

## The Nixon Seminar on Conservative Realism and National Security

### The Iran Nuclear Deal

April 5, 2022

**Mary Kissel:** Welcome to the Nixon seminar on conservative realism and national security hosted by the Nixon Foundation. I'm Mary Kissel, with Stevens Incorporated, formerly of the State Department. And we are honored to have Secretary Mike Pompeo and Ambassador Robert O'Brien co-chairing tonight's events. We're thrilled also to welcome back our distinguished seminar members and a new member of Bridge Colby who is here this week. Our subject tonight is the Iran nuclear deal negotiations but before we turn to that, we're going to start once again by addressing Putin's barbarous war.

What have we learned about the West, about Vladimir Putin and about nations like? So Secretary Pompeo, I wonder if you could kick us off and what have we learned about the intentions of the United States and our European allies? Like a lot of people are wondering, do we really want Ukraine to win over to well,

**Secretary Mike Pompeo:** Thanks, Mary. Great to be with you all. You know, as for what we've learned the first part of your question, I don't know that we've learned a heck of a lot to be honest with you. We knew Vladimir Putin was a bad guy that he didn't value human life. We knew the Ukrainians were tough. People probably learned that they were better and more capable, frankly, with a lot of training and support that actually did come from the west from the United States who've been trained in their special operating forces for quite some time. We didn't learn much about Xi Jinping. We knew that he was simpatico with Vladimir Putin, and that he too was happy to watch Ukrainian kid and be slaughtered if he could get cheap gas through a Russian pipeline. That I don't think that's particularly newsy.

Your second question was, do we want Ukraine to win and I think how you phrased it, lots buried in just the question there. If I send the Ukrainians will make a decision about what victory looks like. We should enable them to get as far and as fast as get them there as quickly as they're capable of getting. They haven't asked for single American soldier marine sailor airman. They haven't asked for SpaceForce. They've just asked for the tools to defend themselves in their sovereignty. And we were late we were slow. We could do more even today. But I have been heartened to watch Europe figure out that putting climate change at the top of their agenda was a truly risky proposition. I pray they don't forget it when this moment passes, and I'd love to see the Biden administration learn the same darn thing. If we did. We could help the Ukrainian people and the people of Europe a whole lot more against these two twin characters Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin. I'll stop there.

**Mary Kissel:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Secretary, Mr. Ambassador, kind of unusually upbeat assessment there from the Secretary of State. What do you think that we've learned here? Are you too heartened by Europe's response?

**Ambassador Robert C. O'Brien:** Well, the first thing I'll say Mary, and I appreciate what Mike's comments I certainly endorse some look it up but I think right now we're going through a heartbreaking period as we watch the Ukrainians these brave soldiers retake towns have been occupied by the Russians and seen the evidence of war crimes, the torture the killing, that the rape the wanton destruction of civilians. This isn't collateral damage as part of our Russia policy, and it's heartbreaking and so, our prayers God to the people of Ukraine and say, we're going to see more of this as more towns are liberated. We're going to see what it means to have a Russian Army. Take over your town, take over your city take over your country. What Yes, do we want to win and if we want to win, we would put full sanctions on the Russians. Up until now the sanctions have been half measures. We've excluded oil and gas sales from the swift and the Russian Central Bank sanctions. And so by doing that, the only thing that Russia sells is oil and gas. The rubles recovered. The rest of the stock market as far as for the most part recovered. Russian oil shipments I learned today, for the most part recovered. The only thing they said was Well, yeah, so if we're not going to sanction oil and gas, there's not a lot of point. Thanks. When's the last time anyone here went on Amazon said hey, I've got to get that newest thing from Russia. Right there. It's never happened because we don't sell anything other than oil and gas, maybe some minerals and some agricultural products. So we've got to put on full sanctions. We had an opportunity to do so today. The EU unfortunately fumbled and they put on sanctions for coal three months from now. Those you know, the Europeans aren't importing a lot of coal anyway. And so it would have been nice to have seen Europe take the lead on oil and gas sanctions. The number two, we've got to be the arsenal of democracy and I remember being in Ukraine in 2014, not shortly after the Crimea invasion. And Ukrainians told me at the time, the same thing that Secretary Pompeo just talked about, they didn't want American soldiers there, but they wanted the tools to defend themselves. And fortunately, in the Trump administration, and then under secretary Pompeo, his leadership and then our team at the NSC. We were able to unclog the logjam and get those Javelin missiles have proved so critical and turning back the Russian invasion at least run in the Kiev region. We got those Ukrainians we got the training that guys like Mike waltz special operators, Special Forces guys were were out training the Ukrainians and so so we did that. But Enough Already we need to get in the mix. I ended the this whole charade and they're not getting the makes and they get funded to Germany. Like if this was Mike Pompeo running the CIA, Mike would have had to mix the two Ukraine from Poland. They would have been paid in Ukrainian livery. He would have probably done it through a Russian arms dealer so that Putin got his cut and we wouldn't have done anything about it. But the Ukrainians would be enforcing their own no fly zone over their own territory with those medics instead of kind of what we've seen that with this diplomatic fiasco. And the last point I'll just make is the same one that someone might talk about. Jing ping is watching this and he's learning some lessons. And the number one lesson I think is learning I said, invading that advanced industrial democracy is hard. And hopefully he's taking that away hopefully believes that the Taiwanese and I think they will fight with the same Alon and esprit de corps that the Ukrainians are fighting with number two he's seen the West supply the

Ukrainians, and hopefully he understands that Taiwan will be resupplied in the same manner. And number three, he's seen the sanctions and if we could get comprehensive sanctions on the type that the Chinese aren't ready to decouple from the world economy yet, and if he knows that comprehensive sanctions are coming against him if we could make that demonstration now against the Russians on Ukraine, it would be easier for the world economy to sustain. And he believes that that would come to him and China and the Communist Party if they invaded Taiwan, that might be enough to deter him from going into Taiwan. So with that all close my remarks and, again, full sanctions are small democracy, all sanctions arsenal of democracy from

**Mary Kissel:** Ambassador O'Brien, Secretary Pompeo heartened by the turn that we've seen in Europe away from climate change and toward a more serious look at their energy sources. And their sources of defense. But the subject of China is an interesting one. Matt Pottinger, former deputy national security adviser Matt, the ambassador just laid out a positive case that perhaps Xi Jinping is looking at this and saying, Wow, look at the sanctions and look at the stalemate on the ground in Ukraine. But what if he's thinking, gosh, the oil and gas is still flowing to Europe and my economy is a lot bigger and goodness. Putin can't really run an army but my army is much bigger, much more sophisticated. How do you interpret Xi Jinping? And how he's behaving? Not just what he's saying about Ukraine?

**Matt Pottinger:** Yeah, well, like Secretary Pompeo said, he's he is backing Vladimir Putin even though sometimes they send deceptive signals suggesting that they're somehow on the fence or that they want to be a you know, a broker for peace. He's doubling down on Vladimir Putin because this is this is a culmination of a 10 year policy that Xi Jinping has been pursuing to basically partner with the other revanchist aggrieved, you know, diminished empire on you know that neighbors them and, and to help Vladimir Putin secure something that Vladimir Putin can hold on to and claim as some kind of a victory, which is why we shouldn't grant him that we need to be giving Ukraine what it needs, not so that they can maintain a stalemate or some kind of a frozen conflict. We should be giving them what they need to achieve victory in a decisive victory against the Russians. Now teething ping to Ambassador Brian's point, you know, invading an island through amphibious operations is a lot more complicated than driving tanks across a border from Belarus or Russia. And we saw how, how that easier with for the Russians. So if I were a Chinese war planner, I'd be sweating right now and revisiting a lot of my assumptions about how easy a war might be. But you know, and by the way, the urban warfare component of that right the Battle of Kiev, or at least the first battle Kiev, has been won by a bunch of scrappy defenders against against Russia. So there needs to be a lot of lessons that are being applied rapidly in Taiwan. And while it's hard to invade an island, it's also really hard to resupply an island if a war begins, which means we need to supply Taiwan now with everything they need all the training that they need. It doesn't need to be high profile, but it needs to be comprehensive and in depth. Poor Congressman waltz we you know, let's send him and his former colleagues in the Green Berets to go train people how to fight in Taiwan because the fight may not end at the beaches, they need to show that they're able to fight in the cities and as well as in the mountains and in the countryside.

**Mary Kissel:** Well, that is one of the things that we have learned now six weeks into this Ukraine conflict that logistics matter. And thankfully, we've got the guy who wrote the book, literally, on Taiwan and the strategy of denial Bridge Colby, and new seminar member Bridge talk to us a little bit, just react to Matt's comments, but also tell us how much we're learning about the import of Ukraine in defending Ukraine. Six weeks in?

**Elbridge Colby:** Sure. Well, thanks, Mary. And let me just say it's an honor to be part of this distinguished group chaired by Secretary Pompeo and Ambassador O'Brien relay and President Nixon's legacy is certainly on my mind. So I think it's really a privilege to be a part of this important group. So thanks. I think, you know, I associated myself with the comments before what I would emphasize Mary is a key lesson that I think is being neglected a little bit here is that sanctions and international condemnation, like play a role, but what's really happening is that Ukrainian I mean, to me, maybe maybe every every, you know, to a hammer, everything's a nail, but it shows denial. I mean, my view is that Vladimir Putin and his forces would be at the Polish Romanian border. If it were nearly a matter of sanctions and international condemnation. But rather, it's the it's the Ukrainians. It's the training that Secretary Pompeo mentioned and he led and it was such an important part of this mix. And you know, who else who knows what else going on in the intelligence world? But I think this is a critical thing. And I think Matt is right that they're, you know, PLA planners are going to take pause, but bear in mind that China's 10x the Russian economy, they're also going to learn from the Russian failures. I mean, if I'm a PLA planner, I say to myself, I take no risks. At the beginning of this I flatten every potential target, I take out everything. I don't let some clever plan of maybe decapitating Solinsky interfere or xi in this case interfere. And I think what what Madison jesting about the critical importance to Taiwan, I mean, I think the window is really closing. I mean, I you know, Admiral Davidson has talked about this window. We, from a defense planning point of view, we are already well within that window. In fact, there are things we probably can no longer do in the near term. So I think we're at a point and this is a real problem with the administration's defense budget that just came out. I mean, you have a President talking like we're in you know, in the midst of World War Two battle between democracy and autocracy, and then you get a defense budget that looks like business as usual, that's maybe above inflation, if we're lucky, and none of the changes that we really are very few of the changes we really need to see. So I think, you know, this decade has already gotten really hairy and I think it's likely to get unfortunately more hairy.

**Mary Kissel:** So lessons on the cohesion in Europe, lessons for the US defense budget ramifications for China. I just want to go to Nadia Schadlow here.

Former deputy national security adviser and also one of the primary authors of the national security strategy. So she's thought a lot about these issues. Nadia, What lessons do you take away from Ukraine and what we've seen over these last weeks.

**Nadia Schadlow:** Thanks, Mary. It's great to be here. And I agree with I think everything that's been said I just want to highlight a one point that hasn't been made about lessons that might be my team tactical that I think actually is quite strategic is, is our miscalculation in some ways about the capabilities of the Russian military. Now, that's not having said I think actually I'm one

of the people that thinks that we still have things we will still see possibly Russian cyber actions that we shouldn't pat ourselves on the back. But having said that, I think we have seen the incredible difficulty of joint operations right of bringing together all of these of the army of the Army and the Air Force of bringing it all together into a way that achieves strategic objectives. It's really hard to do. And so the bridges point and to Matt's point about what the Chinese are learning what worries me that they're seeing this as well, right. And this has been a potential weakness of really all militaries the Americans are exceptionally good at this because there's a way we train, but I think it's really important to keep this in mind down the line, because I think our adversaries will learn from this and understand how important it really is to get this right in this incredibly complex military environment. So there's so many things so many important angles here to discuss we have so little time I want to get as many people in as possible. Kim Reed, former chair of the Export Import Bank, Kim, over to you. So great to be with all of you I've spent earlier today. Time at the transatlantic energy security forum, where I heard firsthand from ambassadors and representatives from Latvia, the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic, Estonia, about how much they really want to be having United States energy exports. So we focused on that Senator Manchin and Senator Cassidy joined us it just really underscored what Secretary Pompeo and Ambassador O'Brien started on the need for us.

Economic security in Europe and I'm feeling that finally the world is realizing this. And I just want to underscore something that the representative from the Czech Republic sent today that is, if Ukraine goes we're next. So just want to say that there's big interest in buying American energy. And I hope that it's awful what's happening, but I really hope that the world wakes up to the value that our country provides to the world.

**Mary Kissel:** Well, it's a great point. It does take time to build energy infrastructure, but we have seen some u turns in particular out of Germany, saying that they will build more LNG as the United Kingdom, saying that they will tap some of their carbon resources which is a great sign. I don't know if we'll see the East West Mediterranean pipeline restarted. I don't know if we'll see a loosening of regulations here in the United States. So let's go to somebody who knows what's going on policy wise and in the halls of Capitol Hill, Representative Mike waltz.

Just want to bring you into the discussion here again, we're talking about Putin's war in Ukraine and what we've learned so far. Before we turn to the Iran nuclear deal, Congressman, react a little bit to to all the angles here that you've heard. What have you learned to date?

**Congressman Mike Waltz:** Well, you know, this is has actually been one of the times where I'm, I'm I'm proud of Congress. And I think Congress has played a constructive role here, dragging this administration along in many ways, and it's been a bipartisan role. Everything from a whole series of congressional delegations last year, the one I was on with with four Democrats and and three Republicans. We were uniform last year, and saying that the sanctions should have been in place then that the Ukrainians should have had stingers on our battery radar. Harpoon anti ship missiles and other more sophisticated weapons that they needed then the the, the frustration of even the embassy last year and the Ukrainians on the foot dragging from the administration with the premise that they didn't want to be too provocative from towards

Putin. They didn't want to be too escalatory. And I think one of the things in terms of a lesson and we had a very, very healthy and heated at times back and forth with both General Milley and Secretary Austin today at the Armed Services Committee on whether deterrence failed and I think we need to acknowledge and be clear eyed that the administration's deterrence strategy did fail. And that integrated deterrence, which is a new favorite buzzword that that we're hearing a lot in Washington also failed yet or seeing integrated deterrence is a key component in the new national defense strategy. So I think we need to understand that a economic diplomatic focused strategy for deterrence didn't work. I don't know that it would work. I think it would be even tougher when it comes to Taiwan. And many on the left are using that, frankly, as a cover to move away from hard power. And, you know, lesson number two is hard power matters. And dictatorships, particularly those like Putin will push and push and push till they meet hearts deal, period. Unfortunately, the latest belatedly are now putting that in the hands of the Ukrainians.

And I think that this the final thing and acknowledging I mean, finally, we had the NATO commander, General Walters this week acknowledged publicly that Ukrainians probably could have performed better their cities may be in better shape, there may be fewer refugees, and sadly, dead and wounded Ukrainians if they had had stingers on day one, and they had had this equipment on day one with the with the training behind it. So I think that's the biggest lesson that we need to continue to press and learn from and then finally, just one one comment somebody mentioned the budget. You know, we had the the comptroller of the Pentagon admit today that he used a 4% inflation figure in this budget when we're talking \$800 billion budget, a three to 4% delta is literally 10s of billions of dollars that were going backwards. mean they even went so far as to kind of pat themselves on the back for a 4% pay raise for the troops are there by my math are going for percent backwards. In terms of even the you know, the the incentives we have for retention and recruitment. And we won't even I know I'm gonna know I'm gonna light Ambassador O'Brien up on the naval, the Navy's budget on the split, you know, you cannot convince me that nine ships sometime in the future are going to replace 24 ships of capability that we're decommissioning and when you see the trend lines in the chart that PLA Navy, the PLA Space Force, their nuclear modernization and you see ours, we you know, bridge Colbys right, we're out of time. The Pentagon budgets on a five year cycle well if you buy into Admiral Davidson's window of 2027, and I do from from all the briefings that we're receiving, that's one five year budget away that means what we're buying right now is what we have, and it is wholly completely insufficient. So I think without that, that happy, depressing input. We have a lot to learn from from this from this tragic invasion. And I'm not sure that we're we're learning it and we certainly aren't applying it in this budget.

**Mary Kissel:** Well, we we have to get on to our main topic tonight the Iran nuclear deal negotiations, but before we do, Ambassador O'Brien, any final thoughts on this topic before we move on?

**Ambassador Robert O'Brien:** Well, the only thing because Walt's when we are busy, you know we would we're gonna we're gonna inflict we're gonna self inflicted Pearl Harbor taking place in this budget. We're gonna lose more ships in this budget. And maybe the ships are new or they're like our Ticonderoga class cruisers that have been the most feared warships by the PLA

Navy because they have 120 vertical launch cells and could be extended for a relatively for 20 years for a relatively small amount of money. And we're gonna we're gonna lose all those ships, more ships. We lost Pearl Harbor in this budget and it makes no sense whatsoever.

Thank you.

**Mary Kissel:** Any last thoughts, Mr. Secretary.

**Secretary Mike Pompeo:** Oh, what's that? Let's get to it. Let's get to Iran. We you should know that these are deeply connected. I'm glad we're going to do them sequentially. But thanks for actually calling me optimistic. That's the first time in a long time.

**Mary Kissel:** Well, there's a time and place for everything, Mr. Secretary. So we will turn now to what was advertised, which is the renegotiation of the Obama era Iran nuclear deal. Here's President Richard Nixon, on the topic of Iran. Let's roll that tape.

**Mary Kissel:** So that was Richard Nixon there and forth, describing his awakening his thought that we still confront today with revolutionaries in charge of that country, still repressing the Iranian people still considering America and Israel, the great Sultans

Ambassador O'Brien. I know you have to leave us a little bit early tonight. So I want to go to you first.

The choice that President Nixon was describing was a choice between something that was not great, the Shah was a very repressive figure, but the choice in some respects between bad and worse, the Shah or the revolutionaries.

Are there ever really these clear choices in foreign policy? What did you make and please react to President Nixon's comments?

**Ambassador Robert C. O'Brien:** Well, look, I think, if Nixon President Nixon showed again with that clip is precious in international affairs, and we need more picnics today. So I'm glad we're doing this program and we're bringing some realism to US foreign policy. I think his his comments can be applied to the JCPOA. And so if you take a look at the JCPOA the first JCPOA it was built on lies. And those lies have now been exposed to be totally exposed and the deal was a sham. The Lie was if we give the Iranians regime the Ayatollah is if we give them 150 billion in sanctions relief, then they'll become a responsible stakeholder in the Middle East, and the middle class in Iran will flourish. What actually happened is the Iranian regime took that money and they spent all of it on accommodate ation of terrorism for the booties, khateeb Hezbollah, Hezbollah in Lebanon. Hamas and other groups. And so the stabilizer neighbors, they said they weren't gonna take any more hostages as soon as they let three American hostages go at the end of the JCPOA. They took more hostages that Mike and I had to try and get out and we were able to get a number of them out fortunately, they their nuclear program, which they said they'd never had a nuclear program was totally exposed by Assad and the

Israelis. When they captured the archives and Prime Minister Netanyahu, I gave the world access to the radio archives. And then the Iranians used that period of time for the JCPOA where even if they technically complied, with it, they use the time to build ICBMs and delivery mechanisms for the bombs that they would eventually have on the JCPOA. JCPOA sunsetted. And that they could marry up and they became a recognized nuclear power. And so now the whole thing made no sense to the Iranian people for the American people or for the world. Now we're talking about doing a JCPOA two that has all of the same flaws, and yet has a shorter sunset period than now that we would want and what I'm predicting now, this is something we've all talked about, and Secretary Pompeo has talked about it as well. We're going to have a nuclear proliferation event in the Middle East like we've never seen, because if we think that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is gonna stand by when the Iranians get their nuke in a couple of years when the JCPOA sunsets or we think the UAE or we think Turkey or Egypt are all gonna stand by, and allow the Iranians to be a nuclear power in the Middle East without them in turn, either developing their own program or buying the nukes from Pakistan, you know that that's fantasyland. We're going to have in the most volatile part of the world we're going to have massive nuclear proliferation. Because of the steel what we should have. What we need to do is go back to maximum pressure, where we were with the Trump administration where you are involved in that very and others on the call Mike and Nadia and others and we need to we need to shut down this nuclear program around once and for all.

**Mary Kissel:** Well, thank you for that, Mr. Ambassador. I know you have to jump off. So thank you for joining us tonight. It's always great for you to be with us. Secretary Pompeo, you were very intimately involved, perhaps more than anyone else in the Trump administration on Iran policy, both during your time as director of the Central Intelligence Agency, to your time as Secretary of State, and you in fact made a speech explaining why the United States should not continue with the deal. But for those folks who are watching this maybe for the first time or don't follow Iran that closely. Can you explain why it would be a bad thing to delay Iran's nuclear program for a couple of years isn't in a couple of yours to play devil's advocate better than nothing? Over to you, Mr. Secretary.

**Secretary Mike Pompeo:** Yes, well, every minute without them having a program is a good minute, but the price to be paid connected to that is absolutely staggering for the United States, for Israel, for states throughout the Middle East as well. You hear back to remarks that I gave in May of 2018. I remember the response from the world. I laid down 12 conditions. These are the things we asked the Iranians to do and I quipped that it's not a single thing in that list of 12 that we don't ask the Norwegians to do these, and yet the progressive left and most of the Democrat party said that these are outrageous demands things like not committing acts of terror, not taking Americans hostage, engaging in world trade, not threatening our friend and ally Israel. Just simple things.

And yet this was a bridge too far for the Iranian regime to give them to give them these resources, this money in exchange for the potential that we delay their program just a little bit is a is not truly a deal. It's a it's a really bad outcome. You know, Robert [O'Brien] walked through this in some detail, but it was really important to remember the things we were prepared to do



when I was listening to Richard Nixon talk. He spoke with more candor than most leaders do. Maybe it was because he was out of office by this point, but he was he was prepared to acknowledge that he was making friends with some characters that were a bit rough. I remember when Jamal Khashoggi perished in the consulate in Turkey, we understood where America's interests lie. We knew that if we did this right, we could put enormous pressure on the Iranian regime. We could support the Iranian people and their efforts and freedom. We could make friends with the the nations in the region that were trying to get it more right everyday nations like the United Arab Emirates. They're trying to get it right. The Saudis right making making real progress by by some standards you could shoot arrows and say that's not enough. You could look at Egypt and say it's not enough but trying to make real progress. I mean, for goodness sakes, Sisi went to a Coptic Christian ceremony on Christmas Day.

**Mary Kissel:** That's the Egyptian President.

**Secretary Mike Pompeo:** Sorry, the Egyptian President Sisi, a Coptic Christian Church in Cairo on on Christmas Day. We need to be realistic about the folks who aren't trying to kill Americans aren't trying to undermine the United States of America... are friends with our friends like Israel and not sidle up to the Iranians. Every billion dollars that we provide to them is \$980 million more that is likely to go into their terror program or their nuclear program, each of which will enable them to hold America more at risk.

**Mary Kissel:** Well, speaking of President Nixon, and that sort of candor and realism, realism that we want to bring in this group to US foreign policy today. I think we do have a second clip of the former president speaking about Iran if we've got that, let's cue up that second video clip.

**Mary Kissel:** Jonathan Burks, you heard President Nixon say there I would not rule out the use of force. We've just confronted this with Ukraine with President Biden saying repeatedly I will not put troops on the ground saying it publicly and now. With the Iran nuclear deal. We're also signaling the opposite that we don't want to exert pressure. We want to give them cash and inducements to sign a piece of paper with us. What do you think of that strategy?

**Jonathan Burks:** It's obviously self limiting. And so the lesson we should be taking from our experience in Ukraine is going to our ability to act is dependent in a lot of ways on the strength that we have as a nation, independent of other nations and the ability to bring other nations along with us by strengthening their ability to act independent of the threat. And so you know, one of the things that we really should be working on both Ukraine and Ukraine context is how do we husband our strengths by increasing energy independence by reducing economic dependence of our allies on on Iran, and how do we help our allies in the region and elsewhere feel more secure, absent the solution to the wrong problem? So I think it's transported think that there's a negotiated solution. That's just in the offing if we're just a little world a little bit more patient, and so we really ought to be thinking about how do we isolate and play a longer take a longer view and a longer strategy on Iran, that doesn't involve either the use of force or a negotiated surrender that only endangers allies and our interests?

**Mary Kissel:** Well, that's a very interesting question. If you don't like the policy that the binding administration is putting into place, but you don't want to put troops on the ground. Is there some sort of middle road here? How might we think about that? I don't know if we've got some, some volunteers here from the seminar that want to tackle that question. If you don't, I'm just gonna call on you. Actually, Mike waltz, you're a sitting congressman, you have to answer these tough questions all the time.

**Congressman Mike Waltz:** You know, we've tried President Obama's way. The Biden administration is continuing to try maximum pressure and it did have success. But the Iranians still continued to maintain their nuclear arsenals still kept, you know, fomenting terror around the region. I mean, is there a strategy that's kind of in the middle that's kind of what Biden is trying to do on Ukraine's their way there to do it on Iran?

Yeah, that's uh, I mean, that's, that's the \$64 million question buried in your your questions will never be tougher than standing before town hall 100 of our great American citizens but yeah, I just we just received a series of briefings from the negotiators from Robert Malley, Breck McCormick and others.

And, you know, the disconnect there is on the one hand, they're saying that maximum pressure didn't work.

But on the other hand, they kind of later in the briefing, so because of the pressure, the economic pressure, the Iranians are at the table and ready to make a deal and they go back to well, it didn't work. But then they go back to a we can do even tougher sanctions if we really want to, when we ask and many members asked what happens if if you know they walk away from this deal, and we have no deal? And the reply was, well, we have a whole menu of far tougher sanctions that could really get to them back to the table, which leads me to wonder why those aren't in place and why we didn't continue those. The fact is, I think we've loosened some of the pressure, particularly visa V reserves in South Korea.

In terms of some of the secondary pressures that we were putting on both Europeans and China, I think there's a number of things that we could do.

The thing that the regime cares about the most sadly isn't its own people is its wallet, and the vast business empire that the IRGC and others in the regime have been running and enriching themselves on for years. I also don't think we should be even at the table while the regime is holding four Americans hostage, literally and one was, by the way, Samia Namazi case that the Secretary knows well was left behind by the Obama administration on the last deal, despite promises from Zarif to carry that he would be released and his poor father went over to see what he could do and he was taken hostage. as well. So I think there needs to be some important preconditions. And and I think there's a lot more we could do in terms of economic pressure, that could influence the regime's behavior and there's a lot more we could do visa V cutter and some of its some of the others that the Iranian regime liens on. And finally, let me just say from a congressional standpoint, you know, I led a bipartisan letter last year, and it's

important to keep reminding folks it's 70 Democrats signed on to this letter to the president in to the Secretary that any future deal has to be wider, deeper and stronger has to include terrorism hostages, ballistic missiles, and a true verification regime. That includes military sites. And doesn't include notification months and months in advance. And really that also that That letter was intended for the markets, and that Congress isn't going to honor this a future administration isn't going to honor it. And therefore every dollar that German or French or other companies think they can invest into the regime will be put at risk and they need to think twice. What I'm most concerned about in the current negotiations are what's being termed inherent guarantees. Basically, the regime is concerned those that the the administration isn't going to bring into Congress won't have the full force of the treaty, a future administration can back out of this deal. And essentially what the inherent guarantees say is that if a future administration does walk away, for a variety of very good reasons that many of the behaviors will snap right back into place in terms of enrichment centrifuges, and other things. I think any effort to tie a future administration's fans is just wholly and completely unacceptable and something we have to watch out for.

**Mary Kissel:** We certainly do so many great points there. Congressman, thank you very much. It also raises the question, which is the bipartisanship that we saw on China on Capitol Hill has now been extended to Russia. And you wonder if we're going to see Congress now also agree that we need a tougher stance on Iran policy, who would have thought that would have been possible even only a couple of years ago Bridge Colby has raised his hand. I also just bridge real quick. So I welcome Chris Cox, who is Mr. Cox Nixon who has joined the seminar, Chris, great to see you. I'm coming to you in a second get ready.

Bridge. She wanted to weigh in here on Iran over you.

**Elbridge Colby:** Sure. Thanks, Mary. I was going to pick up on something that actually Secretary Pompeo was talking about that also related to one of the clips that President Nixon was talking about. And I think this is the point about how we engage with foreign leaders and foreign governments. And I think there's a really key point here. I mean, we've seen in a sense over the last 1516, whatever months, the results of I mean, frankly, it's a bit of a rerun to some of the Carter foreign policy, early part of foreign policy, very highfalutin kind of moralistic rhetoric, which ends up being completely abandoned upon need, and then you have the predictable results with the Emiratis and the Saudis and others, which is well, I mean, if you're going to lash us over you know, with polls or whatever, then we're not going to do you a solid when you ask for oil and to the contrary, they're you know, pricing, some of the Saudis are pricing some of the oil sales and wine and, of course, the Indians are doing various things and countries are acting in their interests. Well, the point of a conservative realist foreign policy musician is see President Nixon's I mean, he's talking about using the word progressive, it had different connotation time, but he was not saying that people liked the Shahs methods he was saying, okay, the world is a tough, imperfect place. And I think that, you know, very much like his mentor, President Eisenhower and I think President Reagan knew this. The Kirkpatrick doctrine is the world's an imperfect place, you know, so let's be consistent, and the best way for freedom certainly our interests but also freedom to flourish in the world is for America and its allies. And partners to be

strong and some of those allies and partners are not going to be pretty. I mean, President Nixon, President Eisenhower had to deal with that reality. President Reagan, you know, with Furman Marcos or certain Central America, you know, you go you go on, but the point wasn't to log that or applaud that. But to Secretary Pompeo was saying by President Sisi, you're going to get a better result for people who are aligned with us over time. You know, and this sort of the sorry thing about the alternative approach is you've got Secretary Blinken, the President talking about how evil these countries are and how they're exists and then going and asking them for favors and it's like, well, at least be consistent. You know, and it's not even it doesn't even work. And so I mean, I think one thing that I really would take in this context, I think it's pretty relevant. The Middle East, is, you know, it's not the unipolar era anymore. It's a tough year. I mean, I think we all are to the serve in the Trump administration and the big thing that Nadia and others Matt vobis, has great power competition model. The basic idea, China's the priority there, Russia is still a huge problem, as we've seen, but we can't just do anything we want. We can't just solve everything magically. We got to prioritize, we got to focus. We got to make hard calls, and we all differ exactly on how to do that. But the reality we're dealing with a tough world where we can't just snap our fingers. And in that context, and I think in particular in the Middle East, but also in Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia. You know, as Secretary Pompeo was saying, You got to have a long term plan you build relationships, you work things to get better, but you're looking after long term coalition's where there's an understanding and I think that's something that we've seen in you know, the Iran deal. I mean, one of the many problems that I see with it is like the people that we actually need, and you know, the Emiratis are playing footsie with the Chinese and the Saudis are as well that doesn't mean that we should just, you know, do whatever they want, of course, but we're gonna need it you know, as my partner and many maybe you know, my great friend West Mitchell. I mean, he's sorry, we got to compete for influence. And I know Secretary Pompeo does Appoint us. I mean, this is the kind of thing Well, that means being smart and being strategic and how we deal even with governments that we don't admire how they, you know, their political regime,

**Mary Kissel:** I'm just going to go quickly to Matt Pottinger on the China points. And Bridge, you raised the Saudi China relationship. You know, how important is China to the region, they're also a party to the Iran nuclear talks. They were the first time around, they are this time around. You know, judging on our experience in government with Beijing, they were never good actors, think of this as an enemy, how do you treat them in this equation? As part of these talks. Do you try to influence them? Do you try to undermine them? I mean, how do you view that dynamic?

**Matt Pottinger:** You know, to Bridge's point. If we win, the bind administration had come in if it had simply picked up where the Trump administration left off with the Abrahamic courts been what an amazing accomplishment that was right we we leave in place. Peace Agreements for the first time in a quarter century between Arab Sunni Arab states and, and Israel, which is, which is also the beginning of a security construct, right. So that's our ticket to being able to focus more resources on East Asia where Bridge rightly points to China's that's the mothership you know, that's the that's the primary adversary that is a lifeline to Iran. It's a lifeline to North Korea, to Vladimir Putin, to Venezuela. So, so we've undermined our own priority by turning our

backs on our Arab partners in the region and in trying to cut a you know, an unwise deal with with the Ayatollah.

Look, this Xi Jinping and, and Taiwan to Bridge's earlier point as well, we're in that window of danger now, right? It's not it's not sort of like well, in a few years, it could get really, really rough. We're in the window of danger where Xi Jinping may choose to act. And to bridge this point about some of the lessons the Chinese may be learning in addition to the fact that they should be re reassessing some of their assumptions about how easy a war would be. They're also probably or quite possibly at least thinking that jeez, if they're going to go go in, they're going to go in big they're not going to salami slice this thing, the way that in essence, Putin had his little green men back in 2014, taking Crimea and then he then he moved into the dome boss, you know, si Jinping, maybe maybe saying, look, if I am if I'm going to use military force to annex Taiwan, I'm going to go in all the way and try to make this a fait. accompli. I think that may also be one of the lessons that he's drawing from the Ukraine conflict. So this is not the time for complacency and that IT budget that defense divided budget was inactive complacency. It was a it was a loud scream of complacency. We're going to shrink our Navy and shrink our budget in real terms. I don't get it. I don't get it either. But I'm hauling us all back to the Iran nuclear talks.

**Mary Kissel:** Jonathan Burk you had raised your hand jump in jump in here.

**Jonathan Burk:** Yeah, thanks, Mary. I just want to pick up on two points that bridge and Matt had made. You know, I think ultimately what we're trying to say is that there's a prioritization that's inherent in strategy. We have to ultimately have a sense of what our core interests are, and what risk we're willing to accept in other places because we don't have the resources either under the Biden proposed budget, or under the budgets that we've had in recent years and given that we're in the window of danger, you know, we have to recognize that there's limited resources that are going to be available to us in this window. And you you worked on Capitol Hill not to interrupt but just so that our viewers know, and you worked for many years on Capitol Hill, you've seen the sausage get made, indeed, and I bear some responsibility for what resources we have available to us today to meet the current threat. And so recognizing that, you know, to paraphrase what Secretary Rumsfeld had to say, once upon a time about you go to armory, go to war with the Army you have we have to recognize we're in a period of danger, and therefore we have a limited window of resources. available to us. And we have to prioritize within that within that box.

And so, bringing us back to Iran, I think that suggests that we have to be more creative about what policies what tools we have available to us, recognizing that we don't have an infinite toolset available to meet what is a real threat? Unfortunately, I think we have options. I think we have options in terms of economic policy, we have options in terms of our alliance structure in terms of strengthening the the security meeting security needs of our partners in the region and other ways that allow us to deal with the challenge that a nuclear Iran will pose without either having to choose between capitulating to, you know, a Goshi ated agreement that essentially blesses their acquisition of a nuclear weapon or saying that the only other alternative is going to work. I think there is a middle ground that can still be effective.

**Mary Kissel:** These are very tough issues. And I think it's hard to appreciate just how difficult they are until you're actually in these offices in the executive branch trying to make decisions that impact people's lives.

Christopher Nixon Cox, I want to come to you, and just ask you a little bit about President Nixon. And you know, these comments that he made, I mean, you know, Secretary Pompeo is right, we just don't hear presidents or national leaders speak is frankly, about the real state of the world as we we did in these clips. What do you think it would say today is we face not just one, not just two, potentially multiple crises?

**Christopher Nixon Cox:** Well, I think they will. My grandfather would say is, is that we have to be mindful of several of his important rules. One is, is that to project power abroad, we have to first be very strong at home. So you know, and I'm sorry, I joined this conversation a little bit late. We're just closing a deal. So So I apologize if I'm repeating things. But, you know, it's very important that we be strong domestically. And I think that, you know, we have this crisis in Ukraine, the fact that we're running to Venezuela, we're running to Iran. And, you know, we're begging them for natural resources, instead of working on building those resources at home. That just shows a weakness at home, which doesn't help us project power abroad. So the first thing I think, he says is that we have to be very strong at home and focus on that, so that we can be stronger abroad. I think that would be one. I think, then the second thing is is that we have to be very mindful of our friends. We can't give more to our enemies than we do to our friends. And I think that in this particular instance, it was touched on by several other people earlier. But the fact that we are giving more to Iran to Venezuela, to our enemies, to our sworn enemies than we are to our Gulf friends, is something I think that it would be a red line for my grandfather. So I think that that's another issue and then I think the third thing is is that you always have to be careful to say What you won't do that you won't use force or you won't put something on the negotiating table. You know, you shouldn't be negotiating against yourself in essence. So always make your adversary get something for, you know, for everything you take off the table if you take anything off the table. So I think that he would have a posture that is, you know, much stronger, more challenging to our enemies, and for our friends, he would want to do more for our friends, and that way he would build a strong coalition. Be strong at home strong with your friends. And that's the best way to confront, you know, the challenges around the world, and certainly being soft on China and being soft on Russia. That's certainly not going to help get a better deal with Iran. And frankly, you know, there's this misnomer that my grandfather, you know, was was very favorable for China. He was also very willing to call out China, when China made what he thought were egregious mistakes, certainly Tiananmen Square being the best and most prominent example. So, you know, I think that it's that willingness to be strong and tough, that he would say we need more of our foreign policy today.

**Mary Kissel:** Fascinating, he were here with us. They're just absolutely fascinating points you. Chris, one of the things I've been thinking about is that it's not enough for our enemies to fear us. It's as you say, our friends also have to like and respect us and if we're not consistent in our foreign policies, some of my colleagues here have noticed that it's hard to win that trust. And

you do see nations like Saudi Arabia saying, hey, maybe we will use the yuan in our energy transactions that would be incredibly damaging to the United States. Who lost that capacity. We are unfortunately running very short on time. We could talk for hours here on Iran on Ukraine on various issues, but I wanted to hand it back over to our co chair, Secretary Pompeo for some final thoughts on these Iran nuclear deal negotiations the idea we delist the IRGC, maybe not go through Congress. Mr. Secretary, wrap this up here, please.

**Secretary Pompeo:** Well these points have all been good, and well taken for sure, we should be mindful to they're all connected. They're connected the through lines here between what we've spoken about on China and on Iran are through line with Pyongyang as well and through lines in Russia. We shouldn't forget to that if we provide this deal, as I've seen it outlined for the Iranians that that money is almost sure to flow straight through the big gap in our sanctions with the Russians. So we will be sitting in Europe, giving the Iranians money and resources that they will use to kill Ukrainian children.

This is the challenge when I can't remember who said it before is if you if you don't have a deep understanding, a realistic understanding of the things that truly matter. You haven't prioritized the things that truly matter than you end up website when these complexities continue to cascade and I'm afraid this is what we're up against that I'm afraid our friends can see that too. I don't know that we've ever had a lower moment between the United States and our friends in the Gulf than we're experiencing today. This is deeply dangerous for the American people. I pray that we begin to get it more right.

**Mary Kissel:** Thank you, Mr. Secretary. It's all you who are watching. We love to keep this conversation going in between our monthly seminars, our participants are active on social media, please do follow them and the Nixon Foundation. Thank you to Secretary Pompeo, Ambassador O'Brien are co chairs to our seminar members to the incredible Nixon Foundation team and for all of you watching thank you for your time and attention but that's it for this month's Nixon seminar on conservative realism and national security. I'm Mary Kissel. Good night.

# #