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

MR. WRIGHT: Good morning. My name is Tom Wright. I'm the director of the Center for the United States and Europe at the Brookings Institution, and a senior fellow in the Project on International Order and Strategy. I am delighted, today, to be chairing this important discussion on Election 2020 and its implications for U.S. foreign policy. Obviously, over the weekend, there's been some rapid developments. There is now a President-elect, Joe Biden, after a pretty tumultuous few days, I think, for everyone, and an election that was pretty close for many days, but now it looks like we have a clear winner.

So, we have a terrific panel, this morning, to discuss not so much the election, but really looking forward to next year, to see what the implications are for U.S. foreign policy, for international order, and to parse maybe some of the nuances of last week and what they may mean, particularly the fact that Trumpism is alive and well, even though the president did not receive a second term and that the Senate could be in the hands of Republicans.

And so, we have Eric Edelman, who is the Roger Hertog distinguished practitioner-in-residence at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, Evan Osnos, who is a staff writer at The New Yorker and a nonresident senior fellow at Brookings, with the John L. Thornton China Center, Tamara Wittes, who is a senior fellow at the Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, and Victoria Nuland, who is a nonresident senior fellow at the Center for the United States and Europe. All of them have served in either have served in very senior positions in government, which I won't go into at the moment, but you can rest assured that they come equipped with decades of experience at the highest levels, and Evan has recently written a book on Joe Biden, which is titled -- sorry, Evan, the title escapes me at the moment, but it just -- it flipped off my screen, there, but it's Joe Biden, I think, his life and times, and what it means for the 2020 Election. So, Evan, let's start with you, if we can.

Joe Biden has been around for a long time. As we've heard repeatedly from Donald Trump, he's been in office or out of office for about 47 years. He has a long track record on U.S. foreign policy. In some ways, he's a very known quantity, but in other ways, he's a bit of an enigma. His views have evolved a bit over time. He has a large team that have these debates about foreign policy that have

been sort of obscured a little bit by the Trump show. Many people in Biden world were expecting a repudiation of Donald Trump, an overwhelming victory that would send a message to the world. He has won a clear victory, but it was maybe more close and more marginal than many people anticipated. He may well have a Republican Senate. He, of course, has said that his superpower is working with Republicans, working with people on the other side of the aisle. So, as he sort of contemplates the first few days of his transition and the beginning of his term, how do you think he sort of interprets the results of last week, particularly with the view to what it means for his foreign policy and for the future sort of America's global growth?

MR. OSNOS: Thanks, Tom. Yeah, and it's great to be with my colleagues up here and with all of you who are tuning in. Look, I think there are, as Tom mentioned, I think there are, in some ways, elements of Joe Biden's mind, his approach to diplomacy, as to domestic policy, that we, sometimes, overlook, or haven't really studied in detail, until just now, and they can help us anticipate some of the things that I think we're likely to see.

I'll talk just for a minute, here, about what I think we can broadly describe as an era of division, at home and abroad, and I think that's important as a defining piece of this, as a way of sort of understanding the period of structural and sustained hostility in the U.S. and in many of its relationships, which will have implications, but, before we do that, I just want to talk a minute about President-elect Biden's theory of diplomacy because when you talk to him about how he thinks about diplomacy, which is something he cares a great deal about, he will tell you that he draws somewhat of a distinction between the way that it's conventionally practiced.

As he said to me at one point, look, sometimes, diplomats get tired because I will say to them, I'm not going to go into a room and say what you want me to say, exactly as you wrote it here, because his basic view, and he would apply this in Wilmington, or in Bagdad, or in Beijing, is don't tell another person what their interests are. That's his fundamental idea. They will have a notion of their interests, and, as he puts it, you know, in my experience, people are generally not -- are not open to being persuaded that their own calculations or interest is wrong. What you have to do is show them the basic element of recognition, that that's -- that you -- that you're hearing them, you're listening with them,

you don't have to pretend you agree, but if you begin from the position that you trust their own ability to calculate their interest, you're starting off at an advantage, than, over than if you come in and tell them why they're wrong.

And I think another piece of this that's meaningful is Joe Biden and Barack Obama actually had some -- a very important thing that bound them together, when they were joined together on this ticket. You know, often times, presidents and vice presidents, the tickets are kind of shotgun marriages. In their case, they have this thing that tied them, and it was this basic belief in the possibility of unification, that you could actually unify people, but they use very different tools to do it.

In President Obama's case, as we know, he had a kind of transcendent story, his own, literally, his own personal story, and the power of his eloquence, of his political rhetoric, was able to, both at home and abroad, he began this process of trying to restore some element of the American image of American credibility, and that was his approach, and you saw that in the sort of significance of his speeches, and so on. President-elect Biden has a different view. He does not pretend, frankly, that he has that kind of American story, that can communicate what the future of the United States is likely to be. What he says is, in fact, I have the relationships, I have these kinds of fundamental person to person contacts, and, most of all, I believe that if you go back to that first principle, that you acknowledge that somebody else's interest may be legitimate, that that's the basis for a meaningful discussion.

And I'll just, very briefly, mention one other thing, which is it is significant that he knows a lot of these people. I mean, George Mitchell, at one point, said to me, we used to have foreign leaders, you know, he was -- it -- he went in the Senate with Joe Biden for a long time, and he said, we would have foreign leaders come all the time, to the Senate, and my job was to go around and introduce these foreign leaders to members of Senate. So, I would say over here is Senator Kit Bond, and over here is Senator so and so, and then these foreign leaders would say, hi, Joe. So, there is a certain -- they just knew him, and that, at a moment, like now, when the United States, frankly, looks unfamiliar, in so many ways, now, in the nature of its politics, the nature of our division, to our friends and opponents abroad, an element of recognizability is a political asset that I think we sometimes discount.

I'm going to save the specific comments about all of the various specific domains, China,

Europe, and elsewhere because my colleagues, I think, will get us going on that, and we come back to any of them in more specifics during Q and A. So, Tom, back to you, I think.

MR. WRIGHT: Thank you, Evan, and, Tamara, you served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Middle East for Near Eastern Affairs, in the first term of the Obama Administration. You had the opportunity, you know, to work with then Vice President Biden. We'll get into the Middle East part of it later on, I think, in the discussion, but, you know, just to the question on his sort of outlook, you know, how it might have changed, following the election of last week, what he's sort of thinking of, you know, what do you think he's thinking about the challenges he's facing in the world, with, still, a very divided country, at home, and is his foreign policy likely to be a little bit different this week, maybe, than it would have appeared just before the election?

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Oh, wow, I think that last is a difficult question, but let me try and start with the broader outlook question. I think that one thing we've seen from Joe Biden, throughout his career, whether it's in domestic policy, foreign policy, or in politics, itself, is an ability to learn, and grow, and change. Let's rem -- you know, this is not his first run for the Presidency, and he, you know, across his career, I think, has just gotten better, and better, and better at what he does.

What Evan pointed out about his determination to empathize and to seek out common ground, I think these are elements of practical diplomacy, that will serve him very well, and, you know, he has got the background to hit the ground running, but the challenge he faces, coming in in January, is how much the ground has shifted, since he was in the Vice Presidency. That's very true in the Middle East, where we've seen historic developments over the last decade, some of which he was in office for, some of which he was not, but it's true across the board, the global geopolitics has changed. Trans-Atlantic partners are in a different place now, than they were four years ago, and there's a -- there is a degree of uncertainty in global politics, that I think has led a number of our traditional partners to engage in self-help, over the course of the Trump Administration, and it's not simple to unwind that.

So, I think his capacity to learn and grow is going to be put to use very, very quickly, but I think that he'll probably root himself in some of the common ground that he's found with partners in the past, whether that is, you know, on the Iranian challenge on counterterrorism, on strengthening our sort of

coalition of democracies across the world, which is something he spoke about a lot during the campaign, but it's hard to see how to put meat on the bones of all of those good intentions, without those deep conversations with his foreign interlocutors, to hear from them and to find that common ground. So, no doubt, there's a lot of prep work that's been going on, but he will be reaching out and having a lot of conversations, he'll want to hear it for himself, and, you know, he's not going to be able to put these things on pause while he figures it out.

MR. WRIGHT: Thank you. Thank you, Tamara. That's fascinating. Eric, if we could turn to you, next. I mean, you have served in very senior positions, in the Pentagon and overseas, in Republican Administrations. What do you think Mitch McConnell and, I guess, the foreign policy-oriented Senators are thinking, at the moment? I mean, there's a, I'd say, a better than 50-50 chance that they retain control of the Senate, following the runoffs in Georgia, on January 5th, that we need to wait to see, of course, the results, but if you're looking at it now, you know, there's probably a pretty decent chance that they remain in control.

So, they'll have control, basically, of the nomination process that have considerable oversight, obviously, they're necessary for any legislation to pass, and it has been a pretty divided election. We've already seen some Senators come out and basically back Donald Trump's theory of the case. So, what do you think McConnell and some of the other Senators are thinking, and is there sort of a prospect for cooperation between a Biden Administration and a Republican-controlled Senate?

MR. EDELMAN: Well, thanks, Tom. First, it's great to be here with you and with all my colleagues on here, with whom I have all sorts of unusual ties. I mean, Tamara and I, I think, succeeded each other in a variety of positions in government, Toria's parents were exceedingly kind to me when I was Ambassador in Turkey, and Evan's grandparents, you know, where -- in the same neighborhood my grandparents did, in Manhattan. So, it's a great panel, and I'm thrilled to be part of it.

Look, the Republican Party, certainly the Republican Party of Ronald Reagan, has been shattered and is beyond recognition, in terms of its approach to national security policy. I think that, for those of us who were never Trump Republicans, who -- and I was part of two different groups of that ilk that endorsed Vice President Biden, we had hoped for, as you indicated, a bigger repudiation of Trump

and Trumpism, and we didn't get it. I mean, I think Vice President Biden is going to win a pretty solid victory, when all the votes are counted.

He's likely to have a slightly higher margin than Barack Obama did against Mitt Romney, but it's still not the repudiation of Trumpism that might've served as a helping cleanser of the Republican tendency to, in particularly in the Senate, to enable President Trump's worst instincts, and, you know, you can see that already, in what's happened in the post-election period, when a number of Republicans in the Senate have jumped, like trained seals, to respond to Tweets from Donald, Jr., etc., about defending his father's, you know, totally undemocratic efforts to cast doubt on the results of the election, which I think is really dangerous for our democracy and benefits only one person, which is Vladimir Putin. It might also benefit Xi Jinping. So, it might be more than one.

What will happen in the Senate? I think Senator McConnell -- I think Leader McConnell's instincts remain sort of traditional internationalist, conservative internationalist, Republican. He does have a longstanding relationship with Vice President Biden. I think his instinct is going to want to try and be pragmatic to get some things done, and I think, in fact, probably, some contacts are already beginning to happen between Vice President Biden's folks and Congressional Staffers on the Republican side.

So, I think that's, you know, all to the good, but Leader McConnell's going to have a very large challenge, and that is going to be that the election results are likely to have ratified in the minds of a number of people, that the problem was not the message, it was the messenger, that this was a, you know, repudiation of Trump, but not necessarily of Trumpism, and that, therefore, a hostility to trade agreements, hostility to our alliances are, you know, are going to be the ticket to success in 2024, and that Trump lane, I think, is going to be very crowded with a number of candidates, and many of them are going to try and stoke the Trump base, and win it over for themselves, and to win Donnie, Jr. and President Trump's, you know, imprimatur for their own candidacies, by being obstructionists, and by opposing everything, by leading the resistance to a Biden Administration.

So, I think McConnell is going to have a tough row to hoe, himself. He's going to need some cooperation from the Biden team, in helping him manage that, particularly on -- I don't think it's going to be as big an issue in confirmation for Cabinet positions, but the Subcabinet positions, I think, that

are open for confirmation, are going to be a bigger battleground, and that's going to require some very dexterous cooperation on both sides, which I hope happens, because that will be good for the country.

MR. WRIGHT: Thank you, Eric. Victoria, you have also served not just in the Obama Administration, as Assistant Secretary for Europe, but also in several other administrations, in both parties, as a Foreign Service Officer, very senior levels. Picking up where Eric left off, if we are likely to see sort of a continuation of Trumpism, in the Republican Party and in the Senate, but you still have some of those international elements, internationalist elements, there, and you have a President Biden, who is sort of naturally inclined to bipartisanship, what do you think sort of the pros -- the best prospects are to sort of recreate, if not the bipartisan consensus, at least sort of a strong bipartisan view, maybe not shared by everybody in each party, on America's leadership role, internationally?

MS. NULAND: Well, thanks, Tom. First, it's great to be with everybody on this fresh Monday morning and with so many patriots and folks who have served their country so well. Listen, Biden came up along with most of the senior members of the Senate, in a period where the fundamental underpinning was that political fights ended at the water's edge, and when you went out into the world, you went out as a unified and, ideally, a bipartisan front to talk to allies and adversaries, alike, about the challenges and about -- and to represent the United States.

I think that will be Biden's instinct, to try to reach out, as Eric said, to the McConnell's, and Burr's, and Cornyn's, and, you know, traditional Republicans of his generation, but I think Eric is not wrong, that, on the foreign policy insecurity side, we don't know, yet, what those who will posture for the Trump voters of 2024, the younger folks, will take from the foreign policy agenda of Trump. I mean, I thought it was pretty interesting that, throughout the Trump period, even as some of the more Trumpian Republicans in the Congress supported punishing allies on the trade side, almost nobody joined this caravan of, you know, Trump hostility towards NATO, even Trump hostility towards the E.U., as an institution, or towards allies in general, and, over the period of the Trump Administration, this America, go it alone, America, unilateralism, did not have a popular support.

You know, public opinion polling for institutions, like NATO and the U.N., went up over this period, and I think that reflects the fact that the American people never really did buy that it's better

for us, cheaper for us to take on issues like China, issues like the new national security challenges from high technologies, like artificial intelligence and quantum, etc., by ourselves, that, first and foremost, if we could do it with allies, that would be better, and cheaper, and more persuasive for us, but, secondarily, that doing it all alone puts all of the burden of things, like sanctions on China, on the American farmer, rather than on a broader coalition, and it stands less of a chance of success.

So, I think Biden's instinct, obviously, will try to be to rebuild a traditionalist bipartisan coalition for American leadership. I think there'll be, you know, a demand, on the Republican side, for a more rigorous approach to some things, China in particular, than they may have seen from the Obama Administration, but, as Tammy said, I think that's where President-elect Biden has evolve -- and his team have evolved, anyway, that it's time to be far more organized, structured, rigorous, and strong, as a Democratic Community, in the way we approach Russia, China, and some of these other challenges, from authoritarians, who want to change the rules-based system in their favor. So, I think he will make a strong effort.

I just wanted to underscore a couple of things that Evan said, as somebody, you know, who had the honor of traveling with Biden and watching him work, as a U.S. Diplomat, in the last -- in the Obama Administration. Not only does he start from the premise that you can't tell somebody else what their interests are, he starts by trying to understand what the other person on the other side of the table thinks their interests are, and then what their political environment is, where their room to maneuver is, and then to try to call the interlocuter on the other side of the table to their higher angels to try to take some political risks together, for a better outcome for both countries or for a larger group of countries, and he's fundamentally extremely optimistic in his approach. So, just as he, you know, believes that the nation needs healing, I think he thinks the planet needs healing, and, particularly, that the Democratic Community has got to come together, in a stronger way, to address the many challenges that we have.

So, I think he will start from that optimistic place, he will do a lot of listening, but I also think that Democratic allies need to be ready, that he will be quite demanding because he will not want to address these big challenges that we have alone, and he will want the help of allies and partners, in Asia, in Europe, and other parts of the world. So, you know, I think it'll be a much more multilateral approach,

but I don't think that he'll be a pushover with allies, either.

MR. EDELMAN: Tom, can I just pick up on something that both Tammy and Toria just talked about, which I think is really, really important, but I want to kind of put a slightly different gloss on it, which is, you know, Toria was just talking about, you know, rebuilding sort of multilateral approaches, and Tammy was talking about the tendency of some of our partners and allies to engage in self-help.

I agree with both those observations, but I think it's important to remember that this actually is -- it's bigger than Trump and Biden, right, because, for a lot of allies, they look back at the last 12 years, including the Obama years, and see a pattern of retrenchment and diminished, in their view, U.S. leadership. They look at the vacuum that was created by Obama's, arguably, underreaction to what happened in Syria, and they wonder whether this is not just a transient phenomenon that Trump represented, but something rather longer lasting, and so, the challenge I think Biden's going to face, as he attempts to address these issues, that Tammy and Toria were talking about, is how credibly can he say, look, I'm not Barack Obama, I'm not just the, you know, the second incarnation of Barack Obama, I'm Joe Biden, and I'm bringing a different approach, and it's one in which America is going to be more active than you've seen it be, not just in the last four years, but in the last 12 years, and I think that's going to be, really, his challenge.

MR. WRIGHT: Eric, that's a great point, and, you know, I've long thought the key analytical question about a Biden Administration is not how he different to Trump, but how is he different to Obama, just in terms of getting leverage on what it might be, and, I guess, Tamara, maybe you could come in next on that, I mean, the way, and, you know, we've discussed this before, of course, but the way I try to think about it is, you know, are there sort of key assumptions or orthodoxies from the Obama Administration that are sort of different this time out, you know, and I guess, you know, you could address that in the context of the Middle East or, more broadly, on other issues, but, you know, what do you think those most likely, I guess, maybe not shifts, but debates, I mean, what are the debates within the broader sort of foreign policy community, around Biden, about whether or not there should be a significant departure, either along the lines that Eric was suggesting or something else?

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Yeah, thanks, Tom, and this is already such a rich

conversation, I'm really enjoying it. I think that, yes, I think there are -- what you've already heard from this panel about the President-elect's proclivities would suggest that he sees politics as the art of the possible, that he doesn't sort of go in with these lofty overarching visions, the way Obama did. You know, remember Obama's speech, this feels like a century ago, on eliminating nuclear weapons, for example, you know? He -- I think Obama had, partly because of his own personal story, but partly because of the way he approached the world, he thought that he could sketch out these ambitious visions and inspire others to move forward.

I think President-elect Biden is going to take a much more down to earth approach, here are the problems we're facing together, how do we work together to make this better than it is, and I, you know, and I think the question that Eric posed of can he really take that down to earth approach, while simultaneously sending the message that we're back, we're engaged, we're driving events, at a moment when, look, you know, the United States, like every other country in the world, is facing a tremendous domestic crisis because of COVID, and that's layered on top of all of the drivers of this desire to pull back from the world that exists in our domestic politics and that affected both Obama and Trump. So, he, you know, if he wants to be engaged abroad, he is pushing into a domestic political headwind, and I think that, you know, I think the challenge begins at home, with persuading Americans that it is necessary to remain engaged, and that, actually, as Victoria -- as Toria said, that we can get more done, more effectively, at lower cost, and perhaps lower risk, working with partners.

Now, you know, where do we see the relative bipartisan agreement? On which international issues can we -- could a Biden Administration start out with common ground, with Republicans in the Senate, for example? China, clearly, you know, you can look back at the clear unified message, from Congressional Democrats, and Congressional Republicans, and the Trump Administration, at last year's Munich Security Conference on China, for example, just across the board. You know, you can see it on Russia, a desire to impose stronger consequences on the Russians, and try to constrain their behavior in Europe and elsewhere, and you can see it also on Saudi Arabia. Let's remember that, you know, Obama had his veto of legislation from bipartisan legislation, the JAXO legislation, overridden by Congress, at the end of the administration, allowing 9/11 families to pursue

remedies in American courts against Saudi Arabia, and we saw votes in Congress to suspend armed sales to Saudi Arabia because of the Yemen War that Trump had to veto.

So, you know, if you look at those three areas, I think all of those are areas where, if that's where you start, it pushes the United States in a more confrontational direction toward these three actors, and, you know, doing that effectively is going to require international coalitions, but there's also the question of is that where a Biden Administration wants to start, rather than focusing on, you know, strengthening democracies, strengthen -- working on climate change, addressing the challenge of nuclear proliferation, you know, addressing the global health challenge, the -- you know, these are things that are going to require cooperation, including from Russia and China. So, I do think there's an inherent tension between the domestic equation, if you will, and the international equation that's going to be difficult to solve.

MS. NULAND: I actually see it the opposite way, Tom, if I might?

MR. WRIGHT: Please.

MS. NULAND: I think if you look at the foreign affairs article that Biden penned a year ago, and, you know, the few times during the campaign that there have been conversations about national security and foreign policy because it didn't really figure too much, there is a strong stream of thought that strong at home also requires being strong abroad, and that the two challenges, rebuilding in the United States and building back better, have to work in tandem with restoring U.S. leadership abroad, and the degree to which we can make an infrastructure leap, an innovation leap, a defense leap, you know, past the old rusty technologies to the new security challenges and use stimulus money to make ourselves stronger, will make us both a better leader, globally, in terms of how we deal with economic recovery, how we deal with pandemic, but will also put us in a stronger position to lead other allied countries in a unified approach, to Russia, to China, will ensure that neither of those countries gets a route on us, in terms of next generation economy, etc.

So -- and then the question becomes, and you see this in the writings of some of Biden's key advisors, how do you convince American kitchen tables that the two issues are linked, that so many of the jobs that they depend on, in the heartland, are linked to open trade and open borders, not

necessarily new trade agreements, but maintaining the freedom of navigation, and freedom of markets, and not tariffing your friends, and all of those kinds of things, but, also, how do you ensure that some of this stimulus money that's going into the United States and that Europe is applying is also bringing us better standing in the world, better outcomes, more green innovative ways of running our countries, such that we're stronger vis-à-vis adversaries and not seeding the field to them in the next generation economies and security infrastructures.

So, I think that they see it as linked. It's a tall order to implement that way because you're going to have to get some -- and this is where the Congress comes in, you know, as the -- is a Republican Congress going to support the kind of investments that Biden's talked about, \$80 billion, and are they going to see it as a gift to him, or are they going to see it as part of strengthening the country for everybody, and strengthening our leadership role. That's the challenge, I think.

MR. WRIGHT: Thanks, Toria. If I could bring Evan back in on precisely that point, and I'll start to weave in some questions from the audience, as well, because they're streaming in, and Trudy Rubin, of the Philadelphia Inquirer, has a question, how Biden handled China policy, including on trade and technology, and, Evan, if you could address that, but if I could also add another China question, as well, to it, which is the point where Victoria's making there, that, you know, getting the domestic agendas through, and even getting some of the nominations through will be difficult with a Republican controlled Senate.

One way to do it is to make competition with China more central to the overall foreign policy narrative, right, that you need to have these infrastructure investments to compete with China, and that there's necessary changes to the technology side that maybe some of the nominees, you know, will sail through more, if they're seen as having a Liberal sort of version of great power competition. There seems to be an active debate, both in Biden world and in Democratic circles, on the wisdom of that. Some people embrace it, some people resist it. What's your sense, I guess, of, A, the substance of it, having such experience on China and you've written a book, of course, on it, but also on the internal politics, within Biden world, on the China issue?

MR. OSNOS: You know, in some ways, this is the issue that ties together so many of the

themes we've been talking about, all of us, today, because in -- you can take, just as an example, China is one of the areas in which you see not a departure, so much, from a -- the Obama approach, but an evolution, often, in some cases, by some of the same practitioners, and this is partly because of a recognition of the facts on the ground, that things have changed both in the relationship, both in Chinese leadership, and also in America's view, at the elite level and at the popular level, and, look, I think if you take -- well, if you took -- if you look back at what Biden wrote, like what Vice -- President-elect Biden wrote, and then, also, if you look at what some of his key advisors have been writing in foreign affairs and elsewhere, you begin to get a feel for the ways in which there is a recognition that the fundamental organizing principle of the U.S.-China relationship under the Obama Administration is no longer operative in the same way.

It's not simply cooperation will lead to a more cooperative China, that it is now a recognition that we're into a phase of, to some degree, a, obviously, a much more contested arrangement. Now, I will say a couple things, specifically. On the U.S. sort of political side, take, for example, just as a datapoint, that you had a Senate resolution to sensor Beijing over its involvement in Hong Kong, that passed 100 to nothing. Nothing else in the United States, these days, could pass 100 to nothing. That creates, from the incoming administration side, a tremendous reservoir of options. They are able to point to Bei -- they can say, Beijing, look, this is what we are contending with, here. It is now in our hand, on our schedule, on our terms to define what we're going to do because we have this mandate to do what we want to do, and that's not to say that they are going to either chuck out, entirely, the Trump Administration approach or simply apply it and extend it.

I think what you're likely to see is, and these are very experienced practitioners who are going to be involved in this relationship, they're going to use the elements of the existing setting of the table in ways that are helpful for them. They don't need to roll back tariffs until something is provided in return. They don't need to simply change course from the existing approach on technology, until they see evidence of progress, and so, even though there may be, and there are, very deep philosophical disagreements about the approach that the Trump Administration took and how the incoming Biden Administration will take it, they are also in the fortunate position of being able to inherit the elements that

they find useful and use them as leverage as necessary. So, that's -- I'll sort of leave it there because there are -- I'm -- this is, by the way, a thrilling chat with colleagues, here, and I just feel like we could do this every day, for the next week, and not even fulfill all of our mandate, here.

MR. WRIGHT: Absolutely, as I feel exactly the same way. Eric, so, one other area for this issue of leverage comes up as, of course, Iran and the JCPOA, and this, if -- I think you were sketching out potential differences between a Democratic Administration of whatever president and a Republican Senate, you know, the JCPOA is probably pretty high up there on the list of areas of difference. Could you speak a little bit about how you think a Biden Administration should conceive of this issue, particularly with regard to all the leverage that this Trump Administration has bequeathed to them, and is there a way to do this that sort of, you know, builds a bridge to the Senate and a way to do it, maybe, that burns that bridge?

MR. EDELMAN: That's a great question, Tom, and, first, I just want to say I agree with every single word that Evan just said, including and, and the, I mean, he, I think, sketched out, brilliantly, how I think the Biden folks are going to be looking at the China question, and this goes more broadly, I think, into defense policy because of the national security strategy that the Trump people adopted, which prioritizes competition with Russia and China, and, you know, before the election, the House Armed Services Committee Chairman, Adam Smith, said that, you know, there was going to be a big fight among Democrats about the defense budget, and Biden needed to do a new national defense strategy, and all of that.

I think they will, of course, do a new national defense strategy, but I don't think it's going to end up quite where Adam Smith saw -- thought because of the election returns and for all the reasons that Evan just adduced, which is there is a broad bipartisan consensus that we're in a comp -- long-term competition, strategically, with China, and with Russia, and that probably China's the longer-term bigger -- bigger challenge. So, I think that -- there's broad acceptance of that, and I think the Biden Administration can make its own adjustments and fill ups and build on that, and Biden, I think, signaled that, in his Stars and Stripes interview, where he said he didn't think there were going to be big cuts, you know, in the defense budget, notwithstanding the Sanders amendment, that calls for a 10 percent across the board

defense cut. I think he was signaling all of this.

On Iran, in particular, you know, the Vice President said that he wanted to go right back into the Iran Nuclear Deal, and I hope he doesn't because I think that would be a huge mistake, strategically, and it really speaks to the point that Tammy made earlier, about every administration, and I went through five different presidential transitions during my 30-year career, and one thing that occurs all the time is the challenge because people always come back from having been in, you know, office, previously, four or eight years ago, and what people discover is that the world has changed, and sometimes it takes them shorter, and sometimes it takes them longer to figure that out, and I hope that the Biden team will discover that, on Iran, it's changed, and that it doesn't take them longer, but shorter because they've been bequeathed, again, as Evan was suggesting with China, enormous leverage because of the impact that almost nobody predicted, including the critics of the Trump Administration, that the maximum pressure campaign would build as much economic pressure on Iran as it has, and the Iranian economy is in terrible shape.

Moreover, the Iranians, now, are very much out of compliance with the standards set in the JCPOA, and so, to go back in and relieve the sanctions pressure, without getting something pretty considerable in return, would be, I think, to squander the leverage that they have. Moreover, it would poison the relationship with Senate Republicans, who'll be looking at this very carefully, and not just Republicans. Let's not forget that at the time the JCPOA was agreed, I was going to say signed, but then I remembered it was never actually signed because it's not a signed agreement, it's just an accord, but the Senate, when it was debating it, never voted on it because the Obama Administration refused to have a vote because they knew they would lose.

The Senate Minority Leader, and hope -- who hopes to be the Senate Majority Leader, Chuck Schumer, came out against the agreement. The Ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Bob Menendez, came out against the agreement. The Next Ranking Member on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Ben Cardon, came out against the agreement, and so, there will be bipartisan folks looking at this to see how much the Biden folks are both using the leverage they've got, but also addressing what even the Democratic Platform admits were omissions in the agreement to

begin with, which is the Ballistic Missile Program and Iran's maligned behavior.

So, I think the way forward for the Biden Administration, on this, is, first, to consult with allies and try and develop a common approach to getting Iran to the table to get a better agreement, that doesn't allow Republicans to pick at all the weaknesses of the earlier agreement, including things, like the Conventional Arms Embargo on Iran, that expired on October 18th, while all the rest of this stuff was going on and nobody was noticing, and that, I think, will be the best way forward for -- if they just rush back in and say we're going back into the agreement, and we don't really care about all the rest of this, I think that it would be both a diplomatic mistake, but I think it'll also envenom relations in the Congress.

MR. WRIGHT: Tamara, if I could bring you in on this, and I'd love to get your thoughts on Eric's comments, but, also, you know, it's hard to think of another region in the world, where, maybe, Joe Biden's election will be greeted so coolly, maybe in the Middle East. I mean, these guys, generally, were totally in bed with Trump and pretty supportive of him, for a wide variety of reasons, so, you know, on the Iran piece, for sure, but also on the broader sort of Middle East challenge that a Biden Administration will face, and, you know, this isn't necessarily an area where you want to reassure, reassure, reassure, and sort of, you know, there are legitimate substantive differences and beefs with several of these leaders, including, of course, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia. So, how do you think about the choices that a Biden Administration will face in the first six months, including on the JCPOA?

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Yeah, I -- I'm doubtful, Eric, that a Biden Administration is going to rush back into a JCPOA that Iran is out of compliance with. I don't actually think that's realistic. I think, more likely, is the question of whether you can tee up some kind of, essentially, a freeze for freeze, where the Iranians stop their -- especially the enrichment activity that has brought them out of compliance, the stockpiling of nuclear material, and, you know, Elliott Abrams is, right now, in the region, consulting with allies about scaling up Iran's sanctions, which, you know, in a way, puts the Biden Administration in a good position, although I don't -- I think Abrams' intent is to tie a Biden Administration's hands, but it does give them more leverage, at least in the short term, I think, with the Iranians, to demand a sort of freeze for freeze, and that gives you time to consult with allies, to sketch out the parameters of what a bigger, longer, stronger JCPOA 2.0 might look like.

So, you know, that's the direction I expect that they will take, but I think that, as far as the region is concerned, Israel aside, the primary concern with Iran has not been the nuclear proliferation, it has been the other activities, and what we've seen, over the course of this maximum pressure with no offramp, is that Iran has escalated those activities, and the Trump Administration's incoherence in responding to that, alternating between blasphemous and aggression, and, you know, truly leaving allies in the lurch, as the Saudis were after the attack on the Abqaiq Refinery Facility.

It's leaving these allies with a lot of questions about the direction of American policy, and so, you know, I do think this is going to be -- it's -- it is both a challenge and an opportunity for the United States, but it's going to come up very quickly, in a lot of places. This is the issue that is going to bring Riyadh, and Abu Dhabi, and everybody else knocking on the door, just as it was when the Trump Administration came in, by the way. One of the reasons that they went all-in for Trump is because they felt fairly or unfairly betrayed and abandoned by an Obama Administration that conducted secret diplomacy without telling them, with the Iranians, and made noises about leaving the Saudis and Iranians to work out their own motives for (inaudible).

So, how does Biden, you know, how does Biden put those pieces together, pursue some kind of diplomatic engagement with Iran, without creating the perception that I think would be incorrect, but is quite likely among these hypersensitive regional partners, that Biden's just being the Anti-Trump and switching sides, you know, back to the Iranians, and, of course, there are plenty of Republican critics here, in the United States, who will jump on that, as well, and so, I think that this is, you know, it would be to his advantage to find a way to sort of kick the nuclear can down the road a little bit, and address the allies' immediate concerns about, and our immediate concerns, about Iran linked to militia activity in Iraq, about the ability to defend against missile attacks and rocket attacks from the Iranians and from their (inaudible) allies and from Hezbollah, and, you know, to have some really tough and honest conversations with regional partners, about the ways in which their behavior over the last four years has gone not just beyond the bounds of partnership, but beyond the bounds of basic international norms, the violations of sovereignty of other countries, including the United States, by the Saudis, for example, you know, not only the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, but the planting of spies inside Twitter, you know, the

abuse of diplomatic facilities, using Saudi diplomatic facilities to help Saudis in the U.S., who were accused of common crimes, escape justice.

This is not how friends behave, and so, there does need to be some very, very honest conversation about the things we need to do together and the things that they need to pull back on, in order to demonstrate that they're committed to this partnership.

MR. WRIGHT: Thank you. Toria, there's a question, here, from Jennifer Reuben, which is how can a Biden -- how can President-elect Biden rebuild morale and institutional knowledge at the State Department? So, I'd like you to address that, but I'd also like to make a link to what Tamara and Eric were just saying about leverage because we often hear that the Biden Administration ought to use this leverage that has been bequeathed to it. I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about how it might generate leverage, and if there's anything sort of that you -- we've all learned from the Trump Administration, in terms of, you know, there were occasions where they did generate leverage, even though people didn't necessarily think it would work, and they didn't have a strategy, necessarily, to execute on it, or to negotiate on it, but were there things, maybe, that, you know, the Obama Administration could have done more of to generate leverage? What's sort of your thinking on how a Biden Administration might be able to create leverage of its own, that it can use, you know, over the subsequent four years? And I just mean that in terms of -- we often hear about reinvigorating diplomacy. Diplomacy is personnel, it's resources, it's the buildings, it's, also, sort of the strategy, and you've got a lot of experience, obviously, negotiating and -- with some pretty tough characters. So, how do you think about sort of revitalizing diplomacy on -- across the spectrum of all of those, all of those areas?

MS. NULAND: Well, first of all, you know, I -- I, and I think a lot of people, subscribe to the adage that diplomacy doesn't work unless it's backed by strength, and that means, as we were talking about before, being increasingly strong at home, recovering fast, but, also, rebuilding this alliance structure, so that, regardless of the adversary, whether it's China, or Russia, or Iran, or any force around the world that wants to undercut the Liberal World Order, run by the Democratic world, we have to rally together, and that's the greatest leverage, when we're working in tandem with others.

You know, I was fascinated listening to Eric and Tammy. I think the Middle East is going

to be the most complicated for the Biden Administration because I don't think we have an articulation, yet, of the Middle East end state that we'd like to see, right? How much does it matter to the United States that Syria is still bleeding, that Libya is still bleeding, that Yemen is a mess, that the Gulf East can't work together, that, you know, Israel is aligning with some, but we're not solving, as Tammy made clear, the strategic fundamental threats to Israel from Hezbollah, etc.

So, you know, I think the question becomes can you articulate a vision of investment in the Middle East, whether it's with regard to Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, you know, that is perhaps not the lofty 2011, you know, Freedom Spring Vision, but is nonetheless a consistent investment on the side of stability, on the side of rolling back maligned behavior, whether it's Iran, whether it's Russia, whether it's Saudis, whether it's our ally, Turkey, and bringing major allies to the table around that vision, and, as Eric and Tammy have said, you know, JCPOA, unlike the climate accord, is not turnkey. You can't -- you can't just flip it back on because the conditions are no longer being met. So, how do you define this bigger, I would say, at the same time that you don't want to see a wrong build -- going back to building nuclear weapons. The maligned behavior, with the support of other malign actors around the world, is more dangerous right now, and how do you build on that?

The other thing is with the JCPOA, you remember that Russia and China were partners, hard to imagine that we're going to be able to do that -- do that with them. So, again, I think this takes you back to your question of leverage, Tom, which is that, you know, with Europe, with our Asian allies, starting with a corps of G-7 Nations, who are the biggest democracies around the world, how do you work to together, both to rebuild ourselves, because you have to start from that cannon place, remember the long telegram speaks about you can't defeat the Soviet Union, if you're not strong at home, which, you know, Reagan also took up with a vengeance in 1980, and I think will be persuasive to Congressional Republicans, if it's articulated right, but how do you convince everybody to make a contribution in common, and, frankly, I don't see another country that can organize this joint liberal approach to China, to Russia, to technology, to Iran, to climate, other -- other than us.

So, we're going to have to first articulate a clear vision. We're going to have to have a team that can implement it. I mean, one of the main problems, at State, was that they weren't doing any

diplomacy. They weren't conducting any negotiations. You know, Pompeo went out and did a little bit, but a State Department that is working, as Eric taught me, has 10 major policy leaders, from the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, Under Secretary for Political Affairs, all the Regional Assistant Secretaries, and even some Ambassadors, who are out engaging in negotiations, and who are supported by young diplomatic teams, who are learning how it's done, who are working with the Evan's of this world, to explain policy to the -- to the Fourth Estate who are in dialogue with the Congress, and who are bringing resources to the table, whether there are security resources, whether they are development resources, whether they are, you know, the punitive resources of a shared sanctions approach, etc.

So, you know, we have not been out there in the world. The table has been empty, and the malign actors, whoever they are, have rushed in to fill the gap, and they've had it easy, but, also, our allies have had it easy because we haven't been asking them to join with us, in some of these things, and some of them may be very difficult, including things, like if we decide that we need to have an export control regime together, against Chinese high technology, which I think is a bipartisan move that people will support. Will the Europeans support that? Will our Asian allies support that? So, there's a lot of work to do, but I think it will be exciting for the State Department to get back into the business of trying to talk to allies, and friends, and advisories, about all this work that needs to be done.

MR. EDELMAN: Tom, can I just pick up on some of what Toria said because I don't disagree with what she said, but I think it is very hard to underestimate how much damage has been done to the diplomatic platform of the United States, by the Trump Administration, and it's not just the Trump Administration. There were a number of trends that go back, way before that, that have contributed to this, but the hemorrhage of Senior Officers, Toria, being, you know, I think, a typical example. I mean, my age cohort, I'm 69, you know, we aged out, and so, that's not important, that people of my age group left, but the problem is American tax payers have invested an enormous amounts of money, getting people, in Toria's age cohort, ready to assume the most senior positions, and they're not there now. There's just a giant void, and you can't make that up by just saying, well, we're going promote the 40 and 45-year-olds because this is a business, where experience and long development of subject matter expertise and familiarity actually means a lot. It matters dramatically. So, I think the State Department is going to

require, really, a kind of 10 to 15 year rebuild.

I mean, when Toria and I entered the Foreign Service, there were, you know, roughly 22,000 people a year taking the Foreign Service Exam. Last year, it was 7,000, and so, there is going to have to be a lot of work done, and a lot of effort, I think, probably, you know, we haven't -- the last time the Foreign Service got looked at by the Legislative Branch was in 1980, with the Foreign Service Act of 1980. It's probably time to review that and have a new Foreign Service Act. There are new Court Compacities that are going to be required. They're probably -- this is an opportunity, I guess, because of how badly the institution was burned down, to actually reimagine it and rebuild it, in a way that serves the U.S. national interests, but I think no one should underestimate the length of time or the amount of effort it's going to take.

MR. WRIGHT: Thank you, Eric, a very important issue, and I know everyone, I think, has views on this, but we have 10 minutes left, and I just wanted to turn, quickly, to several questions, Evan, on, and, Tamara, on, the transition. So, John Rash, at the Minneapolis Star Tribune, asked how diplomatically damaging is President Trump's refusal to concede and to continue contesting the election, and the election results. There is another question, from Dierdre Shesgreen, of USA Today, about which Foreign Leaders will President-elect Biden speak to, in the coming days, and what are those conversations likely to be about? But I guess the overarching question is really this fairly unprecedented situation of a -- what is a 78-day transition, with a outgoing president that seems sort of determined to -- if not quite burn everything to the ground, maybe to, certainly, to push back, not to cooperate in the transfer of power, and to sort of buildup his political position in the future.

Evan, you know, could you just talk to us a little bit, maybe, about the dangers of what's going on at the moment? How rocky are the next couple of months likely to be? You know, how's the Biden team likely to respond, but, more importantly, really, you know, is there any sort of long-term damage, that could be done, over the next sort of two and a half months, that wouldn't be easily repaired, not so much on the policy side, but rather on the, you know, on the institutions of government, and on the health of American democracy?

MR. OSNOS: Yeah, I think, it's impossible to overstate how damaging it is to the short,

medium, and long range interests of the United States to have a president, who appears to be fundamentally rejecting the legitimacy of our political system, and it's damaging to the interests of the Republican Party, as a Foreign Policy Actor. It's damaging to the interests of the American public, and, of course, it makes it more challenging for the Biden Administration, that's coming in, and I think what you've seen is the Biden Administration -- the Biden Campaign knew exactly what Donald Trump was going to do. This was not a mystery. It's one of those weird things, that's both shocking and unsurprising.

And their approach has been, now, quite consistent over the last few days, and I think you'll see it continue, which is they will not allow themselves to be drawn in to the invention of a dispute. There is no dispute, here. The law is clear, the votes are being counted, and the count is clear, and the only confusion here, frankly, is in the mind of Donald J. Trump, and on the part of the leaders around him, who are deciding, in real-time, whether or not to acknowledge reality, or to make the political calculation to stay in his particular form of delusion.

And I have to be honest, I'm being blunt about this because those are the stakes here, and I think -- I think the way to think of it is that the Biden Campaign is practicing what I would call sort of vigilant reassurance. They're letting the world know that they are not participating in the fiction, that there is an actual dispute, but they are also using the courts, as absolutely aggressively as they need to be, but they don't have any question here. On January 20th, President Trump's signature becomes legally inoperative, and the next president will take office, full stock.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Yeah, so, let me come in on that. I do think, you know, the lost time for a Transition Team, in getting cooperation from the current administration matters, although, that is not unprecedented. Bush v Gore was decided on December 12th, and there was an orderly transition, between then and January 20th. So, it's doable, but it seems that, so far, the Trump Administration has instructed agency has not to cooperate with the incoming team. So, the Transition Landing Teams cannot start their work. They -- the transition can prepare personnel choices, but it's going to have a lot of trouble getting those people into the nomination process, if the Republican Senate is not willing to go along with the transition. So, the lost time does matter, but I actually think that there are a couple of other things that worry me more, in this transition period.

One, is that, it is always a part of transition planning to be concerned about which international actors might try take advantage of the transition period, to test the United States, or that undertake activities, where they might otherwise face challenges from the U.S., and given Trump's capriciousness, irrationality, incoherence, the lack of a policy process, that's a more dangerous prospect for the United States in this transition, than in any previous one.

We just don't know how he would react for -- to -- for example, another major Iraqi militia attack on American troops or the American Embassy, in Iraq, just to take one example. So, we have to worry about that. The other thing that worries me, very much, is what will be left behind and what will be destroyed. We have plenty of evidence, now, of the corruption of the Trump Administration's and its willingness to use foreign policy and international relationships, for private purposes and private gain, whether we're talking about the issue that was litigated in the impeachment of the president, or the simple use of the State Department, in, you know, dinners for Mike Pompeo and his wife, to prepare the political ground for, you know, his possible electoral future. That kind of corruption is corrosive. So, even when you remove the elected and appointed officials of the Trump Administration, you have layers and layers of people in the State Department, and in every agency across the federal government, who have been coerced into these acts of corruption. They've simply been complicit, or, in an attempt to defend their agency from worst depredations, went along with them because they had to pick their battles.

All of the bitterness, the recrimination, and the corrosion, of that experience, is left behind for a Biden Administration to confront, and that will impede our ability to do our work. So, I think that's a tremendous challenge that we can't lose sight of.

MR. WRIGHT: Thank you. Is there anyone who wanted to come in on that point before I move on?

MR. EDELMAN: Yes, Tom, I would just -- first of all I agree with, you know, everything Evan and Tammy just said. I do want to make one point, which is, you know, look, if Emily Murphy designates, you know, President Biden, as, or President-elect Biden, as President-elect, on December 14th, when the electors are certified, as Tammy said, that won't be any, you know, later than the -- then the Clinton --

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Bush v Gore, yeah.

MR. EDELMAN: -- Bush position, but I have to say, and I think that, from my conversations, the Biden Transition folks have been anticipating an uncooperative transition from the outset, as Evan suggested. Having said that, you know, to the point that Tammy made earlier, that when people get in, it take -- they need to take an assessment of the state of the agencies, as they are, and prepare, you know, for taking the reins of government on January 21st, and our system is not like the British System.

Where you have the election, and then, you know, the new Prime Minister walks into number 10 and gets handed -- handed his red box, with all of the memo by the Permanent Cabinet Secretary, who continues in office, and everything just kicks over. I mean, if you actually want to watch the transition of power, you know, you can go to the Southwest gate, or as least as close as you can to it now a days, and watch the eighteen wheelers pulling out of West Exec Ave, with all the records of the previous administration. A new administration is coming into the White House, you know, and there's nothing there, except maybe a couple of secretaries and a couple of phones, that might or might not work.

So, the problem is that, as one of my former Foreign Mentors told me, long ago, transition time is equal to three times governing time. Because when you walk in there on January 21st, you are literally drinking from the fire hose. There is everything from around the world, pouring in at you, and demanding attention and a response. And, so, the ability to try and think through these problems that your gonna inherit, calmly, and without being forced to take immediate action on them, is a luxury that we have in our system, that we're squandering.

And, it's gonna complicate everything, and it's one reason why it's such a disgrace, that more republicans have not spoken out, as Mitt Romney has, and a few others, to call an end to this charade.

MR. WRIGHT: Thank you, Eric. We're just -- we're out time actually. So, I'd like to give Toria the last word, maybe on the -- either on the transition point, or on anything else that you'd like to add, before we close.

MS. NULAND: You know, I agree with all that's been said. I think this team will be supremely prepared. I think the bigger problem, and it's not just Trump Intransigents, it's also COVID, which makes it hard to gather and speak informally, and get the wisdom of the long serving professional staffs in all of these agencies. It will be harder, but I'm an optimist, I think, Joe Biden's an optimist. I think the world is ready for a more orderly, and stable, and predictable, and committed United States. So, I look forward to it.

MR. WRIGHT: Toria, Evan, Eric, Tamara, thank you so much. Thank you, all of you online, for joining us, via Zoom, and vis the Website, I think, we had a very large number of people. So, thank you, so much, and thank you also for the questions. And I can say with confidence, that this is an issue, we will come back too, Evan, maybe not every day or every other day, but probably every week, for now, for some time to come, so, thank you again. Until the next time, we are adjourned. Thank you.

MR. EDELMAN: Thank you, Tom.

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