

March 13 Prospects for Afghanistan and Pakistan

Discussion Leader: Bobbi & Jerry Dauderman

Synopsis: Major internal conflict has plagued Afghanistan for four decades. The U.S., for its part, has conducted military operations in the country nearly continuously since 9/11. Today, war with the Taliban persists, and tensions between the U.S. and Pakistan have gradually deteriorated. As his time in office drew to a close, President Obama limited further withdrawal of U. S. troops from Afghanistan. The incoming administration has a choice: will it maintain the status quo, reverse the Obama administration drawdown, or withdraw completely. Does the U. S. face a no-win situation in in these countries?

March 20 Nuclear Security

Discussion Leader: Craig Schaum

Synopsis: Nuclear nonproliferation was a top priority for the Obama administration. While the Iran Deal was a diplomatic victory toward this end, major threats persist from both state and non-state actors. Countries like North Korea, Russia, and India and Pakistan continue to challenge nonproliferation efforts. The possibility that terrorists will carry out an attack using a “dirty bomb” made from captured nuclear materials, looks increasingly real. In a fractious world, which way is forward for U.S. nuclear security policy?

Overview

The Great Decisions Program is America’s oldest and largest grassroots discussion program on World Affairs. Started in 1954, it is the flagship program of the Foreign Policy Association, a non-partisan organization dedicated to providing discussion materials and a format to learn and discuss issues in international affairs and national security. It has been offered to the community by St. Mark Presbyterian Church for more than 25 years, and is open to anyone who desires to gain a deeper understanding of the current challenges the United States faces in the world today, from the threat of global terrorism to environmental issues, globalization, and development. Following each session, participants can send feedback electronically directly to U. S. State Department policy makers.

It is highly recommended that those who attend purchase a Participant Booklet and read the background information on each topic prior to attending the weekly sessions. Booklets will be on sale in the church courtyard the last three Sundays in January or until they have been sold out. Participant Booklets can also be ordered on line at www.fpa.org or by calling (800) 477-5836. You can obtain more information about Great Decisions at the St. Mark Presbyterian Church Website, stmarkpresbyterian.org and from the Foreign Policy Assoc. website www.fpa.org. We invite you to join us!



The 2017 Great Decisions Program

**Every Monday
January 30 – March 20 2017
7:00 pm – 8:30 pm**

**Fellowship Hall
St. Mark Presbyterian Church
2200 San Joaquin Hills Road
Newport Beach, CA 92660**

2017 Great Decisions

January 30 The Future of Europe

Discussion Leader: Tony Hall

Synopsis: The outcome of the United Kingdom referendum on EU membership sent shockwaves across the globe. It even caught British voters by surprise. The European Union has helped secure peace in Europe for the past 70 years. Now it faces an uncertain future. Amid a refugee crisis, lingering financial recession and the constant specter of terrorism, unity seems more imperative than ever. But the Brexit vote underscores the complexities of integrating an extremely diverse continent. What will post-Brexit Europe look like, and how can U.S. foreign policy adapt?

February 6 Trade and Politics

Discussion Leader: Dr. Robert Smith

Synopsis: The U.S. political mood toward trade has gone sour. One need look no further than the 2016 presidential contest for the popular narrative: trade means that China wins, at America's expense. But do the numbers support that conclusion? The metrics used to gauge economic strength -- Gross Domestic Product and balance of trade -- have not kept up with the realities of modern manufacturing. Obtaining an accurate picture of U.S. economic stature requires a critique of those numbers. Only then can the U.S. develop appropriate policy solutions for the challenges at hand.

February 13 Conflict in the South China Sea

Discussion Leader: Dr. Jeffrey Wasserstrom

Synopsis: The South China Sea is a locus of competing territorial claims., and China its most vocal claimant. Beijing's interest has intensified disputes with other countries in the region in recent years, especially since China has increased its naval presence. Despite rising international pressure, including an unfavorable ruling by the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, China staunchly defends its policies in the region. Preventing tensions from boiling over is a matter of careful diplomacy.

February 20 Saudi Arabia in Transition

Discussion Leader: Erik Charles

Synopsis: As Saudi Arabia struggles to adjust to the drastic decline in oil revenue, Deputy Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman attempts to boldly transform the country and shift more power to the younger generation. At the same time, many countries, such as the U.S., point out the lack of democracy, women's rights and human rights in Saudi Arabia, and blame its promotion of Wahhabism, an extremely conservative version of Islam, for creating Jihadists. Bipartisan criticism is rising in Congress. Both countries need each other, but the relationship appears to be at a crossroads.

February 27 U.S. Foreign Policy & Petroleum

Discussion Leader: Jack Freytag

Synopsis: What is the effect of U.S. petroleum security on foreign policy? For 45 years the country has alternated between periods of energy security and insecurity, sometimes able to wield petroleum as an instrument of foreign policy, sometimes not. Despite the so-called "energy revolution," the U. S. today is by no means disentangled from foreign dependence and global trends. To be successful, policymakers must recognize both petroleum security circumstances and patterns in the relationship between petroleum and foreign policy.

March 6 Latin America's Political Pendulum

Discussion Leader: Henry Mayhew

Synopsis: The pendulum of Latin American politics is swinging rightward once again. Yet, as the "pink tide" recedes, the forces of change have more to do with socioeconomics than ideology. Dramatic economic and political crises have coincided in countries like Brazil and Venezuela. Still, the final result for Latin America may be the emergence of centrist, pragmatic modes of governance, and with them, opportunities for the U.S. to improve relations. The new administration must look beyond the neoliberal mode of the 1990's, and develop an approach to relations fit for the 21st Century.