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WEBINAR

HOW THE UNITED STATES CAN USE FORCE SHORT OF WAR

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PROCEEDINGS

MR. O'HANLON: Good morning, everyone. I'm Michael O'Hanlon with the Foreign Policy program at Brookings, although you're just hearing my voice today. And we're going to discuss an excellent new book by Melanie Sisson and Barry Blechman, as well as their colleague, James Siebens, done largely through the Stimson Center in Washington, where Barry Blechman formed the organization with his colleague, Michael Krepon, some 35 years ago after a distinguished career in government and at the Brookings Institution. At Brookings, one of Barry's signature accomplishments was a book that's still widely used today, called "Force Without War," in which he and colleagues examined a number of Cold War cases where the United States had threatened, or in some way signaled the possibility of the use of force, or otherwise employed military power, but without firing lethal ordnance, to try to accomplish various kinds of foreign policy outcomes, whether in crisis, whether in an act of compellence to try to get another country to do something that it had not previously been doing, to reinforce deterrence when that seemed to be shaky, or for some other purpose that served American national security interests.

In this recent study, looking at more than $100 cases since the Cold War ended, Melanie and Barry and James have tried to in many ways update the analysis, but ask also has the world changed, has the way in which the United States uses military power shifted, and should it shift. What does the evidence tell us about the most effective ways for the United States to use military power, short of war? And, again, one could think of all of this as under the general category of military coercion, hence the title of their outstanding book.

So what we'll do today is talk through the study. Its basic findings, its methodology, its strengths, the limitations, not from the study itself but from the data set, which involves a number of cases, but about eight or ten countries that show up the most often, and so we'll have to ask to what extent are these eight or ten indicative of future threats. But for American students of foreign policy and those around the world, the good news here I suppose is that the countries that are most heavily featured in this book are largely the ones the United States is still worried about today. So we'll get into this in just a moment in conversation, but I just want to signal that Russia and China show up quite a bit, North Korea shows up a bit, a number of countries in the broader Middle East, and then Haiti, as well as the former Yugoslavia.

So we'll talk through the cases, we'll talk through the results, and then we'll look forward to your questions that you can email to Brookings, Events@Brookings.edu and I'll be able to see those even though you can't see me later in the conversations.

So, without further ado, we thought the best way to start this — and let me just say a brief additional word, Melanie Sisson also is a Stimson Center associate who has been a senior fellow there, and a number of other distinguished positions around Washington, and she and Barry together, again, spearheaded this effort with the help of colleagues. And so we're really delighted to welcome you both today.

Barry, if I could begin with you and ask if you could just tell us a little bit more about the classic study — my word, not yours. I'm not asking you to beat your own drum, but certainly what I consider one of the best Brookings security books of all time, "Force Without War," what that taught us and why you wanted to update the analysis for the post-Cold War world.

Over to you, my friend. Barry, you may still be muted. Adam, I'm afraid that Barry is still muted, can we —

MR. BLECHMAN: How's that?

MR. O'HANLON: That's good. We're good to go.

MR. BLECHMAN: I'm sorry.

Well, good morning, again, and thank you, Michael.

"Force Without War" might not have been the best book ever written at Brookings, but it was probably the best seller. It was done at the result of a Defense Department contract, one that came from DARPA. It came at a time in the early mid '70s when the Defense Department, coming out of a losing war, was rethinking its role in the world, not only in war, its stock military doctrine and so forth, but what it did in peace time, how it was deployed and how it supported foreign policy. And it asked us to take a look at these incidents. Now, remember, this was in the 1970s, pre-internet. And so we dove into what were then annual command histories from all the (inaudible), we looked at ships logs to see where the aircraft carriers were during crises, and we just looked at a variety of primary public sources, all unclassified, and discovered more than 200 incidents involving the use of force, going back to 1946, the end of the Second World War. And we then analyzed these incidents statistically and also analyzed a

series of case studies which we had commissioned.

And the book caused quite a stir. It was one of the first to look at the military in this way, how the military is used short of all-out war in support of policy and in support of the words, the threats, the demands of U.S. policy makers. And so it became something of a classic. It was adopted at graduate schools all over the country and by all the military colleges. And, thus, throughout the '80s and well into the '90s, it was read by a generation of military officers as they went through school and was very well known at the time, then kind of faded from view.

About five years ago, maybe a little more, it was rediscovered by joint staff officers who were again looking at the role of the Armed Forces coming out of what were not very successful campaigns in the Middle East this time. And someone discovered this book, "Force Without War", and officers would come up to Stimson to talk to be about it. They thought it was quite relevant to the problems they were facing. And I agreed with them, it was a terrific analysis, of course. But I pointed out that it was about a different world, it was about the world of the Cold War. Many and many of the incidents involved the Soviet Union, if not directly then indirectly. And the results, naturally, were skewed by the background of the risk of U.S.-Soviet conflict that was a constant in those days.

And so when they became persuaded that it was time to redo the study, or not to redo the study but to look at the same phenomenon, this time using the modern tools that were now available, not only information available on the internet, but a more modern and more rigorous statistical analysis. And it turns out that the data on the internet was not that good, is not comprehensive, systematic data on military activity available in an unclassified form. When the military went from doing their annual paper reports to reporting electronically, they kind of got sloppy and also started classifying many more things.

And so we resorted to good old LexisNexis and many other standard tools to search and look for incidents in which the United States tried to achieve a foreign policy objective utilizing the Armed Force, but utilizing them in a way that was short of an all-out conflict. And we found out some interesting findings, some similar to those from the first analysis.

MR. O'HANLON: Barry, in the last few seconds you somehow got muted again. Still muted. It was when you started to talk about the comparison between --

MR. BLECHMAN: Okay, am I unmuted now?

MR. O'HANLON: Yeah, you're good.

MR. BLECHMAN: When I was talking about the comparison of the two, the current study is much more rigorous statistically than we were able to do. It depends less on official sources because military records, now that they're electronic, are more highly classified and not recorded systematically as they had been back in the '70s when we were doing the original work at Brookings, and thus depended on James, our co-author, and a coterie of interns and research assistants scouring open sources for incidents in which the United States attempted to achieve a foreign policy objective utilizing the Armed Force, but in a way which would not lead to an all-out conflict.

And, with that, I'll turn to Melanie to describe the contemporary analysis.

MR. O'HANLON: Barry, thank you. And I will pass off the baton to Melanie in just a second, but first I also wanted to not only congratulate you on picking up this important methodology, and thanking you for doing so, but also just to tease out a couple of the interesting findings that we'll get to after we talk about methodology and the approach you took and that Melanie will discuss. But I just want to let folks know, for example, in page 37 of the book you see some of the interesting findings, one of which is the United States has had 92 percent success rate in using some form of military coercion to maintain the territorial integrity of its allies. And that's a pretty high number. On the low end, we've had only a 17 percent success rate in attempting to change regimes with these limited, again non-lethal, in invasion kinds of uses of force.

So, again, the scope of the book is not about the invasion of Iraq or Afghanistan as much as it is more limited approaches to trying to achieve outcomes short of the use of force.

But I think I should now turn to Melanie to, again, explain the methodology from the group up please. You know, what kind of cases were you looking at, how did you go about coding the cases, so to speak, and then we'll get to the findings here in a few minutes.

Over to you, Melanie. And thank you again for joining us.

MS. SISSON: Great. Thank you, Mike. Thanks to you and Adam and the whole Brookings team for having us. I know I feel comfortable saying on Barry's behalf that we're both delighted to be here and have been looking forward to this conversation very much. So thanks.

And thanks to you, Mike, for being a really thoughtful and sensitive reader of the book.

We've had the opportunity to talk before and, you know, I've always appreciated your sometimes probative but always interesting and built in with curiosity questions. So I'm looking forward to continuing that here.

I do want to pick up a little bit on orienting into the study, what it is that we were looking at specifically, things we were not looking at specifically, and how we went about the business of putting it all together.

So, first, just a statement of the purpose of why we would do this. As Barry mentioned, others in the community identified a need for thinking about this particular form of foreign policy behavior. Barry rightly agreed that this is important for the coming decades, potentially century. We see no reason why the phenomenon of interest here, which is the use of the military to pursue foreign policy objectives, will significantly decrease over time.

So the purpose in writing the book was to acknowledge that fact and to try to find ways that say if the United States is going to continue to use the Armed Services in this way, which is costly and risky in some cases, we'd like to see if we can find information that will help decision makers and leaders know how to do that better, right. So went about trying to figure out how to learn how the United States could use the military instrument to coerce more effectively into the future. And I sort of highlight the word "coerce" specifically because I want to make sure that we're defining that construct clearly. Coercion in the context of this study is the use of Armed Forces to shape the behaviors of another actor, right. So military coercion does not impose an outcome, it shapes the choices that are available to an adversary, right. So it changes the cost-benefit calculation.

Now, that can be done — I think you mentioned before, Mike, through — we usually refer to deterrence and compellance, and those are primary modes of military coercion in the study. I will point out that I think coercion carries a negative connotation in some cases. And just in my personal opinion, in the realm of international politics, I don't think that it should, right. I think coercion is not a dirty word, it's not something that only bad guys do. I think it is a simple fact of international political life, and so it behooves us to treat it that way, which is I think why in part this book is timely. So that's military coercion.

The other thing I want to make sure we define is this "short of war" clause that you see in the title. If military coercion doesn't impose an outcome, right, that doesn't mean it isn't a firm application

of force in some cases. So “short of war” does not mean actually that we don’t use kinetic activity and military coercion. In fact we do. There are 21 instances in the data set in which the United States used kinetic action to shape the behaviors of other actors in military coercive efforts.

The final sort of definitional element I want to be sure to be clear about is the time period. When we refer as shorthand to the post-Cold War Era, we’re looking specifically at the time box between January 1991 and June 2018. And so I’ll refer to that as the post-Cold War Era. That is the time period during which all of our cases occurred. So anything prior or post is outside of our scope. That doesn’t mean we can’t, you know, use our brains and think about them, but I want to be clear that we won’t have researched and studied them to the extent that we have the cases that are in the study.

One other quick note. I appreciate Barry mentioning our group of interns and leadership of James Siebens in the data collection. And I certainly want to make sure that we acknowledge — interns are often the unsung heroes of our business, as you well know, Mike, and they deserve great credit and James deserves great credit for his diligence and their diligence in relating the data set that was so rich and usable for this statistical analyses.

Okay. So the other thing to make clear is what we don’t do in this study. So I want to take a couple of things off the table. The first is because we’re looking at short of war incidents, anything to do with the War on Terror is outside of our scope. We don’t address any incidents that fall under the umbrella of the War on Terror.

I mentioned that we do look at cases of deterrence as part of military coercion. I want to be very clear, though, that those cases are specific and what you might consider immediate cases of deterrence. We do not look at general deterrence. And by that what I mean is the area of our interest here was not to examine the ways in which or whether, how, when, why and to what end the United States uses its military to prevent challenges to U.S. interest from arising in the first place, right. So this notion of general deterrence, of preventing wars, of forestalling fait accompli and other sorts of activities that are deemed inconsistent with U.S. interests, those are not our focus here.

So our focus instead actually is only when general deterrence has failed, right. When a challenge to U.S. interest has arisen, and even more, that the United States has chosen to respond with the military, right. So what I’m talking about broadly is our inclusion criteria, right. So we have time

period, we have identified that a challenge has arisen, we've identified that U.S. policy makers have decided to invoke the Armed Forces in some way, shape, or form. The other criteria that we applied, or that there's a clear target, so we're bringing the military out to do something in relation to an identified actor. And, finally, for a stated policy objective, for a purpose, right. And for that policy objective we rely very much on the statements of U.S. political and military leadership.

So we take what our leaders tell us is the purpose of these military activities at face value, we don't interpret, we don't judge, we don't assess, we just code them, right. And, again, James and the team was very diligent about doing that with fidelity. So this is a very set bounded universe of cases for examination, which makes us sure that we're actually studying the phenomenon of interest, which his military coercion and not something else.

In terms of those policy objectives, as I just mentioned, we need them to be identified and we take them at face value from political leadership. Another point of clarification in how we scope the study is to say the kinds of policy objectives we are interested in are not the big line of effort sort of strategic objective, so to speak, which is to say we're not interested in whether or not the United States achieved democratization in Haiti, right, we're not interested in looking at whether or not it was successful in denuclearizing any state, or normalization of all state behaviors, right. What we are looking at — and, Michael, you teased this a little — are very specific discreet behaviors on the part of the actor the United States is trying to coerce, right. So not to revise territory, right, to stop or refrain from acquiring or transiting conventional weapons, to stop or refrain from harming civilians. We have a set of eight very specific demands that the United States levied against the set of overall 14 countries that it targeted through military coercion during this time period. So those are the outcomes of interest. Specifically whether or not those states complied with the U.S. demands.

Since we're not in person, I feel like I should pause, Michael, and see if you have any questions up until that point, or if any questions are relevant to that point, before going into sort of specifying some of the findings here.

MR. O'HANLON: Yeah, thank you, Melanie. That's fantastic. And I do think it's a good moment to give a couple of examples to clarify the scope since I think I may have slightly misled in suggesting that categorically there's never any case that involves the use of force. Your point, just to

clarify, is that if we do use force it's not necessarily, or it's categorically not an invasion kind of situation where we impose an outcome militarily, it's a case where the adversary has to make a choice. That's what really distinguishes the cases from those that might involve all out war. If I'm understanding correctly.

And, so, for example, with the Kosovo War of 1999, as I understand things, you do include that because our goal there was never to directly overthrow Slobodan Milošević or even to control the territory of Kosovo with our own boots on the ground, it was to create enough coercive pressure through the use of actual live ordnance, that Milošević would make a decision to pull out of Kosovo.

Now, is that a correct interpretation on my part?

MS. SISSON: That's exactly right.

MR. O'HANLON: And then another case — and then we can come back to methodology and talking more through the study — with Iraq, in 1991, when we launched Operation Desert Storm, that's not in your data base because Desert Storm was not giving Saddam Hussein the choice about whether he kept forces in Kuwait, we were going to drive him out regardless of his preference. And so it became a technical military challenge as opposed to an exercise in coercion. However, other things that we tried to do over the years with Saddam Hussein, comply with the terms of the cease fire resolutions or UN Security Council resolutions on weapons of mass destruction activities, those required a choice by him. And so even if they did use some force — for example, Operation Desert Fox in 1998, when we bombed for four days. That would be included in the data base. Is that also correct?

MS. SISSON: Yes, precisely.

MR. O'HANLON: Great, great.

So now, what I wanted to —

MR. BLECHMAN: Mike, one interesting thing on the Iraq example is we did try to coerce him before actually invading Kuwait. We tried to coerce him by the build-up on the Gulf and by threats and then by the air war. None of that was sufficient to get him to withdraw his forces from Kuwait. In the end, we had to go to war.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Very good clarification.

Melanie, I'll let you pick up where you left off, but I also wanted to make sure that you

discussed — or, you know — I'm sure you will — the kinds of tools that we're talking about here, you know, just so people know what kinds of instruments of compellance or deterrence or coercion we're using. We just mentioned a few. Barry just mentioned a few, military deployments, no fly zones, et cetera, but I wondered if you could just give us a quick list of the different kinds of instruments that are involved here in your data set?

MS. SISSON: Yes, absolutely. Thank you, Mike.

So certainly we covered the array of the military instruments that were actually applied. So we basically looked at each of the cases that we identified through research. We started, in terms of identification of those cases, using some scholarly sources of militarized interstate disputes and then we researched a lot around and did peer research, I think, as Barry mentioned, through LexisNexis and other sort of resources like that to make sure we're identifying as much as we can. And we take from that research a description of the military activity that was involved. Was it a no fly zone, was it a blockage, did we send a carrier strike group, what kind of planes did we send, how many troops were deployed. The full nature and scope of the military activity itself.

I think it's also important, however, Mike, to highlight that the other elements of coercion that are available and were used by the United States during these incidents also were captured in our data set. We wanted to make sure we're capturing the context and the ways in which these tools are or are not used together and what kind of interactive effects those might have.

So, for example, high level diplomatic talks, sanctions, economic sanctions. We've looked at whether or not the general statements across the apparatus of the U.S. Government were consistent or inconsistent, right. So while we were comprehensive in terms of capturing the military tools that were used, we also wanted to make sure that we captured these other assets at U.S. disposal as well, and those also are in the data set.

So I'll pause again and see if you wanted to follow up on that or if we shall go into some of the findings.

MR. O'HANLON: Yeah, I think this is a good time to go ahead and move into the findings, especially because I don't want to dominate this. And there are a lot of questions coming in, so you folks have definitely engendered some curiosity and interest.

So why don't I let you finish up with the overview of the findings and then we'll get to some of the audience question.

MS. SISSON: That sounds perfect. Perfect, thanks.

So in terms of findings, what I thought I would do is just sort of give a sample of some of the very specific and I think policy relevant guidelines that come out of the study. And then I want to give a little bit of a big picture take away in terms of the importance that we hope that this study provides in terms of carry forward action, how it can inform actual decisions in the real world as we proceed.

So we've talked a bit about having done statistical analyses and we were very fortunate. I cannot claim to have done those sophisticated statistical analyses myself. We were really fortunate to work with two excellent scholars from the University of Maryland, Jacob Aaronson and Paul Huth, very well known in the fields and really great colleagues to work with. So we were privileged to hand over those complete data sets to them for them to work on. And one of the things I'll highlight is that through no fault of Barry's own, but rather, based on the resources available at the time, the prior study found some very important correlations. The statistical modeling that Jacob and Paul did here are causal, right. So we are teasing out the independent of facts of these different influences on the outcomes of coercive exchanges. So we look at things like statistical significance to say, you know, that definitely has an independent causal effect on the likelihood that the targeted actor will comply with U.S. demands.

So we break down the results in three general categories. So the first is people are probably primarily interested in, well what increases the likelihood that U.S. military coercion will achieve — what tools, what instruments, what contexts here have an independent and positive effect on the outcome. So the first — and I think very important because it is robust and durable across many different iterations of the modeling and testing in the data set, is the fact that flowing forces from outside the area in which a conflict of interest is occurring into that area increases significantly the likelihood of coercive success, right. So, again, the flowing of forces from outside in increases the likelihood of success. And that is holding all other variables constant, okay. So independently, that act alone is a net positive for coercive efforts.

The other note I will say about that, in addition to being robust across the different sorts of testing, is that that result holds no matter the composition of the forces the United States is deploying.

So it is not as though we are locked into a particular movement of a particular asset to achieve this effect. There's a lot of flexibility because it is the fact of the movement, not the nature of what is being moved, which I think is really a surprising finding.

Other elements of context or of activity that increased the likelihood of success is making highly specific demands. When the United States made specific demands of the targeted actors, the likelihood of success was higher, as compared to when it made nonspecific demands. This is probably fairly intuitive and understandable.

Contextually, the kinds of things we looked were, for example, is the U.S. government unified or divided across — you know, the White House and Congress. And it turns out when we have a divided U.S. government, coercive efforts have a higher likelihood of succeeding, right. So some samples of the positives there.

There also are characteristics that decrease the likelihood that the target will comply with U.S. demands. Preexisting sanctions and adding sanctions after initiation of military coercion both had a significantly negative effect on the likelihood that the military action would succeed in convincing the targeted actor to comply with the United States' demands, right. This finding was, to me at least, somewhat surprising and runs counter to a lot of current policy, and so therefore I think merits some additional attention and additional thinking. It was not something that had I written down my predictions ahead of time that I necessarily would have thought would fall out of the data analyses, which is a good reminder to always be humble when we're working with data.

Other characteristics that decrease the likelihood of target compliance is general public threats. So whereas highly specific demands increase the likelihood, vague public threats decrease the likelihood that the targeted actor would comply with U.S. demands. And another contextual one that is particularly apropos, I suppose, is that the United States has a lower likelihood of succeeding in military coercion during presidential election years.

Finally, the third category is that there are some characteristics that don't have an identifiable effect, either positive or negative. There is no significant effect when they're present as compared to when they are not. Another one that I think is surprising, that should catch some attention, is that the size of preexisting U.S. presence in the region where the conflict of interest arises has no effect

on the likelihood that the target will comply with U.S. demands. It's not a positive, it doesn't increase, it doesn't decrease the likelihood of success, it just has no effect.

And I'll say again, flowing forces from outside in, which does have a positive effect on the likelihood of achieving success, that holds whether the size of the preexisting presence is great or small, right. So those two findings together I think are a point of particular interest for me when I consider what I've learned from this study.

We have also learned from this study that high level diplomatic talks don't seem to have any independent effect on the likelihood of U.S. success. And it turns out that neither does U.S. kinetic action. So it is not the case that bombing increases the likelihood that a target will comply with U.S. demands. Now, there are some reasons that might be true and so I don't want to overstate. One could consider, for example, that if the conflict has escalated to the point where kinetic action is involved anyway, you have two very resolved actors and so the contest is harder to arbitrate in that sense.

So that's a lot of rapid fire sort of direct findings. And I think, again, I'll take a pause. Michael, you can tell me whether to proceed to the general lessons or if you want to have a moment here.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. That's fantastic. I thought maybe we should also ask Barry if he wants to reinforce one or two of the most striking findings that would perhaps be the most important to take away, either because they're counterintuitive or they're different than this data base relative to his earlier study in the Cold War, or just because they're so compelling that they're so fundamentally reinforced by the data that they're really almost beyond the point of working hypotheses and provisional results and they seem pretty robust.

Barry, any comments on those issues?

MR. BLECHMAN: Yes, I'd highlight Melanie's final point about the irrelevance really of the size of U.S. forces in the theater of conflict or the area of crisis prior to the incident. This is germane to the current debate about whether the U.S. should station forces overseas on a permanent basis in Europe, or in East Asia for that matter, or, rather, turn more to the kind of mobile temporary deployments that we've been doing more and more in recent years.

Our findings would suggest that when you have a permanent presence, even if it's a quite substantial one, and then a crisis emerges the presence is a given. And so a part of the background in

which the adversary is cognizant and the adversary has chose to challenge a U.S. interest despite that presence. But when you move forces into a region for a temporary exercise, or whatever the reason, it has the advantage of getting his or her attention and saying, oh, look, the U.S. is serious and is now putting more at stake, it is showing a willingness to make a deeper commitment. And that seems to have much more of an effect that the fact that we had kept 40,000 troop — or whatever — in that region for the past several decades.

So it's very relevant to the debate about troops in Germany, troops in South Korea, and current questions that will face the next administration.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you.

So, Melanie, over to you for the final piece of this overview and then we'll get to some of the questions from the audience.

MS. SISSON: Great. Thanks.

And to pick up on Barry's very apt comment there, the big take away I think is to remember that military coercion is communication. So Barry just mentioned the flow of forces from outside end is sending a message, right, it is distinguishing itself from the (inaudible) presence already in region. And the shorthand that we've applied from that is that military coercion really is an attempt to differentiate signal from noise, right. You need to be using the military to send a message directly and as clearly as possible about what it is the United States expects from the adversary, what are the demands on its behaviors. And so the sort of key takeaways and concepts and constructs. And I want to note that these sort of general findings or learnings that come out of the study emerge not just from the statistical analyses but from the really well done, in depth case studies that we benefitted greatly from. We have an excellent roster of scholars and experts contributing their thinking to this project. And the study would clearly be half of what it is in the absence of their insights. And so I'm drawing on both of those elements, that statistical modeling to sort of reveal some patterns in causation in conjunction with the thinking and theory and understanding and interpretation that's embedded in those really rich case studies.

So, again, the thing I would just stomp my foot about when we think about military coercion is that it is communication, it is a form of communication, and we need to remember that and treat it as such, right. And what are we communicating then is the question and how do we do it

successfully. We saw some of the “hows”, right, and I can encapsulate those in a couple of bullet points, if you will.

Some of them are very old and familiar sort of tropes at this point. So, for example, we should remember Sun Tzu. We need to know ourselves and we need to know the adversary, right. So we need to understand in the U.S. what our priorities are and how much we care about a particular conflict of interest, how much cost is the United States ready to absorb itself, how resolved is it — in the form of being willing to absorb cost, right — how resolved is it and how much is it willing to accept as we proceed out to embark upon this military coercion.

We also need to understand the target, not just our ability to hurt the target, right, and not just our willingness to hurt the target, but we need to understand what the target values, what motivates the target. The target gets to decide what is painful for them, we don’t get to decide that, right. We ought to know, we ought to learn, we ought to use all of our inter-agency tools, our intelligence community, our scholarship. We’ve got all of these resources in the United States. We need to understand and have — a colleague of mine likes to call it empathy for the adversary in the sense of being able to understand what they care about so we can target our actions, our imposition of cost appropriately.

We need — because it is communication again — to be specific. It is much harder for a target to comply with our demands if they are confused as to what those are. If they don’t know what behaviors the United States is looking for, it’s much harder for them to achieve it. They may not be trying, you know, to misbehave or to disagree or — I can’t find the right word for it — they’re not trying — they may want to do the right thing in terms of what the United States is asking it for, but they can’t understand what that is. So being specific with our demands and with our threats is important.

Finally, I think we have to remember that the world is a manifold and complex place and we cannot wish away context, right. We cannot presume that factors outside of our control do have an effect on the outcome of these coercive exchanges. And so what that means is as decision makers are considering using the Armed Forces for military coercion, they need to be sensitive to and aware of those contextual factors that either help or hurt, right. So we should know our sanctions in place, is it a presidential election year, right. We may not be able to control either of those in the immediate sense, but we should understand going in what they might mean about the likelihood of success in a coercive

exchange.

So those are sort of the big take away lessons that I've drawn from the study. And I'll again stop there and see if Barry, if you have any others you'd like to add or, Mike, if we're ready to move into questions.

MR. BLECHMAN: I might just add one thing that Melanie hasn't brought out yet, which is the choices available to U.S. decision makers on which forces to move into the region when we want to coerce someone. You know, we have 11 aircraft carriers and we often think, oh, we'll have to send a carrier, but they're so limited in number. Well, in addition, we have I think it's 7 amphibious carriers. These are the same size as the carriers the Chinese are building, but we don't call them aircraft carriers. But we found in our study that moving an amphibious ready group into a region had just as much effect as moving an aircraft carrier into that region, which means that decision makers have a much wider choice of resources and perhaps we're not so constrained or not as constrained as the Armed Forces often portray us.

MS. SISSON: Mike, it's your turn — you're on mute.

MR. BLECHMAN: It's nice to see you, but you're muted.

MR. O'HANLON: (Laughing)

MR. BLECHMAN: There you are.

MR. O'HANLON: You're very kind. So I'm now on my phone, but I've managed to read most of the questions in the chat function when I was still on the computer, so let me begin with some of those.

One question had to do with whether the world has changed so much since the Cold War that we really should think of these two studies as apples and oranges. Of course, this is a more academic question because we're still in the post-Cold War world and your study was about the post-Cold War world. So even if these are apples and oranges, it doesn't affect the relevance of your study going forward. But the question had to do with whether in the Cold War we had fairly clear spheres of influence, if you will, whereas in the post-Cold War world a lot of the effort has been to try to create new rules of the road, new places of American influence. Maybe not in Korea, for example, but certainly in the Baltic States or in parts of the Middle East.

And so to what extent are we talking about fundamentally different kinds of problems, you know, trying to use coercion for American foreign policy purposes during the Cold War versus post-Cold War?

MS. SISSON: Well, so, Barry, do you want to go first?

MR. BLECHMAN: Sure. You make a very good point. And not only are the two international environments very different, but the two studies are very different.

As Melanie pointed out, in the first study we were only able to correlate factors with success. We weren't able to isolate causes, determinants of success. Our statistical methods were, frankly, primitive. And we only looked at a sample of cases.

In the later study, Melanie and our colleagues at the University of Maryland were able to determine causality, which is a very different thing, and were able to look comprehensively at all the cases. So it's a much more sophisticated study I would say. The phenomena that we're looking at are the same and the phenomena are very important in the world we live in now. But I think the two studies are very different. And, you know, I wouldn't — there were differences in findings and I wouldn't be concerned about those. But the concept underlying them is similar, is the same, and perhaps that's the important thing.

To emphasize that, the Armed Forces not only can be used in conflict to achieve ends directly, but can be used to persuade others to achieve our ends for us without actually going to all out war.

MS. SISSON: Yeah, absolutely. I agree entirely. And I think that the thing I will just emphasize is that our definition of coercion, the phenomenon that we're interested in, is derived directly from the original studies. So I think while they may be different varietals of apples, I don't think it's an apples to oranges situation because there is that direct conceptual line.

MR. O'HANLON: One more question concerned the degree to which the new kinds of gray area warfare that we could undertake, or maybe more to the point, that adversaries might conduct, either against us or our allies, is somehow captured within your framework. Cyber-attack, terrorism, other kinds of nontraditional, non-Cold War kinds of aggression or use of violence, or even electrons to try to achieve an outcome.

Do you feel like your findings are relevant as we try to understand how American national security policy can affect the likelihood that foreign actors will use those kind of tactics and techniques and technologies against us or our allies?

MS. SISSON: What I would say to that is that the question mark is more around whether or not coercion is the right way to approach those exchanges in the first place, right. So there is nothing inherent about any of those behaviors that I can automatically say well, you know, no coercive effort on the part of the United States should ever be employed, and it will work or it won't work, right. But that question mark has to be asked and the answer has to be assessed against the nature of the exchange itself. I don't see any reason behaviorally you could say we can't coerce a change in cyber behavior. In fact, although we didn't study, you know, the cyber realm for this particular work, we talk a lot about cyber deterrence, right. So those concepts are still applicable even in these — as you say — sort of gray areas.

The real question is about what is the right response for the United States based on what it wants to achieve, and if the military can be useful in that or not.

MR. O'HANLON: Another question concerns where there is any particular case from the last 27 years, or the last 30, in which you think it's especially compelling that the way we might have approached a problem was not useful and we should have used something short of war. I'm not sure if this is sort of a veiled way of talking about the Iraq and Afghanistan invasions or a more general question, but to what extent would you look at a particular crisis and sort of imagine replaying that crisis with whatever tools you think might have been more optimal for handling it than the ones we actually employed?

So is there a case, or two or three, that jump out at you as ones where you could go back armed with the knowledge that you've now got from your study and have the United States replay that crisis response or that act of coercion that's particularly, you know, logical to you that we should have done something other than what we did?

MR. BLECHMAN: I might jump in and talk about our attempt to coerce Milošević to end the war, to come to Dayton and end the war. We did just about everything wrong for several years. And as a consequence of that thousands of people lost their lives in the former Yugoslavia. We were divided

at home. The President was determined that we would not have causalities. We were divided among allies and we were sending mixed messages. As Melanie had said being clear about your objective is essential. And when we finally took military action, we were very, very timid. As we said, we used kinetic activity, bombing, but we tried to avoid getting at anything essential. So first we bombed air defense batterys and then we bombed other military targets. And Milošević kind of laughed that off. He said oh, they're not serious, they're not serious.

It was only when we began, finally, to bomb things that he cared about. And this highlights the importance of understanding the target, the individual target's values. When we began to bomb things he valued in Belgrade and things valued by the cohorts that support, was he willing to concede to our objective.

So I think that's a very interesting case. It was a very costly case for many people.

MR. O'HANLON: Melanie, would you like to add anything to that answer?

MR. BLECHMAN: Melanie, do you have any other examples?

MS. SISSON: No, I think that's perfectly put.

MR. O'HANLON: Okay, great.

We have a question about — and, Barry, you got at this a little bit, but there was a specific question about aircraft carriers. And maybe it also has a utility as a more general kind of question.

To what extent can we take the findings of your study and draw broader lessons and guides about future American military force planning, budgeting, resource allocation, modernization? Because the question is does this study bolster the argument for continuing to fund and build aircraft carriers since there are other questions about their future utility and survivability? And now you've apparently shown that whether it's a carrier or an amphibious ship or battalion of ground forces or, you know, a squadron of fighter jets based on land, it may not matter that much which of those things we send if we're trying to achieve a given outcome.

So does this study sort of argue against aircraft carriers writ large?

MS. SISSON: So I would not say that it argues against aircraft carriers writ large. What I would say is what Barry had said earlier, what it really argues for is some flexible minds, right. We have

flexibility in the tools that we can apply and the Force packages and the Force design. And so we hope that this work can feed into those conversations. I think that overdrawing, you know, balls and strikes based on this would be misguided. I do hope, however, that it generates precisely this kind of conversation, which is okay, how do we think about the Force structures that we need, what is it that we need the military to achieve, what tools do we have, how can we align them, do we need to overweight in any one direction, or is a more balanced set of investments merited, right. I hope this book can contribute to that kind of process.

MR. O'HANLON: Excellent. There's a question about sanctions more generally. And, again, maybe this is sort of in the same broad category of the previous question, trying to think of what we can deduce about a whole type of instrument of American foreign policy from your specific study. And it's about sanctions and whether in effect you are arguing more categorically against the use of sanctions in U.S. foreign policy writ large, or are your conclusions more specific to the situation where sanctions are combined with military coercion to try to achieve a specific outcome at a specific moment in time?

MS. SISSON: Yes, it's a really important and relevant question. I appreciate that. And the latter fashioning is the answer, Mike.

So we didn't study sanctions, right, specifically. We did not examine whether sanctions as sanctions are an effective tool of policy. What we examined were these specific circumstances in which the military was invoked in conjunction with sanctions that were in place either before and/or imposed after, right. So this is not any kind of blanket statement about sanctions. I do think it is important to note, however, the interaction between these two tools used and how they're used in sequence and how that affects the likelihood of success. And I'll ask Barry maybe to add that last layer of the why, why would this sequencing, why would this mutuality of use decrease the likelihood of success in achieving those military coercive goals.

MR. BLECHMAN: Yes, thanks. Well, first I should say there have been studies showing that sanctions are relatively ineffective means of achieving foreign policy goals — studies done across the street from Brookings at the International Institute for Economics. But more generally, sanctions have become a kind of default policy lever for U.S. decision makers. We don't really want to get too deeply involved, we don't want to put lives at risk, we're tied up in the Middle East, for example, and so we'll say

oh, we'll put some sanctions on them. And it's often interpreted — I think particularly when the sanctions come after the military threat has been made, it's interpreted as a sign of weakness. Well, the Americans don't want to go to war or they're not willing to go to war over this so they're putting sanctions on. And there's ways around sanctions. But it's interpreted as a sign of weakness quite often I think. It's not to say they can't work in particular circumstances and they don't achieve some goals, but they've become too automatic a response I'd say in recent years.

MR. O'HANLON: We've got a few more minutes left and a couple of more questions. But I wanted also to give you both a chance — since we've been talking about some failures or some problems, whether it's the Balkans in the 1990s or combining sanctions with military coercion, I wanted to ask whether there were any striking examples of success, places where when you look through the data, study the case, saw the statistical outcomes and also the detailed case study outcomes, if there were — even though you've both been following American foreign policy for a long time and therefore probably weren't surprised by too many of the big picture outcomes — whether there were certain specific findings that were examples of successful practice that we should perhaps try to employ more frequently, more habitually in U.S. national security policy?

MS. SISSON: Yes, thanks. I think that that's important and it's a nice — I'm glad we got here because, you know, one of the things I want to emphasize about the book is that this is something the United States can do well, right. We can use the military effectively, right.

And so one of those cases that stands out to me is the 1999 Taiwan Strait confrontation. And the things that I look at about success, in that case it was the Taiwan leadership had made some statements that ran counter to the One-China policy, China reacted predictably and did some military exercises and some missiles were fired. And the United States became involved. And what I'm looking at is the process for the way in which the United States responded. So basically it was a really cohesive communicative response. We had government officials across departments saying the same and consistent message. There had been a diplomatic visit scheduled to Taiwan, but with the right language around not needing to escalate unnecessarily given the circumstances. At the same time the United States increased its arms sales to Taiwan and moved two carrier groups into the vicinity, into the surrounding seas, right, but postured them in such a place that they weren't threatening, they were just

known to be there, right. So it was a very cohesive, comprehensive use of the military in conjunction with these other elements of U.S. influence.

So that's what was striking to me.

MR. O'HANLON: Barry, any additional comments that you would like to add?

MR. BLECHMAN: Oh, I think I would just reemphasize what Melanie said already, the importance of — well, one, understanding of the adversary or the targets values. What is it he or she is really after? And, secondly, providing a consistent message across government agencies, across officials, which get at that specific value, which makes clear that we understand what's at stake and that we're willing to go to the mat for it. And that's more important than the details of how the Forces have moved or which Forces have moved.

MR. O'HANLON: There's one last set of questions from the audience and then I want to finish up — we'll go a couple of minutes late since we started late due to my technical issues — I want to finish up by asking you both about Russia and China today. Since the National Defense Strategy has elevated great power competition to the very top tier of national security policy — and I realize your study may only speak to certain dimensions of the U.S.-Russia and the U.S.-China relationships — but given the importance of those, I want to see if we can finish up by asking you if you have any further insights.

But before I get to that, let me capture the last two questions from the audience. And they both have to do with American internal cohesion and politics. One of them sounds more specific to the Trump era and the other is more general.

So the general one, you say in the study that we somehow seem to do better when we have divided government. Is that really a robust finding? And, if so, how do you explain it?

And then — I think you touched o this earlier, Melanie, but maybe a little bit more detail.

And then, second, at a time when, as today, we have such intense strife in our politics, are there any lessons that you would leave policy makers with in these next few months of a difficult presidential election year? And then, you know, as we move towards a new presidential term, whether it's President Trump, Vice President Biden, who is elected, any lessons for that period as well?

Over to you both on those questions about internal cohesion and divided government.

MS. SISSON: Sure. Why don't I tackle divided government and then, Barry, you can

follow on with the second question there.

So the finding is robust, yes. And it actually echoes other scholarship in the field as well. And the reason for that is that it is actually a sign of commitment of resolve. If you can get these two fractious parties to agree on the importance of this military coercive action, it carries some indicator of I think the resolve that's being communicated to the adversary, right.

So that can cut both ways, of course, right, insofar as the adversary might think that it's less likely that the president will get approval for any particular action. But that, in fact, is what it makes it more compelling when there is that cohesion around a foreign policy action from a divided government, right.

MR. O'HANLON: Barry, any thoughts on the current moment in U.S. —

MR. BLECHMAN: Well, it's a dangerous period we're entering I think. It's a time where adversaries might think they can take advantage of the divided government, the divided population in the United States where they might think it would be difficult for the U.S. to act. So we're entering a period that's fraught with danger. And I think it's essential that both branches reaffirm when necessary our current commitments and our willingness to stand up for them and to make clear that our political differences notwithstanding, we're willing to continue to support our commitments and our allies.

MR. O'HANLON: And now to pick up on that last point, and then conclude with the specific lessons you might offer for dealing with Russia and China going forward. And I realize we've already touched on a number of aspects already, so maybe you just want to reiterate and summarize any key points.

A lot of cases in your book do pertain to Russia in the2014 time period after the invasion and annexation of Crimea and the Russian supported aggression in Eastern Ukraine. So you've got a lot of material to work with there, a lot of things you looked at in regard to those cases.

Melanie, you just spoke about Taiwan Strait crises from the late 1990s and there are other cases regarding China as well.

Any further final thoughts you two might want to add on those questions of Russia and China? Or while you've got the podium, any other concluding remarks?

Over to you, please.

MS. SISSON: Sure. Thanks, Mike.

Yeah, I think the general lessons of the study are broadly applicable across different actors, different states. I will just say that one of the things I worry about as we move ahead over the coming decades, is as I said before, coercion is communication, it requires understanding of the adversary and it requires that the adversary understand us and what we're signaling as well.

You know, in the Cold War we had a really dense network, a communicative network of treaties and exchanges and talks and communities, right. We've never had those with China and they've been dismantled. The ones that we've had have been dismantled with Russia. And I think that what that means is that it makes the quality of our signals precarious. We don't have a good understanding of how China will interpret military moves, we don't have a good understanding of necessarily what they're doing with their military and why and what the value. And so it degrades our ability to communicate carefully and increases the risk of miscommunication, misperception, and inadvertent escalation, something that I know you, Mike, have thought a lot about, in particular in that region. And that worries me.

And so in addition to the specific lessons from the is book, the general lesson — my hope— is that moving forward we can approach our understanding of China and Russia a bit differently than we have in the recent past and figure out ways to minimize the likelihood that otherwise minimal exchanges can escalate well beyond their intended scope.

MR. BLECHMAN: I certainly second those recommendations about rebuilding communication channels and mutual understandings about behavior.

In the case of Russia, I think it's essential that whether it's a reelected Trump administration or a Democratic administration, that we reaffirm, rebuild, strengthen our commitment to NATO and make clear to Russia that we are as committed to the members of NATO now as we ever have been. And we can do that diplomatically and verbally, but in addition, we can do it through a continuation of the exercises we started in terms of temporary deployments of land based aircraft and ground forces to work with the allies in Eastern Europe, to develop familiarity and so forth. We don't need to base substantial numbers of forces in Poland or in other Eastern European countries, but a series of exercises to make clear of our commitment would be very helpful.

The case of China I think is more difficult because our commitments are not as clear

there. The commitment to Taiwan is very clear, but the Chinese have been pushing, as you know, the East China Sea and the South China Sea, make staking claims, and our response has been ambiguous at best. And that will take some thought as to what to do and how to do it, and to try to reach some understanding and to try to build what we've never had with China, as Melanie pointed out, some series of communications, channels, and understandings about our respective interests and our respective willingness to tolerate the other's behavior in that region.

Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: I want to thank you both very much. I also want to put in a final plug for the book, "Military Coercion and U.S. Foreign Policy". I'm not sure if this is inverted through the technology. But in any event, it's an excellent and very readable book of about 200 pages. In addition to 3 or 4 main chapters by Barry and Melanie, we also have case studies on Syria by Alex Bollfrass, Iran and Iraq by Ken Pollack, the Balkans by Bill Durch, Russia by Thomas Wright, and China by Michael Chase. So excellent reading that explains a lot of these case studies and, again, answers some of the questions we were just talking about with applicability to the most pressing American national security problems going forward. So it's a very policy relevant book, extremely researched and written.

Barry and Melanie, I want to thank you again for joining us today, and congratulations.

MS. SISSON: Thanks very much, Mike.

MR. BLECHMAN: Thank you, Mike.

MR. O'HANLON: So, with best wishes to all and enjoy the rest of your summer, and we'll see you again soon. Signing off.

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