

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION
BROOKINGS CAFETERIA: Americans fear the wrong threats
Friday, July 5, 2019

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(MUSIC)

DEWS: Welcome to the Brookings Cafeteria, the podcast about ideas and the experts who have them. I'm Fred Dews.

"The American public is being fed by politicians and pundits alike, a steady diet of threat inflation that has made them deeply fearful of the world outside their borders." That's according to the authors of the new book titled *Clear and Present Safety: The World Has Never Been Better and Why That Matters to Americans*, by Michael Cohen and Micah Zenko.

These authors argue that national security fear mongering is causing U.S. leaders to focus more on the threats that Americans perceive rather than the ones that actually exist and are, thus, "diverting resources of attention away from the actual dangers that Americans face in their homes, neighborhoods, and workplaces."

On today's show, Brookings Senior Fellow Thomas Wright, Director of the Center on the United States and Europe, interviews Micah Zenko, a columnist with foreign policy, about the premise of the book, about the geopolitical risks that do exist and what role foreign policy might play in the 2020 presidential election.

Also, on the program, meet Christen Linke Young, a fellow in our USC-Brookings Schaeffer Initiative for Health Policy. Find out what she's working on and why she recommends reaching both *Dreamland*, by Sam Quinones, about the rise of the opioid epidemic, and *Infinite Jest* by David Foster Wallace.

You can follow the Brookings Podcast Network on Twitter, @policypodcasts, to get information about and links to all of our shows, including The Current, Dollar and Sense, the Brookings trade podcast, and our Events podcast. If you like the show, please go to Apple Podcasts and leave us a review. It helps others find it. And now, here's Tom Wright with Micah Zenko.

WRIGHT: Thank you, Fred. My name is Tom Wright and I'm delighted to be joined here by Micah

Zenko today to discuss the new book that he wrote with Michael Cohen called *Clear and Present Safety: The World Has Never Been Better and Why That Matters to Americans*. Welcome. Perhaps we could start if you could just briefly summarize the argument of the book.

ZENKO: Sure. The book is an effort to try to get people to rethink how we talk about national security and essentially to enhance discussions around national security towards the threats, risks, and harms that Americans face more consequentially than those that are foreign-based. So, our basic premise is that there's a strategic misdiagnosis in the national security community about what Americans should be focusing its finite time and resources on.

So, we go through the list of risks and harms that are all domestically driven that hurt Americans, everything from the rocketing drug deaths, to road deaths, to medical malpractice deaths, to opioid deaths, and we sort of make a plea for a redirection away from more distant, less-certain foreign threats, which is largely what the national security budget architecture focuses on, to focus more concretely on evidence-based ways to save Americans' lives at home.

WRIGHT: Great. Well, I found it very provocative and interesting, and, you know, I've written stuff that I think is on the opposite side --

ZENKO: Sure.

WRIGHT:—to some of that, so it got me thinking. It made me question some of my own assumptions. But I felt one place to start is, you have a lot of fun, Michael and you, at the beginning of the book, highlighting all of these incredible quotes from very famous generals and politicians saying that the world has never been more dangerous than it is today and that it is even more dangerous than the height of the Cold War or World War II or never less stable, predicting World War III.

And, of course, as you point out, that's a bit absurd when you think of the horrors that have happened in the not-too-distant past, but I thought a tougher question for you and Michael might be whether or not this is sort of the most dangerous and risky times since the end of the Cold War. Like, if

we take that 30-year period, which is basically the bulk of the adult lifetimes of all of the people, a lot of the people who are engaged in this debate, how do you sort of assess 2019 relative to that?

ZENKO: I still claim the most dangerous time to be alive on Earth was in the mid-1990s—and this is not revealing my hand in the fissile material of the nuclear terrorism world—when there still was over 50,000 bombs' worth of nuclear material throughout, essentially, 14 time zones of the former Soviet Union, largely unaccounted for, no accounting measures to know what there was, and insecure.

It is a miracle that fissile material to build a nuclear weapon was never knowingly stolen or used in anger, in part because the intelligence agencies in Central Asia and the United States flooded the market with so much fake stuff that people didn't know what they were buying was real. But that was a source of tremendous catastrophic harm that never got loose.

So, we don't face that sort of threat today. The nuclear threats we face today are actually significantly less than they were in the mid-1990s, before, I would say, Nunn-Lugar ramped up to its high point, and it was a Democratic and Republican supported thing. So, I would say nuclear threats are far less significant.

And if you look at the all forms of harms that people face, they've actually declined on a number of tracks since the end of the Cold War. Suicide rates have declined by 35 percent globally. If you look at the global burden of armed violence, which is the only database of all forms of armed conflict, those have gone down as global population has gone up over the last 20 years.

So, I would say people are experiencing less harm, but the potential for greater harm is absolutely higher. That's certainly the case, in large part because of biological threats, and the ability to get things in a global supply chain and to spread them in a faster way. We have more ways to monitor the transmission of those things, and we have a more international response to biological threats. But the ability to harm people with them has never been greater.

So, I would say nuclear, we're much safer; all forms of violence, including self-harm, we're much

safer; biological and potentially cyber-enabled threats targeted to critical infrastructure, lifesaving critical infrastructures, we're definitely more at risk.

WRIGHT: One of the things that sort of struck me in the book, you very powerfully sort of write about the domestic problems, but in some sense it strikes me more of a book about sort of the domestic sources of risk than about the foreign sources of risk. And I was curious how you think about geopolitical risk. Because geopolitical risk usually is not one of a body count and an immediate given period of time, like if I'm assessing the risk in China, I don't say how many people has China killed last week, because that's sort of besides the point. It's more of a long-term thing.

And Michael and you wrote, of course, an article also by this title in 2012, sort of making this argument. And a lot has happened between 2012 and 2019, and many people—and you sort of acknowledge at the end of the book that there's heightened geopolitical competition and we think differently, maybe, about the threat from Russia.

So, I'm wondering both sort of how you assessed those gathering risks and also does sort of the period since 2012 pose a difficulty for your argument.

ZENKO: Certainly. So, we wrote this article, *Clear and Present Safety* in 2012, and the good people at Foreign Affairs allowed us to write a piece that came out just as the book came out, in March, which is—what has changed since then? And we do sort of a stock-taking of the metrics of geopolitical risk and threat.

And I would say that the problem with geopolitical threat measurements is they're so opaque, right. There's almost no falsifiability. I know people who do this professionally for a living. They're sort of the opposite of forecasters, right, because they don't say anything that can be evaluative, that is measurable, or that is time-bound. So, if you make a sweeping assertion that China is posing more of a threat to the United States, if you don't break that down into its discrete parts, it's hard to know what that actually means or what policies you should implement to counter it.

I was actually in the Pentagon 2 days ago. Somebody just thought about China for a very, very long time, and I asked him about the China threat, and it was a really great conversation. Because I said are you worried about their power or their objectives, Xi's objectives today, or are you worried about their influence?

And he said power I don't care about. He said rising power is actually good, because we get to buy more things to counter it. And he said objectives I don't care about, because those are predominantly domestically determined and they change somewhat over time. Even Chinese leadership over the last couple leaders, they change. He goes, it's really their influence, right? That's the geopolitical threat that is the greatest concern to the United States.

And how to counter that influence becomes a completely different discussion, right, than classical net assessment of countering power, because material power is easier to measure. So, the book, I would say, undersells geopolitical risk and threat, because, at least personally, I find the discussions around that so hard to hold onto, so hard to find the analytical threads to unpack and to identify. And, also, since 2012, we focus more on the domestic things, because the domestic harms have spiked so significantly, in a way that we literally—we wouldn't have imagined that drug deaths would have tripled since we first wrote that book in 2012.

And, so, we felt the limited time we had in the book to focus on domestic was more important than geopolitical. But, you're right, the geopolitical threats, even as, I admit, they're hard to measure, there is greater geopolitical tension, let's say, and disagreement around key themes of the global cooperation, and very specific themes that are of interest to the United States than there was in 2012. There's no doubt.

WRIGHT: Yeah. One thing on that that sort of struck me was, there's sort of a parallel between what you wrote in 2012 and what you write today on what President Obama said at the beginning of his second term. I mean, you'd think he would frequently say things are actually better than people think,

you know, this terrorist threat is not as severe as it's been made out. We need to sort of get out of the Middle East, because, you know, this doesn't affect our interests.

He also said that Russia was a regional power. And while he pushed back with sanctions against Russia for Ukraine on the annexation of Crimea, he also repeatedly just would try to restrain some of his own officials. He wanted to --

ZENKO: Sure.

WRIGHT:—take a tougher line. And, in 2016, this sort of came to the fore in the election interference, as David Corn and Michael Isikoff have written. So, that's (Inaudible) sort of went --

ZENKO: Right.

WRIGHT:—to him with options, and he and the national security advisor sort of demurred and said that actually, you know, we're sort of fine and that this can be sort of dealt with. And, of course, we know what happened. It was probably a bigger sort of threat than he anticipated to the election system --

ZENKO: Right.

WRIGHT:—and to American democracy. So, I guess I'm very curious for your thought on that, but, I'm also wondering, like, is there a risk in sort of downplaying. Like, if we downplayed a threat from an actor who has hostile intent, like Vladimir Putin. I mean, that's a lot of power. Even if it's a lot less than America, it still has a lot of latent capability. Does that sort of make us vulnerable even allowing for the rhetorical excesses that, I think, you correctly go after?

ZENKO: Yeah, I think you can. If you don't take the ambitions and interests of Russia and China seriously, the United States is going to fall further and further behind the relative ability to influence outcomes where Russia and China and the United States have competing interests.

But I would just say that—so, the way you've articulated it is one actor, and we tend to, in the United States, see things through a U.S.-focus lens. We focus on one sliver. So, we focus on the Middle

East all the time. Progressives do it, Libertarians do it. The Middle East think tanks around here do it all the time. It's just 5 percent of the Earth's population, and you're missing the much broader picture.

I don't doubt Vladimir Putin's interest in interfering outside of his region. I assume he will try to interfere in the 2020 elections through all means possible. But that is just one story of what's happening in the world. And if we choose to perceive the world through one limited story predominantly threat-focused, I think we're missing a lot of the other trends.

So, the other thing that Barack Obama and Susan Rice used to often say, it wasn't just about Russia. They made more general statements about the world. And they were completely right, which is that it has never been a better time for the average human to be alive on Earth, and try and understand why that is, and then enabling those underlying trends, everything from international health, to markets, to people like Bill Gates and Michael Bloomberg, all the things that have made the world a better place and where people—I think that's where we tend to focus more of our time.

It doesn't mean it's not right to focus on geopolitical competition, but trying to impact the greatest number of people on Earth with the U.S. foreign policy, at relatively low cost in an evidence-based way, is, I think, a foreign policy that is going to be under greater debate going forward to 2020, although everything will slide to threats once debates start. That's for sure.

WRIGHT: Yeah. One of the questions that I've grappled with before is the role of mobilization and narrative in American foreign policy.

ZENKO: For sure.

WRIGHT: America's a democratic great power. There's been virtually no democratic great powers, depending on how you call Great Britain. You know, in international history, most have been authoritarian just because of the nature of world history and the evolution of governance and the timing.

So, the U.S. has this particular problem of needing to convince people to be engaged. And you

write in the book about Truman, of course, did this and Acheson, his famous line, “clearer than truth,” in terms of --

ZENKO: Right.

WRIGHT:—articulating a case for aid to Greece and Turkey. But the example I was thinking about was Kuwait in 1991. You know, this was a war which I think most people would believe, I think, was sort of justified, that Bush probably handled it pretty well in retrospect, given what would happen later in Iraq with the limited aims. He established a coalition.

But the rhetoric around that war was very much one of Saddam is a new Hitler—you know, he’ll take over the Middle East. This is an existential threat. It was deeply divisive --

ZENKO: Right.

WRIGHT:—in America prior. The vote was a lot narrower than was the case in 2003. I guess my question is, would it have been possible in that case, or indeed in any case, for an American president to mobilize the American people a—you should be a little bit bothered by this but not a lot, but we need to have a major war, because it’s sort of a modest impact on our interest, or do they need to create a narrative to try to sell it? How do they deal with that dilemma? And if you were advising a future president on that, what would you say?

ZENKO: Well, I mean, we know from a lot of the smart people in North Carolina and Duke and who do surveys of—and Dick Eichenberg talks about public opinion polling and going to war, that it really depends on the objectives and it depends upon the perceived extent of commitment and whether or not they’re achievable.

And I think Bush did use a lot of rhetoric in ’90-’91, but the other thing that he did a lot of was, by keeping the aims achievable and limited, I think that was as important as the rhetoric. If he had said we’re going to roll into Baghdad and occupy Iraq—and he made it clear early on they weren’t going to do that.

They also made it clear early on, you remember, when Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell said we will not introduce nuclear weapons. Like, that was very meaningful, because nuclear consciousness was, I think, higher than it is today. So, I would say, rhetoric aside, putting bounds and limitations on an intervention decision is as important. But the other side of that is that, if we do need to demonize an adversary to mobilize the United States public opinion and Congress to go to war, the promise is not always going to be for wars that are limited that we like.

WRIGHT: Right.

ZENKO: And Ronald Krebs has written some really great stuff on the power of the narrative over time. You're right, it is especially pertinent here. And narrative becomes, I think, more important in contemporary society, because the only thing that happened in '90-'91 is there was a congressional hearing cycle, there was a lot of floor debates, there was a long decision. And there was a long buildup to, as [William Pagonis] who was the general who did the logistics for war,—it's called moving the mount and getting everything there to then intervene on behalf of Kuwait. The time cycle is so compressed.

So, presidents don't even have much time to build the narratives. I mean, if you look at the decision in 2013 to intervene in Syria, the amount of time between the initial threat posed to Yazidi people in the Sinjar—Mount Sinjar, to the full decision to intervene was so compressed, there were so few hearings. The consequence of that decision and interventions were quite significant, right, and I just don't think we'll ever have that time again.

So, narrative matters but it's also tied to as much the identity and I would say the political party of the President—Democrats support democratic presidents, Republicans support Republicans. So, I think that's going to be more important, and how you get public opinion on your side is going to—you're not going to have much time to do it.

DEWS: Let's take a short coffee break to meet Christen Linke Young.

LINKE YOUNG: Hi. I'm Christen Linke Young. I'm a Fellow with the USC-Brookings Schaeffer Initiative for Health Policy. My research here at Brookings focuses on health insurance coverage, with a particular focus on the Affordable Care Act and how that's shaped our current health policy landscape.

I grew up in Columbus, Ohio as the child of two molecular biologists, and there was a lot of science in my home, and it wasn't until like middle school that I realized not everyone's family referred to raw egg whites as uncoagulated albumin. But my upbringing inspired a lifelong interest in health and science policy. I didn't exactly want to be a scientist like my parents, but I was really interested in the ideas of the life sciences and how they shaped our society.

I recently came to Brookings after almost a decade in government service. I served for 8 years in the Obama administration, working to pass and then implement the Affordable Care Act, and then another 2 years working in state government in North Carolina.

A lot of my government career was about putting out fires and making things work on the ground. An issue would come up and it would stay on my desk until there was a solution to the problem. Sometimes it was an elegant solution and sometimes it was something that was held together with metaphorical duct tape and toothpicks, but it was really about making things work in the very constrained environments I was in.

Now that I am at Brookings, I get to step back and think about problems without them being my problem, and I think that's really important. It's incredibly valuable to turn an issue around and around and really be able to imagine what the world could look like, and I think that kind of thinking is essential to solving the problems of our health care system.

There are a lot of challenges in health care. The Affordable Care Act was a big step forward, but tens of millions of people remain uninsured, tens of millions more have coverage but are exposed to high health care costs, and health care prices are simply too high today. But I think one of the biggest challenges we face is that our political system may not be able to have a good-faith conversation about how to address

these issues. It's true in a lot of sectors, but I think it's especially true in health care.

Ultimately, the passage of the Affordable Care Act represented the victory of a certain point of view, that the government should do more to make health care affordable for low and middle-income people, especially those with significant health care needs, and that we should pay for all of that by reducing payments to parts of the health care industry and by asking healthier and higher-income people to pay a little bit more.

Among those who opposed that vision at the time, today there's still a belief in certain ways that those were not desirable goals for the federal government and that it needs to be undone. But there's also this acknowledgment that it happened and the country has internalized those gains and moved on in some sense.

So, I think today we spend a lot of energy on bad-faith conversations about preexisting conditions or litigation that just doesn't make sense. All that said, I do think there's some hope that the dynamic is changing and evolving to a little bit more productive place, which I guess is why I'm in this world in the first place.

In the current environment, I spend my time tracking issues related to the implementation of the Affordable Care Act as well as developing ideas for what should come next in health reform. Just a couple of examples—last week I published two pieces. One of them evaluates a recent regulation from the Trump administration, which changes some of the rules around how employers can finance account-based health benefits for their workers. My coauthors and I concluded that the rule is likely to increase premiums and not consistent with the agency of statutory authority.

In a completely different vein, I also published a piece that thinks hard about how to get more people into health care coverage using automatic methods of enrollment, what can we do to make the system just easier for people to get enrolled into the coverage that they're eligible for. It's a really hard problem, and I thought it was worth taking the time to think it through and think about what it would take

to make that kind of system work.

So, I have two book recommendations to share. First is a piece of nonfiction, *Dreamland*, by the journalist Sam Quinones. It's a deeply-researched story of the rise of the opioid epidemic. It's based in doctors' offices and on the streets of the American communities that were hardest hit in the early days of the opioid epidemic as well as in rural Mexico where new forms of heroin were being developed and manufactured. It provides just an incredible window to understanding one of the major public health crises of our time.

The second book I would recommend is a work of fiction that's had a tremendous impact on me over the years, *Infinite Jest*, by David Foster Wallace. For me, good fiction shares a similar quality. It helps you understand what it feels like to be somebody different than who you are.

Infinite Jest is just this beautiful, complex story that provides a window into how addiction and depression are experienced by people. Immersing myself in that novel expanded my capacity for empathy, and I think that's actually one of the most important things in policymaking.

WRIGHT: So, we want to move to the sort of present day in a minute and talk about the election, maybe, and foreign policy in the election. But I do want to sort of touch on globalization, because most experts, I think, would agree that globalization has powered many of these sort of positive trends that you've talked about—you know, billions of people out of poverty in India, China, and elsewhere, a rise in the standard of living, health, you know, maternity, all of these different metrics have been trending in a positive direction.

But, at the same time, people are dissatisfied with globalization, particularly in the West, and many of them—I wouldn't say necessarily have become protectionists, but they are certainly looking for a more managed approach. They feel like the gains have been unfairly distributed and there's certain economic patterns there that may back that up.

So, I guess, two questions—one, what do you make of all of that, in terms of do you feel people

should sort of suck it up a little bit, because it actually is a long-term positive trend and politicians should suggest that, and how should a coalminer in West Virginia or manufacturer in Ohio think about the world if their livelihood is sort of endangered by some of these trends but that the overall trends globally are very positive?

ZENKO: Sure. If you're interested in really knowing this stuff, talk to Alexandra Guisinger at Temple. She's written, really, the best book about U.S. public opinion and trade, and I interviewed her a while ago about the book. And Americans actually aren't opposed to globalization. They're opposed to different versions of globalization from different countries, right. And because we know that market exposure leads to relative winners or losers. People say winners or losers. Actually, relative winners are losers.

So, in her research she finds of U.S. people, should we implement protectionist barriers, Canada and China toggle one and two for a number one trade partner of the United States. And when you ask people should we protect American jobs through tariffs from China, 50 percent say yes. When you use should we do it from Canada, it's only 20 percent.

So, we don't mind globalization from Canada as much as we do from China. And that could be race-based, it could be we don't perceive them as a part of us, could be more other otherness. We could know Canadians, so it could be a different thing. So, I would say that people have very different perceptions.

And I'm from Northern Wisconsin and I grew up working on farms, and I have a lot of people who I grew up working with who are opposed to globalization. It enables their ability to export goods, and in the absence of it they're much worse off. And some of them are getting these small handouts now from the Trump administration to try to buffer the effects of the retaliatory tariffs that the Chinese have put on the United States, very targeted at Trump-focused voters.

And I would say, if you asked them, they don't care what happens elsewhere, right. They obviously accept, as when you would accept, care about what protects their own interests, their own farm, their own livelihood. But if you try to cut off exposure to global markets and to grow as an economy, either a local

economy or as a national economy, it just doesn't work over time. Over time, it imposes a greater penalty and a greater cost upon your people.

And part of this mobilizing rhetoric of our leadership should be acknowledging the relative tradeoffs of winners and losers. And one of the more disappointing things of the 2016 campaign was Secretary Clinton sort of just seeding on TPP, which she had been a staunch advocate for, not just on behalf of geopolitical interest in East Asia, but for U.S. exporters in the United States. And she just gave it up quite willingly without explaining why. Because the political pressure rose --

WRIGHT: She might have lost the primary if she didn't --

ZENKO: She might have lost the primary. So, this is a good case where democracy might be getting in the way of better policy outcomes, and even better livelihoods for Americans. But, you're right, there's no reason why people exposed to international markets who experience the deleterious effects of that should not be resistant to them. But the alternatives are not better, right. The alternatives, over time, are not better either for them or for anyone else.

And part of what the book does it try to direct people to think about—again, most of these risks, harms, and threats are domestically-based. We know how to deal with them, how to ameliorate them, how to reduce the threat level to Americans to a very significant degree, and both at a --legislatures on Capitol Hill and in capitals throughout the United States, we are simply unwilling to grapple with those tradeoffs.

We've spent, as you point out in that one chapter, \$3.8 trillion in Iraq and Afghanistan since 9/11, and what we could have done with \$3.8 trillion domestically to save people's lives is significant, and I hope in the 2020 election we talk about those sorts of tradeoffs.

WRIGHT: Well, that's a good pivot point to sort of looking at the election. I'd be curious as to your thoughts just about—I mean, obviously foreign policy hasn't played a very big role so far.

ZENKO: It never does as much as we want.

WRIGHT: Yeah. Although, I think it played a pretty big role in 2007-'08.

ZENKO: That's true.

WRIGHT: Mainly because of Iraq. But it's slightly paradoxical that it's playing probably as little a role as it has since the Cold War. But, at the same time, most people believe that this is maybe the most consequential foreign policy election, maybe ever, but in decades, because of the question about whether Trump is a permanent feature of --

ZENKO: Right.

WRIGHT:—American foreign policy or a temporary aberration, which, based on my own conversations with diplomats and others from around the world, is the number one question really that every --

ZENKO: Right.

WRIGHT:—country is asking. So, what do you think that the role of foreign policy is likely to be, but also how consequential do you think this election really is? Is this really a hinge point, or is this something we always say and actually it's more in par with the norm?

ZENKO: Well, your thing is always really important. So, we work on foreign policy. To us, foreign policy should be given more attention, and the fact that it's not is a great shame. I think eventually it will become an issue, in part around this "commander-in-chief" model that we put, which is will this presidential candidate be a viable commander in a wartime situation and will they authorize the deployment of troops or missiles that put at risk civilians in other countries and U.S. service members. And I think that's the sort of gut foreign policy question that arises.

But I think you're right. It's going to be hard for democratic presidential candidates to make the claim that foreign policy is the reason to vote President Trump out of office. I think that's going to be a really hard case to make, because he hasn't suffered many consequences for his foreign policy choices. Economic coercion against Mexico and China disappoints Republican-leaning business leadership and those—we talked about some of those targeted exporters in the United States who are being responded to with

retaliatory tariffs.

Even the behavior, the almost psychologically odd behavior towards, like, North Korean leadership, it's really hard to see the penalty he's paid. He certainly hasn't within his own party, and I don't think that's when he's going to suffer, within the own electorate. So, Democrats have to make a case that they have a better alternative to what President Trump is forcing the American people to experience now as it relates to foreign policy.

And I think President Trump gets some credit, because he has aligned himself with people who are former militarist and who have simply not gotten their way. If you look at the people who wanted to extend or, I would say, draw out U.S. presence in Afghanistan, Zal Khalilzad has been directed to end the war. He was given a year, he's been directed to end U.S. military involvement in Syria.

There were people who wanted to extend in perpetuity a more significant U.S. presence in Northeast Syria. That, at least to our knowledge, hasn't happened. People want to intervene in Venezuela. People would love to go to war in the Persian Gulf with Iranian shipping vessels, and in North Korea.

I mean, John Bolton—I know you watch—you're a fellow Bolton watcher—who had such an expressed public opinion about U.S. militarism and coercion, and he just isn't getting his way, time and time again. So, Trump, when it comes to military power, comes off as more of the rational actor, certainly not in the case when it comes to economics, though. What do you think? How will it play out?

WRIGHT: I think I'm sort of increasingly taken in by the parallel between Benjamin Netanyahu and Trump, you know. Both are very militaristic, very hawkish. Both actually have a track record of hesitation about using force. I mean, Netanyahu is—has a pure empirical matter of using force in a major way. He's probably done so less than any other modern Israeli prime minister, which is interesting given than he is more unreasonable, --

ZENKO: Sure.

WRIGHT:—more hawkish, and maybe more, you know, destabilizing in many respects, given some

of the decisions he made. So, I think Trump is highly aggressive, but he is, I think, more reluctant to use force than most people, in a major way. He will in a serious situation or anything that's discreet, that there's very limited risk of pushback. I think he will do it. So, he would have no problem with special operations or air strikes.

ZENKO: Sure.

WRIGHT: But I think something larger—he doesn't define interest in such a way that means that he cares about these places.

ZENKO: Right. I think that's the one area Democrats will get some traction, which is Trump—it's perceived, understandably, that he hasn't been aligned with our allies and partners sufficiently, rattling the tin cup for additional spending from South Korea, Japan, or NATO, being willing to counter long-established, even base structure alliances with the Qatar situation in the Gulf and with Europe.

I think that's the case they'll make, but I don't think Trump not being nice enough to our allies resonates with, certainly, Progressives in this country.

WRIGHT: Do you think there's much to this progressive foreign policy debate? We're seeing a lot of pieces written on—is there a progressive foreign policy? And, like, some of the candidates are trying to articulate a case. Do you think that we're likely to see a progressive foreign policy that is substantially different than traditional democratic foreign policy?

ZENKO: I think there's a coherent progressive foreign policy such as a coherent conservative foreign policy. And there are strands of it that tie into more Libertarian perspectives and then more true sort of left perspectives. The progressive community has had such an advantage of having the global war on terrorism being their framing reference for what they're opposed to.

Because I would say, not just the overreach, the lack of transparency, the unwillingness to or inability to synchronize diplomatic tools to try to find resolutions to some of the areas where U.S. troops are intervened or where U.S. forces are providing essential, enabling, refueling, and arms capabilities, like the

Saudi-led intervention in Yemen. Now these have happened over multiple presidents, they don't seem to be diminishing.

If you look at, just through the lens of the number of estimated transnational jihadists out there, it hasn't diminished in any country, right. So, in some ways it's not just expensive, it's not just sort of unethical, but it's also unproductive, right. So, Progressives are sort of lucky to have that model to be opposed to.

But the problem is it doesn't really answer China. Because China leads to really hard tradeoffs of a hard and increasingly authoritarian country that, not just as it always has, diminishes the rights and abilities of its citizens and specific ethnic minorities, but is now interested in having a direct role, interfering in other countries, which is the thing that Progressives, I think quite rightly, oppose the United States for doing.

So, China is now mirroring in different ways some of the concerns that Progressives had about U.S. foreign policy. Are you interested in having an influence in the future governing structure within China? Probably not. Are you interested in countering China's harm of minorities in those countries? Probably. That requires maybe some coercion and some threats. Are you interested in countering China's ability to have an influence over allies, other countries throughout East/Southeast Asia, South Asia, Africa? If it's a yes, then you have to really reorient your national security strategy, because that requires a longer-term commitment, a willingness as the Chinese do to just burn tons of money on various things, throw money at problems and lose them to countries like Venezuela, hundreds of millions of dollars.

I don't think the Progressives have a good answer to that. And Elizabeth Warren had some very interesting comments about, like, we need to get tough with China. And my response to that is always, like, why and how, right? And the need to get tough with China, I think, is something that more people agree with, but the consequences of the policies that are required to do that I don't think have been considered.

So, on war and terrorism and uses of force, Progressives have something. On some of the other geopolitical tradeoffs that you, I think, focus on more astutely, no.

WRIGHT: Great. Well, Micah, thank you so much for joining us today. The book is *Clear and Present Safety*, co-author of the book, Michael Cohen, and it's available on Amazon and at all good book shops. I highly recommend it. But thank you very much.

ZENKO: Thank you, Tom.

DEWS: You can find the book *Clear and Present Safety: The World Has Never Been Better and Why That Matters to Americans*, by Michael Cohen and Micah Zenko, wherever you like to get books.

The Brookings Cafeteria Podcast is the product of an amazing team of colleagues, starting with audio engineer Gaston Reboredo and producer Chris McKenna. Bill Finan, Director of the Brookings Institution Press, does many of our book interviews. And Lisette Baylor and Eric Abalahin provide design and web support. And thanks to our intern this summer, Betsy Broaddus. Finally, my thanks to Camilo Ramirez and Emily Horne for their guidance and support.

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