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PARTICIPANTS:

AMBASSADOR JAMES DOBBINS
Senior Fellow, Distinguished Chair in Diplomacy and Security
RAND Corporation

PETER BAKER
White House Correspondent
The New York Times

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. BAKER: Hi, everybody. How's it going today? Everybody hear us? All right. Thank you very much for coming, I really appreciate it. Am I doing introductions? All right.

Well, thank you very much for coming. Good evening and welcome to the Brookings Institution for those of you from the outside, many of you obviously from upstairs. My name's Peter Baker and I'd like to welcome you to this Brookings Book Club conversation with Ambassador James Dobbins, the author of his new book, "Foreign Service: Five Decades on the Frontlines of American Diplomacy." It's in fine bookstores everywhere, but conveniently right out there in the lobby for those of you who haven't bought it. Go ahead and get a few extras. It's great beach reading. (Laughter)

Get extra copies for your spouses, your cousins, your friends, and particularly anybody who's interested in public affairs, international affairs because this is an important book. It's a good book to read. Anybody who has experience in this will recognize a lot of lessons in it. Those of us who are younger or new at this -- I say "us," I don't really think I can qualify anymore -- will learn a lot as they get started.

I couldn't be more delighted to be part of this conversation because if you were going to invent a public servant from scratch, James Dobbins is one of the guys you would find there. It would look an awful lot like him. He's given his country and the world a lifetime of hard work and dedication and wisdom, and this book encapsulates it.

Just a couple introductory things about him for those of you who don't know him personally. I suspect almost everybody here does. Jim Dobbins is the zelig of international diplomacy. We were just talking about that earlier; I'm stealing the line, but it's true. If there was a crisis or a big-time global conclave anywhere in the last 40 or 50 years, you could be pretty much sure that Jim Dobbins was there working the problem.

He was there at the Gulf of Tonkin; not his fault. (Laughter) He was in Paris for the Vietnam peace talks. He was in Rambouillet for the birth of what we call the G7 today. He was in Helsinki for the signing of the Human Rights Accords. He was in Berlin when Reagan called on Gorbachev to tear down the wall. He was in Brussels when the Treaty of Maastricht was concluded. He was in Bonn managing the installation of a new government under Hamid Karzai for Afghanistan. He

worked on Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda, Haiti, Kosovo. And finally, when he thought he was done with all of this, they brought him back again to be a special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, one of the hardest pieces of territory anywhere in the world.

So in this rather remarkable time of turbulent international relations, I can't think of anyone better to hear from today than Ambassador Jim Dobbins. Thanks very much for doing this. I appreciate it.

AMBASSADOR DOBBINS: Thank you, Peter. (Applause)

MR. BAKER: To start with, tell us how you ended up choosing diplomacy as a career.

AMBASSADOR DOBBINS: Well, when I was 10 years old, my family moved to the Philippines. My father was a junior civil servant, not working for the State Department, but for another agency and not "the" agency. (Laughter) But the Veterans Administration. The Philippines was part of the United States, an American colony, during World War II, and so all the Filipinos who fought in the war were American veterans. And so the VA had its biggest office in the world in Manila, not in New York or Chicago.

And so we took a train across the United States and a three-week boat trip across the Pacific. Back in these times, travel was so unusual and so rare that government employees all traveled first class. (Laughter) You know, it wasn't a commodity, it was something very rare.

And then we got there and the dollar was strong and this was sort of post-colonial life, and so we had a swimming pool and a tennis court and five servants. And this seemed like, you know, this was the life that I was prepared to sustain. (Laughter)

We then moved to Washington I found there was a foreign service school at Georgetown and that seemed like a career worth pursuing. Now, I never did get the swimming pool or five servants again, but that was the origin. (Laughter)

MR. BAKER: But you went from there into the military at first.

AMBASSADOR DOBBINS: Right.

MR. BAKER: What was that like? And is there a benefit to having served in one and then serving in the other?

AMBASSADOR DOBBINS: Yeah, I mean, back then the draft was in force and

everybody leaving college, you know, not everybody, but most people assumed they would go into the military. And I went to OCS, Officer Candidate School, in the Navy and then spent three and a half years in the Navy on an aircraft carrier in the Pacific. And I think there's two benefits.

One benefit is the obvious one of just having that experience. And then bringing it to any number of subsequent diplomatic crises and endeavors where civil and military cooperation was important, where understanding the military, as a diplomat, was important in working with them.

I also learned what -- it's wrong to call it a habit of command. What I learned was that the people working for me, and I was a very junior officer and I had maybe 50 to 100 people working for me, and every one of them knew more about their job than I did. And every one of them was willing to do what I asked them to do provided I respected their expertise, consulted them where necessary, and gave them orders that were sensible. And I discovered that as I eventually gained more authority and more experience that if you treat people that way, you'll get good performance. So I think that was an important experience.

MR. BAKER: You mentioned that as a way of how to deal with people. I noticed in the book there's a variety of sort of hints about how to make Washington work for you. And I jotted a few of them down under what I wrote down as the "Dobbins Rules." And I found a few of them. I wonder if you could talk about it.

I noticed these are small things, but anybody who works in Washington understands that one of the most important jobs you have early on can be a note-taker in an important meeting. And you wrote that as a note-taker, "don't record what's actually said, but what your boss' boss would have want your boss to have said." (Laughter) I thought that was a smart point.

You wrote, "When traveling with your boss on business, never check your bag, especially when your boss doesn't check his bag."

And, "Always accept diplomatic invitations even if you don't go because they'll notice if you decline, but they might not notice that you weren't there because they don't know what you look like." (Laughter) I love these. These are great. These are great rules.

Tell us a little bit about that. What are some tricks to being a successful diplomat? What are some tricks to being a successful public servant in Washington?

AMBASSADOR DOBBINS: Well, I think, you know, partly there's a degree of luck involved, being in the right place at the right time, and being noticed. And if you have bad luck, you're a terrific person in a two-man post where the only person who notices you is your boss who's almost as junior as you are.

I was, fortunately, assigned to Paris as my first assignment and then went -- worked for Sargent Shriver, who was the ambassador to Paris for a while, and then for Averell Harriman and Cyrus Vance on the Vietnam peace talks. So this was just luck.

If you're lucky, you're in the right place at the right time. And then if you're good, you get noticed. And if those combinations continue for a while, you know, you have opportunities to rise.

As a junior officer, you're largely an observer and a gofer and a facilitator, but you do have to demonstrate a command of the topics. You know, the joke about you write a Memorandum of Conversation so that it reads as your boss would like it to read and as your boss' boss would like it to read.

And there the funny thing was that I was -- these were a very, small, secret group. It was called the Quadripartite Group, which had France, the U.K., West Germany, and the United States. And we kept it secret so that the Italians and the Canadians and everybody else didn't insist on coming to the meetings and making them less productive. And so for about 15 years, this group continued. And initially, it only had one note-taker, which was me, and everybody go the Memorandum of Conversation. So I not only had to make one person look good, I had to make all four of them look good. (Laughter) And the German, at one point, the German political director who was participating said that his minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, always asked for these and he very much appreciated that I'd always made him look good. (Laughter)

MR. BAKER: But is that one of the clues, is having a room with a small number of people?

AMBASSADOR DOBBINS: I mean, certainly for most forms of diplomacy you need to have, you know, a differentiated approach. You need large groups when you need a broad consensus, but you need to work toward that in smaller groups. So, you know, one of the frustrations that -- this was back Henry Kissinger in particular, when he said if I want to talk to Europe, who do I call? And this

became a brief controversy and the Europeans got huffy. And he said this is going to be the year of Europe, and they got even huffier. What do you mean? Every year is the year of Europe, you know. What do you mean this is going to be? Who are you?

But one of the problems was that you had an alliance then, I can't remember, I think there were 16 countries and you had the European Union that were 8 countries, and they all had to be in the room and it became very difficult. You could either talk to one at a time, which was useful to a limited degree, or you'd talk to all of them, and there wasn't any sort of intermediate point. And so we created, this was back in '75, we created two forums.

One was the G7, which went beyond NATO and included Japan. And Canada and Italy burst in, although they weren't initially invited, but that was once it became public it was hard to exclude them. But that was a small group that focused largely on international economic issues, monetary policy, that sort of thing.

And then there was an even smaller group, which, again, was created essentially by Henry Kissinger and his principal European deputy, Hal Sonnenfeldt, who I was working for, which was this Quadripartite Group. And that group continued for 15 or 20 years as a steering group for the larger alliance. And it only worked because it was done very quietly and, thus, everybody else didn't get miffed and upset and complain.

MR. BAKER: You mentioned Henry Kissinger. You mentioned Sargent Shriver. You also worked over the years with James Baker and Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice and Bob Zoellick. I think 10 presidents you said overall, is that right, and 13 secretaries of state? Madeleine Albright you mentioned. Tell us about -- give us some sense of them. Who ranks high? Who ranks low? What made the successful presidents and secretaries successful? What made the ones who weren't successful unsuccessful?

AMBASSADOR DOBBINS: Well, in part, it's opportunity. So, I mean, James Baker was probably the most consequential of them because he had the opportunity: Gorbachev, the German unification, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War. Now, lots of people had worked on that, including George Shultz and Ronald Reagan, but it all came together and so that was an opportunity. Now, Baker was an extraordinarily competent secretary of state, but he might have also

been one not nearly as consequential in a different period.

I mean, the book contains, you know, small character portraits of the ones that I got -- I didn't get to know all 10 presidents. In fact, unfortunately, the day I was sworn in as an officer of the Navy, John Kennedy was assassinated, so our association was very brief. But, you know, as I progressed, I had more of an opportunity to size up many of these individuals.

I think Kissinger, of course, was and remains a fascinating character. He was a bit of a monster in terms of working for him. He flew into rages, was very difficult with his staff; could be very funny and very indiscrete. One of the reasons that he limited access was because he kept saying things which if they became public would have been very controversial. And so there was a logic to his keeping access limited.

And, in fact, when I worked for him, he was both national security advisor and secretary of state at the same time. So we had two forms of stationery in the office: we had White House stationery and we had State Department stationery. And we would send memos on one or the other, depending on where we wanted them to deliver.

So one of the issues we were working with was the strategic arms talks, the first round with the Soviet Union. So State and Defense were always at loggerheads about what kind of -- whether to make a concession and what concessions to make. And so we were in this odd situation in which we would write the State Department position because Sonnenfeldt, who I was working for, was his principal advisor on these issues, and then we'd get a Defense counter proposal, and then we'd do the cover memo to the president from the national security advisor, you know, adjudicating between the two departments and advising the president as to which of these to choose.

MR. BAKER: You're going to love this State Department position. Yeah, this State Department position is great, you ought to think about that. Right?

AMBASSADOR DOBBINS: And so that was a fascinating period to watch the government even though --

MR. BAKER: So you're walking down the street and the theory is that Kissinger doesn't want Sonnenfeldt to have his own person?

AMBASSADOR DOBBINS: Oh, yeah. So Kissinger and Sonnenfeldt were -- everybody

thought they were very close because they were both German Jews who had immigrated from Germany in the late '30s as teenagers and joined the U.S. Army and were part of Army intelligence and had been Germany during the war and then in the Occupation. And then both went into academia, got Ph.D.s, and had known each throughout that period. But they were very different temperamentally and Kissinger was a difficult boss, very demanding.

So Sonnenfeldt told me that Kissinger didn't like his staff to travel with staff. He thought he was the only one who was important enough to have a staff and his principal advisors should not have their own staffs, and so I was to stay out of the way and avoid the Secretary.

So we were in Helsinki for the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975. And I was walking from the hotel to the conference center where Brezhnev and Ford and everybody else were to bring some papers to Sonnenfeldt. I saw that Kissinger and Sonnenfeldt were walking with several other people toward me and Sonnenfeldt went (Indicating), you know, like that. (Laughter) So as I passed I noticed that oddly I was carrying Sonnenfeldt's briefcase, but he was carrying a briefcase, too. And I said 'what's that?' And then I realized that my entire career flashed in front of me. If I was terribly successful, 20 years later I could graduate from carrying Sonnenfeldt's briefcase to carrying the Secretary's briefcase. (Laughter)

MR. BAKER: Which of those Secretaries would you not want to play poker with?

AMBASSADOR DOBBINS: Probably Shultz.

MR. BAKER: Shultz?

AMBASSADOR DOBBINS: Yeah. I mean, I think Shultz kept his cards most closely to the chest. Impressive, impassive, Buddha-like many people said, took a slight pleasure in discomforting briefers when they didn't know their stuff. It was painful. Yeah, so I think he'd be the one I'd be most cautious about.

MR. BAKER: Most recently, you didn't work really you said very closely with Hillary Clinton, but you had some opportunity to work with John Kerry in your most recent position. What was he like as a negotiator?

AMBASSADOR DOBBINS: Yeah, I had some contact, very limited contact, with Hillary when I was in the White House. I spent four years doing Latin America --

MR. BAKER: When she was First Lady.

AMBASSADOR DOBBINS: -- for the President Clinton and had traveled with her and briefed her on occasion, but nothing very substantial.

Kerry I had known as a senator and testified in front of him several times, but was completely surprised when he called. I'd been out of the State Department 11 years at that point and he called one morning and asked me to come back to do the Afghan-Pakistan job.

He was a whirlwind. I mean, I think he decided that the president was going to run foreign policy in Washington and that, therefore, his best option was to be away as much as possible and be the principal American negotiator, the principal face of foreign policy, recognizing that the President and his staff were going to work the interagency process and that he didn't have a lot to contribute there. He went to the meetings when he was here and he even went to them via videoconference when he was abroad.

But I found with Secretary Kerry that whenever I needed anything to do with any of the countries I was working for, he was always available. He was very busy. He knew the brief better than I did. I mean, he'd known all these people for years as the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee and then as secretary, and so it was hard to brief him because he was impatient; he already knew most of what I was trying to tell him. But he was always available to make a phone call or even make a trip. If I said you've got to go to Pakistan, you've got to go to Afghanistan, he would drop what he was doing and do it. It was one of the four or five things that was at the top of his to-do list was the Afghan-Pakistan thing.

We never really had detailed, substantive conversations about where we were going, partially because he'd already been on the trail for a long time when he called me and because he knew where he was going. And it was interesting that over the year and a half that I was in government, Hillary Clinton called several times, I think three different occasions, for lengthy hour-long conversations just asking what was going on. You know, she had created the position for Dick Holbrooke and had invested a lot of time in it herself, and so she was interested in what was going on, was willing to give advice, was very witty and amusing and interesting to talk to. And so in many ways, I had the conversations with her that I would have liked to have had with John Kerry.

MR. BAKER: You write pretty -- I would say as a career public servant I think it's not clear from the book whether you would be a Democrat or a Republican, and I'm struck when you describe the presidents that you worked with there that you have pretty measured analysis of each of them, you know, their strengths and their weaknesses, without tipping your hand. But of these presidents which one do you think was the most suited to national security, to foreign policy, and why was that?

AMBASSADOR DOBBINS: Well, I mean, I think George H.W. Bush was certainly by far the best prepared. I mean, he'd been director of the CIA, he'd been ambassador to China, he'd been vice president for eight years, he'd been a member of Congress, and he was a war hero. This was a resume that nobody else matched during this period. And I think he brought those talents to the presidency and the results are manifest. So I think he's the one I admire most.

Now, again, it's partially a question of opportunity. He had the greatest opportunities, but he maximized those opportunities very successfully. And also, it was -- you know, the longer a party is in power, generally, the more competent, the more professional, the more settled the administration becomes. So second terms of two-term presidents are always better than the first term. And Bush was the third term, in effect.

Truman, for instance, was the fourth term and fifth term of a Democratic presidency. And so there's more continuity. And certainly for the bureaucracy, particularly the senior bureaucracy, it's a much more comfortable situation than when you change parties and anybody who was highly regarded in the last administration is regarded with suspicion by the new administration and you go through a period during which you have to rebuild trust.

Bill Clinton was, you know, by far the most easygoing and pleasant person to work for. I had more contact with him because I was a White House staffer. And although he could be short-tempered with his immediate staff, for the rest of us he treated us as if we were major donors and he was going to run for a third term. (Laughter)

I mean, this compliment began to wear off for a while, but he'd always compliment me on my tie. Hi, Jim, what a great tie you got today. Then, of course, I overheard him telling somebody who had an absolutely awful tie what a great tie they had. (Laughter) And I realized that maybe his taste in ties wasn't that great, but still, I appreciated the gesture. And that was kind of typical. His handlers got

very frustrated because if you were on a trip with him, which I was pretty frequently, you could easily -- you'd be going from one meeting to another and you'd ask him a question and he'd start telling you about, you know -- and then he'd be 15 minutes for the president of whatever. And so his staff would say don't talk to him, you know. (Laughter)

And he was so talented and he could take a speech and really make it sing. And he listened to advice and took advice. There was a feeling that what you were doing was meaningful because the president was actually listening, responding. If you sent him a memo, you'd get a little something back, I agree, I don't agree, you know, or a question, something like that. So there was a meaningful interaction that was very rewarding.

MR. BAKER: And you mentioned, you said that Madeleine Albright was your favorite secretary of state to work with. Why was that?

AMBASSADOR DOBBINS: Well, partially because she gave me the greatest opportunities. This was at the end of the -- remembering my times correctly -- the end of the '90s, so we had Bosnia, Kosovo, the Balkans. She had thrown herself into the Balkans really for the whole eight years. I was just doing it for the last two years of the Clinton administration.

And, you know, there are some secretaries of state who want to leave behind a better State Department. I think Colin Powell was that kind of institutionally oriented Secretary of State. She wanted to leave behind a better world and, you know, the State Department would pretty much take care of itself. I don't want to overstate that, but, you know, she herself told me at one point that she felt she hadn't connected with the foreign service as much as she could and with the career service.

But she wanted to leave a better world and the Balkans was the area that she focused on. And I admired the tenacity with which she followed it and I admired the way she was a woman in a man's world. She was the first woman secretary of state; we've now had several. And instead of trying to act like a man, she acted -- you know, she used her femininity in an amusing and affectionate way to work with all of her colleagues, not just in the U.S. Government, but all abroad were men and she pretty effectively turned them into suitors. (Laughter)

MR. BAKER: Which one was her most successful suitor?

AMBASSADOR DOBBINS: You know, I mean, I think -- I was working on European

issues, and so the group that we worked with most were what was called the Quint, which was one bigger than the Quad, so it included Italy because Italy was close to the Balkans and important for the Balkans. So during the Kosovo air war, for instance, she was on the phone to these five guys or four guys every day and formed a pretty close bond among all of them. Then I was on the phone with their deputies, so before her phone call, I would have a phone call and we'd decide what the agenda was.

And then after her phone call, we'd have another phone call or send back faxes -- this was pre-email days -- to sort of say what was decided and what we were going to do until the next phone call the next day. And so she formed a pretty tight bond with that group, including the Russian, who wasn't part of the group, but was also someone she was talking to frequently. And for years afterwards, she met with them once or twice a year, that same group, even after all of them had left office.

She also spoke very good Russian and very good French. The French I could handle and so if I was the only person in a meeting besides her and she was speaking French, I knew what was happening. But when she went into Russian, I was lost.

MR. BAKER: Well, what do you think, I mean, the Clinton era, the '90s, of course, we saw these interventions in -- well, we saw the end of the intervention in Somalia and we saw the intervention in Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo. You had your hand in all of those. What made Bosnia and Kosovo successful and how do you compare those to what happened in Afghanistan and Iraq in later years?

AMBASSADOR DOBBINS: Well, this is a big subject. I've written several books on this, actually, so forgive me if I go on a bit.

I mean, first of all, administrations get better as they go along. And inexperienced presidents particularly that are new to the office and are surrounded by people new to the office tend to make big mistakes, so you have Kennedy's Bay of Pigs; you've got Johnson's reinforcement of Vietnam after the Gulf of Tonkin incident; and, of course, you've got the worst -- you've got Clinton in Somalia; and then you have the worst of all, which is Bush's invasion of Iraq. And by the time you get to the second term, they've learned a lot, they're a lot better. And that's true for all of them.

So with the end of the Cold War, nation-building, peacekeeping, post-conflict reconstruction became a growth industry. There were a lot of civil wars around the world. In the early '90s, you had something like 40 different civil wars going on around the world, many of which had been

fueled by the U.S.-Soviet competition. And when the Soviet Union went away and Moscow became more cooperative, a lot of these wars could be wrapped up and peacekeeping missions could be deployed.

But this was a new process. It was something we hadn't done before, we the U.S. Government, we the United Nations, we NATO, we various organizations. And there was a lot of -- and the mechanisms to do it were untried.

In normal peacetime, the State Department and the Defense Department, USAID, the Treasury, they all know what they're doing. They all have defined lanes and only limited overlap in their responsibilities. And that's true in wartime; in an actual full-time war, that's also true. Everybody knows what their lane is.

But in these kind of neither peace nor war situations, where you're trying to wrap up a conflict, where you have a military force and a civilian role, nobody really knows what their roles are because it's not part of their defined day-to-day missions. They're all improvising. And as a rule, they're all trying to get somebody else to do the unpleasant things, and so there's a lot of who pays for what; who does this; this is a dirty job, I don't want to do it. And those things have to be worked out and they have to be worked out over time, and only the President and the White House can integrate that. And that's not something that you can just snap your fingers and know how to do.

And so by the time you got to Bosnia, we'd had two experiences. Somalia was a complete catastrophe, no redeeming elements. Haiti went a bit better, but in the long term wasn't very productive, but at least it showed more attention to the mechanics of deploying a force and establishing a secure environment.

And so by the time you got to Bosnia and Kosovo, the various agencies of the U.S. Government were more used to working with each other. And by the time you got to Kosovo, which was the last of them, the international, the U.N., the NATO, the UNHCR, the humanitarian, the OECD, they all had roles and they'd done it in Bosnia, so transferring it to Kosovo wasn't that hard. It needed only small adjustments and so it got better.

Then Bush came in. This is a long answer to your question, I know. So Bush came in. The Republicans had been in opposition throughout the '90s. The job of the opposition is to oppose and they had opposed Clinton pretty comprehensively, including on the whole spectrum of nation-building. So

nation-building was a failed concept, it was a waste of time and money, and none of the missions were successful in their view, even the ones that were successful.

And so they came in, if you remember the four and a half hours of televised debate between Al Gore and George W. Bush, the only foreign and security policy that came up in four and a half hours of debate was nation-building. What a happy time that was where there was nothing else in the world that was worth discussing in a televised debate between two presidential candidates. And George Bush said we weren't going to do it anymore.

And, you know, Condoleezza Rice wrote a long article in Foreign Affairs about how foolish and how the 101st Airborne shouldn't be escorting children to school. And so they came into office predisposed against doing it.

Then, you know, Bush having promised not to do nation-building invaded three new countries in his first three years in office. So in 2001, we invaded Afghanistan; in 2003, we invaded Iraq; and in 2004, we invaded Haiti.

Now, we turned Haiti over to the U.N. with a few weeks, so it was only really Afghanistan and Iraq that were ongoing responsibilities. So suddenly, he was faced with the need to do a mission that he had said we weren't going to do and so the determination was that we're going to do it completely differently. They weren't going to adopt any of the mechanisms, any of the modalities, any of the lessons that the Clinton administration had learned through trial and error over eight years.

So Don Rumsfeld explained in an op-ed and in speeches that by flooding Bosnia and Kosovo with international manpower and economic assistance, we'd turned these two countries into permanent wards of the international community. And we were going to avoid doing that in Afghanistan and Iraq by absolutely minimizing the commitments of manpower and money, and this would make them self-sustaining much more quickly. He was effectively transposing the '90s debate over welfare reform in this country to the international realm, and it couldn't have been a more inapt analogy.

The idea that you reinforce only under failure, that you make an initial commitment and then you increase it only when the initial commitment has shown to be inadequate, turned out to be a vastly more expensive way of dealing with these post-conflict situation because it provides a vacuum of power during which opposition has a chance to organize, to arm, to intimidate the population, and to turn

into a violent resistance movement. And we allowed that to happen both in Afghanistan and Iraq because of this no nation-building, minimalist approach.

If we'd applied the level of commitment in Iraq in 2003 that we applied in 2008, we would have had better results. And if we'd done something similar, if we'd applied the level in Afghanistan in 2001 and '02 that we applied in 2010 under Obama, again, we would have had better results.

MR. BAKER: Let me ask you, we're going to open it up for questions in a few minutes, Russia is a huge issue for us today. And it would be, I think, even if Hillary Clinton or Jeb Bush or somebody else was president. It's especially so because of this president.

Looking back to the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, you advocated a Marshall Plan and you were skeptical of NATO expansion. Tell us what you think would be -- if your views had been the prevailing ones at that time, would we be in the same position today with Russia as we are?

AMBASSADOR DOBBINS: Yeah, I'm not sure how realistic my views were. I mean, at the time, my calculation, this is back just after the collapse of the Soviet Union and there was some preliminary discussions -- this was in the Bush administration, not even Clinton -- about whether the countries of the former Warsaw Pact should be brought into NATO. And my view was that the only country in Europe, and indeed the world, that was a serious threat to the United States was Russia; had been the Soviet Union, was Russia. They retained the nuclear armament. They were the only country that could do serious damage to the United States. And so why would you want to construct a system that was likely to marginalize and antagonize the only country that could be a threat to the United States, which clearly didn't want to be a threat to the United States? It was throwing its arms around the United States. It was a very positive era.

And so my view was, you know, Sweden, Austria, Finland, the neutral countries of Europe had gotten through the Cold War fine. They had the European free trade area, which had a free trade agreement with the European Union. They were the most prosperous and most peaceful countries in Europe. And so why couldn't the countries of the Warsaw Pact join EFTA instead of joining the EU and NATO and enjoy positive relations both with Russia and with the United States?

I didn't think of it at the time, but this was -- my argument was somewhat analogous to

the one that Sonnenfeldt had made, which actually created a big scandal and almost ended his career when he espoused a similar view back during -- this was under Brezhnev's Soviet Union and so it was even more unpalatable at that time.

On the other hand, the countervailing arguments enforces these countries desperately wanted the security and the support that joining the West brought. They didn't want to be anchored to Russia, even a democratic Russia. They'd had enough. And if they weren't provided the safe harbor that NATO and the European Union provided, if they didn't have that safe harbor they were going to become unstable and go back to the kind of Balkanesque conflicts that had led to the First World War and which we did see when you Yugoslavia broke up into feuding states.

And so I opposed the initial enlargement, not that my opposition meant anything because I'd left Washington and was an ambassador to what became the European Union and so I wasn't part of that debate. But when the second enlargement occurred, which included the Balkan countries, now I had concluded that this was going to be necessary to stabilize that region, that we weren't going to be able to garrison Kosovo and Bosnia forever, and that this was probably going to be necessary.

Unfortunately, I think, the price of bringing in the countries that were in conflict and giving them a safe harbor was that you had to get the Baltic states in, too. And I think that was a bridge too far there, essentially indefensible. And because they were not only -- they weren't part of the Warsaw Pact. They were part of the Soviet Union. And before they were part of the Soviet Union, they were part of the Russian empire since 1600, so there was a different character to them.

I'm not suggesting we should have sold them down the river. I think they could have continued to persist, like Finland does today. Finland, at one point, was part of the Russian empire, too, as an independent and democratic state, but one that's not allied with the West and providing a base for Western troops.

MR. BAKER: Moving to the current day. If President Trump read this book -- (Laughter) -- what would you hope he would get out of it? Tell us a little bit about how you see President Trump's foreign policy in the continuum of the 10 presidents you saw or served at some point or another in your career. Does he fit into that continuum? What should he learn? How do you feel about his foreign policy?

AMBASSADOR DOBBINS: Well, if he read the book maybe he'd relent on cutting the State Department's budget by 30 percent. I think he's so completely off the charts in terms of what had become acceptable and normal behavior from the succession of American presidents, certainly during my 50 years, that it's hard to make a comparison. I mean, this is really quite extraordinary.

And we're in this situation now where we sort of have two centers of foreign policy: you've got President Trump and then you've got everybody else. You know, they talk about this polarization in Washington. There's not much polarization on foreign policy in Washington. If you look at relations with Russia, the Islamic State, we don't like nation-building, how to deal with China, even trade issues, there's a broad consensus. And this was most evident in the 98-to-2 vote on sanctions against Russia and Iran. The two people who voted against it didn't think it was tough enough.

MR. BAKER: Right, yeah.

AMBASSADOR DOBBINS: So there's a broad consensus in the Congress and in Trump's cabinet level appointments, the secretary of defense, secretary of state, national security advisor, and to some degree among his principal economic advisors, too, that are all -- you know, they're drawn from New York money, financial circles, or in the case of the national security advisor from the career military. They've gone through successive administrations and grown up with most of the same experiences I have. And so I don't think their policies would be much different if Clinton was president.

And the president clearly has a different view, but he's also rather careful on national security, does tend to listen to the advisors he's appointed, and only sort of goes off the charts occasionally, mostly the Tweets and our domestic or to some degree trade policy. But there are occasions, such as the difference between the Secretary of State and the President on what to do about Qatar, for instance, where it doesn't.

But by and large, he's approached the national security issues more cautiously than some others.

MR. BAKER: Real quickly, one last question, we're going to open it up. Last question. What is the best decision that President Trump has made on foreign policy and what's the worst decision he's made on foreign policy?

AMBASSADOR DOBBINS: Oh, god. (Laughter)

MR. BAKER: And I don't mean cutting State Department because we're going to count that as a budget decision.

AMBASSADOR DOBBINS: Well, I mean, I think the worst decision, but it's a decision that Hillary Clinton made, too, was abandoning the Trans-Pacific Trade agreement, which I think would have been good for the United States economically and would have solidified America's role in Asia. So I don't think that can be blamed exclusively on Trump.

I would say that leaving the Paris Agreement, which he's uniquely responsible for, was the worst decision.

The best decision? You know, I think -- (Laughter) -- I personally think that allowing Mattis to set troop levels in Afghanistan was a little odd, but I think probably was a good decision. I don't think Mattis is going to flood the country with U.S. troops. The military are always the most risk-adverse in any interagency meeting that I've ever been in. And so if you leave these things to the military, they're going to reduce the risk, not increase it almost across the board. And I do think that was probably the right thing to do.

My understanding is that on that issue there's still a debate going on in the White House and this was kind of a half a loaf. So okay, you can have the additional troops, but we still want to debate what our broader policy is and how long we're going to stay. So this -- well, you know better than I that, you know, you have to keep posted, this may change.

MR. BAKER: And may change by the time we're finished here on stage.

AMBASSADOR DOBBINS: And I think his decision to give China another chance to change North Korean behavior was right and we'll see whether -- you know, he's already declared that a failure, which I think may be a little premature. But I think that was the right thing to do, too.

MR. BAKER: We're going to open it up for questions, please. So wait for a microphone to come to you and identify yourself and let's keep it brief. We're going to take three questions in a row real quickly so that Ambassador Dobbins can then duck the ones he doesn't want to answer. (Laughter) I'm kidding.

Right back there. I'm joking.

MS. ROGERS: Hi. My name is Rachel Rogers (phonetic). Ambassadors Dobbins,

thank you so much for being here to speak and also thank you for your decades of service to our country. My question is you've been involved in conflict resolution and negotiation in several very different cultural contexts. Could you speak of it to the balance between general negotiation skills versus having a really specialized knowledge of the cultures that are involved in the negotiations in Bosnia or Afghanistan, for example, and how that plays out when trying to facilitate that process?

MR. BAKER: That's a great question. Can we get right here?

MS. SONENSHINE: Thank you for a very interesting presentation. I'm Helen Sonenshine. I want to follow up on the question you raised, Peter, about the continuity, specifically the continuity of the State Department, the continuity of policy in foreign affairs specifically from the perspective of the various countries that we deal with, whether it be the European Union countries or Asia and so forth. Because what we're reading is the absolute bafflement of what our policies are and, therefore, how do we operate in organizations like the G7 and G20 when we have policies that vary from one day to the next?

MR. BAKER: Right. And one last one for this round. How about right here, sir?

MR. ROSE: Herb Rose. I wonder if you would care to speculate on the difference in views between Bush 41 and 43 towards nation-building. Do you think they ever discussed the issue between them?

AMBASSADOR DOBBINS: Okay, on cultures, I mean, in the early period when we were doing nation-building in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, you know, I found that there was some depth of expertise in the State Department on most of these -- and the U.S. Government more generally, the intelligence community, on most of these countries so that I could find people who told me why they were fighting each other, you know, what they were arguing about. And there was very little depth of expertise on how to stop it. Not so much how to negotiate an agreement, but how to then enforce that agreement.

So how do you raise a police force? How do you demobilize an insurgent militia? How do you train a new army? How do you create a central bank? You know, the kinds of things that when you're dealing with states that have gone back almost to a state of nature and which all the existing institutions have disintegrated, you know, what do you do then? And there was a lack of expertise on how you actually effected change in these societies.

I think that that's changed somewhat. I think we've now had 20 years or more of experience in dealing with these, not just the United Nations -- not just the United States, but a lot of other countries, as well, and a lot of international institutions, like the World Bank and the United Nations, are also dealing with these kinds of broken countries. And so there's more expertise than there was when I started.

And I don't think that the depth of -- and so I do think now at this point probably, if you were looking at where your expertise is not adequate, it would be in the area that the questioner suggested, which is how to understand how local culture is a factor in both why the state failed and how to fix it.

On continuity, I mean, I agree with you that foreign observers, like American observers, are puzzled and uncertain and concerned about exactly what the policy is. On the other hand, as I said, I think that the permanent institutions continue to function perhaps at a lower level. They're not turning over at maximum efficiency at the moment, but still the State Department, the Defense Department, the National Security Council staff, and the other major cabinet agencies are there, they're available, they can to some degree reassure people that there is a continuity at some level. But there's no doubt that there is a degree of uncertainty.

Now, I think this has occurred before. It just hasn't occurred at quite the same level. I mean, I think the biggest discontinuity I experienced was when Reagan came in after Carter. And that was largely a discontinuity because not only Ronald Reagan, but many of Ronald Reagan's advisors had never been in office before. It was a wing of the Republican Party that had not been dominant and, therefore, had not had a strong national security experience. And so there was a good deal of uncertainty then at a time which, in many ways, was even more dangerous than it looks today.

We now know it was the beginning of the end of the Cold War, but at the time it seemed the height of the Cold War. Nuclear deployments were increasing and there was a great deal of uncertainty about whether Ronald Reagan was going to continue the policies not just of Jimmy Carter, but of Nixon and Ford and Kissinger at the time. He came in on basically an anti-détente, anti-Soviet platform, Evil Empire. At one point he unguardedly said, you know, we're going to start bombing in four hours, which disconcerted not only the Soviet leadership, but a number of our allies. And so there was a

period there.

Now, I think it's more extreme now than it was then, that uncertainty. On the other hand, the situation is not quite as dire and dangerous as it was in the waning days of the old Soviet leadership.

MR. BAKER: And then if you want to duck it, there's the Bush 41-43 question.

AMBASSADOR DOBBINS: Oh. Yeah, I mean, Bush 41 has been very guarded about what he tells his son, if anything. And his son claims he never asked for advice.

MR. BAKER: Right, right. Yes, he sought advice from higher father.

AMBASSADOR DOBBINS: And Bush 41 wasn't a nation-builder either. In fact, there's a whole chapter in my book about my frustration with their unwillingness to engage on Yugoslavia as it was falling apart. I mean, if there was anything I would fault Bush 41 and Baker, it was the –we don't have a dog in this fight— attitude toward the collapse of Yugoslavia.

MR. BAKER: How about right here?

MR. MINES: Hi, Jim. Keith Mines (phonetic). I was just wondering if you could comment on what keeps you awake at night internationally right now and what architecture you would use to manage that better? And then also, what keeps you awake at night domestically?

MR. BAKER: Okay. How about right here?

MR. MALUNA: Hi, my name is Jerry Maluna (phonetic) and thank you very much. I just wanted to ask what do you think is the future of American leadership given our recent decisions, as you mentioned, of backing out of the TPP and the Paris Agreement? And what do you believe will be the context of global leadership in the next few years given that other states, such as China, are doing the One Belt One Road policy? So how do you think global leadership is going to look like in the next few years?

MR. BAKER: And right here, the gentleman.

SPEAKER: Ambassador Dobbins, thank you very much for a good presentation. I worked in the State Department under Secretary Shultz. I worked for Alan Wallace, undersecretary for economic affairs, from 1982 to '86. I'm a World War II buff and I liked your statement, "a bridge too far" on the Baltic states. Why are you so skeptical of the NATO expansion?

The Baltic states were independent, Soviet-occupied, German-occupied, and now

independent. And the Russians are a great danger to us. So I'd be interested in your comments.

AMBASSADOR DOBBINS: Okay. So keeping me awake, Korea. I think that's the most dangerous flashpoint now. The world's unpredictable and nobody would have thought we were going to have a war in Afghanistan until September 10th, right? So, you know, something else might occur, but I would worry most about Korea. It has nuclear weapons and it's developing ICBMs. It's soon going to be able to strike the United States.

The Trump administration has said it will take military action to prevent that if necessary. I think there's pretty general agreement that military action against North Korea would at best only involve several million South Koreans getting killed, and could be worse than that. So, you know, I think that's the flashpoint that worries me most.

I'm not sure I can answer the domestic -- you know, what worries me most about the domestic thing. I think my concern is do we come out the other side of this administration with our system continuing to operate effectively. And so far, I think it is operating effectively even under extraordinary circumstances. And the question is, can that be sustained for four or eight years?

On global leadership, you know, I think it's a little early to tell. Trump is not the first president who wanted to back off and adopt a more conservative, a more limited American foreign policy. So in the '70s, just as Nixon was -- early '70s, just as Nixon was beginning to withdraw troops from Vietnam, he declared what he called the "Nixon Doctrine." And the Nixon Doctrine said that we were going to look to our allies to provide the troops for their own protection. It wasn't quite a withdrawal of American security guarantees, but it was close to that.

Jimmy Carter came into office with a very pacifist, limited set of -- very much like Obama reacting negatively to the Vietnam conflict and "never again" kind of thing. And again, Obama came into office promising to end the wars in Iraq and ultimately in Afghanistan, and withdraw from the Middle East and Europe and pivot to Asia, which was the most peaceful area in the world.

Now, none of that worked out. And, for instance, when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, Carter supported the mujahedeen in Afghanistan and he declared the Carter Doctrine, which was that any threat to the stability and security of any persons or country was an attack on America and we would respond militarily. A very broad reversal of his general tendency.

And Obama, after all, didn't pivot to Asia. He ended up reinforcing forces both in Europe and in Middle East.

And so, you know, when the next crisis occurs is the U.S. going to step back and leave it for somebody else or not? You know, I'm skeptical that Americans -- Obama learned that the Americans wanted a cheaper, less risky foreign policy, but they didn't like the reduced influence that resulted. So they wanted all the influence they always had, they just wanted to pay less for it. And so he was penalized and criticized when that influence was reduced.

And I don't think that an American's going to be long content to see our country leading a coalition of oil state monarchies and Third World bad guys while the rest of the democratic, industrialized world marches to a different tune. And so I think it's early to sort of declare the United States is moving back from global leadership, but certainly the rhetoric is consistent with that.

So on the Baltic states, first of all, the Baltic states were part of the Russian empire. They were briefly independent after the First World War. Then they were became part of the Nazi empire. And when the Nazi empire was defeated, they then became part of the Soviet Union. The United States never recognized their incorporation in the Soviet Union and always insisted that it supported their independence, which ultimately they achieved.

But the purpose of alliances is to -- the purpose for the United States having allies to make the United States safer. And the Baltic states are not capable of contributing to the security of the United States. The United States is certainly capable of contributing the security of the Baltic states, but we could do that for almost any state in the world. The question is when you expand the alliance, are you expanding the alliance in a way that contributes to our security and to the security of other allies in the alliance?

Given the geography of the Baltic states, the fact that they're effectively surrounded by Russia because Russia also has the Kaliningrad enclave that's on the other side of the Baltic states, between the Baltic states and Poland, makes them effectively indefensible. That is, there's almost no amount of force that could actually prevent the Russians from taking them if the Russians were foolish enough to try.

Now, the Russians aren't likely to be foolish enough to try because the reaction would be

too costly from their standpoint, and they don't have any particular incentive to do so. But bringing them into the alliance and formally moving the alliance not only up to the borders of the former Soviet Union, but into the borders of the former Soviet Union in that way was provocative and was almost necessarily going to be provocative and costly as a result. So that's why I had doubts about it.

But I counseled my European colleagues that if we wanted to bring in the Baltic, Romania and Bulgaria and the Balkan states, this was a necessary companion piece because the Baltic states had significant constituencies in the United States who would support it and the Balkan states had none. And so the Balkan states were going to come in on the coattails of the Baltic states in terms of the American domestic politics. And so I didn't fight it. I acknowledged it and said it was a fait accompli. But I do think that it was unwise and I think it's clear today that it was unwise.

MR. BAKER: Well, that's great. In fact, the last answer I think touches on this broader question we have today, of course, on Russia and what we do about Russia. I'll take moderator's prerogative and flash you one last quick question as we wrap up here.

President Trump will go to Germany next week. He'll go to Poland first, then Germany for the G20. Presumably, he'll see Vladimir Putin. He calls you tomorrow and says, Jim, what do I say to Putin? What should President Trump do next week?

AMBASSADOR DOBBINS: I think the only thing that President Trump could do that would give him more leeway domestically and ultimately more leeway to make good deals with Russia is to confront them on the election interference issue and make that the center point of his discussion. I think until he establishes his credibility on that issue, he's going to be completely impotent as regards Russia policy, and as indicated by the 98-to-2 vote. These are not just votes on sanctions. This is the first time almost ever that the sanctions have been passed in a way that the President can't waive them.

MR. BAKER: Right.

AMBASSADOR DOBBINS: It's unprecedented in the degree to which it limits the President's capacity to use and manipulate sanctions in a way to achieve objectives. Because the Congress doesn't think he'll use it in the objectives that the Congress wants him to use it in. so that would be my advice.

I think there are deals to be done with Russia as regards Syria. I think it's important.

And I think that we need to talk to Russia and, incidentally, Iran if we're going to sort Syria out without a new conflict there.

And back to Keith's question, I think my second concern is where we're going in Syria. And I think there's even some possibility on Ukraine, although I think that's harder to see a deal there. But I think we're completely blocked from those kinds of constructive discussions under current circumstances.

MR. BAKER: Well, thank you all for joining us tonight for this fascinating conversation. There's going to be a reception out in the hallway and Ambassador Dobbins will be signing books for anybody who hasn't had a chance already to grab his autograph. And thank you very much for a great discussion, really appreciate it. Thank you. (Applause)

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