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OPENING REMARKS:

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FRAMING REMARKS: THE STATE OF THE WORLD AND US GRAND STRATEGY:

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PANEL 1: TRADITIONAL GLOBAL SECURITY CHALLENGES

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MODERATOR: MELANIE W. SISSON
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PANEL 2: NONTRADITIONAL GLOBAL SECURITY CHALLENGES

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MODERATOR: JEFFERY FELTMAN
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KEYNOTE: UKRAINE ON THE GROUND:

INTRODUCTION: DAVID B. WEINBERG
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KEYNOTE: HOWARD G. BUFFET
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O'HANLON: Good morning, everyone and welcome to Brookings. I'm Mike O'Hanlon. I have the privilege of holding the Phil Knight Chair in Defense and Strategy here. And this is the second annual Knight Forum on Geopolitics. We're going to spend the morning talking about the state of the world, the state of American foreign and national security policy, and what to do about our future challenges. We have two panels, a short keynote address, and also a final conversation that I'll have with Howard Buffett. You can see the full details in your program. Let me just give you a couple more thoughts on the overall flow of today's events and the nature of what we're trying to do. Before I hand off to Melanie Sisson, my distinguished colleague who will moderate Panel One, as I say, this is a forum on geopolitics, and we're taking a fairly broad definition of that term. This is not just about the military, not just about defense planning, but it certainly includes those topics, as well as broader economic and diplomatic instruments of American foreign policy. And that will be much of what we hear about in Panel One, which has a combination of expertise across all those issues and across many regions of the world. Then we'll hear from Bob Kagan. We did a little audible on the order of events because he's stuck in traffic, but he will be here by ten for his keynote, which you won't want to miss. And so anybody who's coming late has the good fortune. Don't worry, they're just going to miss me. They'll then hear all of panel one and all of Bob, and that will be excellent because Bob, as you know, is one of our great big thinkers in the country on U.S. national security and history. And so, he's going to help us frame how to think about the integration of all these different instruments of foreign policy and all these different challenges we face.

Panel Two will then discuss what you might consider sort of the 21st-century threat agenda, the transnational threat agenda, and a broader definition of national security not so broad as to encompass each and every problem the country faces. We don't want to make the term so elastic that it means nothing. But we do want to think about large-scale threats to the nation's security and well-being that may come from pandemic disease, that may come from food insecurity, that may come from climate change, as well as other possible problems. And the panel also will feature Vanda Felbab-Brown, who's one of the country's great experts on the fentanyl crisis, among other things. And so, I would like to just quickly-- each moderator will say a little bit more about their panel. I would also note that we have two Trustees joining us today, Bill Haseltine and David Weinberg, two experts in their own right, amazing individuals. And like everyone else, they speak for themselves, not for the

institution. And so, I think, without further ado, I will again thank you all for being here and hand the floor, and the panel, and the microphone off to my colleague Melanie and Panel One. Thank you.

SISSON: Great. Well, thank you, Mike. And please allow me to join Mike and welcoming you all to today's 2023 ninth Forum on Geopolitics. My name is Melanie Sisson. I'm part of the Foreign Policy program here at the Brookings Institution, and it's my real pleasure and honor to also introduce Bruce Jones, Pattie Kim, Suzanne Maloney, and Caitlin Talmadge. We only have one hour and so I'm not going to go through their full list of honorifics but suffice for now to say that that list is long and quite illustrious. So instead, we'll just turn to the two pieces of business that we need to attend to on this panel here today. The first is to consider the state of geopolitics, to take a look at who is doing what, where, why and how, and then on that basis, to offer an assessment of U.S. national security strategy. So, Bruce, one of the propositions of geopolitics is that where a country exists on Earth is very important to the types of relationships that it has with other states that exist on Earth. The United States, of course, considers itself a state, a global power with global interests, and in fact a global leader. How do you see geography affecting the Biden administration's decisions about where in the world to endeavor, to exercise that global leadership in particular?

JONES: Great. Thank you very much. And yes, I am not Bob Kagan, but I will endeavor to say a few broad things about this topic. Look, I think one of the things that's most interesting about this moment in world politics is the the fundamental difference between how we would think about this problem if we were thinking economically and if we're thinking strategically. We've spent essentially the last 50 years and in particular since the end of the Cold War, effectively erasing geography as a factor in trade and economics, right? The advent of very large-scale bulk shipping, laying down of hundreds of undersea cables for data, and financial connectivity is essentially erased as a factor in trade. The unit cost of moving something from, you know, Vietnam to New York by ship is less than the unit cost of driving it from lower New York to upper New York. Okay, so we have essentially erased geography. So yeah, we've embraced geography as a factor in trade, and that's true in spades when you think about issues like climate change and etc. But I'll leave that for another panel. But I think there was this brief moment where we sort of suffered from the delusion that, because geography had become irrelevant to trade, so had ideology, and so had power. And of course, neither thing is true, there is still ideology and there is still power. And once you're into the world of power and ideology and the competition that attends to it, then geography comes back into play with a

vengeance. And of course, in a moment now, where the the contest between major powers is a driving feature of world politics and a driving feature of national security.

The second point that's sort of striking to me is how centrally maritime geography is going to matter to our decisions and to our strategies in the coming period. We've spent the last 30 years fighting land wars in the Middle East, with special forces, and air power and etc., and suddenly we're into a world where it looks very different. It seems to me that the central fact of world politics right now is that the world's two most important powers are separated by 8,000 miles of ocean — six and a half thousand if you factor in Hawaii, which we do — but still a lot of water between us and China. The second most important fact is that there's only 80 miles between China and the Taiwan Strait and there's 7000, whatever it is, between us and the Taiwan Strait. Okay, but a lot of water between us and China. It is sometimes depicted as the oceans are this great barrier that keeps the United States safe. And to some extent that is true. But the oceans are also huge conduits of economics, of data, of finance. We're hugely reliant on the undersea infrastructure, we're hugely reliant on what moves by sea. And so, it is not the case that those seas can be left unattended. They are going to be contested and they're going to be contested in very acute terms.

But it's not just the Pacific. I'm very struck, even as we're in the middle of a land war in Europe, if you look at the sort of serious erosion of Russia's land war capacity, what remains — leaving aside nuclear weapons — is its submarine fleet, which is the second most powerful in the world, and beginning to flex its muscles in the Barents Sea, in the Baltic Sea, and etc. We're going to see a lot more of that in the coming period. We're going to have to devote more natural resources to tracking Russian submarines once again. Suzanne, we'll talk about the Middle East. The Persian Gulf looms pretty large in that, in that region. And we've seen very recently the administration worry about the Atlantic because there is an encroachment into the Atlantic from both nonstate actors and the Chinese and the Russians in ways that are a little worrying. So the maritime geography, by the way, the Arctic is once again a kind of zone of serious contest. So, versus thinking about America as sort of protected by the oceans, I think we have to understand that actually we have vast interests in the maritime geography and that that's going to drive a lot of what our national security has to deal with in the coming period, whether that's from China, Russia, Iran or elsewhere.

SISSON: Pattie, Bruce just walked through some significant features that are on the minds of U.S. strategists. Tell us a little bit about China's perspective and how China's thinking about geography and where it might be being especially energetic in pursuing its own geopolitical interests.

KIM: Well, thanks very much, Melanie. It's a real privilege to be on this panel with my esteemed colleagues. And I want to thank Mike for inviting me to join the discussion today. I was looking back at my notes from last year's Knight Forum that was held in this auditorium about a year ago and it struck me that many of the trends that I outlined about China that last year pretty much stand, and Beijing's growing alienation from the West, by which I mean the United States and its allies and partners in Europe and Asia, its deepening ties with Moscow and its efforts to cultivate partners in the global South. These trends still very much stand, and in many ways, they've deepened. First, with regards to the growing divide between Beijing and the West since last September, there really hasn't been any breakthroughs in Beijing's respective relationships with these countries to fundamentally improve relations. And from the perspective of the United States and its European and Asian allies, China hasn't really changed its policies or its assertive behavior in key areas like the Taiwan Strait or in the South China Sea. It hasn't dialed back on its ties with Moscow, let alone used pressure on Putin to try to rein in on his invasion of Ukraine. And Chinese leaders haven't shown much enthusiasm for setting up guardrails for the U.S.-China relationship or cooperating on transnational challenges.

And so, there really hasn't been room for improvement in relations. On the other hand, in Beijing, there's a strong perception that Washington policies towards China, its hardening policies, whether it's its export restrictions, its alliance-building efforts, are ultimately responsible for the frictions in the bilateral relationship. And there's a firm belief that the onus should be on the U.S. to change its policies. And there's also a belief that even if Beijing were to accommodate the United States demands or to tone down its behavior, it wouldn't necessarily change views of China in the West. And so, it's for these reasons that Beijing has turned its energies elsewhere to improving its relationship with partners outside of the United States and the West and finding friends and building coalitions in the Global South.

Quite strikingly, President Xi Jinping has made only two foreign trips this year. The first was to Moscow in March to see Putin, and the second was to South Africa to attend the BRICS summit. And so, I think this really highlights where China is focusing its efforts these days. It's clear that Xi sees

Putin as his most important partner in eroding what he sees as a Western-dominated global order and to advance their shared aims. We've seen Beijing and Moscow work together, both individually and jointly, to accuse the West of hypocrisy, to question the validity of Western values, to try to shift the geopolitical and geoeconomic gravity away from Western-led institutions to groupings like the FCO and the BRICS plus. And it's in these various settings that Beijing has pitched itself as a leading voice of the Global South, as a new type of major power that understands the needs of the Global South, that is not hegemonic in its ambitions.

And so, this is very much where China has been focusing its energies. And I think, you know, just one thing to note, while Beijing has been largely embraced in these forums and its goals have been welcomed, I think it's also important to note that many states in the developing world don't necessarily take China's claims to be not hegemonic, and it's ambitious at face value. They're not interested in aligning with Beijing at the expense of their-- of their relationships with the United States and other powers. And most states want to diversify their options. I think this is the trend that we're seeing. And so, this is to say that I don't think we're seeing the rise yet of a cohesive China-led bloc that can move in unison to counter the United States and its alliance network. But Beijing has indeed tapped into grievances in the developing world and its-- and it's very much determined to challenge the United States leadership by doing this. And so, this is something that Washington needs to keep its eye on going forward.

SISSON: Suzanne, Bruce promised you would talk about the Middle East. So, I'm going to take you up on his promise. And many of the states in the Middle East have been particularly active diplomatically and politically recently with the United States, with China, and with each other. What does that suggest to you about how those states are interpreting this particular moment in geopolitics?

MALONEY: Thanks, Melanie. And thanks to Mike for putting together this tremendous day of activity, that our Talbott Center has been just an incredible organization for spearheading these kinds of conversations on the changing geopolitics that we're dealing with today. And so, I'm glad to be part of this discussion. The Middle East is an interesting vantage point for assessing both the kind of state of geopolitical dynamics, but also for assessing how the United States is responding to that. We are you know-- Bruce talked about a kind of new era and the return of geography. I think we're also obviously in a new era in terms of the emphasis of where that geography matters. And so far from

1990 to 2021, most of U.S. strategic assets were focused on challenges coming out of the Middle East. Obviously, it wasn't to say that we ignored Russia and China, but several administrations attempted a pivot to Asia and did so without full success. The Obama administration talked about it, but never really did it. And the Trump administration, in fact, in its own strategy-- strategic documents actually recognized that the kind of multipolar world we were beginning to experience was needed to refocus U.S. energies and effort but wasn't able to fully extract itself from some of these longstanding conflicts and significant challenges in the Middle East. The Biden administration has done just that, and it's been interesting to see how the major powers of the Middle East have reacted. They've reacted, I think, quite predictably in a more activist way, seeking out opportunities from all sides and really, I think, reflecting a sense of their own perception that the United States is less engaged, has less leverage, and that they, in fact, have more opportunities by playing one side off of one another. And so, we've seen this, especially over the course of the past year.

You remember early last spring that the Chinese announced that they had brokered a normalization between the Iranians and the Saudis. This had been the end of a formal diplomatic rift, but also, frankly, a real change in the four decades of hostility that has existed since the 1979 Iranian revolution between the two capitals, fought in different ways over different periods of time. And suddenly, you have this, not just, you know, sort of photo op of the two foreign ministers being welcomed by the Chinese foreign minister, but actually talk of real new relationships, including economic relationships. I think this was a very clear signal from the Saudis that from the region there is a sense that they have to go at it alone, that they have a potential partner in the United States, but they are going to seek those benefits that they can get from other players. And it was a very clear signal that Washington is not the only game in town.

I think it's also evidence of the fact that we are no longer the dominant power when it comes to decision-making by regional leaders, that they're going to try to find advantage wherever they can take it, and that they're prepared, in fact, to risk and challenge this long-standing relationship, even strategic partnership, like states like Saudi Arabia, have had with Washington. I'm not sure what it means for the long-term stability and dynamics of the region. I think, you know, we're seeing a lot of flux, a lot of essentially rent-seeking behavior, which is not entirely surprising. There are two big diplomatic initiatives that the Biden administration has undertaken with respect to the Middle East. The first was the attempt to restore the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in the 2015 Iran nuclear

deal. The formal efforts to do so over the course of the past two years have run aground. What has emerged in place of this formal diplomacy involving the various parties to the deal has been, I think, this quiet backchannel that we saw produce a deal that resulted in the release of five Americans who had been held hostage by Iran for many years just last week. And that seems to be part of a larger, very quiet initiative. Again, direct bilateral diplomacy between the Biden administration and the Iranians to find some way to come to some understanding around constraints on their nuclear program. I'm not optimistic about that diplomacy. I understand why we have shifted from the formal multiparty multilateral diplomacy to something that is more quieter and potentially more practical. But I think that puts us what I would expect is on a slippery slope to an Iranian nuclear capability in the long run.

The other big diplomatic initiative that we've seen from the Biden administration, which in some respects is more innovative and I think carries with it more opportunities and more potential, is the normalization efforts between Saudi Arabia and Israel. This would be the kind of capstone to the Abraham Accords that the Trump administration undertook successfully, that the Biden administrations built upon. And it would be truly transformational in terms of what it might mean for the region, but it would also require truly un-- inconceivable concessions from the United States, including some kind of defense assurance, whether it's a pact, whether it's some kind of an agreement between the United States and Saudi Arabia, as well as efforts to permit the Saudis to have uranium enrichment capabilities. I think two steps that are probably a bridge too far, even if this normalization deal would be quite exciting. So, I'm going to close there, but look forward to more of the conversation.

SISSON: Thanks. There's a lot there and I hope we can revisit a few of those elements because they are, as you say, some of them really potentially transformative and still very live with a lot of uncertainties around it. Another place, Caitlin, where there are uncertainties of a particularly unfortunate kind, have to do with the ongoing war in Ukraine and one of the most serious ongoing debates in the United States and about U.S. geopolitical strategy has to do with whether the United States is properly allocating resources across regions. And in particular, there are those who argue that U.S. fiscal and material support for Ukraine as it fights Russia, degrades our ability to pursue our interests in the Indo-Pacific region. What is your assessment of how U.S. strategy is prioritizing interests across those two regions?

TALMADGE: Great. Thank you, Melanie, for that great question. And thank you to Mike for bringing us all here this morning. It's great to be here with all of you. I think your question really is one about strategic priorities, and strategy is about priorities. And yep, exactly, as you pointed out, you know, we have a foreign policy that is putting a lot of focus on Ukraine at the same time that we're facing some of the challenges that others have outlined from China. And in fact, we have a National Defense Strategy that says we really do have to do both of these things. You know, we have to be able to walk and chew gum at the same time. We have to be able to provide for the defense of Ukraine while also dealing with the long-term deterrence problem of of China. And I think, you know, in many ways, the administration has proceeded very intelligently and very skillfully in balancing these two sets of strategic priorities. I think you see the United States working hard to provide for the defense of Ukraine while minimizing escalation risk in that war that could potentially blowback on NATO. And in a parallel set of moves, I think you see the United States doing a lot of things to strengthen deterrence toward China while avoiding being needlessly provocative and, in fact, actually working in some ways to try to strengthen mechanisms for de-escalation in the event that a crisis could arise. And, you know, we haven't had a great deal of success there. But I think there's a commonality in trying to be strong in the U.S., pursuing its priorities, but also being smart and not being needlessly provocative in either region.

And, you know, I think part of the reason we've seen the United States doing things in both of these regions at the same time is that there's a theory that what happens in these two regions is actually somewhat connected, you know. And there's many ways that this connection, you know, can exist and develop. One of them is that the war in Ukraine, as we're all seeing, is affecting Russia's long-term ability to generate military power. And Russia is China's most important military ally. So, I mean, there's a connection there. The war in Ukraine also affects the strength of NATO, which is a very important actor for counterbalancing China in some other ways. And I think most obviously and most simply, U.S. support to Ukraine actually sends a very important message to the world, to anyone who's watching, about U.S. willingness to oppose unprovoked aggression, particularly aggression by an authoritarian regime against a democratic neighbor. And I think that's a message that resonates in Asia and the Asia Pacific as well. And so, you know, there are connections here that mean-- as I said, we do have to walk and chew gum at the same time. I think the United States has also learned a number of things over the past 18, 19 months from this Russia-Ukraine conflict that are relevant to

U.S. thinking about deterring. For instance, Chinese aggression against Taiwan. Not all the things we've learned watching this war unfold have been good news, like we've learned that nuclear-armed great powers actually are willing to engage in big conventional wars, in which they sometimes brush shoulders with other nuclear-armed great powers. And so, you know, if we thought that a world with nuclear-armed great powers meant that we didn't have big conventional wars, I think we've been disabused of that notion. I think the United States has learned that its defense industrial base maybe needs some reinvigoration. And not all of that reinvigoration is about big, you know, expensive platforms. A lot of it's about the boring stuff like munitions. It turns out if you don't have the munitions, it's really hard to sustain a conflict. I think that's something the United States is working on.

I think the United States has also learned, if it didn't already know, that it's really important to build coalitions and to strengthen alliance relationships before a war because wars can move very fast, which again, is a lesson that I think that's relevant to the Asia-Pacific. I mean, part of, you know, what we've seen in Ukraine, is that although NATO has strengthened during that conflict, it was, you know, beginning from a very strong base. And of course, there is no NATO in Asia. And I think we've observed the United States working to expand partnerships in the region, to strengthen alliances between the United States and key allies, but also among the allies themselves. And we're seeing positive developments there with respect to Korea, and Japan, and Australia, these longstanding allies, but also the Philippines, India, Papua New Guinea, other other actors that would be relevant to deterrence of China. And I think at least some of that integration actually comes from what we've learned in Europe.

The other takeaway I think, is that we've also learned how important it is to build partner capacity, you know, and how critical that is to deterrence and to the way that wars actually unfold. You know, one of the interesting things in the Ukraine case and one of the reasons for I think the Ukrainians' surprising military success and resistance against Russia is that the United States had actually been working very actively with them since 2014 on the wake-up call over Crimea to strengthen their capabilities. And I think an important question that that then raises about the Indo-Pacific is whether Taiwan, you know, is doing some of those those same things, particularly in light of what may have been kind of their wake-up call last summer with respect to the actions China took in the aftermath of the Pelosi visit. And so, you know, again, the lesson here is sort of like, once the war started, it's too late. You've got to work on this stuff in peacetime. And so, I think overall, you know,

the United States, to get back to your question, is balancing the challenges in these two regions appropriately and intelligently and is doing some really smart stuff because they are connected in many different ways at the same time. And as your-- as your question points to, can we sustain a surge level of resources and senior leader attention indefinitely in both regions? And I think, you know, probably the answer to that question is, is no. You know, there is going to come a point where this trade-off between the regions is going to become sharper. And I think that does point to the fact that the United States should probably hope for an end to this war in Europe sooner rather than later, obviously for humanitarian reasons and all kinds of reasons. But I think also for strategic reasons. You know, as as your question points out and as the National Defense Strategy points out, in the long run, that the the, you know, pacing challenge does remain China.

SISSON: And Bruce, what about your view? Are there specific kinds of tradeoffs of time, tension, or assets that you're watching?

JONES: Yeah, I think so. I mean, I have to say I very much agree with the way Caitlin framed this. And in the short term, it's it's almost the opposite, right? Especially the defense industrial base piece. If we had discovered the shortfalls of the defense industrial base in the middle of a conflict in the Taiwan Strait would be in deep doo doo to use a political science term. So, it's very useful to have found that out now and start working that-- working out problem. But I do worry if this is protracted, and not just Ukraine but the potentially wider challenge that Russia poses to Eastern Europe to the north, will create these tensions. As Kate Levitz wrote, Tom Stefanik and I have been doing some work looking at the changing patterns of Russian-- Russian submarine deployments, for example. Russian submarines are a very, very, very powerful weapon, and they're very significant threat, just a little less capable than ours, but very, very potent weapons. We have roughly half of our submarine fleet devoted to tracking Russian submarines. We have aircraft carriers devoted to the region, etc. That's fine, so long as China's submarine fleet is less capable and less numerous.

But both of those facts are changing very rapidly. China has just debuted a submarine which is again, very, very close in its capability to ours. And the reach will extend, and the numbers will extend, and the challenge will extend. And so over time, it is going to be extremely difficult if our if our numbers, our capabilities remain largely flat to have adequate capacity devoted to those two regions, quite apart from the fact that there are other regions we've already touched in the Middle East, I'm so obsessed by maritime issues these days that I forgot in my geographical lexicon to notice that there

are 100,000 Chinese troops on the Himalayan border with India that could flare up. We would have to get, you know, being engaged in that in some fashion. So, it will become harder to have adequate deterrent capacity or war-fighting capacity in multiple regions at the same time. And we're, I think we're--we're not there yet, but but that's coming.

SISSON: Each of you has touched on at least one-- and more than one tool that strategists can use as we pursue our foreign policy in the current moment. Suzanne, you in particular highlighted a couple of tools that the Biden team has been using in its relationships in the Middle East. And I was hoping you could elaborate a bit on that. Maybe comparatively look at what has worked in terms of the constellation of tools of influence that the United States has had, the ways it's approached, its relationships with those countries, and what you see over time between then and now-- what you see being used now, and how optimistic you might be about the future in that regard?

MALONEY: It's a really interesting question because I think it really does provide-- we see a real contrast between the kind of, I think it's often called the 9/11 era, but it's really the post-Cold War era of American foreign policy and the way that we approach the Middle East today. And of course, 1990-2021 was an almost exclusive emphasis on military power and had accomplished some things, and it left a lot of other things unfinished, or in fact, in some ways degraded because of the emphasis on might, being the most important way that we could influence regional dynamics. I think what we see today very much speaks to the tradeoffs of the kind of focus that Caitlin, and Bruce, and Pattie all talked about. The extent to which we have, you know, an imperative to address both Ukraine and the pacing challenge of China simultaneously means just correspondingly less energy, less activism, less innovation around our impact and influence on other parts of the world, including the Middle East.

So, Caitlin talked about the kind of efforts to re-energize, and in fact, reinvent American alliance relationships with respect to China. And I think the administration has been incredibly successful in doing so, whether it's AUKUS, whether it's the Quad. There's been, I think, just, you know, every day there's a new announcement and it's it's, I think, very farsighted and it's proved very effective to have this interlocking web of many lateral relationships with different functional focuses and non-exclusivity, but in fact, a lot of flexibility and a very clear strategic message to the world that the United States still remains the predominant player in the region.

I think there's an attempt to do a little bit of this with the Israeli-Saudi normalization effort in the Middle East. But fundamentally, it's very clear that there is just less energy, less attention, less capability, and almost an attempt to try to solve or address the region's challenges by doing the bare minimum and trying to extract the United States as much as possible. And so, I think this is also noticed by the players in the region. And this is why, you know, in effect, the Saudis and others are using the sort of challenge of China as a way to goad the United States to making commitments that it might not otherwise.

I testified on the Hill last week, and one of the representatives who was there for the hearing talked about the need for an Article 5 commitment, you know, sort of a mutual self-defense commitment between the United States and Saudi Arabia. Only not not because of the Middle East, but really to keep the Saudis out of the Chinese orbit. And certainly, I think the drive around providing some enrichment capability to the Saudis is very much, with that in mind, that the Saudis have said, "If we don't get it from you, we can get it from China." That ability of major regional powers to sort of play one of the great powers off of one another I think is underrated as a strategic challenge for the United States. And it's something that I think the administration hasn't yet found an effective way to cope with.

SISSON: And Caitlin, speaking of coping with challenges and U.S. military capabilities and how it's been used in the past and how we're using it today, tell us a little bit about the National Defense Strategy in particular. And do you see indicators that it's being executed effectively?

TALMADGE: Thanks for another great question. So on-- integrated deterrence actually connects very much with what some of what Suzanne was talking about is. As many of you may know, integrated deterrence is this concept from the National Defense Strategy that I think emerged in part because of the heavy emphasis in in previous decades on military tools of power, as Suzanne was getting at, and you know, some of the problems that that created in U.S. foreign policy. And integrated deterrence is really saying, you know, the U.S. needs to use all of the tools of national power in order to pursue its objectives across the government in concert with allies and partners. And so that, of course, includes military tools, but it also includes economic and diplomatic and political. And the objective is by, you know, linking and integrating these tools across all these different dimensions to raise the costs that a potential aggressor would face if it, in fact, engaged in aggression. And again, some of those costs, if an actor engaged in in territorial aggression, for

instance — and again, this is something we worry about in the Taiwan Strait, that that Bruce already mentioned — some of those costs that an aggressor would pay would, of course, be military.

But the idea behind integrated deterrence is that some of those costs would also be diplomatic. They would be economic. There would be a coalition of states that would be imposing these costs, not just militarily, but also in these other domains. And again, that's something, you know, we've we've seen reinforced in Ukraine. We've learned, for instance, that, you know, if you want to sanction a great power, that that cannot be a unilateral project. Your sanctions regime is only as good as the other countries that you can get to come along in bearing the economic costs of refusing to do trade with with that great power. And of course, that's an even bigger challenge with China, which is a much, much larger economic power than it's been with the Russians.

And so, to get to your question about, well, you know, how are we doing on this integrated deterrence project, I think, you know, in the Indo-Pacific, to go back to that region, we're doing a lot better on the military front than we are on the economic side. Perhaps going back to that pattern that Suzanne identified about the past, despite our efforts to break away from it. So, you know, the U.S. is working very hard, and again, I think very successfully in many ways to broaden the military coalition that would oppose China, were it to engage in unprovoked aggression against Taiwan, which is good. That's what we want. We want Xi Jinping to wake up every day and say today is not the day to start a war against this island. Now exactly what the military opposition would look like, you know, I think depends a lot on exactly what China does, what Taiwan's role is perceived to be, you know, what what actually is the scenario involved that would have a big influence on which countries might take on or not take on certain military roles in in a campaign to defend Taiwan. And I think the U.S. has also pushed for Taiwan to do a lot of things to be better at defending Taiwan. And all of that, I think, you know, should create doubt, at least in China's mind, about whether a campaign of aggression would be successful, whether it would pay innocents. So, you know, there's there's progress in those those military areas. But I think a lot of what the United States has been doing on the defense side of things is really hindered by the lack of a U.S. economic strategy in the region.

And so we've got, you know, a military strategy that is at the very least unsupported by what we're doing economically, but maybe even at cross-purposes with what we're doing or what we're not doing economically. The lack of a true economic strategy in the Indo-Pacific, you know, we sometimes forget that for many important countries in in the region, China is their biggest trading

partner. And by the way, it also is much closer to them. As I pointed out, you know, geography matters. It's a lot closer militarily, but it's also, you know, a lot more important economically to them. And so, you know, I would hate for them to decide in wartime that they're better off either sitting on the sidelines or, you know, even worse, casting their lot with China, because the economic consequences, not to mention the military ones of, you know, siding with the U.S. coalition are too great for them to bear.

And so, you know, ideally what we'd want to see if we're really doing integrated deterrence is an economic strategy that complements our military strategy and actually gives countries in the region economic reasons to want to balance against China if it engages in aggression rather than than bandwagon with it. And, you know, I think integrated deterrence is a good concept. It's a right-- the right concept. It's a useful one. But implementing it has a way to go on the economic front where for domestic political reasons, which we haven't even gotten into on this panel, the U.S. has really been stymied. I think the administration has really been stymied in pushing forward the economic agenda that that could help really bring that concept to fruition.

SISSON: Pattie, clearly China is a feature in every region of U.S. geopolitical interest at the moment, and China is not going anywhere. The challenge it presents is not going anywhere. What risks do you see on the horizon as the United States continues to engage in this way geopolitically in response to that China challenge?

KIM: Well, I think first of all, it's very clear that the very successes that we've talked about on this panel that the Biden administration has had in strengthening its alliances and partnerships with countries in pushing forth export export restrictions or building up mechanisms like AUKUS and the Quad or strengthening trilateral ties with Japan and South Korea. All of these developments China has pointed to as encirclement by the United States, as efforts by the U.S. to rally partners to keep China down in order to preserve U.S. dominance. And Beijing has has actively promoted this narrative both at home and abroad. And in conjunction with this narrative, Beijing has also said that this is not the time for China to sit back and just take the blows, but that China really needs to step up. That the party and its people needs to step up to fight back or to struggle back and to actively defend China's national security and its core interests and to navigate these geopolitical headwinds that Beijing is facing. And again, I think this is what has driven China to look for partners and markets and opportunities elsewhere beyond the United States and its close circle of friends. And so, I think this is

very much an example of Beijing both taking the initiative and also reacting to the United States. And and I would note that you know, when it comes to China's foreign policy, Beijing's perceptions of the U.S., the thrust of U.S. policies, the prospects that it has for the bilateral relationship, has always played a large role in shaping the contours of its external relations and its foreign policy throughout history.

Of course, another risk factor or important factor that we need to look at in China is domestic politics. China's growth rates have slowed dramatically. It's facing economic headwinds. China will not grow anywhere near the eight-plus percentage points that it's been growing for the last 40 years. Its property sector is struggling, foreign investment is declining, youth unemployment is at its highest rate in decades. And beyond the economy, there's been a lot of dramatic changes as well. We've seen some personnel shifts, striking ones, in a very condensed period with the abrupt replacement of two top generals in the PLA rocket force. This summer we've seen the dismissal of foreign minister Qin Gang, who was supposed to be sort of the operator and working through the stabilization of U.S.-China relations, for what the party has called "lifestyle issues." And it looks like now the defense minister as well is under investigation and will probably be dismissed for corruption charges.

And so, this is not a picture of domestic stability or a picture where Xi is, you know, very-- things are going well for Xi in his rule. And so, this raises the question whether this is likely to push China in a more destabilizing direction. Is China likely to engage in diversionary conflict or war to detract from its domestic troubles? If you-- if you haven't seen already, Professor Taylor Fravel of MIT published a really great piece in Foreign Affairs I think a week ago or two weeks ago, where he looks at the history of China. And in these moments of domestic struggle-- and he he looks at the question, you know, will China engage in diversionary conflict? And he finds, actually, that it's during these times that China has actually tried to stabilize its relationship outside of its borders. And that-- and so that, that's sort of good news.

But the bad news is China has also reacted extra sensitively to to what it what it has perceived as assaults on its interests or sort of exploitation of these moments of weakness by outside actors. And so I think we do need to-- that, that's sort of the world that we're in. I do agree with Taylor that Xi Jinping is probably, you know, that going to war over Taiwan right now is is quite risky for Xi. There's no guarantee that he would succeed. So this could actually put him in a worse situation. But at the same time, I don't think Xi wants to look weak against any sort of perceived slights or attacks on

China's core interests. And he's likely to respond if he's pushed into a corner. So, we are entering into this this very sort of, I guess, interesting and tense situation where the China challenge will need to be managed very carefully. And I think working on stabilizing the U.S.-China relationship will be more important than ever in this period as well.

SISSON: Bruce, did you have a thought?

JONES: I just wanted to comment on a couple of things that have been said, if I could. Two different thoughts or comments on the PLA purges. It does seem to me that there's another part of the story potentially, right? Which, you know, people have asked from the beginning of Ukraine what lessons with the Russian, over will the Chinese take from from both sides' performance. And it seems to be one very important lesson you take is root out corruption in your command structure because if you don't, it doesn't matter how fancy your assets are if you don't have an actual command structure. And so, it seems to me that part of what we are watching is Xi applying that lesson to the PLA and rooting out key places of corruption. So that isn't necessarily a story of domestic instability. That can also be a story of consolidation of authority, which then has has different implications, integrated deterrence. I'm not going to comment on that per se, but it just sparks a thought that we haven't really discussed so far, which about economic interdependence between ourselves and the Chinese. And of course, it has become a kind of mantra to talk about what we used to talk about, the globalization of globalization. Now we talk about de-risking — whatever the hell that means — etc., basically it means having lost China in our supply chain, right? Except when you look at the economics of this, we haven't moved that one iota, right? We were very happy last year that Mexico had more imports into the United States than China for the first time, for a long time. But when you open up that box, that is 100% inward investment into Mexico, to use it as a bridge into the United States from countries who are 100% dependent on China and their supply chain.

So, we've added a stop on the global supply route. We haven't remotely diminished our dependence on China in the global supply chain. And even when you look at technology, which is a place where the administration has been most focused on this, we're sort of beginning to lay the foundation of some moves towards domestic manufacture, etc. But when you look at the kind of the the core of it, the software piece of this, you know, our most important technology firms still do huge parts of their research and development in China. And we haven't begun to move the needle on that. So, I worry that we go sort of-- we're in this very tense and developing pace of strategic contestation

with the Chinese. And by the way, for all the fact that we are, you know, asking about guardrails and diplomacy, we're also opening new bases in the Philippines and doing all the things, you know, you might interpret rather differently if you were Xi Jinping. And at the same time, despite the rhetoric, we haven't remotely diminished our economic dependence on the Chinese. And so those two worlds are in complete contradiction.

SISSON: Well, before we turn over for some audience questions, I do want to ask you, Bruce, about not necessarily flash points, but choke points if there are particular geographies that you think either are getting adequate attention because they are potential choke points or that are not getting adequate strategic attention despite being potential choke points?

JONES: Yeah, this is-- it's a surprisingly complicated question. I mean, the kind of the the obvious ones are the Persian Gulf, the Suez Canal, and then the Singapore Straits. You know, 90% of world trade, in one form or another, moves through one of those choke points at one point in time and/or another. And what you see in the-- in naval circles as a kind of return to an emphasis on thinking through blockading strategies. You know, were we to have a crisis in Taiwan and we don't actually have to want to lose half the fleet and fighting in the Taiwan Strait, could we blockade Chinese shipping? Okay, the problem with that is I think the notion of Chinese shipping is completely meaningless. Is Chinese shipping a Danish-owned ship carrying Chinese manufactured goods to the American market? Is it a Chinese-owned ship carrying German manufactured goods which were assembled in China to the French market? I don't know what it means. So, we have this notion of blockades that come out of the Second World War where you could take a German ship that was carrying goods only for the German market and you could stop it from going someplace, or vice versa with the British. But that's not the way the economy works anymore. And so, I worry that we haven't really thought through what genuinely interdependent global supply chains mean to issues of choke points and how we think of those. Even energy goods change hands multiple times on routes as they flow across the sea. So that notion of choke point means something very, very different in the modern economy than it does in the way we think about it strategically. And I worry that we're we're planning wrong.

SISSON: Okay. Well, I would like to invite some questions from the audience. You have 45 seconds to formulate your question, and then I will cut you off. But but please do take advantage of

this, you know, really high-class buffet of expertise that we've assembled here for you. So, there's a person here in a white jacket with a blue scarf. Please.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Talking about maritime trade, once the the sanctions to the Russian exports have failed because, you know, now the Russian-- for more than a year, they export to India, to the Indian refineries, and then the rationale goes everywhere. So why don't those sanctions stop once they were not effective as much as they were expected?

MALONEY: I'll give a quick answer, but it's more generic rather than specific to this case. I think that sanctions are awfully easy to impose. They typically take time to work effectively, and they never work fully, conclusively. They're never going to completely eradicate a certain type of foreign policy behavior. They're really intended to impose some costs on the target of the sanctions. And so, I think in this case, the oil sanctions on Russia or the oil price cap, what it has done is, is deprive the Russians of some revenue. It's forced some efforts at some cost to Vladimir Putin to re-- recalibrate where and how he exports his oil. I think that there were always modest expectations on how this would actually impact both the Russian economy and the Russian war effort. And fundamentally, you know, he has a very important supply of a strategic commodity and we're never going to be able to cut off those exports fully to the world without a catastrophic impact on the global economy, which obviously doesn't serve the purpose of trying to deter Vladimir Putin.

SISSON: Let's see, we have a person here also in the middle, gray jacket, I think a blueish collared shirt.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thank you very much, everyone, for the great panel today. I was wondering what your thoughts were on the role of India and with its relationship with the U.S. or with China. I guess that's a big question. We don't have to run down the whole foreign policy of India. But what you see their role is kind of in the medium term here, considering this multi-- multipolarity, excuse me, of the security and geoeconomics. Thank you.

JONES: I could take a stab. I mean, it seems to me that Xi Jinping has done a very good job at pushing India more decisively into the arms of the West. Even five or six years ago, India was weighing very carefully how far it wanted to go on that route. The more Xi sort of provoked along the Himalayan border and cyber intrusion and all sorts of things he was doing on India, the more it's pushed India towards the West. India is, of course, still dependent on Russian arms supplies, but that I think will be a dwindling problem. And we'll increasingly look towards co-production with the United

States. So India becomes an extremely important sort of strategic anchor for the United States in its overarching China strategy, in its overarching Asia strategy. I think one thing which will ultimately prove complicated, you know, this administration, and not uniquely, talks a lot about democracy, leaving the free world, etc., and that sort of doesn't really, really refer to China. You know, Indian human rights abuses, you know, sort of just skips that question. And so far it's gotten away with sort of skipping that question. That can become tricky if the Canadians are able to provide something visible about proof of having assassinated a Sikh dissident on Canadian soil. It's going to be extremely difficult. There's already congressmen here asking for hearings on that. It's going to become harder over time to just ignore what the Indians are doing in Kashmir, hyper-nationalism, etc. And the Indians are extremely sensitive about being called out on those kinds of questions.

And so that relationship could be trickier than we are currently currently treating it. The other piece of the puzzle though, is-- this is oversimplified for a fact, but if you want to move China out of global supply chains, you need another very large, low-cost supplier. And there is exactly one potential candidate for that role, which is India. Now they have not made the domestic policy changes. They have not built the infrastructure for it. There's a long way to go for them to play that role, but they could play that role. And I think there will be a huge interest in seeing them do that, do that over time. So there's all sorts of upside in the Indian relationship with the West, but there are some, you know, issues to worry about along the way.

TALMADGE: Well, I just want to foot stomp and expand upon a little bit something Bruce brought up, which is that there really has been change in in the U.S. and in relationship over the last few years. In many ways, because of China's own behavior. And we've seen that with a number of countries. I mean, I think that the whole story of AUKUS and how the Australians, you know, were kind of pushed into the arms of the U.S. into an even tighter embrace because of China's, you know, actions toward Australia, is really an interesting case study and kind of counterproductive Chinese foreign policy. You know, I think the Indians are wanting to preserve their neutrality and their independence. And their their actions during the Ukraine war, I think speak to that. But I think the U.S., you know, through its diplomacy with India, has, you know, managed to create some doubt in China's mind about, you know, what India would actually do in, you know, for instance, a war over Taiwan. And depending on how that war played out, you know, you might say to yourself, "Hey is India" — you know, getting back to geography — "is India really that important, you know, relative to a

war over Taiwan?" Well, if it's a war that becomes a long war where we're talking about things like naval blockades or, you know, massive economic dislocation, then heck yeah India's really important. And, you know, creating doubt in Xi Jinping's mind about what India would do in that conflict, you know, is part of raising the cost of aggression. And so, I think there has been real change there. And I'm really struck by how that change has actually been more the result, or at least as much the result of China's behavior as of U.S. efforts.

MALONEY: I'll be really quick. I just wanted to put in a plug for our colleague, Tanvi Madan, who is not here on stage with us but has been working on these issues for a long time and just launched a phenomenal podcast about India's role in the world. And so please check it out on our website because you'll hear her talking with some other terrific experts. And it's the first in a series. And I would just from my own perspective, add the point that not in any way to discount what both Bruce and Caitlin have said about the impact of Ukraine on India's strategic alignment, to note that India, like Saudi Arabia, like other major regional powers, is using these, you know, sort of the challenge of China to extract what it-- what is in its own interest from both the United States as other as well as from other world powers. And I think, you know, the if there is any sense that we can create a world of of a complete binary alignment where you're either with us or against us on the issue of China, it's completely unrealistic and it's especially unrealistic with respect to India.

SISSON: Let's do another question. We have a person over here in a fetching bright turquoise tie.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Oh, I'm colorblind. I wanted to get back, if I could for a moment -- this is Antoine van Agtmael, Trustee. To this question of sanctions, and I wonder, what if we're just fooling ourselves. I mean, sanctions work when you're the recognized dominant power, even if you are grudgingly recognized as such. They work less well if you're increasingly less recognized as such. And I wonder whether they have gone from not working perfectly to barely working at all and on their way to no longer working.

KIM: I know there's probably a lot of interesting comments on this among the panelists. Just to briefly note, I think for China, sanctions have worked in a way. It has deterred China from providing lethal assistance to Russia-- Chinese companies. China doesn't want to be ensnared in secondary sanctions. So, in that sense, they have worked in some ways. But China, again, and Russia are working together to erode the effectiveness of Western sanctions. And you're seeing a push by both

Beijing and Moscow to trade in national currencies, to trade in rubles and R&B. And this is so that they're less vulnerable to U.S. sanctions or Western sanctions down the road. This is an area where they've also just ideologically aligned together, where they see sanctions as a tool of oppression by the West. This is a narrative that they've promoted in the Global South and that many actually rally around. So, in that sense, I think China and Russia are using this issue and again, they're trying to push back or counter against what they see as the hegemony of Western sanctions.

JONES: By the way, I very much like the color-coding rule of how we select speakers. Now I'm going to wear brightly colored things every time I come. I think what you say is smart. I would put it slightly differently, which is just that the-- it's not that we can't impose costs on people. It's that the costs to us of doing it are growing and growing and growing. We could have crippled the Russian economy. We could have done it easily, but the costs to us would have been extremely high. And so, I think that that's the way to frame it. By the way, on the on the energy sanctions, I will just say, you know, at the point in which we were beating up the Indians for buying Russian oil, Europe was still importing Russian gas. We ended up stopping that for a range of reasons. But I'm sorry, you can't condemn India morally for buying Russian oil if you're buying their gas. I mean, we just can't have it both ways.

MALONEY: I'll just add, there a number of different factors that shape how effective sanctions can be. Some of them involve how aggressively they're actually enforced, and in some cases, we're not enforcing our sanctions sufficiently. The other key factor is how much international buy-in there is today. And of course, we're in a fragmented world in which we are not going to have great power alignment on economic pressure on almost any country around the world. Final point is sanctions are just one piece of a larger puzzle of economic statecraft. And I think there I would give the Biden administration great credit. They've really invested in a number of different tools, and they've not been over reliant on the sanction's vehicle. There's much more that we can do to try to track the effectiveness and the durability of sanctions, to try to actually make the sanctions that we have meaningful. And I think this is an area of work that both the U.S. and Brookings can do more on.

TALMADGE: And just to chime in, I mean, I think you're absolutely right that as a tool in isolation, there are a lot of obstacles to using sanctions effectively. But but to your point, I mean, I would note that I think policymakers can see sanctions as one of a number of tools that would work in concert to, again, raise the costs of aggression to an adversary. And I think actually in in the Russia-

Ukraine War, we've seen some evidence of that. So sanctions have definitely not been perfect. They've had limitations. They have, as Suzanne said, reduced one source of revenue to the regime. But the regime has also faced other economic costs from this war being very protracted as a result of the defensive capabilities of the Ukrainians, which is that you know, an activity on a whole other front that the United States has promoted. And together, those actions actually have produced contraction in the Russian economy and, you know, some serious economic consequences, you know, from this war to the regime. And so, I think it's, you know, one among a number of tools that can impose economic costs on an adversary in a war, even if it's true that in isolation, it may not achieve that much.

SISSON: Well, I'm sorry to say, I think we have run out of our time for today. The bad news is that that means that we have to say goodbye to these experts for the moment. But the good news is, that means Bob Kagan is waiting in the wings, and that we will welcome him onto the stage. Before we do that, please join me in thanking our panelists for a really excellent session. It's well-earned. And if you would, please stay in your seats while we change over, to give Bob a moment to come on up, that would be much appreciated. Thank you all for coming.

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KAGAN: Hi, all. I apologize. I was supposed to be the appetizer, but I'm the palate cleanser. I also am the only thing standing between you and coffee break. So, I'll try to be as quick as I can. And it's hard to follow that fantastic panel. That was just a really high-level conversation, and I'll see what I can-- what I can add to it. I have to say, as someone whose head is stuck in history, especially the history of the 20th century, these days it all seems extremely familiar, this situation that we're in right now. We have a nation in Europe seeking regional hegemony. We have a nation in Asia seeking regional hegemony. And by the way, this is what great powers do and have always done throughout history. And I just wonder sometimes, how many times can we be shocked when nations do what they've been doing from time immemorial? Every time there's an act of aggression these days, we act like it's a it's a bizarre and strange occurrence. And also, I think we wait for it to be over soon. I think there's a lot of hope that you know, once we get past Ukraine, things will get back to normal. Once we-- if we manage to make it through the next couple of years with China, maybe things will settle

down. And of course, that is a possibility. One thing the United States has accomplished since since World War II is to calm things down in the international system.

So, what I want to talk to you about in the brief time that I have is, first of all, to compare our current situation with the very similar situations that we've had at least since the First World War. And then, and then to see whether we're doing are we in better shape or are we in worse shape. And I want to say overall, clearly we are in better shape. If you think about what the world looked like in the first half of the 20th century, again, it's the same basic structure of the international system. You have great powers seeking regional hegemony in the two major regions of the world, at least from an industrial economic point of view. And you have the United States in the middle trying to decide how it's going to manage this.

Now, in the first half of the 20th century, as you know, the United States did this late, reluctantly, and without any real alliance structure in place, without any global structure in place. The United States did not have overseas bases. It did not have security alliances with other countries until we got into, the United States got into the actual wars. And there were multiple great powers seeking regional hegemony at the time: Germany and Japan, Russia. Those three in particular were significant, and the Soviet Union, obviously. If you think about what's happened since World War Two, the number of countries that seek or have regional hegemony of any kind has — or even desire for regional Germany — has really become extremely limited. Germany no longer demands regional hegemony and is certainly not accorded regional hegemony. Japan does not seek or is accorded regional hegemony. Britain, which was once the great empire of the world, no longer seeks to have that empire. The same is true of France.

So numerous great powers have have stepped out of the geopolitical game. And the two powers that remain, if you think about it from an American perspective, the perimeter is now farther out. It's different dealing with Germany, which was in the heart of Europe, and Japan, which was in the heart of the Western Pacific, was almost entirely a naval power, managed to build a significant ground force as well. But if you think about the difference between dealing with Japan and Germany and the difference between dealing with China and Russia, that's already an improvement. If you consider as well what we've seen of the Biden administration, I think gets credit for activating our alliances. But of course, those alliances have been in place and being built for decades.

And so, when this set of crises emerged, this natural, you know, predictable set of challenges emerged. The United States is in a much stronger position to deal with it. And they, the challengers, are in a much weaker position, historically speaking, than the other powers. Just consider the fact that by the time the United States got involved in addressing the German and Japanese threat, they had practically conquered their entire region. And by 1942, they had-- the Japanese had conquered more territory in Asia than any country in the history of the world. So that was our starting point. Look what our starting point is today. Russia is struggling to gain control of a country that used to be part of Russia. That is the first step. I think should Russia succeed in Ukraine, that would lead to a much greater challenge to us and Europe. But the fact that they are, at least for the moment, stymied in Ukraine, is an extraordinary new accomplishment. It's as if Japan had actually been stymied in Manchuria in 1931 as opposed to being allowed to succeed. And so, you know, so that is a much more advantageous position.

You know, we talked about sanctions in the previous thing. The thing about sanctions is, first of all, that has been a tool of nations again, from time immemorial. I mean, whether you want to talk about Napoleon's Berlin decree or whether the British who constantly used blockade and sanctions, there's nothing unusual about it. But I do think it's really rather extraordinary, the degree to which the American dominance in the international economy allows this much to be accomplished through sanctions as has been. Obviously, they're not determinative, but they have really imposed costs, and I think have had a deterrent effect. And so, one of the things that's most notable about the current situation is, is the degree, the amount of American involvement in the global economy is much greater, and its ability to wield influence in that economy is much greater than it used to be. So, those are the situa-- that is the situation that we're in from a favorable point of view.

I think at the end of the day, if you look at what happened in the course of the last hundred years, there have been several major challenges of great powers attempting to account, to achieve regional hegemony. And every single one of them has failed to the point where I think it's reasonable to say that in the era of the United States being the power that it has been since the 1900s, it's impossible for countries to achieve regional hegemony. I mean, that has been the fact. Is it easier today for China and Russia than it was in the past for Germany and Japan? I don't think so.

Now, what's the-- what are the-- what's the bad news in all this? What are the downsides? Well, first, there are basically two deficits that I think we face right now. And one of them was well-

articulated by the previous panel, and one is a power deficit. I mean, the fact is, whether we want to acknowledge it or not, it was an extraordinary exertion of American power and global involvement that created this international situation, which is so beneficial. It was the incredible investment of World War II, of course. But then also the fact that the United States, for the next many decades, right up until now, has maintained bases overseas, etc. During the Cold War, in a period of heightened anxiety in the United States, the degree of power that the United States wielded in the international system was unprecedented. The problem that Americans have is that, although de facto and demonstrably, their grand strategy is to prevent any real assault on what I would call the liberal hegemony in the international system. The United States has gone to war-- world war, twice, fought a Cold War, and is now once again again engaged in that activity.

The goal of the United States has always been, whether we admit it to ourselves or not, to maintain this global liberal hegemony. But because we don't admit it and because in many respects we're not even sure we want to do it, we leave ourselves at where we are right now, which is in a strong position. But I think as Bruce and others on the panel suggested, not a durable situation because much as we don't want to believe it, again, it is ultimately power that undergirds this situation. It is power that makes it possible to do something to deter regional hegemons or would-be regional hegemons in two regions simultaneously. And I think that it's pretty clear that we're not going to accomplish this objective by sanctions alone. Or even perhaps, simply, this is the real question.

If you look at it historically, the odds that we will solve this problem merely by indirection, merely by arming others, merely by engaging in the kinds of policies we have now without ever having to put ourselves on the line, that is going to be an interesting experiment. It's not as if we haven't tried to accomplish these objectives in the past, at the least possible cost to ourselves, whether by arming others, or by trying to deter by by our statements, or our getting international agreements. I mean, there was no shortage of international agreements that Japan should not be invading Manchuria. The question was, anybody going to, you know, back up those international demands? And I think there's a real question on the part of the-- whether the United States, whether the American people are, at this point, despite their obvious desire to check both China and Russia, whether they're willing to pay the price in terms of money and potentially in more than money, in order to accomplish that objective as they have in the past. And I think there are real questions about it.

And that leads me to the final point, which is the domestic politics of it all. In the United States, I think it's fair to say there is no such thing as a pure foreign policy decision. All foreign policies are influenced by domestic politics and by domestic struggles. And clearly, you know, one of the things that that's difficult as a historian of the United States is to say, what is it that the United States does? Well, in a way, there is no United States. There are-- it's a democratic country with with different factions arguing from very different points of view. So before World War I, I mean, excuse me, before World War II, we talk-- we talk about the distinction between isolationists and internationalists. But that was also a distinction between conservatives and liberals in the United States. It was people who were opposed to FDR and therefore and claiming that he was a communist and therefore being more worried about communism overseas than about fascism. And then there were the liberals who had the other perspective, which is that they were more worried about fascism than communism. And this debate had a lot to do with both the delay and the eventual entry of the United States into the war. And we are having a similar debate about that today.

I personally cannot take seriously the strategic arguments being offered by conservative Republicans about why we should be doing-- we should be basically almost going to war with China, but we shouldn't be doing anything to stop Russia. I know that there are attempts to make that argument sound like it's a practical discussion, but it is profoundly an ideological discussion. Republican conservatives have turned the Ukraine war into the liberal's war. And what they would like to focus on is China, largely, I would argue, for the domestic purposes of focusing on China, which is to play the old Republican game of saying you're soft on China, you're soft on communism, etc. And so, I believe there's a lot of that exploitation going on, which when you put it together with the unwillingness of the American people, I think, to pay the price for sustaining the liberal hegemony, even though they wish to sustain the liberal hegemony, is leading us into a very dangerous place. And I think again, some of the people on the panel discussed this, which is, if we're not really willing to put in the financial and material investment, we compensate for that by yelling at them a lot and also by engaging in a squeezing of them economically, which I think we have to think carefully about whether that's the right thing exactly to be doing right now. What I think is vital is that we deter China militarily, But I think we have to be careful at this moment. And by the way, I don't believe that China, in its current state, is looking for conflict. I actually mostly don't believe it happens rarely in history. But it's

very rare that a country that feels it is doing poorly is eager to get into a war. And so, I think there's going to be caution on the part of China.

But it is also the case, as some people in the previous panel mentioned, that we can frighten and provoke China into an unwise decision. We did that with Japan before World War II. You know, we wanted to stop the Japanese, we wanted to use, and we used almost entirely economic measures and sanctions to do that. And those sanctions, by the way, were so effective that the Japanese thought they would ultimately lose access to the oil and their ability to survive. And it was that part of their thinking that led them to undertake an action which they knew wasn't going to work. I mean, the Japanese knew they stood very little chance of succeeding against the United States. They were banking on our unwillingness to pay the price. But the attack on Pearl Harbor, as I think you all know, was very much provoked by actions that the United States took. Actions which it took, by the way, for perfectly good reasons. It was perfectly reasonable to want to stop Japanese invasion of China and of Asia. But the method that we did it, which was on the one hand not being quite strong enough militarily to deter them, but on the other hand squeezing them till the pipsqueak so that they felt they had no choice.

I don't think that's where we are with China right now, but we need to think about the possibility of getting there. Our goal right now should be to be confident and understand that if we can make it through the next few years on the Asian front, I think we can keep things under under, you know, reasonably calm if we have the ability and the will to deter as is necessary. And I think ultimately on the Russia side, I would love to believe that this is going to be all that's required of the United States. But I begin at a certain point to wonder, maybe the Ukrainians, in their unbelievable capacity and will, are going to save us from the choice that I think history suggests we're ultimately going to have to make. Maybe the Ukrainians will save us. But I do think that we are at the beginning of the Ukraine crisis, not at the end. And that is more than enough for now. Thank you very much.

FELTMAN: Welcome. Welcome, everybody. The panel now will be looking at sort of nontraditional security threats as opposed to the more traditional security threats that were covered in the in the first session. I was-- I was in New York last week for-- Oh, I should introduce myself. I'm Jeff Feltman. I'm the John C. Whitehead visiting fellow in international diplomacy in Foreign Policy here at the Brookings Institution. I was in New York last week for, you know, the the madness of the meetings on the margins of the U.N. General Assembly. And I was struck by sort of how intentional it

was that while Ukraine was still part of the overall conversation, that there was a real emphasis on trying to talk about other things besides just Ukraine, other issues, other global issues. And in a way, this panel is kind of parallel to that. The--- it's that the security issues that we talked about in the first panel that Melanie moderated are key, but they aren't the only ones that affect national security. And I'm delighted to be able to moderate a panel with such great experts. Mike, thank you for pulling this together for us.

And Melanie, in the first panel dispensed with introductions altogether. I'm-- I can't resist — it's such a good panel —saying a sentence about each one. I'm not going to go into all their backgrounds. I'm gonna say just a sentence. Right-- you know, to my right is Dr. Danielle Resnick, who's who's a renowned scholar, a leading scholar on the political economy of development with a specialization in sub-Saharan Africa, working on issues like food security. Next to her, Samantha, Samantha Gross, who brings government and private sector experience into her research, which really looks at the intersection of energy, environment, and policy. Dr. Vanda Felbab-Brown is a fearless researcher into all the bad actors that are, that are working on the nontraditional security issues that we're talking about now. Not only does she research the bad actors, she goes where they are, whether it's, you know, the Shabaab-controlled area of Somalia or Mexican cartel-controlled parts of Mexico. And then on the screen joining us virtually is Dr. William Haseltine, who is who's a scientist, educator, philanthropist, author, businessman, who has spent a career at the forefront of medical research and application, with the goal of trying to improve healthcare outcomes globally. So, I thank the panelists for joining us here today and look forward to the forward to the discussion.

Samantha, I'm going to start with you, because there was a lot of discussion about sanctions in the first panel, the the effectiveness of sanctions that Antoine brought out, and all of that. And specif-- and there was a lot of discussion about Ukraine for obvious reasons. And we have this really interesting phenomenon where you have written about the fact that the oil price caps, the sanctions, etc., were intended to keep Russian oil on the market but to lower the profits to the Russian war machine. And I'm just wondering, how are we doing?

GROSS: You know, better than I would have expected. And backing up a little bit, this this isn't so much a sanctions regime. Typically, when we have sanctioned oil producers, Iran, Venezuela, it has been to keep that oil off the market, whereas Russia is the second or third, depending on the day, largest oil producer in the world. And so the world just simply wasn't ready to do entirely without

Russian oil. Completely sanctioning Russian oil and trying to keep it off the market would have been way too hard on the global economy, would have raised oil prices too much. And as many in this room know, when energy prices go up substantially, the poor and developing countries always hurt the most. And so, this was this was a policy that wasn't really tenable in this case. But oil and gas revenues are the largest source of revenue for the Russian government. And so you don't want to just let it go unchecked either.

And so the U.S., with backing from our friends in Europe and others, really decided to do something quite novel, and that is we want Russian oil to stay on the market, but we want to reduce the revenues that Russia gets for it so that we're reducing the revenues that they can spend on their war machine. I will admit that I was a bit skeptical about this. I thought it was very complicated to control where Russian oil is going and to figure out how to make sure that that oil is sold below the cap. But honestly, it's worked pretty well. The prices that Russia is getting for its oil have come down substantially. And I heard in the previous panel a question, well, isn't it problematic that India is buying Russian oil? And my answer to that is really no because what the cap has done is put India in a much better bargaining position for that oil. They're not participating in the price cap. But given that other countries are, they can drive a much harder bargain to buy Russian oil. So that oil is getting out, but it's getting out at a lower price and it's starving Russia of revenues. And that is exactly what it was intended to do.

FELTMAN: Interesting. Another topic that came up a lot in the session that Melanie moderated earlier today was China. China in terms of sort of more traditional security security threat and the competition with China. But this is a session about nontraditional security-- security threats. And Vanda, given all your work with bad actors around the world, are there nontraditional security threats from China that we should be thinking about in addition to all the more traditional ones we just discussed in the first panel?

FELBAB-BROWN: Well, absolutely. The fact that China is present around the world and its presence is growing also means that the presence of Chinese criminal groups is growing robustly in very-- every dimension of organized crime. But what is characteristic of China, of course, is that organized crime is managed by the state. It doesn't mean that the Chinese government controls every dimension of criminality. There is a lot of criminality against the Chinese government, against the Chinese Communist Party. But there are also very magnificent connections. And China often uses

organized crime groups, particularly the large ones, such as the 14K triad, for a whole variety of purposes. Whether this is to sanction and monitor diaspora, we have heard a lot about Chinese extralegal police stations in the United States and in Europe way before those popped up. China has been using criminal groups as a mechanism to monitor, sanction, punish Chinese diaspora. China uses organized crime groups to facilitate corruption around the world. And of course, China is the source of precursor chemicals for fentanyl, which is causing the most lethal drug epidemic ever in history.

Now, I do not want to say that China authorizes the sale of these precursor chemicals to go to Mexican cartels, but they are produced into fentanyl. That is not the case. But the level of attention, the level of enforcement that China applies to its laws, the level of its dedication to shut down these illicit networks, is highly conditional on its geostrategic relationships. So China essentially extends law enforcement cooperations to countries whom it seeks to court with whom it has benign, benevolent bilateral relationships. And it denies law enforcement cooperation, including against Chinese criminal groups and networks, to countries with whom it has tough relations. And obviously, we find ourselves at the time of high tensions with China, the greatest tensions in many decades, and that has resulted in China essentially pulling out almost altogether, stopping any kind of law enforcement cooperation with the United States for well over a year. Now in the last few weeks, we have seen a bit of a breakthrough. There is increasing interest or at least increasing response, some overtures from China to perhaps restart some counternarcotics cooperation. But we are still in an early stage of return to really any meaningful cooperation.

FELTMAN: Thanks, Vanda. Still thinking about China, I want to turn to Dr. Haseltine for a second. Dr. Haseltine, if we had been talking in 2019, you might have listed pandemic as a, as a nontraditional secur-- national security threat, but I'm not sure I would have in 2019. COVID has certainly changed the perception of those of us who are not scientists, who are not-- who are not medical experts, on how we think about pandemics. I remember that you and Mike O'Hanlon had a virtual conversation in 2021 where you were very upbeat about China's response. I think you called it, like a-- they followed the rulebook, the rulebook set by you and by other-- by other experts on how you would prevent the spread of-- the spread of a of a disease using isolation, contact policy on testing, etc. Of course, since then, we've saw the public reaction in China to China's policies. And I'm wondering, looking ahead in the case of another pandemic, are there other practices besides the

Chinese example that we should be examining in preparation for another pandemic? How concerned should we be? And what examples, besides the Chinese examples, did you find either good or bad?

HASELTINE: Well, the first thing to say is, what is the threat internationally for pandemics? And we've seen pandemics can be very destructive to the current world order, with COVID-19 causing economic and political ramifications. The threat of objective of the pandemic continues . It hasn't abated in any way. In fact, if anything, it's become greater. The fundamental reason is there are more humans. More humans to feed the microorganisms. We're basically food for the microorganisms. Eight billion of us have a very heavy footprint on the life of the planet and in microorganisms. The more of us there are, the more opportunities there are for us to be infected. And we travel a lot. We're very curious for 5 billion individual plane trips a year is a measure of how much we travel. So, there is a significant threat. If you look at COVID, the only country that contained COVID for a while, really the only one with China. And it did so for maybe two and a half years very successfully. It wasn't until the virus itself changed that made it impossible for the Chinese to contain the virus any longer, that there was a threat.

What is happening now is that there is a continual debate amongst countries as to how much data sharing there should be. There is tremendous data sharing during the COVID pandemic, and now there is a current debate of whether you share intellectual property to allow people to create drugs and vaccines and other measures very quickly. And there is some reluctance to do that. Certainly, the intellectual property community is reluctant to give up any of its rights to international organizations. And I think that's where the current fight is. What will happen is just an exaggeration of the current situation, which is inequities around the world, something that I've been working on a good deal of time for many, many years on resolving the inequities in healthcare. We saw that with COVID. We'll see it again. That is a mishmash of several different themes. But are there current themes that are present in the debate over COVID-19 and the threat of pandemics to the community? Yes, there are threats. Are we prepared to deal with these threats effectively? Yes, in a regional sense. No, in a global sense.

FELTMAN: How would you, Dr. Haseltine, how-- what marks would you give COVAX at this point?

HASELTINE: I would give them a very low mark. There was very inequitable distribution of vaccines that were available in the United States and in certain other countries. The only effective

COVAX was really China and Britain that was able to vaccinate much of China and much of India. Other countries in Africa and South America in particular, were left really on their own for protection against COVID-19. The international community has been extremely lax in building the infrastructure for vaccines and antibiotics, and other developments, globally. And that has continued to this very day.

FELTMAN: You mentioned, you mentioned Af-- you know the inequities, and you mentioned Africa. Let me turn to Danielle, given your deep expertise in food security in Africa issues. We're 18 months into the Ukraine war. We're two months since the Russians pulled out of the Black Sea Grain Initiative. Sudan, which which has rich agricultural land, is in, is in civil war and chaos. How is the food security situation in Africa today, both in terms of imports as well as their own indigenous production, given things like ammonia that's traditionally exported from from Russia? And how how concerned should we be for our national security beyond the humanitarian aspects of this?

RESNICK: Okay. That's a lot of-- lot of dimensions to food security, and I'll try to unpacked those different aspects. I mean, I think first, it's important to differentiate between food insecurity and food price shocks. There's certainly overlaps between them, but they are a little bit different. So, a lot of the places that are the most food insecure in Africa, that's the effect of cumulative effects, not just price shocks caused by the Ukraine war. So, the most affected, you think about the Horn of Africa, northeastern Nigeria, southern Madagascar, which has been in a famine for several years now, and wide swaths of the Sahel. That's been really the cumulative effects of climate change, as well, in some of these places, a civil conflict. That's different than food price shocks. And so, when we look at the FAO's World Food Price Index, we're actually, you know, back to where we were even before August 2021. So global food prices have gone down. That obviously obscures what's happening in different regions of the world and for different food commodities. So, you know, the highest, highest food price inflation in Africa is not the same places where we have the highest food insecurity. So, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone have the highest food price inflation at the moment based on on the FAO data. And, you know, part of what has happened is other other dimensions of global food trade have affected food price shocks. To be honest, it's the India export ban on rice at the moment that's causing food price inflation in West Africa because they're so heavily dependent on, on imported rice from South Asia and Southeast Asia. But more broadly, I think since the Ukraine war, a lot of countries in the region adapted their approaches. You know, some switched to promoting more

indigenous grains like millet or sorghum or mixing wheat flour with cassava flour in processing bread. So, a lot of innovation there. Where it's still been problematic is on fertilizer because-- and this was this was one of the main grievances around pulling out of the Black Grain Sea Initiative. It was more on the implications for fertilizer because the market is smaller. Africa has very low soil fertility, the lowest soil fertility in the world. It's extremely dependent on synthetic fertilizer use. And of course, you know, with this reduced market share, a lot of people competing for these different nutrients and inflated prices. We have seen global prices for fertilizer actually going back down again.

But the price of fertilizer in Africa is still extremely high. So, in Malawi, the price of urea, one of the main nutrients in fertilizer, is four times higher than it is on the global market. It's twice as high in Kenya, and Ugandan farmers pay twice as much as American farmers to access fertilizer. And so, we've seen African governments, they continue to subsidize this this input. But this is becoming very unsustainable given the specter of debt distress, you know, looming over the continent. So, you know, one of the the approaches has been thinking more about how do you engage in more kind of micro-dosing of fertilizer use, make it more targeted to to soil use. A lot of it is wasted in the region, not proper kind of soil fertility maps. Thinking of ways to approach more organic farming techniques, invest in more kind of domestic processing ability — as Nigeria has been quite good at this, particularly with the Dangote factory that was set up about two years ago for this — and more kind of investigation into corruption in the entire fertilizer procurement and distribution supply chain. Obviously, huge implications for for U.S. security. You know, of course, historically, as you alluded to, when you have food insecurity or food price shocks, you can have instability, you can have urban protest. And we've seen, you know, in Nairobi, Ghana, Lagos, they've all been in protest in the past few months over the cost of food. So there's concerns on that dimension, but also on the the larger-scale, long-term cumulative food insecurity issues I mentioned, where you have kind of competition over water and land that leads to kind of farmer-herder conflicts that we've seen in different parts of the continent. And that leads people to be more kind of vulnerable to, you know, extremist groups who may want to to kind of integrate and mobilize them into their efforts.

FELTMAN: Thanks, Danielle. Samantha, let me go back, let me-- let me go back to you. And picking up on your previous comments about the the impact of the of the oil cap, I mean, the relation to the U.S. response to the war in Ukraine. You and-- you and David Dollar recently had an interesting conversation on David's Brookings's podcast, Dollars and Cents, where you talked about the fact that

Europe had weathered last winter fairly well, you know, in terms of-- in terms of the fact that Russia had had limited the natural gas that we were sanctioning, the oil, etc. And that Europe had reacted perhaps better than expected. But you've sort of left a question mark about where this is going, and I was wondering if you can elaborate for us.

GROSS: Absolutely. And I'd like to open just with a little background, and that is that the oil weapon is working in both directions in this conflict-- I'm sorry, the energy weapon is going in both directions. In this conflict, we are using Russia's oil exports as a weapon against them by trying to keep the prices down. But Russia is using its natural gas exports as a weapon against Europe to attempt to soften its support for Ukraine. So, Russia has nearly shut down its pipeline exports of natural gas to Europe. You have to understand that Russia was as much as-- as much as 40 and 50 percent of European gas supply in some countries. This was an incredibly important energy shock to the continent. And when this first started, there was a lot of talk of, not just will natural gas prices be too high in Europe last winter, but will there be supply? Will people be freezing cold in their homes because they can't run their natural gas boilers to stay warm?

So, these are-- they sound crazy now, but these were really live issues going into last winter in Europe. And Europe did a lot of things to get through the conflict. They, they put a lot of natural gas into storage. They worked really hard to conserve both in homes and in industry. But a really important thing, and this is what Jeff is alluding to, is that Europe sucked in a great deal of liquefied natural gas that flows on the water, not through pipelines, to supply their own needs. And they got through the winter quite well. Prices were high. There was definitely some subsidies in European governments-- from European governments to help consumers get through it. But they did. And so, the Europeans are quite happy we got through the winter. Go us!

But an important drawback to that was that Europe paid very high prices for that LNG that it was bringing in, pulled in a lot of the global LNG supply, and priced out the developing world, particularly Southeast Asia. Pakistan is a good example. It got very little LNG. Parts of Latin America, they couldn't afford it. And so, the dirty downside to what happened there is a lot of those countries went back to coal because they could not get adequate natural gas to feed their power sector. And so, I'm as delighted as anyone that Europe got through the winter. No one wants Europeans to be freezing in their homes because they can't get natural gas. But that did have a downside. And so, we need to think about this winter and, you know, for the coming winter is, how we're going to deal with

this and how we can keep both Europe supplied with the natural gas it still needs? The energy transition will take time without pricing out developing markets and forcing them back to dirtier fuels.

FELTMAN: Samantha, you mentioned the, you know, the energy transition. And one of the things I've learned from you is that we-- is that we seem to have two trends happening simultaneously, that last year was the highest-- more coal was burned last year than ever before, at the same time that investments in green energy are accelerating. So, there's two trends that they're happening simultaneously. And we've got a very interesting question in advance, you know, someone said a very interesting question in advance, and I won't read it exactly, and I think I'll get the sense of it, which is, by defining climate change as a security threat, does that make it easier or harder to try to deal with?

GROSS: I think that depends on who you're talking to. And when I think about climate change, I think of it as an incredibly multidimensional issue. It affects security, it affects the environment, it affects the economy. It affects, you know, the natural world and our comfort level in it. And so, I think the more avenues through which we approach climate change, the better off we are. Some people don't respond to approaching climate as an environmental issue. It's not where they live. They're trying to pay their bills every day, so you can come to them with an economic issue. Some people are incredibly concerned about security, so you can approach them through a security lens. Something that I think we all learned during this past year and a half or so is that climate change is an energy security issue. And we can do the energy transition for reasons other than climate. The Russians can shut off the natural gas supply to Europe, but they don't have the ability to shut off the wind and the sun. And so, those are actually more geopolitically secure forms of energy. We hear a lot about the critical minerals that go into producing those forms of energy, but the difference there is that they're not fuels. Once you build a solar array, a wind turbine, it still works. You can't shut off the wind or the sun just because you want to. Whereas when Russia cuts off natural gas, it is no longer available for heating and industry, and power in Europe. And so that's just another reason to do this. And so, it gives us another way to approach various constituent groups where they are.

FELTMAN: Interesting. Vanda, going back to you. You mentioned-- you mentioned fentanyl and Chinese criminal gangs. Of course, most of us, who are not as well informed as you are, think of fentanyl and we think of Mexico. When I was in New York last week, I had the opportunity to talk to the Mexican foreign minister, who was very upbeat about the current state of the dialog between the

United States and Mexico on both migration and on-- and on drugs. But as you said, the fentanyl death is now the leading cause of-- the leading cause of death in the United States for young people 18 to 45, I think, which means it is a national security threat. You just were in Mexico doing fieldwork in areas where the cartels are operating. What are your policy recommendations? What would be your policy recommendations? What would you hope to see come out of a U.S.-Mexican dialog on this?

FELBAB-BROWN: Well, it is of business of diplomats to be optimistic. And we are certainly seeing some effort on the part of the Mexican government to recognize that cooperation between the two countries in law enforcement and counternarcotics, collapsed. And it collapsed because the government of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador wanted it to collapse, sabotaged it. We have seen a decline of cooperation over a number of years. There were multiple crises I'm not going to go into, but essentially, we kind of reached a bottom this spring when President López Obrador started denying that fentanyl is produced in Mexico. It is produced-- China is the predominant source of precursor chemicals, but fentanyl is, in its vast majority, cooked in Mexico by the two cartels, Sinaloa cartel and Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación, which they then smuggled to the United States. And yes, it is the leading cause of deaths for people between 18 and 45. It is also, we've also seen deaths for people over 60 quadruples in the past several years. This is unprecedented in drug markets. By the time drug users reach that age, they said they will have already been dead or they will have wean themselves off-- come off their substance use disorder. We are now dealing daily with shocking news like children in school dying as a result of exposure to fentanyl. 300 people a day die in the United States as a result of fentanyl. Stunning numbers. And the United States is not alone, Canada is suffering from similar devastation, and fentanyl use has spread to Mexico as well, despite the fact that President López Obrador denies there is any fentanyl use and in fact has prevented even the delivery of overdose medication like Narcan to Mexico.

So, why are there some reasons for optimism? So, despite the fact that at the federal level, for a considerable period of time, we have now seen really minimal cooperation with essentially all the cooperation being focused on stopping migrants coming to the United States. But the law enforcement, counter-narcotics cooperation being completely hollowed out. There are some initial steps. The Mexican government has recently announced that they have interdicted more flows of fentanyl. That is a number that doesn't tell us much. It's easier to interdict more fentanyl, given how

much fentanyl that is coming from Mexico. We also don't know quite what the interdiction means. The Mexican government has just a very recent history of cooking all kinds of numbers and data. But nonetheless, there is a recognition, there is no longer the denial that any fentanyl is made in Mexico and it's coming into the United States. And we have also had the recent extradition of one of the leaders of the Sinaloa cartel, Ovidio Guzmán, to the United States. We have a long way to go.

And before I am persuaded that we have returned to at least a reasonable baseline of cooperation, I would like to see several things. One is the ability of U.S. drug enforcement agents to operate far more freely in Mexico in collaboration with Mexican law enforcement officials, which we don't have right now. A steady transfer of samples from the presumed seizures in Mexico to the United States and ability to observe these raids. More importantly, however, Mexico needs to start confronting the cartels, not because they are contributing to these incredible deaths in North America, but also because they are profoundly contributing to the destruction of rule of law in Mexico. And you haven't really seen that. We haven't yet reached that stage.

Let me just allow one aside, since we were talking about COVID and the comparisons of the pandemic. So right now, with the opioid epidemic in the US, the death rate is well over 500,000 Americans, which is more than all Americans die in all wars combined since World War II. The death rates from COVID globally was over 6 million people. But you know that I have done a lot of work on wildlife trafficking, conservation issues, including on how to deal with pandemics. One of the things that I find so disheartening about COVID is that we collectively, globally, have profoundly failed to address the underlying causes of zoonosis, the transmission of germs, of viruses from animals to people. And all the opportunities that we had to crack down far more on wildlife trafficking, to smart and tighten legal wildlife trade, to more fundamentally protect areas where there is limited exposure of humans to nature. Essentially, none of that has happened. The focus has been on response, early detection, COVID, economic mitigation. But fundamentally, far better protecting our natural resources and insulating people from the zoonosis transmission has just not taken place.

FELTMAN: Dr. Haseltine, I can't resist. How's-- what's your reaction to Vanda's comments?

HASELTINE: I have two reactions. One, of course, she's right from her perspective. I would say that from a broader perspective, she's incorrect in the sense that the primary interaction between the natural world and human beings took place much earlier during the hunter-gathering period when we subsisted alongside of nature. The fact that there are organisms of any type, whether they're from

natural means or from the sea, or from the air, or from the muckies, coming into the human populations, the basic thing that has changed is that more of us-- we are more exposed, and we travel and we're very gregarious. And things that may have been confined regionally are no longer confined.

So, I think that on the whole, protecting us and our natural environment is a good thing. I certainly do. But it isn't going to save us from recurrent pandemics. The only thing that will save us is more research, more cooperation. I think we have seen through COVID how limited that can be. That is-- most of our ability to fight infectious diseases is with our private companies. And even when the government is involved in transferring its knowledge to the private sector, it doesn't benefit from that. And I think there is a series of international agreements now on the broader theme. Let's take the introduction to this panel. Is the seriousness of pandemics a global threat? On the one hand, you didn't think it might be. On the other, you can remember World War I and the influenza pandemic, although devastating in its effect, had little effect overall on the international relations or war that was ongoing. Did COVID affect the strategic position of any of the countries involved? Certainly not with Russia and possibly even not in the long run with China. The only effect you can say that it might have had with China is to slow down its progression as an international threat. But on the other hand, it may not have done that at all.

So, whether diseases themselves are fundamental to the nat-- the order that the Brookings is most concerned about today, I think it's a moot question. Some would say yes. Some would say no. But the fact that we're even talking about it as a potential national national security threat or global threat is because of COVID. Like I said, if it were 2019, you might have talked about it as a potential, but I think the rest of us wouldn't have-- wouldn't have thought of it as a threat to humanity. Whether it's a threat to the national order is very different.

FELTMAN: Are there any-- you, you expressed the concern about why COVAX wasn't effective. The lack of sharing of information that, that would have been useful. Are there any-- were there any positive lessons that we are applying that came out of the COVID experience?

HASELTINE: One of the most positive lessons is that there was a quick vaccine. It was quickly determined that the knowledge was shared surreptitiously by the Chinese, which allowed the rest of the world to move forward very, very quickly with vaccines. And it was really a miracle of modern technology that allowed a very good response to be made. That miracle is still in place. There are marvelous advances being made every day in science for very serious choices like cancer and

infectious diseases. But whether they will have any long-term effect on the relations amongst the nations, I rather doubt.

FELTMAN: Thanks. Danielle, let me let me skip back to Africa just-- and open this up for for the audience questions in just a moment. There's been, of course, a lot of articles and analysis about democratic backsliding in Africa, of course, most recently Gabon and then before that, Niger, but also Burkina Faso, Mali twice, Guinea. How should we look at these coups? Is this-- how does this affect our national security if it does at all?

RESNICK: Yeah, well, absolutely. I think there's there's worrying implications for national security. I mean, I think obviously the the initial reaction is the impacts on counterterrorism operations of fighting jihadist efforts. And that was certainly why the U.S. has been quite hesitant to declare the the coup in Niger a coup because it affects congressional funding for its security operations there. There's about a thousand personnel on Niger, and they have remained there, even though, you know, French personnel have been asked to leave. And so, I think, you know, certainly a concern from from that perspective, I think from a broader, you know, concern about failed governance and failed states, you know once a country collapses, it's very hard to rebuild. And it creates a vacuum for many different actors, as Vanda knows very well, and, you know, creates opportunities for alliances of those actors with state actors who may have nefarious intentions. So. I think it's certainly concerning from that way.

I think it's concerning that we also don't have a good solution to it. And the use of sanctions hasn't proved very effective in changing the behaviors of military junta leaders there and the African Union and ECOWAS, you know, their approach of using sanctions until the junta decides that it's going to put out an electoral timetable, continues to fail. They continue to be duped by these military leaders. We saw just yesterday, you know, the head of the Malian junta saying they're going to now have to postpone elections on technical grounds. And, you know, of course, holding those elections was was one of the reasons that ECOWAS removed sanctions earlier this year.

So, I think, you know, one of the challenges is, why do we keep getting caught off guard by some of the dynamics we're seeing in the region? How can we be a little bit more strategic, have some type of strategic foresight, analysis, thinking of different scenarios and other hotspots in Africa? You know, there's many places of fragility across the region, and we can be learning from all of these coups from the Sudan conflict and to anticipate some of these other conflicts in advance. We think

about Uganda, Rwanda, Cameroon, Central African Republic, lots of fragility, lots of interest, intra-elite and factional conflicts there, and kind of a lack of planning around, you know, succession, presidential succession there. So, you know, how can we be more strategic and being anticipatory rather than reactive to each of these events, I think will be very important going forward.

RESNICK: And that's kind of linked back to something that came up in the first first session, which is the the competition for having global, so-called Global South Countries sort of with you or without you. That there-- being able to understand the dynamics is important to us. Being able to count on them as, you know, reliable friends in the international system. So. let me give you the last question before we go to the audience, which is just a simple, how are we doing on like President Biden's goal of having 50% reduction in emissions by 2050 based on 2005, the EU's goal of, I think, 55%? How are we doing?

GROSS: I mean, we're not quite on track. The U.S. is probably the easiest to answer. We were-- it was always a difficult goal that President Biden set soon after he took office at the the conference of the parties, the global meeting that year. The IRA and the Infrastructure Acts, which passed in 2022 and 21 respectively, are definitely down payments on that. People have done some analyzes on these looking at where they think that those two pieces of legislation will get us. And they're looking at 40, 40 and change, percent reduction by that 2030 timeframe, as compared to the 50 to 52% that we have pledged in the Paris process. And so, we're getting there. And that doesn't include some fuel efficiency standards that have recently been enacted and that are in the process. And so, that will help a little bit as well. Transportation is the largest source of emissions here in the U.S. and so those will help. We're getting there. But those were always quite lofty goals and it's going to be problematic to get there.

FELTMAN: Thanks, Samantha. Let me open let me open up now for the the floor. We've got about 12 minutes, so please make your questions short and efficient. I will follow Melanie's queue and cut you off after 45 seconds. I see... they're in the back.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hi. Thank you everyone for coming to speak today. I wanted to follow on actually from the last panel, that it didn't actually address-- address what I was thinking about last panel that would apply now. The United States and the Western world in general has been promoting this normative policy agenda to promote democracy in order to develop relationships with the Global South. And like earlier panelists mentioned, the United States has typically been more concerned

about hard security aspects of national security or foreign policy in the Global South. And I'm specifically thinking about North Africa and the Sahel region that you just mentioned. At what point does the United States foreign policy normative agenda of soft power and relationship-building conflict with the harder aspects of its security policy in a way that itself becomes a national security gap?

FELTMAN: Danielle, and then Vanda. I wanna ask both of you to make some comments.

RESNICK: Yeah, that's a-- that's an excellent question. And I think that's a real key tension that we see. You know, even with the example I just gave about about Niger, you know, where you-- democracy is messy and can be violent, you know, and can can have a lot of backsliding to it. And that is very uncomfortable for the security community, right? So even though there was kind of public support for the most recent Gabon coup after, you know, a lot of corruption and democratic backsliding there, I mean, there are concerns now, what does this mean for some of our security operations in the Gulf of Guinea, you know, from the U.S.? And so I think that is, that's a long-standing tension. Some have argued for some of our, kind of Department of Defense support in the region to be a bit more expansive. Its focus thus far on a lot of counterterrorism efforts and there's been a push to kind of make that broader, to be looking more at kind of civil-military relations, looking at mechanisms of conflict-revoluti-- resolution and kind of deeper, more fundamental governance issues. Because, I mean, three of the coup leaders in the region were trained through U.S. Department of Defense pogroms, and they use the counterterrorism rhetoric to justify ousting elected leaders. So, I think, you know, there's a key tension there, but there may be kind of scope to broaden what the Defense Department in particular is doing in its focus in the region.

FELBAB-BROWN: Well, certainly the tension between the U.S. security objectives and wide set of other objectives, including normative, like democracy and human rights, runs the course of U.S. foreign policy over many decades. And yes, the United States can frequently be accused of being hypocritical. I would say that the definition of hypocrisy is like paying homage to virtue. The world, the geopolitical world in which we find ourselves today, of course, is-- there is a very large part of the world where the vice no longer bothers to pay homage to virtue. The alternative relations that countries like China and Russia — through Wagner and sometimes directly — are promoting is a very blatant embrace of authoritarianism. Sometimes even providing services to repress human rights, to repress political opposition. And while the expansion of the BRICS should not be understood as solely predominantly anti-American, and while the BRICS, I think will find it difficult to say yes to each other

on a whole set of issues. What it does provide, is greater ability to say no to the U.S., including on issues of human rights and democracy. So, I fear that quite apart from the faults and mistakes and wrong balancing in U.S. foreign policy, we will find ourselves in the world for years to come where issues of democracy and human rights promotion will be found difficult to uphold.

FELTMAN: Women in the white. Yes.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: About the sanctions again, because it was an answer that you gave, and it was very interesting. You said that the Indian refineries are engaged in negotiative position, about the bargaining position, and I suppose that was one of the metrics that the the American diplomats are counting. Do they count? I'm a European and I'm a Greek. And I well, I was involved back in Greece very recently with the Greek shipping community. So, what I'm saying is, to start with, the U.S. has no fleet to carry its LNG or even the important merchandise. So, one parameter that you probably — the American diplomats — don't count is, how much is the cost of transportation. So once they arrive at India, then they have to move everywhere else. So, the cost for Europe, and as a Greek I know very well, the fuel has gone 4 to 5 times up. So, with very low salaries. Also, we have a huge immigration problem, all the South European countries. So once something starts and you start with the sanctions, there are other metrics that I hope that you take under account.

GROSS: I think I'll just respond to that very briefly and say, yes, there was no way this was going to be a costless measure, even though we're trying to keep that oil flowing onto the global market. The fact that that you want to think that the system was largely optimized beforehand, that oil was going to the place, the closest place is the least expensive places for it to go. And by changing this, by changing where Russian oil goes and how it's paid for, we have, in a sense, deoptimized the system and made things more expensive. Tankers are traveling further, as you're describing, and this is definitely not cost-free for us. And I think we do sometimes try to pitch it as if it is, whereas it isn't. And I think, like sitting and looking at the Greek shipping industry, is one of the places where you're seeing how the system is deoptimized and one of the costs this brings.

FELTMAN: More questions in the back, over here.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Okay, sorry. Hi. My name's Christian. I had a question just about the Democratic backsliding that was talked about a couple minutes ago. There was a similar tide that happened during the the Arab Spring in 2011. There was —I remember studying it at my first college — there was one scholar, Ava Belen, who wrote an essay about considering the robustness of

authoritarianism, and she used some factors in economies across the region. And this was probably ten years before it happened. Some factors across the region like unemployment numbers, youth bulge numbers, access to public services, and some other things to essentially predict a breakdown, a massive breakdown of democratic government in that region. And there was no time period. But then after 2011 and 2012, 2013, she wrote, "Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism," where she essentially said in 20 pages that she was right. And that was the only time I ever saw that happen, you know, studying political science. To your point about making like some some sort of anticipatory mechanism in West Africa or in these regions that are now backsliding democratically, is there a way that we can implement that framework across comparative analysis or something to anticipate these trends across regions? Because for me, as somebody who's part African, you know, it's not easy to see that that's going to happen. But it's much more apparent to me that that some of these factors like unemployment, food, infrastructure, all this stuff will lead to a breakdown. But for other people, it's much more difficult. I think she was somebody who looked across contexts and made that sort of work.

RESNICK: Yeah. So, there's certainly kind of what we call demand side and supply side, you know, drivers of these dynamics. And I think some of the ones you're talking about are, you know, the kind of demand side, that kind of socioeconomic dimensions, the demographic dimensions, unemployment, youth bulge, etc. But we, you know, we have those dynamics across much of the region and we have some pretty robust democracies, you know, despite that, if you look at Ghana or Senegal or Zambia, for instance. So, I mean, when I was talking about being more kind of anticipatory, it was also thinking about the supply side. And I guess because I'm a political scientist, I look more at kind of the party system than what some call the political settlement. So, what are kind of some of the, you know, dynamics across political parties? How institutionalized are they? Where are the risks amongst elites? Where do they get their resources from and their funding from? You know, some some countries in the region have political elites who often own the major businesses in the country, and they're able to kind of continue buying off opponents. And when that collapses, you see a lot of friction. So, kind of thinking more on those supply-side issues was what I was alluding to.

FELTMAN: I really think-- I think that we better close because we're coming to the the end of the session. I don't think there's time for one more question. So, I'd like to ask everyone when the

session ends to stay in their seats because the next session will start right away. But in the meantime, could you please join me in thanking the panelists for their interventions and thoughts.

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WEINBERG: I'm David Weinberg and I have the honor of introducing Howard Buffett, who I've had the pleasure of knowing for the past eight years. Howard has a long-standing commitment to the issues that are being discussed today. His foundation, established 24 years ago, is focused on food security, conflict mitigation, combating human trafficking, and public safety. I'm going to share with you just a few of the things in the first two categories that Howard has worked on over the past few years. They include training youth in Rwanda in modern agriculture to help develop modern irrigation infrastructure, improving soil in El Salvador, improving the treatment of farm labor in North America, improving conservation agriculture in Ghana and Rwanda, and Central America. The work you're going to hear about in Ukraine was a natural extension of the foregoing. At one level, Howard is a farmer and in the great tradition of American farmers, helping neighbors in need. But Howard's neighborhood is larger than most of ours. He's also worked in conflict mitigation in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Colombia, and Western Sahara. You're going to see some pictures that Howard took, and they reflect not just the unflinching eye of a photojournalist, but rather someone observing the biblical injunction that when you see suffering, do not look away. Howard did not look away and has done his best to help. Often going in harm's way to do so. But a warning, some of these issues mean some of these images may not be appropriate for more sensitive or younger viewers. So with that, I'm honored to introduce Howard Buffett and our own Michael O'Hanlon, Brookings essential scholar. So please welcome them to the stage.

[Video Plays]

O'HANLON: Howard, thank you. That is so moving. And I, I think you managed to capture the beauty of Ukraine and Ukrainians and their spirit and courage and resilience, and also the horror of war, all in a short and very moving video clip. I'm a little concerned about losing my composure, so I'm going to get to a question quickly, which is, can you please tell us about your-- just start by telling us a couple of your experiences in Ukraine, especially near the frontlines. I've been to Ukraine as well. We were both there this month. But the difference is you've been there nine times since last February and you usually travel near the fighting and obviously you capture a lot of the images and the, you know,

just the poignancy of the fight. What struck you the most out of any of these? Just tell, if you could, a story or two. I don't want to make this a highfalutin question. I'd like to just hear you talk about your travels and a memory or two that most stick with you.

BUFFET: Well, I think that it's hard to describe the destruction and the devastation without seeing it. And I've seen a lot in my lifetime and been in a lot of conflict areas, but Ukraine is at a scale that is pretty amazing. And, you know, when when the invasion happened in 2022, I realized pretty quickly the impact it would have on food security because of the work that we do in other places. And so, I started trying to figure out how do we get there, how do we learn, how do we meet the right people, how do we build relationships? And so, you know, I realized at that time it's going to be the largest humanitarian crisis in my lifetime. And unfortunately, well after a year and a half, I believe I'm witnessing the largest failure in leadership in my lifetime. I do not understand how this country has not fully recognized the impact of what this war is going to have on our country and what it's going to have globally, and the fact that we have hesitated and been slow.

And so, the stories, I think, when you ask that question, are actually the soldiers on the front line that tell me we show up at a at a high margin location and they have no ammunition. We show up at a howitzer location, they have two shells. We show up in another high-margin location and explain, "Well, we got the the rockets this time." And they dial us back, "We can only shoot them 67 kilometers instead of 82," which we were able to do last time because of the software. And the constant frustration of how they're doing everything they can to protect their country, and they need more. And and the bottom line is that they're fighting for their survival. They realize that if they don't die on the battlefield, then if Ukraine falls, they're going to die anyway. So, they don't, they don't see it as a choice. They don't have a choice.

O'HANLON: You know, that makes me want to ask you about your relationship and friendship with President Zelensky, who you've gotten to know well, and whom you and I were privileged to interview by Zoom back in the summer. And I think if you could comment on this, I think you just captured why, when we hear President Zelensky speak, we hear gratitude for all we have done for what he's up against. But we also hear the occasional, usually well-camouflaged but still unmistakable complaint. And we saw it in spades at the Vilnius summit in July when he tweeted that it's absurd how there's no pathway to NATO membership. But I think more generally he feels, yes, the

West has done a ton for his country, 200 billion in combined assistance over the last two years, and yet it's still not enough. Is that sort of the way you feel--?

BUFFET: Yeah, but at the end of the day, if it's not enough, it's not enough. So, you either win or you lose in this case. And so, the stakes are as high as they can be. And, you know, I think it's a really astute, you know, point to make because you've seen Zelensky's approval rating drop in this country. And that obviously comes from him banging away on, he needs more. And he does need more. And there's things that we should have given them that we're giving today, we should have given 12 months ago and in a more quantities. And when I think about NATO, I think, you know, if — and you have some great people at Brookings that have written about this, you know —if you understand Putin, and he's given you plenty of history to understand him, then when you show weakness or you play into his hand the way I think the United States did at the last NATO conference that you reference, you are just emboldening him. And so, when he sees the fact that either NATO allies aren't completely aligned or he sees that the United States is blocking a fast track to NATO — which could have been defined a lot of different ways, you know. It doesn't-- it's not going to happen during the war anyway — but, you know, there are still things that could be done during the war. And we may find that we have to do things in a year from now that we never thought we were going to do today. And having the-- knowing the fact that Putin won't stop, and I think that is it's as much of a fact as you can state without having it happen. He'll be on the doorstep of Ukraine falls. He'll be on the doorstep of Europe. And this country will be making a decision — which I don't think there's a decision to made.

We certainly can't abandon our our most important allies. So, we'll be fully engaged. And, you know, right now, I mean, it's it's almost hard to understand, for me anyway, how how someone can complain that we've spent 5% of our defense budget helping Ukraine. It's like that's the best 5% we've ever spent. I mean, our guys aren't fighting. Our lives aren't at risk, and we are-- and Ukraine is actually on the road. I mean, there's a long way to success, but they have proven that they can hold their own with the Russians and they have destroyed — you know, there's different numbers — they've destroyed a significant amount of the Russian military. And they're doing at the cost of their lives, not our lives. So, I don't understand how people don't see that.

O'HANLON: Keeping with the same vein of questioning and discussion, is your main concern, if we don't provide greater amounts of aid or if we actually start reducing or even cutting off

aid in the foreseeable future, are you worried more about Russia actually regaining offensive momentum and taking much of Ukraine, or are you are you worried about Ukraine simply being unable to liberate the roughly 17% of its country that Russia still holds? In other words, are you worried that this is just going to stalemate, or do you think Russia could actually regain the initiative and take much of Ukraine?

O'HANLON: Yeah, I think that's a concern because if you look at how Russia pushed the Germans back in World War II, they put a hundred thousand people, they put a hundred thousand soldiers--sorry, they put another hundred thousand soldiers. So, if you look at it from the standpoint that Russia has the ability to kind of overwhelm Ukraine at some point in terms of numbers of soldiers if they have the time, they're going to continue to rebuild. And they're not just rebuilding. I mean, to me, this is one the most obvious things that that that policymakers looking at this should be concerned about. If you-- if you had said to me three or four years ago, "You're going to have Syrian mercenaries, you're going to have mercenaries from Chechnya, you're going to have ammunition coming from North America or from North Korea, you're going to have Iran sending drones and helping to build drone factories in Russia, and they're all going to be part of a fight going on on the European continent." You wouldn't ask me what I had before I went to bed and what dream I had. I mean, like, you know, it just it it wasn't conceivable. And so, if you just look at those pieces and you think about where that's going to lead globally if Ukraine is not successful, it changes the geopolitical landscape forever. And it, it will embolden Putin and he will do anything that he can to keep pushing forward. So if we reduce our support to Ukraine and they start losing ground, which is of course it's possible — you know, I mean, no one wants to think about it, no one wants to talk about it, nut of course, it's possible — and that's why we can't do it. And so, the stakes for this country are so high. And I think if every person, if they had the opportunity to see some of it and understand it and get some kind of an education, they would support Ukraine 100%.

O'HANLON: Well, thankfully, you've made it more vivid today with your excellent photography. I wanted to ask, though, just to keep pushing this point a little bit, because we know this is an acute issue right now in the United States with the budget deliberations and other debates about long-term strategy. Do you feel that, you know, to paraphrase Secretary Blinken and President Biden, we have to do this as long as it takes? Or do you think — let's say we do this for another fair amount of time, couple of years —let's say, at which point if there's still a stalemate, do we start trying to

maybe adjust our aid package, not end it, but adjust it so that it's primarily focused on defensive weaponry? You could imagine a day when we might do that but for 1 to 2 more years. In other words, the question is, how long do we do this if we're just reinforcing stalemate, which is what a lot of people think the war looks like right now?

BUFFET: Well, that's only because you gave me two options that are both unacceptable. So, I mean, you know, we're asking Ukraine to fight a war the way we would never fight it. And, you know, when we went in in the Gulf War, we flew, you know, thousands of sorties over, you know, several weeks, dropping 88,000 tons of bombs before we sent a tank or a soldier forward. Our country would not fight a war without gaining air superiority, and Russia has air superiority. And I don't think it's an overstatement to say that. And so, we're asking Ukraine-- I mean, the idea that you would expect Ukraine to go into a counter-offensive without the right equipment, without the right support., I don't understand the fact that we have no strategy. I mean, our strategy looks like it's one to allow Ukraine to fight and die, but not allow Ukraine to fight and win. That's not a strategy. And I just think if you, the simplest way you can put it is if Ukraine is not successful, people in this room will know people or have people in their family that are dying to fight for NATO. It's that simple. And I think it has to be made that simple, because otherwise, people don't connect to it, and they don't think about it. So, the decisions we make right now are going to determine who's dying in that war a year from now or a year and a half from now. There is-- it's unacceptable to think that we can have some strategy where we just dribble it out and we give a little bit at a time. We don't give them what they need when they need it and expect them to win.

O'HANLON: Thank you. I want to talk a little bit about what your foundation does on the ground. And we're grateful that you and a lot of your team is here with us today and admire what you all do. And you work on demining, you work on getting grain out, you work on other things. I'd like to ask about those details. And I want to then bring in the audience for our final 15 minutes or so. But I want to ask you first one more question about President Zelensky. And it was clear from our interaction with him this summer that you have a great rapport with him. And I wonder if you could just-- he's a fascinating figure, obviously, Time "man of the year." And even if he's somewhat controversial in some quarters, he still is incredibly charismatic and inspiring to most who watch him. Can you tell us something else about him that maybe we don't know as well that you know more from your firsthand friendship that maybe adds to the picture of the individual?

BUFFET: Well, I think that if you look at the president and the first lady and you try to select two people, you know, or two people that you watch on TV, two politicians in this country that you think would step up the way that they've stepped up in a logical, practical, committed way and remain as resilient as they have, and remain as committed to keeping that country together. He's lost millions of people that have left that country, and he's going to need those people to come back when they rebuild. And he's got the best people on the front line dying. I mean, this is a guy who stood up to the largest military in Europe and said, "We're not backing down," when most people, including people in this town, thought it'll be over. I mean, I hate to say it reminded me of our decision in Rwanda, you know. I mean, you know, "It's just going to happen and there's nothing we can do." Well, there's a hell of a lot we can do. And so, I think that the fact that he has been relentless, which has caused him some pushback, but how do you not be relentless when someone is trying to take your country, when someone has raped your women when someone has executed your civilians? I don't see how he can be anything other than relentless. So, I think if he has, you know, irritated some people, good for him. That's what he needs to do.

And the first lady is truly amazing. And some of the ministers, the minister of economy, Kamyshin is the minister of strategic industries now, the guys that operate the railroad, I mean, they have kept this country going, you know, through this war, and they just don't stop. And they work 24/7, and they're-- and because they know what the consequences are. If we, in this country, knew that the consequences were that our children cannot go to school, that 85% of them would have generational trauma, that we know that half of our family is either fighting or going to be killed or getting killed on the front line. If those are the things we would be experiencing, we wouldn't accept that for a minute. And I don't understand how we can't understand what Ukraine needs. And, you know, you can do it. You can do it because it's the right thing to do or he could do it because it's a selfish thing to do. I mean, at the end of the day, you just have to look down the road and say, what are going to be the consequences? And you can have a stalemate. But at some point the stalemate, people are gonna get fatigue and they're not going to get the support they need. And you have to look at that and say, you know, what can Putin do at that point? And I don't want to think about it because I just think Ukraine has to win.

O'HANLON: It's very powerful. Thank you. I'm going to now ask about what you've been doing specifically on the ground, in addition to just gaining this firsthand perspective and sharing it

with us. By the way, I should say your book, your wonderful book, "Courage of a Nation," is out here. And anybody who wants it, you know, I think the deal was if you buy a Brookings book, you get it as a complimentary addition, or just ask if--.

BUFFET: If you don't want to buy his book, call me, I'll send you one.

O'HANLON: That's what I thought he'd say. I was trying to get around that. But it's-- it's fascinating and it's uplifting. It's-- it's, you know, it's it's very sad in sections where the same kind of, you know, imagery of the conflict that you saw on the screen is presented. But also, it's a testament to the beauty of the country and its people. So, I want to congratulate you on that as well. I wanted to ask about two things I know you do in regard to Ukraine. And the first is getting grain out and the second is demining. Could you talk about the grain situation? Danielle Resnick and others on the previous panel just talked about the situation with World Food. In some ways, it could have been a lot worse and still could get worse. But it's all we also know. World food conditions are not ideal. And this is part of the reason and part of the problem. You're trying your best to counteract that. How do things stand?

BUFFET: Well, so I'll just start by saying that we kind of have five buckets that we try to work work from. And we do that because it's very hard to stay focused in a country when everybody needs everything. So, we have agriculture, demining, war crimes, food security, and then strategic infrastructure. And some of the things that you would look at we do, from the outside looking in, it wouldn't all make sense how it fits together. It's a little bit of a puzzle sometimes. But — and I'll answer your question — but to give you an idea, when we started the food kitchen to feed 33 schools in Bucha, kids were going to school. Today they're not going to school. And so, we're building a second one in our case, so now we have to think about, how are we going to make sure every school has a bomb shelter so they can go back to school?

So, you know, it's it's a move-- the pieces are moving, and we have to adjust to that. And so, on the grain side of it, there is not a good answer because Ukraine is so dependent upon the Black Sea exports that they don't have the infrastructure. And it's not just that they don't have the infrastructure, they could actually, through their train system, step it up quite a bit, but then the other ports don't have the infrastructure. So, so you still have to have somewhere to go, and you still have to have somebody that has the storage and the drying capacity and, and the ability to mobilize it and get it into ships. And those other ports are maxed out. And so, it's not a very good situation. And is

there harvesting now? You know, they came off the wheat harvester and sunflowers and they'll start corn pretty soon. And you know, there's no-- there's not, I don't want to say there's nowhere to put it, but there's not very many areas to put it. And if you're a farmer, the last thing you want to do is put your grain on the ground, and there has to be a lot of grain on the ground.

And, you know, on the demining side, that is as much of an economic driver as it is an agricultural driver. I mean, they have to get their agriculture economy back and going. And I will say this, especially coming off the time that that Anne I spent, and our team spent with the minister of economy, who is responsible for the humanitarian demining. Ukraine is going to set a new standard, I believe, for demining. They're going to be innovative in the process. They're going to take risk, not safety risk, but they're going to take risks. And how do you develop a different process? They're going to be innovative in the field with drone technology. They're going to be more flexible, I think, with how they look at mechanical demining and the verification process. I think you're going to see Ukraine come out as a world leader in how you tackle this demining issue. And they're going to have to because they're going to need to.

O'HANLON: One more follow-up on each of those two matters, agriculture and de-mining, which of course are interlinked, and then we'll go to the audience. On getting the food out — and Danielle, you may have to help me here, or Howie — but I think that Ukraine is in the rough ballpark of 30 to 50 percent of pre-war production in export right now. Is that the right ballpark? Are those numbers going to continue to improve, but only slowly? Is there-- you just explained why they can't quickly improve dramatically, but do you expect, you know, Ukraine to cross any particular threshold in the next 1 to 2 years?

BUFFET: Not unless they get there-- some of the occupied area back. They have to have huge success in demining to be able to do that. The chain of the equipment and fertilizer and seeds is not broken, but damaged. They still have to have somewhere to take that grain. And they, you know, they bombed Odessa again last night. So, you look at ravne and Odessa and the, you know, the ports that they continue to hit, that infrastructure is not easy to fix. It takes a while. It takes, you know, it takes expertise. And some of its older infrastructures, now you're trying to integrate new infrastructure with older infrastructure, doesn't always work very well. So, this is not a fast fix. It's just not.

O'HANLON: On demining — and again, correct me if I get it wrong, but we spoke about this a little dinner the other night and I've read and listened to you speak about it before — at one level,

demining technologies are really old fashioned, right, that're in the world today? We really we have to painstakingly find mines one by one, whether it's during the war or after the war. And there's not a way to identify them from remote distance for the most part. And you sort of have to clear them one at a time. First of all, please tell me if I'm right. Second, to the extent you can tell us what you're trying to do about that, maybe some of the ideas you've got with your foundation or some of the ideas you're trying to support as the Ukrainians develop them to try to speed this process up.

BUFFET: Well, no, you're right. It-- it's, you know, and there's a mindset that we're trying to change, that if you are buying something for demining, it has to be demining. We have 33 bulldozers on the water or going into Ukraine today, some of them. And we're sending two more for HALO Trust to actually blow up because we want to see how badly they're damaged when they get blown up. And we want to see what what we can do to fix them. And we're doing some things that I think are pretty innovative in terms of trying to take equipment and find the best attachments. We're buying two million dollars, which if you think about they're just attachments, we're buying two million dollars of different attachments for track hoes and dozers and wheel loaders for HALO Trust to try. And, you know, our mindset — and this is the one that that is really hard to get across to not not just the guys in demining but also our agricultural people we're working with — so we've bought, you know, and now I can't remember, it's 50 or 65 combines. I just lost track. But, you know, and I keep telling them, "You got to get them in Kharkiv, you have to get them to Zaporizhzhia, you have to get them in Kherson," and they're like, "No, no, no, no. We can't leave 'em there. They might get they'll get blown up, you know. They'll get hit by a missile." And it's like, "I'll buy you a new one." I said, "This is where the farmers need the help. This is where you have to go. This is where the equipment has to be." And so, when you look at demining, I keep explaining to these guys, safety first. Nothing that I say is anything other than saying safety first. But I don't care if you blow up some of the stuff we buy, if it gets damaged, if it doesn't, you know, and we have to replace it.

We're going to have to go-- to see Ukraine successful, we're going to go at a pace, that is a new pace, that is a faster pace. We're going to have-- we'll have to integrate technology where we can integrate both, you know, the verification process with equipment that can move quickly, and probably a satellite controlled, in terms of some kind of auto track system. We have a drone over there right now in the field in Kharkiv, that after having seen other drone demonstrations on this trip, we know it is way advanced in terms of where we are. It's not affordable, but we have to first get the technology

right and then figure out how to make it affordable. But we have real-time mapping. So, so when you're running this drone, no one goes back and downloads stuff and looks at it. You're looking at a pin on a map. You're looking at the longitude and latitude. You're looking at a photograph it pulls up, says, this is this is a PM-- PMN1 or this is a TAM62 or whatever the mine is. And so, this is the beginning of that, okay? I think that you're going to see innovation and integration and demining for the Ukrainians that has never. Why? I don't think I know it. It's gonna happen.

O'HANLON: They're an amazing people. I mean, you're struck by the entrepreneurship and the creativity when you spend time with them. And I've had the good fortune of being there now three times in my life, just twice in the last year. And it's something. Thank you for sharing your experiences. Let's go to all of you. We've got about 15 minutes, and we'll start again with Antoine and then work the room.

BUFFET: No difficult questions.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Let me start with saying that I have, of course, tremendous admiration for what Ukrainians have been doing and what an organization like yours has been doing. But I have two, I'm afraid, difficult questions. One is, if you believe in a successful offensive is really the only way — what would be called like a Hail Mary offensive, let's remember, from Iraq — going around, because going through seems to me quite impossible. Second question is, if you analyze it dispassionately, which obviously is difficult, could you say that the U.S. and its allies actually purposefully give just enough military support to get to a stalemate, which possibly could lead to negotiations because they simply don't believe that a true offensive can be successful because of all the things-- because, well, defense lines, no air superiority, etc., and that it risks nuclear war?

BUFFET: Well, if I understood the question right, you're setting me up because I can't tell you how strongly I disagree with what we've done in terms of failing the Ukrainians, in terms of what they need. And I don't-- yes, we are currently setting them up for stalemate, but there's no reason in the world that it has to be that way. And so Zelensky and his team knew what they needed a year ago, and they're asking for it and we wouldn't give it to them. And now we're saying, we're going to give it to them. But, you know, everything is timing. And so, if you think about-- and I believe we could, we could have ended this war in three months or four months if we had decided what we were going to do as the United States and the allies. I honestly believe that having seen everything I've seen and understood how poorly the Russians were prepared in the beginning. We gave them a chance to

regroup. We gave them a chance to think about their mistakes and to learn from their mistakes.

Everybody learn from their mistakes. And so, you know, if we continue to do what we're doing, even if we do it and continue at the level that we're doing it, it's not enough for them to win. And why would we continue to invest in something that we are failing to provide what it takes to win? That's just not very smart. And so, you know, we need to step it up now. We need to give them what they need so that they can gain air superiority.

And if you think about when Russia first came into Ukraine, they had poor communications. They completely misunderstood and misread the situation, thinking of how they would be received. They ran out of fuel. They ran out of food. The morale was low. Any military person will tell you that is exactly when you strike, and we didn't do it. And the Ukrainians were able to hold off, push back. But it is unrealistic to ask Ukraine to fight the largest army on the European continent and do it without the proper tools. And so, we are setting them up for a stalemate right now. And anybody who thinks about our investment going forward should realize that it's a bad strategy to set them up for for a stalemate.

We need to set them up so they can win. Why? Why would we not want somebody else who is putting their lives on the line that is fighting for their sovereignty, their democracy, their freedom? Why would we not want to stand both on the moral ground and based on the principles that this country is about? And then on top of that, why would we not want to make sure that we're not fighting the war in a year or two years? You know, it's just that simple. And unfortunately, in today's world, as you have people-- especially when your candidate for president or Congress or whatever, people want to get in their sound bites, and they want to see themselves on TV and they want to be controversial. They want to do whatever it is. Those activities, those-- that behavior gets people killed and it's getting people killed and it is putting all of Ukraine at risk. And with Ukraine at risk, you are putting Europe at risk. And if you put Europe at risk now, you're going to make a decision at some point in time. As a NATO member, are we going to fulfill our promises to our allies? And I can't imagine that we can abandon the most important allies that we have in the world. And what is that then send us the message to others, whether it's Iran or North Korea or China or wherever it is, what message does that then send and what are the consequences of that? I think if you look I mean, it's amazing how we don't learn from history. I mean, I could-- I could go back and pick a number of things in history that looked just like this or similar enough that you could identify it. And we have

always failed to step up fast enough and strong enough and a lot of times fail to step in at the right time. This-- we missed the right time. Now we don't have time. So, I don't see how we have a choice.

O'HANLON: Antoine, if I could, I'm going to attempt very brief answers that I think are generally in the same spirit, but not nearly with the power and passion. But I think what I would say as a defense analyst is that I don't know how well it will work once we provide the F-16s and the attack comes. But I think we owe it to the Ukrainians to give them a try because, in pure defense analysis terms, it's pretty hard to predict what the effects will be of any additional incremental increase in assistance. But we don't know that they'll fail either. So, my view is I'm agnostic as to what we do in 2026 or 2025, but for now, I do want to turn up the gas myself.

And on your first question, if I could. What I would say is I think you're both generally right. The United States Military would not want to plow through headfirst in this kind of a situation. We'd want to go around, or we'd want to go up and over. But it is worth noting that historically, there have been times where someone did push through. If you look at the 1914 and 1918 battlefields on the Western Front, both of those, even though there were three years in between that were stalemate, largely, those two years were fluid, but-- and they were fluid when no one really had air power, and when the fighting was tough, and the positions were very well prepared, but there was some fluidity. So, it's not impossible to make headway by going headfirst. It's just really hard. The last point, I was just there in a small delegation led by Dave Petraeus, and he's written this publicly as well, so I think I can, you know, talk about it freely. And he and Fred Kagan have argued that the Ukrainians are getting fairly close to the main supply lines in and around the Sea of Azov region. And so if they can get a little bit of a opening and then push through and move 20, 30, 40 miles, then they've got an opportunity to start threatening supply lines into Crimea from their positions. So, that's sort of the hopeful case for this head-first assault approach, which again, is not ideal but has at least a chance.

BUFFET: Well, let me-- Michael, let me just say one thing. The difference between 1914 and 2023 is that this is a war being fought on the field by drones. And so, you have eyes, an ability to react that we've never seen on the battlefield. And they are now determining and using drones as weapons very effectively. And we also-- I don't think I've ever seen a time — and I may be wrong, I'm not a historian — where you could take 40,000 prisoners and use them in a way strategically to try to take out a larger number of the Ukrainian troops. I mean, I just think there's so many things that are different today that it makes it much harder to predict how your moves are going to turn out.

O'HANLON: Fair enough.

BUFFET: You've got to have air superiority.

O'HANLON: Yeah, that's a fair point. So, we've got-- I see two hands. We'll take them together if we could, and then we'll wrap up. Okay. So, please up here in the front. And then we'll go back to the gentleman in the black sweater. No apricot or other fancy colors that I can see, but a very a very nice dark blue shirt here. And there's someone else? Oh, David, also. Okay, so we'll take three and then we'll wrap.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: All right, Karl Golovin. I tried to wear Brookings Blue just--.

O'HANLON: We love it.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Disclosure: my father was born in Odessa in 1912, and it was clearly Russia. So, I may have a internalized bias here, but with the breakup of the Soviet Union and the Russian people shaking off communism, there was a clear promise from the U.S. that we would not push NATO up to the borders of Russia. We would not challenge their security in that way. We've broken that promise. Doesn't Russia have-- hasn't Russia had a legitimate security interest that we have compromised?

O'HANLON: We'll go-- look, let's-- we'll hold up here and I'll get all three and then wrap so.

BUFFET: You think I'm going to remember one question after the other?

O'HANLON: Let's see if I do.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I mean, my my concern is this whole concept that we're gonna--that the Ukrainians are going to win this war and we're gonna extend that type of military assistance to guarantee that, seems to be a course of leading to a much wider war and the possibility of a nuclear exchange. I don't think it's worth that price.

O'HANLON: Okay. And then finally, David. Do you have a question also?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Howard, I know you have a view on the credibility of threats of nuclear escalation. And I think it would be good for you to share that.

O'HANLON: Good.

BUFFET: So, the first question... I don't remember the first question.

O'HANLON: Well, if you want, I'll try that. And then you can come in on my answer, and then I'll be done. So, you're right that there is a complicated diplomatic history here. Apparently, Secretary Baker suggested in the negotiations with Gorbachev that we would not at least put combat forces on

any territory east of where they already were. However, my view on this is that NATO expansion was the wrong vehicle for enhancing the security of Eastern Europe. But to blame us for an unprovoked war of aggression because Russia's pride was hurt by NATO expansion, is going way too far. So, I don't think we made the best-- I think we should have found a new vehicle to enhance the security of Central and Eastern Europe. And I tried to write about this, but — and a lot of my Brookings colleagues disagree with me and think NATO was the better and correct vehicle — but irrespective of where you come down on that, to blame us for this naked Russian assault on Ukraine, we had put no combat forces on any of these territories throughout the entire period of expansion. I just think is an argument and a bridge too far.

BUFFET: Well, I would also argue that it's pretty hard to say that we made a promise. I learned when I was on the county board that one thing that you cannot do is bind a future board. And I think in politics it's the same thing. Politicians can say whatever they want to say. And I think you can go back in time, and you can find — now you can laugh at me that's okay — but but I think you can go back in time and find lots of things that were said, that were changed or not followed through. I mean, we promised-- I mean, look at who signed that back in 1984. We said we would protect Ukraine against, you know, the sovereignty, and so did Russia. Russia said they wouldn't invade. They said they wouldn't cross into Ukraine. So he can-- look you can pick and select any promises you want and try to make your argument. The fact is Russia invaded another country that was sovereign. And that's, I mean, that's the fact. So, the second question is?

O'HANLON: It was a comment. So, you can go to David's.

BUFFET: Yeah. So I'm not the best person to ask about the risk of nuclear proliferation or anything else, because I I'm looking at how I see the pieces as they were if they were to fall a certain way. So, I mean, you can define a world war a lot of different ways, but I think you have Iran and North Korea and Syria, and others involved in this fight already. You have all of Europe involved. You have the United States. That's getting pretty close to world war. I think if Ukraine falls and Putin goes into Poland or — I don't think he'll do that first, I think he'll pick Estonia or something I mean, I think it'll be very clever — but but, you know, once that happens and NATO has to make the decision of what they're going to do, if NATO engages Russia, then I think you have a higher chance of a nuclear experience than if you -- than you do today. No one knows that answer. But at some point, you have to be willing to do what you think is the right thing to do and the smartest thing to do at the time that

you need to do it. And there are consequences. If we run scared — and it is somewhat what we're doing now with Putin — if we run scared of the fact that someone might escalate something, then we will become much weaker, much less of a force in global politics, and we will lose ground in terms of our credibility. So at some point, you make some very difficult decisions and there's been some close calls in the history of this country in terms of, you know, decisions that were made that could have turned out differently. And I look at it probably differently than, you know, I have 12 grandkids and five kids, and and I think about that. But I just look at it from the standpoint that if we are not willing to take some risk and stand our ground, whatever those consequences are, then ask yourself where we're going to be in ten years or even five years, you know. I mean, there are some other things that are going to probably happen in the next five years with China that are going to test us as well. And so, I don't think we have much choice in the situation.

O'HANLON: Thank you, Howard. Before I ask everyone to join me in thanking you appropriately, and I want to again, make a shout-out to all of you who stayed with us all day, all morning, and to Phil Knight, to my colleagues who are up on stage, to Alex and Kara, to Alejandra and Natalie. A lot of people worked hard to pull this off and we're very grateful. But especially want to thank Mr. Buffett, an amazing American, amazing philanthropist. Again, thanks to all of you as well. But please join me in a big round of applause. And we'll see you all soon. Thanks for coming.