

DÉBAT

Jim HOAGLAND, Contributing Editor, *The Washington Post*

If you could identify yourself and keep your questions as brief as possible. Please do not use your time to make comments, just ask questions please.

Mona Makram EBEID, Egyptian Senator and former member of Parliament, Distinguished Lecturer, Political Science Department, American University in Cairo

I think the panel was extremely interesting, particularly on the post US elections. What I want to ask Mr Hoagland, in particular, last year you talked about the US disengaging completely from the Middle East. Mr Obama has underlined this in the Obama doctrine in his interview with Goldberg. I do not know if you are aware of this, but in the Middle East, the reaction to Mr Trump's elections is totally different from the West. In fact, he was acclaimed. One of the first ones to congratulate him, was the Egyptian president. People are cautiously optimistic let us say, that relations with the Arab world will be different than what Mr Obama has said. What do you think it will be with Mr Trump? Is there reason for optimism or is it just wishful thinking?

Jim HOAGLAND, Contributing Editor, *The Washington Post*

Thank you, Madam, for that question. I will briefly respond then see if there is anybody on the panel who would like to take it on. I did talk in the past about Obama treating the Middle East as a burning building that he wanted to flee after his experiences there. I think in general, we are going to see a continuation under Donald Trump of the tendency to have less America, rather than more America, in foreign affairs. Trump is going to be absorbed by the internal divisions that the panel has perceived very well.

Thus far, he has not shown a lot of interest in the classical foreign policy games, the balance of power games that we know about. I think again the Middle East should look on Trump, the first six months in particular as an opportunity, to get in there, to influence him, to try to get him more involved perhaps but I am not sure you will be successful.

A Qatari participant

Thank you very much for your interesting comments. I have a quick comment and a question. I think the problem is not just Trump, it is Trump's picks. We have Mike Flynn, Steve Bannon, Mike Pompeo; they are all hawkish, war advocates. Some of them were even criticising President Obama for ending the programme of interrogation techniques. I am wondering, how would that influence the US image when you have people like these three gentlemen, who are advocates of interrogation, water boarding, amongst other things, how would that influence the war on terror? Since you may have read ISIS have been cheering for Donald Trump's win, saying that it is going to make their job easier. I was wondering if anyone has an answer to that. Thank you.

Jim HOAGLAND, Contributing Editor, *The Washington Post*

Ryan, that falls right into your wheelhouse if you could give us a quick answer.

Ryan EVANS, Founder, CEO, Editor, *War on the Rocks*

Yes, I think that is a really important question. What is interesting about that. A few months ago, Trump gave a second big foreign policy speech. It was billed as how he was going to see the world and it was all about terrorism. All of it. The single organising factor of how Trump at least seems to view the world, in terms of global strategy is about the issue of terrorism, which I think is really interesting and dangerous.

As far as the moral questions that you bring up about torture, and things like that, I think it is an open question. I can tell you that in Washington, there are a lot of people talking about the ethics of serving in this administration. This is mostly playing out publicly among people likely to be political appointees. However, I can also tell you that there are a lot of people in government, civil servants in our agencies, who are talking openly about, 'Well, what is my red line? At what point do I resign?', because we are not going to go back and do these things again.

However, if the Trump administration does decide to go in that direction and reinstitute torture, Trump has said publicly many times, that not only does he think water boarding is torture – he thinks it is torture – but he thinks it is not enough and that we need to go further. I do think there will be a lot of resignations and a lot of public pressure as a result of that.

Hopefully, there will be some congressional push back, which will be more likely after the mid-terms if the Democrats are able to win back some more seats. I still think he is going to be able to find people in the federal bureaucracy willing to carry out those policies. I think that will be terrible and a complete catastrophe. I wish I had something more comfortable to say than that. However, I just think for a moment about a president who sees the world entirely through the prism of counter-terrorism. He does not really understand or maybe care too much about the idea of great power competition. I think that is a pretty scary situation to be in.

Vuk JEREMIC, President, Center for International Relations and Sustainable Development (Cirsd), former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Serbia

I think we are definitely moving away from the attitude of liberal internationalism of the United States of America, and by extension of the wider world. That is simply the way it is in the wake of the election. I understand that people are eagerly expecting President Trump's inaugural address, but again I would not put too much premium on speeches. Arguably, one of the best speeches in history was Barack Obama's speech in Cairo, and very little came as a follow-up to that speech. That said, I don't think we will hear anything in Trump's inaugural that will contradict what he had been saying during the campaign. And he will try to follow through with action.

In briefly addressing the first question, which I will also try to answer, I think that there is an opportunity here. Not in terms of torture, but in terms of the broader attitudes of some of Trump's nominees, and of Trump himself. The attitude that Trump says he is going to have towards resolving world affairs is probably something that would work well with a number of actors that are currently present in the Middle East: both the actors from the region as well as the external ones who do have influence, together with America.

Tadakatsu SANO, Attorney at Law, Jones Day, former Vice Minister for International Affairs, Japan

Thank you. I have a question for Mr Hoagland and Mr Evans. The presidential campaign this time was very exciting and a lot of money has been spent. However, the number of votes in the United States has been less than the previous presidential election. How do you analyse that?

In addition to that, I found the Supreme Court decision of 2010, saying that corporations have no limit to spending money on the campaign for political activities; does it really affect this election? I do not think the Supreme Court

decision will be overruled anytime soon because of the Republican majority in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. The Supreme Court decision may have a certain impact for the coming elections and so on. Thank you very much.

Jim HOAGLAND, Contributing Editor, *The Washington Post*

I think in this particular case, in this election, the Supreme Court decision on corporate donations to political candidates did not play a significant role because Donald Trump spent very little on traditional campaigning methods. Hilary spent a great deal but it did not produce the results desired. I think this vote by and large has to be seen as a rejection. A rejection by the nation of the way things are. A rejection of experts, of institutions, and of these two particular candidates. I think that explains why the vote was down. These candidates, neither of them who stirred a great deal of enthusiasm in my view. Ryan, did you want to briefly add to that?

Ryan EVANS, Founder, CEO, Editor, *War on the Rocks*

Yes. I will just point to what I think is a larger issue, which I think encompasses what you asked about, sort of two complementing issues actually. The first is that in our country, we have a very powerful executive and we also have norms, things that you would usually expect to be regulated are not regulated. When, for example, foreign visitors come to observe American elections, they are always surprised by the fact that Americans do not have to show identification when they vote. They show up at their local polling place, they say who they are and they vote. Foreign visitors are always surprised by that and then we say, 'Well, our system is just so strong and we have these norms in place. We all trust each other and everything is fine and that is why it works'. However, the trust that underlines that system and those norms are starting to wear away.

At the same time, we have less space between the passions of the masses and the legislative branch and more people voted into the executive than we ever had before. What I mean by that is the rise of the primary systems, referendums being used more commonly. You could even go back to early in the 20th century when direct election to the Senate was instituted instead of state legislators picking senators. All these things are diminishing the space between popular passions and the state actually deciding on major things. I think that as that happens and as trust and our norms erode, we are starting to see the larger system erode.

Jim HOAGLAND, Contributing Editor, *The Washington Post*

I want to thank this excellent panel and the questions from the audience. Be assured that we will carry the word back as to your impressions of the United States at this point. Thank you very much.