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FALK AUDITORIUM

A conversation with Assistant Secretaries Daniel Kritenbrink and Ely Ratner  
on US alliances and partnerships in the Indo-Pacific

Friday, July 21, 2023

UNCORRECTED TRANSCRIPT – CHECK AGAINST RECORDING

INTRODUCTION

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DISCUSSION

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**MALONEY:** Good morning to all those who are joining us here at the Brookings Institution's Falk Auditorium, and greetings to all those who are joining us virtually from across Washington, across the country and around the world. I'm Suzanne Maloney, I'm vice president and director of Foreign Policy here at Brookings. And I'm delighted to welcome you to our discussion today with Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs Daniel Kritenbrink and Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Ely Ratner. Our conversation today will examine the American approach to the Indo-Pacific region and how the United States interacts with key allies and partners, particularly Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands, to advance a shared regional vision for peace, stability, and prosperity in a free and open Indo-Pacific.

From the Quad Leaders Summit to hosting APEC in San Francisco later this year to the upcoming visit of the secretary of defense to the region, Washington has placed a renewed focus on the economic, military, and strategic value of the Indo-Pacific and the networks in the region. Building on the Five Eyes intelligence sharing pact, the Biden administration announced the creation of AUKUS in September 2021, a new partnership between the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom, which combines technology-sharing and cooperation to increase military capabilities and solidifies Australia as an important ally for the United States in the Indo-Pacific region. At a time of heightened tensions between the United States and China. How is the Biden administration working with allies and partners in the region to address various challenges and to ensure that competition is managed responsibly without veering into conflict? These are incredibly timely and important questions, and I'm truly honored to have assistant Secretaries Dan Kritenbrink and Ely Ratner here at Brookings to dive into these issues.

Let me introduce our speakers very briefly before I turn the mic over to our moderators. Assistant Secretary Dan Kritenbrink has served as an American diplomat since 1994. He's held the position of assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs since September of 2021 and previously represented the United States as ambassador to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, as senior director for Asian affairs at the National Security Council and as deputy chief of mission at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing. Dr. Ely Ratner currently serves as assistant secretary of defense for Indo-Pacific security affairs. Prior to this role, he was director of the Pentagon's China Task Force and senior advisor on China to the secretary of defense. He has also held roles outside of government, including as executive vice president and director of studies at the Center for a New American Security. We've been privileged to engage with both Assistant Secretary Ratner and Assistant Secretary Kritenbrink here at Brookings on multiple issues related to Asia-Pacific over many years. Joining our speakers here for this moderated discussion are two wonderful Brookings colleagues, Mireya Solis and Bruce Jones. Mireya Solis is the director of the Center for East Asia Policy Studies. She's also the Philip Knight chair in Japan studies and a senior fellow in the Foreign Policy program here at Brookings. She has a much-anticipated book coming out in about six weeks' time entitled "Japan's Quiet Leadership: Reshaping the Indo-Pacific." Her book examines how Japan has emerged as a profoundly consequential actor in the geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific. And I encourage all of you to pick it up when it is published in just a few weeks' time. Bruce Jones is a senior fellow in the Strobe Talbott Center for Security Strategy and Technology, as well as our Center for East Asia Policy Studies. His book, published in 2021, "To Rule the Waves: How Control of the World's Oceans Shapes The Fate of the Superpowers" analyzes U.S.-China naval competition in the wider context of commercial and scientific dominance of the high seas.

Before I turn the podium over to our moderators, I wanted to offer a final reminder that we're on the record today and we're streaming live. So please send your questions by via email to events at brookings dot edu or on social media using the hashtag Indo-Pacific. For those of you in the auditorium here, Brookings staff will come around with microphones for a question and answer session toward the final moments of our event. Thank you. The floor is now yours. Mireya and Bruce. Over to Mireya for the very first question.

**SOLIS:** Thank you very much. And good morning, everyone. Assistant Secretary Krittenbrink and Assistant Secretary Ratner, it's wonderful to have you with us here at Brookings. So I think that the best way to start the conversation this morning is with a big picture. So if I can ask Assistant Secretary Krittenbrink break to offer some thoughts as to what do you see as the most consequential trends and developments? Where should our eyes be when we look at where the region is heading?

**KRITENBRINK:** Thank you, Mireya. And thank you, everyone, for coming. It's such an honor to be here at Brookings today, and I'm really grateful to the wonderful scholarship and thought leadership that Brookings provides on a on a daily basis. And I'm always excited to have an opportunity, opportunity to talk about our commitment to and our engagement in the Indo-Pacific region. We believe that much of the history of the 21st century will be written in the Indo-Pacific. America's future, security and prosperity, prosperity is inextricably linked to developments in this consequential region, and the United States of America is absolutely committed to investing in the collective capacity of our allies, partners and friends in this region to bolster the rules-based international order and to work together to counter all challenges as they may arise.

I'm particularly excited to have an opportunity, Mireya, to highlight the trip that Secretary Blinken will take next week to the Indo-Pacific region. It will be his 12th trip to the region. It'll be his third trip to a Pacific island country. He'll travel to Tonga, New Zealand and Australia. In Tonga he'll have an opportunity - he'll be the first secretary of state to visit Tonga. He'll have an opportunity to formally dedicate our new embassy in Nuku'alofa, which opened in May of this year, again demonstrating our stepped up engagement across the Pacific islands. We'll be able to celebrate our partnership with Tonga, celebrate the return of the Peace Corps, and to talk about the great work that we'll do together to counter collective challenges, including climate change. We'll then go to New Zealand and we'll celebrate the partnership that we have with New Zealand in which we're working on challenges both regionally and globally. And of course, the secretary will have an opportunity to to view a World Cup soccer game as well, which we're excited about as well. Maybe that's the highlight of the trip right there.

Then we'll travel to Brisbane for a series of bilateral meetings with our Australian allies. And then the most consequential, I think, interaction a trip will be the AUSMIN, that the two plus two with the secretaries of state and defense engaging with their Australian counterparts. But again, Mireya, this is just the latest trip that I think demonstrates our strong and enduring commitment to the Indo-Pacific. We are in an Indo-Pacific nation, we are partner, a friend and neighbor to these countries. And again, the central animating feature of our policy is our commitment to our allies, partners and friends building their collective capacity so we can work together on shared challenges. Thanks for giving me an opportunity to open.

**SOLIS:** Thank you very much.

**JONES:** [00:16:58] Let me pull you out a little bit on on that Dan, and Ely, bring you in as well. You know, Secretary Austin is heading to Papua New Guinea and then to Australia for the AUSMIN. And I'm struck watching the dynamics in the region. It seems to me that we're doing two things simultaneously, and I wonder if there is some tension between them or I want to explore that with you. On the one hand, if you think about the relations with Australia, Japan, Taiwan. You know, this very high-end political defense engagement and all along a sort of a geopolitical front, if I can put it that way. On the other hand, if I think about Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Kiribati, Solomons, it's very different. We're looking at global issues, climate change, illegal fishing. Those countries are very keen not to be caught in the kind of geopolitical maw of U.S.-China competition. How do you balance those two things? How does the Secretary Austin think about that when he's traveling and how does that play into how you sort of approach the question, approach the region as a whole? And I would be interested in whether there's, whether there's a difference between how the Australians and how we think about that balance between the geopolitical and the kind of global, if I can put it that way.

**RATNER:** Yeah, well, thanks, Bruce, and let me echo my thanks just for the opportunity to be here. Great to be here with Dan. We were up on the stage yesterday, we were up on the Hill together, and Dan had to answer all of the hard questions. So we decided before coming in that we were going to preserve that format for today. So thanks to Ambassador Kritenbrink in advance for taking all the hard ones.

Look, I think my answer will be that I think what you see as potential tension and contradiction is not how I would view what we're trying to do in the region. And I think one of actually the most significant elements that we see is what Secretary Austin has talked about repeatedly and most recently at the Shangri-La Dialogue in June, is a shared vision among our allies and partners. This is not America's vision for the Indo-Pacific. It is a shared vision that is articulated by the Japanese, by the Pacific Islands, by the Australians, by the Koreans, right down the line of a region that is free and open, that is free of coercion, and in which disputes are managed peacefully. It is true that with different allies and partners, we have different mixes in terms of the types of engagements we have and the tools we bring to bear. But I think there is very close alignment and we meet our partners where they are. And the Pacific Islands, for whom you are correct, are very focused on issues like climate change, illegal fishing. That will be a major part of our partnership. Others who are more focused on high-end deterrence, we're going to we're going to meet them where they are. And so, again, while the tools may be different, I think there is clear strategic alignment and that is why we have been so successful over the last year.

On this trip in particular - and I think the description of it well will bear that out a little bit - you know, we talk a lot about these trips being historic, and this trip will be historic both in its form insofar as Secretary Austin is the first secretary of defense going to PNG ever. But as well as the content both in PNG and Australia, and it comes on the heels, as Dan said, of a series of meetings we have done together, our secretaries have done together starting in January with Japan, with the Philippines, another two plus two, and now this one, in which each one there is no kidding historic steps forward in our collective efforts to advance that shared vision. So the secretary will be traveling to PNG, will be hopping on the plane on Tuesday for a short, roughly 18 hour flight. Secretary's plane has aerial refueling, so we just go straight where we ever we have to go. So long trips out to the region. But so we'll be heading to PNG. Our our countries have just signed a new defense cooperation agreement, which is opening a new era in our defense relations with Papua New Guinea. It's going to allow us to expand our bilateral exercises. It's going to allow us to do more training and deepen the capability of the Papua New Guinea Defense Forces. And it's going to allow us to support PNG through enhanced infrastructure that's going to allow us to operate from there and support them. And one of the agreements that we are going to be advancing as part of this trip is a new ship rider agreement whereby our Coast Guard supports PNG forces and we work together to deal with some of those local issues, maritime security issues, illegal fishing and whatnot. So huge, important moment in the, in the, in the US relationship with PNG. Then onward, Dan said, is to the down to Australia to watch soccer and we'll have a meeting on the margins of that.

**KRITENBRINK:** Are you going to see a match there?

**RATNER:** Yeah, we'll be, we'll all be there together. Very exciting. I think we're going to get to see the Australian women play, which will be absolutely terrific. They had a great victory in their first match, so looking forward to see how they do on their next one. But there again, really important achievements that we'll be talking about. You couldn't ask for a better set of interlocutors than Minister Wong and Minister Marles committed to this relationship. And the, from the defense perspective, what we're going to be talking about is very much in line with what we've been doing throughout the region, with the Philippines, with the Japanese. And I'll just cite three things very quickly. We can get into the details, but number one, working with our allies and partners on their capabilities, the Australians are very focused in building out a domestic indigenous munitions capability, and we're going to support that and we're going to have some specific announcements associated with that.

Number two, we have been working vigilantly to build out a more diversified, mobile, resilient, lethal force posture throughout the region. We've got a lot going on with the Australians and we'll be rolling out some very specific new announcements associated with that. And then finally, and I think one of the most important innovations in the region is that we are networking our alliances and partnerships together like never before. And we made an announcement last year that we were going to start looking at ways to integrate Japan in particular into U.S. force posture initiatives in northern Australia. And we're going to have some specific announcements next week about how we're going to do that. So putting putting really big, important strategic points on the board and in doing so, really advancing that shared vision I talked about.

**KRITENBRINK:** Can I say, Ely, brilliant lay down, my only quibble is you had to, you know, rub our noses in it that you'll aerial refuel on the way. I think we have to refuel at least two, if not three times on the way to Tonga. But that's okay.

**JONES:** Can't you offer them a lift, Ely?

**KRITENBRINK:** Can I just foot stomp one of Ely's key points that just really resonated with me? Again, this is not all about China. This is about our partnerships with with with the countries of the Indo-Pacific. We have a regional strategy of which China is a part and not the other way around. Our allies and partners are intrinsically valuable to us. That's going to be the focus of our efforts across the region. You know, the China challenge looms large for all of our partners, just as it does for us. But I think the best way to manage that challenge is to focus again on building the collective capacity of our partners, talking about how we can work together, demonstrating the strength of our commitment to our partners. And if we do that, I'm confident we'll manage the other challenges.

**SOLIS:** Thank you very much. So let me then, I think this is a very good moment to move to another important topic that builds on a dimension of partnership, but also the interplay between geopolitics and climate change. Because clearly the green transition is very important for the Biden administration, is very important for the Australian government, very important for scores of our partners. But in order to accomplish that green transition, we're going to have access, we need access to a vast amount of resources, critical rare minerals. And China is an important player here. China has a dominant position in some of these minerals. And China recently announced that there will be new restrictions on - let me get the numbers, the names right - gallium and germanium. So what should be the role of the United States, Australia and other partners in making sure that we have access to these minerals? In a way, I'm asking about the geopolitics of the green transition. How should we navigate that?

**KRITENBRINK:** It's a great question, Mireya. Let me just say, first of all, you know, to echo what Ely said a moment ago, we're meeting our partners where they live and we're responding to what their key challenges are. So when it's when it's a partners in the Pacific, they're most focused on issues like climate change, right? And of course, clean energy transition is important to that. But for them, you know, so is its climate mitigation and adaptation. But I think for me, Mireya, the the key point that you're raising here is the importance of secure and resilient supply chains. And I would argue not just in the clean energy, renewable energy space, but I would say across the board. And it's a real focus for us. And I think we've learned in the course of the pandemic, and we've learned watching China's use of economic coercion against a range of partners and friends over the last few years, the importance of making sure that none of us are completely dependent on one country or one supply chain, no matter the sector. So again, we talk about we're not pursuing decoupling, we're pursuing de-risking. We think this is a responsible strategy. It it helps to curb against the possibility of economic coercion, but it also guards against just naturally occurring disruptions as well. There are multiple elements to that. We're working on something called the Minerals Security Partnership with a range of allies and partners to ensure, again, a diversity of supply chains in the clean energy sector. But we're also working to develop our tools to help partners respond nimbly and effectively to instances of economic coercion as well. And if I can make maybe one final point, just ti foot stomp, you know, the China point, when we talk with our

allies and partners, we make very clear we're not asking them to choose. They don't want that. We want to ensure that they have choices and the ability to make their own decisions free from coercion. That's the focus of our strategy. And I think that applies, that really applies to supply chain resilience in the clean energy sector, but I would say it applies across the board, really regarding all of our engagement in the region.

**SOLIS:** Thank you.

**JONES:** If we have time, I might come back to this. I'm particularly interested in deep sea mining, of which there's a huge sort of fight going on. We're not present in the International Seabed Authority, although we're observers, etc., and Pacific Islands are sort of caught in the middle of this. But maybe let's come back to that one if we have time.

I want to go back to this question of sort of high-end security cooperation and where we are and sort of what's what's happening there. I'm among those that thought that AUKUS was a strategic masterstroke. I mean, really a brilliant move. The more I look at the pace at which we're doing it and the pace at which the Chinese are building, I wish we were doing twice as much, twice as fast. That would be hard, but but what I want to ask you about is pillar two of AUKUS the kind of pillar on scientific cooperation, other technologies, missiles, undersea sensing, etc.. Where are we on that? We've seen a lot of attention to pillar one, the submarines. Where are we on pillar two? And is there a prospect for other countries in the region to sort of join in and sort of use AUKUS pillar two as a docking station for some of the the wider collaboration you were referring to earlier?

**RATNER:** Yeah, no, absolutely. And just for folks who are maybe a little less familiar with pillar one versus pillar two, pillar one was the central focus of the beginning of the AUKUS period of developing a conventionally armed nuclear-powered submarine. You don't want to get those two things backwards or you get yourself in big trouble. So, conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarine for the Australians that we would be working on trilaterally with the UK as well. We completed a decision around the optimal pathway at the end of the 18-month consultation period and that work is is very much underway. At the same time, the the three countries at the birth of of AUKUS - and I had the opportunity to participate in some of these discussions shortly after being confirmed - were looking out of the strategic environment and said, hey, look, we're going to be working on this submarine project together, though, that's going to deliver, at least as it relates to submarines, years into the future, and we ought to be working on other advanced capabilities both in parallel to that and in advance in some of the delivery of that. So that was the theory of the case. Since that time, we have identified a series of capabilities and technology areas where these three countries are particularly suited to work together in a trilateral fashion and then have had to work through also a number of issues associated with technology sharing and export controls and really the hard work behind the scenes that makes this kind of an initiative possible. It's what Secretary Austin describes as hard government work. It is very labor intensive. It's it's very important. It involves, there's a huge role for Congress here. And we've been engaging with the Hill quite regularly. Every time I'm up on the Hill, I see the crew of Navy and Joint Staff and our capabilities folks shuffling in behind us in the SCIF to do meetings with members of Congress on AUKUS. So, there's been a huge amount of engagement on the Hill, and I think we're making good progress and we will be looking at areas associated - and those have been articulated in public statements - of hypersonics and counter hypersonics and autonomy and quantum computing and AI and in some other areas that will be really important. So, I think there's increasing focus on delivering on this and we'll be looking forward to doing that. On the question of additional partners, that is something that we will be looking at in the years ahead. It'll be obviously on a case by case, technology by technology basis, but the standard will be the same of what's in the interest of the parties here, what technologies they have to bring to bear, and in particular, what operational problems are we trying to solve.

**SOLIS:** So, I can, building on this conversation, I think it's very clear from all the remarks so far that there's a very robust track record for this administration, thanks to all your hard effort when it comes to diplomacy, when it comes to security cooperation. And clearly there's a new energy

and a new presence of the United States and the development of all these new partnerships. But if I can be very candid with all of you, I think that there are still persistent questions about the economic piece, the regional connectivity piece, and in particular the fact that the United States opted to launch the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework but does not have market access. Now, of course, we were talking about de-risking from China and certainly economic engagement and making those economies trade more with us and have these border, cross-border investments and so forth. It's probably a very good part of that de-risking strategy. So can you tell us about what is your assessment of where IPEF negotiations are? There is expectation that perhaps in a few months in the West Coast, in San Francisco, when APEC leaders meet, that there could be already something near conclusion when it comes to IPEF. So what would be the way in which IPEF builds that supply chain resilience, allows us to develop economic standards and makes us more of an effective player in economic reform?

**KRITENBRINK:** Absolutely. Thank you, Mireya, you're absolutely right. When we talk about how our future security and prosperity are inextricably tied to the Indo-Pacific. So let's talk about the prosperity peace. The first point that I would make is that, however you assess our formal engagement with the region on trade and other matters, we can't ignore the fact that we have \$2 trillion in trade every year between the United States and the Indo-Pacific and more than a trillion U.S. dollars invested across this vitally important region and almost \$1 trillion coming from the Indo-Pacific that's invested in the United States as well. So the United States is a central player, if not the central player, excuse me, for most of these partners in the region to begin with. And we shouldn't lose sight of that fact when people somehow question, you know, the commitment and the presence of the United States. But picking up on your question of what are we doing in terms of our formal engagement on trade and economic matters, I would start with Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. 14 of our closest, most likeminded partners are engaged in a really exciting endeavor that I think will help write the rules of the road for the 21st century economy.

There are four key pillars across IPEF. There is a trade pillar, a supply chains pillar, clean energy pillar, and then what I would call sort of good governance and counter-corruption pillar. We're making great progress on all of those. I think you've seen we've already reached substantial agreement on the supply chain pillar. I'm very confident that we're we're likely - I want to be careful here - we're likely to close out, I would predict perhaps three out of four by by this fall. But I really do want to underscore, excuse me, just how important this agreement is. This gets at, I think, the most exciting and important aspects of the 21st century trade economy. And it helps again with our likeminded partners, helped establish those principles and those rules of the road. I think that's vitally important going forward. There'll be aspects of this when it's done that will truly be novel and unprecedented. So whether you want to look at the reality of our ongoing trade and investment flows or the formality of our trade negotiations in IPEF, you come to the conclusion we're absolutely committed and invested in the future of the Indo-Pacific. I also don't want to forget APEC, and I hope you don't either. The United States is hosting APEC this year; will conclude with the APEC Economic Leaders Summit in San Francisco in November. Again, 21, 21 of the region's key and largest economies will be there. And again, APEC is also still central to what we're doing as well. So together with our engagement through APEC and IPEF, I'm really confident in our ability to shape the economic future of the Indo-Pacific together with our partners. I'm also confident that those trade and investment flows that I've highlighted are only going to continue to grow.

**RATNER:** Can I, can I just maybe please, not to not to build on the economic point, but just to respond to the prompt, which was started with a compliment to Dan and I of the great work of our departments in deepening our alliances and partnerships. While I'm happy to take credit for all that, what I will say is, from the perspective of the Pentagon and what we have seen and why we have been able to make so much progress is because of the demand signal coming from our allies and partners that they are looking out on the regional security environment, they're focused on trying to contribute to this shared vision that we're talking about, and they're doing a few things. Number one, they across in almost any instance, are looking to strengthen their own capabilities, and they want to work with us and we want to support them in doing that. They are working more

with each other, which is really important. You look at the relationship between Japan and Korea, but the, Japan, as you know, throughout the region, in Southeast Asia and elsewhere, the Australians working with the Philippines and the Japanese and others, they're working with each other. That's terrific. And they're looking to strengthen their relationship with the United States, which is fundamentally important. When they look out on what they're seeing in the regional security environment, they are seeking to deepen their defense and security ties with the United States. And I think that as it relates to the question of the China challenge in the U.S.-China competition, I think the point sometimes gets lost that when we are talking about our alliances, partnerships, what we were talking about, again, is meeting our partners where they are. And on the defense and security stuff, the reason we are doing what we are doing with Australia and the Philippines and Japan and South Korea and India and you go down the list, is because those countries are coming to us as much as we're coming to them.

**KRITENBRINK:** That's such a brilliant point. And if I can say, you know, in your introduction, or Suzanne, in your introduction, I was embarrassed that you revealed just how old I am. But I've been doing this for almost 30 years. I've never seen such a strong demand signal from the region for American leadership and engagement. Obviously, it's in our interest to do so, but I think our partners really are eager to engage with us and work together. And to pick up on another point Ely made earlier, I think about the incredible alignment and convergence in our views and our outlook on the region. Most of our partners in the region have formally issued Indo-Pacific strategies that are very similar to ours. This is really just a tremendous moment and it just it makes me very optimistic for our future together.

**JONES:** Let me ask you about a couple of places, which may be a little more challenging -

**KRITENBRINK:** Yeah, fair enough.

**JONES:** - Solomon Islands. Fiji. Kiribati, expanding Chinese presence, expanding Chinese physical presence, etc. How do you think about responding to that? What mix of deterrence questions, global questions, diplomatic questions, economic questions come into the mix in responding to that? I mean, I think China's being reasonably successful in building out along the the sort of southern reaches of Oceania, maybe less so in the northern reaches, but places like Solomon, Kiribati.

**KRITENBRINK:** You want me to take an initial stab at that?

**RATNER:** Yeah, I think it's consistent with our agreement for Dan to take all the hard questions and because and I will say the the vast majority of our work in the Pacific Islands is not defense focused, so it really is an economic and diplomatic story. Yeah, go ahead.

**KRITENBRINK:** Well, why don't I start and then hear your perspective as well. I guess what I would say, Bruce, again, you know, whether whether it's with the Solomon Islands or Fiji or Kiribati or Tonga or any of any of these partners, partners, Samoa and the like. Our message is the same again. We come to the region in partnership. We respect the sovereignty of all of our partners. They will make their own sovereign decisions, how they want to proceed, with whom they want to partner. What we've tried to make clear is what we offer to the region. We try to underscore our shared objectives and our shared interests in maintaining a free and open and secure and prosperous region. And we also try to share our concerns and our experience that decisions that some of our partners make may have implications for their own sovereignty and security down the line.

So, we engage with all of these partners and to try to demonstrate the strength of our commitment and to step up our engagement, we opened in January of this year, our new embassy in Honiara, the Solomon Islands, just to make sure that we're present there every day, working together with our partners in the Solomons, again, about what we can bring to the table. It's why we opened in May our new embassy in Tonga, and that's why the secretary, when he's in



Nuku'alofa, he'll he'll formally dedicate the embassy. It's why we're talking with our partners in Kiribati about our interest in opening an American embassy there, and I'm confident that we'll continue to make progress on that. And just like we're discussing the same with our partners in Vanuatu. So again, I'll just reiterate what I said earlier: we're not asking partners to choose. We're making sure they have choices, the ability to make their own decisions free from coercion, and that animates, I think, everything that we do.

And I will just say too, I feel very optimistic and confident about our position in our partnerships in the Pacific Islands as well. Maybe one final point before I kick it over to Ely. When we engage in the Pacific, much of this is done through the Pacific Islands Forum as well. We do believe in the multilateral architecture in the region, just as we're committed to ASEAN centrality and engaging a lot of our partners in Southeast Asia through ASEAN. We do the same in the Pacific, through the PIF, the Pacific Islands Forum, and I think it's another important feature. The PIF is quite significant. It's also why we announced our first-ever U.S. envoy to the PIF, Ambassador Frankie Reed. So I think it's another important element and an advantage that we bring to the region is our focus on the multilateral piece as well. Ely?

**RATNER:** Yeah, I was just going to underscore the degree to which we are working closely with our allies and partners on these issues in so far as some of the places you mentioned are just as important, obviously, to Australia and New Zealand, France, who's also a Pacific power, Japan, Korea and others as we think about that free and open Indo-Pacific. So I think the more we are working with that collective group of countries, the more success we're going to have. And that's exactly what we're doing. Yeah.

**KRITENBRINK:** [And you know, you mentioned this, secretary of defense is going to Papua New Guinea, a key partner. Of course, the secretary was just out there a few weeks ago where he met with the leaders. We've we've signed the new defense cooperation agreement that Ely mentioned earlier. Again, I think if you go down the list of every partner in the Pacific, you'll see exciting new developments for for each and every one of them. So I guess the conclusion is I feel pretty optimistic about our position in the Pacific as well.

**SOLIS:** If I may, staying with these very important elements we've been discussing of the demand signal for U.S. leadership, for U.S. presence, for U.S. contributions. And obviously there are many factors that go into that, why our partners are so eager to see us stay anchored to the region, and some of them have to do with hard deterrence questions, others have to do about economic resilience. So let me start, stay with that last part. And many of our partners, Australia, certainly Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, they have suffered economic coercion, economic retaliatory measures.

**KRITENBRINK:** Absolutely.

**SOLIS:** And I think that there is a very vocal discussion these days as to what should we do about this. I in the last G7 summit, a new platform mechanism was created. And Australia, of course, attended the G7, so I'm sure that they also had views on this. And I think that there's progress being made, but the more I think about how you curb economic coercion, the more difficult this problem seems to me, because the collective action problem is steep and there are questions as to whether it's wise to retaliate, how you act - effectively deter, how do you help weaker partners. So, if you could bring us up to date on how do you think the U.S. can make an effective contribution on this topic of economic coercion in a way in which, again, it makes it very clear that the U.S. has much to offer to the region to make sure that economic stability remains central to the future.

**KRITENBRINK:** Great question, Mireya. Thanks for for posing it. I guess I'd approach it in a couple of different ways. The first, I think, is continuing to engage in trying to build the resilience of our partners and their supply chains over the long term. I think that's the best, most sustainable way to reduce the risk of economic coercion, right. To make sure whether again, it's in the the

critical minerals space, in the clean energy space, or across other supply chains, to make sure that countries are thinking carefully about their own resilience and autonomy as they make investments in the future. And so I think that supply chain resilience and stability work, security work will be probably the most important part of it going forward. And I do want to underscore in that regard, we're not doing this alone. In the Pacific Islands, I would highlight the work we're doing with the, what we call the Partners in the Blue Pacific. We launched this last year with a number of likeminded partners. I don't know if I can name them all: Australia. New Zealand. Japan, the UK, Korea. Germany. Who else? Canada. Thank you, Melissa. So likeminded partners who share a vision for a stable and secure and prosperous Pacific Islands. And again, just to underscore, meeting our partners where they are, all of the priorities that we work on in the Partners in the Blue Pacific come from the Pacific Island Forum's 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. It's identifying what their needs are, including in the economic security space and then and then delivering, I think, real results to them.

And then the second piece that I would highlight, Mireya, is some of the work that we've done in the short term on an urgent basis, if a partner is in fact subjected to crippling economic coercion, what can we do with these likeminded partners? One example that I would highlight was would be our Lithuanian friends, when when when China went after them for some of the steps that they took, we worked very resolutely, both bilaterally with other partners, to make sure we could offer a range of economic and financing and investment tools to make sure that they could sustain that that initial onslaught of economic coercion measures. And I think we've learned some important lessons there, and we've developed new tools that I think could be applied in the short term if there are other partners who suffer the same fate. But I think the long-term work is probably the most important. You want to add anything to that?

**RATNER:** No, I thought that was terrific. Suzanne mentioned I was the director of studies at CNAS and we did an enormous amount of work at the time on this question of economic coercion. And I'm going to avoid danger and not talk about that and stick to my, stick to my lane here. But it's an important issue, and I think Dan hit the highlights.

**JONES:** I know we'll soon will return to the audience. We got a lot of people online and, you know, an awful lot of knowledgeable people in the room. But I want to we've talked primarily about the Pacific. It is an Indo-Pacific. So I just want to briefly bring in the Indo and particularly the Indians. And even as you're on your way to Australia, PNG, Tonga, New Zealand, etc., building up the partnership, collaboration, engagement, defense, all sorts of other topics with the Indians has been a priority, not just this administration, several administrations in a row. But I just want to sort of get you both to comment a little bit on how you see India fitting into this wider partnership and wider framework of what we're trying to get done, whether that's through the Quad or other things.

**RATNER:** I mean, I can speak to that first. This has been, again, not to overuse the word historic, but this has been a huge year in the U.S.-India relationship. There were a number of meetings starting with the iCET meeting between our national security advisers with which launched a new technology cooperation agreement mechanism that has defense elements or a series of interactions in the first part of the year. Secretary Austin went out to Delhi after Shangri-La, and then, of course, Prime Minister Modi came here and the president hopefully will be going out to India for the G20 later this year. So just a series of really important engagements and therein have been unprecedented, if you ask people five, ten years ago, unthinkable forms of cooperation. And we are doing that in the in the defense lane, both in the defense industrial space - we had a huge announcement on some cooperation we're going to be doing on jet engines - as well as in the operational space with a particular focus on the Indian Ocean region, as well as in new domains, undersea, cyber, and space. So really exciting collaboration. And you know, that is on every level good for the United States. And so we see this as deeply in our national interest, but also very important to that free Indo, free and open Indo-Pacific that we talk about. So and I know our good friend, coordinator Kurt Campbell, has described this relationship as as the most consequential bilateral relationship in this century. And this administration is getting after it with that intent.

**KRITENBRINK:** Hear, hear. Can't add much to that. I would just say the development of the Quad, I think, is one of the most significant strategic developments I've seen in the course of my career. I think it's really transformational for all the reasons that Ely has outlined, because bringing in India, again, another likeminded democracy to work on these issues is really, really transformational. Game-changer.

**SOLIS:** So my last question before we open up to the public and we have questions online, but also from the audience, you know, I think that we're really witnessing a profound transformation in the region. It has already come up in our conversation because it's becoming a region of networks. And some of these are broad security, economic operations, some of them are Asia specific. So it's hard to pick which one I would like to ask you about, but - and certainly I'm looking forward to the announcements on the Australia-Japan-U.S. piece and how that's going to work out - but one that I am very interested in, and that is a trilateral partnership between the United States, Japan, and South Korea, because a few years ago that would seem unthinkable. And when you read that statement in November about Trilateral Pacific Partnership, there's this commonality in terms of reading what the challenges for the region are. I thought that was really striking. So I would like to ask, how do you see that? What is the potential of this trilateral partnership? But also bringing Australia back into the conversation, because in the back of our mind and I'm sure the audience will ask about this, we haven't yet mentioned Taiwan. But when we think about a Taiwan contingency, are allies are closely aligned when it comes to think about the currents and potential scenarios. How advanced are contingency plans? Where are we in this space?

**KRITENBRINK:** Great question. Very broad question. That's a good one to end on, I think. Maybe I'll take the first part and then try to address your final point on Taiwan. The word that we like in the State Department, rather than network, is latticework. We talk about this, these overlapping networks that are both formal and informal that I think together, you know, form this web of partnerships that help us secure peace and prosperity across the region. You know, it starts with our bilateral treaty alliances and our many partnerships across the region. But then it extends to the unprecedented level of trilateral cooperation that we've achieved with Tokyo and Seoul, I think based mostly on the historic rapprochement that has taken place between the two of them. And we really do commend President Yoon and Prime Minister Kishida that for the historic progress they've made. And that's really unlocked the the unprecedented trilateral cooperation that you see now. But you see it in our work with with Australia and then including trilaterally with Japan. You see it in the new trilateral cooperation that we're building out between the United States, Japan, and the Philippines. You see it in our commitment to the Pacific Islands Forum and all of our partners across the Pacific, our new elevated comprehensive strategic partnership with ASEAN. I can go, go on and on. But we really are about building these networks or this latticework of interlocking relationships. I think that will be the key to preserving peace and security across the region.

Look, you are right. We talked about the region and I don't think we actually specifically said the word Taiwan until now, which is extraordinary. But let's talk about it now. The point that we're trying to make is that the maintenance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait has to be a matter of international concern. The maintenance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait is central to global security and prosperity. 50% of the world's container traffic flows through the Taiwan Strait. 90% of the world's high-end chips are made in Taiwan. Taiwan is central to the global economy. So again, maintaining peace and stability, preventing a crisis or conflict across the Taiwan Strait should be a matter of concern for all of our partners in the region and around the world. And I think what I've been gratified by is that I think many partners recognize that there's an increasing awareness of that importance. And we hope that together all of us can contribute to maintaining that peace and stability. Now, I do, for the record, want to underscore there's been absolutely no change to our one-China policy. Can walk you through chapter and verse. But again, we are committed to maintaining the status quo and peace and stability. And our message to our counterparts in Beijing is to not challenge that status quo, to cease, we think, the provocative and

course of actions that they've taken across the strait and aimed at Taiwan so that we can all, again, continue to focus on peace and stability.

**RATNER:** The other thing I would add to that, which was just terrific, just on the prompt of the groupings that you're talking about, I think this is again, I mentioned a little bit at the beginning, but arguably the most important innovation and new trend in the in the regional security environment, insofar as these types of groupings are starting to actually do things together. This isn't just about getting together and having dialogue and sharing views. That's very important in and of itself. But if you look at the U.S.-Japan-Korea defense trilateral, we are now talking about sharing early missile warning data, which our leaders have talked about. We are developing plans for more regular regularized exercises rather than just exercises in response to DPRK activities. So huge, important innovations to institutionalize and really cement that kind of cooperation. Similarly, the U.S.-Japan-Australia configuration is the leading edge from a defense and security perspective, just absolutely important and unprecedented cooperation there, which we mentioned a little bit earlier. Dan mentioned the Philippines out at Shangri-La in June, for the first time ever, U.S. secretary of defense got together with his Japanese, Australian, and Philippine counterparts for a discussion there. Fundamentally shared interests, particularly in the maritime domain and in the South China Sea, and then damage in the Quad, ASEAN, etc., where we are engaging in new forms of defense and security cooperation, particularly as it relates to maritime domain awareness. So a huge amount of activity here in a way that I think we've been building to this point. And I think that's the future is going to be these countries capable working together, mobile, and cooperating in new and exciting ways.

**SOLIS:** Great. So you've been very generous. Now let's open it up to the public. There are a lot of questions, so I'm going to take two at a time. I will ask you to please identify yourself and keep it to a question, not a comment, and be very concise. There's a lot of people and anyone who wants to ask a question. So I'll start with the lady in the back and then this gentleman in the middle. Yes.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** Hi. My name is Laurel Schwartz. I'm a writer for the China Project, and I recently returned from working in Beijing as a Canadian. I am a Canadian Chinese principal at a school there. And at CIS a couple weeks ago, Secretary Krittenbrink, you mentioned that the Fulbright China program was not discussed on the trip last month to Beijing. What is the timeline for restoring that program, particularly, as you mentioned, that China is part of the discussion as you are going to the region, and that it could also be restored by executive order. Thank you.

**SOLIS:** Thank you. And then this gentleman, Laura.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** So, thank you very much. Reporter with China the Real News Agency. My name is Dong Wei Hu. And my question is for Mr. Ely. Last week you met with Chinese Ambassador Feng in Washington. I believe you are talking about the resumption of the mil-to-mil relations. And did you talk about how to remove the obstacle that China claims that need to be removed to resume mil-mil relations? Did you talk about removing the sanctions on Chinese defense minister? Thank you.

**KRITENBRINK:** So, on the first question on people-to-people ties, I'll just reiterate what I said in front of our friends at CSIS a few weeks ago. Look, our relationship with the People's Republic of China is exceptionally consequential and equally complex. But there's no doubt, as Secretary Blinken stated publicly and privately in Beijing, that we do have an interest in continuing to develop people-to-people ties between the United States and China. I don't have anything to say, I don't know what may or may not happen on Fulbright, but there are a number of other opportunities to promote people-to-people exchange. And also, as you saw, one of the agreements that we had coming out of the visit was that we want to look at trying to increase the number of commercial flights between the two countries, which would help promote that. So an important issue, but don't have any specific update on Fulbright.

**RATNER:** And I'll say just as it relates to my meeting last week with the ambassador, we had a we had a very good discussion. I'm not going to characterize those discussions. But I will say what what Secretary Austin has emphasized on a number of occasions, which is that the United States continues to seek open lines of communication with the PLA. We think this is important for stability in peace time and during potential crises. And it's unfortunate that the PLA has not responded to that outstretched hand. And we are going to continue to encourage open lines of communication without precondition.

**SOLIS:** Thank you. So, we're going to take more questions, but I want to put a question from the online audience. So, they don't think that we have forgotten about them. And then I'll take one from the floor. And this is a question about our allies in Southeast Asia. And they ask, what is the role or the place of the Philippines, is a question from Cathy Trix, and of Thailand from Anthony Zoller. In the U.S. Indo Pacific Strategy, what is the state of the alliance with these two countries and what place do they have in the overall Indo-Pacific strategy? And then and then I've forgotten. Yeah, No. I think I think you were.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** Thank you. Patrick Tucker it from Defense One. So in the run up to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, one of the things that military officials have acknowledged was an intelligence failure in underestimating the willingness of the Ukrainian people to mount protracted armed resistance. And multiple senior military leaders that I've spoke to, as well as lawmakers, have expressed concern and uncertainty that we might be making a reverse mistake right now with China and Taiwan and possibly overestimating the ability or the willingness of the Taiwanese people to mount protracted armed resistance. Is there any study or analysis to suggest that whether they would or they wouldn't and what role allies in the region might be willing to play outside of a formal military alliance?

**SOLIS:** Can you identify yourself?

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** Patrick Tucker from Defense One. Thanks.

**KRITENBRINK:** So, on the first question on Philippines and Thailand - and I presume Ely might want to chime in as well - again, when we when we look at our strategy, we start by making sure that we strengthen and revitalize our treaty alliance relationships. And certainly, we've done that, I think, with both the Philippines and Thailand. I think the progress we've made with the Philippines over the last year is really breathtaking, actually. And you think about the two plus two that we did earlier this year with our Filipino allies. You think about the tremendous work we're doing in the security domain, the maritime domain, but also in our economic and trade, in people-to-people ties, really breathtaking. And so, I would argue that our alliance with with the Philippines is probably stronger than ever. And look, I think we've made significant progress with our Thai allies as well. I know that when Secretary Blinken visited there last year, we issued a joint vision statement that I've told people I think is the most significant bilateral strategic document issued between the United States and Thailand since the 1962 Thanat-Rusk communique. It really is that significant. Obviously, there are some challenges as well. We're all watching closely what's happening in the transition following the election. And we're looking to to our Thai friends to make sure that that outcome reflects the will of the Thai people. And that's certainly our expectation. We're also working closely on a range of challenges across the region, probably first and foremost, the situation across the border in Myanmar. But there too, I think we've made important progress with our Thai allies, very optimistic about our future together. Do you want to say anything more on the.

**RATNER:** Well, maybe agree with all of that. And on the Philippines, I think the revitalization of the U.S.-Philippines alliance will be a legacy issue for the Biden administration and for Secretary Austin, who has poured a huge amount of energy into that relationship. We've managed to travel out there a couple of times. He met both with former President Duterte, and that was really the beginning of a renewal of the relationship, and that has just accelerated through the Marcos administration as well. And we've made incredible headway, again, on the force posture

front as it relates to capabilities development and some of our operational cooperation. So I think that's a hugely important development in the region and one we have put a lot of energy to and really greatly value. On the question of Taiwan. My answer to that question would be what I see is the Taiwanese making a important commitment to their own defense and resilience. They made a political commitment in terms of the types of reforms, military reform, reserve reforms that they have enacted. They've made a substantial financial commitment as it made as it relates to major increases to their defense budget. So I look at what they do and how they're responding to the type of coercion they're under as a as a significant and reassuring sign of their commitment to their own resilience and defense.

**SOLIS:** So we're almost at time I haven't taken questions from this side of the room, so I'll go one and then two. And yes, please be very, very brief so that we can have some answers and then you'll be.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** Yeah. Hi, my name is Christian Guichard. I'm a second year master's public policy student at UCLA and D.C. native. My question was to both of you, I just said, you know, I feel like much of the United States' issues establishing, you know, soft power or you know, strategic partnerships in some of these regions has to do with like, you know, the history, the recent history of Western intervention in those regions. You know, whether those were failures or successes, the memory of the misuse of failed approaches, you know, still stands in those regions. How, in your opinion, can the United States establish itself, you know, as in the words of like Louis Foy or, you know Patrick Moynihan, you know, the nation of conscience and this like, you know, 21st century. And you know what needs to be done to restore the cross-cultural, you know, ties and, you know, trust between United States and other countries, and specifically between the U.S. and Indo-Pacific.

**SOLIS:** Thank you very much. And then last question and brevity is appreciated. Thank you.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** Thanks very much. I'm Michael Birnbaum from The Washington Post. And I just wanted to ask your sense of, you know, there is that Chinese effort to kind of wrap together a lot of the Pacific Island nations in a security cooperation plan, pact, that didn't work out so well. But I was wondering if you could tell us your sense of the current Chinese strategy in terms of sort of breaking it down, you know, country by not asking you to go to go country by country. But, you know, if that collective effort didn't work out, what's your sense of the new way they're going about doing things? You've mentioned coercion a couple of times. So I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit about your assessment of the Chinese activity right now.

**SOLIS:** So two very important, broad questions, one minute each, maybe?.

**KRITENBRINK:** One minute each? Well, maybe on the first one. Look, I think what what animates the work, certainly that we do in the State Department every day, how do we demonstrate the credibility of America's commitment to the region? How do we demonstrate, right, that we bring tangible benefits for both peoples of the region and the American people, that that animates what we do. We've been an Indo-Pacific power for well over a century. We're invested for the long term. And I think we do amazing things together, rooted mostly in the shared vision we have for our future together. When I listen to your question, I thought back briefly to my time in Hanoi, where I was the ambassador to Vietnam for three and a half years. And and it reminded me there, too, that even with countries with whom we share a very painful and sometimes tragic past there, too, we've made really dramatic and historic stride, strides to overcome that past. In the case of Vietnam, for example, we built this amazing partnership and friendship now where we're doing extraordinary things together, even as we continue to work on those legacy of war projects. And it's probably the the best example that I can think of. One one comment on the Pacific. I mean, my job is not really to describe China's strategy. It's obviously to talk about what we offer. But I think there's no doubt that counterparts in Beijing are trying to extend Chinese influence across the region and across the world. We live it, we leave it to our partners to make their own sovereign

decisions, but we try to help them understand what some of the consequences can be. If you were to enter into an agreement that might have implications for your sovereignty down the line. But again, the main animating feature of what we do every day is to underscore what do we offer, what do we bring to the table? What what would you add to that?

**RATNER:** I'll just say in conclusion, we've spoken a lot about the shared vision we have with the region for a free and open Indo-Pacific. The PRC is putting forward an alternative vision and they're doing that through their actions every day in their unsafe operational behavior, risky and dangerous operational behavior against maritime and and aircraft that are operating in accordance with international law. We see that the PRC putting forward an order defined by the kind of economic coercion that Mireya talked about. And we see them engaging in other forms of corruption and influence throughout the region. And countries throughout the region have a choice about which type of order they want to live in. And I think through their actions, you can see how they're coming together over the last several months and years.

**SOLIS:** Thank you very much. So, we're out of time. Only one minute past. And before I wrap up, I want to ask you all to please remain seated. And we're going to let our speakers, they need to get on with their day, so they're going to depart the building. So I'll ask you to remain seated. On behalf Suzanne, Bruce and me, I want to thank you profoundly for this opportunity. I think that we begin to see or we confirm as to why the region has a strong demand signal. It's not only all the hard work you do on diplomacy and economic engagement and all the issues we covered, but your willingness to come here and engage with all of us and answer all these questions in such a forthright manner. So, thank you very much. Please join me in thanking them--

**KRITENBRINK:** Thank you.