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GREAT POWER COMPETITION AND OVERSEAS BASES

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WELCOMING REMARKS:

MICHAEL E. O'HANLON, Senior Fellow and Director, Strobe Talbott Center for Security, Strategy, and Technology, Brookings

PANEL DISCUSSION:

GEOFFREY F. GRESH, Professor, College of International Security Affairs, National Defense University

DAWN C. MURPHY, Associate Professor, National Security Strategy, National War College

ANDREW YEO, Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy, Center for Asia Policy Studies, SK-Korea Foundation Chair in Korea Studies

MODERATOR:

ISAAC B. KARDON, Senior Fellow for China Studies, Asia Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

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O'HANLON: Just because we have two military related scholars on the panel and some of you perhaps as well, I'm not going to actually start early and make sure we wait till three. And now it's three. Welcome to Brookings. Thank you for coming today. I'm Mike O'Hanlon with the Foreign Policy Program. I was one of the contributors to this project, but I want to give Isaac and Andrew Yeo a great shout out for the idea they had and what they've done to bring together this team and study a hugely important question. I'm just here to give one or two broad words of motivation and then turn over to Isaac Kardon, one of the two editors of this book, who will moderate a panel. As you know, we're going to be here about an hour. And by the way, welcome to our new wonderful space. Thank you, Dan, for pulling things together and to other colleagues as well. But the idea of this book, of course, is to take stock of where we are in a changing international landscape, especially with great powers as pertains to overseas military bases. This is an area of unrivaled American dominance for decades, and especially in the post-Cold War world. But things are getting a little more dicey and more complicated. And that's what we're here to talk about today. That really is a competition on.

As many of you know, the United States is also trying to rethink its global posture. This was something Donald Rumsfeld wanted to do 20 some years ago before 911 got in the way and introduced some other priorities. The United States military is now trying very much to get back to this business, but it has company. And whether it's in Djibouti, where there are American and Chinese bases next to each other, whether it's in Africa, where the former Wagner group is active and using various facilities to do its deeds and nefarious ways, whether it is the United States trying to think of where we need to keep bases and where we can sometimes consolidate or let them go. The game is on a new great game, if you will.

And of course, the old adage that generals think logistics, while civilians think strategy, to the extent that's true, it means that bases are hugely important because even though we're not in the old days of coaling stations, we are still in an era where a lot of military systems operate over hundreds of miles more effectively than they do over thousands of miles, where communications grids that are intercontinental may be threatened, but local grids may be survivable. There are a lot of reasons you still want bases. And the Marine Corps has built littoral combat regiments that are intended to be near China and potentially use facilities of varying types to be able to direct surface-to-surface missile fire and other things against, let's say, an intercepted amphibious assault on Taiwan. I think you all know that that's why you're here. Let me just remind you one or two other facts and figures and then get off the stage. Again, the United States is the superpower in this domain.

The United States has about 5,000 military bases around the world. Most of them are here, but there are 500 plus of at least 10 million, $10 million value or ten acres size that are overseas. And we'll talk today about

where they are, how they're changing, what they're used for. But bear in mind that simple fact. The United States also has about a quarter million of its 1.3 million active duty personnel overseas at any given moment, many of them operating out of or stationed on overseas facilities. So this is an enormously consequential topic, and I'm just thrilled to get to sit in the audience and join you and learn from the panel. So without further ado, please join me in welcoming this team.

KARDON: Thank you very much, Dr. O'Hanlon, for the substantive introduction. I think it really tees this discussion up quite well. Isaac Kardon, Senior Fellow for China Studies at the Carnegie Endowment. And it's a pleasure to have my co-editor and co-authors here on the panel whom I will briefly introduce and then get into the discussion. Immediately to my left is Dr. Andrew Yeo. He is Senior Fellow and S-K Korea Foundation Chair in Korea Studies here at Brookings in the Center for East Asia Policy Studies in the Foreign Policy Program. In the middle is Dr. Dawn Murphy. She's Associate Professor in the National Security Strategy Department at the National War College and her colleague on at Fort McNair, Dr. Geoffrey Gresh is a professor in the College of International Security Affairs at the National Defense University. And each of us wrote chapters for this volume. Each of us participated in a series of discussions and workshops both at the Naval War College here at Brookings, and in this iterated process of putting the book together. And so I'm delighted to convene this discussion and talk about our edited volume, which is available on sale outside for those interested. So, the first thing I'd like to do is pose the question, the same question to each of you, and maybe we'll start with Andrew and work our way down and getting at something that Dr. O'Hanlon offered. But the underlying facts and figures for which is that the United States obviously has a huge lead when it comes to overseas basing footprint. There really is no comparison in some fundamental ways. And so I think the question that may come to many minds is what is the nature of the great power competition, such as it is for our first overseas base? And given that big disparity between a huge, highly distributed U.S. basing footprint and the comparatively modest positions of other great powers. And another way of putting this is exactly how are Russia and China in particular are projecting power into regions beyond there near abroad. So, Andrew, maybe kick us off.

YEO: Yeah. Well, thanks, Isaac, for that introduction. And you know, Isaac, you are a collaborator in this project that was maybe three years in the making, so it's glad to say it's glad. I'm glad to see that the project is now out and seeing the light of day. I also want to give a shout out to our team, Brookings Center for Asia Policy Studies, also the Talbott Center for helping put this together. Now, let me get to your question about the nature of great power, competition and bases. And I know Mike had given us some figures. I checked the

base structure report for 2024. So the United States has 545 overseas bases, around 700, if you include U.S. territories overseas and about 80 countries. China has one formally declared one base. It's in Djibouti, but it has 78 ports in 46 countries. Although we've been hearing things like the spy station in Cuba, they might be a base here and there. But the point is I guess, one official base versus 545. Russia has around maybe 20 overseas bases, mostly in the former Soviet republics. They have a few outside in Syria. They were looking at bases in Sudan, Mozambique in some places. But that's they've given that probably second thought after the Ukraine, their invasion in Ukraine. So, the point is there's huge disparities and it looks like there's not much of a contest for great power competition. But if we break down great power competition into different regions or different theaters, I think the nature of competition actually looks competitive. And I think that's one of the key points that we want to make in this volume. That strategic competition between the United States, China and Russia manifests itself differently in regions, differently across regions with each great power. And so, there's this variation in different regions about how great power competition plays out. And let me just give one example. In the Pacific and Indian Ocean. China has invested in or built massive ports in countries like Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Cambodia and, you know, the Chinese, you can be damn sure that they're going to want to protect their billions of dollars in infrastructure and investments they want to maintain. They want to ensure that they maintain access to sea lanes that are vital to their national interest, that for their economy, for their regime stability. So it's not far-fetched that these ports could be seen. They could be used for dual use, civil, civilian, military purposes. And that might threaten the freedom of navigation. Or restrict the use of sea lanes for the U.S. and our partners. So, you can see that even though China doesn't have any bases officially, if you start thinking about different regions or theaters, competition may look different. Now, I shouldn't be speaking too much about points. The real expert on Chinese port points is sitting to my right, so I'm sure he's going to want to jump in. But let me stop there and turn it over.

KARDON: And let me say before turning to our two friends here that they're both speaking in their personal capacities, is not representing the Department of Defense or National War College, National Defense University, please.

MURPHY: Thank you. So first, thank you so much to Brookings for having me here and wonderful editors for the volume. I should say that the chapter that I contributed was focused on basing in sub-Saharan Africa. So my comments today are really going to focus on that. Some of my other works looks at Middle East, but my comments are on sub-Saharan Africa. And so the way I tend to look at this is looking at great power interests broadly and then thinking through what the kind of consequences are for looking at basing.

So, from a China standpoint, I would say in sub-Saharan Africa, China envisions itself as a leader of the global South. I would say it is Africa's sub-Saharan Africa's most important economic partner now. So, if you look at trade, it's the number one partner. If you look at FDI, it is already for foreign direct investment flows exceeded other powers as well as if you look at foreign direct investment stocks, it's equal to the U.S. So we're at this inflection point where I would say China is now the top economic partner. It's also an important political actor that uses a broad range of foreign policy tools, from cooperation forums to special envoys, strategic partnerships, Belt and Road, bilateral relations, you know, a very robust suite of tools. And sub-Saharan Africa is also a really important arena for China's broader initiatives in the Global South and throughout the world broadly. So Global Development Initiative, Global Civilization Initiative and Global Security Initiative.

All that said. On the military side, China's footprint is quite limited. It has the Djibouti base that's already been mentioned. It participates in peacekeeping. It participates in anti-piracy activities off the Gulf of Aden. It sells low levels of arms. But overall, it's not a large military footprint. And so, as a result of these interests in the region, China really is focusing its basing on securing access to resources and markets, safeguarding its citizens and businesses. And may and I want to emphasize may, because I think it's too early to really know at this point, based on the empirical information that we have, may pursue the ability to project military power into the Indian Ocean, into the Atlantic Ocean, to support future conflict scenarios with the U.S. or others.

That's China. Russia is a very different type of actor in sub-Saharan Africa. It has very limited economic and political interactions. It's primarily a security actor. And I'm going to borrow some of the words of one of our other contributors, Emily Holland, about Russia being opportunistic and profit seeking and destabilizing a very different approach. It's the top conventional arms supplier to the continent. And as was already mentioned, the Wagner group has now morphed into Africa course, but it's providing mercenaries and now more state-run entities in to support various regimes. And it's in the past pursued, pursued bases. But those seem to be relatively paused right now in light of Ukraine.In the longer term, Russia may have interests in projecting power in the Red Sea. But I don't think that that's an overwhelming interest right now.

And so finally, I'm not going to say a lot about the U.S. because I assume our audience knows quite a bit about the US, but it still has a robust, although it's less than China. It still has a robust economic presence as well as political ambitions and its security interests. You're well aware of protecting the stocks and counterterrorism, responding to humanitarian crises. But another piece of the U.S. approach to the continent increasingly is the desire to compete with China and Russia. And this term is framing it in those ways. The basing again, I won't go into detail on, but we have a permanent base in Djibouti as well as a number of troop deployments throughout the continent to support counterterrorism.

So, with all that said, I would say compared to other regions, sub-Saharan Africa is not a strategic priority for China. Russia or the U.S. and other regions are much more important. So, I think we need to think about that in comparative context. Thank you.

KARDON: Thanks.

GRESH: Thanks very much. Congratulations to everybody here on a really, you know, fantastic book that came together with a lot of hard work and efforts. So, I'll start first related to your question, which I cite in the in my particular chapter that primarily focuses on Europe, a book by J.C. Sharman called "Empires of the Week." And the reason why I like this book is he talks about the European expansion, the 17th century pushing eastward. And basically, his argument is that the European powers were weak powers, especially as they pushed deeper into the Indian Ocean and East Asia, setting up treaty ports, of course, using a kind of small military footprint to then, you know, get at their mercantilist interests. And I think, the parallel, albeit imperfect at some level, is important too, because seeing China not push globally, but certainly into the Indian Ocean, into Europe, to the Mediterranean, etc., is very much a small footprint leading with state operated corporations. Very parallel to the British East India Company, to the Dutch East India Company. And so I think that's a way to kind of better for me at least, to understand and appreciate what's going on.
The second thing I'll say related to that, a couple of weeks ago, I had the opportunity to travel to China as part of the Mingde Strategic Dialogue hosted by Renmin University. And it's been several years since I'd been pre-COVID, so getting to see kind of some of the changes have taken place. One of the things that hit me first and foremost is that, you know, certainly you read, but then actually getting to experience and see the power of information. China today is a cashless society, and it's all run primarily through two apps: WeChat and Alipay. And everything social media, news, feed your identity, your bank, whatever it may be, is all run through that. And that's just, you know, facing its own right. 1.67 billion users as of the end of '23 for WeChat, 1.3 billion users for Alipay. If you look at the Huawei 3 billion users with phones, etc., there's a reason why, of course, there is a concern with internet in the United States.
But then couple that with the strategic point which I'll get to, and that is thinking about the submarine cables that line the ocean floors. At the moment there are around 532 submarine fiber optic cables that line the ocean floors that connect more than 95% of all our information financial flows, telecommunications, etc. all run through the cables. In the next couple of years, that'll be up to 600. The Chinese have been very strategic about laying these cables at a lot of these port cities that Isaac and others have looked at. Laying

the infrastructure to come up in into a given port and then being the internet provider for a given country and the apps and so on and so forth. You get where I'm going.

So to me, what really came home was seeing that the information sphere, at some level, the hard power almost isn't as important at this point because it's geoeconomics and it's the power of information. And the Chinese just have such an amazing kind of pushing outward. And I think getting at your you know, the larger part of your question, Isaac, is how do you project your influence? It's through the power of the internet and just seeing live and then having traveled to a lot of places throughout the Indian Ocean, the European Union, etc., you put it together and it's it's very impressive, to say the least. So that's China. We could certainly talk more about that.

Russia, just briefly, I think in the European theater, of course, already having bases and the ability to kind of as I put in the article, you know, be more of a spoiler at some level. But I think also to holding exercises jointly with the Chinese and they've been doing that for the last five or six years through the joint sea exercises, most recently now in September, this Ocean 24 exercise, which included something like 400 vessels, 90,000 troops. Not only how just in the, you know, European, Western Eurasia, but also in East Asia, too. And this shows kind of this constant interaction with the Chinese, a projection of certain power. And that's one way is certainly maintains is, you know, trying to instill fear, but also to say we're still in the game despite certain setbacks in Ukraine, for example. So that I'll stop and pass it back over.

KARDON: Thanks. Well, appreciate these varied views on what the nature of the competition is given again, the sort of quantitative disparities. And one thing that I'll emphasize here is that in framing this book, we're very much focused on, as was mentioned, particular regional manifestations of this competition. And we felt like that actually helps you isolate and identify some of these other competitive elements. And it's not just a question of projecting combat, you know, readily deployed military power. We're hearing a diverse set of ways in which different types of infrastructure, perhaps not just military bases, enable that. So, I made stick with Geoff for a little bit on this. And you he gave us sort of a comparison between the roles that Russia and China are playing. But I wonder if you could give us an even more give us even more on that. And particularly you talk about Russia as a naval spoiler in the region, in particular in the Black Sea and the Med, and I think to some extent the Arctic in the Baltic. Whereas you talk about China as playing a softer security role. And I think we heard some of what that is. But I wonder if you could unpack that for us a bit. And yeah, over to you.

GRESH: Thanks very much. So, I think the really interesting piece related to the spoiler piece. It goes back to one of the historical again, historical comparisons that I'd like to make is that for Russia in particular, a lot of what it's doing is aligned with is the (speaking in French) or the Jung school, the 19th century French and the French at the end of the 19th century were kind of seen as the weaker power and so relied upon smaller submersibles that were maneuverable that could really go toe to toe against larger powers like the British or the Germans, etc.

And so I think seeing how Russia has continued to invest in its submersible capabilities to be very much the spoiler pretty effectively, and one of the examples I use in the chapter is this their GUI, which is their National Oceanic Research Directorate. They have access to nuclear subs and other research vessels. And it gets at this kind of the challenge of the dual use nature of a lot of these activities and how the Russians, in particular, have been quite effective of using this to, you know, to map undersea, to look at the different cables. There have been some, you know, certainly sketchy cable cuts in the European theater, for example. And it's hard to patrol. And so I think that this has been painted for the Russians to maintain their effectiveness. And of course, on top of that is, as I mentioned briefly, they still have bases that are, you know, legacy of the Soviet era, but developing the anti-access area denial capabilities that kind of create in small oceanic maritime zone, such as the Baltic or the Black Sea or the Eastern Mediterranean with the help of Syria, it can still ensure that it could shut down communications or it could kind of, you know, paralyze a given ship if something further breaks out. So, this enables the Russians to be actually quite effective in the larger maritime domain.

When it comes to China. Yes, you know, the mention of the information, but also investing in ports, I think is something at the moment that they control about a 10th of all of European ports, the cargo that's being put through because of very smart geoeconomic investments. Where you start at the Piraeus is a great example where I think this sort of like 40 percent share. And then over time, more came open and, you know, basically overnight you had a 55 percent or more stake in the in the port. And to be able to kind of control that and squeeze out some of the other operators was rather quite effective.

I will say that the Europeans are, you know, certainly split on looking at China particular. But one thing I was fascinated to read about this summer is in July, the European Commission put out this directive on corporate sustainability and due diligence and where the Europeans are really wrestling with how do we handle a lot of these state run corporations, and they're getting out through sustainability and human rights as a kind of a back door way to potentially control, you know, China's kind of dominance, especially a lot of topics of conversation and not necessarily driven to the ports per se, but is, you know, electric vehicles coming in. And how do you manage that, especially for a lot of automobile makers across the European Union? But

nevertheless, the Chinese have you know, it's not necessarily about hard power per say, but investing economically and having a really strong, you know, point of access into the much larger markets and arena that Europe offers.

KARDON: Thank you. And I guess I'll add on the question of Chinese ports, as I've been invited to do so, that one of the things that colleagues and I have tried to emphasize in a number of studies on the subject and this is particularly relevant in Europe, is that you really want to avoid mirror imaging the way that the United States has thought about bases and commercial ports and recognize that a port is an intrinsically dual use piece of infrastructure. Anybody here, a surface warfare officer or their area that the SUO community knows this well, your'll call in civilian ports all the time to refuel, to resupply, as they say, liberty is a mission and getting a crew off the off the ship and ashore for a warm bath and a meal is important, too.

And this is not the same thing as saying, you know, now that China said running through Chinese terminals, something like 10 percent of international trade flows into Europe, sounds about right. That doesn't mean that they're all de facto bases or bases in waiting. It's more that we see with increasing frequency. The PLA navy making friendly calls, sustaining its logistics, being able to operate in places like the Mediterranean, the Baltic, the Arctic and the Atlantic, and not necessarily project high end combat power. But this gets to the point that I think we're all circling around here, which is that the competition is not entirely symmetric. There's not some obvious risk, say, in the Middle East that if the U.S. Fifth Fleet were to leave the Persian Gulf, that you'd have a PLA Navy Fifth Fleet supplanting it. I'd say far from it. They're concentrated in the Chinese case on contingencies for war fighting in their immediate near abroad, particularly in the Western Pacific. Similarly, Russia is engaged in actual war in its near abroad and their strategic focus is going to remain there. But thinking about the different ways they're projecting power and not limiting your conception of power to high end power projection for combat operations, I think is part of the discussion we're hoping to facilitate.

Enough for me. I'd like to hear more from Dawn about Djibouti, which falls in your AOR. And you've done a lot of research on this. And of course, this is the first and only declared play base overseas. I think I would add the Port of Ream in Cambodia has an undeclared base. It's now had Chinese PLA navy warships docked there for several months and the facility was built by the Chinese. And that's a relationship that is permissive of Chinese military operations. But let's posit that this is the only declared base and another one that has been discussed as being somewhat closer to possibly being realized is also in sub-Saharan Africa, on the Atlantic coast, in Equatorial Guinea. And so it strikes me that sub-Saharan Africa is a rather disproportionate focus either for China from a demand side or maybe from a supply side, as in there are more opportunities for basing in Africa. And I'm wondering if you could tell us why you suppose that is and

maybe to the extent you have time to reflect on some of the implications for the U.S. and its regional strategy.

MURPHY: And actually going to be a bit contrarian in that in thinking through your question, I would actually argue that sub-Saharan Africa for basing is not a focus for China. You bring up two examples, right? If we look at the Department of Defense Military power report, there's a long list of countries around the world. Right? But Djibouti, as we all know, that really was driven by a lot of the interest that I described earlier, wanting to protect the stocks, participating in peacekeeping operations, humanitarian assistance, evacuating out citizens. But I would also say that China chose Djibouti, or at least I argue that part of why China chose Djibouti was that it was trying to demonstrate that it was a responsible power and it didn't want to be seen as having that unilateral presence either by the U.S. or, more importantly, by countries on the continent broadly. Right. So, I think China's being quite careful. You brought up the Equatorial Guinea example. Obviously, DOD has speculated and has expressed concern, very specific concern, especially regarding proximity to the U.S. and the ability for ships to rearm. And I think that's all important. But when I think about kind of the broader approach to sub-Saharan Africa, China's engagement, it's becoming more and more securitized, but it's much more around counterterrorism. It's more about developing local capacity within countries rather than basing. So, I think this gets back to some of your comments earlier about, I think this whole conceptualization and as basing becomes more and more of a target of criticism from the U.S., I think that also could modify the ways in which China potentially is pursuing maybe less base like capabilities that still serve the purposes.

KARDON: Could you say more about that U.S. response and in particular, implications? Let's posit in addition to Djibouti, China was able to secure some access or basing arrangement in the Gulf of Guinea or Equatorial Guinea or elsewhere. How would you encourage U.S. defense policymakers to think about that challenge?

MURPHY: Right. So given the expressed interests and concerns regarding, again, proximity and ability to rearm, I do think we need to triage and look at the continent express where the most concerns would be. So obviously, that's on the Atlantic Coast, as you described there. Also, additional capability on the slots, more in the Indian Ocean, but that means that we're going to triage in that way. If China ultimately wanted to establish bases in southern Africa, for example, in Angola. I don't think that's necessarily as threatening to U.S. interests. And so I think we need to be careful and that what China hears in our messaging isn't that any base established by China anywhere in the world or anyone in the on the continent is going to threaten U.S.

interests. And part of why I think this is important is what I tend to argue at this point is there's a lot more shared interests than differences between the U.S. and China in sub-Saharan Africa. And I think this is actually an opportunity for us to try to manage relations in a bit more constructive way.

KARDON: Excellent. And I guess I'll note just thinking about slot protection is a mission that is important for certainly for the United States, but increasingly for China. The sort of geography of maritime commerce is undergoing somewhat of a change. Your industry calling it a rewiring, but the huge decline in shipping through the Red Sea as a result of Houthi attacks on commercial shipping there is, of course, rerouting a lot of that traffic around the Cape of Good Hope and coming up that Atlantic coast of Africa and said you know that the focal points in the priorities for maritime security and slot protection are changing. And to the extent that China has commercial facilities, it may be in a position to sustain those types of missions in ways that may or may not compete directly with the United States. So thank you for that answer.

YEO: Can I jump in there?

KARDON: Yeah, please.

YEO: Now, you were mentioning that some of China's interest in an Africa angle. It may not directly compete with the U.S., and I think that's an important point that we had raised in our edited by him and just in conversations that the U.S. first doesn't have the capacity to push back China on every single space where China gains influence. And so in some ways with limited resources and budget, you have to pick and choose your battles. There may even be places where having a Chinese base, at least for the time being, may be helpful. If there's piracy going on in the Red Sea. Is it good for the Chinese to want to patrol that area? So, I think the larger point here is that someone used the word whack a mole. Like every time China comes up with it looks like they're building a base. Should we try to set something up or do we need to have more? Do we have to put more assets or shift our own thinking about basing to match China's growing influence in a particular region? We're saying, no, that's. That's not a recommendation that we give. Of course, we have to be vigilant. But I thought that was a good point that that you made. Sorry Isaac.

KARDON: Thank you. And certainly feel free to anyone on the panel to jump in and correct any misperceptions or continue the conversation. But I'd like to ask Andrew now who, in addition to handling this whole project, also wrote about the about the Pacific and the basing picture there. And I think I'm curious

what you would say to the two U.S. defense planners thinking about how they would use this research to understand how to structure U.S. forces in East Asia, where I think there's sort of a real a genuine conversation going on about what is strategically viable, what is a deterrent sort of footprint. So, what kind of forward deployed force posture, if any, makes sense under the prevailing geopolitical conditions in East Asia?

YEO: Sure, yeah, I'll address that. And I should say that my chapter was I co-authored with Michael O'Hanlon upfront there. And you know, something that he mentioned. Is that, you know, sometimes crisis is usually crisis that breeds change. But in East Asia, it seems that crisis is what leads to continuity for basing. So, we've had these legacy bases and on the Korean Peninsula and Japan. We have some presence in the Philippines. We departed. We left Subic Bay in 1991, but the force posture has remained fairly significant since the 1950s, in part because we still have threats from North Korea, we have China there, concerns about China on the Taiwan Strait. So, the basic premise is that the force structure size that may be right sized at the moment. So, I think it's generally makes good strategic sense for deterrence, for defense to have our positions there.

But we are thinking about the broader Indo-Pacific these days. And that's where you've been thinking about things like, well, what's China's influence in the First Island Chain? Or going even further, the Second Island Chain. And as China has been looking westward, you know, building ports and in the Indian Ocean out towards Africa, whereas what has to change for the U.S. in the Indo-Pacific and now right now we don't really have good access. And in Southeast Asia, for instance, or even the Indian Ocean for that part. And so there's a questions of whether we need to reinforce our positions. We have to move further westward as well. I also think in the in the First Island Chain, we see China's military capacity increasing. And we talk about these artificial islands that have been militarized and gray zone tactics as China becomes as their military capabilities increase in that region, that's going to create, I think, more competition in the Second Island chain and beyond. And so does that mean we have to think about the Pacific Islands? There's been some discussion between the DOD and Micronesia or Vanuatu. I think we have AUKUS so we know we're relying on our allies and the Australians maybe to beef up their defense there. But we do have to think differently. You know, it's where we're past the Cold War and that's where I think we have to think beyond just numbers and like troop size and locations. We have to think about questions about, you know, dispersal and we have to think about how quickly we can deploy forces our troops to other parts of the region. So I, I think it's generally right size if there are ways to get more access further west to Southeast Asia in the Indian Ocean, that would be helpful. I do think we have to consider whether our current posture should make

sense. And we were talking earlier in the green room about Korea. I was saying I don't like saying, as the Korea chair that we have 28,500 troops there to deter North Korea, but does that deter will that deter a nuke? Is that is that a deterrent for a nuclear attack or a missile attack? Do we need greater dispersal? Yes. So those are sorts of questions that I think we should be thinking about for East Asia.

KARDON: Yeah. And I'll note the inimitable Bruce Johns of Brookings wrote a really nice chapter in this volume about the Pacific Islands. But I may just come back to you quickly on this, Andrew, to ask about whether the whether the force structure may be the right size, but just to sort of get on its distribution and in particular, having high concentrations of U.S. forces within what it called the where's the weapons engagement zone? But in particular, when we look at the PLA modernization, there's been a lot of focus, of course, on the development of a blue water navy. But I think coming from Navy, doing research in Navy circles, I think their development of what might be called an anti-navy is the most notable when you start thinking about questions of basing and access and potential contingencies in the Western Pacific. So how do you think about essentially the vulnerability of bases that lie within range of this impressive suite of Chinese missiles, which I think are the primary component of this answer?

YEO: That's an excellent question, Isaac. And I think that's the balance, the tradeoffs that military planners have to think about. On one hand, the most likely contingencies in Asia are on the Taiwan Strait, the South China Sea, East China Sea and then the Korean Peninsula. So, you want to have forces that are close enough there so that they could address, you know, if there's any conflict that breaks out that you can meet that threat right away. But at the same time, you don't want to be vulnerable to Chinese missiles, you know, and so do we need to pull further back? I don't have the answer here. I'm sure there are folks at the DOD that are analyzing our assessing what the optimal level is. But I think these are the tradeoffs that we have to be thinking about as we try to address force posture for the next ten, 20 years. You know, there's still a discussion about, you know, the Indo-Pacific. We've been talking about the pivot to Asia for you know over a decade now. And does our force structure meet? Does it address, you know, what we aim to do with this rebalance or pivot, pivot to Asia? But there's also new wars going on right now in Europe or in the Middle East. And so, will that constrain what we actually do in the Indo-Pacific region? But I think you kind of hit the nail on the head in terms of thinking about future force posture. Where should we be thinking about placing our assets, our equipment, our troops closer to where the fight is? Or do we need to start thinking about pulling back a bit because we're vulnerable to the Chinese missiles or North Korean missiles for that matter?

KARDON: Yeah. Well, hopefully this is the beginning of a of a useful and productive discussion on that and certainly being grappled with. But to the extent we can start to compare priorities across regions, I think we're on the right track. Let me turn to let me turn to Geoff again for a question that comes out of your chapter in which even in the title, you emphasize not just basing, but strategic access. And I think this has come up a lot. And it actually sort of directed at Dawn as well, if you want to take a swing at it after Geoff. But what do you have in mind when you talk about strategic access? And I think you've indicated some of those things. But let me leave it leave it to you. And how should how should we be thinking about that here in Washington when we think about what the priorities should be and what sorts of capabilities and sorts of challenges Russia and China may pose?

GRESH: It's a great question. I think that, you know, first and foremost, one of the things that I put at the end of the chapter is kind of thinking about ideas. And many of them actually NATO has indeed kind of put into action. But I think like a lot of things, really investing more in the maritime standing groups or standing maritime groups that, you know, putting them more on patrol, having more exercises, kind of show of force, you know, the promotion of interoperability and this kind of just, you know, getting at the challenge, of course, as Russia roams around or is in the, you know, subsea component, that the Europeans are very much kind of on top of this. Now, coupled with that, I think this is another point that I laid out at the end of the chapter too is the role of the Coast Guard. And frequently, you know, as we know, even our U.S. Coast Guard is so underappreciated, the small but mighty force that has a critical global presence doing so much, you know, a multitude of different missions. And I think the same is the case for the Europeans of investing the desire and the need to invest more in the European Coast Guard capability, because a lot of these concerns, especially for the subsea, which has been a real emphasis for me, is its law enforcement. It's a violation of territorial seas or contiguous zones or EEZs for that matter. And so being able to kind of enforce from a legal standpoint, upholding the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, in the years, European arena is going to be so vital for the Europeans. And I think the Europeans equally to our own Coast Guard, again, has a multitude of missions, are underfunded, under-resourced. We know the migration crisis has been really the at the forefront of focus for the European Coast Guards. But have it also dip into concerns related to the Chinese as well as the Russians needs to be a top priority to.

KARDON: Thank you. Any thoughts on strategic access?

MURPHY: Yeah. And I guess for me, it's not the highest priority for a number of reasons. So for oil, when I think about sub-Saharan Africa, it's about 17 percents of China's oil imports. Middle East is about 50 percent. Right. So, when you start getting into potential conflict scenarios between the U.S. and China, I mean, that's going to be important. But I don't know if it's going to be the military capability that China has at Djibouti that's going to really shift the balance in that particular situation. So, I'm thinking on the oil front, when I think about minerals, I like a lot of how I think about strategic access in general. The much bigger potential threat and concern is the economic and political relations that China is building with countries throughout these regions that if they're forced to choose in a conflict scenario, that they'd be willing to provide that. And I again, as we get further and further away from China's territorial periphery, it's as I think about strategic access and how different the world would need to look for the U.S. going in, trying to secure resources against the will of states in, you know, on the continent. And just to me, it wouldn't be the highest priority to be thinking through, although it is important. I mean, there's a number of different minerals that China has a significant, you know, very, very much a monopoly forming around, you know, production and acquisition. But I don't think that's necessarily a military problem. I think that's an economic and political problem.

KARDON: So, the connection between kind of developing economic and diplomatic relationships, taking back to your original comments as part of that security strategy, may or may not be a major military component.

GRESH: Okay. I think if I could just add another two to add on, and you had mentioned this, but let's use another anecdote examples. So Piraeus, Greece, which had opportunity to visit and I met with folks kind of overseeing the port, if you will, and they gave the same example that a cruise terminal in the off season can also fit a naval vessel of any sort. And so I think when you think about the strategic access piece of for the Chinese in particular, being able to say, hey, we already more or less control the port of Piraeus, we're going to bring our ships in here for replenishment. And one of the things that is always fascinating to me over the years, asking about Djibouti, always for so many years, the line was, well, is the supply and replenishment, logistics, supply replenishment. And, you know, and then at what point does it change into something else? I think right now, though, it's still is just, you know, the dual use. It's nonthreatening. We're just coming through. That's going to be a growing challenge, especially for places that China has taken over. And most of Europe, it's not the case. Piraeus is the main point of entry that provides that access. But, you know, maybe down the road there'll be other ports. But I think at the same time, Europe is undergoing a pretty dynamic

debate about how we handle the ports. And many have kind of swung back to say, yeah, we need to take a harder, harder stance now.

KARDON: Well, we've reached that time at which it's appropriate to open up to the audience. And we do also have a couple of questions that came in online prior to the event. But let me give folks who laid it out and showed up in the room, the first chop at this. So, any questions for anyone on the panel or for the panel as a whole, please raise your hand. Yes, sir. Wait, wait just a second. We'll get you a microphone and please introduce yourself again. Thanks.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Eric Myers with Cultiva Solutions. I wanted to ask you, you said that in today's world, maybe the hard military bases are not as important as some of the other, you know, the internet and other things you're talking about. Is it time for us to reevaluate and maybe do more in that, or are we doing enough or should we do more?

GRESH: It's a great question. You know, it almost it harkens back to, you know, everybody remembers Donald Rumsfeld and one of his arguments at the time when he was secretary of defense was the lily pad approach. Just having a small presence that you could then be very maneuverable. To be honest, I don't know what the right answer is. Certainly, there are a lot of, you know, big thinkers thinking about what our force posture is like. I think, however, in Andrew kind of references too that, East Asia, Southeast Asia is very much it is large. There is a significant challenge there. And so, you know, it's like all regions are not the same. And so having to think about what our basing presence looks like in each of those, you know, combatant commands, I think is the question of the day. And, you know, and you're seeing I mean, the Coast Guard again, moved a lot of its assets that it had in in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, in Bahrain, and they moved some of them to Southeast Asia. So, I think it's ongoing at a very kind of small level. But I agree with you, again, my personal opinion here of that we do need we do need to rethink how we structure bases, especially historical bases that might not serve the same needs because as Dawn alluded to, right, like there could be ways that the Chinese equally need to have access, you know, through the Red Sea just as much as everybody else in the world does. So, thinking about ways that you can kind of reallocate of very valued resources to other parts of the world.

KARDON: Something just to tack on to there that you're alluding to, Geoffrey, is that, you know, there's a certain path dependance to the way that the United States basing posture has been established and there's

been since probably before Rumsfeld's time, a recognition that these may or may not be that the optimal distribution of forces and there's Andrew may want to comment on this too. The domestic political relationships with our hosts have a lot to do with why you continue to sustain those forces there. And it's interesting from my perspective as a student of China's strategy here that they're starting from scratch and they're electing to pursue a different strategy. Now, I don't think the conditions obtain for them to develop a basing network that is equivalent to the United States, even if they wanted it. But it's interesting that where the United States to start from scratch now, what sort of a basing footprint and posture would we adopt? And I don't think it would particularly resemble the one that we have now. I'll tack back to the original comment earlier comment about the missile threat. But bases are big fat targets for precision munitions and maybe not such precision munitions in ways that they weren't at the turn of last century, 19th to 20th century, when a lot of this started getting set up and certainly through the Second World War and into the Cold War, you needed to be a lot more local to really, you know, to damage an airfield or to make a base a target. And I think China's efforts to develop basing and the fact that they've only developed one in the course of seven years now other than evidently concerted effort, could be interpreted as evidence of U.S. success in denying that access. Or maybe that's not the highest priority and there are other ways that they're looking to operate. Got another question here in the front, and if there's any others in the back, we could take a couple at a time.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Michael Tint, Aeronautical Systems Inc. Strategy ultimately involves a lot of setting resources and deciding where to invest in where, not. If you have unlimited resources, just do whatever you want, wherever you want. And I think the hard part about setting resources is deciding where to put them. It's deciding what to give up, to have them to put there. So the question I'd have for the panelists is what should we be doing less of or where should we be investing less to free up resources to pay more attention to the Pacific?

KARDON: Thank you. Excellent question. And prioritization and opportunity costs. And maybe I'll can I give Andrew first half of this and we'll go down the line if you have anything to say about it.

YEO: It's hard to say. I mean, we were reducing our presence in the Middle East, of course. And I mean, maybe that was the right thing to do. So, we had, you know, because of the Iraq once the Iraq War went down in Afghanistan, we left. But now there's questions of did we did did we need to have more presence there because of the conflict that's erupting. Again, I'm not going to directly answer your question. Is it is a matter of troop size and basis of their ways where we can consolidate? I think we've seen that process on

the Korean Peninsula. You know, we've seen bases consolidate towards hubs and moving towards more strategic locations. The base that is in Seoul is now, you know, 40 miles south in Pyeongtaek. If there are ways in Japan, like in Okinawa where you can consolidate, that might be worth exploring. But yeah, I would defer to some of my other panel panelists for other regions and for Europe, perhaps. I mean, Europe is another interesting case to where we thought we could really pare down forces there. But then because of the Ukraine war and the need for, you know, boosting NATO bases, maybe we don't need our presence, but then we get our allies to provide more, provide more access or use to use their bases. That might be one way of having us consolidate or reduce expenditures and getting our allies to do more. That might be one way of looking at it.

MURPHY: One thing I would it's going a little bit different direction with this, but as I'm thinking through the discussion, I've said quite a bit on Africa, sub-Saharan Africa not being a high priority, not particularly. I don't have that much of a concern about basing, I think the Middle East and other countries where we have significant security partnerships with local countries, that actually poses a different risk. It's not just the buildings associated with the base. It's the potential for us technology to end up in the hands of Chinese actors. And so I think we need to be really careful looking kind of country by country. But again, this gets into the what does the competition look like and what is the purpose of a base? You know, the base may not be about force projection. It's about collecting information. It's about having a relationship with the country that then possibly our technology could be vulnerable. So I'm thinking through very public examples that have been reported on in the news with the Emirates, for example. Right. These are our concerns, though, although the Emirates is something that's been in the news a lot, this is something you could make similar arguments about countries throughout the Middle East, whether it's Saudi or Bahrain or Qatar, etc. I think that that as opposed to countries in sub-Saharan Africa that really don't necessarily have a lot of the technology that we would be as concerned about losing. But we need to think through that in other regions as well.

KARDON: Thank you, Dawn. Before we turn to Jeff, this actually dovetails nicely with a question that came in from online from Clayton Robinson, from the DOD, who asked how could a renewed Chinese effort to put a military base in the United Arab Emirates affect U.S. military access, basing and overflight? So just sort of continuing on that particular case and what else you could share with us about what the what the risks are there and what the consequences would be for the U.S.?

MURPHY: Right. And so I would frame again, the point you to open source reporting on these things. But the risk really is just the proximity. It's the level of sophisticated technology and military hardware that we have in the Emirates versus having a Chinese presence there that could collect more. But I think it's not even just about a physical presence. I think this is something we need to think through in the broader relationships because the PRC doesn't need to have a physical base in a country in order to have a relationship that results in the transfer of technology. So, I think I'll leave it at that. But I think the Emirates is something that's been reported on a lot that could be concerning. I mean, we've had these same concerns over time with Israel right now, that's obviously not the biggest concern right now. But Israel and other partners. And you see, you know, with Saudi Arabia, obviously that appears to be part of what's driving the Biden administration approach to Saudi with, you know, Saudi-Israel relations being normalized, that the concerns regarding Chinese basing seems to be part of that.

KARDON: Thank you. Geoffrey, I want to add anything on this one.

GRESH: One thing I might add is, you know, flip the question on its head and not that you focus on the U.S. per say, but to focus on other allies and partners. And I think you see this a bit with AUKUS of really trying to push the UK and Australia to really bolster their capabilities to offset the larger threats. And then, you know, let's expand out around the horn. And certainly the Europeans, you see more I mean, the Germans sailing a naval vessel through the Taiwan Strait just, you know, the last week or so, there is the UK being more involved, the Italians, etc., etc., knowing that there really needs to be greater cross-pollination and cross - interaction and more types of agreements and alliances. And NATO's certainly keep, you know, shaking the tree to get everybody up to the 2% of the GDP in terms of allocation towards defense. But then also, I think and Andrew mentioned Japan. Japan, I think there's so much more and it already does a lot and it has access to places in Southeast Asia, in the Indian Ocean. It does actually a lot in the way of port development. It's been doing that since the 1960s, which has been really fascinating to learn about. But for example, the Japanese have some of the greatest de-mining capabilities in the world that dates back to after the Second World War when they had to de-mine around Japan. But also then they were used and during the Korean War after. But today they maintain that capability. And there's something where, especially in the Black Sea related to Ukraine, they could come in and help when the time is right to really start demining. So, I think relying upon these other partners and allies also pitching in to play their part is equally part of the equation.

KARDON: So, we have just a couple of minutes left. If there's one more brief question in the audience, we can feel that. Otherwise, I'll take one from online. Any takers? Ma'am, please.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Why not? Thanks. So, my name is Anita Parlow. I'm a former Fulbright scholar in Iceland, and I just finished recently a book on a co-edited book on climate and conflict. The comments that you've been making about what's the purpose of a port? What's the purpose of a base? That's extremely interesting in the context, particularly of cyber and hybrid war. So, is it a collector of information? Is there a need for the kind of military assets that have been classically since post-World War two? I mean, how do you is there a process that needs to be developed that is sort of base world global to rethink what it all means? Given the kinds of shifts that seem to be happening pretty rapidly in terms of cyber. Thank you.

KARDON: Thank you. That's an excellent question. And I guess I'll tack on to it. A question from online, which asked about whether uncrewed systems are posing a threat. Just to add a sort of a new and emerging technologies in the way that they affect this discussion. So, this will be the lightning round. So, respond to that as well as any save rounds that you may have on the general subject. And we can start with Geoffrey and move back down this way.

GRESH: Yeah, no, I think it's exactly correct. I mean, the one thing I'll say sort of and we know this, that the United States still Silicon Valley in particular, still dominates so much of the technology and now the artificial intelligence. But furthermore, when it comes to laying strategic cables, you know, matter has laid cables and Google and Amazon and they're all running cables across the Trans-Pacific because they need and they appreciate that this is part of the game, too. The challenge, however, and all of this, again, is that the Chinese, it's all it's a 1.4 billion juggernaut, to be overly simplistic, where the state and the government and state-run corporations are working in tangent. And so, for the United States to, you know, compete against this, it's a real challenge, you know, when it comes to insurance or just laying the cables. But I made the quick point here too, that we still have an advantage in the cabling sphere and the cable spare sphere. The top four companies, five companies, Japanese there two, the United States—I think there's two—, the Europeans have one. We control of those five companies, 90 percent of production capabilities for fiber optic cables, while Huawei only has about 10 percent when it comes to repair and laying of cables, The Japanese are some of the most dominant and most capable. Whatever line is broken, they can fix it. So, it's all to say that there's capability out there. We still have an edge, but it's really tough competition.

MURPHY: So I think what what I would highlight is first, I agree we need to rethink kind of around the world, every country, you know what that looks like. But I would also just give a word of caution, and this is based on my broader research, but something that I've been seeing over the years in China, in the Middle East, Africa, especially around some of these security issues, that increasingly regional countries are exercising their autonomy in a number of different ways. And often the ways in which we frame this as a zero-sum pick sides dynamic is becoming a very toxic, I would say, narrative in many parts of the world that I look at. And I think we need to be careful at the end of the day on some of these really tough decisions. Let's say we had a country that doesn't have a name, right? But if we're going to really say, okay, this is we've tried this, this is really important. And if you continue security cooperation with China, we are going to break off relations with you in that way. We need to be willing to do that because ultimately countries may not choose the U.S. in the current dynamic. There's a lot of things that are happening that I think is really hurting U.S. credibility. And many of the individuals that I interview at the more elite level, there's a lot of cynicism about bringing in great power competition and strategic competition. And this China's ten foot tall with its base in the coming. And so I think we need to be very careful about that as we rethink this.

KARDON: Thanks, Andrew. Last word.

YEO: Yeah, sure. This is really more a comment about the project as a whole. You talked about Russia and Chinese basing force posture looking different from the U.S,. because they have the absence of legacy basing. And so we've been talking about rethinking the way base, you know, how we should do basing because of new threats. Does it make sense to have large bases? But just to end on a contrarian note, there's still clear advantage that clear advantages to having permanent bases and basing access. The U.S. can still pre-position equipment, deploy foreign troops, gain access rights and train with militaries in ways that I think China and Russia can't. They probably envy what we have. So I think that we still have to remember that there are advantages to having these bases. And where I work in East Asia, Japan, Korea, Philippines, where we do have and bases the sort of support for the U.S. and public opinion towards the U.S. attracts like 80 between 70 and 80 percent all these countries. So clearly we're doing something right. Clearly these countries feel that they want to support the U.S. and the U.S. presence. So, I would just keep that in mind as well. So we're not ready yet to leap too far into the future. But again, thank you. Thanks again for moderating this event, Isaac.

KARDON: Well, thank you all for coming. There are books on sale outside and authors around for autographs if you so desire. And yeah, thank you all for coming and hope to see you next time.