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Keynote:

AUDREY TANG
Digital Minister of Taiwan

Panelists:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

GENERAL ALLEN: Good morning, everyone. Good afternoon and good evening to our dear friends who are joining us from overseas.

My name is John Allen, and I'm the president of the Brookings Institution located in Washington, D.C. And it's a great pleasure to welcome you today to our discussion which culminates a year-long project at Brookings that was launched to explore the future of democracy in Asia.

Our Foreign Policy program has recently published 11 excellent papers, all of which I encourage you to explore online at our website. Written both by Brookings scholars, as well as external experts from across the Indo-Pacific region, these papers aim to provide U.S. policymakers and the public in general with a clearer understanding of the strains and the stresses facing Asian democracies, as well as the steps the U.S. and regional partners can take to reinforce democratic governance in the region.

While always crucial, the defense of democracy and strengthening of global systems of democracy is one of the most urgent tasks U.S. policymakers are facing at the moment. Indeed, we were reminded, the United States, of that crucial truth just this past month. On January 6th, the United States survived a grievous assault on its own democracy. We learned a great deal in America over this, about the strength of our Constitution, but about the fragility or indeed, any democratic fragility that underwrites a republic. Meaning, you can have the documents that establishes the law, but in the end, in a democracy, the institutions of democracy rely on the strength of individual leaders to adhere to the rule of law. That was a hard, relearned lesson for us.

Now, these events, or more aptly these inflection points were also a reminder that the challenge of strengthening the global community of democracies and repairing American democracy at home must go hand in hand. As the United States seeks to reinforce the global democratic system, it will have to do so with humility and introspection. It will need to listen and to learn just as much as we need to lead on the democratic stage around the world.

This is why this initiative, which we're discussing today, which looks at the future of democracy in Asia is so important. As Brookings' David M. Rubenstein Fellow, Lindsey Ford, and

Brookings Senior Fellow, Ryan Hass, wrote in their contribution to the series, “The task of reinforcing the resilience of global democracies is not a western project.” And we truly believe that at Brookings. This is not about the West. That’s an exclusive term. This is about the global community of democracies, and Asian democracies, who are on the frontlines of the competition between authoritarian and democratic global governance.

So as the papers we’re going to discuss today make clear, the challenges they are facing and the obstacles they have to overcome can provide powerful lessons for democratic governments elsewhere in the world. That’s one of the reasons we’re so honored today to have Audrey Tang, Taiwan’s digital minister, join us here to offer the keynote remarks for today’s event. It’s particularly fitting that Minister Tang joins us today as it was my visit to Taiwan in 2019 that provided the very inspiration for this project. Truly, my time in Taipei was a vivid reminder, not only of Taiwan’s remarkable transition into a thriving democracy, but also of the resilience and the innovation that Taiwan has shown in the face of tremendous pressure.

There is much for the democratic governments of the world to learn from Taiwan’s example. Today’s discussion marks just the first step in what will be a longer Brookings initiative looking at democratic resilience, not only in Asia but more broadly throughout the community of democracies. And I’m so pleased that we’re able to kick off this work with an excellent series of papers that we’ll be discussing today.

So as a quick reminder, we’re very much live and we’re on the record. Should viewers like to submit questions, they are most welcome. And you can send them to us via email at events@brookings.edu. That’s events@brookings.edu or via Twitter at [#DemocracyinAsia](https://twitter.com/DemocracyinAsia).

So with that I’d like to turn over the program today to our moderator, Ryan Hass, who will introduce the minister, Minister Tang, and the rest of the guests. And Minister, it is a wonderful honor for us to have you with us.

So Ryan, the floor is yours, sir. Take it away.

MR. HASS: Thank you very much, John. I appreciate you being with us and leading us

forward in this initiative. It's great to have your support and your active involvement in it.

We have prerecorded our presentation with Minister Tang, and I think we're ready to air it now.

(Recording begins)

Hello, my name is Ryan Hass. I'm a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, and today it is my honor to have the opportunity to welcome Taiwan's digital minister, Audrey Tang, to our virtual stage to deliver a keynote address for this event.

Minister Tang is one of the leading thinkers in the world on how to adapt democracy to our changing times. And Minister Tang is not just a thinker but also a doer. As digital minister, Minister Tang is in charge of helping develop government strategies for communicating more directly with the public. Minister Tang is at the leading edge of a radical form of government transparency that has earned plaudits around the world. Minister Tang has worked at the frontlines of countering disinformation. Minister Tang also has harnessed technology to ensure better two-way communication between leaders and the public, helping to make sure that a government by the people works for the people. I could go on speaking about Minister Tang's accomplishments for some time but I will stop here. Minister Tang, welcome to Brookings. The floor is yours.

MR. TANG: Hello, I'm Audrey Tang, digital minister in charge of social innovation. I'm really happy to be here virtually to share some thoughts around not working for the people but with the people as I'm a minister working with the government, not for the government.

In Taiwan, we countered the pandemic with no lockdown and the infodemic associated with it with no takedowns. And the reason why we could do that is through digital social innovation, meaning it's everyone's business and with everybody's help.

Now, in the beginning of this particular pandemic we played a SARS playbook because on the PTT or the Taiwanese equivalent of Reddit in 2019 December 31, there was a young doctor with the nickname "Nomar Pipe" (phonetic) reposting Dr. Li Wenliang's message from Wuhan. It said, and I quote, "There's seven new SARS cases."

Now, Dr. Li Wenliang's message did not reach the Wuhan citizens until much later, but he literally saved the Taiwanese people because people started to triage the message on the PTT operating with their expertise and all this reached the medical office at the Center for Disease Control within hours. And then the very next day, starting January 1, 2020, we started health inspections for all flights coming in from Wuhan and set up the Central Epidemic Command Center even before we had the first local case.

Now, the PTT isn't exactly equivalent to Reddit. PTT is part of our social sector. Its funding is by the National Taiwan University. Its maintenance is entirely kind of self-governed by its participants. The source code is open source is on GitHub and all its operation and so on are serving primarily the people of Taiwan instead of the advertisers or any particular shareholders. PTT doesn't really have a shareholder board.

Now, the importance of such digital public infrastructure is most salient when we see like Dr. Li Wenliang's message because this serves primarily a social function, a pro-social function. People contributed rather than, you know, labeling each other, rather than attacking each other. It was conspiracy theories and divisive speech and so on. We very quickly not only fact-checked the message to see that it is probably legit but also people started to recommend ways to prevent SARS from happening again.

And of course, in Taiwan, people who are above 30 years old -- that includes myself -- all remember SARS in 2003. We were hit pretty hard, excluded from the international community, the WHO, just like this time around. And the central government was saying very different things from the municipal government and we had to lockdown the Hoping Hospital unannounced.

A year after SARS in 2004, the constitutional court said that whatever we did during 2003 was barely constitutional and there needs to be a way for the democratic policy to count for SARS if it happens again, and it will happen again. SARS 2.0 within the democratic authorization by instituting the legal protections for the people, their essential rights and applied equitably to quarantines, isolations, and so on, without needing to declare a state of emergency.

And that's exactly what we did. Throughout 2020, there's been so far seven deaths but around the second half of the year life returned to normal. We held not just one but two Pride parades, and so on. And all thanks to the institutions that were built during SARS and also after the SARS pandemic in 2004 that enabled this mutual trust between the Center Epidemic Command Center on one side and the citizenry on the other.

And we also made sure that the communication through the internet also takes care of people's questions without relying, you know, on surveillance, capitalism, or other authoritarian infrastructures. You see the hotline 1922, that anyone can call to report anything that happens during the pandemic. This builds entirely domestic infrastructure and was a very open, livestreamed press conference where the Central Epidemic Command Center answers each and every journalist's questions unlimited until they run out of questions every day, literally every 2:00 p.m.

And these two combined enabled social innovations to thrive. For example, people who called 1922 saying that they developed a way for traditional rice cookers to kill the virus but it doesn't kill the mouse. That got amplified on the press conference.

Back in April, there was a young boy that called saying, hey, you're rationing all the masks and all the boys in my class have blue masks but all I get through the rationing was pink mask and I don't want to wear pink to school.

Well, the very next day everyone, including the administrator (inaudible) wore pink medical masks regardless of their gender and the administrator even said the Pink Panther was his childhood hero so the boy became the most hip boy in the class where only he has the color that heroes wear and the hero's hero wear. And that also enabled contributions from the social sector on the essential supplies visualization.

Early February last year, what we've seen is that there are a lot of coders, what we call civic actors in Taiwan, many of them in the G0 Initiative, volunteering their time to show, for example, the pharmacies real-time mask availability. When people queue in line using their national health cards, this is my national health card which is an IC card, and swiping the card to get a rationed mask. Nowadays,

it's 10 for two weeks. People who queue after them can check their phone, and on more than 100 different chatbots, maps, voice assistance, and so on, they can see in real time the stock of that particular pharmacy decrease by 10, by 10, by 10 every time anyone makes a purchase. And (inaudible) people will call 1922 to report an anomaly.

So I called it the three pillars of the digital social innovation in response to the pandemic - fast, fair, and fun, where the fast pillar pertains to the collective intelligence and the rapid iteration of accountability, of giving out accounts of the scientific measures. And the fairness pertains to not just mask rationing but also the open API, trusting the citizens with real-time open data so that they can build not only various different languages of mask availability maps and so on, chatbots (inaudible) and so on but also make interpolations to the minister because we've never declared a state of emergency. All the measures that we do are subject to democratic oversight.

So, for example, there was an MP (inaudible) who interpolated Minister Chen. Now (inaudible) the MP was VP of data analytics at Foxcom Group so she knows something about data. And she said according to the updated every 30 second to real time open API, the mask distribution isn't quite fair, actually, as the ministry makes it out to be. To show on the map, even though it looks like each person no matter where you are in Taiwan who of course enjoy broadband as human right so we can all check our phone and see the nearby pharmacist's availability is roughly even, it's not actually even if you take into account the public transportation time that people must take, the more rural areas. So by the time they travel to the seemingly close pharmacy, maybe the pharmacy has already closed, past its opening hours.

Now, because this is evidenced-based interpolation. The administration did not defend the policy at all. He simply said, "Legislator, teach us." And so we began co-creation the very next day and we introduced 24-mask, a preordering and pickup system with more than 12,000 convenience stores around the islands. And so that, of course, made the MP very happy and she posted saying that yesterday's interpolation becomes tomorrow's co-creation and this is indeed a nonpartisan or beyond partisan effort that unites the entire parliament and citizenry together.

Now, during the pandemic there's, of course, not just a virus of the body but also a virus of the mind, our conspiracy theories and infodemic. The infodemic is particularly prevalent when it concerns the essential supplies. For example, there was a conspiracy theory around I think April that said that tissue papers are going to run out soon because all its materials are being repurposed to make medical masks. Of course, that's not true. The tissue papers are made out of paper and the medical masks are a plastic material. But nevertheless, many people believed it and panic bought tissue papers. So the fun pillar in fast, fair, and fun took effect. And we developed this idea called "humor over rumor." And we (inaudible) because Taiwan was hit pretty hard by this information around stake years (phonetic) around 2015 to '17 leading to the 2018 Miro (phonetic) election. There were huge amounts of disinformation and information manipulation.

But because people when they're 40 years old and 39, so I barely remember the martial law, but people above my age all remember the martial law. So just as people above 30 years old, we don't want to go back to the lockdown of hospitals and SARS. People above 40 years old in Taiwan don't want to go back to administrative takedown and censorship because we all remember how bad martial law was. And so we need to fight the infodemic and this information without resorting back to the administrative takedowns.

So, what did we do? Well, we discovered that it is possible to make a vaccine of the mind by employing humor. When people laughed about something they turned this outrage into a more creational, a more creative spirit and then people can worry together and create together on how to make solutions without resorting to revenge or discrimination against one another.

So technically speaking, we have this triple two rule that whenever a disinformation or just a viral misinformation that has a basic reproduction value of one that's spreading gets detected, then each and every ministry has a team of participation offices that's responsible to engage training hashtags essentially and they need to roll out two different modalities, like one image and one video. And each less than 200 characters so it fits on the phone screen and it must be very funny and within two hours.

Now, for example, there are conspiracy theories about tissue papers. Within two hours

our premier, the Prime Minister Su Tseng-chang wrote this out. Note this is his backside and it says in very large font, "Each of us only have one pair of bottoms." It's a wordplay because in Mandarin, to stockpile (speaking in Mandarin) sounds the same as bottom (speaking in Mandarin). And this is basically saying it doesn't pay to stockpile tissue papers. And by the way, tissue papers are made out of South American materials while medical masks are made out of domestic materials. This is truly hilarious. It spread, went viral, and reached far more people than the conspiracy theory. And people who have laughed about it remember the comparison table would refrain from panic buying and would more likely than not share this to their friends and families who get immune from the conspiracy theory as soon as they see this picture.

Now, this is not a one shot thing. This is actually quite systemic. Whenever a Central Epidemic Command Center press conference announces a new measure, the spokes dog, official spokes dog Shiba Inu (speaking in Mandarin) of the Central Epidemic Command Center translates that into viral memes. And this particular Shiba Inu actually lives with the persuasion officer of the Ministry of Health and Welfare. And so humor over rumor is rather easy instead of, you know, paying for a copyright for some trending photos or memes. They just take a photo of the dog and then you see social distancing explained in terms of three Shiba Inus between one another. Indoors, otherwise wear a mask or the outdoor physical distance, two Shiba Inus, otherwise wear a mask. Cover the mouth and nose when sneezing. As shown by this. Like, don't do what the Shiba Inu is doing. And this very cute photo shows dads, why would you wear a mask? Because you wear a mask to protect your own face from your own unwashed hands.

And this is quite a critical message because it links hand sanitation and mask use together, and it is much easier to remind one another to take care of one's own safety, appealing to rational self-interest rather than saying wear a mask to protect the elderly or to respect the health workers and so on. We make sure that more than three-quarters of the population have seen this message, remember the message. There's much more hand sanitation and measure by tap water usage going on after this message rose out. And most importantly, people built trustworthiness like with the community

pharmacist and so on who not only dispensed a mask but also health advice and so on so we can all remain calm and collected and experiencing democratic governance even during the pandemic and infodemic.

So, I guess this is a story of us building back better, of encountering a pretty bad epidemic in 2003 and pretty bad infodemic in 2017-18. But with people, public, private partnership, the social sector set the norms, discussed additional public infrastructure, rebuilt public infrastructure for online deliberation and debates, and on those public infrastructures people did come up with viable vaccines and anecdotes, solutions, to both the pandemic and to the infodemic and the democratic governance gets reinforced, strengthened during the twindemics.

So, I guess this is my opening keynote, demos over demics and I will welcome you to follow us, follow our work in Taiwancanhelp.us. Thank you for listening.

MR. HASS: Minister Tang, thank you for that tremendous keynote. It was uplifting, inspiring, encouraging. I think it's what a lot of us need right now. I particularly like the idea of humor over rumor and I think it's really important for us to benefit from the best practices that you and others have honed, you and your team, and the public in Taiwan.

If I might, I want to start out in this area because democratic governments rely upon the consent of the governed. And consent is strengthened through transparency. It's weakened when there's a perception that the government is illegitimate. And in that context, looking beyond the twindemics that you described, what are some of the real world examples that you can point to of how strengthening transparency has helped legitimize Taiwan's government and how has the public been responding to your efforts?

MR. TANG: That's a great question.

So, in Taiwan, we have the National Auditing Office within the Control Yuan its own branch for the campaign donation transparency. And although the campaign donation expenses are tracked by the office, the office only publishes under the Freedom of Information Act paper copies of the campaign expenditure reports before 2017. And so, the g0v, a civic technology group that I'm a part of

does focus on radical transparency and accountability used to work with the NGOs and went to the office in the Control Yuan physically brings out the printed 84 copies of the auditing report and asks people to run OCR or a (inaudible) character recognition. We turn it into a game where people can help digitize those paper reports into open data so that investigative journalists can draw their own conclusions.

Back at that time in I think 2015, the Control Yuan said this is quite dangerous. Even though you say three people have looked into a number to conform its accuracy, you can't be 100% sure. And we wrote back like, of course, you have the public data. You should have made it open data and free from the copyright constraints and so on because this is public money. Like, literally public money for a campaign expenditure. So in 2018, the social sector norm became nonignorable so the Control Yuan did publish the campaign donation and the expenditure as open data. Hence, the independent journalists immediately jumped on it, analyzed it, and discovered that the social media advertisements were not listed in almost all cases of campaign donation or expenditure, meaning that our campaign donation loss, which forbids extraterrestrial -- sorry, extra judicial interference into the campaign donation. Basically, there's a shortcut. There's a bypass through Facebook and other social media venues and that resulted in a lot of hyper precise election-affecting messages, sponsor messages on Facebook and other social media that are truly more antisocial than pro-social during our 2018 election. So we went to Facebook, the Civics Integrated Team and said, look, here is our social norm. Our public sector has already agreed with the social sector on the real-time open data. And if you conform to the social norm then, of course, you will be seen as a responsible citizen. And if you don't, even though we don't have direct jurisdiction over what you do, well, you may face social sanction because it's a very strong social norm already built. And so Facebook did publish in 2019 leading up to the 2020 presidential and legislative election in real-time, the campaign donation expenditure as open data so the dark pattern could be detected and also clarified so there's not so much information manipulation on that particular front. And there's no nondomestic sponsors of election-related messages during our 2020 presidential and legislative election. So I guess that's a pretty good case of the public relationship from the social sector into the public sector and then extending to the private sector.

MR. HASS: Fascinating.

You were just speaking about the contrast between the 2018 election and the 2020 election. I was wondering if I could ask a little bit more about that. Because in 2018, I think it was widely reported and widely understood that there was external meddling in Taiwan's electoral process, but we heard less about the disinformation and interference or influence operations in 2020. And is that observation accurate? And if so, what explains it? Is it what you describe as, you know, these efforts and these outreaches that were made or was there something else at work?

MR. TANG: Yeah, the meme system is definitely stronger in 2019 as compared to 2017-18 election. I'll just cite one example. There was, in November 2019, there was this picture from Reuters, actually, that showed there's young protestors in Hong Kong. Now, the original caption just said, and I quote, "A teenage extradition bill protestor is seen during a march to demand democracy and political reform in Hong Kong." And it's a very neutral caption. On the other hand, the trending social media, this information in Taiwan, says something quite different. This says, "This 13-year-old thug bought new iPhones, game consoles, brand-name sports shoes and recruiting his brothers. And if they murder a police they can earn up to \$20 million."

Okay. So it's the same photo with a very different caption, a very different message. Now, because we already have an immune system in the form of a real-time reporting just like spam reporting in the leading and to an encrypted channel that's to say the line messenger. So people who have seen this message even before it went truly viral, they could just report saying that, hey, this is a very suspicious looking caption going on. And the factcheckers, who are not government employees or contracted from the government, they are professional journalists in the social sector relying on crowdfunding and so on, traced this alternate caption back to the (speaking Mandarin) or the Central Political and Law Units of the PRC regime, their Weibo account, actually. And so we are, of course, quite tempted to take it down but we didn't because we remembered the martial law. So we didn't take it down. Rather, we put out a notice and public notice which mean that once this is confirmed by the Time and Fact-checking Center, whenever people want to share it on say Facebook, there will be a public notice

that says this message is proudly sponsored by the PRC regime on its Weibo account. Well, it doesn't say proudly sponsored but you get the idea. So people understand the frame around which this alternate caption is done.

And because, of course, at a time people understood the Hong Kong issue is probably going to be the dominant and determining issue for our presidential election. So I wouldn't say there was an extra jurisdictional meddling. There certainly was. It was just detected early on by this sort of immune system of the civic participation. And then clarified in real time. And it was the partnership with the private sector entities, the notice and public notice regime reduced the basic transmission rate of those meddling.

MR. HASS: Fascinating.

As we all know, this information doesn't always originate abroad. It also is created at home. And when it happens, domestic disinformation often widens divisions within society. We see this happening not just in Taiwan but in the United States and elsewhere. What can be done in addition to what you've already described about strengthening the immune system to help in democratic societies with free speech protections to reduce the scope and effect of homegrown disinformation?

MR. TANG: Well, in our K-12 education, for as long as people are connecting to the broadband, which if they don't, it's my fault personally. Broadband is a human right. So for the schools connecting to the Internet, we don't quite teach media literacy anymore. That's a last century concept. We teach media competence and digital competence.

Now, the difference between literacy and competence is that the former concept assumes that the students are just viewers, people who receive information from mass media. But media competence assumes that because the broadband is bilateral, right, people could actually upload much more than they previously could. And many primary schoolers are maybe having more followers on Instagram than I do, so they are all media people. They are all producers of media.

Now, whether they are journalists or not entirely depends on whether they have gone through a journalistic newsroom work. So, and in the schools we encourage those very young people to,

for example, fact check the three presidential candidates during the debates and deliberation policy forums. For example, we encouraged them to build the air boxes which are inexpensive devices that measure PM2.5 and other environmental indicators and publish it automatically on a distributed ledger so that everyone can contribute to climate science but also pollution reporting and things like that.

And so democracy for us is a technology. This is not just about uploading three bits of information per person every four years which is called voting by the way, but rather, a continuous input from the population. And once we switch to a competence-based thinking, people would not get captured that easily by the disinformation anymore because they have participated in a newsroom-like process in contributing to the general sense making of the society. And so they get a much more nuanced, much more holistic view on pretty much all the social issues. The basic education integration with the open government's partnership principles is part of our commitment in our national action plan.

MR. HASS: Well, Mr. Tang, we could impose upon you with questions all day if we had the time, but we need to let you go back to doing the good work with the Taiwan people. I just want to thank you so much for taking the time to share best practices, wisdom, insight, and we look forward to continuing the conversation with you here at Brookings in the future. Thank you.

MR. TANG: Thank you for the great questions. Live long and prosper.

(Recording ends)

MR. HASS: Well, thank you all. As you can see, Minister Tang is a wealth of knowledge and inspiration to all of us who are working on supporting and promoting democracy throughout Asia.

It is now my pleasure to turn the agenda to the panel discussion that we will have for the next hour or so.

We're delighted to have an all-star cast of experts to help guide us through questions related to the landscape for democracy in Asia. I'm going to be brutally efficient in introducing them so that we can maximize the time available for our discussion, but their full biographies are available online if you would like to see more about their backgrounds.

The first person I will introduce is Mireya Solis. Mireya is the director for the Center for

East Asia Policy Studies at the Brookings Institution and also a senior fellow in the Foreign Policy program. She is an expert on many things, among them Japanese foreign policy, Japanese economic policy, U.S.-Japan relations, international trade policy, as well as Asia-Pacific regional integration.

Richard Bush is a nonresident senior fellow at the Center for East Asia Policy Studies at the Brookings Institution. He's the godfather of the program having established the Center for East Asia Policy Studies. And prior to his long and distinguished career at Brookings, Richard also contributed significantly through his service in the United States government.

John Lee is dialing in from Sydney, Australia where it is the dark of night, and we appreciate his sacrificing to be with us today. He is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institution. He also is a senior fellow at the United States Study Center and an adjunct professor at the University of Sydney. From 2016 to 2018, John served as a senior national security advisor to the Australian Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop. Thank you for being with us, John.

And we also have Maiko Ichihara with us. She is a visiting scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. She is a steering committee member of the World Movement for Democracy, East Asia Democracy Forum, and Partnership for Democratic Governance in Japan, and is a co-chair of Democracy for the Future project at the Japan Center for International Exchange. She is one of the leading thinkers on civil society movements to promote democracy in Asia.

I also would like to recognize one person who is not with us on screen today but played a pivotal role in this overall endeavor and that is Lindsey Ford. She's not able to be with us today but she has been a driving force of this overall project and we all owe her our thanks.

So as you can see, we have a very distinguished group of experts to help us understand what's at play for democracy in Asia. Over the course of the next 50 minutes or so, we're going to break our conversation up into four pieces. We will begin by trying to diagnose the current health of democratic institutions in Asia. Then we will look at practical steps the United States and others could take to bolster democratic resilience in Asia. We'll explore the question of where democracy promotion should be prioritized amongst a crowded list of issues that governments around the region and the United States

are dealing with. And then we will save time at the end for questions from our audience, which is dialing in from around the world.

So let's start by setting the stage. There's been a fair bit of analysis in recent years about democratic backsliding in Asia. Some of this analysis has been linked to China's growing power and its willingness to use that power to wield influence in other countries and erode democratic institutions.

Richard, you've been looking at this question for some time. Can you help us situate recent trends and broader historical context? And also, can you help us weigh the balance of factors between local factors versus the China factor for understanding some of the democratic backsliding we've been watching in Asia?

MR. BUSH: Thank you very much, Ryan, and thank you for your leadership in this program.

I would not place too much emphasis on the China factor because I think there's a lot going on in these societies. On the so-called democratic recession, I would commend to our viewers the January 2015 issue of the Journal of Democracy which is devoted to this whole issue.

Now, the scholars there talk about the retreat in many countries from protection of civil and political rights, free and fair elections and the rule of law. I think a major reason why this has happened is that the democratic institutions that we associate with indirect democracy or representative democracy, institutions that were created several decades ago, have not been able to maintain their proper autonomy from social forces and have been overwhelmed by the weapons of direct democracy. And social media has accelerated this trend.

Now, how does this manifest in Asian democracies or semi-democracies? First, there are problems in system design. There is a dysfunctional balance between majority rule and minority rights. Second, in a number of the countries concerned, officials seem to represent the interests of their campaign donors and their favor seekers more than they represent the interests of the people who elected them. And third, I think it's very important to understand that the issues have changed. No longer is the state responsible for driving economic development, they are facing mature economies, changing

democratic structures, and pretty deep inequality.

So even if China didn't exist, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan would face these challenges. Reconciling priorities would not be easy and it's not. States face a gap between the tasks that they have to perform and the resources that they have available. Companies want low taxes for competitiveness but that doesn't necessarily leave enough money for the elderly, education, and defense. What happens then is people lose confidence in representative institutions and result to alternatives such as Thailand's protest culture, populism in the Philippines, and a general decline in social trust.

Now, how does China matter? It poses a really hard policy question on top of all these other problems. Basically, it comes down to a choice between accommodation of China or deterring China. Accommodation risks loss of autonomy. Deterrence is expensive and it may result in a loss in economic growth.

Now, formulating the right response would be hard in Plato's republic with its government of wisemen. It's much more difficult in democratic systems, which by their nature foster division and prevent many voices. Thanks.

MR. HASS: Thank you, Richard. You've given us a lot to work with here.

I'd like to turn to Mireya and Maiko to look at this question as well. But particularly from Tokyo's perspective, as Japanese politicians and policymakers look out at the region, how concerned are they about the trend or the perceived trend of democratic backsliding in Asia, particularly in relation to other dynamics that are at play in the region? And also, how do you think Japanese leaders respond to the same question that Richard helped us work through of the balance between local factors versus the China factor in explaining some of this democratic recession?

Mireya, can we start with you?

MS. SOLIS: Certainly, Ryan. And thank you so much for having me here on the panel today. And it's great also to be paired with Maiko-san who is the true expert on this topic. So consider myself the warmup to whatever Maiko will say next.

You know, I do think that there are a number of regional trends that are of great concern

to policymakers in Tokyo. There's a lot happening. I started my paper saying that we're consumed by a vortex of change and the forces of disruption are manifold. And one of them is democratic fact lighting or a recession. So that's one of the elements I think that guides Tokyo's reading of what's happening in the region.

And let me start first and foremost with the China question. I agree with Richard that every single country has its own domestic challenges in creating a vibrant, representative democracy, and I spent a lot of time in my paper to address what are the challenges for Japan in particular, but when we talk about regional dynamics, the role of China is very important. And I think that Japan is a frontline state and therefore, feels very keenly the influence of an authoritarian, economic giant like China.

There is great concern about China's more assertive behavior, flaunting the rule of law in the South China Sea, their recurrent intrusions in the waters near the Senkaku Islands, the use of gray zone coercion tactics, but also there is great concern with China's repression of human rights, the situation in Xinjiang and certainly the adoption of the national security law in Hong Kong which basically rendered hollow the promise of one country, two systems. And there's concern and awareness in Tokyo about the use of the digital tools of authoritarianism.

Now, I think that for -- this is my reading that one nightmare scenario for Tokyo would be the emergence of a sphere of influence in Asia led by an illiberal state like China. And I think that it's the desire -- (inaudible) desire to avoid such a scenario that is a major driver of what is I think the most significant diplomatic initiative of Japan of late, and that is a free and open Indo-Pacific strategy or vision. And these two objectives are actually very important (inaudible) free and open, and there was a lot of nervousness when the Biden administration was coming in. Tokyo wanted to see confirmation that there was enlightenment on this, and they have received the confirmation. And the objectives are important because they signify both the centrality of rule of law and freedom from coercion.

At the same time, Tokyo is very nuanced, I would make the case, and there is no desire to see regional dynamics framed in terms of an all-out, ideological conflict between the free world and authoritarian powers. The Japanese economy is deeply integrated with China, as many other countries in

the region, and Japan wants a functional relationship with China to protect that economic relationship but also to avoid the escalation of territorial disputes. Over the past two or three years we saw some efforts (inaudible) with China. There's a hard stop as to how far that can go, I think, and human rights is actually one of the issues that has made it very difficult to realize a state visit by President Xi Jinping. It's not just the pandemic. That's a convenient argument to make but there is a deeper cause for pausing on that.

So I think that the free and open Indo-Pacific strategy is very much driven by the fact that you don't want the region dominated by an illiberal state but it's not about containment of China. And therefore, it keeps open the possibility of some pragmatic, functional cooperation with China if China abides by the standards that Japan believes are important to prevent corruption and interference in domestic affairs.

My last point, and I'm sorry I'm taking so long, but when you asked me how much should we be concerned with democratic backsliding I would say a great deal. But there is also concern about the role of the United States in the region and the very significant democratic backsliding here in the United States.

You know, Asian capitals are used to hyper-partisanship, conflict, gridlock if you will in the U.S. policymaking process. But what we've seen recently is an entirely different order of magnitude. It's about the resilience of American democracy. And I think in the span of just one month the world saw two very different faces of what is really the current political reality of the United States. It's the America of January 6th with insurrection in the capital and it's the America of January 20th with the triumph of the constitutional process.

And going forward, which America prevails I think is going to be central to the health of democracy in Asia as well.

MR. HASS: Thank you.

Maiko?

MS. ICHIHARA: Sure. Thank you very much, Ryan, for having me here today. And Mireya-san has already covered beautifully about policymakers' concern in Japan. So let me focus a bit

more on the academic aspect in academia and also journalism.

When it comes to democracy regression, I would say the academia in Japan has been quite concerned about this topic since especially the mid-2010s. But it was only recently, I would say either last year or two years back that the media, Japanese media started paying so much attention onto this democratic regression in actually the entire world but especially in the Indo-Pacific. And that was because until recently there were less I would say, well, demonstrations or protest movements in Asia. From 2019, there have been numerous protest movements in Hong Kong, Thailand, and also in other parts of the world. And in addition to that, the election campaign in the United States since 2020, those were all very eye-catching sort of events. So the media started covering this democratic regression or issue.

However, there is one thing I would say either the researchers or the media, or even policymakers have not covered enough or paid attention enough, which is authoritarian intervention in Japan politically and information manipulation. As Mireya-san said, well, there is a very strong concern about China's intervention in the economic spheres or in China's security moves. But yet, when it comes to political manipulation or information manipulation, there is not much research going on. But actually, at the end of last year, I published two papers which focused on China's information manipulation and found that CCP has been manipulating information in Japan through some news websites which disseminates information related to China.

So information manipulation is going on in Japan. So that's something that the Japanese researchers and the media should be aware of. Thank you.

MR. HASS: Thank you.

John, can we turn to you now to put an Australian lens on this question? As Canberra and others in Australia look out at the region, how concerned are they about this trend of democratic recession or retro aggression? And practically speaking, what impact does that have on Australian interests in the region?

MR. LEE: Thanks, Ryan. And I really appreciate being asked to be on this panel as well.

Look, I mean, the way we look at it, there are a handful of longstanding, robust liberal democracies in the region -- Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea, the Pacific Island countries to name several. But most nations in our region, in my region are either autocratic, recent democracies, or so-called imperfect democracies where liberal institutions are weak and elections are either free or fair but not both. The concern for Australia is that there is an increasingly intense competition to set the rules and standards of governance, as well as economic and strategic behavior throughout the Indo-Pacific.

Now, for us, democratic countries with liberal institutions tend to be more transparent, meaning that they're more predictable and easier to deal with, and in contrast, authoritarian countries or those with weak democratic institutions tend to serve the interests of the ruling regimes more than they do the national interests or the longer term interests of that country. And to give some real empirical content to why that bothers Australians, let me take Malaysia which was the country of my birth as a great case study of what you'd call an imperfect democracy that could have gone both ways, or either way in recent times.

So on the one hand, a leader -- the previous leader such as Najib Razak was able to advance his own personal interests at the expense of the national interest during the 1MDB theft scandal or siphoning scandal. At the same time, a country like China was able to assist Najib in covering his tracks and advancing China's strategic and political objectives in Malaysia at the same time. So a classical authoritarian elite capture approach.

However, and while Malaysia or Malaysian democratic institutions are still far from perfect or textbook, widespread community popular outrage meant that Najib could be removed from office without bloodshed to end that particular chapter in contemporary Malaysian political history.

So contrast Malaysia's experience which had the democratic institutions to allow a bloodless change of government to a country such as Cambodia where Chinese elite capture of the (inaudible) government is endearing, is entrenched, and there are no institutions in Cambodia to give effect to the widespread anger that would enable the peaceful removal of the current government in Phnom Penh.

I just raise these case studies to say that for us, democratic institutions, imperfect as they are, they matter because they do allow that light at the end of the tunnel when regimes in various countries make certain decisions that are, I think, negative for that particular country and negative for the interests of Australians.

MR. HASS: Thank you, John.

So now I would like to focus in a little bit more granularly from the regional to a narrower scope.

And Richard, if I might, I'd like to start with you. You've written and spoken about how Taiwan does very well democratically in terms of process but doesn't always match it with performance. And what do you see as the primary obstacles to Taiwan improving its governance performance?

MR. BUSH: Thank you for your questions.

First of all, I would say there are areas of really superior performance by Taiwan's government. Its response to COVID-19 is worth emulating all around the world. And the economy is not doing too badly either. There are some areas of process that are very good. The management of elections. The legislative process often leaves much to be desired.

But to simplify, I see four major problems behind a broader performance problem. First, Taiwan's winner-take-all majoritarian system has led to an alternation of party control, fairly wide swings in policy, and an "I live, you die" psychology among political actors. This zero-sum game is aggravated by contending historical narratives.

Second, the government lacks sufficient resources to meet the challenges it faces. Tax revenue as a share of GDP averages about 12%, which is pretty low compared to other similar countries. And Taiwan is not a poor country by any means.

Third, the policy challenges that the political system faces are daunting. I mentioned those before. A maturing economy, aging population, low birth rate, generational and class inequality, tough choices on energy. So even if China were not 90 miles away, Taiwan's leaders would face a tough job.

But China is 90 miles away. Its ambitions concerning Taiwan are huge, and the challenge it poses to Taiwan is existential. China's capabilities to achieve these goals are growing.

And to pick up on something Minister Tang said, Chinese leaders don't seem to have a sense of humor. Now, the blue and green camps in Taiwan disagree over the best strategy for coping with these challenges. We can deal with those in questions if people want. The only point I would make here is that the stakes are really high. As much as Taiwan would like to be Canada or Norway, it is not. It can't afford to get the China problem wrong.

Coping with these domestic and external policy challenges through a democratic system is tough. Majoritarianism makes it hard to fashion centrists' broadly supported solutions. The blue and green camp have conflicting policy views. Moreover, there have been efforts to circumvent Taiwan's representative democracy -- mass protests, referendums, and populism with its claim that politics is a moral context between the people and predatory elites.

So that's the general picture as I see it. And I'm glad I don't have to be the president of Taiwan.

MR. HASS: Indeed.

Mireya, you have talked about how Japan has really been successful at adapting to economic globalization, resisting the pull of populism, whereas other developed economies around the world have succumbed to it. But in the process, political stability has been prioritized perhaps above dynamism. And so what do you see as the indicators of waning political dynamism inside Japan's political system right now?

MS. SOLIS: Thank you very much, Ryan, for that question.

You know, Japan, indeed, has not been rocked by the forces of populism or experienced globalization backlash like many other mature, liberal democracies. There have been, of course, maverick politicians in Japan, but what we have not witnessed, thankfully, is a demagogue taking on trying to undermine the institutions of representative democracy in the country.

So instead of, you know, having the turmoil that has been happening in many other

Western countries, Western democracies, Japan has actually gone through a period of very, very long political stability. And this political stability has served Japan well in becoming a more consequential actor in international affairs.

But the point I tried to make, Ryan, in my paper is that the sources of political stability matter as well. And in this case I think that it has arrived primarily by an implosion of the opposition camp. And the dashed hopes that Japan would have a more competitive party system.

So many observers of Japanese politics believe that the reason why Japan does not have or is not prone to a populist takeover is that there was a lot of disenchantment with experiment of the Democratic Party in Japan when they were in office for three years, and therefore, because it was a very rocky period, it did not go very well, the argument was made that there was an allergy developed to populism.

I would say that the impact of that experience of an opposition party finally coming into office and not performing very well is much more profound because I think that what it created is a sense that perhaps party turnover would not bring the desired political and economic change and that produced a much more profound disenchantment. And the DPJ eventually fractured, and it has been very difficult for the party and for other opposition parties to capture back the trust of the public.

So I think that the weakening of meaningful political competition in Japan has had significant consequences because it encourages citizen passivity when you feel that you cannot change things very much with your vote because of those legislative discussions and because it weakens transparency and accountability mechanisms.

So what we are witnessing in Japan, I think, Ryan, and this is a phrase I use in the paper is the downsize of politics without alternatives.

And you asked me about indicators. Well, I can point, for example, to very low voter turnout rates, surveys that show that Japanese citizens are not very interested in participating in politics and civic activities. They feel disengaged. The United States is gripped by the fever of polarization. I think that the concern in Japan is the opposite, disengagement. So low political participation. I think

there are issues about representativeness. Very few female politicians in Japan. And again, the weakening of accountability when you don't think that there could be change in power because there is not really a meaningful political opposition.

MR. HASS: Thank you, Mireya.

John, you've helped explain to me a certain paradox in Australia whereas on one hand Australia is really a global pacesetter in terms of setting rules and regulations to deal with external interference in Australia's democratic system. But on the other hand there are domestic shortcomings and governance performance that are, you know, sort of affecting attitudes in Australia towards democracy and the value and importance of it.

Can you help our audience understand that dynamic? And how serious do you think the risk is of further erosion of political support or viewing democracy as critical for Australia's future?

MR. LEE: Sure. As you mentioned, Australia has been ahead of the curve in trying to root out foreign interference and COVID influence in our institutions and decision-making. But I would have to say this is as much or more about defending Australia's sovereignty as it is about protecting Australian democracy which are related but different things.

The main thing to worry about in my view is that when it comes to the view of democracy in Australia there are some real reasons to be concerned. For example, if you take the most recent (inaudible) poll, which is the authority of polling on national attitudes to these sort of things. About one third of Australian citizens surveyed between the ages of 18 and 29 believed that a non-democratic system is actually preferable to a democratic one under certain circumstances such as the current health crisis that we're all facing. Statistics for older Australians are a little bit more promising in that there is a stronger faith in democracy in handling crises. But for particularly young Australians there is almost an assumption that democracy can sometimes be a problem that you should put aside in handling difficult issues.

I think it's important to understand the reasons for this attitude or what I think are the reasons for this attitude. And I think the current attitude to combatting the COVID-19 pandemic is quite

instructive. Now, Australia has done exceptionally well in keeping down infections due to very decisive management by state and federal government, and also it's good luck, mainly because we're an island. We are geographically distant from infection centers, and it's a lot easier for us to prevent incoming sources of infection.

But I think the interesting thing or the significant thing is that different states within Australia have taken very different approaches. Even the (inaudible) state have actually done really well in managing this problem. The worry you're seeing is that some state governments have seen democratic processes of accountability and transparency as obstacles to managing the pandemic rather than the perception that checks and balances and rights are inalienable and solutions in response have to be derived within that framework of checks and balances.

So to give you just one quick example or examples of things that have happened in Australia in the last few months, the Parliament in Victoria has arbitrarily suspended -- was arbitrarily suspended by the government at a time that the government was in trouble for messing up a quarantine program which led to the worst outbreak in the country. To put that in context, state or federal empowerment has never been suspended and was never suspended in either of the two world wars or during the Spanish Flu outbreak. In our Westminster system, as many people would know, Parliament is the peak body for scrutiny because like a meaty interview given by a politician, misleading Parliament is a sackable offense for a premier or a minister.

In some states, extraordinary powers were enacted which gave police, ministers, and officials the right to suspend the operation of any legislation, control all movement in and out of the state, and to direct any government agency to perform any act deemed necessary to respond to this health emergency and the health emergency was never clearly defined.

Remember that case numbers in Australia were low even before these measures were enacted, so these harsh measures are not the reason why case numbers continue to remain low.

Australia has done well.

The point I'm really making is that as mentioned, all Australian states have done really

well in managing COVID-19, but some have done so respecting democratic checks and balances and principles of accountability, while others have very openly boasted about taking an authoritarian approach and have even cited the wonderful example of what's occurred in China as their example or as their inspiration for why they're doing what they're doing.

Now, the Australian population is genuinely divided about whether democratic or authoritarian approaches have been more effective in meeting these crises, and I think this is an argument that democrats in Australia need to win for our institutions to function the way they should be functioning.

MR. HASS: Agree completely. Thank you for sharing that perspective.

Maiko-san, you've spent a lot of time looking at the developments of civil society networks across the region. And why have these networks been relatively slow to develop compared to other regions in the world? And what do you see as the main constraints to these networks from becoming more influential and eventually involving governments in them?

MS. ICHIHARA: Thank you.

Well, let me point out that while it's true that multilateral transnational networks in the Indo-Pacific, or especially in Asia have been slow to develop as Ryan-san pointed out. But it's more in the front of intergovernmental networks. There has been more progress on the civil society networks in recent years.

And secondly, there has been progress in terms of the networking, transporter networking since around 2010. And, well, let me point out several reasons for both the slowness of the development and also the progress of those transnational networks.

I would say there are three reasons for the slowness and the development of intergovernmental, transnational networks. One is the diversity of political regime types which makes democracy not the consensus in Asia.

Secondly, the cultural aspect or the historical element in Asia has been serving as a stumbling block for Asian countries or societies to bring international institutions to move forward,

meaning that Confucius culture -- Confucius tradition has been sort of restricting understanding for civil liberties in Asia and also the history of anti-imperialist tradition has been causing the Asian society to feel that whenever western democracies bring up the issues of democracy and human rights it looks like an imposition of western values for certain Asian people.

And third, there has been a very cautious approach to China. Not to stimulate China by bringing this democracy/human rights issues in amongst the Asian countries.

However, as I said, there has been progress in intergovernmental institutions in the region, especially in terms of the verbal commitment to norms and values of democracy that's in ASEAN or a Bali Democracy Forum was launched in 2008 and SAARC has been seeing some development. And Quadrilateral Security Dialogue has brought the discourse of democracy and human rights.

And in addition, while I said civil society organizations have been making progress like Asia Democracy Network that was launched -- has been developing. And last year on the Sunnylands Initiative, which is a new initiative amongst American think tanks and foundations together with Asian prodemocracy actors was launched.

And I'm briefly mentioning there are four reasons behind these developments. One is the democratization of Asian countries themselves. Those new democracies became the dynamo of bringing these institutions forward in the front of democracy defense. And secondly, institutional development in other regions have been influencing positively onto these regional institutions. And third, civil society actors in Asia have been leading discussions on democracy and human rights and to impact those institutions. And fourth, the expansion of China's influence in Asia has been causing, especially on the Quad and also the Sunnylands Initiative to try to gather democratic countries to strengthen the norms and values of democracy.

MR. HASS: Thank you.

We should now turn to recommendations, policy recommendations for strengthening democratic resilience.

Mireya, if it's all right, I will start with you. Do you have any recommendations that you'd

like to put on the table for how Japan could invigorate some domestic political dynamism? And do you think that it is appropriate or reasonable to expect Japan to play a leading role in the region in promoting political localism?

MS. SOLIS: Thank you, Ryan, and I'll try to be succinct because you have a lot to cover still and time is running away, but I'll try my best.

Let me just say that Japan is at a very important juncture. At stake I think is the ability right now, the political clash to meet the moment. And it's a very serious moment with many challenges. We're seeing many governments, including Japan, facing a test of government competence, the ability of its democratic system to deliver resilient, equitable growth, to handle the public health crisis while preserving economic vitality and instilling competence of the responsiveness of government officials to political concerns.

So therefore, there are many, many crises, economic crises, public health crises, intensified geopolitical competition and Japan is facing these challenges at a moment where it's facing the first leadership concession in eight years where you have prime ministers who are coming with very ambitious plans to change the way in which the Japanese economy works with digitalization and decarbonization, but also with very significant political constraints. He's facing an election later this year.

So if you were to ask me in this context, at this moment of crisis how could Japan advance its own democratic challenges and also be a force for good in the world, I could come up with the following. And of course, it's easier said than done but I think this is where it has to start.

First of all, Japan needs a viable political opposition that can articulate an effective and pragmatic agenda to address the challenges. I think the government, the ruling coalition also face the challenge to show that it can be nimble and responsive. I think that when it came back to power in 2012, it was a changed LDP. It demonstrated that responsiveness but now the question is can it do it again? Can it rise to the challenge?

And I think Japanese voters, especially among the young, need to remain engaged. If things are going to change in Japan, it is going to be, I think, through that citizen engagement.

When it comes to what can Japan do overseas to promote political pluralism, you know, I also note in the paper that Japan and the United States have had very different ideas about democratic support but Japan tends to emphasize with economic aid, governance reforms, rule of law, civil code, but not necessarily support to political parties and opposition parties.

And you know, I think that this is something that I've learned from Maiko-san. I don't want to put words in her mouth but one thing that I would recommend as a go-to issue to discuss now is for the United States and Japan to open that dialogue and try to bring greater convergence in the way in which they think about democratic support in the region because I think there is a very significant gap.

My last point is that, Ryan, that I think policymakers in Tokyo need not only think about whether their approach so far and democratic support has been effective where they could be doing more or not, but also how are they going to position themselves with us, our current reality? (Inaudible) willing to do more to sanction human rights abuses.

There's a very interesting conversation right now going on in Japan about the possibility of adopting something like the Magnitsky Act to sanction individuals who are deemed responsible for human rights violations. That has not happened but I think that that's the future. I think that that conversation is going to be with us more and more and how is Japan going to navigate that I think is something that needs to be put on the table now.

MR. HASS: Thank you.

John, in your last comments you talked about the debate underway between supporters of democratic versus authoritarian approaches to solving societal challenges. How would you handicap that debate as of today, January 29, 2021? And what do you think needs to happen in order for Australia to come out of this COVID-19 moment with more high-functioning democratic institutions?

MR. LEE: Thanks, Ryan. It's a really good question for us.

First, I think we need to get the narrative right. Whether it's comparing performances by states within Australia or comparisons between countries, I think we need to challenge this idea that there is this inherent authoritarian advantage that autocrats are better, in a better place at achieving results and

solving problems. That's a very common assumption in Australia and elsewhere around the world.

In fact, on this issue, a study very recently came out or was released by a think tank here in Australia, the Lowy Institute, once again, which suggested that authoritarian countries are not actually better when it comes to managing the COVID-19 issue. They did a survey of all the countries in the region and came to that conclusion. What they found is it's more about geography, which is, of course, a matter of luck, as well as how well federal and local governments coordinate policies. And it's also about the extent to which populations have trust in their own institutions and their governments which I think is something the United States is now grappling with.

In terms of the Australian experience that you asked about, you know, blocking every democracy, every public policy decision is about balancing rights and obligations and different objectives. And I think there is a problem when governments do not bear the burden or face the consequences of their decisions.

In Australia, we have a problem where the states do not really collect fiscal revenue but receive these from the federal government. I know this seems a very dry subject but stay with me. At the same time, states are responsible for formulating and implementing policies which have huge impacts on the economy and the tax revenue collected, and COVID-19 has shown that these can lead to unbalanced or irresponsible decision-making by state governments.

There does need to be a better alignment between the tiers of government when it comes to making and implementing policies on the one hand and bearing consequences of those policies on the other. This is now actually a discussion and a debate taking place in Australia because of what's occurred over the last few months. That is, aligning better the rights and responsibilities of different levels of government, and I think this is actually a very positive sign for Australia. So this is something positive that has come out of our experiences beyond the health issue.

MR. HASS: Thank you.

Maiko-san, how would you recommend encouraging greater regional investment in strengthening cross-border democratic institutions but perhaps doing so in a way that doesn't sort of push

the region into divergent democratic versus nondemocratic blocks?

MS. ICHIHARA: Oh, yeah, thank you. Let me be succinct because of the time constraints.

I would recommend a multilayered and multi-stakeholder approach for the progress of institution building for democratic defense in the region. One of the issues in the current state of intergovernmental institutions in the Indo-Pacific is the lack of pro-democracy actors with momentum within the frameworks. And so they have to include those actors. And the civil society actors apparently have been, well, playing a really important or have been playing a very important role during the COVID as well, and there should be civil society actors involved in those intergovernmental networks. And by developing both, I mean, both of those intergovernmental networks and inter civil society networks, both of them can supplement with each other.

And secondly, democracies should create or strengthen those intergovernmental or inter-NGO frameworks to strengthen the norms and values of democracy. Asia has been trying to be comprehensive in order to accommodate those authoritarian countries in the region in the discussions on democracy which have been hollowing out the contents of, you know, democracy and human rights. And one of the typical examples is actually Bali Democracy Forum, although it has been doing a wonderful job, but the content has been still weak.

While we maintain those frameworks that incorporate in authoritarian countries, we should strengthen inter-democracy networks. And in that sense, I think the Sunnylands Initiative that I mentioned in the former answer is a useful mechanism. This is so far an attractive approach but it includes former high-ranking governmental officials from Asia. And so there is a possibility that they can connect well with those Asian governments into the framework.

MR. HASS: Thank you.

Richard, what advice would you give to our friends in Taiwan in terms of trying to develop greater political cohesion, recognizing the challenges that you've already laid out? And are there any other countries or historical precedents that Taiwan could look to that have similar attributes to Taiwan's

system to draw inspiration?

MR. BUSH: Those are tough questions. I have a book coming out that covers a lot of them. But let me give you the bottom line conclusion. And that is that I've come to the realization that in order to protect the prosperity, security, and freedom of the people of Taiwan, the islands' leaders will need to contend less and cooperate more. And that's the only way to address some of these problems.

Now, it's interesting that Taiwan's last two presidents, Ma Ying-jeou and Tsai Ing-wen have both made eloquent appeals for national unity, not so different from the appeal that Joe Biden made nine days ago on the west front of the Capitol. These appeals by Presidents Ma and Tsai have seemed to have fallen on deaf ears.

With respect to historical precedents, I would take two from the Cold War. First of all, in the late 1940s, as the Soviet Union was expanding its influence in Eastern and Central Europe, the question was could the U.S. Congress summon sufficient political support for a strategy of containment? And it was possible because in the internationalist wing of the Republican Party led by Senator Arthur Vandenberg, decided to cooperate with the Truman administration. And Vandenberg's phrase was, "Politics stops at the water's edge."

The second one is that Finland, or Finnish leaders who wanted desperately to maintain their national independence and democracy during the Cold War vis-a-vis the Soviet Union, realized that it was going to be necessary to put some restraints on democratic expression in order to avoid provoking the Soviet Union too much.

So the question for me is, can Taiwan's political leaders, in light of the challenges that Taiwan faces, both domestic and external, fix the defects of their representative democracy so that they better serve the people who elected them? Can, for example, they adopt a norm that politics stops at the Taiwan Strait? My own view is the stakes here are too high for complacency and the consequences of policy failure are profound. Thanks.

MR. HASS: Yes, I agree.

Our time is very limited and we've received a flurry of questions from our global audience.

So I'm going to just judiciously pick out two of them, put them in front of you and ask each of you, you know, in 60 seconds or less to just provide a quick reaction.

The first question relates to the Summit for Democracy. This is an initiative that President Biden has proposed and that his team have indicated plans to build on. How big of an impact do you think it will have for democratic dynamics in Asia? How do you think the region will respond to it?

The second question, and you can pick from these two to respond to, is related to influence operations. And it's in response to a comment that Maiko-san made about influence in Japan. And the question is, aren't Chinese influence efforts focused primarily on China's diaspora community in local countries? How much influence do they have over local Japanese or other communities in the countries of concern?

So with that, over to you. Perhaps we can start with John, then Maiko, Richard, and Maria.

MR. LEE: Sure. Thanks.

Just quick comments on both. First, the Summit for Democracy, there are many people in Australia and in the region, particularly in Southeast Asia who don't think the Summit for Democracy is a good idea. I disagree. The reason why I -- well, the reason why a lot of people say it's not a good idea is because there's a perception that a lot of countries will be embarrassed or it will exclude certain countries that are strategic partners. For example, Vietnam. You know, does Singapore take part? Does Malaysia take part? And so on and so on.

The reason why I think it's a good idea is that I think we have become almost embarrassed to talk about democracy which plays into the hands of autocrats, autocratic regimes in the region. And the other thing is that autocrats actually have been quite -- autocratic regimes have been quite successful at defining what democracy is and some of the definitions have now become quite perverse. So I don't think it's actually a bad thing. I think it's a very good thing to have that initiative to focus on a Summit for Democracy as it is now.

The only thing I'd add about it is that I think it needs to focus more so on building

institutions, particularly liberal institutions. I'm talking about rule of law, accountability, property rights, those sorts of things. And progress on universal suffrage. And the reason why I say that is because you can have universal suffrage, but if you don't have institutions the results don't tend to be particularly good. So I do think for the sake of promoting democracy you want to focus on liberal institutions.

Very quickly on the issue of influence, and I feel I've got to answer this because Australia has been really, you know, in the middle of this issue. The reason why China has been so successful, the Chinese Communist Party has been so successful at influencing diasporas, it's not because diasporas are inherently supporters of the Chinese Communist Party. It's because the Chinese Communist Party has been enormously successful at co-opting the leadership of various diaspora community groups. The community groups themselves are not supporters of CCP but a lot of the leaders of these groups, through financial funding, through other forms of assistance, have effectively taken control of a lot of the community groups representing Chinese Australians. That's something the Australian government is currently now addressing quite successfully, but that's the reason why diaspora groups have been an issue. It's more the community leaders of diaspora groups have been an issue for Australia. But that is actually more easily addressed than if it was a situation where diaspora groups were inherently supporters of the Chinese Communist Party which is not the case.

MR. HASS: Thank you, John.

Maiko, and we're up against time, so feel free to jump in if you have some things that you want to supplement.

MS. ICHIHARA: Well, just commenting on China's influence operation in Japan because that was a question I guess raised to me.

Well, indeed, there has been attempts of information manipulation through diaspora organizations and there have been some cases of elite capture. One example is a casino development issue in Japan. But what I found is that there are certain news websites in Japan, especially what's called Record China, that disseminates information on China. But they are manipulated by -- well, they are linked with the United Front Work Department of CCP. And what they have been doing is to basically

disseminate pro-China information in addition to CCP propaganda, but at the same time they have been disseminating anti-Korea sort of on the news to instigate anti-Korea sentiments so that, well, it can split Japan-South Korean relations. And so there's a very political sort of intention behind this on the website. And what's problematic is that their news are disseminated through multiple aggregator news sites in Japan so it reaches a wide audience in Japan.

MR. HASS: Thank you.

Richard, Mireya, do you have any final thoughts?

MR. BUSH: A couple of quick ones. First of all, given the fragility of democracy that was revealed to Americans on January 6th and before, I think an international gathering on this subject should probably be deferred a while. Second, Taiwan is a special case of PRC influence operations.

This is one reason why it's very important for the leaders of all major political parties in Taiwan to get together to draw a line to telegraph in a unified way what behaviors by the PRC are unacceptable. That's it. Thanks.

MR. HASS: Thank you.

MS. SOLIS: Very quickly, Ryan, if I may, the idea of a Summit for Democracy, two things that I think would be very important to avoid is to get tangled up in the messiness of membership, who belongs and who doesn't belong in this. Or that this is seen as a main effort and therefore, there is a sense that the United States is not reaching out to the other countries. And I think that there's something that could be learned from the way in which Japan has approached this question. You know, one thing that has been a constant for Japan is to try to increase the representation of democracies in the regional architecture. And this goes back to the East Asia Summit. This goes back to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. So it's a matter of showing up but it's also a matter to balancing the institutions of the regions so that the democracies are very well represented.

Second, I think that there's a lot to be learned from having focused efforts to collaborate between different, very divergent set of countries on functional issues like supply chain resilience, like vaccine development, so that the totality of the U.S. effort is not just seen as a convocation of

democracies. And once you have that in place then you can think about a more deepened collaboration where interest and values align. And I think that the Quad for example, provides an example that can be built on. The sense is that these are my time (phonetic) democracies that have a shared understanding on the importance of universal values but they also have a very pragmatic interest to defend. And when you approach it in this way I think that then you can nestle whatever conversation is going to take place in the Summit of Democracy in a broader strategic approach towards the region.

MR. HASS: Thank you very much. This has been a tremendously rich conversation thanks to your valuable contributions, all four of you. Thank you for taking the time to walk us through this.

I've come away with two very strong impressions. The first is to really understand dynamics in the region it's important to look at the local level and to understand what factors are at play in driving developments. And then the second, to paraphrase a comment I received from a friend as you all were talking, "Democracy comes in many forms. It's messy, it's imperfect, it's fragile, but it's worth fighting for and working to improve."

So thank you very much for your time this morning, for your wisdom, and I look forward to continuing the conversation.

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