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HOW WILL VALUES SHAPE U.S.-CHINA COMPETITION?

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. CHHABRA: Good morning, everyone. Thank you for joining us here this morning at Brookings.

My name is Tarun Chhabra. I'm a fellow with our Project on International Order and Strategy, here at Brookings Foreign Policy.

As many of you know, we are here to talk about the way in which values and ideology will shape U.S.-China relations.

Two weeks ago in a speech that many of you saw or read, Vice President Mike Pence underscored the Trump administration's commitment to, as he put it "Reset America's economic strategic relationship with China," which reinforced the administration's move in its 2017 National Security Strategy to describe China as a strategic competitor.

And tensions between Washington and Beijing continue to mount over issues ranging from trade to technology transfer, to freedom of navigation, and the future of Taiwan.

But amidst all of this, there's been less attention, I think many of us would agree, to the role that ideology and values will play as U.S.-China competition intensifies.

So, we're here to talk about the subject today particularly in the wake of significant shifts in U.S. policy as well as major developments in China, such as a push toward mass surveillance, and the piloting of a social credit system, well documented reports of large-scale repression of the weaker minority in Xinjiang Province, which we'll also talk about. And efforts to reshape the international human rights regime; and we have a stellar panel to discuss all of this today.

You have bios in front of you, so I'll just introduce them very briefly.

On the far end we Professor Hal Brands from the Kissinger Center at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. We have my colleague Ryan Hass, the David Rubenstein Fellow here with our John Thornton China Center, as well as the Center for East Asia Policy. Ted Piccone; a Senior Fellow with the Project on International Order and Strategy, and also our Latin American Initiative, and the Charles Robinson Chair. And Emily Rauhala with *The Washington Post*.

So, we are delighted. Thank you all for making time to be here today, and looking forward to our discussion.

Hal, let's start with you if we could, you just published a piece on this subject in the journal *Survival*, which I commend to all of you. And I think it would I recommend to all of you. And I think it would be useful to start a little bit with definitions.

When we talk about great power competition, and someone mentions values a lot of people think of values as soft or peripheral to military competition or high-level diplomacy. And the notion of authoritarian values to many people sounds oxymoronic.

Ideology too often carries a very negative connotation, as blindness to facts, or evidence. But as you have written, ideology has gotten a bad name in U.S. foreign policy because it's often taken to signify a commitment to dangerous, moralistic crusades.

All that being said, do you mean something different when you write about values and ideology particularly as they're going to shape U.S.-China competition, so help us define these terms, and tell us why when we talk about U.S.-China relations, you think these concepts, as you've defined them, haven't enjoyed as much air time as they deserve?

MR. BRANDS: Sure. Well, first off, thanks for having me. And thanks to

everybody for being here.

So, when I think about the role of values or ideology in U.S.-China relations I'm thinking about something pretty simple, but I would argue pretty important or even profound, which is just the clash liberalism and illiberalism on the one hand, or perhaps democracy and authoritarianism on the other.

And liberalism and democracy, illiberalism and authoritarianism, they mean different things. I think of democracy as being essentially a procedural definition about the set of processes a country has for selecting its leaders, and choosing its form of governance, whereas liberalism is more of a commitment to a set of particular values about the relationship between the individual and society, but they overlap in the United States, just in same way that illiberalism and authoritarianism overlap in China.

And it's the clash between those two sets of systems and values that I think about when I think the role of ideology in U.S.-China competition. And the argument that I have made, and that I would offer here is that this clash of values is far more central to U.S.-China tensions, and U.S.-China competition than we often recognize, for a variety of reasons, which I'm happy to go into in greater detail, but just to give you two very brief examples.

One, I think the fact that the U.S. and China have different approaches to the relationship, say, of the individual to the state or of society to the state, fosters mistrust, and it makes it harder for us to understand each other. And it also leads to different views of what sort of international order is just and desirable, and so the United States being a liberal democracy has long sought an international system in which liberal democracy is prevalent.

The Chinese Government being an authoritarian, illiberal regime, has long sought an international order in which such regimes can be protected and can

frankly survive.

And so I think that is quite central to the U.S.-China competition today, and this actually isn't unusual, ideological disputes, clashes or values have been central to Great Power Competition going back to Athens and Sparta, and so this is very much the rule rather than the exception, which leads, I guess, to the second question you asked is:\, why haven't these ideas gotten more air time?

And I think you alluded to one piece of it, which is that ideology did get a bad name in U.S. foreign policy after 9/11, and particularly after the Iraq War which was sometimes associated with, sort of, I think wrongly, but was often associated with ideological as opposed to pragmatic decision-making.

And the other is that when we think about ideology competition, our minds naturally go back to the last Great Power Competition which was the Cold War, and because the Cold War was so fraught, and so dangerous, and so tense, naturally no one wants to go there when thinking about the U.S.-China relationship today, for very good reasons.

And so, as a result of that, we tend to think that that was an ideological competition because it involved in the clash between two universalistic forms of beliefs, and forms of values. And so this one is more geopolitical, it's less ideological by comparison.

MR. CHHABRA: And since you've raised the Cold War analogy, just tell us a little bit, let's talk a little bit about that. It seems to me that in the foreign policy community, the idea that we might be entering a new Cold War is becoming a bit of a third rail. If we talk about ideology and values often the immediate response is, you're trying to get us into a new Cold War.

How do you think about that analogy? What's wrong with it, when it

comes to U.S.-China relations? But is there anything right with it? Is there a spectrum of competition that we ought to be thinking about in those terms?

MR. BRANDS: Yes. I mean, I certainly wouldn't say that we're anywhere close to approximating the Cold War as it unfolded between the United States and the Soviet Union. And just to pick one aspect of this, although there is an ideological dimension to U.S.-China competition, it's different than the ideological competition we had during the Cold War.

Or as I said, during the Cold War the United States was facing off against another ideological belief system that was universalistic in its own right, communism was going to spread to cover the globe, and I don't think that the Chinese think about it, think about authoritarianism in the same way.

I think they're more pragmatic in terms of thinking about how the promotion of authoritarianism or the undermining of democracy can strengthen their own security.

And so that's one way in which the analogy misfires, but the analogy is not totally wrong in the sense that I think the Cold War is more normal than we often realized, in terms of a sort of, in the long history of Great Power Competition, because as I said, you know, can go through history and you can find lots of extended Great Power Competitions that did have an ideological dimension, whether it was Athens versus Sparta, or Napoleonic France versus its enemies, or the Dutch Republic against Catholic Spain, or so on and so forth. You can run down the list.

And so the Cold War was a particularly pronounced example of that, but it was part of a longer tradition. I think ultimately we are going to see the U.S.-China competition as being part of that longer tradition as well.

MR. CHHABRA: Great. Ryan, if I can turn to you. You were a China

Director for four years at the White House, you're a member of the China-Washington community in the United States, and you've been reading their work for years, you were in Beijing for many years at the embassy.

How would you say that the community of China watchers will respond generally to the idea of ideological diversions being core to U.S. competition? So, what's the range of views, and what's your own?

MR. HASS: Well, first of all, Tarun, thank you for having me as part of this discussion today. I come to these questions with the modesty of someone who has tried to work on these issues, and understand how difficult they are to grapple with. So, I'm interested in hearing everyone's views, and learning from all of your perspectives today.

I don't know if I've had enough coffee to do justice to that question, but I will offer a perspective. The first is that the China community is not monochromatic, so trying to make any assertion about the China community thinks about the role of ideological divergence or competition is a gross generalization.

But since we're here and that's the question, that's what I will try to do. My sense is that the China community focuses much less on ideology as a driving source of competition than the strategic community does. And I don't think you would encounter much of an argument within the China community that the Chinese Communist Party wants to protect its own form of governance. Every country does. That's natural, that's normal.

But where you may start to have gaps between the strategic community and the China community is over the question of whether there exists any vault in (inaudible) a deep, dark secret document that contains a master strategy for how China wants to make the world look like it. I don't think that exists, and I don't think many

people in the China community do either.

What we instead see, by watching China up close on a day-to-day basis, is a ruthlessly opportunistic, pragmatic country that is aggressively trying to advance its interest around the world.

And so in my mind, the question really is about whether China is willing to risk confrontation, or the possibility of conflict to advance its conception of ideology to try to make the world more authoritarian. My view is, probably not.

But I do think that Beijing made a mistake last year, when President Xi address the Party Congress and talked about this idea of China model as an alternative model to a Western model for how governments organize themselves, because it gave ammunition to people in Washington who were deeply skeptical about China's intentions and ambitions.

My sense is that there is not an exportable China model, the China model is the product of 5,000 years of civilization, a unique governance tradition, the hard work of 1.4 billion people. There isn't another country in the world that has those ingredients or attributes that could pick up and apply a China model.

So, those are just a few initial thoughts. And I guess the final idea that I would offer as a provocation to the group is whether it's advantageous for us to paint with broad-brush strokes when we're talking about these questions, or whether it's better to isolate specific problems that we have, specific concerns that we have and deal with them both at the source, and on the receiving end.

My view from experience is that it's better to isolate and address on specific areas where we have concern, rather than to create these gross generalizations that lead us down a confrontational and adversarial path.

MR. CHHABRA: Great. And we'll come back to it, definitely, at least a

couple of things that you've said. I want to ask you one more question, which is, as many here will remember when Former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson did his first town hall, he drew a lot of fire, because he said, essentially, their interest and their values, one's over here and one's over there.

And I think I and some others took the criticism to be a little bit disingenuous, because I think that's how a lot of people U.S. foreign policy themselves have thought about values and interest for better or for worse, depending on your perspective, for a number of years. So, is that an unfair assessment? Looking back, what do you think?

MR. HASS: Well, I don't know what Secretary Tillerson intended by his comments, but we can gain a bit of insight by looking at a Memorandum that State Policy Planning Staff wrote after the facts to try to justify and rationalize the comment that he made, which was subsequently leaked to the press, and it's available online now.

And in this document, there was a distinction made between liberal idealists, sort of fuzzy-headed hopeful people who want to make the world a better place, and wants values and human rights to be central to American foreign policy, and hard-nosed realists who understand that foreign policy should be guided by countries' external behavior, and not what happens within their borders.

And the argument was that the Trump administration would pursue more of the realists' approach, and use human rights as a club to bludgeon the Chinese and other adversaries.

In my mind, as a former practitioner, that felt like a pretty artificial distinction, and I've never encountered a playbook, a policy playbook for liberal, hopeful people, and a separate one for realist people that gets pulled off of the shelf, depending upon the administration.

This is always a balancing act, and more art than science how to incorporate values and interest in the formulation of policy. At the end of the day my sense is that policymaking really boils down to three questions: timing, sequencing and prioritization. And in a complex, complicated relationship like China, U.S.-China relations, prioritization is essential.

And prioritization really needs to come from the top to give direction to the rest of the U.S. Government about how hard to push on an issue such as human rights and the overall relationship.

And on this score my sense is that folks in the U.S. Government, several of my friends who are here, are working with mixed messages. The National Security Strategy talks about how the United States and U.S. foreign policy will champion American values.

Vice President Pence in his speech two weeks ago, to his credit, I think placed values very centrally in the U.S.-China relationship.

But President Trump in my understanding, and if anyone knows otherwise, I would welcome the correction, the only time that he's really inched close to the idea of raising values in the context of U.S.-China relations was in his advocacy for UCLA basketball players to be released from prison after they were caught shoplifting in China.

And I don't mean to be glib about it, I think it's a serious point, because the Chinese, they take their cues from the top, and if their perception is that our President isn't serious, or does not prioritize these issues, I think that they'll be much less sensitive to the concerns that others throughout the U.S. Government make.

I also think that the discussion about values and the U.S.-China relations can't occur in a vacuum. I think the Chinese are taking lessons from our responses to

events in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere, and I think that also undermines our ability to address these issues in the China context.

MR. CHHABRA: Yes. And that's something Emily has written a lot about. Ted, Hal mentioned the ways in which ideology and values at home end up spilling out into a country's foreign policy.

And you've just published your report documenting the many ways in which Beijing is trying, pretty systematically in the U.N. through economic leverage and other means to block criticism of its own human rights practices, and to redefine some would say, undermine longstanding delimitations and the monitoring mechanisms for human rights globally.

So, tell us about what you fund, and what's at stake, and what happens if some of some of the resolutions that China has been pushing actually get passed even?

MR. PICCONE: All right. Thanks Tarun; and good morning everyone. I'm not a China expert, so I want to declare that upfront, but I've been working on the issues of democracy, human rights and foreign policy over the last couple of decades, and so I have a view about how these issues play into different relations, bilaterally and multi-laterally, and I've done a lot of work looking at country behavior in the U.N. human rights system.

And I think it's a great place to see how countries project their own values and interests in the largest -- the highest body of human rights and international affairs. And what I found was that China has for many, many years used the U.N. system to block any criticism of its own behavior internally.

Not a surprise, most states do that, nothing new there. But what's changed in the last few years, certainly since Xi Jinping has been elevated further up the ladder, is a much more offensive play in which China is, with great confidence, projecting

and inserting its own values into international human rights resolutions and discourse. And this is being carried out in Geneva, in New York through various means.

Now, there again you would say, why is that really a big issue here? I think it's a concern because they're going after some of the fundamental pillars of the international human rights system as it has evolved over the last several decades.

And I'm speaking specifically about the whole concept that the international community has a role to play in scrutinizing other country's behavior on human rights. I mean there's a whole body of international law, treaties, soft law in which countries have accepted these norms, and said, yes, we can hold ourselves up to scrutiny.

China is trying to undermine that by saying, no country-specific resolutions. In other words, U.N. has no place in calling out a particular state for its human rights violations, and certainly not in condemning their behavior.

Instead, they're pushing the notion of, win-win cooperation, technical assistance, mutual support, all of this is code soft language for, no country's scrutiny, no criticism of our behavior. And of course, the all-important reference to sovereignty and non-interference in our internal affairs, which is also embedded in our international law and norms.

And of course as we've heard over and over again from this administration, a value that the White House considers very important as well, and we maybe can come back to how those things are aligning in some unfortunate ways.

Another way in which China is inserting its own interests is to block any role for civil society in the U.N. system, and certainly, specifically, human rights defenders. So, the U.N. system is actually, if you look across the U.N., the most advanced in allowing a voice for civil society at the table, and China doesn't like that.

And there have been incidents where Chinese activists have come to Geneva, and criticized China and they've paid a great penalty for it, including some of them being detained and dying in prison.

So this is serious business. And the Chinese feel very strongly about it. And so as you see these efforts playing out, you have to think about, well, are they alone, or have they pulled other states along with them?

And here it's quite interesting. They're not alone, and it's not like they have to twist a lot of elbows on this. There are a lot of states that want a weak international human rights system, and so it's pretty easy for them to find some like-minded states, but what we see now is a China that is much more powerful economically, and has the leverage to push states even further in their direction.

And that I think, combination is why we need to pay attention to this issue, and see how it's playing out. You add another element, which is the U.S.'s withdrawing itself from the international human rights system. And so it's a big vacuum that China is very happy to fill.

MR. CHHABRA: Okay. Thanks. Ted's paper has some great graphic showing who the swing states are, and I highly recommend taking a look at that. You mentioned the question of, who's going to go along, and who's not. And so, given the fact that you've had a prominent role with two leading global clubs of democracies, Club de Madrid, the Community of Democracies as well, I'd love your perspective on this.

And I think as often as Americans are sometimes a bit quick to assume that in a competition between democracies and autocracies, it means that all of the democracies of the world will kind of band with us in this kind of competition. Is that what you found working with the CD, or the Club de Madrid? Or do you think the dynamics might be shifting a bit in light of China's rise and the way that it's been dealing with its

neighbors, for example?

MR. PICCONE: Just a quick explanation. The Community of Democracies is an intergovernmental forum that was established in 2000 by the United States and Poland, and a small group of other countries, precisely at the high point of, I would say, a democratic wave in 2000, precisely to foster greater cooperation among democracies for the purpose of supporting each other, in their own democratic path.

And at the time it was created, there was some concern in the State Department that this was really going to enrage China in particular, and it would be seen as an attack on China.

And some effort was made actually, to explain to them, at the time that that was not the intention of the initiative, it was not targeted against China or other authoritarians, it was really about acknowledging the fact that a number of countries had decided for themselves after the Cold War to adopt the democratic system, and that there should be support to each other in their own development.

So that was fine, that seemed to work just fine, but the real problem was that democracies had a hard time finding common interests and behaviors I would say. So, we spent some time, for example, trying to create a democracy caucus at the United Nations of like-minded democratic states that would support this more forward-leaning, strengthening of the international human rights system, is one example.

It was very difficult to organize. In part, because a number of states in the swing states in particular felt, well, we don't want to choose sides. We don't want to be seen as, or somehow taking away from our regional identity, or other clubs that they belong to, which I thought was actually that excuse for -- or maybe they didn't want to be too closely seen tied to the United States. I think that was also a dynamic at play.

So, now many years later, the Community of Democracies still exist, but

it is a rather, I would say, underwhelming voice in the process.

Now, the Club de Madrid is different, it's a private organization, of former Presidents and Prime Ministers whose mission is similarly to support the transition to democracy in various states at their request. And they have done a number of very important projects, usually below the radar, at the invitation of different countries, Tunisia, elsewhere, to kind of take the wisdom of these former leaders, who themselves went through various democratic challenges of governance, and share that lesson.

Interestingly their last big meeting was in China, and I got a chance to attend that meeting, and the theme of the meeting was: China's rising aspirations for leading in global governance.

And so it was such a clear demonstration of how the ground had shifted toward talking to, advising China as it thought about its greater leadership aspirations in the world. And maybe this brings us back to why this is so important.

I mean, you said China is unique, but I think China very much is trying to assert the argument that we, China, have a superior model in many ways, including for promoting human rights. State-led development that focuses on the collective, focuses on economic and social rights is a better system, and that is what they're talking to the Africans, the Latins, to others, in making this case.

So, it's not just -- you know, it's saying and asserting a superior model, and that's why I think this competition is for real.

MR. CHHABRA: Great. Emily, firstly, I'd love for you to respond to anything you've heard, but the first thing I want to ask you, it refers to the book, and what Ted and Ryan mentioned, which Ryan said, there's probably not a deep, dark document, suggesting how China intends to spread authoritarianism around the world.

There is, I would mention, research by some various scholars here about

Chinese Grand Strategy though that kind of, I think, suggests there is more consistency within the party's strategy that maybe we had assumed or a while.

But I guess the question is, you spend a lot of time in Beijing as a member of a Western Press Corps in Beijing, I sometimes wonder if we get a little bit wrapped around the axel in talking about Beijing's intentions, and whether it's plotting to export its model of authoritarian capitalism around the world. And I wonder if there's just a way in which we can't help it, in terms of who we are, and they can't help who they are.

And the examples I think about are, *The New York Times* reporting in 2012, when David Barboza and others reported on corruption the Politburo, implicating the family of a former Chinese Premier, which the Communist Party, I think, perceived as an existential threat, and that's understandable in a sense.

It had nothing to do with the U.S. Government, or U.S. Government intentions, or any concerted effort by the United States to promote liberal values, it's just the kind of thing our press does, and we are not about to shut it down any time soon.

And I think also about the examples of the Norwegian Government, which in that case I think it's a bit of a canary in the coal mine, which tried to explain that it, as a government, had nothing to do with awarding the Nobel Prize to (Inaudible), that was the Nobel Committee, and that's how things operated in their system, but that didn't go very far with them. So, in that sense are we just destined to clash, irrespective of our intentions, or any deep, dark designs?

MS. RAUHALA: Well, thanks for the question, and thanks for having me. First some context, I was until September, *The Washington Post* Correspondent in Beijing, and I was there for five years as a Correspondent. So my perspective is perhaps a bit more rooted in the day-to-day, and a smaller scale in terms of values and interests.

One interjection I wanted to make just going back to the points made

earlier, it was just to say that the conversations about values are often presented in a very oppositional and singular way, and that has a lot of value, but perhaps, from my perspective, the most interesting -- the place where the most interesting work is happening is looking at the clash of values within each of these systems, and how that's framing policy.

And on issues like, you know, the press, *The New York Times* case, you have voices on both sides, in both systems, who are arguing for different outcomes, and that's just one interjection I think that's worth making.

I don't think the two systems are destined to clash, but I do think that there are currents running through both societies right now, that make it more likely. And I perhaps see it slightly differently, the most interesting development, for me as a reporter based in Beijing over the last two years, has been not necessarily China and the United States moving away from each other, but it's been the areas of what some would call authoritarian convergence.

So, you see, you know, quite similar messaging coming from the United States Government as coming from the Communist Party, I'm not equating them in a value sense, but you have the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and make America great again, a focus on nationalism, on patriotism, on the politics of the flag, on the politics of the national anthem.

The U.S. use of terms like, win-win and sovereignty, I think that was Tillerson in one of his first visits, sort of used that Chinese language.

Of course within the U.S. that those voices calling for sort of a pushback to a more liberal messaging, but perhaps as a point of conversation -- and I welcome your questions on this -- that's really been a dominant theme in terms of values and interest, from the ground level over the last two years.

MR. CHHABRA: Great. And I'd like to come back with the group, to talk a little bit about whether messages coming out of the White House, are really having a big impact, maybe in emboldening Beijing in some respects, or whether you think it's more the margins, we'll come back to in a minute.

I do want to ask you about what's happening in Xinjiang.

MS. RAUHALA: Sure.

MR. CHHABRA: So, you and your colleagues at *The Post*, journalists at *The Times* as well, analysts at Human Rights Watch, have documented that hundreds of thousands potentially have two million leaders in Xinjiang had been interned in reeducation camps. Many are being -- many more are being surveilled, coerced into, arguably giving up their religion, cultural traditions.

Tell us, what is China doing in Xinjiang? What do Beijing's actions that pretend for a broader values-based conflict for the U.S. and China?

MS. RAUHALA: What's happening in Xinjiang is in many ways I think an expression of Chinese interests -- domestic interests and values right now. What our reporting shows, and there are some debate over this and some controversy, but what my personal reporting has shown is that, there is a mass interment of ethnic Uyghur, and other sort of Turkic Kazakhs, Turkey Muslims in Xinjiang that this has been happening since the summer of 2017.

And that up to 10 to 20 percent of the population is cycling through what are essentially locked internment camps, where participation in, you know, so-called reeducation, whether that means praising the parties, sing Red songs, or indeed studying Mandarin, is mandatory, and you can't leave.

This is, in the last few weeks -- China for a long time denied this, it was deny, deny, deny, and in the last few weeks we've seen a move to sort of shift that

response to a more values-based response, that has to do with what you said, on the Chinese model, and the shift in how this is being defended is very much slightly civilizational.

These people are living in poverty, and the state is here to relieve them of that burden, as part of our rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and maintenance of stability in this region.

So, from the Chinese side I think those are the values issues at stake. What I think is really interesting in terms of interests and values, and perhaps worthy of discussion with the panel is the U.S. response. The global response so far to this, would I consider it pretty grave, and mass violation of human rights has been quite muted.

There's starting to be some traction on a response but from the United Nations and elsewhere, and but it's been quite muted. And the State Department had what I would call a values-based response, calling or these camps to be shut down, you know, confirming their existence, but in terms of an interest-based response, there's been not much, ending what's happening in Xinjiang has not been a U.S. Government policy priority for what I've seen, and there's been no sort of concrete policy, foreign policy response to this. Either because people have decided it doesn't align with U.S. interests to speak out on this, or just because it's not a top priority.

MR. CHHABRA: I'd like to get everyone's views on this. But Ryan, to start with you, as a Political Officer in Beijing you've covered Xinjiang, reported from Xinjiang, you traveled there yourself. Tell us about the evolution of China's policy in Xinjiang, how did we get to this point with hundreds of thousands of people in intern there?

MR. HASS: Well, I think Emily's reporting has shed a lot of life on that question. Chris Buckley's reporting from *The New York Times* has also filled in some of

the gaps. What's happening in Xinjiang I find personally to be tragic, I think it's very unfortunate.

Xinjiang is a beautiful place, and if anyone has an opportunity to go there and see with your own eyes.

But I think what's happening, and Emily touched on this, it's borne out of fear not strength. It's a fear of loss of control, and I think that at one point and in a previous administration there was an effort to integrate Xinjiang with the rest of China, and to use economic benefits in centers, and inducements to try to pull Xinjiang closer.

And as that was happening there were incidents of violence, both in Xinjiang and throughout China, attributed to ethnic Uyghurs which aroused a lot of anxieties in Beijing, and Beijing's response has been to try to use whatever tools they have to assert control. And it's a complex story, but I think that's the essence of what has transpired.

MR. CHHABRA: And so China's up for -- under the Universal Periodic Review -- how do you expect this to be treated in that context? What should we be expecting out of the U.N. system, depending on what's happening?

MR. PICCONE: So, there's a new process at the U.N. where every state is evaluated on their human rights record, it was a way to get away from the politicization of the past to say, okay, it's not just whoever the strong and weak decide who gets scrutinized, but in fact every state gets scrutinized.

So, China is in its third cycle, and we're kind of waiting for the results of it. But what we've seen so far is this game that goes on where China's friends go up in the dais and they praise China's model, and there's no real hard questioning.

And then there's a long line of other states that ask much more critical questions, and China, we are waiting kind of for China's response that what's going to

happen next in the cycle.

But all of this, China would say, this is why we don't need any country-specific scrutiny, because we have this peer review, that's kind of a softer approach, and we shouldn't be condemning any other state in some other forum.

Now, in fact what's happened at the Human Rights Council is a very robust number of resolutions that are addressing human rights problems in Myanmar, in South Sudan, in name the country, Cambodia, in North Korea, with really serious investigating mechanisms, where independent experts are appointed, and are going into countries, and documenting the human rights violations.

The Chinese really don't like this at all, and they're afraid that, you know, this U.N. system could turn its sights on what's happening in Xinjiang, but I think given how much influence China has at the U.N. that that is still pretty unlikely to happen.

MR. CHHABRA: And what's the Chinese perspective on the United States withdrawing from the Human Rights Council?

MR. PICCONE: I don't know if they've said anything specifically about it, but we know that they had already positioned themselves in this more assertive way, even while the U.S. was on the body, so this just gives them more maneuvering room.

MR. CHHABRA: And, Hal, when you look at what's going on in Xinjiang, maybe it doesn't necessarily impact your views about what was already happening in the competition that's underway, but how do you think countries in the region are reading what's happening there. Does it change their view of China in any way? What's your take?

MR. BRANDS: Well, you know, I'm neither a Southeast Asia nor a Central Asia expert, and so I can't speak with great authority in terms of how the events of Xinjiang are being perceived in capitals around the region, but I'll say two things. I

mean, one is that in some ways what's going on is simply underscoring sort of the clash of systems, or the clash of values that we've talked about, and in particularly a pungent way, I would say.

And it just sort of underscores that the differences in how, you know, particular types of states relate to their populations, and there's not necessarily a moral judgment involved in that, but I think it's just sort of a fact of life.

And the second thing I would say is that I have long been a skeptic of the idea that China is going to be able to generate sustainably large amounts of soft power in the international system, for reasons precisely like this. And so I think the Chinese have been successful in generating more influence through the use of the economic power, through the use of diplomatic leverage.

But it was actually just some polling that was released earlier this week which was very interesting, which shows the sort of -- even in the age of the Trump administration, which often seems to be waging a deliberate campaign to dissipate American soft power.

If you ask countries, particularly the countries that are situated closest to China, and particularly around China's maritime periphery, who would you rather see as a global leader? It's the U.S. winning in basically every instance. And so my guess is that this relates, and in some way the perception that while China has generated admirable economic success, which I think is quite attractive to a number of populations around the world.

There's also something, you know, frankly ugly about the Chinese political model that is not seen to be an object of emulation in the same way, at least among -- at the popular level. There are certainly plenty of regimes that would like to emulate the Chinese political model

MR. CHHABRA: And that's, if you would, just come back to the question that Emily discussed a little bit, and Ryan raised as well, which is: how much do intentions matter? How much does it matter if there is the secret plan, on either side, right? Or is this more just about the clash of systems?

MR. BRANDS: I think that intentions always matter, and I have to say that, because I'm a scholar of grand strategy, and so if I say that intentions don't matter, I might as well pick up and go home.

But I do think there is something to the idea that -- you know, the United States and China sometimes just can't help but behave in the way that they do, because it is hard-wired, into their system.

And so, let me give you one example of this. The Chinese generally -- the Chinese Government in particular tends to attribute more intentionality and more sort of sinister design to American policy than is warranted. And there's one story that I think brings this home nicely.

So, back in 2014, 2015, there were reports of aggressive Chinese hacking of this institution and other think tanks in D.C., because the Chinese were looking for the real national security strategy, because they could not believe that the anodyne and the platitude in these documents that the government puts out --

MR. CHHABRA: Easy, easy. (Laughter)

MR. BRANDS: And I'm not speaking of any specific national security strategy. But I couldn't believe that we would actually say what we were doing in public. So, there's got to be some deep plan. And of course, you know, there's not in that case.

But the Chinese have long argued that the United States has basically been pursuing a campaign to destabilize the People's Republic, and they're not entirely wrong. I mean, you know, the U.S. economic engagement from the 1990s onward was

premised on the idea that this would ultimately undermine the pillars of authoritarian control in China, and lead to a peaceful transition toward democracy.

The United States has, in many cases, supported human rights activists, at least in the past, in China in a way that is inherently threatening to an authoritarian system. And so is there a deep American plan to overthrow the regime in Beijing? Not to the best of my knowledge.

But does the United States behave in ways that are certainly perceived to be threatening by an authoritarian regime? Absolutely!

MR. CHHABRA: Does the paranoia run both ways?

MR. BRANDS: You know, I think, yes, in certain ways it does. So, I mean, I think that -- I'll say this, I think that the U.S. conversation about China has shifted quite significantly in the past two years. And so as late as the end of the Obama administration, so the idea of Great Power Competition was sort of seen to be something you didn't talk about publicly. And that has certainly changed.

Vice President Pence gave sort of the laundry list of Chinese misdeeds a couple of weeks ago in his speech. And so I think that there can be a tendency to ascribe more intentionality in their actions, and more connections between all of these aspects of Chinese behavior than there actually is.

That said, you could also make the argument that this is a distinction without a difference, right, because what really matters, from the perspective of the United States, is how China is behaving in the international system, just in the same way that what really matters from China's perspective is how the United States is behaving.

And so if Chinese policy is having the effect of strengthening authoritarian governance in Southeast Asia, and Central Asia, and even in places like Latin America, if Chinese behavior is having the effect of undermining international norms

about human rights, at least in the way that we defined them, then it's a little bit immaterial whether there's an actual weight, or document locked in a safe somewhere or not.

MR. CHHABRA: So, last, and then I'd like to bring everyone in on this question, which is the question of the broad brush, right, which Ryan raised. So, what are the upsides? What are the downsides of characterizing this competition is fundamentally one about ideology, democracy versus authoritarian? Do you want to start, and we'll come back down the panel?

MR. BRANDS: Yes. So, Ryan is exactly right in saying that there are dangers in doing this, in the sense that you tend to inject a more, frankly, ideological element into disputes, you tend to bring sort of the moral aspects of the relationship to the forefront, which can make it harder to find, diplomatic compromises.

And the more that we think about the competition as one that is competitive, not just in a geopolitical sense, but in an ideological sense, and an economic sense as well, it stands to reason that it will be harder to isolate and insulate those areas, where there still is scope for positive, some cooperation between the United States and China, whether that's climate change or anything else.

So those are all the dangers of doing it. I think there is at least one factor that -- there are at least two factors, I'll say, that cut the other way. One, I think that the contrast and values, and the contrast and systems, is a major competitive advantage for the United States, for some of the reasons that we've talked about.

And so if we are sort setting that issue off to the side, I think we are leaving sort of a round in the chamber, so to speak, in a competitive framework.

The other is that if you just look at American history, there has always been an ideological aspect to U.S. competitions with other major powers. I mean going

back to, you know, the competition with the British, you know, in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries; and the reason for this is that it is difficult to mobilize the American public, and difficult to mobilize the American political system to rally to respond to whatever the perceived threat is, without bringing the values dimensions into it, without making the case that this is something that not -- that threatens not just American geopolitical, or American economic interest, but threatens our view of -- sort of threatens the democracy, and human rights threatens our view of how the international system ought to work on a values level as well.

And so I think that will probably hold true in the Chinese case. And so if you believe that the Chinese challenge is as severe as some of the China hawks think it is, then it's hard to see how you can mobilize the American public to contest that challenge effectively without bringing the ideological dimensions into it. So, I think there are negative aspects of it, there are positive aspects of it as we'll.

MR. CHHABRA: Okay. So, Ryan, I'd love your response to that, but also specifically whether you take issue with those two upsides, or whether you just weigh everything differently?

MR. HASS: Yeah, well, I guess if the question was whether -- what is the most effective way to mobilize the American public for unvarnished adversarial relationship with China? If that's what we're trying to achieve, then sure, we should make ideology a centerpiece of our approach to China.

I'm not convinced that that's the most effective or necessary way to approach this problem. When I think about strategy towards China, I'm thinking about it in behavioral issues. What are we trying to influence? What are we trying to encourage the Chinese not to do, or to do?

And if that is the question, if the centerpiece of our approach, if what the

Chinese hear when our mouth moves is ideology, ideology, ideology, I don't think they're going to hear much of what we have to say, or much of the concerns of (crosstalk).

And so it will compel the Chinese to hunker down, as opposed to be receptive to our efforts to engage them constructively to address whichever concerns that we have.

Secondly, to move the Chinese is really hard. It takes a lot of effort, it takes a lot of persistence, and it helps a lot if you're able to attract like-minded partners to work alongside you encouraging and reinforcing messages.

If our effort is anchored around ideology, I have a hard time seeing what countries will want to line up alongside us in that endeavor.

MR. CHHABRA: Ted, if you'd pick up on both. Would other countries join us? But also, you know, Ryan was talking a lot about shaping Chinese behavior, and do we overestimate our ability to do that? What's your (crosstalk)?

MR. PICCONE: I mean, I have a different perspective I think on this question. Looking at it from the U.S.-China perspective, I agree with Ryan, that for managing the relationship you don't want to overdo the ideology competition element. There's a lot of very important issues on the bilateral agenda that need to be worked through, and you're better off doing that in a more pragmatic way.

But when you look at it globally, and you look at our interests around the world, and you see China's rise as a power, especially economically, but also militarily, and maybe much less so on soft power terms, I think that raises a whole set of different questions.

And this is where I think, we've done some studies with my colleagues David Dollar and Harold Trinkunas on China's rising role in Latin America, and what we've found was, not so much that China was trying to impose its model on others, but

that it didn't really have a strong view one way or the other in terms of the state of the rule of law in a country.

And that its investments in trading relationships tended to go toward places where the rule of law, in fact, was lower, where there were higher rates of corruption, and to their disadvantage, I think, they're paying the price, for example, in Venezuela, where they have invested over \$50 billion, and it's just money, good money going after bad in that case.

So, in other words, China has become more of an enabler, and a facilitator of bad behavior that was already going on in many of these countries. So, when China shows up offering a lot more money than we can offer with fewer conditions, it's perfectly rational that those countries would choose China over the United States.

And we haven't fully woken up to this problem. But I think over time, China is amassing enough leverage that when its interest feel threatened they will be able to exercise much greater influence with those countries, regardless of their democratic or non-democratic regime, to suit them against us.

So, this interrelationship between the antagonism at the bilateral level, and then how it can play out internationally, how do we kind of separate it, but they're also related, and I think that becomes on the ladder why it is important to look at it in this global level as more of a values-based approach.

And I just want to add one more note. Maybe we'll come back to it, but just to put it out there. In the terms of U.S. democratic peace theory and our interest in promoting democracy, you know, there's a very strong pragmatic argument that it advances our security interest when we have stable, democratic systems around the world. And I think that's another thing that's on the table now, in this discussion.

MR. CHHABRA: Emily, your take on all that's been said, but one

additional question which is, we can talk about whether United States should be framing this competition in terms of ideology, but didn't Xi Jinping already do that with his 19th Party Congress Speech? I mean, Ryan said it was a mistake, but is China not already doing it themselves?

MS. RAUHALA: I guess I wanted to make one interjection on the Great Power Competition bit. This whole new Cold War framing is very sexy, and it will get you a book deal, and in Washington right now, it will get you a job, it will get you a front-page story, but I think it's bad strategy from the U.S. side, and I don't think it's particularly helpful.

And the reason is that I think when the U.S. takes this sort of -- uses this more ideological language about China, it justifies exactly what Chinese propaganda has been telling Chinese citizens. You know, the U.S. is a war-like country that seeks to contain China and wants to thwart our natural rise.

And I just don't think that language creates space for engagement on the very serious issues that need to be addressed in the bilateral relationship. And the same on the U.S. side, I don't think that this sort hyper-ventilating language about Cold War politics is helpful, or particularly revealing.

What was the second part of your question?

MR. CHHABRA: Hasn't Xi Jinping already framed this in terms of ideological -- by promoting an authoritarian model and saying it's one that the rest of the world ought to adopt?

MS. RAUHALA: Definitely. I mean, I don't think anyone, or very few people are going to say that there's not a massive ideological component to the Chinese system, that's built into it, this is a system that puts the party first, puts national rejuvenation first.

But how does that shape the U.S. response? Does the U.S. meet that with a comparably political and ideological response? It can. I don't think that makes good strategic sense, is my point.

MR. CHHABRA: Hal, I think you have said the same thing.

MS. RAUHALA: Yeah.

MR. BRANDS: Well, aren't we trying to contain China's rise?

MS. RAUHALA: Yes.

MR. BRANDS: Isn't that the point? So, I mean, if by contain China's you mean, you know, have we been trying to make China poor, and so on? No, of course we haven't been trying to do that, but certainly we've been trying to contain the potentially destabilizing aspects of China's rise, and China's geopolitical behavior.

And so, you know, I take the point that if we talk about it as New Cold War, that's probably not productive just from a prudential standpoint, but I think that sometimes the language we've used to talk about the U.S.-China relationship in the past, actually has the effect of distracting us from what we've been trying to do, and distracting us from the reality of the relationship.

MR. CHHABRA: So, when we talk about mobilization, mobilizing the American public for competition, what are we talking about, right? To do what exactly? I think that might help us think about this.

MR. HASS: Can I just offer two thoughts?

MR. CHHABRA: Go ahead.

MR. HASS: first, I'm not convinced, and I don't see much evidence that the American public is enthusiastic about a purely adversarial, highly confrontational relationship with China. And in fact when I look at the public polling data, public attitudes towards China in 2018, are nearly identical to what they were in 2008,

And what that tells me is that there isn't a groundswell of enthusiasm throughout the American public looking to have a new, unvarnished, potentially, escalatory rivalry with China.

Second, I think that Hal has provided, you know, so much thoughtful provocation this morning, and I really appreciate your comments. But if it's people's understanding that the objective of U.S. strategy was to make China a democracy, if it's people's understanding that the objective of U.S. strategy was to put a lid on China's rise, then of course our strategy has been a failure.

But it hasn't been. And there have been instances where American politicians have used rhetoric to pass, for example, to gain congressional support, for China's entering the WTO, that I wish that they wouldn't have, but if you talk to practitioners that have been present and participating in the relationship for the past 20, 30, 40 years, that hasn't been the animating focus of American policy or strategy towards China.

And so I think that part of what's happening right now is the experience of U.S.-China relations is being set against a set of objectives that never were the objectives of U.S. strategy to create the illusion or perception that it has been a failure, and I think that that risk is leading us in some dangerous directions.

Lastly, I would just say that, Ted, I absolutely agree that we are in a fierce competition with the Chinese on a global scale. And I'm glad that we're able to showcase the range of views between us because I think it helps disabuse the notion that there's some singular view within Brookings about the challenge that China presents.

MR. CHHABRA: Ted?

MR. PICCONE: Well, I think another way of flipping it around about the containing China issue, is that the U.S. wants to remain the preeminent power in the

world. Whether it's China as a rival, or any other country, that has been the long-standing, I think, strategic objective of the United States that it remains that case. Now, then it's a question of tone and strategy objectives or tactics --

MR. CHHABRA: But basically, remain the preeminent power in the world in order to do what, because that's kind of what we're talking about here, right?

MR. PICCONE: Well, in order to protect our society to grow our economy, to, I think live in peace, but with a view toward our economic health in particular, and I think that's where the China competition has really meant a lot in our domestic politics. And I think that's where Trump has, very effectively, made the case that we are losing out in this relationship with China; the American people are on the losing end of the stick.

And we see it in manufacturing jobs, in steel jobs, and in main streets, et cetera, and it's objectively clear that with China's economic growth they are the country to focus on in terms of that critique.

Now, I don't agree with the way the Trump administration is doing it, and how far they're taking it in terms trade war, I think that has a lot of collateral damage, probably not the right way to go about it. But there's something there, in our domestic politics that they've put a finger on that takes you right back to China.

MR. CHHABRA: Yeah. Emily, I want to come to you in a minute on the question we were discussing earlier, which is how much has the rhetoric coming from the White House with an authoritarian tint embolden Beijing?

But I want to stick to this point for a moment. Hal, I'm struck by the fact that if you look back at some, you know, older NSC documents, you know, they talk about the purpose of American strategy, we often talk about wanting to safeguard our constitutional system, and wanting to ensure, there's an international environment that's

conducive to safeguarding our values essentially.

It's pretty explicit if you go back to the documents, all the way to the '50s, and even through the '80s, in Reagan NSC documents, we seem not to talk about that anymore, and that's not just the Trump administration, it seems like the language of Homeland Security has kind of become more pervasive, and we've lost a little bit of that. So why did that happen? And why do we not have that kind of clarity, I think that arguably we had before?

MR. BRANDS: Well, I mean, I'll say two things. So, one is I think that directionally is some of that language if you look at the 2017 National Security Strategy, and in fairness that language clashes pretty severely with what the President often says, and then so it's hardly a unified message.

I think that the reason -- and so if you go back to, say, NSC-68, or whichever you like, I presume sort of what you're referring to, that language about preserving the American way of life, is front and center.

And it think the reason for that is it was much easier to imagine in 1940, or 1950, or 1980, that you had sort of an authoritarian challenger, that if it were to prevail geopolitically, in the case of Nazi Germany, or Imperial Japan, or the Soviet Union, that the American way of life would be fundamentally threatened.

Not necessarily because the Soviets or the Germans would conquer the United States, but because they'll become so geopolitically dominant that the United States would fundamentally have to change the way it conducted its affairs economically, politically, to create this garrison state, to ensure our survival in a world that was dominated by aggressive authoritarian regimes.

And so I think the reason that that has faded is because, certainly, after the end of the Cold War, it was harder to imagine, a scenario in which that might emerge.

And let me be very clear. The challenge, I think that the challenge we face from China is quite serious, and in some ways quite severe, it's not on the same order of Germany overrunning, you know, Europe.

It's not on the order of the Soviet Union being positioned to overrun, or to bring under its dominance huge areas of Eurasia, if not for American resistance. We're in a much better place now, than we were then.

If I get to say, one other thing, you know, I take all of Ryan's points. I would just say that, you know, under Bush 41, Clinton and Bush 43, there was very explicit language, certainly at the presidential level, and in American documents, about what we ultimately thought economic engagement with China would lead to.

And we ultimately thought, according to these documents, according to these statements, it would lead to political transformation. And there was less of that under the Obama administration to be sure, but for basically 20 years, I mean this was a bipartisan consensus in American policy, at least as it was expressed publicly.

And on the containment part, I mean, I think we often -- the trouble we have in terms of thinking about containment and whether it applies to the China case, is that we all have in mind, containment of the Cold War era, which was something very different.

This was compound containment, it was meant to limit Soviet economic potential, it was meant to undermine the Soviet political system, and so on and so forth, and we haven't been doing that in the same as we -- we haven't been doing that in the same way with China.

But I would just submit. I mean, what were we doing other than keeping a lid on China's rise, when we sent two carrier strike groups to the waters around Taiwan in 1996?

What were we doing besides keeping a lid on China's rise, when we affirmed that the Senkakus fell under Article V of the U.S.-Japan Defense Agreement?

I mean, what were we doing with the Third Offset Strategy, and the investments we were making then?

I mean, these things are all tailor-made to contain the effects of China's rise. And so it may make sense not to foreground that rhetorically, because it can be counterproductive, and it can indeed be counterproductive especially with our own partners in the region, who don't necessarily want to have to make that choice. But just sort of the level of observed behavior, you can make a strong case that this is exactly what we've been trying to do.

MR. CHHABRA: I wonder if, I mean, are we really talking about China's ambition, not necessarily the rise itself, but what it does is (crosstalk) --

MR. BRANDS: Yes. Exactly, right. We have not been trying to contain China's sort of natural power potential; we've been trying to contain the expression of that power in ways that we find destabilizing on the international stage.

MR. CHHABRA: All right, okay. Emily, I actually have another question for you.

MS. RAUHALA: Sure.

MR. CHHABRA: You wrote an award-winning series on how China is manipulating the Internet.

MS. RAUHALA: Mm-hmm.

MR. CHHABRA: You've written about the ways in which it's using mass surveillance and piloting the social credit scheme. Should we expect to see that exported? Is it already happening? Because, again, this is another case, where potentially it's not about, intention on Beijing's part, but there are other regimes that want

this technology and end up using it, that would have a profound impact.

MS. RAUHALA: Yes. I mean, it's defiantly being exported. Censorship technology, you know, the physical hardware of this kind of program is being exported, but also the idea that -- of Internet sovereignty that every country should and must, for the safety of its people, control the sphere of information, is actually proving incredibly attractive to other countries.

In Southeast Asia, in Central Asia and, you know, one of the -- the key ideas we try to get out in that series was that, and there's still this view in the United States that the U.S. tech is driven and animated by values, and I think certainly big tech in the U.S. would like to believe that.

But that's not necessarily the case, and certainly when people are choosing their day-to-day use of technology, they're not making values-based choices, and I think that's true, that foreign governments who are going to adopt the Chinese censorship technology as well.

MR. CHHABRA: Great. I love your take. And one more question, and then we'll open it up the audience here, and Hal might have to leave a little bit early, he's not leaving (crosstalk) --

MR. BRANDS: I'm just going to be late. I'm having too much fun at (crosstalk) (laughter).

MR. CHHABRA: Okay, great. So, in Hal's "Rebel" piece he wrote this -- there's a tantalizing piece of the essay where he says, the U.S. "Might explore with the appropriate caution and prudence whether there are ways of manipulating the domestic weaknesses of the Russian and Chinese systems for geopolitical advantage. Just as Moscow and Beijing are doing to Washington today."

So, Hal, tell us a little bit about what you have in mind. We haven't

talked at all about the Russian role here. And then we'll come down the line to talk a little bit about that, and then open it up.

MR. BRANDS: So, when I wrote that, I really did mean it as a question, rather than a sneaky suggestion, and in fact it's something that I'm exploring in greater detail, and a piece that I'm writing with a colleague from CSPA right now.

But I think that the basic question is this, there has emerged, you know, pretty solid evidence that both the Russians, and then the Chinese I think in a more sophisticated and subtle way, are doing things that are meant to affect functioning of the American political system.

Whether by sort of distorting processes in the Russian case, or simply affecting out comes in the Chinese case by trying to exert influence, in some interesting ways. And so there is, I think, the question for the United States which is: is this an area in which we should be replying in kind?

Should we be trying to exploit the weaknesses, exploit latent discontent within the Russian or Chinese political systems? Should we be doing things like trying to raise the price of repression, say, in Russia or China, by more aggressively using Magnitsky, or Global Act Magnitsky sanctions? Which is one of the things, by the way, that has been proposed with respect to what's happening in Xinjiang; albeit at the congressional level rather than at the Executive Branch level.

Or, is this an area where either there is more to lose than there is to gain in a competitive sense, because presumably doing this would provoke retaliation? Or, simply, as Ryan said, it would be a turn off to countries that we might be seeking to rally to our side in trying to uphold the international order that we have supported.

And I'll just say this, I mean, without prejudicing the answer, I think it's a question we should be taking more seriously than we have today, and I think we need

more systematic studies of this.

And so one of the projects that I'm working on right now, is to look at the things that the United States did in this regard vis-à-vis the Soviet Union during the Cold War, because there was a long of history of this for better or worse, and to figure out what worked, what didn't, what were the positive effects, what was the blowback.

Because I think, this question is not going away, and so the more informed we can be about sort of the historical precedence, and the net assessment of the cost and benefits today, the better.

MR. CHHABRA: Great. Turning on that, and also if you'd like, the effective terms of rhetoric, potential emboldening Beijing in some of these areas?

MR. HASS: Now, I mean I agree wholeheartedly with what Hal just offered, this is a subject that requires serious, sober, thoughtful perspective. And I don't think it's a decision that should be taken lightly. It's an extraordinary decision, if we decide to try to meddle in China's internal affairs. It will fundamentally transform the U.S.-China relationship. And we may reach a point in the relationship where that proves justifiable. I don't think that we've reached it yet.

And then I think, Emily captured well, the dynamic that's at play, that both sides, whether by default or design, are using rhetoric that are empowering hardliners in their perspective of the relationship. And I think it's been somewhat counterproductive to -- if our objective is to try to modify or change Chinese behavior. But that's the dynamic as I see it.

MR. PICCONE: I think there's a lot of risk in the overt or covert intervention scenario in the internal politics. I have a different perspective on this, it's a longer-term play, but it's something that we've been working on for a long time. Our effort should really be on strengthening democracies around the world, and getting them to

work properly, and function and deliver benefits to their people.

And clearly, we are in a democratic recession around the world, and publics are getting fed up and frustrated and angry at the failures of their democratic political system to deliver a better life for themselves.

We have to address that square on, and yes, there are these other competing pressures at play, but the root of the problem is a failure of democratic governance around the world. And this is what concerns me. And especially when you see the kinds of problems we have here in the United States with our democratic governing system.

And so we are no longer able to play a leadership role, and we've got to go back to some basics. I think when you look around the world, where is it going pretty well, Europe has lots of problems, but nonetheless you still have a community of democratic nations there that are holding firm, and the social safety net system that I think is very attractive to publics around the world.

And I think Europe has got to step up, and with us and others, play more of a leadership role in bolstering and shoring up the democratic countries around the world.

MS. RAUHALA: I totally agree. I was going to say as my final point that, what's at risk in terms of China strategy right now, is multilateralism. At the grassroots sort of embassy level in Beijing right now, the U.S. is still playing ball when someone is detained or, it does the first confession, the U.S. is still issuing these statements with the requisite condemnation.

But in terms of response to Chinese actions, that effort is really being led by the Europeans right now. This is being -- this is mostly coming from the Germans and Canadians, and the U.S. is sometimes signing on, and sometimes not.

So when you talk about effective ways to engage and also counter Chinese policies that the United States might not like, my call would be for a return to a sort of a more multilateral approach.

MR. CHHABRA: Thank you all. The floor is open. I'll just ask you to, please, it pithy, so we can accommodate as many questions as possible. And there are mics in the back of the room. Yes, here toward the center? And please, direct your question toward particular people on the panel.

MR. YEO: Andrew Yeo, Associate Professor at Catholic University. This question is probably best addressed to Ryan and may Hal. So, when I look at U.S.-China relations, at the policy level there still is dialogue, there is some level of engagement, they still have the strategic economic dialogues, but then we're seeing this rhetoric that's revoking the Cold War. And I'm wondering to what extent this language, this turn to ideology, the Pence Speech, or the Xi Jinping 19th Party Congress speeches really about domestic politics or catering to a domestic audience.

I mean, you yourselves have mentioned that, and Hal, you mention the domestic, and that it's hard to rally people without having the ideological component. So, to what extent is this all about, or more about domestic politics or really a clash between the U.S. and China at the entry-state level? Thank you.

MR. CHHABRA: Do you want to start with that Ryan?

MR. HASS: Yes.

MR. CHHABRA: And if you could both say, what is it that we're trying to rally people to do? Hal, we haven't talked about that.

MR. BRANDS: Sure, sure. So, I mean, when I talk about -- I'm just thinking of it like in the abstract, when you think about rallying the American people for a sort of protracted geopolitical -- a protracted international competition. Just a very basic

example would be securing the necessary appropriations from Congress to do what you need to do to compete.

Whether that's in terms of funding, the State Department, whether that's in terms of funding geo-economic initiatives, if we think that we need to compete with Belt and Road, and so on and so forth, whether that's funding, military investments to uphold deterrence in the Western Pacific, whatever. I mean, that's just one very concrete example, of what's sort of the mobilization will get you.

With respect to the question in particular, it's really hard for me to make sense of what's going on in U.S.-China policy today. In part because of the dynamic you talked about, but in part because I actually think we have about three different strategies going at the same time, and so there is the shift toward competition, right, and so this is what you saw most explicitly from Vice President Pence a couple weeks ago.

It's certainly what DoD has been thinking about for a while. And it's what you see in the National Security Strategy, and that is, you know, increasingly comprehensive approach to competition, where we're talking about the military realm, we're talking about the geopolitical realm, we're talking about the economic realm, and so on and so forth. And you can think of that as sort of the bureaucracy's policy toward China.

Then there is sort of the -- I'd say, one of the President's policies toward China, which is that I'm extremely interested in the economic dimensions of competition with China, particularly as they pertain to the effects of Chinese exports, on say, industrial employment in the United States, but I don't think the President is particularly seized with the geopolitical aspects of the competition.

I don't think that, you know, the South China Sea keeps Donald Trump up at night. And so that is sort of a much more restricted view of what the competition

entails.

And then there's this third strategy, which is that we are relying on the Chinese through some mixture of persuasion and pressure and inducement to help us out on security issues that we do care about, and the most obvious one here is North Korea.

And so that's also been a theme of U.S. policy, and so it's sometimes hard for me to figure out how all these things nest together, because I'm not actually confident that there is -- I'm not actually confident that these things do next together, and sort of in a cohesive way within the broader scope of American policy.

And so I take your point about sort of the performative aspects for domestic audience, but when I think about sort of the confusion of the U.S. policy today, I think it's because there are actually three different views, of what we're trying to achieve.

MR. CHHABRA: Ryan, do you want to weigh in as well on this?

MR. HASS: Well, if I could. I would like to acknowledge two people that I invite to jump in any time. One is Ross Dosche, Russ, if you could raise your hand? He's a Post-Doctorate Fellow in the China Center at Brookings, just recently defended his dissertation at Harvard, and congratulations to you. And Jamie Horsley, my other colleague in the China Center, here are Brookings. So, please, colleagues jump in any time.

To Professor Yeo's question, I would just offer one sentence. It doesn't necessarily need to be an either/or, it is possible that there are domestic political dimensions to the recent (crosstalk), as well as geostrategic dimensions, and they both can be playing simultaneously.

MR. CHHABRA: Yes, over here, red sweater?

MR. DWYER: Can everyone hear me?

MR. CHHABRA: We have a recording, so if you could, yeah, use the microphone. Thank you.

MR. DWYER: Hi. Thanks for taking my question, I appreciate it. When we talk about values, especially American versus Chinese, I hear the words democratic values, and autocratic values, autocracy. The one question I had is in this sort of discussion do people ever talk about Confucian values?

A big reason I mention that, especially when we talking about things like Xinjiang, Tibet, or Taiwan, Confucius' values were formed during the time of Warring States period, so maybe in that value sense, having those different areas might not be of their own values. I guess the question is: how do we talk about Confucian values versus autocratic, or is that even something we talk about in this sort of discussion?

MR. CHHABRA: And if you could just, please, introduce yourself as well?

MR. DWYER: Steven Dwyer, I'm a Research Associate at Pasadena.

MR. CHHABRA: Great. Thank you. Emily, do you want to start with that?

MS. RAUHALA: Sure. I'll start by saying that this is not my area of expertise. In as much as Confucian values are part of the conversation, I'd say pretty clearly, they are part of the conversation on only one side of this. I don't hear a lot of American policymakers, or academics, or journalists taking this on.

I do think it's worth considering for people who are tracking the domestic Chinese political conversation, and the way that Confucian values are being used, and I would argue sort of re-appropriated to match Xi Jinping's agenda and his platform versus country is actually really useful. And it's perhaps something that the U.S. policy community could look at more closely.

MR. CHHABRA: That's great. Yes, in the middle here?

MR. LARKIN: Hi. Good morning. My name is Michael Larkin with the Forum on International Affairs. And if we assume for a second that the ideological competition is going on full force, does that automatically mean it's necessary to pull other countries in the region around the world into it in order to convince one or the other that your ideology is correct?

Specifically, I'm thinking about Professor Brands, your comment that the U.S. has a comparative advantage. If that's true it seems to me that implies you have to also convince others around you. So if you could comment on that, that will be great. Thank you.

MR. BRANDS: I mean, when I talk about values as a comparative advantage, I suppose I'm thinking just in the sense that, you know, historically democratic states have been much more effective than autocratic states in building and maintaining lasting alliances. You know, historically democratic states have been far more effective than autocratic states in wielding large amounts of power on the international stage without provoking a ton of blowback.

And so those things, I won't quite say they're inherent to our system, because there are ways we can dissipate those advantages, and we seem to be exploring some of those options today. But that's what I think about when I think about when I think about sort of the comparative advantage.

That said, I think that the -- I don't know if democracy is the right word -- but I think that -- I'll start that. The democracies of the world in the Asia-Pacific and beyond are increasingly going to find themselves with a common perception of threat as China becomes more powerful, if Chinese behavior keeps evolving in the ways that it has.

And in part, this is because, I think that democratic states do often find powerful authoritarian states threatening, in parts because even if you look at Europe, I think there are growing concerns that a number of major European states about the ways that the Chinese have been using their economic influence for instance to stifle criticism of China's human rights practices.

And so I think that that actually sort of this consensus is, it would have emerged quicker if not for the policies of the current administration, which in a lot of ways are driving wedges between the United States, and some of its democratic partners.

But I do think that you are going to see, you know, something approximating sort of the free world coalition, what we might have called it in another age that is going to find aspects of China's behavior threatening, and will be looking for ways to counter that.

MS. RAUHALA: One really interesting case study right now, I think, in terms of this question is the Philippines. It's sort of a real-time example of where you see traditional U.S. ally sort of facing off with China in this war for influence, and I wouldn't say necessarily that the U.S. side is the victor so far on that. There's a lot of people in that country in particular that are finding that Chinese money and guns, big political donations quite appealing.

MR. PICCONE: I would just add that I think there's a kind of before and after with Xi Jinping taking on a much more confident and assertive role in promoting the Chinese model, that that really shifts the dynamic. If this was a China of 10 years ago, where it was, biding our time, and a kind of lower profile, we don't want to rock the boat as we continue to rise in other ways; you wouldn't see the kind of sharpening of the conflict now.

MR. BRANDS: And could I just, very quickly. I mean, I think there's an

interesting question: is Xi Jinping the independent variable or the dependent variable, right? Was it inevitable that if you had growing Chinese power over time, you were going to get a Xi-like leader who would be more willing to throw around Chinese influence, ideologically and geopolitically? Or is he sui generis?

MR. CHHABRA: I'm glad you raised this, because as you speak Ryan and I are co-editing a paper series that will probably come out in the next couple of months about whether Xi's consolidation of power really was a critical variable in the shift in Chinese foreign policy, or whether it was well underway. Already Russ is contributing to that series, and many others. So stay tuned for that.

To the gentleman here in the third row?

QUESTIONER: Gerald Chandler. And what can you say about the rise of democracy in China? They had their democracy movement which was suppressed, but there must be lots of people who want to do that. They've had perhaps as many as a million Chinese come to the United States and return to China, who have some idea about how China works -- how the USA works -- excuse me -- and how China works. And so would you make a prediction: never, 10 years, 50 years? When will there be democracy in China?

MR. CHHABRA: Ted, do you want to start with that one?

MR. PICCONE: No. (Laughter) I really don't. As I said in the very beginning, I'm not a China expert, so I'm going to defer to others on that question.

MS. RAUHALA: I was living in Hong Kong for many years before the 2014 student protests, and if someone had asked me: next year, are students going to take over the center of Hong Kong for three months? I would have said, absolutely not. So, I'm also going to say that, prediction is a dangerous game.

But I have reported extensively on social movements in China, and I can

say that right now, when I interview young feminist activists, labor activists, lawyers, the word democracy is not part of the conversation, and that's probably, strategic for their safety.

But social movements in China right now are not organizing around the idea of a democratic system. They're looking for ways to secure modest gains and rights within the context of the current system. That doesn't mean it's not going to happen eventually, but if we're looking at what we can see, and feel, and touch the ground, I don't see those signs.

MR. PICCONE: I would actually add a point, which is if you look at the Chinese Government's behavior toward its social movements, and human rights leaders, and lawyers, et cetera, it has really become very harsh and repressed in the last especially three or four years. So, clearly, the Chinese Government wants to control and contain any chance that that line would go somewhere.

MR. HASS: I think that there's -- from a policy perspective -- I think there's a legitimate debate to be had about what would be the most effective way for the United States to encourage evolution in China's political system. Some people say you need to have a focus on democracy promotion, and that's who we are, that's what we do, and we should be aggressive and active in that respect.

And then others say that it actually has the effect of undermining or constricting space, as Emily was describing, of people who otherwise would be socially active and engaged on these issues.

One way in the past the United States Government has approached this issue, right, is to put emphasis on what we call hybrid issues, these quality of life issues that are not threatening to the legitimacy of the Communist Party, but are focused on making life better for Chinese people, and encouraging the Chinese authorities to be

more responsive to the welfare of the Chinese people.

One example is with air quality, making air quality information available to the Chinese public. It started out with a monitor on the top of the U.S. Embassy that put out information about what the air quality was in Beijing on any given day. And now in any city in Beijing, they have their own PM2.5 monitors that are publicly available.

So, did it make China take a step towards democracy? Probably not! Was it a practical step to make quality of life a little bit better for the Chinese people, and put a little pressure on the Chinese authorities to be a little more responsive to their concerns about air quality? I think so.

MR. CHHABRA: Jamie Horsley? And Jamie, if you have an answer to the questions though, we would welcome.

MS. HORSLEY: It might be a good time to try and jump in. I was trying to lurk back here because I tripped and fell on my face on Friday. So no cameras, please!

So, a lot of my work involves governance, law reform, looking at what's happening in China. And this is a conversation about values I did want to say that we're so focused on the international realm, the geostrategic, et cetera, I'd like to take us below that level and look a little bit at our shared values between the Chinese people and society, and American society as well.

And it's exactly the sort of thing that Ryan is talking about. We have many areas of, still, very important as well as effective cooperation going on. Last week we had an event here at Brookings on environmental issues. We have U.S. NGOs still working quite effectively in China with people, with Chinese NGOs, with the Government, you know, on these issues that impact both our countries and the entire globe. It's a critical issue, we have to stay engaged.

We have co-operations going on in science, and technology, even in AI, and in my work at Yale Law School, we still work, if you can believe, on governance and law reform issues, but more in areas that, again, impact life.

I'm going to be working on a series of events on: How do people address so called "not in my backyard" movements? You know, how you give voice to local population? What are effective ways to get the population involved?

As Ryan said, of course the Chinese Government wants public participation, sort of democratizing things to take place in an orderly manner, that they feel they can control, and it won't get out of control.

But it's not that the Chinese people aren't asking for this, and demanding as well. And it's not as if the Chinese Government doesn't know they have to be somewhat responsive and maintain the support of the people.

So, I'm just concerned with the current state of the U.S.-China relationship, and focusing on this Cold War and our clash of values, that I would like us to remember that below the level of elite politics and geopolitical stuff, we have a lot of shared values between the Chinese people and the American people, that have been a bedrock of the relationship all these years.

And I think that by our engagement we're helping with -- some people don't like this term -- but little-D democratization China best claim to be a socialist democracy, as well of course, too.

We have a lot of concerns with China in a lot of areas where we do differ in terms of values and the way they handle things, but I think we still have a lot of areas in which we can still very effectively cooperate to the benefit of our two countries, but also the global community.

MR. CHHABRA: Thank you, Jamie. And I'll just make a plug, as she

mentioned her association with Yale.

We have a partnership the Yale Law School, China Center, and on October 30th we'll have a public event featuring a debate on U.S.-China relations, so you're welcome to that.

I'm afraid this is all the time we have. It's been a great discussion. I certainly enjoyed it. And I hope you'll join me in thanking our panelists. (Applause)

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