

Center for Strategic & International Studies

Schieffer Series: Journalist Roundtable – National Security & Foreign Policy Flash Points

Panelists:

**David Gregory,
Moderator, “Meet the Press,”
NBC News**

**Margaret Brennan,
State Department Correspondent,
CBS News**

**Jake Tapper,
Anchor, “The Lead;”
Chief Washington Correspondent, CNN**

Moderator:

**Bob Schieffer,
Anchor, “Face the Nation;”
Chief Washington Correspondent, CBS News**

Introduction:

**H. Andrew Schwartz,
Senior Vice President for External Relations,
Center for Strategic and International Studies**

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H. ANDREW SCHWARTZ: Good evening, everybody. Welcome to CSIS. My name's Andrew Schwartz, and I'm here at CSIS in external relations.

We're so glad that you've joined us. We have just a fantastic roundtable of journalists lined up to discuss "National Security and Foreign Policy Flash Points." In fact, Jake has a stack of articles that he's – (laughter) – collected here if we need to refer – written and – yes.

JAKE TAPPER: Is there a written – I've written them all.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yes. We really hope you will enjoy tonight's panel.

Before we go any further, I want to welcome – one of my bosses is here, General Brent Scowcroft, who – thank you for your service to this country, sir.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Yes, sir. (Applause.)

MR. SCHWARTZ: Another one of my bosses is here too, Judge William Webster. And I'd like to acknowledge Judge Webster.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Sir.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Thank you so much for being here, sir. (Applause.)

Now, for those of you that follow CSIS's multimedia, look for a podcast very soon with Judge Webster and John Hamre interviewing Judge Webster. It's going to be a really good one.

I'd particularly be – we're very grateful for the Stavros Niarchos Foundation for making these discussions possible. And we're extremely grateful for our partners at TCU and the Schieffer College of Communication, who we've been working with for quite some time.

With that, I'd also – you might see a translation booth in the back here. We have a group of newly elected African leaders who are here visiting, and so we brought in the translation group so they could hear this in French. This is a first for the Schieffer Series, and we're particularly glad to have you all with us. So thank you for being here. (Applause.)

MR. TAPPER: You could just speak French, David.

DAVID GREGORY: I may only speak in French. (Laughter.)

MR. SCHWARTZ: And with that, I'd like to turn it over to Mr. Bob Schieffer.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Thank you all very much.

Well, it's very nice to have the translator. You know, growing up in Texas, people often think that – (laughter) – English is my second language. (Laughs.) But we do the best we can.

And having General Scowcroft – General, where have you been when we need you? It’s – (laughter) – we’re proud to have you here today.

And on behalf of the Schieffer School and TCU, I would like to announce that we went back and Andrew Schwartz looked at the records: it was six years ago today – this very day – that we had the first of these symposiums. And we’ve had more than 50 of them over these last six years. So I’m kind of proud of that, and I want to thank CSIS for being so, so supportive.

This fellow on the left, you may not recognize him. (Laughter.) He comes on – he has an English-language program that comes on on Sundays. (Laughter.) It’s called “Meet the Press.” He’s my very, very dear and good friend, David Gregory. And, David, we really appreciate you coming over today.

MR. GREGORY: Thank you.

MR. SCHIEFFER: You know, David and I have been friends for a long time. And people say, you know, can you really be friends with your – with your competition? And you know, the fact is, you can, you know? I mean, that doesn’t mean we’re not going to try to beat each other’s brains out. (Laughter.) But that’s just part of the deal. But David and I have really enjoyed competing against one another. And I think it’s fair to say he’s probably made me better at what I do, and I hope he learned a couple of things from me along the way. He probably didn’t, but it – (audio break) – with a real gentleman.

And it’s also a – (audio break) – compete with old Jake Tapper. He’s just one of the best reporters I’ve ever seen, and he covered the White House for a long time for ABC. He now has his own broadcast daily on CNN. And he told me just before we came out here that he kind of likes that. It’s indoor work, you know? (Laughter.) They used to make him stand outside. (Laughter.) Now he gets to be in there and likes it just fine. He’s also a fine reporter.

And then over here, Margaret Brennan. She is the State Department correspondent, as I suppose most of you know, and – for CBS News. And she has really – she’s joined us in 2012, and she’s reported all over the world. She travels with John Kerry, most of the time, wherever he goes. She covered global financial markets before she came to CBS News, anchored Bloomberg Television’s “In Business with Margaret Brennan” – Margaret, with Margaret –

MARGARET BRENNAN: With me. (Laughs.)

MR. SCHIEFFER: – well, that would be you – a weekday program broadcast live from the New York Stock Exchange. And so she has this great background in economics and – which is something I know absolutely nothing about – and she’s really just doing a great job there.

I thought today – I mean, we normally will do these things and I’ll ask questions for about a half hour. But since we’re all reporters here, I’m going to go to the audience earlier than I normally do to just give all of you a chance to sort of have at us. I mean, it’s sort of your turn.

I should also recognize Larry Lauer here from TCU. And Larry is probably the guy that came up with the idea to have the symposium, so he's sitting right beside General Scowcroft and we're glad to have him today.

So let me just kick this off with a – with a general question. And I'll just – we'll just go down the line here. So we've had this situation in the Ukraine. Where's this thing going, Jake? (Laughter.)

MR. TAPPER: Where is it going?

MR. GREGORY: I'll be – I'm going to be translating for our African delegation. (Laughter.)

MR. TAPPER: David actually speaks French. We didn't need to – we didn't need to do that.

You know, that's a mystery as to how far Putin wants to push this. I mean, I think – I have asked questions along those lines of Republican senators and people in the White House – you know, where is this all headed? And there is a great deal of concern. I don't sense that there's actually that much concern about the Russian ship that just pulled up to the port of Havana. That's something they're not as concerned.

But when you look at 2008 and what Russia did in Georgia, it's not entirely theoretical to think of Putin flexing his muscle. And you have the word that Yanukovych is going to speak tomorrow in Russia – from Russia – that what's going on in southern Ukraine right now, what's going on in the border. There's obviously a lot of – a lot of – there's obviously a lot of evidence that there are Russians inside – Russian government and Russian secret police – inside Ukraine already doing what they do.

I would – I would not be surprised if there was some sort of land grab attempt. I don't think it's going to be like happened in Georgia, but I do think that the idea that Russia is going to sit back and let Ukraine become a Westernized EU ally is naive.

MR. GREGORY: I think, Bob – I think one of the things that's interesting about all of this is, what is United States for? I mean, is our government generally on the side of the protesters in the Ukraine? Do we support democratic foment around the world? We do in principle. But what do – what do we support in practical terms?

Because we don't view this as a Cold War conflict, but Vladimir Putin does. And so the idea of Ukraine migrating toward the West and becoming part of the European Union and all that that portends for him is very much something that could show up on his doorstep later.

So I think the big question is – there's obviously a military component should Putin move forward, but assuming that he stops short of that, where does the United States apply pressure to Russia? When is enough enough? Because, frankly, I think Putin looks like he's pushing America around a little bit. And I think that the administration doesn't like it, but is also aware

of the fact that the more you make this a mano-a-mano contest, the more he probably likes it. So we've got to try to calibrate that response.

But I come back to what I said before, which is: How does United States today, in this period of the limitations on U.S. foreign policy, try to bolster the aspirations of people who want to live in freedom?

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, Margaret, I mean, we have told Putin that we're really, really mad about this.

MS. BRENNAN: Right. (Laughs, laughter.)

MR. SCHIEFFER: And we've said don't do it, you know?

MS. BRENNAN: Right. (Laughter.)

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, what if he does something else? Are we going to then say we're really, really, really mad about this? I mean, what can we do, and what should be do here? What is the thinking at the State Department right now?

MS. BRENNAN: Something other than looking for synonyms for "we strongly condemn" time and again and those – (laughter) – statements you're talking about.

I mean, with this issue, I think more broadly – and this sort of gets at what David was talking about – there is this broader question of, does all of our foreign policy influence right now rest on the leverage via Russia – whether it's Syria, whether it's Ukraine, whether it's Iran?

Specific to Ukraine, I think the diplomats and all the work that's being done behind the scenes right now is about looking at is it possible that there's a win-win here for Russia and the U.S. – that we don't go to that really quick reaction of Cold War, which is instead to look at, wait a second, Russia has between 30 (billion dollars) and \$40 billion of bank exposure here. They really can't stomach a default.

And neither can we, by the way. And the Germans don't like it either because they're already worried about helping to bail out Ireland, Portugal, they're worried about Spain, and they've already been helping Greece. So a shock to the economic system is going to be really painful right now.

Politically, no one wants political instability in that region at the same time. So they're trying to find a way for this not to be a mano-a-mano fight. But more broadly, from the PR perspective, I think something that does find an audience in the White House is this concern about appearances. It does look like we are responding rather than leading on the foreign policy here.

MR. TAPPER: And, Bob, if I could just – if I could just jump in.

When you – when you were introducing David, and you said that you can compete and still be friends, it reminded me of the fact that a lot of times in journalism we pretend that there isn't competition. Oh, we're all just doing our shows and, you know, the viewers like what they like, and there's no competition, when obviously that's nonsense. (Laughter.)

And your candor reminded me of that, which also reminds me of the White House, which keeps on putting out this message – John Kerry saying, you know, there is no East-West divide, this isn't "Rocky IV;" President Obama saying, oh, you know, this isn't – I don't see this as a chess game. Who are you trying to convince? (Laughter.) You know? I mean, are you trying to convince yourself that this isn't a faceoff between the two?

MR. GREGORY: I actually think in that case he's trying to convince the American people.

MS. BRENNAN: Yeah.

MR. GREGORY: I think the American people don't like the appearance of us being pushed around. I mean, they've got Edward Snowden there with political asylum embarrassing the United States, blocking our efforts in Syria, blocking our efforts going back to the Iraq war, you know, not necessarily being helpful on Iran, or maybe in fits and starts. And I think it's a – I think the president and Secretary Kerry – and I like the "Rocky" reference – but they're basically saying, look, Russia doesn't really matter in the grand scheme of things, so let's not make it more important than it is. I think that's the attempt, at least, the message to convey.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Right. But it does matter.

MS. BRENNAN: It does. (Laughter, laughs.)

MR. GREGORY: It matters, but the question is, to what extent does it matter? I mean, I've talked to people about it. I mean, we know it matters because of its nuclear arsenal, but it's not an economic force. It is – it is more than just an irritant because it actually does obstruct, you know, what our aims are in Syria and elsewhere in the world.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, what – go ahead, Margaret.

MS. BRENNAN: I think, in the sense of this foreign policy sort of rationale of the administration, they keep coming back to these words that all of us sort of throw away, like "multilateral diplomacy," "multinational alliances," because we're all, like, what the heck does that mean? But when you look at what they're actually trying to do on Iran, it would really hurt if Russia broke away from that alliance. That would matter, because that would make our sanctions a lot less powerful.

On Syria, time and again you know, the United States stands up and says, this is the biggest, most awful humanitarian catastrophe this generation has seen. Samantha Power said that just this past week. Yet the most powerful country in the world says we're hamstrung by Russia. So we have said that they've mattered in these ways when it comes to the chief tool on

the foreign policy front of this administration, which is via the alliance.

MR. SCHIEFFER: You know, when I – when I was a very young reporter and I went out on a story and I came back and I was trying to explain to the city editor what this was about, and he – and he looked up to me with, I think, the best question that an editor could ask. He said: Why should I care about this? And that’s always, I think, in the second paragraph of every story – you have to put in, this is why this matters.

When you come right down to it, does it matter to U.S. security? I happen to think it does. I’m not sure what course I could recommend here, I mean, because I think – I don’t think there’s any way in the world we’re going to send American troops there or anything like that. But what are the options that are available to us? And how important is this to us from just the standpoint of how we’re perceived in the rest of the world?

MR. TAPPER: I had McCain on my show I think a week ago. I’m trying – the story went so – has gone so quickly. And he was calling for sanctions against Ukraine. I had McCain on my show today and he was calling for money to go to Ukraine from the IMF. (Laughter.) And, you know, obviously what changed was the disappearance of Yanukovich. That is what his position is right now. Our options are get the money flowing, get the IMF involved, stabilize that country, show them that the – that the West is their friend.

MR. GREGORY: Yeah, I agree. I mean, I think the one thing that’s really bad that people should care about are states that fail around the world. And so for – the prospect of a country the size of Ukraine, 46 million people, which has the potential for real economic growth – could help, actually, the European Union, which could use it – (chuckles) – to have more stability, to have more economic growth, to orient toward the West. So I think economic failure – failed states generally are things that we really have to worry about. I don’t think we have – you know, I don’t really anticipate any kind of standoff with Russia militarily in this regard.

I do think there’s another question that goes to your point about how the U.S. is viewed around the world. I interviewed the creators of this film “The Square,” about Tahrir Square, which is up for an Academy Award, Egyptian film. They showed the film in Independence Square in Ukraine. So there’s something going on out there all over the world that is really about young people pushing for a different kind of future and who look to these big governmental institutions and say, you’re not representing me and I want a – I want an improvement in my life. And it’s happening throughout the Middle East. It’s happening in Venezuela. It’s happening in Thailand. So I think there is a generation of people who are waiting to see what America stands for and how it intervenes in the future.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Margaret, let me ask you, what does this administration view as the most serious foreign policy problem that it has at this – at this particular point in history? And I mean short-term and long-term. What would – how would – what do they tell you at the State Department, this is the – these are the things that we really worry the most about?

MS. BRENNAN: I think honestly it’s hard to answer that question, because I think there’s a different view among the national security establishment and among those in decision-

making positions.

So I think if you asked people in the national security teams, you know, at State or at Pentagon or, you know, within the other agencies, they would say they are concerned about a diffuse, basically franchised al-Qaida. They're very worried about that. They're worried about that throughout North Africa in particular, places where there isn't really a military presence or an easy response – a quick response, I should say – force. They're concerned in particular about Syria right now because it has become a magnet and a training ground. They're worried that Syria is what Afghanistan was. And they're also, by the way, worried about what Afghanistan will be after this drawdown in 2014. So they're really concerned very much again and again about the same threat, which is al-Qaida and terrorism.

I think in the decision-making positions – and, you know, I defer to those of you who cover the White House rather than national security – it seems like there's a different vantage point, and that there isn't the same immediate threat response view when it comes to Syria and when it comes to what's next in Afghanistan. It seems to be a different prism that those are looked at.

MR. SCHIEFFER: I would tend to agree with that. I think terrorism in the short run is still the priority here. I think in the long run, I would say our management of our relationship with China is the most – the most important thing that the government has to worry about at this particular time.

MR. TAPPER: The story – the issue, the foreign policy crisis and challenge that we pay sporadic attention to but don't cover as much as President Obama worries about it, is North Korea. We in the news business – it was different in last year, when Kim Jong-un came to power and there was a lot of buildup and a lot – and then that story kind of dissipated. We in the news business have focused more on The Worm's trips – I'm sorry, that's Dennis Rodman's trips – to North Korea. (Laughter.) I was a basketball fan in the '80s. (Laughter.) The trips to North Korea, and that whole circus. But they are very worried about what Kim Jong-un might do. And that directly impacts what you said is the foreign policy challenge of our day, which is China.

In a way, the United States seems sometimes to be held hostage by our dependence upon Russia when it comes to Syria and Iran – or just Iran, rather. Russia when it comes to Iran and China when it comes to North Korea. We need them so much on these issues of Iran and North Korea that we kind of let other things slide.

MR. GREGORY: I just – to me – and as I look at General Scowcroft, you think about how he and the first President Bush managed the breakup of the Soviet Union. You know, 9/11 happens and chapter one was written by the younger President Bush in our initial response and our getting – becoming a security state and getting on a war footing to combat that threat. And the management of this potential crackup – further crackup of this part of the world is really about we will never allow – I don't think there will be an American president who ever allows a safe haven to develop for terrorists, because that's behind the NSA and surveillance. And I don't think – I think the risk tolerance is very low for that threat even this many years on developing

again. And I think that portends consequences for the future of Afghanistan, for Syria certainly, and even for Iraq, which is having all these problems.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Just to go back to the – to the China thing and the long term, and which I think – you know, I think this hangs over all of it. And I was very interested when I – when I was getting ready to do one of the presidential debates last year. I went up to Harvard and talked to Graham Allison up there. And he said something to me that I'd never heard – and it, you know, it was right there for somebody who just went back and looked. But in the history of the world going back to Athens and Sparta, there have been 15 times when you had a sole superpower in the world and you saw the rise of another power that rose up to challenge the superpower of the time. And I believe in 13 of the 15 times in our history that that occurred, there was war. And I think, you know – and I wonder sometimes, and I worry sometimes, are we focusing – are we, all of us in the media, in government, in the intelligence communities, thinking enough about that very thing? And that is – and, you know, we've obviously seen the tilt to the Pacific. But there are a lot of things going on out in that part of the world right now while we're focused on some of these terrorist things.

MR. GREGORY: And isn't it interesting that here we're having the beginning of this debate about our military budget with the idea that we're specifically not preparing for some kind of large conflict with China? And we go – we're in this period of retrenchment now, of coming home, where we think of foreign policy more about our limitations than our potential reach or influence, which we know can change.

MR. SCHIEFFER: I mean, well, one – I mean, that's one of the things that worries me about the new defense budget. I think most people would agree we've got to – you know, we got to reorganize, retrench, prepare for the future, not to fight World War II again. But I wonder, again, how is this being viewed in the rest of the world? Do they see America retreating and this is some sort of – part of some sort of retreat? Or do they see it as Secretary Hagel apparently sees it, and that is we just have to develop a new and different kind of defense for this country?

Why don't we just – we'll talk there for a second, start thinking about it, and we'll go to you all for some questions. As I say, I think we should get to you early to get – to see what's on your minds, since we are –

MR. GREGORY: Looks like somebody's already up there. (Laughs.)

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, there's a hand already up over there. All right. I had a feeling. (Laughter.) Either one of those. There's a hand back there. Be sure and tell us your name, if you don't mind.

Q: Sure. Bill Clifford of the World Affairs Councils of America.

This is for Margaret, who mentioned Syria twice, and anybody else. Secretary Kerry mentioned that Obama is seeking new options. Is the military option really, really on the table? What are the other options that are out there?

MS. BRENNAN: Well, I think if you were to ask Secretary Kerry that he'd say, well, it's never left the table. And it's a pretty big table with all these options that are sitting on it and all that.

I think, reliving the past few months, military option – it's interesting. When we talk about it in the present tense, everyone uses the Iraq reference. And if you look back over history, there have been a number of different options for what military force could actually be. It doesn't necessarily mean an invasion. So I think when you look at the questions of training, when you look at clandestine support internally to train, those are different options that have certainly been asked for by the opposition. The U.S. helping to facilitate delivery is a military option, of certain things that are needed by the fighters. All those things get bandied about.

I think if you're talking about the level of strike that was debated, presented and then withdrawn this past summer, that is not something that I have heard anyone really talk about with any degree of conviction that it would actually be acted on, short of another major incident that would push Syria into the headlines and really force the public debate about it. There really – when you go to Capitol Hill, there's no momentum.

People are very concerned, however, about humanitarian issues there right now. I think a lot of these pictures, a lot of the images that are coming out from Syria have made it undeniable for people that there needs to be more that could be done. I mean, you hear of the rebels asking for airlifts of food – can you just drop us food from the sky if you can't get the U.N. in to deliver it?

So there are a ton of different options even those within the Pentagon have presented. But really only one person's decision matters on that, and we're – we have to see what the White House becomes willing to do.

MR. GREGORY: I thought you were talking about the one person who matters is Vladimir Putin. I mean – (laughter) – he has to be convinced to push Assad from power. He has to be convinced of two things: one, that things are going so badly that his only deepwater port in that area is not disrupted; and, two, that the alternative is not radical enough that ultimately they inspire an outbreak in the Caucasus. I mean, that's – that's how he views this.

I think, from the U.S. point of view, I don't think there's any military options for real. And I think there's a real concern about sophisticated weapons being handed over to rebels that we don't really understand or know who's on top in that. Look, I mean, the Soviet experience – the fact that we gave all these Stingers – you know, low-level weapons and never got a receipt and couldn't track them down. And we know, you know, what that ended up, you know, doing to us.

MS. BRENNAN: But there is a new degree of confidence that you have seen, and you've seen it with recent deliveries, that there is at least some familiarity three years in that we at least know who some of the players are that we're OK with. That has changed.

And I would also say it's really up to Iran more than Russia in terms of whether they

want to back off the support of the Assad regime.

MR. TAPPER: If I could just say one thing about President Obama and the use of force, I've covered him – I covered him on Capitol Hill. I covered both his presidential campaigns. I covered the first term as a White House correspondent. This is not the same – he does not have the same view of use of force that he had in 2009. This is a president who has seen the limits of using force. This is a president who I don't know if he'll ever – certainly not while in office, and I don't – I don't know that he'll ever say this, but I believe, from talking to a lot of people who know his views – I think this is president who maybe would not have surged troops in Afghanistan if he had the chance to do it all over again. Not to the degree that he did, anyway – 100,000 versus the 20,000 or so he sent initially. I think that he is very reluctant to use force, even more so than he was in 2008 when he was elected. Back then he was somebody who was like – his basic spin was, I want to end the war in Iraq, but the real war is in Afghanistan and I want to send at least two battalions there. He's different now. He's changed how much – based not only on what's happened in Afghanistan and the limitations of success there because of our partners there, but also what happened in Libya, even if – even though that was motivated by a desire to stop a massacre of tens of thousands of people from happening, how that has ultimately ended up, the mess that Libya is today.

And I really view – whenever anybody asks a question about what is on the table, you will have to – he will have to be dragged kicking and screaming to authorizing – I'm not talking about drones, and I'm not talking about counterterrorism force, but boots on the ground. He will have to be dragged to that.

MR. SCHIEFFER: All right.

Let's see, way back there in the back. The lady.

Q: Thanks. Hi, my name is Anastasia Mark.

My question is about cybersecurity. And one of the things in the defense budget is a kind of retrenchment that this is something we do care about and this is something we should invest in. And I was wondering if any of you could comment on, when you speak to leaders or those in power, is this on their minds? What are their attitudes towards the cyber global threat?

MR. SCHIEFFER: David?

MR. GREGORY: Well, by all accounts it's something that the president puts on the agenda when he meets with members of Congress and other defense officials as being a crucial – a crucial area for America's security. I think it's something that he's taken stock of even as he's looked at the NSA's surveillance role, that the role of cybersecurity is incredibly important, and that, you know, the big event has not yet happened that could reorient our, you know, national security apparatus in this area. So I can't recall what's in the military budget specifically on this, but I think it's very big.

And this is – this is, again, a huge challenge. It kind of goes to Bob's point about how we

think about Asia and think about the threat that's not right in front of us, which is what do we learn from 9/11 in terms of anticipating threats, putting them on the agenda in a way that the media and the public and government is talking about it to really – to really address?

MR. SCHIEFFER: Were you all surprised – because I certainly was – with the story David Sanger had in The New York Times – I guess it came about the day before or the day after Hagel announced the defense budget, and it kind of got lost in the – in the talk about that – that we are reluctant sometimes to use cyber as part of our – the details of the story I'm kind of fuzzy on, but that we're reluctant to use cyber for fear it would violate some sort of rule or something.

MS. BRENNAN: Or that we'd be the first to sort of openly use cyberwarfare, essentially. That was a fascinating piece that Sanger had, talking about I guess a new version of a military option, which we essentially, like, turn the lights out and turn the power out in Damascus; and that this had been bandied about, taken off the table – the proverbial table – and now maybe put back on it. And the president –

MR. GREGORY: But we used it – we've used it, according to David Sanger, and Israel –

MS. BRENNAN: Exactly.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, now, that's what I was just going to say, we have used it.

MR. TAPPER: As David Sanger knows.

MR. GREGORY: (Laughs.) As David Sanger knows.

MS. BRENNAN: Well, that's the thing. Exactly, as he knows – he knows full well. But that was covert. That accidentally went over. And that that's at least the legal debate – (laughter) – at the White House right now.

MR. TAPPER: I interviewed Leon Panetta when he was CIA director, and he said it was the thing that kept him up at night, fears of cybersecurity. And it's something that it's hard to get policymakers – and it's hard to get even more so the media and the American people – engaged in because, as David pointed out, the threat is basically theoretical to Americans as of now, other than worried about their credit cards – the numbers being stolen because of a cyber hacking at the target. The fears aren't there.

There will be likely – I hope not, but in all likelihood – an event where we look back and can't believe that we were covering Dennis Rodman going to North Korea – (laughter) – instead of the fears of cybersecurity and what could happen. But it is not a story that is particularly compelling as of now. But if it keeps Leon Panetta up at night, then I take it pretty seriously.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Right there. Ma'am.

Q: Thank you. Hi, my name is Ellie Rostum (sp) with Harvard University. I have three

questions. I'll keep them very short and direct. This way, I can get away with three. (Laughter.)

The first one is with regard – since the Arab Spring, the U.S. has had to deal with a lot of government, or new government or government that are trying to put a government together who have either been Islamic in nature or have an Islamic flavor. I would love to hear your thoughts on how that relationship between the U.S. government and those governments – how you see it going forward.

The second question is with regards to China – not so much in terms of a direct confrontation between the U.S. and China, but more in terms of a conflict in a particular region of influence like, you know, Africa, or particularly the Middle East, given how China has been investing especially in Iraq, for instance, in energy. And even in Saudi Arabia, China is the first – the top consumer now, effectively replacing the U.S., and – et cetera.

The third question is with regards to Iran. Iran, when you – you know, I work in energy and I follow foreign policy quite closely. When you look at Iran, I mean, high inflation, unemployment rates, people not happy with their government. In my view, in a few years we could be looking at a rogue state. But yet, when you hear – when you listen to the news, when you read the newspaper, it's always portrayed as this imminent threat. I mean, Iran actually imports energy, which is, you know – given that it's one of – it has one of the larger – or had one of the largest reserves. And, you know, every time we hear about it, it's always a week away from developing a nuclear bomb, but it hasn't happened yet.

So I'd love to hear about your thoughts, especially since – you know, I watch “Meet the Press” all the time and I see all of you on TV, and in many ways you educate and inform the American public. So it would be interesting to see your thoughts on maybe showing the other side of Iran.

MR. SCHIEFFER: OK. So, going backward, Iran, China, and what was the first one? (Laughter.)

MR. GREGORY: Islamic governments.

MR. SCHIEFFER: What?

MR. GREGORY: Islamic governments. Dealing with Islamic governments.

MS. BRENNAN: Islamic governments.

MR. TAPPER: Islamic governments.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Islamic governments, all right.

MS. BRENNAN: (Laughs.)

MR. GREGORY: Well, I think – I mean – I mean –

MR. TAPPER: First of all, this is – it's like a future White House correspondent.

MR. GREGORY: Yeah, that's right. (Laughter.)

MS. BRENNAN: I know, yeah. I know.

MR. TAPPER: Well done.

MR. SCHIEFFER: And if you were Helen Thomas, you would say, and I have a follow-up. (Laughter.)

MS. BRENNAN: Totally.

MR. GREGORY: I think on Iran – I mean, I think, you know, my own reporting indicates that, you know, the president is of the view – what we all know is that he thinks sanctions have worked and that's why the Iranians are negotiating. But he also believes that there's a more pragmatic streak in the government, and that there's a really – a real willingness to negotiate on the nuclear program for the ultimate future of that country and of the future of their economy. I mean, you know, he's going to be meeting with Binyamin Netanyahu on Monday here in Washington, and Netanyahu has an entirely different view, you know, which is that the Iranians are skilled manipulators and that they have time on their side. They're not – they'll play by a totally different clock, and they'll wait out the West and still ultimately deliver on their goals of hegemony in that region.

So, you know, I think the president is inclined to keep negotiating is the point. And I think it goes to something Jake said, which is there has to be a foreign policy definition around what's possible that is shy of the use of force. I mean, you know, there's no good – there's no good military option on North Korea, which is why administrations don't do anything about it. What they do is they keep asking China to turn the lights out, and China says no because they don't want all those refugees coming into their country.

I mean, it's – so it's – I think that's where Iran is, which is there is some more diplomacy ahead, or else we get into more of a standoff that I don't think results in force right now unless the Israelis do it.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, I'll – let me try to answer the China thing.

I go back to this. I still think this something we have to see for what it is. China is there and we are here, and neither of us is going anywhere. And we have simply got to find a way to get the best out of that – maybe it's not a partnership, but a relationship. Certainly, nobody has more of an interest in keeping the U.S. economy going than the Chinese, because they've loaned us all this money, and it would not be in their interest if our – if our economy went in the tank. So I don't think – I think for that reason alone – I think because it's good for both teams – I think they will find some way to work this out. But this is going to be very, very difficult. And it's going to require a lot of work and a lot of – a lot of diplomacy that you don't hear about, as well

as diplomacy that you will hear about.

I think it is very important that the United States maintain what has been an excellent relationship with Japan. I think that relationship is more important than ever, and I think it is a vital part of that. I think it's important that we maintain a good relationship with South Korea, and that too is a part of that.

I think the administration is now urging talks between the American military and the Chinese military because the Chinese military's relationship to the Chinese government is not exactly the same as the American government's relationship with the American military. And that's another thing, and that's one of the things that makes it – makes it difficult.

But, you know, at the end of the day, this is doable. This is doable because it's in the interest of both countries to make it work. And we cannot let that fritter away. So I think we have to keep the focus on that now.

There was a first – what was the first –

MR. TAPPER: The Islamic flavor.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Yes.

MR. TAPPER: Could you re-ask – could you re-ask the question? Because all I remember is Islamic flavor. (Laughter.)

Q: So since the Arab Spring in Tunisia, the U.S. has been faced with many governments that are – that have been elected – I'm thinking of Egypt, for instance, with the Muslim Brotherhood – that have – (comes on mic) – either been governments that call themselves Islamic or have an Islamic flavor. What is the – how do you see the future? This question really goes back to the point that the guy from "Meet the Press," Gregory –

MR. GREGORY: David.

Q: David. (Laughter.)

MR. TAPPER: At least she watches every Sunday. (Laughter.) Names are unimportant in that way.

MR. GREGORY: That's all that matters. That's all that matters.

Q: Yeah. You brought up a good point. You say, where do we stand now? And how should we – on what side are we? Are we with the protesters? Are we with the government? So what I'm asking is, how should the U.S. in the future deal with governments that might be either Islamic or have an Islamic flavor?

MR. TAPPER: I think there's a big premium right now on stability, and that – I don't

know that there was the same when the Arab Spring was first taking root in Northern Africa and elsewhere.

But I think right now – there was a – there was a neoconservative strain that argued, you need to keep Mubarak because he’s the one who keeps that country together. He’s the one that has the alliance with Israel. He’s the one that – we have joint military exercises with Egypt, and if you – if you lose Mubarak, then we’re going to lose our ally. Obviously, that became untenable to a degree, and President Obama trying to – tried to convince Mubarak to step out in a way that he would not have ended up in a prison. And Mubarak did not listen.

I think right now there’s a real premium on stability, perhaps even more so than echoing and supporting the expressions that we heard – the expressions of desire for free and fair elections, for freedom of the press, for freedom of expression. I’m sure the United States government will give voice to supporting those desires. But at the end of the day, with so much going on, what I hear from the State Department – and Margaret can speak better than I about this – is a lot of lip service and nothing really more than that.

MS. BRENNAN: I think you’re right. It’s about stability. It’s about national security viewed that way. But I think right now in a lot of these countries – I mean, and this is generalizing across a huge number of countries that have had revolts right now – but generally speaking, what the U.S. approach has been is help them build an infrastructure, because basically there wasn’t civil society. There wasn’t infrastructure. And we saw what happened when there’s a vacuum in Libya, that there is no security apparatus really there. And so the U.S., like, funding has been to that.

And they’re trying to do that even now in Lebanon – a country that hasn’t seen that, but they’re very concerned about stability there. So it’s more military financing, loans, infrastructure, that sort of thing. That seems to be the stability quotient.

MR. SCHIEFFER: May I just say to David, yesterday in a cab I was mistaken for Bob Barker. (Laughter.) Absolutely true.

MR. GREGORY: So I have a story like that. So a guy came up to me someplace. He’s like, can I get my picture with you? And he was so effusive. And I waited – he had to get a different camera, and he takes his picture. And he’s like, oh my gosh, I love watching you on “Face The Nation” every Sunday. (Laughter.)

MR. SCHIEFFER: Just be whoever they think you are.

MR. GREGORY: Whatever, you know? And live with it.

MR. SCHIEFFER: There you go.

All right, right here. Here we go. That’s true. (Laughs.) OK.

Q: Hugh Grindstaff.

I think it comes back to your business. And if you think about World War I, World War II, even Vietnam – Vietnam, it started changing. We started reporting almost instantly or next day about what’s going on in the country. Nowadays, what goes on in Ukraine you know instantly, almost. The Ukrainians are on the Internet like all of us are. There’s one word that President Obama brought into office, was “hope.” These people are – they want hope – hope that they can live their lives in a way that they feel is better than it is. And that was the same way in Egypt, it was hope – hope that I can go to college and make a living after I graduate from college. But we don’t seem to feel that hope here as Americans because we’ve had it for a long time. But I think that’s what is really the change in life that those countries that are – Ukraine and Egypt, and even Syria in a way – they want to change. And what do you think about the use of mass communication, how it’s changed the equation?

MR. GREGORY: I think it’s – I think it’s huge. But I think there’s also a limitation.

I remember doing a panel where I was speaking to some of the young democratic activists who emerged in Egypt as they were thinking about a democratic future. And what was their political reality, what were their plans at institution-building? They didn’t really have one. What they had was an enormously powerful communications tool, the ability to have connective tissue between likeminded people who are seeking a similar goal. But they paled in comparison to the Muslim Brotherhood when it came to organization and the grassroots, to political organization. And that’s a huge factor right now. I mean, institutions matter.

It’s why the – you know, the great debate we had in this last Gulf War, or war in Iraq, was when you lost a layer of bureaucracy in Iraq that knew how to function – how to make institutions function, you lost something really, really important so that a fledgling government has a much harder time moving forward.

And I think that gets to a core issue, which is we have the technology. We have that shared sense of hope and desire. But a lot of people still look to the United States to say, OK, but what are you going to do for us to make this a reality? And we’re in a position of humility in 2014, where we’ve had two really difficult recent experiences of the limitations of the United States’ ability to try to engineer political change and even institution-building. And it wasn’t that, you know – this was also part of our recent history when General Scowcroft and President Bush recognized the limitations then of trying to engineer change from the outside, to layer on top of an area that’s fraught with sectarian division going back to the First World War, the outcome of which we may be starting to actually see if it’s – if it’s unraveling.

MR. SCHIEFFER: You know, let me just add on to that. It’s not mass communications as I knew it, as we knew it when I came of age, you know, when you had three television networks and every town had a newspaper and all of that. Sometimes it’s the social media now and the fact that everybody is the publisher now. This ability to communicate that we have now sometimes makes it I think harder to communicate, because there’s so much out there that’s simply not true that you have to sort through.

Now, you know, the fact is – and as we saw this in the – I don’t really like to call it the

Arab Spring, but the Arab uprisings – you no longer need a charismatic leader to have a revolution. You can – they just, spontaneous. Everybody talks about it on their Facebook, and suddenly you have a revolution. But it's a revolution where people are frustrated, where they have problems. But there's nobody right there in the beginning to kind of – to bring them together in a cohesive way and lead them in a certain direction.

I mean, you're seeing the same thing with our politics in America today, where, you know, everybody – these stories get out, people – government officials hold a news conference, and somebody's tweeting something out after the first sentence, and it's already out there. And as we saw when the Supreme Court ruled, remember, on health care and whether it's constitutional, the first three news agencies that ran out to report on it got it dead wrong because they only read the first paragraph of the opinion. If they'd read to the third paragraph, they'd have found out that it was – what the true story was.

And so you have this information out there, some of which is wrong by design, you know? You have some information that's just wrong because people have inaccurate information. And I think all of that starts this, you know, kind of churning in these countries. And it's one of the things that makes what's happening now kind of – I'm not saying more difficult, but different than it – than it used to be.

Here we are, right there. Go ahead.

Q: Thank you. It's Dana Marshall with Transnational Strategy Group.

This is a question and a comment that's sort of floated around the panel, but I wanted to see if I could bring it into a little bit more definition. One of the great policy debates which is occurring right now in the United States and in other countries that bears directly on national security and foreign policy, but oftentimes is not recognized as such, is the debate about what sort of international economic policy should the United States pursue.

David Gregory mentioned China. You did as well. And I'm not just talking about trade, or fast track, or, you know, the TPP. I'm talking about our policies on inbound investment, technology policies, tax policies, energy, and many other ones. And the implications are vast in terms of the trade deficit, our reserve situation, our ability to have the resources to project the power that we need.

I guess my – it's both a plea and maybe a question as well about – the plea being to connect these dots – to connect the dots that profoundly need to be connected – but also a question of how do you, in your own shows, make this – bring this out when we have – it's Iran last week, it's now Ukraine, tomorrow it will be something else. But this continues to work either to the detriment or to the opportunity of the United States. So how do you practically, as journalists, do this, understanding the important policy implications?

MR. SCHIEFFER: Go ahead.

MR. TAPPER: Sounds like a Margaret question for me. (Laughter.)

MR. GREGORY: I, for one, think Bob should focus more on international economics on his show. (Laughter.)

MS. BRENNAN: Listen, like, I – you know, I came from covering Wall Street for a decade, so I kind of see things – I know exactly what you’re talking about and the long laundry list that many businesspeople would bring to a meeting and say, you guys on the foreign policy front are getting it totally wrong, these are the priorities.

I think one thing more broadly that’s interesting with the administration – that doesn’t get a lot of press coverage because, A, people think the American public doesn’t really get it or want to hear about it, but it is just, frankly, hard to understand – is how much financial warfare has become a tool. Certainly you’ve seen it in the form of sanctions with Iran. You see that as one of the first go-to foreign policy tools of this administration. And it has been used, you know, creatively and quite effectively there.

But what you’re talking about more is sort of the economy is often the place where you see change first, right, or you see the pain first. Then you see it in the society, and then it becomes a political movement. Certainly, with Ukraine, that’s what happened. I mean, it’s pretty amazing that a revolution erupted over a trade deal – over, you know, do we go with Europe or do we keep taking the, you know, cash from Russia here?

But I think the dots are absolutely connected. I think it’s sometimes hard to explain how they are. But if you boil it down, whether you’re talking about Kiev or you’re talking about Tahrir Square, people come out when they feel the pain on their own kitchen tables. Seventeen percent food inflation in Egypt leading up to that revolution, what you see with that trade deal in Ukraine – the unemployment rates there. It is absolutely part of what policymakers digest, but it doesn’t get connected in a really easy way in the conversation.

I think it’s going to be incredibly relevant throughout Europe right now. That is part of what they’re building through the EU. I mean, that is an economic tie first, right, that they’re now trying to use politically as leverage. It wasn’t Kerry; it was three European ministers who went in there and talked to Yanukovich and got that deal done. And they first came together because of the economy.

So I think you see more and more global markets getting interconnected in the way they are. It’s going to make some of the issues you’re talking about more and more important.

MR. SCHIEFFER: I think it’s a very valid criticism. I think we just should do a better job of doing it. But, you know, I was thinking, as you were –

MS. BRENNAN: That’s a much better answer. (Laughs, laughter.)

MR. SCHIEFFER: – as you were – as you were outlining your question there, I was just thinking, one time James Reston – the well-known columnist for The New York Times – he once said, you know, people will do anything about South America except read about it. (Laughter.)

And sometimes I think that might be the case when you start trying to talk economics, or trying to – it's such an important part of the story. I mean, that's why most revolutions start, because people don't have enough to eat or because they're being thrown in jail unfairly or because they're taxes are not correct.

We need to do a better job of that. And I think – I think we should take some of the heat for that. And if you want to write me some suggestions how we can go about doing that – (laughter) – and get people to watch and listen, I'd certainly want to do that.

Yeah, back there. Go ahead.

Q: Arthur Orkush (sp).

My question is kind of a summation of the discussion about Ukraine. There's been a lot of talk about Putin shoving his finger in American – in the American face, what he's going to do next, the developments on the ground. It was the Polish foreign minister who negotiated a peace on the ground. The people rising up in many ways are looking towards Europe. If we were having this conversation, say, 30 years ago when the Poles were rising up, they were looking towards America.

What can you as the media – what can this administration do to remain relevant in the region? Because there's a lot of talk about the pivot. There's a lot of talk about lines being crossed but no consequences when those lines are crossed. I guess, in that context, do you intend to do coverage about Ukraine on your Sunday programs this upcoming weekend? Will there be perspectives from the region as this story unfolds? Because it's surely not going away in the next couple days. But more importantly, what can the United States be doing as it's trimming its defense budget, as it's looking towards Asia, to stay relevant in the region, to keep transatlantic relations at the level that they need to be in order for situations like this to be resolved in a constructive and positive way?

Thank you.

MR. GREGORY: I really don't think there's any question about our influence or our commitment to – in Europe and to the NATO alliance as a military question, but also as an economic, you know, powerhouse – I mean, the EU being our biggest, you know, market. So, I mean I think that staying power is there. And I think the U.S. has a lot of influence, both in the European Union and on the IMF, to try to keep financial catastrophe from befalling Ukraine.

And then, you know, Russia's still going to listen to what the United States says. What it's concerned about is the United States meddling too far into that part of the world. So I think – I think there's still a compelling – a compelling interest there. And it's really for greater stability and the economic power of the EU. I think that's a primary interest for the United States, rather than provoking Russia.

MR. TAPPER: I know everybody here has covered Ukraine quite a bit on their shows. We've covered it every day on mine.

One of the things that I thought was interesting last Friday, before Yanukovich pulled his Harry Houdini act, I had the deputy national security adviser, Tony Blinken on my show. And basically what he said – I'm paraphrasing – is that – because I asked him about the line, and specifically I asked him about the line in the context of the last time the president drew a line, in Syria. And Blinken, in addition to saying that he didn't understand the question because there's this fantastic chemical weapons deal going on, also said that specifically the U.S. – I would guess through Biden and through others talking to the Ukrainians and talking to Yanukovich – made specific and direct threats – not about military action, not about ships going to Black Sea or anything along those lines, but specific members of the government in Ukraine, specific members of the – and specific oligarchs were directly threatened by the United States that they would have sanctions by the United States, and also I would imagine allies, on them, as well as visa restrictions on their ability to travel.

Now, how much that influenced what Yanukovich did versus what the Polish foreign minister said about that phone call with Putin before all of a sudden he vanished, I can't say. But I thought that was interesting that that was how the U.S. was wielding influence – not we're going to send troops that you know we'll never actually send into Ukraine, but, OK, fine, you can do what you want, but your life is going to be miserable for the next 20 years. I just thought that was – that was an interesting way.

And I know that's not new in terms of how the U.S. wields power. But the fact that Blinken was saying it on TV I thought was interesting.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well ladies and gentlemen, I'm really sorry. We have come to the end of our program. Our time is up. Thank you all. This was really a lot of fun for me, and I hope for you all as well. (Applause.)

(END)