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WEBINAR

THE NEW GEOPOLITICS OF STATE FRAGILITY

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. MARC: So, I want to welcome you all to the Brookings panel discussion on the geopolitics of fragile states. This panel discussion is organized around the Brookings report that was published a few months on the same topic and that you can find on the Brookings website.

The report was prepared to draw attention of policy makers in Western countries on the dramatic changes that are actually happening now in fragile and conflict prone states. With the increasingly aggressive involvement of China, Russia, but also some of the regional powers, such as Turkey, Iran, or United Arab Emirates, just to cite a few. And it seems particularly challenging for the West to acknowledge that they have taken a major step -- that they have to take major steps to adapt to this new situation.

As an illustration that I just want to mention here, the discussion was supposed to happen in the framework of the World Bank Fragility Forum that just ended two days ago but was not included because of the topic was seen as too politically sensitive. And I want to take this opportunity to thank Brookings for recognizing the importance of politics in international development and for hosting this event.

For two decades now, Western countries, including Japan and Korea, have been devising special interventions for these fragile and conflict prone states. The OECD, for instance, has established criteria to identify countries according to various strategies prepared by Western organizations. They require, those countries require increased amount of aid, but also a different type of aid. And the fragile states are a combination of countries with weak governance, lack of cohesion that translates into internal conflicts, and poor economic performance. Of course, there's many other criteria but basically that's the main criteria. And there are about, in the list of the World Bank, there are about 32. OECD has a bit of a different way to look at them. It's more like a nebulous of different risk levels. So, there's not -- all the fragilities are not the same. But most of those fragile states are in Africa

but there are a few on all continents.

The UN also has given much more importance lately to -- with the help of Western donors, to promote a proactive approach to prevention of violent conflict, instead of intervening once conflicts are already too advanced to have a meaningful impact. The policies for both, reducing fragility and increasing prevention, consists, as I was saying, dramatic increase of development aid, support for this -- special support for this country, a focus on improving governance and transparency, a strong coordination between security, diplomacy, and development, close coordination between all Western donors, and especially time, because the time is of the essence in changing the institutional framework for those countries.

And this is, by the way, happening very, very slowly. The events unfolding in Ukraine, Afghanistan, Myanmar, merely shows us that in the field of fragility and conflict, the West needs to adapt very fast because things are changing much faster than the speed at which the Western donors can adapt and move their support in the right way.

So, the question is can Western power really act fast to avoid the race at the bottom? So, we have a great panel to discuss this issue today. And as much as possible, I will also take a few questions of the public. Bruce Jones, director of the Project of International Order and Strategy at Brookings Institution and coauthor of the report on fragile states. We have Lina Benabdallah, who is assistant of politics and international affairs at Wake Forest University and has written a lot on the relation between Africa and China. And Madiha Afzal, who is a fellow at the Foreign Policy program at Brookings and a specialist of Pakistan. Myself, the moderator, I am at the Institute for Integrated Transition, but also the former chief specialist at the World Bank for fragility and conflict.

I will start with a question to Bruce to set the scene for the debate. So, Bruce, how do you think the new activities of China and Russia is changing the game on fragile states for Western nations? I know this is a very big question, but I know you can take big questions.

MR. JONES: Thank you. And first of all, I want to acknowledge your role. You listed me as the coauthor, but it's more emphasis on co. Alexandre did a huge amount of the author in the report on geopolitics of state fragility.

And I want to say something else too. As Alexandre mentioned, this is happening more or less in the margins of the World Bank's Fragility Forum. I would say for 20 years, the Bank has struggled to find the right way to understand how security issues, and political issues, and geopolitical issues should factor into its programming. And the only time it's begun to really, or sort of began to have a more serious approach, was when you had a constellation of personalities with Kristalina Georgieva, Frank Bousquet, and Alexandre Marc really started to drive a more serious approach to these issues inside the Bank. Unfortunately, that was not sustained and we're still, you know, 20 years of trying to find better dynamics, better arrangements to link security and developmental and diplomatic responses, and we're still -- and we're still lagging. The cost of having not succeeded in doing that is about to go up dramatically, I think, because of the issues that Alexandre raised.

Look, it seems to me that we have watched, over the last several decades, we've watched a major evolution in the way the world at large has dealt with the issue weak states, or fragile states, or whatever terminology we like to use. During the Cold War, it fell into two categories. Either we ignored it completely or they became the subject of proxy warfare between the United States and the Soviet Union. And proxy warfare was a particularly brutal and protracted form of conflict, which killed literally millions during the Cold War in countries that we would now describe as fragile states. Very difficult to resolve, very difficult to limit the damage from hugely damaging form of warfare. And my great worry is that we're beginning to trip back into a mode of a number of fragile states becoming zones of proxy warfare. Indeed, we already have tripped back in a couple of places.

We have to acknowledge that we're having this conversation against the backdrop of what's happening in Ukraine. It's not a proxy war. But, you know, it began with

Russia's invasion of Eastern Donetsk in 2014. And there were then some proxy warfare-like dynamics in that part of the country, and now a full-scale invasion, a violation of Article 24, and all that. A massive crisis.

But it's not the only place that we're dealing with a huge crisis. I mean, we're still dealing with massive suffering and violence in Syria, in Yemen, and in other parts of the world. And in several of these places, we are seeing this phenomenon of a wider range of actors engaging economically, diplomatically, and militarily. If we look at Syria, for example, I would say started as a kind of civilian uprising against the state, turned into kind of large-scale state repression, broke into civil war, and has then, you know, emerged as a form of proxy warfare, with the United States, Russia, Turkey, and others engaged in fueling the violence and sort of using the violence for their own strategic ends at huge costs to the Syrian population.

And the Syria case highlights a point that Alexandre made. This is not just the United States, China, or Russia. This is also powerful regional actors. Regional actors have always involved themselves in civil wars. But the ones that are doing so now just have a much greater degree of power to bring to that particular form of response with huge costs.

It's still a minority of civil wars or fragile states that are becoming proxy wars, but the dynamics are evolving and the risks are growing. We're watching substantial Chinese economic involvement and diplomatic involvement in these countries often at odds with the West in terms of their objectives. We're seeing substantial Russian military engagement via the Wagner Group and other forms of sort of semi-official engagement. Much of that is quite deleterious to the security arrangements and governance arrangements in these states. And all of which creating a form of diplomatic competition at least. And I worry about the evolution towards military competition between the powers in these contexts.

And so, I think that in the report we talk about four major risks. That the increased level of major power direct or indirect participation in these crises makes the

resolution much more complicated. And, by the way, here I just want to say in parentheses, it's conventional these days to dismiss any possibility of mediation or peace building, et cetera. But that's nonsense, right? Eighty civil wars since the end of the Cold War and, you know, 70-plus that have ended through some form of mediation, peacekeeping, peace implementation, post-conflict reconstruction, and development.

So, the vast majority of civil wars in the post-Cold War era have, in fact, been brought to a resolution. At least to a partial resolution in some form of peace building process through that kind of multilateral and constructive intervention. And, obviously, a subset that have not. But the majority have. But it becomes much harder when you have major regional and geopolitical powers who have competing interests in the outcome of the state. And we've seen this in Syria. We've seen this in Yemen. We've seen this in Iraq. We've seen this in Myanmar, et cetera.

A second risk that the investment in financial support from China, in particular, has been done in -- not in all countries, but in many countries has been done in a way that undermines long-term economic and financial sustainability. Alexandre, you might want to say more on that as we go. I'm thinking here of the Congo, Zambia, Venezuela.

A third risk that the provision of security support from groups like the Wagner Group from Moscow actually undermined governance of the security sector, undermined the justice sector. It took a very long time for the West to understand that improving the governance of the justice and security sector was a key part of how to help fragile states sort of manage through violence and towards stability. But that's being reversed in some of the cases that we're watching now.

And then, obviously, what we're seeing increasingly is that the geopolitical tensions writ large are brought to the Security Council, and it's impeding the capacity of the council to mandate the kinds of peacekeeping or mediation missions that had been quite, you know, had been very important helping reduce levels of violence in a lot of these cases. There are still, obviously, some peacekeeping and mediation arrangements being mandated

by the council, but far fewer. And there's much more obstruction to that by dent of the tensions between the powers of the council.

And all of this, I think, is sort of substantially eroding the capability of the, you know, the more constructive Western powers. I'll put it that way. And the multilateral system to engage constructively in the search for peace and development in fragile states and risking sustained violence and sustained erosion of governance in these cases.

MR. MARC: Okay. Thank you very much. So, that takes me, actually, quite directly to a question to Lina, who has done a lot of great work recently on -- she's written a great book also on the relation between China and Africa. So, in light of what Bruce has said, how do you see these more specific relations between China, and especially the poorest and the most fragile states in Africa? And is that all negative?

MS. BENABDALLAH: Yeah, thank you, Alexandre, for the question. I think I would like to perhaps first start by saying that in terms of China and the way China perceives and views its relationships to African countries, it does not necessarily categorize them as fragile states, some of them that are in this category of fragile states. And I think that that's already important to understand China's approach to African countries, not from the perspective of perhaps stigmatizing kind of language that speaks about states as fragile, or quasi-fragile, or some other terminology. It does not approach its relationship with African countries from that perspective. I think that's kind of the entry point.

But in terms of how, instead of this, how does China perceive kind of that role between or the relationship between security and development and sort of that geopolitical development element, I think China has kind of, in China's foreign policy towards Africa specifically, there's a strong belief in an intimate relationship and synchronicity between development and security. And this means that China approaches questions of lack of security or questions of conflict from the perspective of development. Believing strongly that creating opportunities that lead to economic growth, lead to poverty reduction, lead to job creation, these things are connected directly to stability. That when a country or

a government focuses on creating development opportunities, that counts as a direct way of intervening in creating security, leading to stability, peace, and stability.

So, from that perspective, we see already kind of China's way of thinking about the connection, the relationship between how to achieve peace and stability and reduce conflict and its impact on development. And from that perspective, we can see how the impact of China's investment in development and infrastructure can be viewed in general, and especially by the Chinese side, as interventions or as activities, projects that indirectly have an impact on fragility, if we would like to call it that.

And so, in terms of infrastructure, we know that China has built more infrastructure, you know, in Africa than any partners that the African continent has. And so, there was a report recently published by Center for Global Development that essentially put out a couple of numbers. They are saying between 2007 and 2020, China's two main overseas development banks invested 23 billion U.S. dollars in infrastructure projects in the continent. And this is 8 billion more than what the other top eight lenders combined, including the World Bank, African Development Bank, U.S., and other European development banks together contributed to infrastructure building.

So, infrastructure is really important here because it provides sort of the, you know, the basics. The sort of paved roads and basic infrastructure that can help create these opportunities for development like I was explaining earlier, which are viewed as, in a sense, as directly related to trying to create opportunities for development for economic growth and indirectly as well for stability and security.

In terms of the other impacts, I mean, I think the one other thing that's very important to mention here in terms of China, you know, it's that it's actually the development model that China presents is, I think, what is really important and impactful about China's presence and China's relationship with African countries. It's that it's really appealing to a lot of Africans, both elites and non-elites, that China's development model is a refreshing alternative. That China is doing development and is approaching development in the

continent and then domestically as well. It approaches development from a very different perspective. It's offering an alternative. And I think that alternative of development model is a big impact, has a big impact in the continent.

So, just yesterday we saw an interview given by Museveni, in which speaks about China's development model in which he speaks about how that development model is extremely appealing in terms of its non-interference principles. In terms of, you know, focusing on, of course, for China can, you know, it can -- has kind of presented that example of, you know, lifting 800 million people out of poverty. Which are things that can be viewed as appealing examples to a lot of African countries, especially the ones that are essentially perhaps, you know, have a lot more to do to achieve development.

So, I can stop here and we can -- I'd be happy to answer more questions.

MR. MARC: Yes, yes. I'm sure there will be a lot of interest in discussing some of those issues. But I want to go Madiha and look a little bit what's happening really in the field from the perspective -- from the perspective of one country, Pakistan, that is actually not on the World Bank fragile state list but is considered by OECD like a country at high risks. And, indeed, Pakistan is struggling with a lot of risks of instability and a lot of issues recently. So, I would like to ask Madiha how the government is dealing with now a lot of the countries we've been talking about, China, for instability, of course, but Russia is also there, and even Turkey I think is coming in and others. So, I'd like to give us an idea of what does -- of how this -- what it does for Pakistan.

MS. AFZAL: Thanks, Alexandre. Thanks for including me in this really important discussion, and happy to discuss sort of where the Pakistan-China, Pakistan-Russia relationships are and then where the U.S. figures in later as well.

So, you know, Pakistan and China have had a longstanding sort of military and strategic partnership, you know, that has gone back to the 1960s. But in recent years, they've grown increasingly close with the economic dimension to their relationship becoming stronger. So, the China-Pakistan economic corridor, which is a more than \$62 billion sort of

project of China's Belt and Road Initiative. That's the flagship project that China touts of its Belt and Road Initiative in Pakistan. The sort of loans and investments that invest in energy and infrastructure projects in Pakistan, started in April of 2015.

It is a project that is not without its sort of bumps in the road. You know, there have been roadblocks. There have been slowdowns. But every few months, every couple of years, then there's an increasing sort of commitment, a recommitment to the project. And this has been consistent through Pakistan's military is committed to it, and Pakistan's civilian governments, both the previous government, as well as its current government, even though the current government had some misgivings about the terms of the projects, the terms of the loans, it is committed to it. And most recently, Imran Khan, Pakistan's prime minister, was in Beijing for the opening ceremony of the Olympics, and met with Xi Jinping and signed, you know, many MOUs and released sort of a long statement to sort of reaffirming their commitment to the China-Pakistan economic corridor.

You know, the U.S., of course, has raised concerns about whether it's a debt trap, whether Pakistani workers truly benefit from the terms of the projects. But the fact of the matter is that for Pakistan, it fulfills economic needs that it feels it has and that it does not seem fulfilled elsewhere from elsewhere. And I think the terms of the projects, you know, there are some questions on that. There's a lack of transparency there certainly. But it remains to be seen where the project goes. I think this is still something that is very much, you know, sort of we are seeing unfolding before our eyes.

Just very quickly to sort of lay out some of the other dimensions of the Pakistan-China relationship, and I'm going to talk briefly about Russia. For China, security is a concern in Pakistan. It has seen attacks on Chinese workers, Chinese investments from the Pakistani Taliban, from Baloch insurgents, and separatists, and that is a worry. And that, primarily, is also the lens through which, by the way, it sees Afghanistan, and we can go into that as well.

So, for China, security is a concern and that's why it sort of holds back.

There was an attack just last year, which killed many Chinese workers in a bus in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. We should also be seeing sort of the China-Pakistan relationship growing exceedingly close in a larger frame as the U.S. deepens its partnership with India. Pakistan feels that it has to turn, yeah, you know, more closely to China. So, there are geopolitical ships that are driving this, but there is also, you know, sort of agency on Pakistan's part. You know, it says it doesn't want a zero-sum relationship with China, the U.S., Russia, it wants equal partnerships with all countries. It wants sort of this new independent foreign policy.

So, I think, you know, it's important to sort of identify that, yes, there are power asymmetries in these relationships that lead Pakistan, for instance, to be quiet on the issue of the Uyghur minority in China and its treatment. And, in fact, you know, there are Pakistani citizens who actually, you know, who have spouses or children who are Uyghurs and who have been subjected to such abuse. But Pakistan remains silent on that.

So, while there are those power asymmetries that drive, you know, how Pakistan responds to these things, there is also an agency here in Pakistan wants this to be part of its sort of its new kind of foreign policy approach where it's focusing on geoeconomics it says, as opposed to sort of a geostrategic approach to the world grid, allied with the U.S., for instance, to fight in the war on terror.

Very quickly, if I can mention a little bit on Russia. Pakistan's Prime Minister, Imran Khan, was actually in Moscow the day the Russian invasion of Ukraine began. Now, that was coincidental in the sense that that trip had been planned for weeks, if not months. But that is also part of Pakistan growing closer or trying to deepen its relationship with Russia. And there has been, you know, sort of increasingly sort of effusive rhetoric on both sides about the relationship. You know, there is -- it's not -- we don't really see it in action yet, but the hope for Pakistan is that a long-planned gas pipeline comes into play and that helps Pakistan with some of its -- some of its gas needs.

There have been meetings that have been held in recent years. The

Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov visited Pakistan last year after a visit to India. Of course, it's striking to note that Pakistan and Russia were, of course, on opposing sides in Afghanistan, you know, 40 years ago, with the Soviet-Afghan jihad and to see how things have changed now.

But I just want to mention, you know, Putin has called Imran Khan three times since August, since the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. President Biden hasn't called him once in 14 months. That is notable, you know. This thing this kind of cold shoulder from the U.S. gets noticed in Pakistan. And Pakistan wonders, you know, we allied with the U.S. and Afghanistan. And, of course, you know, many will argue that there was a double game at play. And, of course, we can talk about that and that that hurt the relationship. But there is sort of a growing disillusionment with the way the relationship has gone with the U.S.

And in Russia, you know, Khan was given a guard of honor, a red-carpet welcome. Though I think there was a little bit of public embarrassment as well that he was -- that he happened to be caught in some ways in Russia the day of, you know, the world turning its eyes to Moscow as the Russian invasion of Ukraine began.

But there are these very real needs. You know, the gas needs. I mean, it could be that this pipeline amounts to a pipedream. But Pakistan is pinning its hopes on that. Pakistan is, you know, Pakistan needs to import wheat from Russia. So, they are real economic needs at play here.

So, those are sort of some of the dimensions I will mention and happy to talk about the U.S. more in sort of our second round.

MR. MARC: We'll come back to the U.S. after. I just want to come back maybe to a quick question after hearing you to Lina, and then I will go to Bruce. But Lina, you made a very interesting explanation of why China can be welcome in Africa. But there's also a lot of those issues around their level of debt, some oversized projects, the problem of too many Chinese involved, the secrecy of the investments that creates a lot of problems

with the IMF. But also, more centrally, I think, there's also worry that a lot of those infrastructure are also put with the strategy military interests of China, especially the ports. Can you say something about that? Lina?

MS. BENABDALLAH: Thank you, Alexandre. Yes, absolutely. I mean, especially, I think, now maybe when we think about the Belt and Road Initiative, that's a good starting point to discuss this. And we know for instance, you know, globally speaking, the Belt and Road Initiative had an initial a billion U.S. dollars infrastructure development fund to help build roads and enable infrastructure just to develop trade in the African continent.

So, of that envelope, and there have been a lot of projects, a lot of development infrastructure projects that are considered strategic infrastructure projects and a lot of this has to do with ports. And a lot of those projects intersect pretty much the two components of the Belt and Road Initiative, which are the Maritime Silk Road, and sort of the land component of it as well.

And so, an example of this would be, obviously, Djibouti. I mean, the construction of the whole package that came together with what now is discussed or called a military base was this big plan, development plan that included a whole bunch of infrastructure projects, you know, from a mall to renovation of a port, to a free trade zone, to a railway connecting Addis Ababa to Djibouti, and then as well, kind of the military base, what the Chinese state calls a logistical facility.

And so, that approach, which is linking Belt and Road Initiative development infrastructure projects to strategic infrastructure, strategic for China, has in Africa materialized in this -- in the example of Djibouti. And there are now essentially, you've got a few reports and talks about an alleged similar approach in the Gulf of Guinea. We've seen *Wall Street Journal* publish an article on this and other places as well. I mean, it remains to be seen if those projects actually materializes. As of now, we don't necessarily have the evidence that supports that there's going to be another military base in the Gulf of Guinea

that starts as a port, the port renovation.

However, it is true that from the perspective of the Maritime Silk Road, these port accesses is extremely strategic. And whether it becomes a dual-purpose port for military use or not in itself, the access to ports and shipping routes, is extremely strategic. And especially for China and Africa, it's the Indian Ocean that is very much about 60 percent of trade to Africa and Europe passes through that sort of Gulf of Aden, Suez Canal, and so, those areas are going to be extremely important moving forward for the Maritime Silk Road Initiative and for the interests of China.

So, that's why we see, for instance, Chinese companies getting interested in renovating ports in Tanzania and in Kenya, and being more and more interested in, you know, in developing relationships that gives them access to these projects and port access. And so, in itself, ports are strategic infrastructure. Now, what becomes a bit more perhaps threatening and perhaps kind of a question of a little bit of an anxiety is that dual-purpose that these ports can have a dual purpose, which will be for military use.

We do not have evidence as of yet, I mean, in the scholarly world. I'm not speaking about other kind of sort of evidence, but in the scholarly world, we don't have yet evidence that suggests that what's going on in the Gulf of Guinea is going to -- is at present, a kind of a dual-purpose situation. So, but again, that's I'm just speaking from that kind of academic point of view here.

MR. MARC: Well, thank you very much. This clarifies a lot. Just to say that the West has also done things like that. So, it's not a strictly Chinese or Russian thing. But I want to come back to Bruce because we talked a lot about China. But it seems increasingly that in the relation with fragile states, China or let's say developing countries, China and Russia have actually relatively different approaches, right? And maybe that means that the West instead of putting all in the same baskets of those people that are disrupting the way we do things, we should look at them very differently. What do you think of that?

MR. JONES: That's interesting. Before I answer you, I just want to mention

one thing. I'll be interested to watch how China's strategy in Africa evolves in specific cases. I'm thinking here particularly of Ethiopia, you know? A huge part of China's infrastructure investment was in Ethiopia. Now, we've seen Ethiopia fall back into war. And China has in a constructive way, involved itself in the UN mediation to try to see if they can bring about some sort of resolution. But it is, I think, pushing the Chinese to recognize it is not always, oh, you can do economic development to get to stability. Sometimes you're going to have to do stability to get to development.

I saw the same evolution in Brazilian strategy in fragile states in an earlier phase. You know, in the kind of when Brazil started to kind of move out into this world and engaged in Haiti. And they were very assertive, you know, against the Western model, no governance conditionality, you know, development led. And then you're in Haiti and war breaks out and actually you have to engage in the security piece before they can do the development piece. And so, I'll be interested to see how China responds.

So, Alexandre, your question of whether they -- I mean, they have very different interests, right? And they have very different approaches. And I would say there's no question that Russia's approach in these cases is much more injurious to the kinds of things that the World Bank would want to do or the UN would want to do, leave aside the United States, right? If we take a more multilateral approach. The kinds of approaches Russia's taking are more injurious to that.

China's a much more mixed picture. Some things they're doing are quite constructive. Some things dual use. Some things a little bit more negative. We shouldn't completely forget that China in Myanmar is doing some things like, you know, funding and providing weapons to one of the major rebel groups. And the West trying to, you know, it's not like they're a perfectly sort of developmental actor in these cases. But it is a much more blended situation.

So, case by case, I think we should treat them very differently. But I can't help but notice that if you look at the list of where China's -- sorry, I have dogs in the

background. I don't know if you all will hear. But anyway, if you look at the list of where China's largest investments are, leave aside the West, but in the kind of the non-Western world, it's a pretty close correlation to the countries that abstained in the vote on Russia in the general assembly. It's not precise, but it's awfully close.

And so, I think that it's going to be hard to not see Chinese economic involvement, Russian military involvement as sort of pulling countries away from a Western model and for the West to react like that, right? So, for me, the only -- I'm a, you know, I'm an old fashioned multilateralist. I actually believe in multilateralism and that's the way forward. But I think it's going to be tricky for the West to approach China as a purely constructive actor in these cases. Rather, I think, there's going to be a lot of suspicion about Chinese motives and motivations. The concern about dual use, especially around the ports, is going to be very real. And then the kind of the, you know, the tight collaboration that we're seeing in different areas between Russia and China is just going to add fuel to that.

But nonetheless, the point is still ripe, right? That in individual cases, we should be looking very carefully at what are the actual Chinese interests and are they quite constructive, which in some cases they are. And/or can we challenge China to be part of a kind of race to the top, rather than meeting China at a kind of race to the bottom on these issues. We'll come to that I know, but that -- but there's no question --

MR. MARC: Yes.

MR. JONES: -- that we should be evaluating them differently.

MR. MARC: Yes, yes, yes. Especially lately and I think the -- I think what we see in Ukraine would mean that the whole strategy of Russia will be much more to come from the West wherever it can find it. And we've seen that in Mali. Much less them try to see and what they can gain out of that, right? Because the game goal became other things. But that's the main goal for the moment of the strategy.

I want to stay with you because we got a few questions of the audience and I want to select one of it that everybody has in mind is, you know, a number of African states

and a few others are remaining neutral on the war in Ukraine, despite all the pressure of the West and all that. Is that a rebuke of Western policies in the country? Or what does it mean?

MR. JONES: And, you know, just going back to the numbers that Lina had talked about. I mean, China's been pouring resources into Africa. It's been treating African countries with a kind of degree of sort of solidarity in their developmental approach, which is often absent from the West. You know, Lina raised the case of Equatorial Guinea and the kind of reports that there may be a, you know, a dual use port/base. And a senior national security official was sent off from Washington to try to make sure that didn't happen. And somebody checked and it appears that it's the first time in something like 25 years that somebody of that rank has gone to Equatorial Guinea, whereas China's having ministers flowing in and out all the time. They're doing it all over the Pacific Ocean.

So, there's a degree of attention, a degree of money, a degree of engagement, which has been really lacking in the West's approach to the -- at least in the American approach. I mean, Europe is a little bit better here. But in the American approach to a lot of these countries. And so, I think that that's one factor.

Quite frankly, if you, you know, if you live in a war-torn part of Africa or the Middle East and you've watched American strategy, it's not, you know, there's a lot of problems in American military response to these places. And that gets bound up in this. I think if you were -- if you were looking for their willingness to be supportive of a multilateral approach to ending the wars, I mean, you'd see a lot more support. But asked to kind of side with the West versus Russia, you know, they're going to stay neutral.

I do suspect, however, that if Russia continues the kind of just intense deliberate targeting of civilians, the destruction of housing, and these kinds of things, it'll become more difficult for countries to be neutral. I mean, you know, it's one thing to be critical of the West. It's another thing to be defending another country who's acting in ways that are even worse than some of the things the West has done. And so, I suspect the

pressure will grow for people to break with the rest. We've already seen that in the region. Let's see if it spreads.

MR. MARC: Okay. Thank you very much. I want to go back now to trying to understand how the West is reacting to all that and especially how we could react to these very strong changes. And I think it was very well mentioned in the first interventions about how things are really changing now in the field with all the examples we've been given. And I want to start with Pakistan instance. How do the Americans actually, and maybe some other Western powers, maybe the British because the Europeans are not very present, but how do the Americans try to adapt to this new situation with China and Russia very much active there and invited there?

MS. AFZAL: Sure. That's an important question. You know, for much of the last four decades, I think America's engagement with Pakistan has been predicated on its interests in Afghanistan, say for the 1990s, where it was sort of disengaged because it didn't have interests in Afghanistan. And I think that's been a mistake. And we are seeing sort of the drift towards China and now towards Russia as a product partly of that mistake. Sort of the U.S. now disengaging with Afghanistan has come to a degree with a disengagement from Pakistan. And so, Pakistan, as I said, you know, there is agency that Pakistan has in its foreign policy. But there's also a response to America's disengagement where it has drifted towards these other countries.

So, you know, I think while part of the relationship with China and Russia I think should be seen as a given, I think an increasing drift towards those countries can be avoided with more engagement from the West. And that engagement does not have to be on security matters, right, on Afghanistan. That as it has been. That engagement can be economic. That's what these countries now want. That's what Pakistan wants.

So, different kinds of investments, right? You know, China's investment sort of in energy and infrastructure are very different from the way, you know, American -- the American private sector would invest in Pakistan. Where, you know, it could boost sort of

trade with Pakistan on things that are Pakistan's strengths. Textiles, for instance, sports equipment. You know, sort of invest more there. This is something that's been lacking, certainly. You know, attention on this has been lacking in the last few years and decades.

One thing I will note is that the, you know, the largest number of vaccines that the U.S. has donated through COVAX has been to Pakistan. Something that's notable, despite, you know, everything, you know, sort of the cold shoulder in the relationship, more than 50 million vaccines, vaccine doses to Pakistan. And Pakistan has had a relatively successful response to COVID. And I think part of that can be, you know, attributed to the vaccine donations received from the U.S.

So, part of this is already happening but in a very low-key manner. To sort of play it up a little bit more so that the Pakistani citizenry also responds to this is important. Because part of this is, you know, sort of perceptions and sort of an attitude that tends to be anti-West and anti-American based on sort of the rhetoric that gets thrown around in the country.

One thing I'll just quickly mention is Pakistan abstained in the UN General Assembly like many of the countries mentioned before on condemning Russia on its invasion of Ukraine. And one thing many Pakistanis cited, you know, if you talk about the public, you know, the government says it wants to remain neutral, as many of these other countries do. But Pakistanis say, look, the West hasn't given us support over in the UN over the issue of Kashmir. You know, and so we will hold back. The ironic thing is they're not going to find support over the issue of Kashmir from Russia. But that's something that they're not even looking at.

So, you know, Kashmir ironically plays a role both in India's abstention. You know, it's not the only thing. But in India's abstention over Ukraine and in Pakistan's abstention over Ukraine when Kashmir is the very issue that is the cause of, you know, much of the conflict between Pakistan and India. So, there is some irony there.

The one final thing I'll mention on sort of avenues for cooperation on

security matters, in fact. So, there was a forum called the Troika Plus that constituted the U.S., Russia, China, and Pakistan focusing on the peace process in Afghanistan. Prior to the Taliban takeover in August last year, they focused on sort of trying to get, you know, the Taliban and the then Afghan government to come to a peace deal. Now, it's sort of focused on the West's and the sort of this forum's demands from the Taliban.

And it's, you know, I don't think we're going to see a meeting happen any time soon of the Troika Plus as it was scheduled. But it has been a relatively successful framework for them -- for these four countries coordinate that have interests in Afghanistan, coordinating their views on Afghanistan and putting them out. Their security concerns, you know, there is some divergence there, of course. But the security concerns the need for a stable Afghanistan is something they all agree on. They haven't recognized the Taliban government. They've made the same demands from the Taliban government, from the Taliban regime in terms of, you know, what they want in terms of human rights, and so on.

So, it's been a successful forum until now where these four countries have cooperated and putting out statements on Afghanistan at the very least. So, I just wanted to mention that as well.

MR. MARC: That's great. That gives us a bit of hope. I want to go. We've received a question now from the public and I want to both get Lina and Bruce to talk about it because I think it's an important dimension. Contrary to Russia, China has continued to be quite proactive in the UN and in the international organization and I was talking with Bruce about that yesterday, actually. They're trying to still influence their sort of international architecture for peace and for development.

And, you know, for example, they've increased their commitment to peacekeeping operation. They've actually increased it. At the World Bank, it was very present. They were actually involved in many of what we were doing, even when things were, you know, the UN -- the U.S. or others were not too keen to engage them in discussing, they were always willing to sit at the table. I have to say the Russians too, but

they were not talking. When the Chinese were trying to actually bring in, they're still a big supporter of the IDA funds that go for fragile states. So, what's the effort there on the UN side and all that to be part of the system of peace building? Lina, I want to have your opinion and then I want to have the opinion of Bruce also on that.

MS. BENABDALLAH: Yeah, that's a very important question. And on the realm of front of peacekeeping, it's kind of interesting. I was doing research just before the pandemic in Mali about this very question about the question of is China approaching peacekeeping differently in Mali and do we see a different approach and how. And so, it's a fascinating topic and it's an important one.

And to preface this, of course, we probably know just in terms of numbers, China has been contributing more peacekeepers than all the other permanent members of the Security Council combined. And in terms of evolution of China's contribution to peacekeeping, we also know that prior to 2012, China was mostly contributing noncombat ready peacekeeping troops. But since 2012, then China has started deploying more combat ready peacekeeping troops.

And so, in terms of the evolution as well and the growing interest of China in participating in peacekeeping, we notice that it's not just as well, it's not only about contributing peacekeepers in terms of personnel or contributing funds, which we know now China is the second largest funder of the UN PKO, the peacekeeping operations. But there's also kind of there's a -- there is a push and a pressure from the Chinese side to also have China have occupied leadership positions as well. And to have a say into putting together and presenting ideas for instance, about developmental peace, about peacekeeping, how to approach peacekeeping, and how to deal with peacekeeping in general. You know, and how that might defer from sort of a liberal peace or how might it differ from kind of, you know, the usual kind of looking at a post-conflict and a peacekeeping kind of the resolution aspect of it that we're more used to in the UN.

And so, and that's kind of from the perspective of China that's kind of a

natural progression that you're contributing not just personnel and funds but you also want to contribute ideas. And so, that's definitely, you know, it seems very reasonable from that perspective. Now, the question from the side, I suppose from the kind of the Western side, would be that figuring out how would this change the game if it will?

And, it's so far, we have seen that there is more or less an interest in including Chinese staff and officers at sort of higher-ranking levels. And so, for instance, in Mali, there is now a Chinese officer who's heading sort the Gao camp and operations in Gao. And so, that's kind of something that, you know, that documents this desire to occupy these higher-ranking places in decision making positions.

But then when we do the research about what -- how has that changed, or what does that mean, what we find is on the technical aspect there hasn't been any documented change in terms of if it's, you know, the leadership is from China. But what you see is the more there is problems of trust between China and Western partners, the more that's going to trickle down to how efficient or not they're going to be operating on the ground. If there is lack of trust, if the troops don't trust the commander, for instance, from a different -- and they don't share information or they don't include everybody in the conversation, that is going to actually hurt the operations themselves. And that is something that we've seen on the ground.

So, it's not that there is a completely different way of running peacekeeping operations if it's done by China. But the problem is trust. If there is not enough trust built between Western partners and Chinese partners, there's going to be a reflection of that on the ground. And that's going to hurt the operationalization of any of these peacekeeping operations moving forward.

And so, I think that that's something that needs to be kind of, you know, thought about from this perspective that on the one hand, Chinese are contributing officers, they're contributing soldiers, and contributing with money. They're holding hospitals and doing kind of -- but they're not interested in just doing that. There's an interest in pushing

forward to taking on more leadership roles. But that the question of trust is going to be a huge challenge moving forward in terms of making those peacekeeping operations actually efficient and effective on the ground.

MR. MARC: That's very interesting. Before I go to Bruce, I want to say with my experience, is that the problem is that the rhetoric at Beijing levels sometimes does not help with the actual things in the field where you can do actually much more. It's the same with investments where you have Chinese firms who are actually at standards of European firms in terms of quality, social safeguards, and all that. But the trust is the real thing to say.

So, I want to go briefly to Bruce. Not only to ask him exactly about the multilateral, but now to talk to us maybe a little bit about the same thing but with Russia. What's the Russia position on the international organization? Because we said that China has -- is trying at least, is trying with ambiguity and with all this, but in the field is trying. Is there something similar with China -- with Russia or where do we stand there?

MR. JONES: I mean, I would -- I don't see much that's constructive these days with Russia. It's much more destructive in all of its forums and formats. I confess that I'm old fashioned on this. I would prefer to see a reversion to the older norm that the P-5 don't contribute to peacekeeping. That they stay out of peacekeeping and that peacekeeping is done by nations that at least can have a credible case for some degree of impartiality in the cases that we're talking about. And that's almost never going to be true of the U.S., of the Russians, of the Chinese. I mean, the British, okay, fine. But, you know, as a general matter, I would prefer that we went back to keeping the P-5 out of peacekeeping. I don't think we're going to succeed in building the kind of trust that Lina talked about where we have Russian engagement. It's never been constructive. So, I would go a different way.

But to my mind it makes a broader point. I know we're close to out of time, so, I just --

MR. MARC: Yeah, yeah.

MR. JONES: -- wanted to make a broader reflection maybe in a couple of

points here that, you know, the West has underinvested in multilateralism. The West is underinvested in Africa. The West is underinvested in fragile states. And in every place that we underinvest, China's going to show up and Russia's going to find the cracks, and they're going to show up. And if we don't want that, the answer is not to complain about what China and Russia are doing. The answer is to increase the investment of all types. And I would say to reduce the extent to which the West is divided over what in the end are very minor differences of policy relative to the differences we have with China or Russia about the kind of governance model or about the kind of strategy that they would pursue.

And every time we allow these little differences within the West to divide us, we're creating space for the governments in question to pick and choose among other actors. And if we want to create a race to the top not a race to the bottom, the essential condition is for the West to work much harder at finding a kind of common position and unity around high standards and approaching the government in that way.

And final point from me, it is true that in a lot of the places the government model -- that the governance model being proposed by China is more attractive. Lina said there's also support in public opinion and that's true. But I also see quite a lot of concern in civil society about what Russia -- Chinese investment in a given country will be, certainly about Russian investment, right?

The West has a much better time dealing with civil society than either China or Russia. And I think to kind of have a very sort of broad-based approach in these cases, keep with high standards, increase investment, engage civil society, and don't give ground and create pressures. Be open to China joining that sort of race to the top, so to speak. I don't think Russia's going to do that. But, certainly, be open to China. But it doesn't work if we, you know, are sort of fractured amongst ourselves and we underinvest in multilateralism and we adopt low standards. Then it just -- then we're in a -- then we are heading back to proxy warfare.

MR. MARC: Yes, absolutely. So, now we have just a few minutes. So, I

want to also give to Madiha and Lina a last word on those issues. But I agree also we have to really continue to look at what we have been doing and, for example, we've not been doing enough infrastructure in places where they were really essential. The trickle down of the programs to the population is still a big question. So, there's a lot of things where the West is itself, I think, has faulted.

So, Lina, your last word on that. We just have one minute each, Lina and then Madiha.

MS. BENABDALLAH: Yes. I think just in kind of a one word, I think, from the perspective of Africa, there is absolutely a huge need and a big room for a lot of partners and a lot of different contributions. I think the World Bank predicted that demand for infrastructure spending was going to be more than \$300 billion a year by 2040. This is in Africa. And \$300 billion a year suggests that there's room for all kinds of different partnerships and all kinds of different actors to take a role. So, it's not necessarily a zero-sum game in terms of looking at what China is putting forward and what everybody else is doing.

And so, I think it is definitely there's room for some sort of not necessarily alternative or competition to the BRI, but some sort of equivalent, some sort of presence to show that there an interest in terms of, you know, putting down concrete projects that lead to development in these countries. Whether we call them developing or we call them, you know, in other terminologies, that can show a vision for, you know, an interest in moving forward with development in these countries. And so, there is a lot of room for that, you know, for other partners as well to come into play and just show presence in terms of development projects in African countries.

MR. MARC: Thank you. Madiha?

MS. AFZAL: I'll just actually, you know, echo the points Bruce and Lina made. I think, you know, in the case of Pakistan, we can sort of see this playing out. The way for the U.S. and the West to engage Pakistan is not to take the China -- the relationship

with China as necessarily, you know, a given that it is growing. I think, you know, to acknowledge that, but to invest in sort of sectors where there isn't a Chinese presence. And to boost trade, you know, that's what places like Pakistan desire. And, again, the zero-sum relationship is something that they have made clear that they don't see their relationships with the West and with China as zero-sum.

The one last quick thing I'll mention that I didn't previously is that the EU countries put out a strong statement asking Pakistan to vote in favor of the resolution to condemn Russia at the UN. And that is something that kind overt pressure is something that Pakistan did not appreciate and sort of pushed back on. So, being sort of delicate with its diplomacy is also something. Rather than being overt and sort of pushy is also something, you know, the West can sort of learn to do with these countries because these sort of increasingly pushy maneuvers are not taken well and sort of hurt the cause of the relationship rather than advance it.

MR. MARC: Well, thank you very much. We are arriving to the end of this event. I think we had very interesting discussion. I think again one thing we have -- we said in the paper here was illustrated that I think a lot of the strategies that Western countries have written lately or international development bank needs to be adapted to this new reality that you have new powerful actors there. And that you have to engage them wherever you like. You have to engage them in the field. It does not help to just ignoring it as we have done too often. And, of course, this is very difficult in a very, very competitive world and very, I would say, world where the exchanges are more aggressive than peaceful, at least on the rhetoric at the top.

So, I want to thank Lina, Madiha, Bruce for those excellent comments, for your work. I would all -- advise you all to go and look at what they have written lately. They've all written very interesting books lately on the topic we've been discussing. So, I would advise you to go and look at them. And I hope very much we continue this discussion. And I want to thank Brookings very, very much for organizing this event and all

the people who are behind it, Adam, and others. Thank you very much.

MR. JONES: Thanks to you, Alexandre, and Madiha, and Lina.

MS. AFZAL: Thank you.

MS. BENABDALLAH: Thank you.

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