

# **Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)**

## **"Confront and Conceal: Obama's Secret Wars and Surprising Use of American Power"**

### **Introduction:**

**H. Andrew Schwartz,  
Senior Vice President for External Relations,  
CSIS**

### **Moderator:**

**Bob Schieffer,  
Chief Washington Correspondent, CBS News;  
Anchor, CBS News' "Face the Nation"**

### **Speakers:**

**David E. Sanger,  
Best-selling author of "The Inheritance" and  
Chief Washington Correspondent of The New York Times;  
John Hamre,  
President and CEO,  
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### **Location:**

**CSIS B1 Conference Center  
1800 K Street, NW, Washington, D.C.**

**Time: 5:30 p.m. EDT**

**Date: Tuesday, June 12, 2012**

*Transcript by  
Federal News Service  
Washington, D.C.*

H. ANDREW SCHWARTZ: Good evening. Could I ask everybody to take their seats please? Good evening.

MR. : (Inaudible) – there’s a book up here – (inaudible).

MR. SCHWARTZ: Thank you. If I could ask everybody to take their seats, we’ll get started relatively on time.

Welcome to the Center for Strategic and International Studies. I’m Andrew Schwartz with CSIS. And on behalf of CSIS and the TCU Schieffer School of Journalism, welcome to David Sanger’s bar mitzvah. (Laughter.)

MR. : We hope it ends well.

MR. SCHWARTZ: We’re really privileged to have David here tonight, and my boss, John Hamre, and the number-one host on Sunday, Bob Schieffer. Let’s give it up for Bob Schieffer.

MR. : Yes. (Applause.)

MR. SCHWARTZ: Bob, the floor is yours.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, I think you’ve written a best-seller here, David. This is one of the largest crowds that we’ve had for one of these this year. So if they buy books – (laughter) – they may just come to find out what’s in it and go home, but –

MR. : That’s happened, Bob. (Laughter.)

MR. SCHIEFFER: But if they do – and – but we all – and you all probably were like me. You thought we’d probably better hear what David has to say before they haul him off to jail here, because – (laughter) – this book has really stirred up a lot of – a lot of talk, both up on Capitol Hill and in the White House.

Let me just start, David – I kind of always like to start with the news. What’s the latest here?

DAVID E. SANGER: Well, Bob, before we start I just wanted to thank you –

MR. SCHIEFFER: Oh, yeah.

MR. SANGER: – and CSIS and John, you for having us all here. I wanted to thank some people out in the audience, starting with my wife Cheryl (sp) here. You know, when you write a book, you get to come up and talk to Bob Schieffer and John. But Cheryl (sp) has been doing something really hard this past year: She’s been teaching some of the neediest students in – at Anacostia High School, and she’s really had an amazing year doing it. But it’s a lot of hard work. And so we did a book and that all at the same time. So I wanted to thank her.

My sons, Andrew and Ned, are here, Andrew headed off to Colorado College. My parents, Joan and Ken Sanger; my sister Ellen (sp) – yeah?

MR. SCHIEFFER: (Inaudible) – let people say who you are.

MR. SANGER: OK.

MR. SCHIEFFER: We want to say – (inaudible) – over it – (inaudible) – here.

MR. SANGER: OK. Just – (inaudible) – you guys just – (inaudible). (Applause.)

And most important for the purposes of the book, Bob, as you know, I'm incapable of, like, organizing my sock drawer, much less writing a book in the course of a year. So we had some terrific – I had the luck of some terrific assistants. And you accused me before of actually not writing a word of the book. That's not true. I did the – you know, at least the acknowledgements, right? (Laughter.)

But just to do a few more: Afrin Actor (ph), who is here – Afrin (ph), raise your hand; and June Torbaudi (ph) – there is June; and Samantha Fitzkieber (ph); and Jessica Harrison (sp) is here; and Lauren Barr (ph); and someplace is Tim Mauer (ph). Tim, where did you go? Well, Tim – (inaudible) – around here.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Was he your diversity candidate? Was he –

MR. SANGER: He was our diversity candidate. And – (laughter).

MR. SCHIEFFER: (Inaudible) – always beautiful – (inaudible).

MR. SANGER: That's right. That's right. So I just wanted to thank them all, because frankly, without their work I'd still be on chapter three. (Laughter.)

MR. : Well, that's good.

MR. SANGER: So what's the news? Well, as you say, the book has made a little bit of news for the Iran revelations. And that is the story of Olympic Games – I'm sure we'll get into it later on – which is a somewhat remarkable operation that the Bush administration started and the – President Obama doubled down on to try to get at – and have another way to get at the Iranian nuclear facilities.

But there's a lot more in this book. This book tells a story of the president's journey on Afghanistan and Pakistan. It talks about the rise of China and what the administration learned along the way. It talks about the Arab Spring and how it took the administration by surprise and how they responded to it. Part of the fun that we had with some of the researchers was going a year after the Arab Spring to poke around the Middle East and see what that looked like. And it deals, of course, with how they've handled Iran, North Korea, some of the other troublesome

areas. But it seems like most of the headlines were about one or two chapters. So – which is – which is fine too.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, let me – let me just ask you about that, because – to bring everybody up to speed on what’s going on: As you probably know, we have now had – the attorney general has named two U.S. attorneys to investigate where the leaks that came in this book and also a book written by Dan Klaidman over at Newsweek came from. John McCain on Capitol Hill again today was saying that’s not enough. He wants an independent counsel to investigate where these leaks came from.

Can I ask you, David – has anybody contacted you yet?

MR. SANGER: You know, so far all I’ve been hearing is from reviewers. But – and you know, the way these things unfold, you never know what it is exactly they’re going to look for. But only in Washington, Bob, would you come out with a book that describes the interesting policy issue – and I think there was a great public interest in playing out the fact that the United States is using cyberweapons. Of course, U.S. had said before it was developing them; it had never said before that it had made use of them. And there are lots of interesting questions about whether or not the U.S. should be using cyberweapons, whether it opens – makes us more vulnerable to others.

But only in DC would the only question be how did that get out? And that is somewhat typical of Washington. But the most important fact to know here is it got out because of a mistake that we describe at the beginning – in the first pages of the book, that a programming error that allowed the entire worm that they had designed to leap aboard the laptop computer of an Iranian scientist, who then left the Natanz enrichment plant, I guess went home, plugged into the Internet, and it spread around the world.

And at that moment the Iranians knew that – this was 2010 – that somebody had designed a cyberweapon. And I – they seemed to at the time express some suspicions about who that somebody would be. And so that was the string we pulled on. But you know, the thought here that it’s news to the Iranians that they were attacked by a cyberweapon – that’s a little bit wild. The Iranians knew it.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Did you – you were on “Face the Nation”; you and Dan Klaidman both were on “Face the Nation.” And it – what struck me this week is when President Obama came out and said, these authors have assured me that this information did not come from the White House. I don’t remember you saying that. Did you say that the information did not come from the White House?

MR. SANGER: No, I think what I said on “Face the Nation” was that this was an 18-month-long project; that I worked from the bottom up and started with the leak of that – of that worm out of Natanz. The phrase “leaks” for the rest of it I think doesn’t really sort of do justice to the process of building a book. You talk to many, many people in many different countries. And you try to assemble as best you can the story of what has happened. But I don’t think that

we have said anything about, you know, what groups of people we spoke to or didn't speak to or whatever.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Dr. Hamre, you've been in Washington a long time, like me. You've been through leaks investigations. What do you make of the uproar over this book?

JOHN HAMRE: Well, I must confess, I – and I said this to David – that, you know, if I'd been in government I'd be pretty unhappy, you know, I mean, because you do operate important actions that need to be kept in secret. And when some things come out, it is – it's an awkward moment. But the underlying policy question – should we use a wider range of tools to try to influence other countries? – it's obscured by this debate over where the leak came from.

And I think the fundamental question we'll get to once we get through the drama of the leak is really that. You know, what do we think about these sorts of tools? Did we create more danger to ourselves by doing this? That ought – you know, that's in one sense the debate that we should be having, rather than this “who shot John.” I've – look, I've started a lot of investigations myself. They never end up well for the government. You know, so I think we're going to – it's probably going to be a fruitless exercise to pursue that. We really ought to be getting to the larger policy questions.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, let's talk about some of that. David, one of the – (audio break) – you talk about in the book is what you think the Obama doctrine is. What is it?

MR. SANGER: Well, President Obama doesn't want to talk about having a doctrine. And I wouldn't blame him, because any time a president comes out and says they have a doctrine, people like me walk along and try to figure out whether or not an individual action fits in the doctrine, violates the doctrine; you're asking all these questions. So you know, Dr. Hamre's been great about writing about doctrines since he got here. But I bet you didn't like doing it when you were in the Defense Department – (laughter) – right?

And if I had to say what I thought the two big elements of the Obama doctrine are, they are as follows. First, President Obama is clearly willing to go use unilateral force when he believes there is a direct threat to the United States. So the bin Laden raid is an example. The use of drones over Pakistan – another issue that I think they were concerned on leaks, not because of the book but because of articles that have appeared in The Times and Mr. Klaidman's book, as we described, and the so-called kill lists. And you see it in Olympic Games. You see there a willingness to go into the sovereign – you know, violate the sovereignty of another country in the purpose of trying to eliminate something that the president believes could be a direct threat.

What those have in common is that they're all light-footprint kind of examples. In other words, the president sort of decided that the era of sending a hundred thousand troops or spending a trillion dollars over 10 years to try to change societies that may or may not be willing to change and that certainly resent our presence – that day is over. And so he needs some kind of tool to be able to deal with these issues. And the tool he has chosen are these.

The other side of the doctrine, though, is that when the threat is not a direct one to the United States, when the threat is sort of a general concern – Syria, Libya – there, he’s – his main objective is to make sure that other countries that may have equally or greater – equal or greater direct threat put some skin in the game; that the United States not always act as the policeman of the world; and that we wouldn’t act until others also go in. And that was the whole message of Libya. And of course in Libya the NATO forces were ostensibly in the lead. They also ran out of ammunition – always annoying when that happens. And the U.S. had to go in and sort of – sort of resupply.

So at moments, it has been difficult. Syria is an example where it’s been really difficult, because everybody’s been frozen by the fact that the United States isn’t willing to go in by itself, and others are resistant, including the Russians. I was at a luncheon today where Secretary Clinton said that attack helicopters were coming in in support of the Syrian government. She seemed to suggest they were from Russia. That seemed newsworthy to me. She didn’t quite say they were Russian attack helicopters, but she immediately went on to discuss Russia and her concerns about –

MR. SCHIEFFER: They’re coming in on the side of –

MR. SANGER: – that they are coming in presumably on the side of the – of the Syrian government. So she was clearly concerned about this. And so these are all examples of cases where the United States has found that the doctrine has run into some limits.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Who makes –

(Cross talk.)

MR. SCHIEFFER: Go ahead.

MR. HAMRE: I’ll just add – but – it – I can’t imagine any president that wouldn’t embrace those two principles. I mean, if it’s really serious, we’re going to do it no matter what. And we’re always trying to find somebody else to do stuff we don’t care about. I mean, we – you know, we didn’t go into Rwanda. A lot of people feel that we should have gone into Rwanda.

MR. : That’s true.

MR. HAMRE: But we just didn’t. We didn’t – we didn’t go into the Congo. You know, we helped, you know, other countries go into the Congo. We – you know, we didn’t go into the Central African Republic. We helped the French get in there. We – and in one sense it’s –

MR. SANGER (?): Give me – give me one example, John, though – I think the president’s team would probably say, if they were speaking about this option, that Iraq was a case where in their minds it didn’t pose a direct threat to the United States. And we did take the lead to go in.

MR. HAMRE: Well, I – (inaudible) – every president seems to define themselves by what they didn't like about their predecessor.

MR. : Sure.

MR. HAMRE: And that's much the quality of this. But in some sense they're quite similar, because both of them wanted to demonstrate a unique new way to accomplish a national goal –

MR. : (Inaudible.) I would agree – (inaudible).

MR. HAMRE: – you know, without really having a strategic frame of reference for either of them.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Who makes the foreign politics – policy decisions in this White House, David?

MR. SANGER: You know, what strike –

MR. SCHIEFFER: Who makes the foreign policy decisions in this White House?

MR. SANGER: What struck me in the reporting for “Confront and Conceal” is that when the president first came in, he cast a very wide net on foreign policy decisions. And here, think about those photographs we saw when they were deciding on the Afghan surge. And there were eight or nine meetings in the Situation Room; they invited in almost, you know, everybody in the U.S. government who had an interest in it; there were days when there were briefings on the Pakistani nuclear threat; there were days when there were budget-concerned briefings; there were briefings on the Taliban. And you'd get these photographs released – it was a very crowded – very crowded Sit Room, which – and it turned out to be a very leaky Sit Room as well at the time, and so there were a lot of news reports about what went on in those meetings.

Fast-forward one year when the president had to decide how fast troops were going to come back out. No Sit Room meetings, that we saw pictures of, anyway – a very small group of five or six officials: Tom Donilon, the national security adviser by that time; Dennis McDonough, his deputy and a very longtime aide to the president; Secretary Clinton and Secretary Gates at that time, but even in that decision, they appeared to have been brought in relatively late in the process; Vice President Biden, for sure, who had lost the first round, but sort of won the second round here; and in the case of Afghanistan and Pakistan, the adviser for Afghanistan and Pakistan, General Douglas Lew, Lieutenant General Douglas Lew. But the group appeared to have gotten very, very narrow, and I would say that in the decisions that have followed, it has stayed narrow.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Let's talk a little bit about China. You brought out a very interesting point in the book. You talk about how the Chinese interpreted President Obama's willingness in the beginning to engage them. As we – and I guess the question is how long did it take the White House to figure that out, and did they change their strategy?

MR. SANGER: They did change their strategy, and it took about a year. The beginning of the – the beginning of the administration, we saw an effort to bring the Chinese in basically as equals, at least on the subject of economic management. And so there was a meeting in London – we may recall is the first big meeting of the G-20 – that was supposed to deal with the financial crisis – and President Obama met with Hu Jintao. I think it was their first meeting as presidents, and there was discussion of a G-2, you know, that the world's first- and second-largest economies would solve these problems themselves. The Europeans and the Japanese weren't really in love with that phrase, but the concept was that the two big economic superpowers would be in charge.

As the year wore on, it became increasingly evident to the administration that that was in fact regarded as a sign of weakness. And by 2010, of course, you saw the Chinese beginning to stake claims down in the South China Sea, declaring that certain islands were their territory and so forth. And when that happened, you began to see the administration push back a bit. And that accelerated in 2011 and led to what the administration briefly called the pivot until the Europeans asked the question, what are you pivoting away from, us, right? (Chuckles.) So they changed it to "rebalancing." (Chuckles.) But that was certainly an effort to try to push back, put some limits, almost an electric fence around where the Chinese were going to go. Whether that works, whether you can do that without making the Chinese feel as if they're being contained is really an open question.

MR. HAMRE: But I think, in fairness, the first year of the presidency, he – there weren't confrontational issues with the Chinese, but there were in the second year. There were five or six episodes at sea where we had some brushing up against each other in the South China Sea. They were our reconnaissance activities, and the Chinese responded. I think we would miss the story without recognizing there were two sides in this. I think the so-called change in the Obama administration's attitude really, in some measure, was responding to challenges. At one point we sent a destroyer, you know, to be there to make sure that there wouldn't be a follow-up incident. So it partly was a change in thinking on the part of the Obama administration. It also was a change in behavior that we had to deal with.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Dr. Hamre, just how would you rate this administration on how it has dealt with foreign policy thus far?

MR. HAMRE: You know, this country is tearing itself apart on – in this election, but it's about domestic policy, not foreign policy. I mean, there's a fairly strong consensus on our foreign policy that the president has, I believe, carried out his initiatives fully consistently in the mainstream of American foreign and security policy; stood up firmly in Asia when that was called for; he followed through in Iraq – there are some – some people question that he pulled out too quickly in Iraq, but that's not controversial with Americans – maybe with the military, but not average citizens; he did surge more forces into Afghanistan beyond what President Bush had put in. This is a very traditional and, I would argue, centrist foreign policy, and as a result, there's not great controversy about it. I mean, it's controversy over this: Did they leak documents to make them look bigger and brighter and shinier than they are? I mean – but it's not about the content of the policy.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Would you agree with that, David?

MR. SANGER: I've seen a little bit on content, but it may not be for real. So Governor Romney, in the course of doing the – getting his way through the primaries, seemed to take positions that were significantly to the right of even where many of his – not all of his, but many of his advisers were. So take Afghanistan, for example. When the news came out that the United States was conducting negotiations with the Taliban – no surprise to anybody in this room; it's been an effort they've been trying to get going for, what, a year and a half, two years now – you heard Governor Romney say he wouldn't negotiate with the Taliban, he would defeat the Taliban. And that left, actually, some of his own advisers asking the question, well, how long would that take; we've already been there 10 or 11 years; how many more troops would that take? And you haven't heard him repeat that since.

You have also heard him make the argument that the United States has backed away from global leadership. And I think that gets to that second element in the Obama doctrine that I was talking about that –

MR. SCHIEFFER: Leading from behind.

MR. SANGER: Yeah, the concept of leading from behind – not my favorite phrase, but I think one that is somewhat telling – is one that the United States should not be involved in. But then when you ask the specific of what would you do differently; would you go into Syria with American troops unilaterally, you don't get a difference that sounds all that great. And Iran has been an area where Governor Romney has repeatedly said he thought the president had been weak.

MR. HAMRE: But I think the one area – and you bring it out in your book, David – that I think is of substantial difference, and that was when President Obama implied a deadline for pulling out of Afghanistan. I think that's – that's one that genuinely is a dividing point and I think is an issue. Certainly the military community is apprehensive about that. It's probably dramatically circumscribed the diplomacy. You talk about that, again, in the book.

MR. SANGER: In the book.

MR. HAMRE: And that's probably the most important, defining difference.

MR. SANGER: And it's not just the military that was concerned about it. There was a big debate within the administration. Secretary Clinton was uncomfortable with that as well and expressed the opinion internally that it's fine to have a deadline for pulling out, but you might not want to announce it. And then there was this great moment when Henry Kissinger went in and went to visit the team that was negotiating with the Taliban. And he said, well, two things: Don't set a deadline, because if you do, they'll just wait you out, and the second thing he said was once you begin withdrawing troops, it's like eating popcorn; you can't stop. And then he paused, and he said, especially in an election year. (Laughter.)

MR. SCHIEFFER: You know, before I forget it, you have one chapter in the book that I found a little bit scary, really, but fascinating called “The Bomb Scare” that describes – there are a couple of days in 2009 when the administration actually thought that the Taliban had somehow gotten ahold of a nuclear weapon.

MR. SANGER: Yeah. This was a remarkable – a remarkable moment. There are bits and pieces of this that were reported prior to my book, so I don't want to take full credit for it, but I sort of dug down into it. It turned out that they believed the Pakistani Taliban had gotten either a weapon or the material for a dirty bomb. And this was based on a series of intercepts where, of course, they're translating out the conversations, and there's some question about whether or not they were hearing the translation right. So one possibility is they just got that wrong. The other possibility is the Taliban had bought something and been scammed by the Russians or someone else. That's happened before.

MR. HAMRE: That's happened before.

MR. SANGER: Yeah. But in any case, there were four or five days when people were pretty much on edge, and the president actually dispatched a nuclear search team to the Gulf. They did not go into Pakistan. And then they asked the Pakistanis to go search around a bit too, which is sort of the polite way of saying, hey, could you guys check and see if anything's missing, you know? (Laughter.) And they got back the report that nothing was missing, which was – which was helpful, but they were a little bit disturbed by the fact that they discovered the Pakistanis didn't have a huge amount of technological depth in going off to search for this material.

And it raised the question, if a Pakistani weapon ever did go missing, did they have the technology and the ability to find it with the speed you would need? And if you're wondering why it is that President Obama has decided on having an enduring force in Afghanistan just over the border from Pakistan, partly it is of course to keep some stability in Afghanistan and to try to make sure Kabul doesn't fall, but partly it's in case what turned out to be a false alarm one day turns into something more serious.

MR. HAMRE: But could I – it is virtually impossible to find a device once it's gone missing. I mean, our search capacity is – you know, we've got these Buck Rogers images that there's some satellite someplace that just beams in and homes in, and there it is, and it's that house. It isn't like that at all.

MR. SANGER: It works in the James Bond movies.

MR. HAMRE: It's in the movies, but it is not real. And so overwhelmingly, our focus has to be on prophylactic action, you know, setting up the control structures in advance; setting up the permissive action, you know, procedures and events so that you put as much preventative structure in place, because if one goes missing, it is – this idea of finding it is not a high probability.

MR. SCHIEFFER: What is the likelihood that the Taliban could get their hands on –

MR. HAMRE: Well, the – you know, the Taliban is a subsidiary of the Pakistani ISI. The ISI is a subsidiary of the Pakistani army. The army runs the production complex, and they manufacture more weapons a year than any other country in the world, with the exception of Russia. This is not a good combination.

MR. SCHIEFFER: How many do they have? Is that information known?

MR. HAMRE: I don't think there is a public number, but, you know, hundreds.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Hundreds. And are they big, the kind we call big ones, or are they tactical? What are they? (Laughter.)

MR. HAMRE: That is well beyond what I really know. They are – well, we don't know. But we do know that they are tactically relevant, I mean, in the sense that you – they're not giant things that take huge, complex delivery structures. They were – you know, they're meant to go on a missile. So –

MR. SANGER: Just to add in on that point, because there's a little about this in "Confront and Conceal," one of the concerns that the Obama administration has had is that as the Pakistanis improve their nuclear force and try to, of course, focus it more on India, they have moved to more very light, mobile tactical nuclear weapons, not unlike what we used to use, you know, during the height of the Cold War when we were concerned that the Soviets would come through the gap in Germany.

And this is worrisome because small tactical weapons are easier to steal, and when they're on the road, they're easier for somebody to get at. And you're never quite sure of the loyalties of the army unit that's moving around, so if you happen to have people who have particular al-Qaida or Taliban loyalties within that group, having a weapon that is small and movable is a lot more worrisome than having something that's stored away where the – you know, the nuclear cores are one place and the triggers are someplace else.

The other difficulty that we've had in this – and John makes the right point; it's always difficult to figure out where these weapons are – it's particularly difficult because the Pakistanis are concerned about not telling us very much about them because they're afraid the biggest threat to their arsenal isn't al-Qaida or the Taliban, but us, that there is always some U.S. group, SEAL team, you know, right over the border. And that's why that RQ-170, the stealth surveillance plane that was over the Abbottabad complex during the bin Laden raid, was particularly upsetting to the Pakistanis, because they're thinking if they didn't see it hanging out over Abbottabad for hours on end, what are the chances they are going to see it hanging out over their nuclear complex?

MR. : (Inaudible.)

MR. SCHIEFFER: But we know how many nuclear weapons they have –

MR. HAMRE: We have a – I think a solid dialogue with them, but the precise – I would probably guess that the precise numbers are more –

MR. SCHIEFFER: Do you know where they are? Do we think we –

MR. HAMRE: I don't – I don't know the answer to that. I don't think I should probably comment on that.

MR. SANGER: We know where some of them are, and that was part of the disturbing element of an attack on a Pakistani naval base that took place shortly after the bin Laden raid.

And I remember there was a quite spectacular attack inside this naval base. It turned out that the base didn't have any nuclear weapons, but there were some nearby, and that got a lot of people's attention.

MR. SCHIEFFER: You write about the Arab Spring. What was the – I guess – I don't know the – exactly the word that they – (inaudible). What was the administration's relationship to the Arab Spring? I mean, did we do much? Did we know much about it? Did it catch us totally off guard?

MR. SANGER: I think one of the most interesting things that we got a chance to go report out for the book was that President Obama had been pretty unhappy with the quality of the intel he had been getting about the possibilities that these regimes were – (inaudible).

So in the summer of 2010, he commissioned a presidential study directive, which was conducted inside the White House, about the fragility of these regimes. And they didn't make it public at the time, because for many of these regimes, you sort of don't want to advertise to them that you're studying whether or not they could collapse. It's a bad public relations move. But that study was well under way by the time the Arab Spring happened.

And there's a scene in the book where Tunisia blew up. It was obviously the first of the Arab Spring states to go. And the president is being briefed, and he asked the question: What are the chances that this is going to spread to Egypt? And the answer came: Oh, very low, sir. That didn't last more than a couple weeks.

Then Egypt happened. And you'll see in the book a bit of a transcript from a remarkable conversation, the last conversation between President Mubarak and President Obama. And this was the phone call after President Obama had watched Mubarak on TV and realized he wasn't getting the message after being told by his aides, you know, he's going to begin to step aside, he gave this very defiant speech.

So the president called him, there had been a behind-the-scenes struggle within the Obama administration about whether or not to help push Mubarak out, with Secretary Clinton and Secretary Gates saying, you know, you might not want to do this until you're sure who follows, and younger members of the administration who could sort of envision themselves out in Tahrir Square saying: No, you've got to get on the right side of history.

And in this conversation, President Obama says: You know, sir, I respect my elders. You've been running the country for 30 years, since I was in college. But maybe it's time to move on. And Mubarak says: Give me 10 days. President Nasser put something like this down. And it was sort of code word for in 10 days I can shoot most of these people and this whole thing will go away. And President Obama sort of pushes back and says: You know, I don't really think you understand what's going on in your own streets. And it was just this very poignant moment where you sort of see the rubber hit the road in the U.S. trying to ease an ally out. And I think Mubarak wouldn't have lasted whether the conversation took place or not, but it was just an interesting vision.

MR. SCHIEFFER: What is the big difference between Syria and Libya?

MR. : Want to take the first shot of that – (inaudible) – (laughter) –

MR. : Well –

MR. SCHIEFFER: And just take that as a – as a launching pad.

MR. HAMRE: Well, I – well, first, Syria has a – has a more competent military. You know, the – Libya was always a fairly incompetent military and a very small Praetorian guard, you know, that was really – so that was a – that was an issue. I think, second, this is a lot more complicated. There are a lot more things that get unhinged. I mean, if Libya failed, the consequences weren't necessarily broad, but here we're worried about the future of Lebanon, we're worried about the future of Jordan, you know, and it's a very fragile – so it's – it could spread much more widely.

And it – there were – we were – we just – we got through Libya with luck. And I think the fear is that this is not – you can't count on luck as a strategy if you're going to do something like Syria. And at this stage, we'd rather not get out on front where we don't have core interests. There are certainly humanitarian interests. I think the – I think it is a larger and more serious situation than we recognize here. And – but it isn't compelling for anyone to want to put boots on the ground.

And unlike the Libya operation where Moammar Gadhafi had alienated all other Arab leaders, even though the Syrians have alienated themselves, the Arab League is not giving an endorsement for military action the way they did with Libya. So I think there's a – there are some substantial differences. It would be a heck of a problem if we had to do something.

MR. SCHIEFFER: What did you find out about it?

MR. SANGER: Well, you know, I thought Kofi Annan put it very well over the weekend when he said: You know, Libya, people were pretty sure would implode. Syria, people were pretty sure would explode. And so that's number one. Secondly, it's a reminder that geography still matters in foreign affairs. The – in the case of Libya, we could see by satellite the Libyan troops moving across the desert. And there was a moment to go get them with aerial bombardment before they got off into the cities, and that really did a huge amount of damage to the Libyan military.

In the case of Syria, they're already in the cities. This is a civil war that's under way. There's no way to conduct a bombing raid without having horrific civilian casualties. So you don't want to do it from the air. Going into the ground – going in on the ground has all of the problems that John described. And then you have the Russians – fundamentally, you know, they don't love Assad. And they – I think they would agree to take Assad and move him out. But they feel as if the United States hoodwinked them in the case of Libya, that they got it – passed a resolution and then used it to go well beyond the humanitarian mandate to force Gadhafi out. And they have vowed they will not let that happen again.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Questions from the audience? Right there.

MR. : Do we have microphones? (Inaudible.) Yeah, stand up. And –

MR. : Here comes a microphone.

MR. : Here's a mic right here.

Q: This is on regards to Olympic Games. Considering that China and Russia have their own cyberweapons capabilities – (inaudible) – the United States had a lead and – but just how much of that lead was lost with the leaking of the virus into the broader world?

MR. SANGER: You make a very good point. We're pretending here as if this is the early days of cyberweapons, and I guess in many ways it is. I mean, we're sort of the equivalent of where we were in nuclear weapons between, what, 1945 and, say, 1955. And we're in the early stages. But so far, the cyberweapons that we have seen used against the United States have been pretty much computer-on-computer. In other words, a lot of people believe the Chinese, the Russians, others come in to lurk around in American computer systems, maybe look for proprietary corporate data, a lot of that, try to get in the defense-related data, maybe airplane designs and so forth. There have been attacks on the Pentagon, on the Office of the Secretary of Defense. President Obama got a pretty big wake-up call when there was a what's believed to be a Chinese effort to get into his campaign's computers in 2008. And I think the same thing happened to Senator McCain at that time.

MR. : Mmm hmm. Mmm hmm. It did.

MR. SANGER: So at least they were equal opportunity. (Laughter.) And then –

MR. HAMRE: Bipartisan.

MR. SANGER: What'd you say?

MR. HAMRE: Bipartisan.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Nonpartisan.

MR. SANGER: Completely nonpartisan. And then of course there was the Google attack in 2009. But these of all have been computer on computer.

What made Olympic Games particularly fascinating was that this was one of the first sustained efforts we've seen – we've seen individual efforts before – to go through a computer system of another country to affect infrastructure, to make the centrifuges blow up. The concept of the worm was to go and speed up or slow down the Iranian centrifuges and unbalance them, and thus make them explode. And these things are spinning at supersonic speeds. And if one blows up, you really don't want to be standing next to it. So that was the effort here.

And I think one of the concerns is that our own infrastructure is of course vulnerable, whether it's the utility system or the cellphone system or the air traffic control system.

MR. HAMRE: If I – but if I could just add just one little piece, I think what's important about this, the – this was a code – this was – this is not like your Internet stuff. I mean, there are things that are going against Internet every day. This was – this was designed to go against a proprietary, unique operating system that's used in industrial processes. The – this code is used to run – I don't know what the percentage is – you know, 20 (percent), 30 percent of all the industrial plants in the world. I mean, it's – you know, to run, you know, chemical factories – so what is unusual and what's, I think, ominous about this is that it – it is – it is a code that is fundamentally used widely in industry.

And you know, in the past, most cybercriminality, for example, would be try to break in, steal somebody's credit cards and charge with it. This is a case where if you could get into a company's – you know, the system that's running the chemical plant and you can say, you know, send me \$100 million tomorrow or I destroy your plant, I mean, we have a whole new dimension of just criminality that's going to be in front of us because of this.

MR. SANGER: That's right. And there are some efforts to protect against that. I was out at a demonstration they did outside the Idaho National Labs, where they had set up a sort of miniature chemical plant and they attack it each day and try to see whether or not you can respond to it. And of course in cyberattacks, the attacker has all of the advantages. And in the one test that they showed to a group of reports, in fact, the attackers won the day.

Now what they were concerned about at that time – Stuxnet was already out, had been discovered; this is just last year that they did this – was that elements of the Stuxnet worm that got out from Natanz are now available to people and they can sort of see how they're structured. And it's a little bit like finding sort of loose ordnance around and they could try to reformulate it and send it back at us.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Another question, right here. Yes.

Q: So if we look at what's been happening both with what the United States, the policy that we've taken, what happened with the release of Olympic Games and then with bin Laden, there's this sense of, back to – the Pentagon said a year – about a year and a half ago is we would – we would respond in a cyber way to kinetic warfare. So if somebody came at us kinetically, we would respond in a cyber way, but only if that happened to us. What the Olympic Games showed is that we actually did this proactively. And there have been some tensions around what we did with bin Laden as far as we went in aggressively, now with Olympic Games.

So I have two questions to that. At what point does the international environment say, OK, enough from the U.S. because you're taking actions and you've done this covertly? And what was the thought process from your perspective, in understanding that – knowing this would eventually get out, but being the one to sort of release this out initially, understanding the secrecy and the confidentiality from a national security perspective?

MR. SANGER: Sure. Very good question.

First, the – in the bin Laden raid, for example, there was no particular effort to cover up the fact that we were violating Pakistan's sovereignty. In fact, the White House said that President Obama had promised during the campaign that if he ever knew where bin Laden was, he would go into Pakistan to go get him. And the Pakistanis objected to that then and of course objected when the raid happened. And a lot of the book deals with – or some chapters of the book – the question of how the bin Laden raid really poisoned the well in what was already a pretty rough relationship. I think we'll be paying – you know, we'll be playing that out for the next few years.

Olympic Games is a little bit different, because it demonstrates, as you say, that the United States is willing to go over sovereign boundaries to use cyberweapons. And in fact, the boundaries become very hard to define when it comes to cyberweapons because cyberattacks happen all over the world and, you know, there are some belief that attacks that might begin in China or Russia or some other place end up being launched from a third country. And that's part of the difficulty. So part of the question – policy question it raises is who is it, where is it that the United States is willing to go attack?

To my – the question of my own decision process in this, here was what I sort of went through: The Iranians already knew they had been attacked by a cyberweapon, and they'd already announced who they thought had been the attackers. So I don't think I was giving news to the Iranians. The Times has a – The New York Times has a pretty set group of procedures in many national security stories – and we did these with WikiLeaks as well – where we go to the government and say, if there is something of importance here affecting operational security, someone's wife, a future operation, let us know and we will – we'll try to, you know, take that into consideration. And it's reasonable to assume that, you know, in all stories of national security nature, you try to have that conversation. So the big question was, could you raise the policy issue that you've raised here and make it clear the United States has already sort of crossed this Rubicon, as a quote someone in the book as saying, without giving away operational secrets? And I hope I walked that line.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Where are we? Yeah, right here.

Q: Thank you. I'm Dr. Arula (ph) from Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo. Thank you for both of you to talk about the – what's going on in the Congo. So my question is, is there any agenda to stop the genocide in Congo? We lost more than 8 (million) to 10 million people. And very recently, just Rwanda invaded the Congo again when looking for Bosco Ntaganda, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court. It makes us believe that the rape of Congolese women and all those atrocity that is happening in Congo is part of U.S. business (assets ?). Now, how do you see that – (inaudible) – this situation? Thank you.

MR. HAMRE: I don't know why you're looking at me.

First of all, sir, I must confess to not be aware of this immediate issue that you've brought up, so I apologize for that; I'd be happy to get together with you and talk about it. I suspect that it is – I don't doubt that people in the administration would be outraged by these actions. It's a case of probably that they've got so many things that they're working right now that it just doesn't rise to the level where they have to respond. But let me come and meet with you and learn more about it, and then – and then I'll see what I can do to help.

Q: (Off mic.)

MR. HAMRE: OK, thank you.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Did you want to say (anything )?

MR. SANGER: The only thing that I wanted to add here is you raise a question that I think the Obama administration is struggling with with all humanitarian interventions, because after Libya, or mid-Libya, the president gave a very good speech, I think, that sort of laid out why the responsibility to protect is part of a mission for the United States, but one that has limits on it. And with Syria, we've discovered the limits, with Congo – (inaudible) – the limits, but we've discovered the limits in many places around the world. And I think this is an area where they're still sort of struggling to figure out, you know, what merits American intervention.

MR. HAMRE: Well, and, you know, honestly, the Bush administration argued that, you know, going into Iraq was responsibility to protect –

MR. SANGER: That's right.

MR. HAMRE: – in this case, a larger world, not just the – so either – just cross-currents to these issues that are very hard to resolve and don't naturally resolve themselves.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Any questions over here? Where? Way back there. OK.

Q: Kristof Marshall (ph) from the German Daily Der Tatchiko (ph). Thank you for your work, David.

I just would like to follow up on the question before the Congo question. It was not only about the rules you tried to obey when it comes to national security; it's also a question how is the world to react to this kind of American action? And there is a study, a Pew study coming out tomorrow. It's embargoed until midnight tonight. And so it will be interesting to see the exact results. But you will not be surprised that probably the answer the world don't like what they see, most of your even allies don't like. They didn't like Guantanamo, they don't like unilateral action with Stuxnet, they don't like drone war, for example. The exact results, we have to see tomorrow.

My question now would be to follow up, should the American government pay attention to that, and to which degree, when it comes to these two different goals? We want to be secure;

on the other hand, we are not acting – we are not living alone on this world. We have to rely on partners as well. And how does this affect our policy? Thank you.

MR. SANGER: Well, you know, I think you're raising one of the fascinating paradoxes of the Obama presidency, which is – I wrote this book because there have been a lot of surprises in the presidency, and one of the biggest surprises has been that the president has adopted techniques that he certainly didn't talk about during the campaign and certainly don't sound like engagement. Now, he's done the engagement as well. And his view has been, in the Iran case, for example, that you can't do engagement alone; you have to do engagement and pressure. But part of the pressure they talk about is sanctions. The part they don't talk about is the cyber side and other sabotage acts.

In the case of Pakistan, it's particularly potent. I mean, just think of this contrast. The United States often says that we don't want to just be dealing with the Pakistani military. We want to deal with a democratically-elected Pakistani government and try to encourage a culture of democracy. Well, the democratically-elected Pakistani parliament, about, what, a month and a half ago, passed a resolution, quite overwhelmingly, to ban foreign drone strikes in their territory. And just by count, it appears that the United States has continued and, by some count, increased the pressure of drone strikes in recent weeks and months.

So reconciling those two, trying to keep the pressure on while they are also trying the engagement track, is, I think, one of the fascinating balancing acts. And if it works, if this mix of pressure and diplomacy works, then President Obama, I think, will be able to say that he cut a new way in American foreign policy. If, instead, it creates as many resentments as it achieves successes, then you've got a much more difficult measurement.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Right here. Mic right there.

Q: Yes, my question has to do with the cyber part of your presentation. My name? Oh, I'm Dr. Will Kergiz (ph) from the U.S. Naval Academy. I have a – I'm wondering about the use of cyber – (inaudible) – and so forth as an instrument of statecraft. It seems to me that the Russians use it quite successfully in their – (inaudible).

MR. HAMRE: This is a growing reality for all of us. All sophisticated countries are developing cybertools of some type, both for defense but also for offense. Overwhelmingly, it's cyberespionage. I think that's overwhelmingly the activity that's under way by state organizations.

You know, it's like all forms of new technology, and man has this capacity to find ways to use them, you know, coercively. And everybody is working on it. Everybody is trying to find a way to do it.

So I think we are right to be thinking our way through it. We are trying to do it in a manner that's consistent with democracy and the rule of law. I have no doubt that they went through legal reviews when they were deciding – I'm not confirming what you wrote; I just –

MR. SANGER: (Laughs.)

MR. HAMRE: But I have no doubt that they went through a process, just as we do with a kinetic weapon, with a weapon that blows things up. I have no doubt that we went through a legal review to assure ourselves that the president was authorized to do this and that it was – that it was appropriate.

And all countries are now trying to develop these tools, and we really do have to develop – it doesn't mean we can't cooperate on trying to create a regime where we can minimize the risk posed by cyber. And I'll just give you an example: I mean, we and the Chinese share an interest in not letting a third country get us into a war with each other. We certainly have an interest in not letting a criminal organization disrupt their financial system or our financial system. We each have an interest in not letting a terrorist organization use machines in their country against us and vice versa. So there are – there are still going to be patterns of cooperation that I think we can and will be developing with cyber at the same time that we're going to be developing for unilateral use if we have to.

MR. SCHIEFFER: All right. One more question.

MR. SANGER: Can I just –

MR. SCHIEFFER: Yeah, sure.

MR. SANGER: – (inaudible) – very quickly in on that.

This is why it's important to begin a debate in this country about whether or not this is the kind of weapon we want to be using and under what rules. And I think, clearly, we're going to end up having to use cyberweapons, just as we've had to use many other weapons along the way. It took us, what, 20 years before we came up with a set of real rules about nuclear weapons. When you think that General MacArthur was thinking about using nuclear weapons in Korea; there was discussion during the Cuban Missile Crisis 50 years ago this October about using nuclear weapons then – and so it took about 20 years. There has been a debate for 10 or 11 years now about the right rules about drones, and we're really still having that argument to this day.

So I think there is no reason to believe it's going to be a very easy argument on cyber because in the case of nuclear, we've decided we're almost never going to use them unless the survival of the state is at stake. In the case of drones, we've decided we're going to use them just about every week because they're something of a precision weapon when we – when we need to. And cyber is somewhere in between. And the rules that you develop for nuclear and for drones don't always fit in cyber very easily.

MR. SCHIEFFER: All right. This lady.

Q: Hi. Thank you. Jamie Morgan with the Economist Intelligence Unit. Can you talk a little bit about the debate process that went on within the administration in deciding how to – in

terms of the whole drone process, in terms of deciding to centralize that decision-making process at the NSC? And it seems to be an administration where the president considers more legal and efficiency issues. You've talked about that balance. And just shed a little bit of light on the rationale that went into that decision.

MR. SANGER: That's probably a good question for both of us.

In the case of drones, as in cyber, I've been struck by the fact that you sort of see the two sides of President Obama here: the constitutional lawyer who is very interested in limiting the way these weapons are used in cyber – he was constantly asking the question is there collateral damage that could happen, are we sure we're not turning off the electricity to hospitals, is this as narrowly directed at the Iranian nuclear program as it can be? In drones, you see a similar issue, I think, as they try to narrow the list – and then asks this very hard question: If you have attacked the top level of the al-Qaida leadership or some other set of targets and then the next level comes up, at what point do you stop using this weapon? Do you to the conclusion that the people who are coming up may not be as direct a threat to the United States? And that's been a very complex set of arguments. And I think what we learned from that terrific piece that Scott Shane and Jo Becker did, and from Mr. Clydeman's (ph) book as well, is that that debate about where you draw the line is so complex that the president has wanted to get involved in it himself directly.

MR. HAMRE: Just – you know, what we don't realize is these drone attacks require a very large ground infrastructure because you've got to know, you know, exactly when the guy is getting in the car and when he's leaving and what the car is. It takes a lot of operational infrastructure to make these work. And that entails considerable risk to the country. So it's – it is appropriate that the president is involved in these decisions because every one of them does entail the considerable reputational and operational risk facing the country.

So I wouldn't – some people are trying to say, well, this is a president that micromanages war. I – it's – this is quite different. And because of the nature of what it takes to be successful in this area, he has to be involved.

MR. SCHIEFFER: All right. Well, that has to be our last question. For TCU and CSIS, thank you all.

MR. SANGER: Thank you. Thank you, Bob. Thank you, John. (Applause.)

(END)