come out of people who classify themselves as evangelical or born again; a significant percentage of the Republican Party right now, nearly half of the Republican Party, so this is not a small group. But a lot of those views, a worldview, if you wish, comes out of that. Now, you know, this is kind of -- it requires deep analysis as to how this group -- obviously they're diverse, I don't want to suggest they're not diverse, but overall on foreign policy they tend to be much more in agreement.

On the Democratic side, I suggest that there is something that you might call a human rights community that has emerged. I bunched it up. I even tested it to see whether, for example, people who are expressing views on Arab-Israeli issues or Syria issues are really doing it because they care about Israel or the Arabs or because they're taking sides or because they care about America's strategic interests. It turns out the number one concern for much of that constituency is human rights.

And so there is a community where the reference point isn't necessarily specific issues or even -- and what goes with that is a particular interpretation. It doesn't always tell you about whether you should intervene or not because you can take it both ways, but I think there's a worldview, and maybe multiple worldviews, within each party.

And, therefore, I think it wouldn't be surprising that people are not analyzing the relationship between issues -- it's good for Iran or good for ISIS or good for Assad -- that they, on the whole, have a propensity to answer in a particular way because

of the worldview they have. Yes, we can do it. Yes, we can defeat Assad. Yes, we can defeat Assad and ISIS and Iran at the same time. And so you have some people who actually feel those -- you know, take these views and you have people who say we can't do anything, forget it.

So what I'm suggesting is while obviously we need to focus on, what E.J. suggested, on the small segment that sways from one side to the next. We're starting off with people who have roughly entrenched views that come out of a worldview, not so much out of analyzing the particular strategic consequences reaction. And I think that's clear in my mind. That's why I suggested that we shouldn't jump to conclusions about cause and effect when we look at correlations in these results.

MS. WITTES: Okay, great. Let me open it up for questions from the floor at this point. I'm just going to reiterate our house rules.

Number one, please wait until you're called.

Number two, please identify yourself before asking your question.

And number three, one -- singular -- question.

Thank you very much and we'll start right over here.

MR. KATTOUF: Ted Kattouf, former U.S. ambassador to Syria. I'm going to get the question pretty quickly, but to paraphrase Dick Cheney, I think before the Iraq War or whatever, he said even if there's a 1 percent chance or less that terrorists or Iraq gets their hands on weapons of mass destruction, we have to go all out, we have to make 100 percent effort. And I wonder, Shibley, if you had included a question that said something to this effect.

What I'm getting at is a lot of Americans seem to have an exaggerated fear of terrorism and ISIS and what could happen to them and their families and communities, but we keep sending the same people over and over again to fight a war

that we say we can't win. So the question is, if you had included in your survey how would you feel about this, if a draft was reinstated and somebody close to you was going to possibly be sent to fight this war that you're in favor, how would you then feel about it? I'd be interested in that. It seems to me it's become too easy for people of hawkish inclinations to say I'm a little bit concerned, so I think we ought to go and send the 82nd Airborne.

MR. TELHAMI: Yes, and do you want to take one at a time?

MS. WITTES: Why don't we take one more, if you don't mind, Shibley, and then we'll come back. So in the third row here. Yes.

MS. CAGRI: My name is Ilhan Cagri and I'm from the Muslim Public Affairs Council. And the question is that in spite of the fact that it's mostly Muslims in the case of Kurds, Iraqis, Syrians fighting against ISIS, there is sort of rumblings within at least certain sectors of the media here and in social media that Muslims are somehow not doing enough to counter ISIS. So I'm wondering if you actually included that kind of information or probed for that within your survey and what your findings were.

MS. WITTES: Good, okay. Shibley?

MR. TELHAMI: Well, let me start with Ted's question, which is a good one in highlighting kind of the choices that people face. And as I said in my opening remarks, usually the more realistic the option is and immediate to them, the more conservative they become, undoubtedly. It doesn't have to be about the draft.

As I said, you know, when you're given the hypothetical what if the airstrikes are not enough, would you then support it, that's a theoretical yes. If tomorrow, as I suggested, Obama says they didn't work, I'm going to send troops, you're going to get fewer number of people who say I'm supportive. So we have to keep that in mind. There's always a connectedness with the reality.

And yet, let's also be realistic. I mean, the President asked them to strike Syria from afar, you know, just by shooting missiles, punitive, and they said no. The President said I'm going to send my Air Force and some logistical support to Iraq and Syria for the first time, and they supported him. So the public does sometimes support. The question is, what is the limit? It's not always -- and that wasn't just hypothetical. That was a real question posed to them.

Now, on the second question, I haven't asked that question and I'm sure there are others who have. I mean, this is something certainly often is debated and, you know, it's already debated in our pages, sort of, you know, "are Muslims doing enough?" And I suspect, regardless of whether they are doing or not doing enough, you're going to get probably a large percentage of people who say probably not. I mean, I wouldn't think a majority, but I would think that you would get a large number of people who would take that position, just like a lot of people are worried that there would be Americans who would join. I would expect that.

That obviously doesn't mean that's true. As you know, there is a whole debate, all kinds of condemnations of this. And even in France, I mean, E.J. talked about "we're not like the French," and we're not, obviously. But the French, you know, when you look at the Muslim French, they're overwhelmingly moderate. Most of them are secular. Most of them don't even want to have anything to do religion altogether, like the rest of the French population. So the fact that you have these criminals who are conducting these awful attacks is not representation of -- you know, you can't lump it together.

There is a problem, obviously, in some segments of the community that people are dealing with. So objectively, I think it's a question of where you place the emphasis, you know, and who's doing what in terms of fighting.

But if you want to look for voices who are condemnation, you can just look from Al-Azhar in Egypt today to leaders across the Arab and Muslim countries to certainly community leaders, including imams in various communities standing and going -- so you have condemnation. I don't think that's going to matter because the issue -- those people who are carrying out these horrific attacks are only using religion as an instrument. They're killers and their aims are political. And I'm not sure that "delegitimizing" them by the mainstream is necessarily going to be effective.

MS. WITTES: Well, it's interesting, too, the gap between I think the intelligence community, both here and in Europe, their understanding of the Muslim communities within their borders and the percentage that are radicalized versus the vast majority who are opposed to such radicalization and the perception of the public. Clearly there's a big gap there.

MR. TELHAMI: Right.

MS. WITTES: And Jim Hoagland, I think, had a wonderful piece in the *Post* that came out this morning about the challenge the French government faces in responding to this because they're going to face contending pressures. It's very polarized. We'd already seen a lot of strengthening of a very right wing, anti-Islamic, anti-immigrant political forces inside France. And inevitably, partly by design, the guys who did this are stoking the growth of that sentiment.

MR. DIONNE: Just two quick points, one on the French. With a last name like mine, I'm not knocking the French. (Laughter) What I was saying is what I do think is the case --

MS. WITTES: But the Québécois knock the French all the time.

MR. DIONNE: -- is that in -- Québécois, yeah. No, but, in other words, when, Shibley, I was talking about American Muslims are not like French Muslims,

specifically what I meant is in class terms, the class position of American Muslims is very different on the whole than the class position of Muslims in France, and that France has had a very large group of poor, relatively poor, unemployed Muslims to a degree that is not the case of the American Muslim community.

And on this gentleman's very good question about -- which I do think the whole issue about the fact that we don't have a draft, the fact that very few members of Congress have sons and daughters in the military -- there are a few -- is important. But I didn't read this poll as terribly hawkish. And even on the question, "We must intervene at the level necessary to defeat ISIS," where you got 57 percent, the alternative was worded very strongly in a way that I think pushed some people into that one, "The U.S. should stay out of the conflict with ISIS," which got 30 percent. I think a lot of people may have drifted to the more hawkish answer because their view is we shouldn't stay out, but we still don't want to send ground troops.

So I didn't read this as -- I saw a certain determination about ISIS, but not a really hawkish result.

MS. WITTES: Interesting, though, that number, that 39 percent, is higher than you get on the Chicago Council's broad question of should the U.S. -- is it better for the U.S. to be involved in world affairs or to stay out of world affairs? I think their latest result was about a third said stay out.

Susan, did you want to add?

MR. TELHAMI: So that goes to that 7 percent, goes to the majority, right?

MS. GLASSER: No, we can go ahead.

MS. WITTES: Okay. Why don't we take a couple more? Here in the front.

MR. MITCHELL: Thanks very much. I'm Garrett Mitchell and I write The Mitchell Report. Shibley, whenever I listen to the results of your work I'm struck by the distinction between -- it makes me think about the distinction between what people think in a response in a survey as opposed to how they think about the questions that you pose.

And I'm thinking back to the first of these two sessions, the Israeli-Palestinians conflict, when you spoke about that one of the ways to distinguish is the people, predominantly Democrats, who looked at this through a human rights lens and the people, predominantly Republicans, who looked at it through a national interest lens. That if the glasses you wear are human interest glasses, you saw the Israeli-Palestinian situation in -- you tended to see it in one light. If you wore the national interest glasses, you saw it in another lie.

And I guess my question is, and we've touched on it a bit, E.J. has touched on it, is there such a factor at work in these questions about ISIS and Syria, if not literally human rights and U.S. interests? Is there some other way that people think about this issue that determines what their responses to your questions have been?

MS. WITTES: Mm-hmm, okay. And we'll take a second question over on this side, in the yellow sweater. Yes.

MR. ULLMAN: I'm Harlan Ullman. I'm a recovering realist. (Laughter) My question in terms of an observation that we've been unsuccessful in two wars, in large measure, I would argue, because we had two presidents who were inexperienced and really not competent to start and then to finish wars, and the proof is my question.

During World War II we had pretty good propaganda against a foe that really deserved it. During the Cold War we weren't bad. But the question I want to pose to you is one I have posed to four Secretaries of State without effect. Why have we not

had a good counternarrative, something to take on to delegitimize and destroy the credibility of al Qaeda, ISIS, and these horrible movements by rallying the Muslim world and maybe to get King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia to get off his ass and put out a fatwa saying this is not good? Why have we been unable to do that?

MS. WITTES: Okay, thank you. Susan, you want to start off on that?

MS. GLASSER: Well, I can't speak to internal Saudi public opinion, but I think you have to say that these guys, when it comes to American public opinion, are certainly very effective American propagandists, frankly. You know, chopping people's heads off on video has given them pretty low approval ratings when it comes to not only the United States, but I'm sure American Muslims. You know, somebody said to me back last fall, when this escalation was occurring in the U.S. presence, they have not only triggered Obama to do something he was extremely reluctant to do, but they're almost a caricature, like the perfect dream villain, when it comes to American politics.

So I'm not entirely sure in the American political context that they haven't been pretty effective propagandists themselves for their own cause.

MS. WITTES: Of course, that's a self-fulfilling prophecy --

MS. GLASSER: Well, that's true.

MS. WITTES: -- for them because if they bring down our wrath, you know --

MS. GLASSER: Sure.

MS. WITTES: If they could actually get the United States to reinvade Iraq, that would be their dream, right?

MS. GLASSER: Sure, sure. Well, you know, this is, I think, a bigger part of the framing that we have talked a lot about today that I'll just throw in there. You started to get into it right before we went to the questions, which is the historical context.

Is it really about where Americans are right now in terms of their views of American power and American foreign policy or does this poll actually reflect a very correct historical assessment that most American interventions or any interventions in Middle East politics are likely to fail?

It seems to me that it's sort of, you know, the same way that one could reasonably look at restarting negotiations for peace talks among the Israelis and Palestinians, that the odds are extremely high that they won't succeed. You don't need to have a lot of additional information. And I do just wonder if the poll tells us more about a sort of sensible conclusion based on their available knowledge that this policy is not likely to affect things very much one way or the other rather than being a real snapshot of these Americans are actually foreign policy realists at heart or they're actually this.

MS. WITTES: Shibley, I want to ask you to draw here on the earlier polling that you've done across the Arab world. And, of course, we also have a lot of data from Gallup and others, broader sentiments in Muslim-majority countries around the world toward Islamist extremism. So what do we know and what do we know about that counternarrative maybe not driven by the U.S. Government, but maybe driven by others?

MR. TELHAMI: Yes, this is a really good question. Let me just quickly address the earlier questions.

And with Susan's, the worldview issue I think is something that needs to be probed. That is something that I start with because I think there's something always there that is just covered when you're just focused on the issues. You have to look at these packages.

And it goes down to -- you know, it relates also to what Garry asked about, so what's the prism through which Democrats or Republicans view these issues, or at least the American public? And obviously they're multiple prisms, but I just wanted

to note one thing. On the poll that you referred to, you're right about the Democrats that tend to see it mostly through human rights, certainly the Israel-Palestine question, mostly through a human rights prism.

But the Republicans actually don't see it necessarily through a "U.S. interest" prism either. They actually see it through two prisms. One is -- also human rights, by the way, particularly evangelicals. But the evangelicals in particular see it through a religious prism. They actually -- on that one, they're the only community -- the only community in the poll -- that had a strong feeling about it. Their position on that issue is just religiously motivated.

Now, here we haven't done all the analysis yet. There will be more analysis of the data when we look at further demographics as we've done in the past one. But I would suggest that if you look here, just at the Democrats, Republicans alone, it tells you that there is something of a worldview that you have to analyze, I mean, just by looking at the differences on some critical issues.

Now, going back to Tamara's question about attitudes towards the Muslim world, of course we've been doing that. I've been polling for a dozen years across Arab countries on multiple issues, including attitudes toward extremism and al Qaeda. We've asked many questions originally about al Qaeda specifically. And there is something to be learned here because initially, when we probed about actions toward al Qaeda over the past decade and a half, certainly after 9-11, what we find is that most people when you ask them what aspect of al Qaeda do you admire most, if any? And so the number one answer during that decade was the fact that it stands up to the United States.

Number two was that it was champion in causes like the Arab-Israeli issue. And those who said they endorse its agenda of a puritanical Taliban-like state

we're always a very small minority that ranged from 4 to 10 percent over that and there was no variation. So it was, by and large, the enemy of my enemy.

Now, that's not necessarily the case for people who join it. Now, remember that. We're talking about public attitudes in the broader community, not about why do people join. That's a different story. But of those attitudes in the public in general, it was the enemy of my enemy.

Now, the interesting thing about ISIS is that while it is -- of course it is derived from al Qaeda. I mean, you look at it and al Qaeda in Iraq and so there is a link obviously, an ideological link. But here's the interesting thing: When ISIS initially emerged it said, unlike al Qaeda, my first aim is not America. My first aim is Arab rulers. And it was tapping into something really, really interesting. First, in Iraq and Syria, that you had Sunni communities that were unhappy with the ruling governments in both places. But more importantly, the fact that you had an Arab Spring of people wanting to get rid of regimes that have obviously stalled and the regimes were fighting back.

So they were tapping into something that was different from al Qaeda's issue, which is they were angry with America. They were tapping into people who were angry with regimes and they said they left America -- by and large, it's not that they liked America. They were attacking America. It wasn't their operational priority, and not it's different.

MS. WITTES: But now it's conflated.

MR. TELHAMI: So now the interesting thing, and this was my worry all along, that the minute you go in and you intervene, do you make it about America and do you play into their hands with people who were reluctant to support them, but may still be angry with America? I still think that one of the things that's working against them is al Qaeda was seen to be a remote, insignificant, America-centric organization that had no

chance of ruling over them.

With ISIS, it's too close to home. An overwhelming majority of people in the Arab world would never want something like ISIS to rule over them and that threat probably is the one that is deflecting a little bit of the anger with the United States in the fight against ISIS.

MS. WITTES: Good thing. E.J.

MR. DIONNE: Garrett always asks the most philosophically interesting questions and I'm going to answer with empirics. (Laughter) But I was very struck just on the issue of what are the roots of opinions on ISIS. And it seems to me Shibley's poll really gives us three groups.

The largest group are simply Americans who fear it's an extension of al Qaeda and Americans just want to fight against the terrorist threat. That's 43 percent.

But then 33 percent gave a kind of human rights answer, most troubled by ISIS's ruthless behavior and intolerance. So clearly, there is still a human rights constituency.

And then what foreign policy types tend to worry about, ISIS can threaten our most vital interests, 16 percent, or threaten allies in the region, 7 percent. So the smallest number are the people who probably think like foreign policy specialists, which may need to include that we are a nation of moralists or protect our own shores Jacksonians who tend to be governed by realists. (Laughter)

MS. WITTES: Well, that is a fascinating point. You know, I have to add just one note on the question of public opinion in Muslim-majority countries when it comes to the extremists. And ISIS and al Qaeda have us at a real disadvantage here that we have to recognize, which is that even if the vast majority of these populations rejects them, rejects the ideology, rejects their goals, rejects the idea that they might rule

over them in the horrific manner that they are ruling over the territory that they've conquered, they don't need a majority of these populations to be successful. And they certainly don't need a majority of these populations to do what these three guys did in Paris yesterday. They need a tiny, tiny fringe. That is the essence of what makes this counterterrorism struggle so hard.

You can do a lot on counternarrative. You can do a lot on enabling environment. But you really don't need that many people to be a successful terrorist movement.

MR. TELHAMI: Good point.

MS. WITTES: And that's just a tough reality with which we have to reckon.

I apologize, ladies and gentlemen. You have been fantastic and I see there are a lot more questions, but we have run out of time. I really want to thank you all for coming. I want to thank you, Susan, E.J., Shibley, for a wonderful poll, for a fantastic conversation, and we will be continuing this conversation in the weeks and months to come. Please join us. Thank you. (Applause)

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