

The Nixon Seminar on Conservative Realism and National Security on America's Withdrawal from Afghanistan

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Hugh Hewitt: Good evening everyone, I'm Hugh Hewitt, President of The Nixon foundation. Tonight's meeting of The Nixon Seminar, the October meeting, concerns itself with President Biden's August decision on the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the consequences to that country, the nation and the world. It is co-chaired by former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and former National Security Adviser to President Trump, Ambassador Robert O'Brien and participated in by the 15 members of The Nixon Seminar. You can see all of their bios and their backgrounds at nixonseminar.com. With that we will begin with a short introduction from Ambassador O'Brien, then from Secretary of State Pompeo and then from Congressman Waltz, then we will open it to the floor for comments, questions and statements. Mr. Ambassador.

Robert O'Brien: Thank you Hugh and it's good to be with you, greetings from California. Look, we suffered a catastrophe when it comes to foreign policy with the botched withdrawal from Afghanistan. It's a debacle that will stain us as a country for many many years to come.

I was a young man and remember the withdrawal from Saigon, the chaotic scene of the helicopters, the HU-1s land on the roof of our embassy and bringing American's home. I lived through the next several weeks as my mom volunteered at Camp Pendleton to help take care of young Vietnamese children that had been sent home by their parents or been sent to America by their parents to avoid communism, what we saw in the four years following that catastrophic withdrawal from Saigon, that again I didn't think would be repeated in my lifetime, was the Soviet Union at the time on the march whether it was in Mozambique or Angola or Nicaragua, Cuba, expanding its influence around the globe and ultimately ending in the invasion of Afghanistan itself in 1980 by the former Soviet Union. It took us getting Ronald Reagan back in office to restore American credibility.

So let me just touch briefly on the the withdrawal which people have asked about and folks will say President Trump was in favor of withdrawals, Robert O'Brien was in favor of withdrawal, Mike Pompeo was in favor of withdrawal, where we were when we left office is we had 2,500 American troops on the ground. That was sufficient to protect our embassy and to enable our counterterrorism operators at various government agencies that were active in Afghanistan at the time. We were backed up by NATO troops, 5,000 of which had come from Western Europe and Turkey. That was an accomplishment of diplomacy that Secretary Pompeo was engaged in with his team, that we engaged and I think Mike and I were on the phone with Jens Stoltenberg almost every week. Because burden sharing didn't just mean the 2% goal for GDP defense spending by our NATO allies, it meant sending troops in the harm's way to fight and secure American and Western vital interest.

So when we left office there were 7,500 troops American and NATO there. Kabul was free and safe, and we weren't facing the catastrophe that ended up occurring. The withdrawal of those

troops was always going to be conditioned based and that was number one, no attacks on America or Western Allies or NATO allies in Afghanistan, those conditions were broken shortly after we took office with an attack on Forward Operating Base Chapman that Mike Gallagher asked about in the various hearings on the house hearings with our leaders. We also had as a condition, this is something that I don't want to step in on this secondaries bailiwick here but we had a condition that the Taliban engage in good faith negotiations with the existing government the President of government, President Ghani. Now that government wasn't perfect and there were issues with it and there's always been corruption in Afghanistan, but the idea was to have a transitional government and a government of national unity. The problem was once the new administration came in and announced that date certain for leaving, and basically took the position that a conditions based withdrawal was no longer in effect. There was very little leverage to encourage the Taliban or to push the Taliban into negotiating with the Government of Afghanistan, and coming up with some sort of transition government that would have been much better for the people of Afghanistan, so had we had to leave, the plan was very simple.

American citizens up first. After that Afghan citizens who enabled us who helped us, our interpreters, our locally employed staff at the embassy. Those that assisted us in sensitive military operations, the pilots, the special operators that were there were especially at risk. If the Taliban was going to take over. And then lastly, we were going to bring our equipment home, and anyone who spent time with President Trump in the Oval Office understood that he said this every time we talked about Afghanistan, "I don't want to leave one bowl. I don't want to leave one nail. I don't want to leave one tent behind. I don't want to see the Taliban driving around and Humvees or MRAPS."

Certainly the idea that they've got advanced night vision goggles, that they've got Scan Eagle drones, that they have a Blackhawk fleet bigger than Australia's. That just would not have happened. Even if we've made the decision to withdraw all forces from Afghanistan. Although I think the President, by the end of his administration realized that by leaving 2,500 troops there he'd substantially met the goal that he'd set for the American people of getting out of Afghanistan and those troops are there to protect our interest.

So there's a lot of time now for the blame game we've got congressional oversight, Mike Waltz has done a great job on that, Mike Gallagher's done a super job so we've actually had members of our Seminar involved in oversight and we'll get to the bottom of what happened, but we need to take steps immediately. We don't have four years like we had in the Carter years, the world moves too fast today. We have to restore American credibility and American leadership now. There are a number of things that we can do and I've written about this with Alex Gray, one of our Seminar members, in a Wall Street Journal Op-Ed I wrote about it earlier, a couple weeks earlier, we have to fortify Taiwan immediately. The first thing that happened after the disaster in Kabul was a Global Times editorial, the mouthpiece of the Communist Party of China, aimed at the people of Taipei, and the editorial basically said this is your future look at what's happening in Kabul now, the Americans were there for 20 years, they had troops on the ground, and they've left the people of Kabul at the mercy of the Taliban. This is what's going to happen to you when we ultimately launch our own amphibious invasion of Taiwan.

This is where you're going to be, you're going to be surrendering, it's going to be chaos and the Americans won't be there for you. We need to help Taiwan become that porcupine that we've been talking about. We need to get them missiles. We need to get them sea mines, we need to get them. You know, we need to encourage them to put together a civil defense force that can engage, or at least present a credible counterinsurgency threat to the PLA. So those are some of the things we need to do with Taiwan.

In the Pacific we have to immediately sign up for the Compact of Free Association. That's our, treaty deal with Palau Marshall Islands in Micronesia. That's been a deal that's been in place for many years, it gives us access, military and foreign policy access to vast swathes of the Pacific. It's being held up now because the Postal Service wants more money to deliver mail and look I'm in favor of making sure the postman gets paid. Everyone likes our mail carriers, but we're about to spend \$3.5 trillion on who knows what. Let's pay the postal workers in the Marshall Islands and Palau and Micronesia and get that signed and keep China off of huge areas in the Pacific.

We need to get tanks to Poland. Poland has come forward and is paying for 250 brand new M1A2 Abrams tanks that we built in Lima, Ohio, close and near and dear to Hugh's heart.

Let's send 250 tanks in the meantime that we've got at our depot so that they have been demobilized from the third armor cab and other former heavy armored divisions. Let's do a lend lease or send tanks to Poland now while their new tanks are being built, let them get trained up and let's have a steel curtain that confronts the Russians on the old border between East and West, we need ice breakers we were very close to leasing ice breakers before leaving office that we would have given to the Coast Guard and gotten up to the Arctic, and they would want our heavy icebreaker to get down to Antarctica, we can even forward based in Australia, and let the Australians, Britain share with the Polar Star, but keep the Chinese from doing whatever they want in Antarctica and avoiding treaty obligations. And let's put a cutter in America Samoa, and people talk about caring about Asian Pacific Islanders and except they don't care about Pacific Islanders when they're actually under threat and their livelihood has been destroyed by illegal, unreported unregulated fishing by Chinese fishing fleets. Let's protect American Pacific Islanders in America Samoa, in the Pacific. So those are some of the things we could do that would enjoy, you know bipartisan support, they would not cost a lot of money, but they would start to show that after this catastrophe that we suffered through an Afghanistan that America is reasserting leadership in the most critical areas in the Indo-Pacific region and in an Eastern Europe. So with that, thank you for the opportunity to share a few thoughts Hugh, I'm looking forward to hearing from the seminar, but especially looking forward to hearing from my good friend like Mike Pompeo, I'll turn it over to you, Mike.

Michael Pompeo: Thank you, Robert. Thanks everyone. Good evening. I don't know that in the Afghanistan debate I'd heard the postal workers brought in before so well played, Robert. I would love to have a discussion about the Postal Service and it's union sometime too but for

another night. I thought I'd start with just a little bit of history Hugh, you'd asked us to think about the connectivity the places where President Nixon faced some of the same decisions that President Trump faced or President Obama frankly before him and then ultimately President Biden about a war that had become unpopular at home. Presidents have to make those difficult decisions, there's always the idea of sunk cost and resources that have been used and lives that have been lost and whether if you have to continue so it can be worthy, President Trump certainly faced that President Biden would have faced that same set of decisions. I think it's worth thinking a little bit about how they are different decisions.

Remember the Vietnam War was fundamentally different there had not been an attack on the homeland we had an attack from Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, the context was different to the threat was there from the theory that the nation states and the dominoes that might fall in Vietnam the threat to the United States from Al Qaeda was a global threat and remains a global threat and so the the risk profile and the American interests that the President's were facing were, I think very different than when President Nixon and Kissinger were talking about peace with honor. I think we can all agree that whatever we got from Afghanistan in the closing weeks is hard to describe as peace, and is most certainly not honorable. We came into the administration with a president who had tweeted about wanting to get every last uniformed military person out of Afghanistan so none of us on this seminar, not a single Taliban fighter, not a single Afghan government official didn't understand the President's intentions with respect to producing the American costs and the American footprint to there. That continued for our entire four years. The president couldn't have been more clear when he was speaking with President Ghani or Abdul Abdulla or with any of the other actors in Afghanistan with whom he spoke, that he believed that the time was appropriate for America to reduce its risk in Afghanistan.

Know that we always tried to think about this in the context, a greater context in which Afghanistan sits it's easy to shout, "Afghanistan Afghanistan Afghanistan," but it sits in South Central Asia and the juxtaposition between the Iranians the Pakistanis and the Chinese and their close proximity presents a very complicated set of issues and we always tried to make decisions about each of those actions, our policy with Iran, our policy with Pakistan and our China policy in the context of knowing to that we had this risk that continued to exist inside of Afghanistan.

We were mindful to that the Bush administration had sent our boys and girls there to crush Al Qaeda, and that we in fact did successfully defeat Al Qaeda there, and you know that that's not about an announcement of victory, it's just a simple mathematical equation. The biggest footprints for all kinds of today no longer sit inside of Afghanistan or for that matter even in the outback region. They sit in places where Al Shabaab resides and Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and there's risk from Al Qaeda in many parts of the world. And indeed, Al Qaeda's most senior leadership, the people who are working to develop complex attacks to put at risk American interests not only American interest here at home but American interests around the world, no longer sit in Karachi, they no longer sit in Kandahar, those individuals today sit in Tehran.

And you have to and my judgment as you think about the right military footprint in Afghanistan, you have to keep in mind, risk to the United States and you have to put all of that in context of the greater risk from Al Qaeda. We know it has a special place in history for the United States because we had an attack launch from there and we know that the caves in Tora Bora present uncovered space with real risk, but the United States and the Trump administration were serious about trying to place that risk in the context of all the other places that resources were required and to make sure that we had the footprint, right. Last thought on that particular piece there's you know everyone talks about the number of uniformed military personnel on the ground, I'm always trying to be very precise when I talk about this, because of course the costs associated with this conflict in Afghanistan and the ultimate protection from the risk of Al Qaeda terrorism from Afghanistan is much bigger than the cost of just the number of troops there.

Who can forget President Trump in the first summer of his presidency going to Fort Myer and Secretary of Defense Mattis had pushed him and he added some 3,000 soldiers there. And we ultimately wound that number down each time pausing each time at 8,600, 8,700 and again at 4,500 or 4600 each time pausing to get that footprint right so that we could present to the President, the relative risks associated with further decline in the number of folks there. I worked my tail off to get us as close to zero as quickly as possibly could. We were mindful that we had other strengths that we had to work our way through too. You should all step back one moment and remember where this was in the American mind.

Secretary of Defense Esper, when he was the nominee to be the Secretary of Defense, sat for a several hour hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee. The word, "Afghanistan" was not used during that hearing. Not once. If you think about what that says about how those national security leaders were thinking Afghanistan or perhaps more appropriately, not thinking very much about Afghanistan. I think it tells you that the direction we were headed, to try and create the conditions where we could leave, we could find a path to have our uniformed military presence there at zero or close was the right solution, I think President Trump had that right. We never quite got to the place where we could all recommend to the President that we would make that final decision. I had seen the other elements of American power deployed there as well. talked about other costs right we still were funding the Afghan National Defence Forces. We are continuing to fund enormous corruption inside of Afghanistan, we cannot forget that President Ghani himself stole an awful lot of money from the American taxpayers during his time in office. While he claims to have won an election in Afghanistan. It was an election that was incredibly fraught and very close, and where there was indeed corruption itself. This was a very complex set of constraints that were sitting on the United States and CIA Director. I knew that there were other resources, other tools available to do what we needed to do to protect America's interest and while I can't say much more about that, the narrow focus on the number of US military personnel on the ground there seems to me to be very short sighted, and what often if you focused on it too much lead to the wrong set of answers to the important questions about America's role there.

I think Ambassador O'Brien gave you a good rundown of the results that happened when President Biden set a date certain, that arbitrary date of September 11, he moved it. I don't

believe, had we gotten to the place where we were intending to move to zero uniformed military personnel that we would have done it in this way Robert talked about the plan that we have laid out and we had articulated to not only my team at the State Department, but the team at the Department of Defense.

And I can't speak to precisely how this unrolled inside the Biden Administration, but it certainly appears he was stubborn, set a date certain denied resources to his military team that was clearly advising him that there was a lot of risk to go below 2,500 or 2,600. And the result of the fact is you still have Americans today that I know a whole bunch of people in this seminar are working their tails off to try and help get out and I want to say to those of you who I've had contact with and who I haven't, and I know are working on this problem set, God bless you, we all still have a responsibility to get them home. And with that, I'm happy to turn it over and hear from other seminar members. Thank you all.

Hugh Hewitt: Thank you, Mr. Secretary, Congressman Waltz.

Congressman Michael Waltz: Thanks Hugh, thanks, Robert, and thank you, Mike. You know, for those that I don't quite know as well, many of you do know that I've worked this obviously out on the ground as a Special Operations Officer but importantly from the Bush White House, as Vice President Cheney's Counterterrorism advisor. Also in the Pentagon under Secretary Rumsfeld and Gates so have to be one of the only, you know, knuckleheads in DC that actually had to go do the strategy that I helped write.

And then, there's my, my rear end on the ground and then to then to come back and say, "Hey, boss. Here's what's going right and here's what's going wrong," and did that back and forth several times and had some highlights in there including leading the search for Bowe Bergdahl being present the day of the CIA bombing at FOB Chapman actually had half of that base and, and was one of the, one of the worst days of my life and poor Jim Matthews and her great sacrifice. But, look, I think this is the end of the day, this is a disaster from five different perspectives. One, obviously we have an ongoing hostage crisis, and despite the administration's spin, that's exactly what it is and the Taliban government, the Hakanis and Al Qaeda have the leverage period. And Blinken for reasons that are still very unclear to me is, is either clueless or lying about the numbers of Americans still there. I was just on the phone today with a veterans organization that was looking at a manifest of 120, Americans, a plane just landed Thursday with 116 and we just got seven across the Tajika fghan border just last week, so you know there, he's putting this interesting caveat in there, 100 that wanted to leave. And I'd love you know candidly asked him if he would leave his family behind. Of course he wouldn't, and therefore doesn't deserve to put those people in a category of not wanting to leave.

You know, crisis number two is from a human rights standpoint. We have already seen that the Taliban have never changed, and from barring women from work in universities to the retribution and the ongoing killings that are going on. I unfortunately wake up to multiple videos a day of these tortures and killings. The UN has already issued a report, the Amnesty International and a

number of other groups. Three, Robert already spoke to our credibility and the damage that's not just occurring in Taiwan, but in Ukraine, in the Baltics and in other places for from a counterterrorism standpoint Al Qaeda equals the Taliban, the Taliban equals Aal Qaeda and the intelligence is clear on that. The military was clear on that the DNI Admiral Haines was clear on it so I'm not sure who Biden is listening to, in that regard but Ayman al-Zawahiri has sworn allegiance to the head of the Taliban. And that has not that has not changed further I think, I think the analogy here is we're, we're heading down a repeat of what we saw on Iraq, under the Obama team there we pulled out in 11 went to zero, you know, a number of analysts were, were you know banging the drum and sounding the alarm at the rise of ISIS, the more from Al Qaeda into ISIS, and then we saw them explode on the scene just a few years later in 2014, and almost take the Baghdad government. I fear we're going to see that repeat but it's going to be far worse because we'll have far fewer tools.

When we have to go back to deal with it. We had in Iraq from everything from ocean access to allies on the ground to to the basis that we have in the region so the fiction that the Vita administration is selling people with over the horizon counterterrorism I think is incredibly dangerous. It is very easy and sounds quite plausible for President Biden, Blinken and others to say well look, we do counterterrorism in places like Mogadishu, and Syria and Libya, and we can do the same in Afghanistan that ignores geography. It ignores the fact that we have no basis in any neighboring country. It ignores the fact that our a drone only strategy will not work, that those drones burn 80% of their fuel, just in the flight there and back and have very little border time, and I firmly believe should we exercise lethal attacks again, that Pakistan will will be under enormous pressure to close those Airways, which we are completely reliant on and they have a long history of doing that with ground with brown supplies. You know, and then finally, with our ground supply lines and then finally, it's a disaster from a great power competition and that was another reason that buying used to justify that we had to get out of Iraq to worry about China will Air Base was the only base in the world, sandwich between China, Russia and Iran. Just 340 miles from the Chinese border and just a few hundred more miles from their brand new ICBM fields that they're putting in the ground and Shin Jang, and you know a question that I asked in the hearing, and one of the hearings was if, you know, I know it's a bit hypothetical but I think we all know the answer, the distance from boardroom to the, to the Chinese border was the same distance from Monterrey, Mexico, San Antonio and we think for a second. If the Chinese had an airbase in Mexico. If they would have given it up for nothing. I think not. So, and then finally I'll just leave on this happy note, you know, General Milley testified he thinks it's a decent likelihood this descends into civil war.

I think it's far more dangerous than that from a worst case scenario, I think it descends into a regional proxy war. The Tajiks are incredibly nervous the president of Tajikista has said he is not going to stand by as their ethnic brothers and sisters are slaughtered And make no mistake, what's going on in the pantry or Valley right now is a genocide. The Indians are incredibly nervous as they should be because I think the first place we see American made night vision body armor and weapons is in the Kashmir at the hands of the Connie's brothers and arms last year retired, and they're not going to stand for that ongoing instability. And so I think we have the real possibility of this descending in absolute chaos, with regional actors stepping in in line with their own interest except the difference between here and other places is obviously we

have a nuclear environment with two sworn enemies in Pakistan and India, and in the hearings we really you know what was so disappointing to so many of my constituents who are blowing my phones up is just the absolute lack of accountability and not even an apology, no one who said here's how this could have been and should have been done better. We frankly just saw a lot of spin so I think on that happy note you will want to drink more. After hearing from the three of us, but happy to answer any questions. I think we had from a congressional oversight standpoint, still have a long way to go to get answers and namely top of my list is the role of Pakistan. The, the numerous reports of heavy Pakistani involvement, amongst other things that that we need to get to the bottom of.

Hugh Hewitt: Thank you, Mike. The Secretary and the Ambassador's lines are always open if they want to jump in. Kimberley Reed has sent me a text message saying you'd like to take the floor, Kimberly.

Kimberly Reed: Good evening. It's great to be with everyone after a great summer and I'm in Marietta, Ohio cleaning out my grandparents house built by my great grandfather in 1912, and what did I come across today? Lots of newspapers about President Nixon. And so I'll be donating these to the library but it just serves as a great reminder of, we really need to look at history and take lessons from that, so I would be interested in hearing from the Secretary and ambassador, and the congressman. So I'm looking here, "Nixon stops military action in Vietnam," So, 1973 Paris Peace Accords, we know how that turned out. What lessons would you hope for? The Biden administration would be taking note of as we go forward? This is extremely troubling to me. I'd also like to just really commend groups like digital Dunkirk and, and would love to know if you've talked with National Security Advisor Jake Solomon or Susan Rice who used to be, you know, the head of the National Security team is now in domestic policy but just love little more inside what's going on, Mr. Secretary.

Michael Pompeo: Just one side, you talked about the Paris Peace Accords and how they were a failure. In the end, when you try to generate a better set of outcomes for the President who always kept saying let's work on peace and reconciliation, you have to do two things. One is you have to be eyes wide open about who they are. We never forgot who these Taliban Bastards were, not ever, not once. We knew that without real leverage and I think it was Congressman Waltz or maybe it was Ambassador O'Brien who said that America has zero leverage there today. I think zero may well overstate the amount of leverage we have to impact what's going on on the ground there today. I actually think the Biden administration is actively seeking to turn the page and not even working to use whatever tools they might have to achieve good outcomes for what remains of our interests there in Afghanistan. But second, you not only need to remember who you're negotiating with but you need to realize that there's a long tail on these things, whether it was the work there and Vietnam what Dr. Kissinger did or the work that was done trying to bring the FARC inside the government in Colombia. These are rough efforts. The chance that the tiger changes its stripes is very low.

So you consistently have to make sure that it's not about some document, it's not about words on a page but rather it's about the power that can be brought to bear to effectuate the outcome

that you're seeking. We knew full well that our discussions with the Taliban would be measured in years not weeks or months, we were, we were prepared to try to lay the groundwork to see if there wasn't a possibility that 10 -15 years from now, we couldn't find a path forward in Afghanistan that was different from the one that congressman wall to describe right. You talked about the civil war. There is a way to solve what's now a hundred years old, set of grievances that can at least accommodate the varied interests. I think if he said well what are the twin lessons from this is the moment that American interests are protected by real leverage not document, then you can see precisely what we have seen these past 90 days in Afghanistan.

Hugh Hewitt: Jonathan Burks

Jonathan Burks: Thank you. Mr Secretary, Ambassador, I appreciate your taking the time this afternoon. I'm, you know I'm struck there's a person probably familiar to many of us - Fred Ikle, who served in the Nixon administration, and went on to serve again for Reagan, as an advisor to many members of Congress over the years until it's relatively recent passing. What a great book called Every War Must End, and it sort of challenges policymakers to think through what the condition is that we would like to see as we engage in a conflict. And I think ultimately sort of the end of Vietnam, the end of Afghanistan, both of those are impart failures of, you know, sort of the elite foreign policy of administration's from the beginning of those conflicts to envision how does that be when, what does it look like at the end of that? And what do we do, how do we get to that end state? So I'm just wondering if there are things that going forward, we can do to be better at ensuring that we have sort of that state in mind and that baton state really guides our conduct of the conflicts from day one, through the end of a conflict.

Hugh Hewitt: Going to stick with you on that, Mr. Secretary.

Michael Pompeo: Sure, I'll let Ambassador O'Brien speak to this as well. I think that is so simple and clear as to be obvious to each of us that we've got to think about what that looks like.

In this sense, it's not the Biden administration that got this wrong thinking about the end, they certainly messed up the end. But we had 20 years where we didn't generate a power of force that had any possibility of surviving without continued American military resources and I don't just mean our 2,500 folks on the ground I mean making payroll. I mean, the glue inside the political government out of our embassy in Kabul, continued infighting inside the political establishment and inside the security establishment inside of Afghanistan. We hadn't done any of the things that when, when one contemplated how this would wrap up we hadn't prepared the folks that we were supporting who were fighting against the people who have tried to kill Americans and will still continue to try kill Americans we hadn't done this, we hadn't done the work right we hadn't train them properly we hadn't done that hard work. You know there were lots of senior military guys folks who were my classmates at West Point, who were responsible for the anti corruption efforts in Afghanistan. Right, it just boggles one's mind to think that after two decades that frankly while the military was better trained and better prepared, it was woefully inadequate to survive in the absence of any kind of political leadership or any military tactic trainings and procedures that could fight what is this Taliban army that, you know, didn't

have an Air Force didn't have remotely the intelligence capabilities that we had been providing, and we left them we left that country in a place where the likely outcome not a random outcome as President Biden has suggested but a likely outcome was the one that we saw.

Hugh Hewitt: Ambassador O'Brien.

Robert O'Brien: Yeah, I'll echo what Mike had to say. Some of you may not know this, I served in the Bush administration and then briefly into the Obama administration, a roadblock program for Afghanistan trying to end some of the corruption that was taking place in the judiciary and on the prosecutors. I remember going to Afghanistan with a marine hero, Dave Carter, who went on to become a federal judge and is still a federal judge out in Orange County, and we sat down with a group of 10 or 15 Afghan prosecutors and Dave bluntly asked. "Who here is corrupt and who takes bribes," and not one hand raised. And then he said, "Who knows somebody who takes bribes," and every hand raised and it was clear what we were dealing with and. And then a couple of them said we were trying to promote women and into the judiciary and the prosecutor ranks and and and some of the guys pulled us aside and said well it's easy for them not to be corrupt their husband has have jobs and so they have to take the bribes that we have to take everybody was on the taken Afghanistan and it was a it was a terrible situation. We tried to stop this in the Bush administration. I was called in on day one with another republican Ambassador. He and I flew to Afghanistan to meet with the government, and ask them to please stop taking bribes and as we were leaving a Senior Pakistani intelligence officer was walking in with a suitcase that we were later told was full of cash so obviously our message didn't didn't get very far.

A couple of quick points on the idea of Jonathan's question about the end game number one: We just can't get in the habit of leaving Americans behind. That's not who we are as a country, we don't do that with the military, we don't do that with our civilians. Before I became the National Security Advisor I worked for Mike as the hostage envoy and, and he backed me up every hour of every day and we went around the world whether it was to Algeria and North Korea, Iran, Venezuela. Turkey Russia to get Americans, some of whom may not have been smart in how they got themselves captured or detained or held hostage but but our goal is to bring every single American home and, and we can't get in that habit of excusing. The idea that Americans maybe shouldn't have been there, they should have known better to go to Afghanistan and therefore we're going to leave them behind, that's just not what we do as a country, and I want to thank the other people on this call and I've been involved in my past.

But Congress Waltz, your office has been terrific and helping to get folks on both visa holders and enablers and Afghans but also American citizens. Morgan Ortega's did a great job early on when the airport was still open, working with her contacts and Qatar to help us get 25 people that were involved in the world law program that we had trained back in the day and Morgan was involved in that and getting them out and getting them to Canada. John Noonan hates seeing emails from me because he's a Staffer at Senator Tom Cotton's office. The early on the only sit room on trying to get Americans home was the was Senator Tom Cotton's office and, and he was running rescue operations out of the Senate, that's you know it's commendable and

I'm grateful for what John did, what Tom Cotton did but this should have been happening at the State Department and had, you know, had we still been office I guarantee you that we would have had the ops center running, you know with reinforcements and going around the clock, getting our folks home and there would have been no, no thought of leaving Americans behind.

So that's number one Jonathan we if we're going to leave, and we decide to get out of a place we don't leave with our, you know, certainly with our soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast Guard men behind but we don't leave our Americans behind. Number two, look part of the rationale for leaving Afghanistan was to pivot to the indo-pacific we have an existential crisis and threat that's going to impact our kids and our grandkids coming from China, and Mike and I spoke about it in long speeches over the course of summer Alex Gray was involved in those issues. Alex was one, you know others on this call, Kim read that and took a number of trips, Mary Kissel, and I can look around and Nadia wrote the great competition document. No one was more involved than Matt Pottinger going around the world, whether it was a plug, places I can't mention and on missions I can't mention fighting this. So if we really are serious about the reason for leaving. We've got to take some of those troops that we just pulled out of Afghanistan and we need to put them in places like pull out like open house like Roberts and barracks and Darwin, we need to actually show the world that we mean when we said so as bad as things were with a departure from Afghanistan, if we were honest and the reason for pulling those troops out of so we can redeploy them. They ought to be in the Aleutian Islands that'll be in Hawaii that would be an American small and pull out first and second island chain, and let's take, take some of those troops and show the world that we met when we said, and we were serious about dependent and it wasn't just a cover for a for a cut and run out of Afghanistan so so so those would be the two responses long winded, but Jonathan, but don't leave Americans behind, and number two do what we said we were going to do if this was really about pivoting to read our competition in the Pacific. Let's move those assets. And let's move that treasure that we were spending Afghanistan, and invest it in the end of the Pacific and and and and confront our greatest threat, our greatest adversary there.

Hugh Hewitt: Thank you, Ambassador for the benefit of our technical team, I'm going to go to Morgan Ortega. then Dr Crowley, then Christian, and then John Noonan. Morgan Ortega's.

Morgan Ortagus: Thank you so much you. I would say one of the things that has been very emotional about the past six weeks is everyone on this call, all of my friends and colleagues on this call we're mostly in our, in our 40s in our 30s. And this is our war, right, this is the war that we have all served in some sort of capacity, whether it's diplomatic Intel military, most of us, I think almost everyone on this call has been in Afghanistan at some point in the past 20 years. And the thing that kept just ringing over and over in my head is that I knew that my campaign would have never, ever left Americans behind or let it in this way and if there's anything that haunts me over the last six weeks. It's not the blame game. It's the fact that it didn't have to end this way, this many people didn't have to die, our American troops didn't have to die at the airport. And so I think that the fact that that haunts me and I think it haunts all of my colleagues who have served like I have in Iraq and Afghanistan. I think we should channel that you know one of the interesting things that I saw a parallel and the readings the overview of the Nixon

strategy and Vietnam, I'm just going to read one sentence it said Nixon felt that America's reputation as a dependable ally and role as a great power, working for peace around the world would depend on the way the United States dealt with ending the Vietnam War. And if that quote isn't so prescient for what we're dealing with today I don't know what is.

You know, Robert at the, at the beginning you talked about exactly what the Chinese said, and their letter and their open statements to the Taiwanese as we were leaving Afghanistan. So my question for you and the Secretary is what parallels are there between us leaving Afghanistan and Taiwan, obviously we all know what's in the news, with the Chinese Air Force's incursions into Taiwanese air defense space over the past few days, so I'm just curious, what are the parallels as we sort of transition our mind to thinking about China's Robert just talked about, what are the parallels if there are any and what do we learn.

Robert O'Brien: So let me address that very quickly I won't be as long as I was and then turn it over to Mike. The difference between Taiwan and Afghanistan, the geopolitical differences is immense. Look, it was important that we were in Afghanistan. I'm grateful for all you know about my friends and colleagues who fought there. I was there as a diplomat a number of times. Above the Bush administration under this administration and it was important. But the United States can afford geopolitically to survive the kind of catastrophe that happened in Afghanistan. We can't afford to survive the loss of Taiwan geopolitically if you look at Taiwan and it's the cork in the champagne bottle and the first island chain that keeps the PLA army and our People's Liberation Army and People's Liberation Army Navy bottled up. If Taiwan goes where our allies in the northern Pacific, Japan, Korea or cut off from our treaty analyze the Philippines and Thailand and, and Australia in the south. The Chinese have open access to the entire second island chain including Hawaii, including the Aleutians I including the West Coast. It's a. The maintaining of a friendly power in Taiwan is absolutely critical. The United States geopolitically going forward. Number two, from just a humanitarian point of view. Unlike Afghanistan, Taiwan is a tremendous democracy, a transition from authoritarianism to democracy. It's the greatest story of such a transition I think in my lifetime more than Columbia more than South Africa. It's just amazing what the Taiwanese people have done, and to relegate them to a fake one country, two systems where they're there they end up like the people of Hong Kong and lose their freedom and loser democracy is something that would be just heartbreaking to me and I think most Americans. So, from a geopolitical standpoint, Taiwan is absolutely critical to our, the continued defense of American outsell lives in the Pacific, and from a humanitarian basis. This is a great democracy. Great rule of law and and and the type of country we need to support you know as Americans and so some differences obviously the way we left Afghanistan was terrible, but we can't afford to lose Taiwan it's just, it's too dangerous us as a country and and morally would be reprehensible, Mr. Secretary.

Michael Pompeo: Thanks for I'll be very brief. I know we've got a lot of folks who want to talk. I'd say two really quick one. We shouldn't forget the economic impact of Taiwan as well. Once you have our technology depends on the capacity for a number of companies there in Taiwan to deliver that equipment to us here in the United States, I promise you the CCP doesn't want that to continue that can win this isn't this isn't so much the difference between these two but we

should be mindful that American credibility wasn't just damaged in Afghanistan, within a handful of weeks, the administration de designated the Iranian terrorists in Yemen, who thinks within a matter of weeks after that the Iranians fire missiles, through their proxies in the Gaza Strip into our friend and ally the State of Israel, and not not long after that they give the Russians of pipeline and shut down energy in the United States and we now have Wi Fi trading close to 80 bucks a barrel. These are all things that the world looks at and sees weakness, this is, this is not something that reinforces the capacity for America to deliver on good outcomes for our people all around the world.

Hugh Hewitt: Dr Crowley.

Dr. Monica Crowley: Hugh, thank you so much Mr Secretary, Ambassador Congressman, great to see everybody tonight. So I was thinking about the connectivity between President Nixon, the fall of Saigon, and what we just witnessed in Afghanistan, the fall of Kabel. And I want to ask about the policy of what was known as Vietnamization, which is shorthand for the United States training equipping funding and then standing up a security force on the ground, made up of indigenous forces. And I think about Vietnamization and the fought valiantly, the Afghan security forces fought valiantly, and ultimately the United States did withdraw support for those forces and then we ultimately saw a collapse in both nations. I don't know if the United States will ever pursue an intervention along these lines at least not in the foreseeable future. But I'm curious to know your opinions about going about something like this. President Nixon always used to say there's no substitute for American power. And I think that is fundamentally true and will remain so for a while. But should we rethink our approach to these kinds of interventions and then how we exit in terms of standing up and indigenous force and our support for those folks on the ground.

Hugh Hewitt: Let me direct it if I can to Congressman Waltz, who served as a Green Beret instructor and companion the Afghan forces as it Chronicles and while you're doing that congressman

Congressman Michael Waltz: Yeah, sure, happy to answer that and I think that's one of the micro one of the real lessons that we need to learn from Iraq from Afghanistan and frankly where we do this all over the world, victimization started very late, relatively late in the war. And frankly, so did truly working within through the Afghan military really not until about 2014 2015, where we actively put the Afghans in the lead. Frankly before then it was very much, whether it was the 82nd airborne or the Marines, or whomever conducting operations somewhat in coordination with the Afghans, but truly putting them in the lead and pulling ourselves into a supporting role wasn't a wasn't a policy choice that we made until well into the war and the same happened with with Vietnamization I think the model that that is worked quite successfully in his is in Colombia. And while we may decry corruption and many of these places where we're doing this around the world, Columbia was no Columbia was certainly no exception if you remember where they were in the 1980s. You had cabinet ministers on the payroll of the various drug cartels you had airlines being bombed. There were many who predicted that Colombia would completely fall into a narco state yet with less than, 1000 special operators working within

the Colombian military. We were able and working in coordination with much closer coordination with our state nade colleagues, we were really able to turn the situation around. But a couple of pieces there one, they're still there. They've been there for 40 years twice as long as we've been in Afghanistan, but they took a very much a supporting role, providing intelligence command and control, logistics, maintenance, in some cases limited air support and and we're not out there on the front lines like we found ourselves in in Iraq, and in Afghanistan, and it was that transition away from that type of mission in Afghanistan in the early days where I think we made a somewhat of a blunder.

So, we've actually done this with corrupt governments, with, with very, with militaries lacking capability, but we've done it a lot for a number of reasons. We've done it better and other places in the world are finally just taking a page from the Nixon years where we did it better. I would encourage everyone to look at the cords program, which was a program where we truly integrated. The military, the State Department USA ID and our intelligence for partners and a unified chain of command under General crate named brooms who were replaced. General Westmoreland was something that he pushed and then the Nixon administration reinforced at the same time they did at the same time that they really push the policy of the conversation. Unfortunately, it was the right policy, but too little, too late. In terms of political support and Vietnam. And I think the same thing too little too late, and to terms of by within the Afghans.in the Afghan war. Hope that answers your question.

Christian Whiton: Thank you, Robert question for you or maybe also format passengers into deals with information coming into the White House and I know Matt also saw combat in Afghanistan, saw that the coalition of information, it deals with the Taliban and the way they are conducting themselves and I don't want to put you on the spot Robert to say anything other than that the Taliban are completely terrible awful people because they are, but I'm surprised frankly at the lack of violence involved in the Taliban governance so far this could change, but beginning before they took cobble, they were giving interviews, the BBC answering some fairly arrogant questions I was sort of surprised that these local Taliban didn't have the BBC reporters beheaded. And were instead engaged in a PR campaign, the PR campaign, largely successful in getting the Afghan Army soldiers to drop their weapons and go home without firing a shot. And then you have of course the takeover of Kabul at any time it seems they could have shut down that airport probably wouldn't have taken what a couple of pickup trucks with border tubes, you could drive them around voice detection stop flight operations they could have presented a military force that probably could have overrun the airport they could have executed American systematically, and there are reports now of course abuses there, you know, maybe a resumption of public executions although probably for criminals they don't seem to be systematically hurting people off the political reeducation camps, or just killing them the way you saw in Cambodia after the fall of Phnom Penh, or in Vietnam after the fall of Saigon. So the question is, did you see any information coming from our intelligence bureaucracy or our \$80 billion a year intelligence bureaucracy about this change in the Taliban, that seems to have occurred from 21 to 2020. You'd think that INR the CIA would be able to not just describe changes in the Christian Democrats in Germany or the Social Democrats in Norway, but actually the political disposition of one of our key enemies in the world. Did you see anything like that?

Robert O'Brien: It says that, yeah without, without talking about, you know, specific intelligence and that sort of thing. Look, the Taliban responded to American pressure, they responded to two sticks and that's what gave Secretary upon pale and Ambassador the ability to negotiate with them is because they knew that if they veered off the path that they would be hitting incredibly hard. And so we condition the Taliban to understand that if there was, if there was a they didn't abide by every jot and tittle of the agreement that there would be a severe punishment that happened on numerous occasions.

Look, as far as what's happening now I think there are a couple things Christian that the Taliban one, number one, they want the us out. And as long as we were at the airport and we had, you know, a couple thousand Marines who were not happy with the situation we're ready to break out of that airport and. And I think really solid for the way that a Hungarian night would have, you know, in the 16th century and wreak havoc. They were nervous they were nervous about to para, the British elite unit that was at the airport they were worried about the French raid squads and we're worried about the carbon airy, and there were there was a lot of firepower, they wanted that gone because that was a threat to them as long as we were there. Even if we were, you know, not in an ideal situation the airport, that was a threat they wanted us out. Number two, they did not want us to help our allies, I mean if you think about the Taliban they're in a better position now than they were on 911 and 911 we had the Northern Alliance guys like, Walter able to parachute in and passenger and, and actually work with allies on the ground and roll up the Taliban relatively quickly they want to make sure that we, we did not support the reconstitution of Northern Alliance, and we haven't so far. And that's probably bad for us, national interest in the long run, but, but they've accomplished that. So some of the, the moderation is probably driven by their desire for us not to get together with, you know, Shaw's son, and others Dostum and others. Third, its money. They want cash and. And this is as Congressman Waltz pointed out, this is one of the biggest hostage negotiations we've ever seen. It's gonna involve billions of dollars it's going to be gussied up as humanitarian aid and and Afghan government money being released to the Taliban in exchange for some sort of humanitarian treatment of the US and and potentially some Afghan enablers that we want back so I think they're interested in money and then finally I do think there is a, there's an element of concern that they have over ISIS. They're very tight with al Qaeda. I don't think there is tight with ISIS and, and they made it may need to call on us our allies at some point for for some assistance there if ISIS starts metastasizing the way that that ISIS didn't in Iraq after we pulled out so I think there are a number of things that are that are leading to the so called moderation but I wouldn't put much stock in it. And I want to get our Americans out. I want to get our Afghan allies out sooner rather than later before you, know that the proverbial mask is pulled off but let me go to Mike Secretary pump out you have any thoughts on on Christians question.

Michael Pompeo: I'm Christians question. Man, I was gonna say somebody let that go.

Matthew Pottinger: Hey thanks now I think Robert covered pretty much everything I just add that, you know, the Taliban wants to make it easier on China to defend them at the UN, because that's their pipeline for money, and that that could be one reason that you've seen relative, I

guess forbearance. The other issue is that they're still consolidating power, Robert. Robert was talking about, you know, the fact you still got some, some holdouts there you've got some divisions within the Taliban, you've got you know the Connie group which is a designated terrorist organization that pretty much runs Kabul now you've got the southern Taliban from Kandahar that that was doing, you know, most of the fighting. And then you've got, you could almost count the the the interlocutors you know there are negotiators as a third sort of faction that is certainly more savvy about, you know, wanting to position, their this new regime in a way that, you know, will will allow it to accumulate resources, but that's all I had to add me.

Hugh Hewitt: Line up everyone - John Noonan, then followed by Dr shadow Alex Gray Christopher Cox and when asked Mary Kissel to close it off by setting us up for next month, all within 15 minutes so John Noonan and this is gonna be fast for an Air Force man.

John Noonan: Well, you know, fast as our business and ICBM says you know you. I'll keep this quick, this is a question for Mike Waltz. Congressman Waltz. It has been 58 years since the beginning of the American involvement in the Vietnam War. We're now at a place where America has spent 30 years, losing counterinsurgency. I think we have now spent more time losing wars and we have winning wars, which does not give me any pleasure to say. You fought there. You wrote a book about your experience there. You are well educated at the Virginia Military Institute, I'd like to know, what if you could go back to 2001. What would you have done differently, and what do you think would have worked like you're muted congressman think you're muted guy and Mike you're still muted.

Congressman Michael Waltz: All right, there we go. All right, let me get that into three seconds per views guidance but like John I think number one. We never really manage your expectations, effectively and that what we're dealing with relatively easy to hunt down an individual or a Bama tank, very difficult to defeat an idea and then feed an idea, ideology and just as it has taken us many decades to undermine the ideology of communism and fascism, it is going to take many to defeat the ideology of Islamic extremism, of which we're fighting on battlefields all over the world and I'm convinced that as long as it is at war with us, that we really don't have a choice whether we're going to fight it or not, it's just how we fight it, and learn from our mistakes and fight it better. And while I am completely holy and, and 100% agree with Robert that in our strategic interest, Taiwan, looms far larger. I can tell you as someone that has to stand in front of Americans, you know in a town hall. That is a much more theoretical argument to make when they're asking me, when are we going, are we on a road to another 911, another Pulse nightclub which was just outside my district, another San Bernardino. And so, you know, we have to balance that and that I do believe it's going to follow us home. We saw that when we pulled it went to zero and a rack and led to the rise of the ISIS Caliphate and attacks across Paris, London, and eventually inspired attacks in the United States. So, so, you know, that's, that's the balance, what does it look like, what would it have looked like number one, and this is not an indictment on the NBA on the liberation of Iraq, but I was there and Afghanistan when I saw the resources leaving, and, and, you know, no nation can fight two wars as well as it fights one. Number two, there has been no counter insurgency in history. That was successful, when the enemy enjoyed sanctuary, and we never solved the

Pakistan problem in Afghanistan, we never solved the Laos and Cambodia problem in Vietnam, we did solve the sanctuary problem next door and I believe that's a large reason why we were much more successful there. We weren't organized as a government to do this well. I gave you an example of the courts program in Vietnam, where we did. And we didn't have, we didn't empower the locals until much later in the war so I think. And then finally, You know we sold ourselves a fiction that NATO could do this as well as us. And because we were so bogged down in Iraq, that we convinced ourselves and NATO did wonderful work. We couldn't have done it without it, but they also in many ways didn't live up to many of the pledges that they made. And, and also tied the hands of those that they did put on the ground with their national caveats for locals. So, you know, John, oh yeah it's a number of reasons but I think if we had addressed each one of those, we would be in a much better place than we are today.

Hugh Hewitt: Thank you, Congressman, Dr. Schadlow.

Dr. Nadia Schadlow: Okay, thanks. I'll be quick, I'd like to go from the past and the recent past to what we can do going forward. I know Mike congressman Waltz on the front lines, fighting this on the hill, but essentially one powerful tool, the United States has is withholding recognition of Taliban, and I'd like to know, or I'd also I'd like to ask Mike because he's on the front lines of this but also Secretary Pompeo. O'Brien about what they think about this. It's really important. Nikki Haley did a great office. Earlier this summer about not recognizing the Taliban pointing out that it took us 30 years before we recognize Communist China 20 years before we recognize communist Vietnam. This is really an important pressure point, opening up aid and funding to the Taliban essentially means we are giving money to a barbaric regime that wants to see our demise. It doesn't make sense it undermines our entire human rights agenda, but certainly the agenda of the Biden administration on gender equality right. So there's a lot here and I'd like, you know, to hear your thoughts. Thanks.

Hugh Hewitt: Mr. Secretary?

Michael Pompeo: Yeah, that's pretty easy. We shouldn't recognize the Taliban.

Hugh Hewitt: Mr. Ambassador. Robert O'Brien. Are you muted? Okay, how about you.

Robert O'Brien: I'm muted. I was just gonna say I agree with Secretary Pompeo a hundred percent.

Hugh Hewitt: Congressman Waltz

Congressman Michael Waltz: Well, you know, add me to the agreement, but I could tell you I'm seeing the signs the administration is heading down that road I think they're going to back into it. rightly pointed out with, with Chinese support and we're seeing that movement occur. I'm also talking to a number of allies, the key that the Taliban wants right now is access to their foreign currency reserves, about 7 billion, held in New York, but a couple of about 2 billion spread across a couple different countries in Europe. Those countries are considering

unfreezing those assets because they are incredibly concerned that the economy is going to go from awful to total collapse, and even more of a humanitarian disaster, and I have legislation in the NDA, I don't know if it's going to survive with the democrats in charge of the house that would ban aid to any country that recognizes the Taliban regime. With a couple of countries that you guys could easily guess in mind, but. And then also, barring any recognition. And finally, I mean just what kind of a statement is made for the United States support of the rule of law. If we have an obvious violent military coup. That overthrow was as flawed as the Afghan government was a democratically developed constitution and constitutional government. We should be recognizing the government in exile, led by Sala and Masood standing with our values, standing with the rule of law and sending the right signal around the world, but unfortunately that's not the direction this administration is going to college

Hugh Hewitt: On that note, it was too late to get out but Ambassador Roz, who is accredited from the Afghan government, the United States has been abandoned by the Department of State. The Department of Defense has had no communication for more than five weeks since the evacuation on August 30. Alex grade and Christopher toxin Ambassador than Mary Kissel.

Alex Gray: Yeah, building on John Noonan's question and kind of the parallels between Vietnam and Afghanistan, I'd be curious. The congressman's take particularly but also the Secretary and the ambassador looking after Vietnam, there's a lot of introspection, about what the US military would look like for structure lessons learned, switching to the all volunteer force. What do you think that the lessons learned from Afghanistan are for the military and kind of that operational level, we have in terms of training and and and for structure. And what do you think are the lessons, one of them, one of the great. One of the themes of Vietnam, but also one of the themes of Afghanistan was a civilian military issue and a divide between the civilians in the military on both of those conflicts and played out in Afghanistan with McChrystal and it played out with all sorts of different flare ups over 20 years. What do you think are the lessons, going forward on the civil civil military side as well.

Congressman Michael Waltz: Yeah sure, just briefly in the immediate aftermath math of Vietnam and this is you know one thing the next administration did that was so critical as we add a political agreement before, before. One more time before we we pulled everything out and, and the South Vietnamese Army fought on and was continuing the fight, they really collapsed not when we pulled out our advisors. But when the Congress for a number of political reasons stopped the funding that's what really truly led to the collapse and I think if this had been managed very differently. That could have been the case, going forward, but I certainly think we would have had ongoing congressional support because of the ongoing threat to the homeland in terms of military lessons learned, one of them. I already spoke to, and that you know we have, we, we partnered with the Afghans we partnered with the Iraqi military which collapsed under you know the way devices. Very precipitously we partner poorly. In many cases in many cases we wanted to do the in thought we could do the fighting better and I go back to Lawrence of Arabia his old adage of, of, let the air do this at 60 to 70% that's better than us doing it at 100%. And so even though that, you know, we certainly invested a lot.

We really had very poor oversight of it, we had very, we didn't have the partnerships that we should have. And I think there's a lot of. There really are a lot of lessons to be learned there and the lessons to be learned are places where we've done it better. We've done it better in the Philippines, we've done a better job in Colombia, we've done it better in South Korea, with the conducive program, I would say, though, in terms of managing the timelines and expectations, you know, the South Korean army had a higher illiteracy rate. At the end of the Korean War than the Afghan army does today. They were incredibly devastated after years of Japanese occupation and oppression. And I would bet you that if we decided to pull out 20 years into that war in the mid 1970s, they would not have fared nearly as well so again I think this this expectation of what it takes to develop military's it takes generations, for them to rise through the ranks and to absorb the lessons that they need to stand on their own and we're still standing side by side with the South Korean military today is the 12th largest economy in the world. So I think one of the biggest lessons Alex is the time and effort it takes over time to partner with, again, 40 years Columbia 70 years Korea we can go around the world with how long do we partner with these militaries and if you look at some of them, their starting point was just as bad as it was in Afghanistan.

Hugh Hewitt: Thank you, Chris Cox.

Christopher Nixon Cox: Thank you. Great to be with you all tonight. I just want to make a quick point on Vietnam and then a quick question. I think perception always drives reality and of course is the perception that the US lost the war in Vietnam, but the perception among world leaders and I remember my grandfather and telling me this, the 1980s was that while the US lost the battle of Vietnam. Vietnam is still an integral part to winning the war against communism by breaking off the Chinese from the communist bloc by isolating North Vietnam and allied the Soviet Union. So, the Vietnam War was a key part in winning the overall war against communism. And I think the problem with Afghanistan is that the perception is that the emperor of the United States has no clothes, and that this perception is starting to drive reality. So I think that that's a key difference between Vietnam and Afghanistan. So my question is, what could the United States do that would show that the United States is back, that Afghanistan was something that's transit and wasn't a permanent feature of our decline. What is something that the US foreign policy establishment and government could do to show that the United States is back.

Hugh Hewitt: Ambassador O'Brien?

Robert O'Brien: Yeah I played on a couple things that at the outset, I will reiterate those Chris's it's a great question. I think that what we have to understand is that there are some fights that are critical to great power competition and that's where we need to focus. We've got limited resources and we have to focus on the Chinese and the Russians and and and to a lot of slightly lesser extent the Iranians. We have to get back to, you know, it's no longer in fashion but what's called punitive expeditions I mean we've got to go in if we're hit. We've got to go into these countries, we've got to root out the terrorists we've got to hit them harder, but

We just don't have the resources or the political will, you know, unfortunately to go to places that folks have never heard of and stay there for 40-50-60 years, and watch Americans come back to Dover. We have to go in and hit hard to take out the Osama's take out the Saddam's when they when they threaten our no fly our flyers or pilots and no fly zones and and we need to deal with the British Did you know over over 200 years with a single army division, they moved around with the Royal Navy. We've got to rebuild our Air Force we got to rebuild the Navy and we've got to be prepared for great power competition and when we get hit hard, or it looks like there's some country that's gonna are some non state actor within a country that's going to hit us and we need to go on and we need to root them out. And, and then we prepared for the next one. I just don't think the idea of, of us being, you know everywhere at once is going to be for 40 years is going to be workable and it'd be nice if we had a 3 million person military and. And we had our allies invested that we might be able to do that sort of thing but we're at the US smaller groups and special operators and Expeditionary Forces and going to take care of business and then move on. And we've got to keep our eye on the ball, the eyes and the ball is Beijing, and their their partners in Moscow and their, their lackeys in Iran and that's what we've got to be focused on hundred percent right now.

Hugh Hewitt: Mr. Secretary?

Michael Pompeo: I'll try to do it briefly. How about not spending five and a half trillion dollars and destroying our economy with the world looks at America. They are counting on American growth, an American innovation economy, we're about to do enormous destruction and turn into a European socialist welfare state at the very best. So there's a good through a handful of operational strategic geopolitical issues but we should never forget that we've got to make sure we have a right here at home and that the American economic power is the most important tool that we have to deliver, every one of these fights the fight against the CCP and the fight against radical extremism alike.

Hugh Hewitt: So let me close with Mary Kissel who's going to help me organize next month's topic and our approach, Mary.

Mary Kissel: I think I just got deputized, thank you. I just wanted to thank everybody for the great discussion tonight I think we've had agreement in this group and in a bipartisan way across the country that the withdraw from Afghanistan just to roll back to the topic at hand was a terribly botch pull out with, with terrible consequences. I think we had an excellent and a very detailed discussion about tactical issues about where to move troops where to put USAID, we've addressed current policy debates like whether or not to recognize the Taliban and the implications of that. But one thing we didn't do tonight is we didn't really touch on the larger question that Afghanistan raises. And that's simply this, what is the US role abroad, what is the purpose of the exercise of us power that's really the question that the reaction to Afghanistan is raising do we want to promote democracy abroad anymore, is that in our interests Should values play a role in the, in how we exercise policy abroad but never fear, just because we didn't talk about it tonight, doesn't mean that we won't talk about it because next time we're going to talk about, Taiwan, which raises all of those similar questions as we face a communist China.

What is the US role? How do we exercise power? What are our interests, how do we promote our values? This is not the United States of the 1940s, it's not the United States of the 1970s, we're past the war on terror, we're in a new era. And I think we're trying to figure out these bigger questions so we'll very much look forward to that discussion. Next time, back to you

Hugh Hewitt: Thank you, Mr. Secretary, thank you, Ambassador, the members of the seminar we are five minutes over. I apologize for that but we will see you on the first Tuesday in November to carry on that conversation that the Secretary opened and that Mary, very nicely set up thank you all have a good evening.