

CONFLICT, STABILITY AND ACHIEVING GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY

Panel Moderator: Ambassador Kenneth M. Quinn

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Panel Members

Ambassador William J. Burns President, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Ambassador Wendy J. Chamberlin President, the Middle East Institute

Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker Career Ambassador, U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan (2011-12)
Iraq (2007-09), Syria (1998-01), Kuwait (1994-97),
and Lebanon (1990-93)

Panel Moderator

Ambassador Quinn

President, The World Food Prize Foundation

I think now we can invite our first panel to come up. This is Ambassador Bill Burns, Ambassador Wendy Chamberlin, Ambassador Ryan Crocker. I've known them for close to 40 years. They were all very junior young officers in their twenties when I first ran across them – I was much older, as you can see. But I am so proud to know them because I've watched their career. Bill has been... Ambassador Burns, I should say, has been ambassador to Russia, ambassador to Jordan. He is only the second career Foreign Service officer to ever rise to become Deputy Secretary of State as a reflection of his capability and service. We're all career diplomats – took the test, passed it, to get in. And we're the mercenaries of foreign affairs. We work for whose ever in charge.

And Wendy Chamberlin I met when she was a junior officer in Laos, brought her back to Washington to work for a guy named Dick Holbrook. And she went on to have an incredibly distinguished career working in South Asia, the Middle East. She was ambassador to Laos, ambassador to Pakistan in the immediate aftermath of 2001 and was then deputy high commissioner of refugees for several years.

Ryan Crocker – it's easier to say which countries he hasn't been ambassador to. He has been ambassador to six countries. If you think of all the hardest names in the Middle East – you know, Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria – all his account. He is the dynamic officer who's out in the field reporting and never wanting to be in Washington.

But our country, speaking for the United States, is so fortunate to have a career Diplomatic Service; because everybody here has been in dangerous situations, done difficult things.

My coming here when I retired in 1999 and 2000, I wanted to put food security and national security together. One of the first times we did it was in 2001 when I put bioterrorism and

agroterrorism on the agenda of our symposium, before 9/11. So in the immediate aftermath in this room, we had seven experts on food terrorism, including the head of the FDA, who said the ideas discussed here help keep America safe in the months immediately after 9/11. When Ryan and Bill were working on Afghanistan and Pakistan, Wendy..., Secretary Vilsack brought the ministers of agriculture from those countries here to talk about the connection on this stage.

In 2012, Danny, Dr. Daniel Hillel who is here, one of our laureates, received the World Food Prize with John, and Ban Ki-Moon, an Israeli having been nominated by three Muslim scientists from three Arab countries for his achievements in drip irrigation.

So this is, though, we've never had a panel like this before. So I'm going to turn to each member of the panel and let them talk about their experiences, their view of the world, and how they see it, so that it can... This is one of the great factors as it relates to global food security and are we going to be able to produce enough food and distribute it to feed nine billion people. So Bill, could I start with you?

Ambassador Burns

First, it's a great pleasure to be here with all of you and a particular honor for me to sit on the same stage with Ken and Wendy and Ryan, three people for whom I have great respect and admiration. We may not be the most uplifting panel, I think, of this series of very important events, simply because the international landscape, at least as I see it today, is as crowded and complicated as at any moment since I entered the diplomatic service almost 35 years ago.

The truth, as all of you know better than I do, is that there have been enormous advances in food security over recent decades, through progress in science, technology, and through the genuine heroism and creativity of many of you in this room. But the further truth is that a lot of those advances, I think, are threatened today on the international landscape with more than its share of challenges.

And among them, again, as you all know very well, are the challenge of climate change, the ways in which increase in the frequency of droughts and flooding around the world is complicating both food production and food distribution, water insecurity – the reality that by the middle of this century it's going to take probably a 15% increase in water use to feed a population of nine billion people, the further reality that, by the middle of this century, probably one in four people on this planet are going to live in areas of serious water insecurity.

Urbanization, a third phenomenon, the fact that again by 2050 you'll have six billion people, two thirds of the world's population, living in cities. Ninety percent of that growth is likely to take place in the developing world, and so you'll have an even further contraction of arable land and further complications in terms of food distribution systems.

And then last but not least, I think, as I look at kind of the big trends around the world today, is the increasing challenge of fragility in states, ungoverned spaces around the world, and the violence that often both feeds that sense of fragility and emerges from it. The reality today is that we have more people displaced from their homes around the world than at any time since the second World War; and there's probably been, over the course of the last five or six years, an increase by as much as a third of the number of people around the world who are living in areas of fragile states. It's most notable as you look at the television screen and often-depressing

news today in the Middle East, an area in which all of us have served over the course of our careers. What we have seen is the implosion of much of the old Arab state system and a big vacuum created. And, unfortunately, there are lots of people who have their own solutions for how to fill that vacuum, from violent extremist groups like ISIS to predatory regional powers like Iran. So no shortage of challenges out there.

But the last point that I'd stress, Ken, at the outset is that – and it sometimes gets lost, I think, in our very complicated presidential election campaign this year – is the importance of American leadership and engagement in the world in helping to make sense of some of those challenges and to make progress in dealing with them. And, you know, in many ways Dr. Borlaug embodied the spirit of American optimism. And here I'm not talking about an optimism born of illusions but of an American sense that you can solve problems, you can do it with partners around the world. And I think in that sense, further progress on food security can be a way of knitting people together against that kind of depressing backdrop of complicated international landscape.

Ambassador Quinn

I should say Bill is now president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He's bringing his diplomatic experience now to this wonderful NGO. Do you want to say just a minute or two about what you're doing there?

Ambassador Burns

Will, first, you know, peace is not exactly a growth industry these days, so it's a full employment occupation for diplomats as well as recovering diplomats like me. The Carnegie Endowment is a global institution; we have six centers around the world. We just opened our newest one last spring in India. So what we aspire to do is not just to see the world through the prism of Washington and American foreign policy, but as people in many important parts of the world see some of the challenges that I was describing before. Because I think in a lot of ways, that's the best way to inform the kind of decisions that Americans have to make as well.

Ambassador Quinn

We endeavor to make the World Food Prize, even though it's in the middle of the U.S., be a place that brings international participants together. Usually we have about 50 countries or so represented here in the audience, some young, some older, some former presidents of countries, head of organizations.

So Wendy Chamberlin is president of the Middle East Institute and also doing interesting things.

Ambassador Chamberlin

Thank you, Ken, and as your mother always reminded you to say "please and thank you," I'd like to say thanks to you very much, one of my first mentors in the Foreign Service and a dear, dear friend, and to the World Food Prize for inviting us here today. You know, my mother also told me that, "Look, Wendy. Smile, because it could be worse." So I smile, and she was right – the Middle East got a lot worse. Bill gave us a wonderful overview, but when you really look at the Middle East, it's a tragedy today. Some of the worst conflicts in the world are right there in

the Middle East – Libya, Yemen, Iraq, Syria, of course. And, as Bill indicated, it has enormous impact on food insecurities and on the health of people, mostly children and women. So there is a lot to talk about. It's an important issue, and, thank you, Ken, for highlighting it.

Ken also asked us to draw on our own experiences, our many years of experiences, to illustrate some of the issues that we want to talk about today. So I thought I'd go back to Afghanistan in 2001. In August of 2001, I had just been assigned, newly assigned as the ambassador of Pakistan. In those days, Pakistan was under sanctions; we had a very tenuous relationship with that country and no relationship in Afghanistan. In fact, Afghanistan was called a consular district of the embassy in Pakistan.

But as I arrived, I did know this – I did know that our USAID team had gone out in the spring of 2001 to do a survey, a field survey. And what they came back with was alarming, that for the three reasons – Bill picked up on them – three reasons that most impact food security, Afghanistan was heading towards a perfect storm. The climate, one reason. Afghanistan had suffered three years of pretty devastating climate, and food stocks were very low. Poor government, failed government under the Taliban, and the Taliban was not permitting World Food Program or international aid assistance to get into the people who needed the food, and three, conflict. Taliban and the Northern Alliance had been in a pretty nasty civil war for a number of years. And the conclusion of the AID study was that, by December of 2001, Afghanistan would suffer from a countrywide famine, that stocks were running low, and by December, a few months away, the floor would fall out.

As I arrived in Pakistan, I was concerned about this. Refugees were beginning to flow into Pakistan from Afghanistan, fleeing hunger, fleeing food insecurities. And Pakistanis were fatigued. They had hosted four million or more refugees from Afghanistan for years, and they were threatening to turn them back. And, actually, my second week in the country, went to the border to Jalozai holding camp and saw for myself the wretched situation some of the refugees were in healthwise because of the food deprivation.

Anyway, long story short, we know what happens next. In September of that year, we were attacked by Al-Qaeda, who planned the operation from Afghanistan; and we were preparing for a military operation. But my team, sitting in Islamabad, also knew that cable after cable – (And I say “my team,” because my economic counselor is actually here today, Pat Haslach, who wrote many of those cables) – back to Washington saying the context for the civilian population in Afghanistan is already very bad. It will be exasperated as the conflict intensified with U.S. action. And, fortunately, some of our best diplomats were back in Washington, and these cables landed on their desk – and they're sitting right next to me today, Bill and Ryan – and our government took action.

Our military central command did do some aerial drops of food pallets. You know, the tensions were good. It was very helpful to the people that the food got to, but we all know that dropping a lot of food from the sky can be very dangerous to the people who are running to try to get it, and that it's not the answer, that you can't really feed an entire nation that way.

But the turning point that... The decision, the bureaucratic decision that avoided famine... And some of you didn't know the situation was that bad, because famine was avoided, and it was avoided because of, I believe, the very courageous decision made by the head of World Food Program, Catherine Bertini, who will also be here tomorrow, to send World Food Program trucks in from the south from Quetta in Pakistan into Afghanistan, knowing that the so-called

government, the Taliban, resisted those trucks. A lot of voices asked her not to do it because it was too dangerous. But sometimes humanitarian international officials have to be courageous, and she certainly was. That's my Afghan story.

If I had just a few more minutes...

Ambassador Quinn

Absolutely.

Ambassador Chamberlin

There is another situation, also a perfect storm, where failed government, climate change, and conflict threatens an entire nation, and I think you all know what I'm going to say – it's Syria today. We can talk more, Ryan will talk more about climate and failed government, but the situation in Syria is devastating. FAO, I think, estimates 90% of the country is in need of food. But there's one practice that I'd like to spend a little time to talk about, and that's the practice of the Assad Regime to use, to weaponize food, to use food as an instrument of war. It's actually become a tool of the conflict there, by laying siege to cities.

We had a young man if you want to... I would actually encourage you to go to our website, the Middle East Institute. It's MEI.edu. And in June he did some research on these sieges and how they actually work. His name is Will Todman. And it surprised me a little bit when I read it; because, you know, when somebody talks about putting a siege on a city, it conjures up in my mind Medieval... You know, surround the city, starve people out, and they surrender. That's actually not the intention of the Assad Regime in these sieges. It's not to starve people out necessarily but just squeeze them economically so tightly that they decide to flee and put down their arms.

The Todman research revealed the way they work these sieges. They establish checkpoints. The soldiers establish checkpoints around an area, sometimes large enough of an encirclement to include farmland – so people are able to grow some food for themselves and to sell within the sieged area. But to control what goes in and out. If there's excess crops, yes, they can get it out through the checkpoints but at a very high price. The people who control what goes in is a small group of elite businessmen, very wealthy businessmen by this time and very close to Bashar Assad in Damascus. And they hire... They're agents/traders, they call them, who actually are working at the checkpoints and inside the cities to collect the bribes and make sure that the prices are high. Not everything gets in. Medicines and medical equipment almost never gets inside these cities.

The situation is very bad. Now, but it is porous to a certain extent. But you know what that means. That means that the poor and mostly children are very negatively affected. Médecins Sans Frontières has reported deaths, over a couple dozen deaths in Madaya – am I pronouncing that city right Madaya? – which was under siege? And we've seen malnutrition throughout the country.

Listen, I don't want you to think that the regime are the only militia and forces out there using siege as an instrument of war. Some of the opposition groups do, too – certainly, ISIS does – and it's enormously resented by the population to be squeezed in this way. And we've seen other attacks on humanitarian distributions by the Russians and the regime air force in Aleppo, which

is clearly beyond international law to do so – bombing hospitals and then coming back and bombing them for second and third time as the White Helmet rescuers go to pull people out of the rubble, just to kill the rescuers. This is... These are tactics of war that are frankly unacceptable.

What can we do about it? Well, short of ending the war – and I think Secretary Kerry is trying to do that without much success – you could resort to air drops, U.N. envoy. Steffen de Mistura has said that's a last resort for reasons that we all know. And they did try it, and again, to not much effect, only a little bit of the food actually got to the people who needed it, but it was an effort.

Anyway, Ken, Bill promised that we wouldn't be having very happy stories to tell here, and I think I delivered.

Ambassador Quinn

I'm so depressed already, you know. No, but this is important, because this is a moment in global food security where everything seems to be going in the right direction – right? The numbers are coming down of people in poverty or malnourished, still a long way to go but coming down. And you hear Bill Gates talk and he's very hopeful about what can be achieved and the Sustainable Development goals, and can we eliminate malnutrition? And yet this other factor isn't calculated in. That's why it's so valuable.

Ambassador Chamberlin

Do you want me to talk a little bit about MEI, too?

Ambassador Quinn

Oh, absolutely.

Ambassador Chamberlin

A little bit about the Middle East Institute. This is actually our 70th year, 70 anniversary year. We've been around in Washington, DC, working on issues on the Middle East for that long period. We're sort of a hybrid. We're a think tank. We have a good policy institute and scholars who write and publish on our website, which I encourage you to go look at. We have about four conferences, full-day conferences a year, at least this large, not this well organized. But we're branching out. We have a library of 20,000 books and a lot of real valuable books, too. And we teach Arabic, Hebrew, Turkish, Urdu. We teach languages.

But the thing I want to brag about is the new direction we're going into, and that's to promote the arts and cultures of the Middle East. We're renovating our building, and in that renovation we'll have a gallery, which, when you come to Washington as tourists in a couple of years, I invite you to come look at contemporary Arab art. Because what we want to show is that there's a lot of political art, protest art there among the young people in Middle East. In most countries in the Middle East today, about 40% of the population is under 30, so there's a lot of vibrancy. They're into graffiti and painting and poetry. They have poetry and rap songs. It's bursting with creativity, and we want to show that. One of the programs to show that is to bring Arab artists to places like Des Moines, Iowa. So I'm going to take Ken up on his offer to bring some of our

young people from the Middle East here, meet with you, talk about, show their art, tell you about what they're doing. And we'll bring at least 40 from Saudi Arabia this year and another 20 from the UAE. And I'm sure they'd enjoy seeing here.

Ambassador Quinn

As I mentioned, we have a group of students flying in from China. No reason we can't have it that some students are going to fly in from Egypt or Saudi Arabia. When they're in high school, this is when you can really set the trajectory of their lives.

So Ryan Crocker has just ended his tenure as dean of the Bush School at Texas A&M University. For some of you who are new, you need to know that Norman Borlaug and his legacy is sort of a tug of war three ways between Iowa, where he was born and went to high school and where he's always remembered his roots, the University of Minnesota, where by tragic error he went to school. You know, I say that when I go up there, but Norm loved the University of Minnesota. And then Texas A&M University. Yeah, here, so howdy. Not you, Howdy Bouis, everybody from Texas. So Jeanie Borlaug, Julie Borlaug are here. They're the Texas Borlaugs in all this, and Norm loved them all. Used to say he spent half the year in Mexico at CIMMYT, the international wheat and maize center, half the year at Texas A&M, and the other half of the year at the World Food Prize and Minnesota. But, Ryan, we're anxious to hear your perspective.

Ambassador Crocker

Well, thanks, Ken, and thanks for having me here. The Middle East constellation in the Foreign Service is a pretty small tribe. We've all known each other for years, and I see that today, as so many times in the past, both Bill and Wendy have succumbed to irrational exuberance when describing the Middle East. So I'll do my best to kind of scale that back.

To Ken's point on the macro level, as we'll hear more later, the signs are good in defeating world hunger. But there's a subset that isn't so good. There are approximately 65 million people out there who are stateless, internally displaced, or refugees. Again, as Bill said, that is the highest figure the world has seen since the end of World War II. Roughly 21 million of that 65 are outright refugees, and it isn't going to be getting any better, because in a place like Syria, for example, not only have the Russians, the Syrians and the Iranians weaponized food, they have weaponized refugees. Sending masses of refugees into Europe, as we saw particularly last year, has brought the European Union to its weakest point of cohesion that we've seen since World War II, and the EU to a large extent is also NATO. So, whether we like it or not, we are in a conflict here where the Russians with a very weak hand, that they are playing very well, have the advantage. I'll come back to Syria.

I just want to pick up on Wendy's Afghanistan narrative, just how we all fit together. A couple of months after you took those initial steps in the fall of 2001, you hosted me just after New Year's 2002 on my way to Afghanistan to reopen our embassy there. And what I saw in Afghanistan redefined the concept of nothingness – no security forces, no functioning bureaucracies; ministries were empty. There was just nothing.

And then probably my second week there, I had a visit from Andrew Natsios then administrator of AID, trying to figure out how we could even begin getting this devastated country back on track. With his background, he came up with one answer that we pursued very assiduously – agriculture. Afghanistan, virtually a complete agrarian economy, that if it was to

return to a productive role, we had to pay attention to the agricultural sector. And we did. We also had to be sure that remote agricultural areas were linked to the rest of the country. You can grow food, but if you can't distribute it, it doesn't go very far.

So we came up with the strategic road system, which is basically complete now. What we didn't do—and over lunch today we talked a bit about this—is we didn't have a program for rural roads. How do you get from the back of beyond to a strategic highway? That still is to me a real regret. Ken, I think it was you that coined the phrase some time ago, *Where the roads end, the insurgencies begin*. And that's a lot of what we're suffering from right now.

But let me skip over to Syria. I'm on the board of Mercy Corps International, which has a huge operation within Syria—not the government-held areas—and in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. We are very focused on the relationship between food security and general stability. We see a vicious circle that's developed. Take Syria, for example. The devastating droughts in the mid-2000s forced tens of thousands of Syrians away from their agrarian livelihood and into the urban areas where lack of economic opportunity, lack of dignity and respect all combined when the trouble started in March 2011 to bring people into violent opposition to the state. And what a state it is and was.

In 1982 the Syrian regime cornered the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood in the fourth-largest city of Hama, and they proceeded to eliminate them. The Brotherhood were some pretty bad guys. But in the process of wiping them out, Syrian armor and artillery killed somewhere north of 20,000 Sunni civilians. So the regime knew for 30 years that a day of reckoning might come. They were ready. The Bashar al-Assad was not Mubarak, he was not Gaddafi, he was not Denali. He was ready for the fight. So basing a policy on hope, we declared Assad must go. Well, he wasn't going. And what would come if he left? Well, probably some combination of Islamic state and Al-Qaeda, so it could be worse. But it is pretty bad, as Wendy described.

That's actually the good news, because the bad news is it's gonna get worse. I had more experience than I would have liked with the Lebanese civil war, two 3-year tours. That civil war in Lebanon, in some ways comparable to what's going on in Syria, took 15 years to resolve. It's still not completely resolved but not large-scale fighting. Syria is much more complex. The Lebanese civil war ended when Syria moved in and occupied the presidential palace in 1990. Well, there is no Syria to move in on Syria in Syria. I don't see how this ends. I know five years into this, it's still closer to the beginning than what I suspect is the end.

A final point I'd make is to amplify a bit on something Bill said about American leadership. The United States, in spite of its best efforts, did not emerge as a world leader after World War I. Woodrow Wilson tried. His famous 14 points were an excellent blueprint, but he was outmaneuvered by the British and the French and the American Congress when the senate, after the 1918 elections voted not to join the League of Nations.

Thirty years later—thirty is kind of magical here—there was another world war. At the end of that war, we postured ourselves quite differently than we did after World War I. The new world order, if you will, was largely conceived in the United States and led by the United States. The San Francisco conference that created the United Nations, the Bretton Woods Agreement that established the postwar international financial system—all driven by America—and then American leadership in its execution.

As we look at presidents since Harry Truman through George W. Bush, Republican and Democrat, in my view, they were in the world of small “I” liberal intervention. We could and should lead in the post-World War II international community. We had some pretty bleak moments when our leadership didn’t exactly make things better – 2003 in Iraq would be an example for me, having opposed the whole concept, along with Bill.

Ambassador Chamberlin

And Wendy.

Ambassador Crocker

And Wendy. I, of course, was on about the first thing flying into Bagdad after the fall of the city to try and make something of the mess that was being created. But the fundamental point is that, in the same 70 years that MEI has been around, there was not another global or even quasi-global return to hostilities. Something different is happening now. In my view, President Obama has re-postured the United States in the international community. For us to work on a very specific agenda not to assume global leadership, let others quit being free-riders, as he styled them, referring to both our Arab and our NATO allies, let the world take care of itself. So it’s a pretty fundamental departure. And in this, quite frankly, when he talks about free-riders and NATO not doing its share and so forth, he kind of sounds like Donald Trump, who is very much, as far as I can discern his national security policy, in the disengagement mode.

Well, we really need to have a debate about that. It would be much more edifying than the debate we’re being treated to. What is America’s proper role in the world? It’s correct to say we can’t do everything. But that shouldn’t be used as an excuse to do nothing, as is, I’m afraid, so often the case. The Middle East is going through a period of turbulence that is unprecedented in its 100 years of modern history. We’re used to coups, instability, violence. But entire nations are now collapsing – complete state failure, as you’ve said, in Libya, in Syria, in Yemen; Iraq and Afghanistan teeter on the brink. They’re looking to us for leadership. I’m out there regularly, as you are, and they feel they’re not finding it. And there is no substitute for U.S. leadership. So I’d like us to have that discussion, because we are backing into a post post-World War II order, the implications of which we really haven’t thought out as a nation.

I’ll part with one optimistic note. As bad as things are in the Middle East today – and they are bad – I think we all should savor the moment, because three months from now we’re going to be looking back at today with nostalgia as a period when it wasn’t completely bad. And we will do that because three months from now, it’s gonna be way worse than it is today. That’s the best I can do on optimism.

Ambassador Quinn

So, Bill.

Ambassador Burns

So Ryan reminds me of one of the... When I used to serve in Russia, and I’d say I was an optimist. Someone would remind me of one of the many typically fatalistic Russian definitions of an optimist as someone who thinks that tomorrow is going to be better than the day after. You have to think about that a little bit.

But, sadly, I think in the Middle East, you know, it's going to take a generation to sort through a lot of the challenges that people and leaderships and societies face there. But like all of you, I really do subscribe to the notion that, as complicated as things are in the world today, they're going to get infinitely more complicated without serious American engagement and leadership. And I should preface that with two or three points.

First is, I know that that statement runs against the grain of what lots of Americans across our society feel and think today. Now, there's a tendency to assume sometimes in the safe confines of Washington or the East Coast or wherever that everyone understands that globalization is going to lift all boats. Well, that hasn't been the case across much of our society where there are lots of people who still feel that consequences of the 2008 global financial crisis. And so, you know, any new administration in Washington needs to take that into account, because it's not a given for lots of Americans. The sort of leadership we've exercised for the last seven decades or so is something that meets American interests.

Second, I think humility is also a good starting point. We've been talking about the Middle East. All of us can attest to a number of instances where we've gotten things wrong, and we've learned the dangers and the risk of overreach. We certainly did in Iraq in 2003 and in the years since. But I think we've also learned in more recent years the dangers of under reach, too. You know, what happens when not only the United States but other states are not able to act as decisively as we might? Because all too often, the truth is that, when you look in the rearview mirror, problems that seem too hard for us to tackle or choices too hard to make, look a lot better in the rearview mirror than the ones that you face today.

And so finding that balance – it's not a very good diplomatic term – but between overreach and under reach, I think, is the real challenge for American leadership in the next administration and the ones beyond that. Because I think the United States still has a pretty good hand to play in the world. I don't mean this as a statement of American arrogance, but I'd much rather play our hand than China's or Russia's or Japan's or most anybody else's in the sense that, not only do we have the strongest military in the history of the world, our economy is still bigger, more innovative, more resilient than anybody else's. We demonstrate, as we have over the decades, that in areas like food security, American ingenuity combined with the creativity and commitment of people around the world can make a real difference. In energy terms, not only in hydrocarbons but in clean energy technology, the United States also, I think, can help lead the way.

In demographic terms, we're still a relatively younger and more mobile population than most of our peer competitors in the world, than China or Russia or lots of other places, especially if we can ever get comprehensive immigration reform right. Geography is a huge asset for the United States. You know, our two liquid assets – the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans that insulate us from some of the vulnerabilities that most other major powers do face.

And, finally, I think, and something that has been under-appreciated in this election campaign is – one of our core strengths is our system of alliances and partnerships around the world. That's what sets us apart from lots of other states. You know, Russia and China are relatively lonely powers compared to the set of alliances and partnerships that the United States can rely on and should invest in.

And so I think for all of those reasons – that’s why, as I said before – you know, I remain an optimist about what’s possible for the United States and the world, notwithstanding all the other terrible challenges before us and before people around this world.

Ambassador Chamberlin

And it sounds like you’re saying America is great now – and I would certainly agree with that, without getting political. Now, let me get a little political.

Ambassador Quinn

No politics at the World Food Prize.

Ambassador Chamberlin

No, no, no, no. What I want to get political on is – what can we do in Syria now. And I certainly agree with both my colleagues that the Syria we face today is enormously complicated, much more difficult to handle as a world power now than it was four years ago. But I’d like to make the case that you can’t give up on it. You can’t give up on it for three reasons. (I like threes.)

First, the turmoil in Syria is undermining the most important alliance the United States has, and that’s Europe. The immigration has led to Brexit. It’s led to some nativism. It’s led to undermining the EU systems of borders, which is essential to the European Union. It’s straining our ties with an important NATO ally in Turkey. It’s the most important ally we have, and we can’t let that be weakened.

Number two, terrorism. I think most Americans would say that terrorism is one of our primary international challenges. And terrorism has ISIS. If you go back and look at the history of it, it’s quite complicated. Actually, Bashar Assad incubated ISIS in a radical mosque in Aleppo while you were, Ambassador, I believe in Iraq. And then he exported these guys. He created them. He exported them to Iraq to kill Americans. And because largely of the leadership of Ryan Crocker and Bill Burns and the surge with General Petraeus, they were shoved out of Iraq. But they went back to Syria, where they then flourished and became what we now know as the Islamic State. So, look, it all began in Syria, it’s about Syria, when they get flushed out of Mosul, they can go back to Syria. Syria is the center of our terrorist, the threat of terrorism in the United States, and we can’t ignore it. We can’t walk away from it. We can’t throw up our hands.

And thirdly, the issue of who we are as a moral state. And I think both Bill and Ryan have touched on that. We are the country in the world that believes in citizen participation on an equal basis. It believes in open borders and free markets as a way of sharing the wealth. And we believe in equity and freedom. And these are America values that I think are hard to..., that everybody would agree with. And so many states in the world don't.

So that’s why we need to focus on doing something in Syria. The question is how, given that it is so darn complex today. But I’d like to argue that again you can’t walk away from it. We talk about establishing free fly zones, and people say – oh, we can do that anymore; the Russians are there. I don’t want to sound too bellicose here, but I think you still can. I think you warn the Russians and warn the Syrian regime that... Let’s take Aleppo. Aleppo is a humanitarian zone. We warn you – we’re going to shoot you down if you go there with a barrel bomb, if you drop chlorine, or if you try to bomb another hospital. And we may have to do it. But we have to be

tough. Setting up free fly zones isn't so hard. The Turks have already done it. They've done it in the West, and they did shoot at a Russian airplane, and they did shoot a Russian airplane down. And we actually... Dirty little secret – we have some American special forces on the ground in this Turkish free fly zone, and we've told the Russians, "You better not come near there," because we've got folks there. And guess what? They don't. This is how you handle bullies. There are things we can do. It's not going to be pretty, it's not going to be easy, but we can't give up.

Ambassador Quinn

So we have a few minutes left. Talk a little bit about sort of the big power arrangements from, viewed on the seventh floor and the secretary and deputy secretary's office. So here's Iowa. Xi Jinping is like, you know, a son of Iowa. He came here as a young man. He has a deep affection for Iowa, when he came back, and we hosted him in 2012, and he talked about remembering, seeing – the sunset over the Mississippi, and he's quoting Mark Twain. His dad came here and took away lessons from Iowa that he used about restructuring all of China's economy. And so there's, connections. There's a soybean buying team that will be here tomorrow at lunch for our soy lunch, and then they're going to probably buy several billion dollars' worth of Iowa soybeans, as they did before. So there is a really huge economic agricultural relationship. And we used to have a lot, not a lot, but a number of people coming from Russia; the Iowa Farm Bureau was hosting groups from sort of the equivalent in Russia. Are there any possibilities for a connection there that can be helpful in all of this?

Ambassador Burns

Sure, there always are. I mean at first on China, history, as all of you know, is full of collisions between rising powers like China and established powers like the United States. And if we're honest with ourselves, there is that risk in U.S./China relations as you look out over the next decade and beyond. But I don't think that's inevitable. I don't think it's foreordained. I mean, what sets apart the U.S./China relationship in many respects from the old Cold War relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union is the fact that China is so interconnected, not just with the United States but with the global economy.

So I think playing the Iowa card is going to be very, very important to continue to do into the future. I think it is possible, complicated as the next few years are likely to be, to build a stable mix of competition and cooperation in our relations with China. It's going to take a lot of effort, but no single relationship for the United States and the world is going to matter more than that one.

On the U.S. and Russia, all I would say, having spent five, six years of my checkered diplomatic career serving in Russia, is that we're in for a continued rough period, I think, in relations with Putin's Russia. And I say that in part because when I served as ambassador the last time in Russia, 2005 to 2008, the old social contract between Putin and Russians was essentially – "You stay out of politics – that's my business. What I will ensure in return are rising standards of living, rising economic growth rates." When he came back for his third term as president (he had never really left power), that had begun to break down. The economy had started to stagnate, standards of living weren't rising. And so what he substituted is a different form of social contract – which came most naturally to him in some ways, given his professional training – is a very nasty form of chauvinism in a sense that there are enemies at the gate, especially the United States, who spend many of their waking hours trying to keep Russia

down and deny it its rightful place in the world. And so I think what that means is that there is likely to be a certain level of tension in relations for some times to come. Doesn't mean we can't find some areas in which we can work together, and we did on the Iranian nuclear negotiations. We're going to need to do it on really complicated issues like the North Korean nuclear program. But there are also in a clear-eyed way going to be lots of problems between us.

Ambassador Quinn

Maybe something to sum up at the end, maybe take a minute or so of where... Five years from now when you're invited back to the World Food Prize for the 35th anniversary that we're having, what do you think? Are the trendlines going to get better, worse? Even possible to project? Ryan?

Ambassador Crocker

Well, it is indeed. I learned the hard way over the years dealing with the Middle East that an extreme, long-range prediction would be a week from Tuesday. Look, it's going to depend to a significant degree on us and especially the next administration. In modern times we have never been as divided at home as we are right now.

And I am reminded, having run his school for some years, what George H. W. Bush did when he assumed office. He and Jim Baker set their priorities. Priority one was not the Middle East, it wasn't NATO. It wasn't even abroad. It was Capitol Hill. Those of you who remember that time, the late '80s, the country was badly divided over Ronald Reagan's Central American policies. Baker's message on the Hill was – this is not Reagan 3. It's Bush 1, and it's going to be different. So they reached across the aisle. They appointed a card-carrying Democrat as the State Department's Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Bernie Aronson. And by the spring of that first year, there was a dialog between Republicans and Democrats. That dialog that they started as a priority became absolutely crucial as a wave of global events unfolded.

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait where the administration was able to get a pretty slim majority, but a majority, in the senate to support the use of force to kick the Iraqis out. We had to deal with German reunification, the fall of The Wall, the collapse of the Soviet Union. But because of that early spadework across the aisle, the President was able to hold the country together on issues of huge import to global security. It's way worse.

It was bad then when the Bush administration took office. It's worse now. But I don't see it getting any better unless as a nation we're able to take a deep breath, recognize that the other party may be an adversary but not an enemy – we're all Americans here. That is going to be absolutely critical in my view. And everything else is going to depend on how that is handled.

Ambassador Chamberlin

I'd like to associate myself with the remarks of my two colleagues here. From my point of view focusing only on the Middle East, let's look at the Arab Spring – enormous optimism at least in this country about the people and what they were demanding of their governments, participation and dignity. They wanted change. Five years before the Arab Spring, if you'd asked us, if we'd had this same panel, our comments would have been – Oh, the Middle East, it's frozen in time, it's ossified. You have the same old Sagittarian leaders, the dictators are running, there's no growth, there's no vibrancy in the Middle East.

And the Arab Spring came in 2011 and there was great optimism and certainly among a lot of the young people. Demographics have a lot to do with that, because they're the majority, as I said before, of the people in the Middle East. And with that, you have a lot of youth and vigor and capability, capacity. It hasn't gone so well in the Middle East since the Arab Spring, including in Egypt and in Tunisia – but I don't think that's the end of the story. I don't think we've gotten to the end of the book on the Arab Spring. Those kids are still there. And as I travel around the Middle East, they're spending their energies on startups; they haven't given up their dream, their demands for participation in their own governments and for a new way of doing things in the Middle East. And they will come back, and it will happen again.

Ambassador Quinn

So, Bill and Ryan have to go to the airport, so I don't know if you have any last thought to share.

Ambassador Chamberlin

Last last thought.

Ambassador Quinn

Last, last, last thought.

Ambassador Crocker

Really last thought, yeah. First, just to say thanks again. It's really been a pleasure to be with all of you. I'm a short-term realist and a long-term optimist, as I said before. I think for all the ugly issues we've just spent an hour edifying you about, you've got to take a step back and look at the realities that in recent decades, as many of you know very well, literally hundreds of millions of people have been lifted out of poverty. You know, people's horizons about health, about life expectancy have widened in some enormously important ways. So I don't think any of the problems we've talked about are without a solution. Many of them are not going to be solved in the short term, but they can be managed, and you can help prevent bad situations from getting worse.

Ambassador Quinn

So what I'd just say is, from my having done this now for 17 years, some of your most important diplomatic efforts are yet to come through the institutions and organizations that you're running, because I see they play such an important role and can do things to bring people together that sometimes government can't do.

So, Bill, Wendy, Ryan – thank you so much for being here. Let's give a round of applause.