

# For the Past Four Years, America Got the Middle East Right

## Guests:

For the Motion: Mary Beth Long, Danny Danon  
Against the Motion: Dr. Justine Rosenthal, Michael Ware  
Moderator: John Donovan

AUDIENCE RESULTS	
<b>Before the debate:</b>	<b>After the debate:</b>
<b>29% FOR</b>	<b>35% FOR</b>
<b>48% AGAINST</b>	<b>62% AGAINST</b>
<b>23% UNDECIDED</b>	<b>4% UNDECIDED</b>

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John Donovan:

The Middle East. America's involvement with the region dates back to the days of George Washington, long before an oil boom, and subsequent wars, redefined the political map. But these days, things are different. The U.S. has largely withdrawn its boots on the ground. Israel has a host of new and relatively friendly neighbors. Of course, the Iran Nuclear Deal is, more or less, dead. It's a far cry from the situation Joe Biden left four years ago when he was Vice President. This approach, for some, was the right one. An unorthodox style that netted some wins and kept America's enemies at bay.

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For others, it squandered U.S. influence. But now, of course, it's President Biden's chance to again shift American foreign policy. But the question remains, for the last four years, did America get the Middle East right? Hi everybody, and welcome to Intelligence Squared, 2021, our first marquee debate of the year. I'm John Donovan, your host and I will also be your debate referee. And today in this debate, we are going to be looking and the Middle East. And a debate

that's actually a referendum on the past four years of American policy, behavior, conduct, decision making about that area. And also, the question about whether Joe Biden should change the direction in that region, or should he be adopting some of what his predecessor has pursued for the past four years. Okay, let's meet our debaters.

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Arguing for the motion, for the past four years America got the Middle East right, is Mary Beth Long, former Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. She is the first woman ever appointed as Chair of NATO's High-Level Group; the highest level responsible for NATO's nuclear policy. Her partner, Danny Danon, former Israeli Deputy Defense Minister and Ambassador to the United Nations, currently Chairman of the World Likud, a global organization dedicated to combating anti-Semitism.

Their opponents arguing against the motion: Dr. Justine Rosenthal, former Editor-in-Chief of The National Interest and Executive Director of Newsweek magazine. Rosenthal served as Director of the Council on Global Terrorism and is the former Director of the Council on Foreign Relations. Her debate partner, Michael Ware, former Time magazine Baghdad Bureau Chief and CNN correspondent, among the few western journalists to live full time in Iraq for several years during the U.S. led war. They both produced the Emmy-nominated HBO film "Only the Dead See the End of War." They are also Intelligence Squared's first ever married debate team.

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And now here we all are. To get this debate started, I want to again thank Danny Danon, and Mary Beth Long, and Justine Rosenthal, and Michael Ware. Justine and Michael, you're in Los Angeles. Mary Beth, you're in Alexandria, Virginia, Danny Danon, you're in Tel Aviv, Israel, thanks for making the leap, the 6,000 miles. I'm in Washington, D.C., and I just want to say at the very outset how delighted we are to have you all here. Thanks for joining us.

[talking simultaneously]

John Donvan:

Okay, so we go in three rounds. And now we're going to go straight into it, beginning with round one, and round one is comprised of opening statements from each debater in turn. These statements will be four minutes each. Our motion is: for the last four years, America got the Middle East right. First up to argue for that motion here is Mary Beth Long. Mary Beth, the screen is all yours.

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Mary Beth Long:

Thank you and thank you for the opportunity. I really have two important points to make, and the first was let's recall where we were four years ago. We were at the point where we were considering putting additional resources and additional troops into the Middle East. And why is that? My second point, the Middle East was a very dangerous place. Under the first point, I'm

going to step back for a minute and remember what it is SATCOM Commander said in January of last year. And there were six points that he was making. Now, four years ago, about this time, we had ISIS really on the ascendancy in Iraq. Well, though some progress had been made, we were still fighting in Mosul, and in fact, I believe the SATCOM Commander said there were about 100,000 ISIS operatives in Iraq alone. Secondly, in Syria, the al-Nusra Front was really on the ascendancy. The caliphate really was still in place, and while we had made some progress, it certainly wasn't diminishing. And that relates to the third point, which was there was a lot of concern about the spill over of what was happening in Syria into the rest of the region.

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And in Syria, the fifth point, we had internal combatants, we had Russia, we had Turkey, we had the U.S., we had Israelis, we had multiple foreign powers from the European countries all fighting in Syria, or nearby. Which was really beginning to make the region more inflamed than it had been in previous years. Now some would say that that was because of an over reaction of the Obama administration and the mistakes that were made in Iraq. But still, the SATCOM Commander did testify that. Even with Egypt, Egypt had not quite gotten past the Morsi support for the Muslim Brotherhood. And the relationship between the U.S. and Egypt had not been good and were not good at this time four years ago.

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And similarly, the U.S. relationships with Israel were not in a good place four years ago. Then of course, the tensions were rising in the GCC, which ultimately led to the boycott of Qatar. So, for those reasons alone, four years ago, let's say, the Middle East is always a mess. It's always been a mess, but it was particularly messy four years ago. Let's step back for just a moment and talk about the proxies and the non-state actors that were contributing to everything I just mentioned. In fact, Iran was participating, probably really for the first time in our memory, with troops, and those include the Quds force, in Syria, in Iraq, in Yemen supporting the Houthis and other proxies, in Lebanon, Hezbollah and others, and even in Bahrain.

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Iran was on the march, and in addition to sending troops, proxies, the Quds force abroad, it was actually having the audacity to fire missiles from Yemen, from foreign countries, into Saudi Arabia and also into Israel. The bottom line was, while that mess existed four years ago, we're in a much different place. And in fact, we have drawn down troops, and the level of conflict in Syria and other places have been greatly diminished.

John Donvan:

Thank you very much, Mary Beth. The next turn goes to Justine Rosenthal. Justine Rosenthal, you're arguing against the resolution, and the screen is yours.

Justine Rosenthal:

Thank you very much. Thank you also ladies and gentlemen all for coming here, if virtually, to spend the time to hear our arguments as to why, for the last four years, America in our opinion

got the Middle East wrong. I will be addressing some specific policy failures, and then I'll hand it over to my debate partner, who will follow with a more geographic breakdown.

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I would say that Trump's Middle East policy has been bad, not only for long-term peace and prosperity in the Middle East, but also for U.S. national interests. Though it is often hailed as one of Donald Trump's singular achievements during his time in office, in fact, Trump's Middle East policy, if, in my opinion, one can even call it a policy, for there has been no coherent objective, except perhaps strengthening Israel, has been a largely unmitigated disaster. Let me begin with Israel. As the Abraham Accords, which normalizes relations between Israel and the UAE and Bahrain, amongst others, is argued to be an unprecedented move towards peace between Israel and many Arab states in the region.

This argument is flawed, in my opinion, for several reasons. First, one can acknowledge that the Abraham Accords are a move in the right direction, but more than anything, the Accords have simply turned a de facto reality into a de jure one. That is to say, peaceful relations between Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain were already in existence implicitly if not explicitly.

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And the bargains that America has cut with other nations to achieve this Accord largely outweigh the benefits. Second, enacting the Abraham Accords without any concomitant movement on a two-state solution, or any conditions on Israeli policy for that matter, only sets back the long-term prospects of Israeli security. Now more than ever, the prospects of a two-state solution are farther away in the rearview mirror. This will further radicalize Palestinians, embolden the Israeli far right, and turn Israel into a greater Israel, whose population will include more Palestinians than it does Israelis.

I can, this cannot be in Israel's interest. Third, the Abraham Accords only deepen the divide between the Shia and Sunni states. And this leaves Israel, and the rest of the Middle East, to face an Iran that is increasingly determined to obtain a nuclear capability. And this brings me arguably on to one of the greatest failures of the Trump administration: its Iran policy. By abandoning the JCPOA and instituting an enormous sanctions campaign, the Trump administration has been successful at certain things.

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Successful at bringing Iran closer to a nuclear weapon, successful at increasing the power of the Ayatollah and the hard liners, and successful at spreading Iran's influence, if not outright control, of Iraq. Iran is now enriching uranium at 20 percent. This is in comparison to the three to four percent outlined in the JCPOA. It is a small step from there to a nuclear capability, and should Iran obtain that nuclear capability, what will follow? Nuclear proliferation throughout the region.

Because it is almost impossible to imagine a scenario in which Iran gets nukes and others do not follow suit. So, imagine a world in which Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt at the very least are all racing toward a nuclear-armed region. How can this be heralded as a success? How can bringing the Middle East to the brink of mass nuclear proliferation serve the regions', let alone the United States', national interests? And how can the isolation and punishment of the Iranian people, that has now [unintelligible] ensured many more years of a hard lined regime be heralded as a success?

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When really was the last time you heard about democracy's rise in Iran, the overthrow of the Ayatollahs? Four years ago? By taking diplomacy entirely off the table with Iran, the Trump administration has left Iran out in the wilderness of U.S. foreign policy, but not out in the wilderness in the Middle East at large. And this brings me to my final point, by focusing almost entirely on U.S. policy toward Israel and the isolation of the Iranian regime above all else, the Trump administration has allowed other great and rising powers the ability to advance their own interests.

It has allowed China and Iran to forge an ever-closer bond. It has allowed Russia to increase its influence in Syria. It has allowed Turkey to engage in an expansionist, territorial agenda many would call neo-Ottomanism. And it has allowed for continuing and horrifying bloodshed in Yemen, as Iran and Saudi Arabia duke it out in a proxy war at the expense of the Yemeni people. The Trump administration threw a ticker-tape parade for small and often pyrrhic victories, whilst there are far more consequential losses.

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In almost every respect, the Middle East is in a far worse place than it was four years ago, and that is why I'm asking you to vote against the motion. Thank you.

John Donovan:

Thank you, Justine Rosenthal. Again, our resolution is for the last four years, America got the Middle East right. Next will be a speaker arguing for that resolution, arguing that that statement is true. So, I want to give the screen to Danny Danon. Danny, the screen is yours.

Danny Danon:

Thank you very much for having me, and I want to encourage you all to support the motion, and I will explain why. First, we have to look at what's happening today. We have diplomatic relations with four countries, and that's remarkable in our region. We can speak a lot about the idea, the speeches, but let's analyze the facts. What happened in the last four years in our area, which is, I agree, with the former speaker, that it's a messy area. It's like a bazaar, like a Turkish bazaar that you never know what will happen.

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But now we have a better situation thanks to the policy of the U.S. administration. And I will

prove that. First of all, the administration worked with the allies of the U.S., mainly Israel, all the Gulf countries, Saudi Arabia, and those allies today feel stronger. They respect the U.S. much more, and the bond between the allies of the U.S. and the U.S. is a much stronger bond. The second point is the issue of the Palestinians. We heard about what will happen, but in the last 72 years, we heard more of the same. So many delegations, so many envoys came from the U.S. to Jerusalem trying to do something with the Palestinians, and look what happened, unfortunately. And today, we have a new paradigm, a paradigm that is exactly the opposite. Let's build bridges with the moderate Arab countries, and together we can actually bring the Palestinians to the negotiating table.

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If it didn't work for 72 years, maybe now it will work. Maybe now, together with Egypt, Jordan, the UAE, Morocco, Bahrain, and many other countries, we'll be able to bring the Palestinians and to negotiate a peace deal that we are praying for.

The last point is the issue of Iran. Iran is sponsoring terrorism, we saw that, this was not an agreement, that was a joke. How can you actually call it an agreement when, if you want to inspect a site, you are telling the Iranians in advance that you are coming to inspect the site? How can you call it an agreement when we know that, from the beginning, the Iranians breached all aspects of the agreement? Enriching uranium, ballistic missile tests, sponsoring terrorism all over the Middle East. So today, I ask you one question.

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If after so many years you have us, the Israelis, and so many Arab countries saying that the policy of the U.S. was the right policy, maybe you should listen to us. We're the ones that live here in the Middle East, and we cherish the stability in the region.

So, to conclude, when I look at the results on the ground, not the speeches, not the delegations, but the results on the ground, I see more stability in the region, and I thank the U.S. for doing it.

John Donvan:

Thank you, Danny Danon. And our final opening statement will be against this resolution, it's Michael Ware. Michael, the screen is yours.

Michael Ware:

Thank you, mate. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Let me say how humbled I am to be here. I seek to further persuade you that for the last four years, America has not gotten the Middle East right. Now, there are two very important words missing from that proposition, and those words are foreign policy. The Trump administration did not seem to have a coherent one, least not one that saw beyond one deal after another deal.

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And not one that was exceptionally American. Rather, it seemed but echoes of the policies of

Riyadh and Tel Aviv. What do I mean? Isn't the ultimate aim after all for at least some kind of lasting peace and stability in the Middle East? Where tensions are eased, not exacerbated? Where American security is more secure? And perhaps, just perhaps, a better life in the Middle East could be just that little better for those who live there. The U.S. has done more to deepen the fault lines of hostility than to ease them. Pitting Arabs further against Persians, Ottomans against Kurds, Sunnis against Shia. American actions and inactions have deepened these divides at the peril of the region and U.S. strategy.

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First, let's look to the east of the region. The Trump administration brought tensions with Iran to an inexplicable high. B-52's flying off its coast? A nuclear submarine in the Gulf? Two aircraft carriers? And that's just in the last month or so. There has been no drawdown in U.S. forces in the region, only in Iraq and Syria. Let's face it, Iran is never going anywhere, it is a regional power whether we like it or not. And, as any U.S. military commander in Iraq would tell me, Iran has its own view of its own legitimate national security concerns. Iran is a bad actor, but it is a rational one.

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The Trump administration's notion of maximum pressure, both economic and military, did little to dissuade Iran. It punishes ordinary people and inflames nationalism amongst ordinary Iranians that we underestimate. It did nothing to persuade the regime that its current actions are not in their favor.

The binding threat of America's actions had been to more deeply entrench the ancient fault lines of Sunni versus Shia, thereby making Iran's fears more real. To the south, the theme continues. In Yemen, amidst its brutal civil war, America enabled Saudi Arabia's war crimes. Even at the end, on its way out the door, the Trump administration deemed the Iranian backed Houthi rebels a terrorist organization, imperiling delivery of food and medical relief to the Yemeni people dying in what the UN says is the largest humanitarian crisis on the planet.

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Why? To appease Riyadh? What's the effect? Herding the Houthi, who are left with no other choice, closer to Iran. The core, in the north, the banal hopes of a false Trumpian love fest with the authoritarian Turkish leader, Erdogan, saw a renewed Ottoman land grab beyond internationally agreed borders. And the shameful abandonment of one of America's most loyal regional allies, the Kurds. The courting of authoritarians has been America's embarrassment, all to the forsaking of rights. Is that the mirror America sees itself in? Finally, I want to dispel the dangerous narrative that Trump destroyed the Islamic State. It's a myth. ISIS is still out there, they lost terrain they could never hold. They've simply gone back underground and metastasized further throughout the region.

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We cannot allow Trump's false claims of victory to lull us into complacency, so I urge you all to vote no on the proposition.

John Donovan:

Thank you, Michael Ware, and thank you to all four of you for your strong opening statements, which certainly staked out a lot of differences over a lot of aspects of the region, of what America's policy has been in the region.

I want to acknowledge a few things, that everyone has agreed that the region is a mess, and difficult, and by no means solved, if not unsolvable. Also, that there are many cuts to this we can talk about, and we'll talk about Iran, we'll talk about the situation in, concerning the Palestinians, we'll talk about the impact of the Abraham Accords. But before we do that, I just want to go to a sort of over arching, almost philosophical question about this. And I'll take it to you, Mary Beth, first. After four years of the Trump administration's policy, is the United States still seen as an important, vibrant player with creative, meaningful ideas that has the concerns of the region in mind, and the concerns of U.S. interests in mind?

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Bottom line, I'm asking if America is respected for its foreign policy in the Middle East.

Mary Beth Long:

I believe it is, and I think the proof isn't in what I say, and in fact, it conflicts with a lot of what our opposition is saying. The proof is that number one, from a U.S. perspective, this was the first administration in recent memory that did not start a new war or did not start a new conflict in the Middle East. And to accuse this administration of exacerbating the Shia Sunna divide, if anything, the Sunna aligned themselves with Israel and the U.S. in an unprecedented fashion. To gloss over what was implicit as now not being effective because it's in writing and explicit, is not to look at the reality. People from Israel and the United States and Arab countries are getting on planes and seeing each other.

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The Arab countries have come out publicly, and they don't even discuss Israel as a threat anymore. They discuss Iran, and unity with Israel on Iran. How that could be undermined --

John Donovan:

Do you think, Mary Beth, that the U.S. gets credit for that? For example, your opponent suggested that the development, that are called the Abraham Accords, the agreements in the last year and a little bit this year, between Israel and neighbors like Morocco and UAE, et cetera, were going to happen anyway. Those contacts were happening anyway, de facto peace recognition between those states, that it's overplaying the claim of credit to the Trump administration to say that that was a big achievement by the Trump administration. In other words, my question to you is, do you think that the credit for the achievements that you're talking about accrued to the United States and to the Trump administration?

Mary Beth Long:

It not only accrues to the United States and the Trump administration, but let's be honest, anybody who's watching knows that, while there were some relations between these countries, particularly in intel and some military, it took the personal involvement of a Trump family member to make it happen.

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And then they converted it to writing, and then they locked it in, whether you agree with the weapons sales to the countries or not, they locked it in with long-term commitments of exchanges on weapons sales and exchanges of military strategy to ensure there's no backsliding, and no one can say well, that's just a Kushner deal. It is a Trump administration accomplishment that none other has achieved to date.

John Donovan:

All right, let me bring this to Justine by going back to the original question. Then, Justine, you can take it where you want. Do you believe that the United States is respected in the region for its policy, military, diplomatic leadership?

Justine Rosenthal:

Well, I think the question would be by whom.

John Donovan:

[affirmative]

Justine Rosenthal:

And as we've seen, yes, if we're talking about have the last four years benefited Israel?

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I say one could argue it that way, I'd say in the long term, as I said in my opening statement, that it will not serve the Israelis well to basically say goodbye two state solution. And I don't think that we're going to be brining the Palestinians to their knees to the negotiating table, because history has never shown that to be the case. I think we'll see them more radicalized and more entrenched. Are we respected, I don't want to say respected by the Iranian regime, because perhaps no one cares whether we're respected by --

John Donovan:

Right.

Justine Rosenthal:

-- them. But we're certainly not a trustworthy partner, and just because they potentially cheat on agreement, and there's a lot of assertion on that without a lot of proof, doesn't mean that we have to be bad actors as well. I would say that in all of the places in which we have abandoned our allies, including the Kurds, no, we are not right now seen as an actor to be respected. And I think that the fact that we're cozying up more and more with the Arab states without seeing how it is

that we can be a peaceful broker in the region, because what we need is peace in the region, not deeper division. I would say our standing is greatly diminished.

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John Donvan:

Okay, now I want to start looking at some of the cuts that were brought up in your opening statements, and let's start with, then continue on Iran. Danny Danon, you talked about the Trump administration's decision to walk away from the Iran Nuclear Deal as a wise decision, because you said that the deal itself was ridiculous and was weak. Your opponents have said that the alternative policy the Trump administration put in place, which was a kind of maximum pressure campaign, with a strong military element and a strong economic element, has in fact not had the impact that would seem to have been intended, which was to break the will of the Iranian leadership. In fact, Michael Ware said it has inflamed nationalism among the Iranian people themselves. The Obama administration seemed to believe that easing sanctions could allow for a more moderate element in Iran.

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To claim that participation with the world would be beneficial, and that Trump took that off of the table. So, can you take all of that on? The pushback from your opponents to the idea that walking away from the Iran deal was a good idea that has led to the region to be safer. They say it's not safer, that the risk of nuclear proliferation, if anything, is higher than it's ever been before.

Danny Danon:

Well firstly, let's all agree that Iran is the problem. Horrible regime, and we all feel for the Iranian people, we have nothing against Iranian people, they are suffering. And let's look at the year of 2020. Iran spent \$7 billion promoting terrorism. Imagine what they could've done with that money, maybe buy vaccines against COVID, maybe support the poor people in Iran. They didn't do it, they support terrorism, they exploit the revolution, and we are dealing with it.

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The question is, what happened in 2014 and 2015 with the JCPOA? I call it the feel-good agreement. It made some people to feel good. Yes, we are solving the problem. But I think it was exactly the contrary. We were not solving the problem, actually, we allowed the Iranians to continue to play their games, and Israel revealed we were incapable of getting our hands-on material from the archive in Tehran. And we showed, not everything, but some of the part that we showed to the world, proved that, from the beginning, before signing the agreement, the Iranians were lying, and they are still lying. So, I prefer that we will deal with the threat together, either economically, God forbid if we'd have to militarily. But we will deal with the threat, rather than we sign an agreement that we know that the other side is breaching that agreement. We know that they are enriching uranium, they are lying to everybody, and I'm not saying it.

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The original signatories of the agreement today acknowledge that the Iranians breached their agreement. So, I hope that the new administration will realize that, and will not reenter the JCPOA before looking at the required amendments that will not allow Iran to do what they are doing.

John Donovan:

So, a key part of the JCPOA, part of the deal was the lifting of sanctions. The Trump administration but the sanctions back in place. Do you agree with the logic of the economic sanctions being in place? In other words, if Michael Ware is saying, number one, they're not persuasive to the leadership, number two, they're harmful to the people of Iran, there's no question the economy is an absolute disaster now. Do you agree with the logic of that argument, or is there any merit to what the Obama administration was arguing, and presumably, potentially the Biden administration will as well, is that easing economic sanctions could have a beneficial impact in this dynamic?

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Danny Danon:

I think we should all look at the end game. You know, we saw what happened with North Korea, they were playing the same game. All of a sudden, we all woke up one morning and we learned about the nuclear test. It can happen in a year from today, that we will wake up one morning and all those games that we are discussing now, the sanctions, the economical pressure, and they will actually acknowledge that they were able to build the first bomb. We don't want to be there, that's why I think we should apply more sanctions, and I urge the Europeans to do the same. And I can tell you, it worked. It worked because it was very hard for the regime to continue, it was very hard for the leadership of the regime to live under the sanctions. And every time that the U.S. Treasury Department came out with new sanctions, they were not happy in Tehran. So, I think that it takes more than the U.S., it takes the entire international community to work together to apply pressure to isolate Iran and to force them to change their behavior.

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John Donovan:

Okay, Michael Ware, your opponent is saying that the economic sanctions worked. Your response to that?

Michael Ware:

Well, no they haven't. And I'm glad that the Ambassador brings up the example of North Korea, because that's precisely where I was going to take us to. North Korea is a far more impoverished nation than Iran. It has just as many sanctions imposed upon it, if not more. And yet this dirt-poor country, despite international focus, still develops a nuclear bomb. So, what exactly do you think you're going to do to stop the Iranians from doing it covertly or in any other way? What incentives are you giving them not to do it? And let me ask this, what honestly do you think you're going to do about it? I mean, the Iranians are not afraid of Israel and the West.

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And we can't thwart them. So, somehow, we find, we need to find another way, and okay, the JCPOA may have been a flawed document, but for goodness sakes, it was a start. And yes, maybe by Trump withdrawing from that agreement, and Biden reentering it, and let's not forget, the European Union never left the agreement in essence. So, when you call on the international community joining in sanctions, well we know Europe doesn't want to. So, perhaps under the Biden administration now, they will be able to make a harder agreement, a tighter agreement, and begin moving to more expansive issues, like state sponsor of terror and ballistic missiles. But to just tear up the document and let the Iranians literally go underground in mountain bunkers and start processing the uranium at 20 percent, that doesn't help Israel, and it doesn't help the United States.

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Justine Rosenthal:

John am I able to just jump in, or are we --

John Donovan:

No, go ahead, please.

Justine Rosenthal:

Yeah, I really just wanted to add that we have also in essence taken diplomacy completely off the table. And I think, in an ideal world, what we would want to see is some form of normalizations of relations with Iran at some point in the future. I do not see how continuing to isolate them, berate them, and lose our European allies in the process on this issue is ever going to get us there, unfortunately.

John Donovan:

Mary Beth.

Mary Beth Long:

I think my comment was, I think we're confusing what the real issue is. We seem to have drifted as to whether, we're arguing about whether we agree that everything the Trump administration did was right, and whether it cured all the ails that we've had now for decades in the Middle East.

The Sunna Shia divide, whether Iran has actually ever said it didn't want a nuclear weapon, and for that to be credible.

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That's not what we're arguing. We're arguing about whether or not, today, the Middle East is a safer place than it was four years ago. And you cannot vote for the fact that it is not, you can't vote for the other side, unless you somehow believe that the JCPOA was being abided by. And

that four years into, and closer to a sunset, that we all agree would probably not be healthy for any of us, and if you ignore everything that the Israelis found about it cheating, if we're going to put that aside and say, well, you know, it was a start. You would also have to ignore the fact that the Sunna Shia, somehow exacerbated by the Trump administration, not true. Factually incorrect. Actually, you've got Sunna countries that have now a written agreement with Israel. You have the Sunna and the Shia, the GCC reconciling.

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You have polling in Qatar and in Oman that actually shows that, for the first time ever, that their populations are more suspicious about Iran than they are about Israel. And you have Bahrain, a majority Shia country, that has signed on to a formal normalization process with Israel. You'd have to ignore all that. You'd also have to ignore that when we pick up the paper every morning, we're not reading about al-Nusra, we're not reading about ISIS, we're not reading about the conflagration in Syria. It's relatively contained, certainly to where it was four years ago. Yes --

John Donovan:  
So, so I want to--

Mary Beth Long:  
-- every country makes a mistake, but we are safer.

John Donovan:  
So, Mary Beth, when you're talking about what the framing of this debate is about, safety is part of it, but it's also, we're really looking at whether the policy is the reason for that, and whether it would be incumbent upon the Biden administration to continue this thread, or to try something different.

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Or, to go back in time to the administration that President Biden will be in office again. And one very big change that came about in this approach of the Trump administration was where the Palestinians were placed in the process. And the Abraham Accords were reached without Palestinian involvement.

Mary Beth Long:  
Yep.

John Donovan:  
And that represents a major shift in what was always an article of faith for U.S. administrations, which was that the Palestinian situation needed to be addressed before everything else.

Mary Beth Long:  
Yes.

John Donovan:

And the Trump administration did not sign up to that, the Trump administration moved the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, which, --

Mary Beth Long:

They turned it on its head, [affirmative].

John Donovan:

-- which was, exactly, they turned it on its head. I want to take that to Danny Danon. Do you think that that approach is, if Joe Biden is tempted to go back to the approach that Donald Trump threw out, which was to put the Palestinians at the center of peace talks, and to regard the solving of the Palestinian issue as being the one that needs to come first, ideally should come first.

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What would your response be if Joe Biden wants to go back to that?

Danny Danon:

I would advise him to look at history. For so many years we heard the same line, that first you have to solve the conflict with the Palestinians before you can build bridges with the moderate Arab countries. We heard it from the Arab League, we heard it from Secretary Kerry, who said it almost every week. Nothing will happen in the Middle East unless you will finalize the arguments with the Palestinians. And look, the paradigms changed completely, and today, when we see the bridges that we have, and I have to tell you, it's not something minor. When I flew to the UAE and to Morocco in the past, as the Ambassador and in a different capacity that I had in the government, and every time it was so sophisticated to do the coordination, the security arrangements.

00:37:03

To make sure that nobody was deported. And look what we have today, 14 flights a week from Tel Aviv to Dubai. In a few weeks, we're going to have a direct flight from Tel Aviv to Casablanca. We don't take it for granted. And I think what will happen, it will be a reality check for the Palestinians. And they will hear it not from us, the Israelis, not from the Americans, they will hear it from the Arab leaders in the region that will tell them Israel is here to stay. You have to accept it, now sit down, negotiate, and we're going to help you to do that. I think it will help the process with the Palestinians, because I don't think that they are capable of negotiating by themselves.

I don't think that they are capable of making necessary compromises to achieve an agreement, and we all know we have to compromise. We proved that we are able to compromise when we signed the agreements with Egypt, with Jordan, and also the recent agreements that we signed, that's how you make peace, compromises.

00:38:01

I think we can make it together with the moderate Arab countries.

John Donovan:

We have a lot of questions that are coming in. W. David Buss (spelled phonetically) asks, has life and security improved for the Lebanese, the Iranians, Egyptians, Jordanians, Iraqis, Syrians, et cetera? Again, improved during the four years and as a result of the American policy of the four years. I'll take that to you, Justine.

Justine Rosenthal:

That was a lot of groups.

John Donovan:

Yeah.

Justine Rosenthal:

Say that one again?

John Donovan:

The Lebanese, the Iranians, Egyptians, Jordanians, Iraqis, Syrians. I know you're marking off a map in your head on that --

Justine Rosenthal:

I am, and maybe at some point if Michael wants to jump in and I miss some of these. Look, I think that we know it hasn't gotten any better for the Palestinians. I just want to follow on the Ambassador's point, I think that was on the list, was it not on the list? Anything --

John Donovan:

It was not on the list but go for it.

Justine Rosenthal:

You know, again, it's not that I think the Abraham Accords are a bad thing.

00:38:59

I don't think this is a black and white issue, I think we can continue the work of the Abraham Accords, but with conditions. Where we are now is that, within weeks of the Accords, there are announcements of new settlements in the West Bank. And speaking of what the problems are going to look like for the Israelis in the future, and you brought up COVID vaccine, the Israeli government is administering the COVID vaccine to Israelis in the West Bank, and as far as I know, as of yesterday, not to the Palestinians. Most things that are not good for the Palestinians are not very good for the Jordanians or the Lebanese. And I would say, in Iraq, the full handover of that country to Iran as a proxy is now complete.

Michael, if you want to pick up on any of the ones I missed?

[talking simultaneously]

Danny Danon:

-- regarding the vaccines, I think it's unacceptable to hear that, because we do cooperate with the Palestinians. Unfortunately, the Palestinian leadership, they care more to use their funds to pay salaries to convicted terrorists rather than to invest in buying vaccines.

00:39:59

But we --

Justine Rosenthal:

That may be the case, but the Israelis now have this greater Israel problem on their hands. And I say, as a supporter of Israel, we need to be thinking about the consequences of that. And the consequences of not getting towards a two-state solution, at least some movement towards it. Because this is going to be a problem, I fear, for the Israelis.

John Donovan:

Michael, were you going to jump in there?

Michael Ware:

Well, I was just going to say, firstly, I support the momentum of the Abraham Accords wholeheartedly. Look, my greatest dream, it won't be in my lifetime, nor my children's, but that one-day Tehran will normalize its relations with Tel Aviv.

But what cost? All we're talking about is tries, and yes, person to person, people to people engagement, that's vital for healing, and that's a great step forward. But what costs have been paid? I mean, it's been like a flea market for arms sales. The United Arab Emirates now has F-35s.

00:40:57

Now I don't know, Ambassador, if you feel comfortable about that, but I know it dulls Israel's military advantage in the region. Mary Beth, you mentioned Bahrain. Why did Bahrain sign on? Because American put a Shia group in Bahrain on the terror list. We can we fly to Casablanca now? Because we in America recognized Morocco's sovereignty over the Western Sahara, and just disenfranchised entire peoples. So, these things have not come without costs, and you want to think there's not going to be blowback from any of these things? And of course, when it comes to the Palestinians, I can see the Arab states are sick of the Palestinians, Lebanon, and all the refugees. Jordan, Saudi Arabia, everyone's getting exhausted by the calls. So yes, finding alternative ways to motivate the Palestinians back to a new negotiating table is most welcome.

00:41:59

But not without their inclusion, and not without America giving away a free for all.

John Donovan:

Okay, Mary Beth, you've not had a chance to talk in quite a while, so I want to give you a good

long run. You can go with this where you want.

Mary Beth Long:

You know, I'm just going to quickly address some of the question that was originally asked. When it comes to the peoples in those countries, having spent some time with the UNHRGC and others, I can tell you that the refugee problem out of Syria has adjusted quite a bit in the last four years. In part because the conflict there is much more contained than it was before. So that, while there are tremendous problems still with refugees, particularly to, in Lebanon, refugees in Jordan of course, refugees, internally displaced persons in Syria, I think overall, given where we were at exactly this time four years ago, the conflict in Syria has diminished substantially, which puts the Syrian population at a much lesser risk.

00:43:02

And there is a much more transparent and much more continual flow of aid. Same for Jordan, which is really suffering from an influx of refugees from both the Iraq and the Syrian conflicts. And having recently come back from Lebanon, some of those Syrian refugees actually are returning. So, by and large on those three, I think things are better than they were four years ago, but they are far from ideal, and far from peaceful, and even far from acceptable. We still need to work on those. As we all know, the Yemen crisis, which preexisted the last four years, is worse.

And, for a number of reasons, and I don't think the targeted killings during the Obama administration had a substantial impact on resolving that. And I don't think that what the Trump administration did resolved, or even bettered that situation, either. It still is a mess; it remains a mess. On the Palestinians, I absolutely agree with my colleagues that the Palestinians have to be involved in a solution.

00:44:03

But what happened in the last four years is the Palestinians held a resolution hostage, because it always had, as the Ambassador said, that card that it played, that it was speaking on behalf of the Arab nations. And much like Justine was pointing out, reality did not reflect that. And what happened was, the Arab nations said look, Israel exists, we not only accept it, we recognize it and we want relationships with it. That will force the Palestinians to deal with reality. They absolutely have to be part of the solution, and we can't have peace in the Middle East without an agreement between the Palestinian and Israelis.

But now, all the options are on the table for the Biden administration. They can continue what the Trump administration set up, they can revert to the Obama administration, or they can find their own path, which I believe he will, which leverages where we are in today's situation with the very vast, a huge change, a paradigm change, between Israel's relationship with its Arab neighbors.

00:45:07

And I'll stop there.

John Donovan:

So, Danny, I want to put to you a question, part of a question that comes from a member of our live audience named Mark Shelltouper [spelled phonetically]. It's a multi-part question, I'm going to take you to the last part of it. And what he asks is, whether the breakthrough on Israeli relations with, through the Abraham Accords, with UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, et cetera. Can that place a check on Israeli actions in the occupied territories?

Danny Danon:

So, I think that when you speak about Judea and Samaria, and the community, the Jewish community in Judea and Samaria, exactly 15 years ago, we proved that that's not the issue, because we decided to pull out from Gaza in 2005, completely. We took out the military, we took out all the Jewish communities there.

00:45:58

We uprooted even the synagogues, the cemeteries, and look what happened. Hamas took over. Today you don't have any occupation, so called occupation in Gaza. You have a Hamas regime, and the people in Gaza are suffering much more than the Palestinians who live in Judea and Samaria. So, I don't think that is a problem. The problem is to find a partner that is willing to negotiate, that is willing to make compromises. And I think it will be easier. It will be easier because we the moderate Arab countries, the moderate forces in the Muslim world, to be active. When you allow the radicals, it can be Hezbollah, it can be Tehran, it can be Hamas in Gaza. When you allow the radicals to be vocal and to be active, there is no future. But when you enhance the moderate voice in the Muslim world, which is the majority, you can be hopeful about the future.

John Donovan:

Does Israel regret seeing Donald Trump leave the scene for the time being, as having any influence on Middle East policy?

00:46:57

Danny Danon:

We have so much politics here in Israel, we don't get involved in your politics when you have election --

[laughter]

[talking simultaneously]

John Donovan:

Yeah, sorry, not going to let you get away with that.

[laughter]

Danny Danon:

I will say one thing, John, we are grateful. We are grateful for the decision he took pulling from the Iran deal, moving the embassy to Jerusalem, and for initiating the Abraham Accords. And we think they were important decisions regarding the Middle East.

John Donovan:

Justine, do you want to respond to that?

Justine Rosenthal:

I will, just to say, --

John Donovan:

Or comment on that?

Justine Rosenthal:

-- I'm not sure how we can continue to sort of sideline and ignore the elephant in the region that is Iran's increasing nuclear program. We can't let the perfect be the enemy of the good, or even the maybe sort of good enough for now. They are enriching uranium at a far greater level; we are talking about having a potential massive amount of nuclear proliferation throughout the entire Middle East. And a couple of handshake deals between Israel and the UAE and Bahrain does not counteract that.

00:47:58

John Donovan:

So, Justine, bottom line, is Iran's ability and effectiveness in disrupting the region today greater or lesser than it was four years ago?

Justine Rosenthal:

I believe far greater.

Michael Ware:

Yeah.

John Donovan:

Why?

Justine Rosenthal:

Because they now have a further nuclear capability. Tell me when, in what version of reality Saudi Arabia will not move in that direction? Tell me in what version of reality Egypt will not then also follow suit? And this idea that they have somehow been checked in their --

John Donovan:

Mary Beth said in her opening that Iran was on the march four years ago, and it's much less so on the march now.

Justine Rosenthal:

Yeah, I don't see exactly how that's --

Michael Ware:

Oh, please!

Justine Rosenthal:

-- the case. I mean, they have completed their stranglehold on Iraq. They haven't stopped their proxy activities. And the only thing I can say is that perhaps there has been some show of restraint from Iran, because of the unpredictability of the Trump administration.

John Donovan:

So, is that a style choice that had, it appears, potentially, that President Trump made that choice as a calculation, and --

Justine Rosenthal:

I --

John Donovan:

-- would one recommend continuing to be unpredictable in that way?

00:49:05

Justine Rosenthal:

No, the rationality of --

Michael Ware:

No.

Justine Rosenthal:

-- irrationality is not something I think is a long-term policy for anybody but Kim Jong Il.

Michael Ware:

Exactly, exactly.

Justine Rosenthal:

And so, I would say that I think that had Trump won reelection, we would not have seen such restraint from Iran. This was a bide our time and let's hope somebody else gets back into the White House that will follow along with the UN and the EU, and other member states that do not want to completely isolate the regime.

John Donovan:

I want to go back to --

Michael Ware:

The Iranians --

John Donovan:

-- let me bring it back, --

Michael Ware:

-- I was just going to say --

John Donovan:

-- Can you hang on, Michael? Because I was going to bring in Mary Beth on --

Michael Ware:

Yeah, yeah.

John Donovan:

-- the point that Justine just made.

Because Mary Beth, it was you who said Iran was on the march four years ago, much less so now. Justine is saying absolutely, absolutely not true. So, can you defend that point that you made at your opening?

Mary Beth Long:

Absolutely, and I want to distinguish, and I think I did, the nuclear portfolio from the other portfolios.

00:50:00

What I was referring to was Iranian presence in Syria and Iranian influence in Syria that was certainly on the increase at this point of time four years ago. The Russians and the Syrians themselves have put a check on that, as have the Iranians when they began to get very concerned about Iranian body bags, could force members and others returning home from Syria. And as you know, Israel did a tremendous job in the last four years checking Iranian activities along the Israeli Iranian border, which were increasing at this time four years ago. I'm not willing to say that there, that Iraq is now some kind of Iranian proxy writ large.

I think the Iraqis are struggling. I don't think Iraq is an Iranian fiefdom, I think that's way too far. Iraq is entitled to have its relationships with Iran. It has been a long time since there has been casualties as a consequence of either ISIS or Iranian backed militias in Iraq to a significant degree, and that's a substantial change from where we were four years ago.

00:51:10

Yes, there's influence. Yes, there will always be influence, and we're always going to have that difficulty in Iraq. But it is certainly not at all taken over by Iran, and certainly, Iran is not on the march, on the ascendancy in Iraq. The same with Lebanon. While Hezbollah, actually, Hezbollah's struggling a bit as its tried to replicate itself in Iraq, and I think most people will tell you Hezbollah right now is waning as far as popularity in Lebanon. There's a real fight trying to

get Hezbollah back into the box in many respects with the Lebanese people.

John Donovan:

Okay, let me let Michael break in here.

Michael Ware:

Can -- yeah, can I just jump in? For what it's worth, we saw that the leader of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, in his end of year message he boasted that Hezbollah has now doubled its precision guided missile capability. And there's actual intelligence fears that the Iranians have helped them set up a missile manufacturing facility within Lebanon.

00:52:10

So, to think that Iran has not maintained its outreach, that its not maintained the breadth of its grasp, its simply not so. And we should go back --

Mary Beth Long:

Michael, that's not what I said. That's not what I said.

Michael Ware:

But --

Mary Beth Long:

I said they were on the ascendancy, and that in fact, the missile production facilities in Lebanon are well dated, well predated the last four years. And in fact, Iran is forced into hiding that in many respects by using Hezbollah. Whereas, in four years ago, they literally had uniformed, not only military, but Quds forces in those places. I'm not saying that --

Michael Ware:

Look --

Mary Beth Long:

I apologize.

Michael Ware:

No, no, I'm sorry. Finish --

Mary Beth Long:

No, please. No, please, go ahead.

Michael Ware:

No, I'm saying, look, Mary Beth, do you honestly believe --

John Donovan:

Really appreciate how polite everybody's getting in this debate.

00:52:59

Michael Ware:  
Yeah.

John Donovan:  
That's kind of a nice thing to see these days.

Michael Ware:  
Mary Beth, do you honestly believe that there's not constantly a Quds force in Lebanon? Do you honestly believe there's not constantly Quds force on the Israeli border? And let's go back to Iraq for a moment. Iraq is not a proxy Iranian state? Well, I was there during the American invasion, right? As General David Petraeus will tell you, at the end of our 10 years there, Iran won the war. They won it before we even started. As we invaded from the south, they invaded from the east. So, as Saddam governors ran away, Iraqi exiles came from Iran and assumed their positions. Every electoral party, virtually every electoral party that makes up the Iraqi government, was either formed in Iran, is funded by Iran, or is armed by Iran. And among those who aren't, like the Kurds, they must maintain a forever relationship with Iran.

00:54:02

And in the first two U.S. sponsored elections in Iraq, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis was voted into Parliament twice, and that's the man who was killed when we assassinated Qasem Soleimani last year, greeting him at the airport.

John Donovan:  
I want to go back to Danny Danon, to circle back to, as Justine put it, the elephant in the region, Iran. And Danny, you know, Israel is a U.S. ally in the region, and we're not arguing what's in Israel's interest, we're arguing more of what's in America's interest in the regions generally. But Israel is in the region. Israel is a U.S. ally, and I want to put the question to you. Does Israel feel safer vis-à-vis Iran than it did four years ago, and is it concerned that the policy of the last four years will not continue?

Danny Danon:  
Well John, I got confused because I thought that we --

John Donovan:  
Vis-à-vis Iran.

00:54:59

Danny Danon:  
-- were having a debate about U.S. policy in the last four years, and we're having a debate about the Iranian's policy in the last four years. But we should all agree that the Iranians are not going anywhere. And I do agree, Michael, that they are getting stronger, because they are dedicated to promote revolution.

John Donovan:

So, does that mean that the last four years of policy did not reduce the effectiveness of the Iranians as disrupters in the region?

Danny Danon:

No, you have two different tracks. You have the Iranian track, the spending billions on terrorism to promote instability, and they will continue to do that. But on the other end, you see that the moderate forces became stronger also. We became united. Today we share intelligence, we cooperate, and the Iranians know today that they cannot send their proxies to Yemen, Lebanon, Gaza, you name it. Today, we are collaborating, and I think that that collaboration is meaningful. And I think we have to thank the U.S. for putting all of those forces together.

00:56:00

You know, when you have a, when you do things quietly, it's important, but when you come to the UN, or you come to the Security Council, and you see all those countries coming and standing against Iran, it is meaningful. So, the Iranians became stronger, I agree with that. But at the same time, the good guys, and we are part of the good guys, we became stronger also. And we became united, and this unity is meaningful for the future where we will have to confront the hatred and radical ideas coming from Tehran.

Mary Beth Long:

Can I add a, it's my turn to jump in for just a second?

John Donovan:

Sure, please do.

Mary Beth Long:

The previous arguments, and I what I think the Ambassador's touching upon, is really important. What a tremendous disservice to the tens of thousands of Iranians and Iraqis, just in the last two or three years, that went out onto the streets and protested against their regime's corruption, protested against Iranian influence, protested against the so called Muhandis and others who were taking over their countries, who really were on the streets in unprecedented numbers, probably since the Green Revolution.

00:57:13

And the martyrs that died because they refused to go back inside, and they refused to be suppressed by the militias that were Iranian backed. Don't take my word for it, take the Iranian and the Iraqi people for it. The Iranian portfolio is very different now than it was just four years ago.

John Donovan:

So, Mary Beth, who are you saying is --

Michael Ware:  
No, no, can I --

John Donovan:  
-- doing a disservice? I just want to understand what you said, it's a terrible disservice, who is committing a terrible disservice to those folks?

Mary Beth Long:  
I think that it's a terrible disservice to say that Iraq is a proxy state of the Iranians when you had tens of thousands of Iraqis who died making exactly that point, that they were not, --

John Donovan:  
I see, I see.

Mary Beth Long:  
-- nor were they going to be an Iraq, and Iranian proxy.

Michael Ware:  
Can I jump in here please? Look --

John Donovan:  
Yes, although I'm beginning to agree with Danny that we're beginning to talk about Iranian policy less than American policy.

00:58:04

Michael Ware:  
All right, well, what I want to say to Mary Beth's point is, and I lived in Iraq for seven years with the Iraqis, not with the U.S. military. Those tens of thousands of Iraqis who just want to be Iraqi, and don't want to be controlled by Iran, have always been there, and will always be there. But the organs and the leaders of power are completely controlled by the Iranians, or completely influenced at the very least. Nothing has changed there, except perhaps Tehran has amplified its influence in the corridors of power where it matters.

John Donovan:  
Justine, as it happens because of the clock, the final comment of this round comes to you. And I'd like to put the question to you, and if we have time, others can take it on. But if you were advising President Biden right now on what to do about the Middle East and acknowledging that talking about the Middle East as one monolith is a huge mistake, because it's far more nuanced than that. But if you were going to talk, let's make it about Iran and let's make it about the Palestinians, if you can do it in two to three bullet points, would you be calling for change in the U.S. position, and what would that be?

00:59:11

Justine Rosenthal:

I would be saying that we need to find a way to get back to the JCPOA as some sort of starting point, rolling back Iran's nuclear program and starting to normalize relations. I would be losing diplomacy with other states besides those in the Abraham Accords, as another arsenal in U.S. foreign policy, and I'd be saying that we need to start moving back towards at least discussion of a two-state solution, and bringing the Palestinians back to the negotiating table, even as we continue to help Israel normalize its relations with other states.

John Donovan:

Actually, I'm going to extend it a little bit, because you put some pretty provocative points out there, and I don't want to just let them hang out there without some response to it.

00:59:50

Danny Danon, the second point in particular I'm interested in your take on, the two-state solution being a priority of U.S. foreign policy. It has not been quite as much for President Trump as for preceding administrations. Do you think that that focus, that that solution should come back into primary focus?

Danny Danon:

I think that promoting a dialogue with the Palestinians should be part of the agenda of the new administration, we encourage it. But I think you cannot leave the allies of the U.S. by themselves. What we saw in the last four years, the U.S. gained respect in the region from their allies. The U.S. will have to include them also in the process with the Palestinians in order to achieve results. I would advise President Biden to listen to the allies of the U.S., to include them in future negotiations, and to bring them to the table when he wants to promote peace in the Middle East, when he wants to promote peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

01:00:56

John Donovan:

Mary Beth, I want to take it to you, and I'm going to take it also to Michael. You know, advising President Biden about stay the course that was set by President Trump in the Middle East in general, or change some things up in a serious way.

Mary Beth Long:

Honestly, I think that what has happened in the last four years has given President Biden a lot of options that his predecessors did not have. And that staying the course means giving up leverage in some respects and not reviewing all his options. I think he needs to find his own course. But I do think that turning back time on the JCPOA, even if you could get the same deal, circumstances have dramatically changed, and it's not the same context. So, I would encourage him to use the leverage, whether he agreed with the policies of the Trump administration, or he agrees with the positives and the negatives and the balance thereof. He needs to find his own path, but don't be afraid to leverage the very good things that have happened in the last four years that give him more options than in the past.

01:01:58

John Donovan:

And Michael Ware, now you get the last word.

Michael Ware:

Well, I actually agree with Mary Beth. I might not necessarily call them all the good things, but I do think President Biden can now use, let's call it the erratic nature, of the Trump administration's involvement in the Middle East to move forward in potentially new and exciting ways. He can either be offering a, you know, more stable tiller, a hand on the tiller, or he can continue some of the momentum. Like I said, I support the momentum of the Abraham Accords, I just don't like the price that America's paid for it. I don't like the way that the Trump administration involved in Turkey, and the way that the Trump administration has done nothing to stop Russia gaining ever-greater influence in the Middle East. I don't like the way the Trump administration, yes, I take the Ambassador's point that the good guys in the region are rallying with Israel and the U.S. against Iran, but these are good guys that chopped journalists up into little pieces in an embassy.

01:03:04

So, you know, there's got to be a different path. So, yes, we can move on from this, and good guys, who round up half the royal family and shove them down in a hotel before they're released? I mean, look, we can't do this blindly, and so transactionally. There has to be a movement on from that. But I do think that the turmoil, and, to its credit, the progress that the Trump administration has made in certain areas, can be a springboard for Biden. If I was advising him, I would argue there's rich fields ahead.

John Donovan:

Thank you, Michael Ware. Thank you to all four of you, that concludes the second round of this Intelligence Squared U.S. debate, and now we are turning the corner to home. We are going to hear, in the third round, brief closing statements from each debater. They will be two minutes each, and this is their last chance to try to change your minds, because remember, immediately after this round, we're going to ask you to vote for a second time.

01:04:04

And your votes will decide our winner, it will be the difference between the first and the second vote that establishes who won this debate. So, let's move on to round three, closing statements. Each debater in turn, here to make her closing statement in support of the resolution, for the last four years, America got the Middle East right, is Mary Beth Long. Mary Beth?

Mary Beth Long:

Look, we've had a lot of discussion about a lot of very difficult subjects. But the bottom line is, a lot of the problems we've discussed have existed, some of them for decades, if not centuries. And we've discussed a lot of players: Iran, Syria, the U.S., Russia, China, all of it. The fact of the matter is, none of these players, and none of these policies, was the trip or the trigger that made everything better or everything worse. At the end of the day, if you're sitting on the

ground in the Middle East, and you're reading the newspaper, you're not reading about ISIS terrorism, you're not reading about al-Nusra.

01:05:00

You're not worried that the JCPOA has hidden the development of not only a run-amok missile program, but a nuclear program. Yes, the Palestinian issue is still with us, but it is dramatically changed. And for the first time in a lifetime, if not ever, you've got the U.S., Israel, and the Gulf states aligned against Iran, and recognizing that Israel is no longer their biggest enemy in the region.

If that and the absence of terrorism in our daily lives is not safer, I don't know what is.

John Donovan:  
Thanks very much.

Mary Beth Long:  
You need to vote for this resolution.

John Donovan:  
Thanks, Mary Beth. Our speaker will be speaking against the resolution. Here is Justine A. Rosenthal. Justine, the screen is yours.

Justine Rosenthal:  
I will keep this brief. Just say, if you wanted to live in a world with a nuclear-armed Middle East, then I would say you vote for the motion.

01:05:58

If you want to live in a world where thousands are dying in humanitarian crises that America does absolutely nothing to stop, vote for the motion. If you want to live in a world where American interests are being overrun by China, Russia, and Turkey, then you vote for the motion. I implore you; this is not the world in which we want to live, and that is why you should vote against that sort of future for America and the Middle East.

John Donovan:  
Thank you, Justine. And our next speaker will be speaking for the resolution, here is Danny Danon. Danny, the floor is yours.

Danny Danon:  
Thank you. I urge you all to support the motion and listen to your allies. We, here in the Middle East, we work together with you, and we are telling you that in the last four years, we felt safer, we felt more secure, and as the former Deputy Defense Minister, we do not take it for granted. We think every day about our security. So, if we feel better today, and your allies in the Gulf are feeling better today, I urge you to listen to them. In the last four years, the allies of the U.S. became stronger, they became more united.

01:06:59

And who knows what will be the challenges in the future, but at least we know that we will do it together. That is why I'm urging you to support the motion.

John Donovan:

Thank you, Danny. And finally, our last argument will be made against the resolution, which one more time, is for the last four years, America got the Middle East right. Here is Michael Ware.

Michael Ware:

I would urge you to vote against this motion. Because, whilst the Trump administration has marshaled allies, in sometimes an unprecedented way, I question the cost by which this has been achieved. And the fact that no fetter has been put on any of these allies to change their behaviors at all, with the singular purpose of neutralizing Iran, thereby escalating tensions with that country, as it lurches or hurtles toward developing a nuclear capability. There are ancient and long-standing divides in that region.

01:08:02

The Trump administration didn't create them, but it went in there and beat them with a stick. I, like others, have seen what these divisions look like on the ground. The invasion of Iraq, I saw a Turkmen nine-year-old girl who'd been shot by ethnic rivals and laid at the step of our hotel door. I've seen Sunni Shia civil war in Baghdad. It's, I can't describe it, and yet, what the Trump administration has done has moved the pieces around so that it's shaken the tectonic plates of these divisions. And I don't think that bodes well for a greater future beyond a four-year term.

John Donovan:

Thank you, Michael Ware, and thanks to all of our debaters. And that concludes the final round of this Intelligence Squared U.S. debate, the argumentation is over. And now it's time to find out who you've felt was most persuasive in the course of hearing those arguments.

01:08:59

Mary Beth Long:

We get to vote?

John Donovan:

You don't get to vote, no.

[laughter]

Justine Rosenthal:

I know that's because I changed your mind.

Mary Beth Long:  
I was thinking that too.

[laughter]

Justine Rosenthal:  
I do want to give my hats off to my opponents, interlockers, it's been a real pleasure.

Mary Beth Long:  
I was thinking the same thing for that reason.

Michael Ware:  
Well, I have to say it was intimidating, but a great pleasure.

Danny Danon:  
Thank you all, --

John Donovan:  
Well, you were, go ahead Danny, please.

Danny Danon:  
I want to thank you all for the great discussion we had.

John Donovan:  
Well, I have somebody else that would like to join in the thanks, and that's our chairman, Robert Rosenkranz, who is the reason that this whole program exists and has existed since 2006. And Robert would like to join us, and he would like to say a few words.

Robert Rosenkranz:  
I want to thank everyone for joining us today. You just heard arguments from Mary Beth, Danny, Justine and Michael, on one of the most important foreign policy topics facing the Biden administration.

01:10:01

Ironically, this very topic was the first IQ Squared debate done in 2006, the U.S. must tolerate a nuclear Iran. Well, the Obama administration decided we couldn't, and made the diminution of Iran's nuclear ambitions the center point of their policy. The last four years we've taken a somewhat different stand. The center point has been to reduce Iran's economic power by sanctions and by taking out, frankly, some of their leaders in the military and in the nuclear scientific establishment.

Which of these policies served American national security interests best? That was the subject of tonight's debate, and I wanted to thank all of you for joining us. Reasoned debate on a subject like this is of paramount importance.

01:11:00

It's especially true in light of the current disarray in American events. This debate, this program, is an effort to restore civility, to create a contempt-free zone, in which reasoned analysis and constructive discourse can take place and bring something to the public square that's been sadly missing in American life. We're trying to break down polarization, we want to get past the sound bytes, and actually listen to different points of view with respect, and with critical thinking and analysis. So, while the final votes are being counted, I now want to hand the podium back to John Donovan.

John Donovan:

Thank you so much, Robert, and I want to say also, that at Intelligence Squared, we have the goal of having conversation that can be adversarial and even competitive but can be respectful and civil and shed light.

01:11:57

And I think all four of our debaters today were just so excellent at that, so I want to thank all of you for the way that you did this. So, thank you.

Mary Beth Long:

Thank you.

[talking simultaneously]

Mary Beth Long:

Thank you for the opportunity.

Michael Ware:

Yeah, it was refreshing.

John Donovan:

Mary Beth, you were saying before that you, you were talking about, in this toxic environment, you've found being able to have a conversation like this was --

Mary Beth Long:

I have to say, with the toxicity and the divisiveness of today's environment, what a joy it is to sit down with colleagues and have real disagreements, and to learn something from them, but do it in a collegial way. I've thoroughly enjoyed it; I hope we get to do it again.

[talking simultaneously]

Justine Rosenthal:

I certainly have enjoyed it; I think we all have. Thank you, everyone.

John Donovan:

That's the beauty of debate and, you know, some rules, and some rules of civility and requirements to be intelligent and build a case, but it allows you to disagree in a way that you don't have to do away not liking each other.

And as Mary Beth said, today there's so much toxicity and partisanship happening in our political discourse, especially on tough issues like these, that it really can be a challenge to find a substantive and reasoned competition of ideas from people who have opposing views but the same commitment to intelligence and mutual respect.

01:13:12

And that's what we do at Intelligence Squared, we bring you, and millions, literally millions of listeners around the world, real debate through our podcasts and through our television and our public radio. And we do it all for free, we put this out to the world for free. And it's something that we care about a lot at Intelligence Squared. So that gets me to, gives me the chance to do a little bit of a commercial, since we are a nonprofit, we really, really rely on the support of the public and people like you to help us do this. If you want to learn more about that, or how to help us, or watch one of the nearly 200 debates we've done to date, I'm encouraging you to go to our website at IQ2us.org.

01:13:52

The other thing is that we've really learned, again, after doing these things for so long, it really, who wins and who loses is not the most important thing. It's the fact that we had this conversation, that we had it civilly, that light was shed by both sides. You all four acknowledged you heard people on the other side with things that you could agree with. But the game is competition, and so I'm going to result, announce the results of the competition, of the game part of it.

So, on the resolution: for the last four years, America got the Middle East Right, before the debate in polling our live audience, 31 percent agreed with that statement, 46 percent disagreed, and 23 percent were undecided. Now let's go to the second vote, the team arguing for the motion, for the last four years America got the Middle East right, again, their first vote, again was 31 percent, their second vote was 37 percent. So, they pulled up 6 percentage points, that is the number to beat now.

And the team arguing against the motion, their first vote was 46 percent, their second vote was 59 percent. They pulled up 13 percentage points, --

Michael Ware:  
Oh!

01:14:56

John Donovan:

-- it beats the 12 percent, it means the team arguing against the motion, for the last four years America got the Middle East right, has been declared our winner. So, I want to say congratulations to Justine and Michael, again, our first ever married couple debating team, for doing this in separate rooms in your house. I want to thank Mary Beth and Ambassador Danny Danon for arguing well and fiercely and honestly and civilly. I want to thank all four of you for, as I said a moment ago, helping to shed light through fair and honest disagreement. I really enjoyed this. I want to say to all of you watching as well, thank you so much, we will see you next time. From Intelligence Squared, I'm John Donovan.

**This is a rough transcript. Please excuse any errors.**