



May 14, 2021

Featuring Tony Badran and Michael Doran

Hosted by FDD Founder and President Clifford D. May

MAY: President Biden has been eager to rejoin the deal that President Obama concluded with Iran's rulers in 2015 and from which President Trump withdrew three years later. The quarrel between advocates for and critics of the so-called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action has been viewed as a disagreement over the best way to prevent the theocrats in Tehran from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability. Our two guests today see it differently. They've written a comprehensive analysis arguing that Mr. Biden intends to both enrich and empower Iran's rulers while simultaneously downgrading relations with Saudi Arabia, the Gulf Arab states, Israel and others with whom the United States has had long friendly relations with. In other words, President Biden is attempting to establish a new order in the Middle East, one that regards the Islamic Republic of Iran as America's primary strategic partner in the region.

They conclude also that President Biden has decided not to speak candidly about this dramatic change, which they call the realignment. As for the latest kinetic battle between Israel and Hamas, I suspect they see that as an inevitable consequence of the Biden tilt toward Tehran. We'll find out when we speak with Michael Doran, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute and Tony Badran, a research fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. We're glad you'll be in this conversation too here on *Foreign Policy*.

Guys, I want to start with a little shoptalk, if you will. The piece you've written for *Tablet Magazine*, which I got to say is really a fine publication, is almost 9,000 words long. That's like 10 regular sized op-eds. You guys must've discussed this, and your editors must have discussed this. Why did you decide to go so long and why did your editor decide to let you go so long? Michael, you start.

DORAN: Cliff, we actually went short. We wanted to go much longer. Our original draft was 12,000 words and we had to cut it back. They wanted us to cut it back to 8,000, but we fought with them. It was Tony. Tony did a lot of crying, a lot of tears. We wanted it to be a definitive statement, so we were going all around the Middle East. We had a section on Iraq, for example. We had a much deeper discussion of the regional dialogues with Iran, and so forth. We did that because we originally started with, we were going to write like a 1,200-word piece.

We found it very difficult to address the arguments that the administration was making about its policy, because there were so many things that were interconnected. In order to understand the regional policy, you had to talk about the JCPOA. We had to unpack, what I would say, "the lies or misdirection about the JCPOA." So, it just kept getting bigger and bigger and then we thought, "let's just make it a comprehensive statement about their entire Middle East strategy."

MAY: Really good. Tony, do you want to add to that?

BADRAN: Yeah. I mean, Mike, pretty much covered it. I mean, the thing is also, Mike and I have been writing about this subject since Obama's second term, even in the lead up to the JCPOA as from my vantage point. Mike wrote about it. You'll remember there was a big article on Iran and then negotiations in *Mosaic Magazine*. I was writing about it almost on a weekly basis in relation to Syria, where I was seeing the regional repercussions of this policy in tandem with the JCPOA negotiations as they were playing out in Syria and Lebanon and so on.

So having this in mind as a background, when you try to explain it, for us, there's something, there's a reference point in our mind, but it's not necessarily one that people are familiar with. So, when you make a statement about, well, here's what they're doing, or here's this word that they're using to describe something and this word doesn't come out of the blue, it has a history, and it was used to mean something else or to deceive or misdirect and so on and so forth. So, we had to pull all that information together so that the reader can have the same background that we had analyzed over many, many, many years.



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It was systematized and obviously in order to do so with various categories around the Middle East, like Mike said, Saudi Arabia, Israel, the nuclear five and so on and so forth, domestic policy. All of that had to be systematized and the language that they use clarified as well.

MAY: Okay. By the way, we're going to dig deep into the thesis of this in a second and I also want to suggest that listeners do read the piece because there's no substitute for that, although it's going to be interesting to hear you talk about it. But I do want to as you were bringing this piece to press, as we used to say in the old days, missiles were being launched from Gaza at Israeli towns and cities, and much of the media, they were saying that this latest battle stems either from a property dispute in Sheikh Jarrah, which is a neighborhood of Jerusalem, or dispute over access to Al-Aqsa, which is Islam's third holiest site in Jerusalem, which is also just above the Western Wall, the holiest place for the Jewish people.

Am I correct to surmise that you see it differently, that you see it not stemming from those incidents, whatever they were, but rather essentially as a consequence, indeed a foreseeable consequence of the changes in policies from the Trump administration to the Biden administration? Is that how you see it, Michael?

DORAN: Absolutely. I mean, I see the conflict today as a proxy conflict between the United States and Iran, between Israel and Iran and the United States and Iran. Obviously, it has all those other elements that you mentioned. There is a property dispute. That does inflame local opinion on both sides. There is the confluence of Ramadan and Jerusalem Day – the Israeli Jerusalem day and the Iranian Jerusalem Day. All those things are not inconsequential at all, but from the American vantage point, the strategically significant factor is that the Iranians are supplying weaponry to Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the Iranians are inciting them to use this weaponry to attack the Israeli civilians at this time.

But one of the things that Tony and I tried to do in the piece is to put together for the reader, a different way of understanding the relationship between the great power contests or the contest between the states in the Middle East and these local conflicts. The realignment, one of the theses of the realignment, as I think we discussed, or maybe we didn't actually in the final draft go deeply into the texts of Rob Malley and Jake Sullivan. I can't remember what finally made it into the article and didn't, but they have a different thesis.

I mean, their thesis is that these local conflicts are local conflicts, and the United States gets sucked into them because the local actors, I mean, the local allies of the United States, the Saudis, the Israelis, they pull the United States in to fight against Iran and that then pulls Iran in further. So, it's the Iranian-U.S. conflict is a consequence of the ambitions of our allies, which I think Tony and I think that's absolutely ridiculous, and we pretty much said that in the article. I don't want to deny that there are these local things going on, but that's what the Iranians do.

The Iranians come in and they use the Houthis in Yemen, they use the Shiite community in Lebanon. They try to use the Shiite community in Iraq. They're allied with Hamas and with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad is a tool of theirs. I mean, they basically created it. So, these local actors present their agendas in terms of local concerns, but the Iranian concern is to destroy the American security system, and that's what we should be focused on.

MAY: Tony, just picking up on it. Let me just do it through one more thing that I find interesting. This is not a defense of President Trump. This is factual, but critics of President Trump warned that if he moved the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem, the region would blow up. That didn't happen. Critics of President Trump warned that if the United States recognizes Israeli sovereignty in the Golan, the region would blow up. It didn't. Critics warn that the peace plan that was put together by Jared Kushner would cause the Middle East to blow up. It didn't.



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President Biden comes in and he reaches out to the Palestinians. He essentially apologizes to them for Trump's policies. He writes big checks to organizations like UNRWA, which is a welfare organization for refugees, Palestinian refugees, and their millions of descendants. Having done all that, the region blows up. Again, this is not a defense. This is just to say that something that I think to most people would seem counter-intuitive is going on here that when Biden comes out, reaches out, and it ends up in a conflagration. Can you sort that out for us?

BADRAN: Oh yeah, absolutely. I mean, this is exactly the right framework to my mind. I mean, we discussed this as well in the article that President Trump puts together the Abraham Accords framework. The Abraham Accords framework is a total repudiation of the second leg of Barack Obama's legacy. The first, like obviously the comprehensive one, is the realignment that we described with Iran. Part of that, okay, which is something that he did literally in his last hours in office is to orchestrate an American position that is akin or an adoption of the old Arab rejectionist line vis-à-vis Israel and premise America's position toward Israel on the rejectionist line and the 1967 lines.

He [Obama] enshrined it in a Security Council Resolution, just as he enshrined the JCPOA in a security council resolution as well. That means it has nothing to do with the will of the American people and so those things to my mind are parallel. They're part of the same equation. That means that the Golan Heights in that framework cannot be Israel's. Jerusalem has to be divided according to the Arab position of the '67 lines. And more importantly, it elevates the Palestinians to be at the center of regional dynamics.

Now, of course, I don't necessarily believe that they believe that the Palestinians are at the center, but just like Arab rejectionists regimes did for decades, they use the Palestinians to spoil any peace agreements between Israel and the Arab states. That's what they did all throughout history and what's interesting to see now is the logical continuation of Obama's adoption of the rejectionist view translate under Biden with the same team, let's be clear, into now also looking to sabotage the Abraham Accords through the Palestinians.

It's remarkable, the parallel of how the behavior mirrors a historic precedent that we've seen with states like Syria, or Iran for that matter of how they use the Palestinians to do these types of things. The Palestinians intuitively when the administration comes in and releases, as you mentioned, millions of dollars to UNRWA and other Palestinian programs says very clearly that they have a distaste for the Abraham Accords. They don't even use the term, the Abraham Accords is there. It's really funny in a way. They tell Saudi Arabia, for instance, you are not to dialogue with Israel.

You're to dialogue with Iran. Okay and they re-elevate the Palestinians and surround them with rhetoric about equality with Israel, like equality, not meaning that they shouldn't have equal rights, but to put them on the same pedestal right? You're elevating them back to the center. The Palestinians, they've been playing this game forever. They understood intuitively what that means, and they understood that they're back in center stage and the way the behavior plays out is through to sort of leverage this attention is through this type of violence.

MAY: Michael, there's one other spark here that I want you to address, and that is the Palestinian elections that did not happen. They didn't happen, I think, because President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority thought, at the end of the day, if he actually had elections –He hasn't had elections in like 16 years. If he had elections Fatah would win. So, he decided not to do that. Some analysts would say that, okay, so then he ratchets up pressure against Israel to reestablish his bona fides as anti-Israel, Hamas has to compete and, in a way, this conflict that we're seeing underway right now, that is the way Palestinian elections, that's the form they now take. Hamas is showing, "Well, you think you're tough because you're saying Al-Aqsa mosque is under threat from bloodthirsty Israelis. We'll send missiles into Israel, and we'll show you we're tougher and that this is politics by other means", in a certain way.



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DORAN: I certainly think so. In this conflict, there's definitely a Hamas-Fatah rivalry and particularly an effort by Hamas to establish itself as the dominant player in the – Hamas' aspiration, I think, its greatest near-term aspiration is to become the dominant element in the Palestinian Liberation Organization. That's what it has always – It has always wanted to supplant Fatah and become the privileged representative of the Palestinians. So, they're definitely pursuing that goal in this. They are also, Hamas together with the Iranians, as Tony was saying destroying the Abraham Accords. I mean they are putting a tremendous amount of pressure on signatories to the Abraham Accords and on the Saudis who are the kind of silent partners in the Abraham Accords.

The UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan are all very close to Saudi Arabia. They would not have made this move toward Israel if the Saudis hadn't supported it quietly. That was the next move in the game. What the Biden administration should have done to take the Accords to the next level would be to work on Israeli-Saudi rapprochement and to create a stronger block. That block also includes, by the way, the Egyptians and the Jordanians. Instead, what the Biden administration did is it sent a signal. Tony mentioned it's this even-handed aspect between the Israelis and the Palestinians and putting the Palestinians back in central stage, but what we show in the article is that that's part of a larger approach to Iran by the administration. The administration is privileging Iran's positions, not just among the Palestinians, but also – or creating an opportunity for Iran or privileging it's position. Not just among the Palestinians, but also in Yemen, in Iraq, in Syria, and also Lebanon. I mean, we've already privileged their position in Lebanon.

So, they're looking to move away from a traditional containment policy, the Biden administration is and instead form a kind of partnership in stabilizing the Middle East with the Iranians and they don't admit this. I was thinking, we didn't mention UN Resolution 2334, which Tony just alluded to, the one that Obama kicked the Israelis with as he left office in 2016. But we could have mentioned it because it fits a pattern that we discuss in the article, which is of dishonesty and misdirection. Because the United States orchestrated 2334, but it put others like New Zealand in the forefront. They're the ones who pushed it through the UN and when it came to the vote, the United States abstained. Which allows Obama and his supporters to say when people like Tony and I say Obama kicked Israel as he left, then all these guys can gaslight us and say, "No, the United States was just responding to the will of the international community and actually we abstained on that one." As if the United States is not a great power, the greatest power on Earth, and it makes these things happen or stops them.

MAY: Most listeners will know this, but I want to be clear in case some do not, that what 2334 essentially did, you correct me if I'm wrong, is to say that Israelis and Jews have no rights even to the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, no rights even to the Temple Mount and the Western Wall, the holiest site in Judaism for thousands of years. If they have no right there, then what right do they have really anywhere in the country that easily leads to a group like Human Rights Watch saying, as they did recently, "Israel is an apartheid country. If it's an apartheid country, apartheid deserves to be abolished. So, an apartheid regime deserves to be abolished by almost any means possible. That means that Hamas has every legitimacy to go ahead and pound Israel. Or with missiles, you can say, some would say, "Well, but they're doing it against civilians."

Hamas' defenders would say, "Well, they don't have a lot of precision-guided missiles, so what do you want them to do?" In other words, I'm suggesting that there's sort of a slippery slope, and they're on snowboards sliding down it with tremendous accuracy here. Coming from President Obama's view on this whole subject, which – and reflect on this, because I'm not sure, which I suppose President Biden shares. Although you don't think of him, most people don't think of him as somebody of the far left somebody who is – To be fair, his administration has said, "We do not agree with Human Rights Watch that Israel is an apartheid regime. We do not take that view. We take the view that Israel has the right to defend itself from Hamas rockets."



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But this whole concept, this realignment as you call it, which puts the Islamic Republic of Iran at center stage and suggests that the Islamic Republic of Iran can be accommodated in a way that is beneficial for U.S. interests even if that leads to the Islamic Republic of Iran getting nuclear weapons over the next decade or so. This is all fine from the U.S. point of view. Okay, I got to ask, and I guess, is do we think Biden believes in this? Do we think that Obama has whispered this in his ear, and he's said essentially, "Yes, sir. I'll go ahead and complete your mission," or is it other people that are part of the Biden administration that are pushing this and convincing Biden, that this is a strategy to pursue? I guess, Tony, you started on that.

BADRAN: Well, so I have two angles on this. The first, it's stuff that we discussed, to bring it back to our article, the stuff that we discussed in our article in terms of strategies that they use. Because if you start from the premise that their end game here is that there is the United States and Iran as the privileged interlocutor. Everything else they view as either a nuisance or a potential sabotage of this partnership, which means that includes Israel too. So, then you have to devise strategies to contain not Iran, but your old allies. So, we discussed, for instance, the values faint. That you start talking about U.S. values, and somehow our allies are not living up to our values. So, we have to them in the head with a club. Same thing with Israel. Somehow mistreatment of the Palestinians is against U.S. values, and we should hit it in the head with a club.

There is what we call the bear hug tactic, which is you profess love and concern for Israel, for its soul, and as well as its security. We really, we will profess everything about how Israel has the right to defend itself when rockets are coming down on its cities, as we legitimize the missile bases from which these missiles are being launched by Iran, whether in Syria, whether in Iraq, whether in Yemen, by as Obama called them, "Recognizing them as Iranian equities." What does that mean, an equity? What is an equity, what is Iran's equity in Syria? What is Iran's interest in Syria?

Syria is a logistical connector to Hezbollah in Lebanon, for them to be able to smuggle weapons to, and a strategic depth for Hezbollah in the case of war with Israel. Now it has become also a secondary front on the Golan, which by the way, the Biden administration refuses to recognize [Israeli] sovereignty, they only speak of recognizing Israeli control over the Golan, not sovereignty. They haven't rescinded it yet, but clearly their position is pre-Trump recognition of sovereignty. So, you have those tactics that they do, and the Palestinians are a very useful tool in both regards that they can use, to distract and sort of keep the Israelis off off-kilter, off balance, and in a corner that's kind of what you should be worried about. That's the nature of our relationship and what you should be concerned with while we conduct our business with the Iranians.

Then there's the second angle, which is the domestic angle. There's a very strong – The base of the Democratic party, the progressive element in the Democratic party in particular, these are not on the wing. These are on the rise and their views on Israel are not positive. They dislike Israel. They don't like the American association with Israel. You see them now, you see the various protests in the country, the various members of Congress from the Democratic party's if you want to call it the progressive wing, and so on and so forth. Elements in the Obama team which are now in the Biden team on the official level share very problematic views about Israel itself. So, there is that element as well that is a domestic policy element that now also is reflected in the foreign policy as well.

MAY: I'm going to follow up on that with Michael. Before I do, a quick question, if it can be quick. While I've got you on this Tony, and while I think about it. So, you've got over a thousand missiles as we speak that have been launched from Gaza over Israel. They probably have, I've heard estimates of about 30,000 more missiles that Hamas has in Gaza, but there are 150,000 or so missiles in Lebanon under the control of Hezbollah, including many more precision-guided missiles, which can possibly overwhelm or evade the Iron Dome system. Both Nasrallah, the head of Hezbollah, and Ayatollah Khamenei in



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Tehran need to be thinking, "Hmm, would it be useful for our goals to have Hezbollah join in the fray right now?" How are they, what's their thought process on this? Is it going to happen or what's the percentage chance that it will?

BADRAN: Yeah. I doubt that Hezbollah is going to join the fray at this moment. Also let's remember, Nasrallah has expressed deep satisfaction at the policy of the United States, not just in terms of forcing Saudi Arabia into a dialogue with Iran, but also the idea that sanctions relief – Not idea, a fact that sanctions relief is around the corner and the policy more broadly, regionally, as it's coming from Washington is extremely advantageous to them. It's all moving in the direction that they want it to be.

Now, Hezbollah can poke at Israel short of an overt involvement that opens the door to say a full-blown conflict. This would be in keeping with precedent from previous wars in Gaza like in 2014 for example. It allows Hezbollah to poke while maintaining deniability. As everyone knows who's responsible, but this avoids a full-on conflagration. For instance, they can allow for supposedly unknown groups, Palestinian factions, or even mock factions meaning that they would do it and then attribute it to someone else, to fire a couple a fire of rockets whether it's from Lebanon, southern Syria, or from the northern front. In addition, as they do that Hezbollah and Iran while not deterring Israel from completing its military missions in Gaza necessarily, it'll still send a reminder about the shape of a future war—that such a war will be a multifront war involving Iran's bases both to the south of Israel as well as to its north.

MAY: I want to make sure that listeners understand that Israeli citizens who are Arab– Israeli Palestinians, if you will. Even during the intifadas they've generally been quiet. They may have sympathized with the Palestinians, but in a city like Haifa or Lod, these are cities where Arabs, Jews, Muslims, Jews, Israeli and citizens of whatever religion or ethnic background have gotten along reasonably well, and yet now they've been incited into these fights at the same time. It's also at a time when you have an Arab politician who has risen as never before within Israeli society. Mansour Abbas is sort of a kingmaker because which party he supports could change what happens in the Knesset and the leadership. All this is now being endangered. Now, I don't think any of this is coincidence, comrade. I think this is very, very purposeful.

Let me get back to you on one thing, Michael, you'll be good on. The idea that—I mean, do the Biden people believe that ideology doesn't matter? That when the Khomeinists who rule around say, "Death to America and death to Israel," they don't really mean that, they just want a little more power, a little more respect and if they're shown that, all will be well? Is this sort of a realist view that it's all a matter of interests and ideologies, it should not be taken seriously? We certainly know that what Iran wants to do is be the controlling power – well, it is in Lebanon. It pretty much is in Syria. It is becoming in Yemen through the Houthis, who are terrorists, who the Biden administration said, "We'll make believe they're not terrorists. We'll just lift the designation without any change in behavior." They have gone on to attack civilians with impunity and with alacrity. They're very happy not to be called terrorists while they engage in terrorism. Can you explain any of that?

DORAN: I think a good way to start actually is not with the Middle East, and it's with American domestic politics because I think that makes a lot of their foreign policy thinking a lot easier to grasp. If you start from the assumption that the goal of these policies is to destroy the Trump coalition domestically or to weaken it, well then it looks a lot different and it looks a lot more rational. As a foreign policy doctrine, and we went into some detail in the article, there's a lot that's wanting there if you have any kind of background on Iran. It's also quite striking that they can't tell the truth about what they're doing. They hide. The extent to which they are getting out of the Iran containment business. They're hiding all the time, and they use rhetoric that suggests that they're still trying to contain Iran when they're clearly not.

So, if they think that this is really as great as they pretend or as they say it is in the Middle East, how come they have to hide it? But if you look at it domestically, they're presenting a picture of the Middle East which totally affirms



the progressive cosmology, which sees evangelical Christians, neoconservatives, traditional Republicans, supporters of a traditional Republican's muscular foreign policy, all of those positions that they see as the war party. If you talk to progressives, the cause of war in the world, the cause of conflict is the American right? That's where conflict comes from. So how do we prevent conflict? Well, we defeat that coalition. The progressives of course hate Benjamin Netanyahu. They hate Mohammed bin Salman. Those are devils in their cosmology. So, the argument is that the American right combined with the Zionists in American domestic politics, they are allying with Netanyahu and Muhammad Bin Salman to drive the United States into conflict and to have conflict with Iran which, if it weren't for the aggressive American policy, wouldn't be belligerent.

That's their argument. That, in a nutshell. If you say, "Okay, Joe Biden won by 44,000 votes distributed across three states, an extremely razor thin margin, and his number one goal is to destroy Trumpism," then you want to erase the Abraham Accords. Of course, the greatest thing that Trump did in foreign policy was in the Middle East. You want to erase that legacy forever and then you want to demonize his followers in domestic politics. This is a great tool for that. So wonderful. It's a great hammer to bash away at all of those things. Now, where I think they miscalculate badly from their own point of view. I'm not talking about – From their own point of view, is that I think they miscalculate. We're going to have to wait and see. I don't think that they realized that they were going to get the kind of violence that they've gotten so quickly.

I think they expected, when they told the Iranians that they wanted to go back to the JCPOA, I think they thought the Iranians would run back to the JCPOA. I think they thought that the Iranians would reduce the tension in Iraq, and I think when they lifted the designation from the Houthis, they thought the Iranians would also moderate the Houthis in Yemen. I doubt they even expected that the Iranians would make a push through Hamas at the Israelis. Now, fortunately for them, most of the people commentating on the Middle East in America and a lot of the people following the Middle East in America don't see it the way Tony and I see it, and so they don't necessarily draw a connection between the Iraqi theater, the Palestinian theater, the Yemeni theater, and so forth. They don't read the region as a contest or a dialogue, however you want to put it, between the United States and Iran.

So, they're fortunate in that respect, but enough people are. Enough people are asking the question that you started with, which is, "how come Trump had a quiet Middle East and Biden, who comes in with the supposedly better policy, gets a big explosion all across the region?" More than that, what this violence between the Israelis and Palestinians is doing is it's bringing to the forefront in the Democratic party the AOC [Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez], Ilhan Omar, and Rashida Tlaib element, and bringing it to the forefront. They're not just bringing Hamas to the forefront on the ground in the Middle East. They're bringing Ilhan Omar to the forefront. I don't believe that the American people want a Democratic party led by Ilhan Omar. But what it's got right now is a foreign policy, is a Middle East policy that is Ilhan Omar's Middle East policy, or something very close to it. So that's a problem for them, I believe.

MAY: Tony, this is getting close to the end here but let me ask you this question: People who follow the news at all know that Tony Blinken is Biden's new Secretary of State. Jake Sullivan is the new National Security Advisor. I think both are regarded as moderates, as sensible kinds of guys. They've hired Robert Malley to be their Iran envoy in this. Maybe tell us a little more about him, because people might be surprised to learn he is rather different from Blinken and Sullivan in his views, or so we would be led to believe.

BADRAN: Well, that's actually a great question because–



that is very much at the center of our article. Mike mentioned earlier the Robert Malley *Foreign Policy* article from 2019, which we've discussed in our piece, which can be really viewed as a systematization of the Obama doctrine. The Obama doctrine as it played out during the Obama years, and what he described as the sort of suspended experiment that needed to be brought to completion, and what should happen when the Democrats take power again. So, remember this is 2019.

These are not Robert Malley's thoughts. This is Obama's program that Robert Malley as being sort of the closest in terms of ideological thinking, to my mind to Obama, was the most capable person to systematize it, and to present it as a template for all democratic, as a platform for the Democratic party.

Fast forward to the second *Foreign Affairs* article that was discussed in our piece in May 2020, I think it was, by Jake Sullivan. Jake Sullivan takes the Malley template and now presents it as candidate Biden's program. If you actually hold up the Malley piece and the Sullivan piece, other than maybe tone, they're in substance, in terms of substance, there's no difference. It is the exact same thing. Everything that Malley –

If you want, it's kind of like a relay. Whatever Malley said, this is what the Obama doctrine is and that got suspended, now Jake Sullivan takes it in a "centrist tone" and says, "Here's the program that we're going to take to implement this doctrine moving forward." I really invite listeners to not just read our piece, but to take the time, pull up the Malley piece, pull up the Sullivan piece, read them carefully, and you will see that this is actually – There is no distinction in the two.

Malley being in this position as the Special Envoy for Iran, is again, because he is the guy who holds the Obama doctrine, who understands it, who articulates it most clearly, is basically there to see it through to the finish line, what he described as something that was suspended halfway, he's going to drive it through the finish line.

But not in conflict, that's one of the key points that Mike and I make in the piece, that not in conflict with the Biden advisors but rather in total consensus with them.

MAY: Michael, any final thoughts or essential points that people need to understand?

DORAN: Just to add onto what Tony just said there, one of the things that Sullivan did in his piece was pretend that he was responding to things he saw on the ground in the Middle East, developments in the Middle East. The piece is titled "America's Opportunity", so there's been, "Oh, we've seen what Trump did, and we see what's happening in the Middle East. Here's a new idea." He doesn't make reference to Obama, and he doesn't make reference to Malley, so he's presenting it like, "Hey, I've got an idea. Why don't we do the following?" Which actually just happens to be exactly what Obama was doing, but there's no recognition of that in the piece.

DORAN: I think we need to be aware that this is what's going on. The job of Sullivan, and the job of Blinken is to put a centrist Clintonian face on what is essentially a radical progressive policy. They know that that's their job. They totally understand it and their job is to put this centrist rhetoric around these positions that are not centrist in any way. Unfortunately, they understand it as a move and as a way of splitting people in on the right because there's a great desire among Republican foreign policy people to go back to the foreign policy that we had in the Republican party prior to Donald Trump. There's a deep longing, I think, a very unhealthy one, or it might be healthy in its sentiment, but not healthy in ways it manifests itself to reconstitute the responsible center.



So, when Democrats like Blinken and Sullivan present themselves as the responsible center rhetorically, they automatically find that a number of significant elements in the Republican party gravitate toward them like metal filings to a magnet. You find the same thing also with a lot of their humanitarian rhetoric. The humanitarian rhetoric on Yemen, you can see a lot of senators respond to that because a lot of people in the Republican party are uneasy about Saudi Arabia and so forth.

So, there's a willingness to take this rhetoric about Saudi Arabia at face value and not look at the larger context in which they are making these arguments about Saudi Arabia, and just to respond to the moral argument. So, my final thought is I want those senators who are aligning themselves with a lot of these policies to stop and think about, "do we really want a permanent Iranian base in Yemen, and an Iran that is aligned with China, which has a base in Djibouti, just 20 miles from that permanent Iranian base in Yemen?" None of this makes any sense from an American strategic point of view.

We ought to as a party, we ought to be standing with a unified vision of what the alternative is, but we can't do that unless we first understand that the other side has a unified vision, and it's very scary.

BADRAN: Yeah, just the last thought is just to follow up on that, this is very important couple of points, is that the part of the strategy on their part is also not just to divide the Republican establishment, the foreign policy establishment, but also to divide the Republican party's representatives from their actual base. When you're targeting evangelicals through this type of policy and presenting a popular policy with the Republican base under Trump, which has made very important achievements like the Abraham Accords and so on and so forth. And a moral achievement also of defining enemies and friends, and say that, "that's bad," and get Republican representatives to back that, you're dividing them from their base and turning them effectively as an instrument of their warfare against their base.

Two, also on the point that Mike made with China, which is what Trump really was successful at, if you remember, after the Jamal Khashoggi affair, Trump issued a statement in defense of the U.S. Alliance with Saudi Arabia, which people saw was very controversial at the time, or tone deaf, or whatever. But if you read it, I really encourage your listeners to read that statement.

It's a perfect articulation of American foreign policy and why America has alliances in the Middle East, the prosperity that the order that America established over 70 years, the prosperity that it has afforded Americans, that this order now is being, with American assistance, being overturned and handed over to a terrorist regime that is a satellite of China, which will end up controlling choke points that are essentially – We just saw a gas shortage in the United States. We saw logistical supply lines failures during COVID. Imagine that world and what it means to America's prosperity and America's security. So, this is not trivial. This is not something that goes on over there that has no consequence on American lives. That was part of the appeal and the success of the Trump administration that these guys are trying now to destroy in a domestic sense, by playing it in a foreign policy play.

MAY: Look, I'm going to close this out by again urging listeners to sit down in a comfortable chair, pour themselves in an adult beverage, and read your article in *Tablet Magazine* because if they do so, they will understand this situation in a way they have not up to now. This has been a great conversation, to be continued. Thank you, Michael Doran. Thank you, Tony Badran. Thanks to all of you who are also joining in this conversation for listening to *Foreign Policy*.