

#1386 Out With The Old Foreign Policy, In With The Even Older

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: [00:00:00] Welcome to this episode of the award-winning a *Best of the Left Podcast* in which we shall learn about the prospects for Biden's foreign policy looking forward, which seems to be mostly looking backward to an era of American overconfidence and self-described exceptionalism that may never have been warranted, the fact of which becomes clearer with every passing year - something people living outside the U.S. have actually known for decades.

Before we get started on that, though, a quick reminder that we are still in or "break glass in case of emergency" financial situation. I'm going to give more of an update at the end. Just remember these three things and take action where you can. Number one, memberships are key to sustainability of the show. We've gotten a lot of new signups, which is great, and I thank everyone who has done that, but we still have a little ways to go. So if you can become a member or want to gift a membership, please do. We have a new merch store and most excitingly we've launched our Refer-O-Matic that you can use to earn Best of the Left rewards, just for sharing the show and helping to grow the audience. Links and details for all of that are in the show notes.

And now onto the show, clips today are from *Intercepted* with Jeremy Scahill, *What Next*, an episode of *Check Your Blindspot*, *The Majority Report*, and *Democracy Now*.

State-Sanctioned Killers: As Trump Expedites Executions at Home, Biden Builds Team for Wars Abroad part 1 - Intercepted with Jeremy Scahill - Air Date 12-9-20

JEREMY SCAHILL - HOST, INTERCEPTED: [00:01:23] Kelley, on that front, give us an assessment of the kind of foreign policy ideology that Joe Biden represents.

KELLEY VLAHOS: [00:01:32] Well, I don't really know what kind of foreign policy or ideology that Joe Biden represents other than what I would say is the internationalist approach of the last 70 years. You know, forward projecting military, global primacy, U.S. global primacy and hegemony in the world in order to "lead the liberal international order," to protect, to promote democracy. But what I see in Joe Biden is that, you know, as a Senator he has made some good judgment. For example, on Afghanistan in 2009 he did not want to surge tens of thousands of new troops into the country. He was overruled. Most of the Obama inner circle had been for the surge. It was a big thing in this city at that time to do some sort of counterinsurgency to prove that we could rebuild that nation. Joe Biden was against that.

JEREMY SCAHILL - HOST, INTERCEPTED: [00:02:34] You are absolutely correct that Biden was agitating against what ended up being this pretty dramatic surge of troops in Afghanistan that brought him derision from the likes of Stanley McChrystal, who was the person Obama chose to run the Afghan surge and war at the time. But Biden's counter proposal was pretty

similar to what Trump now is saying in Afghanistan. Let's keep CIA and special operations forces on stand-by to do targeted strikes and to sort of lean more in the direction of surgical, covert operations rather than large-scale troop deployments.

KELLEY VLAHOS: [00:03:11] That's right. And I get the sense that Biden, as opposed to having his own ideology that he is sort of acting from, he listens to people around him, and I feel like he's listening quite a bit to military voices. And if you listen to anybody, particularly David Petraeus for example, he was on an event recently talking about how leaving a force of 2,000 to 5,000 troops in Afghanistan would be quite appropriate and that we would be maintaining a footprint in that country to A, counter any terrorist flame-ups or to help continue this sort of institution building and not let our allies down. And I feel like that is the overriding approach from the military, that they are insisting that we have some sort of footprint there. And you're hearing it echoed now within his small coterie of transition team members and nominees.

There are much smarter people here in this town than I who will tell you that having that force there is going to do nothing in terms of actually beating back all of the terrorists gains, but it will continue the agitation of the Taliban and the agitation of some of the other terrorist groups that are still operating there. And so this whole idea to maintain a footprint is really just the military not being willing to give up and admit "defeat" in this war, but it still maintains a huge forward operating presence because you have support and contractors which would still be in the country and it would still be stretching ourselves too thin with blood and treasure and keeping these deployments going as they have been for the last 20 years.

JEREMY SCAHILL - HOST, INTERCEPTED: [00:05:13] Well I think one of the most remarkable aspects of the Trump era is just the sameness of U.S. policy when it comes to foreign entanglements, wars, militarism. I don't think you can make a credible case that Donald Trump is somehow wildly outside the scope of normal imperial business under both Democrats and Republicans when you look at his scorched earth policies in Syria, when you look at his wielding of economic sanctions, when you look at his kill-them-all strategy in Afghanistan, as well as his support for Saudi Arabia in Yemen. In fact Trump, himself, authorized, greenlit ground operations in Yemen. He's dramatically expanded drone strikes and covert operations in Somalia. But that was kicked off by the Obama-Biden administration. I think that when you strip away the rhetoric, you'd be hard-pressed to make a case that when it comes to so-called national security policy, Donald Trump was some radical outlier in the scope, particularly the post-9/11 scope, of U.S. national security police. I'm curious your thoughts on that.

KELLEY VLAHOS: [00:06:18] Yeah, I mean, I totally agree with you and I don't mean to sugarcoat Trump's record, you know. I mean, you're absolutely correct and I think one of the least reported elements of his national security policy has been not only the continuing of the drone war but accelerating it in Somalia. So you're correct. It's not like he went in like the bull in the china shop that they all talk about. I mean we all, we have the same policies, pretty much, in Syria, in Somalia, in Afghanistan, in Libya, even Iraq. You know, policy directives have changed, people have gone in and out but really, you know, it remains the same. I think what they just want is one of them, one of the elite establishment creatures that they are used to that make them feel good about themselves, good about our

placement in the world, everything's OK, get the weirdo out of the White House and that we can go on and restore business as usual.

JOE BIDEN: [00:07:26] As Secretary of State I nominate Tony Blinken. He's one of the better prepared for this job. No one's better prepared in my view.

JEREMY SCAHILL - HOST, INTERCEPTED: [00:07:35] Antony Blinken — Tony Blinken — is the nominee for secretary of state. He is a very well-known interventionist. He backed the regime change war in Libya. He wanted more military action in Syria. Blinken now sort of is trying to step away from the Saudi genocidal war in Yemen, but he was a crucial, key player during the Obama administration in advocating for increased sale of weapons to Saudi Arabia. In fact, it was Blinken who went to Riyadh in 2015 as a representative of the Obama administration to announce that the U.S. was expediting its weapons deliveries to Saudi Arabia and he actually said in a press conference that the Saudis were “sending a strong message” with their war in Yemen. Kelley, pick it up from there on Tony Blinken.

KELLEY VLAHOS: [00:08:27] He's been behind every bad foreign policy decision in the Obama administration, whether it be Libya, Syria, Yemen, staying in Afghanistan and, you know, I'm sure he's a nice guy, but he represents this elite Washington establishment, this sort of Washington creature who is very well-versed in international relations and political science. He went to Ivy League schools. He's worked with Biden since his senatorial days. He went right from getting his Ph.D. right into Washington. And so he represents the status quo. And what is that status quo? We will continue to see the Pentagon budgets at a certain level. We will continue to be in Afghanistan. I have seen nothing from Antony Blinken about his position in Afghanistan, being anything other than mirroring what Biden has said. And he has also talked pretty tough about China and it doesn't give me a lot of confidence. That he is going to be bringing in any new, fresh thinking to the job.

What if the U.S. Just Didn't? Part 1 - What Next - Air

Date 12-10-20

MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHAT NEXT: [00:09:40] Peter's views about American leadership aren't exactly popular in some Washington political circles. That's because for years, most American diplomats have seen themselves as essential players on the world stage. Peter does think the US can be helpful abroad, but that argument that if America dialed back its dominance, chaos would ensue, Peter's not buying it.

PETER BEINART: [00:10:04] I'm not against United States involvement in partnership or solidarity at all. What I am against is the notion that we believe that we have some unique right and ability to, as you said, and as Biden said, sit at the head of the table. There may be moments when we sit at the head of the table, but I think that the problem with this metaphor of sitting at the head of the table is it does not acknowledge that we have the capacity to do, to not only just to do good, but to do enormous harm.

And that when we essentially give ourselves the right to set the rules ourselves, we don't take sufficient account of the fact that we are not even often abiding by those rules. We, and no other country, left the Paris climate agreement. We, and no other signatory to the Iran

nuclear deal left the Iran nuclear deal. We, and in the middle of a pandemic and no other country, left the World Health Organization.

We violated, we invaded Iraq in clear violation of international law. We have basically made the World Trade Organization dysfunctional because we have vetoed all appointments to its main panel. We have our record of not ratifying international treaties on things like preservation of the oceans, the rights of women, children, and the disabled, the regulation of arms sales, the regulation of the cluster bombs, nuclear non-proliferation, war crimes, and genocide is unparalleled among any country in the world. And I think the American exceptionalist narrative, which simply takes American innocence as a given, so that when we do things that are wrong, it's simply a mistake, it's out of character. But when other countries do things that violate international law, that's a reflection of who they really are.

I just think a lot of people in the world don't buy that.

MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHAT NEXT: [00:12:03] Well, I want to talk about when you began to see this this way, because my understanding is that you haven't always had this perspective. What was the turning point for you looking back?

PETER BEINART: [00:12:19] I think that I, like some others of my age, my generation, just kind of Generation X, which is the generation of some of Biden's top foreign policy advisors, I think we're very influenced by the events of the 1990s. America's victory in the cold war, the intervention in the Gulf war in 1991 that America won. The debates over America's interventions in Bosnia in 1995 in Kosovo in 1999 were after a lot of fear that these might end up like Vietnam. They actually ended up being interventions that at least appeared at the time as if we had done something good by stopping ethnic cleansing.

I think these set of experiences, the nineties was a period of expanding democracy, a period where America raised its budget deficit, I think led to an excessive faith on my behalf, in both American power and American virtue, in terms of the way we practiced foreign policy overseas.

MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHAT NEXT: [00:13:21] You note that people that are slightly older than you have a different perspective, because of course they were around for the Vietnam war. And so, when your generation came in, there was a little bit of a clash.

PETER BEINART: [00:13:34] Yes. One of the things I noticed and I wrote about this a little bit in a book I wrote called *The Icarus Syndrome*, was that many of the people who were warning about the potential for a Vietnam-style disaster in the 1990s were people who had lived through the Vietnam war.

And I think for those of us who were younger, when the Gulf war and Bosnia and Kosovo did not turn into Vietnam-style quagmires, I think it led us wrongly to kind of disregard Vietnam as an important analogy, an important warning for American foreign policy. So that when this sense of self-confidence in American power was supercharged by 9/11, the Vietnam analogy by that point didn't have nearly as much salience in the debate as it should have.

MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHAT NEXT: [00:14:25] And then of course, we ended up going into Iraq and Afghanistan.

PETER BEINART: [00:14:29] Right. You know, one of the things that I spent quite a few years trying to grapple with after the Iraq war, which the magazine I edited, The New Republic supported, was what were the intellectual assumptions that led me to this kind of hubristic view that the United States could, outside of the framework of international law, overthrow a government and then reconstitute its society in a way that made things better.

MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHAT NEXT: [00:15:02] Part of what makes Peter feel so strongly about this is that he's watched as even humanitarian interventions have terrible outcomes.

PETER BEINART: [00:15:11] It's important to remember that the Iraq war was partly justified as a humanitarian effort to remove a horrific dictator. Libya, which maybe we'll go down as the kind of the end of the era of American humanitarian intervention, was justified that way.

Unknown news anchor: [00:15:28] Muammar Gaddafi, the leader who ruled Libya for four decades by crushing the opposition, could himself be crushed by a popular uprising.

Unknown news reporter: [00:15:37] The US calls it a reign of violence by Colonel Moammar Gaddafi and his cohorts. And it's setting in motion or range of options to stop it.

SECRETARY OF STATE HILLARY CLINTON: [00:15:46] Nothing is off the tables...

MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHAT NEXT: [00:15:47] When he was asked about his worst mistake as president back in 2016, Barack Obama's immediate answer was the US intervention in Libya. Despite his best intentions, Obama acknowledged that after killing Muammar Gaddafi, there simply wasn't a good enough plan.

PETER BEINART: [00:16:06] In Libya, when the Arab Spring broke out, you saw rebellion against the long-serving dictator Muammar Gaddafi. And Gaddafi responded to that by cracking down very brutally against the rebels. And he appeared on the verge of an even more brutal crackdown.

And there was some interest among America's European allies in at least using air power to stop him from being able to do that. And Barack Obama reluctantly agreed to join with Britain and France and other NATO allies to do that. And it then turned -- ultimately what that led to was the overthrow of Gaddafi, but Gaddafi was not replaced by a kind of a government that could represent all of the Libyan people and bring a functional, liberal democratic government. What ultimately happened and was the country fractured into different factions who kept fighting with one another and the two factions were supported by different groups. So ultimately what Libyans got instead of a brutal dictatorship was civil war and a failed state. And that led Obama and others to question whether we had done the right thing by intervening militarily.

MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHAT NEXT: [00:17:33] Yeah. When the United States was considering an intervention, I wonder what that conversation was in Washington.

PETER BEINART: [00:17:40] I think there were folks who felt that it would be a stain on America's conscience if we simply stood by and let Gaddafi carry out what looked like there could be mass killings. And I totally understand that that impulse. I think it comes from a genuinely good place.

And yet I think one of the really hard lessons, painful lessons that I think people have learned, is that states can be fragile. And the alternative to a brutal dictator is not necessarily inclusive, liberal democratic government. Oftentimes what dictators leave in their wake, especially if they're toppled militarily, is state collapse. Especially if the United States is not willing to invest, and its allies and its partners invest massively in a project of nation building as we were not willing to do in Libya.

So it's hard to look at Libya today, which remains a failed state, in a state of civil war, with many outside actors preying upon it, and say that Libya is better off because the US intervened.

MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHAT NEXT: [00:18:48] And we're talking about Joe Biden and his team and what they might mean for US intervention and this idea of American exceptionalism. And I think it's important when we talk about a circumstance like Libya, these characters have been around for a long time. Like the incoming secretary of state Anthony Blinken. He was there for that decision. And as I recall, he and Joe Biden disagreed about what to do.

PETER BEINART: [00:19:18] Yes. Interestingly, Blinken was more interventionist on Libya than Biden was. You know, they remain very close, but their instincts have been a little bit different.

Again, I think Blinken himself is probably chastened by that experience. But I think that my larger concern about Biden and this team has to do with whether they are creating a set of expectations around what our kind of multilateral US foreign policy can do that are unrealistic given the power dynamics that actually exists.

MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHAT NEXT: [00:20:01] Yeah. I mean, I see this incoming team of Joe Biden's having some of the same questions and ideas that you do. Like I was looking at something that Blinken said when he talked about Syria and how he explicitly says, you know, we sought to avoid another Iraq by not doing too much, but we made the opposite error of doing too little in Syria.

And I wonder what you thought about that, because it's another circumstance where of course you could go in with the best of intentions, but you're right: nation building is a lot of work and we haven't really shown that we're great at sticking around and doing it once the military side of things are over.

So I wonder looking at, for instance, Syria and Blinken's perspective on that. Do you think he's toying with some of the same ideas that you are of American exceptionalism and how we should live that in the world or not?

PETER BEINART: [00:21:11] I am very sympathetic to the fact that given how horrific the, after the situation in Syria has been, that that Tony Blinken feels agonized about it. I think he should feel agonized about it. I think that's a credit to him. We want people who feel agonized when there's enormous human suffering. But it does not, I am not convinced of the argument that things would have turned out better had the US intervened more aggressively.

And I think given this set of experiences that we've seen from Iraq, to Libya to Afghanistan, I think the onus has to be now on people who want the United States to intervene aggressively in regime change operations, to be able to prove convincingly that there's a very strong likelihood of a positive outcome, given that we have seen so many negative outcomes over the last two decades. .

Check Your Blindspot 12-12-20

ANNOUNCER: [00:22:06] It's time once again to play America's favorite political game show!

STUDIO AUDIENCE: [00:22:13] Check! Your! Blindspot!

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, CHECK YOUR BLINDSPOT: [00:22:22] That's right. It's Check Your Blindspot, brought to you and powered by our sponsor, the Ground News app, the first ever news comparison platform that provides readers with objective data about the underlying political bias in all published news stories. The Ground News app features the Blindspot, which highlights news stories that just aren't being covered by one end of the political spectrum or the other. So I use the Blindspot to quiz contestants on theirs. With us today is our reigning champion, Amanda from Boston. Welcome back to the show.

AMANDA FROM BOSTON, CONTESTANT: [00:22:55] Thank you. Thank you. Glad to be here.

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, CHECK YOUR BLINDSPOT: [00:22:57] I am going to be telling you about new stories, and you're going to tell me which side of the political spectrum is blind to them.

Are you ready?

AMANDA FROM BOSTON, CONTESTANT: [00:23:06] Yes.

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, CHECK YOUR BLINDSPOT: [00:23:07] Okay. Let's dive right in to round one.

In whose political blindspot is this story? A Michigan lawmaker threatens Trumpers, she refers to them as, and tells them to "walk lightly, we ain't playing with you" and uses the phrase, "make them pay." And the Republicans in the state legislature stripped her of her committee positions in response to this.

AMANDA FROM BOSTON, CONTESTANT: [00:23:37] Yeah. So it's a little tricky because I did hear about this story, but, the headline was more about what the Republicans did and less about what she said. And so I'm going to guess that the angle of what she said that really got Republicans worked up is in the left's blindspot.

ANNOUNCER: [00:24:00] Correct! [applause]

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, CHECK YOUR BLINDSPOT: [00:24:04] That is correct. And, and as we know, headlines are massively important. And so this is a good example of this. Only a handful of outlets, left, right or center, mentioned that her video was in response to several lynching threats she'd received on her voicemail line.

AMANDA FROM BOSTON, CONTESTANT: [00:24:23] Which was the headline I saw. And it talked about her response, but yeah. She's she was threatened with lynching.

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, CHECK YOUR BLINDSPOT: [00:24:32] Yeah. So, this is a good example that on the right, they focus on what she said. And they mentioned that she claimed to have received messages. They didn't just say outright that she actually did, even though tapes had been played, but the headline of course was focused on what she said. Whereas on the left, the reverse happened.

Excellent. Well done. Let's get ready for round two!

In whose political blindspot is this story: the Manhattan DA, according to reports, has intensified their investigation of Trump.

AMANDA FROM BOSTON, CONTESTANT: [00:25:12] [Chuckles] I think this was in the right's blindspot.

[Dinging, cheers] Oh, good!

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, CHECK YOUR BLINDSPOT: [00:25:21] Yeah. That one is pretty clear cut.

To be honest, the alternate story I was considering was that Biden had won the election, and that the electoral college is about to vote. That is a real story that's being published; the right wing isn't aware of that at all. [Gasps from audience]

Excellent. Two for two. Very cut and dry. Let's move on to round three!

In whose political blindspot is this story? A former bin Laden spokesman has been released from US prison and has returned to the UK due to an early mercy release granted because of his obesity and asthma in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

AMANDA FROM BOSTON, CONTESTANT: [00:26:04] Hmm. I'm going to say the right is a little worked up about this. So it's in the left side blindspot? [Dinging, cheers]

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, CHECK YOUR BLINDSPOT: [00:26:18] That is correct. And to be honest, we're talking about the story because it came with the phrase of the day by miles. So here's the headline from the Telegraph: "Former bin Laden spokesman labeled 'obese busted flush,' who poses no threat to the UK. "

AMANDA FROM BOSTON, CONTESTANT: [00:26:39] That's a legal term?

STUDIO AUDIENCE: [00:26:44] Oh, my gosh.

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, CHECK YOUR BLINDSPOT: [00:26:46] Well, I had to look this up. I had no idea. Like I thought it was a cool Britishism or something because he went back to the UK, and so they're talking about it. So no, I had to look it up. The first definition poker players may be familiar with it. It's literally a hand in poker consisting of four cards of the same suit and one that is different, i.e. one card short of a flush. And the second definition is a person, organization or thing that at one time held great potential or influence, but that ultimately ended up in failure.

AMANDA FROM BOSTON, CONTESTANT: [00:27:23] Okay.

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, CHECK YOUR BLINDSPOT: [00:27:24] So they referred to this dude as an obese busted flush.

AMANDA FROM BOSTON, CONTESTANT: [00:27:28] This is creative writing point.

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, CHECK YOUR BLINDSPOT: [00:27:31] Right. Yeah. So the UK is not super thrilled because he was granted asylum in the UK back in the nineties. And so when he was released from prison in the US he was allowed to go back there and like, now he's just there. And so they're writing about it quite a bit.

AMANDA FROM BOSTON, CONTESTANT: [00:27:51] I would bet.

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, CHECK YOUR BLINDSPOT: [00:27:52] Well, good job. That was three for three.

AMANDA FROM BOSTON, CONTESTANT: [00:27:55] Thank you! [Cheers] I do love our fans!

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, CHECK YOUR BLINDSPOT: [00:28:02] Once again, winner and still champion, Amanda from Boston. Thank you for playing.

AMANDA FROM BOSTON, CONTESTANT: [00:28:06] Thank you for having me

That wraps it up for today. It's important to mention that all of today's commentary and analysis is ours alone, and definitely not to that of the staunchly unopinionated Ground News.

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STUDIO AUDIENCE: [00:28:32] Check! Your! Blindspot!

State-Sanctioned Killers: As Trump Expedites Executions at Home, Biden Builds Team for Wars Abroad part 2 - Intercepted with Jeremy Scahill - Air Date 12-9-20

JEREMY SCAHILL - HOST, INTERCEPTED: [00:29:00] President-elect Joe Biden is assembling his national security team. On Monday night reports emerged that he had selected former U.S. Central Command chief Gen. Lloyd Austin as his defense secretary. Austin, who retired from the Pentagon in 2016, would need a waiver from Congress to serve in this civilian post because he has not been separated from the military for seven years. That's required by U.S. law. In fact, that's exactly what Trump did when he appointed Gen. James Mattis and it raises serious questions about the historical civilian oversight of the Pentagon.

But also, Austin is yet another potential nominee who has cashed in on his military tenure in retirement and embodies the revolving door between government and for-profit war corporations. He currently sits on the board of the giant defense firm Raytheon. He is also a D.C. partner in a capital investment firm that invests in defense contractors. But Gen. Austin is hardly the only example of these characters populating the incoming Biden administration, and the outgoing Trump administration. In fact, Biden's national security team, much like Trump's, is shaping up to be a corporate profiteer-filled venture that highlights some of the worst special interest facets of how legalized influence peddling is done in Washington D.C.

FOX: [00:30:21] And Republicans and government watchdogs alike are calling for answers. Senator Cornyn tweeting: "I want to see what foreign countries, if any, they have worked for." And the Project on Government Oversight's Mandy Smithberger saying, "We want to make sure that they are not beholden to anyone else and that any decisions they would make would be beyond reproach."

JEREMY SCAHILL - HOST, INTERCEPTED: [00:30:39] Biden's nominees include people who are notorious hawks, people who were central to the genocidal war in Yemen, the sales of weapons to Saudi Arabia, the regime change war in Libya, the war in Syria, the assassination and drone programs, the use of economic sanctions as a deadly weapon. It is, in short, shaping up to be a kettle of hawks.

Biden is still in the midst of compiling his cabinet, but on national security it's looking a lot like a replay of the Obama-Biden militarist coterie. There are undoubtedly foreign policy areas where the Biden administration will correct the egregious actions of Trump, particularly in the case of the Iran nuclear deal. But there are also areas where Biden could prove more hawkish than Trump, particularly on North Korea, Afghanistan and the question of troop deployments. In all the beltway scuttlebutt around Biden's cabinet, there is no mention of open critics of U.S. warmaking being considered for any key national security positions. That's not an oversight. That's how the business of protecting the militarized myth of American exceptionalism is performed by the establishment Democratic Party.

Joining me now is Kelley Vlahos, the executive editor of the anti-war publication The American Conservative. She is also a senior advisor to the newly formed Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. That's a new transpartisan think-tank created by anti-war progressives, libertarians, and other advocates of military restraint. Kelly Vlahos, thank you so much for being with us here on Intercepted.

KELLEY VLAHOS: [00:32:13] Thank you, Jeremy.

JEREMY SCAHILL - HOST, INTERCEPTED: [00:32:15] What is the big picture, in your assessment, of Joe Biden's victory in the November election.

KELLEY VLAHOS: [00:32:20] I find it very interesting and somewhat disappointing in many respects because I feel like the main takeaway from all of the remarks made in public by Biden's transition team and the foreign policy and national security picks he's made so far is oriented around this idea that the adults are back in the room.

JOE BIDEN: [00:32:43] While this team has unmatched experience and accomplishments, they also reflect the idea that we cannot meet these challenges with old thinking and unchanged habits.

KELLEY VLAHOS: [00:32:55] We're hearing a lot about outreach to partners and allies overseas. We're getting our internationalist order back in check and we are now going to be leading the world the way we were supposed to do before Trump came along and cracked everything up.

WOLF BLITZER: [00:33:14] We're following breaking news. President-elect Joe Biden declaring, and I'm quoting now, "America is back," as he formally introduced key cabinet picks. He said, "The team shows the country is ready to lead the world, not retreat from it."

JOE BIDEN: [00:33:27] Experience and leadership. Fresh thinking and perspective. And an unrelenting belief in the promise of America. I've long said that America leads not only by the example of our power, but by the power of our example. And I'm proud to put forward this incredible team.

KELLEY VLAHOS: [00:33:47] To me that just says that we're going back to the status quo. We're talking about at least forty years, if not more, of failed policies, endless wars and overseas global primacy — some of these things that Trump had actually tried to address, believe it or not. Now that he has been sort of exposed as being little more than a disruptor and nothing else, there seems to be this blobby return to "normalcy" and you realize, Wow, we are probably going to go back another four years or more to the way it was in Washington.

JOY REID: [00:34:27] It's also an attempt to bring back normalcy to what has been nothing but a clown show at 1600 Black Lives Matter Plaza. Now, in case you forgot what normal sounds like, here it is.

ANTHONY BLINKEN: [00:34:37] America at its best still has a greater ability than any other country on Earth to bring others together to meet the challenges of our time.

AVRIL HAINES: [00:34:45] I know, Mr. President-elect and Madam Vice-president elect, that you've selected us not to serve you but to serve on behalf of the American people.

LINDA THOMAS-GREENFIELD: [00:34:54] On this day I'm thinking about the American people, my fellow career diplomats and public servants around the world. I want to say to you: America is back.

JOE BIDEN: [00:35:05] America is back. We're at the head of the table once again. I have spoken with over 20 world leaders.

JEREMY SCAHILL - HOST, INTERCEPTED: [00:35:11] Set aside whatever anyone wants to allege about Trump's motivations in the 11th hour, we need to get out of Afghanistan and we need to do it as quickly as possible. I think Trump is right about that, even if I think the guy is a totally insincere charlatan in so many ways. But I think it's a useful exercise to sort of examine how the bi-partisan war party on Capitol Hill has responded to these inadvertently anti-interventionist moments of Trump, whether it's overtures toward North Korea or, in the case of Afghanistan, saying let's get out.

The Democrats simultaneously would tell the country that Donald Trump is the most dangerous ever to hold that office and then at the same time they would vote for record-shattering military expenditures and military budgets. They would vote for sweeping surveillance powers. And they're sort of apoplectic right now at the thought that we might

actually pull troops out of Afghanistan. Wrestle, Kelley, for a bit with that dynamic, that you have Trump who is kind of, you know, insincere, liar, charlatan, but occasionally seems to want to do what ultimately people like you and I would think is the right thing: to get out of U.S. wars.

KELLEY VLAHOS: [00:36:25] Yeah, I think “wrestle with it” is like the perfect description of what I, personally, have been doing in the last four years because I had worked most of that time as an editor at The American Conservative, which was founded in 2002 in opposition to the Iraq War policy. So we had been foursquare against these endless wars to begin with. So when President Trump or then-candidate Trump had come out and said, Iraq was a failure, we need to get out of these protracted occupations and interventions in the Middle East, it’s not doing anything for our country.

DONALD TRUMP: [00:37:02] The war in Iraq was a big, fat mistake, alright? Now, you can take it anyway you want.

KELLEY VLAHOS: [00:37:08] And when he won we continued to champion any moves he made to get out of Afghanistan, to get out of Syria, to, you know, basically rein in some of the impulses by more hawkish members of his team and in Congress. But then he did a lot of things that, you know, we would not agree with, like getting out of the Iranian nuclear deal, as well as leaving a force in Syria to ostensibly protect oil, the assassination of Qassem Soleimani. And so, it was a mixed bag. So, yeah, wrestling with Trump, as well as his behavior, as well as his approach, his lack of governance, you know, it was pretty tough for non-interventionists.

When you talk about Democrats, though, the fact that they could not get off their butts to get us out of Afghanistan for four years, to actually reset that policy, to get behind the negotiations in a way that would have been helpful. And then when Trump finally makes a stand to say, I want to reduce troops there, they partner with the Republican hawks to try to press legislation that would hold back funds to actually withdraw. So you have these Democrats, who supposedly are against endless wars, who are supposedly for the troops, would penalize the administration for trying to get out of war.

I do want to caveat that by saying there were some true attempts to get out of the war in Yemen. Both the House and the Senate passed votes that would end our assistance to Saudi Arabia in that war, and that is highly commendable. The President vetoed it, another thing that we, as conservative non-interventionists, were against. So, there were some good things that Congress did. But I entirely agree with you that Democrats, I guess, in their spite of Trump have actually kept up from getting out of that war in Afghanistan when the majority of Americans say, in polling after polling, that they want out.

Why Biden Can't Go Back to the Foreign Policy Status-Quo w/ Stephen Wertheim - The Majority Report w/ Sam Seder - Air Date 12-2-20

STEPHEN WERTHEIM: [00:39:21] The senior advisors around Biden recognized that the so-called unipolar moment that the United States enjoyed at the end of the 1990s was just that;

it's a moment and it's past. And actually, the Trump administration has recognized the same thing in its national security strategy.

The problem is that, you know, this could lead you in broadly one of two directions. You can say, okay, the United States didn't even play its incredibly favorable hand well in the most propitious circumstances imaginable. Why should we think it's going to get better going forward? Let's recalculate what threats we face, what our interests are, and judiciously pull back our military force around the world. That's basically what I'm for.

But what the Trump administration, the Pentagon in particular, has done is say, Oh, this is a problem. And now we need to get tougher now that we face a world with a great power competitors, near peer competitors Russia and China. We didn't expect them to rise, and now they're doing bad things. And so now we've got a focus on them, even as we continue to not be able to wind down our own wars in the Middle East and elsewhere.

And, you know, I think that that there's actually mainstream bipartisan agreement on that score, and that's troubling. And so I worry that some of the senior people around Biden basically are going to continue this notion of great power competition to orient the United States, which can provide an argument for getting out of the Middle East in order to focus on China in particular. But I think that's an attempt to cling to as much military dominance as possible in conditions that have obviously changed internationally and domestically. I don't think that would be sufficient to bring about the change that we need.

SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT: [00:41:27] That's basically the first point of five that you make in the foreign policy piece, which is the Biden administration should not pursue global military dominance. And where it, I mean, I don't know, let's move on to point 2, because I want to maybe circle back into that, because the question of China and what global military dominance means in an era where China is at least perceived to be ascendant. You say the second thing is the Biden administration must deliver on its promise to end the forever wars. You touched on that. That's Afghanistan.

Where else do we need to pull back? I mean, Afghanistan, we have now, you know, it's interesting. Trump tried to take off the table I guess half our forces there, which would be about 2,500, if I'm not mistaken. And there was broad pushback on this, in part because it's Trump, or ostensibly because it was Trump, but maybe because of other reasons. Where else do we need to disengage and, and what does that disengagement look like? I mean, do we just leave Afghanistan? What does that say to our NATO allies, although we're get to NATO as another question as well.

STEPHEN WERTHEIM: [00:42:42] Yeah. So, I mean, we've got a forever war framework via the war on terror that spans across a good portion of the globe: the greater Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan included in there. The US has ground troops not just in Afghanistan, but also in Iraq still, Syria and Somalia. And I think the Biden administration, not just to secure our interests and protect our people, but also to restore a modicum of credibility where the American people should bring those conflicts to a close in a clear way over the course of its four years. It really would not be a good thing if the next candidate can run saying, you know, Joe Biden has prosecuted the forever war still. And there's just overwhelming support -- about three quarters of the American public which doesn't agree on very much -- agrees that US troops should come home from Afghanistan and Iraq. That's just an overwhelming number. So, I think to restore some health to our own democracy and

by the way, not create the sense of . . . keep feeding this sense of existential fear that we have enemies out there that want to kill us, and that's why we've got to kill them. This is incredibly important to bring those conflicts to a close.

And it should be done responsibly but in the case of Afghanistan the United States has made an agreement with the Taliban, and US troops were supposed to fully come home at the end of April. I actually think that if Trump had been able to bring US troops fully home from Afghanistan, it would have done Biden a favor and avoided Biden having to make now some difficult decisions. But, it's just unimaginable to me how the United States now, with a very small capacity, is fundamentally going to change the balance of power on the ground in Afghanistan.

We just cannot expect that we're going to lose a war, fight a war for 20 years, not be successful in achieving our grandiose goals and then refuse to leave until conditions are ideal on the ground. They're not going to be ideal. You know, it was the right thing to end the war in Vietnam. It did lead to the North's takeover of Vietnam, but we have to be able to live with the consequences and get what we need and what we need is to make sure that Afghanistan does not become a haven from which the United States is targeted by terrorists. And that's something we should evaluate just as we evaluate threats from terrorism elsewhere without continuing to be a participant in the violence in Afghanistan.

SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT: [00:45:42] Whoa, Whoa! I've forgotten now. What was ostensibly our mission in Afghanistan? I mean, I remember when Bin Laden was in Tora Bora, and we surrounded him and then let him go, essentially because we had to put people into Iraq, but what was the -- and I remember there was a brief moment where people were talking about women's rights in Afghanistan, and putting in a democratically elected government there that is going to be in charge of not just Kabul but everywhere. But we didn't put any resources into that country beyond our military, it seems to me. I don't remember the big project to build all the roads or build schools or schools or the -- I think at one point we were painting them. But that ended, it seems to me, 15 years ago. And we've just been there, maybe keeping the Taliban from taking over a certain part of the country at any given point. I mean, is that basically what the mission has been? And that doesn't seem to be doing, like you say, I guess it doesn't seem to be doing anything.

STEPHEN WERTHEIM: [00:46:54] Well, the release of the Afghanistan papers last year revealed just how skeptical most senior officials and military leaders have been that the United States could achieve its objective in Afghanistan from the beginning. I mean the initial objectives is actually something that I support. Look, the United States was attacked on 9/11. The enemy was Al-Qaeda. The United States then set out to decimate Al-Qaida and also punish the Taliban government for harboring Al-Qaeda. That makes sense. That goal was quickly achieved.

Unfortunately, we did not get the leader of Al Qaeda, Bin Laden. But nevertheless, Al-Qaeda was hurt badly. It was quickly achieved. And so instead of saying, okay, if we don't pull back now, we'll never have a coherent reason to pull back. We continued and expanded the mission to nation building, making -- exactly who believed that we were going to turn Afghanistan into a liberal democracy is an interesting question, and when those beliefs waxed and waned. But we've actually made considerable effort. It's not exactly for want of trying; the Obama administration implemented a major surge of troops in Afghanistan and

caught Bin Laden. So there was another off-ramp to say, Hey, we have achieved our mission. If we don't stop this now, when is it going to end? But unfortunately that off-ramp was not taken. And so here we are with a war that basically nobody can defend. I mean, the Taliban keeps gaining ground. Nobody is seriously proposing in Washington to come up with a creative strategy backed by significant new resources to really change the equation.

We're afraid to leave.

What if the U.S. Just Didn't? Part 2 - What Next - Air Date 12-10-20

MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHAT NEXT: [00:48:49] I wonder if you think president Trump's term has been kind of an experiment here? Because while Trump involved himself abroad a bit like in North Korea, in the middle East, the last four years, the US has withdrawn from the international stage. What's happened when we did that?

PETER BEINART: [00:49:10] Well, I don't think it's quite right to say the United States is withdrawn. I would say the United States has wielded its power in different ways. The United States has been extremely unilateral, levying sanctions on all kinds of countries, even countries that are traditionally our allies. We have withdrawn from all, you know, we were not great about signing up for international agreements or ready, but we've withdrawn now from a kind of unprecedented number of them.

So I think what's what we've seen with Trump is not as, I think it's sometimes described, isolationism, but unilateralism, essentially the notion that American power should be bounded by no authority, legal or moral, beyond what America sees as in its own narrow self-interest. And I think that has really eroded whatever was left of the belief in much of the world that the United States was pursuing kind of a common good in the world.

MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHAT NEXT: [00:50:11] It sounds like a more extreme version of what was already happening.

PETER BEINART: [00:50:15] Yes, I think that's right. I mean, it is important to remember that again, if you look at George W. Bush's administration, the Bush administration not only would not enter the International Criminal Court, which was designed to create an opportunity to prosecute war crimes and genocide, because of the fear that we might one day be prosecuted, but it basically gave the United States the right to virtually take military action to ensure that the International Criminal Court never brought proceedings against the United States.

And I just think we should stop there for a moment and think about that. So basically the position of United States is by definition, our behavior should never be a subject to the kind of international moral standards of human rights behavior.

That's what Trump has done is essentially taken that logic and taking it even further. But that logic has a deep history in American foreign policy. He did not invent it. And I think it's part of the reason that other countries look at the United States and say, On what moral authority do you claim to have to exercise the right of moral leadership for the world?

MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHAT NEXT: [00:51:27] I can understand why your argument may be hard for some people to accept, because part of it means accepting a little bit that America is maybe on the down slope. But then there's also this issue we're talking about now, which is the fact that Americans have behaved badly abroad, and everyone seems to know it and there's been no accountability, but it seems to me that to get people to accept the argument you're making, that America should have a little bit of a humbler role abroad, the first thing we have to do is convince Americans of that second part, of the fact that we didn't do such a great job. And sometimes it's obvious with Iraq and Afghanistan. And then I, some sometimes I think it's not.

PETER BEINART: [00:52:20] I would say, first of all, that it's interesting that if you look at polling, pretty consistently polling does not suggest that Americans want to withdraw from the world, and have America have no role, but neither do they want America to be the single dominant force. Mostly what they want, even if it sounds kind of soft and mushy, is cooperation. They want America to be one country cooperating with other countries. So they're actually, in public opinion, is surprising amount of support for this, and surprisingly little support for the notion of America as the single dominant power, which is often something which is popular in foreign policy circles.

The second point I would make is that there is often a tendency in foreign policy discourse to associate America, the kind of America's global footprint, particularly its global military footprint, you know, who has more power in Syria or in the Caucasus, Russia or the United States? To associate that with the wellbeing of ordinary Americans. And I think if there's one thing we can take away from the Trump experience and the fact that he was elected, was that many Americans don't buy that necessarily. And they're right not to buy it. It is not necessarily the case that America having more influence in more countries around the world and having a larger military footprint in those countries necessarily benefits ordinary Americans. In some ways, it actually detracts from our ability to take care of things here at home. And one of the things that worries me about the Biden folks is that I see in their writing, you know, not a willingness to really look seriously at cutting the defense budget, but instead, an effort to kind of talk about beefing up deterrence vis-a-vis China, so we can compete with China in places like the South China Sea. And I think for an ordinary American, who's just gone through the pandemic, surely that the priority should not be the balance of military power in the South China Sea, but it should be whether the United States can build a welfare state that can literally keep our people alive.

So I worry that the balance there is out of whack. You see Americans asking themselves, what is in it for me? What is in it for me in American global power? How is it actually benefiting me? And a kind of skepticism of the easy equation that I think you often find that ordinary Americans are better off when the United States has a larger footprint around the world. It may well be that, if America were to retract some of its military influence and power around the world and redeploy some of those resources and energy towards trying to build a more functional society at home, that actually Americans at home would benefit from that.

A Trap? Why Assassination of Top Iranian Nuclear Scientist Could Tie Biden's Hands in Future Talks - Democracy Now! - Air Date 11-30-20

AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: [00:55:18] Iran's top nuclear scientist was assassinated while driving on a highway outside of Tehran on Friday. Iran accused Israel of orchestrating the killing of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, who reportedly led Iran's nuclear program. A state funeral was held today in Tehran, where photographs of him were displayed next to Iranian commander Qassem Soleimani, who was assassinated by a U.S. drone strike in Baghdad 10 months ago. The Iranian defense minister, Amir Hatami, spoke at the funeral.

AMIR HATAMI: [00:55:57] [translated] The enemy knows, and I as a soldier tell them, that no crime, no terror and no stupid act will remain unanswered by the Iranian people, and we will severely pursue the criminals. They must know that they will be punished for their actions. ... The criminal United States has thousands of nuclear weapons, and the criminal Zionist regime has hundreds of nuclear weapons. What are these weapons for? Are these weapons for use as decor in your home?

AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: [00:56:26] Iran's foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, has described the killing of the top nuclear scientist as an act of state terror. Conflicting details have emerged about how he died. Iranian state media initially said gunmen ambushed his car in the countryside. But now a top Iranian official says he was killed by an automatic remote-controlled machine gun placed inside an empty vehicle.

Israel has long been accused of targeting Iranian nuclear scientists. Between 2010 and 2012, four Iranian nuclear scientists were assassinated. Many analysts say Friday's assassination was designed to make it harder for President-elect Joe Biden to rejoin the landmark 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran, which President Trump withdrew from in 2018.

The assassination comes just weeks after Trump privately inquired if he could bomb Iran's main nuclear site prior to leaving office. Iran has long maintained its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes. Earlier this month, international inspectors reported Iran's low-enriched uranium stockpile is growing again, but that the uranium is being enriched at a level suitable for nuclear power plants, not nuclear weapons.

We go now to Negar Mortazavi. She's an Iranian American journalist and political analyst, host of The Iran Podcast.

We welcome you to Democracy Now! Can you start off, Negar, by talking about the significance of this assassination, what's understood at this point, and then the fact that Iran is accusing Israel, and Israel has not commented?

NEGAR MORTAZAVI: [00:58:09] Good morning, Amy. Sure. As you said, this is not the first nuclear scientist in Iran being assassinated. Israel has always denied involvement, but it's really the only country with both the motivation and the capability to conduct such attacks.

Mohsen Fakhrizadeh was a top person in the nuclear and defense infrastructure of Iran. He was well guarded. The country knew that he was a target. Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli prime

minister, had named him two years ago in a presentation. He said, “Remember this name: Mohsen Fakhrizadeh.” So the security services knew that he would be a potential target for the Israelis. He was well guarded.

And the fact that this operation was successfully launched — it was first said that it was an ambush. Now there’s talk of an automatic weapon. We’re still not sure how exactly it unfolded, but it was successful, and he’s dead now. It’s just a blow to Iran’s security system. And it’s also — I believe it’s a political move to first try to provoke Iran into a violent retaliation and basically pull Iran into a wider military conflict with the United States, and then also complicate future negotiations between Tehran and Washington when President-elect Biden enters office, which I think this will complicate those future negotiations.

AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: [00:59:36] So, can you talk about whether you believe the United States is involved with this, too? As I just pointed out, we did report earlier that President Trump had asked his top military officials if they could bomb Natanz, the nuclear site in Iran, before he leaves office. But what kind of complicity — do you feel there was complicity here?

NEGAR MORTAZAVI: [01:00:06] Amy, it’s hard to say for sure, and we haven’t heard any confirmation from Israel or the United States, but it’s important to note that there has been some travel back and forth by Mike Pompeo to the region. He’s been meeting with the Israelis, with the Saudis, with the Emiratis. And this was the same pattern last year, right before the assassination of Iranian commander Qassem Soleimani. There was also some traveling back and forth and meetings between Mike Pompeo and the Trump administration’s close allies in the Middle East.

We don’t know. I’m not sure if we’re ever going to know. But I wouldn’t rule it out that this was at least done with a green light and approval of the Trump administration by the Israelis. You know, the Trump administration, President Trump’s orbit, especially someone like Mike Pompeo — he’s been always looking for a military confrontation with Iran or a strike on Iran’s nuclear sites, and this is their final weeks in office. So I wouldn’t rule it out, if this came at least with a nod or approval from the United States.

AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: [01:01:11] And so, talk about how Iran is responding inside, across the political spectrum, and those like Rouhani who recognize that as Trump comes to the end of his term and, at all levels, domestically and internationally, is trying to reinforce what he has done, whether we’re talking about withdrawal from the climate accord and try to prevent Joe Biden from rejoining, to withdraw from the Iranian nuclear deal. This is the Iranian president, Hassan Rouhani, speaking following the assassination.

PRESIDENT HASSAN ROUHANI: [01:01:49] [translated] This brutal and cowardly terror attack showed that our enemies are experiencing weeks of anxiety, weeks when they feel their stress is being reduced and global conditions are changing. ... The relevant authorities will respond to this crime in a timely and appropriate manner.

AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: [01:02:10] And I’d like to go back to 2018, when the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called out Fakhrizadeh as the director of Iran’s nuclear weapons project and urged people to, quote, “remember that name.”

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: [01:02:26] Iran devised a plan to do two things: first, to preserve the nuclear know-how from Project AMAD, and, second, to further develop its nuclear weapons-related capabilities. That plan came directly from Iran's top leadership. ... A key part of the plan was to form new organizations to continue the work. This is how Dr. Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, head of Project AMAD, put it. Remember that name: Fakhrizadeh.

AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: [01:02:53] Your response, Negar?

NEGAR MORTAZAVI: [01:02:56] Well, let me first clarify that the nuclear — or, the weapons-related part of Iran's program, the AMAD program, was stopped somewhere around 2003, year 2003. And this is — the U.N. watchdog, the IAEA, even U.S. State Department reports have confirmed that Iran no longer has a weapons-related program. So this is something that Benjamin Netanyahu alleges, but other international entities haven't confirmed it.

But there is a national debate, basically, ongoing in Iran on one — I would say one main argument is that because Iran doesn't retaliate, if Iran does not respond to such an assassination, to Israeli — basically target Israeli target, this type of assassination will continue with impunity, because we see how Israel has been carrying these out with a sort of impunity.

There's another argument, sort of the opposite argument, more of the pro-diplomacy camp, that is recognizing that this might be a trap set by Netanyahu to basically prevent future diplomacy, to pull Iran into a military conflict, and that Iranians should be aware and not take the bait. And this is something I recognize in President Rouhani's statements. We hear sort of the same line from Javad Zarif. And that camp, the pro-diplomacy camp, is more expecting condemnation from the international community. They haven't been very happy from statements that came from the European Union. They weren't very strong statements. They expect the international community to call this what it is — an assassination, terrorism — and to condemn it with strong condemnation.

So, that would give — if such condemnations continue to come from the international community, it would strengthen that argument that Iran shouldn't act rash and retaliate in a way that Netanyahu has been trying to provoke Iran. But there's also talks of harsh revenge, retaliation and, as the supreme leader also said, punishment for the perpetrators of this assassination.

AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: [01:05:07] And which side do you think will prevail within Iran?

NEGAR MORTAZAVI: [01:05:12] I don't think that the retaliation will be that provocative. The president has said it would be done in a timely manner, so it means that it could — you know, they could drag it. And if they do drag it, the only silver lining of this event could be that Iran can use this as leverage when the Biden administration comes in, to be like, "Look" — the pro-diplomacy camp can go to the table with Biden and say, "Look, we've dragged the hard-liners until now. We've stopped them. We've contained them. But you need to make this deal pretty fast, before, you know, time runs out."

Because we've heard from the Biden camp also, people in Joe Biden's orbit, that maybe the sanctions put on by the Trump administration should be used as leverage when negotiations with Iran happen and to delay a return to the nuclear deal, which I don't think is a good idea.

I think the Biden administration should prioritize a return to diplomacy, to the nuclear deal, and make it fast and clean, to then continue follow-on negotiations beyond the JCPOA.

Summary

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: [01:06:15] We've just heard clips today, starting with *Intercepted* discussing the replay of the Obama-Biden foreign policy cabinet. *What Next* talked with Peter Beinart about the argument for the U.S. taking a step back from the presumed position of leader of the world. We heard our latest episode of *Check Your Blindspot*. *Intercepted* discussed the cross-partisan alliance of anti-interventionists who oppose the forever wars. *The Majority Report* discussed how and why we're stuck in Afghanistan, even though no one can make an argument for why we need to be there. And *What Next* finished their talk with Peter Beinart explaining why people have stopped believing that the U.S. having international dominance is actually beneficial to their lives.

That's what everyone heard, but members also got a bonus clip from *Democracy Now* discussing why the assassination of a top Iranian nuclear scientist could tie Biden's hands in future talks. For non-members, that bonus clip is linked in the show notes and is part of today's transcript so you can still find it if you want to make the effort, but to hear that and all of our bonus content delivered seamlessly into your podcast feed, sign up to support the show at bestoftheleft.com or request a financial hardship membership because we don't make a lack of funds a barrier to hearing more information. So every request is granted. No questions asked.

We have a couple of VoicedMails for you today discussing the connection between the Confederacy of the Southern United States and its origin story in Scotland. The first one we're going to hear is referencing that episode and the Jacobite uprising in Scotland of the 1700s. I think that's all the context you need.

Fan of Outlander - Cara

VOICEDMAILER: CARA: [01:08:02] Hi, this is Cara. This is my first email. It's short and nothing important to say. Just wanted to cry cuz I love the show "Outlander." If you don't know it, basically it's a fictional time travel story based on some books, where a 1920s woman is accidentally sent back in time to the exact moment in time this episode talks about, where she falls in love with a Jacobite soldier. The show is a mix of sci-fi and some history. They show that war, then them eventually coming to America before the government was established.

I admit I definitely didn't know the real history and truly enjoy the show for many reasons. But damn! Now that I know this history and how the show definitely portrays it as a romantic underdog story, I'm a bit conflicted now. I'm very invested, and honestly I'll still probably watch, but ugh! It's gonna be a little more difficult. Though luckily in the show the main character is against owning slaves and feeds to a more modern audience. But still....

I was sad to think I couldn't watch a show I genuinely enjoy for the characters and story quite the same way again, and that it actually has a bit of a mixed message, even if it is technically fiction. Like how much I cried when in the most recent episodes he put his kilt back on after several seasons where he couldn't wear it for the story, then he brought everyone together

by burning the cross. In the context of the show, it's a high-emotion positive moment, this hard lefty cried her eyes out. But through history, that moment isn't quite the same based on that episode.

Final comments Part 1

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: [01:09:26] So what I would say first to Cara and all the other *Outlander* fans out there, speaking of which I had heard of *Outlander* before, but I hadn't watched it so it didn't even cross my mind to reference it in that episode. But what I would say to all of you is chill out and enjoy your show. There's nothing to feel guilty about or bad about because the lost cause narratives of Scotland and the Confederate South are similar and run along similar tracks doesn't mean they come from similarly toxic origins.

Now it's not like everything about the Scotland story is pure as the driven snow, but it's not nearly as noxious as what we know the Lost Cause of the South is based on. You know, we're talking about kilts and haggis and Catholicism versus slavery—there's a big gap there and that's the key difference. The reason why the Lost Cause of the Confederate South is terrible and should be banished from everyone's minds is because it is based on slavery, and no one should build a fantasy world to defend that.

The fantasy world that the Jacobite story is defending is, it's the whole fantasy world of the divine right of kings and all of that, and so that's fantasy on top of fantasy. But having your king be in place rather than another king be in place or your religion be in charge versus another slightly different religion be in charge is not inherently oppressive.

And for more clarification on this, we'll hear from our second VoicedMail of the day, coming from a real life Scott living, presumably undercover, in secret, behind enemy lines, in London. But because it's a VoicedMail and unfortunately I don't have a Scottish accent voice, instead you get to enjoy Mark with - he's the first person to choose the "In a World" movie announcer voice, presumably to help conceal his identity even further.

Jacobite Uprising/Confederacy Episode - Marc from London (Scotland Originally!)

VOICEDMAILER: MARC FROM LONDON: [01:11:49] Hi Jay, this is Marc from London, from Scotland originally.

I always enjoy your show but I found your recent episode on lost causes particularly interesting. I had considered the parallels between the romanticisation of the Jacobite uprising in Scotland and the cause of the Confederacy in the Southern states of the USA, but I had no idea that there was actually a direct link between the two phenomena.

Although not as foul a cause as that of the Confederacy, the restoration of the Stuarts was an attempt to bring back Catholic absolutism in place of the constitutional monarchy which had been established in 1688 with the Glorious Revolution. The defeat of the Jacobites at Culloden was the final nail in the coffin for this reactionary movement and should really be celebrated on that basis, rather than being romanticised by tartan shortbread tins emblazoned with pictures of "Bonnie Prince Charlie."

A recent development has been the adoption by the Scottish independence movement of the slogan, "We are the 45." Following their defeat in the 2014 referendum, the vote was 45% yes, 55% no.

I just wanted to pick up on one detail of the show which was not quite correct. The opening sequence referred to the repression of the Scots language, and then played a clip of Harry Potter being read in Scots. The language of the Scottish Highlanders was Gaelic, similar to Irish Gaelic. It was this language which was repressed following the defeat of the Jacobites as part of the general repression of the Highlanders for having supported the Stuart restoration. The Scots language, or dialect depending on your view, is a variant of English and is the language of lowland Scots, e.g. Robert Burns.

Keep up the great work.

Final comments Part 2

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: [01:13:34] So there you go, you heard it from Mark. If you want to watch Outlander and still feel good about it, even knowing the ultimate historical connections between the Jacobite rebellion and the Lost Cause of the Confederacy, I think you should go right ahead because that connection looks a lot worse for the Confederacy than it does for the Jacobites.

However, what you may want to feel bad about is rooting for the side that would have wanted to reimplement authoritarian Catholicism, which, and just think how that would have played out. They would have turned England back into a Catholic nation along with the colonies, and then here in the U.S. there would be so many more statues of the Virgin Mary. I mean, like so many more. And you want that on your conscience? Uh, I don't know.

Quick last note on the Jacobites though. My absolute favorite little tidbit is whatever happened to Bonnie Prince Charlie? You hear about him waging this rebellion and losing and going away, and then...what happened? Well, this is my favorite little bit. So for the uninitiated, you just need to know that bonnie means beautiful or good looking. So, you might hear reference to a bonnie lass or the bonnie, bonnie banks of Loch Lomond or Bonnie Prince Charlie, obviously. And so a one sign in a museum in Scotland says after Culloden, when Bonnie Prince Charlie was defeated, "Charles, unable to raise support for another uprising, eventually died, alcoholic, disillusioned, and no longer Bonnie."

Now the last thing today, as I promised at the top, I'll give you a little bit more of an update on our impromptu emergency fundraiser that we have going on right now. I announced a couple episodes back that we lost our Amazon affiliate program funds, which is the equivalent, or was the equivalent of about 400 members. And I hoped beyond hope that we could maybe recoup that somehow. And so the update is that with new signups and gift memberships and existing members increasing their monthly or yearly donation, I've done the math, it was a little complicated, but I think we've recouped about 250 members worth, which is amazing! I don't think we've ever had that kind of boost in funding from memberships and donations all at once, ever.

So that is, on one hand, amazing and excellent, and, on the other, not quite there yet. So we just have to keep talking about this. But remember, we are not just trying to squeeze more

and more money out of the existing listeners, we are trying to expand our listenership as wide as possible. So just to reiterate, if you can sign up for a membership or want to give a membership away as a gift, then that is fantastic. You know how much progress we've made, we just need to make a little bit more. Given the size of our audience 150 people is simultaneously not that much, but also it's the holiday season, and we're in the middle of a pandemic, and there are a lot of reasons why people don't want to part with their money.

And I would just say that this show at the level that is running with the production value and time that is put into it has a lot of expenses. It's not just my life, giving me enough money to survive, we have researchers to pay. We have Amanda, who does everything behind the scenes. There's software and services and hosting. And just all the things, like Amanda made a list the other day that I don't have in front of me, but it's like shockingly long, the number of things that we just have to pay for to help make the show run.

And so we just have to keep raising money because going backwards, isn't that much of an option. It's hard to get to the level we are and then decide, well, let's just do it cheaper. Let's just do less research. Let's just not have researchers or let's just not do this or that. To go backwards is really difficult, and frankly, I don't think anyone wants that. I obviously don't, so we just have to keep looking for ways to expand the audience.

I'm excited about the Refer-O-Matic and I think we have great rewards for you if you take the time to sign up, which is obviously free, you just putting your name and email address, and when you refer people to the show using your link, which creates a really easy, seamless way for people to sign up. So it's something that you can put on social media, you can email to people, send a text message to people. It makes it really, like one tap, easy for people to sign up, which is great. I feel like that's one of the sticking points with podcasts a lot of the time is not quite sure how to do it, or even if you know how to do it, there's a little bit of a hassle. Sending a referral link makes it as easy as anyone can make it to sign up for a podcast. So if you do that, then we have great rewards for you, including obviously me thanking you on the show and - look, honestly, amazing smartphone wallpaper images that Amanda and I created that we're super proud of and really want for people to be able to see and enjoy. So you just have to refer five people to the show and that's the first reward you get. So check that out.

The links to everything we want you to do are in the show notes, and we appreciate you doing whatever you can do to help us get through this unexpectedly tight financial period that we're going through right now.

So, as always keep the comments coming in at (202) 999-3991 or by emailing me to jay@bestoftheleft.com. That is going to be it for today. Thanks to everyone for listening. Thanks to those who support the show, of course, by becoming a member or purchasing gift memberships at bestoftheleft.com/support. Thanks to everyone who helps make the show possible, Deon and Aaron and Amanda, and the Monosyllabic Transcriptionist Trio, Ben, Dan and Ken. We could not do what we are doing without the help of all these people.

For details on the show itself, including links to all of the sources and music used in this and every episode, all that information can always be found in the show notes on the blog and likely right on the device you're using the listen. So coming to you from far outside, the conventional wisdom of Washington DC, my name is Jay!, and this has been the *Best of the Left Podcast* coming to you twice weekly thanks entirely to the members and donors to the show, more true now than ever, from bestoftheleft.com.

