Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)

Schieffer Series:
Foreign Policy Challenges for President Obama's Second Term

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Chief Washington Correspondent, CBS News;
Anchor, CBS News' "Face the Nation"

Speakers:
Thomas Friedman,
Author and Columnist,
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CBS News;
Gerald Seib,
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ANDREW SCHWARTZ: Good evening, and welcome for the Center for Strategic and International Studies. I'd like to welcome a couple of my bosses who are here. General Scowcroft and Ambassador Hills are here, and Mr. Hills as well. We also have Admiral Keating is here; we're always happy to see Admiral Keating. And thank you all for coming out on this rainy evening.

We'd – I'd like to welcome to you. My name is Andrew Schwartz; I'm with CSIS. I'd like to welcome you on behalf of the Schieffer Series, on behalf of Texas Christian University and the Schieffer School of Journalism. I know that there's plenty of students down there watching this online. Go Horned Frogs and thanks for tuning in. (Scattered laughter.)

I think we've got a great program tonight, some of the best journalists in the world, and we'll lead it off with the man who's number one on Sunday, Bob Schieffer.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Thank you very much, Andrew. (Applause.) Thank you all. On behalf of TCU and CSIS, this ought to be fun. We – there's certainly no lack of things to talk about after the president's State of the Union last night. It seemed to me that the things we ought to be talking about today are leaving Afghanistan, North Korea, the impact of the sequester, Iran, Syria, cyber and then Israel. So I want to start by introducing Margaret Warner – or not Margaret Warner – (laughter) – she –

MARGARET BRENNAN: We're going to talk about this at the office tomorrow, Bob. (Laughter.)

MR. SCHIEFFER: No, Margaret Brennan, who is our new State Department correspondent at CBS. And we are just – couldn't be happier to have us – have her, and now we're learning her name. (Scattered laughter.) The more we know about her, the more we like her.

Margaret has had a very distinguished career. She used to work at Bloomberg; before that, she worked at CNBC. She is a Whitehead fellow with the Foreign Policy Association, a member of the Economic Club of New York. She anchored live in Cairo during Hosni Mubarak's stepping down. She's interviewed everybody you ever heard of, and Margaret, we're really glad to have you.

Right here, my old friend Jerry Seib, he's the Washington Bureau chief, as everybody knows, for The Wall Street Journal, had a very distinguished career. We've covered a lot of stories together over the years. He won the – part of the team that won the 2001 Pulitzer in the Breaking News category for the coverage of 9/11, and that was one of the most remarkable stories in all of journalism. They got together and decided that what the country needed was a newspaper, and they figured out how to put out a newspaper even though their whole plant had been shut down. And they did, and it looked just like the Wall Street Journal, and it was one of the most complete accounts of what happened that day, just a remarkable thing.

And then Tom Friedman, who probably – has anybody won more Pulitzers than you have, Tom? (Laughter.) If they have, I don't know who they are – three of them – still wrote

what I think is the definitive book on the Middle East, and still my favorite book of all, and that is "From Beirut to Jerusalem." He also is the author of "The World is Flat," which was the basis of a hit song that I wrote – (laughter) – called "Flat, Hot and Crowded." (Laughter.)

MR. SCHWARTZ: I thought he took the title from you; it was the other way around?

MR. SCHIEFFER: I don't – I don't – I don't remember quite how that worked. (Scattered laughter.) We both – we both did well by that. So we're glad to have Tom.

Margaret, John Kerry's been there, what, a week, week or so?

MS. BRENNAN: A week and a half or so.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Just tell us, is it different? What – what's it like? What are your first impressions of the new secretary of state?

MS. BRENNAN: Well, it is week two for him, and he did give us all Red Sox caps in the diplomatic press corps, so that was our introduction to Secretary Kerry.

We've had a few press availabilities from him so far. It's not clear if Senator Kerry's views as head of foreign relations committee will be able to be implemented as secretary of state in the Obama administration, particularly in regard to policies in Syria and the like, where he had previously advocated being a little bit more engaged than we are; that is to say, engaged.

And it's interesting. I can't wait to go on the road with him when he makes that first trip around the world and starts to go out and shake hands. He's made very public his desire to engage, particularly in the Middle East. That'll be different than Secretary Clinton, who made a very public move by saying I'm going to Asia first, the pivot towards Asia being the emphasis there. I think the U.S. has recognized, even when it tries to focus elsewhere, the Middle East is going to call us back for attention.

MR. SCHIEFFER: So do you think that'll be his first trip, or do you have any idea?

MS. BRENNAN: They haven't announced it yet, but there is good indication that he wants to very much be engaged. And obviously, President Obama is going to Israel in March. So there is some legwork and groundwork to be done in the Middle East.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Tom, you heard the president's State of the Union last night, not a lot of foreign policy in it, but there never is generally in a State of the Union speech. He did announce that we're cutting the force in half in Afghanistan this year.

He also said this will signal that our war in Afghanistan is over. We may believe him, but I'm not sure I would agree that the war in Afghanistan is over. What's your take on how the strategy seems to be shaping up in Afghanistan right now?

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: Well, it reminds of an old saying, you know, from Trotsky: You may not be interested in Afghanistan, but Afghanistan is interested in you, OK? (Scattered laughter.) We've learned that lesson, what Trotsky said about revolution.

You know, we are going to draw down there, Bob. I think it's wise and morally responsible that we don't just walk away, we don't go to zero. I think over time, Afghanistan will gradually evolve into an even more de facto partition between the sort of Northern Alliance led by the Tajiks and the Pashtuns in their regions, and Iran, having enormous influence over the third largest city, Herat. And I think the best we can hope for is a kind of balance with that de facto partition and some kind of government in the center in Kabul that you know, can hold onto its head, maintain the military and give us the space to do what we need to do to beat back whatever threats emerge there.

I would say that's the best scenario. Whether that will hold up, you know, I don't know. But I think that, you know, we've done all we could in terms of the regional policy of trying to build Afghanistan into something that it's not. I think there's a recognition we've probably gotten as far as we can, and let's hope a de facto partition, you know, can keep it reasonably stable.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Jerry, do you think that Afghanistan will no longer pose a threat in the sense that it'll no longer be a haven for those that wish us ill? Or as long as these people can find a place to hide, as it were, in Pakistan, does it really make that much difference?

GERALD SEIB: Well, you know, I think it makes a difference in the long run. I think in the short run, the focus has shifted elsewhere – Pakistan, but North Africa. I mean, the focus on North Africa in the next couple of years, I suspect will be pretty intense. I think it's basically the failed states phenomenon; you pick a fail state, you have your hot spot. If Afghanistan turns into a fail state round two or round three, or however many there are on that list, yeah, it becomes a problem. Pakistan, I think is a slightly different category. It's – there are no good solutions in Pakistan.

I think in terms of the threat that drew the U.S. into Afghanistan now, I think there's going to be a lot of attention on other spots – Yemen, Somalia, elsewhere in North Africa. But I think you – to answer your question about Afghanistan, I think you have to have figured out whether Afghanistan turns back into a failed state, and I don't know what the odds are, a 50/50 proposition maybe.

I thought it was interesting that the president decided, you know, as you suggested, Margaret, to go to the Middle East early in his second term. I mean, he's now – he's buying into something he avoided for four years, which is the Palestinian issue. That's not the only reason he's going; he's going because he wants to talk about – he wants to talk to the Israeli people about what his vision of peace in the Middle East is. He wants to talk about the ripple effects from the Arab Spring. And he wants to talk about the threat from Iran on his terms directly to people in the state of Israel and beyond. And you know, once you do that – Tom, you know this better than I – once you do that as an American president, you've bought into a four-year process. And that's beginning, I think, in March.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Yeah, I think just to pick up on Jerry's point – you know, I think what – I think – and Margaret's point – I think Secretary Kerry wants to be much more active in the Middle East diplomacy than Secretary Clinton was. I think he understood the fact that President Obama had not gone to Israel was an impediment for – it was just going to be something out there that they had to get out of the way. I don't think President Obama has anywhere near the high hopes for progress that Kerry has, but I think he's sort of bought onto the idea of new secretary of state, lot of energy, let me get out of the way, let me get myself out of this story, lay the broad framework. If Kerry is successful, you know, then I can come in and try to push whatever rock needs to get over the top. But I don't – I don't see him himself jumping. I think they're going to let Kerry have a little running room here, see what he does, but –

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, let me just ask all three of you. Why was there such a kind of bad relationship, as it were, between Netanyahu and President Obama? Is that – is there something there we don't know about? What's your sense of it? Margaret, you were there with Secretary Clinton.

MS. BRENNAN: Right, she had a very direct line into Prime Minister Netanyahu, and made that clear that she spoke to him very directly. I don't know if Secretary Kerry steps into that as the Netanyahu whisperer that she was in that way. But you know, whether there was one incident or whether there was the perception that President Obama wanted to perhaps not be as unquestioning in support of Israeli policy, had questioned the expansion of settlements, et cetera, that set them off on the wrong foot, or perceived wrong foot.

But I think one thing that we keep coming back to is we often think of the conflict there is these like '90s terms, that it's negotiation between Israelis and Palestinians, or that Palestinian authority and Israelis. At this point, the Palestinians aren't even talking to themselves in terms of that divide between the PA and Fatah and Hamas and the Gaza Strip.

So in some ways, engaging there isn't negotiating a peace settlement, it's just getting any engagement, because there is such a divide within the Palestinian territories. I mean, Gaza and the West Bank are functioning almost completely separately. And in Congress, you've got about $500 million still sitting there locked up that the U.S. hasn't been able to deliver there. You have the Palestinian Authority on the verge of financial collapse. And so it's a – it's not this going and there will be peace; it's just getting something happening in terms of pushing someone willing to engage with the Israeli political system – (inaudible).

MR. SCHIEFFER: But what about this relationship, Tom, between Netanyahu and President Obama?

MR. FRIEDMAN: Well, I'd say a couple of things about the relationship. You know, one is – I'm just making this up – I have a feeling there was some guy on the Harvard Law Review with Obama that BB reminds Obama of. (Laughter.) And they didn't have a good relationship. They had – there was just some chemical there that – there was just some guy from Westchester who exhibits the – you know – (laughter). So, you know, I think that's part of it. And, you know, Obama's not the first president who has been irritated by BB Netanyahu, who

considers himself, you know, almost a member of the Republican caucus in the U.S. Congress. That can be very annoying to a Democratic Senator, yeah. (Laughter.)

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, do you think he just wanted – do you think he wanted Romney to be elected, and that's what part of this was?

MR. FRIEDMAN: Oh, yeah. No question about it.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Really?

MR. FRIEDMAN: Oh, there's no question about that. But I think there's a larger point, and Margaret alluded to it. This isn't – this isn't 1980. It's not 1990. You know, I have a theory about secretaries of state when it comes to the Middle East. And there are basically two kind of secretaries of state. There are those who want their forest in Israel named after them now, and those who want it later, OK? And there are there sort of American statesmen who do not have a bush named after them in Israel, OK? And they are Jimmy Carter, Jimmy Baker/George H. W. Bush and Henry Kissinger. And the historical scorecard is Kissinger in 1973 – you know, disagreement agreements, Baker and Bush, Madrid Peace Conference. Carter, Camp David – all the others, zero.

So you've got to really decide if you want to play in the Middle – this is a hockey game. And don't come and think we're going to play here touch football. And so if you're ready to really play hockey – if you are listed on the Prime Minister of Israel's daily diary as downtime as secretary of state – (laughter) – that's not a good sign, OK? And so you've got to start by taking their hand, put it on the table, take a hammer out, smash – break every bone in their hand. Then they've got their attention. By the way, that applies to the Arab leaders as well and the Palestinians. But if they think they can just sort of relax around you, you're done. And they can smell that from a hundred paces.

MR. SEIB: Well, look I – I don't think there – I don't know about the hammer. (Laughter.) Icepick, maybe – (laughter) – but look, I don't think there are illusions over there at the White House about what – where this is going to lead. We're not – we're not in the 1990s; we're not in the 1980s. We're not talking comprehensive settlement here. There's not even a Palestinian negotiating party. But we are talking about a Middle East that is undergoing enormous change, in which failure to engage on every level diplomatically – and that includes with the Palestinians – carries its own risks.

And there are new parties being empowered all over the region right now. And to the extent that's happening in a place like Egypt – and who knows what's going to happen to Morsi in the long run – but there's a power change. There's going to be an Islamist force in just about every one of these countries. To have credibility with that Islamist force, you have to – you have to punch some boxes. One of the boxes you have to punch is, we're taking the Palestinian question seriously. Does that mean you've got to have a Camp David by the third year of the second Obama term? No, and that's not realistic.

But I don't think that's what this is about. This is about saying we are engaged with the new Middle East. And the president's already engaged with Morsi. You saw that at the end of the year when there was a problem in Gaza, and he worked constructively with him. Fine. Check that box. But you've got to be engaged on every level and build some credibility. I think that's what this is about. This is about building credibility in the second Obama term with the Islamic world, and, by the way, not talking to the Israeli people through the filter of Prime Minister Netanyahu – doing it yourself as the secretary of state and as the president.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Margaret, one of the interesting things that came out, well, I guess last week on Capitol Hill was we learned that both Secretary Clinton and I guess Mr. Gates wanted to – and later Panetta, I guess, wanted to arm the Syrian rebels.

MS. BRENNAN: And Petraeus and General Dempsey.

MR. SCHIEFFER: And General Petraeus and General Dempsey and the president.

MR. SEIB: And they got outvoted 1-to-5.

MR. SCHIEFFER: They got – they got outvoted. Do you see that changing? Do you think Secretary Kerry will have a different idea about that?

MS. BRENNAN: They can have a different idea. Whether there will be a different outcome, I don't – I don't believe so. I think – and he had, in his previous role as senatorm advocated more involvement. There are a few options that are being explored and being pushed, particularly by the Syrian opposition through backchannels in terms of new versions of providing support.

And I think David Ignatius wrote about one of these ideas in his column earlier this week, which was this idea of helping – you know, picking some generals and picking some folks who are in camps in Turkey and bringing them in and training them to go in as, sort of, our version of the perfect soldier. That doesn't mean dumping arms into the opposition hands. I don't think that engagement ever happens.

But, you know, now you've got a Syrian Opposition Council that's trying to open offices diplomatically here in Washington and New York. You're going to have more of a presence. You're going to have the opposition head come here to Washington in the next few months as well. So something more will happen in Syria, but I don't see that happening with military support unless you have some real extreme measure that gets caught on camera and makes it absolutely impossible to deny. But I don't see the odds of that.

MR. SCHIEFFER: What do you fellas think?

MR. FRIEDMAN: Well, yeah – my view on Syria is, you cannot have an intelligent conversation about Syria unless you talk about its twin, which is Iraq. Iraq and Syria are twins. Both borders, you know, carved out by the British and French. One had a Sunni minority ruling over Shiite majority with Kurds, Turks and – Turkmen and Christians around. The other has an

Alawite – a Shiite majority ruling over Sunni – Shiite minority ruling over Sunni majority with Kurds, Christians and Turks – they are twins.

And one of the tragedies to me, among many tragedies about Iraq is, we've actually never had a conversation about what happened there and why it happened and what we should learn from it.

MS. BRENNAN: It's a dirty word.

MR. FRIEDMAN: So – it's a dirty word. It's almost against the law to talk about. So we've expended all this time, energy, money, lives most importantly – ours, Iraqis and others – on something we have never discussed. And then people come along and say, well, let's do this on Syria.

So what happened in Iraq? Well, my view of what happened: Iraq was like a grenade. Saddam was the pin, and we pulled the pin. And then we did the geopolitical equivalent of falling on a grenade as a country. We fell on Iraq and we absorbed the whole blast. Now, because we fell on that grenade and absorbed the whole blast, Iraq never spread. Didn't spread to Syria, didn't spread to Iran, didn't spread to Turkey, it didn't spread to Kuwait, didn't spread to Saudi Arabia, didn't spread to Jordan because we took the whole blast.

Then we sponsored or hosted a civil war, which was inevitable, because we took a hundred-year-old power structure and turned it upside down. All the parties were going to test each other. What you got? What you got? What you got? That took about three years while they tested each other and exhausted each other. Then we did the most remarkable thing, I would argue, in modern Middle East history. We helped them organize the first social contract between the constituent elements of an Arab country of how they would share power without an iron fist.

Then we helped them through three elections. First election, they elected sectarian parties – Jaafari, you remember. Second election, sectarian parties. Third election, in 2010 – remarkable. Iraqis demanded multisectarian parties, and both Allawi and Maliki ran on multisectarian lists. Allawi won by one vote, and we sided with Maliki, because we basically wanted to get out. Right when this thing was actually coming to a point where, you know, one could imagine actually working with it.

Now, when we did that – we worked on the elections from 8:00 in the morning till midnight. From midnight till 8:00 in the morning, Stan McChrystal and the boys basically dealt with the dark side – took on the jihadists in both the Shiite and the Sunni communities so the center could actually come together in a relaxed way. So I would argue – if you think that through, Iraq today, in my view has a 1-in-10 – and it's getting toward 1-in-20 chance of a decent outcome. But my view? The only reason it has gone the course it went, is because we were there. In a country with no Mandela, we were the midwife. Either you've got a Mandela or a midwife, but if you don't have both, you have Syria.

So what's going on in Syria? The people are trying to pull the pin. They got about halfway out – enough to, you know, blow up half the country. But there's nobody to fall on the grenade. There's no midwife and there ain't no Mandela. And so when I hear people – a lot of people who were against Iraq, by the way, because of George Bush, and you know – saying, well, we must do something on Syria. I say, really? Will the ends, will the means, OK? If you don't have a power that controls the space in a multisectarian society that breaks down into civil war where nobody trusts the other – a no-fly zone – ladies and gentlemen, I give you Libya, OK?

A humanitarian corridor? Good luck. And so I'm not actually advocating we go in there at all. I'm just saying, could we have a serious conversation about this? OK, we're talking about a multisectarian society that is broken apart. And without a third party to sit between the sides now and midwife them as we did in Iraq, I think – well, I've said for the last two years: Libya implodes, Egypt implodes, Yemen implodes, Tunisia implodes, Syria explodes.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Explodes.

MR. FRIEDMAN: It goes out. And without anybody to fall on the grenade, that's what it's going to do. It's the problem from hell.

MS. SCHIEFFER: So what should we do right now? I've – that's a fascinating thing that you just said – that statement. But do we just watch now or – and talk about it, or –

MR. FRIEDMAN: These are the reasons why. But I think the – being secretary state of today – and Jerry's alluded to it – is the worst job in the world. (Laughter.) Because, you know, if you're lucky, you get to talk to Putin and the Chinese. You know – (laughter) – they at least answer the phone.

MS. BRENNAN: Lavrov hasn't been, though.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Yeah, I know.

MS. BRENNAN: Kerry hasn't been able to get Lavrov on the phone for three days.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Yeah, well there you go. (Laughter.) And on other days, you get to deal with Mali and Afghanistan and Syria, you know.

MR. SEIB: Look – I mean – I'll violate a journalistic confidence here. You know, I remember very distinctly sitting in General Scowcroft's office over in the White House just before the move into Kuwait. And you told me then – and I'll disclose it now, because the statute of limitations has past – we're not going to go into Iraq; if we go into Iraq, we break it, we own it. I think that lesson – you had a point. Let's just put it that way. You go into Iraq, you break it, you own it. I don't think these – this administration wants to go into Syria. It's already broken. But you go in, you own it. You're the United States; you go in, you own it.

So where does that leave you? What are your options? Well, OK, you can give some arms, but there's no shortage of guns right now, as I've – my impression, no shortage of weapons

in Syria right now. And are you going to – are you going to determine – are you going to tip the balance with some arms? Well, probably not; not unless you're going to go much bigger than anybody's talking about. So if you're not going to tip the balance – you're going to go in and fail to tip the balance – you're going to look ineffective. So then you've – then you're in a failure. Then you're moving down – moving down toward a foreign policy failure. So then you have to fix your failure by prevailing. Well, so then you've got to go in bigger.

And I agree with Tom. I mean, once you're – to me, once you're in Syria, it's a 10-year proposition. I mean, that's – it's everything Iraq was and I really – but they really do have chemical weapons and probably biological weapons and they're going to go god-knows-where. And the sectarian hatred has had even more time to bubble up over the last two years. So, I'm not saying that's an argument against intervention; you know, I – that's not for something like me to decide. I'm just saying if you think this is an easy call, you've not thought it through. And I totally agree with Tom on that.

MS. BRENNAN: No, and Secretary Kerry today was speaking with the Jordanian foreign minister. And the two of them both repeated the same phrase, which is, oh, you can't put a timeframe on this; you can't put a timeline on this. Well, we're coming up on two years in March in terms of the Syrian uprising. And, you know, it has spread, as you've said. But it was interesting to hear the secretary allude to this as-yet-unannounced trip that he will be making, saying his focus will be on changing the calculus of Bashar al-Assad. "Changing the calculus" was the phrase multiple times.

What does that actually mean? The focus has been with Lakhdar Brahimi, the U.N. envoy, and trying to engage the Russians that there would be at some point in the future Bashar al-Assad so cornered that he would engage in some way and actually think of an exit plan. It seems like our focus right now diplomatically will be on crafting some version of that. The secretary also announced King Abdullah of Jordan is going to Moscow. Does he become the emissary for this? And does anyone actually bite, because the Russians so far certainly have not. If they're the closest thing to an advocate for the Syrians or at least an outlet to Bashar al-Assad, it doesn't appear that diplomatically that – short of engagement, diplomacy – it doesn't appear to be going anywhere fast.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Let's talk about North – oh, do you have something, Jerry?

MR. SEIB: I just was going to make – I was just going to make a brief point because it –

MR. SCHIEFFER: Yeah, go ahead. I'm having a Marco Rubio moment. (Laughter.)

MR. SEIB: What both of you said reminded me – reminded me of something. But it's very fashionable today, by the way. (Laughter.) Everybody in town's doing it, if you haven't noticed.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Hydrate.

MR. SEIB: So I lived in Egypt for a few years, and there was – I thought when I lived there, naively, that President Mubarak would actually do the right thing; he would appoint a vice president, he would find a path to having a stable, peaceful transition to a new government; he would create a model for other Arab leaders. Obviously, that was totally wrong, which is why you shouldn't go back and read your clips too much if you're a journalist. (Laughter.)

But I think – and this goes to a point Tom was making – I think right now precedents are being set; models are being built in the Middle East. And somebody has to kind construct a – the constructive model of how this transition will happen in a peaceful way and in a way that is not creating governments that are attempted to be built along sectarian lines, and all that sort of thing. There need to be models in the Arab world that will show people that this can be done sanely. And right now I just don't think there are any.

MR. FRIEDMAN: And I would just pick up on that as one of the reasons I've argued what – why Israel has an interest today in peace with the Palestinians. It's not simply to resolve that issue and all the demographics. It's that with the Palestinians, you have a secular community – multisectarian, Christians, Muslims. And if somehow – and this is – would be a huge project – but if you could actually get a progressive, modernizing, multisectarian model in the West Bank that would stand every day as a refutation of what's going on in Gaza, let alone elsewhere in the region, it would have a huge – you know, one good – one good example's worth a thousand theories.

And Jerry's so right, you know, there – right now, you look at how East Asia developed. You know, Taiwan followed Japan, Korea followed Taiwan; you know, I mean, they had good models to follow. How did Eastern Europe do after the end of the Cold War? They had the European Union to follow. You know, these guys have no successful model except Turkey, which is a non-Arab country and they got their own history with the Turks. So I just think it's a – it's a real challenge.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Let's talk about North Korea – I think we have to – and the nuclear situation. So what's changed? What happened here? Is it a more dangerous world than it was last week now that they've apparently exploded a nuclear device?

MR. FRIEDMAN: You know, I think if you talk to senior administration officials, they will – they will tell you North Korea had a nuclear weapon before this administration and they've got one now. You know, I mean, the latest Kim Jong Un, you know, clearly trying to prove himself to his generals and his uncles or whatever, I think they would tell you. And lastly, they'd tell you that these guys are bat-shit crazy, you know. (Laughter.)

And so there's no telling what they'll do, and I don't – again, I don't envy anyone to deal with them, but the only people, I think, who can effectively deal with it are the Chinese. And when they turn off the lights and the potatoes, that's when you get their attention. Until and unless that happens, we're sanctioned out.

MR. SIEB: Yeah, I don't – I don't think a test in and of itself makes the world more dangerous in the sense that they haven't proven anything to anybody that wasn't known before.

What you don't know is how much proving internally still has to go on between the new young guy and the old guys who are all looking over their shoulder – or looking over his shoulder wondering how he's going to do. I don't think you can make judgments about North Korea until you think the transition is complete. And my guess – and I'm not a North Korea expert by a long shot, but my guess is if you ask somebody who knows a lot about the country, they'll tell you, I think this transition's still under way and not complete.

MS. BRENNAN: The thing that is different is all the rest of the transitions, right? You have a new administration coming in, in South Korea. You've got – you're in the midst of a transition in China that should be complete by March and you've got a new Japanese prime minister in there as well. So there are some new pieces to the puzzle there. It's going to be really interesting to see how, as you said, the Chinese deal with this. I mean, we've relied on them as having the most influence, if anyone has influence. But that was a pretty defiant move to do that against Chinese wishes.

Are you sanctioned out? I mean, I think this is interesting in terms of playing out the theory, right? If this is about sending a message in regard to nonproliferation, well, do you think Iran's not sitting there watching what's happening? That's going to be the more dangerous element, is the precedent you set. I mean, what, is China going to go and hurt its own financial institutions by totally cutting off financial ties to North Korea? No. Do they want an imploded North Korean state at their border? No, that's dangerous. So it's sort of, like, the devil you know; they'll keep him alive, they'll keep him going in North Korea. The degree to which they, you know, backhand him is what we're waiting to see.

But it's going to be interesting for the Iran question how North Korea plays out at the Security Council, I think, and that question of just the technology development. I mean, does this not show that sanctions, while they may isolate you, but they don't stop you from building weapons and the ability to launch them?

MR. FRIENDMAN: If you're North Korea.

MR. SEIB: If you're – exactly.

MS. BRENNAN: If you're North Korea. But we're not even talking about Iran getting to the level that North Korea is currently at, and the level of concern is higher there.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Well, I think one of the – it really –

MR. SCHIEFFER: Actually, Tom, let me just say something just because I don't know: What is the North Korean capability to deliver a nuclear weapon? I mean, what is their – do they have a missile delivery system that –

MR. FRIEDMAN: None that can reach us yet – not reliably. I mean, I think, you know, certainly it can reach Tokyo, though, or –

MR. SCHIEFFER: Yeah, or South Korea.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Let alone South Korea.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Yeah.

MR. FRIEDMAN: No, you know, listening to Margaret, you know, make that point, and going back to the Middle East for a second, and being secretary of state now, there's so many people, if you were secretary of state, it seems to me that you'd want to just sit down and ask, where does this go? OK, I mean, like, you'd really just sit down with Morsi right now in Egypt and say, look, I've been watching what you're doing. Tell me how this ends well for you? You'd want to ask Netanyahu: Like, I get all the threats around you, but tell me how this ends well? You know, you want to ask the Iranian leadership: Like, how is this going to work? Bashar, like, you think you're going to – that you're not going to end up in The Hague? I mean, what is your – what is your game plan here? And the North Koreans.

I think we're – we've got a world right now where so many people are behaving in ways that – I understand it in terms of their own immediate logic, but you really sort of wonder what is their end game here.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Talk a little bit about Iran and their nuclear weapon development. And, I mean, we're telling them they can't have a nuclear weapon. We know the North Koreans have one; the points that Margaret was making. Jerry?

MR. SEIB: Well, look, I mean, I guess the first thing, to state the obvious, they're moving ahead. I think the question is, where is the red line out there? I don't think – the only thing we know is that the Israelis have one red line and the Americans have another. I'm uncertain at this point where the Israeli red line is because if you'd listened to BB two years ago, the Iranians have long since crossed that red line, and so he's moved the red line forward a little bit. I don't know where the Iranian red line is. The one thing you know for sure is that they're moving closer to that red line and they're moving closer to the American red line. But the American red line has been pretty clearly defined as weaponization. So I don't – I don't know how this is going to turn out.

And, again, do you have a way that this doesn't turn out badly? I don't know. But I can construct in my mind a scenario in which there's a muddle through – there's a muddle-through process here in which we get through this year, next year, maybe for a while, in which nothing ever really happens except everybody worries a lot, because maybe the sanctions have been effective enough – and they have been effective – on the Iranians that they say, well, look, we really don't want to live under this kind of situation for a long term; at some point, we will have proven our point.

Everybody knows we have nuclear weapons capacity; that's good enough for now; why do we want to cross the Americans' red line? The Israeli red line doesn't matter to us so much to us anymore because we know they don't have the military capacity to really take out our nuclear program and they know it, too. So the only people we have to worry about are the Americans, so

we'll stop short of the American red line, which has been defined as something we don't think we need anyway, which is a weapon. And we'll all just sort of sit around and kind of mull this over for a while and then we'll talk about a way to get some of the sanctions lifted.

I mean, I'm not predicting that, but I can see a muddle-through scenario here in which everybody is unhappy for the next five years but nobody ever has to actually do anything dramatic about it. That's at least a possibility, I think.

MR. SCHIEFFER: I want to go to the audience for questions. While you're thinking of a question – and we have microphones – let me just turn to Margaret and talk about the whole pivot to Asia and what's going on, on that front. How concerned are officials at the State Department that China and Japan – it may come to a – to a real showdown over some of those rocks out there in the Pacific? And what in fact would the United States do if it did come to that?

MS. BRENNAN: And don't even say their name because that's taking a position –

MR. SCHIEFFER: OK. (Chuckles.)

MS. BRENNAN: – on those islands there, right? Well, there is a concern about an –

MR. SCHIEFFER: Rocks is what I call them.

MS. BRENNAN: Right – (chuckles) – exactly – increasing militarized situation in Asia. You know, North Korea's just a piece of that. You've got the – you had a lock-on incident. About two weeks ago you had some noise about that in terms of some Japanese and Chinese ships and tension there. But I mean, you have the Japanese delegation coming to the U.S. next week to meet with President Obama. We'll hear a little bit about that. It's tension but whether or not that plays out to conflict is unclear right now. I mean, the true economic interest in doing that is pretty low, so it's going to continue to be an issue but I think it's not necessarily on the front page.

MR. SCHIEFFER: All right, questions. Here's one right here.

Q: Should I just speak up?

MR. SCHIEFFER: Here comes a mic.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Yeah a mic – (inaudible).

Q: Hi, Liz Colton. We've talked about a lot of places and we've talked about the pivot to Asia, but we're also back in North Africa and al-Qaida, which was supposed to have been finished. So, I'd like to hear what you all have to say about the situation in Mali and all across North Africa with al-Qaida.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Excellent question. Tom? We'll just go around here.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Yeah, I mean, these – you know, it's now not al-Qaida central the way it was but it's al-Qaida North Africa, Al-Qaida Mali, and, you know, this is the franchise operations. And you know, I think there – it's going to be a challenge, Liz, for all of these governments.

You know, I'm a – I'm a big believer that – I always watch the Israeli-Palestinian conflict because I think the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is to the wider war of civilizations what off-Broadway is to Broadway. So if you actually study the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in miniature, you can see a lot of things. So what do you see today? What you see today is Israel's like a Petri dish. So Israel is now surrounded on four out of five borders by nonstate actors armed with missiles nested among civilians – in the Sinai, Gaza, South Lebanon, Syria.

MR. SEIB: Sunni extremists, all.

MR. FRIENDMAN: And, no – yeah, all of them. And only Jordan is a – is a – is what we would call a conventional border today. And so what's going on there in miniature is what we're struggling with on Broadway with our whole drone policy. So, how do you manage a world now where not just these little but big states basically, like Mali – if you look at the map, I don't have to tell you, is how big Mali is – Somalia, Libya, Syria, Afghanistan, where we have big, now ungoverned areas with nonstate actors armed now with increasingly sophisticated weapons now nested among civilians. So I think what's going on off-Broadway now is coming to Broadway.

And our drone debate is the front end of what is going to be a very complicated and difficult, I think, strategic challenge for us as we figure out how to – how to manage in this new world.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Jerry, I mean, I would like to just know – I'd like to get your feeling, what about the threat of terrorism worldwide? I mean, the president last night was talking about al-Qaida is all but destroyed, but that – to me, that doesn't say that threat of terrorism no longer exists. Are we better off now than we were?

MR. FRIEDMAN: I just want to say one thing. That's the only line in his speech that I cringed at because I would never say that about anything regarding those guys. You know, you just – that's such an invitation.

MR. SIEB: Yeah. No, it's true until it's not true. Yeah.

MR. SCHIEFFER: It's just an invitation, honestly. Yeah.

MR. SIEB: I mean, yeah, the only have to be right one time out of a hundred, as everybody knows, so I don't know. Look, I think, I – this is what I think, not what I know, what I think is that – and I would, by the way, add Nigeria to your list of countries to worry about. It's not a – it's not a governless place, but it's a pretty important place, more important than any other ones, and it's got a problem.

I think it's possible that the threat of al-Qaida in the Maghreb is overrated right now, but I don't think the potential problem is overrated. I think it has a lot to do with how it's dealt with in the next four or five years. Does, you know, drone strategy deal with it sufficiently? I don't know. But I think it's a – I think it's a potential problem. I think it's easy right now to probably overstate its immediate threat, but the potential is really kind of frightening.

MS. BRENNAN: Well, part of that is the debate about how you define threat. Is it threat to the homeland or is it threat against Western interests more broadly.

MR. SEIB: Right. Because I don't think ability to project from the Maghreb is a really proven –

MS. BRENNAN: AQIM hasn't really don't that, but theoretically that's what the French said they were concerned about, you know, AQ right over the Mediterranean there. I've heard – I've heard the theory and I've heard the prediction that basically on the policy front it will mean just generally an expansion of AFRICOM and it will – it has highlighted, as General Dempsey said, some gaps in intelligence there in that part of the world in particular.

But how do you define a threat by al-Qaida? Is it, you know, a hostage situation like we saw in Algeria? Is it what we saw happen on the U.S. mission in Benghazi? Do you put that in the same category as the threat that we determine there to be from al-Qaida in the purest form, you could say, at that point? So it's not clear that we're going to get any more involved, I think you're right, on the drone front. But on the intelligence front, you're going to have to and in terms of allocating resources you're going to have to see that on the U.S. front.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Let me just inject a question of my own because I meant to bring this up earlier and I just forgot. And that is the impact of the sequester. I hate this word – the sequester – (laughter) – these draconian cuts in programs across the board that are going into effect unless the Congress finds some way out of it.

I mean, my sense of it is that the sequester is going to happen, that – and simply because observing this Congress over the last few years, it's my observation that there are times, even when Congress wants to do certain things, they still can't figure out how to do it because the divide is so great right now.

I think – I mean, it's just my thought – I think it's going to happen. And then, after it happens, I think they'll figure out something to either kick it further down the road or do something of significance. But that's – what do you think will be the impact of that, Tom, if it does happen?

MR. FRIEDMAN: Well, you know, I mean, someway, somehow, we have to pay for the terrible twos, which was the first decade of the 21st century, where we blew it out – you know, two wars, not paid for with tax increases, an unfunded, you know, Medicare prescription drug. And then, post 2008, salving our wounds from the Great Recession. We blew it out. And sooner

or later it's going to either mean less Medicare, less Social Security, you know, fewer FAA, you know, employees or a smaller military budget – or a lot of inflation and having to do it that way.

And what we're seeing here is, to me, our two-party system incapable, sort of, of managing that transition. And so now we're left with sequesters. And when you're left with a sequester, it means you're doing things sub-optimally. You know, you're not thinking long term, what world am I in, what are my priorities, and whatnot. And we keep doing things sub-optimally with no due diligence, you know, at the last minute. Well, how long do we remain a great power when everything you do is sub-optimal with no due diligence?

MR. SCHIEFFER: I think that's a very good point. Let's go to more questions, right here, all right.

Q: Thank you. I'm Jay Kansara from the Hindu American Foundation. And I wanted to ask: What do you feel Secretary Kerry and President Obama's policy towards Kashmir's going to be given the recent skirmish on the India-Pakistan line of control? And also, how can the United States continue to engage with Pakistan when you have somebody like Muhammad Hafiz Saeed openly, you know, living with a $10 million bounty on their head when they have been – when it's clear that they are – their connection to terrorist activity such as the Mumbai attacks in 2008 are apparent?

MR. SCHIEFFER: Margaret, do you want to grab that?

MS. BRENNAN: You know, I wish I could say that I knew what the policy was going to be. I haven't quite heard it – I haven't really heard it – (chuckles) – period. I do know today Secretary Kerry did speak to Zardari. There was a phone call today about, you know, mutual concerns about terrorism. But Pakistan, I think, in particular, remains – it remains a tinderbox. It's like two of the countries that were definitely left off the list of being mentioned in the State of the Union – Pakistan and Iraq. It was just – there's no upside to talking about it because there's no clear view on how it plays out.

I honestly don't know the answer to the Kashmir question, to tell you the truth. But I don't think that anything dramatic changes in the near term. I think it'll be hold your nose, pay your money in aid and try to collaborate on terrorism. I do think the theory that's been articulated so far is that, you know, Pakistan will pick up some of the slack that we leave off with the drawdown in Afghanistan, that we want them to be more engaged in terms of taking regional responsibility. That's the model that the Obama administration has said it wants to see in other regions of the world as well.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Another question? Back there.

Q: Hi. My name is Ian Schwab. I work with American Jewish World Service. I wanted to turn south of the border, if we may, as we often don't, and ask a question about Haiti. I was curious, with the departure of Secretary Clinton and the long-standing Clinton relationship in Haiti, if you thought that there would be major changes in regards to the U.S. involvement in Haiti, and whether or not the issue of the U.N. and the introduction of cholera into Haiti, which

you know has killed almost 8,000 people already, would lead to any common cause between the administration and maybe some Republicans in Congress. Thanks.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Who'd like to take that? This is something I have – I'm totally – (laughs) – well, unqualified to talk about it.

MR. FRIEDMAN: I'm not – (inaudible) – I'm sorry.

MR. SEIB: I'll say two things. One is, I actually think Secretary Clinton established – and I'd be curious if you agree with this – a pattern that you now can't just drop. That in other words, there are new items on the foreign policy agenda – you know, women's rights, cholera eradication, paying attention to countries like Myanmar that hadn't been paid attention to previously – I don't think you can walk away from those things. So I don't know what that means in programmatic terms, but I think there's a – you know, precedents matter; we've been talking about them. I think that precedent matters.

I would just say one other thing that's tangentially related that occurred to me this morning. You know, there's going to be two other big – well, there's certainly going to be one transition in Latin America that nobody's talking about, which I think Hugo Chavez will die someday. And you could have one or more guys named Castro die in Cuba in the next couple years.

MR. SCHIEFFER: And exactly what – (inaudible) –

MR. SEIB: Right. And what does that mean? I mean, I don't know. No – does – what does that mean? I mean, that is a pretty significant regional change that could happen tonight. We could wake up tomorrow and discover all those things have happened. And I think that's a big deal and nobody's talking about it and we're going to have to.

MS. BRENNAN: They are talking about it at State and on diplomatic terms. And you have seen, interestingly, that decision to engage with the Venezuelans in terms of counterterrorism and counternarcotics in a way that the U.S. hasn't. So they're starting to put out the invitation, anticipating that. But no one can quite predict, you know, the vacuum that'll exist.

On the Haiti front, I hope you're right. I hope the soft diplomacy model stays in there along with, you know, defense and everything else as a priority. I think the Clinton Foundation will remain very much engaged there, and that's nothing to dismiss in terms of investment. But the idea, I think, that will carry over from Secretary Clinton to Secretary Kerry is the need to also bring in the private sector to develop.

And both President and Secretary Clinton did that in a big way in Haiti in trying to – trying to come up with some economic incentive to put money to work and create jobs there. That model of U.S. business as a door to the other benefits of engaging with America is going to exist in other smaller countries as well now.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Another question, right here.

Q: Mike Duffin (sp) with the State Department. In the past year, if not longer, foreign policy has been politicized. What impact does that have on the United States moving forward? Thank you.

MR. FRIEDMAN: Are you referring, like, to the Susan Rice affair or – and that whole issue, or?

Q: Just, like, congressional hearings where certain people who want to run for president at a later date – (laughter) – are asking so many questions or – (laughter) –

MR. SCHIEFFER: That's been done before.

(Cross talk, laughter.)

MR. SCHIEFFER: Anybody want –

MR. FRIEDMAN: I'm not up on that, go ahead.

MS. BRENNAN: The question was how –

Q: How does that impact just the United States as far as making the best decisions for this country and the world?

MS. BRENNAN: Foreign policy being politicized?

Q: Yes.

MS. BRENNAN: I'm sure it always has been, in some way. Where you work, at the State Department, it's supposed to be nonpartisan, right? I think – and I don't think that's new; I don't think that ends. I think on the issue that I think you have in the front of your mind, as many do, is that of what happened in Benghazi.

I think it's very interesting that the State Department has asked for more money to beef up security. They asked for it in 2012 and in 2013, already allocated money over a billion dollars that's sitting there in a fund that they can just touch but Congress has to hand over to them, and that hasn't happened. It's unbelievable frustrating, I'm sure, for diplomatic security in the State Department, which already has a pretty thin budget at, what, $51 billion a year – I mean, less than 1 percent of the federal budget.

But on the security front in particular, I know why you're asking that question. And I'm surprised it's not more front and center why Congress, after having more than 30 hearings on Benghazi, hasn't given more security to State Department to provide that for their diplomats abroad. I did think it was interesting in the State of the Union last night that the president

referenced diplomats abroad – those boots on the ground – along with American servicemen who are serving abroad. That, in my memory, hasn't happened before.

MR. SCHIEFFER: All right, anymore? I would just like to recognize General Scowcroft sitting on the front row here. General, we're honored to have you and – (applause) – would you like to say something? We'd just love to hear you say something, if you'd like to – (laughter). I won't ask you a question, you can pick your own question and answer it.

Q: This has been very enlightening and I appreciate it. And I have learned a lot.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, so have I. I think, on that note, I'll say thanks to all of you from TCU and from CSIS. Thanks for coming; it's been a great – a great pleasure. (Applause.)

(END)