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THE FUTURE OF AMERICA'S INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCES AND PARTNERSHIPS:
WHAT'S AT STAKE IN THE 2024 ELECTION

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MARIANNE H. WANAMAKER

Professor of Economics and Executive Director, Howard H. Baker Jr. Center for Public Policy, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

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THE HONORABLE BOB CORKER

Former U.S. Senator, R-Tenn.

MODERATOR: SUZANNE MALONEY

Vice President and Director, Foreign Policy, The Brookings Institution

MODERATOR: KRISTA WIEGAND

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PANEL DISCUSSION:

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WANAMAKER: Now I'm on. Okay, great. All right, folks, if you'll take a seat. If I could have your attention. I'm Marianne Wanamaker. I'm Dean of the Howard Baker School of Public Policy and Public Affairs here at the University of Tennessee. And it's a pleasure to welcome all of you in the room and also several hundred online who are joining us for tonight's event. And welcome to the final installment of the Baker School's Fall lecture series. Tonight's discussion of foreign policy will round out our examination. Of the issues at stake in the November 5th presidential election. Our goal for this series was to encourage our community to get informed, get engaged and vote. If you missed our events on the Supreme Court or economic policy, you can find recordings of those events on our website Baker.UTK.edu.

The Baker School has partnered with the Brookings Institution to present tonight's program. It's no secret that the United States is at a critical foreign policy juncture with conflicts raging in Europe and in the Middle East in addition to our long-term strategic competition with China, how the next US presidential administration and Congress address these key conflicts and. Challenges will define America's role in the world for decades to come. We have a full program this evening, so please join me in welcoming my friend, presidential advisor and Brookings Senior Fellow Amy Liu to the stage to get us started.

LIU: Well, thank you so much, Marianne and on behalf of Brookings, I just want to thank you to you and your team for such a warm welcome to your campus and for co-creating this important event today. We are thrilled to be here with the Baker School and the broader UTK community. And I have to say, this collaboration also gave us an opportunity to reconnect with a great mutual friend, Ambassador Culverhouse, who is on the board of the Brookings Institution and now on the board of the Baker School. And I think really shares and shows the potential of this great collaboration. For those of you who are not familiar with the Brookings Institution, we are a nonpartisan institution dedicated to helping local, national and global leaders make better decisions and to develop better policies.

And at the heart of our work is a commitment to rigorous analysis and real-world insights. And in that spirit, I just want to say a few words about why we launched this Election '24: Issues at Stake

Initiative, because we wanted to help the public and help leaders make sense of the complex issues confronting our nation. And to illustrate why we believe this is so important, I just wanted to share two statistics from a recent Pew Research Center poll. The first step that 78% of Americans believe there is too little attention paid on the important issues facing the country. 78%. The second is that 86% of Americans believe that Republicans and Democrats are more focused on fighting each other than solving problems. In short, what the vast majority of Americans really want is more policy over politics and more problem solving than partisan posturing.

And so that is why Brookings launched this initiative and why we reached out to the University of Tennessee to organize this forum. We know that the UTK community and the Baker School share the same values of civic education, civic dialog and learning from different perspectives. And if you go to the Brookings Election '24 website, you'll see, you know, you'll find some issue explainers, you'll find some analyzes on broad areas of policy such as jobs, economy, opportunity, government spending, debt, taxes, climate, energy, Responsible AI, and the U.S.'s role in the world. And that latter, as you heard from Marianne, is the reason we are here today. Brookings and Baker School decided that, you know, we wanted to use our collaboration to raise one really pressing policy question facing our nation, which is what the future of America's international alliances and partnerships is, especially in this current environment in which leaders confront multiple national security challenges and a lot of uncertainty in the international order.

And so our hope is, as Marianne said, that you, all of you here in Knoxville, all of those you've joined us virtually today will walk away more informed, yes, better equipped to determine the kind of leaders our nation needs, and I hope you also walk away from our discussions today knowing that even amid differences of opinion and perspectives, there is still can be bipartisan agreement about what is possible. And we could not have a better set of speakers this evening to help us achieve this goal. So let me briefly introduce the first set of speakers that we have today. We have the Honorable Bob Corker, former mayor, former U.S. Senator who served on behalf of this great state from 2007 to 2019. And what's most important for relevant for today's program is that he served as chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and thus has firsthand knowledge of the complexity in navigating global challenges.

So, thank you very much, Senator, for joining us this evening. His remarks will be co-moderated by two experts from Brookings and the business school. First is my colleague Suzanne Maloney, who is Vice President and Director of the Foreign Policy Program. And she is a leading voice on U.S. policy toward Iran and the broader Middle East. She will be joined by Krista Wiegand, Professor and Director of the Center for National Security and Foreign Affairs here at the Baker School, who is a specialist on international relations, focusing on international and civic conflict, conflict resolution and maritime international law. Their conversation is going to be followed by a short panel. But what I wanted to say to all of you is we want to give you a few minutes today to ask questions, both of the opening panel and the one after that. So please, as you listen open mindedly today and learn, is be prepared to ask just a few questions. And without further ado, please join me in welcoming Senator Corker, Suzanne and Krista to the stage.

WIEGAND: Good evening, everyone. Thank you so much for being here. We are very excited to have Senator Corker here and Brookings joining us. So, we're excited to have an excellent conversation. I'm going to start us off tonight asking Senator Corker, why should Americans care about foreign affairs? And this is this is this is not a topic that is often discussed in the in campaign in the campaign season. So why does it matter?

CORKER: Thank you. And before I say anything, I want to thank Lamar Alexander and Amy Culverhouse for their outstanding public service on behalf of our nation. And it has been. And Randy for the great job he's done here, especially on the Knoxville campus. So, with that, think about it. We have 333 and 40 million people who live in America. There's just under 8 billion people in the world. So, we have about 4% of the world's population, and yet we have 26% of the world's gross domestic product. It's phenomenal. I mean, how does that happen? Well, it happens because we have trade around the world that we have free passage of the seas, that we're able to fly over countries, that we're able to travel around the world to do the things that are important for us to generate the standard of living that we have here in the country.

I just returned from China. I apologize. I, I couldn't even remember one of the questions asked just a minute ago. And I may do the same here, but we were there on an issue regarding nuclear weapons.

I mean, we all think it's important that our country engage with other countries that have thousands of nuclear weapons. So, it is an amazing thing. And actually, now that I'm out of public service, which I have great privilege to serve and was chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, I see even more now how relevant it is to the American people, how important it is that they care deeply about this issue. And just think about if right over Kingston Pike, something was happening, Cumberland Avenue, I guess, now in this part of town. But if something was happening over there that was violent and yet it wasn't happening right here on campus, you would care that that violence not make its way to this side of the street. Well, it's the same thing as it relates to world. So, these issues are very important to you. Very important to me. And I'm glad that Brookings and Baker Center has taken the time to talk about it here, as they are doing on other campuses.

MALONEY: Senator, I wondered if you could speak a little bit about the connection between foreign and domestic policy. When you served in Washington, you dealt, as you said, served as the chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, but you also dealt with big issues of domestic economic policy as well. One of the theories of the case of the Biden administration has been that investments at home can help us compete with our adversaries abroad. That's informed legislation that's been passed in a bipartisan way, whether it's the Inflation Reduction Act or the CHIPS Act. Do you think that, in fact, there is a connection between domestic and foreign policy? And how can we invest at home in ways that strengthen us against our adversaries abroad?

CORKER: Well, we know what we're seeing happening in many authoritarian countries is the directing their economies at home to compete with us. And in 2017, when the United States Senate and others began focusing on China 2025, it really is a colloquial term. It kind of freaked people out for a while, and I think people overreacted to that. Of course, every nation is going to do what is in their best interests, right? We're going to do the same as it relates to the industrial policies that you just laid out. I do think that this might not be the answer you were asking or, but I think we have to be really careful. One of the criticisms that we've had of China is the way they've directed their economy in the manner that they have.

And they have obviously tremendous waste. I mean, empty buildings. They, on the other hand, have been able to move ahead with national strategies. I'm a little cautious and more skeptical of us engaging in industrial policy to the extent that we have recently. I know there'll be some decent outcomes there. There'll also be a lot of outcomes where we have discourse distortions in the economy. But look, as a country, we need to realize that the rest of the world is moving ahead, doing everything they can to make sure that militarily they're coming as close as they can to us. And hopefully they would hope to surpass at some point economically, they're doing the same. And certainly, the two foreign policy and domestic policy have to be intertwined to make sure that we do the very best job we can on behalf of our citizens.

WIEGAND: So, we have two candidates who both have foreign affairs experience as vice president, former president, and they've spoken a little bit about their foreign policy perspective, but not so much. And we are at a point in the world right now where we have some pretty intense ongoing conflicts. We have a rivalry with China. We've got two active wars that we have interests in. So how do you see these particular conflicts and in foreign affairs affecting the next administration's decision making in these conflicts particularly?

CORKER: Well, we've got significant conflicts that matter a great deal to our country. Obviously, the Ukraine conflict has been going for some time. And I think it's going to be a defining moment in that conflict over the next 12 to 18 months. There was a point in time when maybe we could have done an even better job of helping negotiate an end. And that was when the conflict first began. And we thought Russia was the second greatest army in the world. And we realized very quickly at that time, they were the second greatest army in Ukraine, and they were making tremendous advances. And war of attrition over time is not going to be one that is going to be beneficial to Ukraine. And so there will be a settlement, I think.

So, I'll move away from that for just a second. China is going to be ongoing for many years. I mean, this is, this is going to be going on for many years. I don't think there's going to be an immediate issue of magnitude to deal with, but there's a daily activity. Fortunately, just recently, we're upped our mil-to-mil discussions. For a while we weren't even talking military to military with China, which is a good

sign as it relates to our relationship in the Middle East. So much of that is going to be driven by one person, and that is Prime Minister Netanyahu. He's going to do what he's going to do. The United States is an appropriate way, he's hopefully going to support them in ways that are appropriate for us. But so much of that is going to be determined by them with us taking more of a supporting and backseat role. So again, the big issue to me is going to be Ukraine. The Biden administration and I would assume I served two years with Vice President Harris, I served two years with President Trump, I got to know him probably a hundred times more so than I know Vice President Harris because of the roles we both had at that time. Mr. President, Trump's foreign policy is really a transactional foreign policy. It's, there's no long-term thinking.

Now, he does have he did have people working with him who did have that background and were very smart individuals, very seasoned individuals. But generally speaking, his instincts are more relative to the person that heads the country and how they deal with him. I've literally watched as we were going to push a policy, and you know that the leader was incredibly flattering to that individual and that policy never came up. And so, it's very, very personality based. The Biden administration, I assume the Harris administration, if elected, would probably carry out a more traditional type of foreign policy where we focus on building relationships more strongly with our allies, keeping in place, keeping in place sort of the general U.S. trajectory. I will say back to President Trump, one of the things that can be beneficial is because no one knows what he's going to do and it literally could change on a dime in a meeting, that also, some of our adversaries take note of that also. And that sometimes can be beneficial.

MALONEY: I think as we all recognize, especially in this election year, political views in the United States have become more polarized in recent years. How is it that the Senate functions in the way that it does? And how important is bipartisanship in terms of U.S. foreign policy to achieving real outcomes? You were known it during your time as chair of SFRC as someone who really invested in those relationships across the aisle, even on issues on which you might have disagreed with your Democratic counterparts. Can we advance a greater sense of bipartisanship even in an era of polarization?

CORKER: Let me let me I didn't answer one piece of the last question. And Ukraine, I do think that Ukraine and how we deal with Ukraine is a defining moment in our country's history. In our country's history. And I do fear that the election outcome could lead to a tremendous change in that support, because it is because it might be viewed only as something that is transactional and not something that feeds into the long-term values and direction of our nation and our own longer term national interest. I would hope that whoever is elected would continue to support Ukraine and ensure that whatever settlement ultimately is reached and there will be one reached at some point is one that takes into account the long-term interests of us, of Europe, of our allies and our support of democracy. And I'm somewhat worried about that as it relates to the election that's coming up within the next 20 or 25 days.

As it relates to my partisanship and all the more was known for the same. You know, one of the things we did in the Foreign Relations Committee is we had a tradition that politics stopped at our shores edge. Now, that wasn't always the case. You know, a lot of a lot of senators saw foreign policy as something that they could say almost anything they wanted to say and if it played well back home, that was a good thing. And what a lot of people don't realize, I know most of you would, but when you say something in the United States Senate, the rest of the world is listening and watching. And even when you a lot of times people present bills on the Senate floor that are really cheap shots, if you will. They're just things that generate some publicity. We tried not we did operate, didn't try to we never took up a piece of legislation. And in the Foreign Relations Committee that did and began with bipartisan sponsorship and that usually weeded out any these, quote, cheap shots, if you will, or these things that were done just for political gain.

That is the that has been the hallmark. I think maybe that's changed a little bit in the last few years. But to me is incredibly important. And typically, through bipartisan legislation, you come up with something that will stand the test of time. And I'm proud of that. I think we did our best at that. Let me say one last thing on that. I do wish the American people could just see how well, how the United States is seen around the world. And when we're down on ourselves, we talk about all these problems that we have as a nation. And, you know, all the election about is all the negative things that are going on. But believe me, we still are the 'it' around the world.

When an American, even former officials are, you know, and countries they are looked to with such respect and our nation is looked to with such respect. And I assure you, talking about Brookings trying to help and Baker Center, trying to help inform people. People around the world are very informed about our current elections very informed, they watch and everything. And we just need to understand who we are, feel a little bit better about ourselves and the role in the world, but also understand with that the responsibility that we have in conducting ourselves in a way that actually causes the rest of the world to want to emulate us.

WIEGAND: And on that note, you know, people do pay attention to the US and what happens in this country all around the world. And so, our adversaries take advantage of this, and they pursue a lot of disinformation and really spread conspiracy theories, lies about hurricanes, about that, but especially about domestic issues in this country. And that's been very fragmented, fragmenting, especially during the election season. So how should Washington deal with this? How do is or is there something politicians can do? Is there something that Americans can do to handle all this disinformation?

CORKER: One of the last trips I took in my former role was to Eastern Europe. And those countries for years have been used to Russian disinformation and therefore their citizens are less apt to buy these bogus conspiracy theories that that take place where you just spent an hour with students here and they ask a question about social media. And I know there's a lot of small companies and larger ones that have benefited greatly from social media. Generally speaking, I think it's a bane on society. I wish it had never been created. And to deal with social media as an elected official disables the old social media as a country. We look we talk about other countries trying to influence our elections, and they do.

And just for what it's worth, it's not like we don't try to shape outcomes in other countries. But the difference is that many of the countries where we'd like to shake things are basically closed societies. They filter the information that comes in. It's much more difficult for conspiracy theories and those types of things to be disruptive. In our country, it's open, totally open.

Someone cited in an earlier meeting from Brookings that that if you look at the social media input, one tenth of 1% of input creates 80% of the conspiracy theories that are out on social media. So, they have a much easier job. And so, again, those Eastern European countries, they're accustomed to that. Okay? They're accustomed to fake media. They're accustomed. And so, they are they we are not. Unfortunately. It's unbelievable to me that I was it. I just got off from China last night. I went by and got to take out, and a couple came up to me, and I thought, my gosh, I mean, how can anybody think this? But it runs rampant in our country, and it affects our elections. And obviously, campaigns do the same. So anyway, we just need to you know, as I told the students, you know, there's not much that comes on after in the evenings on some of the outlets that's worth watching and read a lot, read, get up in the morning and read, read reliable outlets and, but be careful about both some of the cable outlets in the evening and social media. They're really disrupting our country in many ways used in malicious manners.

MALONEY: Whoever takes office in January in the White House is going to be faced with a world that's on fire. Two wars, war in Ukraine, multiple conflicts happening in the Middle East, and obviously a long-term facing challenge that is presented by China. How should the next administration, whomever it might be? Select its priorities.

CORKER: Well, look, I mean, you have to you know, we are a great country. When an administration is formed. Typically, there are a lot of seasoned great people who join an administration. So, we have to be able, in this complex world, being the world's leader to do. All of those things at one time. And obviously our nation and the people here obviously rightly focused on domestic policy, their concerns here in our own country about border security and inflation and those types of things. But we have to always continue these other efforts because over time they too, will directly affect the quality of life of the American people and even life and liberty, if not dealt with appropriately. So, look, we will immediately, whatever the next whoever the next administration will immediately dive into Ukraine, hopefully in a way that continues to support them.

The Middle East issue is, is more difficult because of the independence, if you will, that the Prime Minister there feels that he has in this regard. And so, it'll be more of a nurturing coaching, hoping

kind of relationship. And then with China, again, it's going to be an issue that we're going to deal with likely for decades and hopefully we'll put in place people that have the capabilities to deal with China. I'm glad to see that again. You know, I was with a bunch of. Minus myself, some other highly distinguished military people. And. Sitting across from some highly distinguished former Chinese officials. It's amazing what each side thinks the other side is doing. And. And a lot of its true. But when, when, when there's not communication, some type of discussion, miscalculations take place, right, because you assume you assume the very worst.

And so, again, hopefully doing everything that we as a country appropriately can do and they in return at least discussing where we are, we know they want to be a great nation. We want to ensure that we're always the greatest nation, just like they hope to see to at some point. And through that, I know we have the issues of Taiwan and South China Sea and sensitive issues relative to chips and military advantages, AI. Hopefully continue effort in ensuring that. Sometimes wars happen. Because they just have to happen. But for a war to happen over a miscalculation is absolutely and unforgivable. And that's the kind of thing we need to keep from happening.

WIEGAND: So here in East Tennessee and in western North Carolina and down in Florida, we just experienced two devastating natural disasters from hurricanes. So, people are really concerned about, you know, what's happening here at home. And even in the, you know, these news outlets you're talking about, you know, there are there are comments about why are we spending money in Ukraine? Why are we spending money? We just, you know, we're sending that that, you know, missile defense system to Israel that was announced today. So, when people are suffering here at home and there are domestic crises, why is it still important to engage internationally, financially and militarily?

CORKER: Well, it can be existential and it's it can be truly existential like that. I know it's difficult. I realize, you know, people are getting a paycheck on Friday and they're going to the grocery store and their issue. Look, I understand, and I know how so many I mean, understand how the populism, populism that has run rampant in our country has occurred. You know, we had the financial crisis in '08 and it appeared the banks were bailed out, and people lost their homes.

We had two wars that, '01 and '03, that, you know, didn't demonstrate that elites really were prepared to deal with that appropriately and all of those. And then we had inflation and people haven't lived, haven't their expectations haven't been what they thought. It's all understandable. And they look at what's happening and they wonder while these quote unquote elites, some may say, are focused on these issues around the world. Look, I assure you, I am no elitist. And yet today I value more than I did while I was serving. It's really interesting. Value more the value of foreign policy to the everyday lives of our citizens. And if you put it aside and say we're just going to isolate and live here, we're going to take care of ourselves very soon? I, I believe I like to say, I assure you, but that would sound arrogant. I believe very soon we'd be dealing with issues here that very much changed the quality of life for Americans far more than any of the issues that we're dealing with today.

MALONEY: You spoke eloquently about China and about your recent visit there and some of the dialogs that you've engaged in. There are a lot of folks who are concerned that we are moving toward a situation of a new Cold War with China. Do you think that's the case? And if so, what should we be doing about it?

CORKER: Well, we're certainly on the verge and I would say, Ambassador Culverhouse, who was dealing with that issue while he was Ambassador of Australia. I think that so much of it. So much of it is that...Xi has taken a direction that he took on his own accord. I mean, we had a situation where China was open. We had commerce between the countries. That alone has tremendously changed our relationship. And I think that I know this sounds putting the blame on the other side. Certainly, we have you know, we're not a perfect nation. And sometimes we get things wrong and maybe sometimes we communicate things in the wrong way. We still want to make sure we have the strongest military in the world.

But I do think that he's had more to do with this change. And I think it's created great damage for them inside their country and economically. And so, for that reason, I know it's about control. But for that reason, I have a degree of hope that with a degree of dialog, that trajectory might change. We still have the historic conflict of Taiwan and the fact that unification is something that he has talked about, that those before him have talked about. He only has a certain term of time. And my sense is that's

something he'd like to accomplish. So, there may be things that create conflict that are beyond the economic pieces that I just mentioned. But look, it's going to, I don't I've already forgotten the question again, because I'm just coming back and I feel like I'm wandering. I think that we obviously are on the verge of going in one direction or another. And I know a lot of people say when they see a Treasury Secretary or a National Security Adviser or somebody having dialog with a country that we're having issues with, they look at that as softness. I'm sorry. I'd like to see all of that that is possible that we may end up in a conflict, God forbid, with China. It'll be nothing like we've witnessed in recent times. I don't think we should talk lightly about that type of thing ever. And it seems to me that again, dialog as a way to keep that from occurring.

WIEGAND: I think we have time for one more question from you and then we'll open it to questions from the audience. So, Suzanne talked about the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East and Iran is playing a role in and kind of meddling in all of this. So how do you think the next administration should handle Iran and its axis of resistance along with its nuclear ambitions?

CORKER: I have not understood the Biden administration's approach to Iran. I, I did not support the Iran deal, but we gave it a real hearing. More senators voted against it than for it, but they, it was done through an executive agreement. I also thought that on the flip side, that President Trump should have tried to put something else in place prior to just doing away with it. And we worked hard at that, I might add, at the end of the day and in conversations with him, he did not want that to happen. So, we ended up then with no agreement whatsoever, which led to where we are today. The Biden administration for some reason has been far more conciliatory towards Iran thinking something that, I've never understood where they thought that would take us. And so, I would hope the next administration would deal with them very firmly.

They much of what's happening right now around Israel, as we all know, is generated through support from Iran. They're not our friend. It's not as if we're nice to them, they're going to change course. This is something that's been in their DNA since the revolution. And I hope that we will deal with them very, very firmly and not view them as a country that if we just treat them nicely, they're going to change their behavior. That's, in my opinion, not in the cards.

WIEGAND: Excellent. Thank you. At this point, please raise your hand. And if you have a question and please keep it brief, we have very limited time, so we want to make sure to get enough questions. Yes, here in the front. I'm sorry. If you could wait for a microphone. Thank you.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thank you, Senator, for your insights. You talked about so many important issues, but one we did not touch on was North Korea, which is run by a character that's hard to describe. But he seems unbalanced in some respects. And he is Pathologically Opposed to the south. And he has these missiles that he's lobbing into the Sea of Japan. What is your view on how best to deal with him?

CORKER: You know, it's gotten to a place that they are nuclear country. Period. If you remember, Rex Tillerson, who was the first Secretary of State, was working very closely with China on sanctions. They're the only country, by the way, that can place any type of sanctions on North Korea that matter. Rex Tillerson was working very closely with them and making tremendous progress on severe sanctions, both cross-border type sanctions and others. And President Trump, famously tweeted out that we were not going to deal with them in diplomacy, he was going to deal with them directly. So, there were three summits, one on one conversations. But it resulted in no outcome. And so, by the way, just for what it's worth, because that sounds somewhat critical, which it is somewhat critical. But many administrations have tried to deal with North Korea and have not been successful. It's been going on for decades.

They are now for real nuclear country. And you just saw over the last week where basically they had been talking about unification with the south, which is at least something that demonstrated something of maybe a positive outcome. Just recently, last week, they've done away with that posture in its entirety, and I think tore down a monument that was represented, a representation of what of unification might be down the road. So, so I don't know how you deal with a country that is so isolated. They depend almost nothing on big portions of trade that the people there are so totally subservient. I don't know how you do. I don't know what the answer to the question is. It's one that we've let get too far down the road. Now that they have weapons.

Now they have thousands of missiles pointed at South Korea. Very difficult to deal with. And somebody beyond my pay grade is going to have to figure out how to do that.

WIEGAND: Yes. Here.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I like to ask a question pertaining to Israel, particularly what kind of transactional benefit does the United States hope to extract through its relationship with Israel? Because we only seem to lose more and more every time Israel escalates, and we seem almost unable to restrain them. So, what kind of benefit do we hope to extract, especially when we only lose face with majority Muslim countries like Malaysia, Indonesia and Turkey that are crucial to countering the influence of rival nations like Russia and China.

CORKER: So, Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East, has been a friend of the United States for, since their creation, there's a tremendous cultural relationship between Israel and the citizens of our country. As a matter of fact, I would say just based on the many visits that I had, the Christian community, especially the evangelical Christian community in the United States, is far more supportive of Israel than the Jewish people in our country are of Israel. Meaning that there's debate over support of Netanyahu. You can read about it daily by many in the Jewish community. So, there's this long term, long term cultural tie. Since we're on air and since there's a conflict underway, if we were in a private setting, I'd be more vocal. I will say that Prime Minister, Prime Minister Netanyahu is a very difficult individual.

So there, they're our friend. But he's a very difficult individual. And we can cajole behind the scenes. We can push. You know. Israel did exactly what Hamas wanted them to do. It's just terrible what Moss did. Unbelievable. Carl Sandburg, thankfully, thankfully, is creating a historic for us to be able to see forever what they did to especially to women on that day. But what they did, they did purposely to get Israel to respond in exactly the manner that they have in Gaza. And obviously, world support of Israel has dropped significantly until recently. Now, recently, what's happening in Lebanon is actually support for Israel has surged.

And I know that has nothing necessarily to do with our relationship and how we deal with them. But let me just come back to close with that. One of the things the Trump administration did that was outstanding was Abraham Accords. Truly outstanding. And I give Jared Kushner, his son in law, total credit for making that happen. The Arab, the Arab world is now working closely with Israel. I used to have a passport when I was going from an Arab country to the. I had to have two passports. You couldn't fly between the two. The commerce between the two was incredible. Hamas knew that Saudi Arabia was getting ready to recognize Israel and that's why they did what they did. But we have an alliance right now with the Arab world and Israel.

It's truly, it's a massive breakthrough. And when this conflict is over, I think it'll still be there. But let me just say, it's difficult dealing. I support Israel. That doesn't mean that you'd like for some different things to happen. I think what they're doing in Lebanon, what they've done there, has been incredible. I mean, think about all the intelligence it took. Maybe they're going too far north now. Maybe they're getting maybe there's a little hubris there. They've done what they needed to do. Maybe they're going a little bit too far. We'll wait and see what they do with Iran. When I wanted information about what was going on in Iran, I would go to Israel and meet with the Mossad. They're very, very good but again can be difficult allies.

WIEGAND: We have time for one more question.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: In the last couple of years, we've seen an increase of Chinese military presence in the South China Sea.

CORKER: Speak up a little bit.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Sorry.

CORKER: And like, I was like I wasn't doing. Go ahead.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: In the last couple of years, we've seen an increase in Chinese military presence in the South China Sea, whether it be through like a war games or the extension of maritime sovereignty through the artificial islands. With this election coming up, how do you think the different candidates are going to treat that?

CORKER: You know, I really think, generally speaking, on that one issue, I think they're probably be pretty similar. I think that, that President Trump was dealing with China. Generally speaking, he likes Xi a lot. He really likes him. But I think they were, he was dealing with that issue pretty much in the same manner that is being dealt with by the Biden administration. A difference could well be that if President Trump, former President Trump, puts in place the tariffs that he's talking about putting in place in China, 100% tariffs, that that'll change the dynamic pretty significantly. China's acting up this week, as you've seen. They've, you know, they're encircling Taiwan because the president there made what they consider to be provocative comments about how independent they were. And so that's stirred them up for a while. But I think I actually think both presidents I assume when I say with Harris assumed that she would be somewhat like Biden, I have no idea because I've never dealt on any foreign relations matters with her. But I think both of them have been reasonable and more long term in thinking with China.

MALONEY: Unfortunately, we this will be all the time that we have. Please join me in a round of applause for Senator Corker. And please welcome our colleagues to the stage for the next portion of our program.

CHRISTOPHER: Good evening. I'm Joel Christopher. I'm the Executive Editor of Knox News and the Knoxville News Sentinel. Get a little feedback here. I apologize. It's a pleasure to have a conversation with these three preeminent experts on foreign affairs, Krista, who's already been introduced, and Michael O'Hanlon and Tara Varma, both of Brookings. Welcome. Thank you for joining us tonight. To start off, I'm just going to ask you for your broadest but brief overview of the biggest issues that are facing us in the 2024 election and how you think those might play out under the different administrations. And we'll start with you, Krista.

WIEGAND: Okay. Sure. So, Senator Corker ended on a great note. I think it's China. It's China and Taiwan. I mean, we have active wars going on in other places, other regions. But in the long term, over the next few decades, it's I think that the China relationship has really deteriorated and is going to continue to cheering over the next few decades. And unless something drastic changes, there's no guarantee of a war in Taiwan over Taiwan in the next few years. But the next administration is going to have to deal with the South China Sea, with China's aggressive policies in the region, not only in Asia, but across the world, including its economic activities.

CHRISTOPHER: Right. And Michael.

O'HANLAN: First of all, thank you for the great welcome. And it's amazing to be in Knoxville at the University of Tennessee. And a lot of admiration for this place for a long time. These amazing senators and others from your great state some 30 some years ago, I did my first major CBO study, Congressional Budget Office study for Senator Sasser, and certainly watched Howard Baker over the years. So, it's just a real treat to be here. I agree with Chris, too, certainly that China demands the greatest vigilance. But I am hopeful that if we maintain good policies, that we actually can manage this. So, in that sense, let me not disagree, because I certainly want to maintain the kind of vigilance, preparedness across military and economic fronts that we have now. But I don't get a gut sense that Xi Jinping is reckless.

However, I'm still worried about Kim Jong Un, Vladimir Putin, and maybe especially the leaders in Iran. And I think some of them are more reckless. They're looking for a fight. They've proven they are willing to have the fight. And so, I think they make me even more nervous day to day. And I'm also going to add in, even though I'm a I like to say a Sam Dunn democrat, I'm going to say something in support of the priorities of the previous administration, the Trump administration. I do think we have to view the border and especially the fentanyl crisis as a national security concern as well. I'm not necessarily taking a Republican or Democratic side on the movement of people, but I am extremely concerned about the movement of drugs when they're killing 100,000 Americans a year. So, I would add that to the equation as well.

CHRISTOPHER: Thank you, Michael. Tara.

VARMA: Thanks, Joe. It's great to be here. I think coming back to the title of our event today, one of the biggest issues that the US has faced is whether it wants its alliances and partnerships or not, and that's going to actually influence the outcome of these large threats and challenges that it has to face. Is it going to face them alone or is it going to face them with allies and partners? I think the outcome of this is going to be quite different. Look forward to the rest of our discussion.

CHRISTOPHER: All right. Thank you, Krista. Could you explore a little bit about how differences in the Harris or the Trump administration's policies on Taiwan could have cascading ramifications for other alliances in America's position in the global order?

WIEGAND: So as many of you know, you know, the U.S. does not have a full alliance with Taiwan, but we do have a promise essentially, to defend Taiwan. So, it's kind of a gentlemen's agreement, if you will. But at the same time, we also have very steadfast alliances with many of these neighboring countries around Japan, South Korea, Philippines, Australia. And we have partners, strategic partners in the region as well, all of whom have interests in the status of Taiwan as well. And so, I think with the different administrations, you know, the Harris administration, you know, Harris has had a bit of a hard time differentiating herself from Biden to some degree. But I think with if she is the next president and there is some kind of conflict with Taiwan, I think that, you know, we're going to we're going to see a U.S. engagement militarily to some degree with regarding Taiwan, to defend Taiwan with our allies. It will not be a unilateral at all, but something, you know, something with our allies to a varying degrees depending on the ally.

I think that the main difference here is with the Trump administration, I think a Trump administration, it's going to be very difficult for someone who's pushing isolationism and saying we need to reduce the wars and get out and not engage in international affairs at that level to really follow through and engage in in that region militarily. The problem with that is it's it sets a precedent. It leaves not only does it leave our allies and partners to deal with a major crisis in Asia, but it sets a precedent for these other countries that Mike talked about Iran, North Korea, you know, countries that are watch

Russia that are watching us and watching what we do. So, if we're not coming to the table and really dealing with these crises effectively, it's a wide-open door for our adversaries to take other actions.

CHRISTOPHER: Excellent. Michael, it's interesting you've written about the fact that when you look at the Biden administration and the Trump administration, in some ways there's lots of similarities in their in their policies. But it's an unknown how those could diverge in in the next Trump term or in a Harris administration, especially on use of force. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about what your thoughts are on what those outcomes could look like depending on who's elected.

O'HANLAN: Thanks, Joe. So, one way to look at this is the policies that have emerged over four years of each side being in the White House. The other way is to look at the personalities and decision-making styles. Senator Corker just pointed out there isn't a huge disagreement in a sense on the substance of China policy, at least in terms of what we've seen so far out of the Biden administration and the Trump administration, a toughening of economic policy, putting more military assets in the Asia Pacific, etc. But I would also say that in broad national defense strategy terms, Jim Mattis, who was, of course, President Trump's first secretary of defense, wrote a national defense strategy that the Biden administration essentially endorsed and only modified modestly.

So, at that level of conceptual, substantive policy, there are some areas where agreement has emerged full stop. Harris and Trump are very different people, and the way they make decisions in crises is extraordinarily different. Harris, whether you like her or not, is much more in the bipartisan American tradition of working closely with advisers to frame options, to studiously evaluate them and to make decisions carefully, at least that's the best we can tell. Because as Vice President, she doesn't quite have the same job she would have as president, Obviously, Donald Trump goes with his gut. And we've heard a little bit of that earlier. We certainly have heard it from John Bolton, his national security adviser, who said, if you want to know what position Trump's going to take on a given issue on a given day, just wait and see what side of the bed he gets up on. Bolton has been scathing and so have some of the other people who worked with President Trump because it scares them to see this decision-making style.

I'm a Trump critic, as you might have guessed. But let me also say, in fairness to President Trump, he usually wound up in a reasonable place. But often after coming up to the brink of decisions that in his supporters minds, many of you who are his supporters perhaps would have would have said that's a good way to scare adversaries, to motivate allies. But the problem is, you never were quite sure if President Trump understood it. On North Korea, for example. We got very close to war with North Korea in 2017 before we saw President Trump try these three summits, before he then just threw out both those approaches and tried to ignore the problem for the next two years of his presidency at that point. So, you saw three radically different approaches. I don't mind trying something realizing that it failed, trying something else.

But with Trump, it wasn't usually well prepared and well thought through. And I have to say that worries me. If he winds up with sort of the same kinds of bottom line decisions as in his first term, where he has people like Jim Mattis advising him and he ultimately comes to good conclusions after a lot of debates with Senator Corker and people like that, that then maybe it's okay, because conceptually, I'm not sure he's radically different from our bipartisan consensus. But his decision-making style and his trust in his own gut are a little bit scary.

CHRISTOPHER: Tara, the assumption is that the results of the election are likely to produce two very different versions of worldview, for sure. From a European perspective, can you explain how the differences in the administrations could have potentially profound effects on the security of Europe and how that ultimately dictates American security?

VARMA: Sure. So, I'll tell you something. Now that I'm not sure too many people know, but the US is first trading partner is the European Union. The US invests inside the European Union 20 times as much as it invested in China until now. And in reverse, Europe invests in the US twice as much as the whole of Asia invests in the US. So that very concretely means that there are 16 million jobs created in the trans-Atlantic space. We're talking about alliances and partnerships and the commitment to security commitments that come with them. And I think that's an absolutely key element, and we'll get to that a bit later. But alliances are also an opportunity to harness opportunities in peace time and trade opportunities in particular.

When you look at the two candidates, you look at two very different, I would say visions. Typically, when it comes to the European Union, because I don't think that with Donald Trump, we would see the end of transatlantic relations. We would see the end of a partnership between the US and the EU. The European Union for sure. But he has allies and personalities that he really likes in Europe, one of whom he mentioned several times during the debate that he had with Kamala Harris and who is the head of Hungary, Viktor Orban. There are other leaders inside Europe who are populist conservatives whom he likes as well. So, we would see we could see a very different axis, a different way for trans-Atlantic relations to work, I think, in a very transactional manner.

We've heard that earlier today. Kamala Harris, she stated time and time again her attachment to alliances and partners. I think she would that would be an inflection in her way of dealing with alliances, allies and partners. I think for Joe Biden, that was almost an emotional attachment. We mentioned Israel, but also to the European Union, a sense of responsibility. He has, I think, a framing that's very much influenced by the Cold War. She comes with a different perspective, a different personal history, but she wants alliances to work and partnerships to work. And I think she would expect actually more of Europeans than what the US is asking right now. But we would see very different perspectives and that that really puts into question the US's commitment to security guarantees.

I think if it's, you know, Donald Trump is elected in a few weeks, the security of Europe is at stake. Definitely, he's set it very clearly on the campaign trail earlier this year, he said that with allies who didn't contribute up to 2% of their GDP and defense spending, he would let Vladimir Putin do whatever he wanted to do with them. And when his advisors discuss this, you know, they keep saying you need to look past the rhetoric, but, when a candidate is campaigning, he's making policy announcements. It's not just discussion like we're having today, you know, kind of a think tank discussion and research discussion. When you're listening to the candidates, these are actual policy announcements. I don't think we can look past the rhetoric. I think President Trump is saying what he thinks, and we should take him to his word. And Europeans need to prepare definitely.

And I think actually, I would say in both outcomes, Europeans need to be prepared to do a lot more, I think. And one of the outcome, they can do more with their U.S. partner in another outcome. They will have to do it on their own and if they are on their own come January. They're just not possible. They're not capable of defending themselves. So that's just the reality of the situation for us.

CHRISTOPHER: You mentioned rhetoric and the influence that has on our world events unfold. And Michael, we talked previously about some examples of how rhetoric in domestic policies can have wide ranging international effects. And I wonder if you could dive into to what the risks and rewards are of rhetoric intended for a domestic audience and how that plays out on the world stage. Yeah. Thanks, Joe. I'll just give one example because, by the way, I do think that like probably a lot of people, whether they're his critics or his supporters, you know, those who follow Donald Trump recognize that a lot of his rhetoric is partly for show, partly for effect. It's often calculated and it's often clever. But there are times where you can sort of play this game almost like, you know, the art of the deal you're negotiating, whether with an adversary or an ally.

There are other times, though, where history tells us to be careful. And the example that I like to use best, it relates to the Taiwan question, where Trump has also recently said that he might not defend Taiwan if they don't do more themselves. The concern we have this ambiguous promise to Taiwan. No treaty, no formal diplomatic relations. What if President Trump once back in office, should he be elected? Says again, I'm not going to defend Taiwan. They're just not pulling their fair share. By the way, he would be maybe partly right. Taiwan should do more. They're spending about 2.5% of their GDP on their military, but it's not insignificant. And they've made some important steps in the last few months to beef up their preparation. But Trump wouldn't be all wrong if he came to the conclusion Taiwan's not doing enough.

But in 1950, many will remember we said we don't care about South Korea's security. And it wasn't just the secretary of state who gave a famous speech at that time, Dean Acheson. We had pulled our military out of South Korea in its short-term occupation after World War Two. George Kennan, the great diplomat, had said that Korea was not in our core area of interest, and most of the country agreed with all these pronouncements that we really didn't have to care about South Korea.

South Korea came up earlier in the question. We've talked about it tonight. At that time, South Korea was a very poor, small piece of land attached to the Asian peninsula. South Korea was mostly rice farms. Guess what? The day after the North Korean leadership attacked on June 25th, 1950, we changed our mind because we decided that if the communists cared enough to attack, we better care. So, what happens when Donald Trump says, I don't care about defending Taiwan? China takes that as a green light. And then we wake up the next day and figure out, are we going to allow a world in which China is now conquering Taiwan? So, I think this is actually the most likely path to war, that China thinks there's an opportunity there. And then we change our mind after having given the green light. That's where rhetoric can really matter.

CHRISTOPHER: Absolutely. You heard Senator Corker talk about the fact that, you know, for many Americans. You know, you get your paycheck on Friday, you worry About groceries, all sorts of things that have nothing to do with what you're steeped in on a day-to-day basis. Krista, can you talk a little bit about if America retreats into isolationism, what the effects of that might look like, especially in regard to our relations in Asia and the Pacific?

WIEGAND: Well, though, the U.S. has been. The most influential country in the world since World War Two. I mean, sure, the Soviets were our enemy, you know, our adversary during the Cold War, but we were still the most influential. And we've been in that position, you know, for a very long time and very comfortable with that position. China is trying very hard to change that. And so, if we withdraw and we pull back, that's a that's an open door for China, and China will take it. They're already trying. They're already working really hard. It's modernizing, you know, the military, the you know, in modernizing nuclear, you know, increasing their nuclear capacity and spreading, you know, economic influence all around the world.

And so that that's a that's something we have to seriously think about if we want China to take that position, we're no longer in charge. We're not influential in the world anymore. And some people might say, okay, who cares? Well, you know, think about all the benefits we get from being the world power. Yes, there are some, as Senator Corker said, there are some you know, there are some downsides to that, too. Right? Like people are paying attention to us. You know, we make some mistakes

sometimes, but we also get a lot of benefits. I don't think we think about that on a daily basis. But, you know, you go around the world, English is very commonly spoken, right? You know, we created the Internet, you know, the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations, like there are a lot international law. A lot of it came from the U.S. influence. And that would change if China were in charge. I think, you know, to thinking about our on a daily basis, thinking about trade relations, Tara has mentioned about, you know, trade with the European Union and such. And, you know, if the Trump if Trump wins this election, you know, the tariffs, I think, you know, everybody keeps saying the tariffs against China and yes, that is they are against China. But what they really are tariffs on American companies.

So American businesses are paying those. And when American businesses want to if they're going to keep their profit margin, that means they need to raise prices. So, all those cheap prices at Walmart are no longer cheap. So those are things we have to think about when we think, okay, we're going to push against, you know, certain countries and, you know, not engage as much. And I'm not saying tariffs are wrong. I'm just saying, you know, we have to think through that kind of again. Is it rhetoric or is it really true? And it's a difficult place to be in some cases to be the, you know, the most influential country in the world. But it's also comes with tremendous benefits that that I think most of us under appreciate.

CHRISTOPHER: Tara, when you think of that question, what a world looks like with an isolated America. How does that play out in Europe in particular? And what would some of those effects how that how would that cascade back to the United States?

VARMA: I mean, I think in Europe it's really an existential fear because with an isolated America, a withdrawn America, Europe is in complete danger of complete vulnerability. We've not invested enough in our defense, and we need to do that. But these are 10 to 15 yearlong plans. I mean, the European Union has the money to do it and it's finally getting its head around doing it. But, you know, it means actually purchasing the factories, training the workers, getting the products out.

So, we're really talking best case scenario of a at least a ten-year timeline, ten years during which Vladimir Putin can invade parts of NATO countries if he believes that the US is not going to be there to defend NATO allies. It's not impossible. He's made his disdain for alliances and partnerships very clear. He's repeated that. I think this is one of actually one of the most consistent views that he's had. So. If he actually implements them, he wouldn't be caught off guard. So, for Europe, there's a real sense that it wouldn't be protected by the US's nuclear umbrella. So completely vulnerable to Russia, but also to China. We've discussed this. I don't know if there is an axis of Russia, China, North Korea and Iran, but what I definitely see is that these four countries have deliberately decided to set aside their differences for the time being in a way that we have not. We're very focused on our differences, on making sure that our both our industrial bases in Europe and in the US don't erode too much. We're looking at this very much as a zero-sum game and they are not.

And in that sense, they're exploiting all our vulnerabilities economic, political. We alluded to this in the previous panel. Our societies are open societies, which I think is our strength, and I still believe that. But it's also the opportunity for our adversaries to step in and to try and create a wedge between us. And so, I think we're really at a point where they're looking to exploit vulnerabilities amongst people. We're seeing fear and anxiety, something that's very common both in the US and Europe. We're seeing the rise of populism in a number of places, the spread of fake news. They know all of this because they're studying us very, very closely. So, I think for Europe, with an America that's withdrawn, it would basically go into a state of decline, I think, and possibly attacks by other actual military attacks. Europe today is not in a capacity to defend itself. If Russia decides to invade Baltic states or Poland. I honestly don't know what Europe can do.

And this is a very real scenario. What we're seeing right now with China support to Russia is not only Russia gaining grounds in Ukraine, it's actually managing to produce and to get its stockpile of weapons back much faster than we are in the US and Europe. So, there is a reality of the military situation in the ground which is really scary, and people don't pay attention to it. And it is I mean, it creates a lot of anxiety. So, I totally understand. You don't have to focus on that every day, but it has consequences in the lives of real people. Just after the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Europe decided to cut itself off from Russian oil and gas, which it was very dependent on.

That meant in the immediate few weeks and months that followed Russia's invasion of Ukraine that gas and oil prices rose significantly in Europe, and that impacted people's lifestyle and savings. I mean, it was a real impact of foreign policy, of foreign policy on people's lives in a daily basis. We're going to see more and more of this because of the dependency that we're in. And I don't think we should give up on the interdependency, but we should be conscious of how our adversaries are trying to exploit our differences.

CHRISTOPHER: And what would you say to Americans who say that's Europe's problem? You know, it doesn't affect us. There's a significant and then perhaps growing number of Americans who say it's not worth the cost for us to bear.

VARMA: I mean, I think Europe needs to do more. I really don't think it's just Europe's problem. It's very hard to buy something in this country that is not made in China. For now, the Russian are not dependent at all on Russian oil and gas. This was indeed more of a European vulnerability. But the US is dependent on a lot of commodities that come from China still. Now, the day these are cutoff and maybe you know that they will happen sooner than we think, this will be a massive increase in prices for the American consumer. And we're talking about something that can happen in the near future. There is a reality of this that I don't think the US can immunize itself from? I think thinking that there is a way to protect yourself from that.

I don't think is realistic precisely because the reason why America has this place in the world is that it is spread everywhere and that it's known everywhere. It has partners and contacts everywhere. I think when you shut this down in the 21st century, I don't know what that looks like. I mean, I don't think California can live off with the withdrawn America. I'm not even talking about other states. A lot of American products rely on exports. If you shut this down, if there are tariffs are implemented, we're talking 60, sometimes 100% on tariffs. This will impact the American consumer, and it will impact everyone in this room, basically. So that's just the reality of foreign policy. There are sometimes some lofty and complicated concepts, but there is also a very real economic side to this that I don't think we should underestimate.

CHRISTOPHER: Krista, you talked about if America withdraws that, it also sacrifices its preeminent role in the rules-based system. Right. Can you talk a little more concretely about what that would look like for Americans if we gave up that ability to influence the rules that govern the world?

WIEGAND: It means somebody else is in charge. I mean, you know, I think, you know, the Europeans have lived with this experience for many years. And the Europeans have been fortunate that the U.S. has a very good relationship with the European Union and with NATO countries. We have a very strong alliance with the European countries. That's not the case with China. I mean, China in charge of the world means a very different thing. I mean, imagine I mean, we fought we, we contained, let's say, the Cold War. Right. Was it being a containment of the Soviet Union for a very good reason. We did not want the Soviets to be the most influential country in the world. That was that was a huge, you know, risky, risky thing for us. And we made we did everything in our capacity to stop that.

And we're here back in the same position. I'm not saying it's a Cold War, but we are in a position now where we are absolutely deterring and trying to stop China from doing the same thing as the Soviet trying to be the most influential country. So I think, you know, again, we may not think on our on a daily basis about how the U.S. really, the role we play in the world and what we get from that, the amount of trade agreements, the, you know, the cheap prices we get from trade with China, you know, the engagement, the influence, the all of the people we send around the world. You know, Senator Corker was just in China, you know, talking to people there, all that diplomacy. We have that power, you know, provides us with something that, you know, that you know. Yes, it's hard. It's probably not as concrete as most Americans would like it to be.

But I think, you know, the points we've heard tonight and from Senator Corker point, you know, point to this, that if we lose that position, there are there are, long term consequences for that. And we live in a world where, you know, China is in charge and somebody and that's not a pretty world. And again, I'm not against China as a country or the people, but I think we have to think about, you know, the Chinese government under Xi Jinping is not a friendly country.

This is you know, they have they follow very different rules. They don't follow international law. They're very assertive, aggressive. And it would not be a comfortable position for us to be in.

CHRISTOPHER: Michael, you've talked about the fact that your life's work is really focused on preventing war and preventing worst case scenarios. So, when we look forward to this election and the choices that each of us is going to have to make. Talk about some of what those worst-case scenarios look like. Well, I'll talk about Europe again and build on some of what Tara has been speaking about. But I'll again go more to the war and peace. Sort of the ultimate worst-case scenario. Sorry to bring you along where my brain usually lives. And in thinking this way, although I'm sure a lot of you have this kind of question on your mind as well. And let's take the case of Europe. The problem is, historically, Europe has too many medium to big countries that are rivalrous with each other and don't get along that well with each other and wind up at war in the absence of some outside power. I actually have a huge admiration for France and Germany. I tend to feel in my gut they bury the hatchet for good, but I'm not sure I want to run the experiment.

What I want neither to see, but I definitely don't want to run as an experiment is NATO dissolving and Vladimir Putin deciding what to do in Estonia and Latvia. These are the two Baltic countries, each of which has 25% Russian speaking population. And Putin has claimed the right to protect Russian speakers wherever they may live. We don't know if that extends to Brooklyn, but we can suspect that it does extend to the Baltic states. The problem with the French and British and German and Polish militaries, these are all wonderful countries, strong economies, decent size defense budgets, but they have not really optimized for expeditionary warfare. With the partial exception of Britain and France because of the colonial legacy.

But each one of them can basically get a brigade that's 4000 soldiers to Estonia or Latvia quickly. Russia has an army of several hundred thousand troops. They do have nuclear deterrence. But combined, Britain and France have less than one tenth the number of nuclear weapons that Russia does. So, is Putin really going to think they will collectively face him down, either with their conventional forces or with their nuclear forces? I don't want to run that experiment. So, NATO has helped keep the peace for decades in Europe.

We can debate historically whether we should have brought the Baltic states in. And to be frank, I was never the biggest proponent. But now that they're in the idea of casting any doubt about our willingness to defend them, I think would be a huge mistake and would drastically increase the risks of war. I'm not saying the risks of war go to 75%, but I think they go to maybe 10 or 20% and that's way too high. With the stakes that are involved.

CHRISTOPHER: Absolutely. Time to take some questions from the audience.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Kind of less than 30 years out from the close of the Cold War and less than four years out from the end of the 20 year war in Afghanistan. How do you think both administrations will approach Preventing the current and potentially on the horizon conflicts from kind of becoming these perpetual conflicts from finding a path to peace and agreement between countries rather than our primary method of foreign policy being an endless well of military aid?

O'HANLAN: Thanks for the question. I think I can only be useful by being specific and taking one example. Let me take Ukraine, if I could. You know, we haven't gotten involved directly in the war. We've provided a lot of intelligence and material support to Ukraine, which I think was the right thing to do. And Senator Corker and others historically have helped Ukraine as it emerged as an independent country after the Soviet Union dissolved. Ukraine has had a lot of issues, but there's a good guy and a bad guy in this war. There's a there's a righteous cause. And as long as Ukraine is under attack, I believe we have to help them defend themselves to survive. Full stop. So, the idea that war is our foreign policy, I wouldn't really subscribe to that from your question, because in this case, I don't think we had any choice but to help Ukraine the way we did.

But the question, which I this is where you do usefully provoke me, is to say, how do we end this thing as soon as possible going forward? And I don't think we can just do the same thing we've been doing indefinitely and essentially giving Ukraine 50 to \$75 billion in assistance and hoping that maybe eventually they win back territory and then we bring them into narrow. I think the maximum version of that story is the correct aspiration morally, but it's militarily unrealistic.

So I believe the next administration's going to have to think hard with Ukraine, maybe give them one more chance to have a 2025 counteroffensive to see what they can take back and then help them think through how do we make sure they can protect their country and the territory they do hold with some kind of Western security assurances, but recognize they're probably not going to win all their land back on the battlefield. They're going to have to play the long game diplomatically to get the 15 or 18% back that Russia still has. So that's the best I can do at answering your question in regard to that case. But I agree with you. I don't want a forever war in Ukraine either. The problem is, of course, Ukraine should make the main call about when they're ready to stop fighting for their own territory because they are in the morally righteous position. But we have to be intelligent strategically to make sure that we don't just fund and fuel a forever war if it proves impossible for them to make progress, let's say sometime next year.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hi there. First of all, thank you so much for being here. My question regards since there's immigration coming from Latin America and large quantities of it. Is there any way America could help provide more foreign aid or help the economic well-being of those Latin American countries to help slow the immigration and some chance and help trade with them in a sort of scenario?

VARMA: So, I think that's precisely what the current administration was doing. And Vice President Kamala Harris talks about this a lot. It's the root causes policy. Basically, the idea that you invest through aid and trade in central and Latin American countries to make sure that there is political and economic stable situation for people basically to not want to leave. That's, first of all, not so simple because when you look at the tide of the type of people who immigrate to the U.S., but that's also true for Europe. They're not at all the poorest people. There are generally middle-class people with sometimes higher education, people who have actually the means to think about a plan to leave and who have had the economic means to do it. And I don't think I mean, I think that's part of the answer, definitely. And it's really hard to do. And I don't think you can do that in three and a half, four years. I mean, evidently you can't. It's a much, much, much longer plan. But there is also something to be done about immigration policy here.

Properly thinking about the people that want to come here are the reason why the U.S. remains such an attractive place, why people still think that it's such a land of opportunity for so many. And I think this is where you need to think about it. But you can't solve this in 3 or 4 years, unfortunately, at least not now. And there are people who are coming in through the southern border who are not just from Central, and that's in America. Actually, there are quite a few Indian and Chinese people coming into. There are people from all over the world now going through that special path. So, it's extremely hard to control. But you're right, it's part of the answer. It's just not the whole answer.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hi. So, we've been talking a lot about. Alliances today and a lot about, like, Russia and China. I have a question sort of from a preventative standpoint. We've talked about having negative relations with. Russia and China. What preventatively are we doing with in alliances such as BRICs to prevent deterioration of like other BRICs nations alliances with us?

WIEGAND: So, you know, the purpose of alliances is to prevent war. Right. You know, it's a lot of people. I mean, you know. Yes. NATO is to defend against a potential rocket or in the past a Soviet attack. So, when we think of alliances, sometimes people think, World War two, World War one. Right, that they fought and fought together and that happens. But it's really it alliances really are for the prevention of conflict. So, you know, the U.S. and its allies across the world, in Asia and in Europe in particular, have really been working hard. The Biden administration and even to some degree the Trump administration previously, even though it was much more transactional, you really worked with our allies to make sure that they also are they have their own national interests, obviously. But thinking more globally and thinking about, you know, international values and, you know, the values we all have about democracy and freedom and so forth, thinking about peace, what that's like, what it would mean to be living in an authoritarian regime.

So, I think our allies, you know, now at this point are all pretty well aligned. I just returned from Japan last week, and, you know, there's a great amount of concern about or questions about the election in this country in Japan, because we're at the closest point where we've been with Japan, with our alliance, and South Korea's the same way. And Britain and France, I'm sure it's very similar. These are they want to support us. We support them.

And we're really working closely together to prevent future conflict. But if there is, as Mike said, if there are any questions about breaking up these alliances or a lack of commitment by the U.S., this could trigger or provoke our for serious to take advantage of that. So, I think that the role of alliances is absolutely critical. And we just have to continue regardless of which administration they're going to have to continue valuing those relationships.

CHRISTOPHER: Fantastic. We've got time for one more question.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hi. Thank you all so much for being here. I had a question you mentioned briefly we can discuss some of the history of adding. A few more countries to NATO, certain trendy figures like RFK Jr and different people we've listened to have said that we bear some of the blame for Russia's aggression in adding new countries to NATO. And previously there had been some agreement that that would not happen. How do you think that's a legitimate concern? The way I would frame it is not to give Russia any pass about the way they behaved. NATO was never threatening to Russia. We never moved combat forces east of Germany after the Cold War ended. It's more that I think you can debate, in my judgment, is how the Russian psyche was likely to respond as we did this more out of a sense of embarrassment on their part, a sense of feeling of aggrievement, a feeling that we had rubbed their face in the in the dirt after winning the Cold War and that they would react in this sort of a way. And it's not just me saying this.

Our friend Sam Nunn had these kinds of concerns about Russia. Former Senator Nunn from Georgia, Bill Perry, who was secretary of defense. They might not have put it the same way I just did. But the concern that NATO moving eastward could potentially create political room for people like Vladimir Putin to exploit that and that therefore, Russia's reaction would be in some way predictable, not justifiable, but predictable. That's where I have been on the debate over NATO enlargement. And I think there were other mechanisms we could have used that might have been more effective. But I'm very careful not to say what RFK Jr said, not to say what the Chinese say, or Putin says, or John Mearsheimer at the University of Chicago and to somehow blame us and to give Putin an out that somehow, he was justified in doing this because he was under threat. He was not under any threat. His pride was wounded. And that's not a good enough reason to do what he's done.

VARMA: Very briefly, I'll add. Actually, last year, two new countries were added to NATO, Sweden and Finland. And clearly Vladimir Putin didn't feel threatened by that because he removed soldiers from the coast of Kaliningrad, which was right next to it. His issue right now is with the perspective of Ukraine getting inside the European Union and evidently getting inside NATO. If that happens at some point. So, there's been NATO's enlargement very recently, and that hasn't provoked a worsening of the situation there.

CHRISTOPHER: Sara Michael, Krista, thank you so much. I hope everyone can join me in thanking, thank you all for joining us tonight. I.