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The 911 terrorist attacks at 25 Assessing the legacy, addressing the future

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2026

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WELCOMING REMARKS

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KEYNOTE

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Governor, State of Maryland

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PANEL 1: TERRORISM'S EVOLVING GEOGRAPHY, NETWORKS, AND TECHNOLOGIES

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PANEL 2: 9/11'S IMPACT ON U.S. DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICY

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ROUSE: Good afternoon. Good afternoon. I am Cecilia Rouse. I'm the president of the Brookings Institution, and I would like to welcome you here today, including those of you who are joining us online, to commemorate an important milestone in our country's history, that is the 25th anniversary of the tragic attacks on September 11th, 2001.

We are gathered here today for reasons that are reflective as well as forward-looking. In an opening keynote conversation with Governor Wes Moore of Maryland, then two panel discussions, we will assess the legacy of those terrible, terrible events a quarter century ago for our nation's military, its security here at home, its economy and politics, our Middle East policy, and America's broader role in the world.

In addition to looking back, we will explore how these various legacies of 9/11 affect our policy challenges going forward. We are particularly grateful to Governor Moore for joining us because, in addition to his service as a soldier deploying with the 82nd Airborne Division to Afghanistan two decades ago, and his many additional years in the Army Reserve, he has important roles in domestic security today, as do all of the nation's governors.

Governor Moore will be joining conversation with our own Michael O'Hanlon, the Philip H. Knight senior fellow in defense and strategy, and director of the Strobe Talbott Center for Security, Strategy and Technology. I would like to close by asking you to join me in remembering the fallen and in thanking the many other Americans in the nation's armed services, as well as its intelligence and homeland security services, its police, firefighters, first responders, its diplomats, aid workers, and others who have, despite many contentious policy debates and policy choices, kept the nation safe these last 25 years.

Please join me in a round of applause for all of them as Governor Moore and Mike take the stage. Thank you very much.

O'HANLON: Well, hi everyone, and what an honor for me today to be in conversation with Governor Wes Moore of Maryland. And thank you as well for your service, and for everyone, I wanna just add my word to Ceci's. Let me have a quick word of introduction because a lot of you know Governor Moore, but his life and his career really make for a remarkable American story, and an inspirational one. I think if I walk through his bio quickly, you'll see

why for us he's the perfect guy to kick off an event thinking about 9/11, its legacy, but also its future implications.

A lot of you know he was born in Takoma Park, lost his father very young, moved to the Bronx, and then his mom got a job in Baltimore. They moved back to Maryland. He wound up going to the Valley Forge Military Academy and College through the 1990s, much of the 1990s, and wound up being commissioned as a second lieutenant at the end of that process. The other good news about the end of that process is you wound up an Orioles fan, not a Yankees fan or a Phillies fan.

MOORE: That's right.

O'HANLON: So thank you for that as well. And, and after that point, he went to Johns Hopkins, actually played on the football team, and graduated in the spring of 2001. And my first question for you is gonna be to ask about where you were on 9/11 and how it influenced you and your career and your life.

Then he went and became a Rhodes Scholar, the first-- I think the first Black Rhodes Scholar from Johns Hopkins in its history, and he graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Johns Hopkins as well. Then activated to join the active Army and deployed to Afghanistan in the city of Khost in the east, and a very intense combat zone, and won a Bronze Star for meritorious service.

Came back, became a White House Fellow. Then also got involved in banking, but also in, in NGOs and in finally the Robin Hood Foundation, trying to help disadvantaged youth get a head start in life and really improve their prospects for having the great American story that he's been able to live throughout his life.

And then, of course, he became governor of Maryland, the 63rd governor, elected four years ago, and making him only the third Black governor in American history and the only one right now. But remarkable in terms of the kinds of accomplishments that he, working on a bipartisan basis with others in the state, have been able to achieve. And so I just wanted to ask you to, one more time, join me in welcoming Governor Moore.

MOORE: Thank you. Thank you, Michael. Thank you. It's an honor to be with you, man.

O'HANLON: So let's go back to 9/11, and I think most people remember where we were at that moment, and also how maybe it affected us for many months and years to come, emotionally, but also in terms of how we lived our lives.

Where were you, and how did it affect your thinking and your, maybe your long-term plans for your career in public service?

MOORE: Thank you and good afternoon, everybody. It's, it really is an honor to be with you any day, but particularly on a day like today. Just, I'm, I'm grateful for the invitation, and Ceci, thank you so much.

You know, my, my baby sister was born on September 11th, 1980. So actually 9/11 was her 21st birthday and my mom and I were actually on our way to go see her 'cause we told her we wanted to go celebrate her 21st birthday with her. And as we were, you know, heading

up, she-- at that time she was in, she was in, in college in New Jersey. And that's when the news started hitting. First was the first plane, then when we realized this was not an accident, that we were a nation under attack.

And it was amazing because you saw, to your point, how much that changed everything about all of us as a nation, all of us individually. Where I was getting ready to head off to, to Oxford on a Rhodes Scholarship. The flight that we took over to the UK was one of the early and first transatlantic flights that was allowed to actually take place. And even when I ended up deploying to Afghanistan, I, I found myself where I joined the Army when I was, you know, in, in 1996. I was, you know, 17 years old. We were not a nation at war when I first joined the military, and by the time I deployed to Afghanistan, I found that almost all of the soldiers, the younger soldiers who I served with and the soldiers who I, who I was, you know, leading when I headed to Afghanistan, their motivation for joining the Army could literally be summed up in a, in a sentence: 9/11.

And so you saw how much that changed, you know, not just the, the nature of warfare, how much it changed where, we have now spent these past, these past decades, where our, our military focus has really been on, you know, Central Asia and the Middle East. But how for so many of the soldiers and the sailors and the airmen and the Marines, and Coast Guardsmen that I had the honor of serving with, some of the best people that I've ever met in my life, how their motivation for joining the military was much, was very different than mine when I first joined, but was also very clear that they wanted to be part of the, part of the response to this country, where there was a ... and were very unified in that.

O'HANLON: I wanted to ask you about how 9/11 has affected the military, and especially of course the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the broader campaign against terrorism more generally. And I guess the way I wanted to ask, governor, is what would you say to somebody right now who's feeling a little down about how things turned out? We lost the war in Afghanistan, and the Iraq outcome is messy, but it was certainly at much higher cost than predicted or promised. And I think a lot of people wonder if it was worth it.

But as Ceci said in her opening remarks, we've been protected pretty well since 9/11 here at home. And I don't know if that's the message or what you would say to somebody who served, still serves, had a family member who served, and is wondering whether it was all worth it. Obviously, the wars themselves didn't go quite the way we hoped, but was the service worth it? How do you answer that question?

MOORE: It's, it's complicated and it's difficult, because, you know, we lost over 7,000 people in these conflicts, that there are people who are willing to give everything on behalf of this country, and many did. That if you look at the conflicts that exist and, you know, take Afghanistan for example, and one of the reasons that I am a, you know, have been so vocal about what we're seeing in Iran right now, for example, is because we're just seeing so many shades of what we saw, have seen, of what we've seen before, and I'm really wondering what lessons are we actually learning.

Where you look at, you look at Afghanistan and, and, you know, it was very clear that part of the motivation, and a significant portion of the motivation behind Afghanistan was that, that the Taliban were the ones who harbored al-Qaida, and we could not allow for the Taliban to be the ruling government inside of Afghanistan. You look at the fact that that, that war lasted 20 years, took thousands of U.S. service people, cost trillions of dollars, and do you know who's in charge of Afghanistan right now? The Taliban. And so it's, it's difficult to, to, to sit with that. And particularly, frankly, after, you know, in the way that the exit from Afghanistan

took place, which I know for me and for so many of the soldiers and so many people who I served with, who, who we're still in close communication have a, you know, still, that's something that will never sit right with us.

I'm thankful for the fact that during that time period, with the creation of a Department of Homeland Security, where we have, we have a more unified set of intelligence assets that are actually coordinating, that we have not had a similar type of attack on U.S. soil during that time period. That is, that is a significant accomplishment, and I can tell you that we are more coordinated now than we were on September 10th, 2001. That is a positive. But it's difficult for anybody to stand here and say that we have been, that all of that has been successful when you consider that there has been a significant cost that has come to that, that we can never, that we can never lose sight of.

O'HANLON: I wanted to now pick up the question of homeland security and really fast-forward to today and talk about the many ways in which you as a governor, and also the head of the National Governors Association, and a member of the Council of Governors, are dealing with homeland security in the here and now. And of course, the rest of today will have panels talking about this issue as well, but we're very grateful for what you are doing.

First of all, let me just say a brief word about the Council of Governors. 10 members, I believe, five Democrats, five Republicans. You were appointed by President Trump last year. And you are the liaison between the governors and Department of Homeland Security, Northern Command, and other people responsible for safety and security here.

MOORE: That's right.

O'HANLON: So when you size up the threat environment now, what worries you most? Is it remnants of al-Qaida or ISIS or lone wolf attack derivatives? Is it Chinese cyberattack with Volt Typhoon, you know, the malware implanted in our cyber infrastructure? Is it what the Iranians apparently did this, this very year to water in Minnesota and elsewhere with cyberattack? And so what is your sort of threat assessment? I, I want to start with that and then ask you about the policy agenda we need to be pursuing to get safer here at home.

MOORE: Yes. All of it worries me. And, and I think it, it has to because I think all of it is interconnected. You know, when we talk about what is the, the threat analysis, the challenge that we continue to see with threat analysis is we have to be right 100% of the time, right? They've got to be right once. And that's what makes this a very unfair battle that then is taking place. So we have to be concerned about everything.

And I think about it in context where, you know, I'm very thankful that the other governors selected me to become the chair of the National Governors Association and, and, and thankful that President Trump asked me to serve on the Council of Governors. But these are issues I know within Maryland that we have a distinct and unique, not just coverage point, but also a vantage point. Where, you know, Maryland is the home of the NSA. Maryland is the home of CISA. Maryland is the home of the US Naval Academy. Maryland is the home of Aberdeen Proving Ground. Maryland is the, is the home of the Applied Physics Lab. Maryland is the home of, of Fort Meade. You know, we have some of the largest intelligence assets that actually exist within our state.

And if you look at so much of the focus of even our National Guard, while I'm very proud to serve as, as the, the commander-in-chief of the Maryland National Guard and Maryland Air

Guard, a lot of our focus is actually a cyber mission. Because we see and understand very clearly that cyber warfare is kinetic warfare. You know, make no mistake about it, when you're talking about cyberattacks, when you're talking about attacks on infrastructure, when you're talking about attacks on waterways, when you're talking about attacks on, on electronic systems and electronic warfare, that is kinetic.

And so we have to be preparing for all of it, as if they are the type of threats and existential threats, that do and very much exist. And so do we think deeply and, and do we have to think deeply and make sure we're coordinated around things like, you know, cyberattacks and, and Chinese cyber hacks? Absolutely.

I'm gonna be very honest, though. What also makes me very concerned, is things like the fact that we have a debt, that right now, just doing basic debt service, we're putting more towards debt servicing than we are towards actually our, our defense budget. And the truth is, is that when we're talking about the challenge of, you know, Chinese cyber hacks, it's also very concerning about the amount of debt ownership that they have within the United States as well.

So I think we have to think about this holistically, and we have to think about it, have to think about it collectively. And that's really the type of focus that we've had with the Council of Governors. It's the kind of focus that we've had with the National Governors Association. It's a type of focus that I've had as not just the commander-in-chief of, of Maryland's National Guard and Air Guard, but working with all the other governors who serve as commanders-in-chief of their individual guards as well because, you know, the things that should really keep us up are not just the things that historically have kept us up in the past. It's the things that we're not talking about now, and it's the things that we know that there are significant resources and, and significant assets that are now being invested to, to be able to penetrate our systems in any way that they can.

O'HANLON: So what's the biggest thing that we need to take more seriously and do a lot more about than we currently are? Is it maybe the cyberattacks against critical infrastructure, you know, and, and sort of making sure the next Volt Typhoon doesn't happen or this one is eradicated from, you know, the malware is somehow excised? Is it some other kind of vulnerability? How would you rank the policy responses so far, and where are they still lacking?

MOORE: I would say, definitely on the cyber piece, but I would... I would tell you, I would caveat it as well. It's the, it's the cyber piece and also the, the increasing speed of artificial intelligence in that as well. Because, and this is where the coordination actually matters, we don't, we are not going to have the luxury of just simply looking at China or Russia or North Korea or anybody else as simply looking at it as an adversary versus adversary conversation.

That horse has very quickly come out of the barn, and I say that for this reason. When you're looking at the advanced technologies that we are looking at when it comes to AI and agentic AI, and how fast this continues to move and evolve, the places that historically have been our adversaries and our competition now become some of your greatest teammates to be able to combat against these type of issues. And so I think it's a, what, I think the thing that we've gotta do, there also has to be a, a measurement of, of, of shift in a mindset in the way that we're approaching a lot of our international partners. There has to be a shift in mindset in the way that we're talking about allied coordination and allied collaboration.

It's one of the reasons where, you know, I do have some very deep concerns about the way that we have used and utilized diplomacy almost like it's a, it's a dirty word. The fact that we are, we are doing a very good job of pushing allies away without a firm understanding of how much we need them. Not just in a short term, but in a long-term conversation.

And so I think that those are the things that, those are the things that I think we've gotta put a greater level of focus on. Isn't just the what, it's the how we're actually going to prepare and how we're gonna be able to, you know, protect our society.

O'HANLON: Is that what you mean, too, when you talk about soft power, that, the return to diplomacy? Because that's been something you've been known for espousing and promoting even though you're a soldier. And just like Jim Mattis, who was a Marine, who said, "If you don't give me foreign assistance and good diplomacy, I need more ammunition." Sounds like you're saying the same kind of thing.

MOORE: I absolutely do. It's like, I think that, I'm a firm believer that our military can do anything. You know, the United States military is, it really is a, it's a one-of-one tool on the globe. Our military can do anything. But we shouldn't do everything, and I think that's a very unfair ask of your military when essentially, when you are a hammer, then everything starts looking like a nail.

And I think part of the, you know, and I think we do have an issue right now that we've been, that we've been dealing with where, where we are utilizing our military force to be able to answer every single question. And using it as both the carrot and the stick for people. And I think that there, when you're watching a pullback from foreign assistance and foreign aid, when you're watching a pullback from international cooperation and intelligence sharing, when you're watching a pullback of trade and supports, what the consequences are is now everything becomes a future kinetic operation. Everything becomes how the military then has to be used and, and how the military is gonna be used and respond.

And you look at that in sharp contrast of some of our international partners. You look at a sharp, sharp contrast of how China has mobilized over these past two decades, where China has been very deliberate about the usage of soft power. China's been very deliberate about how they've been using their foreign aid. And let's be clear that China, China's strategy on foreign aid is not benevolence. China's strategy on foreign aid is not because, you know, well, we just want to, we just want to help in Latin America, and in Africa, and in Europe. But like, no, there's a very clear agenda that is being done.

Now, I'm not saying that, you know, that foreign assistance and foreign aid somehow needs to be a purely, you know, Machiavellian or transactional endeavor. But what I am saying is that foreign aid and foreign assistance and soft power, diplomatic power, those are assets that a government can use and utilize to better advance their way, and not everything has to be the military.

So I think there has to be a redefinition of strength, a redefinition of what it means to be powerful. And you know, we... there's a, there's a choice. It's a philosophy of this idea of, of peace through strength. Or you can take a philosophy of strength through peace. And I think there's a different type of mentality that we, that we should look to approach in the way we're looking at our foreign policy.

O'HANLON: Thank you. I've got two more questions, and then we'll bring in the audience for some more until we finish up at about 1:45. The first question I wanted to ask, because we're on the general subject of safety, and especially safety at home, it's not too much of a stretch to talk about crime.

And I don't think we've talked about it enough in recent years, because this is actually an area of substantial bipartisan success in the last, in, in our lifetime, in our adult lifetime. Just to take one example, murder rates in the United States today are half of what they were in 1990. And you know this very well because in Baltimore, you and the mayor and the police department, police chief there, have brought down homicides by more than 60% since you took office. So two-part question, what are we doing right? And it's not just you. It's, you know, it's Rudy Giuliani, it's Michael Bloomberg, it's been Republicans and Democrats, but at the state and local level primarily. So what have you guys been getting right, and what do we need to keep doing or getting better at so that we continue this trend?

MOORE: Yeah. You know, I always start these conversations with the caveat of we're not done. Because if one person does not feel safe inside of their neighborhood and community, it means you have work to do. But the results that we are seeing are undeniable, where, you know, in 2022, Baltimore City was averaging about a homicide a day. In 2022, where the seven years before we came on board, the homicide rate in the state of Maryland had nearly doubled. The non-fatal shooting rate did double. And I was just very clear. I've said it when I campaigned, I said it during my, during my inauguration. I said it on our very first day when I became the governor. I refuse to spend eight years giving eulogies and offering thoughts and prayers while we do nothing about this ridiculous amount of bloodshed that was taking place in our communities.

And so we decided to do something really different and unique. We decided to actually start working together. And so saying, you know, we're, we're working with, you know, we made historic funding in local law enforcement because I believe that you can have local law enforcement that moves with appropriate intensity and absolute integrity and full accountability.

And we made historic investments in our community violence interrupters, the people who are in the community making sure that they could stop violence before it actually happens. That we said we are going to invest in, in, in making sure that if a person commits a violent crime, particularly a violent crime with a firearm, we were going to make sure we have them in handcuffs in 24 hours and provide the resources to prosecutors to make sure that those cases stick.

And we were gonna make sure we're helping people who are returning home from incarceration and giving people a second chance. And it's why, you know, I, you know, I did things like I signed the largest mass pardon in the history of the United States of America when I pardoned over 175,000 misdemeanor cannabis convictions in the stroke of a pen. And I did it because I do not understand how you can continue punishing people for something that is now legal in my state, but you have a person who cannot get a job, cannot get a home loan, cannot get a barber's license because of a misdemeanor cannabis conviction from the 1990s.

So I pardoned them all and gave them a second chance to get back into the workforce. And so what has now been the result where we have seen how the job growth rate in the state of Maryland, for example, has not only beaten the national average, it has almost doubled the national average, and the homicide rate in the state of Maryland as a whole is now down.

We're now down nearly 60% in violent crime since our administration has come on board. And to your point, in Baltimore City alone, the last time the homicide rate was this low in Baltimore City, I wasn't born yet. That's the kind of drops that we have seen in just a matter of three years. And so we're, we're, we're, we're thankful because what we've been able to show is that by actually being serious about this, by making it a focus, by not turning it into a partisan talking point.

I'm very clear that we did it because we believe in public safety and we did it because we believe in civil liberties, and you don't have to choose between those two things. That we did it because we believe in supporting our local law enforcement and we believe in supporting opportunities for our young people.

And we were able to drive those kind of results amongst the fastest drops in the United States of America, and we did it without activating our National Guard. We did it without asking for federal troops to start patrolling our neighborhoods, because our communities don't need us to save them. They can do it on their own. What our communities needed was for us to see them, and that's what I think has helped to create the difference that we see now in, in the state of Maryland.

O'HANLON: Well, that's inspirational, and congratulations and thank you. And thanks to all the others who have accomplished this and contributed.

I wanna finish on one more big-picture question about how we can do things together as a country, and try to get a little beyond this period of divisive polarization. And I know you've got some ideas, so I just really wanted to give you an open-ended question to talk about some other big idea that perhaps we could consider for trying to bring the country into a greater sense of patriotism.

MOORE: Yes. Well, I believe that service will save us. And I know that because service in many ways saved me. That, you know, Michael, you know, laid it out where I first got sent to military school when I was, you know, 13, 14 years old. And people say, "Why'd you choose to go to military school?" I'm like, "No one chooses to go to military school." It was a choice, but it was a choice that really helped to save my life.

And I joined the Army when I was 17, and I learned there the importance of being part of something bigger than yourself. And in fact, I, you know, I remember when I started campaigning for governor, there were people who I, who I served with who came and door-knocked on my behalf. You know, some of them were not Marylanders, some of them were not, many were not Democrats. But they just were like, "I just wanna share about the guy that I served with." And I think that does become really important, especially in this moment.

And we made Maryland the first state in the country that now has a service year option for all of our high school graduates. In fact, when I leave here, I'll be heading up to Bowie State University to welcome our newest class of service year option fellows. These are people who either have a high school degree or a high school equivalency that are now doing a paid year of service to the state of Maryland. And they can do it however they choose. They're working in serving veterans. They're serving animals. They're serving in the environment. They're serving young people. It's your choice. Tell us what makes your heart beat faster, and we wanna give you an opportunity to go do that, and we'll pay you to go do it.

The reason it's been so transformational is because it helps deal with the workforce crisis that we're having. Because right now in this country, there's over five million people between the ages of 16 and 23 that are neither in college or in careers, just out there. So this has in many ways helped to provide a pathway for a universal jobs guarantee for these young people, and in a way that helps to find their passion, that it has helped to build up a skill set for them.

And importantly, in this time of this political divisiveness and political vitriol, I just believe that service is sticky, and the more our young people get to know each other, the more they go outside and work on big projects together, that service is gonna be the thing that's actually gonna help to save us and bring us out of this moment.

And so as serving as chair of the National Government Association, we're very proud that the success of Maryland is not gonna be kept in Maryland because we've now launched Service United for the National Government Association. So we are gonna be working with governors all around the country to be able to expand this so every single state should and will have the opportunity to, to be able to preserve their own future by allowing their, by allowing their young people to lead us through.

O'HANLON: That's awesome, thank you. Okay. Well, let's get a couple other questions from the audience. Maybe I'll go over here to the side first. The gentleman in the fourth row with the pink shirt and pink jacket.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Thank you.

MOORE: How you doing? Good to see you.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: All right. Oh, thank you. Good afternoon. I was talking with my daughter today, and my youngest grandson is thirteen. I have one that's twenty-four. I'm trying to explain to my young one about 9/11. I wanted to know what you say to your children. Reporters are saying how many millions there are that run around, have no concept of what it was like. I was a beat reporter in Chicago, frightened out of my mind going downtown on a train with nobody but me and the photographer. So I'd like to know from your perspective, how do you address young people, particularly your own children, in a moment that for some of us, we can't seem to forget?

MOORE: Yeah, that's a great question. I think that, the thing that's difficult for people to understand, unless like us, they were all – that we all experienced it and saw it, was the fear of that day. The fact that all of this was happening and no one had a full understanding of when it would stop. That whether it was learning more about the plane in the Pentagon or the plane that crashed in Pennsylvania, that, that there was just so much going on and so much chaos that was, that ensued. And just with every story that we heard on that day, it just got worse and more and more heartbreaking.

But the thing that I always wanna make sure that my kids and all of, and everybody who did not experience that. And it's pretty amazing when you think about it, where, you know, for example, for all of our young people who are joining the military right now, for many of them, they were not even alive when 9/11 happened. Wasn't just making sure that they understand about what happened on September 11th, it was also making sure they understood what happened on September 12th, and September 13th, and September 14th. And because everything feels so polarized right now, it's difficult for people to remember how unified that

the nation felt at that moment. That no matter your political affiliation, no matter your background, no matter what part of this country you called home, or frankly, no matter what part of the globe that you called home, there was this idea that no matter the tragedy, we would not be broken by this.

And actually, I think that that is a really powerful and important lesson. That we saw a whole new generation of public servants that were born out of 9/11, whether they're people who joined the military, or people who joined the police force or the fire department, or people who said they want to be teachers, or people who said that, you know, that I want to be a counselor, inspired by 9/11, inspired by an idea that we, that, that we are now entering a moment of repair, and that all of us needed to be able to have our part as part of that repair.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Follow up on, I don't need the mic. [off-mic]

MOORE: I do. And, and you know, and, and honestly I think that it's even, it's even bigger than a red, white, and blue, because we had an entire global community that stood up. Now I remember when I, when I said I ended up, I went to Oxford just weeks after my flight, when I started my Rhodes Scholarship. And, you know, we had these cubbyholes in Oxford, which is, you know, kind of a very antiquated way that Oxford, and they're never gonna change how they do mail there. And I remember my cubbyhole was, like, full of notes and people just saying, "I'm so sorry." Because they didn't know me. I hadn't arrived yet, but they just heard that an American was coming, and they just wanted to let me know that they were with me. And so, I think -- we're brothers and sisters, and your brother and sister's pain should be yours, too.

O'HANLON: That's really well said. I'm just gonna really quickly add that I was in Japan on 9/11, and my Japanese friends and colleagues took great care of me. And then I flew home to Toronto, and I was brought to tears by all the Canadian flags at half-mast. And so it's a good moment to say that since we're not exactly having our best day with Canada right now. Anyway.

MOORE: That is true. That is true

O'HANLON: If I could get another question, please. Let's see. If I can go, we'll go, well, to the gentleman in the white shirt right here, please

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Oh, well, thank you so much. And first, first I want to congratulate you and thank you, governor, for your best exemplification of the principles set out in the poem, If, Walking with Kings and Maintaining the Common Touch, and I think you know what I'm talking about.

MOORE: It's one of my favorite poems.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: My question is, Maryland is also the place where the terrorists trained in their flight, et cetera. Are there, what principle, what, what procedures are in place to assure that won't happen again? And was there any particular significance, you think, in their selection of Maryland as the place to train?

MOORE: Yeah. Great question. Thank you. You know, I, I think in, in many ways, the assets of Maryland also make Maryland a unique target. And it's something that we wrestle with

and we contend with every single day. All of those assets that I laid out before, you know, the NIH in Maryland, right? The, US Cyber Command in Maryland. Fort Meade in Maryland. All these things that, that are assets that we're very proud of also does make us a very unique target. And it's something that doesn't just weigh on me, it's something that I take very seriously as both, you know, the chief executive of the state, but also the commander-in-chief of our National Guard and our, and our Air Guard.

One of the things that we had to invest in, and this actually even goes back to the, to the conversation we're having about crime. When I came on board, I significantly increased investment in what is called the Maryland Coordination and Analysis Center, or MCAC. MCAC really is the governor's leading tool for intelligence sharing and intelligence coordination, in making sure that all of our jurisdictions are communicating, to making sure that, you know, the way that crime works, and whether you're talking about cyber terrorism, whether you're talking about foreign interference, whether you're talking about domestic lone wolves, or whether you're talking about street crime, that generally, they don't see jurisdictional boundaries. And in fact, they actually exploit boundaries because, you know, the reason that a lot of these groups will fester in border regions is because there's always a jurisdictional question when you're dealing in border regions. And so that's one of the reasons it makes it so attractive. And so what we try to do then is basically eliminate the confusion around borders, eliminate the confusion around silos, and that's really what the focus of the Maryland Coordination and Analysis Center really does, and why I've been so proud of the work that the incredible men and women who serve in, at MCAC and who serve again as my leading intelligence tool, have been able to provide.

We, again, you know, it's not lost on us that, we've always gotta be right. They hardly ever have to be right, but if they're right once, it's a, it's a tragic and it's a disaster. So we try to try to make sure that we are always right. But making sure we're continuing to invest in that, making sure we're continuing to, you know, to really protect those assets are important.

I will say one thing. Coordination with our federal partners does matter in this. And what we have seen now for the past year and a half, and this is not a partisan comment, 'cause I know I have similar conversations with Republican governors as well. When you have relationships, when you have communication tools that between the feds and the state that in some cases are not even altered, in some cases they've been severed, there are consequences to that.

And so we have to find ways of rebuilding that measurement of both trust and collaboration between so many of these federal assets that in some cases have been gutted, and the tools and resources that our states have and that the state's chief executives rely on in order to make sure that our people are, are consistently safe.

O'HANLON: We're now gonna do a transition seamlessly to panel one where Eric Schmitt of The New York Times will introduce a panel on counterterrorism. But please, before that, join me one more time in thanking the governor.

MOORE: Thank you all. Thank you.

SCHMITT: Thank you very much. Good afternoon. I'm Eric Schmitt. I'm a national security correspondent with The New York Times, and I have the honor of moderating this discussion with a panel of distinguished experts on counterterrorism, violent extremism, diplomacy, a number of other things. People who have traveled the world doing important research in many of these fields we'll be talking to today.

What we're gonna do is we're gonna have a moderated discussion for the first portion of our, of our talk, and then we're gonna throw it open to you all in the, in the audience. So, so start thinking about some questions, that you may have for our panelists as we do here.

I just wanted to introduce briefly our, our panelists. You have a fuller description in your, in your packets there. To my immediate left is Tricia Bacon, a professor of justice, law, criminology, and security at American University. To her left is Jeffrey Feltman, the John C. Whitehead visiting fellow in international diplomacy, Strobe Talbot Center for Security, Strategy and Technology here at Brookings. And to Ambassador Feltman's left is Vanda Felbab-Brown, senior fellow and director, the Initiative on Non-State Armed Actors, also here at Brookings. And to her left is Fonteh Akun, the senior fellow and director of the Africa Program at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

You know, as, as a reporter who was here in Washington covering 9/11 the day that of...It was a blur, as I'm sure many of you all here too. You know, 25 years, however, after those tragic attacks on 9/11, Washington's foreign policy priorities have shifted away from counterterrorism and toward great power competition, but terrorism remains a challenge for the United States both at home and abroad.

Today, terrorism has morphed, however, giving way to a much more dispersed ecosystem spread across multiple continents. There're actually more terrorists and more terrorist organizations now than there were on 9/11. It's a much more complicated mosaic. al-Qaida and the Islamic State remain influential brands, but it's their offshoots that really hold sway in core organizations versus the core organization in places like Yemen, Somalia, and the Sahel, as well as still in the Middle East. The challenge now is how to understand and combat a fragmented and adaptive system in which transnational networks, local grievances, self-mobilization, criminal economics, and state interests overlap in what can be a very toxic environment.

So I'm gonna start with, with Tricia here on my, on my left. And Tricia, I want you to first maybe just describe where you were and what you were doing on 9/11, but then start us off, since of course, this really stemmed from going after al-Qaida in Afghanistan, to give, give us some sense of what the state of terrorism and violent extremism is in south, southwest Asia right now.

BACON: Sure. First, I'd like to thank Brookings for organizing this event on this really important anniversary, especially to Vanda for organizing this panel and, and of course to Eric for moderating. 9/11 is the event that literally set off the trajectory of my career I was finishing grad school at the time, and it- watching this event on TV made me decide that I was going to go into this realm specifically.

I joined the State Department the next year, and 25 years later I'm still very much focused on these issues, including specifically South Asia. And I think what's interesting about South Asia is the dominant paradigm to understand the threat within the region and beyond the region has long been state sponsorship.

This has been a place where a lot of governments have seen utility in sponsoring militant groups and terrorist organizations, and that's still largely true, although in ways that have changed significantly. Pakistan is still sponsoring organizations that attack India, but the sort of veneer of plausible deniability is gone, and so there's a much more unstable environment between those two nuclear powers.

Pakistan long sponsored the Afghan Taliban, only to find that the Taliban is no longer interested in being sponsored by Pakistan now that it's taken over Kabul again. And the Taliban itself is acting as a sponsor, both in terrorism in Pakistan and still of al-Qaida. And so it is an important way of understanding the region and a lot of the ability of groups to thrive in it.

And governments understand this about each other, and they see each other through this paradigm, but we have sort of an asterisk next to this, and that is that the Islamic State's affiliate in the region, Islamic State in Khorasan, is the one major terrorist organization in the region that does not have a state sponsor.

And that doesn't mean that, governments understand that. They often see this group as being sponsored by one another in ways that hinder counter-terrorism cooperation, and that's particularly problematic because it's the most serious Sunni extremist threat in the world, to the West in particular. This is a group that is transnational in its capability, in its ambitions, its ability to inspire, and it is still very much sort of rooted in South Asia while having a broader transnational network, both of facilitators, logistics, and of course its propaganda wing.

So we still have an environment 25 years after 9/11 where the most important terrorist threat to the United States and to the West is happening in this region, but at the same time in a different way than it was 25 years ago.

SCHMITT: And you mentioned Khorasan, and that's really important because they've carried out attacks outside the region.

Correct. Places in, in Moscow for instance a couple years ago. Yes. What, what's the significance of that, when you have an organization that's coming from the region but is extending its, its attacks beyond the region itself?

BACON: In some ways, the group's ability and willingness to become transnational reflects that it's experienced some losses within Afghanistan.

The Taliban, much to many of our may- perhaps surprise, has turned out to be a pretty effective counter-terrorism force against the group that it prioritizes that efforts against, and that is ISK. ISK is a direct threat to the Afghan Taliban. It regularly targets its leaders. And, and ISK also is a group that stands out in the indiscriminate nature of its targeting.

This is a group that has targeted schoolgirls taking tests. It's targeted a maternity ward. Its scope of targeting is big even for terrorist organizations. But to your point, Eric, one of the adaptations that it's made as a result is becoming more transnational, particularly recruiting from surrounding countries in Central Asia, connecting with logistics in places like Turkey.

So it's turned into sort of the, the pointy spear for the Islamic State network in terms of transnational plotting. But we can also see that 25 years after 9/11, counterterrorism isn't the unifying platform that it once was. So the United States, for example, shared information with Russia about the ISK threat, which Russia ignored because we're no longer an environment where CT as E provides that, that sort of narrow avenue for cooperation even when the broader - the bilateral relationship is problematic. And so unfortunately, the efforts against

ISK suffer as a result of sort of the broader mistrust in the international system that, that there's no exemption 25 years after 9/11.

So I think ISK has been effective at exploiting that change in the environment and compensating for some of its losses by becoming more transnational.

SCHMITT: Jeff, you've spent your long career as a US diplomat, diplomat at the United Nations, much of your time in the Middle East. Talk about the evolution of terrorism from non-state actors to what we see today, certainly since October 7th, the emphasis on organizations such as Hamas, Hezbollah, the Iran-backed militias in Iraq, and of course, just picking up the, you know, reading the news in the last few days of the Houthis' advance in Yemen, and they're now claiming control over the Red Sea. What, what is the significance of that trajectory as you see it?

FELTMAN: I mean, it, it is one of the the unintended consequences of our response to 9/11, which was the de facto empowerment of Iran by taking out Saddam Hussein and by taking out the Taliban in Afghanistan, that, you know, Iran was able to strengthen the proxy network that it had.

We saw that Iran works very well in chaos, whether it's Syrian civil war, the Lebanese civil war, or, or Iraq civil conflict. And so a lot of... Well, like you, a lot of my career was dealing with the implications of 9/11 in terms of these, the axis of resistance militias and how they affected US foreign policy or UN interests in the region during the two chapters of my career.

And when I'm looking at the, at the situation today, I mean, first of all, it's significant what the Houthis have, have done in terms of moving toward the Red Sea, of taking the Port of Mocha, of taking the island of Perim in the, in the middle of the Bab el-Mandeb. Mocha, Mocha, the port of Mocha in Yemen is less than 50 miles from the, from the Bab el-Mandeb.

And, and so this is a significant move by the Houthis to add a second chokehold, to be able to, to apply a second chokehold to world trade, in addition to the Iranian chokehold that they're attempting in, in Hormuz. But what I find fascinating is the Houthis are essentially playing the role that Hezbollah once played.

You know, the Hezbollah was once sort of the regional actor, working for Iran to train Iraqi militias, working, working with bad actors elsewhere, making connections with, with, with criminal groups in South America, et cetera. Hezbollah is now fighting an existential battle. And it- Hezbollah's not able to protect Iran right now.

Iran's trying to protect Hezbollah. It, the purpose of Hezbollah has been reversed in that case. But the Houthis are now more and more playing that kind of role of building the web among these non-state, non-state actors. You see the Houthis in Iraq, working with the, working with the Iranian-allied militias in Iraq. You see them in Somalia, working with Shabaab, crossing the sectarian from from Shia to Sunni. It's, it's quite dangerous what's going on with the Houthis right now. But Hezbollah's also interesting to watch right now because Hezbollah is, of course, adapting, as we've seen with the FPV drones that they've used against the Israeli occupation in southern, southern Lebanon.

But think about what I would describe, and I was ambassador in Lebanon, so I've watched, watched Hezbollah quite closely for many years. Hezbollah basically had five cornerstones

of its strength. One was an unusually charismatic and commanding leader in the person of Hassan Nasrallah. His successor's nothing like Hassan Nasrallah.

SCHMITT: Who you met, right?

FELTMAN: No, no, that was the supreme leader of Iran. Not Hassan Nasrallah. I would've been fired from my job had I met Hassan Nasrallah. But they don't have the, Hezbollah doesn't have the leadership they had. Hezbollah doesn't have the back office land bridge, whatever you wanna call it, support in Syria. Syria's now ruled by, by an interim administration that fought Hezbollah. So they've lost that.

SCHMITT: And led by a former terrorist leader.

FELTMAN: Yes, yes. But-

SCHMITT: And, and how do you think that's gonna turn out? Where do you come down on, on Syria's pla- in, in the region?

FELTMAN: I think, I think that the, you know, it's too early to tell. I mean, Al-Shara is, is projecting everything correctly, but, but he's not a democrat. You know, he's, he's not looking to embrace the great diversity of, of, of Syria's demographic richness. He's looking to, to be sort of an autocratic. And if, and frankly, if, if you, if we lectured Al-Shara about democracy, say, democracy, inclusion, all that, he can look at Lebanon and say, "Hmm," look at Iraq and say, "Hmm," and then look at the Gulf, where they don't have inclusion and democracy, and say, "I like that model better."

But, but Hezbollah I think is... I'm going back to Hezbollah for a second because Hezbollah has changed dramatically since before October 7th. The Israeli decimation of Hezbollah's leadership, the Israeli degradation of Hezbollah's military, military force on the ground has really changed Hezbollah. And the thing to focus now on is how to remove the remaining cornerstones of Hezbollah's strength.

One is Iran's still gonna try to support them. Iran's not gonna give, is not gonna give up on them. And the, with, with cryptocurrency and other ways, Iran has clever ways of still supporting Hezbollah. So we've gotta keep a focus on that, and I know that the Trump administration has recently announced, yesterday I think, even more sanctions focused on that.

But the other thing is how to have the Lebanese state be able to respond to the needs of the Lebanese people all over, all over the country, but particularly the Shia who turn to Hezbollah for jobs, social - you know, security, dignity, political power, in a country where the Shia were long considered to be second class. But I think that there's a real chance now to marginalize Hezbollah to the point where it, where it no longer poses a regional threat. It will still pose a threat inside Lebanon.

SCHMITT: Vanda, I wanna turn to you because you are studying very closely what seems to be a new front in at least this administration's war on terror, if you wanna think about it that way, and that is focusing on the Western hemisphere.

Obviously starting at first on the border operations, but then we've seen the boat strikes against alleged drug trafficking on both the Caribbean and the Eastern Pacific over the past year. You've seen new agreements that the US State Department and military have created, the so-called Shields of America, with countries such as Ecuador, Colombia, others. And this new counter-terrorism strategy that puts quite a focus on narco-terrorism. Many would say that's not terrorism in the sense that what we've been talking about so far. That's criminal enterprise, that they're now applying many of the kind of lessons and tactics, techniques, procedures that the US learned during the, during the, the post 9/11 era on some of these cartels that they're going after.

How should we think about this and what the administration is doing? Is this really a new front in terrorism, or are they just using the mechanisms that have been built up in the, in the legal, the legal justification to go after these, these networks?

FELBAB-BROWN: Well, let me just start with a side note, which is that in Afghanistan, many members of the Taliban wish they had Al-Sharaa instead of Mullah Hibatullah, and they quite frequently say that, including for normalization or improvement in relations with the US.

Look, Eric, the domain of terrorism in Latin America is not new. Before 9/11, the leftist guerrilla armed group in Colombia, FARC, and another one, ELN, had been designated as foreign terrorist organizations by the United States. And those designations were only toughened after 9/11. The United States spent decades fighting communism, leftist insurgencies and calling them terrorists. And the first time the term narcoterrorism was used was by a US ambassador in Colombia in the early 1980s when Pablo Escobar, a drug trafficker with, in charge of the Medellín cartel, bombed an airliner, Avianca Colombian airliner, and killed a lot of civilian passengers in ways that were not different what happened with Lockerbie.

I think the difference now is that the Trump administration has designated more than a dozen different criminal enterprises across the region as foreign terrorist organization. And this is something that governments had been embracing because they had been struggling with the extraordinary violent criminality that has been taking place there. And so even before the Trump administration made designations of Mexican cartels, Haitian criminal gangs, we had the government of El Salvador and the government of Ecuador making those terrorist designations. And this comes with multiple implications, one of which is the heavy dominance of the use of military to target the criminal groups.

And we now have the Trump administration, or at least its members, explicitly saying that law enforcement approaches are inadequate, they have failed, and that the effort needs to be centered on the use of military. There's also a, a concurrent demand that those countries that are part of the Shield of the Americas, which is now most of the right-wing governments in the Southern Cone and also in Central America, will allow the use of the US military for conducting strikes. This is also a central demand, even if contested demand, to the government of Mexico.

So, you know, is it legitimate and valuable to call the entities terrorist groups? If one uses the, the concept that the, that terrorism is killing innocent civilians, then yes, they will qualify. Many of them do that. It raises big questions, however, about the validity of US airstrikes, and certainly a lot of experts will say that the legal justification the administration is using are not sufficient for the, for the airstrikes against the boats. I think that the notion that law enforcement should not play any part is deeply problematic. And there is also an enormously

worrying tendency that the counter-terrorism prism is throwing out or at least significantly eviscerating civil rights, civil liberties, and it's being used by governments as a path toward authoritarianism and elimination of checks and balances.

SCHMITT: You certainly see that in a place like El Salvador ...

FELBAB-BROWN: El Salvador is the most emblematic example, but we see it in a variety of governments. The new president of Colombia is, you know, explicitly talking in language that threatens political enemies, that raises questions about civil liberties, due process, concern for non-combatants. He's posing with bodies of supposed killed drug traffickers.

So, you know, there is no, there is no doubt that the violent criminality is dangerous, worrisome, and impacts the United States, but to respond by just this one narrow approach that undermines what should be the core aspect of foreign policy, human rights, civil liberties, democracy and accountability, is deeply problematic.

SCHMITT: Fonteh, I, I wanna turn to you now because you're studying a continent that many call the epicenter of where terrorism and terrorist attacks at least are the most numerous of anywhere in the world right now. I think anywhere from 60 to 70% by some accounts. You have the, the mix of groups in the Sahel, whether it's JNIM and ISIS groups there.

Swinging over to the Horn, we have Somalia, ISIS, Somalia there, which plays an unusual role in, in kind of also thinking and, and, and acting as a broker almost for ISIS global operations. Talk a little bit about the importance of, of this and where you see the trajectory. 'Cause a lot of people I'm, I'm sure here, maybe not so much in our audience, but maybe the general, you know, viewers are saying, "Well, why, why does it matter about terrorism in Africa? It hasn't, it hasn't extended and reached out to the United States yet." But, but talk a little bit about how you see things in this very dynamic, dynamic front.

AKUM: Thank you very much, Eric, and thanks to Brookings as well for organizing this really important panel as we commemorate 25 years of September 11th.

I'd, I'd like to pick up on a few points before getting to the importance of the conversation. The first one is the diffusion that we have seen of terrorism globally. The second one is basically picking up on Tricia's point as well about state sponsors of terrorism and demonstrating how they differ from the African context.

Looking to the African context particularly, starting with Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin, we see a context where the challenges to statehood and unfinished state construction actually provide an opportunity at cross-border spaces for many of these violent extremist and terrorist groups. The second observation that we have is the connections between these groups which started locally to international franchises, to the extent that, if you look at the Lake Chad Basin, for example, what started as Boko Haram then led to a pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State. And on the Sahel front, what started as Al-Mourabitoun and Katiba Macina pled allegiance as well to al-Qaida, to form sort of, the group for support of Islam and the Muslims.

So these dynamics are very different. The second -- the, the third observation based on those differences is why it's important and why it matters. It matters because what we see in

the African space is sort of a clear linkage to global terrorism, first, and second, the appropriation of modes of operation, that, that exist in other spaces.

If you look at technologies, for example, we see an early adoption of the use of unmanned aircraft systems in terrorist spaces across the continent in ways that challenge the responses. The second is we observe as well that within the African context, there's a way in which terrorist groups have an anthropological understanding of statehood that differs from the centralized state's understanding of its positioning and its ways of engagement with society.

The third is that they control more they're increasingly controlling more territory, particularly cross-border territories. So in a global context where we think the state is the primary actor in international relations, by terrorist groups eroding the capacity of state across Africa, they present a huge threat, and they present a lifeline for the reemergence of terrorist groups in other spaces as well.

I would like to land on the financial networks that allow these groups to equally exist and continue to operate. Through the initial franchising, there was the transfer of finances, and audio visual technological modes of operation as well. And as these franchises actually consolidate on the African continent, they definitely provide the opportunity for groups that are defeated elsewhere to reemerge and reinvent themselves.

SCHMITT: But can you give us some examples of where, either where you see the beginnings of this or what you're watching closely where that, where that might develop?

AKUM: A couple of patterns that we have seen. The first one is between 2019 and 2022, there was the connection of the West -- of, of the Sahel front with the West Africa Province front to create the Islamic State for West Africa and the Greater Sahara, right? And that was a clear concern given that it crossed several borders.

The second is we are seeing ways in which the Islamic State in Mozambique is actually connecting as well on the eastern seaboard with Al-Shabaab in Somalia. So these are all concerning patterns that we continue to track.

SCHMITT: I, I'd like -- go ahead.

FELBAB-BROWN: Can I just pick up on one point on something important that Fonteh is saying? And, you know, the, the reconnection of the Mozambique Al-Shabaab with the Somalia Al-Shabaab and actors in, higher up. This all emerges out of a sense that you have a defeat of some of these groups, or at least substantial weakening that later on turns out untrue. So whether it's the, lots of the issues that US and Western forces struggled with in Afghanistan and Somalia, in different iterations in Iraq, the brutality of the Russian forces, Wagner and Africa Corps, the military activity managed temporarily to weaken the group. But then they found rather extraordinary resilience in the connection.

So Mozambique seemed to be, by some would argue three years ago, a finished business. Well, not so at all. We see significant pickup of activity. What is happening in Mali, Burkina Faso, Togo is just demonstration of how utterly hollow the Russian approach to counterterrorism, brutality, *ibrahim*. But for all of those external actors, the challenge has been the military action suppresses but doesn't resolve the underlying structural issue, doesn't defeat sufficiently, and the groups find a way to come back.

SCHMITT: We're gonna take some questions at the, at about, in about 20 minutes, but I'd like to use the time between now and then to have a kind of a more interactive discussion among our panelists, and I'll pose some questions. But please, as you've just done, Vanda, jump right in.

And, and Tricia, I wanted to come back to you and, and kind of link in what, what Vanda was saying about Africa, 'cause you've just got back from a really interesting trip to Mogadishu. But also tied back to something Governor Moore said, I think that's a really important theme that we wanna-- I'd like to explore with all of you, and that is the importance of partnerships, whether it's here in the United States, domestic partnerships or the international partnerships, many of which seem to be fractured, as we've been kind of discussing among many of us.

And your experience, as we were talking before we came out here, was similar to mine when I was last in Mogadishu about three years ago. I was stunned at the number of international actors that were there completely uncoordinated, it seemed. You had the Emiratis, you had the Turks, the Brits, the Americans, some others. And yet, you know, working kind of with or the government there seemed to be playing one off with each other. And I wanted you to kind of pick up and maybe share some of the insights that you got from your most recent trip, but then talk about this importance of partnerships at a time when at least this administration seems to be discarding them or, or, or openly antagonistic to partnerships, whether it be through terrorism or other diplomatic and military means.

BACON: I think this also gets back to my earlier point where there was a period of, we'll say, 20 years after 9/11 where, where counterterrorism cooperation could be this exception to f-problematic bilateral relationships. And there, so there was an ability to, to cooperate in that sphere even when the, the relationships in a, in a variety of ways were more problematic.

I see the validity of the US prioritizing strategic competition with China and revisionism from Russia, so I'm not arguing that counterterrorism should still be what it once was. But by deprioritizing it and expanding what it, what it captures to things like organized crime, sort of the counterterrorism compacts are, are really becoming much more frayed.

And I think what we see instead is a lot of what we, we have been calling middle powers stepping into the vacuums where the US has pulled back. And that's no- that's clearer perhaps in Somalia than a lot of other places, where you really see the extent of Turkish influence, for example. You see the effects of US disengagement on the UN's ability to sustain its mission or the African Union forces.

And so there is a fraying of a lot of that investment in counterterrorism partnerships and relationships that we relied on for the, the 20 years or so after 9/11. So I think that that is going to sort of limit our ability to undertake some of the more delicate counterterrorism efforts that are still required.

Because as Vanda pointed out, these are groups that are not hard to degrade. They're incredibly hard to defeat, and they have a rejuvenation capability that you see over time. There is a lot of obituaries that have been written about these groups only for them to rise from the dead, and that's clearly the most true when you think about the Taliban.

A month from now, six weeks from now, 25 years ago, the Taliban was militarily defeated, and here we are today, 25 years later, with not only the Taliban in control of Afghanistan, but

in control of all of Afghanistan, something it never had during the 1990s, with no real serious opposition to its rule. So I think that's a, a paradigm we have to keep in mind as we're sorting through some of these partnerships and these relationships.

FELTMAN: If I could pick up on what Trisha said too on the cooperation. I, I was at the, I was at the undersecretary-general at the UN for six years, and one of the hats I wore as undersecretary general for political affairs, whatever that title means, was I was the UN's counterterrorism coordinator. And the UN, the UN doesn't have a whole lot of tools compared to, say, the United States, but they had some very important tools, which were the Security Council passing counterterrorism legislation. Passing resolutions often proposed by the United States but backed by the Security Council. And then the Security Council had this subgroup called the Counterterrorism Committee that would look at what, look at what the member states of the United Nations, what their capacity was to implement those Security Council resolutions, you know, airline passenger lists, what have you, on counterterrorism.

We, in our part of the UN, would then take those reports and send out technical assistance to governments to be able to, to comply with the Security Council resolutions that were passed mostly unanimously on counterterrorism. And because we were the UN, we didn't have... and some countries wouldn't have accepted the technical assistance from the United States or from, or from Russia for political reasons. But the UN, with everyone feeling that they're a member of it, it was easier for us to do that.

Well, that kind of cooperation has broken down because the Security Council is deadlocked when it comes to sanctions, when it comes to new legislation like this. So what I saw as one of the quiet victories of both CT cooperation and of the UN being effective has withered.

SCHMITT: And what would be the impact of that? Can you, can you point to any conflict where this may have been-

FELTMAN: Well, Sudan. Trying to get an arms embargo on Sudan now that's more than Darfur. There's an existing arms embargo on Sudan that has to do with Darfur, from, you know, that's dating back to the Darfur conflict. But, but trying to get a larger arms embargo and then a committee set up to monitor that arms embargo, that, that has not passed the Security Council.

SCHMITT: Vanda, I want, turn to you to talk a little bit about this and any thoughts you might have on this, but also the kind of the broader question 25 years later, has the United States and the West lost focus on the counterterrorism fight?

We've, we've talked about these resilient networks that are quite pragmatic. They're independently, financially independent. They've been... We can talk a little bit about their ability to tap into technology, whether it's crypto, AI, as we've been -- We, my colleague and I at The New York Times wrote a piece about Boko Haram, possibly one of the first using AI to help in its tactical operations, not just intelligence. But, but maybe we can kind of pick up the conversation now about have we, has the US, and, and because of maybe some of this fracturing, lost the edge, and we're not gonna be as prepared as whatever that next 9/11 might be?

FELBAB-BROWN: Well, look, even before the Trump administration, you know, during the Biden administration, and Trump won, in the end of the Obama administration, the US foreign policy was really grappling with how to right-size the counterterrorism focus. It was

President Obama in his second term who wanted to get out of Afghanistan. And had the, ISIS not been on the step of Baghdad, very likely the US forces in Afghanistan at the end of 2014 would be 1,000 soldiers guarding the US Embassy. So like Tricia said, there is no doubt that focus on Russia as a co-destroyer of the order and China as the rising power and major challenges to the United States needs to be part of it.

I argued during the Biden administration that we need to have far more focus on Mexico than we were having. But not just the flows of fentanyl to the United States, but the takeover of large parts of the country's territory, institutions, economies, elections by dangerous drug trafficking groups that are spreading around the world. The Mexican cartels are in Europe, they are in Africa, they are in Asia, they are in Latin America, clashing with Chinese criminal groups or supporting and cooperating with them. So the issue, however, is you understand that something is a priority one, two, three, however you rank it in any given time.

What are the tools that one applies to it? And what worries me most is that we are just so narrowing the approach to essentially kick down the door, shoot military policy only. The Trump administration liquidated investments in preventing violent extremism, countering violent extremism. Look, many of the programs were not great. They were not terribly effective. Did they need to be reformed? Yes. But to just say, no law enforcement, no justice processes, forget investment in socioeconomic structural issues, it's going to be this narrow tool only, this is one of the things that worries me most.

And second is indeed the collapse of the international consensus. That didn't exist on September 12th. Pakistan was sponsoring and continues to be sponsoring anti-India groups, and they were sponsoring the Taliban. How many times did those of us who work on Afghanistan and Pakistan wonder when will Pakistan, will it ever stop its support for the Taliban and its empowerment of killing of US soldiers?

Saudi Arabia, the day after 9/11, was the country from which Osama bin Laden originated. Saudi policy was to sponsor Wahhabism around the world. It took a lot of time for Saudi Arabia to rehabilitate its image after the time. But that emerged out of sustained US leadership to create that counterterrorism structure, its money, counter-finance facet. That is gone.

And it's not just that the actors in Mogadishu are not coordinated. They are directly working against each other. They are picking up militias, actors, supporters, political actors. And frankly, the same thing, and I end on that, is happening in the organized crime space. So it used to be that one man's terrorist was another man's freedom fighter, but someone's criminal was everyone's criminal. That too is gone.

SCHMITT: Fonteh, in Africa, where, where, what are you seeing? I know obviously you covered the-- covering the Sahel, we've seen the withdrawal of the United States. We've seen the pulling back of the French. Question, can the African Union or are there other mechanisms step? Or is this, as you were referring to in some of your earlier comments, kind of the weakness of some of these, these governments, it's just gonna get worse?

AKUM : So in many of the epicenter countries where we see terrorism on the African continent, it is an existential threat. And because of this existential threat, we have seen the emergence of ad hoc security arrangements to effectively address, degrade them without completely eliminating them, and in this process, we have seen the emergence of some heuristic approaches.

For example, the elaboration of the Lake Chad Basin stabilization strategy, which was meant to not only serve a regional, - as a regional framework, but effectively address Boko Haram in Nigeria. However, we have also seen the limitations of these approaches that combine sort of Operation Safe Corridor, which is about DDR processes for ex-Boko Haram associates with military pressure from the multinational joint task force and development interventions to boot.

The second is with this sort of relative withdrawal from, from Africa of the US, we have seen a disappearance of an aspect of this response which was really important. The Department of Justice used to do a lot of work behind the scenes to actually coordinate policing and judiciary police units with, among the countries that were facing terrorism, largely because the problem was a regional problem that was often trying to be solved through a national prism. And so the Department of Justice was connecting some of those dots to allow for information sharing across borders, but to also create frameworks for joint interventions by policing services, and that is gone at the moment.

The third is we've got to acknowledge the implications of the coups in the Sahel as well, and the ways in which they have basically altered the landscape through which you can actually provide the support that's needed to those countries. So it's a changing landscape, which at the end of the day has also led to the fracture of ECOWAS itself. And not that ECOWAS was the foremost responder on terrorism in West Africa, but when you have terrorism spanning the ECOWAS region, Nigeria and Niger on one side, and the ECCAS region on the other, Cameroon and Chad, it necessitates thinking through innovative mechanisms.

Unfortunately, three gaps exist. The first is a capability gap, not only on the security front, but to address the economics of violence and to make them actually spread out to cover the entire supply chain of financing, of terrorist groups. The second gap that exists, it's a coordination one. At the end of the day, most of those mechanisms have ended up at bilateral squabbles in implementation. And the third gap that exists is coordination. So what happens when you arrest a Cameroonian in Nigeria for terrorist charges? What are the extradition treaties? How do you process them? Do they serve their jail term in Nigeria or in Cameroon? A lot of those gaps do exist, including one which speaks to a political solution because in many of those countries, it's increasingly being touted, the necessity to actually negotiate their way out of the current terrorist violence that they are facing.

SCHMITT: We- we've got about five minutes left in our discussion. We're gonna go to a lightning round. I'm gonna ask each of you, in one minute or less, to kind of give me what you're looking at as your kind of top priorities in the next, next 6 to 12 months. And since this has been such a sobering discussion, I want one of them to be somewhat hopeful, if you can pull one of those out.

Fonteh, I'm gonna start with you down at that end. We'll just come right down here. I'll give you a minute. No, just quick, whatever you're kind of really looking at 6 to 12 months out. And audience, take notes, 'cause we're gonna hold these guys accountable here.

AKUM: Well, we're looking at regional and global guardrails against new technological uses in terrorist spaces.

SCHMITT: Okay.

FELBAB-BROWN: Will JNIM take significant territories in Mali.

FELTMAN: What will happen to the Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq after September 30th when the US troops have left and the Iraqi prime minister has said they must disarm, and there's signs that some are willing and signs that some are not?

BACON: I'm gonna take my full minute to answer this question. I'm half joking, but I do want to just take the moment that I do have to talk specifically about al-Qaida. This is something I'm thinking about a lot, and I think in this moment, we, we need to spend some oxygen on it.

This is an organization that just turned about 40. It's middle-aged, basically, right? And it's a hopeful story, and it's a cautionary story. This is clearly not the group it was 25 years ago. What is it now? It, it is much more powerful through its affiliates in, in Africa, we've talked about today. But the core organization itself, there's, there's sort of a duality to it. It has reverted to a position as a force multiplier, where it is helping other organizations with their capability and serving that support role, which in a lot of ways is a reversion to what it was before, without bin Laden's money, which is not a small loss for it.

But it's simultaneously an organization that doesn't have an emir. And I say the word emir specifically. It's got a de facto leader. A de facto leader is not an emir. And in a religious organization like this that's trying to inspire, that's trying to lead, the absence of that kind of leadership is actually an important counter-terrorism success in some ways. So it's a mixed picture on the al-Qaida piece of it. It still has this haven in Afghanistan. It still has a function within the movement. It's not the leader it once was. And so I'm continuing to watch and think about that piece of it.

FELBAB-BROWN: And I think for our audience, the leadership is believed to be in Iran, however.

BACON: And that maybe is another point that's worth sort of touching at this moment, 'cause that's part of the reversion to the 1990s. We have al-Qaida's leader, de facto leader, is in Iran. We have al-Shabaab cooperating with the Houthis. In the 1990s, we saw al-Qaida train with Hezbollah, interact with Iran. So this cross-sectarian cooperation is by no means new to al-Qaida, but it's an interesting return to it, and there's a lot of, I think, threats that can emanate from that collaboration, that Jeff, you may also have a view on.

FELTMAN: No, I, I agree 100%. And I think that there's a, that sometimes people describe this as sort of a, a hub and spoke. You know, that there's Iran in the manner with spokes out to these different groups. Or, you know, there's an emir with spokes. It's more of a web, with all these groups sort of interacting at various, at various levels now, which is harder to go after.

SCHMITT: Yeah, exactly. So we have some microphones in the audience. Why don't we start in the back. Gentleman on the... There, in the beard. Yes.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Hello. Thank you so much. I was wondering if you could talk a bit more about guardrails in technology, especially in regards to cryptocurrency and AI changing both how terror is financed and also increasing their capabilities.

FELBAB-BROWN: Want to start? I can perhaps take the first step. So crypto is woefully under-regulated. We see a wide variety of nefarious actors using cryptocurrencies for everything, from cyber scams in Mexico, not just in Asia, to terrorist activities, to evading US sanctions. There is urgent need to regulate cryptocurrencies much strongly than is the case

today. They are not subject to the same requirements that formal banking institutions are. You can think that those systems in the banking sector are perhaps not sufficient, have not produced great result in evading money laundering, but they are much stronger than what we see in crypto.

And in terms of the diffusion of other technologies, the use of drones, not just aerial drones, marine drones, drones that are weaponized, this is picking up at an extraordinary speed. The, the criminal groups and terrorist groups are using AI, not just for tactics, but I think increasingly to rethink strategy. And just like everything else, that is, it might be there are huge changes in the way where terrorists and criminal groups, non-state armed actors, will have the capacity to conduct a very lethal attacks very far away with very few people and very limited resources. Potentially being able to turn everyday common items into mechanisms of attack. So much decreased labor, much less decreased need of territory five years, 10 years down the road.

FELTMAN: Well, and look at the, and look at the localized production in places like Yemen and places like, like Lebanon now, Hezbollah. But okay, Hezbollah lost its land bridge to Iran, but they're producing their own, their own stuff with things that they can just buy, you know, buy at the store.

FELBAB-BROWN: And the Houthis are apparently tapping into Claude to improve their missiles.

AKUM: Yeah. And on the African front, I'll just add that we need to pay closer attention as well to the possibilities and responses to cyberattacks, which are likely to get on most of those terror, terror groups' radars as well.

And second, the retrofitting of commercial off-the-shelf, un-armed aerial vehicles as factors for surveillance, but also to coordinate attacks. So those are absolutely important and they necessitate multiple levels of regulation.

SCHMITT: In the back with the hat. Yes.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Hey, good afternoon. I have a question particularly for Tricia.

SCHMITT: Can, can you just speak a little more directly into-

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Sure. Yeah, so, just, the new information just yesterday, al-Qaida just published a video and that shows this Hamza bin Laden, he's in Afghanistan. And they're saying they're gonna continue. And he had this attire, like local attire, so I don't know how accurate it is, but they want to say that he is in Afghanistan.

But my question would be, like, don't you think our foreign policy, particularly the new conservative foreign policy, kinda contributed to rise of some of those terrorist groups in Middle East, particularly in Afghanistan and Iraq? Because when we invaded Iraq and Afghanistan, there was only two and three terrorist groups. But now in Afghanistan, more than, like in 2014, there were 14 or 16 terrorist groups. We didn't had ISIS in Iraq, but they kinda rised after our being there. So don't you think our presence there kinda contributed to the rise of those terrorist groups?

BACON: So on the question of the video with Hamza bin Laden, there are a couple questions in the terrorism field that, that if you asked five different experts, you'd get five different answers. There's nothing about that video that shows that Hamza bin Laden is alive today. There, they have him in the video. He doesn't make any references that are contemporary. There's nothing... So he's there. The US said he was killed in 2019. There are some people who think he's still alive and in Afghanistan, and that video doesn't do anything one way or the other to prove it or disprove it. There's also footage of Zawahiri, and I'm pretty confident on that one that he's not alive anymore.

But I understand why they need to hold these figures up, because they don't have a contemporary one to do so. It's one of the most interesting pieces of the Sunni jihadist environment right now. There are no leaders who have cross-organizational appeal. There are some pretty effective leaders at the organizational level, but there's no bin Laden, there's no al-Baghdadi, there's no figures that have that sort of transcendent appeal, and that's a important absence within the movement. And so I think that that's a, that is part of what al-Qaida's trying to capture with that video.

On your second much more loaded question, what I would say is, and I don't think any counterterrorism analyst would disagree with this. The US war in Afghanistan was the most disastrous counter- from a counterterrorism perspective of any action. The implications of that war still reverberate now and were absolutely incredibly damaging from a counterterrorism perspective. That is very, very clear, and I think that that is perhaps the least controversial component of what you, you were asking about.

FELBAB-BROWN: Did you mean Afghanistan or Iraq?

BACON: Iraq. What did I say?

FELTMAN: Afghanistan.

BACON: Oh, geez. Yeah. And they were like, "We would really like to disagree with her." I beg your pardon. Yeah. Thank you, Vanda, for, for correcting me on, on that. No, I, I absolutely meant the invasion of Iraq. And I was in the counterterrorism community at the time, and I can remember sort of the deep breath everyone took because there was a, a recognition that things were about to get a lot worse, and they in fact did.

SCHMITT: Yes, sir. In the front row.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: I was curious. We see the AFD in Germany, we see other right-wing parties in Europe. Do they have any common philosophy on counterterrorism?

FELBAB-BROWN:: Well, I can... So, the common philosophy is that migrants coming from Muslim countries are the core problem, and that they should be expelled, and that they should be removed, and they should be stopped. then it gets more complicated because a lot of the far-right parties in Europe are closely supportive of Russia. And, you know, we speak of Russia's actions in Europe as hybrid terrorism, but they could be called state-sponsored terrorism. This is recruiting organized crime groups to conduct sabotage attacks, attempts to assassinate, industrial leaders in productions, variety of threats. You know, if we were speaking about Iran, we would be calling this state-sponsored terrorism. In the case of Russia, we speak about a hybrid warfare, yet many of the far-right parties are quite close to Putin, and often visiting Moscow and echoing talking points of Russia.

We see also far-right governments emerging across Latin America, and they are, you know, closely allied with the Trump administration. They are part of the Shield of Americas, the new coalition that the Trump administration has developed in Latin America. And, you know, for them, again, the highly militarized approach toward dealing with criminal groups whom they label terrorist organization is a common thread, common theme. That's an essence.

As is a very strong position on migration. The new president of Colombia, President de la Espriella has announced that Colombia is going to expel all the Venezuelan refugees. This creates interesting tensions for the administration that is closely collaborating, one would say dictating terms, to the Delcy Rodriguez government in Venezuela. They don't want all those refugees to, or all those migrants to come back 'cause they cannot employ them, and they are providing vital remittances. So a bit of an interesting tension there. Also accepting deportations from the United States, so the immigration agenda is closely linked to the drugs and terrorism agenda in the Latin American space as well.

SCHMITT: Yes. Right on the corner here.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Hi, my name's Asia, Asia Buckham. I am a former BBC World News journalist and a Chatham House Common Futures Conversation fellow. My question is very specific about the future of war in foreign states and surveillance. I'm curious to know, do you all believe that in the future we will see wars and bases, specifically sites, excuse me, areas where there's no need for military personnel, so aircraft hosting drones to surveillance and to attack foreign threats? Will we see wars where there are no men or women on the ground?

SCHMITT: Robotics in the theater. Anybody want to tackle that?

BACON: I guess, I don't think I have an answer to that. But I think my initial reaction to it is probably not no men and women on the ground, but the need for men and women to be in, and personnel to be in harm's way will be diminished by those kinds of technologies. But so will some of the moral dilemmas will rise at the same time. But I'm not sure how far out we would have to look to a war that didn't have any of that kind of ground presence. I think that's further around the corner than, than it might seem right now given the rapid adaptation of, of technology.

So I, I don't think we're, we're gonna see that anytime soon. But I do agree with you that there is more and more wars that can be conducted without a presence on the ground.

AKUM : Well, using a real example, you'd need to look at the proxy war between Russia and France in the Sahel, which has taken place largely within the realm of misinformation, influencing, and disinformation as well, where Russia's not had to have a huge outlay of investment on the ground to displace the military relationship that the Sahel countries enjoyed with France.

And I think we are likely to see a ramping up of such influencing campaigns using new technologies. And of course it necessitates a combination of soft power, diplomatic engagements, and the deployment of Africa Corps, as we have seen, to make that happen. But less and less huge aircraft carriers and fleets out there doing that work. Thanks.

Vanda Felbab-Brown: Yeah, I would add one element to it, which is what I think is even more troubling, is the extent to which human decision-making will be removed from

battlegrounds. So, you know, whether you have zero people on the ground or not, whether you have 10,000 fighters or 5 sicarios and 10,000 drones, I mean, will we be in a situation where even non-state armed actors such as criminal group will send off a drone and say, "Here is a picture of someone. Go kill that person," and let autonomous system make the decision, and the human will at some point become irrelevant, and it'll be depend... it will be really up to the machine for days, weeks, months hunting for that person or the target and, and making the decision to kill or not kill. Yeah. That, to me, is really the, the frontier of where we are heading.

SCHMITT: All the way in the black with the glasses.

I'm sorry. Whoever was - yeah, go ahead

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Oh, thank you very much. I had a question that just came to me, you know, right now thinking about the leader of Syria, the current president, al-Jolani. And I was thinking, you know, here we have an exceptional case where we have a former member of ISIS, a former member of al-Qaida, who, you know, becomes ascendant in a major country in the Middle East, and we have an American administration that takes a very pragmatic, we could say, approach, and decides to remove sanctions on Syria and, you know, de-lists al-Jolani from the terrorist list, like, watchlist.

And I was wondering, my question is, how do, how should American and, you know, European policymakers make the determination as to whether to work with, potentially, you know, leaders that have, like, a Islamist past? You know, say, "Okay, well, they're moderating, you know, they're more pragmatic now. We should engage this country and try to kind of rebuild civil society there." And when should we say, you know, "Oh, okay, we, we really have to be careful here, you know, these people are, like, this, this is kind of like a charade, you know, to mask, like, Islamism"? I, I'm thinking of, like, the 1979 Iranian Revolution, you know, where we had Khomeini, and some of the Carter administration people had thought that, "Oh, maybe, you know, he's more moderate, you know, maybe you can work with this person," and, you know, that turned out to be wrong.

So, that's my general question. Maybe a bit, you know, too expansive, but, you know.

SCHMITT: Jeff, that sounds like a, in your wheelhouse.

FELTMAN: And the Reagan administration with the, with the Iranian regime, too, one can, one should mention.

On, on Syria. I, I don't think it's clear yet where Syria is going to end up. And you've got Syria also being at the frontline between the Israeli-Turkish competition right now for the region. And so the, it's, the future of Syria is not fully in the, in Syria's hands right now, given the, given that it's kind of a plaything between Ankara and Jerusalem right now.

But I think that the -- my Brookings colleagues will, will be surprised to hear me say this, but I think I, I support the Trump administration's attempt to engage him. I think that this was the right policy choice. Had we not moved to lift sanctions, ease sanctions on, on Syria that were put in place because of the Assad regime and, and support of terrorism, we would've definitely helped contribute to the collapse of Syria. It's not clear that lifting sanctions will lead to great success, but it gives the, it gives the Syrian people a chance.

And, you know, I have question marks myself about al-Sharaa, but he's saying and doing the right things in terms of his relations with the, with the region. Look at, look at the trying to - look at the Syria and Lebanese relationship. You've got, you've got a Christian president of Lebanon who fought the, who fought the Islamists in, when he was army commander, jailed Islamists when he was army commander, now dealing with a Syrian president that comes from that, and vice versa. You know, the, the, you have a Syrian president that's dealing with the Christian Lebanese. So I think that we need to give Syria a chance and, and al-Sharaa a chance, while being cautious and remind ourselves that sanctions can always be reimposed.

SCHMITT: I think we're out of time, but I wanted to invite the audience to join us outside in the break, and there's also gonna be another terrific panel after that, on the 9/11 impact, implications of 9/11 on domestic and foreign policy.

But please join me in a round of applause for our, our terrific panelists. Thank you.

SISSON: I don't have a gavel, yeah. Give me the glass. Hello, everybody. Hi, welcome. My name is Melanie Sisson. I'm senior fellow at the Strobe Talbott Center for Security, Strategy and Technology here at the Brookings Institution. Thank you very much for joining us today.

This is, of course, a day of remembrance and also of reflection. It's an opportunity to honor those lost and to grapple with the choices our nation made in the aftermath of tragedy. That requires taking a comprehensive look at the post 9/11 era, and that's what we'll do here today with this Brookings team you see assembled here: Bill Galston, Mara Karlin, Ben Harris, Suzanne Maloney and Bob Kagan. Their impressive bios and links to their scholarship are, of course, available on the Brookings website.

One of the choices the United States made after 9/11 was to go to war, first in Afghanistan, and then in Iraq. And the human costs of those wars have been enormous. The Cost of War project at Brown University estimates that more than 900,000 people were killed across Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen and Pakistan, and that more than 3 million died not from direct violence, but from the conditions created by that violence. Over 7,000 US service members died, and tens of thousands more were wounded or injured. The total financial cost to the United States has been estimated at around \$8 trillion, but this doesn't fully capture the fiscal effects.

So Ben, let's, let's start with you. We now have public debt above 100% of GDP and annual interest costs that are greater than the defense budget. How much of that do you attribute to the post 9/11 wars, and how much to other fiscal choices the nation has made over the last 25 years?

HARRIS: Thanks, Melanie. And, and thanks to Mike for organizing this terrific event. Let me just say, usually... I've been at this stage a lot over my career. I was here on 9/11. I was a research assistant. But usually when I, I talk, I kind of know the answers. I had to study a lot and reflect for this particular event. And it's a great question, you know, would we be in the debt situation we are now if not for 9/11?

And just so, some brief history. So heading into 2001, the United States was in a pretty good fiscal position. Our debt to GDP ratio had peaked, had a kind of a local peak in 1995 of around 47%. It had declined to about 37... sorry, 42%. It declined to about 32% in 2001. So things looked really good. But the reason for that was because we had these deficit reduction packages in 1990, 1993, 1997. We had increased productivity because of the

internet expansion, the dot com explosion, and also the peace dividend. So things were looking really good from a fiscal standpoint.

2001 came, and you had this inflection point. So rather than the debt decreasing, we saw the debt to GDP ratio increasing. And so the right way to look about it is if we're sitting here in January 2001 talking about Congressional Budget Office projections, we would say, "In six years or so, we think the debt to GDP ratio is going to be about 8%."

There was actually in 2001, a conference here at Brookings, and we wondered on this stage, what's going to happen if Treasury doesn't issue any debt, how will financial markets work? And, and what a terrific problem that would've been.

But, so the right question is... So from about 2001 to about 2007, rather than having a debt to GDP ratio go down to 8%, like CBO had projected, the debt to GDP ratio stayed mostly stagnant and went up to 35%. So the question is, why? And the answer for that period is probably not 9/11. So at that time, we had passed, in 2001, EGTRRA, which was a sweeping tax cut that was bipartisan. We had, in 2001, JGTRRA, which is a follow-up to that, which accelerated those tax cuts, and also put in place further cuts to investment income. We had the introduction of Medicare Part D. We had the bursting of the dot com bubble. We were actually in a recession when 9/11 happened. It happened to be the shallowest recession in modern US history. It was over by November. And so we had all these things happening which contributed to the change in debt that were really outside of that, that horrible day in September 25 years ago.

The recession owing to 9/11 was very short and localized in New York. I think the Federal Reserve deserves numerous credit. We can talk about that later. But then what happened after 2007 was that the debt began to accelerate again. And over the next six years, we went from around 35% debt to GDP up to 72%. And some of that was due to military spending. You cite the \$8 trillion figure coming out of Brown. And so I think it's, it's probably, just to kind of conclude here, I think from a debt perspective, for the initial six years or so after 9/11, it was probably unlikely that that trajectory was due very much to the aftermath. But if you take a longer perspective, 12 years or so, the increased military spending certainly played a role.

The real legacy, I'm not sure how big a deal it is, is the nature of military spending became increasingly supplemental. And so the last thing I'll say is that if you look back over the history of DOD spending, it was almost always included in, in normal appropriations. Prior wars, you'd see some of it be through emergency spending. So for example, during the Vietnam War, 6% of DOD spending was through supplemental appropriations. If you look at the period after 9/11 or so, the average emergency spending as a share of total defense spending was around 17%. So the process for allocating spending certainly changed, in addition to the level of, of spending. But overall, the debt story is due to so much more than, than 9/11.

SISSON: Well, the debt wasn't the only thing that expanded over the last 25 years. Treasury's role in national security also changed substantially. Remind us what happened institutionally, and if you could tell us a little bit, in, in your view, you know, how did that change for Treasury affect its relationship with State and DOD, and particularly when it comes to things like turf and, and coordination on the use of economic statecraft?

HARRIS: Yeah, so I, I'm gonna be a little biased here because I served the Biden administration as assistant treasury secretary and, and spent a lot of time with the sanctions

on Russia. But this was such an important inflection point for the role of Treasury in policymaking from a couple different standpoints.

I mean, one, Treasury was sort of the home to, you know, the badge and gun type of enforcement. You had, Customs was there, you had Social Security, you had ATF. After 9/11, Customs and the Secret Service... Did I say Social Security? Customs and the Secret Service went to DHS, ATF in 2003 went to DOJ.

But Treasury had this newfound scope when it came to basically economic statecraft. And so the way I look at it, there were sort of four big developments. One was the role of OFAC, the Office of Foreign Asset Control. OFAC, prior to 9/11, had largely been focused on state actors, and immediately after 9/11, their remit was expanded to non-state actors and, and terrorism groups that didn't, that did not belong to a formal state. So you had an expansion of their scope.

The second change, and this was a big one, was this was sort of the start of the modern financial compliance, a system where before you would have, if the United States issued sanctions, they would basically say, "Country X can no longer have access to US banking system." After 9/11, and fairly quickly after 9/11, that switched to saying, "Not only can country X no longer have access to the official banking system, and no longer can stateless actor X no longer have access to the US dollar, but anyone doing business with actor X can no longer have access to the US financial system." And this had sweeping repercussions for banks. I mean, it really is the beginning part of the modern compliance system, where now we were asking the financial institutions around the world to start screening their customers, to start reporting suspicious activity to OFAC, and to really be a partner in, in the war on terrorism. That was a really big change.

So the third big change was that Treasury became, became part of the intelligence community. I don't think you could reasonably claim that Treasury had a seat at the table before 9/11. Now Treasury has the new OIA office, has its own intelligence infrastructure. Treasury is truly a part of the intelligence community after 9/11 that became formalized later with the Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence. But the effective role at the table happened pretty quickly in 2001.

And so the really big change, outside of changing modern financial compliance, is that Treasury is now home to economic statecraft for the United States, and this happens at a time when economic statecraft is increasingly used as a tool. So just counting number of sanctions, 2001 was around 972, I think. That increased by 1,000% over the next 20 years. And so the use of economic statecraft was intensified, and it was housed in Treasury.

And so just thinking about it, when I was at Treasury and we were putting in place, for example, a price cap on Russian oil, and we did it in a matter of months, if not weeks. The idea was conceived, tested, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This never could have happened in the year 2000. We would not have had the diplomacy and the, the diplomatic chops to fly around the world, which, you know, me and my colleagues did, and negotiate a price cap. We never would have had the analytical infrastructure to do so, and we sure wouldn't have had the remit to go ahead and start sanctioning thousands of entities. Well, hundreds of tankers and thousands of entities that were involved in the trade of Russian energy.

So, you know, this changed a lot, Melanie, and I don't think I actually realized that until I had an opportunity to study for this, this event. So, thank you.

SISSON: Well, you did well. I think you passed the test.

Bill, when you reflect back on the last 25 years and think about other changes to the institutions of our government, what do you think about in terms of an enduring legacy, whether it's institutional relationships or just the actual structures of our government?

GALSTON: Well, like Ben, when I heard about the questions you were gonna ask me, you know, I had an initial moment of panic followed by an extended period of reflection.

And it's been --

KAGAN: The other way around, Bill.

GALSTON: Speak for yourself, Robert. And here in brief, and I mean in brief, are my conclusions. Number one, the most important institutional and constitutional development of the past quarter century since 9/11 has been an unprecedented growth of executive power. And when you think about it for a minute, that is not so hard to explain. And here's why. Throughout human history, in times of conflict and outright war, executive power has always increased because war calls for more of the qualities that the executive has and fewer of the qualities that other kinds of institutions have. And people are willing to accept those trade-offs in the name of security and victory.

And to illustrate just how old this phenomenon is, I will take you back to the biblical Book of Samuel, okay? And the people are only semi-organized into tribes, and they get together and come to, to Samuel, you know, who is a prophet and their spiritual leader, and says, "We want a king." And Samuel gives a very interesting and intelligent reply, "Really? Here's what a king is gonna do to you." And then he goes through a long litany of abuses of executive power, which categorically are very familiar to all of us, including taxation, you know, military draft, abuse of power, et cetera, et cetera. And the people say, in effect, "We don't care. We want someone to lead us into battle to secure victory and to keep us safe."

Okay, why does that matter in the 9/11 context? Because we have been mostly at war for the past 25 years. And that has had with... you know, that has expanded the executive with American as opposed to, you know, Hebraic characteristics, but the basic, the basic phenomenon is the same.

Now, next point. You might say, well, this has happened over the supine body of Congress. And to some extent, that's true. You know, for much of this period, Congress has been dysfunctional, but let us not forget that in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, this organized expansion of executive power was done with the full cooperation of Congress. You know, we had, of course, you know, the AUMF, you know, for both Afghanistan and then Iraq. We had the creation of the Department of Homeland Security. You know, we had the reorganization of intelligence. We had the Patriot Act. And we had a continuation of the relentless expansion and proliferation of emergency powers. A long-term phenomenon, but which continued, indeed accelerated during this period, so that we now have more than 130 separate congressional grants of emergency power to the president with no time limits, no sunset clauses, no nothing. And in many, many of these emergency powers are very generally drafted, and they will be used and often abused in times of, in times of war and conflict.

Final point, and this was an accident of the immediate 9/11 period. It coincided with the entrance into government of representatives of the legal community who believed very strongly, not only in the unitary executive theory, but also in the case of a man I've debated three times in the past six months, John Yoo, the proposition that it was perfectly constitutional for the executive, the president, to take us to war without congressional authorization. Congressional authorization is nice, sometimes useful politically, but it is not legally or constitutionally necessary. And that idea has lurked in our government ever since, and I would say it has been manifested most recently in, you know, in the Iraq War, where there have been only the feeblest gestures towards, towards congressional authorization.

SISSON: The Iran war, yeah.

KAGAN: Do you mean the Iran war?

GALSTON: Iran. Iran War. Yeah. I'm sorry. Iran War. In the previous, in the previous panel, one of the panelists confused in Iraq and Iran or Iraq and Afghanistan, and I just repeated that mistake. But I think now that we've dwelled on the mistake—

SISSON: It's Friday.

GALSTON: --the point will perhaps, you know, still linger. And so that is, you know, that's my sort of three-step answer to your question.

SISSON: So you described very well the, that, that a lot of this consolidation emerged as a response to the really emotional experience that many people had living through the attacks of 9/11, and the desire for security thereafter. And you described emergency powers and unusual authorizations. They're still with us. Part of the explanation you, you just forwarded was that it's because we've been at war for so many of the intervening years.

My question for you is about the general population. Is your sense that the general population felt during this period, you know, consistently that we were at war, and so these authorizations and powers were still necessary, and even more now that we needed a strong, strongman leader with that, that unitary executive kind of power? Or do you think that's waxed and waned?

GALSTON: It has waxed and waned, but if you ask me during this period of pell-mell institutional construction and creativity, was it backed by the American people? And the answer is surely yes, right? And I would, I would say that things began to turn when the Iraq War did not meet public expectations.

And, you know, there's a long story here, but, you know, to make it brief, American public opinion, you know, towards the end of George W. Bush's first term turned emphatically against the war, you know, even though it had been modestly supportive at, at the start. But that put pressure on the Bush administration to change policy, which it did, although not in the expected direction.

But it did nothing to dismantle the new institutional structures that had been created. And, you know, and what we're seeing now is what can happen when this mighty instrument, you know, the, you know, Department of Homeland Security can be deployed for new, unanticipated, and to many of us, unwelcome purposes

SISSON: Mara, the war, the, the wars during the period that Bill was just discussing are not just discrete wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It was a global war on terror. And the Department of Defense had to sustain it globally against non-state actors on a scale and duration that had never previously done. When you look back, what do you think are the most deeply entrenched changes that that construct introduced into the department?

KARLIN: Yeah, absolutely. Thank you for convening us for this fascinating panel, Melanie. There are four that really jumped out at me.

So the first is purpose. You know, the '90s were kind of a curious time in the global security environment and for the US military to kind of figure out what was it doing. Mogadishu, Balkans, what's, what's it supposed to be doing? And then the 9/11 attacks happen, and its purpose feels very clear. Now, to be sure, that doesn't mean everyone buys it, including the Secretary of Defense at the time, Don Rumsfeld, who did not wanna prioritize what was, you know, the response to the, the 9/11 attacks. But it, it, it sort of filled the oxygen, I think, in the Department of Defense and gave it a purpose.

The second piece is the, this tension became very, very loud between how you think about today's wars and future wars throughout the last 25 years, and, you know, how do you source them? What do you do about the people? How do you preserve the readiness of your platforms and assets or use them? And there are all these moments in the last 25 years where this gets really, really intense.

I think the most spectacular is 2014. The Pentagon comes out with a strategy in March or so and says, "We're going to focus on the future. Future wars, it's going to be about the Indo-Pacific." And with a few, within not even days, Russia has taken Crimea, and within about two months, ISIS is running all over Iraq and Syria. And so that tension gets, gets even more real. I think it's a tension we feel again after the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and then again, in, post the October 7th Hamas attack. So kind of thinking about that, that tension, how do you think about today's challenges? What about tomorrow's?

There's sort of a bureaucratic piece that's really meaningful as well. You get the rise of those who think about today. So this is the combatant commanders, the folks in the Pentagon whose job it is to think about what about today's wars? What if we have to fight something else tonight? They become serious bureaucratic actors, right? They're the most popular ones, always at the front of the table. And as you can imagine, that probably doesn't always make strategic sense because they're only seeing the world through that aperture.

And then the last piece are all these frameworks that the Department of Defense has to develop about how it is going to tackle the post-9/11 wars, who it is going to focus on. So there's theories, right? What does it look like to deal with counterterrorism? Can counterinsurgency be one? I will note on the latter, there's this fascinating thing where the military becomes very focused on how the Brits and the French did this and doesn't actually look at its own history, which if you have an idea of how the Brits and French did it, they're not necessarily models you would wanna follow.

So that would be this idea of sort of, these theories, and then who, who do you focus on, right? Is Pakistan an enemy, right? There are a number of years after the post-9/11 wars where the US military is trying to work very, very closely with Pakistan while it is simultaneously helping to kill American service members in Afghanistan. How widely do you focus on adversaries? Is this a sort of al-Qaida? Does Hezbollah fit into this? How do we understand it as well?

So I think those are sort of the four that jump out the most. You know, really thinking about the, the purpose, the prioritization of today versus the future, the bureaucratic dynamics and how that, of course, affects strategy and resources, and then the frameworks that animate folks.

SISSON: Well, it's not just Bill and Ben who cheated on the test for today. I also cheated a little bit on the test. I know that you've thought very deeply, not just about the war fighting implications of, of our approach and reaction to the attacks on 9/11, but you also care very much about the people who serve in the institution, in the Department of Defense, and how well it works.

And you, in fact, this is the part where I cheated on the test, is you published a great book in 2022 called *The Inheritance*. And in the book, you described a department in three crises: a crisis of confidence, a crisis of caring, and a crisis of meaningful civilian control. Is the military still in any one or all three of these crises? And if so, which is the most acute?

KARLIN: Oh, gosh, yes, absolutely. I mean, this book was an attempt to figure out the legacies of the longest wars that our military had, had ever fought. And I think all three are real. The third is probably the most acute.

So the crisis of confidence, right? You've got folks going back and back to the same battlefields in Iraq and Afghanistan, and they're really losing sight, for understandable reasons, of what is their purpose. So their purpose becomes incredibly tactical. Don't die. Take care of your troops, right? Really not understanding, what am I trying to achieve? And I think that that absolutely still is deep in the minds of a lot of folks in the, in the senior US military who feel like they did not achieve a victory. And I, when you look at Afghanistan, that is a compelling argument. Iraq's a little bit more complicated of a picture.

The crisis of caring is also real. One half of 1% of Americans serve in the US military. Our public was asked to do absolutely nothing after 9/11. We didn't pay more taxes. We weren't asked to go serve. So you had profound public disinterest for much of these wars. What I've been wondering a lot is, is the current Iran war changing that crisis of caring at all? Not least because people are feeling it in their pocketbooks, so we have to pay a little bit more attention.

But the crisis that I think is the most acute is this crisis of meaningful civilian control, right? What does it look like among the most senior military and political leaders who are trying to make decisions about how to go to war and how to wage war? And what you're seeing in the Iran war right now is unfortunately a really spectacular case study. I mean, you're seeing the military taking a very, very circumscribed role, right? Just the facts, ma'am. All I do is tell you options. I, I don't really do much beyond that. I think that's really problematic and dangerous.

And, you know, you have at best a very non-traditional secretary of defense who has brought along a whole bunch of very non-traditional people as well to advise him and try to manifest civilian control. So I think these crises continue to be real. We inherited them from the post-9/11 wars, and unfortunately they continue to grow.

SISSON: Suzanne, thanks for joining us to talk a little bit about the Middle East then and today, and in particular about Iran. When you look back, what do you think was the most important change, I'm sure there were many, but the most important change that our

reaction to the 9/11 attacks introduced into our relationship with Iran, specifically our Iran policy?

MALONEY: Sure. Well, thanks, Melanie, and thanks for this phenomenal panel, which I am somewhat humbled to be a part of. But for me, what I really wanna do is go back to something that Governor Moore said in his conversation with Mike O'Hanlon in an earlier part of this event, which was just that, it was not just a moment in the immediate aftermath of the attacks where there was a rallying of Americans around, around the idea of being Americans and around a sense of, of deep patriotism, but it really was a rallying of the world in sympathy on our behalf, and that didn't just extend to our friends and partners.

Mike talked about Japan, the governor talked about his experience in the UK. It, it actually also extended to our adversaries as well. And so on the, on the evening after the attacks, I had, at that point had, had spent over the course of the previous couple of years, about six months in Iran as a student and visiting for academic events, and I received a barrage of calls from people in Iran on my very old-fashioned flip phone, trying to ensure that I was okay. And that included people in, in, you know, affiliated organizations of the government, which one would not presume to be sympathetic to the United States. And, and that reaction didn't just play out with people who had happened to meet the one random grad student who had been stumbling around the country over the course of the past couple years. It extended to many, many Iranians, and it reflected, I think, a deep sympathy on the part of many across the world with what the United States had experienced, but also with just what the ideals of this country have always promised, and, and the extent that American culture has contributed to change around the world.

And so you saw a sort of, a memorial candlelight vigil that took place in Tehran. You heard the Iranian president, then someone with, who was known as a reformist, who was trying to at least introduce some degree of liberalism within the system, express condolences and condemn the attacks. And, and so, you know, that wasn't just rhetoric. It actually did extend to direct cooperation for the first time between the US and Iran since the revolution. I would argue, you know, certainly the deepest diplomatic engagement since the end of the hostage crisis, until, of course, then the negotiations over the 2015 nuclear deal.

But real coordination on the ground. In my very last opportunity to visit Iran, I talked to senior officials in the foreign ministry now many years ago, explaining that in fact, the Revolutionary Guard had built the bridges that enabled Operation Enduring Freedom in its early days to actually access parts of Afghanistan. And so there was not just that logistical tacit cooperation that went on between the United States and Iran, but for approximately 20 months or so, there were direct consultations between senior US and senior Iranian diplomats that took place in Geneva on a semi-regular basis to try to deconflict, to try to ensure that there was some degree of coordination. Because it was, of course, the Iranians who had been supporting the northern alliance and had key contacts and, and ability to help us succeed in Afghanistan in those early years. I'm not saying they played that role consistently throughout our experience in Afghanistan, but at least at the, at the early moment, the Taliban were an adversary of Iran, and they were quite prepared to cooperate with us.

And it was a moment. And that, that cooperation was ended by the Bush administration in May 2003 after a terrorist attack in Saudi Arabia, barracks that included American citizens, including military, that was attributed to al-Qaida operatives who had been resident in Iran. And at that point, the United States ended that cooperation, ended that engagement, and adopted, for the first time really since 1979, a much more total embargo on any kind of engagement with Iran.

And of course, we've had no diplomatic relations since 1979 with Iran, but much of that was driven by the Iranian side. The United States through, across administrations, Republican and, and Democratic, had sought to engage, had sought to have some kind of a dialogue with Iranian officials. And for just this one period, 2003 to about 2006, we said we would not, we would not have any engagement. And, and that was driven at first by that terrorist attack, but it was also driven by, I think, the sense of overconfidence in the early months of, of the Iraq invasion. The sense that we were able to, to topple the country that Iran had fought to a draw for eight years very quickly and without significant loss of life from the United States.

I will say on my last trip to Iran, which was just before the Iraq war began, I, as I said, I was speaking to senior people in the foreign ministry. They told me, "It's going to be much more difficult than you think it's going to be in Iraq." They, they knew from their own experience. So I will say that, you know, there was a moment.

I don't think that the, you know, there, there are narratives that suggest if only we had leaned forward a little bit, we could have changed the course of Iranian history. I don't think that's true. I do think we missed a key moment to engage on the nuclear issue, which at, at a time when Iran was prepared to suspend all of its enrichment through diplomatic engagement with the Europeans, we were refusing to engage.

Ben made the point about the economic statecraft. Iran was one of the first targets of some of the most innovative measures to block its access to the international financial system beginning in 2006. And, and that is, I think, a core part of how we have exerted our power. And ironically, because we have extended our, those measures so successfully, the world has begun to build workarounds that have begun to diminish that power, and I think that's also an interesting dynamic.

SISSON: Well, we're obviously in a very different place now with Iran, and it's not fair to ask you for predictions about what's going to happen. The war's ongoing. We don't know how it will resolve. But do you think you see shifts in US relationships with other actors in the region emerging at this point? And if so, can you give a sense of what, what you think that's starting to look like?

MALONEY: Yeah, I think that we're, we're seeing all of our traditional allies and partners in the Middle East, with the possible exception of Israel, diversify in ways that were, would've been unthinkable in the past. I think it is not a rejection or a repudiation of the American security umbrella. If anything, the kind of defense integration and cooperation that Mara certainly knows more about than I do, that it has existed, that enabled the very successful responses to the Iranian barrage of missiles and drones against its neighbors during this war, but also earlier in, in the exchanges with Israel over the course of 2004, that actually continues to this day, and I expect will only continue to deepen and strengthen.

The fact that, that we have been able to do so many things successfully is still, I think, a significant point of confidence for our allies and partners in the region. What we saw during this war, in many respects, is the impressive capabilities of Israeli intelligence, for example, being able to control the traffic cameras and track VIP bodyguards in Tehran. The impressive capabilities of US air power, as though any further proof were needed, the ability to achieve air dominance and then superiority very quickly over Iranian territory. But I think that it is also matched by a recognition that the, that these impressive capabilities are not, in fact, always deployed in a strategic fashion, and that the planning for the day after, whether it was respect to Iraq or whether it was with respect to this conflict, has been incredibly deficient.

And so what we're seeing is that our allies and partners, particularly in the Gulf, are hedging their bets. They're building alternative structures in order to have options, whether that's economic relationships with China, whether that's this new Mecca pact, agreement with Pakistan and Turkey.

But it is also, I think, just, sort of a sense that they're going to be hedging, and that includes trying to build a different kind of relationship with Iran. They recognize they're going to have to live with Iran on their periphery, and they don't want to live with a, a recalcitrant, impoverished state that is going to be incentivized to try to destroy their own economic transformation and their own efforts to build a new society and engage in the global economy.

SISSON: Bob, you will get the last question before we, we turn to the audience. And you'll correct me if I'm wrong here, but you're a historian. Is that correct? You can affirm? Yep, yep. Okay.

KAGAN: Legal minds may differ, but yeah, sure.

SISSON: So to your historian's eye, how much of these features that we've been talking about of these 25 years later do you attribute to 9/11? Features of American domestic politics, features of foreign policy. How much of that do you think you attribute to the reaction to 9/11, and how much to other features of our past and our present?

KAGAN: Right, I guess what I, I wanna pick up on something that Bill mentioned, which is the sort of, the way societies respond to - when they have a real perceived threat that is dire. And in the United States case, the, the examples are legion, and we've been through this, what we went through in 9/11 and the effect of it, we've been through several times.

There was World War I, for instance, and the shock in World War I was the Lusitania. Not that it led immediately to war, but it completely changed Americans' views. And then once we got into the war, we did experience what would turn out to be a kind of paradigm, which was, on the one hand, a complete reorientation of our military strategy and policy, briefly, until we got out of the League of Nations and we turned down the Versailles Treaty, but our involvement in Europe was, was -- you know, we had two to three million people fighting over there, as well as a domestic repression, which was truly horrific, by the way. And worse, it... I'm afraid it's where we're heading now, but it's worse than where we are right now. I mean, there was literally a crackdown on basic freedom of speech, Eugene v. Debs being the most obvious example, but there were hundreds of people arrested just for saying the wrong thing about the war or the wrong thing about Lenin or, or what have you.

And then of course, World War II. Pearl Harbor is a very good analogy with 9/11 in, in a couple of ways. One was that although Americans had actually done a great deal to provoke the Japanese to launch that attack, when it happened, Americans were completely oblivious to that and thought that they'd been attacked out of the blue for no particular reason by savages, which led them to the conclusion, the majority of Americans to the conclusion when the, when we began setting up for the post-war period, that we could not allow that to happen again, which meant we had to be out there everywhere. I mean, America did not have foreign bases prior to World War II. The idea of having a, having bases in Asia and Europe and all over the place was a direct response to the, to the Pearl Harbor experience. And then similarly, of course, we all know the sort of repression of basic free speech was not as bad during World War II, but we did have the internment of, of the, of Japanese Americans, which by the way, long before, well before the federal government got involved,

Fiorello La Guardia was having Japanese people arrested in the streets of New York just, just because. It, it was a, it was a spasmodic reaction, is what I'm saying, by, by the public.

Now, what I used to reassure myself about, because obviously this was a, a tendency as Bill talked about, was that because the United States is fundamentally a democracy, because of it, its fundamental adherence to the idea of the Declaration and, and individual rights, et cetera, that after the period of panic, that, you know, a lot of the measures that were taken, we either felt bad about and we walked back or tried to undo. And as Bill points out, that has not been the case, unfortunately, since 9/11. And so now the sins that we committed, perfectly understandably in the wake of an attack like 9/11, have come back to haunt us in an entirely different context.

And I just wanna say, I don't think it's fair to say that -- I know you're not really saying this, Bill, but I don't wanna use the excuse of "we've never stopped being at war" for the reason that we are now facing this crisis. American people do not feel that they are at war now. There is no fundamental external threat. But unfortunately, we have an administration that is trying to manufacture external threats to justify using these vast powers of the government that have been created in the wake of 9/11 to go after their political enemies here at home.

And that is the danger that we now face, that, that you see people like Marco Rubio and Stephen Miller talking about the domestic left-wing terrorists that need, that are being inspired by Cuban communists, that are being inspired by other kind of bad actors around the world, and in calling this domestic terrorism, which is what they call people who protest against the government now, they are really setting us up for a kind of repression that we have not witnessed before.

And are the tools that were created after 9/11, gonna be used in that way? Yes, there was no ICE before we -- there was no Department of Homeland Security. Those were both creations of 9/11. The fact that they are still here and now being used for domestic repression, that is new in American history.

And, and this is the one thing I'm gonna end with, unless you're gonna ask me another question, which is there are continuities between the past and the present. There are continuities about what happened after 9/11 and what's happening today. But I think it's very important to understand the sharp discontinuity that's taken place because of the nature of the regime we have in power today in the United States.

This is no...you know, George W. Bush went out of his way to say, "Don't blame Islam." George W. Bush, you know, we did those things that we should not have done, but there was a sense that we knew why we were doing them at the time. This is something totally different. This is about domestic repression, and these tools are being used for that.

SISSON: I will not ask you another question. But I imagine an audience member will. So let's turn to, to the room here, please. Let's start over here. There's a person with a black jacket, white shirt. And if you could please make sure it's a brief question and identify yourself so our panel knows to whom they're speaking.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Yes, my name is Charles. I'll make it a very brief question. So my question's open to the entire panel, but it references Mr. Galston's work. In Mr. Galston's prominent article, The Populist Moment, you cited a very telling figure, which is that 49% of Americans in the following days after 9/11 supported restrictions or freezing the First

Amendment protections. And it seemed to me the American conscious, which one would take for granted that is fundamentally liberal, can evaporate in a few days in a time of crisis.

So my question to you is, do you think that democracy on a long enough timetable, including crises and times of catastrophe, tends towards suicide in line of with the Schmittian concept? Do you think it is the miraculous achievement held together by those who believe in liberal democracy, or is it more of a natural condition?

GALSTON: Those who argued that it was either the natural condition or the inevitable tendency of history had their moment. I don't think that things have worked out exactly the way they expected. It's an incredible human achievement, you know, it's a delicate achievement, and like all human creations, subject to decay.

I persist in believing that the American belief in things like freedom of speech still goes quite deep, and I have a lot of contemporary survey evidence on my side. And what people feel in a moment of panic, deep insecurity and fear, is not necessarily what they're going to feel when the moment passes and the insecurity abates.

You know, Bob Kagan ran through a, a history of exaggerated responses to foreign threats, which in past, in past episodes, have eventually been, you know, repealed in effect, and the status quo ante of individual liberty was, was restored. Whether that will happen in this case, I think is a difficult, a difficult and imponderable question. But if it doesn't, it won't be because the American people now want to surrender their liberties. I don't... I, I really believe that, and I think the evidence is on my side. And I would predict therefore that governments that try to build on the assumption of compliance, you know, with actions that contradict or undermine those basic liberties, I don't think even now they're going to succeed unless they do it by force.

And as Bob Kagan pointed out, the mechanisms are now in place to make that a real possibility. But it's not because we've given up as a people on liberal democracy

SISSON: Bob, did you have something to add?

KAGAN: I, I --

KARLIN: Sounds like a yes.

KAGAN: I'm a little less sanguine about the people than Bill is. And I recall, I recall because I studied it, but, Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1781 that he was worried that the things that got Americans to fight the Revolution, the jealousy of their rights, they would gradually lose sight of and would, and would stop being as jealous of their rights once the war ended. And he was very concerned that they would return to their daily activities of making money and leading their lives and not do that. I think that has always been the risk, and I would like to believe that what you say is true, Bill, but I'm afraid some of the evidence at least points in the other direction.

GALSTON: Well, if I may.

SISSON: You may.

GALSTON: If, if I may, I will point out, you know, that the opposition to the draft federal Constitution that came out of 1787 focused on the fear that individual rights were not sufficiently protected in the Constitution. And it was only when the Federalists advocating the Constitution agreed to assert, insert a Bill of Rights into the Constitution as soon as the new government got started, that the path to ratification of the draft was secured.

So if Jefferson was worried in 1781, by 1787 to 1788, he should've, he should've felt vindicated in, you know, in his original belief that the people would jealously guard their liberties, and I think history speaks to that. I have my rights, right? I mean, that's what Americans always say, and they still do, and I don't think they've changed.

KAGAN: I have my rights, but you don't have yours.

GALSTON: Well...

SISSON: Gentlemen, if I may, can we--

GALSTON: Yeah, yeah.

SISSON: Thank you. Questions please. There's a person in the very last row in the back there.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Thank you. Hi, my name is Rebi. Thank you guys so much for doing this. My question is for Mr. Kagan. You spoke very deeply about emerging domestic repression, especially as it relates to censorship, which is something that really resonated with me.

I not only agree with your perspective, but I think it, I think it kind of extends to DC's current federal occupation as well. And I wanted to ask you, how effective do you think that military presence in DC is contributing to that domestic repression in DC specifically? And what would you say to a community that is feeling that repression in a phenomenal way but wants to push back against it? Thank you.

KAGAN: There's no question in my mind that the reason there are young people walking around in National Guard uniforms here is an attempt at, at oppression. The, that is the purpose of it. It is a show of force by the government. It is unwanted by the citizenry here. And I understand the difficulty that the, that the political forces here, given the nature of the DC's relationship to the federal government, how difficult they have fighting back against it. But I don't think we should have any doubt that these friendly young people who are walking around on our streets are an act of oppression by the federal government against people in the District of Columbia.

KARLIN: If I might just also add, it's really expensive. So we can obviously, and should, talk about the philosophical piece, but when, when you do call-ups like this, it's incredibly pricey to pay for them to be out and about, to be away from their families, to be oftentimes living in, like, hotel rooms, for instance.

There's an opportunity cost, right? A lot of these folks are the ones who are supposed to help when we've got a wildfire, right, or some other, like, disaster, you know, humanitarian

disaster or what have you. They're not doing that right now because they're walking around Dupont Circle and monitoring it as well.

And then I guess the, the last piece, the one that perhaps I find most worrisome, is because so few Americans have much exposure to the military, it is very easy to mix up who's military, who's law enforcement, what are they each doing. And while that's problematic in a bunch of ways, it actually also hurts support for the military as well. So there are numerous reasons why this isn't a great, great use of those folks' time.

SISSON: Other questions? Let's just move up. There's a person one row forward from the very back there.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Hi. Thanks all for being here. My name's Daniel Bernhardt, and I'm an Albert Einstein fellow serving at the Library of Congress. My question is, post 9/11, we had an opportunity to be, we had so much world support. I remember it really vividly as a high school senior when that happened. We had the sympathy of the world. We had people who might have been enemies who were concerned. I feel like we traded our security... We traded our freedom for security, which Benjamin Franklin warned us against doing, and we've paid the consequences.

In the wake of 25 years since 9/11, I was wondering if you have any thoughts on how we might take that back, how some of these things might be repealed, some of these executive powers might be walked back. Thank you.

SISSON: Thoughts?

GALSTON: Who's that addressed to?

SISSON: I think anybody is welcome to answer.

GALSTON: Well, I'll pick up just one small piece of that, and there's absolutely nothing original to what I'm about to say. We need to think comprehensively about this promiscuous heap of emergency powers that we've allowed to develop. There were efforts to do that 50 years ago for various reasons, including rulings of the Supreme Court. Those efforts are now null and void. We need to do it again.

I think we ought to consider devices such as universal sunsets, you know, for existing emergency powers. And so there would have to be an affirmative act of Congress, unless those...an affirmative act of Congress in order to restore and renew them. That may sound like a far-out proposal. It's not. It's quite mainstream, and I hope very much that a subsequent government and administration will give ideas like that a hearing. There are lots of other pieces to the puzzle, but that's just one of them.

SISSON: We have time for one more question. How about here in the front row with the dark blazer?

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Thank you. I have a quick question for Mara and one for Ben. For Mara, think in 10 years, make a guess, how many of our bases will we still have? And to Ben, of the sanction power that we have now, which is considerable, has been an effective, and sometimes not effective, use. How much of that sanction power will we have 10 years

from now with alternative systems, with crypto, and you, you know, all the things that can replace it or, or change it?

KARLIN: What a great question. So the American way of war that you watched, you know, six months ago when this war on Iran started, it is predicated on this unparalleled network of bases all over the world. No other country in the history of the world has ever had bases to the extent that we have. You might note that China, like a decade plus ago, they wanted something like this. No one other than Djibouti was terribly interested in hosting them, so they literally started just building islands, right? But that hasn't been the case, right? That's why we, we've been able to do it, and it's how we have thought about our military's ability then to find, fix, and finish just about any target just about anywhere in, in the world as I think Suzanne had alluded to.

So, we've had some real challenges, I think, posed by this Iran war. First of all, the US went in without really talking to its European allies and partners. And so a number of them said, "Well, we're not terribly interested in facilitating this." Now, most ended up changing their mind, you know, as the war kind of took hold, but that actually causes a real break in military planning.

Then you turn to the Middle East, and that also gets really interesting because you've seen some really impressive Iranian targeting of these bases all over the Gulf, Jordan, where the US military is. I think the dilemma for a lot of these countries is to figure out what are they getting out of having these bases, and what are they not getting? So when I look at the Gulf, for example, I, I don't know that they're overjoyed by the notion of continuing to have these US bases. I also don't think they have great alternatives, right? The Chinese are definitely not the ones they want to welcome in. The Russians aren't the ones they want to welcome in. So what does it look like for them to have some sort of basing posture, and also to rely on themselves, and maybe potentially perhaps one another in a, in a different way?

I think the question you're asking is, like, the question for defense planners to be focused on right now. Because if you do not have these bases, you can't actually fight wars that you have- in the way that you have for the last few decades.

HARRIS: Okay, I think we're at time. I'm gonna answer Antoine's question really quickly. So the question was, what will the sanctions capacity look like in 10 years? If we look at the static use of sanctions, I think there's a potential for it to look very different a decade from now, and that's because of changing payment systems, changing access to financial systems. But, but it shouldn't be static. So, two points.

One, it, it really should not be static. If we sit down with our allies and say, "Let's actually not just take the world as it, as it is, but build towards the ability to sanction," this would mean, for example, having more control over our shipping capacity in the United States instead of surrendering it to the Chinese.

This would mean putting in place more stringent regulations on flagging states that have basically completely abdicated their responsibility. This would mean building towards a better sanctions system. And if we do that, sanctions can be much more effective. The current system has basically been, issue a sanction and put very little effort into enforcement.

And, and also not only that, but it shifts between administrations in ways which I think are very confusing to industry and to, honestly, to sanctions evaders. The Biden administration sanctioned 216 tankers over the course of the two years after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The Trump administration has sanctioned zero, while our allies in the UK and the EU are now up to 600 or 700.

So you have all these problems with the sanctions approach, but they're solvable problems. If we don't solve them, sanctions will continue to become less effective. But if we choose to weigh in on enforcement, if we choose to build up a better web of a system to actually issue sanctions that bite, they'll continue to be impactful.

KAGAN: If everybody goes along with them, with us.

HARRIS: Yes. Okay.

MALONEY: I think this can be the subject of a great debate for our next event.

SISSON: Exactly right. Well, and speaking of, with congratulations, to Mike O'Hanlon and to Vanda Felbab-Brown for putting together such a wonderful event today. Some really excellent discussion, all across the board.

So, indeed, and thank you all for joining, and one more round specifically for the panel up here today. Thanks so much.