



## THE NIXON SEMINAR

on Conservative Realism and National Security

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#### A Discussion on the Unrest in Iran

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#### **PARTICIPANTS**

Secretary Mike Pompeo, Ambassador Robert C. O'Brien  
Elbridge Colby, Monica Crowley, Alex Gray, Mary Kissel, Kimberly Reed, Rep. Mike Waltz,  
Alex Wong

#### Rough Transcript

#### **Mary Kissel**

Good evening and welcome. I'm Mary Kissel with Stevens Inc, your host and fellow panelist for tonight's Nixon seminar on conservative realism and national security. We are honored to have Ambassador Robert O'Brien and Secretary Mike Pompeo again back co chairing this discussion with our outstanding seminar members. Tonight we're returning to a subject that we discussed back in April Iran except this time the circumstances are very different. The death of a young Iranian woman masa meanie in custody has sparked weeks of protests. The senior Biden administration official says the Iran nuclear deal talks are effectively dead for now and Saudi Arabia just in these last hours, has warned the United States of imminent Iran backed attacks possibly on US troops in Iraq. And in Saudi Arabia. So there's much to discuss Secretary Pompeo going to start with you. Give us a sense of how far we've traveled here. Since April how different is this environment within Iran today versus back then?

#### **Secretary Mike Pompeo**

Well, Mary America, it's hard to know I think that these protests are serious. They are broad. They are compared to other levels of other times that there have been protests even even the protests that occurred while we were in office, but especially those back from 2009, they are they are deeper and more broad based. They have been sustained for an extended period of time. The regime has pushed back. They've you know they've had leaders say this will be the last day of riots. It turned out it wasn't. So some level of progress has been made. But we should of course, never underestimate the regime and its capacity to inflict enormous enormous burdens on those people. To beat them the buses. The IRGC, the local law

enforcement officials, I am confident are determined to maintain maintain the regime's supremacy but some of the acts so that's so that's the inside story of the outside stories. We've seen a relatively weak support from the United States of America. Even while the protests were going on for a period of time we continue to United States to negotiate through the Russians with the Iranians to give them a clear pathway to a nuclear weapon, and perhaps just as importantly, give them a whole bunch of money to continue to inflict tyranny on their own people and terror across the world. But I think now the whole world can see even more clearly than they could see in 1979 or 2009. They can see the nature of this regime and I I pray that these protesters will be safe that they will continue to demand the simple things that they are asking for and that this regime will change. We'll come to understand that their religious zealotry, their kleptocratic nature doesn't work for the noble Iranian people. And I pray that when we do this a year from now, we will see a fundamentally different government in Iran.

### **Mary Kissel**

Ambassador O'Brien just building on what Secretary Pompeo said, you reference the nature of the regime for those viewers out there that have been getting nothing but you know, coverage of Ukraine and China of late, maybe don't pay so much attention to Iran. What is the nature of this regime? Why is it so critical that we pay attention to those brave people out on the streets?

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

Well, that's a great question, Mary. The regime is, is powerful, it's cruel, and it was and it's lost all legitimacy. These protests are enduring. They're indigenous to the Iranian people. They're not stoked by anyone outside under normal circumstances. Masha meany would be given Nobel Prize posthumously, women's groups should be flocking to her. What amazes me is that people that here in America claim and and even folks in the administration who claim to be concerned about women's rights, who can claim to be concerned about human rights work for LGBT rights. They're literally watching gays and lesbians been thrown off buildings and hung from cranes and women being killed, because they don't wanna wear a hijab. I mean, and you're hearing nothing, no sense of outrage other than Iranian expats, no women's groups taking to the streets about this is pretty shocking. And, well, we need to do a couple of things with the protests immediately to undermine the regime but to help the Iranian people. They communicate via the internet. And the Iranians are putting up firewalls and blocking apps and that sort of thing. We can take those down and we should we should get them Starlink uplink facilities like we did the Ukrainians and get those in covertly through through our allies, so that these protesters can communicate with each other so they can let each other know when the secret police that Mike referenced and the Revolutionary Guard are coming and they can warn each other so that there are things we can do on that front. But I want to go back and talk about the regime just for a moment and then I'll finish up. This is a regime that right now is sending these kamikaze drones to Russia to rain down on the people of Ukraine. And again,

the administration and then so many of our Democrat friends are so concerned about what's happening in Ukraine but Ukraine is going dark you know at night they don't have electricity because he's Iranian drones are taken out electricity electrical substations, and yet that seems to be okay. Everything. Everything the Russians is bad. But if the Iranians supply and train the Russians with their drones that can't be talked about their the attacks on American allies in Iraq. I mean, think about the blood and treasure we spent in Iraq, and all the help that we tried to give our friends and our allies, the Kurds and others in Iraq. They're being attacked every day at will by the Iranians with that without response. There have been threats to senior US government officials and credible threats to attack them on our home soil. i People said that can't happen here. Well, then we saw what happened to Salman Rushdie, who was brutally attacked and stabbed 14 times last night and may have lost an arm as a result of it. And now this regime is threatening our allies and Saudi Arabia and at a time of significant oil crisis in the world. Because we have American give them centered independence with the Saudis or are under the threat of an attack. On their refineries state, the same drones are taken out vast infrastructure in Ukraine. The Iranians are threatened and send those very same drones to oil refineries in Saudi Arabia. How's that going to affect the world economy? And yet while all this is going on, we're using the Russians. And finally like heck, and even though they said today, it probably won't happen. We're trying to like heck to get that JCPOA back in place. The JCPOA will do nothing other than give the Iranians money and allow them to become a legitimate nuclear power in two to three years. It's the craziest thing you've ever seen. The fact that we're made out of war with the Russians was certainly adverse. The Russians were using their ambassador in Vienna to negotiate with their ally, the Iranians on our behalf. I mean, who thought that was a good idea. Well, under what circumstances and so but there's this weird religion about the JCPOA it was it was the only foreign policy accomplishment of the wrong administration. A lot of the same folks are back and they want to get it back. I don't know if it's a gift to perform President Obama or not or why they're doing this. It makes no sense. It doesn't make geopolitical sense. It doesn't. You know, it doesn't advance US interests at all. And now we're pushing Saudi Arabia away. So, look, there have been certain areas in the Biden foreign policy, where both Mike and I have said Secretary Pompeo and I have said there's a level of continuity between the policies we've put in place. Maybe they're not going far enough in China, but they're keeping a lot of our policies in place. One place they aren't is around, they've got it 100% Wrong. Richard Nixon was 100% Right in that clip that you played I was, that was terrific. And when he talked about the how Jimmy Carter handled the boat, the Shah and the hostages guy he was he was directly on point. And when I was finished with one thing, I worked closely with Secretary Pompeo, as you know, Mary, bringing American hostages home and Mike got more hostages on that it started a little earlier at the CIA than that I started the State Department. You got a few people today and it got more out with your Secretary of State working. I had the privilege of working with one that we never gave into blackmail. We got our hostages. home because we had a policy of peace or strength. And they understood that the detriment that they did them and then the potential consequences they'd

face from holding American hostages was far worse than any leverage and attempt to gain over us so So Richard Nixon was right, Secretary Pompeo was right in how we handle those policies, and get the Iranians still today hold American hostages by and so all in all, what long answer your question. This is C minus or D for the administration on how to deal with Iran. And I think we realized that you know, as far as short term threats the United States Iran's tops the list.

### **Mary Kissel**

I think the answer I was looking for was it's a revolutionary Islamist regime that you can't really negotiate. You can't really negotiate with them and they and they threatened to keep the Iranian people they threaten their neighbors said that very, very well. Alex Wong, jump in here, please. Former State Department.

### **Alex Wong**

Great, thanks, Mary. I just want to pick up on something that that Robert had mentioned. I mean, there there are scenarios where there's some continuity, as Robert said, between the Trump administration and the Biden administration, obviously Iran is not one of those they are highly divergent. And a return to as Robert had explained this pursuit of the JCPOA. The reason for that, and we have to be clear on this is there's a fundamental strategic difference in how the Biden administration views Iran, rather than as a source of instability rather than as the number one state sponsor of terrorism around the world rather than a country that is revisionist, in its outlook on World Order. The Biden ministration wants to go back to the Obama philosophy that they need to bring Iran into the region as a partner as somewhat as a stabilizing force. Through the JCPOA. Now, I hope this moment is is a wake up call. I think there have been many others before this, but I hope this moment of protest is a wake up call that even if the Biden administration wish to rely on Iran as a stabilizing factor in the region, that its own internal instability makes it unsuitable for that and there has been some talk or at least some some off the record remarks or or on background remarks about the administration thinking back to the 2009 Green Movement and the mistake of the Obama administration and not speaking up and in fact, the president, then President explicitly saying they didn't want to meddle in the Iranian protests at that time. So they're thinking about that moment. And I hope it's not simply because they don't want to be politically vulnerable on this point. I hope that it is a true strategic rethink, of of the suitability of Iran as a quote unquote partner and a rethink to recognize them for what they are which is a revisionist power, an adversary that has made its partnerships with other revisionist powers of the world and are are moving against our interest not just in the Middle East, but globally.

### **Mary Kissel**

Now not not all undemocratic regimes are the same. We have to differentiate between the nature of these regimes Alex Gray, please, over to you.

**Alex Gray**

Yeah, thanks, Barry and I your last point about differentiating between the types of regimes we're talking about. That's really the key here and one of the major failures of this administration has been the inability to make logical distinctions between the regimes that we're dealing with. Now go back to my fellow Oklahoman Jean Kirkpatrick, six democracies and dictatorships and double standards from 40 plus years ago, and she was very prescient, then and it holds true now, we have to be making a distinction between systems of government that we may not agree with, but where the interests converge. Saudi Arabia is obviously a great example of that. President Biden said he wanted to make them a pariah state. He's done everything he can to alienate them and to do to push them not just out of our corner but into China's corner. And he's done this across the world and by failing to make logical practical statesmen like distinctions between regimes and human rights in our interests. They weakened us in the Iran example is I think, one of the more prominent examples of that, but it's by no means the only one.

**Mary Kissel**

Well, that clip that we played from President Nixon makes makes that very clear. He saw a combination of who he was the worst choice out of two sets of bad choices. Congressman waltz, thank thanks for coming on tonight. We know your time is short. You're up on Capitol Hill. Is there is there bipartisanship here? Is there a difference? Between now the political figures and up their view the situation versus the folks in the White House on the National Security Council?

**Rep. Michael Waltz**

Yeah, very there there is bipartisanship, but there I fear it's diminishing to be candid. Last year, I did lead a letter to Secretary blanket and President Biden. And you know, there's a lot of letters that come out of Capitol Hill, but this one was notable in that 70 Democrats signed on with 70. Republicans saying any future deal had to be broader to include hostage taking the other elements of a nuclear weapon that ballistic missile program, the weaponization. And and the the inspection regime had to be far deeper 70 Democrats that that that signed on, I think that is significant. And you heard some real concerns as the JCPOA just in the recent months. Seemed to be on the brink of being signed before these protests. And before, frankly, the regime, I thought that they kept moving the goalposts. They know with this administration that if they just ask for a little bit more that this administration will probably concede a little bit more. Where I fear is diminishing, though is we're just hearing more and more of an outcry from the progressive left, particularly, not so much around Iran, but around Israel, and some incredibly dangerous language around Israel. You know, terms like an apartheid state and the oppressive government, they're really turning their back on the long standing Alliance, or our partnership there. And I fear that voice is only going to grow louder as the progressives take

more and more. I think, frankly, control of the agenda of the Democrats. I just want to just state a couple of things just from some recent meetings that I had and then I think Ambassador O'Brien is absolutely right, in calling out the the radio silence that we're hearing on the oppression of women, just to be very blunt. I think this administration has the worst record on women's rights of any modern administration when you add in what's happening with Afghan women and girls since that withdrawal debacle, what's happening in Iran today, what is happening to Uighur women that the administration agrees with with Secretary Pompeo that are being brutalized, raped, tortured, and put into forced sterilization campaigns and then on our southern border where 30 40% of women are raped or sold into trafficking as they go through that migration. It's a horrific record and then the other piece is, you know, our other friends in the region that I don't think are getting the attention in the in the relationship that they deserve are the Kurds. I'm co chair of the Kurdish caucus. I just met with the head of the Iranian Kurdish party. While he was in Washington. He couldn't get a single meeting at the State Department, not even an action officer not even come on down. Single State Department is not meeting with any of the Iranian opposition groups because of this ideological ideology this religion of the Iran deal, and one wonders when historians look back on us why we're not prepared when a regime implodes from within and we have zero relationships with anyone who then is is comes to power and these folks are practically begging for one with us or in line with our interests and our values. And the new Iraqi Kurds final point is we rock is sliding into the regime's hands. We have a very hands off approach there. We have American Oil and Gas interests by the way instead of going on bended knee to Iran or Maduro. For oil on the global market. The Kurds are absolutely wanting and willing to work with us but American oil and gas firms are being pushed out by the Iraqi Government in favor of Chinese and Russian under a Ron's influence. So I mean, it's just the catastrophe and the ripple effects from from this administration's flawed approach is touching so many of our friends and affecting so many women around the world.

### **Mary Kissel**

And you're right, we don't hear much about it. For instance, the Wall Street Journal recently reported that since 2015, there have been almost 1000 Iran backed drone attacks in Yemen, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Oman and of course, as Ambassador O'Brien has said, Ukraine so they're not just depressing their own people threatening the elimination and destruction of Israel. They're threatening to kill Americans.

### **Rep. Michael Waltz**

Mary if I can just use it one more thing. You know, I think this will be near and dear to Ambassador O'Brien and Pompeo is hard that Senator Ernst and I are pushing legislation we hope to get it in the defense bill to force the administration to certify that no American officials are under any type of current threat from the Iranian regime before they can release any any more money or lift any statutory sanctions. And we're also looking to make President Trump's

executive order the sanctions that he put in place to make those statutory so that the administration has to come to Congress before they enter any type of any type of New Deal.

**Mary Kissel**

Thank you, Congressman. We should have said that because viewers out there may not know that Secretary Pompeo or former Iran envoy Brian Hook and others are under very serious threat from from Iran even here in the United States. Kim read you raise your hand. You know, so we've outlined the threat and the fact that this is a very different regime, but we've also got the Iranian people very courageously standing up. We have Germany and the EU who may sanction the IRGC as a terrorist organization. We have some bipartisanship on Capitol Hill. Should we be a little more optimistic here? I mean, what else? What else can we point to? Or is this just all a terrible situation and nothing? Nothing to be done?

**Kimberly Reed**

Well, I think it's wonderful sign that you see these protests in Iran. And I pray for the safety of everyone. And I feel that the regime is feeling threatened. And that's why we're seeing that, as you mentioned today, breaking news in the Wall Street Journal on Saudi Arabia as a woman, and noting that President Biden signed again into law reauthorize the violence against women's act. It's now a three decade old law. And so that just happened in March. And as he created when he came into office, the White House gender policy council, which I quote, has an ambitious agenda to support women and families through domestic and foreign policy. I just want to say how what are we hearing? And what are we seeing? And I don't think that we're seeing enough and they're watching closely. And I just want to commend Secretary Pompeo and Ambassador O'Brien and so many of us here who worked on the Abraham report and I really think that we need to build up the Arab Israeli Alliance and our allies and also that we need to double down on sanctions, but I really want to hear all the women that we've heard so much of recently be focused on this horrific situation. And I know that our voters will speak loudly on next Tuesday about this,

**Mary Kissel**

though. Thanks. Thanks, Kim. Great to mentioned the Abraham accords. Monica Crowley, we do have the prospect of another Netanyahu leadership potentially in Israel. Richard Nixon showed such great strategic foresight when he saw the opportunity to help defend Israel and negotiate agreements with their enemies. I mean, what can we learn from both how President Nixon understood this regime? Because let's face it, it's the same essential regime and is there anything we can take away from his from his approach?

**Monica Crowley**

Well, thank you, Mary. It's great to be with everyone again tonight. And before we address that part of the question, I just wanted to say I want to echo the absolute appalling the concern that

we all have about the appalling silence on the women's issue, it would be nice and we saw the me to movement, rise in defense of these Iranian women and it's been outrageous that we haven't seen it. Look, I think from a broader strategic angle from 1979 on the United States, from a policy perspective, this was a public perspective. We have claimed that we've been waiting for these kinds of moments, right. So in 2009, with the free movement, and that open revolt, at that point, we had been waiting 30 years for that moment, and yet President Obama and his vice presidential Biden chose not to lift a finger not even to offer a word of moral support for the Iranian people and now here we are several years later, and now it's 40 years that we've been waiting for this moment. And now we have Joe Biden successor, Obama's successor, Joe Biden doing the same exact thing. And all in the name of this pursuit of this disastrous nuclear deal from a strategic angle. Look, I think we are hamstrung by this administration. I don't think they're gonna get off their pursuit of this. But I think that the the dynamics in the region have changed so much thanks to President Trump's leadership Secretary Pompeo, Secretary Minuchin Ambassador Orion, Jared Kushner, all who realigned the strategic dynamics in such a way that you've gotten a lot of economic and strategic integration in the region. Now that is going to be irreversible that is serving as a containment policy in and of itself with regard to Iran, but then again, there's no substitute for American power as well. You talk about Bibi possibly coming back? Yeah, I mean, Israel is facing an existential threat from a possible nuclear armed Iran. We all know that. I think we're going to be in the era of comebacks. Maybe Bibi is going to be the first of several we will see across the West. And I do think look from you've got the geopolitical aspect of this a geostrategic aspect you also have the human rights aspect. You know, Democrats traditionally, for decades have talked about human rights and other champions of human rights. And yet you've had two now Democratic presidents in Obama and Biden, who have tossed human rights to the side with regard to Iran, but there is a critical element to all of this in addition to all of these strategic aspects were talking about, which is demographic change in Iran, over 60% of the Iranian population is under the age of 30. And so obviously, change is going to happen in Iran. It's happening right now. Whether without support from the United States and the West. And we'd better be in a position to take advantage of that and speak to those younger people who are pretty soon sooner rather than later going to be in the leadership in Iran. So this administration might not be thinking about this, but we have to think carefully that if this current regime collapses, what do we want to see, replace it, and cultivating those younger generations to make sure that we as President Nixon talked about with regard to the fall of the Soviet Union, and what kind of successor state in Russia we want to see and how we could encourage that optimal successor state. We need to be thinking about that right now. And in terms of encouraging and reaching out to those younger demographics in Iran, that will be taking control over the reins. of power suit probably again sooner rather than later.

**Mary Kissel**



Secretary Pompeo can this regime be contained? Is that possible? Is that we were trying to do with the maximum pressure campaign or do we really need to see a free Iran to stabilize that very important region, the Middle East?

**Secretary Mike Pompeo**

Oh, goodness, you know, the, the capacity I think you said earlier married, the capacity to negotiate with the Iranians is exactly zero. You'll remember from our time in office, there was a theory that there were Iranian moderates, right that Zarif and Rouhani were the somehow if they could just get a little more power. Life would be good for the world. That was folly. It was naive. And now they of course have left the stage and the grip has been tightened by the Islamize by the theocrats. In the end, this will be a change that comes from within, but in the interim, our theory of the case was to deny them the capacity to be troublemakers. Kansas would think about it when you had a dispute at the boundary of your farm, right. So we were taking away their wealth, their capacity to build their military, their capacity to build the very drones you we were speaking of earlier, their ability to cause trouble around the world. Right. So this administration has done exactly the opposite of the deeds that we did, if you think forget, forget the words and the rhetoric for a second. So the first thing these guys did is they walked in and they said, it turns out the Houthis aren't terrorists. Of course, even then, the Houthis were firing missiles into Saudi Arabia every day, something that we of course said what happened to our country? These being the Iranian proxies in Yemen. Yeah. So the so you could go through the list. They're underwriting the Shia militias in Iraq. The Iranians are the administration then forces the Israelis to cut a deal on natural gas. I won't get the middle of whether it was a good deal or a bad deal. But suffice it to say the administration largely adopted a number of the equities that belong to the Iranian backed Hezbollah. They sat with the Russians, they undid all of the work we've done on snapback. They made clear to the Emiratis, the Omanis, the Kuwaitis, the Saudis, they made very clear to them that they were they were to be second fiddle to the relationship between the United States and Iran. And so all of the focus at the senior level was the negotiations between the United States and the Iranians and the Saudis were left to be pariahs. Those are the things that people around the world noted. Our theory of the case was very different. We had a friend a partner in Israel. We moved the embassy recognize the Golan Heights made clear that Israel was an unoccupied nation, I traveled to Judea and Samaria as a secretary of state. We identified Iran as the problem child and we isolated Iran, and maybe that is the best one can do. But that isolation gave the opportunity for the Iranian people to have increased space increased capacity. And built up opportunity for moments just like this one if the Iranians had a few billion last dollars, if their economy hadn't grown more this year than ours, the probability of success for the Iranian people and human rights and women's rights instead of that country would be far greater than it is today.

**Mary Kissel**

Well, when well said I want to bring in a bridge Colby, who has just written a book on Grand Strategy thinks about that the marathon initiative bridge, you know, we've heard now several times that because the Iranians have this money that Secretary Pompeo just mentioned, courtesy of the Biden team, that they are able to effectively aid Vladimir Putin and those regimes are working together. That regime is working with China. You know, as you stand back and you look at the world, you know how does Iran fit into this nexus? How important are they? And could they tip the balance in a place like Ukraine?

### **Elbridge Colby**

Thank you. Thanks, Mary. And I think you're it's funny, I was not funny. It's on point because I was doing something earlier in the day about the potential for simultaneous conflicts. And how stressing this is for our not just our military, but for our strategy on the whole. And I think, you know, picking up on the on the theme that a number of the other speakers have have emphasized and Secretary Pompeo was just emphasizing is the importance of having strong partners and allies and I think others were saying the same thing. And of course, Israel our you know, special ally, but also Saudi Arabia, you know, which despite the fact that it's a different form of government, we we don't approve everything they doing they're much better and more natural and established partner of our ally and a lot of ways of ours than then then many others. And I think having those positions of strength, and that's something that from my understanding. It was really a signature of President Nixon's approach. But I think, you know, instead of saying, Oh, we're going to take care of the Iran problem by you know, reaching out to them and giving them much money and hoping for the best and you know, sort of transforming the nature of our relationship with them. Why don't we negotiate for if you know, if that's appropriate, why don't we approach this problem from a position of strength and, you know, both with the Saudis of course, were really in a bad place as far as I can. Tell. I mean, there was the sort of notorious fist bump but that seems to have been followed by pretty open, sort of undermining of the narrative by the Saudis. There was a long article in the Wall Street Journal basically saying they don't, they don't trust us at this point. And I mean, it's, you know, it's not completely incomprehensible. And I mean, some of those some of the points that were just mentioning about about sort of the policy, the administration early on in Middle East, so I think that's not surprising. And of course, you know, I think we're in a lot of ways we're seeing an increasingly bifurcated world and it's not surprising at all that the Iranians are supplying the Russians and it seems to be fairly material, the Russians are using those drones a lot. And we don't know what else is going on. And I would expect the Chinese are going to be doing the same kind of thing. And it's very clear from the party congress that the Chinese regard confrontation with the United States and our allies is inevitable, and fundamental. And in that kind of situation, if you're China, I mean, you're gonna stick with Russia as they are not because it's a good thing that because that's your option and with Iran, and so we should expect these things to go together. And so in those kinds of positions, you don't want to you don't want to sort of toss your your your strong partners like Israel and Saudi Arabia to the side

you want to you want to bolster them and back them up and, and give them the ability to help as much as possible.

### **Mary Kissel**

You know, when we say help as much as possible, I want to go to Ambassador O'Brien and it's rare to get a former national security adviser, one on one here to pick your brain but when we think about tools to help the Iranian people, it often gets boiled down to well, we're going to sanction the regime or we're going to go to war with them or we just talked to them, but it just strikes me that there's an awful lot in between that we can do that we have many more tools at our disposal. You just address that a little bit for the viewers to get a sense of, you know, we we talk about diplomacy, you know, are engaging with this. Let's be frank enemy. You know, what, what can we do? What are the options that the President has?

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

Well, there are a lot of options. There's a big gray area in between appeasement, which is where we're at now, and I just wanna make a point. And Secretary Pompeo remember this, I was relatively new as National Security Adviser, and we were at the UN back in 2019. And we wanted to negotiate with the Iranians. We wanted to try and get a good deal on on the nukes. The Iranians would not come to the table, we had no preconditions. They wanted us to pay to come to the table to negotiate with them. In other words, they wouldn't negotiate with us unless we made concessions to get them to the table. So they came to the table pretty quickly in the Biden administration. And so obviously massive concessions have already been made to the Iranians, just to get them to the table because that's the Iranian negotiating position. But between the rank appeasement that we're seeing and between all out war, there's a large gray area. So one thing we ought to be doing is using the tools of national power and one of our great tools of national power is our tech industry. The way we can use our private sector tech companies to open up the internet in Iran. There's nothing the Iranians can do about it, and allow their people to have access to the internet. Why are we doing that? Why isn't the Biden administration with their great relationship with the tech companies encouraging big tech to open up the internet? Why aren't we smuggling and there's it's a smuggler's paradise in that part of the world we can be smuggling dows just like the Iranians smuggle things into the into the Gulf countries and to Yemen. We can be smuggling uplink facilities for Elon Musk's satellite Starlink so the Iranian people can communicate with each other. That's one area. The other thing is propaganda. And propaganda is got kind of a bad, bad word, but using our Radio Free Europe assets using our allies that Mike Waltz, Congressman Waltz, talked about Iranians who wanted to change their own country and have have routes into Iran. We need to start getting material whether it's like the old Samas dot know, copies of of newspapers, that sort of thing in the Iranians, but we can also use the radio waves and SMS is and texts and all kinds of things to get to get word in to the Iranians.

## **Mary Kissel**

Robert we we tried to reform the radios during the last administration. They're they're kind of lost. They're almost unreformable, I mean isn't really an option. We got to push back on neither

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

was the right leadership we could and and then you go to you talk about diplomacy. The Abraham accords it was it was a massive blow to the Iranians. And we we should be adding, say instead of pushing Saudi Arabia Wan calling them a pariah. They were very close to coming into the Abraham accords. When we left office when Secretary Pompeo and President Trump and I and Jared and all those who were who were involved in the secretary Minuchin were involved in the courts. And there were other countries that were talking to us, and we're serious about it. That would put tremendous pressure on Iran. And then what we could do is we could use sanctions targeted, we could target sanctions, like the duties that Secretary Pompeo talks about. The first thing that the Biden has done, are they I can't remember if they got if they removed the sanctions on Putin and nordstream to or remove the sanctions on the terrorists who tease first, but there was a mad rush to do both of them. Now, we can we can sanction Hezbollah, there's a lot we can do with the Lebanese we give the Lebanese government a lot of money that government is now basically owned and controlled by Hezbollah. We need to we need to help the Lebanese push back. We need to help our allies in Iraq push back against the Iranians. We need to help the Kurds as Congressman was pointed out. So there's deployed that there are economic tools we've got there. There's you know, kind of gray area information warfare that we can use. And, and look there's there's something else is pretty simple. I mean, Ronald Reagan used to talk about winning the Cold War, by being the shining city on the hill by being that beacon of freedom. We're not the sunshine seen the hill for the Iranian people because as they got in the streets are killed. We just keep asking the Russians to please please, please get the ayatollahs and the mullahs back to the table in Vienna, so that we can surrender to him. I mean, we're not that beacon of strength rather than shining city on the hill. So look, there's a lot that we can do short of military intervention with Iran directly. And, look, we did a lot of that in the Trump administration, the array the Israelis did a lot and with the Iranians on their back heels, and now that on their back heels are leaning forward and their their punches with jabs.

## **Mary Kissel**

I mean, a lot of our seminar members travel around the country meeting with lots of different communities, including the Iranian American community, which is extremely active. And it's not just the folks who are living here in the United States. So we saw photos from Berlin 1000s of Iranian exiles out on the streets protesting for freedom. I might go over since you guys aren't raising your hands. I'm going to go over to Alex, Alex Wong, who, you know has dealt with the the ins and outs of diplomacy and thought through these issues. Alex, you know, is there a role

here for the for the community and, and exile? And if so, what can they do? How can we harness their enthusiasm and their personal connections back home? Well, I

### **Alex Wong**

think there's certainly a role. You know, I think there might be a general misconception that Iran is a closed off country closed off society, but in fact, it's quite porous. And then people travel they do get information they do are understand what's going on in the world. So and much of that is through the diaspora communities that are around the world that you've mentioned some of their protests, but getting information that the world is aware of the protest is supportive, and having diplomatic messages sent, you know, with our like minded stat, if there is a moderation of the regime or a change in the regime, that there is a place for a more moderate non revisionist Iranian leadership down the future that that could be a great sucker to the protests right now. And I don't think we should be shy about voicing our support for the protests in the way that I view the Biden team to be to be reluctant because a part of what we have to understand about the Iranian regime is there is a level of sensitivity to their population. Now I'm not saying in democratic terms are obviously not sensitive in the way that our government is sensitive to the vote. But there is a deal that they have constructed here, where they give a modicum of some self determination are at least a fig leaf of it, in the form of some democratic elections at the local levels and some corrupt national elections. But then a deal of some economics at least steady state if not growth, combined with some nationalist sentiments. abroad and some glory abroad and a strong military and a strong internal security service. All of those work in concert to keep the regime in power. Now when those kind of stilted regimes start moving out, whether the economic situation is is arrived, whether the corruption of elections which you've seen multiple times gets to a point where it's undeniable, or where they start to be fissures in the military. That is something that we should put pressure on democratic pressure. internal pressure is a tool for us in our strategy to again, work from a position of strength against the Iranian regime. And those are things we should look at in the diaspora communities are a part of that. Then one of the largest families Yeah, you know, we're we pay a lot of attention not you know, justifiably to the upheaval, socially, economically, politically, that have come has come from the COVID 19 pandemic. We should be aware that a lot of the upheaval we're seeing now economically socially, trust in their own regime. But the COVID-19 pandemic hit Iran much harder than that it hit us in relative terms. So what we're seeing here is upheaval. And we should not be shy about analyzing that upheaval trying to predict what will happen but yes, trying to affect it and give our support whether it's through diaspora communities or other other methods. If we can move the regime move the region to to it to a state that's more amenable to our interests.

### **Mary Kissel**

Well, Secretary Pompeo, that's kind of natural segue to you. You ran CIA. You know, do we engage or are in those kinds of activities? Is there kind of a taboo because we we got a bad

name for doing that over time. You know, is there is there a role here? And secondly, well, while I've got you, are there partners in the region that we don't speak much about? I mean, we hear a lot about, you know, especially on the political right, partnering with Saudi Arabia, but should we be talking about what the Iranians do with us or, you know, other regimes in the region give us kind of an inside look here.

### **Secretary Mike Pompeo**

Oh, Mary, I can't I can't say a whole lot about the things the CIO is or isn't doing. It is the case that 1953 of us today guys guys, there are there are great stories. I can neither confirm nor deny them. But but we do have we do have clandestine capabilities. We have quiet kijos not just the Central Intelligence Agency, but the clandestine services of our department of defense as well. There are there are many tools that we can work to provide support, and I hope the administration is doing those. We also had a great partner. We had a great partner when I was a CIO with Mossad. We have great relationships with their wish and bet in their internal services. They have a they have a singular focus. So they are very powerful. They're right there, their existential threat and you know, America is to the CCP as Israel is to Iran would get you a decent shot on your SAP test. Those were still permitted in America. But they have a real toolkit and we ought to provide help and assistance to protect not only Israelis but American interests there as well. And you know, the I'd say one other thought that hasn't been mentioned tonight when you talk about other tools. I heard President Biden speaking I think it was yesterday about a windfall profits tax. I assume he means on the Iranians who are making who are making ungodly money from the sale of their energy because we're not enforcing sanctions, and they are now still selling at a discount to the market price. But the global market price is much higher. I assure you the Iranian margins on their crude are higher today than they were at noon on January 20 of 2021. And so when I think of a windfall profits tax, it seems to me that might be the place to put it and produce that energy here that would actually help the Iranian people an awful lot too if the Iranian government didn't have access to the sale of their petroleum products around the world, either smuggled or in the open market in ways they couldn't do for the last 20 months of the Trump administration. These are these are serious tools that could give the Iranian people the opportunities that they need, and that they so richly deserve. You should know Mary too. We were talking about the diaspora you were on some of these trips would make when I would travel in the United States, we often meet with them, sometimes quietly, sometimes more noisily we did in Dallas. We did it in Los Angeles. I think we did it in Chicago, we would go meet with those groups, not because we were picking a winner inside of Iran as for who would be the next set of leaders, but we wanted to know that we were supportive of them and often their families who were still stuck in this terrible place and we were I am I am highly confident that the Biden ministration is not meeting with Iranians around America, who could be an important voice inside of that country supporting the Iranian uprisings as well.

**Mary Kissel**

Branch I want to take it

**Ambassador Robert C. O'Brien**

just jump in for one second. Look, I think the Biden administration will send an envoy a special presidential envoy to Midland, Texas, and to Calgary Canada instead of Sam to Venezuela and to Tehran and to Moscow. So let's get him on board of Midland and see if we can solve this energy crisis.

**Mary Kissel**

And he raises the question of leverage, right. Where's our real leverage over this regime? And what we haven't talked about are our friends and allies that are buying that oil from Iran. I mean, is India cutting off? Is the French oil company to tell so want to do business in Iran? You know, bridge, I know you were at the Department of Defense living in our allied relationships, and we were talking a lot about our enemies. What about our friends? What are they doing for us here?

**Elbridge Colby**

Well, that's a good that's a good question. I'm not I'm not tracking it. too closely. But obviously, I mean, the Indians, for instance, are buying up a lot of Russian gas. So I mean, I think realistically, and I mean that the Chancellor of Germany is heading to China right now. So, I mean, I think the almighty dollar whatever the equivalent is, it's a reality that we're going to have to deal with. But again, as Ambassador O'Brien was just saying, I mean, let's, let's get our own energy production. So we make it not only something where we have to ask the, you know, the better angels of the nature of our of our allies, but it's actually an ever peculiar interest and will have a much more compelling case than then, you know, sort of simply ambassador was saying, you know, going to the Venezuelans and begging them to up production. So I think that's the best way we're going to is to appeal to the, the self interest of our allies, especially where they're where they're most aligned, and then we're the most likely to make progress together.

**Mary Kissel**

Monica Crowley jump in.

**Monica Crowley**

Yeah. Thank you, you know, listening to this conversation. I just want to make a point about the media and the importance of media coverage of situations like what is happening right now in Iran. You know, when Russia invaded Ukraine, the US media, the Western media, rightfully gave it extensive coverage, wall to wall coverage continues to do so. They created a narrative. They continue to feed that narrative with regard to Russia and Ukraine, but we have these

mass protests going on in Iran. And because so much of the media now is propaganda for the Biden administration, and for the left, those protests simply don't fit the narrative so they're not getting coverage. So it's one thing when you have an administration that has a certain set of policy priorities that can drive immediate narrative because the president, the administration secretary said, national security adviser, they're all talking about it, forcing the press to cover it, or you have a situation that is happening that the press is then forced to cover with or without an administration's prioritization of what's happening externally but in this case, you have this incredible development in Iran. And the press is simply not covering it for a whole variety of reasons. And, you know, I'm not sure what the answer is. I mean, I do think the diaspora can put a lot of pressure on elected officials and others, to continue to raise this in order to bring pressure to bear on the media to cover it. But I think if you walked into an average street, you know, Peoria, Illinois and asked an average American Do you know what's going on in Iran right now? They would say no, they have no idea. There is some activity on social media. There are certain groups covering it. But in terms of the mainstream press, they're simply not doing it and without the press covering it. You know, we're really at a loss for that major weapon that we can bring pressure to bear on the administration and members of Congress to talk about it and advance some of these policy ideas that we're all bringing to this conversation.

### **Mary Kissel**

You know, that Iraq has a new leader in the last couple of weeks. He's talking about that. Monica, you know, automatic, you know, how effective was President Nixon from your experience in your conversations with him about, you know, driving that narrative? I mean, we heard him at the top explaining very clearly the choice that was before Jimmy Carter, you know, and analyzing it and a lot of you know, just just plain common sense. What what did you learn from him and working with him?

### **Monica Crowley**

Well, I mean, look, every President has to do a calculation in terms of risk and reward and certainly we're facing that calculation right now with Iran. Look, he Nixon and Kissinger were both disciples have the concept and the approach to foreign policy, real politic, balance of power issues, which they applied to the region very effectively. Henry Kissinger was engaged in constant shuttle diplomacy in the Middle East and trying to advance America's interests and our interests in the region. And here in this administration, you simply have none of that. And, you know, we've often talked to in this group about how President Nixon was a visionary and we spoke about it the last event live in person at the Nixon library. We don't have a visionary leader right now. In fact, we have the antithesis of the visionary leader right now. So all of the policy ideas that we're standing about now we're really hamstrung by having a president who doesn't appear to be willing to move in any of those directions. That doesn't mean that we shouldn't be prepared for the eventual transition of power here. But in terms of thinking



strategically, the Trump administration Secretary Pompeo, Ambassador O'Brien, thought extensively about this and executed policies that got us to a very productive place in the region where we were delivering real durable and stable peace and integrating those moving parts in a way that would backstop any kind of backsliding in the region. But now we're faced with a real opportunity and Iran and there's simply no visionary leadership whatsoever.

### **Mary Kissel**

I mean, we we tend to miss everything. I mean, we missed the fall of the Soviet Union. We missed the Arab Spring. We didn't think the Iranians would would have an uprising and no nine we didn't think that the Cubans would get out onto the streets just a couple of years ago or the Venezuelans. I mean, we seem to be really lousy at understanding the internal dynamics have real critical countries that could really, you know, change the outlook on important parts of the world. Kim Kim read, you wanted to jump in. You're on mute.

### **Kimberly Reed**

I just just for those who are watching us support the Nixon library. We had a great session last month together in person and we really appreciate your focus on President Nixon and as we look at the future. I want us to remember who we're focused on today and tell you a little bit about her. So she was 22 years old. We've talked about her masa Mimi, but she was occurred in her Kurdish name was Gina and she wasn't allowed to use that name. The Iranian Brownings would not allow that. And so I just hope going forward. What's what's Iran going to do? It's going to be up to Generation Z in Iran. And I really hope that we do all we can through conversations like this because the internet's very powerful. And the Nixon seminars, one way that we can get these great ideas over there. Also, is the Supreme Leader Khamenei thinks about his legacy. He's 83 years old. We know that he's focused on an economy of resistance. And so going back to your economic question, he's focused on trade with our our, our wonderful non allies of China and Russia, in countries like Afghanistan and Iraq. So I really hope that the Biden administration focuses on how we can get at this from a national security perspective. I just wanted to take it back. And as we remember Gina and her wonderful life

### **Mary Kissel**

yeah. Well, thank thank you so very much. We're running these conversations. We always seem to run short on time. We've only got two minutes left. That's about a minute apiece for our co chairs. Ambassador O'Brien, any any final closing thoughts?

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

So we've talked a lot about the the challenges we're facing some of the disappointments we're seeing in the current administration. But look, I'm an optimist about America. America remains fundamentally strong. Were the greatest nation on the earth. We can be again, we need new leadership. I think we're gonna see new leadership very soon. Starting next week and in the

house in the Senate. And then two years from now we're gonna have great leadership again in this country and and when that happens, the the American people should remain hopeful or they should remain cheerful remain optimistic. freedom, liberty, the rule of law, our way of life is going to prevail. We've got the best men and women in the world in our military and we're gonna we're gonna prevail against the Iranians, the Russians, the Chinese, but but we need new leadership to do it. And I think it's coming. I think that's something we can all have a smile about and hope for, as we watch the midterms coming beat beanies back and I think others are getting back as well. So I think there's some there's good news on the horizon, no matter how discouraging someone is we talked about today as

### **Mary Kissel**

I like that upbeat tone. Secretary Pompeo final thoughts.

### **Secretary Mike Pompeo**

We should end there with that optimism that there are there are good things to come in the anchors that were set with the Abraham accords. In the region, I think will prove lasting. They took American leadership but they will continue to because it's good for the people of the region. And when you get that right when you get enhanced prosperity, less risk, more security, then those nations can continue to confront Iran and one day we'll be in a place where we can all say yep, this went well. And good outcomes all around and the risk to the United States and the fact that we the risks that we have to send our young kids to fight in that place again, can move even closer to zero than we were able to get it to during our four years. I think good things are in store because in the end, we set the course and set those anchors.

### **Mary Kissel**

We have to just commend the courage of these Iranian protesters. How extraordinary to see them out in the streets, and we wish them good luck and success. I want to thank our co chairs Ambassador O'Brien and Secretary Pompeo are really outstanding, very experienced seminar members. They're serious people thinking serious thoughts. Is that nice to hear. foreign policy, please follow them across social media, their podcasts or TV and their radio. We don't have a seminar in December, but we have a Nixon grand strategy Summit in Washington, November 10, and 11th. It's going to be streamed live on YouTube, and we hope that you will all follow us there. So thanks to everyone for participating. Thanks to our viewers and listeners. We appreciate you and we hope to see you live on YouTube at the strategy Summit.

Good night.