

**Panel 10: RNDF AT TEN: A DISCUSSION ON PEACE THROUGH STRENGTH WITH
FORMER NATIONAL SECURITY LEADERS**

Presented by the T. Boone Pickens Foundation

Moderator:

Bill Hemmer, FOX News Channel

Panelists:

Mr. Stephen J. Hadley, Former U.S. National Security Advisor

Amb. Robert C. O'Brien, Former U.S. National Security Advisor

Hon. Leon Panetta, Former U.S. Secretary of Defense

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Bill Hemmer:

We are so happy to see you with us here. A lot of these topics have been chewed over throughout the day, so we're going to maybe come at this from a different angle. But first I want to give special recognition to my colleagues. Jennifer Griffin, great job on your panel today. And Shannon Bream if she's here. And also, our president of Fox News, Jay Wallace. Jay is back there in the corner with Scott Wilder. And Jay's really spearheaded our involvement as a network for the past seven years coming out here. And it is awesome to be here, first weekend of December. It reminds us about a special place, not just in history, but where we are today, and maybe we can try and figure out where we're going to go tomorrow. And Fred and Roger and David, thanks for having us back here. I saw Heubusch at lunch today, so it was good to see him as well.

Fox News has been a part of this for seven years that I mentioned, and we were talking earlier, I don't know if we heard North Korea today. And I know a year ago, hypersonic missiles were all the rage, and they still are because of the disadvantage that we have right now against Moscow and Beijing. But we can do this, and we can catch up. I want to frame the following discussion when you consider that we are coming into an election year, and ask yourself, where will the issues of the world land within our own country and with our people? And we're familiar with the phrase peace through strength. I see that in two ways. Yes, you want to build your defenses strong enough so that you can out-scale your adversaries, but you must also show the desire to use it if necessary. And that was part of the one-two magic that Ronald Reagan showed the world and led us to a whole new generation of peace. So come on up here, gentlemen. Let's get going here and start our first topics. Leon Panetta, Steven Hadley, and Robert O'Brien.

Partner.

Hon. Leon Panetta:

Hey pal.

Bill Hemmer:

Right on. You got it buddy. Robert, nice to see you sir. Welcome. Ready for this? Okay. Alright.

Amb. Robert O'Brien:

Where do you want to sit? Do you want to sit there?

Hon. Leon Panetta:

Where do you want to sit, Bob?

Bill Hemmer:

Well, I did not have the seating chart, so gentlemen, you're going to have to go rock, paper, scissors, and we will fight it out amongst our own. Unless you have it here. You got it, please. You got it.

Hon. Leon Panetta:

Wherever the hell you want to put us.

Bill Hemmer:

Gentlemen, thanks for being here. As I mentioned earlier, a lot's been chewed over today, and I want to come at this from a little bit of a different angle and see where it takes us. By the way, I have no idea what you guys are about to say. Some of these are hypotheticals, but I want to get an understanding for maybe how we can predict what the best, smartest move is for America. Alright, Ukraine, we don't know if Congress will give the support for the war which President Biden is requesting. We do know this: Russia is reinforcing its war from military bases on its side of the border. To date, Ukraine has not shown the capacity or the desire to reach those bases. However, what if our European powers, the Germans, the Poles, the Brits, or the United States provided the weapons to reach those bases in Russia? If you want to win the war, do you consider that to be responsible or reckless, Secretary Panetta?

Hon. Leon Panetta:

Well, first of all, let me congratulate the Reagan Forum on Defense. I think you guys have done a great job in these programs, but most importantly, you've kept it bipartisan. And I think if we're ever to protect our national security, I think bipartisanship is absolutely essential to making sure that we protect America for the future. So my congratulations to everybody involved in that. With regards to the Ukraine, I think it is very important for the United States and our NATO allies to continue to provide whatever assistance is necessary in order to help Ukraine be able to succeed in stopping Putin. This is a war that will determine not just democracy in Ukraine, it will determine democracy in the 21st century. So it is very important that we do that. I think the assistance we provide to Ukraine obviously needs to be the kind of assistance, whether it's tanks, whether it's F-16s, whether it's air defense missiles, it has to be the kind of weaponry that will help Ukraine be able to not only defend itself, but to be able to continue to conduct this war against Russia. I think with regards to whether we give them the missiles to be able to strike targets in Russia, I think the key we've always provided in providing these weapons is to make sure that they will not use those weapons in order to attack Russia. And I think that it probably makes sense that as we continue to provide advanced weaponry as we continue to provide other weapons of war, that we make sure that it is

up to Ukraine to decide ultimately what is necessary in order to protect themselves, not the United States. Ukraine has to make that decision.

Bill Hemmer:

Mr. Hadley, you agree with that, or you have a different opinion?

Stephen Hadley:

I agree with that. I think Leon has laid out the framework correctly. I guess I would add a little bit of nuance under that, which is that I think what we would not want to see is Ukraine being provided with long range missiles or aircraft and then conducting the kind of attacks in Russia that Russia's attacking is conducting in Ukraine in terms of devastation of civilian life, infrastructure, and the like. But I think it's fair to say that if Russia's forces attack Ukraine from positions in Crimea, or positions in Russia, they ought to be fair game.

Bill Hemmer:

So that's happened.

Stephen Hadley:

They ought to be fair game. It has happened, and the Ukrainians to the best of their ability have been willing to respond. And I don't think we should be holding back longer-range missiles to prevent them from doing so.

Bill Hemmer:

So you would engage.

Stephen Hadley:

I think that's the line. I think the line is if the Russians attack Ukraine from bases in Russia, then Ukraine, it ought to be fair game for Ukraine to go back after them and hit them.

Bill Hemmer:

Have you thought about this before?

Stephen Hadley:

Pardon me?

Bill Hemmer:

Have you thought about this before? When you war game it out, and Putin were to make the accusation that the weaponry that's hitting inside of his country is not Ukrainian-made. Is there a danger there of escalation? Or do you already have a conclusion for yourself as to what Putin would do?

Stephen Hadley:

I don't. Look, we've been restrained for fear of Putin's escalation. I think too much. And I think what could be said in defense of the administration is they've gotten, through

incremental action, Putin to move that line. But I think given what the Ukrainians have already done, for US weapons to be used to attack Russian forces that are attacking Ukraine and killing innocent Ukrainians from Russian territory, that's fair game. And I think Putin, I do not believe that that will escalate the conflict. I think it's also terribly important that Ukraine be able to target Russian forces in Crimea because Crimea is the base from which they basically have run this operation.

Bill Hemmer:

And they have tried there. Robert O'Brien, Is it reckless or is it responsible?

Amb. Robert O'Brien:

I'll tell you one thing, I'm pretty happy we got the Javelin missiles to Ukraine when we did. Because without those, three armored axes of Russian troops invading Ukraine would've succeeded, and they would've taken Kyiv. And so, we were the first people to give lethal aid. And I'll tell you, there were people in the administration I'm not going to name that were concerned about this, this idea of provoking Putin. Putin was provoked back in 2014 when he went into Ukraine. And the idea that somehow we're going to deescalate by not giving the Ukrainians the weapons they need to defend themselves is ridiculous. I mean, the Poles wanted to give the Ukrainians MiGs at the outset of the war. We were the ones who set the red line on them and said, well, we can't do that. That might provoke Putin, or that might create escalation.

The Russians, the Soviets gave MiGs to the North Koreans and the North Vietnamese and shot down a lot of American pilots, and didn't worry about escalating with us in those wars. So I think the idea that somehow by providing the Ukrainians the weapons they need to defend themselves we're going to provoke Putin is a weak argument. And we need to give the Ukrainians the weapons they need, but it goes beyond the weapons. We hear all this self-congratulatory talk about Ukraine, about how well the administration's done with Ukraine. And I understand this is bipartisan. I've tried to be bipartisan on Ukraine and I compliment them on what they've done, but it's these Ukrainian soldiers who are doing the fighting and the dying, and we've been parsimonious with the weapons systems we've given them. And so, I think we've got to be a little less self-congratulatory.

And the other thing we need to do is we need to put full sanctions on the Russian Federation Central Bank. We need to cut the Russians off to the extent we can. We may not be able to stop all the oil and gas sales because the oil and gas is fungible, but we haven't kicked the Russians out of SWIFT. We haven't sanctioned the Russian Federation Central Bank. Putin is worth more today than he was when he started the war. The Russian economy is doing just fine, and they're rebuilding their military with the higher oil and gas prices, because we destroyed our own energy independence and we let the Russians finish Keystone -- the Nord Stream 2 Pipeline, and we cut our own Keystone Pipeline. So let's get serious. If we really want to help the Ukrainians, let's sanction the heck out of the Russians, and force Putin to the table, and let's give them the weapons they need to defend themselves, and stop patting ourselves on the back about our leadership with Ukraine while their soldiers are fighting and dying for us.

Bill Hemmer:

Okay, I have six categories, that's one of them. We're going to get through all of them. We're going to do it efficiently. Okay. Mr. Hadley, on Iran. Iranian proxies have been hitting our bases in eastern Syria and Iraq at least 76 times in the past six weeks, including one that was reported just three hours ago in Iraq. Now we have responded on a few occasions, but in January of 2020, we took out Soleimani when he landed at the airport in Baghdad, and the world held its breath, and nothing happened. How far should we be willing now to take on Tehran, and what do you see as responsible or reckless?

Stephen Hadley:

Well, I thought the Secretary of Defense, by the way, who gave, I thought, a terrific speech here at lunchtime, touched on this, and basically I think the standard he set out was we are going to do enough in terms of providing protection to our troops with, he didn't mention it, but air defense capabilities and the like. And we are going to retaliate against those Iranian forces that threaten or attack our folks in an appropriate way in order to deter and protect our people. Now whether that means you have to hit the Iranians and their supporters in Iraq and Syria 20 times, 25 times, 15 times, this is a judgment he's going to make. But I think the framework is right. I think the real question, and it'll be very interesting to see, what the Israeli people decide after they work through this terrible tragedy and this terrible attack that Hamas has done.

Do they say that it's time to go back to this two-state solution? Do they say that actually you can't deal with the Palestinians, and we ought to annex territory on the West Bank, and then put up the kinds of defenses that protect Israeli citizens from Palestinians? Or do they sign a third thing, which is that they can no longer live with a revolutionary Iran, that the threat, backed by Iran, posed by Hamas and Hezbollah and even the Houthis, is too great, and they've got to go to the source of the problem, which is Iran? That's a big idea. That's a big idea. I don't think they're there yet. I don't think the United States government is there yet. But I think that issue is going to come on the table even if the war does not expand beyond its current scope.

Bill Hemmer:

Secretary Panetta, I think someone last week used the phrase, I forget the individual who it was, they called Iran the "ring of fire." What should we do? What would you do that you would consider to be appropriate?

Hon. Leon Panetta:

Look, I think the most important thing is what the Secretary said today, which is that we have to protect American lives under any circumstances. And if they are attacking Americans as they have been -- Hezbollah, the proxy forces for Iran, have been going after US forces in Iraq, in Syria -- when that happens, we have to go in and hit those that are responsible for doing it. What I would do is not just kind of selectively attack, I would basically determine where those missiles are coming from, and we have that capability to do that. Where are they being fired from? And then attack those positions immediately in order to make sure that they don't do it again. So I would be much more aggressive about going after those that attack our US forces, but I would not -- look, with regards to Iran, in many cases, this is an issue of whether Iran wants to go to war and destroy its regime. I don't think that's where Iran is right now. I think Iran wants to use

proxy forces, they want to use Hezbollah, they want to use Hamas, but that doesn't mean that the United States should not do everything we can do to protect US forces.

Bill Hemmer:

Do you think to date that our response has been too soft?

Hon. Leon Panetta:

I think it's been a little bit too selective. I mean, we hit some ammo dumps, we hit some other targets. I want to go after those who are firing missiles at our troops, and make sure they understand that when they fire a missile, they're going to die.

Bill Hemmer:

I think these scenarios are set in the following way that leaves you asking the question whether or not the US is on offense.

Amb. Robert O'Brien:

We're not on offense. That's clear. And the defense is pretty poor as well. I mean, we've had American troops in Syria and Iraq targeted over 80 times. And I'll tell you, the toughest part of the job that I had, and I think Leon and Stephen would agree with me, is having to go to Dover for the dignified transfer of the remains of our fallen heroes. It is the worst day of the job, and having to go to Walter Reed and see our wounded warriors. And to think that we're allowing the Iranians -- because look, we can call Kata'ib Hezbollah and Hezbollah and Hamas proxies, and they are, but they don't do a thing without approval from the IRGC and the Quds Force. They're 100% controlled, owned, and operated by them. And so, to think that we've let the Iranians attack us 80 times, and we've had a couple of pinprick responses that make Clinton's attack on the aspirin factory in Sudan looked like the invasion of Normandy and think that we're going to give the Iranians even a second thought at not attacking our forces.

They're doing it with impunity. And so, we've got to do that. But also, we have to recognize the Hamas attack on Israel was basically an Iranian invasion of Israel. That's a fact. Hamas wouldn't have shot a BB gun over the border without the approval of the IRGC and the Quds Force. So the Iranians authorized it, they supported it, they celebrated it. And we had the most gruesome, I mean, it wasn't even terrorism. To call Hamas and what their operators did terrorism gives terrorists a bad name. I mean, these are serial killers that came over. They're psychopathic serial killers who came over and tried to exterminate Jews. I mean, this was more than just a dispute between Gaza and Israel. This was the most severe anti-Semitism and genocide that we've seen against the Jewish people since the Second World War. And it was sponsored by Iran, and celebrated by Iran.

So look, we're not deterring Hamas. That didn't work. We are not deterring the Iranians from attacking our troops willy-nilly, every day, every hour in the Levant. And we're not deterring Iran and the Houthis and others from taking our ships and from harassing us throughout the region. So look, we're not on offense, we've got a weak defense, and it's time to turn that picture around, because we're here at the Reagan Library talking about "peace through strength." Does anyone really believe in their heart -- I mean, if you're in

the administration, I understand you can't say anything -- but in your heart, do you believe that we're projecting peace through strength in the Middle East right now? Do you think the Iranian ayatollahs and mullahs are looking at us and saying, that's a strong America, and we're going to change our behavior because of their conduct, because they're showing strength? That's not happening.

And until we get back to a peace through strength posture -- and look, I hope it's the Biden administration that does it. I hope that President Biden and Vice President Harris and Secretary Austin, and the whole team, Tony Blinken, Jake, they change their views and adopt a Ronald Reagan approach to the Middle East right now, because that'll be good for the country. It's not a partisan issue. It's good for America to go back to what Ronald Reagan talked about, what Pete Wilson talked about when he was in the Senate helping Ronald Reagan with his peace through strength policies. If we go back to that, we'll save American lives, the lives of our warfighters, but also the lives of innocent American citizens.

Bill Hemmer:

Keep it with you, Robert O'Brien, and on the Middle East, Israel has designs to take out Hamas. How successful they'll be remains to be seen. But we can expect, based on its history, that it will have the Mossad going after Hamas leaders for years to come. That'll be either in Gaza or in Qatar or Syria or Lebanon or wherever they're living. This is a separate issue from the Palestinian civilians in Gaza or the West Bank. Here's the question: the United States, how far should we be in assisting Israel at a time when many have already predicted that the terror will be here in the US if it's not here already?

Amb. Robert O'Brien:

Well look, without getting into too many details, we know that there are Hezbollah cells in America. There's likely Iranian operatives in America. The border has been wide open. And again, it's not a political issue, it's just a fact. We've had catch and release, we don't know the got-aways, so we have to assume there are terrorists here. We saw what they're able to do on October 7th in Israel and the surrounding areas, and these are absolutely brutal people. Now, the great thing is here we've got the Second Amendment so people, our citizens are armed for the most part, and we've got great local law enforcement. And so they're not going to have as easy a time, I don't think, in America as they would in Israel with the attack that they waged, although God bless the Israelis who fought back and the stories of heroism that are coming out, especially, I've got two daughters in the armed forces, to see some of the stories about the IDF women who fought back and killed these terrorists is heartwarming, but we've got to be concerned about an attack on the homeland. There's no question about it.

Now we've got to reauthorize 702 collection as part of that. That's something my fellow panelists would agree with. But we've got to do everything we can to stop attacks. We've got to be prepared for it here, and we're not deterring the Iranians, we're not deterring our adversaries right now, and we need to get back to a posture where they understand that if you hit America in the homeland, the response is going to be devastating. And so, think twice about it.

Bill Hemmer:

Yeah. How much do you guys think about that, Secretary Panetta or Stephen Hadley?

Hon. Leon Panetta:

Look, you begin with a premise that we live in a dangerous world. There are more flashpoints in the world of 2023 than there were since, I think, World War II, the end of World War II. I mean, we're dealing with Russia, particularly in the Ukraine and trying to give them what help they need to be able to defeat Putin. We're dealing with China and the threat that China represents in Taiwan. We're dealing with North Korea, a nuclear armed country that threatens the Pacific and threatens the United States. We're dealing with Iran, and we're dealing with terrorism. Terrorism is still very real. Now, look, 9/11 happened and the United States went to war against terrorists, as we should have, and that's what Israel's doing. They've been attacked by terrorists. They have every right to defend themselves and go after the terrorists. We did it. We did it successfully. We went after their leadership and we got them, took a while, but we targeted them and we got them. But terrorism has metastasized. It's metastasized into ISIS. It's metastasized into other elements of Al-Qaeda. It's metastasized into Hamas, it's metastasized into Hezbollah, Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab. There are a lot of elements of terrorism. The United States, our responsibility is to defend our country from attacks, and if there are terrorist attacks or those that threaten attacks on the United States, we have every responsibility to go after those terrorists.

Bill Hemmer:

Stephen Hadley?

Stephen Hadley:

I think, if I understood your question correctly, I think we should do everything we can in terms of intelligence support and all the rest to help Israel go after Hamas leadership, wherever they may be found. Hamas is a terrorist organization as defined by the United States, and it would be unworthy of us to withhold that support for fear that we ourselves might be attacked. We've done a lot to protect ourselves against terrorism. We must continue to do so, and ought to be very clear that if Hamas decides to undertake attacks, and Hamas leadership decides to take attacks against the United States on the US homeland, it's going to be the most foolish decision they ever made.

Amb. Robert O'Brien:

Bill, I'll just say looking at the F-14 out there, I'm thinking of the Achille Lauro, and what Ronald Reagan said at the time, you can run but you can't hide. Hamas has already attacked America. We forget that because we're so concerned about escalation and what might happen in the Middle East. Hamas killed 20 to 30 Americans in the attacks on October 7th, and they're holding about 10 American hostages now. And you hear very little about that. I'd like to hear a little more Ronald Reagan, you can run, but you can't hide, and not be talking to -- telling the Israelis that they've got a limited amount of time and just a little bit of credit left in the bank to finish the job. We haven't told Zelensky in Ukraine they've got a limited amount of time and just a little bit of credit left to beat the Russians. We need to be standing -- I agree with Leon and Stephen, we need to stand with the Israelis shoulder to shoulder until they get the job done and give them as much time as they need to eliminate these terrorists. And I'll tell you, if you're a Hamas leader

down the road, be careful about opening the door for room service, because the Mossad doesn't forget.

Bill Hemmer:

The Reagan Survey, we can put up for our folks here, about American support for global military presence. It goes to exactly what you three gentlemen are talking about. The Middle East is Iran and Hamas; East Asia, arguably China, Taiwan; Europe, that's Ukraine at 17%. On China and Taiwan, Secretary Panetta, this is a bit of a guessing game. I believe, and a lot of people talk about this, but I don't know how we get to the nut of it and maybe we can't -- I'll frame it this way, peace through strength, and are you willing to use it? We understood after the invasion of Iraq how difficult it is to fight a war, win a war, control its land, and control its people. The Russians are finding that out in Ukraine as we speak. China hasn't fought a significant war in decades. Taiwan's an island of 23 million. Would you expect to, rather, President Xi to make a move on Taiwan, or do you believe that question has been overplayed?

Hon. Leon Panetta:

I think that we've been through a period where both Putin and our adversaries in the world, including China, have looked at the United States as not being as strong as we should be in dealing with threats. I think the reason Putin went into Ukraine is he went into Crimea and didn't pay a price. He went into Syria, did not pay a price. He went into Libya, did not pay a price. He conducted a bold cyber-attack against the United States of America in terms of our election systems, did not pay a price. And I think ultimately that convinced him that, especially after Afghanistan, that he had the opportunity to go into Ukraine and not be challenged. And I think China is the same way. I think Xi basically sensed a weakness on the part of the United States, and as a result of that has gotten much more aggressive about Taiwan, about the South China Sea, and about building up their military capability.

I do believe that the ability of the United States and our allies, our NATO allies, to take a stand on Ukraine, draw a line, support Ukraine, and provide the weapons necessary for Ukraine to be able to stop the Russian invasion, I think that sent a very important message to Xi with regards to Taiwan. And I think the reason he has probably hesitated to go into Taiwan is because he envisions the same problem happening that Russia ran into in Ukraine. And by the way, let me just say this. I know there are some in the Congress who basically say we ought to withdraw or stop providing aid to Ukraine. If we do that, and Putin succeeds as a result of that, imagine the message that sends to Xi with regards to China. You cannot be tough on China and weak on the Ukraine. You've got to be able to do both.

Bill Hemmer:

Gentlemen, you want to weigh in on that?

Stephen Hadley:

Yes sir. On this, I agree with Leon. We've got to deter China from going after Taiwan. We ought to do that by defeating Putin's strategic objectives in his invasion of Ukraine. And we need to do that by shoring up Taiwan's ability to defend itself, and our posture to be able to defend Taiwan, if necessary militarily, by our own presence in the region. So

that's the deterrence message. I think though we spend too much time, I'm focusing exclusively on the big threat, the sort of cross-Strait amphibious invasion, and I think we underestimate the extent to which Xi has an enormous number of tools to put extreme pressure on Taiwan. Cyber-attacks, interference with trade between Taiwan and the mainland, going after Taiwanese businesses in China, the kind of thing that Xi did after Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, closing off the airspace and the sea space for a period of time to do "exercises," thereby disrupting Taiwan's ability to trade, raising questions about the reliability of its supply chains, increasing insurance rates, all the rest. There's a myriad of tools that Xi has at his disposal to put pressure on Taiwan. And we need to be thinking very deliberately what they are, what are the strategies, how can we strengthen the resilience of Taiwan to be able to deal with them, and what can we do by way of assistance? So I worry, you want to focus on the big war, of course, but we've also got to spend time figuring out how we can help Taiwan to counter lesser techniques that are available to Xi that would allow him to coerce the Taiwanese.

Amb. Robert O'Brien:

Well, I agree with Leon and Stephen. Look, if we lose Ukraine, that's a green light for Xi, and I think Xi's watching what happens in Ukraine very carefully. And again, he is not just watching the military aspect and the resupply efforts, he's watching the sanctions and he's watched Russia get away basically scot-free with a bunch of half-measure sanctions for almost two years now. And he's calculating that when he thinks, "if I take Taiwan, or if I attempt to take Taiwan, what's the economic impact on China?" And he's not seeing a deterrent there. I agree with Stephen. Look, it may not be a Normandy-style, or maybe the better analogy is a Sicily-style invasion, amphibious invasion of Taiwan. It could be the Republic of China could be cut off with a blockade.

I mean, the ROC, Taiwan has about a 12-day supply of fuel. They don't have a lot of fuel storage, and they just closed down their last nuclear plant. So if Xi wants to really squeeze Taiwan, he does a naval blockade. And so, where's the US Navy there? And is the political leadership here going to escort tankers past Chinese warships into Taipei and offload oil for them? I mean, that would be a major step for a President to say he's going to, especially -- I want to remain bipartisan here, but I think it'd be very hard for a President, some Presidents to say, we're going to break the blockade and we're going to send US Navy ships. And then if you do that, you're risking war, right? Because a blockade is an act of war and breaking the blockade is going to be an act of war. Where's our submarine fleet? That's what gives us a huge quantitative and qualitative advantage against the Chinese, against the PLA Navy.

Well, today about half of our submarine fleet, and I see Prime Minister Rudd's out there, and I'm thrilled about AUKUS, I think it's going to be a great deal, but we can't even get the Australians a Virginia-class boat anytime soon. And half of our LA-class, Virginia-class boats are tied up alongside waiting for maintenance. So if we can't maintain -- this goes to Stephen Hadley's point about peace through strength. And I used to tell my staff, I grew up on Ronald Reagan. I'm from California. My first political rally was in 1976, my dad taking me to see Ronald Reagan, he was running against Gerald Ford, and so -- I know there's some Ford supporters out there, and we loved Jerry Ford. But I was with Reagan. My dad was with Reagan in '76, maybe even back in '68, and I'm Chairman of the Nixon Library, but Reagan ran against Nixon in '68.

We've been Reagan people from the start, and when we had our staff meetings -- and Stephen Hadley gave me great advice on how to run the NSC when I became -- and I appreciate that Stephen, he was one of the first people I went to, and Henry and Connie and Stephen gave me a lot of good advice, and I'd sit them down for our senior staff meeting and I'd say peace through strength works. It's not just a cliché. And American weakness is provocative. And some of our senior directors around here, they'll tell you if you ask them, they got bored of it. And I think they thought it was platitudes, but it was real. And if we don't get our submarine fleet maintained and out in the field, out deployed, if we don't start expediting our hypersonic missile deployments, as you talked about Bill.

And you're absolutely right. It's as important today as it was two years ago. If we don't start acting, we can talk all we want, and we can talk about democracy and the rules-based international order. And by the way, I've never known anyone who wants to fight and die for the rules-based international order. They might want to fight and die for America and for the free world. But until the free world gets its act together and shows strength, we're not going to deter our adversaries, and we're going to end up in a blockade, or a massive cyber-attack or some green zone or gray zone tactics with the assassinations of Taiwanese leaders in Taipei. And we're going to have a very hard time responding to it. We need to get our act together.

Bill Hemmer:

Yeah. Two more topics, about 10 minutes left. I know this is all very serious stuff. I guarantee you it won't end this way, but I want to look domestically, because a year from now we're going to have gone through another national election. Based on today's projections, either Joe Biden is going to win a second term, or based on today's projections, Donald Trump will return to the Oval Office. The summer of 2020 was active, shall we say, in American cities. The past two months, I think, have caught many people by surprise, given the reaction and protests to Israel in college campuses and in the streets of major cities, it could be yet another active summer of 2024. Since you were the last person to serve in a White House, Robert O'Brien, what is likely to be the biggest challenge for the next President?

Amb. Robert O'Brien:

Well, look, I used to get asked, I think you're talking about domestic challenges or the possibility of protests. I mean, what we've seen with these protests recently, and I just want to say I think it's despicable what we've seen on college campuses and in cities. I went to celebrate Jim Baker's 30th anniversary at the Baker Institute of Rice University in Houston a couple of weeks ago. And Hillary Clinton went, it was bipartisan. Henry, I think it was maybe one of his last public appearances, joined us by video. And as we walked in, there were students chanting, waving Palestinian flags, chanting, "burn, Israel burn." It was the sickest thing I've ever seen. And I took a lot of willpower not to go confront him, but it probably wouldn't have been very smart of me to do. But that's what we're facing. And by the way, for these protesters who are here on student visas, who are engaged in this vile antisemitism, or if they're here illegally, you're pass to America, in my view, just got pulled. Okay? Because you can't come here and advocate the burning and killing of Jews and stay in America.

So as far as the protests go, we've got to deal with those sorts of protests. Look, antisemitism can't be the last form of acceptable discrimination that takes place in America, or threats to kill and threats of genocide from the river to the sea, which is basically not just referring to territory, but referring to killing all the Jews that are in Israel. We can't have that here. So that can't be acceptable in any party. Republican, Democrat, Independent, that just can't be a thing. And if you're involved in that and you're here as a guest, your guest pass should be pulled. As far as the biggest challenge we have, and I'll be brief on this, the threat to our kids' and our grandkids' liberty and way of life is China. And we've got to be focused on that like a laser. The daily threat that we've got from terrorism and to our troops deployed overseas is from Iran. Russia obviously is a huge threat as well, but that's Putin trying to restore an imperial Russia. The Chinese want to dominate the world and change our way of life, and the Iranians want to kill us every opportunity they get. So those are the big challenges.

Bill Hemmer:

Secretary Panetta, what would you list?

Hon. Leon Panetta:

Look, the most important responsibility for the next President of the United States is to unify this country. That's the most important responsibility. We can't -- we've talked about Ukraine, we've talked about Taiwan, we've talked about Israel, and other issues. And the problem right now as we speak is that the chances of passing a supplemental to provide aid to Israel, aid to Ukraine, aid to Taiwan, all of the countries we've talked about that are important in terms of national security, that supplemental is having problems. It's having problems on the Senate side, it's having real problems on the House side, because, why? Because in Congress right now, there's an inability of Republicans and Democrats to work together on national security issues. And that's critical to our security. If a President wants to deal with protests, if a President wants to deal with issues in the country, he has got to be able to have a Congress that is able to work together in order to protect our country.

That means we've got to unify this country. We've got red states, we've got blue states, we've got divisions, we've got deep polarization in the United States of America. The time has come for a president to speak to both sides and say, it is time that we focus not on tearing our country apart, but on unifying our country to deal with these issues. That -- look, unfortunately, your President hasn't unified the country. He's split the country. Biden has not, unfortunately, unified this country. It's still split. If the next President wants to save our democracy, he better damn well unify this country.

Amb. Robert O'Brien:

The only thing I'd say in response to that, Leon, is President Biden's my president as well. I've had two presidents recently, and they're both my presidents and I think that's true for all of us.

Hon. Leon Panetta:

You know the guy I was talking about.

Amb. Robert O'Brien:

No, look, President Trump was my president. President Biden's my president. And I think that's true for all of us here.

Stephen Hadley:

Yeah, I served a different president and when I would venture to offer a domestic political advice, Karl Rove would say, Hadley, stick to foreign policy. That's something you at least know something about. But I would say this, I agree with Leon, but I think it's harder than that. We've spent a wonderful day here, thanks to all the sponsors of this wonderful Forum, talking about foreign policy challenges. I actually think we can manage all those challenges, as daunting as they are. And we've talked about the kinds of policies that we need, peace through strength and all the rest, to do that. I think we have to focus on our platform here at home. I think that's the problem. If you are going to unify the country, there's some things we need to do for the American people. We've got to show that our political system can work. I would submit that we've known for decades what the problem is with entitlements, and the border, and immigration, and fiscal stability, and all the rest. We just haven't been able to come up with sustainable, bipartisan policies to address these issues. We've got to make sure -- we've got to start doing that, because Americans have beginning to wonder whether our democratic system works.

And if we're going to unify the country, we're going to have to unify around some principles, and we're going to have to show that our political process can solve problems. We have a lot of Americans who feel victimized by globalization, threatened by immigration, and betrayed by elites and by their politicians. That's got to be addressed. And we've got to do that by having a political system that produces sustainable solutions to national problems that have grievances of Americans. We've got to have an economic system that provides growth, but inclusive growth, doesn't leave people behind. If we do that, you can begin to pull the country back together, restore Americans faith in our institutions. And that does two things. One, it allows you to engage the American people to say to them, alright, we're addressing our problems at home. We've got to address these problems overseas because they threaten the peace and security here at home. But it also gives us the kind of effective platform we need if we're going to implement policies overseas to deal with the challenges we face.

Bill Hemmer:

That sets us up perfectly for our last category. When I come out here and listen to the conversations, sometimes I leave concerned, sometimes I leave assured. I don't know what to feel just yet or what to think, but let's take the sunny side of the street as Ronald Wilson Reagan would do. What makes you still believe in America and its destiny? Secretary Panetta, begin.

Hon. Leon Panetta:

Look, the reason I always remain hopeful about this country is because, look, the real strength of this country isn't in Washington. The real strength is in the American people, in their resilience, in their common sense, in their belief, in basic values. That's really where the strength is. And I've seen that strength in the eyes of our men and women in uniform. I've seen young men and women who are prepared to put their life on the line in order to fight and die for this country. If the elected leaders of this country just had a

little bit of that courage to make the tough decisions about governing, we'd be a better country, we'd be a better country. So the real strength of our country lies in the American people, and I trust in the American people. And I think that, ultimately, they will make a decision that is important for their family, important for their child's education, important for their job, and important for their ability to speak freely in this country. Those are the fundamental values. We need to return to the rule of law. We need to believe in the Constitution. All of those things are what gives America that fundamental strength that gives me hope for the future.

Bill Hemmer:

Alright, Stephen Hadley, what makes you still believe in America and its destiny?

Stephen Hadley:

It's a little bit of an elaboration on what Leon just said. This country was founded on a set of principles, of democracy, freedom, human rights, rule of law, and it was founded on the assumption and the belief that a society based on those principles is better able to provide for the prosperity and security of its people than system based on any other set of principles. I still believe that. I think Ronald Reagan believed that. I think that's one of the reasons why the American people were so drawn to him. So yes, we should, as we've talked about today, we should develop our strategies for dealing with China, for dealing with Russia, for dealing with the Middle East, and all the rest. But I think underlying that, we should be confident that our principles are the right ones, and they will win out. And that the authoritarian state capitalism, which is being reflected in what Russia's doing, what China's doing, what Iran is doing, in the end of the day, that is not the future. And we should be confident in our values and our people. Work like the devil to have the policies we need to deal with these -- deal with these challenges, but we should have some underlying confidence in our system and in our peoples, and in the principles under which our country is based.

Bill Hemmer:

Mr. O'Brien?

Amb. Robert O'Brien:

I agree with both Leon and Steven. And Bill, you were nice enough to have me on the show. It's early morning on the West Coast, so it's nice to get you later in the afternoon. But oftentimes I'll go on TV, whether it's Fox or CNN or one of the other networks, and my wife will always tell me, gosh, that was a "Debbie Downer" show. No good news there. And I'm glad you asked that last question, because at the end of the day, I still believe like, what Ronald Reagan said, we're the last best hope of mankind on Earth and womankind on Earth. We've got freedom. We've got free men and free women. We've got free markets, we've got ingenuity. We've got innovation. There's no one here, as bad as our polarization is, and we need to be concerned about it, no one's getting in the wheel well on aircraft at LAX and trying to get out of America. People are flooding here because they want a piece of what we've got.

And so I'll end it the way Ronald Reagan talked about ending the Cold War. They said, "how does the Cold War end?" And Ronald Reagan said, "We win. They lose." And I think that's how I feel about China. I feel that way about Russia. I feel that way about Iran and

North Korea. We win. The malign actors, the authoritarians, the dictators, the tyrants, the terrorists lose. It's going to be some tough sledding between now and then. We need the courage of the men and women of our armed forces, but beyond that, of everyone who supports them, their families, to make sure that happens. But at the end of the day, we're going to win, the bad guys are going to lose, and we've got a glorious future ahead of us on this -- I still think we're the shining city on the hill, notwithstanding our flaws.

Bill Hemmer:

We'll leave it there. But before we take a step forward, America, before we go forward, Panetta and O'Brien have to make up. Gentlemen, thanks. Secretary Panetta, Stephen Hadley. Thank you, Robert. Thank you. You bet.

Announcer:

Ladies and gentlemen, this concludes the 10th annual Reagan National Defense Forum.

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