

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

THE MIDDLE EAST AND RUSSIA:  
AMERICAN ATTITUDES ON TRUMP'S FOREIGN POLICY

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**Introduction:**

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**Discussants:**

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

MR. SACHS: Good morning everyone. Thank you very much for joining us this morning. We have a fascinating, excellent annual tradition and this year titled, "The Middle East and Russia: American attitudes on Trump's foreign policy." This is our annual release of data compiled and analyzed by Shibley Telhami, our nonresident senior fellow and it is a special privilege. I'll get to that in a minute.

This also is the beginning, the unofficial soft beginning of our Saban Forum for 2017. You may have heard the news yesterday that we'll be hosting senior advisor to the president, Jared Kushner for a public discussion on Sunday. We will have a video message from the Prime Minister of Israel. Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked member of the cabinet, Tzachi Hanegbi, member of the cabinet, Ambassador Husam Zomlot, the PLO ambassador here in D.C. and many other distinguished guests will be speaking to us there. You can follow that at #Saban17.

This is a special privilege especially because it touches on something that I think is very fundamental to what we try to do at Brookings. As you may know, Brookings as an institution doesn't have an opinion or a policy stance on any policy or political issue. We, of course, as individuals in this institution certainly do and we share them widely. We often disagree with each other and we enjoy that disagreement. We enjoy it because it is based on a constructive debate that takes one belief the institution does have very seriously. It is a contentious belief these days but we truly do believe that facts exist. And because we think facts exist, we think they are the only serious basis for policy recommendations, for policy analysis. And so, the best of our work is one that is based on these kinds of facts, on rigorous social science and other science, national science as well, and tries to produce from them, the best policy recommendations we can have.

There is no better example to my mind then exactly these poles that Shibley Telhami does. Shibley is a nonresident senior fellow with us but he is much more

than nonresident. He has been with us and has been a pillar of the Center for Middle East Policy since its very beginning when it was founded by Martin Indyk and has been a friend, an inspiration, a senior colleague to me and many of us here. So, it is really a special privilege in that regard. And these data are ones that every year, I truly use throughout the year. I site them in closed and open sessions all the time and I imagine you will as well. They are often some of the best nuggets.

Because this is done so regularly, there is also a special added value of timelines, of looking at data with the same research, with the same analysis sometimes over time. The United States, in the Middle East, Israel, among Palestinians, among other Arab countries and all over the world.

It is also a special privilege for me that we have an excellent panel of discussants. Two of them happen to my colleagues and friends. I'll start with our guest, Ambassador Dan Shapiro, thank you Ambassador, for being with us. Ambassador Shapiro was President Obama's ambassador to Israel until last year and is now associated with the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv and is certainly no stranger to Washington, to policy and politics. Thank you very much for joining. Suzanne Maloney, Deputy Director of the Foreign Policy program who is also our Iran maven and the one I turn to for anything I need on JCPOA or anything else to do with Iran. We'll be speaking as well especially on those aspects. It will be moderated by my friend Tamara Wittes who needs no introduction here and is an expert on certainly all things Israel and all things Middle East actually and just came back from testifying in Congress. Without further ado, let's turn to the more interesting part and I'll invite Shibley up to the stage.

MR. TELHAMI: Thanks so much, Natan, for the generous introduction. I do go back before the Middle East. I proceeded Martin at Brookings. I've been associated with Brookings for probably 22 years actually, 1995. A great relationship which has been mutually beneficial and I'm always proud of it.

Today I'm going to present to you some of the findings of a poll we just

conducted earlier in November just a month ago. I just want to say a couple of things about this poll which is, it is part of the University of Maryland Critical Issues poll. I direct that center and my partner with the professor, Stella Rouse, who is the associate director. We do a lot of polling not just on the Middle East and foreign policy. In fact, this one is a huge poll we're going to be releasing other parts of it. We even have a part of North Korea's nuclear issue that we're going to release in January with a Japanese partner in NGO that is conducting a similar poll in Japan to see how public opinion in the U.S. and Japan differ on nuclear issues. We also probed domestic politics so we have a study underway from this poll on the American dream, on things like reaction to the NFL kneeling and to fake news. So, this is an extensive project but today I am releasing only the parts that pertain specifically to the Arab Israeli issue and Middle East policy, particularly Iran. So, that's what I'm going to share today.

Let me just say a couple of more things about methodology. All of these polls that we conduct are with Nielson Scarborough. They are all pretty large samples. This one is 2000. They are an online probabilistic panel. Not only is this a 2000 size, it has an oversample of young people, 1042. We wanted to make sure we net a large number to talk confidently about young people. As you know, and I mean 18 to 34. One reason is that generally when you do polling in the U.S., you don't get as many responses among young people. So, usually people upweight the data so we wanted to make sure we could speak confidently about young people and we got an over sample of young people. We down weighted it, obviously.

So, let me start here with what I'm going to show today. Some of the questions that I have are about immediate issues. Some procedural, some policy issues and two are going to be trendline questions where they are questions we've been asking for a long time, we just want to see what is happening in American politics and how it is changing. One of the things that I'm going to show is that how the parties divide on the Israeli Palestinian issue is growing. It is not only big but it is growing. Although not on

every single issue as you will see, partisanship is deep in America and I would argue that historically, American attitudes toward the Israeli Palestinian issue were less partisan. And now, of course, we have partisanship on almost every issue but the story here is that this issue, the Israel Palestine issue is no longer immune to that divide. In fact, it is a deepening divide and I will talk about it in the conversation as to why that is happening.

But on some issues, surprisingly, America has come together and we will see and on other issues, they are not quite as divided. So, let me start with an issue that is important today which is, as you know, the Trump administration is contemplating moving the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem based on what the President had promised during the campaign. As you know, other presidents had promised that and clearly they didn't fulfill that. Now there is talk that the President might actually fulfill that and maybe even as early as this week. Some reports say it is hard to know for sure but clearly, that's an issue on the table.

Let me explain to you how we proceed to explore this issue. First, we give them the narrative and you can see the narrative President Trump pledged during the 2016 presidential campaign to use the U.S. embassy in Israel from its current location in Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. But like previous presidents, since Congress passed the 1995 Jerusalem Embassy Act, he has renewed a waiver that will temporarily keep the U.S. embassy in Tel Aviv based on national security interests. Now tell me the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. So, what we do on a question like this is a typical methodology that we pursue. A question like that we don't only ask one question. We present them with an argument of people who want it moved and we present them with the argument of people who don't want it moved and then we ask them a bottom line. Now that you've heard both arguments, what do you think?

So, let me show you how people responded to the arguments. The first argument is the U.S. should immediately move its embassy to Jerusalem. The embassy should be located in Jerusalem to fulfill the president's pledge and there is no national

security reason to file and exception to the 1995 Jerusalem Embassy Act. Such an act would serve to demonstrate the commitment of the United States, the State of Israel and to its control over a unified Jerusalem as its capital. Now, that's the argument that we present. Then we present the opposite argument, and by the way as it says here, the options are randomized. We sequence them in a random fashion so sometimes this comes first sometimes the other option comes first. This goes, by the way, for every one of the questions that I'm going to articulate. I'm not going to repeat myself because that's the process that we do.

So, what's the answer to this? Here it is. So, what you find is actually the black line is the total number of all Americans. 57 percent disagree or somewhat disagree with that statement. Of course, you can see a partisan divide. 73 percent of Democrats disagree, 54 percent of Republicans agree with that statement as stated. This is not about the policy it is just the argument. Then we follow with the following which is, the U.S. should not immediately move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem. The international community and including the UN, European allies, have not accepted Israel's annexation of Jerusalem which was occupied in the 1967 war. The U.S. government's position has been that the ultimate status of Jerusalem has to be agreed in negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians. If the U.S. were to move the embassy to Jerusalem, it would be violating international norms, harming important relationships worldwide and generating anti-American sentiments among Arabs and Muslims globally. So, it is the counter argument that we here in the debate.

So, what is the answer to that? Here you find that 65 percent of the panelists agree with it, somewhat agree or strongly agree, 65 percent. Even interestingly, I'm going to look at the Republicans, 54 percent of Republicans also agree with it. By the way, that is not uncommon. Meaning it is not uncommon when you present an argument for and an argument against for people to say, well I could see this and I could see this too. You always have an (inaudible) and we all sometimes are

divided on issues that are very close and controversial. That is not unusual at all, in fact, it is rather common. The question then is when they're forced to choose, what do they choose, that is the bottom line. So, we follow with another question which is having thought about it, do you support or oppose the United States immediately moving the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. That's the bottom line. 63 percent say they oppose, so the majority of Americans say they oppose it. You can see 81 percent of Democrats oppose it, 60 percent of Independents oppose it. Republicans remarkably are divided actually, almost down the middle. It is 49 percent to 44 percent. Even Republicans are not strongly in favor of moving the embassy. That is really an interesting part of the story.

Now, we asked a similar question, by the way, about the UNESCO because it was in the news, the withdrawal from UNESCO over its being accused of bias against Israel and withdrawing from that institution. We also give two arguments for and against. Here, the U.S. participating in UNESCO is important even when the U.S. disagrees with some UNESCO policies. It demonstrates engagement in the international community and ensures the health of UNESCO, et cetera. So, we give an argument against withdrawing. Remember again, these options are randomized so the fact that I start with one doesn't mean everybody sees that as the first one.

So, here is the answer. You have 62 percent who agree at least somewhat. That even when we disagree with UNESCO it is important for the U.S. to stay in the UNESCO. We then present our argument for withdrawing from UNESCO. So, the U.S. cannot accept UNESCO's approach on Israel and Israeli Palestinian conflict. UNESCO's disregard for Israeli position justifies U.S. withdraw from membership in the organization. We find here that overall, there is more of a divide and it is really a question of a divide along partisan lines, very much along partisan lines. This is really interesting. The minute you mention the term Israeli, I'm going to come back to this about the polarization. 71 percent of Republicans essentially strongly agree or somewhat

agree and then 71 percent of Democrats strongly disagree or somewhat disagree. So, here's the bottom line. Now you've heard both of what should the U.S. do and you have 55 percent say they oppose withdraw from the UNESCO. Obviously a long partisan line, a very large majority of Democrats Republicans oppose still in large numbers but not as large on some issues that you have. And certainly, independence more oppose than support this issue. Just quickly on the young people, clearly young people oppose it even more, 61 percent versus 53 percent for those 35 and over.

The next question is on mediating -- President Trump has commenced efforts to mediate the Israeli Palestinian, the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. His effort has relied on active personal diplomacy involving his top advisor, Asana Law, Jared Kushner and his former lawyer, Jason Greenblatt. Tell me how much you agree and disagree with the following statements. So, here this is procedural, it is obviously in the news, we wanted to probe, in a way, the partisanship issue. Whether the partisan issue even can affect something like this. This is not really a policy it's about process. Whether or not the partisanship is as deep as being reflected in such a question. So, we start, we give the following option. It is wise for the President to rely on family members and people who are close to them in Middle East diplomacy, as that increases the confidence of Middle East leaders in the Presidents effort. There are people who make their argument, including by the way, former President Jimmy Carter, who actually made that argument. Middle East leaders like to talk to people who are close to the President, so we give that as an option. What we see here is even as we give that option, the strong majority disagree with it. You have 60 percent disagree with it as an option including a slight majority -- Republicans are evenly divided on this one obviously, 49 to 47 percent.

And then we give the alternative argument which is in complex diplomatic efforts such as the Israeli Palestinian conflict, it is best for presidents to rely principally on experts who have knowledge and experience of both parties in the conflict. And here you



have the overwhelming majority of Americans on every party. There are no parties and differences on this one. 83 percent agree with it. Now that they've thought about it say, now tell me which of the following do you agree with more which one of those statements and here you have the overwhelming majority of Americans agree that it is better to rely on experts. So, you have including 71 percent of Republicans. Now, make that what you want of it but it is interesting to me here that the partisanship is not transferring into such issues. It is not a policy issue per se.

In general, what role do you want the new Trump administration to play in mediating the Israeli Palestinian conflict. By the way, this is a tracking (inaudible). We asked that last November after the election and we asked it and we also have a long history of asking a similar question about U.S. policy. So, we track this to see, I've actually been -- the first time I asked this was almost 30 years ago, this kind of question. So, we have a long track record of figuring out, how the American public opinion is shifting. This is, remember what I said up front, that this issue is no longer immune to partisanship. In fact, that partisanship is growing. Let me tell you the options that we have historically given are straightforward. Leaning toward Israel, leaning toward the Palestinians, leaning toward neither side. We don't say, be pro, lean is a little bit more muted and we've used that but that's exactly the wording we've used in the past so we have good tracking of this.

You can see that 59 percent of Americans want the U.S. to take neither side. 34 percent want to take Israel's side. Obviously, only a few want to take the Palestinian side, 6 percent. So, generally the choice is between neutrality and taking Israel's side in this overall and that is not unusual. This has actually been the history of American attitudes on this issue has been that the majority of Americans throughout ranging from two-thirds to three-quarters have wanted the U.S. to take neither side. It is that among those minority who want the U.S. to take sides, a lot more people want the U.S. to take Israel's than the Palestinian side. That has always been the trend. But I

want to show you, once you break that down, where you see the partisanship. Here if you look at, let me just see, this is the data comparing 2016 with 2017. This is a year ago when we released that data here a year ago, you could lean toward Israel among Republicans among Democrats. Among Republicans slightly grew from 56 percent to 58 percent of people who want to say straightforward, they want the U.S. to take Israel's side. It increased a little bit but still within the margin of error so it is really not much of an increase. But look at Democrats. You have people who want to lean toward neither side, when up from 69 to 77 and the people who wanted to take Israel's side has declined from 17 percent to 13 percent. So, you see that in that data. This is especially telling when you look at 35 and over versus 18 to 34 which is overall more of the younger people want to be even handed. Look at the young Democrats which is really an interesting story because it tells you the story about Democrats.

Here the story is that when you look at the bottom line, you could say that the third category leaning toward neither side, it went 73 percent for 18 to 34 versus 78 percent for 35 or over. But look where the difference went. That difference went in favor of leaning toward the Palestinians. So, you have among young Democrats, the number of people who want to be pro-Israel are the exact same number of people who want to be pro-Palestinian 13 and 13 percent which is really, you can't get any more neutral or divided on this issue than what we see among young Democrats.

Now, we asked them, of course, what they want the Trump administration to do but now we ask, what do they think it is, in fact, doing? So, the question initially we had 59 percent saying they want the U.S. to take neither side so what do they think Trump is, in fact, doing. Well, here's one place where Democrats and Republicans agree pretty much to the same numbers within the margin of error. The margin of error is about 2.19 for this poll. So, the majority, 57 percent, think that it has actually take Israel's side, not being even-handed.

One of the issues of tension between the United States and Israel has

been its construction of Israeli settlements. We tell that narrative, this is again, a story that we have been tracking for several years trying to figure out what Americans want to do about settlements. So, we give them to option, how do you believe the U.S. should react to new settlements? So, the options that we have given were the really four options that are combined here. What options do nothing, what option limits U.S. opposition to words but take no other action, impose economic sanctions or take even more serious actions. Here you could see that overall, 53 percent, a slight majority of Americans believes that the U.S. should do nothing or limit opposition to words. But the story again is on the partisan divide. By the way, this is the number, if you look at it even aggregately comparing from when we started this particular question November 2014 to November 2017. In November 2013, you had 60 percent say, pretty much do nothing. 38 percent say sanctions are a tougher action that went up to 43 percent which has been consistent with what we found over the last year, by the way.

On the divide, that's really where the story is. If you look at Democrats in the brown color, 2014 versus the yellow color 2017, look in the middle with the Democrats who want to impose sanctions or harsher measures, it went up from 48 percent in 2014 to 57 percent over the past year. So, that is really an interesting issue and, of course, it is an issue for the Democratic Party because that's not where the leadership is, that's where the constituents are. It has been an interesting space for politicians to navigate. One reason why it probably has not been a major issue for the Democrats per se is that this is not a top priority issue for most of them. If it were, it would be a different story. When it flares up and rises to the top, then it becomes an issue but in the background it is not one of the top priorities for most people.

Just very quickly, I'm going to go through two more findings and then I'll invite the panelists to join me. The attitudes on Iran, we asked a couple of questions. As you know, this issue has been in the news following the president's action. We asked a couple of questions about how they feel about the Iran deal. We thought hard about how

we might ask these questions in a way that we know that the public probably doesn't have a lot of information on this. So, we tried to figure out where the instinct is on this. We asked a couple of simple questions and then we asked them specifically about the president's decertification whether they agreed with it or not, just a straightforward question.

So, in this particular case, we asked them if the Iran nuclear deal, assuming that both sides comply, whether they think it reduces the chance that Iran will develop nuclear weapons. So, here you have 55 percent say yes, they think it will, 40 percent say no but again, look at the partisan divide. A strong majority of Democrats, 70 percent say yes, Republicans the majority of them say no. But then in the next question which is, it serves the national security interest of the United States as a broader theme than just Iran's capacity to build nuclear weapons. Here we have more support for this. We have 70 percent of Americans agreeing with this that it actually serves the national security interest of the United States including interestingly, 61 percent of Republicans.

So, then we asked them that Congress may be contemplating imposing additional sanctions on the nuclear issue. Obviously says, you know can impose sanctions on unrelated issues. On this issue being a violation of the agreement. So, the question is, what should the U.S., if Congress is considering that, what should they consider most. What signals should they look for? So, we have the first one is that U.S. national security agents, we specific actually Pentagon, CIA, State Department, just to be very clear. Find evidence that Iran is not complying with the nuclear deal. So, that gets very strong support if, in fact, that what the agencies find. You have 73 percent say that is an issue to consider in imposing sanctions.

We look at the next one which is the national security agencies determine that imposing sanctions is in the U.S. national security interest. We also get support slightly less but 68 percent support that. Then we present if other deal signatories, and we specify them, also agree with imposing sanctions. So, consensus

kind of position. Here again, we get 64 percent say, yeah they should consider that as well but obviously not as large numbers. Then if imposing such sanctions help make Israel more secure, specifically, well a majority says yes but it is much more divided 54 percent to 40 percent on that one and the same thing with Arab countries. So, we asked the question, if imposing such sanctions helps make Iran's Arab neighbors more secure and we also get 57 percent to 37 percent say yes. And then when you ask them to rank these now that they've thought about them, ranked them individually, which one is most important, we get exactly the same ranking that you just saw in terms of how they value them. The top two is that national security agencies say that Iran violated or it is in America's national interest. The next one is that there is consensus among the signatories and then you can see that Israeli and Arab interest come next. It doesn't mean that they're not important, as you can see. When we asked them individually, there is still a majority say it is important but they don't rank them as high in comparison to others.

So, question about the decertification whether or not they agree with it or not, very straightforward question. Here again, the most interesting part is that how many people said they don't know. We rarely get that in these kinds of polls. Usually people have opinion. On this one, you can tell the public is confused, they don't know. Of course, they don't even know whether we're violating the deal, it is just about certification or decertification. The fact that we have 27 percent don't know is really telling and then the rest of the public is divided, 37 percent disapprove of the decertification, 35 percent approve really at a tie. And, of course, look at the partisan divide, 68 percent. The President did it, it must be right and the Democrats the President did it, it must not be right. That's what we have here.

Final issue is Russia. Let me tell you why I'm including Russia because obviously there are a lot of questions about whether the U.S. should cooperate with Russia despite what they have done in our election on matters related to the Middle East

whether it is the Arab Israeli issue, Syria and elsewhere, I wanted to see where the public is. But in order to do that, I wanted to find out what they thought of the Russian role at home first to see whether they supported it or not. So, we asked the question do you believe that Russia interfered in the recent presidential election and if so, did it influence the outcome. So, we gave them three options. One is no, they did not interfere, one is they probably interfered but did not alter the outcome and then one was they interfered and altered the outcome. Now, again you can see there is a huge partisan divide, not surprisingly. But interestingly, overall only 12 percent say Russia didn't interfere in our election. So, that has become part of conventional wisdom for America is they interfered. The question is whether it made a difference or not. More people think it made a difference, 41 percent and 36 percent say it didn't make a difference. So, they Start off with yeah, Russia did interfere with our elections, that is obvious. And then do you view Russia as a foreign ally. Well, it's interesting because actually the largest number of plurality 47 percent say it is neither a foe nor an ally. But only 11 percent say it is an ally, 42 percent say it is an enemy. So, given that, do they think that the U.S. and Russia should cooperate at least somewhat cooperate on issues like terrorism, especially ISIS and Al-Qaeda.

Well, if you look at this number here, it is not combined here for some reason. So, it is somewhat desirable. Only 10 percent say it is not desirable at all. The overwhelming majority of Americans of all parties think that it is at least somewhat desirable to cooperate with Russia on ISIS. On the North Korea issue, just to take a question outside the Middle East, you also have only 12 percent say, not desirable to cooperate. At least somewhat desirable on dealing with the Iran issue the same story. Only three percent say it is not desirable. On the Arab Israeli issue actually interestingly slightly more people say they don't want Russia to cooperate. I've got to tease that out more but it is still 19 percent only to see where that is.

So, on Syria, the same thing, achieving stability on Syria overwhelmingly

yes. On Libya, overwhelmingly yes. So, the story is that despite the fact that Americans believe that Russia interfered in the election, overwhelming majority of Americans Republicans and Democrats. Despite the fact that only 11 or 12 percent believe that it is actually an ally. The overwhelming majority actually think the U.S. should find a way to cooperate with Russia on some of those critical issues facing the U.S. and the Middle East. And maybe the President knows something we have been missing on this one. Thank you very much, I'd like the panelists to join me.

MS COFMAN WITTES: Okay we're going to get everyone set up with their microphones here. Shibley, first let me thank you for a wide ranging and fascinating set of results. I'm a fast tweeter and I had a hard time keeping up with you. I think that one of the recurrent themes of the polling that you've done on American attitudes towards the Middle East over the last several years is this issue of partisan differences. And in past years, you have taken pains to note that the partisan differences with respect to the Israeli Palestinian conflict are not about Israel. The vast majority of Americans see Israel as a strategic ally. It is about the conflict. And in some of your earlier polling, you've dug into the constituencies within the Democratic and Republican Parties that drive these partisan differences. In other words, the evangelicals are driving Republican opinion and blacks and Hispanics are driving Democratic opinion. So, what looks like a partisan difference is actually a tribal difference, if you will in certain ways.

Today, you seem to be making a broader point about partisanship and the way that it is growing around this set of issues. I want to give you a chance to talk about what has changed. What do you see that has changed in the data and what does it tell us?

MS. TELHAMI: All right. There are really two kinds of big issues related to Democratic position specifically on the Arab Israeli issue. One is the identity of the Democrats that have identified egalitarianism, more international law, more equitable, and that is reflected in demographic changes within the Democratic Party. African

Americans, more Hispanics, women, younger people with those kinds of attitudes.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: If I remember right, a couple of years ago, your polling showed that Democrats and specifically African Americans and Latinos looked at the conflict through the lens of human rights and that drove the attitudes.

MR. TELHAMI: Partly true. The human rights or egalitarianism actually more broadly is driving part of the identity. So, there is a trend in the Democratic Party that's (inaudible) and this issue that Palestinian Israeli issue has become a symbol of it, in some ways, for a lot of the activists for a variety of reasons. But that doesn't explain why you would have big changes over one year or two years. Those are trends where you would expect the change to take time.

So, what is driving the short term change? And there, I think, it is really our deep partisanship. What do I mean by that? That Israel has become a symbol of partisanship. Why do I say that? When people think Netanyahu, they think Republican. And why is that, well there are a lot of reasons for it. It is not just because we've had a right winged Israeli government that has been closer to the Republicans in some ways than to the Democrats but because particularly of the high profile issue that mobilized the Democrats over the past few years, particularly the Iran nuclear deal where there was direct intervention by the Prime Minister of Israel. Where in the poll that I released a year ago, if you recall, Netanyahu was considered to be the most popular leader among Republicans of all world leaders and particularly among the evangelicals. So, in ways there is this symbolism, the partisanship in way, if you recall, I also released the same time, a question about how is it that in our anti-Islamic rhetoric mood, we've had American public opinion improve towards Muslims because people suddenly discovered Muslim and learned more about them and it was more about Democrats saying, if Trump is against it, I'm for it. So, in some ways yes, that's part of what is going on.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: So, it is less about the substance of the issues and more about how Americans read that issue relative to their own partisan



identification.

MR. TELHAMI: No, that's not what I would say, I would say it is both.

The reason I say that is even separate from this change we've seen over the past year or the year before, we have seen a trend in that direction that is substantively rated. When I say it is human rights, they are making an evaluation of the Palestinian Israeli conflict. Where they are saying occupation is unjust or they are saying the fact the Palestinians don't have a state is unjust or the fact that what is happening in Gaza is unjust. So, people are making some judgements that are fit into their frame of mind and their own identity about feeling their egalitarian or feeling the human rights. So, it is that plus the more intensive polarization now that explains the short term bumps that we see.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Thank you. I appreciate you taking the time to unpack that for us because it is a very complex and very controversial issue. Dan, I want to ask you to reflect on this a little bit since you were the U.S. ambassador in Tel Aviv during that period of intense partisan debate over the Iran deal. The Israeli government firmly opposed, in fact, the majority of Israelis opposed to the Iran deal. So, the Israeli policy position sort of got inserted into a domestic American highly partisan debate in ways that we hadn't seen before.

So, from where you've been sitting, how does this growing partisanship over Israel and the Israeli and Palestinian conflict play out for Israelis and their attitudes toward the United States?

MR. SHAPIRO: It was probably easier during the Obama presidency when President Obama, for reasons that I think are well understood and were somewhat a cause of regret for me, was not as popular among Israeli's as some other presidents had been. Although, I think, sometimes that is overstated actually. But it was easier to sort of say, right now we have somebody in the White House who doesn't get the Middle East the way we do, who is more sympathetic to the Palestinians than we're accustomed to and to dismiss those things.

One of the things that is so interesting about the reaction to the Trump policy is that they have absorbed it even though the policy in many ways is not so different. When President Trump was elected, after the election, there was almost a celebration among Israelis on the right, advocates for settlements, many in the coalition itself, who thought this meant the end of the U.S. pursuit of the two state solution and the end of any opposition to Israeli settlement activity. In fact, that was the legislation that was advancing, it was the atmosphere in which the U.N. Security Council resolution came to vote. Once the president came into office and reverted to something that looks a lot more like traditional policy, whether or not he uses the words, two state solution, the other elements of what he is describing --

MS. COFMAN WITTES: I want you to hold back on settlements a little bit and that kind of thing.

MR. SHAPIRO: Settlements a little bit and a peace agreement reached through negotiations that meets Israel's security needs and Palestinians self-determination and opens Israel's relations to the Arab world, I'm pretty sure he is talking about a two state solution by whatever name one calls it. And quieter but still, nevertheless, real pressure on settlement activity to the point where there is a lot of resistance and disappointment coming out of that same group. I think there is a certain discovery that U.S. interests are actually rather durable and not so defined on partisan terms by the administration. Now, we'll see, of course, what they present as a peace plan in the coming weeks but that, I think, has been a little bit of a splash of cold water for some Israelis.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Great. So, we'll come back in a few minutes to the American debate over the Iran nuclear deal and sort of the echoes of that in our politics today and our policy today. Particularly as American partners in the region are increasingly looking to Washington to push back on Iran in a variety of ways around the region. We'll talk about what that means, what American public opinion means for the

possibilities there. I'll just flag for now, the end of your presentation, Shibley, noting that Americans want to work with Russia on this stuff, they don't want the United States to go it alone on this messy stuff in the Middle East and that's a constraint that any American president is going to have to deal with.

But before we go there, I want to stick with a symbolic issue, one that has been in the headlines the last few days, the prospect of moving the American embassy to Jerusalem. There was a report in the Israeli press a few days ago that the White House was about to announce its move. There are laws on the books in the United States that require the president either to move the embassy or to issue a national security waiver every six months. The next waiver is due imminently, I think technically today is the deadline. Although he may be able to string that another business day into next week or something. The White House has said no decision has been made yet, there is clearly an ongoing debate within the administration. So, now we have some public opinion that suggests that once they are presented with arguments for and against, Americans are not so hot on this idea. Even Republicans are divided on this. So, I guess the first question is, why is the president so set on doing that?

MR. TELHAMI: well, first of all, even though Republicans are divided, if you were you to take a strong case in favor of it, that Republican support would be bumped up because they want to support him. And, of course, more Democrats will oppose it at the same time. You're going to have that affect. The bottom line is, I spoke to one of his advisors on this issue. The advisor said, he feels obligated to fulfill his campaign promise. I said, well every president has made that promise. I don't really believe that is the core reason. I believe he is getting a lot of pressure from core constituencies. We're talking about the Republicans, of course, yes the Republicans but if you look at the president, remarkably he is increasingly made evangelicals one of his core constituency. For a president who was not evangelical, who didn't initially receive the evangelical support and as you know, I'm writing a book on that issue, that he is a -- if

you look at what you did on appointments, what he did on tax exempt schools. All of these things there is no question that this is a core constituency and they are mobilized on this issue. They are telling him, this is priority one for them. So, this is the one issue on the Middle East that he is actually feeling heat from his evangelical core.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: And Dan, let me take this to you as well from a congressional perspective. You spent a lot of years on The Hill and, in fact, in Congress, that's where this law requiring the embassy to move came from, of course. From Congress it was seen at the time as a nice symbolic win but with the assumption that presidents would save us from ourselves. In other words, using the national security waiver would be a way of avoiding any drastic consequences in terms of blow up in ongoing negotiations or complications among some of our Arab partners. So, as we look at the politics of it today where the president may actually decline to issue this waiver, what are folks in Congress thinking? Is this a moment where they say, we wish we hadn't played symbolic politics?

MR. SHAPIRO: Well, it's already almost 20 years ago so I'm not sure anybody is going to lose a lot of sleep over how they voted back then on it. It is true that the legislation included the very standard national security interest waiver and it has been used almost routinely by Presidents Clinton, Bush, Obama and Trump until June of this year. What the purpose of that waiver was, the logic was don't let moving the embassy a desirable thing from the point of view of many in Congress and many other Americans screw up the possibility of our broader interest being served by reaching a Middle East peace deal or just spoiling other relationships.

Now, I did spend five and a half years serving as our embassy in Tel Aviv and almost every day I got in the car and we drove to the Jerusalem and I did my business with the Israeli government in all of their offices in West Jerusalem. So, there is something a little bit phony or false about this whole issue. I actually think the real decision they need to face with this is, if we're going to do this, how do we do it in a way

that advances our broader strategic goal which is still to achieve a two state solution? The biggest danger and the reason the waiver was provided was to avoid letting this decision for whatever its merits and there are merits because Jerusalem is Israel's capital and the Jewish have a longstanding claim there and have their government based there. But there are complications to it so that was the reason. If you can find a way to move the embassy or declare your intent to do so but at the same time, make clear where it will be, it will almost certainly be in West Jerusalem, that East Jerusalem has a different status. One that we don't need to determine that status but it is going to need to be negotiated. Palestinians have claims there. It is certainly possible and almost every previous Middle East peace initiative that has gone into the details has suggested there would be some sharing of the city, maybe not divided by barbed wire and checkpoints but with a Palestinian presence in the Arab neighborhoods of East Jerusalem, some arrangements for the holy sites and Israel maintaining its capital in West Jerusalem.

There are ways you could describe this and frame this that actually advance the broader strategic objective and give Israel what it wants, what those members of Congress have voted for want, which is to have our embassy operating in Jerusalem.

MR. TELHAMI: Allow me to add just one thing on this because I think just to be clear on what drives the decision. Of course, we all speculate about how President Trump operates so let's keep that in mind. When I say there is pressure including from the evangelicals on him, that in and of itself doesn't fully explain it. Because normally there is pressure on presidents but the president has advisors who make a very strong case against that pressure when they say, this is going to this and this and this and that in the Middle East and so forth. Now, he has his core advisors, obviously, including his son-in-law who historically sympathized with that position. So, the starting point, at least personal starting point, and they don't know a lot about the rest of the (inaudible) to make a case about the potential consequences. They get feedback,

but frankly the Arab feedback while they tell them they're opposed to, when they go into meetings with Trump and when they talk with Trumps staff, they want to win them over more than criticize them even as they present their case in a soft way. So, for that reason, I think I'm not sure the President gets the point about what the consequences could be.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: It's noteworthy that King Abdullah of Jordan has been in town this week. When President Trump was first inaugurated, there was a thought that he might announce an embassy move right away. King Abdullah made a quick scheduled trip to Washington, apparently to discuss precisely that issue. President Trump then issued the waiver and did not move the embassy, issued the waiver in June and King Abdullah is back in town this week so we can guess what was at the top of his agenda.

I want to turn now to another issue that I'm sure was on King Abdullah's agenda and is also very, very interesting in your poll results, Shibley, which is the Iran nuclear deal and the partisanship around this issue in the United States. It continues to be one where Democrats and Republicans are pretty dug in. I found it very interesting that in the polling questions on under what conditions would it be worthwhile considering new sanctions on Iran, you had very unified views on the first three conditions. But then as soon as you put the word Israel into the question or Arab allies into the question, you got a partisan split in the results. What does that tell you?

MR. TELHAMI: Well, it's interesting because it does tell me that most Americans still think American national security first. When you use the term, American National Security Agency, they still trust it. But the interesting thing here though is, the consensus among the signatories which typically is not something that Americans care about as much, certainly not on the right, seem to also rank higher. Now, I want to again stress the fact that while it does get a little partisan, if you look at it issue by issue, they still think that it is important to consider, at least a small majority of Americans, over 50

percent, that it is still important to consider Arab neighbors interest and Israeli interest in this mix. It is just when you ask them to rank them, those are really much lower on the priorities than the other three.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Great, thank you. And Suzanne, I want to bring you in at this point. You have written extensively about the agreement and its implications for Iran's roll in the region. You also spent a lot time in the midst of the debate over the nuclear deal talking to members of Congress, talking to their staff, doing public speaking, doing media on this issue. So, first question, do any of the results that Shibley showed us today on this issue surprise you and then secondly, if you are one of those American partners in the region who was unhappy about the nuclear deal, do these results make you feel like you're likely to see this deal stand or that Trump is going to come over to you side and maybe push against the deal.

MS. MALONEY: Thank you, it is a really interesting question. The answer to both sets of the question may be one in the same. I think it was perhaps not most surprising but really interesting to me was the strong approval rates from Republicans for the president's decision to decertify Iran in compliance with the nuclear agreement. Contrasted with the strong disapproval rates among Democrats for that very same decision. It is an interesting finding because what it does is reinforce the political wisdom of what the president did. There was no strategic value to taking this step and I think that's why so many analysts were to some extent puzzled and frankly dismissive of this as a sort of gesture on the part of the president back on October 13<sup>th</sup>. And now, with great fanfare decertification which has no actual immediate or direct implications for American adherence to its obligations under the JCPOA.

What it does is set off a process in Congress for either reimposition of some of the statutory sanctions that were waived or suspended as a result of the deal. Or as the President really seem to advocate, an amendment to the original review legislation for the nuclear agreement that might find a way to sort of reimpose American sanctions if Iran

took any set of particular steps. Including, resuming its nuclear program after the expiration of the deal itself. So, in effect, what the president was suggesting was that this might be a way to make the deals penalties permanent for the Iranians.

There has been very little traction around that on The Hill. But what you see is that clearly this resonates with Republican voters and that that is considered, I would imagine, a huge net positive for the White House. If I were sitting in either Israel or in some of the States of the Persian Gulf who were very vocal opponents of the nuclear agreement at the start, what I would worry about from, I think, the findings of this poll is that there is still among the American public, some sense of confidence, as you said, national security agencies, and what we know to be the fairly universal assessment of both those agencies and the international atomic energy agency and American partners in the deal, that Iran, is in fact, complying with the agreement. That seems to matter, at least in terms of public opinion. In a sense it creates, I think, a complication for the President to actually take any steps to walk away from the agreement itself.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Okay. So, the agreement itself, Americans seem to be happy to live with but the symbolic politics are still working for the White House. Dan, I want to turn to you in this because I think that the Israeli government is amongst those who during this period of debate over whether Trump would certify compliance, took the view that questioning the deal was a way of gaining leverage on Iran more broadly. How are Israelis reacting to a step that seems to have had no practical implications when they are still very concerned about Iranian behavior in the region?

MR. SHAPIRO: The emotional impact, of course, of the decertification was similar maybe to what the polling shows the president's supporters, Republicans tended to feel. There was a certain validation of the fears, of the criticism that the Prime Minister had lead and many Israelis agreed about the terms of the deal. But since it has on practical effect, where that leads is still very much a question. And, of course, the



Prime Minister himself has adopted a slogan of fix it or nix it. But those are two completely different strategies. So, fixing it, amending it, trying to find ways to extend the sunset clauses, trying to strengthen the inspection protocols to make sure there is access in military sites in other ways and, of course, building pressure on Iran against its non-nuclear activities. Those are things that, I think, many in the region could get around, many on a bipartisan basis here could get around and would allow us with unity with European partners to try and bring Iran to accept some terms that we probably are always going to need to come back to. This deal was never the perfect deal, it never ended the Iranian nuclear program, it bought time and maybe there is a way to extend to buy more time.

But nixing it, canceling it, is almost the exact opposite. It is to, as the president said, he might do if Congress doesn't act, terminate our participation in it. Iran essentially released, from its obligations in that situation and we would have, I think, no chance of an internationally unified community to try and reimpose sanctions or go back to Iran. They could resume all the aspects of the program that have been suspended under the deal.

I think Israelis are still puzzling through this question of even though the emotionally satisfying aspect has not been achieved, what is the practical policy that will have the best impact. And a signal of that might be when Prime Minister Netanyahu was in London about a month ago and he met with Prime Minister May. He came into that meeting and said, I was talking about cancelling the deal. I am now much more focused on fixing, improving, strengthening, extending the deal. That is certainly the right approach with the Europeans but I think on a practical matter, a lot of Israelis are going to discover that it is actually the right approach for their own interest as well.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Suzanne, I want to come back to you on this point because a lot of our debate about the Iran negotiations, about Iran in general in the United States, is focused on this idea of can we empower moderates in Iran, are we

empowering radicals in Iran, are we playing into the hands of the hard liners. And looking at the partisan divide on Iran and the United States and the rhetoric of the President and his administration, one could expect that Iranians might be making some of the same calculations about the United States. Do you think that this sort of sharp divide and the heated rhetoric from the White House about not just the nuclear deal but Iranian behavior more broadly? Does this have the effect of making Iran hesitate at all in its regional behavior? Does it make Iran perhaps more willing to consider amendments to the nuclear deal?

MS. MALONEY: I don't think it does in the short term. It certainly indicates the narrative of hard liners and of the supreme leader that the United States is not to be trusted, that there is no possibility of a broader negotiation or certainly not a broader (inaudible) with Washington because there is just an implacable animosity toward the Islamic Republic here in Washington. I do think that the sense of uncertainty around the future of the deal as well as the sort of corresponding uncertainty around what, if anything, the Trump administration is prepared to do about Iran's extension of influence around the region, Iran's involvement in conflicts in Syria, Yemen and elsewhere. Has given the Iranians a couple of somewhat countervailing pressures. One is, there is a clear consensus expressed across the political spectrum by Iranian leaders that Tyron does not want to be the bad guy with respect to the future of the deal. The Iranians are very cognizant of the utility of their verging rehabilitation in terms of the international community and the revitalization of their diplomatic and economic relationships with Europe and they want to protect those. So, if anything happens with the deal, they're not going to be the first to take a step to undermine it.

On the other hand, the Iranians also recognize that as U.S. pressure, at least rhetorically and potentially on the ground begins to intensify, that their own impetus is to push back the best defense is a good offense. They really want to make clear that Iran is, if anything, a stronger power in the region today than it was when President

Obama left office. They want the Trump administration to understand that very clearly and so I think you have these countervailing pressures on the Iranian leadership and it may play out in a very erratic fashion in terms of the way we see things on the ground.

MR. TELHAMI: May I add, just a connection. Because one question that you asked is excellent about how the Iranians see it. Think about it also in the context of North Korea and Iran and the impact on each. So, if you're sitting in North Korea and the Iranians are saying, the U.S. is not to be trusted with the deal, think about what North Korea might do. And think about what Iran might draw from the fact that North Korea now has the capacity to hit American soil which is changing the nature of the relationship. Maybe opening actually, maybe there is an opening for negotiations as some suggested because the leadership there has said, we've now completed. They had said, we're not going to start before we completed our program. So, if I would compare the two, I know that there will be consequences both in Iran and certainly North Korea.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Thanks. So, I want to come back around to American domestic politics. We talked a lot about Trump and how these political differences are shaping his policies but we've got congressional midterm elections coming up next year. And Democrats and Republicans both dealing with a White House that is unpredictable, to say the least, on foreign policy. We've seen Congress play a much bigger role in foreign policy debates over this first year of the Trump administration. And now members of Congress are going into a year where they're thinking primarily about reelection and how they want to position themselves for their best advantage in the race that is coming.

It strikes me that the America first rhetoric really cuts in two different contradictory directions when it comes to America's role in the world. On the one hand, it is selfish and self-interested and all these big global problems aren't our problems. So, just let them figure this stuff out themselves, we're not going to do everything for

everybody else. On the other hand, there is a kind of bellicosity and a confrontational approach on a lot of issues especially in the Middle East and certainly when it comes to fighting terrorism and confronting Iran. Here we come to the last section of your poll results, Shibley, and the idea of cooperating with Russia on these thorny Middle East security issues and on North Korea as well. And some of your other earlier poll data which shows that Americans are still pretty tired of intensive American engagement in the Middle East and they would like to do less. As you look at this latest set of results, what does it tell you about what the American political traffic can bear? If you are a member of Congress who wants to distinguish himself, perhaps from the president.

MR. TELHAMI: Well, part of the problem in answering that question is that the Democrats have made the Russia issue such a featured issue in their politics. So, it is really hard to analyze it strategically. For good reason, obviously. There was intervention in our election, it probably mattered and it should be investigated. But nonetheless, it has become so tied to politics that it is very hard. If you are entering a new election, if that's going to be a featured issue for Democrats in the election I think there is some tough space there. I think there are public who don't necessarily see Russia as an enemy. There are only 40 percent who see Russia as a foe and they want some cooperation.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Well, as you said to me earlier, Americans don't like Putin but they like him more than they like ISIS.

MR. TELHAMI: Yes. So, I think that's a thing where we should start. I don't also know how much foreign policy is going to be part of the election. Now we have an excellent article today in the Washington Post about how is it that many of the core constituents of Trump who stand to lose big in the tax reform still support it. Whether they're just being blinded or whether they care more about identity issue than they care about economics. That, I think, is the big story of our time. I think it's bigger than foreign policy and we're going to have to think about it deep and hard.

MS. COFFMAN WITTES: Thank you. Dan, I want to come to you on this. You were a very successful foreign policy advisor for a very successful presidential candidate and spent a lot of time working with members of Congress on domestic politics and foreign policy and how to position themselves. So, as you think about how the Democratic Party and Democratic members have been positioning themselves on Russia, on engagement in the Middle East and the war on terror, they for the most part have taken a strong internationalist stance. A stance in opposition to the White House but they've really doubled down on these foreign policy issues. When you look at Shibley's results does it make you uneasy at all for those Democratic members? How would you advise them?

MR. SHAPIRO: I think internationalism in the sense of maintaining alliances of being actively engaged of trying to help resolve conflicts with partners carrying their share of the burden.

MS. COFFMAN WITTES: But not American leadership.

MR. SHAPIRO: I think that remains popular and I would hope most members of Congress would approach it because I think it is the right thing to do. But also, I think it is something they can describe a compelling narrative to their constituencies. I am much less certain that there is support for intervention if we're talking about significant military engagement. We're still a decade and a half from the beginning of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, those losses still weigh very heavily. A campaign against ISIS which was mostly conducted from the air with the boots on the ground being Kurdish and Sunni Arab allies is one thing. But actually, being pulled more deeply into the kind of military engagement, it might be required to really confront Iran and Syria as it tries to take advantage of ISIS's defeat and Russia sponsors it or wherever else they are operating in the region. I am much less certain there is a strong American appetite for that.

What I took from Shibley's results, the question about Russia related to

Syria really made sense to me in that context. That a lot of Americans, if they can figure out a way to have Russia help us stabilize Syria which means we don't have to go in and do it ourselves, that's preferable. Obviously, I think, from some of our allies in the region, Israelis but also some Gulf Arabs, that's unnerving because Russia's friends are not their friends, Isola, Assad and Iran and so forth. We might agree and the American people might be willing to agree to terms that are not sufficiently robust leaving them to feel like they have to act on their own.

I think, frankly, again where I'm sitting now, I hear from Israelis that they do have to act on their own. They've already conducted their own air strikes in Syria on many occasions. That has been publically discussed by their own leadership but I think they have a sense, they may feel the need to extend that freedom of action into a broader target set in Syria if Iran is coming in and they won't necessarily have the United States involved. What they'll look for is legitimacy for that freedom of action, some diplomatic support with the Russians but really expect to carry the burden on their own.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: You know, I remember at last year's Saban forum, Defense Minister Lieberman saying in a public session that if he were forced to choose between having Iran on the Syrian side of the border with Israel or having ISIS, he would rather have ISIS. Here we are a year later and it looks like the Israelis are getting the choice they didn't want. I'm going to open it up to questions from all of you. There are microphones around the room. I'm going to do my best to be equitable in the geographic and gender distribution of questioners. I am going to ask you to do three things. Number one, introduce yourself. Number two, state your question and number three, note the way I phrase that. State your single question. We'll start right here on the isle in the checkered shirt.

MR. SHORE: My name is Stephen Shore. One word that no one mentioned in this discussion about foreign policy is trade. And our President seems to view it as a zero sum game that in every bilateral trading relation, there is a winner and a

looser. So, I'm wondering if they survey asked anyone questions about trade policies and agreements.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Thank you. Shibley, you had a lot more in there than you presented today.

MR. TELHAMI: About trade policy specifically, no we didn't. We asked about a lot of other questions like immigration, for example. We have on refugees and questions like that, we've done a lot. We really don't ask much about economic issues. That's not part of our set.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Okay, yes sir, on the side.

MR. KLAY: Thank you. My name is Bill Klay. I wonder if Shibley could give us some more information please, on the sample. Its size, percentage Republican, Democrat, the growth or decline of those. Whether the Independents are center right, center left and if he sees any bumps in the road that he could predict along those lines.

MR. TELHAMI: Sure. Well, sampling is done by Nielsen Scarborough. They choose a national representative sample of 2000 from their panel which is almost a half million that they originally recruited by phone and by mail. It is weighted along all the variables based on census data. With the partisan divide, we've always done, we take the last six month average of gallops of partisan divide and we use that as a guide and consistently over time so we compare it in the same way. And that's, of course, out there on our website. Also, on the Nielsen Scarborough website when they go for the full detail of how they recruit the panel.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Thank you. Next question right here.

SPEAKER: I want to ask about something you indirectly maybe touched upon but not directly and that is the issue of democracy. The latest attack in Sinai in Egypt as, I'm sure, we're all aware, has touched off some sort of debate here in the United States whether the tight grip, tight fisted policy in Egypt is the right policy or is Sisi need to open up. In terms of American attitudes to the issue of democracy, I wonder if

you could say something about whether what is happening in the Saini has done anything to those dynamics.

MR. TELHAMI: First of all, I hate to speculate because we didn't poll on that directly. But I can just give you my orientation on this. I think my own view is that a lot of the attitudes on Egypt are going to be along partisan lines. In part because Trump is friendly with the government. The Egyptian government had an uneasy relationship with the Democratic Party. They don't really follow the narrative inside Egypt very closely. So, you're going to find that kind of divide. Also, my view is that other than the experts, those of us who follow it closely, and we can have this really nuance conversation, is the policy fueling more terrorism or is it reducing terrorism, a legitimate one we should have that. I know you're going to have that on Al-Jazeera this afternoon. The question, of course, is for most Americans, they don't follow that. I think it actually goner more sympathy for Egypt overall. Because when you look at the horror of this attack and what you see and also the story line behind it. A target of a mosque maybe because it was frequented by Sufis. So, I would think that it garners actually more sympathy with Egypt in general, even though it will still be across partisan lines. But it will generate a really powerful conversation among experts for sure as it is in Egypt itself.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Shibley, if I may, just given the results that you've garnered in earlier polls about attitudes on human rights, on international law and the partisan differences on that, do you think that there is space to make arguments for and against Trump's embracive dictators in American domestic politics? Is that something Democrats might be able to pick up on?

MR. TELHAMI: Sure. Here's something that I want to say, an article I'm actually writing. We talk about the clash of civilization. But the reality of the biggest clash right now is within civilizations. Within America, the differences between Republicans and Democrats on matters that were related to the Muslim world like the Muslim band, are greater than the divide between the United States and Egypt, between the United



States and Saudi Arabia. And inside these countries the divide between these two groups, however you break it, is greater than the one across. So, we have here something really, really complicated in terms of making the assessment. And yes, of course, I think the Democrats evaluate the Egyptian government partly on the human rights issue, partly on how it worked with the Obama administration and partly on being an ally of the Trump administration. It is exactly the opposite on the Republican side. Where Independents are, I don't venture. I haven't actually polled that directly but as typical in these polls, they are somewhere in between.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Thank you, next question.

MS. WEINER: Thank you. I'm Leah Weiner from the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. I was wondering, you addressed the decertification of the JCPOA sort of in isolation and I was wondering what the partisan divide was on the more comprehensive U.S. approach to addressing Iranian regional threats and how those two pertain to each other. Thank you.

MR. TELHAMI: I'm not following the question.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: So, you asked specifically attitudes toward the decertification decision on the JCPOA. But did you ask attitudes more broadly on the U.S. approach to Iran on Trump's policy to Iran.

MR. TELHAMI: Oh okay sorry. We had a couple of other questions on Iran but they didn't touch on that specifically. If I recall correctly, part of the problem asking these kind of questions, we struggled. This is like on questions where you know the public isn't following very closely, you're trying to figure out what is it that they know and how you can get the most information from what you think they know. So, we found that these questions that we asked them were the ones that kind of dealt with their level of where we thought they were and we didn't introduce additional kind of variables into the conversation.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Thank you. Okay in the back in the striped

shirt.

MS. DONAHOE: Hi, I'm Megan Donahoe from Search for Common Ground. I had a question for Suzanne. Generally, more about Iranian diplomacy at the moment and I was wondering about your thoughts on Iran's stance in Yemen currently. Thank you.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Actually, as the conversation in the region has shifted from the nuclear issue to other dimensions of Iranian behavior, there are issues coming up, especially the war in Yemen, that haven't actually penetrated American public discussion very much.

MS. MALONEY: I think Yemen is more a case of non-diplomatic action on the part of the Iranians. It's an extension of Iranian influence through support to the Houthis via the revolutionary guard and other elements of the Iranian security bureaucracy. It's a fairly low level priority, I think, for the Iranians that seems to be the conventional wisdom and it bears out in a sense that there seems to be a greater willingness on the part of the Iranians to engage around the issue of Yemen.

But the difficulty at the moment, and it is a contrast from where the regional dynamic was historically, there seems to be very little impetus on the part of the Saudi government to reciprocate or engage in any serious fashion over Yemen or any other issue that might involve Iran. That stands in contrast from the way that the Saudi government handled this long standing animosity and frictions with Iran, even during the Iran/Iraq war during the 1980s when the Saudis were very much directly involved when the relationship between Tehran and Riyadh was extremely problematic. The Saudis repeatedly sought to deescalate with Iran and repeatedly issued overtures to Khomeini at that time, seeking to avoid a wider clash. At this stage, I don't think there is an address in Riyadh that is terribly prepared to engage with the Iranians. Even where the Iranians somewhat untraditionally have been reaching out to the Saudis, they apparently are getting very little resonance.

Unfortunately, my sense is that there is very little pressure here because it hasn't become a very wide spread public issue. Because the Trump administration appears to be trying to align itself more closely with the Saudi government and with crown prince Mohammed bin Salman for whom Yemen is a signature foreign policy move and perhaps a signature foreign policy disaster.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Thank you. I think one of the big changes that we've seen with the new prominence of crown prince Mohammed bin Salman, is the shift from the Saudi approach from bet hedging in its relations with Iran. Balancing between confrontation and outreach. Now it is all in on confrontation and we see that in Yemen, we see it in the recent death stop over Saad Hariri's resignation as Prime Minister of Lebanon. And that move in Lebanon, in particular, raised the prospect of heightened tensions between Israel and Hezbollah and the possibility of escalation to violent conflict. It seems to be a moment when, in the region, our American partners are much more willing to contemplate confrontation although none of them are looking for more war. As Shibley's poll data shows us, Americans are really not looking for confrontation. We're still looking for less.

MR. SHAPIRO: Again, I think it is a little bit of a dissonance between the Trump style and the rhetoric and the decertification and the strong tough talk which resonates and people appreciate. Of course, the backing given to the Saudi crown prince is a part of that. The question of, well what is that going to add up to on the ground and where will the United States play. Some of these partners, Israel perhaps in Syria, Saudi Arabia with Yemen, with Lebanon, with Qatar, are beginning to take matters into their own hands. Although, they are not necessarily totally coordinated themselves. If indeed, Mohammed bin Salman was trying to accelerate what everyone assumes is the inevitable next war between Israel and Hezbollah because they expect Israel is going to really bloody their nose very severely. I don't think the Israelis are looking to have that war. They are preparing for it but they are also trying to postpone it as long as possible. So,

without a coordinator of this whole counter-Iran aggression coalition which is needed, it can get very disorganized and people can go off in their own directions.

MS. COFEE WITTES: Isn't there also a risk of cross signals where the rhetoric from the White House suggests that we would encourage our partners in that kind of more sort of behavior but it is not clear that we're going to back them up if they get in a jam. Last question, Gary Mitchell.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you. I'm Gary Mitchell and I write the Mitchell Report. I think I'm collecting my 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> star for attending Shibley's wonderful presentation. I think I always try to craft a question that appeals to the Yoda in Shibley. That is, there are lots of questions that you didn't speak to today. You go back a couple of years, I'm wondering what two or three things you feel came out of this particular session, this particular polling session, that tell you something about what is going on that the rest of us may not either understand or that we misunderstand. You've spoken to some of that in your conversation, particularly opening comments with Tamara about the move from polarization to tribalism. What is your sense of what comes out of this that is not specific per se to Iran or to Israel or to moving the embassy?

MR. TELHAMI: Let me just say that we're going to release a study out of a poll pretty soon that includes questions that go more into the core of what is driving Americans. Including a sense of whether they think the American dream is still alive or not and try to connect some of the really deep questions with policy questions to see if there is something driving it and we think there is. We're in the process of preparing that.

So, these questions, of course, by themselves are a part of something bigger, as I said. Even on North Korea, there is something interesting whereas Dan and Tamara have noted, of course, the American public is reluctant to get engaged militarily. But we see actually in what we're going to release, we have not released it yet, on North Korea a greater accepting of military action by Republicans in this administration than there was before including with countries like North Korea.

So, I think there is something going on obviously that I've always asked the question to myself, does the messaging from a president matter. Obviously it does. It does in superficial ways and it does in deep ways. The superficial ways are it does make people, if you are a polarizing figure, leader, it is just by virtue of taking a position you swaying public opinion one way or the other because you become the issue, not the substance of the issue. We see that very deeply here. But it is also more important because it may be that when people have uncertainty about what to do, they still go to the commander and chief for signals. And not everybody but enough people that it actually alters their position on the world. We saw that with George W. Bush after 9/11 how even people who didn't support him suddenly said, well you're the commander and chief, tell us what to do. Yes, there was divide but the divide was a lot less than it was the day before.

We see that Trump is actually swaying Republican public opinion, not just keeping them on. That is really interesting and that is something to watch for. I think Democrats are wrong to think that because of all the things that they have against, that he still can't win. The reason for it is very simple. He can still make a very strong argument on the same core issues that he ran on that he is dismantling the establishment. He is devastating the State Department. That is exactly what they want to hear. So, I see something here and Russia is another story part of it. Russia, yes don't you see it is really a problem but don't make it your only central problem because is more nuanced on it. So, that's kind of the general thing that I get out there that those people who are running by being just anti-Trump, are missing something much bigger that is influencing public opinion.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Thank you, Shibley. Thanks to all of you for a fantastic discussion and I hope that you'll follow the public portions of the Saban forum program over the weekend. There will be webcasts on the Brookings website and you can look on Twitter at the #Saban17. Thank you so much.

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## CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

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