

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION
CENTER FOR EAST ASIA POLICY STUDIES

**MR. X AND THE PACIFIC:
GEORGE F. KENNAN AND AMERICA POLICY IN EAST
ASIA**

*The Brookings Institution
SAUL/ZILKHA ROOM
Washington, D.C.
Tuesday, September 18, 2018*

[Transcript prepared from an audio recording]

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*Mr. X and the Pacific: George F. Kennan and America Policy in East Asia
Center for East Asia Policy Studies, Brookings Institution
September 18, 2018*

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. BUSH: Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. My name's Richard Bush. I am a senior fellow here in the Center for East Asia Policy Studies at Brookings, and it's my pleasure to welcome you to our event this morning on a fairly new book, "Mr. X and the Pacific: George Kennan and American Policy in East Asia." The title of our program is the same as the title of the book. The book was written by my good friend Paul Heer and it's a particular pleasure to have Paul speak to us today.

Last year, Paul retired from the U.S. government after a distinguished career in the U.S. intelligence community. He and I first worked together in the mid-1990s, when he was an analyst at CIA and I was the national intelligence officer for East Asia. I was very pleased in 2005 that Paul became the NIO for East Asia.

Commenting on Paul's presentation today will be my colleague Tarun Chhabra, who's a fellow in our Project on International Order and Strategy. As many of you probably know, Bob Kagan was going to serve as commentator on Paul's presentation, but he suddenly had to go out of town this week. I'm really grateful that Tarun can substitute for him on short notice.

George Kennan, the subject of today's program, was probably the most prominent Russia and Soviet specialist of his day. He wrote the "Long Telegram" and the Mr. "X" article in Foreign Affairs. As the first director of the Policy Planning Staff in the Department of State, he played a seminal role in the crafting of Washington's first strategy of containment. But Kennan knew little about East Asia, a region that was experiencing tremendous turmoil after the end of World War II.

So in early 1948, 70 years ago this year, he made a long trip to the region in order to fill in the gaps of his knowledge. That trip and, more broadly, the evolution of Kennan's views on U.S. policy towards East Asia, are the subject of Paul Heer's book. And we're very pleased that he's with us today to talk about "Mr. X and the Pacific." Paul.

MR. HEER: Well, thank you, Richard. It's a great thrill and an honor to be here. It's especially a privilege to be hosted and introduced by Richard because I don't know, Richard, if I ever told you this, but when I applied to be the national intelligence officer for East Asia one of the questions I had in the interview was, "Which former NIO would you consider your role model if you got this job?" And even though I did not anticipate the question, I immediately answered Richard Bush. So it's a thrill to be here with him.

I'm also greatly privileged that Ambassador Kennan's daughter Joan is here. It's quite an honor to have you here today.

When I tell people I wrote a book about George Kennan and East Asia, I usually get a quizzical look or the explicit question, "What was there to write about?" And I'm actually somewhat heartened usually when I get that response because it reinforces my hope that people will find something new and different here when they learn how much there was to write about Kennan and East Asia.

It's easy to overlook the fact, as Richard said, that when Kennan was centrally involved in formulating the policy and implementing the policy of containment of the Soviet Union during the late 1940s, when he was director of the Policy Planning Staff, which was really the period when he was most influential, that his purview was not confined to the Soviet Union and Western Europe. It was global. So he, in that capacity, was required and really ended up having

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a profound influence on East Asia policy, especially with regard to China and Japan during his time at the Policy Planning Staff.

The connection to the Soviet Union obviously was that the overarching framework and goal really of U.S. policy at the time was that of, as I said, containing the power and influence of the Soviet Union. So within that framework Kennan's approach to East Asia was really based on his assessment of the relative strategic importance of China and Japan primarily, which is to say their respective vulnerability to Soviet influence.

Kennan at that time had formulated a framework for global analysis. He thought there were five strategic power centers in the world: the United States, the United Kingdom, Western Europe, Russia, and Japan. So Japan was really the centerpiece of his approach to East Asia. And he inherited this assessment, and I'm just going to make a brief reference to an obscure to most people historical figure, but only because he was such a seminal influence on Kennan's thinking about East Asia, and Kennan's assessment of the importance of China and Japan and the rest of the region, and this figure was a man named John Van Antwerp MacMurray, who was -- and again, I'll just briefly mention him -- he was a generation older than Kennan. He was another Foreign Service officer. He had been to China and served in China in the teens and in the twenties.

And the seminal contribution he made which affected Kennan was in 1935, when Washington was grappling to understand what was happening in East Asia after the Japanese invasion of China earlier in the decade, he was asked as a China hand to explain what he thought was happening in the region. And he prepared a memo in November of 1935, which was considered so sensitive at the time that it was never disseminated outside the State Department and it

wasn't published until more than 50 years later. It was entitled "Developments Affecting American Policy in East Asia."

And to make a long story short, MacMurray basically judged that the Far Eastern crisis was the product of China's failure to live up to its international commitments and Washington's inattention to really obliging China to do so. And he predicted, again, this is 1935, that if Washington did not recognize and defend the legitimacy of Japanese efforts to exercise economic influence in China and on the mainland of East Asia, we ran the risk of getting into a war with Japan because Japan was more important than China, which was his bottom line.

His assessment was that China was essentially a lost cause. It was a basket case. It would never recover. It would never have strategic consequence. And Japan was the linchpin of U.S. policy in East Asia. This was based in part on MacMurray's personal experience with that Nationalist regime, the Nationalist government in China over the previous 20 years, which was further reinforced by another Foreign Service colleague of Kennan's, John Paton Davies, who plays a central role in the book, who had a similar experience working with China for the previous 20 years.

Kennan basically inherited and wholly adopted this view that MacMurray and Davies had formulated for him, that China was really a lost cause and that Japan should be the focus of U.S. policy in the region. They also assessed, and again, I'll come back to this, with regard to the Soviet Union that China was unlikely to ever fall under the influence of the Soviet Union. But importantly, even if it did, it was not strategically consequential. (Laughter)

And I fault Kennan for his shortsightedness on that view, which he persisted in for most of the rest of his life. But it was based on this set of ideas that Kennan had inherited from an earlier generation of East Asia hands that he played a pivotal role really in two respects.

He played a central role as Policy Planning director in the 1970s in justifying and rationalizing the policy of withdrawal from the Chinese civil war under Secretary of State George Marshall, who, as you well know, most of you know, had his own reasons for being skeptical. Because just before he became Secretary of State he had spent a year in China himself failing to mediate the civil war. And this experience informed by the assessments and the experience of MacMurray and Marshall and Davies really developed in Kennan an almost contemptuous attitude toward both the Nationalist regime in China and, frankly, the China lobby here in Washington that was its proponents.

Secondarily, based on the same set of ideas, he emphasized the importance of Japan and that became the kind of pivot, the centerpiece of Kennan's Asia policy. He was the primary agent within Washington, and it's a very complex, bureaucratic story which I outline in the book, of the redirection of our occupation policy in Japan in 1947 and 1948, away from a punitive approach, which was aimed at preventing Japan from ever having the capacity to wage war again and toward a reconstruction and redevelopment focus of policy for the purpose of bolstering China -- Japan's stability against the potential for Soviet influence. And again, that's because Japan was the consequential power in the region. It was vulnerable to Soviet influence in ways which China, if it was, was expendable.

And this was one of my favorite episodes doing the research here. This led to Kennan going to Tokyo. Richard mentioned the trip that Kennan made to Japan in 1948 to confront Douglas MacArthur, by that time the essential proconsul governor of Japan, who was resistant to the

pressure and even the constituencies in the Defense Department organization at the time, for redirection policy.

I mention this, again, to emphasize that it was connected to Kennan's containment policy because Kennan in his memoirs judged that his role in Japan policy redirection was second only to his role in development of the Marshall Plan in terms of his contributions to foreign policy. And they essentially had the same purpose. The Marshall Plan and the "reverse course," as it came to be known in Japan, were both aimed at insulating those countries against Japanese -- or, I'm sorry, Soviet influence.

And it was during this same trip that Richard mentioned in 1948 that Kennan developed what he called his strategic political concept for U.S. policy, overall U.S. policy in the region. And this was essentially one of the initial formulations of what became the defensive perimeter concept, which later became famous when Dean Acheson as Secretary of State in January of 1950 gave -- I'll come back to this in a minute -- a famous speech in which he outlined the defensive perimeter concept, essentially excluded South Korea from it, and according to many historians and commentators helped set the stage for the Korean War.

But going back two years earlier, Kennan during this trip to Japan, and which he made side trips to Okinawa and to the Philippines, developed this concept in which he basically asserted that the entire mainland of East Asia was strategically expendable for the reasons I mentioned before in terms of his assessment to China. But the Korean Peninsula and all of mainland Southeast Asia, as well, were not strategically important to the United States. And we should minimize and, in fact, extricate ourselves from commitments there. Japan, on the other hand, would be the focus and the strong point. But interestingly, Kennan's view was that Japan, even in this framework, should be neutralized and demilitarized. The only forward U.S. military presence that he

advocated was in Okinawa and potentially in the Philippines, depending on the determination of what was important there.

Now, for reasons which we all know, the defensive perimeter concept had a very short shelf life. It was upended essentially by the Korean War, but it did, in fact, become the de facto basis for U.S. policy in East Asia for the next couple of years. It was very much reflected in another policy document which has become an historical footnote.

In December of 1949, just six months before the Korean War and at what essentially was the end of Kennan's tenure at the State Department -- which he left that year for reasons which I'll come back to -- the National Security Council published NSC 49, the position of the United States with respect to Asia, which if you read that document today without the foresight or the hindsight of the Korean War, it was very much a compilation of Kennan's influence on East Asia policy because it largely reflected a lot of the policy documents that had been produced under his tenure at the Policy Planning Staff. And again, as I said before, the defensive perimeter concept was reflected both there and in Acheson's speech a month later.

But nonetheless, during this interim period Kennan did work assiduously to the extent that East Asia was a priority in implementing his strategic concept albeit with diminishing effect over the course of really 1949. And the diminishing effect was in part a result of the fact that Marshall had been replaced by Acheson as Secretary of State.

It's important to note historically that Kennan's influence over policy was really largely a product of the responsibility that Marshall had delegated to him in 1947 and 1948. Marshall created the Policy Planning Staff. He created it for Kennan. He said, "avoid trivia, make policy."

And it was in that capacity that Kennan had the influence he had not just in terms of the Marshall Plan in other parts of the world, but certainly in Japan and China as I outlined.

Unfortunately for Kennan, Acheson had a different management style. (Laughter) And most importantly for Kennan, and having been a government bureaucrat for 30 years I could relate to this, Marshall did not require Kennan's papers to be coordinated by the other bureaucrat drills in the State Department. They went directly to the Secretary of State, who usually took them directly to National Security Council meetings. And because Marshall had such stature, the State Department's position often made policy.

Acheson required the PPS, the Public Policy Planning Staff, to coordinate its papers throughout the rest of the department. And Kennan took umbrage to this and it was the beginning of his marginalization really within policymaking and his disillusionment with policymaking. But in the meantime, he continued over the course of really late 1948 and 1949 to pursue, with regard to East Asia policy at least, this vision.

With regard to Japan, he continued to advocate neutralization of Japan with the exception of a defensive police force, what now today we call the Japanese Self-Defense Forces. But there was no consensus during this period within the Department of Defense --actually across the government-- as to whether Japan at that time was ready for the formulation of a peace treaty; whether Japan would be the site for long-term U.S. military force installations. And this uncertainty persisted really until the Korean War. And that's the interesting thing, the Korean War was just a benchmark for so many of these issues.

With regard to Taiwan, in the wake of our liquidation from our involvement in the Chinese civil war, there was also no policy consensus over the course of 1949 about what to do about Taiwan.

The military establishment was ambivalent. They didn't want to dismiss it out of hand, but they didn't want to commit themselves to a military commitment there. And Kennan, just as an aside, there was an anomalous little episode where Kennan essentially advocated briefly, before it was quickly discredited, asserting unilateral U.S. control over Taiwan and, quoting from the memo, "the way Teddy Roosevelt would have done it." (Laughter)

This idea went nowhere. But, again, it was based on Kennan's very negative attitude toward the Nationalist regime and Chiang Kai-shek, who had been the source of so much tension during the civil war period.

With regard to Southeast Asia, again during the same period, Kennan, and this is where he became -- one of the areas where he became prescient, he tried to advise against intervention, especially in support of the French efforts to reestablish its colonial control over Indo-China. And this is where Kennan first started to grapple with one of the dilemmas that really I think became representative of the inconsistencies of his approach to dealing with East Asia.

He asserted, as I said, that Southeast Asia had very limited strategic value, but Washington was still grappling with the idea that there was some need to sustain our credibility and our prestige there. And this is one of the places where Kennan I think ultimately was never able to reconcile his strategic assessment of the importance of East Asia and this idea that U.S. credibility and prestige are something that couldn't be compromised.

And the same thing, obviously, came to happen later with regard to Korea. During this period, 1948 and 1949, Kennan, along with everybody else in Washington essentially, had supported U.S. military withdrawal from the Korean Peninsula. And here he was not alone in dismissing Korea in terms of its strategic importance for the United States. It wasn't even addressed. The

Korean Peninsula wasn't even addressed in the strategic concept memo that I mentioned that he had prepared during his trip to Japan.

And like Japan, he thought, to the extent that he paid attention to it, that Korea only needed to be reinforced by an indigenous self-defense force. But again, this later -- in fact, immediately became, within six months or so, became another area where this prestige and credibility issue became a dilemma for him.

So that was all the run-up to the Korean War. Kennan had defined our interests narrowly, had tried to minimize our commitments there. And then June of 1950 happened. The North Koreans invaded the South, which very quickly essentially destroyed and upended the whole concept of a defensive perimeter and it led to a much more militarized version across the region, as well as in other parts of the world -- a much more militarized version of containment than Kennan had advocated.

And he himself actually at the outset and immediately had supported U.S. intervention to turn back the North Korean attack for two reasons. Because of this prestige and credibility issue, which was somewhat immaterial, but still central to his thinking, but perhaps more importantly, because he, like just about everybody else in Washington at the time, thought the North Korean attack was pretty much a Soviet operation. Now, we know from the historical record that's been exposed since then that it wasn't as simple as that. I mean, there were a lot of fault lines between Pyongyang and Moscow and Beijing for that matter at that time. And again, it's a tangent to my story. But Kim Il-sung was playing Washington -- or, I'm sorry, Beijing and Moscow off against each other.

But in the summer of 1950, Washington reacted to that as if the Soviets had wanted this to happen and it was their initiative. But even here Kennan's attitude toward Korea was ambivalent because, frankly, by the end of that summer he had kind of retreated to what I call his kind of fair-weather view of the strategic importance of Korea and was again advocating a U.S. military withdrawal in connection to, as I said, this earlier idea he had. In fact, I'll come back to this in just a second. It was connected to his idea about maintaining the neutrality of Japan.

In any event, over the course of the summer of 1950, this is really the period where Kennan became very disillusioned, partly because official Washington in his view was not prepared to accept his analysis and that of others that there were, in fact, limits to Soviet ambition. He also, with regard to Korea, by the end of the summer of 1950 he was probably one of the only substantial voices that was warning against crossing the 38th Parallel once we regained the initiative. And that came back to haunt a lot of people.

But the bottom line is that by the summer of 1950, Kennan had grown so disillusioned with his influence and with the direction of U.S. policy in East Asia -- in fact, I start the book with a memo that he wrote to Acheson on that occasion in which I'll just quote this one sentence. With specific reference to U.S. policy in East Asia he said, "The course upon which we are moving today is one, as I see it, so little promising and so fraught with danger that I cannot honestly urge you to continue to take responsibility for it."

He thought everything about our policy in response to the Korean attack was highly problematic. And, in fact, the impact of the Korean War, and I'll wrap up with this essentially, upended his vision for U.S. policy in the region. It provided, over the course of the next year or two, it provided the rationale for a long-term U.S. military presence and alliance in Korea and an alliance with the South Koreans that he did not support before or after.

In Japan, by this time John Foster Dulles had been brought into the administration as a Japan policy advisor. In Japan, it had provided the rationale for moving toward a peace treaty, rearmament of Japan, and the retention of a long-term U.S. military presence in Japan, which, as I said before, he opposed for reasons that I mentioned. With regard to China, the Korean War had provided the rationale for the protection of the Nationalist regime in Taiwan and the adoption of a hardline position on Communist China's membership in the U.N. and U.S. diplomatic recognition of China, in which he was much less ideologically inclined and much more narrow in his assessment. It also -- I think this is one of the things that reinforced Kennan's view on China really for the rest of his life, the impact of the Korean War and the "Who Lost China" debate led to the humiliating end of John Davies' career, which was a tremendous personal blow to Kennan because they had been very close for the previous couple of decades. And I think that was one of the things that so personally affected him that it reinforced his view, really his desire for most of the rest of his life, to have as little to do and to advocate Washington having as little to do as possible with China.

Again, what this ultimately amounted to was the militarization and the extension of containment to areas where Kennan didn't think they were applicable and thought that they were ill-advised, and certainly within East Asia. And this came back 15 years later during the height of the Vietnam War. Kennan's earlier warnings against inheriting it from the French certainly came back to the forefront and he emerged as a very prominent public critic of U.S. intervention in the war. And there were some highly publicized appearances he made during the mid-1960s on Capitol Hill in which he upheld his view that Southeast Asia was strategically expendable. But again, there was this lingering uncertainty.

Because of his view on the importance of U.S. credibility and prestige he didn't really advocate complete withdrawal from Vietnam until really our prestige was irretrievably lost there. But that was kind of a sequel to his earlier efforts in the 1950s.

So let me just end with kind of a few comments on the -- so what is the balance sheet? With regard to containment, I'll just reiterate here a little bit, Kennan never thought that containment, with the exception of Japan's vulnerability to Soviet influence, was applicable in East Asia, particularly on the mainland. He didn't think it was applicable to China because, and he was quite emphatic about this, containment was exclusively about containing Soviet Communism. And he didn't think that Soviet Communism was a real threat outside Japan in places that were strategically important to the United States.

He also was one of the few people at the time -- well, actually there were a lot of people at the time who hoped there was the potential to drive a wedge between Moscow and Beijing. The Korean War kind of eliminated opportunities for doing that. But I think he deserves some credit for foreseeing at least the potential for the Sino-Soviet split, which in his memoirs he described as the single greatest measure of containment that could be conceived because it contained Soviet influence from that hemisphere.

But again, even with regard to Chinese Communism, he dismissed that largely because he didn't think it would be -- that China would ever fall, as I said, under the influence of the Soviet Union in a decisive way. But even if it did, China was strategically inconsequential.

The paradox or the irony is that later on in the '60s, Kennan advocated some policies, I mean, and there were several things I mention in the book, where he gave speeches referring to things

like firm barriers that needed to be erected against contemporary Chinese imperialism; and that the Chinese Communists hated Washington because of the audacity of America to stand in its way. I think that he was essentially advocating pushing back in ways that sounded a lot like his definition of containment in the “X” article.

And I think the irony today, among the many ironies today, is that this idea of trying to minimize Chinese influence with any stage relative to that of the United States is, in my view, inherent in our policy toward the region today. And more importantly, it’s what the Chinese leadership calls containment. So I like to say that some version of his doctrine has survived in East Asia even though it’s changed or renounced its name.

Finally, with regard to the other legacies or lessons of Kennan’s involvement in the region, on the downside I think he certainly was blinded far too long by his distaste for dealing with China, either Communist Chinese or Nationalist China, despite he had great respect -- in his memoirs it’s clear -- for Chinese civilization. But there’s one quote, I can’t remember specifically, but he says, "I have no interest in either regime. We need fear neither Chinese regime or have any relationship with it." And I think this was, again, a shortsighted view that was informed largely by, you know, the problems of dealing with Nationalist China during the war and the civil war, and especially the destruction of Davies’ career at the hands of other U.S. political constituencies who had been advocates for that regime.

I think, frankly, that, again on the downside, a lot of his ideas with regard to East Asia were not politically viable. Some of them were based on really a tinge of racism. He was very dismissive of Southeast Asian governments’ inherent indigenous capabilities.

And again, I think the primary complaint I would make against his approach to the region is that, as I said before, he was never able to reconcile the tension between his assessment of the strategic unimportance really of mainland Southeast Asia -- mainland East Asia and his view that somehow U.S. credibility and prestige were something that couldn't be compromised. And I think, frankly, we're facing elements of that same dilemma today in terms of measuring our credibility and its importance and its value to other countries in the region.

On the upside, on the balance sheet, I give Kennan credit certainly for the reverse course in Japan, which, I mean, it's been the subject of historical debate, as well, in terms of the inner tension really to democratization and parts of that process. But Kennan certainly played a central role in the rebuilding of Japan to make it a strategic bulwark in the region. At the same time, he did anticipate the ambivalence that the Japanese would have about the U.S. alliance and the military relationship going forward.

He did, as I said before, provide the rationale for withdrawal from the Chinese civil war, which was obviously very controversial. It's true that it was kind of a foregone conclusion, but that was a hard thing to advocate given the domestic political environment at the time.

With regard to Southeast Asia, he was certainly vindicated in his warnings against U.S. intervention in Indo-China. And I think there's one quote I came across from one of his speeches which I think was about Southeast Asia, but I think it was very insightful in foreseeing the potential problems of dealing with ambivalent allies and maybe we can come back to that.

But I think, you know, my closing thought is that most importantly I think Kennan's approach to the region was always based on, and I think appropriately, on his assessment of the limits on U.S. interests there, the limits on U.S. influence there, and the need to develop policies in the

region that recognize those limits rather than -- and really have an accurate assessment of our interests and have an accurate assessment of our influence. And focus much more on the utility of the different levers that we have, particularly avoiding military levers to the extent, certainly in his view, in the region and how best to pursue our interests in the region with that kind of a framework of a very narrow definition of interests, which I guess is what defines him as one of the textbook realists.

And I'll leave it at that. Thank you all for coming and I look forward to the discussion.

(Applause)

MR. CHHABRA: Thanks very much, Paul.

MR. HEER: Thank you, Tarun.

MR. CHHABRA: We're really delighted to have you here. And I really can't recommend the book enough. It's deeply discounted in the back, a better deal than what I paid for it, in fact.

(Laughter) So I hope you'll pick up copies on the way out.

I thought we'd start out, Paul, on a more personal note, if we could, which is that you were in the intelligence community for 30 years; for much of that time you were working on this book. And I wonder if you could say a little bit about the ways in which your reflections on Kennan, not just about East Asia, but more generally on Kennan as an analyst, impacted the way that you thought about your own career in the intelligence community.

MR. HEER: Well, that's an interesting question. I mean, in terms of working on the book, the funny thing is that part of the problem was that I wasn't able to work on the book. When I was --

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I'd been working here as an analyst for about five years before I talked the office into giving me a bit of a sabbatical. I came to Washington with a master's degree. And in 1989, they gave me a year off to start my doctoral program here at George Washington and I was able to complete that. Well, I took coursework for one year and then I went back to work.

I completed the program and the writing of the dissertation while still working -- while having returned to work full time. I don't know how I ever survived that. I guess I didn't with sanity. But I finished the dissertation in 1995 and it sat on my shelf because I was too busy dealing with Richard as NIO and other things during that period to pursue publication. And it was only after I retired that I was able to put it together.

But in terms of as an analyst, it's interesting, people keep making comparisons between me and Kennan and they say that the cover photo of the book looks like me. But I had become enamored of Kennan and had really kind of adopted his realist perspective when I was an undergraduate. I was enamored of his writing style. And I think I used it, I think, partly as a model.

But I think the simultaneity of my work on East Asia and my research into his work were kind of mutually reinforcing in terms of a very realist perspective and a more sophisticated historical understanding. I mean, Kennan, as you know, was himself a historian, so I think that reinforced my approach to it. And actually, a lot of the analysts, some in the room here, will tell you that working with me was sometimes challenging because I was always invoking history and I was probably often making comparisons to Kennan's approach to things and the region.

MR. CHHABRA: Well, one of the critiques of him in your book is that he would often generate proposals that were politically untenable. Right? So how did you think about that as an intelligence officer? Obviously, you were not in Policy Planning proposing initiatives, affirmative

initiatives, in the same way, but how did you think about that as an intelligence officer and whether analysis you were providing was out of sync with the politics of the day?

MR. HEER: Well, the interesting thing about -- well, that's kind of a prevailing issue today. I mean, an intelligence analyst learns early on that their job is not to engage in policy recommendations. So, in a sense, whether our analysis is politically palatable is not irrelevant, but it's certainly the environment in which we operate.

I think the difference in that respect, you know, Kennan was a policymaker, so he was always making recommendations that were inattentive to domestic political constituencies or other alliance relationships. As an intelligence analyst, we didn't make policy recommendations. We were kind of, as I said, protected from that accountability.

And, in fact, it was always something gratifying when delivering intelligence analysis to policymakers which -- whether it was politically viable or not, we knew that sometimes it didn't agree with their own analysis of the situation, even in terms of foreign policy analysis. But not to be too cynical, but our view was, well, that's their problem. (Laughter) We assessed the situation. We presented our analysis to policymakers. And what weight they assign to it and whether they made decisions that were attentive to some of the vulnerabilities or either the risks or opportunities a policy that we would identify, at least implicitly, was their call.

And it was sometimes frustrating when we thought some element of our analysis was being overlooked. But the upside was that we were not held -- we did not see ourselves as accountable for policy decisions that might have run counter to analysis we provided.

Now, one of the other cynical views within the intelligence community is that all policy failures are blamed by policymakers on intelligence failures. But we never wholly subscribed to that view. (Laughter)

MR. CHHABRA: One of the points you made toward the end of the presentation and you repeatedly underscore in the book is that Kennan was very conscious of the limits of U.S. influence in the region as a major factor to consider. And one question I have for you on that count was whether in some ways Kennan was unqualified to be making judgments he was making about East Asia. Obviously he relied on Davies, he relied on MacMurray. But as you point out in the book, he wrote when he was 94 years old that the reason he wrote little about China was that “I knew and still know very little about it.” (Laughter)

MR. HEER: Yes. Well, I mean, he would be the -- at the beginning of his career and all the way through he always would be the first to admit that he had no experience with East Asia and wasn't qualified. Well, he wasn't a specialist or an expert there. But he did have a certain, obviously, level of intellectual arrogance. He thought that his strategic analysis of the balance of power in the world and what was important and what wasn't was still valid.

I think that he overstepped in several respects there. I mean, certainly, in terms of his assessment of -- you know, one of the ironies is that given his inattention to political realities, the fact that it was political distaste really that reinforced his dismissive attitude toward the strategic importance of China for so long is really striking.

So I think what I say in the book is that he was sometimes right when the Asia experts were wrong. But even when he was, it wasn't always at the right time or for the right reasons.

MR. CHHABRA: Well, since you brought it up, obviously his relationship with China was complicated. His attitudes toward China were quite complicated. So you at one point say that he thought of the Chinese as the French of Asia, which I take it was a mixed compliment in some ways. (Laughter) But you write that he acknowledged China as the seat of a great culture which deserves our highest respect; the Chinese as being extremely mature, intelligent, industrious, resourceful people, and indeed the most intelligent man-for-man of the world's people. And on the other hand, as you mentioned, there was this ethnocentrism and a selective memory that you thought clouded his judgments in many ways.

Was his response to that just to throw his arms up and say I can't put all of this together?

MR. HEER: Well, I think there what he was trying to do was make a distinction between China and the Chinese government, or to be more precise Chinese governments. And, in fact, even when he was complimentary of Chinese civilization and culture there was a certain kind of ethnocentric stereotype that he applied to it. In fact, it was the same toward Japan. I think early on he described the virile people of Japan compared to the feckless people or whatever of China.

But, I mean, he never fully succeeded in making that distinction because, as I said, even though he had respect for Chinese civilization, he was wholly dismissive of both the Chinese Communist government and the Chinese Nationalist government. And I think that was the basis for him throwing up his hands. Well, that and his simultaneous assessment that it was not going to be strategically consequential that led to his persistent belief that we should just keep them at arm's length. I think one of the other quotes is we should be content to leave the mainland of Asia alone and to be left alone by it.

And the fact that he was saying -- I think the last document I found in my research in which he commented on China was a letter he wrote at the age of 97 to then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld in 2001 in which he said, among other things, "I don't know why we can't get over our infatuation with China. They're not going to love us." (Laughter) But even then, I mean, that was 20 years after Deng Xiaoping had started transforming the country into a highly consequential place. But like me, Kennan was never an economist, so he didn't pay much attention to that. (Laughter)

MR. CHHABRA: Let's talk a little bit about his relationship with George Marshall. So as you mention in the book, that was really the apex of his influence. It diminished sharply under Acheson. Part of that was Acheson's bureaucratic style, but part of it was also just Marshall's trust in him. So tell us a little bit more about that relationship and why Marshall trusted him.

MR. HEER: Yeah. It's hard to think of two personalities that were more different than Marshall and Acheson. Marshall latched on to Kennan because, as Richard mentioned, Kennan became famous in 1946 and 1947 with the "Long Telegram." In January of 1946, Ambassador Harriman was on leave in Washington and Kennan was chargé at the embassy and received a cable saying we need somebody out there to explain to us Soviet foreign policy. So he wrote this I think 5- or 7,000-page, 10-part cable.

Sorry?

SPEAKER: You said pages.

MR. HEER: Oh, words, I'm sorry. Yeah, I'm sorry. To a lot of people it seemed that long. And explaining in exquisite detail through highly sophisticated -- I mean, he was a historian, he was a cultural expert on China. It was just a brilliant tour de force.

And that telegram started circulating in Washington thanks to Secretary Forrestal and other folks who were trying to formulate. It was just at the right time a brilliant explanation of what the Soviets were coming -- where they were coming from. And then a year later, it was kind of repackaged as the "X" article, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," in which he outlined the doctrine of containment.

And when Marshall became -- by the time Marshall was appointed to be Secretary of State in January 1947, Kennan's name and his approach to the Soviet Union, which was seen as, as I said, the overarching challenge of U.S. foreign policy, was attributable to Kennan. So he said you're the smart guy. And Marshall being a four-star general -- or was it five? -- He was good at delegating responsibility. So he wanted to create a staff within the State Department that was comparable to the Plans and Operations Division at the Pentagon. And he handpicked Kennan to do it and said, here, you will make policy for me because you know how to do that and I don't.

And it was really, as I said, because of that and the unique relationship, the unique access that Kennan had to Marshall, who he revered as most people in Washington did at the time, gave the policy papers that Kennan was producing on all parts of the world center stage in policy formulation. And it was a very symbiotic relationship that was largely a function of Marshall's recognition of Kennan's brilliance and his ability to deploy Kennan's analysis in support of the policy formulation in the inner agency.

MR. CHHABRA: Let's talk a little bit about Korea. You mentioned Kennan's complicated views on U.S. credibility and reputation. So Kennan went from calling the Korean Peninsula strategically expendable to then firmly advocating the commitment of U.S. forces to then saying the U.S. should allow the gradual and not so conspicuous control of the Korean Peninsula by the Soviets. So explain this evolution.

MR. HEER: Well, frankly, it was the one thing that was kind of mysterious in my correspondence with Kennan. The one thing that he faulted me for in the dissertation version of the book was that I didn't fully understand his position on Korea. But no one else did either. (Laughter) It seemed to fluctuate and I think it's because it was an inconsistency that he was not able to resolve himself.

And it comes back to the prestige issue. Like everybody, I'm not sure how you formulated the last part of the question, but even though -- well, actually, yeah, he thought that we needed to respond to what he saw as a Soviet initiative. But by three months later, he was advocating a withdrawal that would have allowed Soviets in control of the Korean Peninsula, if this could be done in an inconspicuous way. (Laughter) But it didn't seem -- I say in the book, I don't know how that was possible, how you could allow that to happen and not have it be noticed or not have it be seen as a liability or a net deficit in terms of our credibility and prestige.

MR. CHHABRA: Did you have an opportunity to ask him what he meant by that? What the --

MR. HEER: No, I didn't.

MR. CHHABRA: Okay.

MR. HEER: Yeah. I mean, I corresponded with him several times. I only met him on one occasion, but it was very briefly. I was never able to -- I mean, I think his assertion that his position in Korea wasn't fully understood, in my maybe self-serving view, it was a product of his own ambivalence. And I think the inconsistency that I never saw resolved in his writing about it then or later -- well, in fact, there was another inconsistency.

In the summer of 1950, he thought it was a Soviet operation, but in some of his writings 10 years later he said people in Washington were underestimating this as exclusively a Soviet operation. So I think he certainly had a learning curve there, too. But over the course of 1950, he went very quickly from this is not important, as you said, to we need to push back, to a couple months later, we need to get out of there in the form of a totally politically and diplomatically unrealistic proposal.

What he was proposing in that memo to Acheson in August of 1950, he said we should make an offer to the Soviets. If they will get the North Korean troops back into North Korea, we will withdraw from both South Korea and Japan. We will neutralize both of them if they will neutralize the South. I just don't think that was ever viable and I don't know how he thought that-- I mean, perhaps in strictly realist terms it made a certain amount of logical sense, but politically and diplomatically it was not something that could have happened inconspicuously without a net loss really for us and our allies.

MR. CHHABRA: do you think his struggle with the credibility question resembles debates that we have today about the same issue with Russian provocations of China? How do you see that, his own struggle refracted in today's debate?

MR. HEER: Well, I mean, I think about it a lot whenever I see the debate about the South China Sea. You know, Kennan's argument in the summer of 1950 was we cannot allow the Russians to extend their influence and control over the Korean Peninsula in a way that's inimical to our credibility. And now we're having the debate about we can't allow the Chinese to extend their control over the South China Sea, which, in a way, that's inimical to our interests and our credibility among the other claimants in that region.

But there are logistical and resource constraints and legal constraints on how forward we can be in pushing back. So to me it's a version there of the same issue.

And, in fact, even in Korea today, you know, I think the overarching issue in Korea is what a strategic orientation of the Peninsula is going to be in the 21st century. It's kind of, in my view, the swing vote in terms of the U.S.-China spheres of influence in the region. I think that underlies the entire approach we have to the Korean Peninsula, and part of it is this desire -- you know, 70 years ago it was the desire to prevent Soviet influence over the Korean Peninsula at our expense. Now we want to prevent, and reasonably so, Chinese influence exclusive of ours on the Korean Peninsula.

I think, you know, I don't view it as exclusively or necessarily a zero-sum game. And I'm not sure Kennan did either.

MR. CHHABRA: So the dreaded question, what would Kennan do about the South China Sea today? What do you -- the impossible question. And Korea. We know more about his views on Korea as they evolved through his academic writing and retirement. But you've mentioned Korea and the South China Sea. What would Kennan do?

MR. HEER: Well, again, he was inconsistent here. As I said, for most of his career he would have -- in fact, in the 1970s, at the end of the Vietnam War, he said finally we're out of there. We can relegate that region to irrelevance again.

Again, one of the ways you can fault him is his inattention to the strategic and economic potential of Southeast Asia, let alone the rest of the region. He was dismissive of the strategic -- I mean, he would certainly be dismissive of the strategic importance of the South China Sea and these inconsequential islands.

But as I said, he did advocate elements of kind of pushing back against this immaterial extension of even Chinese influence at the time. So I think he might not be too -- diverge too much from our imperative now to prevent the Chinese from taking over the South China Sea. But I feel strongly he would, and I agree with this, I think he would advise against defining it as a military problem that required a military solution.

I mean, that was his complaint against containment in that region and in Europe, that we turned it into a military strategy. And he was ambivalent early on, but he spent most of the latter part of his career denying that he intended containment as a military strategy.

And I think he would have advocated, in fact, did in a different kind of set of circumstances, pushing back diplomatically in a way that would retain U.S. influence and the credibility of the U.S. as a power broker and a grantor of security in the region, but not in a way that would turn it into a military containment strategy. And I think the same applies to the Korean Peninsula.

MR. CHHABRA: There's a passage from his diary that you cite. I want to read it at length because it kind of stuck a chord I think with a number of analysts that I've talked to recently, in

which he says, “Plainly the government has moved into an area where there is a reluctance to recognize the finer distinctions of the psychology of our Soviet adversaries for the reason that movement and this fear of speculation is all too undependable, too relative, and too subtle to be comfortable or tolerable to people who feel themselves confronted with the grim responsibility of recommending decisions which may mean war or peace.

“In such times it is safer and easier to cease the attempt to analyze the probabilities involved in your enemy’s mental processes or calculate his weaknesses. It seems safer to give him the benefit of every doubt in matters of strength and accredit him indiscriminately with all aggressive designs, even when some of them are mutually contradictory. In these circumstances, I was inclined to wonder whether the day had not passed when the government had use for the qualities of persons like ourselves.” (Laughter)

So I read that and then I thought about a piece you wrote for the Asan Forum about U.S.-China relations, and maybe I’m reading too much into it.

MR. HEER: I don’t think you are.

MR. CHHABRA: But, yeah, say a little bit -- I mean, that is a sentiment that I think a lot of intelligence analysts probably feel at a particular moment. I’m not reading too much into it, you’re saying.

MR. HEER: No. Well, I mean, what Kennan was complaining -- this was in 1950, I think, right? He was complaining against the policy community’s, I think I mentioned, I alluded to it earlier, resistance to a sophisticated and subtle explanation of Soviet foreign policy as something other than a winner-take-all zero-sum contest.

And just a few months ago I stumbled across again some things that he wrote in the 1970s in one of his books, *The Cloud of Danger*, 1977, in which at that time he detected a very hardening of attitudes toward the Soviet Union, which he thought was highly problematic and dangerous because it was this kind of stereotypical, one-dimensional Soviet threat. And policy and politics were kind of converging around that characterization of the Soviet Union.

I feel strongly that the same thing is happening today with regard to China. And again, partly as an analyst and as an intelligence officer, I think the prevailing characterization of the threat that China poses to the United States is almost unidimensional. It's stereotypical. It's much more zero-sum and existential than I think as an analyst is accurate.

So I think there's very much a resonant echo to that. His view of the Soviet Union I think is echoed in the, I think, disturbing trend, the direction and the way that the political community is thinking about and a lot of the media is characterizing China. I mean, as I say in the Asan article, China poses an unprecedented and huge historical challenge to us. That's going to be -- it's, I think, more consequential than the Soviet Union did and it's going to be harder to deal with, but it's of a very different nature and I think that's not sufficiently understood.

MR. CHHABRA: I'm going to channel my inner Kagan in a minute and question you on the piece. But before that, I mean, how would you describe the debate within the China-watching community today? How would you describe the camps and kind of what are the core areas of disagreement right now that you see?

MR. HEER: It depends on how broadly you define the China-watching community.

MR. CHHABRA: Here in the United States, yeah.

MR. HEER: Well, I mean, there's debate even within the intelligence community, frankly. You know, I often come back to the debate over whether China is pursuing a zero-sum, winner-take-all, I guess I mentioned that earlier, strategy toward the United States.

I think the debate focuses on what is the breadth and scope of China's strategy and its ambitions. I mean, if you read the national security strategy I think that that has embraced a characterization which is toward, you know, one end of the spectrum. It describes China as a revisionist power that is trying to, I can't remember the phrase -- I think I have it in the Asan article -- seeks to frame the world inimical to U.S. values and interests.

MR. CHHABRA: It seeks veto authority over other nations' economic, diplomatic security, too.

MR. HEER: Yeah, I think there's some other -- well, and wants to supplant the United States and achieve global preeminence. I think that's one end of the policy debate, in fact. Well, it's not the far end because there are even more extremist views. I think that China is trying to communize the world and wants to eliminate U.S. power. In fact, there was something -- well, there's just endless commentaries today which have a really absolutist, exclusive of U.S. interests and values view of China's goals and its strategies.

I think the other end of the debate -- well, there's different flavors or characterizations -- is the view that China is not necessarily pursuing a zero-sum. It doesn't want to supplant the United States as the global hegemon because it recognizes that this is neither achievable nor necessary to guarantee China's security; that China is trying to legitimize its political and economic system internationally, ##26:55## not export it, and get the rest of the world to subscribe to it in

totality, China is prepared for some version of peaceful coexistence with the United States rather than of an exclusive role in the region.

That China is certainly -- I think even people at this end of the debate acknowledge, and I say in the Asan article, China is relentlessly and ruthlessly competitive and sometimes it's going to play by the rules, but I, frankly, think it's enough of a problem when it isn't going to play by the rules. I think it's enough of a challenge when it does play by the rules because it has a lot more to bring to the international rivalry than the Soviet Union did.

But I think the debate centers on how absolutist or exclusive China's goals are and the extent to which China is trying to remake the world in its image because I'm on the end of the debate which suggests that China is trying to certainly maximize its influence and its footprint in the world. It's trying to maximize the extent to which it is one of the rule makers and it's going to seize every opportunity, particularly in the non-military realms, to extend that influence. But it's not trying to forge a world inimical to U.S. values and interests and, as I said, remake the world in its image. I think that's where I would characterize the two kind of, I'm simplifying, poles in the debate.

MR. CHHABRA: So you do say that "Efforts to sustain an unsustainable or ahistorical role in East Asia would probably be counterproductive and fuel regional tensions." By which I interpret you to be saying the era of American primacy in East Asia is essentially coming to an end and we should yield to Chinese primacy in East Asia. If I'm misinterpreting you, tell me. But if that's the case, how stable do you think that arrangement will be?

MR. HEER: Well, the question is how to forge something that is stable, and it's a really tough call. I mean, I think you're extrapolating a bit. I mean, as a historian, you know, my view is --

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and I think this is consistent with the way Kennan thought about our role in East Asia at the time, you know. And again, maybe I'm fooling myself in hindsight, but I think what Kennan recognized during his tenure at the Policy Planning Staff was that the role that the U.S. secured in the region in 1945 was a historical anomaly that the sustainability of which and the permanence of which was eventually going to go away.

And I think that, unfortunately, since that time we have kind of internalized an assessment that U.S. primacy in the region is a vital interest and retaining it is a vital interest and retaining it is a vital interest. And that is the only way to secure U.S. interests against China's efforts to deny us that.

My view is that that mindset is flawed in two respects. I don't think that U.S. primacy -- well, first of all, I don't believe that China is trying to extrude the United States from a strategic role in East Asia. Again, I mentioned, you know, I think they're receptive to some version of peaceful coexistence or overlapping spheres of influence, however you want to define it, rather than an exclusive or absolutist view. And the question you asked is how could we formulate that?

I know that Michael Swain and others have written on this idea of this challenge of building a stable balance of power between the United States and China in the Western Pacific. But again, my view is that the idea that retaining U.S. primacy is the only way we can secure out interests against the Chinese challenge I think mischaracterizes the nature of the Chinese challenge as an absolutist and inclusive one. And it also overestimates the extent to which a primacy is sustainable or whether it's vitally necessary. I think that we need to recognize that primacy is probably not sustainably in material terms and we have to find some way of defining our interests in a way that don't oblige us to pursue what Kennan would call a containment strategy.

I think the other thing that's overlooked is that in our deliberations on how to rationalize a definition of our interests and what's vital and what isn't and how to pursue it, I think we often are inattentive to the views not just of the Chinese, but of all the other countries in the region, including and, in fact, I think especially our allies, who I think understand better than we have for the last 70 years that our role in their region was kind of historically an accident and was not always going to be there.

I think for our own reasons in terms of resource constraints and, frankly, our own political polarization and dysfunctionality at this point, it's hard for me to see how we could sustain it even if we attempted to. But the thing we need to be attentive to in my view, and this is where I think Kennan would have agreed with me, the uncertainties and, frankly, the doubts that our allies and friends in the region have about our attention span, about the sustainability of our interests -- because I think they already have mixed concerns about that and are already recalibrating their approach to each other and to the Chinese in ways which are further ahead in accommodating history than I think some of the voices in Washington are.

MR. CHHABRA: One final question, then we'll open up to the floor. There's a tremendous amount of expertise here in the audience. So it's on Russia-China relations.

So as you mentioned, Kennan considered it one of the great victories of containment to split the Russians and Chinese. As you look now at President Xi and President Putin cooking blini together and participating in war games and meeting almost on a monthly basis, engaging in pretty big technology cooperation deals and so on, do you think it's more of the same, there are hard limits to cooperation and that longstanding theory in the U.S. Government still holds? Or should we be generating some kind of more falsifiable hypotheses about what kind of cooperation would indicate a new relationship between the two governments?

MR. HEER: Well, I'm one of the people who thinks there will always be hard limits there. I mean, I think that that's an evolving relationship. And I think it certainly poses an additional strategic challenge to the United States for reasons which we've seen for the last 20 years. I mean, they have a strategic partnership. They cooperate. I mean, they have some shared interests that are contrary to the United States.

Well, either U.S. interests or the U.S. role in the world.

I mean, they've taken turns vetoing U.N. Security Council resolutions. They've got arms control. They've both been committed to what they call the democratization of international relations and a kind of diminution of the hegemony of the United States. And I think there are additional areas where their relationship is especially problematic.

I think their military exercises are less of a -- I mean, it's easy to, you know, highlight them, but I can't see the Chinese and the Russians actually fighting us jointly anywhere. I don't know where that would be. I think the challenge is more in multilateral fora and on issues like cyber where they have a very different view of Internet governance and sovereignty than we do.

And certainly, I mean, they're obviously a threat, a challenge in terms of their influence operations and their intelligence operations. I mean, and they're both, as I said, both relentless and ruthless in pursuit of their interest.

So, I mean, in my mind the balance sheet is that it's a relationship which is something we need to contend with and need to find ways to push back against. On the other side of the balance sheet I think it's easy to exaggerate it for a couple of reasons.

One, if you look at the primary strategic problems that we confront in dealing with the Chinese, most of them are not the same areas where we're confronting the Russians. I mean, certainly in international fora, but our primary problems with China are within East Asia. There are sovereignty issues. They're throwing their weight around, their coercive behavior. I mean, again, that extends globally, as well. Whereas the Russians are a problem for us in Eastern Europe still and in the Middle East.

And interestingly, I think this is where the Chinese don't want to get involved in the areas where Russia is a problem for us and Russia isn't really involved in the areas where China is a problem for us. And, in fact, China doesn't want them to be. I think it's important that the Chinese don't want Russia to be a player in the Western Pacific.

The other thing is I think that relationship has evolved a lot over the last decade because of its internal imbalance. I mean, 20 years ago, when as an analyst I was first drawn into assessment of the China-Russia relationship, they were both of kind of comparable strategic importance. They're not anymore. China is very much the rising power. Russia is a declining power. It's the junior partner in the relationship. It needs China more than China needs it. And I think that is, in addition to the historical resentment and suspicions they've had against each other, I think that's one of the constraints on how that relationship is going to develop.

And, in fact, I was at another seminar a couple days ago and I think the Belt and Road Initiative is another potential fault line there. Certainly Xi and Putin have collaborated on this and there are certainly economic opportunities for the Russians in this thing. But I can't as an historian avoid seeing the great gain. I mean, there is a latent contest for influence in Central Asia between China and Russia, which has been percolating, you know, on the back burner for the

last 20 years. And I think the Belt and Road Initiative is only going to advance China's influence in what was China's sphere of influence -- I'm sorry, Russia's for 100 years. So I think there's limits there.

MR. CHHABRA: We could continue this for the whole session, but the floor is open now. At the back.

MR. LI: Victor Li from Global Peace Foundation. I had a question regarding Korean Peninsula. In your view what would be the ideal situation for the United States?

MR. HEER: What would be the...?

MR. LI: Korea, ideal situation.

MR. HEER: Oh, ideal.

MR. LI: Whether a unified Korea under the idea of freedom, democracy, and rule of law, and those kind of scenarios are desirable and a feasible situation. If so, how can this happen?

MR. HEER: Well, I mean, I think the textbook answer is that the ideal situation for the United States would be a unified Peninsula under the auspices of the government in Seoul, which retains a U.S. alliance -- an alliance with the United States, and really leaves the United States more influential on the Peninsula than China does. And I guess that's conceivable, but I think the Chinese are always going to anticipate and expect and, in fact, demand more influence, at least some influence, not to be excluded.

And I think the Chinese, and again, there are Korea specialists here who can talk about this more authoritatively than me, but I think the Chinese believe with some reason that for geographic and historical reasons the Koreans themselves do not see as feasible to attempt to exclude Chinese influence there, particularly because I think even the South Koreans, frankly, have long been ambivalent about the U.S. relationship and our attention. I mean, this has been reinforced off and on for several years. And I mentioned in my talk or I guess earlier that I see the Korean Peninsula as kind of the swing vote in terms of the strategic orientation of the region.

You know, the ideal solution, obviously, for the Chinese is a unified Peninsula that's under their sphere of influence and not ours. And I would say that it's not necessarily the case that that would be under the auspices of the government in Pyongyang. I know I'm kind of an outlier here, but I think the Chinese -- I don't subscribe to the idea that the Chinese are retaining North Korea as a buffer state because a buffer state is supposed to protect you from something and I don't know what North Korea has protected China from for a long time now.

I think the Chinese have every reason to -- have reached the conclusion, if they haven't already, that their relationship with North Korea or the existence of North Korea is a net strategic liability for them. And it's one of the reasons they've been investing, or until recently, have been investing heavily in their relationship with South Korea.

Now, for self-destructive reasons the Chinese squandered a lot of that over the last couple years in their response to the THAAD deployments and all. But I think a unified Peninsula under the auspices of the government in Seoul could be an ideal solution for the Chinese because it's a more reliable government. And, you know, the only reason the Chinese don't actively pursue that is because they have no confidence nor can they in their ability to control the process by which this comes about.

You know, I think the ideal solution for both sides is, frankly, a unified government for both the Chinese and the United States, is a unified Peninsula, frankly, under the auspices of the government in Seoul, which is pragmatic enough to have progressive, constructive relations with both Beijing and Washington and Japan. And I think that a lot of the diplomacy of the last decade has been kind of reconnoitering around whether such a thing is possible.

I'm not optimistic. I mean, you know, there's a lot of things up in the air now. And, in fact, the one thing I would -- I guess I'll end with this. I mean, I think that a lot of the commentary of what's been happening this year I think is somewhat inattentive to the importance of the North-South relationship. I mean, Moon is in Pyongyang as we speak forging a relationship or pursuing a relationship which I think on both sides is intended to marginalize the extent to which either Beijing or Washington dictates the future of the Peninsula.

The South Koreans have always been ambivalent about Washington and I can promise you the North Koreans have always been ambivalent about Beijing. So I think that they're kind of the drivers now of what's happening.

And again, we're cultivating our relationship with Moon and with Kim. Xi is doing the same. But I think the most important variable actors right now are the two leaders on the Peninsula.

MR. CHHABRA: You had a question in the third row here. Maybe the two of you together and we'll take them at once.

MR. SANKEY: Hello. Thank you for your talk. My name is Evan Sankey. I work at Johns Hopkins SAIS. I think you were too harsh on George Kennan with regard to China and I'd like to

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mount a brief defense. China was never one of the George Kennan's five industrial centers, especially when he was writing, you know, agrarian. It was wracked by civil war. It made sense from the perspective never to privilege China in the way that he privileged Japan.

He did recognize the potential early on for the Sino-Soviet split. You gave him credit for that. I'm glad that you did.

The third thing is that one of the key pillars of Kennan's thought in Asia, but also in Europe was that the core competency of the United States was maritime. He saw the U.S.-Soviet conflict not just as an ideological thing or a matter of psychological resilience. It was also a matter of U.S. maritime power facing Soviet land power. And he did not see the United States as having the competencies or the capabilities to be a land power in Eurasia. That's why he discounted China. That's why he discounted Korea. He may have changed his mind a little bit, but I think that explains this blind spot. Thank you.

MR. CHHABRA: And we'll take this question, as well.

SPEAKER: Yeah, my question's a little bit related. When the Beijing government -- when Mao took control in '49, I think we continued, somewhere in around '50, we continued to recognize the government in Taiwan as a legitimate government of all of China.

MR. HEER: We did until 1979.

SPEAKER: Until '79. What was Kennan's view on the wisdom of that policy?

Secondly, I just want to make a comment. I don't think you appreciate the impact of the imbalance in our trade and technology and investment relationship with China and the importance of that in helping them increase their comprehensive national power and create political problems in the United States because of the impact on our own economy and our own workers.

MR. HEER: Thank you. Well, if I can remember the sequence here.

Evan, I'm not sure, I don't think I disagree with anything you said. If I included China under the five power centers that Kennan said I misspoke. I meant Japan.

MR. SANKEY: You didn't.

MR. HEER: Okay.

MR. SANKEY: I was trying to give a greater rationalization for this blind spot.

MR. HEER: Well, I mean, the blind spot, I think it was accurate at the time. The blind spot was 50 years later when he still was dismissing China as strategically important. And I think that was because his perspective on its importance of kind of clouded by really, as I said, the contemptuous attitude he had both toward the Nationalist government and, frankly, the China lobby in the United States, which was driving policy in a direction that he thought was insignificant.

You know, I don't disagree with your point about him seeing the United States as a maritime power, but I don't think his vision was confined to that because, I mean, Kennan's view, the

centerpiece of containment was the Marshall Plan, which was very much a continental strategy. And his approach to Japan was, as I said in my talk, kind of a counterpart to that. It was we need to build up a place that's politically and economically vulnerable to Chinese influence.

I think he would have agreed with you because I think it's consistent with the notion that he didn't want containment to be a military strategy. Let's not think in terms of competing against the Russians militarily on the Eurasian landmass because that's a losing proposition. He would have agreed to that.

On your point, sir. The first point you made was?

SPEAKER: What was his view on recognizing the Beijing government as a legitimate government during that whole period when we didn't?

MR. HEER: Yeah. Well, I think there's a brief section in the book where I say that he saw no reason not to.

SPEAKER: Not to recognize it.

MR. HEER: Not to recognize them. Well, particularly because he thought it was irrational to assume that the Nationalist government in Taiwan was the government of all of China. It had lost the civil war. It had no authority over the mainland that it could exercise. And again, as I said, he had no regard for that government at all.

He had no regard for the Chinese Communist government, but in the deliberations in 1949, 1950, he said, yeah, recognize them. Let them into the U.N. He thought it didn't make a

difference and that we could only antagonize the Chinese and other countries in the region and in Europe, frankly. I mean, the British I think recognized the Chinese Communist regime in 1950 early on.

SPEAKER: Yes, they did.

MR. HEER: And he didn't see any reason why we, you know -- even though he didn't think we needed to have anything to do with them, he thought that it was a petty thing to deny them diplomatic recognition.

SPEAKER: Was that from Acheson that chose to do that?

MR. HEER: I think Acheson and Dulles. Dulles was very consequential at that time. He had been brought into the administration even though he was a Republican because they were trying to respond to the "Who Lost Asia" debate, and he lost out. There's an interesting little anecdote in the book where it was during that period that Kennan heard secondhand that Dulles had described him as a very dangerous man because he was advocating -- he was indifferent about recognizing China.

And then the last point you made about --

SPEAKER: The economic imbalance in our whole relationship with China.

MR. HEER: Yeah. Well, I mean, I'm not an economist, nor was Kennan. And you're absolutely right, I mean, the economic consequence of China and its impact with the trading relationship

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here is profound. But I think, you know, all of the economists that I deal with think that, frankly, the current way that the administration is dealing with it will not work and will probably be counterproductive in terms of creating a more adversarial relationship than we need.

You know, I think the challenge from China is primarily an economic one and not primarily a military one. But I think what we need to do to respond to it is to just get our act together and step up to the plate and compete, and right now we're not doing that. I mean, if you look at the Belt and Road Initiative and all these other places where we're complaining about the Chinese making inroads against us, these host countries are not seeing a viable alternative that we're bringing to the table. And I think that's where the challenge from China needs to be confronted.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

MR. HEER: Thank you.

MR. CHHABRA: The lady in the back.

SPEAKER: Hi, thank you. I'm an undergraduate student from the George Washington University. And my question is what do you think are the first principles for students learning -- studying foreign policy or what do you think are key questions when students are reading the historical narratives and analysis in foreign policy, especially U.S. foreign policy? Thank you.

MR. HEER: Oh, my, first principles of students. Well, I mean, as a historian the first thing I would say is read a lot of history. Well, I've taught at George Washington, as well, in the Elliott School. And again, I was that University of Iowa, one of my other alma maters, just last week and got the same question: If we want to pursue a career in international relations, what do we

do? And I will say the same thing. I'm just a firm believer of the importance of history in understanding contemporary international relations. I mean, I think that goes without saying.

But the other thing, I always say two students is -- this is a field where writing is of central importance. Maybe I'm old-fashioned, you know. I get the sense that undergraduates in particular and even graduate students -- well, maybe not so much graduate students -- aren't required to do as much writing certainly as my generation did. But written analysis is the most important vehicle for contributing to foreign policy debates.

And, you know, I was just a liberal arts student and I became a lifelong advocate of that. I think research and analytical writing skills, certainly that's what we -- in the intelligence community that was our bread and butter. So my advice is just read as much as you can, especially history and political science, and write as much as you can because that's what creates the skills that you need to succeed either in the intelligence community or in the policy realm or anywhere, in the think tank community. In the broader foreign policy debate you have to be a concise, articulate writer who is well-informed by history.

MR. CHHABRA: Final question to the gentleman here against the wall.

SPEAKER: I'm a guest from the Armenian National Committee, a Ph.D. from China. So I know that containment strategy is mainly about foreign policy, but American society had to pay a high cost for containment strategy against Soviet Union. So my question is about is American society ready again to pay a high cost for any type of possible containment strategy against China, especially now when China is portrayed a partner of U.S. allies, unlike the Soviet Union? Is any kind of policy about containment strategy realistic for USA if the American government finds it necessary? Thank you.

MR. HEER: Could we -- I guess your question is could a containment strategy work? Are we prepared for it?

MR. CHHABRA: Are we willing to pay for it?

SPEAKER: (off mic)

MR. HEER: Yeah. Well, my answer and Kennan's answer would be probably not. I mean, I think there's two parts to the question if you're talking about a containment strategy toward the Russia today or toward China.

SPEAKER: Toward China.

MR. HEER: Yeah, you know, I think for the reasons which I outlined I don't think that -- sorry, just one second here. There was one other quote from Kennan which I think is immediately applicable to your question. I don't see it here.

But I think Kennan would have -- in fact, Kennan did recognize and would today that a containment strategy toward China simply could not work because China doesn't have the attributes and the capabilities or, frankly, the goals and strategies that the Soviet Union did. And, in fact, when policymakers in Washington say of course we're not trying to contain China, it couldn't work because it's not the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was an insular country that was not an economic powerhouse and was not controlling areas that were strategically vital to us. The Chinese are at risk of doing so. They're integrated in the global community.

I also think that unlike the Soviet Union -- if you read the way Kennan characterized the Soviet challenge in the "X" article, it was very much a, from the Soviet perspective, we need to destroy capitalism and there is no potential for peaceful coexistence with the West. My own view is that China has never subscribed wholly to that. I mean, socialism with Chinese characteristics is essentially capitalism, so it's not like they believe that there's something incompatible between the two. (Laughter) Well, as much capitalism is central planning.

But China is, I think -- and this is where I diverge from some of the prevailing debate, I don't think China is trying to export its system and transform the world in its image. I think it's trying to maximize its influence and certainly adherence to that model because it gives credibility to the model back home where they're primarily focused on selling it to their own domestic audience.

But I think, you know, back to the central element to your question as to whether -- I mean, aside from the fact that a containment wouldn't work against China, I think we are, frankly, problematic in our capacity to pursue it. And this is my closing thought.

I mean, one of the things that Kennan said in the "X" article was that in 1947 the U.S.-China contest is -- "The issue of Soviet-American relations is, in essence, a test of the overall worth of the United States as a nation among nations." And I don't have it here, but he goes on to say that at that time the United States needed to demonstrate, frankly, to the rest of the world, and I'm not quoting exactly because I can't remember, but he says that it knows what it wants and has its act together and is assiduous in its pursuit of what it wants. And I, frankly, think all of those questions are subject to debate right now.

As a former government official I think it's very much unclear. If we know what we want and how best to pursue it and if we have the capability to pursue it because of our domestic political situation right now and, frankly, the credibility I think that we're -- we are endangering our credibility in the rest of the world and our reputation as a nation among nations.

MR. CHHABRA: Well, on that note, stay tuned for many more events on that question and the scope of China's ambition. And please join me in thanking Paul and congratulating him on the book. (Applause)

MR. HEER: Thank you very much. (Applause)

MR. CHHABRA: Thank you.

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