



2012 ISW President's Circle Conversation Transcription

The Future of National Security with Senator Joseph Lieberman and Dr. Kimberly Kagan

13 November 2012

[Full Transcription]

Gen. Jack Keane: Well this is a special evening tonight and we truly appreciate you coming out and joining ISW on an evening when we're going to honor a prominent national leader who has provided a lifetime of service and leadership to this great country of ours. And that, of course, is Senator Joe Lieberman. And we're delighted to have his wife Hadassah with us this evening to join him, we appreciate it ma'am that you're here, who's been side-by-side with him this entire journey. Almost a quarter of a century in the Senate and following an early life of public service in his beloved state of Connecticut. And what Senator Lieberman has always done, that we feel so strongly about, is his commitment to national defense. And it's always been there, right from the beginning. In addition to that, moreover, when it was recognized that force had to be used, and we're always reluctant to do that, but when it needed to be used, Senator Lieberman, without equivocation, was for that use of force. And he's also here tonight with his sidekick, if I can be a little bit casual and informal, Senator John McCain--one of the "Three Amigos," a term affectionately given to them by General Dave Petraeus. And the other aspect of this, the two of them, when they believe that, and have strong feelings about it, when you're fighting a war, you should win that war. And that seems obvious to most people, but trust me, it's not that obvious [laughter]. So despite what always happens in war, which are setbacks, profound disappointments and more setbacks. If you're going to win it takes leadership and perseverance to get you through all that and never lose sight of what you're trying to achieve. And they, arm-in-arm before all of that, have provided actually moral courage to many of our leaders who are trying to do the very same thing in the field. When I think of Senator Lieberman, what comes to my mind immediately is character, courage, and compassion. Not only did he earn the respect of all of his colleagues in the Senate and also in the House of Representatives, but he earned the respect of the American people. So it's a real pleasure for us to honor him tonight. And what's going to happen here is Dr. Kagan, President of ISW, is going to conduct an interview with Senator Lieberman, you'll have the opportunity to ask some questions, after that we're going to go to dinner, and then we're going to have an award presentation. Dr. Kagan.

Dr. Kim Kagan: Thank you so much General Keane. You have been such a phenomenal leader and chairman for us at ISW. And thank you so much Senator Lieberman for joining us here tonight and for agreeing to talk about policy as well as agreeing to have us talk about you and the service that you have provided.

Sen. Joseph Lieberman: Well, thanks Kim. I'm happy to do both [laughter]. Really. That was a much appreciated statement. General Jack Keane is a great American patriot who really has informed a lot of the work that I've been privileged to do with John McCain over the years. Great to have John here. To have in the same room my sidekick and my wife [laughter]. Really, this is good. And to have them hear your kind words. But I know Hadassah will make sure that

I stay close to the ground and when we get home that I take the garbage out. Anyway I'm honored, really honored to be honored by this group. Kim and with what's that guy's name...Fred. Kim and Fred have really provided extraordinary service as others at ISW have, so I thank you very much. I'll have more to say although briefly of a laudatory nature, later.

Dr. Kagan: I am happy to get to the policy questions because I think there is really a lot to talk about. And I think we are here in an interesting time at an interesting precipice of American national security issues and affairs. Now I think you've probably seen these precipices before but I don't know. I would like to know whether you think that we are in a unique strategic environment now different from an environment you have seen over your career of service.

Sen. Lieberman: I do. So, I'm ending as, Jack said, 24 years in the Senate at the end of this year. About a quarter of a century. So if I look back to when I came into the Senate in 1989, the threat environment, the strategic environment was remarkably different. I mean we were in a great power conflict with a single great power, the Soviet Union. And while it was serious and threatening in many ways, it was much more simple. I mean it was really a global conflict between two great powers with remarkably different ideological views of not just the world but of, sort of, human nature and the rights that people had. Today there is no such one great power opponent, but we face a series of threats and it makes the threat environment all the more challenging to defend against. So I would say...just to list quickly: so we obviously face the threat of violent Islamic extremism in two forms. The first is non-state and Sunni, which is al-Qaeda, the group that attacked us on 9/11 and would given the opportunity and the means attack us again in whatever way they possibly could. And the second is state-sponsored Shia Islamist extremism which is Iran, of course. So I think those are two very different kinds of threats that emerge on totally unconventional battlefields, particularly al-Qaeda, not coming at us in uniform, not coming at us on battleships or in tanks or fighter aircraft, but coming out of the shadows and attacking civilians. It's a very different kind of conflict, which I think we have gotten better and better at defending against. We also have a very different kind of challenge which very different-- the threat of a rising China, which is growing in both economic power and military strength. Not necessarily a military adversary in terms of actual open conflict but doubling its military budget and with it, for reasons that are both economic and in some ways I think psychological, asserting itself much more aggressively in the Asia Pacific. So it's a very different kind of environment. The ways...back in the '90s, I guess, I first heard the term asymmetrical warfare. What the heck is that? So, you know, it's not great power on great power. It's an asymmetrical enemy attacking us, a great power, in a way that gets around our strengths. So terrorism is obviously one way to do that, as we saw on 9/11, and cyber warfare is another. I guess I'd say that maybe there is a final challenge now which relates to all the others, maybe we'll talk about later, which is the question of whether we're prepared to continue to commit adequate resources to our national defense. You know, if there is anything I learned, or maybe re-learned, since I learned it when I was a student studying the Constitution, is that the one main, irreplaceable responsibility that the federal government has is national defense, is to provide for the common defense. And last year, the budget control act was adopted which cut a half a trillion out of the defense budget over the next decade. If sequestration goes into effect it will be another half trillion and we are already accepting unacceptable risk as a result of that. So I wrap it up that way to say that we've got to win that battle at home so we can continue to defend against al-Qaeda, Iran and meet the rising threat of China in the Asia Pacific.

Dr. Kagan: I'd actually like to talk a little bit about defense policy and about that unacceptable risk and then we can move back out from the resources into that strategic environment. First of all, what is that-- we talk about risk very often when we talk about our nation defense, and we talk about levels of unacceptable risk. But can you tell me more specifically what you think that is and what risks we may be taking should we move toward sequestration or further budget cuts. And how will that have an impact on our military primacy?

Sen. Lieberman: So, look, the less money we commit to defense, the smaller and less adequately equipped our the military will be and the fewer responsibilities it can take on. You don't have to be a genius to know that. And so let's start with the Navy. The Navy is now down to I believe 285 ships and it is going to drop another 9 in the next year or two. The administration has, whatever word you use, made this pivot or rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific, which I'm happy to talk about in more detail, and that is mostly a matter of the presence of the Navy. At the same time the greatest immediate threats to us are coming from the Middle East, broadly speaking. And Iran particularly, but we have great economic and strategic interests there. So we can't do both of those well with 285 or lower ship Navy. And that you can do it will really stress your force. And we are beginning to do that. And stress your equipment. You are going to begin to do damage to the vessels, and give the Navy personnel less time at home and that's going to create morale problems. I mean, so we are not going to be able to carry out those responsibilities. As a result of the Budget Control Act there are required cuts of 92,000 in Army and Marine personnel. Believe it or not that's going to require, what they call it in other parts of government, RIFs. There is going to be actually layoffs, of Army personnel particularly. Because there will be involuntary terminations. That's an outrageous effect, particularly in the economy where all of those folks are going to have trouble finding jobs. But, if there is anything I've learned and here again you don't need to be a genius and deserve an award from the ISW to say this, there are always going to be surprises. I mean, look back at the last period of time I've been here, I mean who would have guessed, well, we didn't see 9/11 coming, we didn't see the Soviet Union collapsing, we didn't see the Arab Spring coming, we could go on and on. And therefore you've got to really size your military both in terms of personnel and equipment for a wide range of contingencies. I think right now, just carrying out the Budget Control Act, let alone the threat of sequestration, we won't have the necessary equipment or personnel. I left out up the Air Force, they're going to buy fewer planes with this year's budget than in memory, I forgot the exact number.

Dr. Kagan: Let's talk a little bit about that strategic environment and about the strategic pivot to Asia. Is an Asia-focused military posture the correct alignment for the strategic environment that we are in?

Sen. Lieberman: Well, Obviously the Asia Pacific region is very important. The stability there is very important, to our prosperity, to our security, to the world's prosperity, to the world's security. So it's important that we have a presence there, and a robust, healthy presence there, because we are indispensable there, and I'll come back to that in a minute. But if we do that by taking personnel and the Navy presence and the rest out of the Middle East, for instance, we are going to expose another flank. So the idea of a pivot is a bad idea. I guess if we are saying that the Asia Pacific is important to our security that is important to say. The point I want to make here, and it speaks to the extraordinary role that the U.S. military has played in the world, and now I am going to back before my time to the post Second World War period, but the continuing presence in the Asia Pacific, particularly the Navy, has been the guarantor of maritime security and maritime freedom of movement, which has been the precondition for the extraordinary growth and prosperity in the Asia Pacific, incidentally from which we have grown in our prosperity because of the trade that we do. And that simply wouldn't have happened if the U.S. wasn't the guarantor of that commerce. We also created the stability in which a remarkable number of people, so I would say hundreds of millions of people in the Asia Pacific came out of poverty in direct relationship to our role in maintaining stability there. The other thing is we created a stable context and a role model for a broad expansion of freedom in the Asia Pacific. But, it's not quite right to say that we haven't—so I make that point to say, one: It's not like we have not been ignoring the Asian Pacific, we've been there. We developed in the Bush administration particularly our relations with India, which are very important. So the truth is we need to be focused on both of those critical regions. Just to run this answer a little longer than it should be, but it's important—the whole idea that we put a wall between the Asia Pacific here and the Middle East there, it doesn't work. It's not like—these are contiguous parts of the world and they relate in many ways. Sometimes in leaping over ways that are not good. I mean, North Koreans after all are the ones that are building the nuclear plant in Syria. Look, we think of

India as part of Asia, but the Indian government, our ally, care a lot about what happens in Pakistan. And that's a very fragile, difficult relationship. What happens in Pakistan is impacted by what happens in Afghanistan. So if we are withdrawing from Afghanistan and that whole region, it's not like we can hold its impact in the Middle East--it's going to affect Asia. The other thing to say, very briefly, I was struck some years ago, and it was actually after the surge began to turn things around in Iraq, I was at the Chamber Law Security Conference in Singapore and I was in a conversation with three defense ministers from Asia Pacific allies of ours, that was a long way, these are South China Sea area allies, a long way from Iraq. And they were expressing their relief that we did not exit Iraq in defeat. Why? First because it would have undercut their reliance on us for their own security, for obvious reasons—if you are going to leave them, why won't you to leave us-- and second, in a more constructive way or a more positive way, the fact that we hung in there said to them that they could rely on us and therefore it gave them the sense of security to go ahead and continue to be our allies and not feel that they had to be pressured to be accommodating to China, which they don't want to do.

Dr. Kagan: I would love to think a little bit more about the threat of violent Islamic extremism which you had mentioned on your list of great threats to the United States. I'd like to ask you whether you think that al-Qaeda in decline or on the rise.

Sen. Lieberman: It seems to be both at once. But ultimately, it's not gone. Parts of al-Qaeda are obviously in decline, a lot of its top leadership, including Osama Bin Laden, has been eliminated. But it's, you know, appearing and metastasizing in a lot of other places. So anybody who thinks that you're going to end this threat, which is the threat of Sunni Islamic extremism and terrorism, by killing a few people at the top, it's not going to be that easy. Unfortunately, and of course we see it now in places like Yemen, and Somalia and now in Mali, opening up a new front, coming in, in their own way back into Iraq, present in Syria, I mean, this is an ideology, and so you don't wipe out an ideology by wiping out even the person who becomes it's leading spokesman, Bin Laden. Al Zawahiri seems to be playing a role as the heir to bin Laden, he seems to be to be playing at least an inspirational role and, I suspect, more, with regard to some of the al Qaeda activities in other parts of the world, the Middle East and North Africa in particular.

Dr. Kagan: So if we are actually wrestling with an organization with such a potent ideology, and a determination to create disorder and also to inflict harm on the United States, how do we actually deal with that as a security threat? What are the additional steps that we need to take and continue taking in order to make sure that we are not again surprised as we were on 9/11 or as we were on 9/11 this year, in Benghazi?

Sen. Lieberman: Right, so I think one part of this is defense and it happens by twist of fate, that committee I've been on, that I've been on played a role in the creation of post 9/11 homeland security changes that have occurred, beginning with the department, but also John and I put in the legislation that created the 9/11 commission, and then we adopted the legislation to reform the intelligence community to make up for some of the gaps that occurred on 9/11/01 and which I think together have represented the most significant reforms certainly in the intelligence community and maybe in our national security organizations since the '40s and quite appropriately at the beginning of the Cold War. So we've raised our defense and that's part of why we have not suffered another attack like 9/11 here. But this is all a question of trying to empower the moderate forces in the Arab world and this is where, what might seem like an accident of history which came along, which was the Arab spring. And I think ultimately the best defense against violent extremism is democracy. Democracy also is no guarantee. So, while we see some of the Arab Spring countries like Tunisia, and actually Libya for the most part, are doing pretty well in their first elections, others like Egypt, with the rise of the Muslim brotherhood to leadership there worry us. But ultimately, every time people have actually had the opportunity in the Arab world to vote they've indicated they are certainly not for violent extremism. This requires presence, and I don't want to take too much time on this, but I think, as you know Kim, that it was a mistake that we withdrew all our forces from Iraq, or to put it another way that we were unable to reach an agreement with the Iraqi government to have

a follow-on force there. Because that would be a way to continue to send a message to the Iraqis that we were there just in case. It would enable us to continue to play a counterterrorism role and a training role and it would have said to our enemies, both al Qaeda and Iran, we're not going anywhere. In fact, today in Iraq, Al Qaeda and Iran, are back. And so it's a combination of supporting democracy, supporting democratic forces in the Arab and Muslim world and maintaining a military presence, different than when we're at war, but clearly there.

Dr. Kagan: As we think about these Arab Spring countries and wrestle with the problems of the radical ideologies, both Sunni and Shia, that you have described, somehow the crisis in Syria leaps to the forefront of my mind and I would like to ask you about that. Do you see Syria's future on a trajectory that will increase the threat of violent extremism, either state-sponsored or non-state sponsored or do you see it on a trajectory that will come to some other end? How do we get there? How do we get to some other end?

Sen. Lieberman: So, I think that the answer to that today is a lot more complicated and uncertain for me than it would have been a year ago or year and a half ago if we had gotten more rapidly, we and our allies in Europe and in the Arab world, had gotten more rapidly involved on behalf of the opposition to Assad. And I never have understood and will never understand why we waited so long. John and I were over there early in this conflict. And it is certainly our considered judgment, well I'll say mine for now, that the people who began that uprising against Assad after he turned his guns on them were really Syrian patriots, they were not Islamic extremists. They were mostly Sunni, it's true, they were probably subject to some secular antagonisms but the fact that we have not at least given them the weapons with which fight including antiaircraft weapons, has done two things: it has radicalized them, I'm afraid, in a secular sense where they now do want to settle scores with some of the Alawites and that will make a peaceful conclusion or a peaceful transition to a post-Assad Syria more difficult but it has also meant that the door is open to more radical extremists coming in. I mean, one of the last times John and I were in Istanbul meeting with two very impressive leaders of the Free Syria Army, both people who had left the Syrian Army after 20 or 30 years, these were not kids, and they did it at some peril and they were very committed to the fight, and I remember one of them said to us, he pleaded with us for weapons with which to fight and he said "if you don't give us, if the world doesn't help us, we will fight with whatever we have and we'll never give up, because we can't give up." But he said "the longer you wait to help us the more the jihadists are coming in and the more they are offering more to our young men than we are able to offer." So look, I take the agreement over the weekend in Doha to create a unified Syrian opposition, unified in terms of lot of the components, but also unified in terms of those inside and those outside of Syria, to be a very good sign. You get surprises in the world but once again today the French government led not from behind but from ahead, they recognized the new Syrian opposition and I hope that our government will do that very soon because it will strengthen them in this fight. So it's going to be more difficult as I said at the outset but this can still end well. And look, I haven't mentioned one important point, beyond the effect that we oughta be there consistent with our values to stop genocide, to stop a dictator, this guy is obviously the number one ally of our number one enemy in the Middle East and in the world: Iran. The Iranians get the consequences of this fight. They're in there with everything they've got to keep Assad going. It just boggles my mind, it actually infuriates me, that we haven't seen that. This is a poor rule to state, but among the things I've learned over the 24 years serving in the Senate dealing with military matters but if your enemy is in a battle with everything he's got then it ought to make you think that maybe you oughta be there as well because you've got some strategic consequences on the line. I think that's true in Syria.

Dr. Kagan: Tell me more about the strategic consequences you see of a rising Iran and a nuclear Iran?

Sen. Lieberman: Well, you know, I can do this quickly because I'm sure everyone in the room is familiar with it. But look, Iran is still the most significant state sponsor of terrorism in the world as stated by the U.S. Department of State. They clearly have, and I'm not one to use these terms loosely, they have hegemonic ambitions. They want to be the dominant

power in the Middle East and this is both a matter of theology and ideology, but this is also, old national dreams die hard and this is the Persian Empire, in one sense rising again. And the Sunni Arabs, the Arabs there certainly see this and worry about it more than we do. So, God forbid the Iranians take hold of some of the Gulf countries that are our good allies, which I think they would first try to do by coercion if they were a nuclear power and then they would try to do by military action and control more of the oil supply of the world, their capacity to hurt us and our economy grows exponentially. The other thing to say is that their client terrorist groups like Hezbollah and Hamas would be immensely strengthened because they will have Iran's nuclear umbrella over them and that has would have really bad consequences, obviously for Israel, but also for other important allies of ours like Jordan and Lebanon.

Dr. Kagan: The sanctions that you have fought for and that are now in place on the Iranian regime do not appear to have halted or perhaps even slowed Iran's nuclear development. What other options remain to the United States in order to deter Iran, prevent Iran from continuing to developing that capability?

Sen. Lieberman: Well, I mean, the options are getting to be to be slight. I do think the sanctions we've adopted, incidentally, this has been one of the few really bipartisan policy agreements of the last couple of years, the sanctions against Iran, they've hurt the Iranian economy. You can see that the Iranian currency, the rial, is grossly inflated, and causing some disorder in Iran. But the regime is still totally in control and you only have to look at Damascus to ask yourself what the regime would do if the people did rise against it. They will use their power, militarily, to strike the people down. So right now I'll would say we'll try adopt some more sanctions and we'll push the administration to enforce all the sanctions, but in my opinion we've come to a point because of the Iranians, we have to be very careful about this at this moment, as I think I sense that they are trying to bring us back, and we are looking for an opportunity to go back to negotiations with them. I think ultimately, they, the Iranian Regime, has to feel that we, the United States, not Israel, but we, the United States, are serious about what the President has said, and Congress has said, in an Anti-Containment Resolution, that if we are going to try to stop the Iranian nuclear program by peaceful diplomatic means if we can, but we are going to use military force if we must, and I don't know if they believe that today. And I think until they do, we won't have any chance of a peaceful resolution to it. I keep hoping. I am about to use a really homely analogy from a political experience and it is probably totally unrelated. I apologize for it. It is very unlike somebody who would be receiving this award. But when I ran for the Senate the first time against the incumbent senator we were really hitting him with a lot of stuff and yet in the middle of September I was still down about 16 points, maybe I was thinking of this because Vinnie Roberti came in, and he was with me, so I naturally think of home politics. And so I remember calling my media consultant and I said what the heck is going on here? He said, you know, this was Senator Weicker, you know they may have just put their arms around him during Watergate, they've got a full embrace, they're just never going to let him go. On the other hand, very time we hit him with something, they may be loosening up the grip, and then and all of a sudden, because of one thing, boom they're going to let him go. Fortunately he was prophetic in that case. Buy I keep hoping we are hurting the Iranian regime enough that though, they haven't stopped their nuclear weapons development program at all they are loosening their grip. Because the one think that they want, the only thing that matters more to them than nuclear weapons capability is the survival of the regime. And if they think that we're really about, either to squeeze them economically so that there is chaos or most important, if they really believe we are going to attack them militarily, then maybe they'll loosen their grip on the nuclear program. I'm not counting on it. I think this is a big year of decision ahead for President Obama really more than anybody else.

Dr. Kagan: One of the topics of discussion here in Washington, which therefore may or may not be of great relevance to the world, is whether there would be a so-called "third-party strike" (I like the way we really anonymize that) against Iran and its nuclear program at some point in this year. What options does the United States have, if Israel acts unilaterally and engages militarily with Iran and how would you recommend should the United States respond?

Sen. Lieberman: Well I want to state in as strong terms as I can that I hope that if military action is necessary we take it because we are so much more capable of carrying it out successfully. And I think it does matter to us in the most profound ways strategically. For the reasons we state, if Iran gets a nuclear weapon the world is going to be a very different, much less secure place in terms of not only in terms of safety but also in terms of our economic prosperity. I just hope that we can---the Israelis are anxious. You know as I do that the Arabs are as anxious as the Israelis. As a matter of fact some of the Arab leaders I've talked to have said that the Iranians rhetorically target Israel because it's advantageous to them politically, they'll never strike Israel first. These leaders have said they'll strike us because we're not as capable of responding. And of course I think we'd have to respond if that ever happened. So I hope we never come to that position. If it does we'd have to stand by our ally.

Dr. Kagan: So what should the U.S. redline be?

Sen. Lieberman: Well...

Dr. Kagan: Just to put you on the spot, on the record.

Sen. Lieberman: I have a little diagram here...[laughter]. Look, I mean there are some clear red lines such as the Iranians kicking out the IAEA inspectors or our intelligence making clear that they've gone to 90% enrichment. Those are in a way easy, those are real red lines, but the danger here is if it happens more suddenly, you know they are continuing increase their supply of fissile material, they're continuing to build more centrifuges. Right now they're on a course to have an enormous capability to break out and they'll do it relatively quickly. Our intelligence I think is better at what they're doing but it's not perfect. So, I don't have a simple answer to that. To me, of course, I should say for the record that I do believe this is about capability. If we wait until they have a nuclear weapon it's too late. This is about the point at which we can conclude that they have developed the capability for rapid break out into nuclear capacity. And then I hope we will strike.

Dr. Kagan: I'm going to change to happier topics.

Sen. Lieberman: Oh good.

Dr. Kagan: Afghanistan? [Laughter].

Sen. Lieberman: Well, you know when you're speaking before a group called the Institute for the Study of War you don't expect a lot of humor.

Dr. Kagan: We're really a funny bunch. [Laughter]. Afghanistan. Can't ever resist talking about so before I open the floor up to questions, I really would like to know whether you think success in Afghanistan is important for U.S. national security. If so, why? And if not, why not?

Sen. Lieberman: Well it's very important for U.S. national security. Obviously in the first instance we needed, there was bipartisan support strong to strike back, to eliminate the Taliban from which the attack of al-Qaeda, from which the attack of 9/11 came, al-Qaeda being in Afghanistan with the permission of the Taliban. We've now seen that it's not enough as we saw in Iraq to defeat the enemy, you really do, I don't like to use the word nation-building, but you do have to hang in there long enough to create a secure, and, a relatively secure environment, and train enough of the indigenous security forces to protect their own security. So why is it important? Well you don't want to create another safe haven from which al Qaeda or some other terrorist group could strike at us. There is beginning to be a little bit of an argument surfacing here that goes, even if the Taliban came back to control in Afghanistan they would never allow al Qaeda back in. Well first off, it's not going to be good for us to have the Taliban in control of Afghanistan. But why does

anybody feel that they won't let al Qaida or some other groups back in. Beyond that, we have real strategic interest in that region. In an affirmative way because of our relationship with India, also because of the consequences of the Indian Pakistani standoff. And hey folks, it happens to be that the country we have been talking about-- Iran is right there to the west. Not to mention the strategic and economic consequence of all the "Stans" on the other side. So even if we hadn't gone in after 9/11 and we didn't have this interest in helping the Afghans continue their modernization and self-government and self-defense. There is enough happening in that region that it's in our interest to want to try to keep Afghanistan stable.

Dr. Kagan: Could you describe for us, since you actually have spent a lot of time in Afghanistan I know with our own forces but also with Afghan politicians and leaders, what you think would be the consequence of a rapid withdrawal of U.S. forces in Afghanistan?

Sen. Lieberman: Incidentally, I should say here that that ISW has done some extraordinary and unique work regarding on Afghanistan. I mean There are a lot of groups that work there, a lot of think tanks in Washington, but nobody has done what you've done Kim and those that work with you and I really appreciate it. It's very helpful to us. [Applause]

Dr. Kagan: Thank you, that means a lot.

Sen. Lieberman: You earned it. This is an extraordinary people, the Afghans, you know. They are survivors. They've been through a lot. Incidentally, they've had periods of relative modernity not so long ago, particularly under the king, for a while, but they fell way back. So what would probably happen there if we left I think it's probably less likely that the Taliban would take over the country, the Taliban would take over part of the country but Afghanistan would become a battlefield for every neighboring power and there would be chaos. I'm talking about Iran, obviously Pakistan, India would feel it had to get involved. And then internally, the first great human victims of this would be the women of Afghanistan who have seen the light for the first time since that period of modernity from the 50s. You look at some pictures of Kabul in the '50s and you think, is that Kabul? That must be Paris, you know. But then they fell way back. And now the women are being much better educated. One of the papers today had a story about this that the women in Afghanistan are really terrified of what will happen if the U.S. makes a rapid exit. So, and all the hope of self-government that we've created there and the hope of a better life would be gone...they'd suffer terribly. And so would we.

Dr. Kagan: Now let me turn to the audience for questions.

Hossain Amir-Aslani: Thank you Senator Lieberman. I'm Hossain Amir-Aslani and by the way I'm a proud New Canaan resident.

Sen. Lieberman: Welcome constituent!

Mr. Amir-Aslani: And by the way I am Iranian American as well. Question about Iran actually. There was a lot of disappointment during the 2009 Green Revolution when the administration did not support, orl at least the lack of support. I can tell you from family members that that was pretty vivid. What can the U.S. administration, I guess the new Obama administration, do to help the opposition in Iran?

Sen. Lieberman: Yeah, well, this is really important. I think that the administration's timidity and really silence in response the Green Revolution in June of 2009 will be seen by history as one of its lowest moments and there has been a certain loss of spirit among the Iranian people not so much among the inner core of real democratic activists but in the larger group of middle class people who really want a better life, want to be part of the world, despise the regime, I think they are a majority there, they are not 100% but I think they're a majority. We had programs awhile back in which in which our government, that was actually back in the previous administration, was giving some money, to third party

NGOs, not the third party referred to before, but third party NGOs to give money to human rights groups in Iran, women's groups, labor groups, journalistic groups, etc. That money got terminated. I just don't think we're doing enough. It's an uphill fight and it's really hazardous because unless there is a real mass uprising, the IRGC... As you know this government has become, with all respect, as far as I can tell, these mullahs have not taken a vow of poverty. They may have taken other religious vows. But some of them are deeply involved in moneymaking in the country and the IRGC is also involved in the same way. They've become a little bit like the KGB during in the Soviet period, so they would really step on an uprising. But still I think there is a yearning there. I can't say much more than that except that we're not doing enough and I wish we would do more. The point is we have to take sides. And it's not hard. It's pretty clear who our enemy is there—it's the government—and it's pretty clear that we actually have a lot of friends there—which are the Iranian people. There is a poll I saw at one point of attitudes in the Middle East, this goes back some years, so I'm not sure it was still true, but the only two countries in which there was a positive view of US among the people were Israel and Iran. Go figure.

Kim Kagan: Alright. Second question to Jack London.

Mr. London: The last couple of months the swirl of Libya and Benghazi have been a real torrent in our society and around the world. Would you reflect a little bit and share your views of what that all that means and where that's headed?

Sen. Lieberman: I'll give you a preliminary response. Our committee, the Homeland Security Committee, has begun, it's hard to find a committee on the hill that hasn't began an investigation on Benghazi—we're gettingis getting a classified briefing tomorrow, in part because the Director of National Intelligence and the National Counterterrorism Center came out of the 9/11 legislation which come our committee so I'm curious to see how they perform here. So there are a lot of questions to be answered. I'll tell you what my own feelings is from the public record now. Two things, are lessons to take away. There are a lot of questions about why people were saying what they were saying after the attack. What happened during the attack. Here are two takeaways I think we're going to have and I feel justification for them already. One is, there was so much information about how dangerous eastern Libya and Benghazi had become. That is, the movement of not only the militias that were not friendly to the US, but real foreign fighters, jihadists Al-Qaeda related people; al Qaeda in the Maghreb. That it was simply irresponsible not to have more security in Benghazi. It will raise a larger question, and this really in some ways goes to Iraq and Afghanistan, and the rest of the..., and this goes to what I said earlier —the smaller a military is the less it is able to do. We need to provide better security for people at our embassies and consulates and missions, in places where our intelligence tells us that it is dangerous for Americans. The second thing is, I think we're going to, the fact is that once the attack began we did not have military personnel in close enough range to Benghazi to come to the aid of our personnel there until it was over ought to tell us to take a really close look at the African command and give it more personnel than it has now. I mean, we had to grab, as you know, Secretary Panetta, from what we now know from the public record, he had one team in Croatia it just happened to have there he began to move into Benghazi. There was a group in Rota, Spain which he began to move toward Sigonella in order to move into Benghazi. But then he deployed a group from the East Coast of the U.S., special operators to Benghazi and needless to say they didn't get there until it was over. I think we have to learn those lessons about not only Benghazi but a lot of other places. You can't just...I mean, our involvement in Libya was a success. And the Libyan people, for the most part, are really grateful to us, because they saw that we were involved. And McCain is beloved there. I can't understand it myself. Honestly, he is a hero because they knew he was out there well before everybody else and right there. But you can't just say, Oh great! We won. Now goodbye. We have every reason...just going back to how do we defeat the violent Islamist extremists, one way in Libya would be to hang in there and help them build up their security forces and their counter-terrorism forces and as far as I can tell the government is prepared to have us do that.

Dr. Kagan: Now I will call on Fred Kagan.

Senator Lieberman: That is very generous of you, Kim.

Dr. Fred Kagan: Well thank you, Dr. Kagan.

Dr. Kagan: You're welcome, Dr. Kagan.

Dr. Fred Kagan: At ISW events I am often honored that people think that I am associated me with ISW in some way, but in fact I am not. So this is my, appropriately, my only speaking role here. So my opportunity to associate myself in advance with the laudatory remarks that will be made about Sen. Lieberman and thank him for all that he's done for our nation. But I do want to ask you a painful question that is increasingly being asked of me and Kim and others. Which is, was the surge worth it? Given that we appeared to have lost in Iraq anyway.

Sen. Lieberman: My answer to that is a resounding yes because the consequence of retreating in defeat from Iraq would have been catastrophic for the region and for U.S. credibility around the world in the ways that I described earlier. Also, I think we'd be in a lot better shape in Iraq today if we had kept some continuing presence there. But, it's a lot better than it was under Saddam Hussein. We have country that, ok, it's complicated but we can deal with them, and they know they need us in some ways that are really important. They also have a situation where they did elect their leadership. Though there is a lot of concern about Prime Minister Maliki, if they could get the votes together in Parliament they could toss him out. But they haven't been able to do that. The other thing to say is that they are blessed by nature and circumstance with oil supplies. They are pumping oil again, it's good for the world economy it's good for us. There are American businesses involved with them there. They also desperately want to acquire weapons and continue a military relationship with us. So, are there things I worry about? Sure. I worry about Maliki not being inclusive as he should have been with people in the country, the different secular groups. I worry particularly about the fault line between the Kurds and the rest of Iraq and the difference in the standard of living between the Kurds and the rest of Iraq. But the surge was worth it. Iran has more influence there than it should, be but the violent Islamist extremists are nowhere near in charge and this country does not represent a threat to the region or to us the way it would if Saddam Hussein were still there.

Dr. Kagan: General Dubik is that you? I have a light in my face. Please...

Lt. Gen. James Dubik: Sir, Lieutenant General Dubik, Institute for the Study of War. First, thanks, sir, for your service to the nation and also your support for soldiers, sailors, airman, marines and their families throughout your career. Thank you very much. There is a lot of after action reviews going on now within the military services -- what have we learned after 10 plus years of war and I wondered if I could ask you to reflect on what you think the nation should learn as a national security apparatus, executive branch and legislative branch, about how this nation wages wars.

Sen. Lieberman: Well the first is that these unconventional wars that we're facing are obviously different, they're unconventional; the first thing I want to say about the military, our military has really been remarkable. These are really different types of conflicts than we were prepared for. I'm talking about Iraq and Afghanistan. The military has a remarkable capacity for innovation, for learning. Yeah you can knock me down, but you can't keep me down. I'm going to get up and figure out how to defeat the enemy. but I'll get back up again and defeat the enemy and they've done it. And we've developed weapons systems for an extraordinary use of high technology, but in the end just a remarkable American courage, what the military calls unit cohesion but unbelievable loyalty to one another and the cause, which is greater than any one of them and is really an inspiration for our overall country. So one thing I've learned is that we are damned lucky to have an incredible military and we owe them everything, for our freedom and our security. The other thing to say is that winning wars like this and succeeding at wars like this takes time. And there is a natural way in which

the American political system is not patient and you reach a point where if you don't have a clear victory, somebody, one side, can gain advantage from saying, "Let's bring the troops home" and the consequences of that kind of premature move can be disastrous for our security and cost us a lot more. The other thing to say is that we don't have a strong bipartisan support for...I'd say we have bipartisan support for the military though unfortunately not consistently for the military budget that we need, and particularly not for military actions that don't end in a hundred days. Which was a rarity, you know, or 100 hours. So this requires leadership, there's no substitute for it. And I hope and pray it will continue to be there. As long as McCain is there, John, it'll be there.

Dr. Kagan: I think we have time for one more question and you have the question, I'm sorry, I can't see... Dan Potocki.

Mr. Dan Potocki: Thank you, Senator, for your service. I wanted to ask tonight, as you receive the award for national security leadership you know you mentioned Afghanistan, before Jeff Dressler for example at ISW, made up of young leaders themselves and analysts, received the award for top 99 under 33. So, just a question to you if you could reflect on as we move in to a new generation of leaders what advice do you have for the young analysts at ISW and other organizations in DC and abroad?

Sen. Lieberman: Well thanks for asking that question. What you do matters a lot. I mentioned the work that Kim and others at ISW have done in Afghanistan. Joe Holliday and Elizabeth O'Bagy have done remarkable work in Syria, really right up there with the work that people in our government are doing to tell you the truth. In terms of both fact-gathering, and analysis, and recommendations. So, this business of war is with us and it's complicated and you can do it too quickly but then you can decide that you don't have the patience to do it long enough. In the end, the better analysis we have the more thought is going into this, the more rational we'll be about when we commit our forces and put their lives on the line for our security and our values and our freedom. So I don't know that this is an area that there is enough interest in but I always appeal to people to think about public service and public policy and being an analyst in the military area is critically important. Incidentally, just a last word about this, I worry that in the squeezing of the Defense Department budget one of the things that gets squeezed is the various programs that allow military personnel to get better educated and to take time off the battlefield to go to one or another War College, to study, so that they have a sense of history, and they are prepared to deal with the conflicts of the future. Anyway bottom line, what you do is very important.

I think I'll tell a story maybe here at the end, that I was going to say later, so this means I'll speak more briefly later. The Lieberman family has had a long relationship with the Kagan Family. Beginning with the mother of Fred, mother-in-law of Kim, Myrna Kagan, who taught our three oldest children English at school in New Haven, in Woodbridge actually, and all three of them are quite literate. [Laughter]. So I thank Myrna Kagan for that. And then there is Donald Kagan, who I assume most of you know about, A great historian, one of the most thrilling lecturers that Yale has ever had. So somebody said to me, when they saw what I was doing tonight, "The institute for the Study of war," that is a tough name, but there needs to be an Institute for the Study of War. Don Kagan has done some remarkable histories, which bear reading, but I remember in one he quoted Will Durant, who studied this actually, and found that in the last 3500 years of recorded world history, he could find about 250 that were free of war. So that's less than 10 percent. So for better or worse, it is a condition of human nature. As I learned one from a rabbi about government he said "if there weren't some rule of law, people would be like fish, the big ones would eat the small ones." There is no rule of law internationally. So because there are big ones, there are small ones that are violent that will take advantage of those who are otherwise peaceful. The only way that civilization the way we want it to be will survive is if we maintain the capacity to defend ourselves. We maintain the capacity to win wars. We would be a lot better at that if there are institutes for the study of war. So I am very honored to be receiving this award tonight and to have participated in this discussion.

Dr. Kagan: Thank you so much Senator for your kind words. For all that you have done for us here in the United States and for many of the people around the world that have yearned to be free and have made a go of it. You have really been a tremendous leader. But I think maybe should talk more about that after dinner.

Senator Lieberman: Thank you.

Dr. Kagan: Thank you very much.