

## Iran, North Korea, and Beyond

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**00:03:** Wendy, great to be back with you, and Anya, thank you very much for all this. So Wendy, assuming that you heard most of what Brian had to say there, let me start with this. Three years, nearly four years into the Trump administration, where are we with Iran to your mind compared to where we were on the day that you left office or the day that President Obama did? Obviously the president exited the agreement more than two years ago. Tell us where you think that's gotten us.

**00:43:** I think it's gotten us to a pretty bad place, quite frankly. I think Brian was very fluent and he was very well-spoken about his and President Trump's approach to Iran, but here we are. After the deal that was reached in 2015, we have no deal. Iran is now enriching at higher levels with more centrifuges. They are still supporting proxies in the region, they are still undertaking maligned behavior in the region, they are still putting Americans and others into Evin Prison, they are still abusing the rights of their own people. They are not a responsible player in the international community. So I appreciate that the Trump administration has put on a maximum pressure campaign, and they indeed have, but what it has gotten them, and Brian said this himself, is resistance and actions, in my view, in the wrong direction. So I think the administration has had a series of tactics, but it is not clear to me at all what the strategic objective is. The administration has said it's not regime change, and yet I think they're hoping that will occur. They said they're creating leverage to get a better negotiation, but I think we all see that Iran is nowhere close to negotiating with the Trump administration. So I think we're in a quite worse place.

**02:20:** Well, the essence of Brian's argument was essentially this, that if you terminated the agreement and put enough pressure on the Iranians, economic pressure, kind of suffering their economy has gone through, cutting off the oil, they will come back and agree to some kind of a revised form of what you negotiated five years and a few weeks ago, but that it would include no enrichment ever, and that the fatal flaw to their mind of what you negotiated was that 15 years out from that agreement they would begin to be able to enrich anew.

**03:07:** Right. Well, we can debate the "sunset clauses" of the deal, and I think every arms control deal really has a follow-on deal. So we could have that debate, but I think this notion of a fundamental issue here of whether in fact Iran has a right to a civil nuclear program, which they do under the... and of course, we all would hope that everybody would sign up to the 123 gold standard that the UAE has, but that was not to be here. And President Obama, along with all of the other members of the P5+1, the permanent members of the Security Council, European Union, and Germany, supported 15-0 by the Security Council, believed that it was critical to ensure Iran not get a nuclear weapon, because if they had a nuclear weapon, their ability to project power into the region would be profound, and it would deter our, our allies' and partners' ability to act on all of the other issues of concern, which are of concern to all of us.

**04:17:** You said before that you believe they had a series of tactics, but not strategy, and you wrote last week that that belief stretched across a number of other areas. So let me take you into a few of the others, and we'll come back to Iran by reference. But start in the Middle East. A good deal of your concern about the reason we needed an Iran deal was to stop proliferation through the rest of the region. You heard Brian talk a little bit about how the UAE has now been 10 years into their

123 Agreement, their agreement to basically get civilian nuclear power without going to enrichment. We now have doubts that the Saudis are staying on that run. So tell us where you think we are in our dealings with Saudi Arabia tactically... Obviously the administration has given them a very, very long leash. Does that leash extend now to being able to have their own enrichment cycle?

**05:20:** Oh, we've also heard President Trump talk about giving nuclear technology to Saudi Arabia, and he famously said, "So what if everybody has nuclear weapons?" Totally misunderstanding the risks that are inherent in proliferation of nuclear weapons. We're really heading in the wrong direction around arms control, around nuclear technology and nuclear weapons. And as you pointed out and Nick Schifrin pointed out in the last interview, there are now reports that China is helping Saudi Arabia extract yellowcake from uranium ore, a very concerning step forward, and many people believe that Saudi Arabia has a lock on a nuclear weapon in Pakistan's arsenal. It will be very dangerous if in fact we have proliferation of nuclear weapons around the world, and we are seeing that the administration is not moving forward in extending the New START agreement with Russia, and time is running out on strategic arms control as well.

**06:24:** So I think we're in a very bad place, and I wrote the piece in Foreign Policy about really the Trump Administration not having a foreign policy. Because we've seen with Russia no overarching strategy, no ability to take on Russia, including whether Russia's given weapons to the Taliban, whether they've offered bounties for killing American soldiers, absolutely no action in that regard. We've seen them not move forward on arms control with Russia or push back with Russia in any way, shape, or form. With China, we've seen a trade deal that now is quite suspect whether it'll ever produce any real result, and only a maximum-pressure strategy, it appears now, or tweaking China by sending the HHS Secretary Azar to Taiwan to drive the Chinese nuts, we haven't really taken the action on Hong Kong that we need to, or on the Uyghurs in terms of human rights.

**07:27:** And finally, coming back to the Middle East, David, you know well that we all waited for Jared Kushner to put on the table his Middle East peace plan. That's gone completely by the wayside. We now see in the terrible tragedy of yesterday over a hundred people killed in Lebanon by those horrific blasts, thousands injured. The Lebanese were already struggling, and now we have a horrifying situation of meltdown, a lot of questions about Israel's future and their security, certainly no future for the Palestinian people in sight, so we're really in a very tough place, and I don't see a strategy to really tackle these issues in the Trump Administration.

**08:17:** So let's take it on to Russia. So we're in this critical couple of months. If you go back exactly four years, August was where we began to see WikiLeaks, documents being leaked by the Russians to WikiLeaks...

**08:32:** Something you know a bit about.

**08:35:** Yeah, we've seen a little bit of that. We now see the Russians working on a different playbook. If, whoever wins the next election, what is the room that we have to deal with the Russians given the current set of behavior, separate and apart from whether we have only tactics or a strategy? Putin's clearly got a strategy, but I'm not sure it's one we can work with.

**09:02:** I think we're in a very tough place in general. Obviously, I don't think it's a secret, I'm a Democrat, I hope that Joe Biden becomes President of the United States, and one of the reasons is because the way that we can operate more effectively in the world is to build back our alliances and our partnerships, whether that's the alliance with NATO, the alliance with our European allies, our alliance certainly with states in the Gulf, our alliance with countries in Africa and Latin America, so that we work in a collective strategy. Europe has much more to be concerned about in an immediate physical way, geographic way, about Russia than we even do. They trade with Russia at a very high rate, United States does not. So Europe has leverage that we do not in building and refashioning a relationship with Russia that is on our terms for where we wanna see the future. Likewise, a strategy with China cannot be effectively achieved without us working with others. Looking after our national interest in the first instance, of course, 'cause that's any President's responsibility. But unless we work effectively with our allies and partners in the first instance, we won't have the leverage that we need to get things done that are in our interest.

**10:29:** And taking your same argument over to China, it strikes me that in listening to this campaign, there's sort of a race to the bottom here about who can sound tougher on China. You heard Vice President Biden in his statements earlier this year, the argument that President Trump would have been willing to give up way too much to the Chinese for the hope of a trade deal, you've heard President Trump argue and move from... That he was cooperating wonderfully with his good friend Xi, to referring to the coronavirus as the Wuhan virus or the China virus. So it strikes me that whoever gets elected, we're gonna be in a pretty bad place. What's our leverage? If you were coming into the China file today, what would it be?

**11:22:** I think our leverage are several things. One, a brand new day, a way forward that will be different, working with those allies and partners to bring us working together to deal with China. There is no doubt there are tremendous challenges with China, but some of those challenges are about the investments we also make in our own economy for innovation, for artificial intelligence, quantum computing, all of the infrastructure that we need to be able to compete with China and work with our partners to do so, to challenge China where we must, whether that's in the South China Sea, if they try to steal secrets from our corporations and from our community, and to see where there are any places where we can work with China, certainly on climate change. Unless we are working as an international community, we will not achieve what we need to achieve. The east coast of the United States just went through a tropical storm of tremendous force over the last 24 hours.

**12:32:** I here in Cambridge didn't really get touched except by a downpour, lots of people lost power. But there were tornado warnings, on Cape Cod. There were tornado warnings on the eastern shore of Maryland, that's never happened before. The world is changing, and we have to look for where we can cooperate with people as well, but I think that a Biden administration, any administration is going to have to be able to compete to invest in our own infrastructure, in our own technology, our own innovation, compete with China, be ready to challenge and confront China when we need to, and look for those couple of places where we might actually be able to cooperate. It's a very nuanced and complex strategy, I don't think the current administration is up to such a strategy, it's been a very tactical approach, I think we'll need a pretty sophisticated approach to be successful.

**13:27:** Well, one more question from me before we go to the audience, I'm old enough to remember when you were just doing North Korea. [laughter]

**13:36:** Yeah, we haven't talked about those lovely folks. Yes.

**13:41:** So we're emerging after two years and a few months after the Singapore Summit, with a North Korea that by some estimates has an arsenal that has roughly doubled in size. You don't hear our President talk about North Korea very much anymore. He doesn't even talk about the lovely letters he was getting from Kim Jong Un. You never dealt with Kim Jong Un, you dealt with his father. But, again, if you were stepping back into your old job on January 20th, and who knows, maybe you will be, but if you were, where would you start with a North Korea that now probably has somewhere between 20 and 50 nuclear... Probably 30 and 50 nuclear weapons?

**14:29:** Well, I'd first rebuild my relationship with South Korea and Japan. I wouldn't be arguing over whether South Korea is paying enough for American troops, they do pay for American troops. This is in our interest to have our troops there, we always should look at our force posture, I know that Secretary Esper is gonna be speaking next, and he may talk about our force posture both in Germany and in Korea. I think the decisions that have been made there have not been the right ones, but nonetheless, I think that I would be rebuilding that relationship, I would be looking at how we can move together with North Korea, this is a very, very tough problem. It is tougher even than Iran, because North Korea has nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them. I don't believe that Kim Jong Un is suicidal, so I would hope he would never use them. But he certainly has established a deterrence in many ways, and so this is a tough way forward, I think it'll take a lot of hard work to see if there is an opening, but we won't be able to do it on our own. This may be one place where we can work with China, but probably not in the first instance, because I think China is in a position where they now like having North Korea back on the field as a chip on their poker table, not a chip on ours, and we're gonna have to do a lot of work.

**16:01:** Use the Security Council, use the United Nations, even use this COVID crisis to try to find our way back. There is no doubt that China shares a lot of responsibility for where we are, for not having transparency around COVID, but it is also a place where we are all gonna have to work together. One of the things I need to say about not only North Korea, but China in particular, is the current administration's destabilizing multilateral organizations around the world has only left a vacuum for China to move in and try to take control; the WHO, the World Health Organization is one of those places where we should not lose our seat at the table because China will only be too happy to take it.

**16:51:** But at this point, don't you think we pretty much have to accept North Korea as a nuclear power the way we've ended up accepting Pakistan's nuclear power?

**17:00:** I don't think we should literally and forcefully accept them as a nuclear power. I think that it is important to maintain the belief that the nuclear power or the five original nuclear powers, yes, Pakistan and India have gained nuclear weapons, they have a... India at least has become de-facto a member of the NPT, they've always been strong around non-proliferation, and the US has had a long-standing relationship, which I hope is still intact in terms of the security of Pakistan's nuclear

weapons. But, I think that once you start announcing that someone is a nuclear weapon state, you are opening the door to saying others can become one as well. And even though some may believe it is a difference without a distinction, I think it's a very important distinction.

**18:00:** Right. So we have a few questions that have come up, and to remind those who are participating, you can raise your hand using that feature in participants. We're gonna start with Drew Dornstatter. Drew?

[pause]

**18:26:** Are we hearing from Drew? Drew, are you on?

**18:32:** Maybe if Drew just unmutes or if someone will unmute him, even if he can't do video.

**18:40:** Okay, we're not hearing Drew. So why don't we move on to...

**18:44:** Hey, can you hear me now?

**18:44:** Oh, very good. Okay, Drew, your question.

**18:47:** Yes, thanks. Forgive that delay. Under Secretary, thanks for this question. Would you please address the tension between the US-led construct, and the European-led maritime awareness construct, around the Strait of Hormuz, and how that creates tension between the United States and our allies? And anything else you'd like to offer. Thanks a lot.

**19:11:** Well, Drew, I don't know you, but I would guess from your question, that you're either current or former military and have probably greater insight into the posture in the Strait of Hormuz than I do, but what I will say is, we care about commerce being able to move through the Strait of Hormuz, though it is less of an immediate necessity for the United States, in terms of oil, certainly these days, but it is certainly of great concern to us. We hope and want the Europeans to help share the burden of making sure that the Strait remains open. And I think the differences that we have attest to the issue that David and I have been talking about, which is, we simply do not have the relationship with Europe that we must, that we need to. We are always stronger when we are working with others than when we work by ourselves.

**20:17:** Wendy, we're gonna go on to Michelle Nichols. Michelle, are you able to hear us?

**20:40:** I think she's trying to unmute or get someone to unmute her, 'cause I see her name on the screen.

**20:44:** Yeah. We don't all have this 100% down, yet, Wendy. There we go. Michelle, can you hear us? Maybe not. Why don't we go on to Jeannie Nguyen. Jeannie, are you able to hear us? You wanna ask your question?

**21:23:** Yes, I'm here. Thank you, Under Secretary. Would you tell us what you think the Biden

administration would do in the South China Sea? During the eight years that Biden was Vice President with Obama, they had been very slow and let the Scarborough Shoal be lost, to China, to the current situation. Now, if there was a tension... If the tension is higher, would there be a kinetic conflicts? And what would Biden do? Thank you.

**22:03:** Thank you for the question. I'm not here as a surrogate for the Biden administration, so I don't wanna speak for the Vice President. What I can say, is that, I believe that President Obama, Vice President Biden, Secretary Kerry, Secretary Clinton, had a very assertive approach, to the South China Sea. Quite frankly, it was Secretary Clinton, with President Obama, who first raised these issues, spent a lot of time, working with ASEAN and with other partners in the region, to put together a concerted strategy, including with the Philippines, to try to challenge China in what it was doing in the South China Sea. I would suspect that you would see in a Biden administration as part of an overall strategy, that challenge continue, and hard work, hard diplomatic work, with ASEAN and with other partners in the region, to push back, including any legal means to do so, as you pointed out, on the Scarborough Shoals, and decision by the Hague. So, I think this will again be a tough problem, but one that that we have to go about in a concerted way, working with those in the region, who have much more at stake in an immediate geographic way, even than the United States does. But we are a Pacific power, not just an Atlantic power, so this is an issue of great concern to us as well.

**23:40:** Okay, and one last very quick question, 'cause we're just about out of time, from Joshua Walker.

**23:57:** Can you hear me?

**23:58:** Yes, we can.

**24:00:** Yep.

**24:00:** So, Wendy, thank you for your presentation. The question I have is hopefully a real simple one, which is, there's a lot of news out of the Middle East, not just about the horrific explosion in Beirut, but about Saudi Arabia making a deal with China, China making a deal with Iran. What do you think the future of non-proliferation in the region and the world, more broadly, looks like from here on out?

**24:23:** It's a very concerning one. There's a terrific piece by Jessica Matthews, in the New York Review of Books, talking about the nuclear future, reviewing four books that have come out recently, and none of it looks very good. I think that you point out, Joshua, in your question, one of the points that I think is really important. We see an informal, if not a formal relationship, between Russia, China and Iran. There has been a strategic document that's been agreed to between Russia and Iran, one with China and Iran that is being undergone. There are other players. Turkey might end up being part of this nexus of players, who try to thwart some of the things that are of concern by the United States of America. So I think, both on the non-proliferation front, as well as how we are working to solve the problems that threaten our security and the security of the world, including proliferation of nuclear weapons, we have a lot of work to do. I hope that President Bush gets to try

to do it, and I think he will make a tremendous progress.

**25:40:** Great. Wendy, thank you very much for the time you've spent with us, for your previous service. We're gonna be wanting to hear from you a lot in the coming months, as we head toward the campaign. And we will now thank you and throw it back to Anya and to our next speaker.



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