

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION
BROOKINGS CAFETERIA: Will foreign aid matter in the 2020 election?
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(Music)

DEWS: Welcome to the Brookings Cafeteria, the podcast about ideas and the experts who have them. I am Fred Dews. For the third year, I am pleased to present another set of episodes from the Brookings-Blum, an annual forum for global leaders, entrepreneurs, and policy practitioners to discuss innovative ideas and to pursue initiatives to alleviate global poverty.

My colleague Merrell Tuck-Primdahl, Director of Communications for the Global Economy and Development program here at Brookings was at the roundtable at Aspen, Colorado to talk with some of the participants and she has joined me in the Brookings Podcast Network studio to introduce the topics and speakers of these two episodes.

You can follow the Brookings podcast network on Twitter @policypodcasts. To get information and links to all of our shows, including Dollar and Sense, the Brookings trade podcast. The current and our events podcast.

The show is available on Apple, Google, Spotify or whatever app you use to listen to podcasts. If you like the show, please go to Apple Podcasts and leave us a review, it helps others find it. Merrell, welcome back to the Brookings cafeteria.

TUCK-PRIMDAHL: Thank you, Fred.

DEWS: Can you explain in a little bit more detail what the Brookings-Blum collaboration is all about?

TUCK-PRIMDAHL: The collaboration between Richard C. Blum, who is the benefactor for the Brookings-Blum Roundtable and our global economy and development program is driven by passionate support for international development and a desire to bring together innovators and people with new research and breakthrough approaches to

solving some of the toughest development problems and to grappling with other issues on the global agenda, whether it's the rivalry with China or the growing role of new donors in the development space and also other issues like the role of artificial intelligence in tech and development.

DEWS: My understanding is that this collaboration has been going on now for 16 years and every it's a different theme. So what was the theme or themes from this past year?

TUCK-PRIMDAHL: Yes, the theme that we had this year was the 2020 presidential election and beyond. Is it possible to maintain a bipartisan narrative on US global development?

DEWS: So can you let our listeners know what you've got for them in this episode and also kind of briefly to set up what the next episode is all about?

TUCK-PRIMDAHL: Sure, in these upcoming episodes, I am asking first of all whether our country is retreating from its longstanding role as a leading nation in international development. And then in the episode that follows, I am asking about the US China rivalry and whether or not there is a way to move toward a smarter, more mutually beneficial approach with China, rather than a zero-sum game.

DEWS: It's a really fascinating set of topics and a great lineup of participants that you've brought to the Brookings Cafeteria Podcast. Merrell, thank you and the mic is yours.

TUCK-PRIMDAHL: Merrell Tuck-Primdahl here recording from the annual Brookings-Blum Roundtable. Listeners today will be hearing from EJ Dionne Jr., Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, as well as a syndicated columnist and prolific book author. Also, Liz Schrayner, President and CEO of the US Global Leadership Coalition. Liz will

be asking a few questions to Charlie Dent, former Republican Congressman from Pennsylvania's 15th district. Charlie is currently a policy advisor at the law firm DLA Piper and is a political analyst for CNN.

Our topic is the US presidential race and how to get traction around support for international development. Let me start with a few questions to EJ. This is his first time attending the roundtable. So EJ, what were some key takeaways from our session titled Mapping the 2020 political landscape, foreign policy platforms and development cooperation?

DIONNE: The thing that really struck me being at this meeting is that beneath the surface, there has actually been some agreement across our usual lines of division around certain aspects of foreign assistance around lifting women up around the world and it was just very heartening to see that in the midst of all of this anger and the country divisiveness, often led by the President, it was possible to make some progress in some areas and maybe this can model something for the future in a slightly less difficult time. I think what's been striking about the campaign so far is what a small role foreign policy has played altogether.

You've had a few candidates give major foreign policy speeches. Former Vice President and Pete Buttigieg giving broadly internationalist addresses to sort of use a label that I think is fair and Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders giving very interesting, quite different foreign policy addresses basically saying American Foreign Policy has failed because it hasn't stood up for the economic interests of average Americans for a long time.

Now these would seem to be at odds. I have the theory that foreign policy, and internationalist foreign policy only works when Americans in factory towns and inner cities,

places that are hurting, like in and near former congressmen dense districts feel that this foreign policy is working for them. I go back all the way to FDR and Harry Truman where they linked the Marshall Plan and the creation of various international institutions, not just to doing the right thing in the world, not just in the case of the Marshall Plan, to fighting communism but also to creating a prosperity for American workers and also for European workers, for creating middle class and I think foreign policy elites and anyone interested in an internationalist foreign policy can learn from those Warren and Sanders speeches, even if they don't agree with Warren and Sanders because Trump took advantage of the sense that people have that elites are alienated from their interests and paradoxically, in order to help people abroad, charity begins at home and justice begins at home and I think these two causes need to be brought together.

TUCK-PRIMDAHL: Very helpful. Liz, let me hand it over to you. You've been all around the country, talking on these issues and taking the pulse of people so tell us more.

SCHRAYER: The US -- after the 2016 election, we noticed that the exit polls showed that 4 out of 5 of every voter viewed foreign policy as either extremely important or very important to their votes, regardless of which candidate they voted for.

So we really wanted to go out and understand what was the question, what were they really looking at? Particularly in the heartland, where we say citizens actually wondering and questioning what engagement we'd have in terms of an impact -- similar to what EJ was talking about it. How does it impact their safety, how does it impact their prosperity? So my colleagues and I have literally held hundreds of forums around the country, going to places like Kalamazoo, Michigan, Scranton, Pennsylvania, Dayton, Ohio, Southwest Texas and South Carolina -- literally all over the country and talking to people

about why leaning globally matters locally. We've hosted member of Congress, Democrats, Republicans, Independents, business Leaders, veterans, faith leaders and one message comes loud and clear. Americans see the danger of withdrawing, they understand that infectious diseases like Ebola have no borders, they understand that conflict can land at our doorstep tomorrow if we don't pay attention to it overseas and then really understand great power competition with countries like China, has an impact if we don't engage.

So one of the things that we focused on is how do you tell the story? How do you make the connection? I still remember talking to a business leader in Macomb County, Michigan. Everybody focused on that because that was where a lot of Obama voters switched to Trump voters. He is a father of four and he talked about the competition with China really worried him.

When I told him 11/15 biggest exporters were once foreign aid recipients, he said "Oh, I get it." And immediately understood why international development was really important.

I talk to a lot of veterans. They absolutely get why America's engagement is important to our security but what they get is they get what Jim Mattis tells us all the time, if we don't fund the state department, then we are going to need more ammunition.

So I think this election is setting up in 2020 to be a really important election for and an opportunity for candidates to talk to the American voters about why our engagement matters to our security and our economics but they have to do it in a way that tells a story about why and exactly about what EJ was just talking about and exactly why I am really glad that I am sitting next to Congress Charlie Dent who can talk about how it matters to his former district in Pennsylvania so let me ask you, if I can, what it was like being back in

your district and talking to your constituents about why we needed to be engaged in the world and how it made a difference in your hometown, which is the home to something that we all know of, Hershey chocolate.

DENT: The sweetest town in the world.

DIONNE: It is indeed. They say at peak production, they can produce 70 million kisses a day.

SCHAYER: I love it.

DIONNE: Which is a lot of loving as we like to say but having said that, typically though, in engagements with constituents over the years at townhall meetings, a question would inevitably arise about foreign assistance and foreign aid and usually something like this: "Congressman, we've got all kinds of funding problems in this country. Social Security is going broke. If you simply just cut this foreign assistance back, we can stabilize social security. Something like that. That's typically the question you are going to get and I think there is obviously a lack of understanding of what we do in foreign assistance but one way I try to connect foreign assistance to that individual, I would say to him, this country has a national security strategy that is three legged as far as I'm concerned. Diplomacy, defense and development and we spend a hell of a lot of money on defense, we spend a significant amount on diplomacy and then a pretty small piece, a tiny piece, maybe less than one percent of all federal spending on development assistance and what does that go for, well (inaudible) we had a rather successful program there. We've helped stabilize many countries in sub-Saharan Africa --

SCHAYER: Saved over 17 million lives.

DIONNE: Yeah, we saved a lot of people. And they say "Well you know, if these

countries are more socially stable, if they are healthier, that means that they are less likely to have political instability, which leads to violence and often military interventions that can get us dragged in. So that makes sense but more directly, I would often say to them, when I represented Hersey, I would say here we are. This Hersey company relies on cacao. Last I checked, we don't grow cacao in North America so we have to import it. Oh, from West Africa. So this company here is making great investments in the cacao farmers and educating their children to make sure that they have stable healthy lives because if there is instability in West Africa, in Ghana or Cote d'Ivoire, that will disrupt this cacao supply which will affect the jobs out here, in Hersey, Pennsylvania and other confectionary jobs around the country, at other companies and other Hershey plants.

I said so it's in our interest to make sure that some of these places are stable because we are tied economically to these folks so that's a really big part of it and I often would talk about the Marshall Plan. I said well that's probably the gold standard of American foreign assistance and you'd have to argue that that was a remarkable success and not only did we help bring Europe back to prosperity. It's peaceful.

SCHAYER: And opened up markets for ourselves.

DIONNE: We opened up markets and it's really a wonderful thing now that when the French and the Germans disagree with each other, they don't send armies into each other's countries. I mean this is called progress.

DENT: And we helped build the European middle class. We protected Democracy in all of these countries and we provided trade in a place to sell American goods. I totally share your Marshall Plan vision for how we have to start thinking about this --

DIONNE: And I say that Americans don't get killed in Europe anymore. This is

progress.

SCHAYER: So let me bring this back to the politics of it and ask you, starting with you, Charlie, where do you see foreign policy showing up, if at all, as it relates to the 2020 elections both at the presidential level and then in Congress?

DENT: Right now, the way it's showing up at the Congressional level and in the campaigns, it's really showing up more in the form of international trade.

SCHAYER: Mm-hmm.

DENT: With the multi-front trade wars going on right now; that's where it's showing up. In the form of immigration and particularly as it relates to the central American migrants who are fleeing obviously very desperate situations and that really speaks to the intersection of not only the immigration issue but the foreign assistance issue that maybe if we help them stabilize the situation down in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala, that might prevent the flow of migrants and maybe the investment down there is better than the investment up here.

We are dealing with it at the back end, when the migrants show up here at the border towns of El Paso and McAllen or Brownsville, wherever they are showing up and we have to accommodate them which is very difficult when they are coming in by the tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands. Maybe it would be better to stabilize it down there at a fraction of the cost and that requires foreign assistance so that's how you can start registering with people. I think most Americans would agree, that's what we should be doing.

SCHAYER: So let me ask you a question on the Republican party. You were active in the Republican party as a great internationalist voice. Comment, if you will, about the

America first mantra and where this fits into? As we look to the election, is the Republican party, as they have often talked about themselves as the party of American exceptionalism or are we looking at a party that is more nativist, populism, isolationism have been some of the terms that have -- where do you see the party going?

DENT: I've often talked about what I consider to be that three headed monster of protectionism, isolationism and nativism and I can throw a fourth one, nihilism from time to time but the first three are the worst, the biggest problems and to be perfectly candid, I have seen protectionist and isolationist elements in both political parties for a very long time.

Frankly, I would argue that at least at the Congressional level, the Democrats have been a much more protectionist party than the Republican party has, although with Donald Trump as President, that has become completely turned on its head. Given where he is, he sounds like a (inaudible) on trade.

DIONNE: Watch that, Congressman (laughter).

DENT: So long story short is there is this problem within the party. I worry a lot about the nativism. You see that with some of the very harsh rhetoric about immigrants, whether it was the travel ban a year or two ago to some of the rhetoric mostly coming out of the White House about the people who live south of the border.

So I think there is this challenge within the party. That said, there are plenty of members of Congress on the Republican side of the aisle who deeply believe in a robust American international presence and leadership and that we were forced for the good in the world and I think that many of them were not very public about it. I think privately are very dismayed and horrified about some of the things coming out of the administration.

MR. DIONNE: I'd just like to press on that a little bit. First of all, on protectionism and nativism, I tend to see them as two quite separate things and I think it is not surprising that there is a backlash against trade after a long period of economic change that has left a lot of places behind. Not all of that change is trade related. A lot of it is technology related, some of it is foreign companies getting ahead of us but there is a trade component, particularly after China joined the WTO so I think that that's why for example, Trump is tough on China policy. A lot of people say he is not handling it very well but that sentiment that we need to renegotiate the relationship with China I think is widely held across both parties.

MR. DENT: Agreed.

MR. DIONNE: That's different from the kind of often very hateful rhetoric that's coming out of the Republican party and it's such a radical shift from the strategy that President George W. Bush pursued along with Carl Rove, where he tried to get immigration reform through Congress when he was President and I've always seen the defeat of that by Republicans in the senate as really, in a way, the beginning of their Trump movement because already back then large segments of the Republican party were moving towards a nativist position and that was a big part of the tea party that we didn't talk about that much but it was an important element in their view so Trump didn't come from nowhere. He came from there and I think the problem -- I'll close on this and I'd like to ask Congressman's reaction. It's significant that Congressman Dent is not in Congress anymore because a lot of Republicans like Congressman Dent have either left Congress, some of them were defeated in primaries, some of them lost their seats to Democrats because they represented moderate districts who said we kind of like you but you're in this party that we

can't stand anymore and a lot of Republicans went down to defeat in 2018 so Democrats are now almost the party that runs for moderate Republicans to Democrat Socialists because of what's happened to a lot of these formerly Republican voters.

DENT: There is a fair amount of truth to that. The only thing I would probably comment on the protectionism issue. I think you're right, EJ, about China. There is a broad consensus that China steals intellectual property, they coerce technology transfers, they engage in improper subsidies of industries and the metals, especially, so there is that concern but the concern that I had is that my imposed tariffs on Canadian aluminum and steel --

DIONNE: Amen, absolutely.

DENT: For German cars. What did BMW do to this country other than invest too much money in America. I mean really? Is this what this is about.

DIONNE: No, that is crazy and it doesn't have broad support.

DENT: You're right about the China issue. And my observation too over the years has been that a lot of people would blame international trade for the failure of an industry. My area of steel failed. I can tell you it didn't happen because of trade. That was not the primary reason by far. It was (inaudible), they had all kinds of other issues stemming back to the 50s when they were very strong that led to their ultimate demise. Long story short, the Republican party I think has to become much more socially tolerant and accept the fact that there can be great wins for the party on some of the initiatives. I would tell Republicans, take credit for the Pet Farm Program.

SCHAYER: So one of the interesting areas is that -- where there is so much polarization in Congress today and Washington today and around the country today. One

area, which is, Charlie, what you're just touching on, where there is bipartisan agreement is in the area of international development and we've seen it over and over again. In the last Congress, the one area where there was more bipartisan legislation passed in almost anything was around global development and a whole range of issues on water, on wildlife trafficking, fighting human trafficking, on electricity, Power Africa, and one of my questions to both of you is why are we seeing this and you are sitting here in a roundtable conversation where we are exploring what are the big agenda items that people can rally around so why, Charlie, is there energy in Congress around these issues and is there hope that this can be a place where we can continue? We saw the administration get excited about building capacity around development finance, Ivanka Trump is leading a women economic empowerment initiative with bipartisan support in Congress so I am curious to see is this a scenario where we can continue to see bipartisan support?

DIONNE: Yes, generally. Particularly for the members of Congress who are -- committees of jurisdiction but those on the committees of jurisdiction, whether on the appropriation subcommittee dealing with state department foreign operations or under foreign affairs and senate foreign relations committees, these people tend to embrace these types of issues so there is that.

Now the challenge for people concerned about international development is the budget office in the White House. Even though there is this great bipartisan consensus on some of these issues, their budget proposals always come out with a significant reduction to the state department and related agencies.

SCHAYER: And Congress keeps rejecting it though.

DIONNE: And Congress keeps rejecting it. So that's the good news. The bad news is

foreign assistance is an easy target. It's a very easy target when you have a budget office that says we are not going to touch Medicare, social security. We are going to increase defense spending so we have to find some savings somewhere, oh here is foreign assistance. That's easy. That's how they do it and that's why -- you get a budget proposal that slashes the state department to pieces. So that's, I think, really the bigger challenge on the funding level.

SCHAYER: But what was incredible is when they did, across the board these last three years now we've seen freedom caucus members and progressive caucus members come together to reject these draconian calls of cuts.

DIONNE: Well I always said the President proposes and Congress disposes.

SCHAYER: Yeah.

DIONNE: I say that after every budget presentation by every President of either party, they always propose things that are going to get trashed at the end of the process. So, you're right, you have good allies in Congress. The question is can the constituents of these members of Congress support their members?

DENT: Could I just something on that?

SCHAYER: Yeah.

DENT: Because a lot of people say that appropriators, members of the appropriations committee are actually a party unto themselves and that appropriators --

DIONNE: I resemble that remark.

DENT: I'm sorry?

DIONNE: I resemble that remark.

DENT: Personally I am glad they are there for that reason and that there is more of

a history of bipartisanship among appropriators and they actually tend to want government to do certain things in certain areas and so I think that sort of long tradition in the congress has actually helped in this and other areas of government activism.

SCHAYER: Can I ask both of you as communicators. One of the things that we are finding as we travel around the country is larger audiences that we've ever had, business leaders as they said, farmers are coming out to our forums around foreign policy. Faith leaders, young people, a big diversity of crowd is coming and they want to talk with their members of Congress about why we should be engaged in the world and we are also finding a demand of interest from members of Congress that want to connect to their constituents around these issues.

My question as communicators, Charlie, you are now in the news media quite a bit as now a talking head as they call them and EJ, you're writing columns all the time. What would you say to candidates? If you were sat here and there's a candidate here saying what should I say to my constituencies I am running about why we should be engaged in the world, why it matters to our own interests, kind of that what we all call the kitchen table conversation and how do we make foreign policy and particularly international development to a kitchen table issue today. EJ, what do we say?

DIONNE: First of all, I always say that I am not a political consultant so people can read my column and it is cheaper than hiring a political consultant because it's almost free online.

The kinds of arguments I would make, first the one Charlie already mentioned about the border. There are a lot of problems that you are better off dealing with at the front end than at the back end and I think migration is clearly one of them and I don't think

that is at all difficult for anyone to understand that moms and dads are going to pull out of countries that are a violent, corrupt -- and where their kids are in danger and no matter how difficult it is, they are going to try to bring their families somewhere else so what can we do to make their lives better. It's good on moral grounds but it's also very practical for us so I think that's one whole area.

As I said earlier and Charlie alluded to this in his comments as well, I think it's very important to link the idea of helping other countries to programs that are also designed to make our economy work better. I think particularly for people who have gotten the short end of the stick economically over the last 25 or 30 years, they have a right to expect that government, when it creates foreign policy, when it thinks about foreign assistance is also going to be thinking about them and I thought Charlie's story, for example, about Cacao in West Africa is a good example of that but there are other ways. For example, I think Judy Harris who is at the Hewlett Foundation has talked about agreements with corporations where you could really sort of begin to demand action at both ends of the supply chain. That you ought to treat workers well at our end of the supply chain but you also ought to treat workers well at the origins of the supply chain. I think there are conversations you can have about foreign assistance and the ways we are interlinked with the world because I think instinctively, everybody understands that we are connected in ways we had never been connected before and like it or not, we have to deal with that fact.

DENT: Americans will understand, with the Marshall Plan, Europe was laid in ruins and America came out of the war comparatively less scathed.

DIONNE: We had 50 percent of the world's GDP.

DENT: And a big country like ours, where are we going to sell all that stuff. We have

to have customers who can buy it so we had to help Europe get on their feet, not only for humanitarian reasons but for economic reasons. It was in our self-interest, in our nation's interest economically and I would argue from a securities standpoint. Same true today with the border. People can see with their own eyes what's happening down in these three countries in central America that are just, for whatever reason seem to be ungovernable or become uninhabitable for too many people and then they are fleeing. And so it's in our interest. It's in our security interest to engage. Walking away creates vacuums and then of course I always say to people too, if the United States if not engaged in some of these places, I guarantee you, there will be others engaged who don't share our interests, who don't share our values and we may not like what happens and it could be worse.

DIONNE: And I think that's a central argument, which is Americans are understandably frustrated that we have been engaged in two very long and indeterminate wars and they are not wrong to be frustrated over that, whatever you think of those wars but the real question is if we withdraw from the world, there will be some kind of vacuum.

SCHAYER: Who fills it?

DIONNE: And it is highly unlikely that it will be filled by people who believe in Democracy, in human rights, in women's rights. Our major competitors in the world are not committed to those things and I do think there is a small democratic case for why we just can't walk away.

SCHAYER: So my last question goes back to the original question that Merrell asked which is, it's the day after the election, 2020. Not who is going to win, but have the voters said that foreign policy mattered -- so I mentioned the exit polls of 2016 where 4 out of 5 said either extremely or very important foreign policy was to their votes. Do you think that

will be the same in 2020? Will foreign policy have mattered to their vote?

DIONNE: I have to confess, I am a bit skeptical about that finding about 2016 unless you define foreign policy in a certain way --

SCHAYER: National security, yeah.

DIONNE: The version of the poll that I saw that was very interesting is that candidates who mentioned foreign policy explicitly, which was by no means a large majority, voted for Hillary Clinton. Voters who mentioned foreign policy -- voters who mentioned terrorism voted overwhelmingly for Donald Trump.

SCHAYER: So maybe a more broad definition.

DIONNE: In other words, I think some Americans -- The Center for American Progress did a very interesting study where what they were really looking for in foreign policy is first foreign policy that protects us, particularly from terrorism and foreign attack but also that in some ways protects our economy. If you define it broadly that way, then you can say yes, a lot of voters will have this on their minds in 2020 but I think the nature of President Trump's presidency and I'll try to be very restrained here is that Donald Trump will be the issue that overrides everything else and that for some people it may be his foreign policy, maybe ethno- nationalism. For other people, it will be other aspects but along the way candidates are going to have to talk about these issues just because --

SCHAYER: They are running for commander in chief.

DIONNE: They are running for commander in chief and chief diplomatic officer of the country and so we are going to hear about it, I just would be very surprised if it is a central issue, absent an emergency of some kind.

DENT: Yeah, I agree with EJ. My observation has been that most voters may say

that they are interested in foreign policy but they sure don't talk about those issues generally to their elected officials. Although, with Donald Trump in office, I do think foreign policy has taken on a bit of a new meaning. I think many Americans now are starting to think more about the last 75 years and what it has meant where we had this consensus on foreign policy for at least up to the Cold War and I would argue even after the Cold War we had a consensus for a period of time but we don't have that consensus anymore.

It was bipartisan and this whole international order that's being questioned -- I mean I was always appalled when the President said he wanted to pull out of NATO. I thought well this is the foundation of American national security policy.

Why would any American President say such a thing and so I think many are questioning this order, that the United States, with our friends and allies created and have led and I think many other people are thinking about foreign policy in a different way.

If Trump leaves office either in 4 years or 8 years, where does the country stand? Do we go back to where we were before? I think most people are saying probably not back there but where do we go.

SCHAYER: Where do we go?

DENT: Where do we go? We need to go back to a better place but we can't go back to where we were either. So I think foreign policy is at the fore of many people's minds but at the end of the day, most people are going to vote about hey, my healthcare premiums are too high, my deductibles are too high, I can't pay my college loans off, I am stuck in a job I don't like, I want a career and not just another job. So more their own personal circumstances drive a lot of their votes. Sometimes foreign policy is a bit abstract.

SCHAYER: Thank you. This is a fascinating conversation. It will be interesting to see

as the election draws near if indeed, some international relations issues do start to hit the debate stages a little more often than they are up until now but in the meantime, let me thank the participants.

DENT: Thank you.

DIONNE: Thank you.

SCHAYER: Thank you.

DEWS: The Brookings Cafeteria Podcast is the product of an amazing team of colleagues, starting with audio engineer, Gaston Reboledo and producer Chris McKenna.

Bill Finan, director of the Brookings institution press does the book interviews and Lisette Baylor and Eric Abalahin provide design and web support.

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