

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION
BROOKINGS CAFETERIA PODCAST
THE ART OF WAR IN AN AGE OF PEACE

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PROCEEDINGS

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

The world is in an age of peace, relatively speaking. Great powers are not fighting each other and haven't for a long time. But, as my guest on this episode says, the United States must stay good at the art of war. Senior Fellow Michael O'Hanlon joins me to talk about his new book, "The Art of War in an Age of Peace: U.S. Grand Strategy and Resolute Restraint," published in May by Yale University Press. In it, O'Hanlon presents a national security policy that contends with current challenges like Russia, China, North Korea, and Middle East turmoil, but also calls for attention to new dangers, including biological, nuclear, digital, climatic, and domestic cohesion. In this era, O'Hanlon argues for continued American engagement, military deterrence, and working with allies.

Also on this episode, Senior Fellow Molly Reynolds offers her thoughts on what's happening in Congress, especially how the filibuster has shaped recent events in the Senate—including failure to establish a bipartisan commission to investigate the January 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol—and also how the filibuster will play out in upcoming debates on election reform, lobbying rules, and more.

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First up, here's, Molly Reynolds with what's happening in Congress.

REYNOLDS: I'm Molly Reynolds, a senior fellow in Governance Studies at the Brookings Institution. When the Senate returns from its Memorial Day recess next week, expect the calls—which have been growing since President Biden took office in January—for Senate Democrats to change the chamber's filibuster rule—or to eliminate it entirely—to

continue. Just before the recess, legislation to create an independent, bipartisan commission to investigate the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on January 6 failed to advance; 35 Republicans had voted in favor of the legislation in the House, but only six of their Senate colleagues did so.

The failure of the commission legislation, first and foremost, illustrates the degree to which many Republican members of Congress want to divert attention from the attack and, in at least some cases, believe that what happened was no different than—to quote one Republican House member—a “normal tourist visit.” But the way it failed in the Senate reminds us of one of the many legislative challenges created by the Senate filibuster rule. Ending debate on most legislation requires three-fifths of the Senate’s membership—generally 60 votes, unless there are several vacancies—showing up and voting in favor of a measure. The burden is on the supporters of the legislation to muster those votes; as long as the proponents aren’t going to get to 60, opponents can miss the vote and still get what they want. Indeed, nine Republicans and two Democrats missed the vote on the January 6 commission. It didn’t matter for the outcome; given what we know about senators’ positions on the measure, supporters of the bill would have still fallen short even if everyone had been present and voting. But it does remind us that the filibuster, as it presently operates, does not always impose equal costs on the majority and the minority.

A second legislative debate that unfolded in parallel with the failure of the January 6 commission legislation also illustrates an important way in which the filibuster shapes the Senate’s deliberation in the contemporary Congress. For roughly two weeks preceding the Memorial Day recess, the Senate had been debating research and development legislation—framed, in part, as a way to counter Chinese efforts to assert more technological power. The bill went through committee deliberation and was—in a way that is unusual for legislation in the Senate in recent years—the subject of several amendments on the floor. It appeared likely

to pass with bipartisan support before Memorial Day, but Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, responding to efforts to stall the bill's progress by several Republicans, ultimately pushed the final vote until after the Senate returns.

If the Senate is successful at passing the measure in a few weeks, it won't have fallen victim to a filibuster—but its consideration will still have been shaped by the Senate's effective 60 vote requirement for most legislation. Among the reasons Republicans gave for objecting to moving on to final passage of the measure was that, despite being given some opportunities to amend the bill, they had not been given enough chances to do so. This conflict illustrates one major challenge of legislating, even on a bipartisan basis, in the contemporary Senate: relatively few bills come to the floor that are expected to get enough votes to clear the 60-vote threshold, and so the ones that do are targeted aggressively by rank-and-file senators as a way to achieve their legislative goals. Senate leaders have to provide enough opportunities for input to secure the coalition they need for passage without making so many changes that the entire agreement unravels. Add in the fact, even if there are 60 votes for something, the Senate often requires the agreement of all 100 senators to speed up a plodding process of jumping through necessary procedural hoops and we are left with a chamber where deliberation on even measures with bipartisan support are affected by the filibuster.

In addition to returning to consideration of the research and development bill, Schumer has also indicated that he will bring sweeping legislation to change election administration, lobbying rules, and the process by which congressional districts are drawn—known as the For the People Act—to the Senate floor later in June. The House passed its version of this bill in March, but it will meet the same fate as the January 6 commission legislation in the Senate: a filibuster. And while a range of legislators inside the chamber and advocates outside of it argue that Democrats should change or eliminate the filibuster for the

purposes of passing S. 1, they do not currently have the necessary unanimity in the caucus to do so.

In the coming weeks and months, the For the People Act is likely to be joined by other Democratic priorities on the list of bills that cannot move forward thanks to combination of Republican opposition and Democratic disagreement on a combination of the underlying policy itself and the legislative strategy necessary to pass it. Whether Senate Democrats ultimately chart a different course remains to be seen, but in the meantime, debate over the future of the filibuster will be much of what's happening in Congress.

DEWS: And now, here's my interview with Michael O'Hanlon on his new book, "The Art of War in an Age of Peace."

Mike, welcome back to the Brookings Cafeteria.

O'HANLON: Thank you, Fred. Nice to be with you today.

DEWS: I looked at the records and it's been probably over four years since I interviewed you on the Brookings cafeteria. You did a lot of interviews with other scholars last year, but I haven't actually had an opportunity to interview you directly in a long time, and I apologize for that. So, it's great to see you again.

O'HANLON: Well, thank you for making this a special occasion. And I'm thrilled because this book is something that I hope speaks to the moment and brings together a lot of what I've been trying to do in my career. So this is this is the right moment to return to the Cafeteria.

DEWS: Right. And so for again, for listeners, the occasion is the publication by Yale University Press of your book, "The Art of War in an Age of Peace: U.S. Grand Strategy and Resolute Restraint." There's a lot to unpack just in the title, and I always like to ask authors to unpack their title. So can you discuss that duality, the art of war, which sounds like Sun Tzu to me, and also the age of peace?

O'HANLON: Well, you are 100 percent correct that I tried to pack a lot in and with the title I tried to create tension, or even an oxymoronic quality. Why worry about the art of war if it's really an age of peace? And what I'm trying to do is, is partly to counter two prevailing sentiments that are out there that I want to challenge. One is that somehow the world is falling apart, just because China's rising and Russia's in a bad mood and other problems are apparent. And I really think that if we look at the fundamentals of today's global order, it's still fairly strong. Yes, it's being challenged on multiple fronts and it's fraying. And there are new threats emerging, not least COVID-19. But, the great powers don't fight, at least they don't at least they don't fight over major territory and don't really want to threaten each other's existence, as best I could tell. And that's huge news compared to most of world history.

So that's why it's an age of peace. Great powers are not really interested in lopping off big chunks of each other's territory, and they're not really able to because we have enough capability in the form of nuclear deterrence, conventional deterrence, to prevent that.

But that gets to the art of war. We've got to stay good at the art of war. This is not a naturally self-sustaining moment of quietude. Obviously, it's not quiet if we look around the Middle East or certain other areas, and we see China challenging its neighbors on the Himalayas with India East, and South China Sea threatening Taiwan, we see Russia threatening Ukraine. So obviously it's not really quiet. But to the extent that the great powers don't fight, which to me is the fundamental point that I want to drive home in describing this as an age of peace that requires American engagement and military deterrence, working with allies, among others. And so that's why the art of war is still important. So, we've got to stay good at the art of war, even though this is an age of peace.

DEWS: Right. Well, I want to ask you to take us through in more detail your arguments in the book in a few minutes. But I want to I want to stay on the book itself for just

a couple of more questions. And you start in your preface by noting that and I'll quote, "more than anything I've ever written, this book is the result of a lifetime of education and learning." And Mike, you've written or coauthored, by my count, on around 30 books or something. Quite an astonishing volume. How does this book fit into that body of work?

O'HANLON: This is the first time I tried to describe an overall foreign policy for the United States that I wanted to recommend, which, as you know, is often labeled by the term grand strategy, especially as you're thinking about the military and national security elements, not just not just the military, but more generally protecting the country from physical threats. That's where I really associate the term grand strategy. And in this book, I try to pull it all together. I try to pull together what the Pentagon has often called the traditional threats, the "4+1": Russia, China, North Korea, Iran and terrorism. That's been a phrase that's been around for about a half-dozen years. And then I talked about the new 4+1: biological threats, including pandemic nuclear proliferation threats; digital threats, including cyber hacking and espionage and artificial intelligence; climate threats, including rising oceans and changing rainfall patterns; and then finally, the threats here at home that come from our not being unified as a country, not being as well as before to stay active on the world stage and without a very strong, active United States.

I don't think this global order necessarily remains an age of peace. So, I wanted to cover that full landscape and I didn't, you know in two hundred pages I didn't want to get into detailed prescriptions about each and every tool of U.S. foreign policy. But there is a chapter on the defense budget, defense strategy, and there is a chapter on the home front or at least the new 4+1 and what to try to do about each of them, including the home front and our domestic challenges here.

So again, I'm trying to push back both against the people who say the world is falling apart and the people who say that we don't really need much of a military budget, that war

has become obsolete. I don't think either of those positions holds up. And so, I'm trying to chart a passionate middle course. It's not really a defense of the status quo. There are a number of areas where I challenge the status quo, but I am arguing passionately for sort of what you might call a moderate American foreign policy.

DEWS: I think in that is the tension that you mentioned just a few minutes ago and that tension courses throughout the book. And it's not only in the title, *The Art of War in an Age of Peace*. It's also in part of the subtitle, which I'd like to ask you about now. And that's the concept of resolute restraint, U.S. grand strategy and resolute restraint. So what is resolute restraint?

O'HANLON: So, I put equal emphasis on both words. "Resolute" means that we have to defend our own country, of course, but also our key allies, their major territories, their populations, their safety. We have to make sure the alliances really mean things, NATO, U.S.-Japan, U.S.-Korea, et cetera. So, in that sense, there can be no wavering.

And also we need to protect open oceans and sea lanes and air lanes upon which global commerce depends and freedom of movement. And again, if the Chinese try to shut down the South China Sea by basically claiming it's Chinese territory, that's preposterous. I tell Chinese friends that's sort of the worst thing they're saying these days, and that's unacceptable. And I actually would be willing to fight China over access to the South China Sea. On almost all other issues I look for ways around conflict, but on that one, if they really try to shut it down, I don't think we have much of a choice. So there's the resoluteness.

But the restraint part comes because I think, looking around the United States, going back to the Iraq war experience, Vietnam before that, we do have a tendency sometimes in America to maybe either inflate a threat or get so passionate about confronting it that we don't think as clearly about what that could require. And we actually need to stay a little bit more calm, and also not get too worried that the world is falling apart, not feel like each and

every little Chinese or Russian probe is tantamount to Hitler trying to take pieces of Czechoslovakia or Austria or what have you. It's a whole different world and it's not as dangerous as those earlier periods.

So, in that regard, restraint is in order. If there is a crisis with another nuclear armed country, generally speaking I want to look for nonmilitary ways to try to de-escalate it, if at all possible. I don't want us to be in the position of firing the first shot to reclaim some uninhabited island in the Western Pacific, for example. And I also don't want us to expand alliances further, especially NATO, especially into the former Soviet space with countries like Ukraine and Georgia that used to be part of the Soviet Union that we've promised now for 13 years running to bring into NATO someday. I think that's a categorically bad idea and I try to explain why in the book.

And so, again, this notion that we have to cover much of the globe with American alliances I don't think holds up very well. It doesn't really it doesn't really follow from the basic reasons these alliances were created in the first place and doesn't really make sense for today's world. So that's another area where I advocate restraint.

And then finally on how we handle North Korea and Iran, these fledgling or would-be nuclear powers. I think we have to be resolute but also be pragmatic. And so we can get into that in a little bit. But the North Koreans are not going to give up all their nuclear bombs because of some brilliant Biden diplomatic effort. And so we've got to get out of the habit of thinking that Biden or Trump or Obama or Bush or Clinton or anybody can talk the North Koreans out of their bombs. That can't be a realistic first step. And so, again, a little bit of restraint in our ambition or something like that negotiation, I think, is appropriate.

DEWS: Let's go to that NATO question for a moment then. You mentioned it throughout the book. It's a very important issue, and you argue for not expanding NATO

beyond its current configuration. Can you explain to listeners why expanding NATO to countries like Ukraine and Georgia is a bad idea?

O'HANLON: Sure. But I'll start by asking why did we expand NATO by 14 more countries since the Cold War ended? It's done, and I'm not suggesting we undo it. And there were some reasons that had to do more with protecting and promoting democracy in Europe. Because during a lot of that period, we didn't really think Russia would be a threat again and we didn't really think about bringing in former Warsaw Pact countries and the Baltic states and many of the Balkans states in terms of defending them from Russia.

But I think we indirectly contributed to a worsening of tensions with Russia. I mean, George Kennan, Mikhail Gorbachev, a lot of people told us back in the '90s that this could probably be a big mistake and yet we did it anyway even though the reason that NATO was created no longer even existed, which was, of course, the Soviet threat to Europe, to Western Europe in particular. So, I think we got sloppy in thinking about a military tool as an instrument of democracy promotion. When you confuse purposes like that, I think you're asking for trouble.

So now NATO includes 30 countries. It only had 16 members at the end of the Cold War. It only had 12 when it was created in 1949. So, I just want to ask people to put this idea on pause. What do we think we're doing with expansion of NATO? Do we really want a promise that we'll risk American lives in the most far reaching and relatively peripheral areas of Europe and even into Asia? Because the country of Georgia is actually in Asia. And NATO explicitly says in its founding charter it's for North America and Europe. And yet we've gotten so ambitious in our vision for what the alliance can usefully do that we're now, ever since George W. Bush, promising that someday Georgia will be in as well. I just think we've turned the whole logic upside down.

And, the way I answer your question directly about why we should not bring these countries in is, in addition to the military practicality of not wanting to send my kids or your kid or anybody else's kids in the United States, six, seven thousand miles away into the heartland of the European or Eurasian steppe into a place that Russia considers to be sort of its own historical heartland to defend a country right next to Russia. In addition to that, I would say I like to go back to the great Greek philosopher Thucydides—or the historian and strategist; you mentioned, Sun Tzu who, of course, was a great Chinese thinker back in ancient times. But Thucydides wrote during roughly 400 B.C. period when Sparta and Athens were at war. And it's a beautiful book because he really gets at, I think, a lot of the nature of human beings and human competition in the security space in a way that holds up today in many regards. And he said that people go to war for one of three reasons: Greed, and that's explains a lot of imperialism historically; fear, because they think they're about to be attacked if they don't attack first; and then finally, and here's the key, pride, or honor as Thucydides put it.

And I think Vladimir Putin is all about wounded pride. And he saw the United States, in his judgment, rub the face of Russia metaphorically into the sand after the Cold War ended, when, in his opinion, the Soviets had done a good thing by conceding the Cold War and ending it themselves. And yet we chose then to expand NATO and use of military power throughout the broader Middle East. And, when you read Putin's views as, for example, laid out in our great colleague Fiona Hill's book with Cliff Gaddy, “Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin,” which was a book they wrote about seven or eight years ago, you really sense that this is genuine. This is the way Putin views the world. Now, he's a bad guy. He's corrupt. He's got a lot of corrupt friends. I'm not suggesting we should really want to please Vladimir Putin. But I am suggesting that he is typical of the way humans and Russians think about security. And if you bring a Western military construct right into their heartland for reasons

that are not particularly apparent, they're not going to like it. And you're basically guaranteeing a bad relationship. So, you can sit on the principle that you're allowing all of Europe to be free and democratic and make its own sovereign choices. And to me, that's a that's a hortatory goal, that's an abstract goal that sounds good, but it doesn't really square with the realities of international politics. And I'm not saying Russia deserves its own sphere of influence. But for Russia, we're trying to make Ukraine and Georgia into our sphere of influence and it's right up against their borders and it's formally part of their own country. And I just think you're asking for trouble. If you do that.

There are better ways to help Ukraine and Georgia make progress. And frankly, when we promise NATO membership, I think we encourage Russia to do enough to destabilize those countries that they won't be eligible, which is why 13 years after the promise was first made to each of them, neither one is in NATO. Russia's managed to destabilize and it will continue to do that. So, we just got to rethink the whole concept. And I believe in a zone of non-alignment in Eastern Europe. That to me is the is the right answer.

DEWS: Can you talk a little bit more then about that tension as it exists in actual NATO countries that do border Russia and I think Estonia and Lithuania among them? You talk about some of the book. Can you explore that for the listener, please?

O'HANLON: Yeah. And I begin the chapter on Europe with sort of a passage from my trip to Lithuania two years ago, sponsored by the Atlantic Council and done in conjunction with our colleague Steve Pifer. Great trip and it's a beautiful country, it was this time of year, so even though it's far north, it was bound to be gorgeous. And those countries, as you know, are in NATO. The Soviet Union had forcibly annexed them at the beginning of World War II and never let them go. Wasn't their choice to join the Soviet Union. And so when George W. Bush decided in 2002 that he wanted to convince the rest of the existing NATO membership of that time to bring the Baltics into NATO, there was a reasonable

argument. But we also were asking for some trouble. And lo and behold, as Russia got stronger and angrier over the next dozen years, the idea of having these Baltic states in NATO no longer seemed like such a no brainer because all of a sudden, we've got to worry about defending them. And this is wide open tank country right next to Russia's borders. So, if you look at a map, all three of the Baltics border Russia; with Estonia and Latvia, it's on their eastern side, with Lithuania, it's on the western side, that Kaliningrad pocket, and it also borders Belarus. And so, they are exposed.

Now, in keeping with it, you know, tension in my book—this is not a peacenik book. I basically say NATO has been correct to recognize that since we have brought the Baltics into NATO, we'd better be capable of defending them. You can't have half measures. You can't have second class allies. And you can't give Russia any sense that they could get away with, you know, chipping away at the territory of the Baltics or even just grabbing them in one big chunk, one big bite. So, for example, since 2014, NATO has been building up a small but more capable presence in each of the Baltic states. And the United States has built up a larger presence dominated by U.S. Army forces in Poland. I support all that and I think we have to keep it. In fact, I might even augment it here and there.

But at the same time, the Baltics, which were never really properly part of Russia in any historical or cultural sense, are different from Ukraine and Georgia, which are much closer to Russia, much more inherently and intrinsically involved in its security. And therefore, I think a bridge too far in terms of contemplating NATO membership. So, I'm not suggesting we undo NATO or that we somehow dismantle it, but I am saying it's big enough. Thirty is plenty. And let's stop there.

DEWS: Let's stop there and let's go back to Asia, to the South China Sea and other regions that you talk about a lot in the book, I think there was a recent incident, in fact, in which China said to the U.S. Navy, you're in our waters, you need to leave. And this seems to

be happening more and more. And they're building something in places in these far-flung islands that aren't really that close to China, as far as I know. Can you talk about how resolute restraint responds to China in an era when it seems to be getting more aggressive with its military, but it's also expanding economically in places around the world?

O'HANLON: Right. Well, the economic stuff I'm not suggesting we counter with a military buildup. In fact, we often have to get our own economic game in better order and recognize that there are some places where China invests that the recipient countries actually want that investment and need it. There are other places where China's so-called Belt and Road Initiative is rather exploitative and not very optimized for the needs of countries that are often incurring loans with harsh payback provisions. So, Belt and Road is really a mixed bag and we should be trying to arm countries around the world with the economic sophistication to know when to say yes and when to say no to those Chinese loans, and also to be offering our own alternative kinds of finance. So that's the economic piece.

But to get to your South China Sea issue. Yeah, you're right, Fred. So starting about eight years ago, the Chinese started to reclaim, quote unquote or frankly just build, these artificial islands where there were already land formations that you could see at low tide or very shallow water. And you could imagine dredging up from other nearby areas and then just putting a lot of sand and rock on top of a small concentrated space and creating an artificial island. They built about seven of those. They've got airfields on a few of them. They've got air defense systems, missile batteries. And this was all after President Xi promised President Obama that he would not militarize those islands. So, I consider him to have broken that pledge.

So I think the United States did need to clarify, as we began to in the latter Obama years, that we're going to still operate in the South China Sea, and we're not going to recognize Chinese control of these islands, even though there's some degree of legal

ambiguity. But frankly, the Permanent Tribunal at The Hague has argued that China does not have the right to do what it's been doing, even if there's some degree of legal ambiguity about some of the actions. We cannot allow any ambiguity about our access and the international community's access to the waterways of the South China Sea, and the so-called nine-dash line that China's drawn to more or less claim the South China Sea as an inland lake or the equivalent thereof. That's unacceptable.

So, the good news is, they won't admit it, but I think the Chinese know it's unacceptable. I think they know we're not going to put up with that. And they may have some kind of a concept for how to try to push us out. But since we're not going to be persuaded and they presumably don't want to shoot at us, then I think we're sort of reaching a new normal, which is tense, but probably not fundamentally dangerous as long as we stay resolute, hence title and subtitle of my book. So, that's where I think we are with the South China Sea.

I actually worry a little more these days about Taiwan, which, as you know, the Chinese consider a core part of their territory, even though they've not controlled it and there's been a separate government there in effect since 1949. It's not a government that we recognize as a country, but it's one that we have good relations with, President Biden is trying to establish good ongoing relations, maybe even upgrade those a little bit at a quasi-official or unofficial level without recognizing Taiwan as a country, per se. But with China's much greater military capabilities in the modern era, I think that Taiwan is getting harder and harder for us to defend the way we would have historically. So, part of what I do in the book is to suggest a way to help defend Taiwan [that] does not require us to sort of sail our Navy within 100 miles of the Chinese coast and try to break a blockade the Chinese might have imposed on Taiwan. I think that mission is getting too difficult and dangerous militarily, and I'm not even sure who would really win between China and the United States. And I'm not even sure winning is a meaningful concept because whoever is initially losing may decide to

escalate to use nuclear weapons, especially the Chinese might do that. If they think they're losing a key part of their own territory, they might start using nuclear weapons tactically against our aircraft carrier battle groups or Okinawa, Japan and our airfields. And then who knows where that ends.

So, I'm really nervous about a fight over Taiwan, and I want us to have more options for what we could do in response rather than just have to go break a blockade directly or try to do that. And so I develop a concept that seems to have some resonance with Secretary of Defense Austin's new term of "integrated deterrence," because I want to, in that scenario, have the option of using economic warfare against China where our allies are with us, and then also trying to use military force to interfere with China's shipping in the Indian Ocean, where we have more geographic advantages and the Chinese have a lot of dependencies on Persian Gulf and African oil, among other things.

So, that's not necessarily designed to be our only option, but it's a new option that I think we need to prepare to deploy because it actually does require some preparation right now, including making sure we're not vulnerable to Chinese economic retaliation. So, we've got to diversify our sourcing on certain kinds of materials, certain kinds of rare earth metals, certain kinds of electronic components so China would not have the upper hand or the escalation dominance in any economic war between the United States and allies, on the one hand, versus China on the other. So that's where the Taiwan contingency, I think, requires some new thinking and the full government and not just the Department of Defense involved in preparations which are largely going to be in the economic realm, not just in the military realm.

DEWS: Is your worry about that Taiwan scenario somehow related to, say, the relative strength of the Chinese military, the Chinese navy especially as compared to the U.S. Navy? And here I'm also thinking about I remember during the Obama administration, critics

of his policy would count the number of U.S. Navy ships and count the number of Chinese Navy ships and show that there was an imbalance in the two. There was talk on the Trump administration about increasing the number of U.S. Navy warships. And you've written tons about military readiness, military equipment, military budget. Is there something in that worry about just the actual composition and strength of the U.S. military assets in that area?

O'HANLON: It's a great question, Fred. And, first of all, yes, you're right to note the changing trends. The Chinese now have a larger navy in the sense of more ships by, I think, 20 percent. We have a larger navy in the sense of more aggregate size and tonnage, because we have the big ships, we have the big aircraft carriers, we have the medium size aircraft carriers that the Marine Corps will often operate planes off. We have the large amphibious ships that the Marine Corps could send Marines ashore from, plus a lot of destroyers and other surface combatants. We still have the world's best attack submarine force.

But the Chinese are catching up and they have good attack submarines now in substantial numbers for the first time in their history. They also have very good missiles that can be fired either from land or other platforms and with precision, a few meters' precision, attack airfields or if we're close enough, even our ships. And so it's not just navy on navy. It's a broader military change.

And the problem is not that China's better than we are militarily. It's that the scenario that we're talking about is right next to China's coastline. So, it gives China an advantage. And when you think about it, it's sort of stunning and jaw dropping that for many decades we thought, and correctly thought, we could win a war against China right next to its home coast. Because even though China had fought us to a draw in the Korean War, they did not have the kind of naval or air capability that could compete with the United States during most of the Cold War.

And so, for a maritime fight or a Taiwan struggle, whether it was an invasion attempt by China or a blockade or anything else, we were way ahead militarily and we could have dominated. But now they have quiet submarines, accurate missiles, stealthy airplanes. And because the fight would be so close to their shores, they could cause a lot of trouble for us and we would lose a lot of American assets. And by the way, whoever seemed to win that first engagement, I don't know why we assume the other side would just take that defeat.:

28:14] ~~It's more like~~ [0.5s] It's not so much like Saddam Hussein getting overthrown or the Taliban being overthrown in Afghanistan. It's more like the first inning of a baseball game or, you know, or maybe the first game in an NFL season when, you know, you're going to play the same team later in the season and there's a lot of time to do things. And maybe it's more like the European struggles or maybe Germany between the World Wars when it basically spent 20 years digesting the results of the First World War and tragically under Hitler, getting ready for the second. I'm not suggesting the Chinese are as bad as Hitler, but I do think that whoever loses that initial fight over Taiwan might actually decide to draw some lessons, take some compensating steps, and get ready to try again in a few years.

So, this is really not a fight we want to have near China's shores. And that's why I want to play to our advantages. We have at least two big advantages over China. One, we have a lot of allies and they don't. And our allies are all over the world, including in the Middle East. And, two, we've been building this long-range power projection-oriented military for decades, and they are primarily a regional military. So, if we can have any kind of confrontation confined to the Indian Ocean/Persian Gulf areas for at least for another decade or maybe two, I think that plays to our strengths, and the Chinese won't be as good. Obviously, my hope is that over that one to two decades, we see an evolution of the U.S.-China relationship to the point where we don't have to duke it out militarily, that we figure out some solution to our disagreements, that the Taiwan issue would somehow be mitigated

or resolved. And so, if and when China has caught up as a global military superpower worthy of that term, maybe in a couple of decades, the risks won't be as great as they seem to be right now. So that's sort of my vision for how to think about the Taiwan problem.

DEWS: Well, Mike, I want to pivot from the existing 4+1 framework to the new 4+1 framework that you have in the book and that you've written about before. Can you first just again lay out for listeners what those 4+1 elements are?

O'HANLON: Yeah. By the way, two quick shout outs, if I could, while we're wrapping up the China piece and transitioning to the new 4+1—I want to also commend everybody, the books of my colleagues that have just come out on China. Ryan Hass's book, "Stronger," which is sort of an integrated U.S. grand strategy towards China, specifically. And then Cheng Li's book on the middle class in Shanghai and how we have to think of that kind of group as a group that can be our friend and can help us in the broader pursuit of peace with China and reform in China if we play our cards right.

DEWS: Cheng Li was just on the Cafeteria. And I'll put links to both those books in the show notes.

O'HANLON: That's excellent. And then I had the privilege and pleasure of writing a book seven years ago with Jim Steinberg on U.S.-China relations, "Strategic Reassurance and Resolve." And Steinberg taught me a lot about how to think about China, and he's been a very thoughtful person, former VP of Brookings Foreign Policy program, also former deputy secretary of state of the United States of America, so a very experienced guy there as well.

In shifting to the new 4+1, you know, Fred, it just struck me as I wrote this book that I didn't want it to just be about classic defense policy. That's what I've written about in a lot of my other work. And if this book is going to address grand strategy, at least has to in some way try to situate classic defense challenges within the full spectrum of all national security threats to the United States, including nontraditional ones—transnational, global, maybe

more you could call it the 21st-century threat agenda, even though some pieces have been around longer than 20 years. And so even though many of the old threats are still around, but it's sort of the new age kinds of threats.

And the more I pondered, the more I recognized that I really could use a similar kind of framing for the new threats as for the old threats, because, again, Chairman Dunford—the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joseph Dunford—he came up with this 4+1 concept back in 2015 when China and Russia had been getting much more assertive as he took the reins at the top job at the Pentagon for uniformed military. And he coined this notion of 4+1: Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, and transnational terrorism, and the last one being different from the other four because it's not a single nation state. So, four plus one.

Similarly, and especially in the era of COVID, it made sense to me to begin with the broad range of biological threats, which could be either manmade biological weapons or pandemic like COVID-19. And then nuclear proliferation. Even though there are also nuclear dangers associated with Dunford's 4+1, nuclear proliferation is sort of a danger unto itself if the threats expand or diversify. And because of the seriousness and the destructive power of nuclear weapons, I wanted to emphasize that again. And then, of course, digital threats, and everybody's talking about robots and artificial intelligence and Terminators these days. But the simpler threats are more about hacking of our cyber infrastructure, our command systems perhaps being vulnerable, our national infrastructure being vulnerable, our political system being vulnerable to various kinds of cyber threats. And certainly, that needed attention. And then climate, which in the years to come could wind up displacing tens or even hundreds of millions of people around the world. And that could have national security implications if it displaces huge numbers in certain specific areas of the world and the refugee flows become major problems for international politics, for the countries that may be receiving them. We saw what happened with refugee flows just out of the Syrian civil war, much smaller flows

than I'm talking about now. And that allowed some ISIS fighters to immerse themselves within those refugee flows and then start attacking targets in Western Europe. So, there are all sorts of ways a climate if it leads to especially the much larger refugee movements, could be a security threat.

So again, biological, nuclear, digital climate, those four. And then the plus one is our own domestic cohesion and our own willingness as a nation to play the role of leader that we have been playing since World War II. And without which I really worry about the ability of the international order to hold together. On this point, I'm like Bob Kagan, who wrote a book in 2012, "The World America Made," and wrote another book in 2018, "The Jungle Grows Back," expressing concern that the world America made is starting to really weaken. Bob is probably a little more pessimistic than I am, but I think we share the view that it's not clear how the international order is backed up and undergirded without American alliances and military power. Just too much possibility for Russia to be tempted to do things in Eastern Europe, for Japan, Korea, and China to wind up resuming their historical rivalries and animosities, for other things to happen. I really think the United States, by virtue of being a more distant power and also a superpower, can help with its alliances and its forward military deployments to actually calm some of these neighborhoods that are not naturally self-calming unto themselves.

And so that's sort of where I'm coming from with some of these ideas towards different key parts of the world. But if we're not willing to do that, if we feel that this international order is not serving our interests, if we have presidents like Donald Trump who challenge the whole logic of trade and alliances, and actually next time around more than Trump did previously actually start dismantling some of those alliances or trade agreements or other main elements of the international economic and security order, then I really worry about not only our own well-being at home, but what this means for the stability of the

planet. So that's why American domestic cohesion has to be seen as a national security concern. And it's the "+1" in my new 4+1. So, I've got the old four plus one and the new four plus one.

DEWS: Is that domestic cohesion, is that really about the current politics? Is it about our economic state, is it about these issues that we talk about with, you know, poverty, inequality? I'll just tell listeners that the acknowledgments section of your book in the front, I always read the acknowledgments of books because they say a lot. You think just hundreds of scholars, authors, colleagues, a lot of our foreign policy people. But I noticed a lot of them are domestic policy scholars, especially at the Brookings Institution, in the Metropolitan Policy Program, in global economy, in the Economic Studies program. And that really struck me as I read through the book and was grasping your new 4+1 framework, just a huge array. And then you call that section the domestic underpinnings of national power and purpose.

O'HANLON: Yeah. And by the way, a quick shout out to Fiona Hill, whose book does some similar things. And it will be coming out, I think, in a few months. I just read it in draft, it's spectacular. But you're right, Fred, that I'm very worried about American domestic cohesion and I have looked for answers in the work of my colleagues. I describe myself as a Sam Nunn Democrat, not just because I was born in Georgia and I love Sam Nunn, but I'm fairly centrist. But centrist doesn't mean just always going back to the middle of the road options. I do think there are some very important and powerful ideas from both the left and the right that we should think hard about that speak to the issue of the American working class and middle class not being nearly as strong as they have been historically and not really having a positive vision for the likely future that awaits for them, for their kids. And it's a question of income trends, it's a question of job insecurity, it's a question of feeling disrespected. So, Richard Reeves, and Belle Sawhill, and a number of other colleagues, as well as our colleagues in Metropolitan studies who think about how to get local economies

going more strongly like Alan Berube and Mark Muro and Amy Liu, these are some of the people who have influenced me.

So, as a foreign policy analyst, I'm not going to overstate my expertise on politics or my sense of how to change the culture wars. But I do think that economic insecurity is a big part of the problem. The basic drying up or weakening of the middle-class dream in America that says that if you work hard, you can improve the quality of life of yourself and your kids. They can probably have a better life than you did, or at least that you'll all feel a certain financial security. And I think that that traditional sort of 1940s, '50s, '60s view of how our economy is supposed to function is no longer widely believed. And the culprits are often seen as international trade, when in fact that may be a little bit of the problem, but automation is probably a larger part.

And, of course, this is where inequality comes into play. I'm not necessarily so concerned about promoting equality, but the sense that some people have that they're not getting a fair shake, that's a danger. And so I try to go through colleagues' books like the different people we've already mentioned, plus Bill Gale and other people who have written about sort of figuring out a way to pay for the kinds of investments we need to make in physical infrastructure, human infrastructure, skills, job retraining.

And without trying to argue that government programs are the only solution here, I nonetheless just try to do the math, sort of tapping back into my previous stint at the Congressional Budget Office, where I first worked in Washington for Bob Reischauer and Bob Hale and tried to just do the numbers and figure out if we're going to get serious about really restoring the middle class dream in America. What's the scale of investment that's needed? We see some of this dialog with President Biden, with people on the left and the right who are trying to come up with big packages. And if there's one blessing out of COVID, it's sort of blown up the debate. And you're allowed to talk these days about big numbers,

because we obviously on both sides of the aisle have recognized the need for big responses to COVID. And so, in that sense, one can be a little bit more comprehensive.

And what's daunting, unfortunately, is that because I believe the middle class and the working class and folks not doing as well, cannot be asked to pay more taxes, that it's the top 20 percent, as Richard Reeves has underscored, who really have benefited from economic trends of the last generation and need to be asked to pay those greater taxes and doing the math and aspiring to a greater degree of fiscal responsibility than we have today, even if this would not mean balancing the budget right away. It looks to me like the wealthy among us, and I would include myself and most people I know in Bethesda in this definition, we probably need to pay at least 25 percent more taxes if the kinds of investments that are needed are going to be made, because I don't think those can come out of the Pentagon budget, which is not big enough to fund all the things that need to happen domestically, and also is important for international stability, as discussed earlier. And I don't think those kind of revenues can come just out of the top 1 percent, just out of the billionaires. There aren't enough of them, although they have to certainly be asked to do a lot more.

But I think the top 20 percent are going to have to be asked to varying degrees to consider paying more taxes if we're really going to get serious about all the investments that are going to be needed.

We'll see if that becomes politically possible to discuss right now. That's not politically possible to discuss in the sense that President Biden has concluded the only real taxes he can talk about are on the top 1 percent and on corporations, unless I'm missing something. But that's basically been the Democratic line for a couple of decades. The Republican line is no new taxes on anybody and cut them, in fact, where you can. And I'm afraid that both of these positions are inadequate if you take seriously the kinds of physical, human, educational, scientific, infrastructural investments the country needs. So, I don't claim

to solve the problem, but I do try to do the math and to sketch out at least the rough magnitude of what I think would be needed if we're going to be serious about addressing the set of problems in our country in the coming years.

DEWS: Sure, and there's more in throughout the book on that particular "+1" in your 4+1 framework and also listeners to the show will be familiar with other episodes I've done with Richard Reeves, Martin Muro, Isabel Sawhill, Bill Gale. So, I commend all that to listeners' attention. Mike, as we as we start to wrap up here, I want to go back to one of the central tensions that course courses throughout the book. You talk about it a lot, and that's the distinction that you make between a rules-based global order and a liberal global order. What's the difference and why does that distinction matter?

O'HANLON: Thanks, Fred. And if you don't mind, I'm also going to, one more of my sort of linguistic hang ups is the phrase "American exceptionalism." So, if you don't mind, I'll add a word on that as well.

DEWS: Absolutely. Absolutely.

O'HANLON: But on the rules-based order versus the liberal order, you know, I've been reading literature in the international political science realm for a long time. And this term "liberal order" gets tossed around a lot. And I don't think people define it very carefully. And I think people mean different things by it, even though they talk about it as if it's sort of got an obvious meaning. I think at its simplest level, what it means is that nation states are not inherently in zero sum competition for survival and for power, that in fact one could imagine a collective benefit to various kinds of trends in human existence and interstate relations. Also, I think it implies that progress is possible, which is another way of saying the same thing, that we don't have to keep falling back on the kinds of dynamics that have dominated much of history, with warfare often being the means by which competing countries or groups settle their disputes.

But then there's also the concept of liberal order meaning the full range of sort of progressive ambitions, many of which I support--better environmental policy, better climate policy, better human rights policy around the world, protection for the innocent, helping on the anti-poverty agenda, helping defeat authoritarianism. And those are all very important goals. But I think that they should be distinguished from what I call the "rules-based order." The liberal order can be very ambitious if it's taken to mean this full range of progressive ambitions whereas the rules-based order is what we really have to make sure we uphold, and that is no fighting between the major powers, no challenges to the territories of the major powers, and protection for the international seaways and airways on which the global economy and more generally global society depend. And also, I would say, restricting the proliferation of the most dangerous weapons, especially nuclear weapons but in the future biological weapons and perhaps digital weapons.

So, that to me is the rules-based order. It's a little more simple, it's a little more foundational, it's a little more basic, and it's a little more essential for our own safety and survival. And so, what I try to argue is, yes, let's have a debate about how to advance a liberal order if we wish, and let's talk about what that means, and which tools of foreign policy we have to try to further that agenda. But let's not confuse it with getting the foundation right. The foundation requires a strong military, strong alliances, a UN system that tries to hold nation states accountable or at least has the legal side of that covered, and the discouragement or prevention of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction to the extent maximally possible, and then protection of the global commons.

That is to me, the rules-based order and its essential task. And that's where American defense policy should focus. So, you know, promoting human rights in my old Peace Corps country of Democratic Republic of Congo, or helping Georgia with a more stable and successful government and economy, or working on the next iteration of the Paris Accords to

ensure that the climate will not spin out of control--these are worthy goals, but I don't think they are the proper focus for American defense policy. I don't think we should be using our military to try to advance them. And again, I think the rules-based order is what's truly essential. And by the way, if we look at that order, it's actually in better shape than people often acknowledge, which is part of why coming back to the tension in my title I want to underscore that, yes, things need to get a lot better. Yes, there's fraying around the edges of the world's basic stability, but we should not confuse that with a fundamental threat to the planet's safety for the major powers.

And so by focusing on the rules-based order, you can feel a little bit of encouragement that perhaps the world isn't quite as up in flames as it sometimes seems if you look at a broader agenda and broader set of goals. So that's the distinction for me, and that's why it's important.

The last thing I try to get at in my sort of semantic review of some of the popular terms out there that are sometimes used in a fuzzy way, a lot of people talk about "American exceptionalism." And some of this comes from the so-called neoconservative movement, which is very bullish on the United States and believes that we are the Shining City on the Hill and that we have a mission, almost one that we should follow with some degree of zeal and almost divine purpose, to spread our system around the world. And it's a very optimistic view of the United States and a very demanding view of what it can usefully accomplish.

Now, in fairness to the neocons and I apologize if some of them who might be listening think that I have mischaracterized the movement, this is a movement that actually calls on us to do a lot of good things in the world, to try to do good things. And it's an ambitious movement, but it also feels a certain responsibility to not be selfish as Americans, but to try to be globalist and try to spread values that we really do think are in many ways universal.

So, that's one view of American exceptionalism. But I have a little bit of a hard time with that view at some junctures because it seems to gloss over all the mistakes we make in Iraq and Afghanistan and Vietnam and elsewhere. It seems to encourage us to let our ambitions and our appetites run amok. And we wind up trying to expand NATO to every nook and cranny of Europe, for example, and it tends to make us a little too self-confident.

So, that vision that basically seems to imply that we're smarter and more ethical than most other countries, that definition of American exceptionalism that some espouse, I don't really agree with. But I do think that Madeleine Albright was correct to say the United States is an indispensable nation. And I do think, therefore, there's a version of American exceptionalism, some of which I've learned from Bob Kagan, that is correct and compelling. And what it basically says is because of our nation's size, because of our economy's size, and our military strength, our system of alliances that we've built up over the years, our geography where we are within reach of Eurasia, but not of Eurasia, and then finally our demographics and our Constitution, which are the basis for our country--and even though we often fall short of the values in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, we are brought together as a country by a set of values that we hold to be self-evident and universal and we're constantly trying to hold ourselves up against, even if we rarely attain those standards.

And so we don't have, sort of like the Chinese or the Japanese or the Koreans or many others, we don't have an ethnically based view of who we are. We don't have a sort of specific, long historical tradition that tells us who we are. We define ourselves by these foundational documents and by our demographics, our melting pot character. And that makes us very unusual in the world and allows us to interact with a lot of other countries with a real attitude of, at least in principle, of equality and non-superiority. We don't think we're the

master race. We aren't really even any given race or ethnic group or historical or cultural group.

And that gives us a position in this international system that explains why so many countries want to be our ally. So many countries may criticize many of our policies, but still think that they'd rather be with us than against us when the going gets tough. And I can't see another candidate for doing that same thing, with the possible long-term exception of the European Union, which is nowhere near that place yet today, and probably further away than it was five years ago with the departure of Britain.

And so that's what I think of when I think of American exceptionalism. So, we have to understand that there are certain things that we can do in this world order that nobody else can do and that are essential. And that's why in the end, it's a grand strategy of resoluteness as well as restraint.

DEWS: Well, Mike, I cannot think of a higher note on which to end this terrific conversation about what I think of as an extremely important book and contribution to the thinking about U.S. grand strategy. I really appreciate you sharing your time and expertise with us today.

O'HANLON: Thank you very much. It's a privilege. Thanks for all you do at Brookings and appreciate everybody listening and hope to get some reactions at mohanlon@brookings.edu. If anybody wants to chime in after listening and/or reading. Thank you so much.

DEWS: Again, it's a great book. It's "The Art of War in an Age of Peace: U.S. Grand Strategy and Resolute Restraint," published by Yale Press. And you can buy it wherever you like to buy books. And may I recommend your local bookstore.

A team of amazing colleagues helps make the Brookings Cafeteria possible. My thanks to Audio Engineer Gaston Reboredo; to Bill Finan, Director of the Brookings

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Until next time, I'm Fred Dews.