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WORLD IN DANGER?
EUROPE AND THE WORLD IN 2021

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Discussion:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. HILL: Good morning, everyone. I'm really delighted that everyone could join us today for what's going to be a really excellent discussion between two of the leading global, I would say, not just international and transatlantic U.S. and European commentators on the title of a book just written by one of our participants today, "The World in Danger."

We have with us Wolfgang Ischinger, former ambassador to the United States from Germany and the head of the Munich Security Conference, who I think most people know only too well and I don't need to have any further introduction; and Ian Bremmer, the head of the Eurasia Group, who people also see most frequently on their televisions these days from his undisclosed location in secrecy and quarantine somewhere in the United States, which is where all of us are these days. And I'm Fiona Hill, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institutions, equally sequestered away. So, I'm really glad that everyone could join us from wherever they are today.

Wolfgang has just had a book published. It's being published, first of all, in Germany in German, but we've just got an English translation. In fact, a revised a version of this published by the Brookings Press under this title of "The World in Danger."

And I wanted to turn to Wolfgang first because, clearly, as is the nature with books, they're written quite some time before they're published. And this title appears extraordinarily prescient now coming out at the beginning of 2021, after a global pandemic has raged and engulfed us all and it's still going on, the first in a 100 years since the 1918, 1919 flu pandemic. And when Wolfgang was writing the book, I mean, of course, this emerged in the course of your writing. But you couldn't really have foreseen quite the impact that it would have had over the course of that following year.

And also, Wolfgang, you were worried very much about the U.S.-European relationship. This was after, you know, several years of tensions with the Trump administration and European counterparts. But also, perhaps, you couldn't have envisaged the turn of events here in the United States, which have been a shock not to just to all of us sitting here, but to you, as well.

So, I think I'd like to turn it over to you to give us some thoughts, not just on the book and how you conceived it in the first instance, but how you think it sort of set the stage for where we are now. And then I'll bring in Ian to make some comments.

And I just, for the audience, before we get into the discussion, we've already received ahead of time about 22 questions. We've ordered them out into different themes here and I've got the names of the people who submitted them ahead of time. But if others as we're going along would like to have a question, please use the chat function and one of my colleagues will send those to me and I will try to weave them into the discussion as we go.

So, Wolfgang, thank you so much and thank you to everyone else for joining us this morning, this afternoon, this evening, depending on where you are.

Wolfgang, the inevitable problem that we always have when we're doing Zooms, I think you're on mute still there. If having an issue, we'll see if our technicians can help.

AMBASSADOR ISCHINGER: It's coming now.

MS. HILL: There we are. There we are.

AMBASSADOR ISCHINGER: Can you hear me now? Yeah.

Well, Fiona, first of all, let me say you thank you to you and, of course, also to Ian for doing this. It's a wonderful opportunity for me. I wish I could have pursued my original plan, which was to go on a little book tour once the English version came out or late last year, but, of course, because of the pandemic that is now not possible. I'm looking forward to the moment when we can more easily travel again across the Atlantic.

So, you know, when I started thinking about this book the original intention was, of course, to write a book addressed to a German audience. And my original intention was in 2018, a year or so after Donald Trump had taken over, my intention was to kind of write a wake-up call type of book for Germans. My fellow Germans have been told ever since 1990, when we had German reunification, that, you know, paradise has now begun because we are now only surrounded by friends. Soviet army is gone, actually the Soviet Union is gone, even Poland is now an ally of NATO. So, why do we need an army? Why do we need the Bundeswehr? We're now living in the happy of being surrounded by friends.

That kind of thinking, I thought two and a half, almost three years ago, needs to be shaken up a little bit because it has literally prevented many of my fellow Germans to see that as we enjoyed our life in this European cocoon, we did not pay enough attention to the fact that there was terrorism not only continuing in places like Afghanistan, that there was a war in Syria, that there was a

breaking apart of a country that most people can't find on the map called Mali, but with enormous security implications for the entire region, etc., etc. So, I could go on and on.

So, the original intention was to explain to Germans that actually the world has become more risky, threats have been growing, and we need to worry about that. And we cannot simply sit there and wait for our American patron friend in Washington, D.C., to take care of it because Donald Trump has actually sowed the seeds of doubt with respect to the NATO -- the substance of the NATO arrangement of the North Atlantic Alliance. So, that was the intention.

Then when we saw what had happened just before the pandemic broke out a year ago, I thought it would be a useful idea to revise the book and adapt it so that it would also, hopefully, be found interesting as a European view, of course, by non-European audiences in terms of what about the future of Europe? What about the future of the transatlantic alliance? How should Europe interact with China? And what about our future relationship with Russia, etc?

So, I'm really delighted that we felt with Brookings Press we were able to publish this English language revised revision. And quite frankly, I've had a number of phone calls from friends in America who thought it really quite funny that I included in the book my little anecdote about how I met, you know, in a very naïve way as far as I'm concerned, Donald Trump at Mar-a-Lago in early 2005, where he had just opened this resort hotel. And they arranged for a big charity ball and I end up -- a couple of my fellow ambassadorial friends were invited. You know, it was a white tie affair, very formal, very fancy. And I even had a small little chat with Donald later that evening about his German roots. And I had absolutely no idea, and I can't forgive it to myself, I had absolutely no idea that I should consider this person a future candidate and actually a future president and now, looking back at it today, the only one who was ever impeached twice. I had no idea in 2005. So, diplomacy is also full of surprises occasionally.

MS. HILL: Well, I think lots of people are looking back to all kinds of encounters that they had never anticipated and certainly the way that things would unfold over all of this period.

I mean, I think it's interesting that you started here taking us back to 1990 and the German view that a whole new world of peace and prosperity had broken out and, you know, the expression that you used about a cocoon. I mean, all of us remember only too well, and, of course, he's

one of our neighbors at Brookings at SAIS, Francis Fukuyama's idea about the end of history and also thinking we'd come into an era where a lot of these struggles of ideological currents had passed away with the end of the Cold War along the lines that you've laid out here.

But, of course, that's 30 years ago. And as you say, a lot happens even from 2005 and your encounter at Mar-a-Lago.

And you mentioned China. And, Ian, you've been looking at the China rise for some considerable period of time. And if you think back yourself, also as a student of the Soviet Union when it was the Soviet Union, the Eastern Bloc, you and I met in grad school when, you know, we were both starting out looking at these, you know, I'm sure that we don't really want to talk about how long ago that was. But, you know, we had a similar sort of perspective on the way that the world was unfolding.

And the rise of China also was not anticipated in that particular period. I mean, I remember us all working on various research projects and looking for sure about how the relationship with the Soviet Union and the former Soviet Union and Russia would evolve. But China was not being factored in in any particular way in the 1990s.

So, I mean, Ian, kind of let's try to sort of forgive Wolfgang for not foreseeing the fatefulness of his meeting in Mar-a-Lago in 2005. But, I mean, how do you think we should have anticipated that things unfold if we look back to that period that Wolfgang has started with?

MR. BREMMER: If my dear friend Wolfgang had actually thought Trump would be president in 2005, I would have asked for his head to be checked. Right? So, to be clear, I think we can all forgive him for that oversight.

I'm delighted to be with both of you who I've known for a long time. And, you know, before I answer your question, one thing I would say is that I think all three of us are wrestling right now in very personal ways with the fact that we're historically kind of scholars and public intellectuals and talk in the realm of ideas and yet we all three of us in personal ways had to become kind of intellectual activists in this environment. And it's been kind of forced on us because we see developments in the world that we think are dangerous, that we understand represent a tipping point, and we want to do something about it. And that's one of the reasons I was particularly happy to join the two of you for this event this morning.

You're right that, you know, we used to talk about China and India as the rising emerging markets, so many books and economists' coverage written about that. We talked about the BRICS, right? Nobody talks about the BRICS anymore. China's going to be the largest economy in the world, right now it looks like 2028. That's pretty significant. Their growth last year with the pandemic of 2%; their expected growth of 7% or 8% this year.

Their ability, after they admitted finally to the pandemic occurring in their country and spreading internationally, their ability to shut it down was pretty extraordinary. And look, this just reflects one of a few things that I think the Western commentariat has gotten wrong.

I mean, so you pointed to one, the end of history. And I think a better argument in retrospect is that 1991 sewed the beginnings of the end of the American order, precisely because we were so indifferent to what might happen to Russia as a consequence of the loss of Soviet empire and our lack of engagement, whether it was the NATO-Russia Council or all the things. I mean, you remember the who lost Russia debate, all of us do.

A second big one that we got wrong, that everyone got wrong, was the idea that as China got more powerful and wealthier they would have to reform to look more like the United States, both economically and politically, or they would fail. That's completely wrong. Xi Jinping today has consolidated more power, he is more authoritarian, has ended term limits. He is more state capitalist. We have not heard from Jack Ma in months. You know, fintech is becoming the new strategic sector on top of AI and a whole other bunch of things.

But, you know, also, the commentariat got wrong the idea that Brexit would be the beginning of the end for Europe and would make Europe weaker and more divided. And Wolfgang and I talked about this a couple weeks ago. Actually the European response to a really bad Brexit and what's happened in the U.K. is, you know, we need to come together in a more constructive way. And I think you've seen the use of the crisis to provide massive redistribution from wealthy countries in Europe to poor countries. I think Brexit informed that to a degree.

So, the fact that people get things wrong because they're path-dependent in the way they look isn't always necessarily going to lead to chaos and disappointment. And I think there are some opportunities, too.

And the fact that the new global order is not going to be an American-led order, the fact that the new global order doesn't mean the United States is back the way we used to be, does also create opportunities for the incoming Biden team to think different. On climate they're clearly doing that. On other issues, too early to say. Maybe I'm a little skeptical, but they can change. And so we'll see. We'll see what we get.

MS. HILL: That's great, Ian. Thank you so much.

I mean, many of the questions that we've got in, because I'll start to weave those in as Ian has provided us with some perfect segues to touch on all of these issues, and I think that this point about everything is not always path-dependent is a very important one. I mean, looking back now we can obviously see the way that things have evolved, but as we look from the present forward, as you say, we tend to push forward the trends we already see. We don't think that there might be some disjuncture or something that could throw these off.

And I think, you know, Wolfgang, that's obviously what spurred you to write the book, pointing out that the past was different from what we thought in 1990, the past being from this vantage point of 2020, and the future is likely to be, too. So, in actual fact, if we pick up on that idea, as well, Ian has talked about climate. We have three big C's as everybody's saying at the moment. We have COVID, which has had huge dislocation effects. It looks like China actually is having a resurgence to some degree. We have to be careful, of course, about how that's going to play out there, too, but showing that it's still got a long way to go before it burns itself out if that's, you know, the right impression it's going to be.

There's climate, major climate change. And China may or may not be well positioned to deal with that. Certainly, technologically China has all of the hallmarks and perhaps a successful response, but China also is a country that has serious problems with water and natural resources, and also has been on -- with its rise over the last 20 years on the kind of same sort of pollution bender that the rest of us have been on since the Industrial Revolution. And so there's a lot of issues for China to contend with there and demographic, you know, change linked to that.

And then, you know, as I said, we've got climate, COVID, and China that are all rolled together there as the three kind of C's for the future.

But, Wolfgang, if you think about that and about the issues that you've raised in the book, I mean, what are the implications of that and based on what Ian's just said for the future of the EU? As Ian said, Brexit has not been the end of Europe. It's certainly causing some major problems for the United Kingdom. But what does the larger landscape look like for the EU with these other three big challenges in the next couple of years or so? And what do you think the Biden administration should do -- these, again, some of the questions that are being asked in the chat here, as well -- to reposition itself vis-à-vis Europe?

Because there's no going back to a relationship that preceded the Trump administration this last four years. Too much has changed in this time.

AMBASSADOR ISCHINGER: Fiona, quite clearly, for the European Union, which has established itself, which had established itself as a major trading block, an economic power, no doubt about it, for the EU the challenge going forward is to become an adult member of the global strategic community, to develop the ability to be taken slightly more seriously as a global player, which the European Union so far is not really. I mean, we'd love to play a more significant role. We have been looking rather helplessly at what developed in Syria, did we not, and Libya and elsewhere. Our efforts to play a role when it comes to, for example, peacekeeping or military activities have been weak because our capabilities weren't there.

So, I think for the European Union going forward the big challenge is can we develop capabilities? And can we develop as 27 nations decision-making processes that will avoid the situation that we've been having almost on a daily basis, that each time some question comes up one of the 27 will find a reason to cast a veto, and to make the European Union look, you know, undecided and impotent? So, I think that's the challenge.

And as a matter of fact, I'm actually quite optimistic that given our performance in the pandemic or the lessons learned from the pandemic, I'm more optimistic today than I would have been a year ago. The European Union, after initial despair and disorganized separate national reactions, the EU has actually gotten its act together. We have big debates at this moment was it a good idea or was it not such a good idea to make the European Union the organization that gets all the vaccine material and distributes it throughout the EU?

But the fact is we took that decision. We took that decision and we also took a decision, which I think is an historic one, last summer, for the first time in history the European Union, given the magnitude of the economic crisis because of COVID-19, allowed itself to enter into a debt situation. That was contested literally for decades, not only by my country, but in particularly by Germany.

So, actually I think the EU, and I'm really delighted I can say that seriously, the EU is actually coming out of this terrible crisis, I mean, COVID-19, the transatlantic dispute about NATO, etc., and, of course, Brexit, the EU is coming out relatively unharmed and maybe even slightly stronger and, hopefully, a little better prepared. And I'm so glad that we can now hope that the incoming Biden administration on day one, as I understand, will announce that they would rejoin the Paris Climate Accord, speaking of climate. That is what you in America call low-hanging fruit.

Everybody in Europe, from the far right to the far left, will applaud that decision even when it is taken by the Biden administration. In other words, there are a number of things the Biden administration can do or has already announced they would do which would be seen in Europe as most welcome decisions to bring the transatlantic community together again, not working against each other, but trying to work together.

And the big one, that's my concluding point, the big -- the most important medium- and long-term challenge as far as I'm concerned for the transatlantic community between Biden and Ursula von der Leyen and Biden and the successor to Merkel and with Macron, etc., will be how to manage, how to figure out a way to coordinate our relationship with China. I think that's the big one and I hope we can address that this year in a meaningful, organized transatlantic manner.

MS. HILL: Well, thanks, Wolfgang. This really gets to the heart of a number of the questions that we've got, you know, that are really focused in on the feature of the European Union, all of the consequences of Brexit, and trying to repair in some way the relationships with the United States after all the damage of the last several years, but, also, these shifts in the nature of the relationships. And then about handling the relationships with China.

And as I'm listening to you I'm thinking here, you know, what you're describing here is an EU that's trying to define itself completely separate from the U.S. and China. I mean, all of our questions are really kind of putting the EU back in the relationship with either the United States, the traditional

relationship going back to World War II and during the Cold War, and then thinking about a new relationship with the EU and China. And it's actually giving the European Union a little bit less agency in this. I mean, you're describing, in many respects, an EU as obviously an aggregate and amalgamation of independent sovereign states, but as a sort of separate power that's trying to secure its own sovereignty and own place in the world and then interact with others. But it's not defining itself just in terms of these relationships between the U.S. and China.

And I think then that does raise some major questions about how you handle this complex relations. Because certainly President Trump didn't want to coordinate with the European Union on China. I mean, he repeatedly said, you know, this is about the U.S. relationship with China. I'm not going to do all the heavy lifting and then have you take advantage of it. He didn't see the European Union or even some individual European countries, like Germany and the U.K. was extolling the idea of a golden age of U.K. relations with China, as a partner in this. And I do think that does raise some questions, particularly in the light of the EU investment agreement with China about how we work this out.

And, I mean, let me just ask Ian first of all about, you know, obviously there's been a lot of heavy breathing here in the United States about that agreement. There was a tweet from Jake Sullivan, you know, obviously in a mild way because of the restrictions on the incoming administration being able to engage in any formal way with foreign counterparts, but a kind of a tweet there that suggested that, you know, there was some concern about the way that Europeans had rushed into this agreement, so that's been unfolding for some time.

But, I mean, if you think about it from the U.S. perspective here, Ian, is it going to be difficult with an EU that's sort of trying now to flex sovereign muscles and have its own set of relationships that won't always be taking the U.S. perspective into consideration? And how does China look for us and how should we think about it?

MR. BREMMER: Well, the United States is in flux right now, too. Let's be clear that if it wasn't for the pandemic Trump has a second term. And the Europeans know that, too.

And, you know, I'm a little less worried about the nature of the EU-China agreement, in part because the Chinese moved really fast and gave a lot up before Biden became president to get it done. And their ability and willingness to actually execute on the intellectual property promises, for

example the subsidy -- lack of subsidy and transparency promises is virtually zero. So, I do think the execution risk for the Chinese is high. Dissatisfaction of what had just been bought by the Europeans is going to be significant.

And the lack of trust from Europe of China, it remains vastly higher than the problems that the Europeans had and have with the United States right now. That's real. That's not going to go away as China gets more powerful. In fact, in some ways it gets greater. And unlike Southeast Asian countries, unlike Sub-Saharan African countries, which increasingly have no choice but China for vaccines, for debt and investment and everything else, the Europeans do actually have choices. And even the East and South Europeans have more choices now when you have, you know, the EU putting more than 10% of their GDP into their budgets. That's why the Hungarians and Poles ended up having not such a big problem with some of the political conditionalities of that massive investment.

But, you know, I think for the United States this is less about how we reach out and work more closely with the Europeans. Yes, Biden is going to do everything he can. I mean, you know, Blinken's fluency in French and Kerry knows every single one of these leaders well and has for a long time. I mean, there will be a honeymoon. Most of the Europeans want anything but Trump. Biden is indeed anything but Trump.

But let's be clear, Biden's priority one, two, and three, in order to make the European relationship work, has to be address the problems in the United States right now. It has to be to deal with the divisions, has to be to deal with the violence. I mean, the European leaders I've spoken to in the last several days, the response has been disbelief, has been shock, and has also been what are the consequences going to be? What are you going to do to respond to the fact that you legislature was almost decapitated? What are you going to do to Trump who engaged in acts of sedition? And I think my response is mostly I don't think we're going to do very much.

Well, why not? Well, because it's not a big enough crisis for a lot of political leaders in the U.S. to put their country before their party or before their individual ambitions. That's my view. That's a horrible view.

If that view persists, Biden's ability to rebuild the damage that's been done with the European relationship will have a ceiling. It will get better. Of course we'll rejoin Paris. We'll rejoin the

World Health Organization. I mean, leaving the WHO in the middle of a pandemic is an obscenity. I want to be very clear about that.

We can fix a lot of those things, but that's not the real problem. The real problem is that the United States increasingly is vastly more dysfunctional and divided as a political system, as a representative democracy, than our European friends. And that was not true in 1989 when the wall came down. That was not true in 1991 when the Soviet Union collapsed. It wasn't even really true in 9/11 when the Americans and Europeans worked together so closely. It's true now. And this is not just a matter of one administration to rebuild. It is a generational issue, and I'm not sure America has those generational leaders right now.

MS. HILL: You've raised a very important point here, Ian. And I still want to be able to push the China issue with Wolfgang in a moment, but let's kind of think then about two questions here, Wolfgang, that Ian has raised.

The second point that Ian made didn't really come up within the chat discussions that I'm trying to refer back to here, but, of course, China was a major point. And some of the issues that Ian touched upon there have also been reflected in some of the questions. Of course, Ian was talking about the global reach of China and the fact that many countries some considerable distance from both the United States and the European Union have very little choice when it comes to China. China's the big neighbor on their borders. It's the big factor in their economies and also has a great deal of political influence over them because of this economic heft.

And I think one of the questions is, will the European Union think about the implications of China's global role in the way that the United States has? And not just in a security sense because, I mean, obviously, many European states, Germany included, haven't really been thinking about what China's been doing, at least only at the periphery level of thinking, in the South China Seas and in the Northeast Asia Pacific, Southeast Asia, as Ian is suggesting. And it's only been when it's been questions about the sovereignty of European countries, is China getting too much of a foothold, you know, say in some of the more vulnerable countries in Central Eastern Europe or Southeastern Europe when it buys up major assets -- like in Greece with buying the port facilities or making efforts to buy ports and other facilities in other parts of Europe -- that Europe starts to think about that.

So, if Europe is going to be a big global player can it think of China globally? I mean, clearly, France as a member of the EU does. France still has international reach with its navy and still has French possessions, territorial islands out in the Pacific, as well. With the U.K. out, you know, that's kind of a little -- you know, kind of less of an investment there.

So, if you think about that first, Wolfgang. And then I'd actually like to really get to what Ian said about the U.S. domestic side and to get your thoughts, as well. But can the EU think globally about China and the way that China uses its hard power to infringe on the sovereignty of others? It's not just an issue of human rights and Xinjiang and the Uighurs and Tibet, which, of course, Europe has paid very close attention to, but it's this hard power aspect of China and the bullying predation of other countries, as well.

AMBASSADOR ISCHINGER: Fiona, we are at the beginning, we're really literally at the beginning of a process in the European Union of creating something that would deserve to be called a European-China strategy or policy.

Let me be very blunt here about this. Let me start with my own country, Germany. Until a very few years ago, the approach taken by German leaders -- left, middle, right -- was China is actually our biggest export market, full stop. It was only a trade and investment issue. We had very little -- I mean, we did have a human rights process with China, etc., but essentially there was no developed strategy, no developed approach to China regarding such issues as Hong Kong, the human rights issue, etc., etc.

Now, the one thing that I think all members of the European Union have begun to understand in the interim is that if we try to deal with China as individual, very small nations, Germany happens to be the biggest one, we have 83 million inhabitants, that is nothing compared to more than 1 billion Chinese. So, I think we're beginning to try to figure out and we as 27, constituting a significant trading and investment power, can we get our act together and develop something that would actually deserve to be called a European approach to China?

And can we, on the basis of that, engage with the United States of America, with the incoming Biden administration to see where can we identify overlap? Where can we identify shared interests? I'm sure those can be found very easily in Hong Kong, in how to deal with Xinjiang, in human

rights issues, in intellectual properties, cyber, and so many other areas. So, I'm not so pessimistic, but I think it is a major uphill battle.

China, I'm not sure most Americans are aware of this, China has been very, very clever in exploiting the absence of a coherent European China approach. They created this process which they call 17+1. They found 17 European countries, they're all very small countries, and they actually organized a summit with these 17 countries. Not all of them are members of the European Union, but many of them are members of the European Union.

And this is, of course, divide et impera. That is a classic example of how you organize things in such a way that if and when a decision in Brussels needs to be taken on China, China can always call on some of these small countries and tell them didn't we just buy your entire port of Piraeus, you prime minister of Greece? How dare you vote against us because we just bailed you out. This is a perfect example of the kind of challenge, country challenge, we face.

I think the willingness and the awareness in Europe is growing that we need to build this comprehensive strategy and we need to find a way to engage with the United States in order to, hopefully, on important strategic issues, confront China with a transatlantic position. That would be the ideal position. I think that's doable, but I think it's also going to involve very hard or, what do you call it, heavy lifting. Heavy lifting.

Now, on the other question, just very briefly, you know, as a former ambassador I learned that you should never tell your host country what to do. It's a bad idea. So, I'm not going to talk about, you know, what Republicans should not do, etc., etc. That's for Americans to figure out.

What I worry about, Fiona, is that in these types of situations where seen from the outside world the United States, the incoming administration has a weakness because apparently there are, I don't know, 70 million or at least a significant part of the 70 million who consider the new president not a real president, maybe only an illegitimate president. That is seen by the outside world a weakness. And I would be totally surprised, after having spent 40+ years in international diplomacy, I'd be totally surprised if folks in Beijing and Moscow and a number of other capitals wouldn't say let's see, let's check it out. Let's see whether this guy, Joe Biden, is going to be strong enough and has enough support to actually play a role of strength and have time for international things. Maybe he's going to be so

preoccupied with his domestic challenges that we will have more free rein in Africa and in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Joe Biden, that is my concern, will not have a lot of vacation time coming after the 20th of January. He will be tested. I would be totally surprised if the Chinese, the Russians, and others -- and it may -- I'm not talking about military testing, but it could be political, it could be cyber, it could be advances made by the Chinese in the Middle East, in Africa, and elsewhere. In other words, this year starts as a year -- the title of my book is "World in Danger" I think I would say 2021 is a year of significant danger.

MS. HILL: Can I think turn this around? And I'll bring Ian in after this, as well, back to you. There's a couple of questions in the chat, one coming from Damian Murphy over on Capitol Hill, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, you know, which actually picks up on the point that Ian was making about the difficulty of incoming President Biden really being able to take an assertive foreign policy because of the ceiling that everything that you've just spoken about and Ian just laid out will put the divisions on his efforts.

And Damian's, you know, talking about the debate that's going on here in the United States that Jake Sullivan and Tony Blinken and many others were also a part of before even the campaign was underway, about trying to make foreign policy more responsive to the interests of the American people, particularly of the middle class or sometimes seen as the working class in other parts of Europe. And clearly, this is a debate that's been going on in Europe, as well, Ambassador Ischinger. I mean, Germany, having had much more of an egalitarian society in many respects for long periods started to worry also quite recently about inequality.

Clearly, in the United Kingdom rampant inequality, you know, almost as bad as it was back in the '20s and '30s, like here in the United States, was one of the impulses for pushing on Brexit; promises that money that was sent to Brussels would be coming back and spent in the United Kingdom. The gilets jaunes, the yellow vests movement in France, is an outgrowth of inequality in France and the great divide between city elites and the suburbs, the banlieues in Paris, and also the rural areas that have been left behind. We've seen the same in Italy with the rise of populist governments. So this is, you know, I could go on and on. But this is a problem everywhere.

Now, as I'm thinking and listening to you, if we think back to history, to an earlier history,

after World War II, the United States stepped up for Europe when Europe was also divided; when there were coups and efforts in Greece, in Turkey, Portugal, you know, the whole period in Spain to try to get over the Franco period, and the kind of questions about the future of democracy. And the United States helped. Perhaps given the long history of Germany and its struggles with overcoming divisions, not just at the end of World War II, but after the unification of Germany, there's something that you could all do to help, as well.

So, I'm wondering, you know, when Joe Biden is talking about build back better, you know, is there a way of us building forward together transatlantically with Europe? Maybe this is a time that Europe could help the United States. Because, you know, there's a lot of questions that we've had in the chat about can Europe really forgive the United States for this last period? You know, the tensions, the way that Trump treated the allies. There's a lot of feeling of kind of resentment that spills up that the United States, you know, behaved out of character, behaved out of type, and that can't really be forgiven.

Well, you know, as Ian has pointed out, there's a lot of problems that we have here. This is somewhere that Europe could step forward at this particularly point, and particularly Germany. And Damian's asking about lessons, you know, from Germany's own contemporary thinking and his historical thinking.

And then I'd like to ask Ian for his thoughts, as well.

AMBASSADOR ISCHINGER: Well, absolutely, Fiona. I think the single stupidest thing for Germany and actually for the entire European group of populists of the United States, whether you talk about the EU or European NATO populists doesn't make much difference here. The stupidest thing would be for us to sit back and wait until Joe Biden makes everything right again which Donald Trump has made wrong, creating doubts about NATO, calling Europe, the EU, a foe instead of a nice partner, etc., etc.

So, instead of waiting for America to come across the Atlantic again with a friendly face on it -- and, of course, I'm happy to say I should have said at the beginning, you know, a little anecdotal point. The only international decisionmaker I know who attended my conference, the Munich Security Conference, as early as 1980, the only active international decisionmaker that I know is Joe Biden. We could have mentioned John McCain, but he has, of course, left us. We could have mentioned Helmut

Kohl, but he has passed away. So, Joe Biden is really the only person I know with a role at this time, and the single most important role in world affairs at this time, who has been engaged in these types of international activities for 40 years.

So, actually I can't think of a better qualified person than him to deal with what I call the three T's: truth, trust, and transparency. I think these three elements, which sound simple, are really the framework for cooperative, for meaningful, for successful international cooperation and for successful diplomacy. I think Joe Biden can rebuild trust easily as a person, but also through the policies he develops.

We on the European side should come to Washington, should go to Washington, and be mindful of the fact that Joe Biden needs to be able to say to the American taxpayer we're actually doing stuff with Europe that benefits our farmer or our taxpayer, our middle class. If he says he wants to do a foreign policy for the middle class, that's exactly what he will want to say to the American taxpayer before the next election in 2022 comes up. And I think there are many issues where, in fact, we can maybe not help, but where we can be cooperative and have an open mind.

Personally, for example, I know that this is not a common position in Germany at this moment, but if you ask me I would advocate an initiative by my own government. Chancellor Merkel will, of course, step down later this year. I would advocate an initiative by my own government, by the entire European Union to reopen the question should we not propose to the United States another attempt at TTIP, you know, a comprehensive trade-investment cooperation scheme that would benefit both sides of the Atlantic and would bring us together closer, would make us stronger together. I thought it was foolish at the time that we failed to get that through because of also considerations on both sides of the Atlantic.

So, there is low-hanging fruit. We should come to the U.S. in a proactive manner and, in fact, help create a situation where Joe Biden can proclaim -- can present success stories to his voters, especially to those who believe that Donald Trump should have gotten a second term.

MS. HILL: Ian, what would success look like or, you know, kind of the most useful proactive approach? I mean, there's a lot of skepticism, to be frank, Wolfgang, about TTIP just in the form that it was before because the world has evolved. And, I mean, Ian, you've been talking about this, I caught you recently, we've got a lot of -- on the TV and some of your comments, we've got a lot of

divisions over the digital sector, taxation, you know, trying to think about this in the OECD context or just the sort of massive taxation, not just the regulation of the digital giants that are based in the United States.

I mean, this will all be part of Biden's approach, as well, to figure out how to put the U.S. economy back on a footing. So, a struggle over who taxes where and where the revenues go is not going to be perhaps the most propitious beginning here.

But, Ian, you know, obviously China and Russia will be watching us very closely, too. I mean, China has a different perspective from Russia, which likes to see more divisions. But we have to be able to show here that we are resilient and viable and able to do things together. But also for the United States it'll be very important to have that, as Wolfgang said, seeing that success. Joe Biden has to deliver just as all democracies have to.

So, Ian, what would it look like from your perspective?

MR. BREMMER: So, let's stipulate that coming out of the box the Europeans are going to want Biden to look stronger than he is. They are going to want to help him get some successes, make the summitry look good and positive, and it's in everyone's interest for that to occur.

I think that if we could -- if that works, at the margins it will make a difference. And some of the areas that I could see that being promising, I mean, there's a big difference between Europe with a very strong, sustainable stimulus that also plays out with tariffs and trade and where the Americans are lumped in with the more carbon-intensive economies. And, as a consequence, we have a trade fight with climate -- with the Europeans over climate.

That looks very different than saying we want to make the COP meeting in November in Scotland the historic breakthrough meeting that is much bigger than anything we accomplished in Paris. And Boris Johnson, by the way, is also going to be a big part of that because he's hosting it. And that's the Americans, the Europeans, the Brits trying -- and John Kerry maybe having a shot at the Nobel that he's so desperately for such a long time, all of that stuff. Right? So, that would be interesting.

In technology, there is a big difference between the United States and Europe that both understand that China is the world's largest data market. It is largely controlled by the government. It is oriented towards maximal surveillance, no privacy, enormous consolidation, and an absence of human

rights and liberties. And that even though we have different approaches, we need to find a common approach together not just on 5G, but on anything with a chip in it.

And we need to create architecture around the ethics of artificial intelligence and around how we roll out applications and all the rest. There's a very big difference between that and the U.S. social media companies de-platforming Trump and #StopTheSteal and the Europeans saying that's wrong. And I'm concerned.

I mean, both of these issues, fundamental issues about new architecture that we don't yet have the real organizational sort of -- we don't even have the people in place to deal with it, never mind the organizational structure. You know, a very constructive U.S.-European relationship on those issues would make the world look different than one where the Europeans are going their own way. So, I do think that, you know, at the margins, and the margins are big, they're the kind of margins that my students frequently turn in on their papers that make them more pages, you know, I think that that does matter.

But I want to go back to what you said before with Jake Sullivan. And that is we need a foreign policy that resonates with the average American. We need a foreign policy the average American feels like it matters to them. We need a system that feels less grey, less broken.

So, I mean, I personally think that TTIP would be a great thing to have done strategically for the U.S. and Europe. I would suggest that before anything is promoted by the Germans, have them ask the Biden administration quietly, and I'm sure Wolfgang would do that, to make sure this is something they remotely feel like they could lift. Because let's keep in mind TPP failed under Obama and Biden, not under Trump. Obama and Biden couldn't get it done. And it's because the average American does not support free trade right now.

And the average American does not support U.S. troops all over the world right now. And the average American does not support promoting and exporting democracy all over the world right now because we're not even sure that we have democracy in our own country.

So, you know, as much as I believe that the transatlantic relationship is a lot to play for, and we will have people in the Biden administration, including the president-elect himself, that are oriented to doing this, that we have to have a foreign policy that feels connected to American citizens.

And we have failed at that. The foreign policy establishment in my country has failed at that for decades. People on this call have failed at that for decades.

And they failed not because they don't care, though many don't care. They've also failed because it's freaking hard and the country's getting much more divided. The social media business, actual business structure, is itself incompatible with a healthy civil society and because the nature of capitalism and the animal spirits that are unleashed kind of uniquely by the American system increasingly isn't relevant for lots of Americans that have very little to contribute to that.

Those are -- and so for Jake Sullivan -- I mean, again, I really believe that Jake is being honest when he says I want a foreign policy that resonates for average Americans. But we should all recognize just how daunting a task that is going to be. And if you don't get that right, again, the ceiling on what the transatlantic relationship could be, even with the best of intentions, is actually pretty low.

MS. HILL: I think this is a very important point, Ian. And actually, Wolfgang, I remember from an earlier Munich Security Conference that you and many of your colleagues were discussing about how to bring in more varied voices into the discussion. The Munich Security Conference is one of those linchpin events for the transatlantic dialogue and you had mayors and, you know, governors.

I mean, obviously, the Munich Security Conference takes place in one of the German (inaudible) in Bavaria. Germany itself is a very varied and diverse country. But the question is how to bring in people who are more representative of the groups that Ian is mentioning, that the foreign policy establishment tends to be divorced from. Even though we may have had our origins in, you know, kind of these settings, once you become part of this foreign policy grouping you kind of -- you're talking about the larger meta level things and not how they affect the micro events back at home.

But, I mean, this seems to be something, though, that the EU might be well placed to assist with actually. Because the European Union, like most European diplomatic services, has representation all over the United States. You have consulates and the delegation headquarters, relationships with governors and mayors of big metropolitan areas, but these could be taken down, as well. And I think, you know, Europe has great experience with regional development, you know. So, this may be something when we're thinking about TTIP perhaps in a different way.

And, Wolfgang, these are the debates going on in Germany right now about how do you

deal with the discrepancies in wealth and development between different parts of Germany? You've had the kind of post-industrial decline in parts of the North-Rhine Westphalia that's had to be turned around. All over Europe there is this challenge.

So, I mean, I don't know whether you've been thinking much about this, but Ian has laid that out really. I mean, we're thinking about TTIP could involve some of the regional development perspective, maybe drawing up on some of Europe's experience and bringing, you know, countries along and lifting them up through the (inaudible). I'm not suggesting the United States should join the EU, but, I mean, I think there's different ideas there that Europe has.

And I don't know whether there's any debate about this in Europe at this particular time, but it would be interesting to see could Europe help with the United States, thinking about how to pull its foreign policy closer to an American in Iowa? You know, as you've kind of -- you've been out all the way across the United States in your role as ambassador here. Do you have any thoughts on this?

AMBASSADOR ISCHINGER: Well, my first thought is we Europeans, certainly we Germans, made a big mistake when some, I don't know, 20 years ago or so, during my tenure as ambassador in the early 2000s, we thought that the relationship with the United States was now on such firm footing post-German unification that why do we actually need eight consulates across the United States? Let's cut it down to three or four, and all these Goethe-Instituts where people can learn German. Do we really need that? I think -- so we close some of this. And other Europeans have followed in that line.

I think we should now do the exact opposite. We should build our presence not just in terms of diplomatic presence, but in terms of cultural and relationship presence. And my motto when I talk to German parliamentarians and others about this, my motto has been when I look at the United States with all the polarized political debating in Washington, D.C., etc., my motto's been don't think of Washington only -- don't think of the United States only in terms of Washington, D.C. Don't forget, and most Europeans are forgetting this all the time, don't forget that if California were a separate country, it would be one of the biggest countries of the European Union in terms of economic power, the number of people living, etc., etc.

So, engage, engage, engage I think should be our European recipe not only with the

lawmakers in Washington, D.C., but with statehouse -- I mean, parliamentarians in state capitals, with governors. We happen to have currently at least one governor who actually previously served as ambassador to Germany. He happens to be the governor of the wonderful state of New Jersey. And there are plenty of others who are interested in talking to Europeans.

I just the day before yesterday I saw this really interesting message by Arnold Schwarzenegger. Now, he is not German, but he is at least Austrian. That's almost as good as German. (Laughter) And so we have so many contact points. Engage, engage, engage is I think what we should be doing in order not to allow the Atlantic to grow wider. And it will grow wider and we will understand each other less if we don't, from both sides, proactively engage, engage, engage all the time at all levels, not only at the level of the public intellectuals, ourselves, but at all the levels and all the categories of our lives, the business community, civil society, religious leaders, and local and regional parliamentarians from both sides.

You're absolutely right. Europe has a lot of diversity to offer and maybe some of this can be useful for this or that aspect of the American story. I think there is a lot of -- we should redevelop the kind of transatlantic optimism that existed when I was a young diplomat in the 1970s. I mean, it was in the middle of the Cold War, but we were actually optimistic about managing the challenges. And I think we will manage the challenges this time, also.

MS. HILL: Well, that's fantastic, Wolfgang, because I got a note saying we were out of time. So, actually you gave us an uplifting sense of optimism for the end there.

And, you know, I think that that's kind of the message to take away. When the world is in danger, get back to basics and start to think again about how we can build ourselves up and restore that sense of optimism and that can-do spirit that we've had so many difficult times in the past.

I want to apologize to people who sent in questions that we didn't directly get to, but I think we touched upon one way or another on most of them. I mean, there were some very specific questions about, you know, how Europe and the United States might deal with very critical issues, like Iran and the Middle East. But as you're saying, if we can get back to the basics in our relationship, we can frame some of those discussions. We did a lot of discussion on China, we touched on Russia, you know, one way or another.

But I think this has been a very rich discussion. I'd like to thank Ian for joining us, to help us along, to give us your, as usual, very incisive and insightful perspective on these issues. And I know you'll continue to speak out.

And I'd just like to encourage everyone to get Wolfgang's book. You can also buy it in German, but, you know, obviously, Brookings Press would be very pleased if you would buy the English version from the Press. Available in all the usual outlets.

Wolfgang, I wish you every success with the book. But it's really a platform for the discussions like this. And I do hope even though you can't go on a tour, you can certainly use Zoom and all of the other outlets like this to reach a large audience. And when we're all able to travel again, we'd obviously love to see you here as well as joining you at various events in Europe and internationally.

So, thank you very much to everyone for a really rich discussion, a great set of questions. And, Wolfgang, every success with your book. And thank you again, Ian, for joining us, as well, today. Thank you. Thank you, everyone.

MR. BREMMER: Thank you.

AMBASSADOR ISCHINGER: Thank you.

MS. HILL: Thank you.

AMBASSADOR ISCHINGER: Thanks a million. Thank you, Ian.

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