

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

SYRIA STRIKES, TRAVEL BAN, REFUGEES, AND MUSLIMS:
AMERICAN ATTITUDES ON TRUMP'S EARLY POLICIES

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. WITTES: Good morning everyone. Thank you for making your way through the rain to be with us. As some of you know, I think, today's event is part of a wonderful series convened by our colleague Shibley Telhami. About twice a year, we do these launches of polls that Shibley does. It's the University of Maryland Critical Issues Poll, which is fielded by Nielsen Scarborough and it's a wonderful partnership I think, public-private partnership between the University and Nielsen and between Brookings and those organizations to bring this information to you. I want to particularly welcome Neil Schwartz from Nielsen who is with us today. Thank you for joining us and thank you for everything you do for this project.

So those of you who have been with us before for these poll events know that Shibley has focused intently over the last several years of the attitudes of American voters toward the Middle East and toward U.S. Middle East policy across a range of topics. And over the course of the past year, in a very contentious and polarized political campaign, Shibley has sought to plum the areas where Americans are deeply polarized and those areas where they are less polarized on attitudes towards the Middle East and what that might say about the room that our political leaders have to navigate a region in turmoil and some very thorny issues.

This morning's event will focus on three issues that have been front and center in the first 111 or so days of the Trump administration. The unexpected missile strikes that President Trump conducted in Syria about a month ago, the travel ban that his administration imposed immediately after taking office and the whole question of admitting refugees to the United States and then the broader, underlying question of American attitudes towards Muslims and Islam.

And Shibley is going to give us an overview of his key findings this morning, and then we are very fortunate to have a great panel to discuss the issues with Shibley. Karen DeYoung, the senior national security correspondent and associate editor at the Washington Post. Karen has been following U.S. foreign policy in this region for many years, and is about to get on a plane with President Trump and go out to the region to see how he handles his stuff in person. And we are joined this morning also by my colleague Shadi Hamid, senior fellow in our Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World here at Brookings. And Shadi has written quite a bit about the interactions

between the United States and Muslim majority countries, and also more recently the challenge of our public debate about military intervention, which has significant implications for Syria and some of the attitudes you'll see emerging from Shibley's data.

Shibley himself, of course, is a nonresident senior fellow here in the Brookings Institution in our Center for Middle East Policy. I'm very proud to have him as my colleague and he is also, of course, the Sadat professor of peace and development at the University of Maryland. So I'm going to invite Shibley to take the stage, followed by our panel. Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. TELHAMI: Thanks, Tamara. It's always a great pleasure for me to do this. Let me just tell you a little bit more about this poll very quickly. And this is part of, we have a new setup with polling. I've been doing polling, many of you know, for many years. Really, I was just remembering the last poll I -- the first poll I ever did was 1989, when I was an assistant professor at Ohio State University. And it was on American attitudes towards the Middle East. But we've established this center, critical issues poll, University of Maryland Critical Issues Poll in conjunction with our Center for American Politics, and my colleague Estella Rouse is associate director. And we do some polling not only on foreign policy but also even domestic politics. We're doing more as well as part of the poll.

This particular one was a significant sized poll. It was conducted just three weeks ago, April 12 to April 17, so it's very fresh data. We had a very large sample of 2,138. We have released some of the American data a couple of weeks ago, and last week, we released some questions related to the Arab Israeli issue. And this is specific to those questions that we have in the title, the strike on Syria, the banned refugees, and attitudes towards Islam and Muslims. You can see the margin of error, this is 2.12 percent.

So, let's start with the attitudes towards the strike zone, Syria, which surprised most of us, and there have been obviously other polls on this immediately after to see where the public is. We sought to probe a little bit more on some of the questions and also to look into the demographics of how this breaks down. So first, we state the facts upfront about the strike and then we asked them how do you feel about these strikes.

So, if you look at the results broken down by party, support, oppose, don't know, 52 percent support the strike. It's actually still, you know, which was pretty consistent with some of the polling that was done immediately after, perhaps a little bit less support, but still slight majority 52 percent, but obviously look at most of that, that slight majority is coming from the overwhelming majority of Republicans who support the strike, 81 percent. Only 31 percent of Democrats, 34 percent of independents support the strike. But that overwhelming support among Republicans tips it up over 50 percent for the general population. So obviously very partisan, but you're still getting some support from Democrats and Independents. Because on most issues, the partisan divide is wider than this and I will show you.

So in some ways, there is some Democratic support, perhaps even bigger than expected on this particular issue. I'll give you my own explanation as to why. Now, if you break it down by age, not surprisingly, younger people are least supportive, 18 to 43, only 36 percent support, people over 55, 64 percent support. Now here's the gender division, too very interesting because you have far more men are more supportive by far than women, 61 percent of men support, only 44 percent of women support. By the way, you see the gender divide almost across all the issues. It's very pronounced, very bold from on those issues.

In not surprisingly the constituents and Democratic Party, women of course included, and young people included, we've already seen that, it's also true of African Americans and Hispanics. So you see African Americans are least supportive, 19 percent in comparison to non-African Blacks and African Americans are supportive. But if you look at Hispanics, you know, 37 percent are supportive in comparison to 55 percent for the rest. So you can see here that those constituents are leaning in a particular direction.

I want to show you something else here. We have a question in the poll that we released last week about whether Americans want Trump to lean toward Israel, toward the Palestinians or to lean toward neither side. Not surprisingly, meaning that we've found that in every single poll over the last quarter century, the majority of Americans choose, they want the U.S. to lean toward neither side. But you have a large percentage of Americans, about one-third who want him to lean toward Israel. And so we wanted to see whether there's an Israel factor in attitudes toward the

Middle East broadly in the think of Americans.

So we looked at those constituents who want the U.S. to lean towards Israel and see if their attitude on some of those issues tend to be, and mostly evangelicals, by the way, based on the data that we have, mostly evangelicals, certainly many Republicans, whether they tend to have different attitudes than the rest. And look at this, very interesting. Those who want the U.S. to lean towards Israel, large majorities support the ban in comparison to 38 percent for the rest. That seems to hold across party lines. We've looked at this, meaning that's true of Republicans, that's true of Democrats, that's true of Independents. That is more people who want the U.S. lean towards Israel tend to be more supportive of the strikes than the rest of the population, regardless of party line. That's an interesting thing. And you'll see that it's actually there for multiple questions as well.

Now, thinking about how Trump made his decision, how has this affected your confidence in the president's decisionmaking? Now, I say this because if you recall, some people said I'm happy he did it, including some Democrats because they want punitive against the use of chemical weapons, but said this was impulsive decision, you know, I don't like the way the president is doing it, but I still support it. I mean that was something that we heard in the discourse, it was very not unusual.

So I wanted to see if people really made that nuanced differentiation. Did they make a judgment related to this based on how the President was seen to have made a decision. And so, you know, we asked them if that decision made them more confident than before, less confident than before, or about the same level of confident as before. And so what you find is really you know, a plurality clearly think it didn't affect their level of confidence. Republicans, you know 56 percent said it made them more confident. You expect them to lean -- that's not a huge majority by the way, in comparison to the overwhelming majority the president is getting on all these issues.

But interestingly, it's also not surprising that Democrats have less confidence, 44 percent to 7 percent, given where we are on the parties in divide. So it's always important here to watch for the Independents. And the Independents are breaking more closer to the Democrats on this. You know, still about half say it didn't affect their level of confidence. But of those who say it affected their level of confidence, more have become less confident, 31 percent, than have become

more confident, 17 percent. So there's a little bit of an impact.

Given what you may have read or heard about the use of chemical weapons in Syria this month, which of the following is closest to your view. And the question here is whether, in fact, they accept the interpretation that Assad used chemical weapons, some people raise questions, the Russians did. Some people on the left raise the question, certainly the Syrians did, some Europeans raised the question. So we've had some kind of doubt thrown into this and wanted to see where the public is. Are they accepting this or not.

Actually, most people, most Democrats and Republicans accept that Assad used chemical weapons, 75 percent of the Republicans, but still again, not the 85 type majority that we've come to expect. This is a little bit of doubt. A majority of Democrats, 66 percent, think that Assad actually used chemical weapons, but Independents are really not as certain. More people are uncertain, 44 percent, than think Assad used chemical weapons. Now I have to tell you, overall of course, it's 66 percent of the American public that think Assad used chemical weapons.

Now, this is important because I happen to think that as you will see from some of the following results on this issue specifically, that I think the American public, even those who are supporting, the 50 percent, half of the American public is supporting this, partly of course, their support for the President. But among Democrats and Independents who are supporting this strike, they are not supporting it because they think it's going to make Syria better, but more because of the punitive, you know, it's about time we hit them for use of chemical weapons. And you'll see that in the following thing and this is important to keep in mind, because look at this.

So when you ask them how do you think the strike on Syria will affect the prospects of ending the violence in Syria, what do you have here? Well, it will have no impact, 51 percent, it'll make it more likely, 20 percent it will make it less likely to end the violence, 27 percent. So more people actually think it's going to make it less likely than more likely. And about half think it's not going to make a difference. So clearly, that's not what's swaying their decision, they think it's going to help end the violence.

The same thing is how you believe the strike on a Syrian airbase will affect the level of American military involvement in Syria and you know that Americans are very skeptical about

increased involvement in Syria, certainly about sending ground forces to Syria. So how do they feel? Does this make it less likely that America will get more involved, or more likely that America will get involved. Well, look at this, 63 percent of Americans it's actually going to make it more likely that America will get involved, and that's one issue over which Democrats and Republicans and Independents agree. You get a majority of, all three to varying degrees thing that it's going to actually draw us more in. And that can't possibly be the reason why they're supporting the attack.

And similarly, about Assad himself, because presumably, this was a deterrence kind of attack, at least portrayed that way, you're punishing him and therefore, he's less likely to do it again. So the question here is, is this strike going to make Assad less aggressive or more aggressive in hitting his opposition, what do they think? Well, look at this. I mean if a plurality think it's more likely he's going to be more likely he's going to be more aggressive, 44 percent, a majority of Democrats, Republicans are divided. One-third say it will have no impact, but only 23 percent say it will make it less likely that they'll be more aggressive.

So here again, that doesn't seem to be the reasoning behind why Americans slightly support the strike. I think it has to do more with the fact that they think Assad used chemical weapons, they think it's punitive, they think it's about time, and I think that's kind of interesting to keep in mind. This is obviously, aside from the base that will support Trump no matter what, what tips the balance slightly in favor of a majority.

All right, question on the refugees. Some of you who have followed our work and our presentation here at Brookings, know that a year ago, Brookings had a wonderful project on Syrian refugees by the way, and there's a lot of write ups that you can look for online. But on that occasion, we actually launched a poll on refugees. In that particular case, it was actually a Brookings poll as well as a University of Maryland poll. It was funded by both. And that particular poll showed something that was surprising in the context of the debate and it was highly quoted, because it was seemingly surprising, and that is that it showed that 59 percent of the American people were supportive of accepting refugees from conflict areas in the Middle East, including Syrian refugees, assuming they will be vetted for security, that that was, you know, the pretty significant majority.

So we wanted to see whether that was again, a function of our campaign or whether

there was something else going on and we repeated the same question here to see whether there's any change at all in the trends. So the questions in general, so you support or oppose the United States in refugees from conflicts in Syria and other Middle Eastern countries after screening them for security risks. That's exactly what we asked. This is a repeated, identical question as before.

Well, here's what we have, 59 percent say yes, exact identical number with a year ago. Of course, it's partisan. More Democrats, 83 percent, Independents somewhat divided, slightly more support. And Republicans are divided, but not, you know, as much as is typical in the polarized environment when you compare it with other issues. There are still more opposed than there are supportive. Again, not surprisingly when you look at demographics, young people, particularly 18-34 are more supportive of accepting refugees but interestingly, people above 55 are also somewhat supportive. It's that middle group that is a little bit less supportive.

And in the case of the gender again, look at this, 63 percent of women support it compared to 55 percent of men, again a gender effect is very pronounced. African Americans, again are more supportive, slightly, not by a huge difference, but somewhat more. The same things holds with Hispanics, more supportive. And here's the comparison of last year with this year, you know 59, 59, identical. And in general, do you support or oppose the refugees, looking at the divide by party. The differences even across party lines from last year are small, not very big.

Now, what about the Israel factor that I talked about earlier. Are people who want the U.S. to lean toward Israel, more supportive or less supportive of refugees and look at that big gap -- 72, uh, 40, only 40 percent of that group want to take in refugees from Middle Eastern conflict and that holds across party lines again. This is not just Republicans, this is true of Republicans, Democrats and Independents to varying degrees, obviously. But that trend holds across party line. Again, remember a good part of that is evangelicals.

American views for or against the ban, now the travel ban, many of you know of course has been debated. Obviously, the courts have suspended it for now. And one of the issues of course is whether Americans support or oppose it, but also whether in fact they think it's a Muslim ban or not. Now, before we asked them whether they support the ban or oppose the ban, we gave them two common arguments in the conversation that we're all having nationally, meaning one

argument, like the President's argument of people who support him about why we need the ban. We wanted to see how much they agree or disagree with that argument, and then we give an argument against the typical opponents of the ban to see how much they agree or disagree with it. And then after, we air both arguments and have them give their answers about agreeing or disagreeing with it, then we ask the bottom line question which is, now that you've heard both arguments and thought about it, where do you stand, do you support it or do you oppose it. That's the way we go with this. This is typical of some of the experimentation that we do along the line. And by the way, it's not uncommon that you're going to have people agree with the for arguments and against arguments because we all have dissonance.

And in this particular one, about 15 percent of the American population agree with both arguments, about 300 people or so agree with both arguments, so that's not uncommon. That is typical of most of these complicated issues because we all sometimes are divided within our own self so we expect that to show up in the way people think out loud about these issues, not surprising at all.

So we describe the ban and then we give them an argument for, which goes something like the executive order is necessary to ensure the safety of all Americans, the government has a responsibility to ensure that nobody entering the country is coming here to do us harm, it is only reasonable to limit immigration from those six countries until we know that people coming do not pose a threat. While it may be true that many who do not pose a threat will be kept out in the process, our top priority must be reducing the threat to American citizens by keeping potential terrorists out. That's sort of the argument for the ban.

And then, so look at how people, what people think of this, 50 percent agree with this argument, at least strongly or somewhat agree and 40 percent disagree with this argument if you combine somewhat and strongly. So obviously, again there is a big divide, party divide. You find that 84 percent of Republicans agree, only 21 percent of Democrats. Independents are divided, but more agree than disagree with this argument.

The same thing with the argument against the ban, which is the United States is a nation of immigrants, one with a long history of taking in those fleeing persecution in their home

countries. Refugees have also contributed considerably to America. The data shows that only a handful of refugees have been charged with terrorist plotting, among hundreds of thousands who arrive in the U.S. in the past decade and a half. The Constitution prohibits restricting immigration based on religion, which some courts have found this order to be.

So, those are pretty much the basic arguments that are out there. And here again, you have 50 percent support the argument, just like at 50 percent support the argument there, only 30 percent actually oppose it. Even fewer people oppose the argument. And again, a big divide, Democrats oppose the argument -- Democrats, that actually is, should be the other way around. Oh, no, no, it's right, yeah. No, I got a little confused there for a second.

So, having thought about it, do you support or oppose the travel ban. Now what's the bottom line, so they've done that, we've seen what they think about it, what do they do? Well, here it is. This is actually, I want you to stare at this. To stare at it as much as you could because it is the most polarized slide I have seen so far. There's a lot of polarization slides. I mean we've seen them. But this one really stares you in the eye. I mean look at this, 75 percent difference between Democrats and Republicans, 75 point difference. This is like amazing. It's just the exact opposite. And at the same time, look at the Independents. They're down the middle. So you've got, this tells you the entire story. It's an amazing story right here when you look at this slide.

Now, break it down again demographically, you know, only young people support it less, as you can see. Women support it less, as expected. African Americans support it less, Hispanics support it less. So it's the same trends, you know, a demographic trend. Now, what about the Israel issue? Here it's even more pronounced actually, that people who want the U.S. to lean towards Israel, 80 percent support the travel ban. It's even higher, it's certainly higher than the rest of the population but I'm not sure, let me see if it's even higher than the Republicans, no the Republicans, you've got 88 percent. But remember this is not only about Republicans because this includes Democrats and Independents because this holds across party line.

So, in your opinion, is this ban principally intended to keep Muslims out of the U.S.?
Okay, so this is one of the questions obviously that we have. Well, American people say yes, it's a Muslim ban. 56 percent say it's a Muslim ban and 43 percent say it's not a Muslim ban. It's a good

majority, it's not a huge majority but it's a good majority across American line. Now, if you look at, again, you have of course, a big divide, 86 percent of Democrats say yes, and 77 percent of Republicans say no. So another huge polarization. But here, interestingly, Independents poll more on the side of Democrats. A majority of Independents say it is a Muslim ban, only 41 percent it's not. They're really roughly the same as the average American population right here, and that's interesting.

Now, one question we have dealt with is initially, as you recall, there was some wording related to Christian -- giving advantages to Christian immigrants into the U.S. This isn't about the travel ban per se, but related to the travel ban. That had been removed ultimately from the proposition. So the question was how do Americans feel when deciding which immigrants should be allowed to enter the United States. Should we give priority to people who are Christians or should we treat all immigrants the same regardless of religion. Now, you know, it's one that we're all kind of contemplating, and obviously a lot of people in the Middle East may assume that there is a factor here that's related, just like we often assume about the Middle East.

Well, here's one thing where Americans agree in a good way. A majority, the overwhelming majority, 81 percent of Americans say all immigrants regardless of religion should be treated the same. And, you know, a big majority of Republicans, a big majority of Independents overwhelming majority of Democrats, and look at the people who say yes, very few Democrats, among Republicans less than a quarter. So this is actually kind of interesting and I think maybe sheds some light on some of this complex issue.

Now, I want to end with one thing about attitude toward Islam and Muslims. Anyone who has followed our work particularly during the election year, we did four polls in a row in the election year, beginning with November 2015 all the way up to October 2016, four consecutive polls to see how the campaign was influencing American attitudes toward Islam and Muslims. And, as you know there was a heated campaign about Islam and Muslims and there was a lot of anti-Islamic rhetoric in the discourse in America associated with the campaign. And we know that there were also horrific attacks on American soil sometimes carried out in the name of Islam during that period.

And what was really, truly, truly surprising, and I wrote about this in the articles that are posted on the Brookings website, University of Maryland website and the Washington Post

Monkey Cage. So when you look at that data, it was really striking because Americans throughout the whole year became progressively more favorable towards both Islams and Muslims in a statistical significant way. And it seemed like a shocking thing, how could this happen. And my interpretation of it at the time was that because we're in a campaign and one campaign is associated with the anti-Islamic mood, that those who are reacting to it rejecting it, rejecting the campaign and there were people who had an interest in bringing down that paradigm that it's about Islam. And so that polarization, in fact we show the evidence in the polling, where most of the improvement came among Democrats and Independents, so much that it swayed the majority in favor of, you know, in favor of Islam and Muslims.

And so, the question was, in fact Tamara moderated one of these and Tamara asked me a question on the panel. She said, well, does that mean after the elections, this is likely to go down? Is this polarization pushing actually improvement and then when you don't have as much polarization, is it going to change? Well, this is our first test. Now, to be fair, there hasn't been a decline in polarization even after the election, so even with day one speech on Inauguration Day. But still I was, you know, I had written about what I expect. I actually did a piece again, for the Washington Post Monkey Cage, which is our other partner here sitting at the table. And what, in which I anticipated less of a decline than initially thought for a variety of reasons. But here is the result. So look at the, the numbers from, these are five polls now, because we have the one in November, the black is November 2015, May 2016, June 2016, October 2016 and now the April 2017.

Now you can see that attitudes towards the Muslim people had become more favorable, when from 53 percent in November 2015 to 70 percent in October 2016. And now, in 2017, they pretty much stayed the same as they were in October. They haven't diminished. And you can look below, you can look the same thing at, this is the breakdown by party, but I just want to look at on the attitudes toward the Muslim religion, which by the way have been more negative than attitudes towards the Muslim people historically, a big issue to talk about. But you can see here that again, in November, 2015, there was 2015, there was 37 percent favorable, it went to 42 percent, it went to 44 percent, and then in October, it went to 49 percent, now it's 46 percent, but roughly within

the margin of error, if you consider this margin of error and the last poll margin of error, it's still really staying static. In fact, if you look, the same thing at the somewhat unfavorable at the bottom, it's 49, 51, it's staying roughly the same, so there hasn't been movement since the election on this issue. It has not been impacted. So I'll end with that, and I'll invite my colleagues to join me on the panel.

(Applause)

MS. WITTES: Okay, good. Can everyone hear me? Wonderful. Okay. Well, Shibley, thank you, that was fascinating, in places contradictory, in places hopeful and in places deeply depressing. So I hope that over the course of this conversation, we'll be able to probe each of those, but I think one of the themes that has run through this series of polls and particularly over the last year as we've been through this incredibly divisive election is in fact the theme of polarization. And I was going through the findings, I was very struck therefore by the areas where Americans seem less polarized. And I think there are some cautionary notes in there for American political leaders, but may also some areas of hope as we think about our public discussion of these issues.

So maybe let's start with one of the cautionary notes which I think relates to the American role in the Middle East and the question of military intervention. We are sitting here at a moment when President Trump is contemplating increasing further American ground commitments in Iraq and Syria. He's already scaled them up in just the first four months he's been in office, and in fact that's continuous with what President Obama was doing before in this anti-ISIS fight that's taking place in Iraq and Syria, committing more American special forces and now perhaps a wider array of American forces. We have seen combat deaths in Iraq and Syria in the last few months, and in fact we also had a combat death in Yemen, where Trump ordered a very controversial operation early in his tenure.

So as I look at these results, it seems to me that one of the commonalities between Republicans and Democrats is a skepticism about American military engagement in the region, a concern -- well, I don't know if I should say a concern, but an expectation at least that Trump's decision to strike Syria after the chemical attack may lead to deeper American involvement in this war, but it's not going to end the violence. I'm reminded of an earlier poll of yours Shibley, where you asked people what they expected the anti-ISIS fight would bring, and they said they expected it would

beat back ISIS for a time, but it would reemerge in another form. So it seems to me that we have a sort of growing consensus in the American public that these wars in the Middle East are A, endless, and B, slippery slopes or dangerous for the United States.

Number one, is that reading too much into this data? And number two, how does an American government navigate that. And so Shibley, let me start with you and then I'm going to ask Karen and Shadi to weigh in as well.

MR. TELHAMI: Overall, first that question that you raised is not just from these slides, but overall the data results were clearly Americans don't want large ground forces in the Middle East. Every poll has shown that, and certainly my previous posts have shown it. I did not ask it here. But I want to warn against one thing. I think when you are in a polarized political environment like this, where politics is identity politics, you are going to drag a lot of people with you by virtue of that divide alone, as we've seen here. People may think it's not going to have an impact on what happens in Syria, but they'll still support the President for it. Identity politics is Trump and we see how partisan the divide is. That's number one.

Number two, there is a war of narratives. And it's always about not facts, but how you interpret the facts. And so we have seen this, right. We have even seen the fake news argument in the discourse. But even when there's no fake news argument, it's all about who is doing the interpretation. So who are the people who have the hegemonic role in their communities to interpret the facts about intervention, about what it's going to lead to, about whether in fact it is, you know, is it a special op, or is it really we're sending ground forces to Syria, you see the pictures of the tanks. Do you call them ground ops or do you call them we're on the slippery slope.

So I caution because I think that to this day, you know, because of this identity politics and this deep divide in America and the fight what America is that seems to trump everything else. Now, obviously, in between, that leaves you with that Independent category about where it's going to sway. So far, it's swaying more towards the Democrats. What's helping Trump overcome that is an overwhelming support from the base to this day, and people say if it stays over 80 percent, or 85 percent, he's okay, because he can overcome some of the divide, some of the negative, as long as he gets only 31 percent among the Democrats supporting the strike in Syria is enough for him, 34

supporting a strike on Syria is enough for him to put it over the 52.

So the question is whether the fear about the cost of intervention in fact, as we go in and there are more casualties, will overcome this, you know, interpretation that it's going to come for political reasons.

MS. WITTES: Thank you. And I think it's also interesting, Karen that there seems to be a gap in preferences and a gap in expectations between the American public on these issues of American military engagement in the region and what our regional partners are expecting from us. So as we look ahead to this Trump trip out to Saudi Arabia, they would like to see us more involved, including in Yemen. How does a president navigate the public, the domestic side, and the expectations of those foreign leaders? What do we see from Trump so far on that?

MS. DeYOUNG: Well, I was listening very carefully to Shibley when he was talking about people interpreting the facts and that weighing on their answers. And I see that in my own mind, where when I see a surprising result, then I start to interpret that fact in a way that justifies it based on my own preconceptions. And I, you know, I would have thought that the number of Democrats for example, supporting the strikes would have been higher, and I interpret that to mean that people who identify as Democrats are not going to support anything that Trump says or does and so --

MS. WITTES: Just because it's him?

MS. DeYOUNG: You know, because the strikes are, you know, I think everybody shared the horror at the chemical attacks. There were no casualties, it was a show of strength. I think a lot of people were sort of fed up with the Obama Administration's equivocation and kind of dithering on the whole question of Syria. So I would have thought that the number of Democrats would be higher. So then you go to the question to the decision and how much confidence people have in terms of decision making abilities and how he made this specific decision. And here's where, here's where my respect for the American people rises, because people said, no they don't, this is not going to change anything. Yes, they think no matter what, they think it's going to draw the United States in more. And they just don't have much confidence. And this is something where the Republican figures were higher than I would have anticipated them being.

So I think that, the question is, does the administration read this poll and does it comport with polls that they've done themselves, and to what extent does that influence their decisions. I suspect that it will influence their decisions very little. I think that the President is about to go off that will begin with three days of meetings in Saudi Arabia, not only with the Saudis but with all the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council and then with a much larger group of Muslim majority nations, the list of which we don't know yet. I think it's sort of --

MS. WITTES: Well, we know the Pakistanis, the Jordanians, the Moroccans, the Egyptians, at least.

MS. DeYOUNG: Right, right. And so I think that there will be pressure there for greater involvement, particularly in Syria and you could get a little glimpse of this in the meetings yesterday with the Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov's visit and what he said about what he thought the Americans were going to do, and the administration itself being pretty quiet because I don't think they want to show their hand yet, and they haven't finished their decision making process yet. But again, I think that what's really interesting about these figures is that when it comes to a question that means support for an action of Trump, you see this very strong divide. And support for a rationale that Tump has given, for example, for the travel ban, when it comes to questions where Americans sort of self-identify, you know, what me, have a religious bias, of course not. And that's where I think you see this sort of dissonance where I'm not sure people are being necessarily completely honest. But in the question of on Syria, that's my bias, I think they are being honest.

MS. WITTES: Okay. So, I want to come back to those questions about how Americans see themselves and about how they feel about religious equality and so on, but let's stay on Syria for just a minute. Shadi, you've written quite a bit recently about, over the last year or so really, about whether President Obama over learned the lessons of Iraq and Afghanistan and taking a sort of hands off approach. To Syria, you've made arguments on behalf of a more assertive American role in trying to end this conflict. The American people are pretty skeptical of that pathway. So what's the argument, do you see anything in this data that you think gives you hope in making the argument that you've been making?

MR. HAMID: Yeah, so the fact that over 50 percent of respondents support Trump's

strikes, that to me says something. And I can imagine that if Obama had gone ahead with strikes in 2013, that that turning point where he didn't turn, that you probably would have had something similar because you would have had some Democrats rallying behind their president, but you would also have the more kind of hawkish Republicans, people like Rubio and McCain, who would sort of give cover to more Republicans to say okay, we don't like Obama otherwise, but we like that he's finally taking action on this.

So that to me says that, you know, and Obama I think had always used this argument that we can't do more on Syria, we can't do more on X Middle East conflict because the American people aren't behind us. And not just this poll, but previous polls, I've always been skeptical of that in the sense that if Americans see that someone is leading, that itself is going to have an effect on how they perceive something. So if Obama is going out, or if Trump is going out and making a compelling argument that draws on both moral and national interest arguments, that will resonate with some Americans. That's one thing.

The other thing that sort of stood out to me, so I'm a little bit weird in this respect because I'm one that -- so I think that Shibley and Karen, you were talking about the prospect of drawing -- that strikes would draw America more in to Syria, that that was kind of a pejorative thing. If I'm being honest, one of the reasons I supported Trump's strikes is because I hoped it would draw us in more. I mean that's not how I would put it, because that sounds bad. But what I'm --

MS. WITTES: But you're counting on the pack dependency.

MR. HAMID: Yeah. So I mean one of -- I was skeptical of the initial strikes because I was worried that it was just Trump doing something for the sake of something. And I don't think that should be the justification for targeting asset. We should do something because it's tied to a broader strategy that satisfies America's short and long term objectives. It shouldn't just be a one-off punitive strike, because that's not actually going to shift Assad's behavior. My hope was, and still is, and I'm not talking about ground troops, and I always worry that when we hear the language drawing us more in, we automatically think Iraq style invasion. That's, no one is really talking about that seriously. There's no major politician who is calling for a major ground invasion.

But what people are calling for is to use the threat of force, the credible threat of

military force, and potentially the actual use of military force to force Assad to negotiate in good faith. It's not even necessarily regime change. I'm not someone who is calling necessarily for regime change. I'm saying that the use of force can contribute to more effective diplomacy by shifting the balance on the battlefield and also sending a message to Assad that he can't count on getting away with murder really, endlessly, that there are real costs and not just one time, but perhaps you know in the future.

MS. WITTES: Okay. And you're sort of relying on the notion that if an American leader stands up and does -- starts down this road, that there will be a rally around the flag effect and he'll end up with at least majority support, and you would say that the Trump strikes demonstrate that, because lo, he did end up with at least majority support?

MR. HAMID: Yeah.

MR. TELHAMI: May I just on this, because I want to just make clear that obviously on this particular issue, whether it's a good idea to get involved more or not is not obviously what we're looking at.

MS. WITTES: Right.

MR. TELHAMI: But you can see it at Brookings, we have people who are fellows at Brookings that have different views on this. And I certainly have not, I don't believe that we have a strategy that is a military strategy with increased involvement in Syria. Now you can maybe it was debatable initially when this crisis started, but at this point, where we are now, I do not believe that we have a military path to improving even our leverage with Russia per se. I don't believe it, so I mean I respect that you have a difference of opinion, we all have. But whether the public sees it that way or not, whether the public thinks that this is a good thing or not, that is when they say I think it's going to give you more involvement, I think that's not what they're seeing. Because when you look at the confidence level, I mean Shadi, you may want an American policy that is more robust or more aggressive or more human rights driven. We all do in some ways.

But when you are looking at who's doing the decision making, or what you're interpreting the president to be attempting to do, what the public sees, the public sees, the public sees, it certainly isn't increasing their confidence in the President's decision making. And so I would

assume that even if they had wanted it, certainly Democrats and Independents, even if they had wanted it, I don't think they have much faith that it could be done well or effectively for the right reasons. And that is a problem why I think you're going to still see the opposition.

MS. WITTES: Thank you. So let me turn now to some of the attitudes toward religion, towards Muslims and Islam and how that relates to the travel ban. I think Karen, you made a very interesting point earlier that sometimes people answer these poll questions in an aspirational manner, that they say well, of course I don't believe in discriminating according to religion. And that's what produces a result like 81 percent saying all immigrants should be treated the same. But what strikes me in this data is that the attitudes towards Muslims and Islam have stagnated, that we saw this slight improvement over the course of the political campaign in positive attitudes and then it seems to have stagnated. And when I put that together with is the travel ban a Muslim ban result, which is so split by party, and I think about the way these issues have been discussed, priority for Christian versus Muslim refugees, the safety or security issues, the question of do we say the words radical Islam. These are questions on which we've seen sharp partisan arguments over the last year and sharp partisan divides in the polling data. So I guess my question Shibley is, are American views of Muslims becoming captive to party ID? Is it now simply a function of, or increasingly, a function of party ID, and we're not going to be able to have a substantive conversation about Muslims in America?

MR. TELHAMI: That's a really good question and I think that if you look at it in terms of the substantial bump in favorable attitudes over the past year and a half, you would have to say that the bump really had to do mostly with our politics and identity politics where people associated with one paradigm than the other, for sure. Because there's nothing, nothing was out there that could have given this kind of rapid rises, nothing out there -- in fact, if anything, it would have taken it down because of the events. So yes, in the short term, but in the long term no, and here is why. Because actually when you look at the demographics of America over time, as I've been tracking it, not just over the past year, but over the past several years, that expanding segments of the American public and the more assertive segments of the American public, African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans, as well as women and young people, they all have had far more favorable attitudes of

Islam and Muslims and so the trend is that way.

But that there's another thing, the increasing globalization, so we track, we track indicators about people who have passports, people who have visited, it doesn't matter where they went, people who have relatives, even remote relatives living overseas anywhere, people who speak a second language other than English, people who interact with people other than Americans on regular basis on the Internet, which is obviously an expanding portion of the population. All of those people have more favorable views of Islam and Muslims and the rest of the population and that is also true especially among those who say they know some Muslims, even not well. And we've correlated this across party lines, the interaction.

So I think that the trend is, the long term trend is in favor of more favorable attitudes. Obviously, there are a lot of things that could intervene. But the bump in the past year undoubtedly, it's mostly related to the polarization.

MS. WITTES: Shadi, I want you to comment on this, and I'm thinking back to the very moving piece you wrote last fall about Thanksgiving in the Hamid house, so please.

MR. HAMID: Yeah, so just some background on actually, so things have happened Christmas, Thanksgiving, holidays, you're with your family, you talk about the future of your family. I'm Muslim, and American Muslim, you know, so we've had, my parents have given me the talk. So when Trump was rising in the campaign, there was the Muslim version of the talk, which was hey, if things get really bad here, you know, kind of half-joking, because you know, we don't want to really confront that possibility, but also with a hint of seriousness, well look, it's unlikely, but if it happens, then we have to have a conversation about this. And it helps that my dad is Canadian and an American citizen. So, it's not just a kind of we'll be like, we'll just cross the border into Canada as Americans just assume they can just go to Canada whenever they want.

But, so what really stood out to me in these results, before I came this morning, the one thing that I had to sort of, I had to, there was a double take where I was like wait, is there a mistake in these results, 71 percent of Americans like us? I mean what's going -- that's kind of weird, what's going on. And so I mean I'm still kind of processing that result. It seems like a lot to me, quite frankly.

MS. WITTES: You can unpack.

MR. HAMID: But there's a couple of things that are really interesting. I think one thing is that you see among Democrats and people who identify on the left that one way of expressing your opposition to Trump is being more outwardly and in some ways almost over the top pro-Muslim than you otherwise would have been. So you go out of your way to always mention Muslims when you're mentioning all the kind of minority groups in America. But also, for the first time, really you have people going to airports and Muslims are praying in airport terminals and people on the left are kind of encouraging them and showing their solidarity. We didn't really see images like that before. And usually when you see a bunch of Muslims praying in a public space, people might not be opposed to it, but they won't get so excited about it, yes, Muslims, you're praying in an airport terminal. So I think that's an interesting development. And you know, it's encouraging, but I worry again that it just kinds of falls along partisan lines that it's not so much that you actually like Muslims more, or are more open to Islam as a religion, but it's a way to -- it's virtue signaling, as it's called now.

So that's concerning me, and it's also the opposite where Republicans might otherwise be open to Muslims or Islam, but because their party is so closely identified with anti-Muslim policies that they sort of have to go along with that. So that to me is a very, that's a troubling trend if it continues.

MS. WITTES: You know, it strikes me Karen that maybe one silver lining of the travel ban and the chaos that surrounded its rollout and then blocking by the courts is that it did produce a lot of stories in papers like the Washington Post, but across the media of images of that kind of solidarity and also stories of people who were trying to come to the United States and what their hopes were and their dreams were, and how they dealt with the disappointment and the danger of that journey. You've delved into these issues for a long time. You also now, you know, are making editorial decisions about how this stuff gets --

MS. DeYOUNG: Not in editorials.

MS. WITTES: Okay, not in editorials, but as an editor, on how this stuff gets featured. And I wonder if you think that there is an opportunity hidden in there to give that news

reading public, which thank goodness seems to be growing, to give them access to different kinds of images and narratives about Muslims than they've had over the last 10 or 15 years.

MS. DeYOUNG: Well, I don't know in the news pages, as opposed to the editorial pages, I don't know that there's been a conscious decision saying oh boy, now we have an excuse to write about Muslims. I think it's more that making news judgments about what's in the news and what people are interested in. If you're talking about Syrians, and there's a global debate about how, what's the fair share of Syrians as the world divides up refugees. Then I think that it's obvious that you'd want to do a story about well, who are the Syrians that have come here, and you've seen endless stories in my newspaper and everywhere tracking certain families, you know, about communities taking them in, other communities not wanting them, who are they, who are they, how do they live their lives, how well do they adjust. And there are larger stories too about communities that in this country that for many years, long before all of this have had large Muslim populations and that we've sort of, I mean I remember the first stories I did about it were not particularly generated by a kind of positive feeling, but they were after 9/11 and going to see whether people are being oppressed, whether the outreach by the FBI and other law enforcement was being met with cooperation or not by these communities. So, I think that there has been a sort of a shift, a bit of a shift to a more positive reference. When you have people arrested, you know, Somali kids arrested trying to go to Syria or whatever from Michigan or Wisconsin or Minnesota, lots of stories about going to those families and saying well who are these families and seeing the same anguish in those families as you would see in any non-Muslim family in a similar set of circumstances.

But I wanted to talk a little bit about the poll numbers and again this kind of dissonance that I see where if you have, you have on the one hand you have a sharp divide on support for the ban and people who consider it a Muslim ban where Democrats say yes, this is a ban on Muslims and Republicans say, oh no it's not, even though they strongly support it as a Muslim ban. They say, yes, it's a Muslim ban, but we like Muslims.

And so again, I go back to this, this kind of self-identification and I think that plays in with the Christian thing. You know, Americans think of themselves as people who are not -- everybody knows that the constitution says you cannot make any laws about religion, so when you

say should there be a ban against -- is this a ban against Muslims, and they say yes, and should this ban exist, and they say yes, there's this caveat about proper security screenings. And I think we could all go and have a discussion about views on what constitutes a proper security screening.

But then when you say so should we give preference to Christians, people say, oh no, I don't want to do that. And it's just an interesting sort of shift that sort of doesn't make sense. And I see you see the same thing in the Israel Palestinian thing where the large numbers of people who say they lean towards Israel and see these policies as favoring Israel kind of doesn't necessarily comport to the numbers of people who say they favor or don't favor the policies themselves.

MR. HAMID: And, in fact, you know, it's interesting that you -- I'm glad you pointed it out, because it obviously goes along with what we've been saying about sort of the source of these attitudes, but a couple of years ago, I did a piece for Brookings online explaining why Americans have a more favorable view of Muslims than they do of Islam. And in some ways, that tells the story, because in some ways the attitudes towards Islam is going to be a better guide, and there only half have about a positive view. And the reason for it as I explained is exactly what you pointed out, the people when you're personalizing it, they don't want to say oh, I'm anti-Muslim, or anti-people.

MS. WITTES: Right, these are people, we like people.

MS. DeYOUNG: Yes.

MR. HAMID: Or ideology or thought or religion or faith or ideas you might be against. And so it's easier to do that. And one of the things that we see in the polling that is still problematic, despite these favorable views of Islam in the short term, both Islam and Muslim in the short term is when you ask them would you vote for a Muslim president okay, and you compare it with an evangelical Christian, a Jewish president and a Mormon president. And it's much, much lower support for a Muslim president. I don't have the number off the top because this was not in the recent poll, but in a previous poll, my assistant is here, you don't remember the percentage, but it was definitely at the bottom where, by the way, Jewish is also above evangelical, meaning that people would vote for a Jewish -- more people would vote for a Jewish president than they would vote for an evangelical president.

MS. WITTES: So Joe Lieberman's got a better shot than Mike Huckabee?

MR. HAMID: I don't know about Joe Lieberman. (Laughter)

MS. WITTES: All right, let's open up the conversation to all of you. Let me remind you, number one, wait for the mic, number two, identify yourself, and number three state one question. And where are our microphones? Oops, hmm. Well, okay, I'm going to ask you in the absence of a microphone to stand up and speak loudly please. Oh, here we go, not one but two, you can choose.

DR. POPLIN: I'm Dr. Caroline Poplin. I'm a physician. My question is did you factor in American attitudes about refugees in general. I mean this is a country of refugees and how many people or what percentage of the population are within two or three generations of the actual refugees? I mean there were a lot right before the '20s, right before cutoff, those people are dead, but their --

MS. WITTES: Their kids and grandkids are still around.

DR. POPLIN: -- are still here, and still remember. I mean it's part of the -- it's the Statue of Liberty. And how much is about Muslims, Muslim refugees and how much is where the country is on refugees in general and in the population that still remembers that their people were refugees.

MS. DeYOUNG: But don't you -- I think you have to separate between immigrants and refugees, you know. They're very few people in this country who don't consider themselves part of an immigrant family at some point or another. I would just, just to build on your question, ask whether there is a difference between thinking of the United States as an immigrant country and thinking of it as a compassionate country that has to help people in immediate need as part of the global community no matter where they're from.

MR. HAMID: I mean let's not forget too that I mean Donald Trump is a child of not immigrants but one immigrant, his mom, right. I mean and Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio, so the Republican candidate --

MR. TELHAMI: (inaudible) mention his wife.

MR. HAMID: Oh, yeah, right, right. The Republican candidates all have very close relationships with immigrants. So I think, but --

MR. TELHAMI: No, I mean that first of all, it's a good question when we did it a year ago, and we did the poll on refugees specifically, we asked some broader questions and we also gave the narrative about how many refugees have come, even since 9/11, we've got hundreds of thousands from all over the world and in fact, we test to see how many refugees they think have been involved in terrorism and we tried to tease out the Middle East part in that. But I think Karen's point is really important because a lot of people confuse refugees and immigrants. And we have tried to tease that out and in fact we have a poll that we're giving to Nielsen next week with trying to tease out what people mean by refugees. And in fact, one of my students was assigned, an assigned graduate student, was just working specifically on trying to figure out what the term refugee evokes in people's mind, including immigrant or expatriate or different kind of language, so we're trying to tease that out.

MS. DeYOUNG: Well, remember that the original and I think subsequent executive order banned both immigrants and refugees, immigrants from certain countries.

MS. WITTES: Right, and halted the refugee admissions.

MR. DeYOUNG: Which happened to be Muslim.

MS. WITTES: Yeah, right there up front.

MR. LEWIS: I'm Evan Lewis. I'm with the Program for Public Consultation. And this was a question that really wasn't asked in the poll, but I was kind of curious about it because when it came to the travel ban, one of the criticisms was that it seemed to be arbitrary in terms of the countries that were chosen, Saudi Arabia, most of the 9/11 attackers came from Saudi Arabia. None of them came from any of the countries chosen, and so I was considering if support or opposition to the travel ban may have been influenced by the arbitrariness of the countries that were chosen for the ban itself.

MR. TELHAMI: It's possible. It's really hard to know Evan, for sure. But what we tried, obviously we want to, you know, we didn't do a comprehensive set of questions on the ban, but what we tried to do in giving the argument for and the argument against to capture much of what people discussed, without going overboard because there was so many more arguments against than for. And I felt that if I stacked all the against in the against argument, I'm not being balanced in the way I'm presenting it. So I had to limit myself to only a subset of the more common argument about

why we shouldn't support the ban. So obviously, if we had added that, it may have swayed some more people in the conditional questions about whether they support the argument for. I don't think it would have made a big difference in the bottom line.

MR. HAMID: And also, I mean there were some Democrats who were making this point well why not Saudi Arabia, why not Egypt, and I was very uncomfortable with that response because first of all, it legitimizes the logic of the travel ban, and you know, what if Trump came back and said he wouldn't do this obviously, to Saudi Arabia, close ally and all that.

MR. TELHAMI: Not now anyway.

MS. WITTES: Yeah, not now.

MR. HAMID: But I mean if they came back and said okay, we're going to expand it to these two very problematic countries, where you can make a stronger case, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. It's not as if then all of us would be like oh, that's better than it was before. To me, that would be actually more problematic because that, then you would expand the number of Muslims who would fall under the travel ban. So I think we have to, you know, so that's just one thing to keep in mind on that particular argument.

MS. WITTES: Yeah, I think too there's a broader question when we get to how do we - how does the public understand these policy decisions, whether it's the executive order on the travel, or you know this week, the decision to fire Jim Comey. There's no question on the face of it that the executive branch and the president have the authority to do these things and that they have bases on which they can make arguments on behalf of these choices. But there's a question about are those arguments credible to the public. Does the public believe that the reasoning is what the President says it is? And you know, you used the word arbitrariness. I think that it's been a recurring challenge for this administration to kind of tee up its decisions in a way that makes those arguments in a proactive manner that the public sort of right away says okay, we understand that argument.

And instead, they roll these things out or sometimes, don't even roll them out, and just kind of drop them in a way that makes it very easy for the polarized commentariat and politicians to start picking apart and making claims about you know, skepticism on one side or the other about the substantive choices that they've made. And this week to me is yet another example of that. You

know, does the President have the right to fire the FBI director. Sure, it's all about the timing, right. And do people believe that the reasons are what the White House says they are. Yes, other questions? In the back.

SPEAKER: Just one comment first on the arbitrariness. I mean there's no doubt that the decisions are both arbitrary and seem to be spontaneous and everything else. You will get people however arguing way further down the line that some aspect of the decision which countries were chosen has to do with the strength of the nation state and the nation state's ability to actually control its travel documents, control its airports, things like that, which might put Saudi Arabia in a different category than some of the others.

That said, I have a question when the poll, those who were being polled were presented with these arguments, were they side by side or sequential?

MR. TELHAMI: That's sequential, but we also varied the sequence so that we sometimes put one over the other. But they are first presented one argument, they decide on it. And then afterwards, they're presented with a second argument, they decide on it. And then after they have decided on both arguments, they go to the bottom line question of whether they support or oppose the ban.

SPEAKER: Did you do any -- did you do to see if the order made any difference?

MR. TELHAMI: We haven't actually done that, you know. I mean we could do that. It's very rare that we find a major factor, and obviously sometimes it is. In this particular case, I would be very surprised, because they're just right after the other and people have thought about both of them.

SPEAKER: Was there any reason not to put them side by side and let them see them both in the same way?

MR. TELHAMI: Well, yeah, sure because it's much easier to read and for them to think about it one by one. It's just here's an argument for, here's an argument against. I mean that's the way we do it methodologically. And if you would like to talk about that afterwards, I'm happy to talk to you about it.

SPEAKER: Thanks.

MS. WITTES: Yes, the best we can do when we have sequencing effects is to randomize the sequence of the questions.

MR. TELHAMI: Yes, we randomize, most of the choices we randomize as well, so that we make sure when you give them four or five choices, we make sure we randomize the choices on things that are sensitive.

MS. WITTES: Okay. Why don't we take these two questions here and then we'll come back to the panel for final comments. Mr. Schwartz.

MR. SHWARTZ: Yes, this has to do with U.S. relations within the Islamic world, and we haven't really touched on this, but it's more current and it's probably overshadowed by the events of this week, but what is your perceived impact of the decision to fund the Kurds and how it's going to impact our relationship with Turkey.

MS. WITTES: Wonderful question, we'll, just take that one there. Thank you.

SPEAKER: Did you do any sampling of pro or against the travel ban before you gave the argument for and against and see whether they changed after the arguments? Something what you often do in say a focus group?

MS. WITTES: Excellent. Okay. so we have a policy question and interestingly, I think when we look at the list of countries that we know have been invited to Riyadh as part of this counter-ISIS fight. Turkey is not among them so far. And it's quite notable that the Trump Administration has made this decision to go ahead and directly provide weapons to the YPG, this Syrian Kurdish group despite its links to the PKK, which is a Turkish Kurdish terrorist organization, that's recognized by the United States as a foreign terrorist organization, and despite the real opposition of the Turkish government. So to me, this sort of gets to what's the American priority, what's the lens through which our policy makers are looking at the conflict in Syria. And this decision says to me they are still, as did Obama, they are looking at this almost exclusively through the lens of the fight against ISIS. They're not thinking about the civil war, they're not thinking about how to end the conflict that gives ISIS the space to emerge and recruit and operate. They're just focused on attacking this group, destroying its territorial base and dispersing it as best they can, and if you're worried about the future of Syria, you need Turkey on board. But if you're worried primarily about

fighting ISIS, you need guys on the ground who are good at fighting ISIS and YPG are one of the few.

So to me, that's what I take away from this. But I think in the long run, excluding Turkey from that conversation is probably not -- it won't be sustainable and certainly won't be constructive in the long run. That's my take. I pass it on to you for further thoughts. Karen, do you hear anything from the administration about this?

MS. DeYOUNG: I think that it was no accident. I mean first of all, no one was any doubt that this was what the Americans were going to do, including the Turks were not in any doubt because even though they had been strung along with endless conversations, I think it was always clear this was going to happen. You know, President Erdogan is going to be here next week. He's going to be here on Tuesday and have a White House meeting with President Trump and I think they wanted to get that on the record before he got here, so that it wouldn't, the meeting itself would not look like a clash. The public response has been predictable. The president, prime minister, have all come out and said this is unacceptable, this is a terrible decision, doesn't the United States understand they're being snookered by these people, our belief is that the YPG, the Syrian Kurds, who they say are aligned with the PKK, the Turkish Kurds, who are terrorist by our lights and theirs, that their goal is to basically take over parts of Syria and kick out the Arabs and the Turkmen and the Christians, and we've seen that happen in the parts of Northern Syria, where they already have, under U.S. auspices gone through and pushed out to Islamic state. Turkey considers them an existential threat, is the phrase they always use. They believe that the Turkish Kurds and the Syrian Kurds are as one, these groups, not all Kurds. They say that any weapons that the United States supplies to the YPG will go to the PKK and that they have proof that they already have in the past. So what's Turkey's response going to be?

I think the Turks are going to fulminate and yell and ultimately sort of finesse. They don't really have a lot of choice. They want to stay in NATO, they toy with the Russians, but they don't see that as part of their long term future security strategy other than as a sort of slight balancing against NATO where they see their future. I think that they will pound the table and make demands about assurances that the YPG forces will not go directly into Iraq as part of the offensive and that they won't stay there. The Americans will make those assurances even though they're not really in a

position to do that because it's going to be very hard to get them out, because the Turks essentially are right about what the Kurdish ambitions are. The Americans are sort of turning a half blind eye to that because they really believe that that's the only way they're going to get the Islamic state. So short answer after that very long one is they're going to pound the table, they're going to scream, the Americans are going to be really nice and at the end of the day, it's going to happen exactly the way we've been told it's going to happen.

MR. HAMID: I mean Tamara, I agree with you that it's problematic for this one main reason which is it suggests that this administration is zeroing in really on this narrow counter ISIS approach and there's a lack of a broader strategic vision that looks at things like governance deficits and legitimacy and state collapse and so on. So that to me is what's troubling about it. That said, I think it's tough to talk about this sometimes because there isn't a Trump policy. There are like four simultaneous foreign policies that are competing with each other at any given time. So it's like amazing to me, I'll hear Nikki Haley saying something at the U.N. and I'll be like that sounds like a different foreign policy than what I just heard from Rex Tillerson. It's almost like they are representing competing administrations.

So I think that's what makes it a little bit challenging, and also you wonder, I mean McMaster has national security advisor, has different views on some pretty key issues than the president that he serves. So, for example, on radical Islamic terrorism, and it's remarkable to me that the top national security official would have a fundamentally different view on what was an overarching campaign plank of this kind of obsession where the radical Islam, radical Islamic terrorism. So that to me suggests that when we're looking at this administration, we have to always keep in mind that the way we analyze, we can't analyze the way we analyzed under President Obama. Where Obama, for all the criticisms we might have had, he had a very, he had a very particular view of the world and he was the one who was ultimately driving it. You know, we don't quite have that luxury in this case.

MR. TELHAMI: And just first of all, on the methodological question, no, we didn't do that. We could have, it could be interesting. We're doing so many methodological things and this Nielsen Scarborough is enabling us to do, including for the first time, we're actually measuring latency

of how long it takes people to respond to every question and to read every question to measure dissonance in part. And we're trying to correlate that because it's something we're analyzing. We haven't done that yet, but there's a lot of stuff in there that we're going to be able to use for analysis.

But just one final thought on this foreign policy issue. I think strategically, it really doesn't change much. I mean in all honesty, the Turks are going to do what the Turks are going to do, which is the Kurds, the U.S. is not going to stop them. How much support we give the Kurds isn't going to impact the relative power vis-à-vis Turkey in the end if there is going to be confrontation. And it'll make it look messy in the end, but it's not going to change much.

But I do want to say something on sort of how the picture, to add to what Shadi said about, you know, it's not the real issue, it's about, okay, so what's this part of, or what's going on here, or should we really even analyze the consequences. Right after the strike on Syria, I said, I tweeted, you know, in a few days, the choice for the administration would be accept the interpretation that the strike has failed to achieve the desired outcome or escalate, that that was kind of, that's kind of what I envisioned was going to be the case. And it still is.

MS. WITTES: Right. That would have been a normal, closer to (inaudible), right.

MR. TELHAMI: That would have been the normal. But they always have the second strategy, which seems to be the first strategy which is change the subject. And we've seen this over and over again, you know. ISIS was number one story, now it's North Korea, now it's probably going to be back into Iran, tomorrow it's Saudi Arabia. So this goes into this thing that we can't analyze any issue. Before we even start thinking about what are the consequences, what's the next move, we're focused on something else. And that really is, I think, symptomatic of the crisis we face in American foreign policy right now.

MS. WITTES: Well, I think that is very trenchant, if troubling point on which to end. And it means that all of us who do this work, who have been trained to connect the dots and describe coherence are challenged to find a new way of explaining things to the public. But I am grateful to all of you for joining us for this iteration of the discussion and I know that I am looking forward to and I hope you will look forward to the next round of poll results from Shibley and Nielsen and thank you very, very, much for joining us.

(Applause)

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CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

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