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## **Intelligence Squared U.S.**

### **Unresolved: Shifting Power in the Middle East**

**Host & Moderator:**

John Donovan

**Debaters:**

Michael Doran, Reuel Marc Gerecht, Bernard Haykel

Brett McGurk, Barbara Slavin

Moderator: John Donovan

Start Time: (00:00:00)

John Donovan:

The Middle East. So many moving parts. So many layers of uncertainty. So many stress lines that no pundit, no policymaker, no U.S. president has really ever been able to figure it all out, which is what makes strategic questions about this region we think so very debatable, so that's what we're going to do. We are going to debate them. I'm John Donovan. This is Intelligence Squared U.S. We are here with our live audience at the Symphony Space in New York City. Our theme for this outing Unresolved: Shifting Power in the Middle East. And our use of this word "unresolved" is very deliberate. It's how we signal that we think that there is so much to dig into in this region, so many cross currents, that we are actually going over the course of this program to argue through three separate resolutions, one after the other, and we are going to have five debaters on the stage, deliberately an odd number, who will each be flying solo taking a position of yes or no on each of these resolutions.

00:01:04

So, let's meet our debaters in just a moment, but before we do, I want to give a reminder to those of you who might've just arrived that we would like you to cast your pre-debate vote on these resolutions. Go to [iq2US.org/vote](http://iq2US.org/vote) and you can do that using any mobile device and you will be prompted to vote yes or no on the resolutions Trump is Right on Saudi Arabia, The World is Safer Without the JCPOA, that's the shorthand for the Iran Nuclear Deal, and Turkey is an Asset to NATO. Let's meet our debaters. First, ladies and gentlemen, once again, please welcome Reuel Marc Gerecht.

[applause]

Reuel, it's great to have you here. You are a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. You're a former CIA case officer. You are an experienced Intelligence Squared debater as well. You have now four debates under your belt with us. Well, it's great to have your back with us again tonight.

00:02:01

Reuel Marc Gerecht:  
My pleasure.

[applause]

John Donovan:  
Next to Reuel at the debating table please welcome, ladies and gentlemen, Bernard Haykel.

[applause]

Hi, Bernard. Welcome to Intelligence Squared. You are a professor of near eastern studies at Princeton. You're a Guggenheim fellow and you're the co-editor of the book, "Saudi Arabia in Transition, Insights on Social, Political, Economic, and Religious Change." Bernard, we look forward to hearing your views and insights this evening. Thanks so much for joining us.

Bernard Haykel:  
Thank you.

[applause]

John Donovan:  
Next, Michael Doran. Michael, you are a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute. You served in the Bush administration as senior director on the national security council, among other positions. You're also an experienced Intelligence Squared U.S. debater. This is your third time on our debate stage and we can't see -- wait to see what you have in store for us tonight. Michael, thanks for joining us.

Michael Doran:  
Thanks for having me.

[applause]

John Donovan:

Next in the lineup, Barbara Slavin. Barbara, you're director of the Future of Iran initiative and a non-resident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council.

00:03:05

You're an author and a columnist and an expert on Iranian affairs. You and I were journalists together in 1986 in Libya as American bombs fell on the city, which was a very, very harrowing experience. I am glad that we are both here tonight. Barbara --

Barbara Slavin:

Me too.

John Donovan:

-- it's a pleasure to have you.

[applause]

Barbara Slavin:

Good to be here.

John Donovan:

And next in line, Brett McGurk. Please welcome Brett McGurk.

[applause]

John Donovan:

Brett, you're currently a distinguished lecturer at Stanford. Previously, you served in senior positions in the Bush and the Obama and the Trump administrations, including as special presidential envoy for the global coalition to defeat ISIS under Presidents Obama and Trump. Brett, it's great to have you on our stage for what we think is a timely debate. Thank you so much, Brett, and thanks to all of our debaters.

[applause]

So, I just want to remind you again of how this is going to unfold. We're going to be working through three different resolutions one at a time. For each of these resolutions, at the moment that I announce it and invite a debater to speak on it, that debater will declare yes or no to the statement.

00:04:10

So, we'll find out at that point what positions they're going to be taking. They will have each 90 seconds to make their case for why they're taking that position.

So, let's get to the debate. The first of our three resolutions deal with Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia has some tough critics here in the U.S., including among members from Congress from both parties, but a more forgiving perspective comes from President Trump himself, who appears more likely to excuse than to criticize some of the excesses of the kingdom and who told his controversial prince, Mohammad bin Salman, according to the New York Times, "You're doing a terrific job."

So, given that, our first resolution is this: Trump is Right on Saudi Arabia. Our first speaker on this resolution will be Michael Doran. The resolution, Trump is Right on Saudi Arabia. Michael, how do you declare, yes or no?

Michael Doran:  
Yes.

John Donovan:  
And you have 90 seconds.

Michael Doran:  
Emphatically so.

John Donovan:  
The floor is yours.

00:05:06

Michael Doran:  
Thank you. The President is right on Saudi Arabia because he understands that we've had two elections from two different -- two presidential elections that have elected candidates who said the United States is going to pull back from the Middle East. First that was Barack Obama, and then that was Donald Trump. He understands that the American public is not willing to have another George W. Bush-style intervention in the Middle East, and yet he also knows, as I think does our entire national security elite, that we can't just leave the Middle East and leave it to its own devices. That's the legacy -- that's the lesson of the Obama administration's foreign policy. President Obama tried to pull back. He -- the last thing he wanted to do was to go back in Iraq and to get involved in Syria, but he had to, because we have to have order in the Middle East.

And if the United States is going to make order in the Middle East, and it's not going to do it itself, then it has to have friends, and it has to work with allies. And the number of allies who can work to create a regional order is actually very small, the number of candidates who can project power beyond their borders.

00:06:21

There are only three, and they are Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. That's it. There's no other choice. If we're not going to do it ourselves, we have to do it with friends. There's no other possibility. Thank you.

John Donovan:

Thank you. Thank you, Michael Doran.

[applause]

We move on to our next debater on the same question: Trump is Right on Saudi Arabia. Barbara Slavin, how do you declare, yes or no?

Barbara Slavin:

No [laughs]. I'm surprised you didn't mention the United Arab Emirates, but anyway. No, the Trump administration has squandered its leverage in the Middle East by blindly supporting the Saudi monarchy and in particular its reckless and cruel crown prince, Mohammad bin Salman. There was no good reason for Trump to go to Saudi Arabia as his first foreign trip. He could have gone to a democratic ally of the United States.

00:07:10

His bet appeared to be that the Saudis would be so bowled over by this presidential attention that they would forge an overt alliance with Israel and spend billions more dollars on U.S. weaponry. While the Saudis have drawn somewhat closer to the Israelis, they have not supported Trump's unilateral moves, like moving our embassy to Jerusalem, or recognizing the Golan Heights. And they haven't bought much additional U.S. hardware. Meanwhile, Mohammed Bin Salman, who is known as "MBS," had made a series of disastrous decisions, including boycotting Qatar, holding the prime minister of Lebanon and nearly 400 Saudi businessmen hostage, waging a brutal war in Yemen, and last -- but very much not least -- murdering the journalist Jamal Khashoggi a year ago.

00:08:06

Had the U.S. taken a different tack, we would have had much more leverage with the Saudis, and it's possible that MBS would not have become crown prince.

John Donovan:

Thank you, Barbara Slavin.

[applause]

Brett McGurk, you're next in line on the resolution: Trump is Right on Saudi Arabia. Are you a yes or no?

Brett McGurk:

I'm a no, John. Take Trump out of the question. We're here in the Upper West Side. I can imagine what most of the audience thinks -- but take Trump out of the question. What do we want from Saudi Arabia? We want a moderate Saudi Arabia. We want a successful Saudi Arabia. We want a Saudi Arabia that is working for stability in the region. Trump has given Saudi Arabia unconditional love, and there should be no unconditional love in the Middle East. We had no ambassador for two years. We had no engagement from the Secretary of State, because Trump went around the Secretary of State. And look at the results. Saudi Arabia today is weaker, more isolated in the region and in Washington, and facing increasing problems.

00:09:01

On Trump's watch -- and I agree with Michael; we need a united front in the region -- on Trump's watch, the GCC, the Global -- the Gulf Cooperation Council, six countries in the Gulf -- has split because the Saudis have led a boycott of Qatar.

That has weakened our ability to deal with problems in the region and Iran. Saudi Arabia, on Trump's watch, has escalated the war in Yemen, and we've basically abandoned diplomacy in Yemen to try to de-escalate that humanitarian catastrophe. On Trump's watch, bipartisan majorities in Congress -- which are rare these days -- have rebuked Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is now becoming a partisan issue in Washington, which is not good for us and not good for Saudi Arabia. Defense spending in Saudi Arabia -- they spent 11 percent of their GDP on defense. They spend more than Russia on defense, and yet, they are in desperate need of domestic reforms because they have an economic crisis, and we are not working with them at all on these critical questions. So, I speak as a friend of Saudi Arabia. And the record, I think, speaks for itself. Trump has not been good for Saudi Arabia.

John Donovan:

Thank you, Brett McGurk.

[applause]

Reuel Marc Gerech -- Trump is Right on Saudi Arabia. Yes or no?

00:10:07

Reuel Marc Gerech:

No. I mean, I have to say, this is an odd occasion if I am in agreement with Barbara Slavin, sort of.

Barbara Slavin:

[laughs] The foundation for defense of democracies -- my God.

Reuel Marc Gerecht:

I tell you. I mean, I'm going to define this fairly narrowly, you know? I think President Trump has some flexibility in his definition, so I'm going to utilize the same flexibility. I -- if you look at Saudi Arabia, is it really an ally of the United States in the sense that -- can it allow the United States to diminish its footprint in the region, and can it help build an alliance against the Islamic Republic of Iran -- which is the most convulsive and lethal force in the region? And I think the answer there has to be no. I mean, the Saudis are incapable of using ground troops in any meaningful sense. In Syria, the Iranians, the Russians, and the Assad regime have slaughtered hundreds of thousands of Sunnis, and the Saudis were able to do nothing.

00:11:08

Saudi Air Force has some power, but let's be honest. If the Americans aren't there lending a hand, they can't really do anything. You don't trust them. I think that has come clear in the Yemen war. There's a good reason for the Saudi to be fighting in Yemen. However, I would disagree in the way that they have done it. I don't think it's been terribly productive. And again, it's largely because MBS in particular goes his own way, and he's not reliable. And I would say -- I mean, just take, for example, the murder of Khashoggi. I think it's fair to say that was a botched effort.

John Donovan:

Reuel, I'm sorry. Your time is up. But you can continue your thought --

Reuel Marc Gerecht:

I would just say the Iranians do a vastly better job. I mean, you cannot -- the Saudis cannot --

John Donovan:

Okay.

Reuel Marc Gerecht:

-- actually kill someone competently.

John Donovan:

Okay. Okay.

[applause]

Barbara Slavin:

That's an odd way to put it.

John Donovan:

Trump is Right on Saudi Arabia. Bernard Haykel, are you yes or no?

Bernard Haykel:

Yes, I'm with Michael on this one.

00:12:06

I think that Trump has basically seen the -- the lie of the land in the Middle East and he's seen in Saudi Arabia a regime that is willing to do certain things that are profoundly in America's interests, the first of which is the complete cessation of all funding to Islamists and to Muslim political radicals throughout not just the region, but the entire world. Saudi Arabia now is in a transition away from Islam being a fundamental core element of its identity towards a -- a country that is more like a normal country where nationalism is the -- is central to the identity of the country. The second thing that this regime is doing in Saudi Arabia is that it is trying to change and modernize its society by clamping down on reactionary Islamists domestically. It has given greater rights to women, something that was thought impossible before the present regime in Saudi Arabia.

Women are now in the public -- in the public arena. They're in the workforce. They're driving.

00:13:15

And this seems to me to be a momentum that cannot be stopped. So, on a number of -- on a number of issues Trump has been right to support this regime. Now this regime has also made terrible blunders in Saudi Arabia, the killing of Jamal is only one. The -- Warren Yem [spelled phonetically] is the other but you can't, you know, pick and choose your allies and we are stuck with Saudi Arabia. And we want it to move in the right direction.

John Donovan:

Thank you, Bernard Haykel. And that concludes the opening round.

[applause]

And now we have a more free willing conversation, but what we have are on the resolution Trump is Right on Saudi Arabia three no's and two yes's. The no's have

described Trump's position on Saudi Arabia as unconditional love and as blind support, as reckless and naïve. They're basically arguing that Saudi Arabia does more harm than good for U.S. interests, that it's an unreliable ally, a weaker ally than before, and that the bottom line cozying up is not -- is not bringing about improvement of the position of U.S. interests.

00:14:18

The two debaters on the other side make a very strong argument number one, we need the ally. Saudi Arabia has been an ally. Saudi Arabia will do things that we want Saudi Arabia to do. Some of them might not be very pleasant, but we want them to do it and that Saudi Arabia is changing, is trying to change and becoming less perhaps offensive culturally and politically than it has been in the past. So, we have a lot to dig in there. I want to start with you, Barbara Slavin. The -- the position that your argument -- some of your now at this point opponents are taking that at bottom Saudi Arabia does deliver, that -- that if we -- if we need an ally out there to do stuff, give us places to base our planes, for example, spend money in areas we want it spent, for example, that Saudi Arabia does it and that nobody else is going to do it and that that's -- that's the key of the argument for why it's a good thing to keep Saudi Arabia in our corner.

00:15:15

Barbara Slavin:

Yeah, well, look, I'm not arguing that we should cut relations with Saudi Arabia. I just think we need more balance in our relations with various countries in the region and I think that embracing this blind anti-Iran position was a particular mistake and I know we're going to get to that, but there are other places. I mean, we have the United Arab Emirates. We have Qatar. We have our biggest air base in Qatar. So, we don't really need Saudi Arabia for that. I support the idea that the Saudis are trying to reform, but you know, they've got most of the advocates of reform in prison, including a number of women who, you know, wanted the right to drive and so they have the right to drive, but instead these women are in jail. I just think --

John Donovan:

Why -- why does that matter --

Barbara Slavin:

NBS is --

John Donovan:

Why does that matter to U.S. interests?

00:16:00

Barbara Slavin:

Because I think NBS has shown that he has terrible judgment, that he's reckless and cruel. And he is not somebody that we should put a lot of faith in. I think we have to be very, very careful and not put all our eggs in his basket.

John Donovan:

Michael Doran, respond?

Michael Doran:

Look. There are realities of power in the world. There's realities of power in the Middle East. We are not going to remake this -- this region into an image -- into our own image. We're not going to -- we're not going to coerce these people through military force and we're not going to -- we're not going to entice them to be like us. We have -- we have interests. We have to focus on those interests and we have to think about who are the most influential actors that can help us. The problem we have in the region now is the rise of Iran. Iran is spreading its influence all over the region through proxies. It's delivering to them precision weapons. They're threatening all of our -- all of our allies and especially Israel and Saudi Arabia sees the region exactly as Israel does and it's using its resources and its influence, which is considerable, in in Europe, in Washington even, to put to -- to project a picture of the region and our interests and their interests that is identical to Israel's interests.

00:17:18

John Donovan:

Barbara wants to jump in.

Barbara Slavin:

I'm sorry, but, you know, the war in Yemen has been a gift to Iran. Every stupid thing MBS does is a gift to Iran. He is not a reliable ally --

John Donovan:

Brett McGurk?

Barbara Slavin:

-- for the United States.

Brett McGurk:

Look, I've worked with MBS, and he actually is someone who you can reason with. If you simply give him unconditional support, as Trump has done -- again, no ambassador in Riyadh for two years in the Trump administration. There was no ambassador there for two years. We had no various senior level engagement, because everything was going around the entire national security team. I actually know something about the

region. But I keep hearing, "Trump sees this. He sees this." Trump doesn't see anything. There's no strategy behind this. Trump --

[applause]

Trump is being described -- he's being described as a close friend of Saudi Arabia. This is a man who has said repeatedly that King Salman, the custodian of the two holiest mosques of Islam, a very important figure, would be gone in two weeks without our military support.

00:18:10

That's what Trump says to him. He embarrasses them; he diminishes them. He brings MBS in the Oval Office with posters of ships and boats. As a senior leader said to me, "It looks like you've been bought." He is not benefiting Saudi Arabia, and I speak, again, as a friend of Saudi Arabia. I agree with the moderate reforms. That has to happen. We're not helping. We're making it worse.

John Donovan:  
Bernard Haykel?

Bernard Haykel:

I mean, I think that there are a couple of assumptions that have been made here. One is that somehow, if Trump wouldn't support the regime, then someone else could have come into power; MBS could have been replaced by the United States. I think that's hogwash. We cannot interfere in the internal workings of another country like Saudi Arabia. It's a very opaque place, and the royal family has total dominance and control over the society, and MBS is in charge. Now, if we want to start meddling there in a way like I suspect Barbara would like us to do, we could have a civil war in that country --

Barbara Slavin:  
No, I'm not --

Bernard Haykel:

-- a civil war in a country that produces over 10 million barrels of oil a day; a country that when we tell it, "Well, you need to produce more," because there's been a cutoff or shutoff of oil either in Libya or Venezuela or wherever, they will do it.

00:19:22

They are an ally of the United States. They're not perfect, far from it. They have lots of warts, and we should put pressure on them to fix those warts. But to pressurize them to behave in exactly the way that we want them to behave is not going to work.

Male Speaker:

Well, whether Trump --

John Donovan:

I want to bring --

Barbara Slavin:

[unintelligible] Trump policy.

John Donovan:

Wait, we haven't heard from Reuel yet. I want to give him a chance to get into the conversation, then I'll come to you as well. But -- so, just bouncing off of what Bernard was saying, that we shouldn't meddle, can't meddle -- are you actually arguing in your no position for wanting to change and shape what Saudi Arabia is?

Reuel Marc Gerecht:

Not really. I mean, I think the primary thing I always have to be concerned with Middle Eastern societies, particularly a traditional one like Saudi Arabia going into transition, is its fragility. So, I think the primary American objective with Saudi Arabia is "do less."

00:20:12

I think it should be -- we should want them to do less outside of Saudi Arabia, and we should probably want them to do less inside of Saudi Arabia. I'm not a terribly big fan of the argument that says we want authoritarian leaders to coerce their societies into progress. I think modern Middle Eastern history tells you just the opposite, that these progressive leaders, the ones that are usually embraced by the West, end up uprooting traditional society and actually bringing on that which we wanted them to actually stop. It makes the situation worse. It makes it into a pre-revolutionary situation. So, I think the United States wants evolution in Saudi Arabia -- all societies evolve -- but you would want to do it conservatively, and you do not want to see the Saudis, particularly MBS, start trying to throw its muscle around the region, because it's just going to muck it up.

00:21:05

John Donovan:

Brett, you wanted to jump in a moment ago.

Brett McGurk:

I just -- the war in Yemen was mentioned, but even on the war in Yemen -- and I agree what the Iranians are doing in Yemen is terrible, but on Trump's watch, the UAE, the only real ally with Saudi Arabia and Yemen, is leaving. So, the whole record here, I think, speaks for itself. It just has not been beneficial to Saudi Arabia or to our interests.

John Donovan:  
Michael Doran?

Barbara Slavin:  
Just one point on the crown prince.

John Donovan:  
Sure.

Barbara Slavin:  
Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law, developed a relationship with MBS before he was crown prince, and he pushed him and pushed him, and I'm sure that had some influence in Riyadh, because there were others who could have been named crown prince if not for the mucking around of the Trump administration and Trump's son-in-law.

John Donovan:  
Michael Doran?

Male Speaker:  
I don't agree with that. I actually --

Michael Doran:  
I want to --

Male Speaker:  
-- agree with you --

Michael Doran:  
I want to make --

Male Speaker:  
-- we should [unintelligible] --

John Donovan:  
I want to give Michael --

Michael Doran:  
I want to make --

John Donovan:  
Yeah.

Michael Doran:

I want to make two points. One is this: since the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, this is the - everyone in America knows his name. We've got in China --

Male Speaker:

They don't pronounce it correctly, though.

[laughter]

Michael Doran:

We've got in China -- we've got a million people in concentration camps.

00:22:08

There hasn't been as much attention on that as there has been on Jamal Khashoggi.

Barbara Slavin:

That's true.

Michael Doran:

Why? Why? It's not because of Saudi Arabia. It's not because of MBS. It's because of the relationship between Jared Kushner and MBS. It's all about -- it's an indirect way of going after Trump. We have become an incredibly parochial country, where our domestic debate -- [applause] -- we now talk about foreign policy discord debate -- discord points in our domestic debate. This is not the way -- this is not the way to run a good foreign policy.

John Donovan:

All right.

Michael Doran:

One last point --

John Donovan:

Okay. Sure --

Michael Doran:

-- very quickly, very quickly.

John Donovan:

Yeah.

Michael Doran:

The Yemen war -- we had a great deal with Saudi Arabia for many, many years -- 75 years. They bought our arms, and they didn't use them. And then, the deal was, we

took care of the region around. And under Barack Obama, we said to them, "We don't do that anymore. The Iranians are moving into Yemen? Your problem. Not ours."

00:23:04

The Iranians are building a Hezbollah in Yemen, with precision weapons that can hit Riyadh -- a G-20 capital with which, as Bernard said, has some of the largest reserves in the world. And we -- what do we do about that? Nothing.

John Donovan:

Okay. Michael -- rather, Barbara, you're in.

Barbara Slavin:

Yeah. Look. I don't see it in domestic political terms. Jamal Khashoggi was lured --

Michael Doran:

You just did.

Barbara Slavin:

-- was lured into his own consulate in Istanbul and butchered. I'm sorry. You know, I think that's -- whatever the Chinese may do -- you know, they have their own human rights abuses. But this was appalling. He was someone who lived in the United States. He was a peaceful advocate of change in his own society, and there has been no accountability --

Michael Doran:

The Iranians --

Barbara Slavin:

-- for that action.

[applause]

Michael Doran:

The Iranians and Hezbollah -- [applause] -- the Iranians and Hezbollah and other Iranian proxies have uprooted 10 million people in Syria. They have killed 500,000 people in Syria. Every one of them has a name.

00:24:06

Barbara Slavin:

Yeah. Well, I would put that on the --

[applause]

John Donovan:

I want to ask Brett McGurk a question, and then I would like Bernard to respond to the answer that Brett gives. But Brett, you had talked about unconditional love is problematic. I don't mean this to be sarcastic, but what level of love should we be showing for Saudi Arabia? To what end?

Brett McGurk:

Could you draw pictures?

[laughter]

The thing is, not only unconditional, it's also abusive; because I mentioned what President Trump has said about King Salman. I think that's very important.

Barbara Slavin:

Yeah.

Brett McGurk:

Look. Saudi Arabia is a critical ally of ours. We have to engage with them. I've spent a lot of time in Saudi Arabia. But what's happened in the first years of the Trump administration was just a total green light, and you saw all sorts of reckless behavior, which has damaged our interests. Our allies in the region now are divided. The UAE, a critical ally of ours, is leaving Yemen. Donald Trump -- you might think -- wants to be more present in the Middle East, to correct for some of the mistakes of the Obama Administration, but he says publicly, "Why are our ships there? What are we doing there?"

00:25:05

There is no confidence in the region that Donald Trump wants to be engaged in the region. So, it has to be a level of engagement with a very close partner of the United States who shares interests of ours, but also has a lot of differences with ours. But when you're not engaged, when you don't have an ambassador, when your Secretary of State is cut out of the loop, you end up seeing reckless behavior. It creates a classic moral hazard.

John Donovan:

So, the solution is what?

Brett McGurk:

The solution is to have -- I mean, finally have a strong ambassador in Saudi Arabia, you're engaged --

John Donovan:

To -- in order to be telling the Saudis what to do?

Brett McGurk:

Yes. You have to. You have to be regularly engaged, and say, "This -- if you do this, that will be very bad."

John Donovan:

Bernard --

Bernard Haykel:

Yeah. I mean -- I totally agree. I mean, I think that the relationship with the United States and Saudi Arabia -- this highly personalized form of the relationship -- is not helpful to either side. We have to build institutional links, like we used to once have, between the intelligence services and so on -- but also, to explain to Saudi Arabia that "If you're going to be an ally, that's -- that establishes certain limits on what you can do."

00:26:03

John Donovan:

So, are you on the other -- are you now arguing the other side?

Bernard Haykel:

No. No. No. I'm not arguing on the other side.

John Donovan:

Okay.

Bernard Haykel:

I think that -- I think that you have to give Saudi Arabia support for all the good things that it's doing --

John Donovan:

Yes.

Bernard Haykel:

-- and then you have to tell them discreetly that certain things that they're doing are wrong, and they have to -- they shouldn't do that.

John Donovan:

Reuel?

Reuel Marc Gerecht:

I mean, the primary problem is that President Trump is continuing the policy of President Obama -- and that is the disengagement of the United States from the Middle East, the retreat of the United States from the Middle East. When the United States retreats from the Middle East, guess what? Other people are going to go on the vacuum -- in this case, MBS -- and MBS simply can't handle it. Saudi Arabia as a society can't handle it. So, you want more of America, less of Saudi Arabia.

John Donovan:

We have one minute left. We have two speakers I'd like to have give -- have a last word, Michael and Barbara. Michael, can you take it first? And really, try to keep it to 30 seconds. I'll stop you at 30.

Michael Doran:

We have to start from the assumption that we're not going to do more. This is the point. We're not going to do more, and we have to work with the powers that exist -- the powers that are comfortable with the American order.

00:27:05

There is a country in the region -- Iran that is trying to overturn the American order and it's supported by Russia. We have to look at the region very clear -- in a very clear-eyed fashion and work with those people that want to keep the American order and keep stability, fight terrorism, and -- and keep the problems of the Middle East in the Middle East and not elsewhere.

John Donovan:

Barbara Slavin.

Barbara Slavin:

Yeah. The Iranians are an opportunistic power and they are profiting from the numerous mistakes made by the United States and its allies in the region. Mike, you served in the Bush administration. The invasion of Iraq was the main reason why Iran has more influence in the region.

Michael Doran:

Brett --

Barbara Slavin:

And I -- I --

Michael Doran:

Brett worked on Iran. Not me.

Barbara Slavin:

You know, I don't think it's fair to bring -- bring Syria into this. What's happened in Syria is terrible, but let me just say that NBS, you know, it's not just Khashoggi. Sixty-four of the Saudis detained in the Ritz Carlton Hotel, their whereabouts are unknown. Thirty others have been forcibly disappeared. Luzane Al Hafuel [spelled phonetically], one of the champions of women driving, has been rotting in prison tortured.

00:28:09

This -- we have influence in Saudi Arabia. We don't have influence with Assad. We should be doing something about that.

John Donovan:

Thank you. That concludes our debate on resolution number one: Trump is Right on Saudi Arabia.

[applause]

And a reminder of where we are. We have five panelists at this Intelligence Squared U.S. debate debating several different resolutions on shifting power in the Middle East. We're now going to move on to our next debate and again, Ben, can you come down and help me pick a speaking order? You should've sat on the aisle. Thanks.

[applause]

Ladies and gentlemen. Thank you. Okay. Thank you very much. Our second resolution -- our second resolution is going to be looking at Iran and particularly the aftermath of the Iran Nuclear Deal being first agreed to and then called off. The Iran Nuclear Deal officially called the JCPOA, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, was meant to slow down Iran's development of nuclear weapons. It was negotiated and agreed to by the Obama administration. It was called off by the Trump administration. Now Iran is beginning to cross some of the boundaries that that deal set in place. The upshot of all of this, that's what we're going to be going after with this next resolution: The World is Safer Without the JCPOA, Without the Iran Deal. Our first speaker on this resolution will be Reuel Marc Gerech.

00:29:17

Reuel Marc Gerech on the resolution: The World is Safer Without the JCPOA. Are you yes or no? Can you say it out loud for the folks at home?

Reuel Marc Gerech:

Yes, yes.

John Donovan:

Okay.

Reuel Marc Gerecht:

Sorry. Yeah, I mean, I look at this fairly straightforwardly. One, at the historian in me says, you know, it's a little too soon to tell, but what we do know I think as a general rule, it's not a good idea for American foreign policy to be built on self-deception. That's essentially what the JCPOA is. We're deceiving ourselves of its value. It should not be built on blackmail. That's essentially what the Iranians are doing. They're saying if you do not do -- if they don't publicly do certain things with the nuclear program clandestinely, they can do whatever they want because the system of verification that deal is so awful that we'll give you billions of dollars in return. I also think appeasement isn't a terribly good start for American foreign policy and that's essentially what we're doing. We're appeasing the Iranians.

00:30:17

We're giving them billions and billions of dollars and they can use it any way they wish and the way -- one of the ways they use it is by expanding their influence in the Middle East by engaging in mass slaughter in Syria and I think we should always dwell on that the Iranian role that they've had in Syria. They've essentially run much of the Syrian armed forces. They have been the masters on the ground and yet we're giving them billions of dollars to engage in the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of people and to move millions from that country. I think it's just a very unwise policy to deceive yourselves in thinking that down the road it's going to get better. We should approach this realistically. Now, we do not know what Donald Trump is going to do. No one does, including him.

[laughter]

[applause]

John Donovan:

Thank you, Reuel Marc Gerecht. The resolution The World is Safer Without the JCPOA, Bernard Haykel, how do you declare?

00:31:13

Bernard Haykel:

I would say it is absolutely safer and that is because Iran took advantage of this deal to build up its ballistic missile capability to -- it used the money that was given to it by the United States to spend not on its own population but on proxy fighters and militia men who fought in the Syria civil war. They built better drones, better guidance systems for their missiles and their drones, which we're now seeing being deployed in Yemen that are threatening the Straits of Bab-el-Mandeb. The Iranians basically took advantage of

this deal and said, "You know, well, we'll halt this nuclear stuff," which they can always restart, and in return we gave them a pass on all the other stuff that they were doing, which made the region much more dangerous than it ever has been. So, I think that, you know, it is definitely safer, and it is also -- and I agree here with Reuel, which is that it is built on a deception. It's, in fact, built on a form of hubris and pride.

00:32:16

The United States believed -- certain elites in the United States; you'll hear this view in a minute -- felt that we could move within the Iranian -- within the different circles of power in Iran, we could kind of push the moderates against the more extremists, and that the deal would help the moderates. This is all hogwash. Iran is a theocracy; it's run by one man, and that man is no moderate. Thank you very much.

John Donovan:

Thank you, Bernard Haykel.

[applause]

Michael Doran, on the resolution The World is Safer Without the JCPOA, are you yes or no?

Michael Doran:

Yes, I'm with my colleagues here. I agree with every word that they said. It was a massive self-deception, and, you know, one of the things that we know now from the atomic archive, which the Israelis spirited out of Tehran, is that we didn't understand how far along Iran was in terms of building a nuclear weapons program.

00:33:15

It was much more advanced in terms of weaponization than we realized, and we also didn't realize that they had -- that they were continuing a clandestine program. It's all much clearer now. What they did back in 2003 when the United States went into Iraq, they were afraid that George W. Bush might attack them, and their -- some of their program had been discovered and was being investigated by the International Atomic Energy Association.

And so, what they did is they started to emphasize the parts of the program to declare the parts of the program that could be plausibly explained as part of a civil nuclear program while putting deeper underground the hidden parts. And when I say underground, I mean actually underground, like the Fordow site, which was built solely to enrich uranium to build a nuclear weapon.

00:34:12

And under the JCPOA, they have kept Fordow, and they haven't done any of the repurposing of it that they were supposed to do according to the agreement. So, what we have done is given an international cover for them to continue their covert program. It's --

John Donovan:

Thank you, Michael Doran.

Michael Doran:

-- a massive self-deception.

[applause]

John Donovan:

Thank you. On the resolution, once again, The World is Safer Without the JCPOA, Barbara Slavin, do you declare yes or no?

Barbara Slavin:

The world is definitely not safer without the JCPOA. You notice that these gentlemen are all referring to missiles and other issues. The deal was supposed to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon for at least 15 years by preventing Iran from having sufficient material to make a nuclear weapon for 15 years. It provided for the most intrusive inspection system ever negotiated, and Iran was in full compliance with this agreement when President Trump withdrew.

00:35:10

Since he did that --

[applause]

-- the Middle East has become a much more dangerous place than it was before. The Iranians were patient; for a year they did nothing. They took no steps. But after a year, and after the Trump administration imposed a total embargo on the sale of Iranian oil, all of a sudden there were sabotage incidents in the Persian Gulf, and the Iranians have begun to exceed some of the limits set in the JCPOA. We are profoundly not safer. In terms of their regional influence, this is something that goes back a long time, has to do with other mistakes made by the United States, and the fact that our own diplomacy is so poor should not be a reason for railing against the Iranians for having influence in the region. We were safer with the deal; we could have built on it. Now we have nothing.

00:36:05

[applause]

John Donovan:

Thank you, Barbara Slavin. Brett McGurk on the resolution The World Is Safer Without the JCPOA, are you yes or no?

Brett McGurk:

I'm also a no. I just think, "Look at the facts." On June 21st, just a couple months ago, President Trump tweeted that he was cocked and loaded to bomb three strikes in Iran, but then 10 minutes before the strike, he said, he stopped it, because he learned at the last minute he might kill 150 Iranians. So, just think about that. We were on the verge of a new military conflict, which even if you think that strike was justified, and I could actually argue that case -- it would have been launched with no thought to the consequences, no planning for the consequences. Iran would have reacted. How would we have reacted? And up the escalatory ladder it would have gone. And how did we get to that point? Trump pulled out of this deal without any consideration of what would happen or what would come next. And the question for -- on the resolution is not whether the JCPOA is a good or bad deal; the question is whether the world is safer. I will stipulate: Iran is a terrible, terrible country under the leader of Ayatollah Khamenei. Iran has killed colleagues of mine.

00:37:08

Iran is an enemy of the United States of America. But is the world safer without the deal? The answer is no. Since Trump left the deal with no plan, Iranian behavior in the region has gotten worse -- even according to the Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo. It's gotten more aggressive, targeting oil tankers in the Straits of Hormuz. It's actually increased support, in many ways, to its proxy militias. It has dramatically strengthened its ties with Russia and China, our two great power competitors. And if we get into an ill-conceived war with Iran, we will lose the century to China. There's a lot more to say on this topic, but given the time, the answer is no.

[applause]

John Donovan:

Thank you, Brett McGurk.

[applause]

So, on the resolution, The World is Safer Without the JCPOA, we have three Yeses and we have two Noes. I want to take the point that both Barbara Slavin and Brett McGurk - - who are the two Noes on this -- to Reuel Marc Gerech, who are basically saying Iran's behavior since the U.S. pulled out of the deal has gotten worse. The world is not safer. The world is less safe, demonstrably, at the hands of Iran's activities.

00:38:16

Reuel Marc Gerecht:

I'm not sure how you can argue that. I mean, I think it's fair to say that Iran's behavior before they pulled out of the JCPOA was abominable. It was atrocious. It was hideous. It was during Obama's administration that the Iranians went wild in Syria, and President Obama did nothing. A part of the reason why he did nothing -- I think -- because he was gunning for this nuclear deal, and he was gunning for the illusion of having some diplomatic breakthrough with the Islamic Republic.

And I just have to get back to this, we don't know what the Iranians are doing clandestinely. The JCPOA is like Swiss cheese. The notion that we have an idea of what they're doing clandestinely -- was, I think, disproved by what happened immediately after the deal was sealed, and that is, we went back into -- and this sort of robot-controlled -- Iranian-controlled inspection, and what do we find?

00:39:09

We found two more particles of uranium. What did the IAEA do? Nothing. It did nothing because no one wanted to do anything. The Israelis gave the IAEA information about a warehouse in Tehran, which came out of documents that were seized. What did they find there? Uranium again --

John Donovan:

So, so --

Reuel Marc Gerecht:

What have the IAEA done?

Barbara Slavin:

From an old program. From an old program.

John Donovan:

So, your point is that they were cheating on the deal --

Reuel Marc Gerecht:

But -- they could be cheating. We don't know. We didn't interview any of their --

John Donovan:

I want to --

Reuel Marc Gerecht:

-- scientists.

Barbara Slavin:  
How do you --

Reuel Marc Gerecht:  
We didn't get the paperwork. We didn't follow any of the standard protocols that the IAEA uses.

John Donovan:  
Let me bring Barbara in.

Barbara Slavin:  
Uranium -- it -- particles like that can -- as we know, they have an enormous half-life. How do you know that this didn't date the --

Reuel Marc Gerecht:  
Let's go find out.

Barbara Slavin:  
-- to the previous work which was scrapped in 2003?

Reuel Marc Gerecht:  
I agree with you, Barbara. Let's go find out. Let's go back in there and inspect.

Barbara Slavin:  
But how are we supposed to do that if this deal is collapsing? And what's the IAEA going to do --

Reuel Marc Gerecht:  
The Europeans --

Barbara Slavin:  
-- if we have no agreement?

[applause]

Reuel Marc Gerecht:  
The Europeans can call for that anytime they want.

00:40:06

Barbara Slavin:  
I'm sorry. We've undermined the deal.

John Donovan:  
Michael Doran?

Barbara Slavin:  
We've undermined our ability to find out what's going on.

John Donovan:  
Michael Doran, I want to point out that you actually argued this treaty in a previous debate with us.

Michael Doran:  
And I won.

[laughter]

John Donovan:  
That night you won.

Michael Doran:  
Decisively. No.

John Donovan:  
Let's not get ahead of our skis, here.

Michael Doran:  
[laughs]

John Donovan:  
Go ahead.

Michael Doran:  
The -- I think what Reuel is saying is that the IAEA is not going in and inspecting because the powers -- the JCPOA powers have sent a very clear message to it that they don't want them to go in and inspect sites, because they know that if they go to a military site and demand inspection -- as they have the right to under the JCPOA -- the Iranians will say, "Get stuffed." And that will end the JCPOA. So, there's this -- there's this dance going on, this self-delusion -- where the IAEA is not asking questions that it knows it's going to get a bad answer to.

00:41:00

John Donovan:  
Brett McGurk -- I mean, there's a little bit of a note here that Iran is dangerous anyway, with or without nuclear weapons, and that it has -- and this came out -- it has money. It

has influence. It has bedfellows in dangerous and risky places. How does that factor come into this whole conversation about the world is safer or not without the deal?

Brett McGurk:

Look, they have a nuclear program. We gave them this Particles for Peace program that Eisenhower started. We actually started their nuclear program. They then made a clandestine program through [unintelligible] and the Russians and the Chinese, but they have a nuclear program. This is the real world. I'm not ideological about this. I'm very practical. How do you deal with the nuclear program? The two ways, diplomacy through a deal is not going to be perfect. We want to buy as much time as you can or a military strike. And all assessments of a military strike as reported in the New York Times are not disclosing anything you're going to set the program back by one or two years and then what?

So, I mean, the question is do you favor a military strike to set back the program one or two years? Or do you favor very imperfect diplomacy to buy time? You hear a lot about the fact that since sanctions came back on Iran they have a lot less money.

00:42:05

Here's the truth. They spend very little money on these proxy groups. Even according to State Department figures that came out last year, they spend about \$2 billion a year max on their proxy groups. You are not going to sanction your way to better Iranian behavior. I agree with my colleagues to the right of this stage. I don't like the Iranians. They're an enemy of the United States of America. We have to work with our allies around the world to build alliances to make sure that we contain their behavior and push back. But we're at risk by this unilateral policy, as I mentioned, of losing the sentry here in the region to China and Russia. I was in Beijing not long ago. The Chinese have a very sophisticated Middle East policy. They have -- investing in four countries with comprehensive strategic partnerships. Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and UAE and the Saudis are embracing this posture. We are increasingly isolated by the way Trump has gotten out of this deal and I do not believe it's working in our interests.

John Donovan:

Bernard, do you want to respond to that?

[applause]

Bernard Haykel:

Well, I mean, I would say -- I would say that coming out of this deal has basically just lifted the veil on -- on this regime and on the people who have been trying to pretend

that this is a regime that can moderate, that can change, that can become different, and the -- the way in which Iran has often been described is that there's --

John Donovan:

But do you think the deal was premised on that notion that Iran --

Bernard Haykel:

Yes.

00:43:27

Barbara Slavin:

Premised on -- that's nonsense.

Bernard Haykel:

Absolutely. Absolutely. The deal was premised on the notion that there were these two factions within the -- within the regime and that ultimately some form of normalization would -- would -- would happen, would come out and result from this deal because people within Iran would -- would say look, you know, such benefits have come out of this. We need to become closer and -- and -- and better -- have a better relationship with the west and that's just never going to happen. This is a regime that every Friday in its principle mosque, every Friday for 40 years has cried out, "Death to America," every - - imagine if --

John Donovan:

But if your opponents are arguing that at least deny that regime 15 years' worth of nuclear development as opposed to responding after the fact for a two-year delay that that 15 years is better than two years.

00:44:16

Bernard Haykel:

Well, first of all, I don't think that delay actually, as my two colleagues have -- have argued was actually possible. Second, it gave them a pass on all this other stuff that they were doing. And, you know, if you -- if you had stopped everything, the ballistic missiles, the proxy stuff, then fine. I would -- I would think -- I would say this is a good deal, but it's not that.

John Donovan:

All right. Let me go to one of the two no's. Barbara or Brett.

Brett McGurk:

So, I just -- Barbara can argue the intricacies of the nuclear deal. That's really not my area. I'll just say they're starting the nuclear program again. I don't think Donald Trump

realizes the corner into which his national security team has put him in. The decision will be do we do a military strike or not and Trump has already shown he doesn't want to do that. So, we have a maximum pressure policy without the backbone of a president that's ready to see it through.

00:45:03

[applause]

So, even if I took this, and I agree with a lot of what my colleagues to the right of the stage say. This -- this strategy just really makes -- makes no sense, but the question really is they have a nuclear program. This is reality folks. And in terms of the entire internet -- the intelligence community, all the agencies of the intelligence community, in their report they say, and they've said it consistently now and the State Department just confirmed it a few months ago, Iran is not now going through the mechanisms through which to produce a nuclear weapon. They have not done that since 2003.

John Donovan:

But Brett, your opponent's argument has been that the Americans and perhaps also the inspectors are guilty of -- or have committed self-deception.

They're kidding themselves. And that was two of the argument -- two of your opponents made that -- take that on.

Brett McGurk:

Look, it's a dangerous world out there as President Trump has said, but sometimes you have to trust the unanimous judgment of the intelligence community and recognize the intelligence community --

John Donovan:

You're kidding.

Male Speaker:

--- can be wrong.

[laughter]

Brett McGurk:

They can be wrong.

Male Speaker:

You're absolutely kidding. But we now have --

Reuel Marc Gerecht:

There's an incredible track record on nuclear issues, let alone so many other issues, in getting things wrong. So, I mean, the 2007 NIE said clearly they had stopped developing their nuclear weapons program.

00:46:11

The Israeli archives that were snatched out of Tehran clearly show that's false. It is an untenable position now.

John Donovan:  
Barbara.

[applause]

Barbara Slavin.

Barbara Slavin:  
Maybe Netanyahu is running for re-election. If there were a real facility in Iran working on -- working covertly on nuclear weapons, he would have disclosed it to the world. Instead he had some pathetic announcement the other week -- think about some facility -- it wasn't even clear if it was nuclear or missile -- that the Iranians had destroyed.

There is not at present a program, a dedicated program, to make nuclear weapons, but there will be --

Male Speaker:  
There is.

Barbara Slavin:  
There will be if the United States stays out of the JCPOA, if the sanctions remain, and this agreement falls apart.

Reuel Marc Gerecht:  
I think --

Male Speaker:  
There is --

Reuel Marc Gerecht:  
-- a logical mind has to look at the Persian material -- and I don't think you've looked at it, Barbara, since you don't know Persian -- that if you look at the material, it is clear there is a program. That program continued after 2003.

00:47:12

Now, why would the Iranians have stopped a program that they invested -- a clandestine program which they knew the Americans and others were going to come after? Why would they stop it?

Barbara Slavin:

Well --

John Donovan:

Michael Doran? Michael Doran, I want to take on the part of -- the other part of this deal that Iranian assets were frozen and sanctions were lifted. There was a financial payoff for the Iranians as a result of this deal, which they now lose. But what are the implications of that payoff having been in place? And Brett McGurk and Barbara agree -

-

Barbara Slavin:

Well, it's their own money--

John Donovan:

-- that --

Barbara Slavin:

-- you know.

John Donovan:

-- they're not actually --

Barbara Slavin:

It was their own oil money. We didn't give them anything.

John Donovan:

But -- well, but they now have more money to do bad stuff about if that's what they want to do, but you two have argued that they're not actually spending that much money on bad stuff. But I want you to take that point on, Michael.

Michael Doran:

Well, look, I mean, Brett, I say this with respect and love and --

Brett McGurk:

Uh-oh.

Barbara Slavin:

Uh-oh.

[laughter]

Michael Doran:

-- great -- you're talking out of both sides of your mouth. Right?

00:48:03

On the one hand, you're saying we need to contain Iran, but on the other hand, you're saying, "Well, they have a nuclear program, and there's nothing we can do about it, and, oh, by the way, the main actor in the Middle East who's going to help us contain Iran in the Arab world, Saudi Arabia, we have a problem with them as well." So, when you start adding up all of the different positions you're taking, you're really saying we have to give Iran a pass. And there is not -- the choice is not between war and giving them a pass. The choice is containment, just like we did with the Soviet Union throughout its entire history. One of the problems with the deal is that -- there are two major problems with the deal. One, it did not stop their program in any way. It just allowed them to reconfigure it and gave an international legitimacy for a program that continued, and it handed them enormous resources to pursue their aggressive policies across the region, and that's why they're now in Yemen, which they weren't before until the JCPOA.

00:49:07

It's why they are now running the show -- they're more influential in Iraq than we are, and they are running the government basically, certainly the military forces, of Syria.

John Donovan:

Let me let --

Michael Doran:

All of that --

John Donovan:

Let me let Brett --

Michael Doran:

All of that happened within the context of the JCPOA. It's not simply a nuclear deal. It was a pass to Iran writ large.

John Donovan:

Brett McGurk?

Brett McGurk:

So, I just have to say --

[applause]

Look, let's bring this conversation into the situation room, and I just -- the facts are Iran has a nuclear program. They definitely have a civilian nuclear program. No question they had a weapons program. I don't always trust the intelligence I get, but it is unanimous judgment that they are not now pursuing a nuclear weapon. Before the deal, they were one to two months away from being able to develop a bomb. The question -- the big question is -- this is a question the president will face, and any future president.

Michael Doran:

How many months are they away now? How many months are they away now?

Brett McGurk:

According to the intelligence -- look, according to the intelligence community -- and you can -- it's a year. The point -- but, Mike, the point is they have this program. It's a fact. Do we --

Michael Doran:

We bought --

Brett McGurk:

-- bomb it?

00:50:09

Michael Doran:

We bought 10 months.

Brett McGurk:

Do we bomb it?

Michael Doran:

We bought 10 months --

Barbara Slavin:

That's a lot of time.

Michael Doran:

-- and gave them all of -- gave them -- opened all the doors of the region to them --

Brett McGurk:

Okay --

Michael Doran:

-- and gave -- and bought 10 months.

Barbara Slavin:

When the stupid Bush administration invaded Iraq, we opened the region to them. I mean, you have to look at all the factors. This is not the fault of the JCPOA. This is the fault of foolish and stupid U.S. intervention in the region, support for autocratic regimes like Saudi Arabia. I mean, Iran has an affinity with these groups. Why? Because many of them are oppressed Shia minorities. If Saudi Arabia treated its own Shia better, there would be no room for Iran to play. If Saddam Hussein had not oppressed the Shia majority of his country, we would not see what we have now.

Michael Doran:

Barbara, I --

Barbara Slavin:

You can't put it all on the JCPOA. It's ridiculous.

Michael Doran:

I remind you --

Male Speaker:

I'm just curious --

Michael Doran:

I remind you --

Male Speaker:

[unintelligible] Syria.

Michael Doran:

I just -- yeah, I was just going to say --

Male Speaker:

Thank you.

Michael Doran:

I was just going to remind you --

Barbara Slavin:

In Syria?

Michael Doran:

I was just going to remind you of the 500,000 people who have been killed --

Barbara Slavin:

Yeah, well, there was at the hands of the Iranian [unintelligible].

Barbara Slavin:

There was something called the Arab Spring, which had nothing to do with the JCPOA, and Assad is a brutal bastard, and there is no doubt that he has had support from Iran, and there is no doubt --

Michael Doran:

Support?

00:51:17

Iran --

Barbara Slavin:

-- he has had --

Michael Doran:

-- runs the --

Barbara Slavin:

-- support from Russia.

Michael Doran:

Iran runs the military forces on the ground in Syria. There's no Syrian army. It's Iran --

Barbara Slavin:

Tell me how Iran with a nuclear weapon is going to make --

John Donovan:

And that concludes our debate on the second resolution.

[applause]

The World is Safer Without the JCPOA.

[applause]

We were going a little cable news there.

[laughter]

Male Speaker:  
Correct.

Barbara Slavin:  
Sorry about that.

John Donovan:

Our third topic zooms out on the nation that is locked into the middle of everything, and that is Turkey. Turkey, which sits between Asia and Europe; Turkey, which sits between Russia and the Arab world. But more recently, a Turkey which is actually shifting somewhat between democracy and autocracy. Turkey has been a member of the NATO alliance for most of the time most of us have been alive. Given recent trends, however, there are questions being raised about that last fact, which we are framing as a resolution this way: Turkey is an Asset to NATO.

00:52:16

On that resolution, our first speaker will be Bernard Haykel. Bernard Haykel, on that resolution -- Turkey is an Asset to NATO -- are you yes or no?

Bernard Haykel:

I'm a yes. Absolutely. I mean, Turkey is a hugely important country. It's one of the most important countries in the Middle East, as was mentioned earlier -- the others being Israel and Saudi Arabia. Turkey has an absolutely massive population, a very strong military, has been a stalwart ally of the West for many, many decades, and it is tragic to see it move away -- as it has done -- from the Western alliance. And you have to keep in mind that this is also a period when the Russians are coming into -- back into the Middle East, and there are relations between the Turks and the Russians which are detrimental to Western interests -- purchasing of the S-400 missiles and all kinds of other deals.

00:53:14

John Donovan:

Could you take a minute -- 20 seconds, I'll give you the added 20 seconds -- just to explain what that missile purchase is --

Bernard Haykel:

That's a very high-end Russian missile system that's ground-to-air. It can shoot down virtually any plane that flies in the air and --

John Donovan:

Its significance is that it's Russian?

Bernard Haykel:

And -- it's Russian, and it's also not inter-operable with the equipment that already exists in Turkey, which is all Western. And so, this is a very bad development. I think that Turkey -- one of the reasons that Turkey has moved in the direction that it has -- away from the West -- has to do with the politics of the Middle East, in particular the question of the Kurds, and the cozying up between the Americans and the Kurds in the war against ISIS. And Brett here would know all about that. And I think it's crucial to look to Turkey, and to tell them that, you know, this question of the Kurds does not mean, in any way, a diminution in the alliance or the support that the West -- and specifically the United States -- has to give to Turkey.

00:54:17

So, Turkey is fundamental. It has to remain in NATO. And I hope we -- to God -- that we keep it there.

John Donovan:

Thank you, Bernard Haykel.

[applause]

Michael Doran, the resolution goes to you: Turkey is an Asset to NATO. Yes or no?

Michael Doran:

Yes. Emphatically, yes. I agree with everything that my colleague Bernard said. And I want to tell you that there's a story that hasn't been told in the United States, which is about the way that we abandoned our ally, Turkey. I mean, I think people are very familiar with the -- with all the story about how Erdogan has turned away from the West. But one of the problems with Erdogan is -- and I would say, actually, Turkey in general -- this is a nation that does not have a public relations gene, because they have a very good story to tell in the United States and they haven't told it.

00:55:07

We went into Syria through the YPG, which is the Syrian arm of the PKK -- those are the separatist Kurds in Turkey who want to carve out a Kurdistan from Turkey. They are an extremist terrorist organization, recognized by the United States as a terrorist organization. This is the equivalent of the United States going into, say, Jordan, and building up Hamas. And when the Israelis say, you know, what you're doing there next - - right next to -- to our country building up this organization that wants to tear my country apart is not good for us. We said sit down and shut up. We told them to sit down and shut up and when there was a coup attempt against Erdoğan orchestrated by

Guilen [spelled phonetically] who sits in Pennsylvania and Erdoğan said hey, can you extradite that guy, we said sit down and shut up.

So, at a certain point he said, you know what, they're actually anti-Turkey. Today, forget about Erdoğan. 80 percent of Turks, according to opinion polls, regard the United States as a hostile power.

00:56:13

John Donovan:

Thank you, Michael Doran.

Michael Doran:

There's a reason for that.

John Donovan:

Thank you.

[applause]

The floor moves to Barbara Slavin on the resolution: Turkey is An Asset to NATO. Are you yes or no?

Barbara Slavin:

Unbelievably I agree with my colleagues here on this one.

Male Speaker:

I'm changing my vote.

[laughter]

Barbara Slavin:

Maybe -- maybe for slightly different reasons. I'll let Brett speak to the -- the YPG and the Kurds and all of that. I just -- I just think it's important to keep Turkey tethered to the west. It's -- it's a very important -- it's a very large country and yes, Erdoğan has taken it in very undemocratic directions, but we've seen a resurgence of Turkish democracy recently. There were municipal elections and all the major municipalities, including Istanbul, voted against the -- the government supported-candidates. So, there are -- there are now defections from the ruling AK party.

00:57:11

Some of their most talented officials, former officials, are now going to start a new party. So, I think the last thing we want to do is to move away from Turkey now when Erdoğan finally is beginning to look a little bit weaker. The other thing is the

neighborhood Turkey is in. I mean, if we -- if we push them out of NATO, that just pushes them even more into the laps of the Russians and -- and the Iranians, which is certainly not in -- in our interest. You know, NATO is not the EU. There have been countries with rather authoritarian regimes in NATO. Spain and Portugal famously at the beginning. So, we should keep Turkey in, not out, and let's be patient. Let's -- let's have some faith in the Turkish people.

John Donovan:

Thank you, Barbara Slavin.

[applause]

Brett McGurk. Turkey is An Asset to NATO, yes or no?

00:58:02

Brett McGurk:

I'm going to say no.

[applause]

Not -- I --

John Donovan:

Thank you.

Barbara Slavin:

Interesting.

Brett McGurk:

I am not saying we should kick Turkey out of NATO, but the question in the present tense are they an asset to NATO and what is NATO? It's a vital transatlantic alliance aimed to protect the security and prosperity of its members and on that standard Turkey right now is not an asset to NATO. I'm going to look at the Trump administrations national security strategy. What do we care about? Great power competition, China and Russia, international terrorism, and Iran. On all three measures right now Turkey is not an asset. On international terrorism I have -- look, I ran the ISIS campaign. Forty thousand foreign fighters, Jihadi's from 110 countries around the world all came into Syria to fight in that war and they all came through Turkey.

The caliphate was on the border of Turkey. We worked with Turkey. I was in Turkey more than any other country to have them seal their border and they would not do it. They said they couldn't do it, but the minute the Kurds took parts of the border it was

totally sealed with a wall. So, let's just be honest about the record. It is not the fact that we went with the YPG and told -- told Turkey to sit in a corner, that's just not factual.

00:59:06

On Iran, Turkey was the biggest sanctions buster backdoor of any country around the world to Iran. Almost \$100 billion in a sanctions busting scheme went through Turkey by their own state-owned bank, the general manager of whom was prosecuted here in the southern district of New York and Erdoğan accused that judge and the entire -- our judicial system of being run by the cleric in Guilan in Pennsylvania which is ridiculous. On Russia, Turkey is buying the only NATO member by sophisticated military hardware from Russia. That is a serious problem. NATO is an alliance --

John Donovan:

Brett McGurk, I'm sorry, your time is up.

Brett McGurk:

--- against Russia. The answer is no.

John Donovan:

I think you're going to have a lot of chance to talk in the next segment.

[applause]

Turkey is An Asset to NATO. Reuel Marc Gerecht, are you yes or no?

Reuel Marc Gerecht:

I think I detected a few Greeks in the audience.

[laughter]

It's quite --

John Donovan:

We need your participation.

Reuel Marc Gerecht:

Is there any possibility I can argue yes? I would just do waffle? I mean, I --

John Donovan:

Can you tell the listening audience what your choice is?

01:00:08

Reuel Marc Gerecht:

No, no, no. I'm -- I'm -- I'm very torn here. One person --

John Donovan:

Well, let me for the record say that you have put up the flag no.

Reuel Marc Gerecht:

No, but I wrote waffle.

John Donovan:

Waffle.

Reuel Marc Gerecht:

So, which is what I want to do. I mean, I -- I -- when I lived in Turkey for a number of years and I'm very fond of the Turks and Istanbul is the greatest city on earth, you know, I -- I think that Turkey in and of itself remains a potential asset to NATO. And I agree with Barbara, I think it should remain, to the extent that we can, tethered to the United States and to the West. I think it's an investment that is well worth our while, and the great experiment of Turkey is by far -- it's not over yet. With that said, I don't have doubts that Erdogan is a fairly determined Islamist. I am surprised that Michael actually didn't bring up this issue. I think he has a desire and a dream to take Turkey in a different direction, certainly not in an Atatürk direction, a Kamalish direction. That cannot possibly be good for the United States.

01:01:12

Militarily, obviously, Turkey can no longer be brought with the secrets of NATO now. NATO is a very structured organization. Some people in NATO get to see more than others. Turkey is going to be at the very bottom of that list now. It has deeply compromised the F35 program, the new stealth fighter program, bomber program -- it's an all-purpose aircraft. You cannot possibly allow that thing to be deployed in Turkey now. I don't know what they've done --

John Donovan:

Okay --

Reuel Marc Gerecht:

-- with some of the intelligence agreements that we have with Turkey that --

John Donovan:

I have to stop you because your time is up.

Reuel Marc Gerecht:

I'm stopped now.

John Donovan:

Okay. Thank you very much.

Reuel Marc Gerecht:

I waffled.

John Donovan:

Thank you. That concludes the opening round of our third resolution, and --

[applause]

-- on the resolution Turkey Is an Asset to NATO, we have three yeses, we have a very, very firm no, and we have a waffle --

[laughter]

-- disguised as a no. So, I think, being the firm no, Brett, you're going to have a lot of time talking back to your opponents.

01:02:11

But what I think I heard was a sort of constant theme which unites you all actually, is that Turkey has the potential to be a fantastic NATO partner, and sometimes it is, and sometimes it's not, and it would be better if it were, depending on conditions. What I also heard was a little bit of "Whose fault is it that this thing is up in the air right now?" Mike Doran, I think you were saying that Turkey has been treated badly and that -- the notion being that could be corrected there for.

So, Brett, could you take that thought on, that -- I think Michael's argument that the reason Turkey, in your view, is not an asset right now has a lot to do with our treatment of Turkey and that that could be corrected.

Brett McGurk:

So, first, I'm fairly confident if you look at any public opinion poll in Turkey almost any year, Americans are very unpopular.

01:03:02

Before we ever heard of this group, the YPG in northeast Syria -- and I can talk to, but I don't want that to dominate the whole debate -- but before we ever heard of the YPG, and we decided to go to war against ISIS, because ISIS was committing genocide, and it was controlling 11 -- eight million people across Iraq and Syria -- you all know about ISIS -- we went to Turkey and said, "Hey, let's fight this together. We want to fly to Incirlik

Air Base to target ISIS. We need you to do some things on the border," et cetera, et cetera. And thankfully -- I have to be honest -- they did nothing. They would not let us fly out of Incirlik Air Base; they would not let us do anything. It was incredibly frustrating. We tried to do everything we possibly could with the Syria opposition, working out of Turkey, and too many times they were completely interwoven with extremist groups tied to Al Qaeda that we could not work with. And Turkey, frankly, did not do much to help at all. The YPG was a group that was surrounded by ISIS --

John Donovan:

For those who don't know the terminology --

Brett McGurk:

The YPG is a Syrian Kurdish group in northeast Syria. They were about to be slaughtered with a bunch of Kurdish civilians at a little town on the Kurdish border --

Michael Doran:

Is it the PKK?

Brett McGurk:

They're affiliated with --

Michael Doran:

Is it the PKK?

John Donovan:

We'll come back to that, Michael.

Brett McGurk:

Has -- here's the key question.

**01:04:08**

Has there ever been an attack from Syria into Turkey from this group? The answer is no. The answer is no. And who made the decision to arm the YPG? It was actually President Trump, not President Obama. So, there's a lot of history here that I want to make sure that we get absolutely right. But when ISIS was about to take this Kurdish town on the border with Turkey, we made the decision to do what we could to help save this town --

Barbara Slavin:

Kobani.

Brett McGurk:

-- and, frankly, at the time, Turkey was working with the YPG. They did an operation into Turkey, working in cooperation with the YPG. I was Accra to manage that operation, and it was a big success. And as soon as the Kurds started taking these towns away from ISIS on the border, Turkey totally sealed their border. We said, "Why didn't you seal the border when ISIS was there and flatbed trucks were coming across the border with ammonium nitrate and weapons and all sorts of things?" So, there's a lot of history here, but the argument that Turkey suddenly turned a switch because we worked with the YPG is just simply not true.

01:05:04

John Donovan:

Barbara, could you do us the favor of just a little education and take four sentences to explain to people who may not be completely familiar with the Turkish-Kurdish relationship what that's about? Because that's critical in the conversation [inaudible].

Barbara Slavin:

Yeah, it is, and, you know -- and Brett may know this better, but there was actually a peace process. There are many, many Kurds in Turkey. Ethnic Kurds make up, what? Thirty percent of the population probably.

John Donovan:

Okay, so just very basically, the Kurds are an ethnic group.

Barbara Slavin:

The Kurds are the world's largest ethnic group without their country. There are Kurds in Iran, there are Kurds in Iraq, there are Kurds in Syria. There are Kurds in Turkey. They are the largest ethnic minority in Turkey. And there have been clashes. There have been guerrilla groups. There have been -- there has been terrorism. There was a peace process, though. One of the reasons Erdogan was initially so popular was because he actually agreed to peace with the Kurds. And then, this peace agreement fell apart, and I'm still not really clear on whose fault that is. I think that Erdogan got paranoid. He saw that Kurds were becoming more prominent in Syria.

01:06:08

He got worried. And there were incidents -- who started it, Brett? Who attacked whom first? But there were incidents that -- the ceasefire broke, and then Erdogan got very, very upset --

John Donovan:

Okay. All right.

Barbara Slavin:

-- about the U.S. working with fringe groups --

John Donovan:

I don't want to go too deeply --

Barbara Slavin:

-- against ISIS.

John Donovan:

I don't want to go too deeply into the background, but I also want to add the fact -- and Brett has alluded to it -- that the Kurds have been our allies in -- against ISIS and --

Barbara Slavin:

They've been very effective.

John Donovan:

-- some of them have, and it's been very critical. But Bernard Haykel, I want to take to you Brett's point that at critical moments, the Turks have not acted like allies. They haven't done the things allies do as requested, and that's a pretty serious charge and a pretty good definition of a bad ally. So, can you take that response?

Brett McGurk:

Well, look -- I mean, Turkey is an independent country. And for instance, the first instance where they didn't do what the United States wanted them to do was to join in in 2003, in the war against Iraq.

01:07:06

They forbade the United States from using Turkey as a launching pad for the Iraqi invasion. And that proved very costly for the United States, because we had to get around Turkey. So, you know, the Turks have their own kind of independent and autonomous policy, and they don't always see eye-to-eye with us. On ISIS, they probably thought that the Kurds were more dangerous than the Islamic State. That comes as a real shock to us as Americans.

John Donovan:

Right.

Brett McGurk:

But you know, they have --

John Donovan:

But the fact that they're dancing with Russia, and they're dancing with China right now - - who are our most existentially concerning rivals out there -- does that not seem non-alliance-like?

Brett McGurk:

Yes. But I think one of the reasons they're doing that is because they don't feel that we have their back.

John Donovan:

Michael Doran?

Michael Doran:

Back in 2015, the Turks shot down a Russian airplane. And we -- and they looked to NATO to support them against the Russians.

01:08:05

And we treated it like a bilateral problem. We said, "We hope that you Turks and you Russians sort out this problem." We didn't treat it -- Russia was probing all along the NATO airspace, from the Baltics all the way down to the Balkans -- even into British airspace the Russians were probing. We could have used this as an example to say that this is unacceptable. The Turks shot down a Russian over Turkish airspace at the time. So, we -- that sent a very clear signal. It was -- and I'm not just talking about the one incident; I'm talking about the entire Syria conflict.

John Donovan:

[affirmative]

Michael Doran:

We are the only country in the world that went in and said "We" -- that the overwhelming priority -- the number one priority of the United States is to destroy ISIS. Everyone else in the region had a very simple, and logical, and important question, and that is, "What order is going to replace the order that is in Syria now?"

01:09:04

John Donovan:

Let me bring in Brett --

Michael Doran:

"Who is going to fill this vacuum?" Wait -- can I -- just one more sentence?

John Donovan:

One sentence.

Michael Doran:

We never went to the Turks and said, "Let's work together to build an order," because we didn't like their answer.

John Donovan:

Brett?

Brett McGurk:

I just -- Michael, I say this with all due respect -- but --

John Donovan:

Uh-oh.

[laughter]

Male Speaker:

[inaudible].

Brett McGurk:

But the problem with Michael's -- I'm just going to back the lens up. This is a debate about the Middle East. The problem with this formula for the Middle East is -- he mentions -- Israel, Turkey, Saudi Arabia. Israel and Saudi Arabia, if they have really one - - I mean, Iran is obviously enemy number one. Enemy number one-and-a-half is Erdogan. Saudi Arabia and Turkey are fighting proxy wars and supporting different groups all throughout the region. This is a serious, serious problem. But the truth is that when it came to ISIS, we had to fight ISIS. I mean, what is the formula here? There was no Syrian opposition group that we could work with that could be effective. We invested hundreds of millions of dollars through the Department of Defense and certain groups, and when we inserted them into Syria, they gave half their equipment to Al-Qaeda, and they ended up going backwards when they started military operations.

01:10:07

That was a very desperate situation, but we did all we possibly could with Turkey. I was in Turkey, again, more than any other country in the entire coalition that we built. But it's not just Northeast Syria. Turkey is threatening to come into Northeast Syria to attack the Kurds, which will put American lives at risk. That's a serious problem. Erdogan is also saying, at the same time, he wants to push the Greeks into the sea because he has claims in the eastern Mediterranean. This is a problem throughout the region right now. Erdogan is a serious de-stabilizing actor.

John Donovan:

Let me bring in Reuel Marc Gerecht. Have you -- do you waffle on this? Or --

Reuel Marc Gerecht:

I'm still sort of waffling. I mean, I would say that I mean it's a byproduct once again of the American retreat from the region. If President Obama or President Trump had been willing to insert say 3,000, 4,000 troops into Syria I think the situation could've been different. We were not -- so, we played on a fault line in the Turkish psychology. That's inevitable. I mean, Turkey actually does view itself as a much more fragile state than I think people in the west realize and the primary fault line is the Kurdish one.

01:11:10

Now, I might dissent a little bit on the way Michael has described the YPG in Syria, but I think you have to accept the way the Turks look at it and you can understand why they got deeply nervous and I -- I don't think -- also when the Turks look at the United States, as does everyone in the region now, they're saying is the United States really going to be there. I mean, NATO becomes a secondary issue for Turkey. If the United States is going to actually retreat from the Middle East retreating from the Middle East I think they read that also as retreating from NATO.

Michael Doran:

Look, look. NATO. What is NATO for? NATO is to counter Russia. The Iranians and the Russians moved into Iran and moved into Syria. The Iranians provided the ground troops. The Russians provided the air cover and the Turks said, "We don't like that." And the Obama administration said, "Sit down and shut up." One of the reasons we -- one of the reasons we picked the YPG to fight ISIS is because the YPG has a history of good relations with Russia and Iran.

01:12:15

It was -- we knew that the -- it's not -- it's not that they were going -- they weren't going to go deliver their weapons to Al Qaeda and to -- and to other Jihadi groups. It was because they would -- they promised us they wouldn't fight the Iranians and Assad because not fighting Iranians and Assad was part of the -- was part -- not fighting them was part of the JCPOA conception.

John Donovan:

May I just say this is all -- this all sounds very complicated.

Male Speaker:

Yes.

Male Speaker:

It's very -- no, it's very simple. It's very simple.

Barbara Slavin:

Do you really think we could've overthrown Assad.

Male Speaker:

It's very simple. Obama wanted to cut a deal with Iran.

[talking simultaneously]

John Donovan:

Bernard hasn't had a moment.

Bernard Haykel:

I just also -- I mean, just to --

Brett McGurk:

We'll come back to you, Brett, to finish.

Bernard Haykel:

I think to back up a little bit, too, in addition to Turkey being a fragile state with 20 percent of its population being Kurdish, so there's always the fear of succession. The other thing about the Turks is that they were always treated very badly by the Europeans.

01:13:09

They wanted into the European Union. They were always treated like these dirty Muslims who didn't fit in and weren't really European. And then the Americans come and often treated them also as a kind of spare tire that can only be brought out and used whenever necessary. And I think that that, you know, hurt their -- hurt their ego and hurt their sense of pride and honor and we're seeing the consequences of this in the behavior of Erdoğan.

John Donovan:

Brett, do you want to --

Bernard Haykel:

I agree. I agree with something Michael said earlier very much. Our foreign policy is becoming too partisan. Trump this, Obama that. I totally agree with you and yet when I hear you speak it's all about the Obama administration. This goes back a long time. Trump has been in office now almost three years. The S-400s were purchased on Trump's watch. It is Trump that said we're getting out of Syria. You're all on your own, which totally spooked the Turks. So, it's not all about Obama. It's not all about Trump either. It's about some pretty serious --

[applause]

--- dynamics that are going on right now in Turkey under the leadership of President Erdoğan that are leading the country in a bad direction.

01:14:10

There's a romanticism about Turkey in Washington because of Turkey of how it used to be. That Turkey is not there right now. I think we want to try to get it back. That requires some serious engagement, but also requires telling the truth when they're doing things that are totally against the interest of the United States and NATO.

John Donovan:  
Barbara Slavin.

Barbara Slavin:  
Yeah, I just -- you know, Michael, with all due respect, you have this fantasy --

Michael Doran:  
And love?

Barbara Slavin:  
With --

Michael Doran:  
Wait. Hold on. We're on the same side.

Barbara Slavin:  
We are on the same side.

[laughter]

But, but, but you have this fantasy that somehow more robust American intervention would've gotten rid of Assad. I mean, look at -- you know, --

Michael Doran:  
I don't know. The Russians thought the other way around. It seems to have worked.

Barbara Slavin:  
Look what happened in -- look what happened in Iraq. Look what happened to us in Iraq. Look what happened in Libya. You know, then comes Syria. I -- I think that it's a fantasy that -- that we could've overthrown Assad. And even if we had the likely result would've been an ISIS-led state or certainly a Sunni fundamentalist-led state. So, Assad is a son of a bitch.

01:15:10

He's horrible but that doesn't mean that we could've somehow gone in there and changed the trajectory.

John Donovan:

And I conclude this debate on our third resolution. Thank you very much, everybody.

[applause]

And I also want to say this about what we all just saw. As I said at the beginning, our goal is to -- it sounds a little too precious, but to raise the level of public discourse. The thing is, we mean it. We do mean it, and we work at it. We aim at it. Our team is very, very careful in choosing and picking about the people we put on our stages and the issues that we debate, and the thing we always count on at the end is that the debaters will come up and really bring fact and argument and passion, honesty, and respect for one another. And I just want to say that what the five of you did tonight absolutely lived up to it for us, so I want to thank you very much.

[applause]

And in that spirit, I don't want to take too much time doing this, but I'm quite curious.

01:16:16

Sometimes we ask in the unresolved format, was there anything that you heard from somebody on a position that opposed yours that you actually thought, "Oh, I've got to think about that again?" Something that you found persuasive from the other side? Barbara, you're nodding yes already.

Barbara Slavin:

Yeah, on the YPG and so on and Michael's description of how Turkey regarded what the U.S. had done. There were a couple points there that I hadn't really considered. That was useful for me. On the other hand, on Iran he's completely wrong.

[laughter]

John Donovan:

How about you, Michael?

Michael Doran:

There was a point when Brett was talking. I think his words were, "I really agree with Michael" --

[laughter]

-- and I thought that was --

John Donovan:  
You liked that?

Michael Doran:  
I did. That was very persuasive.

[laughter]

John Donovan:  
Bernard?

Bernard Haykel:  
I have to say, I'm sticking to my guns, I think.

John Donovan:  
Okay, fair enough. No, that's often been an answer to the question, is, "No, I didn't really hear anything from the other side." How about you, Brett?

01:17:12

Brett McGurk:  
Well, on Saudi Arabia, I agree with Bernard. We need Saudi Arabia to succeed, and I think that's why we need a dynamic policy. I just -- I don't think Trump is approaching it the right way.

John Donovan:  
Yeah. And Reuel --

Michael Doran:  
[inaudible] -- sorry. If we --

John Donovan:  
It's okay. Go ahead.

Michael Doran:  
-- had had the opportunity to talk it out, I think that on the Saudi question Brett and Bernard and I were actually in the same place, but Brett interpreted the question differently, you know, that Trump is right on Saudi Arabia. He didn't like the way Trump was handling Saudi Arabia, but he didn't disagree that Saudi Arabia was an ally.

That's what I mean. I don't --

Brett McGurk:  
Yeah, that's true.

Michael Doran:  
-- want to put words in your mouth, but --

Brett McGurk:  
Yeah, that's right.

John Donovan:  
And, Reuel, we know you have an open mind, so --

[laughter]

Reuel Marc Gerecht:  
Yeah. I mean, since I was schizophrenic on two of the three issues, I find myself in agreement often with others.

John Donovan:  
Yeah.

[laughter]

Interesting. Okay. Well, I'm so glad for the sake of the debate that you pretended otherwise. So, thank you.  
On the first resolution -- Trump is Right on Saudi Arabia -- before the resolution, the vote was 15 percent said yes and 85 percent said no.

01:18:17

Afterwards, the vote was 16 percent said yes --

[laughter]

-- and 84 percent said no.

[laughter]

So, what I want to ask is, those of you who voted yes, could you just stand up for a moment so we can see?

[laughter]

Okay.

[applause]

All right. On the second resolution -- The World is Safer without the JCPOA -- before, the vote was 17 percent yes.

Barbara Slavin:

It's looking very --

John Donovan:

83 percent no. After the vote was 22 percent yes, 78 percent no. The swing went towards "Yes." Could the Yeses stand up on that one?

[laughter]

[applause]

Okay. On the third resolution, Turkey is an Asset to NATO, before, the vote was 71 percent yes, 29 percent no. The vote after, 60 percent yes -- 40 percent no. The noes won on that one. Could the Noes please stand up?

[applause]

Male Speaker:

You're a waffler!

[laughter]

John Donovan:

All right.

01:19:20

Male Speaker:

The waffler doesn't get to --

[laughter]

John Donovan:

So, the selection of this audience is entirely unscientific, but we think it's interesting as a rough measure of the -- whatever. I just want to say --

[laughter]

-- I just want to say it's been a pleasure to launch our season with all of you here today, with Ben, and with our five debaters. Thanks, everybody. Thanks for joining us. We'll see you next time. I'm John Donovan.

[applause]

[end of transcript]

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