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US-CHINA COMPETITION: POLICY PRIORITIES FROM CAPITOL HILL

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DISCUSSION

THE HON. JEANNE SHAHEEN (D-N.H.)  
U.S. Senate

THE HON. THOM TILLIS (R-N.C.)  
U.S. Senate

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**HASS:** Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to today's event that is going to look at policy priorities from Capitol Hill on US-China competition. This event is the kickoff of a multi-year, institution-wide effort on how the United States can best sharpen its edge for dealing competitively with China.

My name is Ryan Hass. I'm the director of the China Center, and today I will preside over our conversation. And it is my honor to help facilitate a conversation with Republican Senator Thom Tillis from North Carolina and Democratic Senator Jeanne Shaheen from New Hampshire. These two senators are steeped in American foreign policy.

Senator Shaheen is the ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, a committee she's been on for over 17 years. She's a leading voice in setting the terms of America's relationship with the world. Senator Tillis is a leader in the Senate on strengthening NATO, on taking a firm and principled posture towards China, and towards bolstering America's alliances. He is also co-chair of the bipartisan Senate Taiwan Caucus.

So thank you both for being with us today. I'm going to use the next 45 minutes to extract as much wisdom as I can from these two individuals.

**TILLIS:** You gonna give me a chance to talk?

**SHAHEEN:** Wisdom.

**TILLIS:** She's got the wisdom.

**HASS:** Particularly on Congress's priorities as they relate to China. And then we'll open up the floor to our audience at the end for, for audience question and answers.

But I would like to start by asking both of you, and I'll, I'll start with you, Senator Tillis, about Congress's prerogative on China policy. Because historically, Congress has played a very strong role in shaping America's approach to China, including by heading, helping set national priorities related to China. So from your perches in the Senate, and recognizing that President Trump will be traveling to China in a matter of days, what issues do you think should rise to the top of the agenda in our relationship with China right now?

**TILLIS:** Boy, man, that's, there's a lot to cover. He needs to schedule a long weekend. There are so many things.

First and foremost, we can't forget what China is. I was talking to my staff on the ride over here, number one, a developing nation. On the one hand, it's a developing nation, on the other hand, it's using debt to basically conquer other countries to develop those nations. So at what point do we recognize that they've probably emerged as a developed nation and should have the same kind of expectations imposed on it that we do?

We can't forget, and I hope the president doesn't forget, that there's still two million Uyghurs who are living in less than free conditions in China, that there's forced work in China, that China is sharing intelligence and material support in Iran and in Ukraine.

China is, at best, I hope we can get to a cooperative, cooperative sort of competition environment with China, but we're not coexisting. China is patient. China will wait out this

administration, and any agreement that this administration has with China needs to have the staying power of congressional ratification. Otherwise, China will make whatever agreement they want to and wait until 2029 and see who else they can toy with in the White House.

I have a very jaundiced view of China based on the reality of what we see every single day. Their, their activities in every hemisphere. Their – I was in Kenya last year and looking at the infrastructure investment that they're making in Kenya, their, their road investments. They're, they're, they're investing trillions of dollars across the globe to position them for hegemony, and they're not taking care of their own people at home. And I hope that the president is briefed up on that reality because I believe that that is the reality that he's going into when he visits Beijing.

**HASS:** Thank you. Senator?

**SHAHEEN:** Well, I wanna focus on the congressional aspect of that question because I think since I got to the Senate in 2009, China has been viewed as the biggest adversary, both economically and militarily, of the United States. And Congress, as Thom pointed out, has been really important in setting policy around China because administrations come and go, but Congress, if we can keep policy bipartisan on behalf of Congress, then it outlasts the existing administration. And I think unfortunately what we've seen for too much of, this administration is Congress abdicating its responsibility on China.

I brought along a report that the Democratic members of the Foreign Relations Committee did. This is the second report. It's called "The Price of Retreat: Undermining America's Economic Edge and Alliance Advantage with Respect to China." And we focused on China because it has been such a bipartisan effort on the part of Congress for, you know, as far, as long as I can remember, actually. And I think what we've seen under this administration is mixed messages about what the United States' position is relative to China.

Thom talked about the, the Uyghurs and their human rights that they've been denied. Well, you know, Beijing is denying the human rights of all of their citizens, and to the detriment of the world, and that's their position with respect to their interest in hegemony over the rest of the world. I mean, that's the position that they have taken, and we see that, whether it's through the Belt and Road Initiative and their efforts to coerce, through loans, the countries where they're doing development. And the United States' response to that, as of last year, was to eliminate USAID and the foreign assistance that we have traditionally provided to so many countries. And what we're seeing is that China has gone into many of those countries and has picked up the exact programs, and they're designating themselves as the reliable ally and partner of the countries, as opposed to the United States, and they're saying that countries can't count on us.

So I think we're in a very difficult position at this point. I think President Trump goes into his meeting with President Xi this week in a very weak position, and that doesn't bode well for anything positive coming out of that meeting or for what he might be willing to give away with respect to Taiwan and other interests in the Indo-Pacific.

**TILLIS:** The, the key, the key point or the thing I'd ask the president—and I'm, I'm glad he's going to China, you've gotta talk even to your adversaries—but the, the point here is that Xi Jinping knows that the president will not be president in January of 2029. So whatever they agree with here is only as good as the, the number of days left in this administration.

That is why I think it's important to have it rise to a level of an agreement that is binding, that has enforcement mechanisms, and that is ratified by Congress. That is the role that we need to play in China policy in this, this episode with the president's outreach to China.

**HASS:** Right. You both put a lot of issues on the table that I want to come back to, including human rights and-

**TILLIS:** Yeah, it was kind of like a Festivus airing of grievances for me. I recognize that. I got a lot of grievances with the Chinese administration.

**HASS:** Well, fair enough. But before we get to those grievances, and Taiwan and human rights in particular, I want to ask you, Senator Tillis, Senator Shaheen just talked about a report that, that her staff and her, she and her colleagues put out. How would you evaluate how well America is postured right now today to compete effectively with China?

**TILLIS:** I, I think that we have a pacing threat. I mean, we still compete with China. I mean, at the end of the day we're, we're doing, we're doing fine, but I see a pacing threat here in innovation. I, there, there's virtually very little difference in, in the AI space right now. They've caught up. A part of that is 'cause they rip off our technology. DeepSeek, if you all know that, that AI, LLM, basically became an LLM by distillation and taking all of the information that was in the baseline ChatGPT LLM as an example, hiding in plain sight, stealing our intellectual property.

As long as they're allowed to do that. They have become an innovator, though. At the, in the past, they would rip off our technology and, and clone it. But now they have their own legitimate innovation, and they are still not bridled, in terms of ripping it off if they can't innovate first. I just think that that's true, and I view that from my perch—that's, those are not headlines, that's from my perch as being either ranking member or chair of the intellectual property subcommittee for the last seven years. I've seen it. We've had hearings on it. They've been caught red-handed, and so I, I think that, that we're still maintaining a quantitative edge in innovation, but there is a pacing threat going forward, and if we don't start holding them accountable, then that gap will, will narrow, and there could be certain areas where they'll surpass us.

We're already seeing their, their acceleration in clinical trials, for example, for pharmaceutical drugs, that's a pacing threat we have to deal with. In technology, they've, you know, they've had a long history of ripping off our networking. Cisco, think about Huawei, how they got there in large part because after Cisco produced a new product, magically they had something almost identical to it six months later.

To give you an idea, and then I, then I'll, I'll end my Festivus here. To give you an idea of just how blatant China was in allowing their state-owned enterprises to compete, Huawei started renting office—Cisco had to get to a point to where when they rented new office space, they would not, the, the landlord would not allow Huawei to have a facility in the same building.

So they're ripping off this technology, cloning it, selling it at a discounted price, and then having the audacity to rent space in the same office building of one of our lead integrators in the communication space. It's one example. There are a lot I could give you.

**HASS:** Right. Well, we like to think that it is special to have the two of you here at Brookings, but this is not the only place where the two of you have shown up outside of Capitol Hill.

You've also traveled to Asia recently together. Can you, starting with Senator Shaheen, offer us a, a sense of what messages you took to Seoul, Tokyo, and Taipei, and what you heard?

**SHAHEEN:** We started in Taipei, and we wanted to be there to send a message to our allies in the Indo-Pacific, the, the closest allies, that Congress has strong bipartisan support for the relationship. And we wanted to encourage Taiwan to pass a defense budget. They were in the process of negotiating that when we were there. We had a chance to meet with their Yuan, their legislative body, and had very good, I thought, yeah, a very good discussion with them, with President Lai, talking about -- we really said two things to them about the need to pass the budget.

One was, it's an important message to send to China, but it's also an important message to send to the United States and to Congress, because what it says is that we are concerned about our own defense and we're gonna do everything we can to protect it. And I think the fact that they got to a compromise that the parties all, virtually all agreed to, is a very positive step.

And we gave the same message in Tokyo and in Seoul, and I think it was a message that our partners wanted to hear because they are very worried about China and also about North Korea. And North Korea, with the added benefit of work partnership with Russia now, is an even greater threat in the Indo-Pacific. So it was important, I think, to be there.

We scheduled the trip thinking that President Trump would be going to, to Beijing shortly after that, and then his trip got postponed because of the war in Iran. But it, it was important for us to be there to reassure our allies that we think our relationship is very important. It's not only important to them, it's important to us.

**HASS:** And senator, is it your sense that there is still strong bipartisan support for alliances in the Senate?

**TILLIS:** Yeah, I think so. I, and I, and I also kind of took note of how warmly received we were in each of the countries. They've all got a very positive opinion of the U.S., and, you know, with some of the challenges we have with some of our NATO partners and allies. And, and what I found remarkable about that, particularly when we were in Seoul, is that with the Strait of Hormuz effectively closed they're, they're at risk of massive energy shortages, assuming the current supply chains hopefully will reformulate and provide some relief.

But when we were in Seoul, our meeting with the leadership was delayed because he had to go before his legislative body requesting temporary measures to deal with the, the spiraling cost of fuel, and actually creating a cap, a government-subsidized cap, to weather the storm.

So I got to thinking, you know, we're a US delegation traveling to three countries that get about 70 to 90%, depending upon the country, of their energy through the Strait of Hormuz, and we are singularly the country responsible for that disruption. And yet, there was no discussion about any frustration or disappointment with that, it was more of a, "We gotta manage this." And obviously they're looking for us to help. But I found that enlightening. I expected a little bit cooler response, like, "What are y'all gonna do to fix this?" sort of posture, and I didn't get that.

It was... And in Taiwan, I'm glad to see one of the people that we met when we met with the speaker and some of the other leaders as we were leaving, said, "You all, we were really

encouraging the supplemental defense budget," which has some of the traditional capabilities, but also asymmetrical warfare, a, a base that they're building in Taiwan. And he leaned over and said, "I think you'll be happy with where it's going." We were going in, we didn't know quite how it was gonna end, but it ended just the, the way they predicted. I think that's a positive outcome.

**SHAHEEN:** Yeah. They gave us nice bubble tea, so, they were very--

**HASS:** Well, that always helps.

**SHAHEEN:** --very pleasant.

**HASS:** On the topic of Taiwan, you two have made news today by leading a letter that was sent to President Trump about Taiwan arms sales, and specifically a arms sales package of \$14 billion that appears, or reportedly is held up. Can you help our audience understand what is going on here, and why did you feel it so imperative to send a letter to the president today?

**SHAHEEN:** Well, as I said earlier, I think President Trump is going into this position in China in a weaker position than he was in in 2017 when he went because of the war in Iran, because of the policies that he's engaged in, the elimination of USAID, alienation of our allies in so many places.

And as I talk to people, and as I think we heard from folks when we were in Taiwan, there's real concern about what he might give away when he's in China in terms of the way we have historically responded to Taiwan and supported Taiwan.

And so I think, I certainly thought it was important for us to send letter to the president expressing that concern and trying to be reassuring about the importance of the relationship with Taiwan and the importance of the United States and Congress continuing to support Taiwan. I, I don't know you, I don't know if that was your motivation, Thom.

**TILLIS:** I think it's just follow through. You know, I've, I've, I'm still prompting the, the administration to follow through on our Ukraine commitment and support. And to me, this is the analogue in INDO-PACOM AOR. We've, we've got to make sure that that which we've already approved flows. If we see any sort of a delay, that would look like an opening for China, and China would take it. So I think we have to make it very clear that there is no change in posture with respect to, to Taiwan and that any material support that we've already committed to, and that we should move in that direction needs to move.

And I also think that the, the position on Taiwan is self-governing. The American people get the importance of Taiwan. They get the, the humanitarian and the economic fiscal importance of Taiwan. And I think any narrative that would suggest that we're stepping away from that, and any smart person gives you a Ghost of Christmas Future of what the economy looks like and the world looks like with a Taiwan that falls under Beijing's control, it's not gonna be well received by the American people and the American electorate.

**SHAHEEN:** Hopefully. And I think, just to be clear, the 14 billion was approved back in January. But we still haven't been noticed as Congress that that support is going. And, and

most of that, by the way, is for American arms. So we get a benefit economically. It's not just the semiconductors from Taiwan.

**TILLIS:** Yeah, for me, that was a get-her-done letter. I mean, that's our, that's, that's settled decision. That's, this is a matter of execution. It's not a matter of whether, it's a matter of when, and when needs to be as soon as practicable.

**SHAHEEN:** But, but what we're hearing from our sources is that, well, the president doesn't wanna notice that arms sale before he goes to China. Well, what better time to notice it than when he's going to China? Because that sends a very strong message that--

**TILLIS:** Yeah.

**SHAHEEN:** --we're gonna be there, and that China should keep its mitts off of Taiwan.

**TILLIS:** Refresh my memory, I slept on the floor most of that flight on the, on the CODEL. But, but didn't we have a member of the China announce the meeting with the opposition, member of the opposition in Taiwan, pro-China in that timeframe?

**SHAHEEN:** Yes, the, the chairman of KMT--

**TILLIS:** So they're, they're kinda upping the ante.

**SHAHEEN:** --while we were there, was invited.

**TILLIS:** Why, why would we, why would we tap the brakes when China's kind of flexing? I mean, the way you respond to a China flex is with a flex. And this would be a good one to do it, and it's not, it's not a precipitous decision. It was some, a decision that was taken months ago.

**HASS:** Mm-hmm. Well, one last question on Taiwan, and then I promise we'll move on. But there has been a fair bit of speculation about how President Trump will approach his conversation with President Xi on Taiwan when he is in China later this week. Senator Tillis, you just indicated you should respond to a flex with a flex. What is your, what would you counsel the president on how to approach this discussion and, and how to respond to the pressure that he will feel when he's in Beijing?

**TILLIS:** Well, you know, I, I wanna build a meaningful, fair relationship between China and the U.S. The world benefits from that. But I think that we have to communicate certain red lines. And, and I think one red line is any whiff of any change in the posture with respect to Taiwan. That, that would be the, the main thing I hope comes from this meeting.

You wanna talk about the opening markets in the U.S. to Chinese businesses, and opening markets in China to U.S. businesses, stop the forced technology transfer, work in collaboration, great. But we all know the elephant in the room is the status of Taiwan, and I think that that has to be sacrosanct going in and coming out.

**HASS:** So, I will not ask either of you to predict what will happen when President Trump and President Xi meet, but I would like to know your view of how Congress will score this visit.

And specifically, if the two leaders, President Xi and President Trump, reach some type of understanding that involves a relaxation of American export controls or an announcement of future inbound Chinese investment into the United States, how do you think that news would be received in Congress?

**SHAHEEN:** I, I think there's real bipartisan concern about a relaxation of export controls. We talked a little bit about Taiwan's control of the semiconductor market. Well, one of the things that there is real bipartisan concern about is allowing the advanced chips to go to China. And I've been in several hearings where it's not at all clear that various aspects of the administration understand what, what, the left hand doesn't understand what the right hand is doing or doesn't seem to be in communication, and that's troubling, especially when it comes to something that's so important to our future economy and to our military effort.

So, I think there are a number of pieces of legislation that would address that, that would prevent the sale of the advanced chips. I, I think it's important for Congress to weigh in on this because it says to the administration, "This is something that we're watching, we're paying attention to this on a bipartisan basis, and you should not do it." And it's not at all clear that President Trump is gonna follow that when he goes to China.

**TILLIS:** Mm-hmm. I think it really comes down to, even on export controls, I, I was, there was a story, it was a couple of years ago, that when we put certain controls on chips going to Russia because they were, they were using it to weaponize and attack and kill innocent Ukrainians. All of a sudden, the number of dishwashers and washing machines went through the roof going to Russia. And all they were doing was dismantling these components and using them for weapons purposes.

My point here is we gotta, we gotta realize that unless, you know, we, we build a, a wall around the manufacturers and check every single chip and track it over its lifespan, that China's gonna come in possession of this technology. It's just gonna happen.

And so, how do you have transparency, oversight, and accountability that sees when and how they're using it? It's a very difficult situation, but I, I think to assume that the controls themselves are enough to keep the technology out of the hands of China is naive and defies history.

So, how do you, how do you come up with a smarter way of doing it or a way of accountability, crying foul? And you know, part of what I think we have to do with respect to China is figure out how to get a force multiplier in holding them accountable. There's only so much that we can do in, in customs.

And, you know, we've, it's completely unrelated to this, but we're talking about, like, a private right of action so that companies who have been wronged that would otherwise need to take a case through CIS can now have standing to bring a lawsuit against China to address this enormous backlog of all other trade improprieties that they're guilty of or their shell companies are guilty of.

So maybe we have to come up with a different way of managing it and recognize at some point they're gonna get it, otherwise they get it and we don't really have an effective mechanism for tracking it afterwards. So I'm somewhere in the middle on-- I, I get-- thematically what we need to do, I know the what, I just feel like the how is maybe not as well-ironed out as it needs to be, and not cognizant of the reality that sooner or later they get

the technology. It's a matter of whether they get it at scale, or they can rip it off, reproduce it, and then develop it at scale.

**SHAHEEN:** But, but where we are right now, I think, and, and the really troubling factor in terms of the most advanced chips is that if they get those, then they have the capacity to make their own.

**TILLIS:** Right.

**SHAHEEN:** And that means that they catch up with us that much faster.

**TILLIS:** Yeah.

**SHAHEEN:** So the question is, how do we continue to innovate and stay ahead of them? And that's, that's the challenge that we have in terms of where we are with these chips, and that's why I think legislation is important.

**HASS:** Well, you both have spoken out about the importance of America maintaining its technological edge in relation to China. What legislation are you most focused on, animated about, that you think will help us do that right now?

**SHAHEEN:** You know, we need individual pieces of legislation, but we need some real policy changes. What I'm worried about, I spent this past week in New Hampshire, traveling around the state. I visited a number of colleges in the state, and what I heard when I visited was concern about this administration's policies with respect to immigration. That they're keeping at those policies mean that the best and brightest no longer wanna come to the United States. And what has China done? China's stepped right in, and they are doing everything they can to attract the best and brightest students. I heard about concerns that research dollars that universities were counting on to continue to research in everything from health to advanced weapons systems aren't there, because the research dollars have been held up by this administration.

So we need to do legislation, but we also need to see some policy changes that affect immigration and how we're dealing with the best and brightest from around the world to make sure that we're not keeping them out of the United States. And we need to make sure those research dollars continue, because that's how we continue to innovate. And if we're cutting off the minds and the research, then we're gonna fall behind, and it's just a question of time. And China, check out our report. It's online. We're already seeing the impact of these policies on China's ability to catch up with the United States.

**HASS:** Senator, we started this conversation in the Festivus section of the discussion talking about human rights, and I wanna return to, to human rights. What role, if any, do you think human rights should play in the U.S.-China relationship? And related to that, because I think I already know your answer to that part of the question, how should the American president address this issue with his Chinese counterpart?

**TILLIS:** I think you, I think you start-- I was trying to remember. I, I, I would, I'll probably destroy this story, but it, it, it related, it was in, "How an Ordinary Man Became an Extraordinary Leader," a book about Ronald Reagan. And I just remember vividly, I haven't thought about this for years, it was 30 years ago when I probably read the book, but, I think

the president needs to go in with a Reagan-like posture of, "We know you. We know what you're doing. We know what your threats are, and you can come and pretend like you've got a list of grievances, Mr. Xi Jinping, but let me tell you about our grievances," whether it's on human rights, whether it's on any of the number of the things that I've already talked about. So I think it's going in and making it very clear and not sugarcoating.

The best way to build, I think, a meaningful relationship is to be honest. And I think it was that honesty and the direct approach that, that President Reagan used with Mikhail Gorbachev that developed a good relationship there and, and really historic outcomes with respect to the fall of the Soviet Union.

We need to go in and, and treat these people in a very clear-eyed way and not gloss over a single skeleton that they have in their closet that they need to, to account for, and that we should hold them accountable to.

**HASS:** Senator, how do you think about this question of human rights in the U.S.-China relationship?

**SHAHEEN:** Well, as we started, nobody-- We need to have a relationship with China. Nobody wants war with China. Continuing to have conversations and being frank, as Thom says, are important to do that. But we also need to be clear-eyed about what they're doing, and I would hope, though we haven't seen much evidence of this, I would hope that the president at some point in his conversations with President Xi would make the point that we care about human rights in the United States. We think it's really important. It's one of the values that underpins our democracy, and whenever we don't raise those issues when we're dealing with world leaders, it sends a message that it's not something that we care about.

**HASS:** When you are at home, you were just in New Hampshire this past week, when, when you are both at home talking with constituents and China comes up, in what context does it often come up? What are your constituents most animated about when they're talking about foreign affairs related to China?

**TILLIS:** Chinese investment in the U.S. And in my state, it has a lot to do with investment in land and agriculture, and some of the news reports that have proven to be true and other cases they weren't, about China's interest in farmland in and around our military facilities.

I don't know if they think it's more fertile land or maybe fertile land, fertile land to, to surveil us. But I think those are the sorts of things in North Carolina, you know, we're the, we're a pork state. They've, they've bought up a lot of, of, meat processing facilities that's created. So they're thinking more that, that how do, how do they affect my life here? What's this about them trying to buy land in and around or near Fort Bragg or Camp Lejeune? Or why is it that they've got one of the largest pork processing facilities in the country under control in North Carolina? That kind of stuff.

So they're actually, they're seeing it at a micro level what China's doing at a macro level all over the globe. And I believe that when they see them coming in the neighborhood, they're feeling a little bit, a little bit concerned.

**SHAHEEN:** You know, what I heard from businesses and what I continually hear, New Hampshire has a, a pretty big defense industrial base. In our state people are concerned about rare earth components, not being able to get those. They're worried about supply

chain issues, and they see China as one of the, as really being the bottleneck that's preventing them getting them.

And they're also worried about the tariffs, and they see the, the, the fight with China being about tariffs and, you know, the president raised tariffs on China, so China now has raised tariffs on products and industries in the United States. One of my favorites is lobsters. You know, New Hampshire only has an 18-mile coastline, but we have good lobsters too. We have a company in the seacoast that had cut a deal to send lobsters to China right before the president announced his tariffs, and of course China canceled the order. And to replace that is not easy for that small business. So they're really economic concerns.

**TILLIS:** Yeah, that, that's a great point. I do hear that. Obviously, agriculture is our leading sector, about 100 billion dollar sector. And China uses the same old playbook. I told everybody on Liberation Day, I know what was gonna happen. Immediately they're gonna cut any purchases of tobacco. They did. They're gonna ramp down soybean pipeline. They did. It's like, my gosh, guys, I, I could, I could tell the Chinese people what to do because I already know what they're gonna do because they do it every time we get into these skirmishes. And, and, and agriculture tends to have a disproportionate immediate impact. They've taken the edge off of some of that, but not all of it.

**HASS:** Yeah. You both have been very outspoken on issues related to Ukraine and Iran, so I want to take a minute to dwell on those two issues. What role do you think China should play? What should we want China to do as it relates to either the situation in, in Iran or Ukraine?

**SHAHEEN:** Well, first of all, to stop supporting Iran and stop supporting Russia in Ukraine. I think that, that would be where I would say let's start. It's, you know, my, my current issue that, you know, has my hair on fire is that we've lifted the oil sanctions on Russia, so they're, they're able now to provide oil to China, which is where China gets most of their oil.

And at the same time, they're providing targeting information to the Iranians so they can kill Americans. I mean, how does that policy make any sense at all? And, you know, that has spillover. Every military and intelligence person who has briefed a committee that I've been on in the last few years has, since the war in Ukraine started, has said that President Xi is watching to see what the outcome of the war in Ukraine is.

If we walk away from Ukraine, if we don't provide the support that we've promised, if the NATO alliance breaks up, if the transatlantic alliance breaks up, that is doing exactly what Xi wants, and he is watching to see what the United States is gonna do, and all we've done is send mixed messages since President Trump got elected.

**TILLIS:** Yeah, I think really China needs to stop being a personal trainer for our adversaries. That would be really helpful. And I think that the president should go in and say, it's very clear that you've provided either directly or indirectly economic support for the war in Ukraine. It's very clear that you know about the, the thousands of North Koreans who are working in a Russian factory creating autonomous vehicles that are killing countless numbers of Ukrainians and sharing ideas on how to make it better and build it at scale so that you can threaten our partner South Korea when this is done.

You know, it's very clear that you're playing a role, economic or otherwise, in propping up Iran. And like Jeanne said, it's very clear that now with reducing the sanctions, China is

buying oil at an inflated price, providing more margins for Russia to provide weapons and strategic up to and including attack plans against US assets in the region. So stop being a part of that too, please.

I think that's what we, that, you know, that's what we, that's, that's what I would tell China, but, but I'm, I'm kinda Thom Tillis blunt. I'm probably not a very good diplomat.

**HASS:** Well, you are both very effective senators. I- we've asked a lot of hard questions about a lot of hard issues. I want to ask one question that is on the other end of the spectrum, which is, if the United States and China were capable of cooperating on an issue that served American interests, where would you want to see that cooperation develop?

**TILLIS:** You go first, Jeanne.

**SHAHEEN:** You know, probably in the disease arena, around global pandemics, around, I mean, what we've seen very dramatically in the last couple of weeks with the hantavirus is just the threat that we all face, because diseases don't respect boundaries. And, you know, we're still debating why COVID wound up moving from China to the rest of the world, but if we could cooperate to address pandemics, if we could cooperate to find a cure for cancer, I mean, just think of what an impact that would have on the world.

**HASS:** Yeah.

**TILLIS:** Yeah, I think, life sciences, biotech, is probably the, the most fertile ground for cooperation with the fewest entanglements with national security. There can be some there, too, but if, you know, if you assume that they're, they're entering those kind of partnerships for the right reasons, then our collective ability to innovate could be truly transformational for the world.

And maybe you, you, you start building some trust and, and relationships that let us, you know, build more productive, a productive foundation for working together going forward. But I think that's probably the, the sweet spot. It's one where we're either, they're catching up, we're almost peer or near peer, and so why not try and create some synergy out of that and see if you can build on that.

**HASS:** Well, as someone whose mother and sister have been touched by cancer, I would welcome seeing a solution to that terrible disease sooner than later. Why don't we open the floor to questions from our audience? We will start here. And if you can, please just introduce yourself, and make sure that you have a question mark at the end of what you're about to say.

**SHAHEEN:** And tell us who you represent, please.

**AUDIENCE QUESTION:** Yes, certainly. Sarah Schoenart, I'm with Politico. It's a question for Senator Tillis. Given the investments that have been made in North Carolina's electric vehicle industry, I wonder, are you concerned that President Trump might strike a deal in China to allow electric vehicles or EV manufacturing investment in the U.S.?

And if you're not concerned, how realistic is it to think that the U.S. can be fully insulated from Chinese EVs when Mexico and Canada are allowing them into their markets?

**TILLIS:** Well, I, I find it hard to believe that that would be an area where the president would give much ground, if for no other reason than I'm, I'm reminded of the discussions that we had in Japan, where they're approaching nearly three-quarters of a trillion dollars in foreign investments in the U.S., primarily in manufacturing, a lot touching this space. And then, I think in Seoul it's to the tune of about \$20 billion a year. So these are real numbers that would be dramatically affected by a change of that, of that posture. So I, I think it's unlikely if the president and the people on the ground have been properly briefed. And I'm sorry, what was the second part of the question?

**AUDIENCE QUESTION:** If you're not concerned, how realistic do you think it is to keep the U.S. sort of isolated or insulated from the Chinese EVs when Mexico and Canada-

**TILLIS:** You know, I think that should be, if China is making headway there, I think that should be a part of what informs our, our posture going into the discussion of USMCA beginning next month actually. So if we, if, if we, if it represents a threat because we, we think it may be an unfair sort of market play in, in China and Canada, then I think it's absolutely a legitimate part of what we should talk about with modernizing USMCA or re-upping USMCA. That may be the way to govern it.

And hey, if it's -- I'm a free market capitalist. If China has a product that isn't founded on ripped-off technology and manufactured by Uyghurs that they wanna offer to Mexico and Canada, have at it, but if they're coming in and they're competing on an unfair basis, then I think we have to hold them accountable. Hold those countries that would do that accountable. It's like, where are your standards?

**HASS:** Great. Thank you.

**AUDIENCE QUESTION:** Thank you very much. Vanita Datta, former USAID. So senators, this is really interesting, and I'm going to be purposely a little bit provocative. If we were writing a briefing book for the president and China pointed out the ironies in our position on democracy, autocratization, human rights, warmongering, how would we respond? Thank you.

**SHAHEEN:** Well, Tom and I may have a little bit different view on this because I have been arguing we should not have eliminated USAID to start with. I think foreign assistance is important. Were there excesses in some areas? Yes. Well, we should have dealt with those, but we should not have wholesale eliminated, eliminated and cut. And we should not, I think, cut the expertise at the State Department that allows us to make good decisions.

I think the, the decision to go into Iran was not, was a flawed decision, and I think we're seeing that because we are at this point with a regime that's more hard line than the one that was taken out. We have no plan to deal with the enriched uranium that's in Iran, we have no agreement on the part of Iran to stop funding terrorist activities across the Middle East. We have not accomplished any of the goals, and all we've done is forced Americans to pay the bill and weakened our position globally.

So, I would not be called upon by this president to write a briefing book for how he should behave because I would be opposed to what he's done.

**TILLIS:** I think it's a fair bet you won't be, nor me, for different reasons. But, but anybody who would ask a question that would suggest, and I'm not, I'm not suggesting that you did,

that there's some moral equivalence to our standard for human rights, for workplace environments, for religious freedom, let me go down the list, and say that somehow, that this administration has created a moral equivalency of Beijing really needs to do their homework.

Look, we, we've got institutions in place where we debate differences, and at the end of the day, the voters run us out. The last time I checked, Xi Jinping's not worried much about how he's doing among any demographic in any of the far reaches of China. They operate at a very different level. We don't. And so with that, I would say to the briefing book, "Mr. President, you may wanna, you may wanna point out some things that we could do better in this country. We didn't do so well in Minneapolis, for example, with some of the operations there that led to the termination of the Homeland Security secretary. That's how we deal with things like that. How do you deal with Tiananmen Square, for example?"

So I just wanna make sure everybody realizes anybody was... The, the reason I bring this up, I think it was Patagonia that has a fair amount of manufacturing operations in China. And I happened to go on their website and saw a rationalization for their operations in China versus the United States were justified because in many respects there was a moral equivalency between those two jurisdictions.

That's a bunch of bullshit, and people should take a look at the stark differences before they go down that path with me.

**HASS:** Well, that is the note that we're going to have to leave, end on. Because I've promised your staff that we will have you out on time. But I want to thank you both for your candor, for the insights you've shared with us today, and your continuing leadership in exercising Congress's prerogative in the conduct of America's relations with China.

**SHAHEEN:** Thank you.

**TILLIS:** Thank you.