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THE INSIDERS' GAME: HOW ELITES MAKE WAR AND PEACE

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O'HANLON: Good morning. I'm going to break up the party in the front row and welcome you all to Brookings. It's wonderful to have you here. I'm Mike O'Hanlon with the Foreign Policy program. We have a real treat today to celebrate and discuss Elizabeth Saunders book, "The Insider's Game: How Elites Make War and Peace." She's going to come up to the podium and speak, lay out the main thesis and argument in a few minutes, and then we'll all join her up here on stage for a discussion with conclusion, with your questions and thoughts in the in the end of the hour. The panel discussion will include Ed Luce, a famous author of Swamp Notes, among other things, and he will be moderating a panel with E.J. Dionne, who again proved his strong command of foreign policy with his column today on reviewing where we stand in the broader Middle East struggle. And then Kori Shockey, one of my best and longest standing friends and colleagues from AEI, who runs their foreign and national security program and is the author of a number of books, one of which I still use. And of course, I teach at Columbia, where Elizabeth is also a professor. She's a real professor. I'm just an adjunct, but it's Kori's book with Jim Mattis about understanding the role of our military in society today. That remains very important at a crucial moment in the all-volunteer force and other decision making. But Elizabeth's book, as you know, is about how we make war and peace decisions in this democracy. And when you think about it, she's going to talk about the role of elites. And this means sort of the blob, as we sometimes been called, but more generally, the political classes, the strategists, the academics, the media, and how in some sense there may be a distinction between how elites look at decisions on war and peace and how the public writ large does. And in the modern era, I think she's going to argue that elites are often more hawkish. So this will be a fascinating argument to have her lay out. She's been working on this book in a remarkably interesting way, with a lot of different methodologies for a long time. A lot of back background information is presented very clearly. It's very well written, and it's no surprise because with her background in physics and astrophysics, she is not your typical political scientist. And so, without further ado, could you please join me in welcoming Elizabeth to the podium.

SAUNDERS: Thank you so much. Thanks, Mike, for that kind introduction. And it's a real honor to be able to launch the book here at Brookings, where I was lucky enough before I even finished my PhD to have a fellowship. And, it really helped, helped me sort of, on my way to writing about US foreign policy. And I want to also thank the Brookings team for all their efforts to put this together today. So I won't go through everything that's in the book, of course, but I want to just highlight a few themes that, I hope will spark some discussion. And I'll do that after kind of giving an overview of the book argument itself. And it starts from a very basic premise about democracy. We assume that voters, all of us, elect elites to make national security decisions on behalf of all citizens, and that constraining those elites happens at the ballot box. Right? We can vote the bums out if we don't actually like what they're doing. So the conventional wisdom is that elites are broadly the sort of faithful intermediaries, as I call them in the book of for voters. They they're there to take voter preferences and translate them as best they can into policy. And yet we know that the public rarely votes on foreign policy, drawing a lot on research in American politics and international relations. There's a large body of work that supports the notion that foreign policy is it's a hard thing to actually coordinate voters on in in elections. We also know from international relations research that democratic leaders are rarely punished for defeats, and they're really rarely rewarded for victories. So we could just ask Winston Churchill or George H.W. Bush about that. And we also and I think this is the most sort of, poignant and pertinent point. We also know that many democratic leaders and many US presidents have gotten into wars and continued wars that they didn't think they would actually be able to win. And they've included and

added to the the commitment, with their eyes wide open. And that just doesn't comport with this idea of elites making decisions on behalf of voters. So how do we make sense of this? And the argument in the book is that leaders, democratic leaders, do care about the public. They're not ignoring the public. The public is not irrelevant in the story. But in the first instance, what they are doing is speaking to an elite audience. And, in doing so, they induce what I call a hawkish bias in American decisions about the use of military force. So what do I mean by that? I mean that elites are able to punish or reward leaders in a very, very different way than voters can. Right? We only get to go to the polls every four years or every two years. If you want to count the midterm elections in order to make, the voters voice heard. But presidents have to meet elites early and often, right? They're in the Oval Office, or they're writing reports that make it up the chain into the Oval Office. Presidents cannot escape elites. Their elites also have a much larger set of tools in order to punish or interact with, elites when they don't like what they see. And the leader also has more tools to, to deal with elites than with voters. So all the leader can do is make speeches and try and persuade voters. But elites, we know who they are. They have proper names, we know where they work. We can call them into the Oval Office. We can deal with them. Right. We can provide them with different rewards or threatened punishments and so forth. And this kind of bargaining and horse trading, which can often involve also careerism. Right? Promotions and, and, and political careers, both threats and benefits. These things seem sort of unseemly in the context of war. We really don't like to talk about politics in the context of national security. But one of the things, one of the themes of the book is that this is just part of how policy gets made in democracies, and we can't escape it. It is part of the national security process in a democracy. Voters have much more limited tools, as I said. And so what happens is that leaders can can leaders don't have to sit back and just take it. When elites have opinions about their decisions to use military force, they can't simply manipulate public opinion or elite opinion, but they can take steps to try to convince other elites. They can try and build consensus. And so I think this image we have of the blob or all of the, elites in Washington have the same view is actually not right when we observe presidents generating an elite consensus. When President Obama comes to West Point to announce the surge in Afghanistan in December of 2009, in prime time, and he has the entire national security team sitting in the front row. And they all we know now from very good reporting, they disagreed widely on what to do, but they were all there and they all supported the decision in the end. That consensus is not because elites share a warmonger mindset. It's because there's been a political process behind the scenes that generated that consensus. Leaders can do better at this. Or were some some leaders are really good at this. Lyndon Johnson was probably the absolute Olympic champion of generating an elite consensus for war and holding it together. It can fall apart, but it's fundamentally a political process that generates elite consensus. And so I argue in this book that managing an elite consensus is a fundamentally different political problem for presidents than persuading voters. So it's not that elites are the faithful intermediaries, it's that. The the, the elites and the president are playing what I call the insiders game. And I think it's important because the the image of the faithful intermediaries assumes that leaders, that elites don't have their own policy preferences, their own independent sources of information, that they don't have career ambitions or policy ambitions. And elites are not saints, right? They have all those things, and we need to treat that as part of the input into the policymaking process, if we hope to ever, improve it. So I do argue that this leads to a hawkish bias and decisions to use force, but it's not because of a shared warmonger mindset among elites. And I'll get into the details of that in just a second. But it's really about the political bargaining that takes place that makes it easier for elite, for presidents to get into wars. But elites are also fundamentally part of how we hold leaders accountable. So I just want to, close

by highlighting a few themes that emerge from the book and from the, the, more than a decade that I spent working on this book and kind of reflecting on what it meant for democracy and what the 2016 election may or may not have meant for, a book that was fundamentally about elites. The first theme is that elite politics are normal, right? This is part of how foreign policy gets made in democracies. Voters don't follow issues that all issues that closely, closely, but no one does. Right? This is not an indictment of the public. This is not an argument that the public is stupid or can't understand. There's a lot of evidence in the book from public opinion surveys that when presented with this information from the media, they absolutely can most voters can actually take this information in and form, opinions. That doesn't mean that we all need to go every day and read, you know, inhale the New York Times and understand every single issue of the day. Right. No one could, humans can't make sense of a complicated world that way. What do we do? We use shortcuts. So if you had invited me here to give a talk on health care policy or even German foreign policy, since I see Constanze, I would have said no, ask Constanze to give the talk about German foreign policy. Right. She's the expert. So we all do that in our everyday lives. This is an absolutely normal part of human behavior, and it's natural that voters would want to let the elites sort of handle foreign policy so they can go about their daily lives, and they rely on the elites to do what I call pulling the fire alarm. If something goes really wrong. That's when the voters want to know and want to hear from elites. And that's where the voters will become engaged and will start to pay attention. So voters can constrain they can vote the bombs out, but they they're not relying necessarily on elites to be their faithful intermediaries, but rather to to pay attention and, manage foreign policy and tell them when it's time for them to be the ones to get into the game. And so elite politics is a feature of democracy. It's not a bug. The second big theme of the book is that the parties are not the same, and this is a book that focuses on the United States, for a variety of reasons. But I think for this audience, probably the most relevant is that the United States is the democracy that makes these decisions to use military force most often, right? It just has the the capabilities to do that. And so I think there is this idea that all elites are the same, or we often hear, you know, a favorite column. I think that that people like to write in Washington as the Democrats and Republicans are the same on X issue. Right. And there are some areas where that may be true, where there are points of consensus. But the politics of, Democrats and Republicans at war are not the same. The parties have different agendas. National security is is plays a different role in those agendas for the Republican Party. It it has tended for a long time to be the sort of very central to the Republican Party's program. Whereas even, though the Democratic Party has many competent people who focus on foreign policy, it's it has traditionally not been the central, feature. They also have different demons that they're running from. Right. The Democratic Party since at least 1949 and the "who lost China" debate has been, haunted by this idea of the stereotype of the wimpy dove being weak on national security. And I think there's a lot of evidence, in the book and in other scholars work, that that has haunted Democratic presidents and influence their choices about national security, whereas Republicans worry about sort of this image of the warmonger or being overly bellicose. And there are different traps that they fall into. So this is sort of a pox on both your houses kind of story. Both parties have pitfalls that. They repeatedly. Must try to avoid, but frequently don't. And so each party has a pernicious tendency, but they're not the same. So two of the big, sort of ideal types that I cover in the book are what I call the doves curse and the hawks misadventure. So what do I mean by that? Democratic presidents, for better or for worse, are tarred with the stereotype of being overly dovish. And it's incredibly ironic because it starts more or less in the modern era with Harry Truman, who was, of course, the only president who dropped an atomic bomb in wartime. And yet only a few years later, he is, he is, attacked with this who lost China. How could you allow

the the, Chinese Communist Party to win the civil war in China. And this is really, to me, like the best evidence that this stereotype hits every Democrat than a Democratic president, no matter what their record in wartime, actually is. And so often you see Democratic presidents bringing hawkish or Republican, officials into their administrations. So this is why we've often seen Republican secretaries of defense in Democratic administrations, but it's never gone the other way. The problem is, if you bring hawks into an administration, then of course they're there and you have to actually listen to them. Right? So what seems like a good idea at the time, in the heady days after winning an election, can often come back, and, present its own problems later on. They also don't Democrats typically don't want to be focusing on national security, and sometimes they see neutralizing the national security issue as the way to get focus on what they really want to do health care, the Great Society, complicated legislative programs that really take a lot of time and energy. And that's a scarce commodity in Washington, both for the president and especially for members of Congress. Right. So. The Democrats have more to lose on the sort of other issues that other agenda issues. Whereas Republicans are happy to talk about national security most of the time. And finally, it's harder for Democratic presidents to get the endorsement of elites. That would really sort of convince everybody that this is not a good war to fight. And it's it's politically the wise move to stay out. Right. So imagine if a Democratic president wanted to not send troops in a conflict and was worried about this idea of the wimpy dove. The thing to do would be to get somebody like John Bolton, who is known to be hawkish and is on CNN all the time, to say this is not a good idea, right? And in fact, someone I have said this in a number of recent book talks, and just last week, apparently Bolton did say it would be really terrible to send US military forces to Mexico. And someone said, oh, it's the even John Bolton example in the wild. But think about how hard it would be to convince a John Bolton what you have to give John Bolton to endorse a decision not to use military force. It's a lot harder to do that than to get your own party, who might have a little bit of skepticism to support the president. So it's harder to build a coalition if you're a Democratic president, to do what you most would naturally want to do. And that's why Democratic presidents sometimes conclude it's really, easier just to fight what they think is going to be a little war. And it then spirals and ratchets up, because, again, you've got those hawks on the inside, and you see frequently what I call the doves curse. So I write about the Korean War and the Vietnam War in this context. And I think one of the most fantastic books ever written in this area is, Les Gelb and Dick Betts' book, "The Irony of Vietnam." The system worked, which was actually, I think, published by Brookings Press. And it makes the argument that presidents tend to put in just enough troops to not lose wars, but not enough to actually win. And my friendly amendment to that in this book is that that's the phenomenon you get in Democratic administrations. Hawks, on the other hand. So that's the doves' curse. And the flip side, to, you know, fair and balanced, right. Is hawks can more easily engage in what I call hawks misadventures. And why is that? Because the kinds of things that hawks need to do in order to free themselves to be hawkish, right. Which is their natural inclination, costs a lot less politically. Right. They don't face the same pressures to bring against type advisors into their administration to bring doves in. Right. They don't have a huge, agenda that that will be sacrificed by focusing on national security. And they can more easily get doves to support them, to go to war, in part because the kinds of things they can offer doves are things like procedural concessions. I will, if you support my war, I'll get an authorization from Congress or the United Nations or some other international body. And so instead of everybody having incentives to act against type Nixon going to China and so forth, the book argues that we actually end up with more sort of extra wars from Democrats, because it's easier for hawks to be themselves than it is for doves to be done ish. And this is not inevitable, right? It's it's doesn't happen always. But it's a thumb on the

scale. And it's something I think we need to understand, but we need to understand this is fundamentally a political process and not just the product of a blob mindset. And so I think a final theme, I'll, I'll try to, draw everyone's attention to is that I think sometimes the debate about elites can be so black and white elites are good. We need them. Technocrats, expertise. Elites are bad. They make terrible decisions. They have all the same mindset. And this book is unsatisfying in the sense that it's going to tell you it's both. But I do think we have to move past this black and white distinction in order to really understand how wars get made in democracies. Elites can smooth the path to war, but they're also essential sources of constraint. They're the ones who do oversight. They're the ones who dig up information about failing policies. And that's an essential component of democracies. And as I said, they're not saints. They have career ambitions. Their ability to have, and political ambitions in some cases policy ambitions. But that's what allows that bargaining to take place that can really help generate constraints. They don't make these decisions out of the goodness of their hearts, and we cannot expect them to, if we want to understand how to improve national security making. Politics can, in fact, be good for national security, but only if we have a connection between policy expertise and, policy preferences and something that benefits people who work in the space politically or career wise. Right? It has to be connected to something real. Instead of simply this, polarization where no matter what a Democratic president does, Republicans will oppose it, right? And I think that has really been lost in this black and white debates about elites. So I hope that it's provocative and sparks some discussion. I'll stop there and look forward to what the panel and you all have to say. Thank you very much.

LUCE: Thank you, Elizabeth, for that very crisp, summary of, of your book. Yeah. You're the sophisticated political scientist. I am the dumb journalist. So I'm going to ask, why?

SAUNDERS: But you can speak with a British accent. So it sounds smarter.

LUCE: It sounds really smart.

DIONNE: 40 IQ points we give you. Yeah.

LUCE: That's all.

SAUNDERS: Well, it's like the 200 points on the SAT.

LUCE: So, Elizabeth, let me start with you. You mentioned, very eloquently, the doves' curse. And you go through Korea, Vietnam, the Lebanon War, Iraq One, Iraq Two, Afghanistan, etc. But let's bring this up to the present, to the Biden or to the near present, the Biden administration. And an example you you know, flesh out in your book of Biden leaving Afghanistan in August 2021 and until that point, having a net positive approval rating, and since that point, having a net negative approval approval. So this is kind of an inflection point. And therefore there's a popular backlash against him ignoring the doves curse and doing a dovish thing and saying, I'm going to pull out come what may. I don't mind what the consequences are. And he gives an address to the nation saying that essentially it's still the right thing to do. How does that fit with your thesis? And was the net the shift from net positive to net negative rating for Biden, because this was

considered by the American public to be an act of weakness, or is it the incompetence of how it was executed?

SAUNDERS: Yeah, I think the, the, the politics of this are really interesting. So one thing I do in the book, is a sin that all, er, scholars probably commit at least once in their time, which is to generate what's known as a two by two table, right where the there's boxes. And I won't go into the details. But essentially the doves' curse and the hawks' misadventure. Just two of the boxes in this. There are two of the possibilities that you can have, right. Another one is the hawks' advantage, which is the Nixon to China. Nixon can go to China, right. So this idea of the hawks can make peace more easily. But the fourth one is the doves' choice. And that is when a dove just decides to to make a dovish choice and absorb the cost. And I think there are several examples of this, I think President Obama's choice to throw the Syria crisis in 2013 to Congress. Maybe not such huge costs, but anything that you ask Congress to do if you're president, it takes away from something else it could be doing. Right. There's huge political opportunity cost to that. And I think that was a case where he tried to get Congress to kind of, buy into the idea that he wasn't going to, send in, he wasn't gonna enforce the red line. In the case of Biden, you know, clearly this is what he wanted to do. He had been opposed to the to the degree of the 2009 Afghanistan surge. He'd been on record for a long time. He had the benefit of Trump having basically the same preference and having tried to get out and cut the deal with the Taliban. So I do think that the, the, the manifestation of the, the, the, the dramatic events on the ground and how it unfolded is what took everyone by surprise. But looking back on it, it would have been pretty politically easy for him to he might have been tempted to say, all right, I'm going to leave 2,500 troops or I'll keep Bagram Air Base or something symbolic, regardless of whether it was wise militarily, because we've seen Democratic presidents do that over and over again. To me, the most interesting thing about this case, though, is actually not that what happened in August of 2021, but who Biden picked after he won the election in 2020. And there's a lot of evidence that he surrounded himself with people that he knew would go along with the complete pullout from Afghanistan. And what's interesting to me is, as terrible as that time was, you did not have a lot of recriminations from inside the administration, which in a lot of other similar cases, you absolutely did.

LUCE: And there was some slightly unfair blaming of the CIA that went on the White House.

SAUNDERS: But not.

LUCE: From not for not forecasting the speed of the clashes.

SAUNDERS: Yes, yes. That's that's right. But I think there was not a sort of, anonymous, but really, you know, who it's coming from, kind of, blame game that you often see play out. And I think it's because Biden, you know, he understood this might be difficult. And he wanted people who were on board and loyal to him. And, you know, so that's an example of knowing in advance that you would need elites on your side in order to weather the storm.

LUCE: So what would be, I think is going to get onto the panel in one second, but what would be the best example of a democracy where elite foreign policymaking aligns with popular opinion? I mean, that the sort

of maybe specious example that came to my head was Germany, but actually a very different one could be Israel. I mean, Israel right now, that doesn't seem to be much daylight between the IDF and the people on the street.

SAUNDERS: Yes, but and Israel is often held up as the case that, you know, if if foreign policy and national security is going to matter anywhere, it'll be there, right? Especially, you know, for a variety of reasons, but because everyone serves, I think that's another, you know, important reason. But the the one interesting feature of of the Israeli national security, foreign policy and public opinion, the kind of nexus, I think, you know, the October 7th attack by Hamas was a terrible shock, but it was an even bigger shock in some ways because successive governments, many of them had had not all, but many of them headed by Benjamin Netanyahu over the years, had really sort of taken steps to make it seem like the Israel like the Gaza problem, that Hamas problem was solved or could at least be ignored. It was stable. This idea that all the surveillance, you know, they were walled off and, which of course turned out not to be correct, but that's a product of elite bargaining and elite consensus. Right. And it's very clear it took many Israeli elites by surprise as well. But so I think what the public knows and understands and, and its interpretation of events is often shaped even in a place like Israel by elites. The last thing I'll just say, going back to Biden, what's really interesting to me, given how much, say, a Lyndon Johnson believed that if he hadn't fought in Vietnam, he wouldn't have gotten the Great Society passed. Biden's approval ratings do drop, and a few months later, he gets the IRA passed. And I think this is one of these things that polarization may have changed in our politics, right? If the if the IRA was going to pass 51, 49 and all come down to Joe Manchin, regardless of what happens in any other dimension, Biden could make the doves choice without imperiling his legislative agenda. So I do think that's one sort of interesting, wrinkle that polarization brings.

LUCE: Okay. And we'll get back. I mean, I'm conscious of the fact we have quite a short period of time. So I will machine gun questions and you don't have to machine gun answers, but be relatively economical because I want time for --

DIONNE: That's very un-dovish of you. Machine gun.

LUCE: Yeah that's true. That's a bad analogy. I'm sorry. Kori. Elizabeth and I but go does a very, very good job of going through the Korean War, the Vietnam War, Iraq, etcetera. Now, certainly Vietnam and Iraq were, disastrous wars for America. And public opinion was sort of broadly supportive, but it was manipulable. And, I mean, it was a sort of middle layer that followed elites signaling. So. To paraphrase Bertolt Brecht, do we need to dissolve the elite and get a new one?

SCHAKE: So, first of all, I love the book. I think it's really important. And the research and it is outstanding. And when Jim and I did the surveys that were the basis for the book "Warriors and Citizens," that Mike nicely mentioned, it validates a lot of Elizabeth's, judgments, namely, the American public is overwhelmingly ignorant about these issues. They can't come within a factor of six of the size of the Marine Corps. But their judgment is actually terrific. And there is wide deference to elite opinion. Something like 45% of Americans won't a positive view on a foreign or defense issue. They wait for elites to identify the stakes, and exactly as Elizabeth said. But I think there is an inherent, assumption in the analysis that the public, in particular

Democratic voters, are more dovish than the advice that elites give presidents. And I'm not I'm not persuaded of that. So I'd be really interested in having Elizabeth draw it out some. Because I do think in free societies and in particular in the United States, but I can think of other examples. Very often the public pushes, for policies that are bellicose. And I think the assumption that the public and that democratic elites are inherently more pacific is policy neutral, in a way, it actually shouldn't be. An alternative explanation is that, you know, looking at a complicated situation, a bellicose option is better than the alternatives. And the analysis is policy neutral on that in a way that I think, I'm not persuaded by.

LUCE: You want to come back to that?

SAUNDERS: Well, I'll just say, I think, I think you've hit on something that's quite right. And I sort of chose to go to, to, to you have to start somewhere with, with defining what does the public want, which is, you know, is a terribly fraught question that we really should stop asking because, you know, public is not homogeneous. It's very it's diverse in all sorts of ways. There's tremendous public opinion work that has shown geographic differences in hawkish and others views. So, so one problem for anyone trying to compare elite and public attitudes is that which public do you mean? Right. And an air of partisan polarization. It can be defined purely by party in many ways. So I think you're absolutely right. And there are times where you see presidents going around public opinion, because the public does have a more bellicose preference and they're worried about escalation control, right, that there's a lot of there many cases of that. I think for me, in the sense of like trying to to set up an argument that is the most generous to public opinion, to give it the best chance to kind of be, to matter and to influence, policy. I started with the with where a lot of the other sort of arguments in this space start, which is that the public on average, it wants competence, it wants the if you get into a war, you want to win. And if you you don't want to fight, you want to fight the necessary wars and you don't want to fight the dumb wars, which is sounds great in theory and as we all know, very, very hard to pull off in practice. And so but I think in, in there are many cases where, what really matters is what, what segment of public opinion gets. Expressed and has political power, right? That's what really matters. It can be a very small segment of public opinion, that gets that presidents activate and kind of speak to and and that that's, I think something that would be useful to sort of look at in future work. But I think you're absolutely right.

LUCE: E.J., I'm sort of following the line that, the public doesn't know what it thinks until we tell them what it thinks. The era of polarization, which you deal with, in your book, the the the end of your book includes Trump of course. Particularly includes Trump. Who might indeed be the next president. Now, I know what you think of Trump. I know what I think of Trump. I know what probably almost everybody here thinks of Trump. But, the one thing that's perhaps less discussed about him is that a lot of his populism is based on being against wars, of all kinds. And he actually formulated that deal with the Taliban that Biden then implemented. And other than Iran, he didn't seem to be at all bellicose.

SAUNDERS: He does like bombing things.

LUCE: He likes bombing things, but he doesn't like boots on the ground. I guess that's the sort of essential thing. And notwithstanding the fact that he did actually, at the time, support the Iraq War, his subsequent

opposition to it was and to the Bush family was a big sort of factor in his rise. So my question to you is how has politics actually now changed? I mean, because I don't think the elites would agree with Trump's position or Biden's on Afghanistan. Has politics actually now changed? That makes foreign policy making a lot more difficult in the future than it has been in the past?

DIONNE: I think it's always been difficult. I mean, one of the first of all, it's great to be here, and I want to welcome Ed Luce's dad to Brookings. Great to have him, here.

LUCE: Thank you.

DIONNE: I actually, in a conversation before, referred to Kori as a dove, for which I apologize, but it was a fun, it was a fun exchange.

SCHAKE: Surprising.

DIONNE: Yeah. The, the, it was a misunderstanding on my part. The, I want to take that question, but I want to go. I want to get there around an about because, this book squares, I think, with a view I've always held, which is voters are willing to delegate considerable room to elites until they screw up. And then the democratic process kicks in. And that's because voters, I think a rational I make, broadly speaking, our vote, is irrational. I love the modest line. Democracy is based on the hunch that most of the people are right most of the time. And I believe that, and I think that where, foreign policy gets highly politicized and where, you one moves away from elites is at certain points either down the road when a policy fails or certain kinds of issues that really ignite a lot of people. And that's what I want to ask you, about, I do think the I, I disagree with the idea that Democrats are inherently the dovish party. And you really saw that in the split around the Iraq War. The Democrats were riven down the middle. Meantime, the Republican Party and this is a big change, I think, in the wake of Iraq, especially, the disillusionment, with what happened after Iraq spread to both parties and that, Trump understood. I've never I don't usually put those two words together. And, Trump understood the, the disaffection in the Republican Party with, with, intervention. And he really tapped into a deep strain. And now you're seeing that split. It's really a split that goes back to the Republican Party of the late 1930s, early 1940s. So I think it's still the case that both parties are split. And you're seeing that in the argument in the Democratic Party around Gaza, where the Democrats, I think are quite, riven. I wanted to, do two things. I want to just I mentioned when we were talking before, I really appreciated your treatment of Lebanon and the Marines in Lebanon. And I was in Lebanon in 1983 and actually interviewed the Marines about a month before they were blown, that they the attack. And it was and I would like you to talk about this the I was really struck that journalists were invited into the marine compound, given free rein to talk to the Marines, all of them on the record. And just a few of the quotes from that piece. One Marine said, "You feel helpless. We're guinea pigs. What are we doing here?" These are US marines serving the government. Then he quickly added, his training kicked in, "They have reasons for all this stuff", he said, but he sounded utterly unconvinced. Another Marine I spoke to is, It's my second hostile duty, but in Vietnam I was allowed to fight back." And then we got to a room where they had this, you know, it was sort of dark humor. A long quotation from a Soviet newspaper on a bulletin board that read, "the appearance of Marines on foreign soil has always in the past indicated the beginning of dangerous military adventures." That was a month before, and

it was really frightening. And I I've never lost the sense -- and this is where I think elite elites influencing elites play in -- I am completely persuaded that we were invited in there to send a message back to the elites in Washington, and that that these Marines were entirely speaking for themselves, but in speaking for themselves, they were sending a powerful message about that policy. I'd just love you to talk about that. Two quick points. One is, the other last point I wanted to make, which I also wanted to toss your way, is, I think we have had moments where foreign policy really did engage the public in a big way. The argument in the US, in the lead up to World War II, there were two mass constituencies arrayed, about intervention pro and anti-intervention large popular organizations. Big fight at the Republican convention in 1940. Wendell Willkie was the preferred candidate of the interventionists, was a strong anti interventionist component in the Republican Party. I would say Vietnam after 1967, became a mass public argument. It was remarkable how many books people wanted to read, about Vietnam, Eugene McCarthy's challenge to LBJ was entirely around the Vietnam War in 1968. And I would argue right now, the Garza argument, is now if you look at the polling, Gaza, Israel-Gaza, Palestinians is not an issue. That is top of the list in voting for everyone. But this is a real argument among large groups of Americans. So I guess my question back. I'd love you to talk a bit about the Marines, if you could, just because it's an obsession of mine, because it seemed such a bad idea when you were sitting there in Lebanon. But also, you know, how there seems to be a line you cross in this that where these issues do become popular, small the democratic issues. And I'd like you to discuss that, if you could.

SAUNDERS: I'll try the Herculean task of answering all of those in one response.

DIONNE: That's what I figured. I knew you are up to anyone who I don't know is up to Herculean task.

SAUNDERS: So I think I first of all, I think I appreciate your comments on the Marines, and I think that case is one that we that ought to be studied more because it's really, it's really quite interesting. And, and I think what you're getting at, another way of putting the anecdote you're telling is that elites and if we include the Marines in that and the decision to let them to let the press in, right, that was made by somebody higher up. Right. To send a message back to Washington. That's an example of how elites hold each other accountable. Right. These things do tend to become politicized in the public sphere after the elite consensus fractures. And in the case of Reagan and Lebanon, the people who really, Democrats, Tip O'Neill, I looked at some of the Tip O'Neill papers for this, gave Reagan's support for a long time. And it was really Howard Baker, the Senate Republican leader, who was highly skeptical of this intervention. Caspar Weinberger, secretary of defense, the joint chiefs of staff, they were the ones who were very opposed to this intervention and tried to put a lot of limits on rules of engagement and so forth. And Reagan did not want to pull out. And the public was still pretty permissive, even after the bombing of the marine barracks in October of 1983. But eventually, Jim, Jim Baker, and others convinced Reagan that it was going to become a political liability, in part because they wanted to focus on making overtures to the Soviet Union in the second term. And, this was going to tarnish their national security reputation. So that's an example of a hawks' misadventure. It was not that hard to get Tip O'Neill on board, right. But once you get into a war like that's the Republican brand. And so the Republicans are paying attention and do not want the, you know, you have to win. And this is a case where elite accountability really matters. And I think the other thing you really highlight it is it's essential for there to be different wings of the party. Both parties have always continued quite right hawk hawkish and

dovish wings. And that is what generates the uncertainty about whether a given president from the party is really dovish or hawkish right. And to me the fascinating thing about thinking about we have this image of 1968 and the protests and the Iraq War and those huge protests on the eve of the war. But if you look at the sort of timeline, it's actually remarkable how long Johnson was able to hold the coalition in favor of war together. And it's remarkable that after the 2006 midterm elections, Bush was able to sort of take the signal sent by voters, which was to basically get out of Iraq and turn it into the surge, right. And I think, to me, the story of Iraq and Vietnam is of how long it takes and how much can happen between electing the leader and things going awry. And it just highlights that, you know, politics can impede the ability of voters and others, members of Congress and so forth to exert constraint. So constraints exist on paper, but they're often hard to give them teeth. It's hard to give them teeth in practice, in part because politicians are politicians. They know how to make bargains and convince people and give them ambassadorships in order to get them out of the way of which is a time-honored technique. And, and so I think, I think we have to understand so much can happen between electing someone and when everybody starts to agree that things are really terrible, there's a lot of politics that happens in between. And that's what the book is really about.

LUCE: That, Michael. So I'm conscious that I've, I've only going to have time to machine gun each of you once before we go to the audience.

DIONNE: Please don't.

O'HANLON: Get me.

LUCE: Well, I want the audience to have, there's like 13 minutes left. But, Michael, let me machine gun you one and a half times, if I may. And my question to you, the broader question is, I mean, you've been involved in and, you know, defense, national security in this town for, what, 30 years? So you're you're a very, very –

O'HANLON: Old

LUCE: -- marinated, no, you're not old. No, no, no.

SCHAKE: Marinated, I like that.

LUCE: I was going to say experienced, marinated. Is it fair to say that there are more hawks and doves? I mean, this is kind of, you know, this town, as Eisenhower warned, is a military industrial complex. This town has a hammer and it tends to see nails. That's a sort of fast question. There is the elite are more hawkish than dovish A and then B is the elite what it used to be I mean I think part of the elite as you correctly define it is Capitol Hill. Capitol Hill's foreign policy expertise, I think, to put it mildly, is not what it used to be. And its ability to over --

SAUNDERS: A Britishism, if ever I heard one.

LUCE: Yes, it's a, it's an understatement. And its ability therefore to, to exercise oversight of administrations is not what it used to be. So that's the sort of one and a half questions really, that, you know, the elites, more hawkish than dovish. And are they not what they used to be.

O'HANLON: Thank you. And let me join everyone else. And again congratulating you, Elizabeth, on a great book. And I find your thesis generally persuasive, which to me is very good political science. Sometimes political science feels like it has to explain 100% of everything, and you have nuance, and I appreciate that. And I think your argument works more often than not. Which to me is good enough to make it a very important contribution to the literature. Yeah, I think there are more hawks and doves. Yes. I think Congress is weaker than it used to be, but not necessarily out of the game altogether. And we've had a lot of past periods when Congress, you know, drank the kool aid and, or otherwise didn't do a good job in oversight, such as, for example, in the McCarthy period or in the early Vietnam period. So, yes. Thank you. So, but let me add just a couple of cases to generalize beyond the time horizon and tell you why I mostly agree with Elizabeth's thesis if I could. Actually, one comes from within that time horizon. John F. Kennedy's decision not to attack Soviet missile positions in Cuba in 1962, when the elite told them he should. And that might be the most consequential non-action that you could add to your list of cases, because that could have meant that civilization got to live another day or another century, when who knows what would have happened if Kennedy had followed the elite? A counterpoint would be I'm still surprised that George W. Bush won reelection in 2004. When the Iraq war was going so badly for 18 months in a row. But somehow the American public decided that his hawkishness was slightly less objectionable than John Kerry's attempt at a middle ground. That was hard to specify. And so that would suggest that the public in that period was fairly hawkish. And the fact that Barack Obama needed to run in his mind on a platform of, I'm going to go win the right war, even as I get out of the wrong war, to me, is telling because it suggests that maybe he was wrong, but he felt that the American public wasn't going to elect a junior senator from Illinois unless that guy was showing some hawkishness on at least some issues. So it's a complex mix, and that the conversation today and your book had been getting at the point that it is a complex mix. But very quickly, three more wars, our three biggest, I think, generally support Elizabeth's argument. The Civil War, Abraham Lincoln had to figure out how to get the country to come with him, to be willing to fight to to maintain the unity of the country. And it was not a given. And when you study Lincoln in that period of, you know, his election and then early 1861, he had to work very hard and had to figure out how to. You know, there's a famous line not just keeping the public, but keeping the border states. And somebody asked him if, if, if he thought God was on the Union side and he said, well, I'd like for God to be on the Union side, but what I really need is Kentucky. Yeah. And so that's an example, World War I. Wilson runs for reelection in 1916, saying we're going to stay out of this war, that those silly Europeans are fighting. And I'm not even sure which side I really want to win. Yeah. And then six months later, he's brought the whole country with him to a declaration of war by a very strong vote in both houses of Congress. And that was a classic example. I mean, there was, you know, things happened in between, but it was basically the elite changing the country's mind. And then, of course.

DIONNE: They got their clocks cleaned in the 2020, 1920 election. Yeah, I think in part because of that broken promise. But that's another.

O'HANLON: Good point. And we can talk about the League of Nations as well. But I want, as I mentioned briefly, World War II, where I do think after Pearl Harbor, the country was behind the idea of a strong response. But if it weren't for Roosevelt anticipating that, we'd probably wind up in World War II. We would not have been nearly as ready for it as we were. Which, so the final point that I'll make is, it's true that sometimes elites are more hawkish. Sometimes elites are right to be more hawkish in the cases that you focus on. They were probably generally wrong. But that's the only caveat I would take by sort of broadening the historical lens a little further. But again, I love the book.

SAUNDERS: And I'll just only add to that, I think I think one of the things I'm kind of pushing back on is this idea that we don't have enough debate and they're not enough dovish voices and restraining voices. Part of what's so often poignant in the book is how many dovish voices are, or skeptical voices, even among people who you might consider hawkish, are present all the way inside the the, you know, the decisionmaking circle and how easily those voices are dealt with politically to keep them quiet. Right. So to me, it's not enough to just say, add more hawkish voices, it's that the dovish voices need some political, some more political avenues to exert constraint.

DIONNE: Credit for one sentence that I appreciated. I think we go back and look at Iraq and the intervention and the assumption is made. This was broadly popular. If you look at both the early polling and I talked to a bunch of Republicans in September of 2002, it was astonishing how much, doubt there was about whether this was necessary both in the public and in, among Republicans in Congress. And you quote Dick Arme in the book. It was only later, once we go to war, people tend to unite initially, but I think there was a lot more doubt about that going in.

SAUNDERS: But the crazy thing was, so you mentioned how did Bush win reelection? I promise, very brief. It's remarkable that the Democrats had to be persuaded to make Iraq an issue in the 2006 election to make it part of their platform, you know?

O'HANLON: In '06.

DIONNE: They declined to in '02.

SAUNDERS: In '02 but but even in '06 it took convincing and John Murtha sort of coming out in favor and in favor of withdrawal. And that's another example of just how long it takes for these dovish constraints.

LUCE: I mean, you did have two key members of the foreign policy elite, Brent Scowcroft and Brzezinski, against the Iraq War before and.

O'HANLON: Jim Baker, kind of.

LUCE: And Jim Baker sort of.

SAUNDERS: But you also have, Colin Powell, who was persuaded. And that was a quite deliberate decision. He was known to be skeptical, but he commanded a lot of respect, and he was the one they sent out.

LUCE: And then Tony Blair going, me too, me too. Okay. Questions not not very long. I'm sorry for.

SAUNDERS: You. And take a few of them.

LUCE: I'll take. Okay. Do you want you want me to gather them and then, the gentleman towards the back and then the lady here. So.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Yes, my name is Roger Cochetti and I'm an editorial contributor on technology policy for The Hill newspaper. My question is, for any member of the panel, I would posit that there is no party that has a greater interest in influencing the, blob or the elite that you're describing and subject to foreign policy than Europeans. They have probably far more at stake than Americans do, if that's correct. And that that would specifically be European governments and European industry. Do you examine the efforts by European interests to influence, the American elite because this is life or death for them and the Rotary Club of St. Louis may never talk about foreign policy, but the Rotary Club of Munich probably has it on the top of their agenda.

LUCE: Does Munich have a Rotary Club?

AUDIENCE QUESTION: So could you talk about that? Yeah.

LUCE: And, the lady

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Thank you.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Hi. Thank you for the book and the presentation. My name is Gabriela Mundaca. I have two questions. The first one is --

LUCE: Could you do one, because of the time?

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Okay.

LUCE: Sorry.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Yes. Do you analyze in your book, the role of resources, the interest in land and resources, natural resources, economic interest in this conflict?

LUCE: Thank you. Yes. As with, why don't you take those two and then others? If you answer efficiently.

SAUNDERS: Yeah, yeah. I mean, to be very efficient. The short answer is no, I don't I don't really look at natural resources, in part because in any given case, so many different kinds of elites can be important that what political scientists are paid to do is traffic in massive oversimplifications, right. So in order to make everything –

LUCE: That's my profession.

SAUNDERS: I bet we could have a contest to see who has the, we just use, like, less, more fancy big words. But that doesn't really matter.

LUCE: You win on that front, you win.

SAUNDERS: Anyway, so I had to kind of keep it narrowly. The elites in my that I really theorized directly in the book are members of Congress and, the military and civilian advisors. But I think there's a lot that could be done on that front. In terms of Europeans, I would rather draft concerns of the to answer this for me. But, I think there is a lot of interesting work you could do on outside influences. But again, I was trying to show sort of that the constraints come from often within, within president's own parties, within their own administrations. And so I'm hopeful that people will take this and run and run with it and start applying it to other contexts.

LUCE: I, the gentleman there. Yeah. Take the mic.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Hi. My name is Phil. Thank you for being here. Quick question. How do we incentivize the elite, as a cadre to, better diversify because every group likes to reproduce itself, and I see, like, even when elites are no longer elites, they still are senior advisors, and they have a lot of power. So I'm thinking beyond, partisan diversity, what else can we do to incentivize the elites to diversify and include more viewpoints beyond the dichotomy of doves or hawks? Thank you.

SAUNDERS: I think this is really the essential question, right? I mean, I'm not arguing that the state of elite politics is good or perfect or, you know, elites make a lot of mistakes. And I they're they're detailed in pretty gory detail, in, in the book. But I think incentives are really critical here because just adding more voices without looking at the incentives is, is really dangerous. And I think one thing we have to do is stop vilifying elites. We have to stop, you know, canceling over policy differences is is really not. We need to have elites with different policy positions debating in the public sphere. Right. And if if we vilify elites for just for being in positions of power, that's not really going to get us anywhere, because we need the connection between expertise and strong policy preferences and it being able to get you somewhere. That's what generates the incentive to invest and in more expertise.

LUCE: I'm very conscious that, Kori, you've had the least airtime and I know you've got as a fellow –

DIONNE: She's an elite.

LUCE: She's that, but she's a non-elitist elite. Yes. As a partner in crime in the weekly podcast "Deep State Radio," the ironically named "Deep State Radio, I know you've got a lot of opinions, and I want to give you another chance just to add to this discussion.

SCHAKE: So I think even in the question about diversity, there is the assumption that, that different kinds of people would make different choices on these issues. And it's not clear to me that that's true. It could be that wider. I'm in favor of a much wider base of participation in these issues. I agree that that elites are too narrow, but I would encourage you to, consider the possibility that that that a more diverse range of voices is still going to have this same dynamic that the book describes. The second thing I would say is, issues of war and peace are objectively difficult. There's a high degree of difficulty and simplifying it down to the notion that why weren't less bellicose choices made? Can in fact skew how we think about the problem, because it's entirely possible that. The policies chosen were the best available policies, irrespective of your view on the issue. And so I think we need to, embrace the possibility that, first of all, the public understands that these are hard, complicated issues. The public holds elected elites accountable for mistakes. You can see that in the Biden example on Afghanistan that you, raised. And third, they're also surprisingly forgiving, when elites acknowledge what they had wrong. And there, I think, President Biden's mistake and saying there was no alternative to what we did in Afghanistan. And there was no way to do this better. My mom's not buying that argument. And I think that more than the mistake, because the public actually expects elites to be accountable for their mistakes.

O'HANLON: But hopefully she'll go buy the, hopefully she will buy the book.

DIONNE: Can I ask a quick question?

O'HANLON: What I was supposed to say earlier is when you leave, please consider doing so.

DIONNE: Can I ask a quick question of Elizabeth or Kori or, Mike?

LUCE: Remember the machine gun? The machine gun? Yeah. It's time.

DIONNE: There's no point in diversifying the foreign policy elite, because once you join the foreign policy elite, you are obsessed with foreign policy, and that there is a distinction between people who care passionately about foreign policy and all the rest of us and the the bias – this is my question -- would there not be a bias within the foreign policy elite to do something? Because that's what the foreign policy elite does. And I'm just curious.

SAUNDERS: Well, I think this is a really good note to maybe end on, which is, you know, I think Kori's absolutely right. And I have a lot of sympathy for elites. And when I read these cases, because it is these are hard choices that you don't get to the situation room for the easy calls. Right? And so I do think that they're making a lot of hard decisions under time pressure and limited information. And sometimes they make a good call and it just goes wrong on the ground. And that's, you know, life in the big city, so to speak. But I do think that and one, the late, great Robert Jervis used to write about this in a way that sort of implied, like bias

is what we pay elites for, right? We need them to have bias. We need them to have views, beliefs, knowledge. That is sort of the mental architecture that when that information comes in, they can take it in and assimilate it quickly and efficiently and make a decision. It's not going to be perfect. And there is, I think, a bias towards doing something. But, you know, to me this is all tradeoffs. There's no perfect answer. And you clearly don't want to have no expertise. But if you have a lot of expertise, you want to at least be aware of what the biases are. But bias is not inherently right or wrong. It's it's part of, you know, and we want to have we want to have people cycling in and out in alternating parties and having a healthy Republican Party on foreign policy, which is something Kori has done a lot to work on, I think is essential. And right now, the problem is not so much that we don't have dovish voices. It's that the the very idea of being a foreign policy elite is no longer tenable in one party. And that's not good for either party. It's not good for the Democrats, stagnates their policies and doesn't expose them to enough scrutiny, I think.

LUCE: Well, I don't see any doves or hawks on this panel. You're all owls, wise, wise owl. And starting with Elizabeth, thank you so much for, presenting your fascinating book and for inviting a very great panel to discuss it. And please, please buy her book, please buy her book.