Live Broadcast of NPR's Talk of the Nation

Obama's Foreign Policy: Opportunity and Risk

Jane Harman:
Hi everybody, I'm just the warm-up act. My name is Jane Harman and I'm wondering where -- thank you.

[laughter]

-- where the rest of the audience is, but I'm president and CEO of the Wilson Center and an NPR junky. And I have been on "Talk of the Nation" in the past and it reaches a huge audience, that would be you, plus others. And it's an honor to host it at the Wilson Center today. It's also fun to have friend participating. David Ignatius is out in the hall finding out the latest on the -- what's happening in Syria. But he moderated the national conversation on -- called 9/11, the next 10 years. Last September, he recently returned from Syria and, as I said, he's working on it. He sent me flowers, I want you to know, to make up for years of rudeness, but didn't work.

[laughter]

Bob Kagan and I -- that's Bob Kagan over there -- were on "Talk of the Nation" with Neal Conan, who is right here, this September to discuss how U.S. Foreign Policy has changed, another 9/11 topic. His book, "The World America Made" -- I mentioned your flowers but you missed it. His book, "The World America Made" caught the president's attention and it should be required reading and show be viewing of the movie "Lincoln." Okay, how many of you have seen that? Okay. David, have you seen it?

David Ignatius:
No, I was too busy ordering those flowers.

Jane Harman:
And --

[laughter]

-- the clock is ticking, but Graham Allison, Cheng Li, and Ashley Tellis, who will be in the second segment, have all

been active at the Lincoln Center there -- at the Lincoln Center. Wilson Center.

[laughter]

Get me out of here!

[laughter]

They're dear friends, we love our partnership with NPR and the NPR team and the professionalism and passion, some of it is encompassed right here in the body of Neal Conan, who will now say a few words and I am slinking off the stage to return later. Thank you. Clap!

[applause]

Neal Conan:
Thanks everybody for coming. Thank you Jane for that gracious introduction. I thought you were going to mention my book on foreign policy.

[laughter]

Play-by-play baseball radio and --

Jane Harman:
[inaudible]

Neal Conan:
But the fact is we're thrilled to be part of this. Well, The National Conversation, we proposed the "Talk of the Nation," but it turns out had been taken already. It's, in fact --

[laughter]

-- it's a topic that both these institutions are so superbly well-positioned to do because, in fact, it's what we've been doing since our inception. It's what National Public Radio is all about, which is to promote information and "Talk of the Nation," of course, is thrilled to be the interactive part of that where the audience can get on the conversation. And the Wilson Center has some of the best scholars around and they've been regular members of our crew on the air ever since, well, I can remember. In the meantime there are special rules about this live broadcast.

For one thing, it's live radio! And Sue Goodwin is our executive producer here, is going to inculcate you into the brotherhood and sisterhood of live radio audiences including the secret handshake.

[laughter]

Sue Goodwin:
Thank you all for coming. Thank you Jane, thank you Wilson Center. It's an honor to be here, certainly hope to live up to good name. So I get to do the housekeeping. So first of all, cellphones, anything electronic that's going to make a noise, turn it off. On the other hand, we want -- as Jane mentioned, we have a lot of listeners, close to four million listeners a week on "Talk of the Nation," over 400 stations nationwide. We also are on Berlin radio and Armed Forces Radio Network so we're getting calls and listeners from all over the world. And we want them to know you're here, we want you to know that we are in this place with a live audience. So if there's something funny and, believe it or not, Neal can make the Cold War funny, he can make -- don't be afraid to laugh or sigh or whatever. And also we've given you cards.

[music playing]

Down a little? Thank you. If you've ever heard this show, our listeners are just as important as our guests. They bring questions and more important, they bring stories. We believe that listeners are an expert on their own lives and their own lives make up our world. So we try to frame the show that we can get stories from people and it really adds valuable content.

Our first topic today is we're talking about Obama and what should be going on with foreign policy right now. So we're asking you, if you've been working overseas, any type of experience overseas, and you see a problem you think the president needs to address or if you see an opportunity you think the president needs to take advantage of, write it down, hold it up, and someone will collect your card. I wish we had time because this is an amazing audience to get everybody on the air but there's just not, we'll be taking calls from around the country and emails. And we sort of sort through it to make sure we're not duplicating the same comment, that type of thing. So what happens is, your name will appear right up there, I think where it says

"Discourse The Nation Deserves." And make sure you put your first and last name because there's probably more than one Robert here. And then when you name does appear go to the nearest microphone and Neal will call on you soon. And the last thing I could say is we do have applause, I'm the human applause meter. There's just a couple places in this show, but follow my lead, if you see me clapping clap with me, okay?

[laughter]

Let's see. The first hour, we're talking about foreign policy. And I don't know -- we'll talk about the second hour when we get there, okay, but I hope you enjoy the show. Thank you.

[applause]

Neil Conan:
Yes [inaudible] giving the call.

Deborah Amos:
-- the Internet blackout came earlier in the day. Communications are often shut down in restive neighborhoods and towns, but this appears to be the widest blackout in the 20 months of revolt. Anti-government activists say the air force carried at unusually heavy bombing runs on the outskirts of the capitol. Syria's official media blamed what had called terrorists for the Internet shut down. But web-tracking analysts say only a government can shut down a country-wide system. It comes a day after rebels downed an air force jet and a helicopter with surface-to-air missiles. Deborah Amos, NPR news. Antakya, Turkey.

Lakshmi Singh:
Meanwhile, Egyptian media were reporting that EgyptAir is suspending all flights into Damascus because of the heavy fighting. Members of the Islamist-dominated panel that drafted Egypt's new constitution are preparing to vote on a final draft today. But some members of the panel have pulled out of the process saying it's being hijacked by those loyal to Islam as President Mohamed Morsi. Morsi recently gave himself sweeping authorities over the courts, but he said the decree would only last until Egypt had a new constitution. At last check on Wall Street, Dow was up 50 points at 13,036. You're listening to NPR News.

Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas tells the international community that a vote for a state of Palestine is an investment in pace. He issued a statement today ahead of a U.N General Assembly's vote on whether to elevate Palestinian status from entity to non-member state, a move strongly opposed by Israel and its U.S. ally as a detriment to achieving Palestinian statehood through peace talks.

The death toll in Iraq has risen to at least 31 in a string of bombings in two major cities south of Baghdad today; dozens more people have been wounded. Local authorities say Shiite Muslims are again the targets of violence that appear to escalate as Iraqis began religious observances last weekend.

Certain drugs used to treat HIV may also help suppress malaria according to new study released today. NPR's Jason Beaubien reports the research could be particularly useful in Africa where there is significant burden of both diseases.

Jason Beaubien:
HIV-positive children in Uganda who are treated with two different types of anti-AIDS drugs had significantly different rates of malaria according to a new study published in the New England Journal of Medicine. Children who were on the first regimen of protease inhibitors had 41 percent fewer cases of malaria than children on another common form of anti-retroviral therapy. Kids in both groups still got malaria but the children in the first set were far less likely to have the infection reappear. Malaria is a major problem for children whose immune systems already compromised by HIV. This new research suggests that changes to kids' HIV regiments may help protect them from one of the leading killers in Africa. Jason Beaubien, NPR News.

Lakshmi Singh:
I'm Lakshmi Sing, NPR in Washington.

Male Speaker:
Support for NPR comes from the Bill and the Melinda Gates Foundation, dedicated to the idea that all people deserve the chance to live healthy, productive lives, at gatesfoundation.org.

[music playing]

Neal Conan:
This is "Talk of the Nation." I'm Neal Conan with a special broadcast today from the Joseph H. and Claire Flom Auditorium at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, D.C. Today's show is part a project called The National Conversation, a joint production of the Wilson Center and NPR. And with the election behind us, we focus today on U.S. foreign policy and a second Obama administration. The president faces ongoing repercussions of the Arab Spring including an immediate crisis in Syria, more on that in a moment, a constitutional crisis in Egypt, and continued protests in Bahrain. Barring a diplomatic breakthrough, there's a looming confrontation with Iran. Russia seeks dominance in much of the old Soviet Union and the broad strategic challenge in emergent China, and of course I've left out a continent or two. If you've traveled abroad, we want to hear from you. What is a problem the U.S. needs to address or an opportunity that the U.S. ought to exploit? (800)989-8255, email us, talk@npr.org. You can also weigh in on our website, that's at npr.org, click on "Talk of the Nation." We'll also take questions from the audience here at the Wilson Center. But we begin with Syria where, after months of stalemate rebel forces appear to have seized the initiative. NPR foreign correspondent Debora Amos now joins us from Ankara, the capitol of Turkey, nice to have you back on the show. Deborah.

Deborah Amos:
Thanks Neal, and I'm in Antakya, which is much closer to the Syrian/Turkish border.

Neal Conan:
Well, good. I have to ask you about what seems like ominous news from Syria today. Foreign airlines canceling flights into Damascus, reports much of the Internet is down.

Deborah Amos:
Indeed. The Internet was black in the whole country and after this 20 months of revolt, it was unusual to say the least. We have seen the Internet shut down in some restive towns, some neighborhoods, over time usually Friday, it slows down but never on this scale. And so it's been very difficult to find out what is happening inside the country. There have been some videos that have emerged, there are some activists who still have satellite communications, but

for Syria to go dark, since about noon today, is really something.

Neal Conan:
And that raises the question, the government denies it's responsible, it blames what it calls terrorists. Others say it's the government itself that brought the Internet down.

Deborah Amos:
I've talked to some people who know a whole lot more about the Internet than I do and they compare it to what happened in Egypt when President Mubarak flipped the switch and turned off the system there. This is a country-wide shutdown. It's very hard to think that any group could do this on their own. And so most people who do follow Internet protocols say that it is something that only a government can do.

Neil Conan:
And that raises a question in the case of Egypt, it was believed the purpose was to prevent rebel groups -- opposition groups, from communicating amongst themselves. In this case the fear would be this is the government doing things that they don't want us to see.

Deborah Amos:
Well there's two issues here. One is the regime has used the Internet over time and certainly over these 20 months to actually monitor activists, to find them. And so in a way they have kept it on for their own intelligence purposes. Today there was certainly speculation that this was a moment that the government was taking the gloves off and they didn't want the videos to be uploaded. But no country can really keep their Internet off forever, not a country that has banks, insurance companies, international businesses, you simply can't do it. And even the Egyptian government found that after a day or two, they had to turn it back on.

Now we do have some limited reporting from inside Syria. Apparently there was a ferocious bombing campaign on a suburb call Daria. And I saw some videos that emerged from yesterday and it looks like the end of the earth. There is nothing standing in some of these neighborhoods. A video also emerged from Aleppo today where there was a bombing on a school and you could see the people taking the bodies of

young children out of that school; they had been killed in the bombing raid. I think we will not know, maybe tomorrow, maybe the next day, the full extent of what happened. We do know there was heavy fighting on the airport road, that Damascus airport was shut, and there were many international carriers who suspended all flights into the Syrian capital.

Neal Conan:
And they cited the situation around the airport, around the Damascus, the capital. What do we know about that and how serious is it if -- Emirates Air and EgyptAir don't flown in?

Deborah Amos:
Well, it is very serious, for -- certainly for the government to have their international airport shut down. Earlier in the day, there was some official news that those flights would be moved, that's very difficult. The rebels control so many of the roads outside of the capital that it's hard to think where exactly people would go to take international flights. The fighting on the airport road was apparently very heavy from the limited reports we are getting. The Aleppo airport in the north has also been surrounded by rebels, those flights are also sporadic. And so, at the moment, international flights in Syria are off.

Neal Conan:
Step back for a moment, Deborah. There's been sort of a stalemate for several months now as the government and rebel forces have battled against each other, that seems to have shifted. How quickly are things changing?

Deborah Amos:
It does seem that we are in a different momentum that I have certainly seen in the past couple of months, even the past couple of weeks. And the real turn has come over maybe the past week. The rebels have taken four bases in a week, including a helicopter base outside of Damascus. They didn't hold that base outside of Damascus because they know there are air retaliations for that kind of activity, so they moved back out of that base. But in the north, they have held those bases; in particular, a rather large base outside of Aleppo which gave them an enormous cache of new weapons.

Yesterday we saw two regime aircraft taken down by surface-to-air missiles. And a video emerged early this morning of the gunner who shot those two aircraft down. He was a man said to be a schoolteacher. We were able to reach early this morning into the country, people who know him. And they say he had graduated from college, he's a geographer and then a schoolteacher. He joined the rebels and he was holding this missile launcher and talking about what had happened and how he shot them out of the sky and said that there would be no more regime flights over his town.

That is a big jump for the rebels, we haven't seen that before that they have been able to take out the air force because up till now that has been the regime's trump card, they -- the rebels can hold the ground but as long as the regime controls the skies they really don't hold much of anything because towns and villages are bombed on a daily basis. So this is a bit of a game changer. Now we're only one day out of this particular event. The real question is how many of these surface-to-air missiles do the rebels actually have and there's all kinds of speculations, from 40 to 60, we really don't know.

Neal Conan:
And as this is going on, it raises a series of questions we haven't considered for a couple of months now. Among them: is there any thought toward an endgame? Are the rebels in any kind of a shape to present some sort of credible transition government? What are the Alawites going to do?

Deborah Amos:
Let's talk about the military first. They are in a chaotic mess to be quite frank. It is lots of groups of rebels, they come together in some operations, they argue among themselves on others. It goes from, you know, secular defected soldiers to downright jihadis with links to al-Qaeda. And there is no real command structure.

The political part of the opposition is trying to very quickly bring themselves together, they feel that momentum coming. I was in the town of Gaziantep on the Syrian border, it's in Turkey, and was able to meet with some of those political leaders, was able to cross the border and meet some more. In Aleppo province, this is where the financial capital is, Aleppo a town that was 4 million, many of those people now have left. That town is trying to organize itself, even trying to have an election over the

next couple of weeks to have representatives from towns and villages including Aleppo, there is already a transitional revolutionary council that has committees for humanitarian aid, for legal aid, for the military, for the police, but there's so many problems in setting up these local governments.

In the few trips I've taken in the past couple of days inside Syria, the thing that's really striking is, for example, garbage. You know, you kind of forget that's so important to run a town. And garbage is everywhere and you really see it in the videos, nobody's figured that out how to do that yet. They are very busy ferrying people who have been wounded in these air attacks and artillery attacks, that takes up a great deal of time to get people to field hospitals. Some smaller villages have been very good at standing up local governments. There is a town call Manbij, and in Manbij, because it's a small town, they have three newspapers, they have a very good working revolutionary committee that's running the town. But some or the larger places haven't quite gotten it yet. And there's a real push to get this political structure together because I think the civilians are rightly worried that if they don't, then it's the rebels, it's the men with the guns, who will have a larger say.

Neil Conan:
In the meantime, there are also considerable forces that are still in support of the government and it has been the thought that the Alawite community, the minority in Syria, but nevertheless very loyal to President Assad who is of their membership of their company that they would fight this to the death.

Deborah Amos:
It is true and over these 20 months, the external opposition that has come together has never been very good at reaching out to the Alawite community. I would say they have failed to reach out to the minorities in Syria who are concerned that they will not do well in a government that is control by Sunnis and what they see as very conservative religious Sunnis. They are very worried about it. This new opposition is trying to be a little better in reaching out to them but still there is great concern in these communities for what will happen to them.

Neil Conan:

And great concern in the region too, you have Sunni powers, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, who are funneling arms and supplies to the rebels, the Shia power, Iran, which is supporting the government, many questions about how far they will go to support their ally. Deborah Amos, as always, thank you very much.

Deborah Amos:
Thank you, Neal.

Neil Conan:
More from the Wilson Center in just a moment, stay with us. It's NPR News.

[music playing]

This is "Talk of the Nation" from NRP News, I'm Neal Conan from the Woodrow Wilson Center today in Washington, D.C. The president says it's his job to do more than one thing at once in his second term; he'll have plenty of opportunities. From Iran to China to the Middle East, his foreign policy to-do list must run several pages and that's to say nothing about the future crisis we know nothing about. So help us out. If you've traveled abroad, we want to hear from you: what's the problem you've seen the U.S. needs to address as a priority or an opportunity the U.S. needs to exploit, give us a call. (800)989-8255, email us, talk@npr.org. We'll also take questions from the audience here at the Wilson Center with a long list of vexing foreign policy problems, President Obama and a new Secretary of State will have to plot their priorities carefully. Joining us now with some ideas about where to start, David Ignatius, Associate Editor and columnist for The Washington Post and Robert Kagan, senior fellow in Foreign Policy at the Brookings Institution, author of the most recently of "The World America Made," nice to have you both back on "Talk of the Nation".

David Ignatius:
Thank you.

Robert Kagan:
Thank you.

Neil Conan:
And David, let me start with you. With reports this morning, the Obama administration is reconsidering its

Syria policy, this is just where we left off. And with the now certainty of a second term, thinking about being more bold.

David Ignatius:
Syria is one of the issues that the administration in effect put on hold late last summer. I've written that the administration of President Obama kind of put a sign out the White House lawn saying "Come Back After November 6th." And that was certainly true with Syria. What the administration is pondering is whether to take a more active role in shaping, supporting, even supplying the Free Syrian Army, the military side, as it took a role in reshaping the political opposition, it was really through Secretary of State Clinton's pressure that the feuding countries that had been supporting different factions in the political opposition got their act together earlier this month in Doha, Qatar and formed a new coalition of political organizations.

As Deborah Amos said in that excellent report that preceded our part of conversation, the opposition military, despite these recent victories, is a mess in terms of its command structure. So I think issue one for the administration is how does the United States working with its allies empower leaders? They're called military councils in each of the major urban areas so they can exercise control over these many jihadist groups. This is a real revolution so the fighters have come from the ground up. Each mosque, each neighborhood, each town forms its own battalion, and those battalions seek funding from wealthy people from the Gulf typically, and they operate largely independently. Unless that's pulled together, if Bashar al-Assad falls, as seems increasingly likely, you may have a completely chaotic situation on the ground with each battalion going for itself with a kind of chaotic militia-driven a non-governance that we're seeing now in Libya. And I think the U.S. wants to focus on this as much thinking about after the fall of Bashar as getting to Bashar's fall.

Neil Conan:
And Robert Kagan, as well, you know the -- one of the concerns is if you supply effective weaponry to the opposition groups, that weaponry will fall into the hands of those jihadists we've been talking about.

Robert Kagan:
Well that's been the concern of the administration for a long time. I'm afraid though, that, you know, the longer this has gone on, the greater the likelihood that the jihadists are going to be big forces. I think that the only thing that I -- one of the things that I worry about now is we haven't seen the worst that Bashar has to deal out in terms of dealing with his population. He is not Mubarak and clearly the Syrian military is not quite Egyptian military which refused to fire on the people ultimately, and whether Mubarak ordered it and they didn't do it, or whether he wouldn't even order it is not clear, they're -- the Syrian air force certainly is already doing this and I worry about this Internet blackout as a time when he may carry out things that we haven't even begun to see yet, in which case, I think that the United States and the world is going to carry a very heavy moral burden and we will wind up being forced as we were, for instance after Srebrenitsa to take action, maybe sooner. And then we aren't going to be talking about how many, you know, shoulder-fired anti-air missiles or in people's hands are going to be in a much bigger situation.

Neil Conan:
And you're talking about chemical weapons here?

Robert Kagan:
Whether -- no, I'm talking about a need to respond to massive slaughter that has just reached the stage that the world -- that we can't and many others can't tolerate anymore and then we need to start looking at options that don't take six or eight months and we hope Bashar falls.

Neil Conan:
Let's step back just a little bit. Through the first Obama administration, there was criticism after the advent of the Arab Spring, there was no coherence to the policy, this country this, this country that. You've got a situation where, yes, there's a new government in Egypt and a constitutional crisis there, different situation in Libya which seems to still be pretty chaotic. Bahrain, majority Shia country, where those people are advocating for their democratic rights, the United States allied with the king there, and with Saudi Arabia, his ally, Shias there are -- should there be one clear and clearly articulated policy for all of these places that everybody understands or do you go case by case?

Robert Kagan:
Well there's no such thing as perfect consistency in foreign policy. I think there should be an overall doctrine that we are trying to move all these regimes in the direction their people clearly want them to go. And I think the days of the dictatorship in the Arab world which we'd gotten awfully used to are clearly gone. Now you obviously going to use different tactics and different strategies in different countries and we do have conflicting interests that guide us in a lot of different directions, but I don't think that's really the key issue. I wish, honestly, that the administration had even focused more on the policy that they said they were going to focus on. Although I just want to say as a broad matter, second terms are often very productive terms for presidents. They either start getting serious about things they've been kicking down the road, they've learned from what they've been watching and are able to start implementing policies, so I'm hope -- if you look at Bill Clinton's presidency, there's no question his second term was a lot more active and effective than his first term in foreign policy. And so I'm hopeful that the Obama administration will now really begin to dig into some of these problems in a way that I don't think they really quite did in the first term.

Neil Conan:
Well, David Ignatius, in part because of the State Department, can sometimes be more tractable than Congress.

David Ignatius:
The administration needs to communicate more effectively with Congress to do everything that's on its agenda. And I think that would be the measure of whether President Obama has a successful second term, is he the leader of his own party, is he the leader of the Congress, does he speak to the country and then to the world as a decisive leader? In foreign policy, what's striking to me is that he doesn't really have to worry a lot about framing the issues on the agenda, the issues are coming at him. The obvious ones coming at accelerating speed, are Syria, we've been talking about Syria, he needs a policy that's more coherent both to achieve the stated goal, the fall of Bashar al-Assad, but I think more important to think about what kind of governance you'll have in Syria and what to do about the chemical weapons.

The chemical weapons in Syria -- when I see the news about turning off the Internet, I worry that that's prelude to using these ghastly weapons. The United States has warned strongly about this, more importantly, perhaps, so is Russia. This is a red line the international community has drawn. Bashar al-Assad may go across that red line, what do we do next? Another problem coming at him fast is obviously Iran. We're in a period now when the U.S. needs to explore, through perhaps bilateral negotiations, whether there is a deal, whether you can see the shape of the deal. We can go on to other issues. But Obama in a sense has to respond quickly the things that are already in motion.

Neil Conan:
Let's get a caller in on the conversation. Again (800)989-8255, email us talk@npr.org. You just heard David Ignatius, Associate Editor columnist for The Washington Post. Robert Kagan is also with us, senior fellow on foreign policy at the Brookings Institution. And let's get -- let's see if we can get Mac on the line. And Mac's on the line with us from Phoenix.

Male Speaker:
Hey, good afternoon, gentlemen. I just wanted, you know, maybe chime in and add to the point about taking advantage of the very widespread goodwill of the Iranian population towards the U.S. and the content of the nuclear negotiation.

Neil Conan:
And the --

Male Speaker:
-- and outplaying the regime and speaking directly to the people, more public diplomacy.

Neil Conan:
Robert Kagan -- many have urged the president to take that role that Mac is talking about and try to outflank the Iranian government with its own people.

Robert Kagan:
Well, you know, the administration is consistently, whenever it's wanted to move toward negotiations considered those two policies to be diametrically imposed. You're either talking to the people and effectively encouraging them to either influence or maybe even oust their regime,

or you were talking to the regime. I'm not sure that there's a clear tradeoff, I don't know that you can't do both, but up until this point, that's the way it is. Now, by the way, some people will say that the Iranian people love their nuclear weapons too. I'm more skeptical of that, I actually believe we have an easier time dealing with a different kind of government on this issue than we're having with the current regime in Iran.

Neil Conan:
Well David Ignatius, whether or not they love their country, the belief is that an attack by the United States and/or Israel would ruin whatever support the Iranian people have for the United States.

David Ignatius:
Well I think certainly the regime would have a better chance of consolidated public support if it was attacked, and that's one of the strongest reasons against an attack unless it's absolutely necessary. The only -- it is literally the last resort before Iran becomes a nuclear power. What's striking to me about the public mood in Iran now as best you can tell from reading translations of the Iranian press is that the idea of talking to the United States, of Iran entering into a real discussion about the nuclear issue and about key regional issues as well, that's now accepted. Every faction that I see in Iran talks about what should be discussed, what the limits should be, but there once was a taboo not long ago, a taboo against this idea of talking to the Great Satan and I think we've entered into a different era, and so I regard that as in itself positive.

Neil Conan:
Let's get a question from here in the audience at the Woodrow Wilson Center.

Paulette Lee:
Thank you very much, my name is Paulette Lee. I'm a communications consultant here in the D.C. area. My question is, gentlemen, how do you see the United States' efforts to prevent Palestine from having any seat or any status in the U.N. as moving the peace process forward? Thank you.

Neil Conan:

Thank you very much for the question, the United States voted against that in the General Assembly today and was among those who were outvoted. David Ignatius?

David Ignatius:
Well, the simple answer would be I see that policy is unsuccessful, that the U.S. has tried to prevent what happened today, increasingly it's tried half-heartedly, more for form's sake than anything else. I think the question that we're asking as journalists here in Washington, I'm sure the administration is asking, is can this act that lifts the status of Abu Mazen, the leader of the Palestinian --

Neil Conan:
Mahmoud Abbas.

David Ignatius:
Mahmoud Abbas, his real name, the president. Does this augmentation of a status reopen the path toward negotiations between Fatah, the organization he represents, perhaps joined with Hamas and Israel, we have a platform for going further, and if that's so then today's fall will be seen as a good thing.

Neil Conan:
That's David Ignatius of The Washington Post. Also with us, Robert Kagan, of the Brookings Institution, author most recently of "The World America Made." You're listening to part of The National Conversation, a joined project between NPR and the Woodrow Wilson Center and this is "Talk of the Nation" from NPR News.

Robert Kagan, back on that same point, given Hamas's political victory in the war between itself and Fatah in the recent conflict with Israel. Does the move at the United Nations today in whatever position the United States takes on Palestinian status in terms of the PLO, does it make a difference?

Robert Kagan:
Well, first of all, I'm not sure I agree that it was a complete victory for Hamas. I mean, one of the things that happened in the course of that conflict, Hamas clearly was trying to rally a changing Arab world behind it and I think, for instance, President Morsi in Egypt said, "I am not going to be dragged into a conflict in Israel over what

you're doing. I'm not going to break the treaty arrangements that we have." And in fact he helped achieve a cease-fire. So I'm not sure Hamas accomplished everything that they wanted.

Now the problem I think -- or if you're in Hamas, the benefit of what's just happened is I think although many who voted in the U.N, like Europeans, for Palestine's resolution believed and were hoping that they were helping Abbas. But if the result is it looks like the reason that this happened is because of Hamas's attacks in Gaza against Israel then it strengthens Hamas. And I think at this point negotiating with Hamas is not an easy thing to do. I mean, they will be -- it will be the first time that a group that has not renounced terror, has not renounced the use of force against Israel is supposed to engaging in negotiations with Israel. That's not an easy thing to accomplish.

Neil Conan:
And we have this email from Hannah which says two words and a lot of exclamation points "Mali crisis!!" This, of course, reference to the situation that northwest African country, which is -- the northern part of which has been taken over first in a Tuareg rebellion and that it's been taken over by the Islamist factions there who were forcing out the Tuaregs as well. Ban Ki-moon, the secretary general of the United Nations today called for U.N. military action in Mali. David Ignatius, how important is this?

David Ignatius:
Well three words in response "Don't know much."

[laughter]

I wish I knew more about the situation in Mali, I haven't been there, most reluctant to comment on places that I don't know. It is obvious that the international community including the U.S. is increasingly concerned about the growth of Islamic radicalism in Mali and generally in that region. There's some discussion of whether this is kind of fall on domino effect after the fall of Gaddafi in Libya, you just had a lot of seepage of weapons and people south. The U.S. in recent years in dealing with African problems has turned to a combination of African Union forces which have had, I would say, a different success, and the new

Africom, the command that we've stood up that isn't actually based in Africa but has responsibility for that, it's just clear that the war against Islamic radicalism is now going into Africa big time

Neil Conan:
And now let's get a question from the microphone here at the Woodrow Wilson Center.

Alvis Kahn:
Hell, thanks. My name is Alvis Kahn [spelled phonetically], I'm a federal employee here in the D.C. area. My question is on the so-called war on drugs. It is an understatement to say that it has been a failure over the years. And my question is, does the Obama administration see an opportunity here to move into a different way? Many leaders in Latin America are calling for changing the policies, moving towards some sort of legalization. Do we see an opportunity here?

Neal Conan:
Robert Kagan, Mexico's president-elect was just in town.

Robert Kagan:
I think that, you know, this is an ongoing problem, it has -- it's having particularly destructive effects in Central America where, you know, the crime is just out of sight. But I guess this where I would start to say there are only so many things the president is going to be able to do. And we have mentioned two -- the other big decision that's coming up is on Afghanistan, which is going to have major implications for the president's second term and what happens in that second term. And we haven't even gotten to Asia yet.

So, you know, everyone would like us to focus on the war on drugs and come up with a clever policy, but I'm just not going to -- I don't think there's going to be a lot bandwidth expended on that.

Neal Conan:
You may be right, but it's a war on our border which has taken the lives of tens of thousands.

Robert Kagan:
For a very long time.

Neal Conan:
When we come back, more with our guests David Ignatius and Robert Kagan. We promise to get to the Middle East and talk about some of those others parts of the world. As well we'd like to hear from you: (800)989-8255. Email us: talk@npr.org. Stay with us. We're in a special broadcast, part of The National Conversation today from the Woodrow Wilson Center. I'm Neal Conan. It's the "Talk of the Nation" from NPR News.

[music playing]

Male Speaker:
Support for NPR comes from NPR member stations. And from Chevrolet, maker of the Volt, an electric car that runs on electricity or gas to go farther. Details at chevyvolt.com. From Sit4Less, featuring the Zody Chair and the Very Task Chair by Haworth, online at sit4less.com. And from Unisys Corporation, committed to providing IT solutions to contribute to a safer and more secure connected world. More at unisys.com. This is NPR.

Neil Conan:
Fifty years ago, the U.S. and the Soviet Union narrowly avoided war in the Cuban Missile Crisis, in part, because Washington and Moscow controlled the triggers. Now, with nuclear buttons in Beijing, New Delhi, Islamabad, Pyongyang, and Jerusalem, what lessons can we learn from history? I'm Neil Conan, "Avoiding the Next Cold War," plus Jane Harman on a world led by women. Next "Talk of the Nation" from NPR News.

[music playing]

Neal Conan:
This is "Talk of the Nation." I'm Neal Conan at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, D.C. and here are headlines from some of the other stories we're following today here at NPR News. President Obama's top negotiator, in talks to avoid the fiscal cliff, headed to Capitol Hill today. Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner is meeting with top law makers from both parties. Republican leaders have demanded plans for spending cuts, while Democrats push to extend tax cuts to all but the wealthiest Americans. If no deal is reached before the end of the year, automatic tax hikes and across-the-board spending cuts go into effect.

And a new report on the British phone hacking and bribery scandal calls for an enhanced press watchdog. The Leveson Report recommends new independent oversight for the British press, backed by legislation. That recommendation divides British politicians, with Prime Minister David Cameron saying he has concerns that new laws could infringe on the freedom of the media. Last year the tabloid, the News of the World, came under fire for hacking into the phones of celebrities and crime victims and bribing police officers. Details on those stories and, of course, much more later today on "All Things Considered."

Right now we're discussing foreign policy agenda for President Obama's second term. If you've traveled abroad we want to hear your suggestion. What's a problem the U.S. needs to address, or an opportunity the U.S. ought to exploit? (800)989-8255. Email: talk@npr.org. You can also weigh in on our website: that's at npr.org. Click on "Talk of the Nation". And we'll also take questions from the audience here at the Wilson Center. Our guest, Robert Kagan, author of most recently "The World America Made" and senior fellow and foreign policy at the Brookings Institution, and David Ignatius, associate editor and columnist at the Washington Post.

We have a question from the audience here at the Wilson Center.

Male Speaker:
Thank you. Yet another area: Is it time for the U.S. to reconcile with Cuba? And can the president actually do this without support of Congress and, especially, the House of Representatives?

Neal Conan:
Robert Kagan, the election is over; the president does have a freer hand. Is Cuba one of the places where he can change policy?

Robert Kagan:
I think, in theory, yes. I think, first of all, the very powerful Cuban-American community is shifting itself as generations, sort of, move on and younger generations come forward. And I think you've got, you know, some -- you got a very creative and thoughtful Republican senator from Florida, Marco Rubio, who takes great interest in this. But, at the end of the day -- and this is the thing -- it

really does depend a little bit on what the Cuban government does. The Cuban government has to be willing to show some intention of loosening up its grip on that society. I think if it does do so, you can see some steps in the United States to start easing the embargo and trying to start moving toward, eventually -- if there's sort of reciprocal steps -- some kind of moving toward normalization with Cuba. But it really does require that the Cuban government be willing to do so.

I mean what we've seen in Burma, it didn't just happen. The United States didn't just lift sanctions. The Burmese government took some steps to give some hope that they were going to change. The Cuban government will need to do the same thing.

Neal Conan:
David Ignatius, there was a new generation of leaders in Burma, do we have to await the same in Havana?

David Ignatius:
Well, certainly we need to await a post-Castro era, when there's younger leadership. On this question whether the president should take a strong stance on normalizing relations with Cuba, or deal with the war on drugs, I would hope that the president would think strategically, much as he did to such a success in his campaign. And by that I mean identifying a limited number of issues and going after them one by one, and building from success to success, I think that's what leads to effective foreign policy.

When you have everything kind of thrown up against the wall in the first year -- and we saw a little bit of that, I think, in Obama's first year, but in domestic and foreign policy -- what you get is, I think, kind of loss of momentum, loss of clarity. So the president can do his first job, which is win a big debt package fight on the Hill, then move to the Iran negations which are Topic A in foreign policy, move toward something with Israel and the Palestinians, move towards something clearer with Syria, one by one you might begin to see some real progress.

Neal Conan:
So after July he should be free?

[laughter]

David Ignatius:
After -- you know, this is the -- we'll find out just how strategic President Obama is in policy making, as opposed to politics, and how effective a leader he is over these next four years. But, you know, I think the next few months will tell us whether we're going to have something more systematic than what we saw in the first term.

Neal Conan:
And Robert Kagan, if there's been a vision expressed about that by the president it has been the pivot to the Pacific.

Robert Kagan:
And as this conversation, and every other conversation I've had over the last month since the pivot was announced has demonstrated, before you pivot you finish talking about the Middle East, and as soon as you pivot you go back to talking about the Middle East. I mean there was nothing more ironic, again, than the fact that the president on his big trip to Asia spent most of his time talking about Gaza, and the secretary of state had to break off the trip to go heading back to Gaza. And I think this is going to continue to be the case; we are going to continue to be dragged back to the Middle East.

Now what's unfortunate about that is -- and I was in a conference in the Middle East where even people in the Middle East were saying, "Can't the United States walk and chew gum at the same time?" And we are clearly going to have to do that because Asia is important; the president is right to put enormous emphasis on it. The president is right to involve the United States more deeply in the region. Secretary Clinton and her very capable Assistant Secretary Kurt Campbell had done that up until now. But it's going to be difficult to sustain, and it's going to be difficult with a new secretary and new team at the State Department. And it's going to be difficult in tight budget circumstances, and it's going to be difficult when the Middle East does keep dragging back our attention.

Neal Conan:
Let's get another question for the audience here at the Wilson Center.

Shay Hester:
Good afternoon, my name is Shay Hester [spelled phonetically], and I visited my daughter and her husband in

Chiang Mai, Thailand. They were there working with Burmese refugees whose lives have been put on hold for many decades. My question is what is the Obama administration doing, or should they be doing, to help these refugees return to Myanmar and get on with their lives?

Neal Conan:
And David Ignatius, we've seen the president visit, the first president to visit Myanmar, also known as Burma; he was there briefly and, of course, met with the opposition leader Aung San Suu-Kyi as well, but some question whether he has gone too far too fast.

David Ignatius:
Well one thing you say, I think, is that the U.S. has built up some credibility and leverage with the government in Burma/Myanmar, which ought to be useful in dealing with this refugee problem. Refugee flows, in my experience, re one of the hardest problems to deal with. People just get settled. Think about how long it's going to take to get Afghan refugees who are in Pakistan back in Afghanistan, it's going to be a generation; and that may be true in this case.

But I think that Myanmar/Burma policy has been carefully handled -- you know, if you're looking for real successes for Secretary Clinton in the first term as she gets ready to leave, I'd say this would be high on the list.

Neal Conan:
There is also the withdrawal from Afghanistan. The combat role for the United States is supposed to end, scheduled to end, in 2014. How many troops between now and then are kept? How many troops after that are kept? And there is still the lesson of what we have wrought in Iraq after withdrawal from that situation. But, again, if there's been one consistent in the Obama administration it's been to withdrawal from Iraq and complete the U.S. mission in Afghanistan.

Robert Kagan:
Yes, and, of course, this is one of those decisions that's not going to wait. He's going to have to make a decision in the next few weeks about how quickly to drawdown the forces in Afghanistan. And there are certainly some significant players in the administration who would like to drawdown very rapidly, and much more rapidly than the

military commanders on the scene believe is appropriate. And so we'll see who wins that argument. But if we do drawdown rapidly we're then going to test the proposition as to whether Afghanistan really can hold in the absence of, you know, a sufficient number of U.S. forces. And if it can't we're going to start facing -- dealing with the consequences of that.

And I think that it's very easy to say let's get out of Afghanistan. I think we're going, if nothing else -- and people have been talking about this openly -- if you care about what's going on in Pakistan you're going to need to keep American troops in Afghanistan; that is the base from which the drones fly that allow the United States and this administration to attack terrorist bases along the border.

So then the question is going to be well how many troops do you need to keep in place to do that. I'm prepared to predict that we are not going to be out of Afghanistan unless you want to redefine what a combat role is to include upwards of 30,000 troops by 2014.

Neal Conan:
David Ignatius, a lot of people would say this is going to be critical for the president's legacy, this is his war now.

David Ignatius:
It is his war. This was the war where he was going to refocus America's energy, get away from the bad war in Iraq. He did add 30,000 additional troops; those are the troops that have now come out. And he has to decide what, going forward, is the commitment.

Like Bob Kagan, I think that some continuing U.S. military presence in Afghanistan, both from a counter-terrorism side, to have bases to go after people who want to kill you and me and a lot of other people is important. But, I think, equally important is the political transition. I'd love to see the administration put more emphasis, as it thinks about taking the combat troops out, on political structures and the combinations that can either prevent a civil war or reduce the destabilizing effects of the kind of sorting out that's going to happen in Afghanistan. I think that's the thing they haven't done and need to get more serious about.

Neal Conan:
Question from the audience here at the Wilson Center.

Ibrahim Hussein:
Good afternoon. My name is Ibrahim Hussein [spelled phonetically]; I'm an Egyptian-American retired here in Washington, D.C. I'd like to start by saying last January I went back to Cairo to join the celebration of the first anniversary of the revolution. It was so wonderful that people who did not want into politics, from the cab drivers to the college professor, are all talking about democracy and freedom and human rights. And it is very sad for me to see what's happening now.

I have, in terms of the comment about strategic, that's what I came to say. The strategic direction for U.S. foreign policy, the U.S. policymakers need to realize the difference between two things: one of them is Islam. I'm born a Muslim. Islam, all over the world, is a peaceful, loving, very much similar to other great religions. And difference between Islam and political Islam, and making our policy, and defining where we want to go or what we want to do, we need to make sure we're not touching the big base of Islam, and we are only dealing with people who are using Islam for political objectives. That including the terrorist, the extremist, in my opinion, the Saudis -- I mean they are exploiting a great religion for immediate gain. And U.S. policymakers need to be aware of this distinction and promote the first, and try to develop a strategy with the latter. But the fact that we have election every two years makes it difficult.

Neal Conan:
Robert Kagan, I hate to drag you back to the Middle East.

Robert Kagan:
Well, that's okay. That's what happening these days. I mean, look, the greatest -- I mean the greatest sort of laboratory of this whole tension and experiment is Egypt, where you have, you know, an avowed political Islamist group which won overwhelmingly. It is a testament, in my view, the failure of American policy over a couple of decades that we played into Mubarak's strategy of weakening liberal forces in Egypt and objectively strengthening the Brotherhood by the way Mubarak handled his own dictatorship and we tolerated it, so that when the forces were unleashed the Brotherhood was the best organized, the liberals were

the most scattered, and we're now paying the consequence for that.

As a practical matter, however, Morsi won the election; the Brotherhood won the election overwhelmingly. The United States should be dealing with a democratically elected government. And I think as we would with any government, whether Islamic or non-Islamic, we also need to do our best to hold them to the real standards of democracy which is not just elections, it's about supporting individual rights, it's protecting minorities, it's protecting women, and we need to put, literally, our money where our mouth is in that regard. And that would be true whether it's an Islamist or not an Islamist government.

Neal Conan:
We're talking about foreign policy in a second Obama administration. You're listening to "Talk of the Nation" from NPR News.

And David Ignatius, let me hit another part of that from our question, and that is the role of Saudi Arabia. This is a despotic monarchy, a gerontocracy, important to the United States for any number of reasons, if for no other reason, its opposition to Iran.

David Ignatius:
Saudi Arabia is a strategic ally, strategic meaning that it has all that oil; and we may not need it as much in future years but other countries will. I do think, when I visit Saudi Arabia, I'm reminded that while it's certainly an authoritarian regime -- not a place where I'd want to live -- it is seen by enough of its citizens, a majority of its citizens it appears to me -- as legitimate. King Abdullah is an old man and he's not making decisions all that effectively, people say, but he is pretty well liked and respected by a majority of his subjects. We need to remember that.

So changes coming to Saudi Arabia -- what I hear people worrying about is the regime is so old and creaky, it's just not getting the job done. But as near as I can tell, it's still seen as legitimate by enough of its citizens that I don’t see a revolution in Saudi Arabia around the corner as we've seen in Syria.

Neal Conan:

We just have a couple minutes left, and I'd like you both to step off a cliff, not the fiscal cliff, but perhaps the cliff of what we actually know. One thing, two things, three things are going to happen over the next four years that none of us in this room have anticipated or talked about. Robert Kagan, is there some part of the world, some issue: global warming, climate change, whatever, that keeps you up at night?

Robert Kagan:
[laughs] Many things keep me up at night; I've got two teenagers that keep me up at night. But -- and this always the part of the discussion where we say, "Okay, there are these things that are going to happen that we don't about. What are they?"

[laughter]

[laughs] And I don't know.

No, for me there is plenty of known "knowns" that are out there that keep me up at night. You know, David has a hopeful view of the possibility of a negotiated settlement with Iran. I, myself, am dubious that there is any deal that we and they are going to agree on, and that includes whatever the Obama administration may propose, which is going to lead to this very difficult decision. I think Afghanistan is in a very dangerous state. I think Syria is going to get much worse before it gets better. I think we are facing a kind of long-term challenge from China which can have short-term effects on us, so, for me, that's plenty to stay up awake at night over.

Neal Conan:
David Ignatius, I guess we'll turn to you for comic relief.

David Ignatius:
Well, Bob Kagan covered the gloom and doom patrol admirably. Those are the things that we should worry about. Just to focus on one thing that Bob talked about, because we haven't really covered it adequately. We have a new leadership in China under soon-to-be president Xi Jinping, now head of the Communist Party. And this new leadership, contrary to expectations, is not as inclusive of reform-minded people as a lot of U.S. analysts expected. And there is a danger with all of the problems of corruption, regional difference in China that a very

nationalist policy will be taken, which this new leadership will try to unite by having external enemies including the United States, including Japan; that scares me.

Neal Conan:
And we could have a new nationalist government in Japan as well, so, you know, we'll have to see where that goes. Thank you both very much, and we'll chuckle all the way to the exit. So Robert Kagan and David Ignatius joining us here at the Wilson Center.

[applause]

Tomorrow it's Talk of the Nation's "Science Friday." This is "Talk of the Nation" from NPR News, I'm Neal Conan in Washington.

Male Speaker:
Support from NPR comes from NPR member stations, and from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, dedicated to the idea that all people deserve the chance to live healthy, productive lives at gatesfoundation.org. From Ally Bank, who believes intelligent news and knowledgeable customer service should be available around the clock. Learn more at allybank.com. And from Subaru, where all vehicles are built in zero-landfill plants. Love, it's what makes a Subaru a Subaru. This is NPR.

[music playing]

Ira Flatow:
Bits of Obamacare are gradually taking effect, but what does that mean for you as a patient? I'm Ira Flatow, join me on Science Friday as we map out the milestones. Critics of the Affordable Care Act are forecasting doctor shortages, higher premiums, any truth to that? It's all on "Science Friday" from NPR.

[music playing]

Avoiding Another Cold War: Lessons from the Last One & How to Prevent Another

Neal Conan:
From NPR News in Washington, D.C., I'm Neal Conan, and this is "Talk of the Nation".

[music playing]

Fifty years ago, President Kennedy told the American people about Soviet missiles in Cuba.

John F. Kennedy:
The purpose of these bases can be none other than to provide a nuclear strike capability against the Western hemisphere.

Neal Conan:
Presented with the choice to acquiesce or attack, President Kennedy came up with an inventive Plan C. Graham Allison of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government hopes we can find analogous options in the current confrontation with Iran.

Graham Allison:
I call them "ugly options," very ugly options, but that would nonetheless be better than attack or acquiesce.

Neal Conan:
Graham Allison is among our guests. From the Wilson Center, "Lessons from the Cold War in a Multipolar World." It's the "Talk of the Nation" right after the news.

Lakshmi Singh:
I'm Lakshmi Singh. At the United Nations, the General Assembly is poised to enhanced Palestinian U.N. standing to that of non-member observer state, a status held by the Vatican. As Linda Fasulo reports, despite U.S. and Israeli opposition, some two-thirds of the 193 member assembly, including a dozen European countries, are expected to support the Palestinian bed.

Linda Fasulo:
Diplomats say upgrading the Palestinians U.N. status could be viewed as an implicit recognition of statehood. It does not, however, confer full member state standing to the

Palestinians. Only the Security Council can do that, and that effort failed last year. The U.S. and Israel see the upgrade as a largely symbolic move and stress that only direct negotiations will bring about a two-state solution. For NPR News, I'm Linda Fasulo in New York.

Lakshmi Singh:
The Internet is down in the Syrian capital Damascus and possibly across the nation. Activists are also saying their cell and landline phone services are being disrupted in what may be the worst communications blackout since Syria's civil war began a year and a half ago. Syrian rebels are battling troops just outside the capital, prompting the closure of the main road to the Damascus airport. EgyptAir says it has suspended all flights into Damascus.

Pledges of compromise are giving way to blame in the latest budget battle between the White House and congressional Republicans. Each side is accusing the other of hindering progress. The Democrats say Congress should immediately approve an extension of Bush-era tax cuts for the middle class, but they're not budging on also extending those cuts to the wealthiest people. Republican House Speaker John Boehner told reporters today he's not seeing any significant deficit-cutting concessions from the White House.

Former President George H.W. Bush is being treated at a Houston hospital for complications of bronchitis. He's expected to remain hospitalized 72 hours.

The Senate Judiciary Committee has approved legislation to increase privacy protection for emails and other online content. NPR's Martin Costi reports.

Martin Costi:
Under federal law, police do not need a search warrant to get online content that's more than six months old. Proposals to extend the warrant protection have been stalled for years until this morning. Senator Patrick Leahy told the Judiciary Committee that the time has now come for greater online privacy protection.

Patrick Leahy:

We sense a need, and this brought together Republicans and Democrats, we sense a need to contain the way surveillance was expanding and taking away out privacy.

Martin Costi:
The ranking Republican on the committee, Iowa's Chuck Grassley, express concern that the bill could hamper certain kinds of investigations, such as insider trading cases. The bill is now headed for the floor of the Senate.

Martin Costi, NPR News.

Lakshmi Singh:
Dow is up 48 at 13,032. This is NPR.

A French Appeals Court has overturned a manslaughter conviction against Continental Airlines for the July 2000 crash of an Air France concord that killed 113 people. NPR's Eleanor Beardsley reports that the court ruled mistakes by the company's mechanics were not enough to make it legally responsible for the deaths.

Eleanor Beardsley:
A French court initially convicted Continental Airlines and one of its mechanics, imposing $2.7 million in damages and fines on the carrier. The court ruled that the mechanic improperly fit a metal strip on a Continental DC-10 that fell onto the runway, puncturing the Concorde's tire. The tire burst and sent bits of rubber into the fuel tanks, which started the fire that brought down the plane. The crash hastened the end for the joint French-British supersonic Concorde. The aircraft was high-tech and luxurious, but a commercial failure. Parties including Air France and Continental compensated the families of most victims years ago, so financial claims were not the trial's focus. The main goal was to assign responsibility.

Eleanor Beardsley, NPR News, Paris.

Lakshmi Singh:
There's been another deadly roadside bombing in southern Afghanistan, despite renewed calls by the U.N. for the Taliban to stop using such explosives. Today, a bomb struck a minivan in Urozgan province. At least 10 people lost their lives, several were wounded. The U.N. is reporting a 30 percent increase in the number of deaths from homemade bombs in the first nine months of this year.

In the U.S., major retailers are posting weak November sales, despite the surge of activity over the Thanksgiving holiday weekend. Target and Macy's were among 18 retailers reporting sales through last Saturday rose 1.7 percent from the same period a year ago.

I'm Lakshmi Singh, NPR News, in Washington.

Male Speaker:
Support from NPR comes from Ally Bank, who believes in getting more from your news and your money, offering money market accounts. Learn more at allybank.com.

[music playing]

Neal Conan:
This is "Talk of the Nation". I'm Neal Conan with part of The National Conversation, a joint project with NPR and the Woodrow Wilson Center here in Washington. We're at the Center's Joseph H. and Claire Flom Auditorium with a conversation about the lessons of history, what can we learn from the Cold War? In a world where at least nine countries have nuclear weapons now and China's projected to become the world's largest economy, the analogy to the old "bipolar world" of the Cold War may seem limited, but it's the only template we have on how to manage the competition over resources and markets, and the crises that seem certain to arise. Call us with one lesson from the Cold War that may inform leaders today: (800)989-8255. Email us: talk@npr.org. You could also chime in on our website. Go to npr.org, click on "Talk of the Nation." We'll also take questions from the audience here at the Wilson Center.

Later on in the program, we'll talk with the Wilson Center's president and CEO, Jane Harman, on how women lead differently. But we begin Graham Allison, director and professor of Government at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard. He also served as special advisor to the secretary of defense under President Reagan and assistant secretary of defense for policy and plans under President Clinton.

Good to have you on "Talk of the Nation" today.

Graham Allison:
Thank you.

Neal Conan:
And you've described the confrontation over Iran's nuclear ambitions as a Cuban Missile Crisis in slow motion. The crisis part is pretty scary for those of us who lived through the Cuban Missile Crisis, so I guess we will just have to be thankful for the slow motion part.

Graham Allison:
Well, it's hard to remember. You and I are old enough to, but many people aren't, that we just had the 50th anniversary of the missile crisis. Actually, I was here at the Woodrow Wilson Center for an event a few weeks ago. So 50 years ago, in the course of 13 days, the U.S. and the Soviet Union rushed up to the nuclear precipice. Kennedy, who was eyeball to eyeball with Khrushchev, estimated the likelihood that this would be a nuclear war between 1 and 3 and even. That would've killed several hundred million people. So when we remember the Cold War, we should remember it was a very frightening period, but we had a strategy, we sustained it, and we survived, and actually, we won.

Neal Conan:
Those who do remember the Cold War tend to remember the last part of it, which was relatively stable. As you suggest from your example from the Cuban Missile Crisis 50 years ago, this was not a stable situation. This was a dynamic situation dictated by crises in places like Berlin and Cuba.

Graham Allison:
Absolutely, and I think -- again, I teach this at Harvard for students. They can't remember, what was the Cold War about, when was the Cold War, why was it -- how could it have been so dangerous. How could people have been thought --

Neal Conan:
It's at the end of the history book.

Graham Allison:
Yeah, thinking of going to war over what, for what, with a hundred million or two million people killed? So the Cold War was a Manichean competition between what we call the "free world," which it was, and the "evil empire," which is what Ronald Reagan called it. And over a period with lots

of crises, of which the missile crisis was just the most dangerous, over time, the parties worked out what Kennedy called after the missile crisis "some precarious rules of the status quo" that allowed for competition, but without surprises like putting missiles in Cuba, or without major incursions into the other party's core interest area. And I think that's an interesting analogy that we might think about applying today, even if we think about Iran, but certainly about China, yeah.

Neal Conan:
Nevertheless, it's not just the United States and the Soviet Union, it's working out arrangements so India doesn't surprise Pakistan, and Pakistan doesn't surprise China, and -- well, who knows about Iran?

Graham Allison:
Well, the notion of a chessboard in which you have not just two parties playing -- in the Cuban Missile Crisis, you had a third party that wanted very much to play, Castro, but was kept off to the side. In the case of Iran, you certainly have three parties playing, because Israel is a very active player. And in the broader chessboard, as you say, you've got eight or nine parties moving at the same time.

Neal Conan:
And forget to mention the wildcard, Pyongyang. But in any case, let's bring Cheng Li into the conversation. He's a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, director of the National Committee for U.S.-China relations. Good to have you with us.

Cheng Li:
Thank you.

Neal Conan:
And one of the principal themes of the Cold War was containment. The United States and its allies sought to contain the Soviet Union, prevent the expansion of communist and that form of government. The Unites States says it is not trying to contain China, that this is not an appropriate policy. But if you're the new Chinese president and you look east from Beijing, you see a string of American allies, from Japan, and Korea, and Taiwan, and the Philippines, and Australia, and some days, Vietnam, and that might look like containment to him.

Cheng Li:
Well, not only Chinese leaders feel that way, but also Chinese public and the young generation also feels that way. They think United States want to put China down, despite our leaders, the president and secretary of state, constant mention that it's not our China policy to contain China. We want to cooperate with China and this is the most important bilateral relationship in the 21st century. And we welcome China's rise.

But from Chinese perspective, this is just empty words. They see the aircraft carriers and show muscle around the China Sea. They see these countries, Japan and South Korea, and also India and Southeast Asian countries, they all kind of are very close to the United States.

Now, of course, there's partly the policy problems of the previous leadership, but on the other hand, they are really put in a corner. Now, let me also mention that Chinese leadership does not want to have a confrontational policy with the United States. They don't want another round of Cold War. And otherwise, they would not send their children to the United States to study. They would not promote the trade with the United States. But the situation is that you already this kind of tension. When you look at a Chinese borders, it's actually they're questioning in the points out. For them, for Chinese public and the leaders, they feel that another Cold War, with the pivotal policy by the U.S. government, really puts China into a corner.

So it's not only a danger for Cold War, but also really danger for Hot War.

Neal Conan:
There was another dynamic that informed the conversation between the United States and the Soviet Union, the confrontation, and that was this conflict of ideologies. We have a nominally Communist government in China with capitalist policies, for sure, but certainly a Communist Party. We have the challenge of the Islamists in Tehran and elsewhere. Is ideology as dangerous a flashpoint today as it was during the Cold War?

Cheng Li:

Well, it's not. But before talking about ideology, we also should see the economic globalization. There's a new trend because during the Cold War, it's very much divided, there's no economic activities or globalization. Now, Einstein once said that release of the atomic bomb has changed everything except the -- how you think. The things I think are in China, I mean, today's 21st century because of economic globalization also change everything except the way of thinking. People think the two major powers should be, you know, conflictual. This is not right, because if United States economy not doing well, China suffer. The same way, that if China is not doing well, India's not doing well, United States also not doing well. So it's a really new era. But unfortunately, the people still occupy this kind of Cold War mentality or 19th century worldview.

Now, talking about ideology, there's no confrontational ideology from China. You can see the Chinese political system's still a one-party system. But this is also on the verge of major transformation. The public demand for change of a political system is getting stronger and stronger. Now, particularly, you look at a young generation in cities like Shanghai, Beijing, Chongqing, Shenzhen, and these people, they live in the similar ways, similar lifestyle. They enjoy the fashion and the music and the movie, like the "Life of Pi," it's simultaneously shown in China. So this generation, they think in a much similar way, behave much similar way than their older generation rather than compare with the same generation in Taipei, in New York, in Tokyo. They're quite similar.

So I think that Cold War certainly should be avoided, and, certainly, we should try very hard to avoid Hot War in that region.

Neal Conan:
Let's see if we can go to a question on the mic here at the Wilson Center. Please, go ahead.

Christy Brandly:
Hi, my name is Christy Brandly. I'm with "Russia Beyond the Headlines." I recently spent a lot of time in Vladivostok, Russia. I studied international relations there. And I also had a lot of friends, the younger generation, who were studying Asian languages, specifically Chinese. And I know, for example, the Russian Foreign Ministry has said that it's looking to develop a coherent

strategy toward the rising east, which includes deepening relations with its so-called strategic partner in China. What might this mean for U.S.-Russian relations, the specific turn in U.S. -- not in U.S. -- in Russian policy? Might we see more conflict or more cooperation in the Asian Pacific with a stronger alliance between Russia and China? And might we see a stronger alliance in Russia -- between Russia and China at all?

Neal Conan:
Vladivostok, of course, Russia's great Pacific port. But, Graham Allison, let's turn to you for that.

Graham Allison:
Well, it's a very interesting question, and it's very complicated, because, on the one hand, you would think that both authoritarian regimes -- more or less authoritarian regimes -- in Russia, moving even back towards the China model, and China, the one-party state that David already told us about, would find themselves, particularly since the U.S. is meddling in both, from their point of view, almost natural allies. On the other hand, they share a long border where they've had a history of territorial disputes, and everything west of the -- I mean east of the Urals is pretty unpopulated. It's full of resources but not very many people, and there are quite a large number of people just to the south of it. So the Russians, I think, spend more of their time worrying about the Chinese, actually, than they do about the Americans. And I think that dynamic, which is a dynamic of territory and nationalism and resources, I would suspect will turn out to be more relevant than their alignment that might otherwise be possible if they didn't have to live next to each other. So if this was Australia, I would say it would be a different story, but because of the history and the border and the resources and the people, I'd suspect that China and Russia will remain very nervous about each other.

Neal Conan:
And Cheng Li, briefly, there's a lot of Chinese people moving into that relatively unpopulated part of Russia.

Cheng Li:
Well, that's true. That's also created some tensions. And the bottom line is, despite the strategy, you know, cooperation between China and Russia, I mean, Chinese and Russian do not trust each other, for historical reasons and

for many other reasons. And so, for Russians, they always just think that the Chinese new generation readers are actually pro-U.S., because many of them study, you know, work in the United States. So they are very scared about that kind of a U.S.-China kind of become closer and closer. But the reality is that, certainly, it's not the case. But you do see the distrust. And also, very interesting, a year ago China wants to establish Chinese version of Nobel Prize to offer to Putin, but the people in China just laugh about that, and, you know, become a joke. So it is an interesting sort of tension.

Neal Conan:
Now, we're talking about lessons from the Cold War, how they might apply today. One of the great surprises to the United States during the Cold War was that communism was not a monolith and that the Chinese and the Russians ended up fighting a war. Graham Allison, author of "Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis," Cheng Li, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, are our guests. We'll go on and bringing Ashley Tellis in just a moment. Stay with us. It's the "Talk of the Nation" from NPR News.

[music playing]

This is "Talk of the Nation" from NPR News. I'm Neal Conan, broadcasting today from the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, D.C. During the Cold War, the lines were clearly drawn; ideological divide was plain. Today that's not the case. Power is shared by a wide variety of actors, by the nine or more countries with nuclear capabilities, by the growing populations in China and India, but also by countries in control of water, food, and mineral resources. Still, the Cold War is the best example we have of how to manage the discrepancies in wealth and power and the conflicts they're bound to inspire. Tell us, what's a lesson from the Cold War you think should inform leaders today? (800)989-8255. Send us an email at talk@npr.org. You can also join the conversation on our website. That's at npr.org. Click on "Talk of the Nation."

We've been talking with Graham Allison and Cheng Li about lessons from the Cold War for the new world order, and we're joined now by Ashley Tellis, a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, previously served as senior advisor to the ambassador at the U.S.

Embassy in New Delhi, and joins us here at the Wilson Center. And it's good of you to be with us today.

Ashley Tellis:
Thank you.

Neal Conan:
And what role do you think nuclear weapons will play as the U.S. and other nations move ahead into these new patterns of competition?

Ashley Tellis:
I think nuclear weapons are not going to go away. I think that is the one thing we can say with certainty. If we are lucky, we will be able to bring down the size of the inventories to more stabilizing proportions, but I don't think we should pretend that we will be able to eradicate these weapons anytime soon. So nuclear weapons will remain against -- they will remain as a backdrop to all the international politics that transact themselves, both in Asia and beyond.

Neal Conan:
And you say drawing down stockpiles. Well, perhaps Russia and the United States will, Pakistan is building them as fast as it can.

Ashley Tellis:
In fact, that's going to be one of the big challenges of managing what the future nuclear regime looks like, because the established nuclear powers, especially the United States and Russia, will probably see progressive declines in their nuclear stockpiles, but the regime that has been constructed to manage this reduction is a regime that is limited only to these two states, and so the challenge, I think, for the future is: How do you expand this regime to bring in other nuclear powers that currently stand outside disarmament?"

Neal Conan:
That's -- the "regime" is the Non-Proliferation Treaty. It's -- India broke out first, then Pakistan followed suit, as it was compelled -- it felt compelled to do so. Israel, of course, had nuclear weapons outside the NPT already. Now there's North Korea and the advent of Iran. The nuclear crises between the United States and the Soviet Union over the course of the -- long course of the Cold

War, scary enough, these new calculations, the kinds of psychological games that people will play with their nuclear weapons, because -- we're not accusing anybody, but the United States and the Russians played those games for many years.

Ashley Tellis:
I think that's a reality that we simply have to live with, and there are two dimensions to it. We want to make certain that as these states continue to maintain their nuclear arsenals, those arsenals remain secure, that control over those arsenals does not break down so that the weapons get into the hands of irresponsible actors. That's, I think, the first objective that we need to meet. The second is that we need to make certain that these arsenals are essentially safe against attacks that might be mounted by others, and that is the old problem of deterrence stability that we had during the Cold War. I think if we manage a solution with respect to both security and safety, we will have done the best we can in these circumstances.

Neal Conan:
So deterrence and mutually assured destruction, MAD, as it used to be known, these are elements of the Cold War which are, well, proliferating today but still prominent.

Ashley Tellis:
Well, we may not have -- we may not have the equivalent of MAD, because MAD was a very peculiar condition that grew out of the fact that the United States and the Soviet Union had huge arsenals that were capable of comprehensive societal destruction. In the case of countries like Pakistan, India, North Korea, comprehensive societal destruction may not be at issue. But the fact is, the use of any nuclear weapon would be catastrophic and certainly by the standards of modern societies, would constitute unacceptable destruction. And therefore, what deterrence essentially means is that we have to ensure that none of these weapons ever get used. That is the fundamental political objective in the second nuclear age.

Neal Conan:
Let's get a caller in on the conversation. Let's go to Eli. Eli on the line with us in St. Louis.

Male Speaker:

Hey, everybody. Neal, thank you for taking my call. It's greatly appreciated. So I've always been very interested in foreign policy. I loved reading books when I was 14 and 15 about nations and about -- on and on and on. I mean, I read a ton of books. Basically, one of the things that caught my eye was that the United States during the 1950s overthrow Mohammad Mosaddegh in Iran, a democratically elected leader, and had we not done that, Iran would not be a problem to the United States today. We are the reason for Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and, in turn, Ayatollah Khomeini being in power. That's number one. And number two, we need to remember that we propped up al-Qaeda in the 1980s. We propped up bin Laden, we gave him CIA support, and not only that; we gave the Mujahedeen, who would eventually be our enemies in Afghanistan, support. And what we need to learn is that we shouldn't prop up people in the Third World, or even the Middle East, who we think are good for the United States' interest when they can just turn our back -- or when they can turn their backs on us and immediately become massive threats. I mean --

Neal Conan:
Eli.

Male Speaker:
-- we could have prevented all that had we just done better with our foreign policy during the Cold War, which I believe was a disaster.

Neal Conan:
I will have to correct you on the CIA support of bin Laden. That is not correct. But your broad point is correct. The enemy of your enemy is not necessarily your friend. And this is something that came back to haunt us, as Eli suggests, in Afghanistan, in Iraq, and elsewhere around the world. And, Graham Allison, that stemmed from a policy of seeing the world as, "You're either fer us or agin' us."

Graham Allison:
Well, and I think, while Eli is maybe one-third right -- I would say about two-thirds wrong -- the proposition that your actions have unintended consequences, often unanticipated, and come back around to bite you is certainly right. And this is not only true in international affairs, it's true in life. But I would say that if you look at the Cold War, the Soviet Union, if it had succeeded, in the same way that Hitler's Nazism, if it

had succeeded, would have given us an entirely different world. We wouldn't be living in a free society. We wouldn't be living in an open economy. So I would say we should remember that the Cold War was about some core values of the U.S., and, good fortune, we won. Yeah.

Neal Conan:
Let's see if we go to Skeeter. Skeeter with us from Eugene, Oregon.

Male Speaker:
Hi. Thank you. I think that the Obama administration should really take the initiative and say to the world, "We are not going to modernize our weapons, and, in fact, we all have to cool it and back off," and have the Obama administration really work toward getting everybody to back off, because I want to remind folks that the Cuban Missile Crisis also had its origins in Khrushchev and the others in the Kremlin being very concerned about the antiquated weapons that we already had in Turkey, and that that's part of the reason -- reasons that they decided to move weapons to Cuba. And also, in the early '80s, when we were putting cruise missiles and Pershing II missiles that were on a first-strike kind of, you know, computer-generated launch at the slightest warning. I think that we're in a very scary place. A nuclear winter is going to mess up the planet like you've never imagined, so we've got to really back off.

Neal Conan:
Well, Skeeter speaks eloquently of the dangers of nuclear warfare, but, Graham Allison, as you look at those lessons of the United States and modernization of nuclear weapons, at the moment, of those nine countries we know about that have nuclear weapons, there is one country that is not working actively to modernize them, and that's the United States.

Graham Allison:
Yes, and I think President Obama has made it plain that he intends to devalue nuclear weapons. He's been devaluing nuclear weapons since the famous Prague speech at the beginning of his administration. The new START Treaty that he reached with Russia will reduce the numbers of active weapons to 1,550, and I suspect there'll be another round of negotiations. I think the point you made earlier, that in the case of Pakistan we see a country that's expanding

its arsenal and actually miniaturizing to have battlefield nuclear weapons, which become extremely dangerous.

Neal Conan:
Cheng Li, China, how does it see its nuclear arsenal? It's in the process of modernizing some. We read reports about extensive tunnel systems that could hide any number of missiles. Nobody really knows how many weapons China has.

Cheng Li:
Well, certainly, China's military mobilization lacks transparency. That has been a concern in the United States and elsewhere. But having said that, and compare with the United States and the military budget and the military advantages, China has lagged far behind. And with a country, you know, has a very strong economy, relatively speaking, you can -- you know, and this kind of full landscape and also possible contaminant, from their perspective, from the outside world. They have to accelerate the military mobilization program. But it's interesting to know that there's some different kind of strategies: symmetrical weapons, the asymmetrical weapon. They probably more emphasize on the cyber war, you know, this kind of methodology. This certainly makes things more complicated. So they would not purely rely on nuclear arsenal. They will also look at some other aspects in the modern warfare and et cetera.

Neal Conan:
Ashley Tellis, sometimes we look at it from the wrong perspective. The United States built its arsenal to balance the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union built its arsenal to balance the United States. China was balancing against the Soviet Union. India was then balancing against China. Pakistan is balancing against India. These are not, well, symmetrical enemies.

Ashley Tellis:
Right, and I think the whole history of the Cold War has been this classic example of how vertical proliferation, horizontal proliferation have intersected. I don't think that problem is going away because if you look, for example, at India's nuclear modernization currently, it's taking its bearings very much from what it sees China doing. Pakistan, in turn, is responding to India. Those problems are going to remain with us perennially, but there is an important difference. The new nuclear powers are

more focused on having relatively small arsenals, because they're not into the business of war fighting. They're not into the business of counterforce, which is what the United States and the Soviet Union were very heavily invested in.

Neal Conan:
Are you among those who believe that the fact that both sides had nuclear weapons deterred India and Pakistan from going to war, what, five, six years ago?

Ashley Tellis:
I believe that's the case. I believe that's the case.

Neal Conan:
Let's see. We go to the audience mic here at the Wilson Center.

Karen Dickman:
Hi, my name's Karen Dickman [spelled phonetically]. Viewed from the perspective of military readiness and proxy wars, arguably we have never stood down since we joined the Second World War. From some perspectives, Syria is a proxy war, even today, armed by the United States, at least indirectly, and Russia -- at least that's the source of the weapons -- and both sides trying to leverage international influence through the U.N. It seems the U.S. should take note of the fact that the Soviet Union dissolved under the crushing weight of its military-industrial complex, and a more practical relational toolbox is in order.

Neal Conan:
Graham Allison, is the analogy apt?

Graham Allison:
Well, it's an interesting -- there are three or four analogies there, which are all very interesting. I think the proposition that the U.S. has a huge military establishment and that this is now going to be shrinking is correct. I think that's right. In terms of the proxy wars, I wouldn't say that's correct. I would say, in my view, what we now see are lots of places where events almost seem out of control of anybody. What's happening in Syria is, I think -- Neal had a very good conversation about in the previous hour -- is genuinely a revolution and maybe a civil war with multiple contestants. They may buy arms from the international market, which include the Russians and the Americans, but basically the drivers are

what's happening there on the ground, not in Washington or in Moscow.

Neal Conan:
We're speaking with Graham Allison, director and professor of government at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard University; Cheng Li, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution; and Ashley Tellis, a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and you're listening to "Talk of the Nation" from NPR News. And we've been focusing on many of the crises of the Cold War. Not many would have predicted that the Soviet Union and its allies in Eastern Europe would have gone away without a shot being fired. As we look toward the end of the Cold War and what happened there, I want to turn to you, Cheng Li. What lessons do the Chinese and the Communist Party in Beijing draw from the collapse of communism in 1990 and '91?

Cheng Li:
Well, certainly, that there's -- ask different leaders or different advisors for the government, they will give you different answers. But the thing is that they see the collapse of the Soviet Union, and it caused a lot of problems. And they still think that it's part of the Western conspiracy. But at the same time, China certainly benefitted from that -- the openness, you know, when President Nixon and Henry Kissinger, you know, opened China, and that drastically changed the global landscape. And by aligning, making kind of a close friendship or partnership with the United States rather than Soviet Union, so make China, you know, very good shape. But now they face some other crises: domestic demand for democracy, for more transparent government. But at the same time, you also see the Arab Spring caused the collapse of a regime. The Chinese leaders certainly don't want to be like Mubarak or Gaddafi. So -- and also, 2008, the global financial crisis makes Chinese government also alert, whether you should be fully engaged with international system. So there's different messages, but ultimately they need to react to the current situation, and a one-party state faces serious problems.

Neal Conan:
Let me just turn to Ashley Tellis on that exact point. So no glasnost equivalent for China, because that causes problems. On the other hand, if you don't do that, you

have a brittle, inflexible state which cannot respond to the demands that Cheng Li was just talking about, and that's a recipe for disaster.

Ashley Tellis:
Well, it just underscores the point that, while reform is important, how you reform is just as important.

Neal Conan:
So reform then, Cheng Li, takes on very cautious forms, and we've just had a new leadership elected in China. Do they study the Cold War?

Cheng Li:
Well, of course, they grew up during the Cold War period and during -- and they were born in 1950s and grew up during the Cultural Revolution, and they witnessed the dramatic opening of China. They went back to school after Deng Xiaoping returned to power.

So certainly they are very familiar with that period, the importance is what lesson they can learn from that. I think this is a new generation leader; they are more cosmopolitan in terms of their worldviews, and at the same time, they also -- because of their formative experience, they are determined to make China stronger and also determined to protect China's vital interest. At the same time, they are open for this kind of a further dialogue. So we have opportunity, but also we will see some challenges.

Neil Conan:
Graham Allison, just a few seconds to return back to the source, to Russia, back to the future for Russia.

Graham Allison:
Well, I'd say two things. One, the Chine have studied very well this collapse of the Soviet Union and are terrified by it, so they're very glad that Deng Xiaoping was not Gorbachev, as they say. With respect to the Russians, I think Putin says the greatest geopolitical catastrophe in the 20th century was the collapse of the Soviet Union, so that gives you a sense of his sense of the world. And I would say he's trying to move back to the Chinese model.

Neil Conan:

Graham Allison, thank you for your time today. Cheng Li, nice to meet you. Ashley Tellis, thank you very much for joining us here at the Wilson Center. After a short break Jane Harman joins us to talk about women in leadership positions; what they bring to their jobs and why they're so important. Stay with us. I'm Neil Conan, it's the "Talk of the Nation" from NPR News.

[music playing]

Male Speaker:
Support from NPR comes from NPR member stations and from Constant Contact, committed to helping small businesses and non-profits stay connected to customers using email marketing, learn more at constantcontact.com. From Novo Nordisk, committed to changing diabetes and communities worldwide, and supporting World Diabetes Day, novonordisk-us.com. And from the Melville Charitable Trust, supporting solutions to prevent and end homelessness. On the web at melvilletrust.org. This is NPR.

Melissa Block:
Facebook has had complaints about its privacy policy. Who can see your pictures? What personal data that apps can collect?

Male Speaker:
There's too many complex issues that need to be figured out. I, actually, I just don't have enough time to go through everything to try and understand it all.

Melissa Block:
And Facebook privacy rules are about to change again. That story later on "All Things Considered," from NPR News.

[music playing]

Neil Conan:
This is "Talk of the Nation." I'm Neil Conan at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, D.C. And here are headlines from some stories we're following today at NPR News: A new study finds the polar ice caps are melting three times faster than they did in the 1990. According to new research in the Journal Science, polar ice sheets are melting especially quickly in Greenland. Researchers looked at satellite data and determined sea levels have risen just under half an inch in the last 20 years.

Scientists say they don't know yet how much the melting might accelerate in coming years.

An Egypt assembly gathered to vote on a draft of a new constitution. Members of the Islamic-dominated constitutional convention are voting on articles in the nation's charter; they're expected to push the document through despite backlash in recent days against President Mohamed Morsi. Opposition parties accuse Morsi of hijacking the democratic process and complain the draft constitution was hastily thrown together.

Details on those stories, and, of course, much more later today on "All Things Considered."

When Women Lead

Neil Conan:
While the next Congress includes more women than ever before, the sexual ratio remains way below 50-50. And that applies not just to electoral politics, but to the ranks of government officials. Yes, we've seen three women as secretary of state, but what about the Pentagon and U.S. intelligence agencies? Important, argues Jane Harman, the president of our host today, the Woodrow Wilson Center, not just as demographic justice, but because women would lead differently.

So give us an example from your life on the battlefield of the boardroom, how do women lead differently? (800)989-8255; email us: talk@NPR.org. You can also join the conversation at our website, that's at npr.org, click on "Talk of the Nation"; we'll take questions from the audience here at the Wilson Center, as well. Prior to her job here, Jane Harman served nine terms in Congress from California's 36th district, and served as chair of the House Intelligence Committee. Welcome back to "Talk of the Nation."

Jane Harman:
Thank you, Neil.

Neil Conan:
And thanks very much for being our host today.

Jane Harman:
We're delighted to host this. I -- by the way, I'm the first president and CEO of the Wilson Center who happens to be a woman, and we do have women in all of our programming. Today, we have me, but I will try to be as substantive as possible, because I know how much it matters to have a woman's voice as part of the conversation on every issue.

Neil Conan:
I have to begin, though, with reports that you may be on the shortlist to leave here as be under consideration to be the next director of Central Intelligence.

Jane Harman:
I'm very happy here, and, by the way, there are 16 intelligence agencies, four of which at the moment are

headed by women. I think 50 percent is a good number, since we are over 50 percent of the talent pool. And why not use all the talent pool of America for leadership jobs and also for any other kind of leadership initiative? Not everyone who leads is in a job. But, at any rate, I'm very happy here and we'll see what the president does. I'm pleased he was re-elected. There are big problems, as we've discussed in the prior two segments, that confront him.

Neil Conan:
Why is it important? What element of leadership to bring -- do women bring to the job that is different?

Jane Harman:
Well, women don't always lead differently; some women lead the same. But women bring, as Barbara Jordan, a former and beloved member of Congress from Texas, as she said, a broader lens. I think in more cases than not, not in every case, women are the support systems and the caregivers, and the protectors of the nest. And when you have to be half-awake all night listening to a baby cry or worrying if your mother is okay in some health care setting, or worrying about your husband's something, and at the same time you have a big job, you have a broader lens. And so I think that helps us. And I watched women lead in Congress, I watched a small number grow into a bigger number, and it is thrilling to think that 20 percent of the Senate is now female. Not that percent of the House, but shout out to New Hampshire, the all-female state, where there is a female governor, two female senators, and the House delegation is female: Yo.

[laughter]

That was not big applause for something historic. Come on.

[applause]

Neil Conan:
As you looked -- as you came into Congress, as you looked towards exemplars, who did you follow as a model?

Jane Harman:
Well, that was very clear. She wasn't in Congress when I was elected, but she became a good friend of mine when, in the '80s, I was counsel to the Democratic platform

committee, and she was Geraldine Ferraro. I thought she was an extraordinary leader. First-ever woman nominated on a major party ticket; she was the vice-presidential nominee in 1984, for those of you who have forgotten that in some way. But she had it all, I thought, and that campaign was a rugged campaign and they lost badly, but she stayed in the game, she tried to come back. Well, she had to give up her House seat to run for vice-president, something I actually did to run for governor of California, which I lost and then I came back to the House. But Gerry tried to come back twice to be senator for New York, didn't happen. But, even at the end, after battling cancer for 12 years, I remember the election night of 2010, I looked up on my TV and there was Geraldine Ferraro, on television, in her last months, on one of the election commentary channels, I think it was Fox, actually, fighting it out. It was just so moving.

Neil Conan:
There are some who would say, "We've seen examples of women in political leadership," and say, "Was Margaret Thatcher different?"

Jane Harman:
I didn't know Margaret Thatcher. Interestingly, she was interviewed by Laura Liswood someone who started something called The Council of Women World Leaders, which has now migrated to Wilson Center; it is the group of women who head countries. And, at the time, it was started in the mid '90s, Thatcher said she would take the interview but only after every other woman head of a country was interviewed. There were eight at the time, there are now 20. We're getting up there. There have been 49. And we -- and a woman may soon be elected in South Korea, so then we'll be 21. But, at any rate, Thatcher's origins were certainly not unusual. She was a grocer's daughter. How she came to be so fierce in politics is unknown. That quality is useful at that level, and very few people, female or male, have that quality.

Neil Conan:
Let's get some callers in on the conversation: (800)989-8255; email us talk@NPR.org. Our guest is Jane Harman, director, president, and CEO of the Woodrow Wilson Center. And let's start with Susan -- and if I remember, I'm in a different computer today -- Susan is on the line with us from San Rafael in California.

Female Speaker:
Good afternoon, fans of you both. My comment is, I'm 55 and a former executive of an insurance company, and I think that what women bring to the table are both being consensus builders and better listeners. And I think those two things are really linked. My experience with men in the executive workforce, and this would be even at the executive leadership level, is that they listen only to a certain point, and if their point isn't being supported, they tend to stop listening. And I think women grow up differently. It may be even genetic, it starts from the playground where we build better relationships because we listen more, and we enjoy sharing more. And I think that consensus building is really the critical feature. I'll take your reply off the air.

Neil Conan:
All right, Susan. Thanks for the call.

Jane Harman:
Well, I agree, but I don't think you can generalize that to all women, I'd say more women do that. Women are problem-solvers in the rest of their -- the rest of our lives. And I saw women in Congress trying very hard to solve problems; women in both parties in Congress trying to solve problems. Maybe it is a male trait, you know, whatever, but a lot of -- many males tend to fight more, you're right, listen less. And I'd say solve problems less. So I'll just tell you a funny story. Pat Schroeder, who was a long time congresswoman from Denver, Colorado, and coined the phrase "Teflon president for Ronald Reagan," about Ronald Reagan, which has stuck to him even since although nothing sticks to Teflon --

[laughter]

-- was sitting with me in the House late one night in the '90s, during what I call "the reign of Newt Gingrich," was then the speaker, and there were late-night votes, and males were yelling at each other on the House floor, and Pat sort of nudged me and she said, "I know what let's do, let's give them all estrogen shots."

[laughter]

And I don't think there's a medical answer to this, but I

do think the caller was right that women solve problems, and I wish Congress solved more problems. The paradigm, sadly, in politics now is to blame the other side for not solving the problem, rather than work with them to solve the problem. Why is that? Because, politically, that works. We say that in this campaign, and hopefully, we are now in Obama 2.0 and Boehner 2.0 and we're going to solve problems, not just the fiscal cliffs, but a lot of other problems.

[applause]

Neil Conan:
Let's go to Aubrey. Aubrey with us from Jacksonville.

Female Speaker:
Hi, I'm an officer in the Navy, and I've experienced a lot of circumstances when I've seen women lead in the way that is natural for many of us, where we're very concerned about the people under us and our family and our personal lives, and I've been told by superiors in the past that I need to lead more like man and not ask about those questions, not care about those things. But in a job where I go to war with these people, you know, we deploy with them, I'm with them all the time, and in order to effectively lead them in their professional lives, I feel like I need to understand more about their personal lives and that gives me an advantage. And a lot of the men that are leading next to me don't see that.

I also wanted to say that your guest, she said that she was in a position that she also happened to be the first, or assumed the first of whatever she is, and she also happens to be a female, and I really appreciate that, because I think it's important that we get to where we're going and then we notice "Hey, guess what? I did this and I'm a woman."

Jane Harman:
Hear, hear. Let me just add to that, though, when you get there, you've got to help the women coming behind. Madeleine Albright, former secretary of state, beloved friend of the Wilson Center and me personally, is quoted as saying, "There's a cold place in hell for women who don't help women." And there are a lot of women out there who don't help women. As for leadership traits in the military, I have the highest respect for you and for those

who serve. Thank you for your service. I spent my time in nine terms in Congress on all the major security committees; I represented a part of Los Angeles, California, where our intelligence satellites are made. I think the guys who are giving you that counsel are just dead-wrong, and I think the future of the military is going to be a much more human-friendly place. Don't Ask, Don't Tell was the beginning. We have to embrace the diversity among us, we have to understand that regular and extensive and repeated deployments are very hard on human beings; we've seen a lot of people break under that pressure, sadly, in Iraq and Afghanistan. And, boy, do I salute the service of women alongside men, and I have noticed that a law suit has been filed about letting women have positions in combat roles, which would enable them to be promoted. I certainly support the promotion of women in the military and think there are women who deserve to be four stars.

Neil Conan:
Aubrey, may I ask a question? I've read that the infantry officer has two priorities. First, to make sure that the troops get fed before he does; and then, second, to make sure that their feet are dry and clean so that they can perform in the field. What would be the equivalent in the Navy?

Female Speaker:
I think in the Navy the equivalent would be that they ate well and that they got enough sleep to stand our watch, because we sail 24 hours a day, the ship never sleeps.

Neil Conan:
Aubrey, thanks very much, appreciate it. We're talking with Jane Harman, director, president, and CEO of the Woodrow Wilson Center; former member of Congress representing California's 36th district as a Democrat. and former chair of the House Intelligence Committee. You're listening to "Talk of the Nation" from NPR News.

And let's get a question from the mic here at the Wilson Center.

Joseph Spearing:
Hello, my name is Joseph Spearing [spelled phonetically]. I'm working in journalism in the D.C. area. And I have a question concerning the promotion of anyone. When you focus merely either on skin color or sex, there's a danger

that you fail to look towards the skill set of the person involved, be it male or female. I just see that there's a possible danger that people say we need 50 men, we need 50 women. And so, they hire, appropriately, 50 men and 50 women, but they don't necessarily look at the skill sets of the individuals involved. And so, although in some cases there may be 60-40, 70-30, one way or the other, I don't see that as a -- necessarily as a problem, as long as people are looking towards the skill sets and the abilities, rather than ethnic origin or the gender of the person involved.

Jane Harman:
Well, I agree with that. You're talking basically about quotas. And, historically, in certain circumstances, quotas may have been important. The goal is to get beyond quotas. We're still litigating in this country about quotas. It comes up a lot in politics, especially internationally, where there's not a history of electing women. And it's very interesting, I was in Tunisia observing the election for parliament last year, and Tunisia has what's called a "zipper law," which is -- that requires that on various party slates, every other name has to be female. It doesn't say how many have to be elected, but every other name has to be female, and in that election, 30 percent of the people elected were female. In Egypt, which had no law, no quotas, no nothing, women basically lost almost all seats in the parliament. The parliament has been dissolved since, but it went from 64 to five.

So figuring out how to get women started is important, but I totally agree that competition based on merit, and not just for gender, but for ethnicity, is the way we all win. And a society is better if everyone in the society has opportunity, but also is required to be excellent. Tom Friedman makes a big point recently. Tom Friedman, the columnist who wrote his first major book, "From Beirut to Jerusalem," at the Wilson Center, and who has been here many times, makes the point that average isn't good enough anymore, excellence -- excellent is what we need. And there are very women out there who are excellent and who should have opportunity, wherever they are, all over the world, to be leaders of countries, be leaders of legislatures, and be leaders of major businesses.

Neil Conan:

Email from Kelly in San Antonio. I'm eager to hear this discussion because I'm male and I've had the opportunity in recent years to work for a woman owned and operated business. Women were in every position above me, from the owner to the accountant, to my managers. One thing I realized was that despite my compensation having been relatively minimal for my workload, I had no desire to look elsewhere, and always enjoyed working. I came to realize this was because the women in charge did not have measuring contests -- I will call that -- they just got it done.

[laughter]

I am eager to see women run the world, or at least America. They don't have as much of a need to prove themselves or to win each battle to have the last word; they just get it done. Bring on the women.

Jane Harman:
Love this guy. And, Neil, the reason you look so good is because of Sue Goodman sitting over there making you look good.

Neil Conan:
My executive producer.

Jane Harman:
There's a little sign on my desk here that says, "The best man for the job is a woman." Women do well leading, leading in all endeavors, many women do well. Some women don't do well, some women, as I said, don't help women coming behind them. And you have to understand, this applies to men, too, but it really applies to women, that it's lonely up there and you become a bigger target, and you have to take risks, know that when you fail, failure can be your friend, it can make you stronger. And, darn it, help those behind you. I got to tell you a story, I have four little grandchildren, and the oldest of them is female, the younger three are male. And she has announced -- Lucy has announced that my other two children, who are getting married soon, may have children, but they all have to be male. So, I said, "Lucy, why is that, honey? You're six years old, don't you want to have girls in our family?" "Absolutely not. I want to be the only girl." And Lucy hasn't learned Jane Harman's leadership lessons yet.

[laughter]

Neil Conan:
Jane Harman is director, president, and CEO here at the Woodrow Wilson Center. A pleasure, as always. Thank you very much. We'd also like to give special thanks today to our collaborators here at the Wilson Center, especially John Tyler, Peter Reid, Sharon McArthur, and their staffs. Thanks, as well, to the technical staff at NPR who made this special broadcast possible, especially Nathan Bark, Zach Coleman [spelled phonetically], Robert Jackson, and Daniel Shukhin.

Tomorrow, join "Talk of the Nation's "Science Friday" for a discussion with the photographer behind the new global warming documentary, "Chasing Ice." We'll talk to you again on Monday. It's the "Talk of the Nation" from NPR News. I'm Neil Conan at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, D.C.

[applause]

Male Speaker:
Support from NPR comes from NPR member stations, and from Ancestry.com, an online resource for starting a family tree and getting clues to the past. Learn more at tryancestry.com. From the William T. Grant Foundation, supporting research to improve the lives of young people, online at wtgrantfoundation.org. And from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, celebrating national adoption month, and promoting life-long families for all children, at aecf.org. This is NPR.

Ira Flatow:
Where do you go to see evidence of climate change? I'm Ira Flatow, join me on "Science Friday" for our view of the documentary "Chasing Ice." Plus, the sci-fi book club has the right stuff; join us and Gen. Chuck Yeager, for a look back at the Tom Wolfe classic. That's all on "Science Friday" from NPR.

[music playing]

[end of transcript]