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WEBINAR

GEOSTRATEGIC COMPETITION AND US, CHINESE, AND RUSSIAN OVERSEAS BASING

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KEYNOTE REMARKS:

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PANEL DISCUSSION:

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Michael O'Hanlon: Greetings, friends in Washington and around the country and around the world. I'm Mike O'Hanlon with the Foreign Policy program at Brookings, and today I have the privilege of kicking off a session that we are going to hold over the next 90 minutes, thanks to a project that Andrew Yeo has spearheaded at Brookings on overseas basing and geostrategic competition with a particular eye on China, Russia and the United States. And we're privileged to begin this conversation, which we'll conclude with a panel discussion, but we're going to begin with a keynote address and then a keynote conversation that I'll have with Assistant Secretary of Defense Mara Karlin.

Mara is known to many of you as a distinguished scholar and professor and has also been central in the Pentagon's efforts in the last two years to develop U.S. military strategy under the Biden administration's national security strategy. She's worked on the Global Posture Review as well, which was an early part of that overall effort. She's the author of a book called "The Inheritance: The U.S. Military After Two Decades of War," which I recommend literally to everyone with any interest in understanding modern military affairs, this captures the human as well as the technological and readiness and political sides of what's become of American defense planning and defense, the defense establishment after two difficult decades of war, as we now pivot to a much different set of priority concerns as reflected in both the 2018 and 2022 national defense strategies.

And again, that's what we're here to talk about today. So she is the assistant secretary of defense for strategy, plans and capabilities, meaning that she has an eye on implementation as well as on theory and doctrine. And so this could not be a better moment to discuss these matters with her. Just one last word before I hand off the baton for her opening remarks, and again, I'll then have a couple of questions to follow up and at 11:00, we'll move to Andrew Yeo's panel. Andrew has assembled an excellent team for this panel and more generally for a project that has now produced a number of policy briefs available at the Brookings website that look at the overall questions of basing and geostrategic competition, but also break down some of the dynamics region by region. And he'll have more to say about that at 11:00 our time here on the East Coast. So without further ado, Secretary Karlin, we're delighted to have you. Thank you for joining us. And over to you.

Mara Karlin: Thank you so much, Mike. It is such a treat to be here and to get to talk about this topic. Before I get into the details of how we're thinking about progress on posture, I thought it would be useful to spend a few moments on the 2022 National Defense Strategy, since it really does

frame the Department of Defense's thinking, in particular on the broader challenges we face vis a vis the People's Republic of China and Russia and how we get after some of those challenges, including through force posture and working with our allies and our partners around the world.

As you know very well, Mike, the Department of Defense released its three strategic reviews together for the very first time in its history, pretty recently. That was especially important because it led to a real kind of integrated and seamless approach to deterrence and to risk management and to a tight linkage between our strategy and our resources. Really, that central premise of the national defense strategy is the urgent need to sustain and strengthen deterrence; focusing on the People's Republic of China is the department's pacing challenge. That's because we see the PRC as the only competitor with both the intent and increasingly the capability to systematically challenge the United States across the board, militarily, economically, technologically and diplomatically. We see Russia as an acute threat, one that is immediate and sharp. And we also, of course, need to be vigilant against a range of other persistent threats like North Korea, Iran, violent extremists, as well as trans, transboundary challenges like pandemics and climate change. And all of this informs kind of how we are approaching our posture, as I'll get to in a moment.

Most notably, of course, the National Defense Strategy is really focused on allies and partners as a center of gravity. And I just want to highlight that because, as you know, we have this unparalleled network, a network that I think our adversaries and challengers, you know, find incredibly capable, find meaningful as one thinks about contingencies and also for deterrence as as as well. So how are we making this real? What are we doing to implement this strategy? As I noted, allies and partners are foundational to making it real. That helps in terms of making sure we have a combat credible force that can move at speed and at scale around the world and across the spectrum of conflict, using capabilities in all domains. And I really can't underscore that enough. You know, that is in many ways the secret sauce of the US military.

Part of how we are implementing this strategy is through critical adjustments to our global posture. You had mentioned the Global Posture Review, which the department put out in late 2021. And what I'd like to do is kind of run through a couple examples of how we've been working to make this real, especially through the National Defense Strategy. So two on the Indo-Pacific and one in Europe as areas of focus that I want to emphasize. First in the Indo-Pacific, we are building and deepening our alliances and our partnerships.

One great example here is AUKUS. AUKUS is a strategic partnership that's focused on enhancing regional stability and safeguarding a free and open Indo-Pacific. And it complements our engagement with existing regional architectures. As I think you know, AUKUS is really about providing Australia with a conventionally armed nuclear powered submarine capability and also the ability for these three countries Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, to develop joint advance military capabilities. And we've made exceptional progress on that front. In fact, in December, the Secretary hosted his counterparts from the UK and from Australia for the very first AUKUS trilateral defense ministerial, and they talked a lot about how we are orienting our capability development to accelerate near-term delivery of technologies that will meet our military's requirements to enhance capability and increase interoperability. Some examples include our co-operation on maritime undersea intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities and using all three of our countries' autonomous systems to enhance maritime domain awareness.

We're also leveraging exercises in the region to demonstrate and test advanced capabilities. And we're pursuing additional collaborative demonstrations, including for hypersonics and autonomous systems over this next year. And I really wanted to highlight that example. It's interesting, of course, because it's bringing allies from different regions together, but it also gets at a point that you were just noting, Mike, which is the capabilities piece, right? When we're thinking about force posture, we want to think about where we are and what we're doing. We also want to think about capabilities we have to deliver and ideally to deliver together. So that's kind of one case study.

Another effort that I wanted to emphasize is the posture investments that we're making in the Indo-Pacific in particular. And this really is a fascinating time for Indo-Pacific posture. We are seeing some meaningful efforts across the board by the United States in tandem with our very closest allies and partners. So in Japan, first and foremost, we pursued multiple posture improvements in very close consultation, of course, with our Japanese allies. These include, for example, recent announcements to replace what had been old F-15c aircraft forward station in Japan with a more capable rotational excuse me, for the more capable mix of rotational aircraft to include fifth generation capabilities.

We also recently announced that we would begin MQ-9 operations in Japan, which will be critical for our maritime domain awareness. As you probably saw pretty recently, there was a two plus two ministerial with the Japanese, and during that our secretary announced that we would forward

station a marine littoral regiment in Okinawa. That's going to bring more advanced and mobile capability to help address the full spectrum of fires requirements in the region. Also during those discussions, we announced the forward stationing of additional army watercraft in Japan; that'll be important for maritime mobility to both the forward Station Marine Littoral Regiment and Army Multi-domain Task Force capabilities that go to the region rotationally. We're also updating our roles and missions so that Japan can more actively contribute to regional security alongside the United States and other like-minded partners.

So Japan is going to establish a permanent joint headquarters, they'll work with us on command and control and make us all even more interoperable. We're going to expand how we're sharing facilities in Japan, we're going to increase exercises, and that includes exercises in Japan's southwest islands, I should highlight. And all of this really sings nicely with Japan's updated defense strategy that they recently highlighted, which demonstrates a serious effort to invest profoundly in the Japanese self-defense forces. So that's a little bit on what's happening on the Japan front.

In Australia, I've already talked a little bit about AUKUS; I would also highlight that we're expanding rotational fighter and bomber deployments, we're deepening our logistics cooperation as well, and we have a group that's meeting on a very consistent basis with the Australian's, a forced posture working group that is constantly looking at new opportunities and making sure that we're getting at implementation. This is one area in particular where it has been extraordinary, when I look back at my previous tour in the Pentagon and see where we are now, and it's just extraordinary to see the progress that has been made on this front as well.

Let me also give you a little bit on the Philippines. You saw the secretary just announced that we're actually going to get access to a number of new locations under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement. This Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, EDCA, excuse me, is a key pillar of how we cooperate, and it enables combined training exercises, interoperability that lets our forces better cooperate when we're looking at humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, we get to work together on a whole bunch of things. And in particular, I would note that that includes the South China Sea. We also are going to restart joint maritime patrols in the South China Sea. We're going to enhance the scale and complexity of our combined exercises. We're working on opportunities to improve how we are doing joint planning for regional crises. And we're working closely with the Philippines to make sure they've got the advanced capabilities they need.

And then, of course, beyond the Philippines, we're doing a lot of good work with the compact states. So getting, designating new defense sites in places like Palau and in the Federated States of Micronesia, that'll be important. We're also doing a bunch across Southeast Asia in terms of rotational deployments, exercises, logistics cooperation and targeted security assistance. So taking all of this together in the Indo-Pacific that I just walked through, it's really important to see the effect that will have for our warfighting advantages and also for our allies and our partners. So it's not just about what's out there, it's how we're using what's out there and what we are putting out there.

Finally, let me just quickly spend a moment on Europe, since I know that's also an area of avid interest, and we are working to deepen our partnerships and enhance our posture in Europe, most notably alongside our NATO allies. And that's really been happening over this last year. You saw just how quickly the U.S. military surged forces to Europe as the war, as Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine kicked off last February. So we quickly surged forces from about 80,000 or so to over 100,000 like that. And I would note we did that across domains. Air, land, maritime, cyber, the whole swath of U.S. military capabilities. And we then also deployed more combat power quickly to NATO's eastern flank. And that was really important in terms of being able to send a strong deterrent signal to Russia. And so we've got more more, more combat power out there. Indeed, we put one of these new BCTs out there headquartered in Romania, which I was able to visit pretty recently.

We also strengthened our rotational deployments to the Baltic region, which has been important as well. And our allies are doing so too. We see this in terms of our, their defense investments and in terms of how they are moving their posture around as well. I know you and your smart audience are tracking everything that was announced at the NATO summit last year in terms of some enduring posture improvements as well in Europe, including forward stationing the Fifth Corps and its enablers in Poland, adding engineer and air defense capabilities to Germany, increasing short range air defense capabilities in Italy, forward stationing F-35s in the UK, and two additional destroyers in Rota, Spain as well.

So looking ahead, we'll continue, of course, to recalibrate our surge forces based on the conditions and the security environment and making sure that we're complementing what our allies are doing as well. So I hope it's been useful for me to quickly outline how we are thinking about our posture, how we are deepening our understanding of what it offers, and how we are in particular really

prioritizing a whole lot of energy and a whole lot of attention to our Indo-Pacific posture in particular. With that, I'd be delighted to take your questions, Mike.

Michael O'Hanlon: Secretary Karlin, that was fantastic. And thank you. Thank you for all you're doing as well. I guess I had wanted to break down my questions into the regions that you've already touched upon, but just maybe ask for a little bit more detail. But first, I want to take a step back for our audience that may not follow this stuff quite as carefully as you and I and the other panelists and, and remind folks that in broad terms, the United States military typically has around a quarter million uniformed personnel abroad or in international waters at any given moment. And you've talked about the key regions of the Indo-Pacific, where most of the forces are in Northeast Asia still. But as you say, more in Palau, Australia, Singapore, and there have been important initiatives in the southeast quadrant. And then, of course, Europe. And you just mentioned 100,000 or so U.S. troops in that region, up from 80,000 over the last year or so. And then finally, the broader Middle East, where we used to have 200,000 at the peak of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, and now we're down to more like plus or minus 50,000.

So if I could ask about the Middle East, I guess I have two related questions, I'll just put them both before you. One, going back to the Mattis era at the Pentagon and other periods of time in these wars, DOD has been reluctant to share detailed data on country-by-country presence. Are you, do you anticipate that will change and we'll be more specific about all of our deployments in the region? But regardless of that, your answer to that question, how would you explain the basic footprint in the Middle East today? And is it more or less at what you would think of as a steady state? Or are you still hoping that perhaps we can scale it back further? Over to you.

Mara Karlin: Thanks for that, Mike. You know, the sine qua non of the U.S. military has been its ability to get anywhere at any time, and in particular with the secretary's integrated deterrence concept, what we have tried to do is ensure that that goes across all domains. We know that the war fighting domains have expanded, they've expanded for how our adversaries and challengers understand them and for us as well. So it's really important that we take that holistic look, and I'm using that as a way to get at your good question on the Middle East in particular, because it's important that we right size our Middle East posture, making sure that it is sustainable and effective and really tailored to the threats.

The Middle East posture has been around 35,000 in recent years. And what will be important as we look at it is making sure that it is best tied to the challenges that we see ahead and also to what's happening inside the region, because there's some interesting things happening inside the region that frankly didn't exist five, ten, 15 years ago. And that is the partnerships that we're seeing increasingly across a number of different countries in the region who all recognize that actually the Iranian threat is worrisome and that the more they can collaborate in understanding that threat and countering it, the more effective they are, they are going to be. And we're seeing some, I think, real kind of meaningful progress on that front in terms of things like maritime security and integrated air and missile defense cooperation with our partners around the region.

In addition though to looking at what's in the region, I would just kind of draw your attention to the sorts of kind of dynamic efforts that we can jump in and do with partners in the region as well. And so one really spectacular example just happened was this exercise called Juniper Oak that occurred pretty recently that you might have heard of. It was the largest exercise the U.S. and Israeli militaries have done to date, included 8000 people, we had a carrier strike group, we had F-35s all sorts of interesting things, a lot of innovative and new capabilities. And what's meaningful is not just how great the cooperation was between the U.S. military and the Israelis, but that we could come in, that we could run such an exercise and have what we believe is an important impact in showing our interoperability and our ability to respond quickly when we need to do so.

Michael O'Hanlon: Excellent, thank you. And I think implicitly, if I heard you right, you were suggesting that there are no immediate or near-term plans to further scale back, let's say our presence in Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar. I think those are the big three terms of land-based presence or our overall pattern of maritime deployments within the Persian Gulf and then just outside, which is sort of the fourth big pillar of our presence. Am I hearing you right that you don't anticipate substantial change in the years ahead?

Mara Karlin: Look, I think we are always assessing the security environment and we want to make sure we do that with an understanding of what our strategy is and where our strategy is trying to drive us toward and an understanding of what our partners and allies are capable of doing. As you know, our European allies are also doing important things in the Middle East, right? So you see this when the French are putting a carrier in or the U.K. relatively recently had a carrier in.

So I think, you know, for our national defense strategy to be real, it's crucial for us to incorporate our allies and partners at every stage of defense planning. And one great example is how we manage and employ our forces together, and the Middle East could be one of those regions where we already do a lot, and we probably could, could do more as well.

Michael O'Hanlon: So if I could turn back to Europe and ask you, you've explained already the larger presence in Romania, larger rotational presence in the Baltic states where we previously really hadn't had Americans, there have been a lot of NATO forces since 2017, but the American presence was more in Poland. Do you anticipate that we're going to settle in on some kind of a quasi-permanent presence in the Baltics and Romania, or is it just too soon to say, given the flux of the Ukraine conflict?

Mara Karlin: I think it's a little too soon to figure out what the answer is. And frankly, there probably is no answer, right. What is going to be important is that we recognize how and in what ways the security environment in Europe is changing. We know it is incredibly dynamic. I think the last year has kind of shown that. And so we are continually assessing Russian threats to NATO territory and assessing how we can best adjust our posture based on these threats. So the president last year announced some enduring posture changes. Some of the ones that I just ran through at the NATO summit last year. And so those are going to be important for some key capabilities. So I mentioned things like F-35s, for example, right, some, some, some pretty serious capabilities. That's all going to be important for deterring Russian aggression and improving our support to NATO's security. So we'll keep reviewing.

We also want to make sure we are keep reviewing, reviewing what we're doing, but also what, what our allies are doing as well, their investments in their militaries, how they're moving their posture around. It is pretty heartening to hear how those conversations have changed and to hear just how I think our allies' expectations of themselves are also, also growing. And look, to date, that has really signaled unity and it has signaled meaningful deterrence to the Russians that when the president says not one inch of NATO territory, that that is exactly right.

Michael O'Hanlon: So two more questions. I want to finish on the Indo-Pacific, where you basically began and, and placed so much of your emphasis. But I want to ask just in passing about Latin America and Africa and if there are any substantial changes planned. Of course, we don't have big forces in either continent. Somewhere in the ballpark, I believe, of 6000 total U.S. uniformed

personnel in the continent of Africa. Fewer than that, I think, in Latin America. But is there anything you would say is notable about ongoing trends or plan changes?

Mara Karlin: You're exactly right. There is not a lot there. What's important, I think, with both of those is understanding how many ways the security environment is changing, working really across the US government to figure out where are areas that other departments and agencies of our government may be able to have a more meaningful role? And where is it that the US military cannot, can kind of plug in in areas that make sense? And so I don't know that I would expect kind of major changes there. I would think in particular about how we're operating, how we're innovating to deal with any of the challenges and take advantage of any of the opportunities that we're seeing in either the AFRICOM area of responsibility or the SOUTHCOM area of responsibility.

Michael O'Hanlon: And then finally, my last question on the Indo-Pacific. As you well know, we have roughly a hundred thousand uniformed personnel there, and most of them are still where they've been for a long time, Korea and Japan. And you've talked about a lot of the important, but still in general terms, relatively modest scale changes that we've had in Australia, Singapore, Palau, the Philippines. My question is, are we doing enough? Is the, is the rate of change and the scale of change adequate to the change security environment? And if not, you have a vision of where you would like to see us be, if not necessarily during your tenure in this job, but maybe in ten years' time? Or is it inherently a step-by-step process where it's a function of diplomacy with allies, a function of responding to specific Chinese behavior or initiatives, and therefore, we really shouldn't worry about a vision, we should just keep taking these modest but substantial steps one by one, especially in the broader Southeast Asia and Indian Ocean regions.

Mara Karlin: You know, it seems to me, Mike, the rate of change and the scale of change is dramatically different in the Indo-Pacific than it was ten years ago. I think that is due to a number of reasons, but in particular, you increasingly see cognizance and concurrence of how the threat environment has changed and you see a need and a desire by our allies and our partners across the Indo-Pacific. And I would say a whole lot of agreement by our allies in Europe as well about the need to focus and collaborate on what we are all doing there to ensure security and stability.

And so when you look at just that region specifically and you look at how our allies and partners are investing in their militaries, how they are changing their ways of operating, how they are working closely with us, you know, it was a decade ago, gosh, yeah, effectively a decade or so ago

where we were really putting in peace efforts to begin to put the Marines at Darwin in Australia. And now we have AUKUS, right? We are in such a different place, I think, in terms of of, of the, of the alliance, in terms of both the breadth and the depth. So it seems to me when we step back, we see a rate and scale of change that is meaningfully different in the Indo-Pacific and that's across the board. The capabilities, the posture and the collaboration with our allies and partners. So it seems to me the future is looking pretty bright.

Michael O'Hanlon: Fantastic. Thank you. You covered so much in such a brief amount of time and such a comprehensive and a very strategic perspective on basing, which is exactly the spirit of what we're trying to do with this project. So thank you again, Secretary Karlin, for spending time with us today. And with that, I'll, I'll thank you and now handoff the baton, so to speak, to Andrew Yeo.

Mara Karlin: Thank you, it was a real treat.

Andrew Yeo: All right. Well, thank you so much, Mike and Secretary Karlin, for your remarks. I know you have a very busy schedule, but we really appreciated you joining us. But just to introduce myself, I'm Andrew Yeo, senior fellow and the SK-Korea Foundation chair at the Brookings Institution. I'm delighted to moderate the second portion of this webinar on geostrategic competition and overseas basing, and our project, which was co-led by Isaac Kardon of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and myself, included ten top experts to address overseas basing in regions as diverse as the Arctic, sub-Saharan Africa, the Baltic and Black Seas, the Pacific Islands and East Asia, among others. So we really cover a wide swath of force posture for the US, but then also thinking about Chinese and Russian basing as well. And unfortunately, we weren't able to squeeze all of our, of all of our participants onto this virtual panel.

But I'm delighted to introduce three of our contributors to discuss how Chinese, Russian and US overseas bases, basing project influences geostrategic competition. So first we have Isaac Kardon, formerly of the Naval War College and recently appointed as senior fellow for China studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Then next, we have Emily Holland, an assistant professor at the U.S. Naval War College's Russia Maritime Studies Institute. And finally, we have my colleague, Bruce Jones, a senior fellow and director of the International Order and Strategy at the Brookings Institution. So I'm going to turn the floor over first to Isaac, who helped me co-lead this project on geostrategic competition and basing.

And so just to kick things off, Isaac, I was wondering if you could explain how basing posture in the Indian Ocean region differs between the United States and China. And you've written quite a bit about Chinese port access. Does that access in the Indian Ocean pose a serious threat to US strategic interests?

Isaac Kardon: Well, thank you, Andrew, and to Assistant Secretary Karlin and Michael O'Hanlon and Brookings for putting this all together. It's been a really valuable set of conversations. And I'll just jump right in on that question. In taking the Indian Ocean region as my regional focus, I learned a lot about what I would describe as some basic asymmetries in the strategic objectives that the United States and China in particular are pursuing and in the varied roles of different major powers in the region to include India and Australia, UK and France in particular. And that is somewhat broader scope than I'm usually accustomed to focusing on. I've been quite intent on understanding China's maritime strategy, and that's drawn me inexorably, as it were, to the Indian Ocean region.

I'll get into what I, what I mean by this difference or this asymmetry, and I think actually Assistant Secretary Karlin's remarks tee this up in a really powerful way in the sense of looking from the perspective of a senior official of what the United States' strategic goals are with respect to its force posture, with respect to its military basing and access in various world regions. And it is a much more global and a much more expansive vision about the capabilities and the types of contingencies that the United States joint forces are postured and ready to meet. And that's not something that we see yet, of course, with the PLA and I think there are some very good reasons for that. Just as a little thought experiment, I don't think that Assistant Secretary Karlin will have a PRC counterpart in their civilian ministry of Defense, nor, nor in the PLA who's going to have that level of thought and strategic planning with respect to coordinating with allies, for example, with respect to projecting high end power into various world regions, what you'd see is a lot of concentration on the Western Pacific as the war fighting theater.

And I want to get back to that, I think that's really the key asymmetry is the strategic role geographically, thus our focus on geo strategic issues, the geographic implications of China's dependance on the Indian Ocean for its commodity imports in particular, for oil and gas necessary for anything China wants to accomplish, but here we're also thinking about mineral resources. But ultimately when, when Chinese leadership is looking at the Indian Ocean region, they see something that's strikingly different than the United States. They do not see as, as, excuse me, Assistant

Secretary Karlin said, they do not see a necessity to quote, build a combat credible force that can move at speed and scale to employ joint capabilities, say, in the, the western or southern Indian Ocean. This is not to say that they won't ultimately achieve that, but the way that they're postured and the way that they're allocating their resources is much more tailored.

And this is the core of the asymmetry. China's principal interest, as well as its principal power resource in the Indian Ocean region, is really its economic weight. When we think about things like strategic competition, it's really important to define the, what is the stake over which we're competing. And here that asymmetry comes out quite starkly. China's position and its influence on various states in the region, and here I'm thinking especially of the Gulf states, which have shown remarkable affinity for China as their biggest purchaser of oil and gas, despite the fact that it steadfastly in fact, it plays quite the opposite role with respect to Iran than does the United States. And yet there is an open door for China because it's their economic value, their economic value proposition, their economic strategic advantage, I would argue that makes them appealing even if they are actually cutting across purposes on certain security matters.

And I think I'll leave with just two comments, one on ports and then one on what we can infer about the types of missions that China and the PLA in particular are picking up in the Indian Ocean region. And again, how that contrasts to the US. As Andrew mentioned, I've done a fair amount of work now on understanding China's development of commercial ports globally and have looked at their intrinsic dual uses as well as their empirical dual uses. There's quite a lot of PLA navy activity at a very low level of intensity at various commercial facilities that China owns. And this is consistent with that basic asymmetry. They're trying to protect a narrowly defined set of Chinese overseas interests. They're trying to accomplish a far seas protection task, not a high-end power projection test. They have no intent to deter Iran with this posture, for example, and regional states don't expect them to deter Iran. In fact, they've had to make their peace with the fact that China is going to enable and, and bolster Iran and make its survival possible. And I think that really is instructive.

And so just the last thought on implications for competition, we're not competing for the same stake. China is not certainly in a position now to substitute for the types of security goods, public and club and ally and partner network and otherwise that the United States is providing. And I don't think we need to worry about that kind of direct symmetric competition. We need to worry about what does China's economic access grant it in terms of strategic leverage, coercive leverage. And I think our

network of allies and partners and here I'm thinking not just of, of the NATO allies, France and the UK, that are quite involved and hold important territories, which we can talk about in the IO, but the regional powers, India and Australia in particular. So I'll leave it at that.

Andrew Yeo: All right. Thanks, Isaac. And I should point out that Isaac had written his policy brief on Indian Ocean, on the Indian Ocean. And later, when we circle back to the Q&A, I may ask you to point out some of the recommendations that you might offer if you think that the U.S. should be shoring up its force posture in that Indian Ocean region. I want to turn over now to Dr. Emily Holland at the U.S. Naval War College, who wrote a brief, her policy brief on basing in Europe, looking at Russia, but also US and NATO basing as well.

So if I can just ask you a couple of questions just to talk about your policy briefs, what you had written. Emily, to what extent do you think Russian military presence in its near abroad, such as Belarus, Georgia and Armenia, been a factor in sustaining or supporting Russia's invasion of Ukraine? Of course, that is on everyone's mind the war in Ukraine. But have Russian overseas bases or presence had a role in this? And in light of a protracted war between Russia and the Ukraine, looking forward, what recommendations might you have for the U.S. and NATO policymakers regarding their force posture in Europe?

Emily Holland: Thanks, Andrew, and thank you, everybody for having me. This has been a really interesting project for me to work on. I am a Russian foreign policy specialist, so it's been interesting to, to see how Russia's practices compare to great power rivals, because in many ways it's quite different. it's much more constrained. So yeah, I think the question on Belarus is really interesting. Belarus has served as a base for Russia's initial invasion of northern parts of Ukraine last February, and since then it has provided military stores and equipments, it's helped with logistics, and it's allowed mobilized Russian conscripts to train in its territory. In addition, it also serves as a launching point for missile attacks on Ukraine. And last fall, Russia sent many troops to Belarus. And just last month, Ukraine began to stage war games near the Belarusian border.

So, as you can see, this is a really important part of Russia's operations in Ukraine. And, you know, this is a story that goes back years. So for years, Russia has been trying to expand its military footprint in Belarus. In 2013, Moscow expressed its desire to sort of formally build and commission an airbase in Belarus that would improve its forward presence vis a vis NATO. But the relationship between Moscow and Minsk has not been straightforward. In 2014, Minsk perceived that it had

increased bargaining power vis a vis Russia in light of Russia's very dismal relations with the West following its invasion of Crimea. And so Minsk rejected Russia's proposal. This project was then sort of put on hold in light of Russia's activities in Syria. And instead, Russia reinforced air defenses in Kaliningrad and established a new division along its border with Belarus. But in 2021, after Belarus's own relations with the West deteriorated significantly.

Alexander Lukashenko, is the president of Belarus— dictator, I should say— reversed his earlier rejection of Russia's proposals and announced that it would have a single army in practice with Russia and that it would create a joint military base with Russia. So in February 2022, Russia deployed its largest ever number of troops, about 30,000 and many weapons systems to Belarus for a military exercise called the Union Resolve Exercise. Now, this exercise formally ended on the 20th of February 2022, but Russian troops remained in Belarus and then were deployed for Russia's offensive on Kiev. So so you can see it's been actually very crucial for, for Russia's involvement in the war on Ukraine. And it fits in with sort of Russia's larger patterns of, of basing which focus on, of course, protection of its homeland vis a vis involvement in the near abroad. So it's been really crucial for Russia.

On the other hand, you know, for the West, there's a problem here. So are we back to the Cold War? Not really. And we've heard Assistant Secretary Karlin speak about this. We've seen U.S. troops return to, to the region as a result of Putin's aggression in Ukraine. But still, the West is deploying significantly fewer troops to Central and Eastern Europe than it did during the Cold War. And, you know, US is in this position where U.S. wants to reassure European allies while urging them to shoulder more of its security burden. And this is because the U.S., as we've heard today, regards China as the only serious threat to the U.S.-led liberal order. So today, there's only about 100 that well, only, I should say there's 100,000 troops stationed in Europe, the majority of which are hosted in Germany.

And Assistant Secretary Karlin mentioned the most significant of these U.S. installations, the new ones that have happened since the end of the Cold War, are the two naval support facilities in Poland and Romania, which host the Aegis Ashore missile defense ground sites and the deployment of these systems and sites causes serious dispute with Moscow, right, who believes what many in Russia believe or say they believe that that these threaten Russia's ability to target the U.S. via ICBMs. And some in Moscow argue that Aegis Ashore could also function as a surprise first strike

weapon. In 2018, Moscow claimed the deployment of these systems violated the INF treaty. So it's part of a sort of spat with the U.S. over the IMF treaty.

Meanwhile, the Baltic states for many years have been stressing their vulnerability vis a vis Moscow, and so many of our Baltic allies have been trying to seek further U.S. involvement. Lithuania actually constructed a military facility which was designed to entice the US to establish permanent military presence in Lithuania. I would say this seems unlikely given overall U.S. grand strategy and commitments like its commitment to, to Asia. So, so there's an issue here, right? There's a security dilemma both for Russia and the U.S. And I think there's two main challenges here.

The first one, Russia is no doubt in a degraded security environment. There's a real security dilemma. NATO has been reawakened and repurposed, Sweden and Finland have abandoned neutrality and are in the process of joining NATO. U.S. troops have returned to the continent, and Russia's focus, therefore, will be prioritizing national security through maintaining a buffer zone, right, its always wanted to maintain a buffer zone that is supported by its bases in neighboring states and in Russian regions close to Ukraine. So the challenge for Ukraine is how does it maintain a deterrent presence in Europe? How does it support its allies while not potentially triggering a further security dilemma for Russia, which might cause further aggression?

I think one of the main challenges for the U.S. is going to be upholding NATO unity. We just heard Assistant Secretary Karlin emphasize how the administration is prioritizing our allies and partners. So the U.S. is seeking to send these strong deterrence signals to Russia, but they are really emphasizing working through and with partners. So it's important for the administration that where it sends troops, NATO is also sending troops and support. At the same time, the U.S. has to worry a little bit about Russia, which is frustrated, I'm sorry, Europe, which has been frustrated. Europe has serious security needs. And there are certain voices within the European community, which is, which have voiced frustration, saying that the U.S. is prioritizing China when there is a major land war happening now in Europe. So how do you, you know, support our European allies while maintaining the overall American grand strategy, which is focused on Asia-Pacific?

And, you know, the challenge is not only maintaining NATO unity, but also European unity. So there are different voices within, within NATO, not to mention sort of transatlantic voices. And so overall, the goal is to ensure security and stability while at the same time really sort of managing a quite unwieldy coalition within NATO. And then for Russia, that will be how do we maintain, you know,

homeland security, given the extremely degraded security environment, what potentially is a losing war in Ukraine and potentially is a very long war in Ukraine where Russia knows that it has to have a sustained presence along its western flank for, for the, for the foreseeable future.

Andrew Yeo: Thanks, Emily. A fascinating set of remarks and insights there. And you hit something that Secretary Karlin also touched on, too, about our prior, prioritization. And we are hearing a lot about the Indo-Pacific and about China. She mentioned that that is really our, a pacing threat, our, a competitor. But yet, you know, the threats are really acute right now and Russia. So it leaves questions. You know, right now we're talking about different regions. But if we go back to a more global perspective, it leaves to questions of where, where and where our force posture should be moving forward. So I'm going to probably ask you that question after we get to Bruce when we can have a more general discussion about prioritization for the US.

But Bruce, so I know your policy brief touched on not just the Pacific Islands, but really the broader second island chain. So going beyond East Asia, looking at Oceania, parts of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific and the Pacific Islands, though in particular has attracted significant attention in the past year. And now we're seeing the United States, Australia, China and other countries also development banks just pouring large investments into the region. So can you tell us why and how great power basing has become a part of the recent narrative of the Pacific Islands? Because as Secretary Karlin said five, ten years ago, I would have never thought about basing competition in this part of the world. So can you just for our audience out there, explain to us why this has become so significant in the last, last couple of years?

Bruce Jones: Well, thanks and delighted to be part of this panel and to have been part of this great project led by, by you and Isaac. Look, you know, picking up something that Emily said, it sometimes feels a little bit funny to be talking about this if it's the land war in Europe, but the fact of the Russian war in Ukraine doesn't change an underlying reality, which is that the first and second largest economies in the world and the first and second largest defense spenders in the world are separated by 8000 miles of Pacific Ocean. And that's just a basic geographical fact that's going to shape, I think, a lot of brand strategy in the coming period.

Since the end of the Second World War and built during and vitally during the Second World War, the United States has maintained a set of critical naval assets and logistics and air capabilities across the northern arc of the Pacific from the Hawaiian Islands out through the North Pacific Ocean,

past Wake Island to Guam and Palau and northwards to Japan and further east to the Philippine Sea and bases in the Philippines. And that's being absolutely crucial to U.S. power projection in Asia, as well as the Middle East, actually. And the Pacific Ocean has been crucial to the United States in commercial terms for more than a century.

The big change is in the last ten years, 20 years that China has had extremely rapidly expanding interests in these waters, first and foremost, I think are commercial, you know, China is even more dependent than the United States on the flow of commercial energy goods and raw materials in and out of its ports by sea, 85% of world trade moves by sea. China is entirely dependent on the flow of those goods. The Pacific Ocean hosts two of the most important sea lanes of the world to the West Coast of the United States and along the southern route down to Panama, the Panama Canal, South America, huge resource inputs from South America feeding the Chinese growth spurt over the last 20 to 30 years, so hugely important commercial stakes.

China also has diplomatic interests in the region. That's, I think, of two parts. One is a sort of a general interest that China has to increase its diplomatic standing and presence in virtually every region of the world. But given that this is a quite proximate reason to have particular interests there and the Pacific Islands have two of the three or four or sorry, there's about 14 remaining countries that recognize Taiwan. And two, a few years ago, three. Now two of them are in the Pacific Islands. So those are an important diplomatic, very specific diplomatic interest for China. And third, I think that this is a place where China is interested in laying the foundation, diplomatic and logistical, for potential new basing for several reasons.

And by the way, before I move to basing, this is also a region where countries are exploring a deep-sea mining is probably the most important reservoir of rare earth metals in the world is the subsea trenches in the central Pacific Ocean. For China on the strategic side, China is vastly the world's largest trading nation and I think it has an overweening interest in playing a role in securing the flow of trade. We have played that role over the last 35 years. That's an uncomfortable reality for China to have the United States serve as the guarantor of its most important economic input. China wants to play a role in protecting trade, and then there are real security issues as well. For China, a central part of its security doctrine is what it's called its counterinsurgency doctrine, which is its desire to have enough naval air force, space and other capabilities, postured beyond the first island chain eventually to stop us from flowing our assets in across that northern arc of, of bases and assets into

the first island chain. And to reinforce our position whether that would be in a Taiwan scenario or for simple self-defense reasons.

So this counterinsurgency doctrine, this desire to be able to stop the American fleet outside the first island chain is a very important driver of Chinese grand strategy, and that puts the Philippine Sea and the second island cloud into the kind of front and center in US-China strategic competition. And I think we'll see an increasing degree of focus and tension between those two actors in those waters. The United States has not really lost ground on the northern arc. In fact, it's gained some ground. It's got new basing agreements with the federal states of Micronesia, it's expanding its presence in Palau. We just heard Mara talk about the kind of new agreements in the Philippines and etc.

On the southern arc, China has been making some progress, certainly in Fiji, probably in Vanuatu. Also face some reserve, reversals, particularly in the Papa New Guinea. And then I think very interestingly and very importantly, beginning to make headway in establishing some degree of Chinese logistical presence in Kiribas, which is basically due south of Hawaii. So really the first place where China has a presence in the, in the center of the Pacific within striking distance, so to speak, of that key arc of assets that the United States has across the northern region. So that's one that I think we should be keeping a close eye on.

Last point I want to make. For all of the American and Chinese, and by the way, also a degree of Russian and Indian and other sort of interest in these questions, but really the United States and China as the drivers, for all of the focus on basing rights and coastguard activities, etc., for the countries in the region, the crucial issues are climate change, rising sea levels, illegal fishing, a whole host of environmental pressures that they confront. And a very important dynamic is which country, China, the United States, or which, which U.S. allies, India, Japan, Australia, etc. can really engage these countries where the issues confront them, which is in the environmental and the climate and the fishing space. Basing is a secondary question for them, it's not the primary question and that produces both diplomatic tension and diplomatic opportunity.

Andrew Yeo: You somewhat damped in my other question, because I was going to say the bases are there and there's a presence, but it's not just to prevent armed conflict, but there's other issues that need to be addressed, climate change, there could be humanitarian needs as well, too. And so I may follow up with you on that in a bit, but I want to bring all of us into this conversation now

and get back to that point on prioritization and for our virtual audience there, we held a closed workshop with all our participants back in November. And one of the takeaways that we, that Isaac and I walked out with was that prioritization appears to be a serious policy challenge for U.S. competitiveness in different regions. And it's just clear that the US can't respond to all threats in all locations all the time.

And so to, to the three of you, where do you think the US should prioritize its basing posture in light of present acute threats in places like the Ukraine and Eastern Europe, but also keeping in mind the long term geostrategic competition where early influence and access may be key in regions such as the Indo-Pacific, including the Indian Ocean or the Pacific Islands, where Isaac and Bruce, you guys had written about. And if I can drill this down a bit further, maybe Emily can go first, because I think this really is the big question that everyone's asking. There's a, an actual conflict taking place in the Ukraine where we need resources, we need, we need troops, we need material, but yet we're still talking about this longer-term competition with China. So, Emily, if you could maybe give your perspectives and then after that, this is between you, Bruce and Isaac.

But I know the Indo dimension was really big with coming into the Trump administration and the Indian Ocean was that kind of the next region that we need to really pay attention to because of China making inroads in that part of the world. But then, you know, from last year, we started talking a lot more about the Pacific Islands. And so I don't know if that's taken away some of the luster of the Indian Ocean region, because now we also have to focus on Pacific Islands, getting back to this point about prioritization and that we can't be everywhere all at once. But, but maybe, Emily, if you could start us off and then we can hear from Bruce and Isaac after, so Emily.

Emily Holland: Well, you know, obviously it's a very difficult question, which is why there is this challenge for policymakers. You know, I would say the situation in Europe is very grim. I don't know, I don't know if anybody knows with the outcome of this war will be, but I think suffice it to say, there's going to be a difficult security environment in Europe for quite the foreseeable future. Even if, even if Russia loses this war very badly, we have observed Russia over many years and its ability to regenerate. So it's using a lot of its military equipment, its moving through troops. But we've seen Russia be able to sort of come back. We've seen it in digitize a lot of processes, sort of military and military equipment and things like that since Crimea, since the sanctions. So and digitized a lot of

those processes already. So we do expect that you know, Russia will continue to be a challenge for the foreseeable future to Western interests, particularly in Ukraine.

You know, that said, that doesn't mean that the US does not have priorities elsewhere. But what I think is really going to be crucial for, for U.S. planners is to, like I said, strike the balance, because I don't believe that the U.S. can pose a serious, serious threat to, to the to the Indo-Pacific or Asia without other allies, right. And so if the U.S. seeks to move forward as a leader of a liberal world order, it's going to need Europe with it. Now, Europe obviously has its own concerns, but the U.S. is a part of that and needs to really uphold transatlantic unity, I think, to, to if it wants to still continue to be the leader of the liberal world order. So I think what it's doing right now is sort of the best it can do, focusing on, you know, increasing moderately and rotationally troops to Europe, but doing so alongside and with its NATO allies will be crucial.

So that said, it'll even be difficult. We all know that the challenge in East Asia is very acute. And so the U.S. will be stretched, but it has to, I think, really focus on maintaining its relationships with its European allies. The Biden administration has really worked hard on doing that, and it'll be crucial for subsequent administrations to, to keep putting the work in with Europe if it wants to, to continue to be a leader in the world.

Andrew Yeo: Yeah, and just to intervene really quickly, it's interesting that European countries also talk about the Indo-Pacific as well, too, so they have concerns there as well. So there might be a way of really having these conversations with the Europeans about looking at both what is needed in Europe, what is needed in the Indo-Pacific, and that's, I think, the reason why outside airports posture these ties to allies and strengthening these networks that Secretary Karlin mentioned is really important.

Okay, gentlemen, Bruce and Isaac. So on, on this point about the Oceania, the Pacific Islands and the Indian Ocean region, I mean, this gets to my own policy brief on East Asia, because Mike and I wrote about whether force sizes, as of right now is that are we right sized in Northeast Asia where a lot of troops are concentrated, but there's pressure to expand westward or southward. So where do you see the priorities? And has, has this changed even within the from the transition from the Trump to the Biden administration looking at the Indo-Pacific?

Bruce Jones: Isaac, you want to go first. Well, I'll just.

Andrew Yeo: Unmuted first, though, Bruce, go ahead.

Bruce Jones: If I were going to place, pick one place on the globe where I'm most worried about a potential conflict between the United States and China, it would be the Philippine Sea. And that's both sides of the of the island itself. I mean, the sea is on the, on the eastern side. But I'm worried about the issues our side as well. I think that a really central focus of Chinese strategy as to limit America's capacity and American capacity to flow resources through the Luzon straight into the first island chain, into the seas that surround immediately surround China's eastern coast. And so I think they're going to be putting a lot of effort into building out their access on the other side of the Philippines in Second Island chain, Second Island Cloud.

So that strikes me as extremely important if we, I think the reason for the shift in emphasis is a growing focus on the possibility of an acute scenario in Taiwan. And if we face an acute crisis in Taiwan, then and should we decide to come to Taiwan's defense in an operational sense, then our ability to flow resources across the North Pacific and into those waters is essential. And that puts a very heavy emphasis on our set of capabilities in the second island chain, although increasingly those are also under a Chinese missile threat. And so there's sort of complicated questions there about how much you then need to fall back even further to Australia and or places farther away. But I, I can't really see a scenario in which the United States deprioritizes that core arc of assets that bring us from the West Coast of the United States into Asia.

And second point is that it's not actually particularly expensive to add to this right now. The core structures are there. We're adding some capability in Palau, federated states of Micronesia, the Philippines. It's not going to be a particularly significant addition to the defense budget relative to the myriads of other things. So it strikes me as extremely important and not particularly expensive in the scheme of things there are much, much bigger drains on the defense budget in terms of this kind of scenario than the, than the bases themselves or the access points themselves.

Andrew Yeo: All right. Isaac, do you agree with the thoughts that Bruce mentioned about the Philippine Sea or do you have other thoughts, expand further out into the Indian Ocean?

Isaac Kardon: So I'm largely in violent agreement with Bruce on the Philippine Sea or the Western Pacific being the priority, and rightly so, for military operational demands. And obviously this is a discussion about basing and posture. And so I do think that's right. And yet, as Emily and others will, have pointed out, priorities are going to be a dynamic question. We're not just going to, it's not going to be preserved in amber when these plans were being drawn up, Russia hadn't yet invaded

Ukraine. That has, I think acute is a good word for it that's presented this acute threat. It's, it's very problematic. It's necessarily crowding out other priorities. But I guess the, a key insight when we're thinking about competition to achieve what, that doesn't necessarily demand augmenting the U.S. basing position in Europe.

In fact, you could argue precisely the opposite is not the venue necessary to, to do that other than to say we need to think about what are the, what are the various tools in our arsenal and in the spirit of integrated deterrence. And back to Bruce's point about the Philippine Sea being where we see the PLA wanting to take the fight, they don't want to be fighting in China's immediate littoral. They'd prefer to fight as far out into the Pacific as they, as they possibly can. But that's only, you know, taking this regionalized look has really been illuminating for me at least, where you think about, well, what are the other sort of strategic centers of gravity. And again, I can't get past my, my basic focus on China. And when I think about priorities, I'm probably getting past my pay grade trying to assign them to the U.S., which has a much more complex set of global interests. China's are somewhat less complex, at least now.

You know, the Indian Ocean region is not an area where China needs to project high end power, it’s not an area where they need to intervene in in a domestic or international conflicts. It's an area where they need to protect their equities and they're certainly still feeling military capabilities to do so. But again, largely on this commercial backbone and on this economic kind of leverage that puts them there. So priority wise, it puts the United States, I suppose, in an interesting position where I think we had to work with the fact that China does, in fact have quite substantial economic leverage in a lot of countries that we would like to think of as partners in this region and that we can't necessarily expect them to come along with everything that we want to do in the context of great power competition with China.

I think Bruce made another really important point, which was that if you were to talk to the leadership of various states, he was talking about the South Pacific where the most acute concerns, security concerns will have to do with climate change, will have to do with fisheries. These are actually their number one priorities. And all this talk of strategic competition, great power competition is completely theoretical and abstract, very distant from any specific interests that any of these countries have. I think China has exploited that asymmetry. If you look at their relationships, again, back to my brief on the Indian Ocean region, I emphasized before the fact of growing Chinese comity

with the Gulf states, and the core cynical transactional logic of that is that China is by far the biggest purchaser of their main commodity export, and that's the basis of their economic model, and it's the basis of their political security and stability.

And so I think by way of priority, the United States can be seeking to leverage the fact that China is investing in a lot of intrinsically dual use infrastructure, letting other allies and partners make use of that, if not the United States, kind of hoodwinking China into providing maritime security goods that we are also interested in. I think the counter-piracy mission that China initiated as its very first foray into out-of-area kind of permanent operations, it's not all, it's not all a sad story. We don't know how the movie's going to end, but in a sense, it's not crazy to rely on China to, in its acts of protecting its own discreet national interests, to be quite interested in sea lanes security, in energy security, in keeping the Iranians and the Saudis from decapitating one another, or worse, keeping a nuclear arms race from, from emerging in the region.

And so I think we need to be careful about whether or not we need to symmetrically oppose everything they do, especially if it is the case, back to priorities, if in the Middle East, what we're looking to do is as, as Assistant Secretary Karlin said, right size our presence, which I take to be a euphemism for downgrade our presence and transfer it elsewhere, whether it's to the acute threats in the European theater or to the long term strategic problems in the Pacific. But if that's the case, we just need to price that in to what we're going to do. We can't do that and be more competitive militarily with China in that region.

But I think we don't have to, I think we do need to worry about China's additional incremental establishment of more PLA presence and capability, that's not trivial would not be trivial for China to establish a major SIGINT post in the Gulf, it wouldn't be trivial for them to have more operating facilities, but at the same time, that's not where we expect the pointy tip of the spear from the PLA, they're not organized or postured or capable, frankly, of doing that anywhere but the Western Pacific and out into the Central Pacific, as Bruce is pointing out.

So as far as like the strategic center of gravity, I think that this geostrategic, this geographic view is exactly right. It's just hard to do. I believe the pivot began in 2010, 2009, and I guess it depends on how you count it, but I suspect it hasn't really produced quite that radical redistribution of U.S. assets and force posture and strategic attention that was intended. And I think that's probably still the right direction, frankly.

Andrew Yeo: It's interesting to point out that the Philippines is that area, it's really at the nexus of where the first and the second island chain meets. And it's close to, getting closer to the Indian Ocean. But I will say that my friends in Manila will be pleased that you're using Philippine Sea or the West Philippine Sea rather than South China Sea, because they love to hear that. But I want to say.

Isaac Kardon: I meant to say the actual Philippine Sea, east of the Philippines.

Andrew Yeo: Ah Philippine Sea, okay.

Isaac Kardon: That Bruce was referring to. I will not enter any positions on the name of the, the South Sea is actually what it's called in Chinese, so maybe we should just call it.

Andrew Yeo: All right. Well, fair enough. But I wanted to pick up on this point that you made, Isaac, because you were talking about the challenges of China and, and there may actually be areas where, you know, Chinese presence can at least be somewhat useful, or they can help address some issues related to the public goods. And that's something that we also addressed in this earlier workshop that I had mentioned that the United States doesn't have the capacity to push China in every space where China gains influence or a basing foothold. And I think an analogy that one of our friends, Steve Watts at Rand used was like, we can't be playing Whac-A-Mole and at sometimes trying to, trying to block China, every point may lead to greater risks than benefits.

But that's why I wanted to ask the three of you, are there regions where you think China and Russia do have a legitimate interest to protect, whether it's commercial or scientific? And is, are we, I mean, there's, you know, intense competition with China. And because of the Russian war, it seems like cooperation is really out of the question. But in places like perhaps the Arctic or in sub-Saharan Africa, not to say that we need to cooperate, but would or should we be less resistant if there's Russian presence in those, in those areas? So if you could share any of your thoughts about the legitimate interests that maybe China or Russia have and put the focus a little bit on, on China, Chinese and Russian strategic perspectives, because I know we've been talking a lot about the US response to China and Russia to this point.

Isaac Kardon: Let me just jump in first and I want to clarify, I don't see a lot of scope for getting China to provide various security goods that we want. What I'm saying is in incidental to them taking care of their own interests, they're doing some things that are not necessarily in competition with us. And I think that's really the key point. And yes, you're right, Andrew. I think we need to

recognize them as legitimate interests. China's legitimate interests in the Indian Ocean sea lanes is that all of its vital commodities flow across of it. Its biggest export market is Europe. That's an Indian Ocean trip. Unless and until the Arctic becomes a high throughput type of route. So they have very legitimate economic interests, and they have legitimate political interests.

What I would say that— and a bit like a broken record, but I think it bears repeated emphasis— China's military strategic interests, at least for now and into the foreseeable future, are, are relatively modest. Its interest in things like scientific research and deep seabed mining, those are, those are somewhat problematic, those are also intrinsically dual use types of things, particularly given the way that China's state and academy and scientific enterprise are organized. It's just, it is just inevitable. But nonetheless, those are going to be legitimate interests. And because of China's economic relationships with the various states to include small island states across the Indian Ocean in the Pacific, and the confluence of that with its legitimate, lawfully assigned leases to explore deep seabed minerals in the various areas that they've leased from the International Seabed Authority, they're going to be there.

There's not going to be a basis for excluding them from operating, especially in high seas, nor of having their own bilateral relationships with countries that might say, well, and we see this all over Africa, perhaps not as much in the Indian Ocean region, they'll allocate some portion of their EEZ catch to China to dust and water fishing, where Chinese firms will create local entities and fish out their stocks. That's a legitimate interest. They made a commercial transaction. We might think it's unfortunate for fish stocks or for disadvantaged people in various countries, but it's going to be very difficult to close that door. But I'm curious to hear what Emily and Bruce think about these legitimate interests.

Andrew Yeo: Well, they're legitimate interests, but they're, legitimate interests but using illegitimate means, I guess, to try to secure those interests, I think that's one of the biggest problems, especially with, with Russia. But Emily or Bruce, do you want to weigh in at all.

Bruce Jones: I mean, just to weigh in on this, because you can have legitimate interests, you can use legitimate means to pursue them, but they could be inimical to our interests. Whether they're legitimate or not, sort of fades away pretty quickly. right. So, I mean, the problem, it seems to me in all of this in the fishing and the deep-sea mining and the posture, etc., is every part of it is dual use. The science is dual use, the naval capability is dual use, the logistics access is dual use. And so there are

lots of ways in which having China be a part of a counter-piracy coalition, be part of cyber defense, of maritime shipping, be part of trade protection, etc., would be contribute to the, to kind of share global goods.

But at the same time, it would also be contributing to their capacity to develop their naval presence on the, on the far seas. And in the end, that's going to be very hard for us to reconcile against our legitimate core interests right. So the fact that they're legitimate interests in my mind doesn't change the fact that they're in tension. The other piece of this in, Isaac in your last intervention, I agree with sort of 95% of it, but I just want to always highlight in these conversations, our role for the past 35 years in securing freedom of navigation, securing sea lanes communication and securing the flow of energy out of Gulf into other markets is a huge part of what gives us diplomatic power in the world.

And so it's not, we're not going to stop trying to find some role in that, to be sure. But every ounce of influence they get in that is at our cost. It's a zero-sum question in terms of the influence that comes with it. It's positive sum in the commercial side, its positive sum in the economic side, but it's zero sum on the diplomatic side. And so I just think there's going to be a lot of tension around this question, even if we don't assess that their presence in a given space is a direct security threat, even if all it's doing is enhancing their influence on the flow of trade that is to the benefit of their global influence and to the cost of ours. We're not going to go to stop them from doing that at scale, but it doesn't mean we shouldn't be worried about those developments.

Andrew Yeo: All right. Emily.

Emily Holland: I'll just hop in and talk briefly about Russia's legitimate interests, which may not, may not go well with ours. So, of course, you know, Russia has a very serious and legitimate interest in the Arctic, both in sort of building military infrastructure, economic infrastructure, energy infrastructure. You know, Russia is much more materially constrained, obviously, than the U.S. and China. But Russia is very good at playing an outsized role relative to its, its size economically or even militarily. So it did that as a hydrocarbon superpower. It caused, you know, absolutely astronomical transformations of the global energy market this year. And, you know, I foresee its role in the Arctic. It is looking to play a sort of similar role, whether that be through trade routes as they open up, obviously, mining of critical minerals, more hydrocarbons extractions, and then, of course, working on commercial partnerships with China, right.

So this is an area in which Russia now knows that it's, you know, going to play a sort of diminished role in, in other areas of geopolitics. But it's focusing very heavily on its bet in the Arctic, right. It has the sort of largest portion of, of the Arctic. It sees itself as a leader in the Arctic. And I don't see that it's going to, to pull back from that, even as we've seen Russia be more material, materially constrained before the the invasion of Ukraine and now seriously after, after the Ukraine, after the invasion of Ukraine, it's going to keep focusing on areas like that. I don't think that we are going to see, is when it sort of deprioritized areas such as Africa where it has sort of minimal impact and certainly Latin America and it will focus on the homeland and the Arctic through a variety of different projects.

Andrew Yeo: Thanks, Emily, for weighing in there. I want to turn this now over to the audience. And I should say that we had at least 50 questions come in before the event when, with the registration, and then we have some questions that are coming in now. And so in the interest of time, I might group some of these together, I won't identify where they're from, but I'll I'll bring in a couple of questions that were sent in in advance of the event. And then and then I'll draw some that are coming in live. But to our panelists, if you can be fairly brief in your response, that way we can get to as many as possible. But this first one, you know, I'm lumping two together, but it has to do with how Chinese and Russian basing plans may have changed over time.

So one part of this has to do with the string of pearls so China's much types string of pearls strategy of seeking foreign basis material. Has it materialized beyond Djibouti? Is there some potential with the BRI? And in terms of changing of plans and of course, the invasion of Ukraine may have changed or modified Russia's plans. Emily, I know you've written before about Russian interests in Syria and Sudan and in Africa, and there is some, some luck there maybe in Iran as well, too. But now with the invasion of Ukraine and what's, what's happened to Russian basing outside of its near abroad.

Emily Holland: Yeah. So prior to the invasion of Ukraine, Russia had been expanding beyond its sphere of influence, right? So it had significantly expanded its military base at Tartous in Syria. And it had begun discussions, it actually, there was a published agreement with Sudan for a naval support facility in Port Sudan that would have been Russia's first base on the black, on the Red Sea since the Soviet Union. So this was pretty significant to Russia. But obviously Sudan went through some political, significant political transformation since then. And the deal has sort of

languished. And now, given the very serious material constraints that Russia is facing as a result of its war in Ukraine, those, those areas have sort of languished.

We expect that I don't know what's going to happen with the Sudan agreement. It doesn't look like Russia at this point is going to make any move to to to diminish its presence in Syria. But we do sort of see, obviously, there's going to be some belt tightening. We just got some figures from the Russian economy today, which are not as bad as maybe everybody expected, but are pretty pretty significantly pretty, pretty significant. There's going to be austerity in Russia, that's for sure. And so I think we're, we've seen a sort of diminished goals for Russia.

So we, there was a period sort of, you know, after a great success in Syria for Russia, in which there were some grand strategic plans, I think, to expand Russia's footprint, you know, to sort of keep expanding outside of its former sphere of influence. Now that is going to be rolled back and there's going to be a serious prioritization on defense of the homeland. And that will include increasing its military presence and economic presence in the Arctic, but probably it'll reduce its footprint significantly in Africa.

Andrew Yeo: Okay. Fascinating. I'm sure a lot of people aren't aware about that Russia had these interests outside of its near abroad in places like Africa or the Arctic. Isaac really quickly or Bruce on string of pearls, I know people use that phrase a lot, I don't really hear so much about it these days, but is there more to it or is the port strategy, you know what, we're not really going to see bases per se, but is it more about more access to dual use ports? Isaac.

Isaac Kardon: Yeah. So I think that Emily's comments really provide a helpful comparative insight, and I'm glad we're doing this, Andrew, this is all your idea to stack them together because it is really instructive when you start to think about what are they trying to accomplish with their capabilities to do it. In China's case, the goals are also changing over time. And I think what you're describing asking about the string of pearls, the BRI, the Maritime Silk Road, all these other, you know, some sort of genius go or wei-chi strategy that China may or may not be implementing across this region. I think it is, these are all describing basically the same fundamental geo strategic phenomenon, which is that over the course of the last 20, 25 years, there's been huge incentives for China, both a push and pull, a domestic push in the form of industrial policy and other incentives, political as well as financial, to be invested in things like ports which started to be identified, I don't know whether it was by American or Indian analysts as this string of pearls across the Indian Ocean.

But I actually think there's a great deal more continuity. The Belt and Road, Belt and Road, I said this before, I'll say it again, I don't know what it is, I think analytically it's quite difficult to to make any use of it as a branding campaign, as a slogan, but it's a continuation and an expansion of a bunch of very clear political and economic incentives that China's been pursuing in different regions. Some of those dynamics are, again, things that you can't necessarily plan for. And I'll highlight two things that are interesting as we think about what is it that China is trying to accomplish across this region or military basing globally generally?

First is that it seems pretty clear that the COVID pandemic had had a major influence on everything in Chinese society to include the PLAs overseas operations. And they really stood down a lot of the stuff that they had been doing up to 2020 in terms of physically going into ports, among other things, and probably all sorts of other engagements. You know, they're not doing a lot of person to person anything which has been the main tool of military diplomacy and part of the process of developing basing and access, of course. So that's a big hit. And I think that's changed things. And I'm very intent on watching now how the PLA responds to obviously a very new COVID policy in China. And I expect we should see them hit their stride with presence in some of the places that they had been going.

But the second thing that I wanted to point out is that I think that the geostrategic environment facing China is not necessarily all that conducive to lots of bases to begin with. I've written a long piece about this for security studies, which I'm happy to share with anybody who asked me for it. But just the, the wave types on that are that unlike the United States, China doesn't have a legacy network of bases. So the strategic question confronting them is quite different. As we heard from our senior defense official today, the US is thinking about how to use this existing set of assets, thinking about how it needs to be, excuse me, adjusted for contemporary strategic realities, some of which it is spectacularly ill suited for, and I think that's especially clear in the Western Pacific. Big fixed bases are big fat targets for China's very impressive suite of missile capabilities. It's not a Navy question, although some of them are owned by the Navy.

And so just the last point on this is so what is it, you know, why are there no more base, why aren't there Chinese bases now in 2023 on top of Djibouti? And I think some part of that we have to accept is it's a challenging environment, it's not that easy to reach these negotiations and it's not necessarily all that useful to them. It's nice to have. But they're getting some of the military capability

they need out of the commercial ports. And thus I do think we see an evolving and a moving target, a dynamic set of Chinese requirements driving this.

Andrew Yeo: Yeah, I think you answered one of the questions that were posed by a virtual audience about how these agreements actually come together. But we only have 4 minutes left. So let me just group two final questions before we wrap up. One is a question that came in live, and it was around when you were speaking, Bruce, and maybe it's directed more to you, but the question was about the panelists, we were talking, they said the panel's focusing on what the US is doing in reaction to other countries, are their actions that the US is taking proactively. And I'm assuming maybe because with the Solomon Islands we have, it's the US now reacting to that, but is there anything that we've been doing that you would say is proactive and not just reactive to what China and Russia is doing?

And then the last question I think is, is terrific. But it's about, I guess, the intent of, of military bases, I think this is more toward China and Russia, well, it says I'll just read the question, are these military bases targeted at the big powers themselves or are they more specifically intended to target control and insert power and influence locally or regionally to strengthen one's control over the targeted countries? I mean, obviously the answer is both. But I think depending on which maybe the specific regions that you work on is a focus for Chinese and Russian basing more about, is it about stunting US power and influence, or is it, is it really about control and over influence over targeted countries? So a more local motivation for establishing bases. So I'll let each of you just have a minute and, and then we'll, we'll close there. So Bruce, you're unmuted so maybe go to, go to you first.

Bruce Jones: You could probably put AUKUS in the category of proactive, pretty significant investment in key, highly classified nuclear technologies, nuclear propulsion of submarines being the most important to try to change the dynamics over time and in the Western Pacific. But intrinsically, it's going to be reactive because we are the more powerful entity. We are the established power. We have command of the high seas. So they're going to want to be challenging us more than the other way around. It is sort of intrinsically going to be reactive, I don't think that's problematic.

In terms of the second question, what's the purpose? Look, I do think that this is much less about trying to influence the politics of the local countries per se, at least in the places that I'm focused on. These are relatively small countries. They're not diplomatic heavyweights on the world stage. There are some specific issues like Taiwan recognition where China is looking to change their

posture, or we might want some votes in the UN on this or that and the other thing. But that's not the central purpose. The central purpose is to maintain control of the sea lanes or to gain control or access to control of those sea lanes in some meaningful.

But one very final thought in the last question. I think to my mind, the most important concepts to understand what China is doing across this is not string of pearls. It's the work that Isaac and some of his other colleagues have done on strategic strong points. That's, to my mind, the right way to understand what China is doing in these, in these places.

Andrew Yeo: All right, Emily.

Emily Holland: Jump in very quickly. Russia wants to be perceived as a great global power, not a regional power. They say this you can they literally say this many times out loud in many statements. Most of their work in overseas basing over the past years have been to increase their perception as a global power to act as an arbiter in a region outside the former Soviet Union. That's why Russia spent so much time and energy in developing its base in Syria, right to act as an arbiter in another region. Now that it is going to be probably a diminished power as a result of Ukraine, it will probably have to retreat. But we're going to see, I think, you know, more effort put in now to the Arctic to sort of maintain its role as a major world power. And I'll leave it there.

Andrew Yeo: Thanks, Isaac, 30 seconds.

Isaac Kardon: Okay, well, I'll have to just agree with my colleagues then. But just quickly, on the question of Chinese basing or basing interests intended to stunt U.S. power and influence or control influence targeted states, like most things, it's some combination of all the above and it's going to depend on the states. But largely like the United States, China thinks in its kind of great power chauvinist terms, and it's mostly it's actually mostly thinking about its own vulnerabilities, basically. But that is a familiar dynamic for students of international relations and conflict. Their actions to secure their sea lanes, to protect their overseas interests inevitably make the United States and other regional states feel insecure. And that's really the dynamic we're looking at playing out right now. And not a lot of obvious ways to break out of that other than not necessarily competing to fight and die for every hill because we're not looking to do the same things.

Andrew Yeo: All right. Thanks so much, Isaac. I want to thank the three of you, along with my colleague Mike O'Hanlon and Secretary Karlin for spending your Friday morning here if you're in Eastern US to, to talk about geostrategic competition and basing, and also to the virtual audience for

the questions for tuning in. I also want to thank the Center for East Asia Policy Studies and my colleagues there who have been working hard to put this helps support us in this project and to put together this webinar. Please do go to the Brookings webpage where you can read the nine policy briefs that were published related to this topic on geostrategic competition in China, Russia, US basing. So thank you again. Have a great weekend and thanks all.