



# THE NIXON SEMINAR

on Conservative Realism and National Security

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### The Second Anniversary of the Abraham Accords

September 6, 2022

#### **PARTICIPANTS**

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#### **Mary Kissel**

Good evening. That was President Nixon in June 1974 returning from a trip to the Middle East. I'm Mary Kissel with Stephens Incorporated, your host for tonight's mixing seminar on conservative realism and national security and tonight, we too will discuss the Middle East and mark the second anniversary of the Abraham accords the landmark agreements that normalized Israel's relations with Bahrain, Morocco, the UAE and Sudan are honored. The Secretary Mike Pompeo and National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien with us tonight is our co chairs as well as our outstanding seminar members. Welcome, gentlemen. Good evening. Secretary Pompeo, I want to start with you as we mark two years of the Abraham Accords. Are there echoes here of Nixon's efforts to negotiate with other Middle East partners to have new thinking what was the key insight that your administration or administration had that made the Abraham Accords possible? Over to you.

#### **Secretary Mike Pompeo**

Mary, thank you. It's great to be with everyone tonight. There are certainly echoes of what you heard President Nixon speak of there. When you think of people, leaders that had to be in place to make such a thing happen and the trust that had that had to be built over a substantial period of time, I'm sure we'll talk about that places where we had gaps to the central understanding that allowed us to break free however, was something that I think President Nixon would have appreciated. Times are certainly different when we came into office. The central understanding was that we made a committed a decent

full on effort to make life better for the Palestinians. And we clearly demonstrated they were going to reject that and everything else and that freed us from the central conceit of frankly, both Republicans and Democrat administrations before ours, which was nothing can happen until that thing is fixed till somehow the Palestinians and the Israelis come to an understanding. We knew that that wasn't going to happen with Abu Mazen in charge in the West Bank, with Hamas in charge in the Gaza Strip, because we moved past that, and we were able to, and we'll talk about that, in some depth. We were able to convince the other countries that joined the Abraham accords to move past that as well that this was a different time in history, that all resolving a conflict and making life better for the Palestinian people was important. It wasn't a gating issue for them changing their core, their core foreign policy belief, which was the destruction of the nation of Israel. And so once we moved past that and had adopted a posture that said we're happy to work and care for our minds and changes as my as these guys come out of their decades of terrorist support, happy to work with him, but until they do, we're not going to stop working on the peace which is so important to reach. And that understanding freed us up in so many ways that we found great partners that joined us and that understanding.

### **Mary Kissel**

Ambassador O'Brien, I'm wondering if you can pick up there also where the Secretary was leading us. So there was this central idea that, you know, if it didn't work for decades, it wasn't going to work. And so, that's important. That's a foundation but you do have to have partners give us a little bit of an inside view as to how you and others found those partnerships and who the people were that that made this possible. I think you're on mute ambassador. All right, here we go.

### **Ambassador Robert C. O'Brien**

Thank you, Mary. And thank you, Mike. So there were a lot of ingredients that went into the Abraham Accords and a lot of leaders, including Secretary Pompeo who played key roles, let me talk about two issues that I think are relevant here. First, are the personal relationships, which I think are key to diplomacy. And let me give you one example about that in just a moment, and the second is building political capital and then spending that political capital in the negotiation process to get the results that led to the signing of the course. So first, on the issue of personal relationships. I give you one example of a relationship that I developed with my support with Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. The current president at that time, the Crown Prince of the UAE, I was a hostage job while working for Mike and working for the President. And we went to the UAE and we asked him to get a hostage back for us. It was a man named Danny Burch who was imprisoned in Yemen and the UAE them Rotties watched a really terrific operation they got Danny home, and we often ask other countries to do a lot for us as

United States, but sometimes a good thing. And one of the things that I did. Mike encouraged me on that was it's always good thing folks that help us and so I flew over the UAE and I met with MBZ was late at night. Those meetings in the Middle East or want to be and we were Dallas and I think we had a nice conversation. And then MBZ got what was on his mind. And what he needed were weapons and platforms and systems so that he could defend his country, much smaller time from Iran against the Iranian threat. And he wasn't getting what we were getting into the support he needed from United States and so he gave me a list of what he needed and asked him to take it back to Secretary Pompeo a little bit out of my lane as the hostage envoy, but I never went lanes constrained, knew I was trying to do things that are good for the United States. I came back and had the conversation with Mike and I said look, I'm sympathetic to the request and the UAE is our ally. And I think the Secretary same way and and then Mike took it from there to the football and we got it done. And so that leads to the next issue of political capital. We built both capital of both sides. We forgot example of getting the UAE the weapons they needed this to defend themselves. When we moved our embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. I was something Republican president Republican candidates and Democratic candidates as promised for years and years and years and we were in a rush to pick up stakes and Tel Aviv and go to Jerusalem. And it never happened. There are always reasons it couldn't happen. The experts didn't want to have those. We flooded the streets. And we were practicing Islam and and then we recognize the Golan Heights. And when it came to our Arab allies, they were deathly concerned about the Muslim Brotherhood about Islamic extremist. And we defeated ISIS with the physical caliphate. And then we took that out Baghdadi and brought justice to him. And we put maximum pressure on Iran. And so by doing all these things, we put some money in the bank. We put some credit the bank and when it came time, that Mike and I and Jared were negotiating at the end, and we had to ask the Israelis to do hard things we had to ask him really is not to annex parts of the West thing. We had asked the Arabs to do hard things, to walk away from the Palestinians and there and not a lot of Palestinians have a veto over the peace accords. We were able to ask them to do those things. Because we had the political credit in the bank. We had their back we had developed the competence status with the personal relationships by doing what we said we do. And therefore we were able to make those surpass. And they said, Yes, we were able to finalize the court. So I think those two issues have the key personal relationships, and everyone else will play second Pompeo did that. Jared did, the President did. I did it and that was how we got it done. We develop relationships. We did what we said we do we build capital. And then we did something politicians don't like. We spent the capital to get a great result. And it was it was a historic undertaking and it's enduring. I just came back from Israel last week. And we'll talk more about that later. But gosh, the people in Israel are grateful for what the team did for President Trump did, and Secretary Pompeo, and that our whole team did to get those Accords in place you

do the change in our lives, day to day they're seeing the impacts of the Accords today, two years later, so it's, it was a blessing for that.

### **Mary Kissel**

It was a wonderful achievement. It's remarkable. It's a bipartisan achievement, which is fantastic as well. Secretary Pompeo, I think when we talk about these kinds of Peace Accords, people might think well it's about getting, you know, two sides to really like like one another. But Nixon had a great quote in one of his books he said, quote, peace in the Middle East is not a matter of Arabs and Israelis learning to like each other. He goes on to say it means learning to live peacefully with their differences. Ambassador O'Brien talked about having money in the bank being credible, was a lot of this about, you know, coming together because they had common enemies and Iran unnecessarily because, you know, all of a sudden they were learning to love one another. I mean, that seems like a process that might take a lot of time.

### **Secretary Mike Pompeo**

Yeah, I think that's right. And this often goes to we can think about when you say they like each other, you can think about whether the leaders get along and cooperate whether the people of the countries have deep ties and connections as well and the breadth and depth of those relationships. It's certainly the case that those relationships don't get built out until after with any true strength. And I think for the things as per O'Brien's referring to is what's happened in the ensuing two years where you've now have real footholds in the commercial space security space in the diplomatic space that didn't exist even when the agreements were signed, I think that's true. That so you do have to move past that you have to find a set of common interests. There were three pieces of this Ambassador O'Brien spoke to them. One was no, no Arab nation, no one in America. No other country who was watching us do this as well. There's a lot going on in the world while we were doing the Abraham Accords, ever mistook the fact that we were going to be deeply connected to the nation of Israel, and we were going to do everything we needed to do to have their back that turned out to be really important, not just to the Israelis, when we asked them to do hard things, but our other friends saw that we were going to stick with our friends. So there was an important component of that as well. The second piece I just call "Iran bad." Our notion of "Iran bad" gave courage to the Arab nations, not just those who sign the Abraham Accords, but those around the Omanis, the Kuwaitis, the list goes on, to say they recognize the thing that threatens our people, and they are prepared to do the hard work to enable us to secure our nation against those bad actors. You know, I don't know that the Abraham Accords happen without the strike on Soleimani. Right? We don't think of those as being connected. But I can assure you that those Arab leaders that Oh, my goodness, these folks are serious about pushing back they knew what the risks that had been taken in striking Soleimani

the rest of America the rest of our forces in Iraq and Syria, they knew they knew we were prepared to do hard things to secure prosperity and peace for their region in a way that previous administrations had just walked away from. So deep connection to Israel, prepared to do hard things to push back against Iran being so such an uncounseled trend actor, the world's largest state sponsor and terror, and those built the conditions that enabled us to get this thing across the line at the end.

### **Mary Kissel**

Again connections to Richard Nixon, who armed Israel during the Yom Kippur War, but also worked to find common ground between Israel and its former enemies in the region. Ambassador O'Brien I want to go back to you before we open it up also to the seminar members. Secretary Pompeo talked about Iran, the maximum pressure campaign, the fact that that pressure is what facilitated the Abraham Accords and by the way, also stopped a lot of terror in the region and around the world. We have an administration now that is once again, coming to the table for talks, what impact if any, might that have on the Abraham Accords?

### **Ambassador Robert C. O'Brien**

Well, I think there's a real concern. As I mentioned, I was in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem last week, with a lot of officials, former officials and the current government officials of Israel. Saw our friend Bibi Netanyahu who sent his best to you, Mike. And there's a concern that the the new JCPOA deal which was viewed in the region, not just by the Israelis, but by our Arab partners as a complete American surrender to Iran in two years that will allow Iran to increase its original capacity by tenfold. It'll give them \$100 billion in sanctions relief. No one believes that the Iranian government is gonna spend that on the middle class and making Iran a better place they're gonna spend on on terrorism and on ballistic missile programs. And so there's a real concern, that if that happens, especially our Arab allies, if they see the US pulling back in the region, if they see the US pulling back from maximum pressure on Iran, that they're gonna have to create their space for themselves and they're gonna have to engage in the equivalent of a separate peace with Iran, because they no longer believe the US has their back the way they did when we were in office. And as a result, but the Iranians aren't gonna do that for free. The Iranians are going to ask those Arab allies, allies of Israel now and the United States, to lessen their ties with Israel to tamp down on all the commercial activity that Mike was talking about with you reports. And there's a concern that China will step in the region and China will step in and ask our Arab allies to do things that are harmful to Israel for a different reason. One of the benefits of the Abraham Accords and and this is something that the Secretary and I worked on, dealt with 5g and technology. The Chinese when we shut them out of buying a lot of our tech companies and stealing our tech, they turned to Israel because Israel has a burgeoning tech industry in Tel Aviv which is kind of the

second Silicon Valley now it's really an amazing thing to behold. And the Chinese were trying to invest there. Once we had the Abraham Accords, a lot of that investment that Israeli tech came from the UAE it came from Bahrain, it came from Saudi Arabia, and it displaced the Chinese money. And the Chinese got kind of pushed out of the tech sector in Israel. Now, if the Chinese come back in to give security guarantees to our Arab allies, they see the US retreating. They're not going to want that to happen. They're gonna want a piece of whatever investment in is really taking place. So we've got a real danger here that the JCPOA which is was a terrible deal to begin with, the current deal is even worse the first deal if that can be. There's a chance that that if that's signed, this wonderful framework of the Abraham Accords of peace with with not only the Arab countries but even the state of Kosovo, which is a Muslim majority state in Europe, it can really fall apart because of the the failure to contain Iran, the failure to keep up a maximum pressure campaign and we all work so hard on. So it's a concern in Israel, I think it's a concern in the entire Gulf region. It will be a heartbreak, if that, if signing that deal leads to lessening of American influence the region and undermining these trigger Acords that we got signed. Mike, you have a comment while we get Mary back on the line?

**Mary Kissel**

I think we mentioned Communist China and suddenly my feed was cut so you can tell if that's a cool incidence or not. I'm sorry, I just missed you there for the last couple of minutes. Ambassador Do you have anything else to say otherwise? I want to open it up. I have wanted to kick this over to one of the congressmen that have joined us any further thoughts? Ambassador?

**Ambassador Robert C. O'Brien**

You are I think I've had my say and a number of Americans.

**Mary Kissel**

Well, okay, great. And if I get cut off again, well, you know who to blame. Congressman Gallagher. Thanks so much for joining us tonight. We've got a great lineup of seminar members. I want to follow up on the China theme, you know, Richard Nixon worked with Egypt to pull Egypt away from the Soviet Union and then former Soviet Union and into our sphere of influence, should we be doing the same thing then? We're thinking the same way about Saudi Arabia, trying to get them into the Abraham accords to pull them towards us and pull them away from Beijing? Well, I

**Rep. Michael Waltz**

think absolutely always want to be adding friends and partners to your existing alliance structure. The reality is we already have an extensive amount of cooperation. In Saudi

Arabia, but I'm reminded by something that Nixon said, I believe when talking to you in lie, in talking about sort of the at times the unpredictable nature of statecraft and grand strategy, he said, The helmsman must ride with the waves or he will be submerged with the tide. And Kissinger had earlier said the pledges of each new administration are like leaves on a turbulent sea. I think that highlights something that's really significant and brilliant about the Abraham Accords, which is to say, they harnessed a development that was already emerging in the Middle East. And that's not to downplay the creativity and the significant accomplishment of everyone in the administration, but rather to highlight it, recognizing the reality that our Sunni Arab allies the Gulf states, were not seeking to Palestinian eyes, their relationship with us and that their top priority was actually aligned with the top priority of Israel. And it is Iran was a brilliant, brilliant strategic move. And I think that reality should allow us to build off the Abraham accords framework, enhance cooperation between the Sunni Arab Gulf states, so Saudi Arabia Foremost among them, and it may not be sort of a formal admission to the Abraham Accords, it could be sort of minor Confidence Building Measures, and then over time, find a way perhaps to reduce our force posture in the region and focus on the Indo Pacific and China and I cannot overstate, I think the significant accomplishment of the Abraham accords and just the farsighted nature of Secretary of Pompeo, Ambassador O'Brien, and everyone that worked on it, I think it opened up an enormous, enormous opportunity for us in a region that quite frankly, has posed significant problems for us for for over a decade. And it is I think, incumbent upon all of us in a bipartisan fashion in Congress to build off of that framework and to bring as many other countries as possible into the region in that framework, because I believe that is our best chance at getting the most defense at least cost over the long term in the Middle East. And so I'm very optimistic about it except for the fact that this administration may be getting back into the Iran deal. And the final thing I'd say is that all the courageous moves that were mentioned earlier, are recognizing Israeli sovereignty over the go on various diplomatic outreaches. Just that decision to get out of the JCPOA despite an enormous pressure to stay in and let's face it, some pressure even within the Republican Party to see if they could fix the deal, I think deserves a ton, a ton of credit, and I'm not sure how many other presidents would have made that decisions, how many other secretaries of states etc etc. And so, I think we all owe secretary, secretary Pompeo and former President Trump an enormous debt debt of gratitude for their willingness to see the JCPOA for what it was and and for all its deficiencies in the clear light of day.

### **Mary Kissel**

Well, let's stay on the congressional theme Congressman waltz I think we've got you with us on the line. I don't know if you can hear me. Okay, great. Well, you know what, let's talk about the prospect of more nations joining the Abraham accords. I mean, is

any national capital in their right mind going to do this while we're negotiating through the Russians with the Iranians?

**Rep. Michael Waltz**

I don't, to be honest with you. I don't see that in the short term unfortunately. I do think the opportunities are there as representative Gallagher laid out and I certainly want to second His praise. Of the administration. I mean, it was it was a really a series of moves that they were able to put in place in a relatively short period of time. That I think is, as Mike Gallagher said, really just essentially realized, and poured fuel on the fire of the reality of what our Sunni what our Sunni allies had, I think the direction they had been wanting to move for some time, but like we see all over the world. It really just took American leadership and really to put our shoulder behind it and to lay that path out with some reassurances. But to your point, in terms of moving forward, I think the administration and this just may be some overall ism on my part, is going to find a real problem and Congress on both sides of the aisle with where they're going with this current version, Iran deal 2.0 You know, I think frankly, it's far worse than the JCPOA even we could have imagined and what has me so alarmed amongst the many things one is, is obviously lifting the secondary sanctions on the IRGC, which is basically back ending dropping them from the foreign terrorist list, which if we believe what the Iranians, the Russians and others saying is what the administration is contemplating the releasing of billions from some of our Asian allies into the Iranian government. The lifting of sanctions from the Ayatollah is in our circle, many banks, their energy sector and on down the list, only to have the sunset clauses still kick in in just a few years. So really, ISIS almost no time for the infusion into the regime's coffers. But where I was going, the thing that has me so upset, that's frankly unconstitutional, and it's just wrong for any administration to do is to try to put things in place now that will tie a future administration of either party's hands to tie a future President's hands and to leave the Russians of all people as the arbiter of whether you know either side is following this deal, but to your point on is just asinine and wrongheaded. But to the point we just had 50. Democrats and Republicans express their concern. I led a letter last year with 70 Republicans and 70 Democrats, 70 Democrats to get on board with 70 Republicans on anything right now is significant, saying that any future deal had to be broader and stronger than the previous JCPOA, I think is really significant. And so this should be coming as the treaty. We'll see if they try to get around I Nora, the legislation that was passed in 2015 saying any future deal has to come before the Congress and if we express discontent with four, if basically we don't agree with the tenants of the deal, then we can pull the rug out from under it. So I think there's a lot still to go, even if they enter it as reported in terms of Congress's input on both sides of the aisle, and I think both sides right now are ringing the alarm bells for how bad this deal is not to mention



the spill on effects that it could have with the Abraham accords and any prospects of future of additional countries entering

### **Mary Kissel**

Well, let me play devil's advocate on that Secretary Pompeo, Ambassador O'Brien express concern that these negotiations with Iran could have negative impact on me. But what if the opposite happens? What if they see this renewed Iranian aggression? And say, gosh, we we can't just work together on the economic front? We have to continue to work together on the defense front to I'd note there's talk of in the anti missile cooperation agreement. There's cooperation in the strait, I think, to patrol that for international shipping traffic as Secretary Pompeo way in here.

### **Secretary Mike Pompeo**

Somewhere I actually think you'll see both you'll see increased security cooperation or you have Emirati airplanes flying alongside Israeli airplanes information, just put your head around that five years ago. Or seven years ago, right. It would have seemed awkward, incomprehensible to frankly, most everybody including many of us on this call. And so you'll I think you'll see that you'll see that in the intelligence space. You'll see it in other places as well. But there will be there will be the verse as well which is as a political matter and as a risk reduction matter. If they don't see the things that they saw the strong push back against Iran, the willingness to provide them with a defensive system capabilities that they need, they will find them someplace else, and they will find places to exchange ambassadors with the Iranians find ways to signal to the Iranians though Can't we all just get along? So I think I think you'll see each of those behaviors take place when you don't have an America that is prepared to both be a strong ally and partner of Israel push back against Iran and make sure that the city Arab nations understand that, that we are good security and political partners for them as well. They'll still they'll still those that are in the deal will still try to find ways to work with Israel, even some who aren't will find security places where it's important that they they work with Israel, but you can't get the breadth and depth and scope of what happened in the Abraham accords without all of the elements that have come into play by the third year bar administration.

### **Mary Kissel**

I want to pull in Tim Reid, the former chairman of the Export Import Bank, or chairwoman, rather, you know, I don't want to minimize the import of economic ties that are developing now. Between places like Israel and the UAE. Can you say is that continuing? How do you how do you engage that and do you see it expanding?

### **Kimberly Reed**

It is so very important, nice to be with everyone this evening. And Mary We all know economic security is national security. And I really have great hopes for what can happen and I hope that the United States is part of that. I'd like to tell a backstory for those watching part of the Nixon library. But I really want to give my my thumbs up to Secretary Pompeo and Ambassador O'Brien. I dealt with the Abraham accords as well. And I will never forget the behind the scenes that goes into something like this. And as we know President Nixon says that we think peace is more complex than waging war. And Robert I don't know if you remember being over in the old executive office building back in September 2020. And I was in a meeting with you with the President of Serbia Lucic, and and the then Prime Minister of Kosovo tea and to see you and Rick Grinnell and the entire team what it took to bring them together in the negotiations in the intensity of that discussion. It was it was an honor to watch diplomacy take place firsthand. And economics was absolutely part of that. I don't know if you want to add to that, but also I want to say Secretary Pompeo did a great job is a negotiator diplomat all around the world and that in December of 2020, there's something that happens every year called The manana dialogue, and this was at the height of COVID. And Secretary Pompeo appeared virtually for his remarks. And I had the honor of being the lead American there on the ground. And so this is an annual gathering sponsored by the International Institute for Strategic Studies. In all the countries of the Middle East are there and they have intensive policy discussions. But more important than that are the side discussions and I had one on one bilateral meetings with a variety of foreign ministers and finance ministers from countries as the versus Bahrain to Oman. And I brought that economic message and what accent could be doing and what grew from that was then going to Amman, and also what grew out of that. Just to close out on the economic front, something that really troubles me right now. I'd love to get the Secretary and ambassadors read on this, but one of my last trips is head of ExIm was into CDM and this was in early January 2021. And it was with great pride that I got to meet with all the leaders of that country. And I signed a MOU with the finance minister and I don't know if you can see this, but this is a picture of me with with the finance minister, Dr. Eva, Ahmed Alby and I gave her something I don't know if you can see it here. But But what I gave her was a Martha Washington pin. And Martha Washington had this pin at the start of the United States and she gave this for the hope for the future of peace, prosperity for our country. And I extended that same message to the people of Sudan, and what a travesty of what we have going on right now. So I hope some good things can come but I'd love to hear some points on that because they were it was great to have them be part of the Abraham accords.

### **Mary Kissel**

Well, I don't think it's widely known by the public all of these other people that work toward actually securing these records. And Kim, you know, these stories just aren't

widely known. I mean, you know what Jared and Robert and the Secretary did, but before we go back to our co chairs, I want to pull in Alex Gray, who was very much behind the scenes shuttling back and forth between all of these nations. Alex, I mean, it looks great. Now we're celebrating a two year anniversary but you know, when when you were in the middle of this, were you sure that this was going to come off? I mean, how did it look from your vantage point? It's the National Security Council.

### **Alex Gray**

Well, thanks, Mary. It's always fascinating watching up close as history like this is being made and the amount of as Kim Reid alluded to, the amount of behind the scenes prep work that gets done is pretty extraordinary. And you know, we always rightfully celebrate the people whose names are on the signature line, but there's a lot of great staff work by people like Miguel Correia and Rob Greenway and the State Department team that goes into this and so a lot of unsung heroes making this stuff happen. I think that you know, at the time, there were certainly fits and starts and there were many moments where it looked like any number of things could have disrupted the the flow and any number of kind of day to day upheavals could have could have blown us off course. But I think it's a testament to the perseverance of Secretary Pompeo and Ambassador O'Brien and President Trump that we never end the leaders on the other side. That we never allowed ourselves to be thrown permanently in the wrong direction. So, you know, this is the thing about making diplomacy at that high level of stakes. I I think there is a tremendous capacity for human error and for day to day events to to take us off course, but we have a firm strategy. We had good leadership. And I think ultimately the outcome was was we were going to get there eventually, even if we had a couple of hits the turbulence on the way in.

### **Mary Kissel**

Well, I Ambassador O'Brien I want to go back to you because Kim did pose a question about Sudan and the chords there whether or not it's lasting. Are you concerned that you mentioned this earlier that you think that some parts of the these chords might deteriorate over time?

### **Ambassador Robert C. O'Brien**

Well, Kimbra is a good point. That was always great to have her in our negotiations because Kim has textbooks so I know the Secretary and I always liked having Kim or Adam bowler playing because they could they could help do some economic work that every politician every country wants more jobs and more infrastructure and and Kim was able to help with that and then others were as well. So she she played a key role and Adam did and Brian hook and and many others, keep Crocker with the State Department. So we had a great a great economic team that did help underpin or

undergo these when it comes to Sudan and we do so at a time in the region last week. Talking about Stan, they've always seen had some some backsliding as far as their democracy goes. The concern there is that we're not cutting Sudan off and if Sudan doesn't, we don't engage with Sudan if we don't make make sure Well, maintaining our values and and protecting human rights in Sudan but we all nurture and maintain that relationship that it has with Israel, but also with the other partners with Bahrain and Morocco and the UAE, we could lose Sudan from the courts. And so we need to make sure that Sudan understands their benefits. Whatever happens with their government, there are benefits from having made peace with Israel, and having joined this framework and you didn't see one country leave and have the whole thing start to crumble. I don't think that would be the case of Sudan left, but I don't want to test it. And so I think it's important that whatever differences we ever the government of Sudan, we make sure that they understand that we value their participation, the Abraham accords and whatever government is that the radicals are fundamental that relationship between the US and Sudan. I'd be really concerned with Kim about the situation now but like, I think we could fix it.

### **Mary Kissel**

Sometimes when listeners or viewers hear about countries like Sudan, they think well, why is that in the US interest? What do they give us? What's why is that important? Either for us or for our friends and allies in the region. So I want to draw in a former senior defense department official bridge Kobe, who's the author of the strategy of denial, it's a book about defending Taiwan and grand strategy, bridge, jump in here and talk about these nations which sound you know very different from one another and they are you know, how does the security to US interests for a courts like this, and, you know, could the template be used in other

### **Elbridge Colby**

places where they will thank Marian, it's part of this discussion. And, you know, I didn't have any role in the Abraham Accords, but a great admirer and supporters from the outside and important kind of really almost a revolution in our strategic posture in a really critical region. And I want to build on what Ambassador O'Brien Secretary Pompeo and others said, but also, I think, Congressman Gallagher very well, which is that I think this is kind of a template for a way that we can use to actually increase our focus on Asia, not just in the in the Middle East, but actually potentially in Europe and other regions. And I think there's a there's, there's, you know, you mentioned Mary and we saw some President Nixon remarks, but one of the things that was so typical, I think President Nixon's most successful foreign policy, sort of coos, if you will or maneuvers was that he and you know, Kissinger and others, were able to turn things that seemed impossible or improbable or even counterproductive into advantages. I mean, the way

that that we were able, I mean, partially because we hadn't said that you were able to turn a conflict a horrible conflict in the in the Yom Kippur War, the October War of 73 into a much different relationship with Egypt that still stands today. And of course, a you know, in many other respects, but I think you know, what Secretary Pompeo was pointing out about the Soleimani strike and and others have made the point about sort of the improbability the the willingness to grasp it opportunities and use the kind of strength to be able to communicate and their hat as as investor Brian was saying having more capital in your pocket that makes people trust you and that allows you to focus on the things you most need to focus on. I think that's a super important lesson. I also think there's a there's a sort of, like a trust factor but also a willingness to deal with countries on their own terms. I mean, in the sense that, hey, the Israelis have perspective, the Gulf Arabs have a perspective you know, we're not going to agree with you know, Saudi on every everything. But we're going to look at what's the big what's the big issue here and where we can align and how we can make progress even if that involves steps that seemed you know, the capital Jerusalem or recognizing Israeli sovereignty of the Golan, those were shibboleths in the old days. And, and, you know, apparently not, and that's a very, I think that's, that's a model that we sort of, I think we can build on and I, I mean, I see a little bit today there's sort of a tendency to stick to the to the tried and true and the old ways and the old ways are ill adapted now we're going in a fundamentally different world and I think that's, you know, a historic legacy of the of the Abraham Of course, which is significant enough in the region, but also as as the just a kind of a template. I think there's a you know, part of Kissinger's memoirs, you know, he's such an incredible you know, writer where he says there's this sort of dramatic kind of breathtaking maneuvers, but I think they often are exactly the point that that, that I think you were making Mary which is they have reflect underlying realities, but you can accelerate and catalyze that is something that where, you know, statecraft and statesmanship really, really comes through and I think this is this is an example but one where, you know, I think building on the Middle East, but also in Europe and and and in place, you know, even in Asia itself in places like South Asia where we can have a much different relationship with India, for instance, I mean, really moving past some of the old, the old legacy ways and forming a much different kind of relationship. I think that's the sort of one of the big sort of inspirations I take from that from this historic agreement.

### **Mary Kissel**

Is recalls another quote from Nixon's book, seize the moment he said, quote, we should not impose a settlement but rather convince the parties of the merits of its own terms. In other words, just as you said, bridge, we have to appreciate everybody's point of view and then give them incentives to join. I want to pull in Lampi Chen, who also worked on some pretty out of the box orthodox deals dealmaking in different parts of the world, are there lessons here land he, you know, to purchase point to use this model that Nixon

kind of pioneered with his peacemaking in the Middle East and that the Trump administration did visa vie the Abraham accords looking forward? Could could we use it in other places like Asia?

**Lanhee Chen**

Yeah, I think it can be very valuable. And I think one of the things that is still relatively under appreciated because of the relatively short distance since the signing of the accords is the degree to which we will see massive I think economic benefits for the different countries involved and for the entire region. I mean, we talked about this a little bit already. But if you look, for example, that investment outbound investment from Israel to some of the other countries, you're talking about, potentially billions upon billions of dollars in economic activity that's created and made possible because of the Abraham accords. I think that the question is, can we transfer this model to other parts of the world and you mentioned Asia very, very rightly so because I think they're the old paradigm that was established in my view many years ago, is a little bit broken. In the sense that you'd be the new trade routes that we're seeing the new integration between Southeast Asia and the rest of the Indo Pacific are increasing interest, I think strategic and otherwise and the economic success of countries in Southeast Asia in particular. And while there isn't that necessarily the same history that plagued the region of the Abraham Accords, one does wonder if these kinds of groundbreaking deals are exactly the kinds of things we need to open the economic spigot and create huge development opportunities surrounding the Indo Pacific and in particular, I key in on Southeast Asia because I think it's such a huge area that's really under appreciated, even unfortunately, I think in our current politics, the politics of our current presidential administration, a failure to really understand and recognize the strategic as well as economic importance in Southeast Asia. So I would be curious to get the ambassador me the Secretary's views on what more we can do with respect to development and and the future relationship of the United States with Southeast

**Mary Kissel**

Asia. Well, let's go there. Ambassador O'Brien. You know, the Biden administration has expanded the so called quadrilateral Alliance, that's Australia, India, Japan, the United States they've started August that's a largely military agreement between the US and the UK and Australia. They're opening up embassies in the Pacific Islands. I mean, the current administration does seem to be doing some of the things that land he has talked about. Is it enough? What else what more can they do? You've written on this region, please weigh in?

**Ambassador Robert C. O'Brien**

Well, I'll mention one of the last trips I took in office and after the election was to Vietnam, Philippines and in fact, that I was following in Secretary Pompeo's footsteps. I think he's been there about a month before. And there is a hunger in Southeast Asia for American involvement. They don't want to be satraps, the Chinese they don't want to be dominated by fighting Communist China. They want relationships with the United States. And in our trip to Vietnam one of the highlights was our Kim Reed signing a deal out of the finance, I think a billion dollar LNG facility that in Vietnam that with reduced energy dependence on some of the countries that they didn't want to rush that others didn't want to be involved with, but that increased their energy interdependence with the US and with Australia, and hence the Western Allies. So I think there's certainly a security aspect, and there are things I applaud the current administration for doing expanding the Quad that was something we worked on very hard in our administration. I'm glad it's something that continued to engage in, but also Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam. Not every country originally sure our highs and Vietnam may not be a democracy, but they want to remain independent. They value their sovereignty, they don't want to be bossed around by the Chinese. And so there are opportunities in countries like Vietnam, but then there are also opportunities with countries like Indonesia, which is a massive democracy. And we're going to be in a situation a world where you got a top proceeds where you've got Tehran and Moscow and Beijing and Havana and Caracas, and then you're gonna have a free world. And in the old days, when we had a kind of a bipolar world, there was a non aligned movement. I don't think there's room for non aligned movement today. I think we need to the great democracies Brazil, and Indonesia and India. They need to side with us with the countries that believe in freedom and liberty, against the autocracies and a lot of those folks live and reside as Lanhee pointed out in Southeast Asia, their capitalistic there, there's a lot of energy there. There's economic opportunity for the United States of America. And we need to be not just militarily in the region but also on economic and diplomatic basis, to the extent that we have for many years

**Mary Kissel**

Bridge Colby, do you agree or disagree?

**Elbridge Colby**

I totally agree in that sense that that Southeast Asia is going to be a critical area and I just kind of wanted to, to underline the point. I mean, it's a huge area of demographic growth and also economic development. And I think others probably spent more time there. But I mean, I think if you've been to column four, you're talking about a society with you know, upper middle level, you know, income development, large population, Indonesia is a huge population, obviously still a lot of poverty. But really moving up the value chain. And I think that in a lot of ways, there's a lot of focus on Taiwan, there

needs to be quickly from a military point of view. But actually, one of the things that I'm concerned about is, you know, first of all, we've got to make sure that we can defend the first island chain perimeter and you know, is the the Trump administration's, you know, Asia strategy clear on that, and I think that's, that's critical. But actually, whether that happens, or actually, you know, whether we're successful or not in Southeast Asia is going to be a real arena of competition because particularly if there if the Chinese run into a bit of a wall on the first island chain, I think that's going to make Southeast Asia more and more than kind of cognitive competition, because there's enormous economic area and of course, a lot of this is of course, as Lonnie was saying, about, you know, general economic competition, but having market access, the ability to scale your you know, the companies have scale, etc. The markets we're talking about in Ossian are enormous. And of course, when you add in India, as well, and in terms of the growth rates, so I think Southeast Asia is going to be really important. I've seen there's been some sign meetings, there was an ASEAN meeting. The, frankly the economic package that was rolled out was was I don't think very significant. I think if lambda was a bit of a thought in Southeast Asia, all store, I would say the administration's rhetoric. I don't think it's well tuned to, you know, the kind of Austrian context, which is, I think, what it really put us, which were focused on sovereignty, I mean, you know, I think we've talked in the past, but, you know, nationalism may be a dirty word in the precincts of certain precincts of Western Europe, you know, and support, but in these places in Asia, where, where it represents freedom from colonial rule, you know, and I mean, kind of independence and national self determination and that's, that's a that's a good word. So I think there's actually a lot of the rhetoric of the free and open Pacific, Indo Pacific and the rhetoric of the Trump administration, I think was was better tuned to that kind of context, where you are, you know, obviously, you have to move people and persuade them but it's not about necessarily imposing a certain one particular vision of you know, what life should be latte, sipping and Cambridge, Massachusetts or something, pick your pick your analogy, but it's allowing people to have the independence and the freedom to determine their own future. And I think that will resonate and that is something that China in particular does represent a threat to, and I think that's almost at like a human elemental level. This sort of increasing belligerence and assertiveness and kind of domineering quality of Beijing. That's something we can work with. But I mean, then again, to go back to the historical analogies, obviously in a much different and much more tragic way, the Nixon administration was very focused on Southeast Asia, but also, I think, in a way that was strategic in the way despite the despite the horrible situation that existed at the time, but I think that's something where we can also take, you know, we can take a kind of a clear eyed look at the strategic situation.

### **Mary Kissel**

I see you have a little visitor behind you, they're



**Elbridge Colby**

enjoying quiet performance.

**Mary Kissel**

I want to go over to Congressman Wall to I also think has a new little one at home. But it's not fair. It's tonight. Just to go back to nations that are threatened, like bridge pointed out, but in the Middle East Israel, obviously. Launching operations it seems like every day to beat back Iranian threats in places like Syria. Talk to us a little bit about how the Abraham accords have, you know, helped augment Israel's security and you know, how we've drawn closer to Israel to in this period.

**Rep. Michael Waltz**

Yeah, I just very quickly, I just wanted to mention to, you know, other kind of doors that the Abraham accords amongst so many who have gotten locked that I don't know is fully appreciated yet. One is that Israel was formally in terms of partnerships dealt with by our European Command, which obviously is dual hatted with both NATO and Europe and for so many years, that was the main conduit for military engagement. Since Abraham Accords, Israel has now been moved into Central Command. And that just may sound like some bureaucratic line shifting but it really truly is significant in a number of ways. One as you just mentioned, it brings Israel fully or more fully into our command and control with our operations that we're conducting in Syria, counter ISIS in Iraq and other places, and I believe much more fulsomely enhances that cooperation. But there's other spill on effects example Israel, has reportedly sold drone technology and anti drone technology to Bahrain, and their defense industry is now coming together in ways that was just totally unthinkable. Prior to the Abraham accords. There's intelligence sharing, that's going on. There are joint naval exercises with Israeli frigates in our Gulf Arab frigates with port calls, even in each other's ports, all of these things just a few years ago, prior to the administration's old move in Abraham accords was completely unthinkable and for so many out there on the left and the right, that's that one of the reduce US involvement that, you know, throw their hands up at the notion of endless wars in the Middle East. So I think putting Israel from a defense standpoint, technologically and otherwise, more in the center of that relationship allows the US to focus on other things, and then very quickly other doors that unlock we mentioned, development, economic and other types of relationships. The India Israel, US UAE, the ITU you to kind of a different quad. Obviously, the US had relationships with all of those countries. Israel had a relationship with India, but bringing the UAE in was not possible without Abraham accords. And now they are cooperating in everything from food security. The UAE is a regional hub, in terms of both its ports and airports. Even space cooperation is now ongoing between all four countries. So there are all kinds of positive

ripple effects and spill on effects, secondary tertiary effect from the Abraham accords that I don't even think we have fully realized that potential yet. But certainly, I think needs to be fully recognized. I just wanted to throw that out there.

### **Mary Kissel**

Well, I think if this has happened in any other administration, a couple of people on this phone would be recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize. It's an old saying that they weren't I mean, I know I know, the ambassador O'Brien Secretary Pompeo about the architecture Peace Award. That's great. And actually very wonderful, but I think I think they deserve they deserve more. Oh, there we go. We've got a photo of them with the award that that's great gentlemen, Ambassador. O'Brien, you were just in Israel, as you mentioned, we've had just a parade of Israeli officials coming over the United States. We have the Mossad chief here. This week. So concerns about this Iran deal. Can you give us any insight information or breaking news here about what the Israelis are saying behind the scenes about the accords and about this appeasement of Tehran?

### **Ambassador Robert C. O'Brien**

Well, they're very concerned very and they're concerned with the opposition and the government. People are concerned. I think there was some thought that by the current government, by the Prime Minister that if they engage in quiet diplomacy, with the Biden administration, and they didn't criticize out loud, they took maybe a little bit of a lower profile than Bibi Netanyahu did with the Obama administration, but that would garner them some dividends. So I think they're seeing the leaks about the concessions that have been made to get this report done. They're saying that the Americans engaged at a time when the Russians are invading Ukraine, that we're using the Russians as our interlocutor with the Iranians. They don't understand. And so I think you're gonna see even with the current government changes, take a quiet approach up until now, I think you're gonna see more vocal approach. I think there'll be reached out to senators and congressmen like Ben Carson Gallagher, first of all, it's on the line but But Democrats as well, I think they're gonna be engaging the American public because this is existential for Israel. I was at the UN back in the Bush administration in 2005. When awkward, didn't jive came and said Israel's a one bomb country. And nothing's changed. So percent and same bomb they'd like thick Israel out and I think Israel understands across the board politically, with all the different parties center left center right. Far right that they understand the the devastating geopolitical impact that the JCPOA could have on their national security. They're extraordinarily concerned. Concerned about I think we're gonna hear more in the coming weeks from the Israelis. I hope it's not too late. And I hope the administration realizes as they get closer to signing that it's better to walk away from a bad deal than they get a day or two of media attention for resign records. They're gonna they're gonna do far better in the long run. ISIS is American that is a

Republican, far but in the long run, walking away from this fed deal, and keeping maximum pressure on the Iranians

### **Mary Kissel**

Secretary Pompeo closing thoughts tonight, marking the second anniversary of the Abraham accords. And also this news that we've been talking about throughout the seminar of renewed appeasement of Iran and the potential impact on the Accords.

### **Secretary Mike Pompeo**

Two closing thoughts first, there's a lot of credit that should go around to lots of people. We've mentioned a few names. I just want to mention a handful of ambassadors that wouldn't have happened without these folks, Ambassador Friedman in Israel, Ambassador Rakolta in the Emirates, Ambassador Adverset, the King of Saudi Arabia all were working for years that are live with us. And then of course, the Emirati ambassador, United States Ambassador Tiber, the Bahraini ambassador, the United States as well. These were people who were central figures and dealing with very complicated domestic issues that we had a whole handful of complex domestic issues in Israel. Governments changing all the while we were working through these problems, and of course, every one of these sections worried about their st rising up. Historic resistance to signing on acknowledging Israel's right to exist was in fact this fear that somehow there'd be a chaos in the streets of these Arab Sunni Arab nations. All the work that so many of these people did laid the foundation to make sure that when these announcements were made, that that did not happen, and in fact, history will reflect that it did not second thought. So as this administration continues to pursue discussions with the Iranians, you can see the risks to the United States of America. I remember being told I've been the Secretary of State just for a couple of weeks when we withdrew from the JCPOA. I remember being told there's just no way you can get this peace deal delivered, and that the sanctions that you intend to put in place the American sanctions because it will be America alone won't work. Well, facts matter is as of as the day we walked out on January 20 at noon of 2021, the Iranians had gone from having \$96 billion worth of foreign exchange reserves down to \$4 billion of foreign exchange reserves. Sadly, this administration, even before they've re-upped into an agreement, have ceased to enforce those sanctions with the same energy and vigor that we have, and the Iranian economy will grow faster this year than the American economy. That is dangerous to every American all across this country and the Arab nations are noticing this as well. Once you can see the right to enrich to the Iranians once you can see that central right no matter how much training that we have, once you tell them that they are permitted to enrich in a way than the Emirati. So we were holding to the quote, gold standard, end of quote. Saudis, many nations in the region will see for themselves that they tune in to possess the capacity to enrich. They're all pretend it's for their domestic

energy sources. We of course, know that there's no need to enrich inside your country to deliver for domestic nuclear power. Once you can see that right to the Iranians. Then we are down a path that is fundamentally at odds with what we deliver to the Abraham accords. I pray this administration will see that this makes no sense. They will recognize that the next American president is going to walk away from this thing that is just 30 months from now, this this is a short term deal for sure. And they'll say that it is not worth accountable for them. And now let's continue to protect America in the way that we did.

### **Mary Kissel**

Well, on the second anniversary of the Accords, congratulations to everyone who participated. It was a historic achievement. And as we've discussed tonight, it's an achievement and the kind of thinking that could be applied in other parts of the world and that we also take inspiration from President Nixon and his shuttle diplomacy and efforts for peace. And with that, we're unfortunately out of time, so I want to thank our co chairs Ambassador O'Brien and Secretary Pompeo tonight, for their insights are fantastic seminar members, the Nixon Foundation team, and of course, all of you for watching please follow us. Everyone on this seminar call is on social media and on your television screens, and in your ears and podcasts and radio. That's it for this month's Nixon seminar on conservative realism. We'll be in person in Yorba Linda, next month. We hope you'll join us there my Mary kissel. Good night.