

# The American Conservative

## American Allies Speak Against Restraint at CPAC

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The decline of American leadership abroad took stage at CPAC this Thursday.

A breakout session titled “The State of Our Alliances” featured scathing reviews of the Obama administration’s treatment of the U.K., Israel, and Japan. But ultimately, this panel ignored any and all American interests in these alliances and offered the audience a lopsided argument.

Worse, this is not a one-time offense.

Nile Gardiner of The Heritage Foundation defended on the importance of the U.S.-U.K. “special relationship” and American commitments to NATO. Gardiner highlighted how the American reputation of strength was faltering in the international sphere. An alliance with the U.S. today doesn’t carry the same weight as it did 20 or 30 years ago, he said.

Jeff Ballabon of B2 Strategic and Short Cove Advisors advocated for a renewed commitment to Israel. His policy suggestions included abandoning the two-state solution, tearing up the Iran Deal, and “going on the offensive” against potential threats. Ballabon argued that Israel has an image problem—that it is perceived as a Goliath when it is actually David in need of American assistance to survive.

Jikido Aeba of the Japanese Conservative Union pivoted to the Pacific to discuss the U.S.-Japan alliance. He argued, with the help of his interpreter, that although the alliance was created to counter the Soviet Union, it must evolve to meet today’s threats. Namely: terrorism, encroachment from China, and rogue states like North Korea.

The speakers drew heavily from the Obama administration’s engagements with Russia, Iran, and Cuba. They presented increased diplomacy with these nations as contradictory to America’s alliance obligations. An emboldened Iran and Russia, in particular, were portrayed as endangering the states that Obama should be prioritizing above all others.

All of the panelists explained why the nation they represented *needed* America's help to solve its problems. Some even explained why the U.S. should strengthen their alliance from a moral standpoint.

None of the panelists argued the value of their alliance from a strategic perspective.

None of the panelists explained what the U.S. either already receives or would get out of increased alliance ties with their country.

More than that, Gardiner answered a well-posed question about states free-riding on U.S. military strength with the assertion that the withdrawal of American resources does not inspire European states to increase their own defenses. It seems the U.S. is stuck playing policeman to the world whether we want to bear that burden or have it shoved upon us by states that refuse to pay for their own protection.

"The State of Our Alliances" presented only a skewed version of alliance maintenance because the U.S. lacked an advocate of its own. It lacked a voice to argue for the benefits and drawbacks of each alliance. This panel proved asymmetrical because it only offered one side of a two-party partnership.

Unfortunately, this was not just one sub-par panel discussion, but part of a larger trend. Emma Ashford of the Cato Institute exposed this ongoing problem in her recent article, "Two, Three, Many Chalabis." Exiles and foreign representatives exert influence in Washington to advance their own agendas and dominate debates much like the one at CPAC yesterday.

Ashford points out that these representatives have "a strong incentive to mislead." The panelists of "The State of Our Alliances" represented nations that reaped the benefits of American dominance in the past. Their countries have the most to lose from a new age of American restraint.

Audiences trust experts to be unbiased, but in reality they are often anything but objective.