

SARAH BALDWIN: 2018 can be a challenging time to produce a podcast about global politics. With each episode, we explore a different problem. And it's often one we've never really thought about before. And given the state of our country, not to mention the world, new and more complex problems are emerging with what feels like relentless regularity.

ROB BLAIR: [INAUDIBLE] Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan--

SARAH BALDWIN: After the 49th episode of *Trending Globally*, we thought we'd take a moment to take stock and see if we could gain new insights into the global insecurity we're living in.

ROB BLAIR: --and more, just the list goes on and on.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

SARAH BALDWIN: So for our 50th episode, we asked a range of experts one question, what keeps you up at night? Their answers touched on everything from nuclear warfare to the death of diplomacy to the stock market. They were illuminating, often terrifying, sometimes even hopeful.

CHAS FREEMAN: Well, the world is going through a real sea change. The international order we've been used to since World War II is well along in its collapse. President Trump is giving it the coup de grace as it were.

SARAH BALDWIN: Chas Freeman, diplomat.

CHAS FREEMAN: This is a world in which rules and norms prevailed. We're heading into a world in which might makes right. The new world disorder that we're in is one in which diplomacy is destined to play a much larger role than it did even before. Ironically, therefore, we're in a period of dismantling our own diplomatic establishment and incapacitating ourselves. Makes no sense.

CATHERINE LUTZ: Well, I don't think we know what to be afraid of. I think we don't have enough information in our public sphere around the question of where the threats to human well-being are. And we are overly focused on war as a solution to problems of insecurity.

SARAH BALDWIN: Katherine Lutz, anthropologist.

CATHERINE LUTZ: So I guess what I worry about is that we have too little information about what the true nature of war is, what it actually involves to go to war. I mean, obviously, soldiers know, their families

know. But I don't think the American public in general understands how expensive it is in human terms, in financial terms, in the kind of social opportunity costs that it involves.

JO-ANNE HART: So if you ask me what keeps me up at night--

SARAH BALDWIN: Jo-Anne Hart, political scientist.

JO-ANNE HART: --I am so concerned that the US will intentionally or by miscalculation start a war with Iran. And that would be a worse mistake than anything else we've done in the Middle East. Now we have a new national security advisor and a new Secretary of State both seem disposed toward regime change in Iran. And it's hard to state how disastrous any attempt to do that would be. Iran is a much harder case than Iraq or Afghanistan. And in any case, we wouldn't want to replicate our operations in those places.

But even more importantly, there is no reason to go to war against Iran. Most of the energetic and young population are not anti-American. And they will be in a heartbeat if we start killing Iranians. And there are 80 million Iranians.

NARGES So what's keeping me up at night is the withdrawal from the US from the Iran deal--

BAJOGHLI:

SARAH BALDWIN: Narges Bajoghli, anthropologist.

NARGES --and that a lot of what President Trump and his administration are saying in regards to Iran

BAJOGHLI: today are kind of like a bad carbon copy of the same screenplay that the neocons used under George W. Bush's time in the lead-up to the Iraq war.

NINA I worry about the possibility of nuclear war. For the first time in my professional career, I

TANNENWALD: actually worry that the American president could get us into a nuclear war. I've never thought about this before. For the first time since the tensest days of the Cold War, the prospect that an American president might actually contemplate using nuclear weapons against an adversary has become thinkable.

SARAH BALDWIN: Nina Tannenwald, political scientist.

NINA President Trump's bullying talk about using nuclear weapons, threatening to rain fire and fury

TANNENWALD: on North Korea, and his enthusiastic embrace of a massive nuclear arms buildup, these are normalizing the use of nuclear weapons and raising the risk of nuclear war. When the leaders

in North Korea and the United States are two narcissistic bullies with fragile egos, it's a really dangerous recipe.

MARK BLYTH: So what keeps me up at night? What keeps me up at night is something that's probably quite different from most people. I worry about ETFs, Exchange Traded Funds.

SARAH BALDWIN: Mark Blythe, political economist.

MARK BLYTH: So ETFs a very powerful investment products where you can buy a bit of a market, you can buy a selection of equities, and you can have infinite diversification. They're essentially optimization programs that try and basically give you the best balance of exposure to equities or whatever it happens to be without actually holding it. So, essentially, these are all derivative products in a sense, right, well, at least the ETFs.

Anyway, why do I worry about this? I worry about this because the whole market now is so affected by these so-called passive vehicles. And they're so cheap that companies that make them like BlackRock and Vanguard are basically dominating the way that equities are traded.

I'll give you an example of this. So Exxon a couple of quarters ago has a bad sale result, probably to do with Venezuela, something like this. And usually when that happens, you expect the share price to go down. But it didn't. It went up. Why is that? Because it's embedded in 25 different ETFs.

PETER ANDREAS: What worries me the most right now is that not only are we literally building physical barriers, walls between peoples and places and countries--

SARAH BALDWIN: Peter Andreas, political scientist.

PETER ANDREAS: --but the act of doing so has actually created a mentality of walling ourselves off from the rest of the world. And we're kind of creating a bunker mentality, hunkering down, a sense that we're under siege from outside forces. And, unfortunately, the rhetoric-- not just the reality but the rhetoric of walling ourselves off, especially from Mexico-- creates this anxiety and sense of wanting to retreat inward and close ourselves off.

ROB BLAIR: There are many things that keep me up at night, but I would say the one that comes most immediately to mind is a sort of combination of continued proliferation of civil wars and the refugee crises that those have provoked, combined also with what seems to be a weakened commitment to international institutions and international intervention, especially to UN

peacekeeping, which is a particular interest of mine.

SARAH BALDWIN: Rob Blair, political scientist.

ROB BLAIR: That worries me as a student of peacekeeping, largely because we have a lot of evidence that international intervention really works, both to prevent civil wars, to prevent them from recurring, to make them less deadly, to make them less prone to spillover from one country to another or one region to another, even within countries. And the fact that we are going to see less peacekeeping or at least less effective peacekeeping, less well-financed peacekeeping, suggests to me that we're going to see conflicts that are longer and more deadly.

STEPHEN KINZER: What distresses me most about what I'm seeing in the world now is the evolution in the American role.

SARAH BALDWIN: Stephen Kinzer, journalist.

STEPHEN KINZER: In some ways, it's not a dramatic change. Really much of what we're seeing now under President Trump has its roots in the period of George W. Bush. But we're being much more explicit about it now. We're being much more open. We're not trying to pretend that we're, for example, maintaining alliances. In the old days, we used to want to say we always act with allies, but we would heavily pressure our allies. We would create alliances, but only as long as we ran them and other partners had to be subservient. Now we don't even maintain the fiction.

CHAS FREEMAN: It's very easy to destroy a government unit, an instrument. But then rebuilding it is going to take a long time. So my contention is that while we wait for the recovery, which will come because we have no choice but to recover our ability to compete internationally, as we wait, we should be thinking about how to rebuild.

ROB BLAIR: I am not necessarily a cheerleader for projection of American power abroad. But I do think there are consequences when the US abdicates its role as a promoter of peace and democracy and other things that we tend to think of as being, you know, valuable things in the world. And I'm not sure we know what a world looks like in which the US really does recede from all of those commitments.

SARAH BALDWIN: In uncertain times, what is the role of researchers and academics? And how can scholars help us understand and navigate this era of global instability? What keeps them going? Is there reason to hope?

CATHERINE

LUTZ:

Yeah, no, I have a lot of hope. When I see what's happened in the last couple of years-- and this is political, it can't not be-- I see a lot of people very mobilized to combat the erosion of democratic norms in our country. And I think when we talk about security, that erosion of norm, the norm that the people and the people's representatives should decide when and where we go to war, if we do, that that's eroded since the Vietnam era, if not before and that that's the kind of thing that gives me hope, to see that people have started to pay attention to the fragility of some of our democratic values. And one of those, it should be that, as it was originally, that war is a public decision, not a private one.

CHAS FREEMAN:

Well, first thing is that I did spend 30 years as a diplomat. And as I have said on other occasions, optimism is to diplomats what courage is to soldiers. You can't be a diplomat if you don't wake up in the morning and think, "I can do this," just as if you can't be a soldier if you don't believe you'll survive the charge up the hill. And so I have an instinctual ability-- or maybe a disability or professional deformation-- which says to me that this too shall pass, the tunnel will end, there will be not light at it, there will be open space. And you can look forward to maneuvering.

JO-ANNE HART:

Let me get to something positive which is that the nuclear agreement itself is working. It's an unrivaled, unprecedented level of monitoring and verification. And there's no question that that agreement is working. It's really only the Trump administration and those media advisors around him that are feeding his preconceived views that are opposed to the nuclear deal with Iran. So my hope here is that the fact that most of our key allies and even our rivals want to stay the course on the Iran agreement.

NARGES

BAJOGHLI:

What keeps me hopeful-- and maybe this is me just being an optimist against all odds-- is the desire by many, many people in this country to vote different kinds of people into power and the November 2018 elections. So the thought that, you know, hopefully, as a country, we will take midterm elections and local elections extremely seriously because they do matter. So what keeps me hopeful is that even though I may not agree with those currently in power, it feels like there is a momentum on the ground. Two, a hold our elected officials accountable.

What allows me to keep doing what I do are my students. I love being able to-- because they are grappling with all of these questions as well. And talking it out with them, teaching them that there-- that as difficult as they may find what's going on politically today, there are precedents in history and figuring out how people at different points in history sort of dealt with these issues and dealt with these questions.

NINA And it's a bit of a dismal time and I think we owe it to our students to guide them, to leave them
TANNENWALD: forward, to give them the tools, the intellectual tools, the analytical tools, but also the
inspiration to tackle some of the big global challenges, the challenges our world faces.

PETER ANDREAS: What keeps me going? My kids.

[LAUGHTER]

ASHUTOSH [INAUDIBLE] what is called a low level equilibrium. It will just go on-- and until deep fatigue
VARSHNEY: sets in.

SARAH BALDWIN: Ashutosh Varshney, political scientist.

ASHUTOSH If intellectuals were asked to contribute, we have some solutions in mind. But intellectuals may
VARSHNEY: not be acceptable to the political process on either side. And therefore, the proposals that we
might have for solving the problem or helping Kashmiris, we're really caught in a-- in many
ways, in a crossfire between India and Pakistan. Those proposals just remain intellectual
proposals. And the political process has its own logic. And security process also has its own
logic. And therefore, I'm not hopeful, actually.

ROB BLAIR: It's quite possible that things will look more or less the way they do now with a more subdued
US role abroad. But I'm skeptical of that. And I'm worried of what's going to happen as the US
continues to pull back.

STEPHEN What makes me hopeful, in a way, is that undermining American power might not be a bad
KINZER: thing. It can't be said that American power in the world has always been used for good. We
like to tell ourselves that. But perhaps the erosion of America's ability to-- and even interest in--
- trying to dominate the rest of the world will reduce over the long run the desire of the United
States to want to shape everything that happens in the world.

In a sense, I think you could say that people who comment on the world, either as authors or
professors or journalists, might be the only group that's benefiting from the chaos we're seeing
around the world. People are coming to us more often. People are puzzled. They're
concerned. In some cases, they're terrified about what they see in the world.

The role of people in the academy and in the media in trying to educate Americans and trying
to place international affairs in a proper perspective and see the world in a larger sense rather

than narrowly from the perspective of the United States is something that I think is going to become more and more important. I would love to see a quieter world in which I wouldn't have to wake up every morning and think about some new explosion that I have to think about and analyze. Nonetheless, the fact that we are in that world does make me feel that I'm doing something that's probably more important than it was when the world was a somewhat calmer place.

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