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CROSS-STRAIT CROSSROADS: PATHWAYS FOR AMERICA'S TAIWAN POLICY

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PANEL

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HASS: Happy Monday morning and welcome to everyone who's joining us from around the world, including Vashon Island. And welcome to our public event, “Cross-strait crossroads: Pathways for America's Taiwan policy,” co-hosted with the RAND China Research Center. My name is Ryan Hass, I will co-moderate today's event alongside my friend and colleague, Jude Blanchette, who is the Distinguished Tang Chair in China Research, as well as the director of RAND China Research Center.

I'll turn the floor over to Jude in a moment to help situate this project and what we're trying to get done this morning. But before I do let me be ruthlessly brief in introducing my colleagues who are going to be the key speakers and discussants today. Jennifer Kavanagh is the senior research fellow and director of military analysis at Defense Priorities. Bonnie Glaser is the managing director of the Indo-Pacific program at the German Marshall Fund of the United States. David Sacks is a fellow for Asia studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, and Matthew Turpin is a visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution and a senior counselor at Palantir. Each of these speakers has distinguished backgrounds.

I encourage you to look at the event page if you want to learn more about their background. But for now, let me turn it over to Jude.

BLANCHETTE: Great. Good morning, everyone. First of all, it's great to see people in person. I forget that people still thankfully come to think tank events, even in this post-COVID world. So, appreciate everyone showing up.

Really great again to partner with Ryan and the great team here at Brookings. This has been a pretty sizable undertaking but has felt seamless and smooth. And as anyone knows who works on these projects, that is a hundred percent to the credit of all the amazing team members who are behind the scenes, making sure that workshops are set up, catering, events, publications. So really just this has been a really great partnership and appreciate it.

I'll be ruthlessly quick here in just briefly outlining the motivation and the goals, because I think we're all interested to get to the conversation here. But just to say very quickly, the motivation for this, I hope is somewhat self-evident. But it is since June 1950 when President Truman sent the seventh fleet into the Taiwan Strait to quell an incipient crisis of significant military proportion, the United States has been puzzling through this very challenging equation of maintaining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.

75 years later, I think that a lot has been learned, but challenges persist. And those challenges do not stay still. They continue to be a moving target. And so we felt that it was appropriate given all the, to quote Xi Jinping, “great changes unseen in a century” now occurring in a number of domains, not only in military technology, power distribution, focus of the United States in its military posture, domestic developments in Taiwan, the extraordinary growth in capability of the People's Liberation Army, as well as what to many of us feels like a heightened degree of intensity and coercion coming from Beijing that it brings to bear on the Taiwan Strait, it is important and necessary that we bring together what we thought was the smartest group of people thinking and working on Taiwan, U.S. military strategy, grand strategy, for a series of discussions. And then out of that, papers that kick the tires on where U.S. policy on Taiwan is now and offer suggestions on where and how it can be in improved.

We also thought it was important to have a spectrum of views here. This is one of these issues that I don't think any single voice has all of the answers. And one of the things that this community in Washington can do best is bring views together, to challenge each other, push each other, help refine, so that we just have a better set of options, and I think we achieve that with this. One quick methodological note, although I hope and assume you've all spent the entire weekend reading the full report, so this will be unnecessary. But what you see on stage here today is not only the work of the individuals who've written papers for this, but behind this was a series of dedicated workshops starting last fall where initially drafts were written by these individuals, put into the meat grinder of a workshop where 20 or so, I think again, of the sharpest minds debated, argued, supported key elements of it. And then again, the memos were revised again. So this is really not the individual voice of everyone on stage here, but also a collective effort of everyone who agreed to read and comment on the drafts. So I think that really made all of these really quite strong contributions.

So that in a nutshell is why we thought this was important and how we went about it. And the goal for this is really what you're seeing today, is there's going to be a great conversation over the next hour or so. I think the papers are already kicking off a conversation on Twitter [now X] and elsewhere, and we hope that these have shelf life and will continue to push and challenge and shape the debate in the weeks, months, and years ahead. So with that, Ryan, I'll turn it back over to you.

HASS: Thank you, Jude. And if Jude and I do our job well, this will be a pretty interactive spirited conversation amongst these four people who all have strong views that are not all in alignment with each other.

So I want to start by just setting the baseline, and Bonnie I'm going to ask you to get us started. What do you identify as America's interest in Taiwan? Why does America care so much about Taiwan?

GLASER: Well, let me start by thanking Jude and Ryan and everybody else up here. Also, Kharis Templeman, who was part of the project because it was really a collegial effort and I think it is important to interrogate U.S. policy to Taiwan and see where it needs to be improved, where some of the gaps are.

This is a question that I address in my paper. Kharis also addresses in his a little bit differently. But I would start by saying, or reminding everybody, that George W. Bush referred to Taiwan as a beacon of democracy. And I think that Taiwan's democratic resilience is important because it really represents an alternative model to the Chinese Communist Party. It is an ethnic Chinese society that has demonstrated that democracy works. And it is really, I think, a powerful example to the world.

Secondly, we all know how important Taiwan's economy is to the United States, last year Taiwan was the U.S.' fourth largest trading partner, of course, due to mostly chips and other ICT components. But that's now more important than Germany. And of course, Taiwan's position in the supply chain for semiconductors produces over 90% of the most advanced semiconductors. And while we have had some officials in this administration say that it is a goal to bring 40% of that to the United States, that's going to be very challenging. Even

Taiwan has pushed back on that. So, it is crucial to U.S. economic competitiveness and prosperity.

And then I think that Taiwan really is central to global perceptions of American credibility. So it's a signpost that countries around the world would look at the United States, if we did not come to Taiwan's defense, if it were attacked by China, I think that we would see countries around the world, and not just in Asia, feel that they have to rely much more on themselves. We would probably see more countries go nuclear, develop their own nuclear deterrents, and the implications for U.S. credibility and leadership in Asia and the rest of the world. I think that would, that would really come under challenge.

HASS: Thank you. Does anyone want to add to or amend anything that Bonnie just said?

So David, why don't I turn to you next. We often talk about upholding the status quo in the Taiwan Strait. What exactly is the status quo?

SACKS: Well, I have a bit of an issue with thinking about the status quo in the Taiwan Strait because to me it gives us a false sense of comfort that all three sides have bought into whatever is there right now should be there, indefinitely, that there are rules of the road that Beijing, Taipei, and Washington have all agreed to and will adhere by, and that basically we are on a sustainable trajectory. And so I take a little bit of issue with that.

And so what I would say to just highlight my thinking on that is that as we sit here in March 2026, the status quo as we would define it, or as U.S. officials would define it today, is very different than the status quo of 2022 or 2021, if we think about actual activities in the air and on the seas around Taiwan. Pre-August 2022 the status quo was that both sides would adhere to the median line in the Taiwan Strait, would not go over that median line. That no longer pertains to the situation today. You would say that the status quo, as well as that the PLA Navy and the Chinese Coast Guard are not ringed around Taiwan on a continual basis; well that's no longer the case. You would say that the status quo includes that you would not have major PLA military exercises and closure zones around Taiwan. Well, that's no longer the case as well. So my issue with the status quo is I think that we can all identify certain parts on a political level of a status quo that exists, which is that Taiwan right now is a defacto independent entity that has its own military and has its own foreign policy and political system and holds elections.

But I think that beyond those very basic facts that we can identify, I think at a kind of operational or tactical level a status quo doesn't really exist. And I think that all three entities, Taipei, Washington, and Beijing are pushing in different directions on what we would perceive to be the status quo.

Beijing, of course, wants to go and bring it towards unification. I think they're very actively pushing in that direction. We, of course, are pushing in the opposite direction to maintain Taiwan's autonomy. And so I'm not sure that it's a very useful construct in terms of thinking about cross-strait dynamics.

HASS: So we will, from this point forward, describe this situation as dynamic and not static in the Taiwan Strait.

SACKS: I think that's right, and I think that Kharis actually had a good line about coercive bargaining as the way that he described the dynamics in the Taiwan Strait. And I do think that you want to think about this as a far more dynamic situation where all the parties are pushing back against and feeling out where are the red lines, where are the boundaries? How far can we push? And I think that, my paper was focused on the gray zone coercion of Taiwan, and I think that's really where we see this playing out, where Beijing is trying to sense, where are the boundaries? How far can we push this before we elicit a response from the United States or Taiwan?

And so I try to think about cross-strait dynamics in those terms, rather than as a quote "status quo."

HASS: Great. In the workshops as well as the papers, one of the dominant takeaways is that there was no constituency calling for keeping policy on autopilot. Each, in your own way, you have proposed amendments, revisions to America's approach to cross-strait relations.

Jennifer, I want to bring you in first and Matt second. What is the problem that you think that we need to solve for? What is the deficiency right now in our current policy?

KAVANAGH: Well, so my view is that the U.S. needs a policy that guarantees that it stays out of a war over Taiwan. The benefits that the United States receives from the current dynamic – status quo as David described it – there are benefits, but in my view the costs that the U.S. would incur from fighting a war are far greater than the interests at stake.

And so I disagree a little bit with Bonnie's characterization of the importance of Taiwan. I don't think that democracy is a reason that the United States needs to defend Taiwan. The United States has spent decades defending democracies and trying to build democracies. And it hasn't worked out well for the United States or the countries that the United States has tried to defend.

The military gains that China would get from a reunification with Taiwan are modest and worth thinking about, but they're mostly things that China will get anyway, even just by its development of its military capabilities. So we're talking about delaying China's military advance, not stopping it.

When we think about the credibility issue, again I guess I don't see U.S. credibility as necessarily being on the line here. The U.S. commitment to Taiwan is very different than than U.S. alliances in Europe and U.S. alliances in Asia, and countries understand and recognize that.

So I don't think that we should think that all of U.S. credibility here hinges on whether or not the United States defends Taiwan. The economic consequences of a unification between China and Taiwan would probably be the most significant for the United States, but they're again not things that can't be mitigated with investment.

I agree with Bonnie that this would be a significant challenge. Building domestic capacity to produce semiconductors is a significant challenge, and the U.S. hasn't done that well on it so far. But I have a lot of confidence that if the United States really put its effort and resources into overcoming this challenge, it's something that could be done.

So my view is that the consequences of a unification between China and Taiwan are manageable for the United States, but the cost of a war with China are not manageable. They would be catastrophic. The costs economically and militarily would make the conflict with Iran look like a tiny war. The costs are just astronomically higher, including the cost of the U.S. military casualties and the casualties that Taiwan and China would also experience. And then we have the shadow of nuclear use. There's a real risk that a U.S.-China conflict over Taiwan would end up involving nuclear weapons. So I just see that fighting a war over Taiwan would worsen U.S. security not help it.

The current policy doesn't require that the United States defend Taiwan. That strategic ambiguity leaves it open. The U.S. might, it might not. But in my view, because Taiwan is not an existential interest, leaving this risk, the open door that the U.S. might fight a war over Taiwan, is unacceptable. The U.S. needs to shut that door and say that it will not fight that war.

And the final point I'll make is that the current U.S. posture hinges on this idea that more U.S. forward presence deters China. We could challenge that. We could say that more U.S. forward presence actually increases the risk of war by provoking China, by making it feel that this goal of reunification is slipping out of its reach. And in that sense, strategic ambiguity isn't a 50-50 prospect. It actually increases the risk that the United States will end up being pulled into a war for any number of reasons. So my recommendation, my paper really focuses on what the U.S. needs to do to shut this door finally.

HASS: Thank you. Matt, you have a different perspective on this. What problem do you think that we're solving for here?

TURPIN: Yeah, well first I want to thank Adrien Chorn and Jennifer Mason for putting all-- and doing all the back work effort to make this happen. None of this workshop would've happened without their hard efforts. And to both Ryan and Jude, thanks so much for bringing this team together to work on this. You guys did a great job.

So first I agree with David and Bonnie's points, particularly around this idea that the status quo is not static, right? That we live in a dynamic system. My take on this is that we have-- the United States has two principal vital national interests. One, to maintain a free and open, peaceful and stable Indo-Pacific, largely because that is the growth hub of the global economy. It's very much in the United States' interest to maintain that. And so that's the positive interest that we have.

The negative interest we have is that we have an interest in preventing a hostile rival from dominating the region and therefore foreclosing a whole bunch of options for the United States. And so therefore, the principal thing we're trying to solve for is, how do we deter Beijing from using force to annex Taiwan, right? Because that's really what the war is. The

war isn't that the United States is going to launch a war against China, the war is that Beijing will take the opportunity to do so. And so what is the best way to be able to do that? I completely agree that the cost of a conflict is extremely high, which is why we should be trying to prevent it from happening and to persuade Beijing that doing so would also be for them an extremely high cost and therefore best for them to pursue negotiated settlement with Taipei. So I think that to me is the same…

So in many ways I think we agree on what the problem is, right? That we have a problem here, and that in many ways I think we agree that there should be a degree of clarity from what our-- we happen to be on the opposite sides of what that clarity should actually be. But I think there actually is a general consensus that, as you put it Ryan, that autopilot is not a good idea right now. I happen to think that continued ambiguity raises the prospects of conflict, largely because Beijing may conclude to themselves that they have an opportunity to use force to achieve an objective that right now they're not able to achieve through negotiation.

BLANCHETTE: I wanted to maybe pick at a few of the threads that have been started here. And also try to use the availability of the four of you to give a bit more analysis on something that I think for many the general public, and frankly many of us in in DC, is difficult to tease out, which is the motivations, urgency, and timeline for Beijing.

I think there are debates and divisions on a few key questions. One of them is, how quickly is Beijing looking to see a resolution of the Taiwan issue, either through formal annexation via use of military force and or coercion to squeeze Taiwan and hopefully force a political settlement?

There are some that say Xi Jinping has time. Time and momentum are moving in Beijing's directions. They're shaping events, maybe not perfectly, but in a way that Beijing might feel satisfactory to-- and again, this is the only time it's okay to quote Sun Tsu, "win without fighting."

Then I think there are those who say the strategy isn't working right. Beijing is seeing that, for all its efforts to squeeze, it's producing antibodies in the Taiwan system. You're seeing that in polling data. You're seeing, I think significant efforts on things like Taiwan's resilience strategy. You're seeing more from the United States.

So wanted to maybe go down the line and ask each of you, how do you conceptualize Beijing's sense of urgency here? And I think what would also help us is what to you is the strongest evidence that you point to supporting your position. Note particular order, you're scratching your beard, so I'll go you first, Matt, and then we'll just go down the line.

So how urgent is Beijing-- does it think its strategy is working or not? And how much time do you think we have here?

TURPIN: Well, I think Beijing does think that its strategy is working right? And I think-- and I'll be very clear, I think that Beijing's strategy is one of political warfare to use economic coercion, military threats, cyber-attacks, a variety of activities, some of which we would put

into the gray zone to bring about a cognitive change in Taipei to bring about a capitulation, right? Again, to go back to the “win without fighting.” That is their preferred approach. And I think Beijing still believes that that will work.

I happen to think that there is increasing evidence that that is not working and that at some point in time Beijing may conclude that in fact that it may have to resort to plan B. And I think plan B is the use of military force and that is likely a full scale, right? Starting from a desire to essentially isolate and quarantine, to hope to bring about the capitulation. But you wouldn't start that without having a plan to go all the way to the end, right? Because obviously if you start down that path to use military force and all you had planned to do was to go halfway and then the Taiwanese are able to resist that, you're stuck. So my suspicion is that, a plan B certainly would start at the lower end of that, but it's able to escalate, right? So I think that's where Beijing is at right now.

My sense is that the United States and its allies still have the capability to be able to deter plan B. And I would rather play for time to see whether or not-- I happen to think that the Taiwanese democracy is far more resilient than I think that Beijing counts for it as. And I believe that it's much more important to be able to play for time and be able to provide that support over time so that Beijing can maybe conclude that there has to be a plan C, which does not involve coercion, right? That actually involves real negotiation.

And on the U.S. side, that requires a degree of support and continued deterrence at the level that certainly shifts to the threat. But that the level that we've been doing now for-- you said three quarters of a century. We've been doing this for quite a bit of time.

BLANCHETTE: David?

SACKS: So I agree with most of what Matt said. So let me-- I'll just add one thing, which is that I think that intentions can change overnight. In many ways, the PRC is a black box. We have certain data points of what Xi Jinping has said, what the Taiwan Affairs Office has put out publicly. But those are just scattered data points. But capabilities are things we can measure, things that we can look at and scrutinize and say, well, what are these capabilities for? Why is Beijing doing certain things? And my question that I would put forward is, what would a country that is deadly serious about annexing Taiwan do that Beijing is not doing? And I don't see much there.

And so if we think about China's nuclear build out and the modernization of its nuclear force, if we think about the amphibious lift capabilities that are coming online, if we think about exercises that use civilian ferries to put troops over a body of water, if we look at the sophistication and scale of the PLA exercises and the amphibious operations that they practice on the PRC, those are all data points that I would say show that Beijing is very serious about having a military option available to Xi Jinping if he wants to go down that route.

I think that for Xi Jinping, when he came into office, it was likely unacceptable that that military option did not exist. And that he is determined to ensure that, if he decides to go -- and we don't know exactly what would trigger that or whether he will choose to do so, I'm

cautious about that side of the coin -- but that if he does decide to go, that he has a viable option to get him there. And so I think that that's something that we need to take extremely seriously. And so that's the evidence that I would point to.

BLANCHETTE: Bonnie?

GLASER: Well, first I would say that you have to look at capabilities and intent. I think it would be dangerous to ignore intent, and we should be paying close attention to statements that are made, documents that we are able to procure. I think that is an important part of making an assessment as to how high the risk is of using force. I agree with Matt that this is mostly about psychological warfare. It is about instilling a sense of despair in the Taiwan public that their government cannot deliver good governance and that the United States is unreliable.

And public opinion polls are showing us that China is making some headway in that direction. And that worries me greatly. I think for me this whole question of the urgency of Xi Jinping is a very important one. I did a debate once at CSIS a few years ago on this issue. And if you ask me to provide one piece of evidence, it would be that in October of 2017, Xi Jinping said that unification -- or reunification, actually, in Chinese it's [re]unification -- is essential for national rejuvenation.

Now, you might think I'm going to say that that signals urgency, but in fact I think it's just the opposite, because it tells us that if there is any timeline, it is 2049. Xi Jinping will be 96, I believe, in 2049. So he has had an opportunity since 2017 to pull that sort of timeline forward. Say, we need to achieve something by 2035. But he has repeated this statement, so you could interpret this actually as kicking the can down the road potentially to his successor, that this is something that, yes, agree with David, he wants to have the military capabilities to deter independence and to try and compel unification. But I don't think that he believes that this is something he absolutely must achieve in his period in office.

And we could argue about what he-- I would say he already has a legacy that includes many things. This does not necessarily have to be it. But I believe that he is trying to make progress toward unification, to put this relationship with Taiwan on an inexorable path toward unification, so that when he leaves office, that gets picked up and pushed forward.

It's not peaceful, right? It's coercive. We all know that, this is not really about achieving peaceful unification. But I don't see solid evidence that Xi Jinping has attached so much urgency that he believes that he will have no legacy if he leaves office without having achieved a full unification.

KAVANAGH: And so I agree with Bonnie here, and I guess I'll just make a couple of additional points. So in my view, Xi Jinping has to look at his current strategy and think it's working pretty well. He's using military and economic coercion to so slowly shrink Taiwan's freedom of maneuver in the international arena. And in the Chinese view, the United States military power is on decline. And so why rush? Why not wait if the current strategy is working and the military balance is shifting in China's favor. What's the hurry? If anything, Xi Jinping has to look at the war in Ukraine and now the U.S. war in Iran, and understand that if he is

going to move militarily on Taiwan, he better be really sure that he can do it quickly and successfully so that China doesn't end up in the type of quagmire that Russia and the United States now find themselves in.

In my view, there's lots of signals here that that would encourage China to wait and to be patient and no indication that they're rushing even as they build up these military capabilities.

The other thing I'll say is I agree with Matt, that it is in the U.S. interest to try to delay any sort of military action and to push towards negotiation. And, and so a peaceful resolution of cross-strait disagreements. But I would also note that U.S. policy is not that China and Taiwan must be separate forever. U.S. policy is that it opposes coercive changes to the cross-strait status quo. And so in that sense, the U.S. should be ready to accept any sort of peaceful outcome that would come from negotiations between China and Taiwan.

BLANCHETTE: Great. Thank you. I suspect we'll circle back to thinking about the definitions of “peaceful,” because I think that is a key issue. But, an important point to make.

Jennifer, I might come to you first with the next question and then open it up. I think this was in the workshop discussions. I noticed maybe one of the most significant divides was not on the near term stuff, was actually about thinking about the future. Namely, what does the world look like for the United States after, or assuming that China is able to successfully unify and or annex Taiwan?

Those are different paths. But I did notice that across those, there were differences amongst the group. And Jennifer, I know you had a *uniquer [sic]* position on this. So I just wanted to ask if you could think out loud -- and then I want others to join in on this -- which is namely that world that the United States will be dealing with if there is a PRC flag flying over Taipei.

I get the sense, but don't want to put words in your mouth that you see a world in which China's able to unify with Taiwan as being one where the disturbances in the force are relatively minor for the United States. I think that was an area of disagreement within the group because I think some were starting from that end position in thinking, actually no. And there was a whole bunch of knock-on effects that were deleterious to the United States.

None of us have a crystal ball. This is all speculation, but just wondered if you might just take a stab at laying out the vision for what you think the future looks like in a unified world and essentially make the argument about why you do not think this is significantly deleterious to U.S. interest that it merits our attention now, and then we'll open it up for the group after.

KAVANAGH: Sure. So in my view, the United States has two main interests in Asia. One is to protect U.S. economic interests, so access to markets and key resources. And second, to be able to balance Chinese power. The United States does not need to dominate Asia to protect its national security.

And I push back on this idea that the U.S. needs a big security perimeter forward. This is a question that often comes up because the United States is actually-- the homeland is very secure. We have oceans on two sides and weak neighbors to the north and south. So we

don't need a big military presence forward in Asia or Europe to protect the United States. What would be the consequences of a unification between China and Taiwan, and would they threaten either of these two interests that I've laid out?

My answer is no. I don't see a unification between China and Taiwan as sufficient to shift the military balance in the region enough that it would force the United States out of Asia or give China an easy path to regional hegemony. In order to have dominance over the region the key player in my view is Japan. That's the linchpin. If Japan switched sides and bandwagoned with China, the implications would be much more significant for the United States. So I don't see any real challenge to the U.S. ability to balance Chinese power if there were to be unification.

I think the economic interest question is more challenging and more complicated. There is the semiconductor issue which we've talked about a little bit. We can maybe talk about that more, but I'm going to focus on a different piece, which is, can the U.S. protect access to markets, freedom-- the sea lines of communication, if it doesn't have-- if Taiwan and China are unified?

My answer to that is yes. You don't actually need to be able to navigate through the Taiwan Strait or even the South China Sea to get access to most key markets in the region. You can use the straits in Southeast Asia and the Philippines Sea to the east of Japan and still have plenty of access to the key markets that the United States would want to reach.

Controlling the Philippine Sea would be very difficult. It's big. It's not something that either the United States or China could dominate in its entirety. So in my view, all the U.S. really needs is a posture that is along the second island chain. And that-- a unification between China and Taiwan would not preclude U.S. presence in the region. The second island chain is where the U.S. already has a number of bases, so you'd want to invest in those bases and you could maintain posture, U.S. military forces in Japan.

Now, I would recommend you probably want to move them if United States and China reunified [*sic*]. Having military forces in Okinawa and in Luzon in the Philippines, they would not be-- they would be very vulnerable. There'd be a high risk of miscalculation. So I would pull them away from Taiwan, and you wouldn't need them there if unification had occurred and you were no longer trying to defend Taiwan. So I do think there are changes to U.S. military posture and economic strategy that would be required for the U.S. to manage this unification, but I don't see it as something that presents an existential risk to U.S. security or economic prosperity.

BLANCHETTE: Great, thank you. I think probably the three of you might want to come in. I saw Bonnie already has her mic on, so she's--

GLASER: Sure I'll be brief. First I think we need to state, what at least is my premise, that if the people of Taiwan really want to be part of China, that China will have been completely transformed. It will no longer have the political system that it has today, because I think the people of Taiwan don't want to be part of an oppressive system that denies individual and

human rights. So we're-- I have to assume that this occurs through coercion and potentially use of force. So I think that's, that's important to posit.

And I would say three things. Almost all the countries in the region, maybe not Japan, would accommodate, I think, to China. Countries in Southeast Asia, many of the smaller countries, and in the broader region. I think that, as I said earlier, that U.S. credibility essentially would've been shattered. It would no longer be the partner of choice. I have no doubt that Japan, South Korea, others might go nuclear. I think that the United States could not remain any kind of a leader in this region. And I'm puzzled when people say somehow we can retain our alliances and our relationships with countries after we have allowed China to take Taiwan by force.

And then there's a factor that I think isn't discussed enough. I've been following Chinese foreign policy now for many decades, and when the Chinese make foreign policy decisions, of course, what they bring into their deliberations are the things that are in their toolkit. And use of force has really not been a central part of China's toolkit, and I think that if they were to use force successfully, that going forward, Chinese leaders -- when they deliberate any particular foreign policy, whatever that might be -- that the PLA will have a stronger voice at the table. It will put forward options and perhaps Chinese leaders would be more likely to use those options. So I believe that use of force in Chinese foreign policy is something that would be very difficult to predict now how they would do so, but I think would become far more likely to the detriment of the United States.

SACKS: So I'll just add two things quickly. I actually start from the same premise as Jennifer, that the United States has a vital strategic interest in preventing the emergence of a rival hegemon in Asia. I think, as Matt said as well, the United States also has a vital strategic interest in having continued access to Asia. As Matt said. I don't think either of those vital interests can be preserved if China annexes Taiwan through coercion or use of force.

And so what I would say on both of those points is number one, I think, as Jennifer said as well, a lot of this is about what Japan does afterwards. And I don't believe that Japan would just pick up where we left off the day prior and say, everything is fine, we understand the United States, your relationship with us is different than your relationship with Taiwan, you'll still have our back, so we're okay. I think that basically the day after you look at the Senkakus are no longer defendable and Japan's southwest islands are no longer defendable. And Japan has real questions about whether it can continue to rely on the United States for its security. And as Bonnie said, I think it chooses a far more independent path, potentially to include nuclear weapons while the weaker countries in the region conclude they have no option but to bandwagon with China.

And it's not me who's making that assessment. I think actually you see Prime Minister Takaichi making a similar assessment with her comments about Taiwan. And I think you saw former Prime Minister Abe also make that assessment. And this really came home to the Japanese in August 2022 when the PLA exercises after Speaker Pelosi's visit landed missiles in Japan's EEZ. And so they realized that whether they like it or not, they are in the battle space and it brought home, I think just how close they are to Taiwan and to this conflict potentially.

The other thing in terms of economics is that we know from history that regional hegemons do not just grant access to other great powers to these regions. And so we can't assume that China basically says, okay, well, we're the regional hegemon, but the United States, don't worry, trade with anybody you want, invest wherever you want. We'll grant you those privileges. I think that what we would look at is basically much more of China dictating the terms of our commercial engagement in the region. And so that is something that disappears, I think after a Chinese annexation of Taiwan. So those are the two points that I would make.

TURPIN: I agree with Bonnie and David.

HASS: So Jennifer, I think we've exposed a bit of a fault line amongst the four of you on this question. I want to give you a chance to lay out your argument in a little bit more detail, and then we'll ask the others to do so as well. But what do you see as options for limiting U.S. commitments while expanding Taiwan's self-defense capabilities? And, related to that, where would you draw boundaries around the United States defense perimeter in Asia?

KAVANAGH: Sure. I think my argument is that the United States should state explicitly that it is not going to defend Taiwan. But this would require that the United States make a number of changes to its own policy, its relationship with China and its relationship with Taiwan in order to protect U.S. interests.

So the goal should be to have an end state where no matter what happens in cross-strait relations, the U.S. interests are secure. First of all, I discussed a little bit what I would do for U.S. posture. U.S. posture needs to change because as it is right now, there's a high risk that the United States could get dragged into war. If you have forces in Okinawa and in Luzon, there's a risk that they could either-- if the United States policy isn't clear China might strike them preemptively, or just the fact that they're there could create risks that drag them into war. We see in the Middle East how dangers to U.S. bases is often a reason that the United States ends up in conflicts that are not necessarily in its interest.

So you'd want to move U.S. forces so that they are in a more survivable location. I'd move them to Northern Japan and increase U.S. presence and infrastructure along the second island chain. The U.S. would also have to make economic investments to protect its economic security to deal with the semiconductor and other issues.

On Taiwan, I think, my view here is that the United States should be prepared to accept any peaceful resolution. And that the choice here should be up to the Taiwanese people. It's possible that if the United States decides it's not going to defend Taiwan, it makes this clear, Taiwan decides it is not worth fighting. It would prefer political accommodation or finding a modus vivendi. And if that's the case, the U.S. should accept that. If that's not the case, then Taiwan decides that it does want to continue to arm and defend itself, the United States should continue to sell weapons to Taiwan and it can do things to encourage Taiwan to make good use of that military investment. It could say that they could be at the front of the queue for asymmetric capabilities, assuming that they spend a sufficient amount on defense. It could invest in Taiwan's civilian and military infrastructure. It could set up intelligence sharing mechanisms to support Taiwan and support Taiwan's logistics. It could deal with energy security. There's lots of things the U.S. could do to help prepare Taiwan.

And the third thing would be to work with China to create incentives for peaceful resolution here. Some of the U.S. posture changes could be tied to China reducing its coercion of Taiwan in the Taiwan Strait. It could be tied to-- the U.S. should reinforce-- that just because the United States is saying it won't fight militarily for Taiwan, that doesn't mean that there might not be economic consequences if China were to use military force. These are the types of things that the United States could do to incentivize China to continue to prioritize a peaceful unification. There are other diplomatic things the U.S. could do, for example, making very clear and stating explicitly that it will accept any peaceful resolution. So I see this as a way that the United States could protect its interests, give Taiwan a path to self-defense if it chooses, and recalibrate the U.S.-China relationship to help reduce tensions and deescalate.

But I should acknowledge that it's not guaranteed that even if Taiwan invests 10% of its GDP and defense, it will be able to defend itself successfully. And so the policy that I'm recommending requires acknowledging upfront that unification might happen peacefully or by force, and the U.S. interest will be okay, the U.S. can manage those consequences no matter what happens.

HASS: Thank you. I think that you'll all have things to say about that argument. So I welcome you to do so in the process of your response. But Bonnie, we asked you to look at our diplomatic approach towards Taiwan and cross-strait issues, and you proposed several renovations, one of which was really working to build a coalition of countries to demonstrate support for Taiwan, but also to inoculate against Chinese economic coercion. I was wondering if you could unpack your thinking there and any other things that you would like to add.

GLASER: Well, thank you Ryan. My paper does focus on diplomacy and I want to highlight that, but let me just put a pin in it for a second and mention one other thing. And that is the recommendation that I have, which is sort-- it's my answer to retaining strategic ambiguity, but not adopting strategic clarity. And while I understand the arguments for strategic clarity and in some ways sympathize with them, I believe that the PLA has long operated under the assumption that the U.S. would intervene. I don't see much likelihood that China would miscalculate. That could change, but I think at present, that's not true. And I think that strategic clarity runs the risk of provoking the attack that you want to deter. So I find that the argument in favor of strategic clarity does not give me confidence that we don't end up provoking a Chinese attack. Because I know you don't assume, Matt, that China's a paper tiger and it just won't do anything.

Okay, so back to… And the other side of that is that, what I do recommend is that we should make it unambiguously clear to Beijing that if it were ever to use force against Taiwan, that the U.S.-China relationship would be irreparably damaged. In other words, this would not be the aftermath of June 19, 1989, where the United States thought China was so important to the United States in the Cold War and resisting the Soviet Union that we would-- and the signal we sent very shortly after that was that we would get over this Chinese massacre in Tiananmen Square very quickly. I think we would have to convey that directly to Xi Jinping. So it that I think would be important.

The second piece that I'll address, and there are others in the paper, but I'll just limit myself to the one that Ryan raised, which is about building an international coalition. I think if you look at what China reacts to most strongly, that often gives you some insight into what you're doing right and what you're doing wrong, and the efforts by the United States, particularly in the Biden administration, but also proceed the Biden administration, and to some extent is still going on, although not enough, is the internationalization of the Taiwan question. It's bringing countries into the deterrence equation and planning for responses if China were to implement, whether it be a quarantine, a blockade, or full-scale invasion. And so I think we have to demonstrate that Taiwan is not solely a U.S.-China issue. This is exactly what the Chinese want. If they can limit it to us, then they push out the United States and they're just dealing with Taiwan on its own. So I think that the United States should organize a group of countries, articulate a set of positions with our like-minded partners that we oppose use of force, we oppose unilateral changes to the status quo, we support the peaceful resolution of differences. And then from there, move to an action-oriented agenda.

For example, there are some things being done to push back on China's distortion of UNGA resolution 2758 at the United Nations – its effort to establish the one China principle in international law. We, I think, need to support more Taiwan's meaningful participation in international organizations, those that require sovereignty for membership. We could coordinate our contributions to the whole of society defense resilience program. We certainly should be warning Beijing, as a collective group of countries, that they should not exclude Taiwan from APEC this year. And I worry about that because it's going to be held in Shenzhen.

And then finally, we really need to be preparing measures that would impose costs on China if they used force against Taiwan. And this is something that a conversation that began certainly under the Biden administration -- limited progress made. But we need to be talking about financial sanctions, about export controls. And there are some lessons we can draw from Russia's invasion of Ukraine and what worked and what didn't. But China's very different from Russia. So it's not going to be a playbook that we can just copy and paste. And I think that signaling willingness to do that, the actual preparations, would also have an impact on China.

HASS: Thank you. Jude is going to bring the audience in, in a moment. But before we do so, I want to give Matt and David a chance to lay out a little bit of their arguments. Bonnie provided a bit of a prebuttal to the idea of strategic clarity. Strategic clarity was the topic of your paper, Matt. So why don't we turn to you next to address that.

TURPIN: First I'll just, very quick to Jennifer, and I certainly appreciate the thought that went into it. My opinion is that sort of the proposal that you've laid out will bring about the conflict that you say that you want us to avoid.

So I just think that that approach in which the United States would provide clarity that we would not intervene to me is very reminiscent of where we were in December of 2021 or January of 2022, in which we made very clear to Vladimir Putin that the United States and NATO would not intervene at all in Ukraine and we got the conflict that we had hoped to deter.

So that to me is the logic that would flow from that. It seems to me to be a fairly dishonest effort to portray this as a reasonable strategy. It seems to me to be completely directed around reducing sort of U.S. military spending, U.S. military footprint and a retrenchment back into the United States. That seems to me to be the purpose. And then there seems to be an argument about how this would also just all work itself out. And I think that, that's just not the case.

On a sort of a strategic clarity/ambiguity, Bonnie, I think you are right. There is a risk that Beijing uses that as a pretense to make the commitment. But I tend to view this as -- and I agree with you -- that Beijing already concludes that the United States would likely intervene militarily if it were to launch an effort to annex Taiwan. So I believe that is the case, right? And changing that from what is relatively little ambiguity for Beijing's perspective to now no ambiguity, the United States is actually going to do this, there is some risk there. I agree with you.

But the benefits on that is that, one of the challenges that we have is that the military problem is becoming more acute given China's military modernization and its force development. And so whereas in 1995 and 1996, we could unilaterally sail two carrier strike groups through the Taiwan Strait, not coordinate with Taiwan, not coordinate with Japan, not coordinate with anyone else, the United States could unilaterally deter the military capacity that the PRC had at the time. That is not the case right now. And so we're in a position where the acuteness of the military problem does require a degree of coordination.

And you pointed this out, Bonnie, I think this is absolutely right. The United States has to begin to bring together that group of countries. And one of the challenges we've had with that is that if our policy is one of ambiguity, it's really hard to get others to sign up for the actual planning that would be required to do those things that would presumably put together that kind of case. So that's my-- that's the dilemma that we're in.

And so I actually think that, that risk is relatively low on U.S. essentially changing its language. Again, it's an if-then statement, right? The United States-- if China invades, the United States will intervene militarily and we're going to begin to prepare for that. Which then opens up the ability to say to Japan, who has essentially already made that same statement, okay, let's conduct the actual military preparations. Let's build the command-and-control systems. Let's set up the logistical system. Let's do all of those things that move us from an ambiguity side to a much more clear and concise, that Beijing already believes we're going to plan to do.

So I don't think we actually lose that much in the terms-- like in terms of provoking Beijing, but we gain a whole bunch on actual military capacity and to be able to deter this fight. And that then fundamentally, the purpose is to make sure the work doesn't happen, right? And that's the outcome that we're looking for.

HASS: Thank you. We, we need to wrap up this this session soon, but I don't want to do so without giving David a chance to weigh in on what he focused on, which is how to respond to China's gray zone pressure on Taiwan. And then Jennifer has a quick thought to wrap us up, and we'll turn it back to Jude.

SACKS: Well, just very quickly on the strategic clarity question. I do think that we have to take account of the fact that President Biden did articulate some version of strategic clarity four different times. Yes, on the first three occasions, they were walked back by administration officials. On the fourth occasion, it was not. The president's statement stood, and that did not prompt the Chinese attack on Taiwan, nor did it cause a rupture in U.S. China relations. I actually would argue that that was a stabilizing facet of U.S.-China relations, or that helped stabilize U.S.-China relations to some extent.

And I also just completely agree with Matt that on strategic clarity, I think that the conversations with allies now are, why should we be clearer about our commitments than the United States? And I think that the United States has to go first if it's going to push countries like Japan, Australia, and even South Korea, to be clearer about what they would contribute in a U.S.-led coalition to defend Taiwan. And we cannot ask the Japanese or the Australians to be more unambiguous than we are. And so I think that it's a necessary component, as Matt said, of galvanizing that coalition and doing the real planning that needs to take place so that we can maintain a credible deterrent.

Now in my paper in particular, I was asked to look at China's gray zone coercion of Taiwan. And the way that I approached this was I think that there is a narrative in Washington to some extent that dealing with China's gray zone coercion or preparing a strategy of denial for Taiwan is basically a zero-sum contest. That every dollar spent responding to gray zone coercion is a dollar not spent on missiles mines and preparations to blunt an invading PLA force crossing the Taiwan Strait. And the reconceptualization that I argue for in my paper is to not view gray zone activities as a distraction or as something that China's just doing to placate its domestic audience or to make certain political signals to Taiwan. But actually I think that the gray zone coercion is best seen as a pre-conflict campaign to prepare the conditions for China to defeat Taiwan and to prevent the United States from intervening on Taiwan's behalf.

And so if we think about gray zone coercion in that context, then the United States does have an interest in imposing costs on Beijing for continuing down this path and for preventing further gray zone coercion of Taiwan. And I think that if you think about, for instance, Admiral Paparo's comments that exercises are now much more like rehearsals for an invasion of Taiwan, or you look at what Taiwanese military officials have said, that it is very difficult to distinguish between what looks like a routine activity or potentially the opening salvo of a strike against Taiwan. I think that we can see how much it-- China's gray zone coercion has eroded our early indicators and warnings and the interest that we have in actually restoring those.

And so the playbook that I put forward in my paper is actually one where we impose costs on China for gray zone coercion, and we do so in a way that actually complements a U.S. and Taiwan strategy of denial.

HASS: Great. So Bonnie has one thing to say. Let's try-- and Jennifer as well, let's try to do it in one minute or less each for the two of you, and then Jude over to you.

GLASER: I completely agree with David that the gray zone threats are growing, that we don't have an effective strategy to counter them. But I don't think the playbook of export

controls and increased Taiwan Strait transits and expanding our entity lists are going do it. I'd just like to see more effective strategy.

And then in response to the point that both Matt and David made, I would argue just the opposite about allies wanting strategic ambiguity. I think that if we have strategic clarity, their hands are tied. And then they've decided that they're going to work with us, and we enter a war that actually they decide at the time, maybe they don't want to be part of.

So what they do need is trust in the United States. They need a solid relationship with the U.S. that we understand the threats in the same way, we're likely to act together. We plan to act together, but at the end of the day, they're going to want the choice left up to them. So I don't think that that's a persuasive argument for strategic clarity.

HASS: Okay. Jennifer?

KAVANAGH: Yeah, Matt is right that if the U.S. decides and declares that it's not going to defend Taiwan, China might decide to move up its timeline and take advantage of that. But I would argue the same is true of strategic clarity. If the United States declared today that it was definitely going to defend Taiwan, why wouldn't China decide that now is the perfect time to move-- to take its action? Because right now the United States couldn't defend Taiwan if it wanted to. All of its military capabilities are tied up in the Middle East and its munition stockpiles are depleted.

So I think the argument here goes both ways. It's just as likely that if the United States said that it wouldn't defend Taiwan that this would be a motivation for Xi Jinping to wait. There's no rush. The U.S. isn't going to defend Taiwan. We have more time. The window isn't closing. So I think it really comes down to whether you think a U.S. military power is stabilizing or destabilizing.

And I don't think the Russia example is a good one because I don't think the United States was trying to deter Russia from invading Ukraine by saying that it wasn't going be involved. It was trying to stay out of a war with Russia and make clear to Ukraine that it wasn't going come to intervene. So I don't think that's a good example. There is an active debate here about whether U.S. military power deters or increases the risk of conflict. And it's fine for Matt to disagree, but I don't think that makes me dishonest because we have a different-- a disagreement over the answer to that question.

BLANCHETTE: Great. Well, as you see, we could keep going back and forth. I appreciate Matt's forbearance here. But we'll continue this discussion another day and they continue in the essays.

We'll go now, we've got 13 minutes. Just, I personally like long rambling questions that are actually personal opinions. Brookings does not. So what I'm going to ask is, I'm going to take in groups of three. Ask a genuine question. Ask this so we can hear the opinions of others, not yourself. And please try to ask the question in about 10 or 15 seconds so we can get maximal questions.

Demetri from the Poughkeepsie Gazette [*joke, Financial Times*] first, then you, sir. And then just behind in the pink.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: It's Poughkeepsie Times. [*joke*]

Question for Bonnie and Matt, I hear what you say about rallying allies and obviously in the Biden administration, that was a big part of their policy. When Prime Minister Takaichi made her comments on Taiwan in November, President Trump did not come to her defense. And one thing that hasn't really been picked up here is the Japanese readout of her summit last week with Donald Trump does not mention peace and stability in the Taiwan Straits. The U.S. readout does. So how are you going to get allies to, basically, to ally with the U.S. on Taiwan when they don't trust the administration on that point right now?

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Thank you. Mark for United Daily News from Taiwan. Just two quick questions. How can U.S. set up conditions--

BLANCHETTE: Just one, please.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Okay, all right. I'll pick the second one. Although delayed, Trump's meeting President Xi in probably April or May. Do you think this meeting could trigger changes in the current status quo? Thank you.

BLANCHETTE: Great question.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Hi, Jessica Gardner from the Australian Financial Review. How useful is AUKUS as a deterrent of China, especially given the timelines that you have in your mind?

BLANCHETTE: Great. So we'll go to the panelists now. Please pick from-- we have Japan summit and AUKUS. Who's burning to go first?

David, you're nodding so I'm going to take that to be you.

SACKS: I'll just take the second one. I wrote an essay with my friend and colleague Marvin Park in Foreign Affairs looking at how Taiwan could be nested within a summit between President Trump and Xi Jinping. I do think that President Trump will be under pressure when he's in Beijing to make concessions on Taiwan. I think there's no chance that he goes through that set of meetings without Xi Jinping raising Taiwan and pressing him on that.

I also don't think it was surprising at all that Taiwan wasn't necessarily raised in Busan when the two leaders met. I thought that they both had an interest in thinking about the economic relationship and finding a way to deescalate that facet. And I thought that it was smart of Xi Jinping to wait until Trump is in Beijing to make the big push on Taiwan. So I do fear that that is coming. I think the Chinese interlocutors have signaled in private settings that that is coming.

And of course there is an ask out there that President Trump formally state that the United States opposes Taiwan independence or supports efforts at unification. That leads to the question of, should we care about that? Does that matter to the United States if President Trump says something to that effect? In my mind that does matter a lot. I would just say there's a reason why Beijing really wants President Trump to say that, and that's because it matters. And I think that it would fundamentally undermine President Lai and his standing in Taiwan. I think it would make it much more difficult for Taiwan to pass the special budget and to continue to invest in its defense in a meaningful way. And I think that it would continue to raise skepticism of the United States as a reliable partner of Taiwan as Bonnie mentioned in her paper and earlier this morning.

BLANCHETTE: Great. Matt? And then looks like Bonnie wants to come in.

TURPIN: So on Demetri's, I don't know why it wasn't raised or why it isn't in both readouts. My sense is that there is a degree of trust between Tokyo and Washington on these issues, right? And that there is a degree of coordination and collaboration, particularly in the Southwest Islands and lower Ryukyus. It's operationalized. It's already underway. It's been underway for years and years, and so my sense is that, in the constellation of issues it, that may not have been the topic that came up in the Oval, but that doesn't mean that that isn't being worked on.

BLANCHETTE: Bonnie?

GLASER: On the question of the summit meeting and the implications for the status quo. So I would agree with everything David said. But I would add that it is, I think, clear to many of us that Trump administration officials have been sending signals that they see declaratory statements and declaratory policy overall as just less important under this administration, which could be maybe laying the groundwork for, if the president does say something that alters that declaratory policy even further, that the administration can actually say what they also have been telling everybody, including journalists and think tank experts, that U.S. policy hasn't changed. It remains unchanged, even though it seems to be in some ways the declaratory policy at least changing.

So my view is that the status quo would not be would not be significantly affected, but I do think the biggest challenge and the largest impact would be on Taiwan, that it would further lower, I think, the confidence that Taiwan has in the United States, and China would see that as a win. I hope that that doesn't happen.

And very briefly on your question, Demetri, I hadn't seen the Japanese readout, but I wonder if the Japanese actually had a hand in maybe shaping the U.S. readout, that they would've wanted to see a reference to peace and stability. Maybe it's because of the very high degree of tension in Japan-China relations that they thought at this moment, saying it in their readout maybe wasn't a good idea. But I think you and I would have no doubt that this remains Japanese policy. And the U.S. statement has, what I think is, pretty robust wording in support of Taiwan.

BLANCHETTE: Jennifer, did you want to come in on any of this? Please.

KAVANAGH: I'll address the AUKUS question. Yeah, so I don't think AUKUS is irrelevant, but I guess I don't really think it figures that much into Chinese calculations. I think it's relevant in the sense that the Biden administration was big on building these minilateral coalitions or organizations that had different levels of formality. And I think in the Chinese view, this contributed to the idea that the United States was trying to build like a circle around China to encircle it, to squeeze it.

But in terms of the actual capabilities, number one, the timeline is so long that it's not really a factor. Number two, there are questions about whether it even happens. The U.S. can barely meet its own needs for submarines and is trying to increase the fleet. So this really depends on whether the United States is able to ramp up its industrial capacity to produce submarines at the level that would be required.

And then the third piece is there's no guarantee that Australia would use the submarines in a way that would really threaten China. Whether they would just be used to protect home waters nearby.

I guess the one piece that could factor into calculations is actually not the delivery of submarines to Australia, but the ability to position more U.S. submarines forward, since that does provide this sort of like low footprint, hard to detect U.S. military power forward. So I think in that sense it could matter. Because I do think if there were to be a war, which I would like to avoid, I do think submarines would play a really big role. But I'm not sure how much that is a decisive factor as much as just something that China will try to build and account for in their planning.

BLANCHETTE: Great. Next round, sir, Richard, and then sir, in the-- sorry, you.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Hi. Antoine van Agtmael, Brookings trustee. My question is, can we really, at the moment-- are we stuck in a way? On the diplomatic side, it seems that we-- it's difficult to brush up our diplomatic toolkit at a time that supremacy of the United States is somewhat fading. And on the military side, we have learned a lot of lessons and know more about the vulnerability of aircraft carriers, far away bases. You can go through a whole refuelers whole list.

BLANCHETTE: Thank you. What was the question, sir? Specifically.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: The question is how stuck are we?

BLANCHETTE: Oh, got it. Great. Richard,

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Great project. I would like to ask what would be the impact if 22 months from now Taiwan voters return the KMT to power? What's the impact on how China approaches Taiwan, the politics and substance of cross-strait relations policy in Taiwan, and what kind of freakout would we have here in the United States?

BLANCHETTE: Great. And then I remember the word I was looking for, sir, was gray jacket. I would've gotten there, but--

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Thanks very much. James Sebens from the Stimson Center. So this question is primarily for Bonnie since you talked about the focus on diplomacy. I wanted to ask if you would articulate what China's clearest red lines are.

I think someone else on the panel said, we don't know what might cause Xi Jinping to decide to attack Taiwan. There's actually been decades worth of white papers articulating China's red lines around these kinds of things. So what do you see as the brightest, clearest, most articulated red lines that China's put forward? Thank you.

BLANCHETTE: Great. So how stuck are we, KMT in 2028 and Beijing's red lines? And this will close us out. Who would like to go first? And I'm happy to call on someone unless I get a hand. Bonnie, please.

GLASER: So my answer to that last question would be Taiwan declaring independence, essentially changing its constitution. So changing the name of the country, something really rather significant. We did see China's reaction to holding a referendum and Taiwan joining the United Nations under the name Taiwan. Actually think today would have to go farther than that, but I think that would-- that is a red line.

U.S. recognition, diplomatic recognition of Taiwan or Republic of China, whatever. I think that would be a red line.

And Taiwan reviving nuclear weapons program I think probably would also be a red line. So those would be at least some.

And there are others in the anti-secession law. It's always useful to remember that the Chinese have said, if everything else fails, we are entitled to use force. We are justified in doing so.

I really like Richard's question and I think it would deserve a really terrific think piece that you might pen on what would what would change and what China would do. But I'll just mention a few things.

We know that when Ma Ying-jeou was in power and even in his campaign before he was elected, he talked about how he wanted to have political negotiations with Beijing and he gave that up. But I think that China has not, and so I do think that China would try to compel the KMT government to agree to political negotiations. And I think that there might-- it would probably be revival of many of the agreements that were already passed in Ma Ying-jeou's term. But I think ultimately there would be coercion in various forms to try to get a settlement, something with Taiwan that then could be implemented even after that government might leave power. And I think it would put that KMT government in a very, very awkward position, and there would need to be greater sort of national consensus on these issues. And as you know better than I do, there is anything but a consensus.

BLANCHETTE: Great. Others? And, sorry, I have to ask that we, we get responses in about a minute or so, because we're just at time. Jennifer?

KAVANAGH: I'll just say on this question of the U.S. freakout, there shouldn't be one, right? Like we shouldn't interfere in other countries domestic politics, and we shouldn't interfere in Taiwan's domestic politics. That's the standard that the U.S. has set. So no matter what the Taiwanese people decide, the U.S. should be okay with it, as long as it doesn't cross the line of coercive, change in the cross-strait status quo.

GLASER: Even if China has interfered in Taiwan's internal situation?

KAVANAGH: I don't think that justifies U.S. interference.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: I agree with you, but I know Washington.

KAVANAGH: I don't disagree with you. I'm just saying that's what it should be.

BLANCHETTE: Great, David?

SACKS: No, I think that I agree with what Bonnie said about the KMT. My sense is that there is very little low hanging fruit left in terms of cross-strait agreements in technical areas that could be struck once the KMT comes to power. I think that Ma Ying-jeou actually did a very effective job of just staying focused on those technical and cultural aspects so that they can say, look, we're making progress, we have another agreement, another agreement… But I think that, as Bonnie said, I think Beijing's patience is now wearing thin, and they're going to say, we've done all of this. We've reached all these agreements, now it's time to have political talks.

I think that the question, though, is what KMT comes in 2028 and runs for office in 2028. Is it a Cheng Li-wun kind of branch of the KMT? Is it a Lu Shiow-yen? Is it somebody else? And so I don't think that the KMT is a monolithic actor. I think that there are still having these internal debates and struggles over what the KMT proposition on cross-strait relations and on U.S.-Taiwan relations should be for them to be competitive in 2028. So we have to see how that all plays out.

BLANCHETTE: Matt, you get the benediction.

TURPIN: Well first I, I don't think we're stuck.

And on the KMT question. Yeah. I think it's just in the cycle of how democracies work. The likelihood that the DPP is going to win four elections in a row is not all that high. You're likely to-- if the KMT want to win elections, they're likely going to try hard to do that, but they're going to be up against many of the same sort of structural issues, right? If Ma Ying-jeou couldn't get certain technical economic things through a dozen years ago when the Taiwan-mainland economic relationship was much better and everyone was assuming that China was growing-- would inevitably be the most powerful economic power in the world, there is a

much lower case of why Taiwan would necessarily tie itself completely to the mainland today than they were a dozen years ago.

So I just-- I think Beijing will be very happy if it gets a KMT leader. I don't think it will actually result in the outcomes that Beijing thinks that it's going to get.

HASS: Thank you all for a tremendously rich conversation. We started this discussion by noting that the status quo is not static, it's dynamic. As the situation evolves, American policy and strategy must as well. And in order for it to do there must be vigorous healthy debate like we've witnessed on stage today.

These are a range of viewpoints that that are all intended to help push forward the conversation about how the United States should adapt to a changing environment. Thank you to Jude Blanchette for your tremendous partnership in this exercise, as well as Jennifer Mason and Adrien Chorn for driving us along.

Thank you all.