

Vy Bui

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Review

The speaker for the Richmond World Affairs Council for the month of November was Mr. Edward P. Joseph. One of Mr. Joseph's biggest achievements in foreign affairs occurred when he served as a Deputy Ambassador. In April, 2012, Mr. Joseph diverted a major conflict by helping Serbia and Kosovo negotiate an agreement.

Mr. Joseph opened the talk by discussing the need to talk about Trump objectively. The speaker jokingly said, "what if we could have a completely objective conversation about Donald Trump". He acknowledges that this is extremely challenging considering the current political environment. The speaker reveals that opinions about Trump's foreign policy range from high praise to sharp criticism. For example, Trump is praised for keeping us safe by standing up to China and scolding freeloaders in NATO. On the other hand, Trump is criticized for pulling out of Syria and leaving the Kurds exposed. Pulling out of Syria was an action deemed abhorrent by Democrats and Republicans alike because the Kurds were a valuable ally in fighting against ISIS. In the middle of this praise to criticism scale lies those that think Trump is not as radical as he sounds and has not achieved some of the things he had planned on. After discussing opinions surrounding Trump, Mr. Joseph transitions to a new topic, how to think objectively. His three tips were to take out some issues like immigration, to make sense of Trump's style, and "to imagine that a new president had called on you to chair a small bi-partisan team to tell me what to do about foreign policy based on the Trump record". Finally, he talks about bi-partisan views on Trump elements. First, he mentions that Trump was audacious for engaging in a trade war with China and was near war with North Korea. Second, he said that Trump was also transactional which can be seen through his quid pro quo with Ukraine. Third, Mr. Joseph claimed that Trump was contentious because he said Germans are captive to Russia even though Germany was a U.S. ally. The speaker concluded the talk with what he would tell the new president regarding foreign policy based on the Trump administration. He said, "Learn from the exploitation of American power that Donald Trump has used and learn from his mistake".

Overall, I think that Mr. Joseph achieved his goal of objectivity. It was really fascinating to see the wide range of opinions regarding Trump's foreign policy. The speaker raises awareness to the polarization that surrounds American society which I find invaluable during a time of political conflict due to impeachment. The talk by Mr. Joseph altered the way I view Trump and how I will carry out conversations regarding Trump in the future. I've learned that for any discussion about Trump to be fruitful, everyone involved needs to be objective. To be objective means to give credit to Trump where it is due but at the same time acknowledge his shortcomings and mistakes. Prior to this enriching session, I was quite blinded by the media portrayal of Trump as president. A president that has only "abused his power" and ruin our relations with other nations. Mr. Joseph stated otherwise, he emphasized how Trump have

strengthened NATO and stood up against China. Being able to think objectively enable me to make better informed decisions in an environment that is scarily polarized. By attending this conference, I am no longer a victim of polarization.