TRANSCRIPT
Event
“What’s Next for US-China Relations? The View from Congress”

DATE
Monday, November 6, 2023 at 1:15 p.m. ET

FEATURING
Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-IL)
Ranking Member, House Select Committee on the Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party

CSIS EXPERTS
Jude Blanchette
Freeman Chair in China Studies, CSIS
Jude Blanchette: Well, good afternoon, everyone. Welcome. My name is Jude Blanchette. I’m the Freeman Chair in China Studies here at CSIS. Really delighted to be hosting this conversation, and really delighted to have in the studio here at CSIS Representative Raja Krishnamoorthi, who since 2016 has been representing the Eighth District in Illinois.

Wears many hats, has many titles, a prestigious C.V. For the purposes of our conversation today, though, on U.S.-China relations, on our U.S.-China policy, and we’ll also dig into some of the international events going on, the title that matters most for us is he’s the ranking member of the Select Committee of the Strategic Competition between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party, which, as most will know, was formed earlier this year with a mission to work on a bipartisan basis to build consensus on the threat posed by the Chinese Communist Party and develop a plan of action to defend the American people, our economy, and our values.

So we’re really delighted to have you here. Appreciate your time. And thanks for coming over to the mothership.

Representative Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-IL): Hey, thanks, Jude. Great to be here.

Mr. Blanchette: So we have a relatively short amount of time, so we’ll forego with the normal pleasantries and chit-chat, and just dive right into it. I wanted to talk about three broad buckets today in the conversation.

First, I wanted to get your assessment of the select committee, how you think things have gone, what’s the work ahead, what are the gaps you still need to fill?

I then wanted to ask you a bit about America’s China policy more broadly. Outside of the purview of the select committee, how are things going? Where are the critical gaps that you see? What’s going right?

And then, finally, we’re on the cusp of a proposed bilateral meeting between President Joe Biden and President Xi Jinping, the president of the PRC, and the general secretary of the CCP. So I wanted to ask your thoughts on that as well.

But why don’t we dig right into the committee formed earlier this year. And I’m curious, over the course of these sort of nine or
ten months, how is the committee doing so far? Let me just start with that basic, open-ended question.

Rep. Krishnamoorthi:
I think it’s going well. You may know that the legislation creating the committee passed with almost 370 votes. Few measures seem to command that much support in the House these days. But it was on a bipartisan basis, and we had three different missions: assess the technological risks associated with the competition with the CCP; the military/national security risks; and then, finally, the economic risks – and, also, to suggest ways to deal with those risks.

You know, we started off basically looking at the military/national security risks, because the NDAA, the National Defense Authorization Act, process was underway almost at the start of the committee. And so we put out a report called Ten for Taiwan, 10 recommendations to deal with Taiwan, which helped to inform the NDAA process. Many of our recommendations made it into the NDAA. Of course, now that’s a work in progress as we go through the budget year. We’ve also put out a report with regard to the Uighur genocide, and put out a series of legislative recommendations with regard to tightening up the Uighur Forced Labor Prevention Act, which is the primary vehicle for how we try to deal with the genocide and goods that are imported from Xinjiang province, where the genocide is happening.

I think that, you know, going forward we hope to see that report get translated into legislation that passes through the committees of jurisdiction. But overall, it’s been done in a bipartisan manner and in a thoughtful, serious way. And credit goes to former Speaker McCarthy as well as Leader Hakeem Jeffries for creating a space where we can actually do some serious work. And they selected excellent members on both sides to populate the committee as well.

Mr. Blanchette:
You know, I should have asked you this at the beginning, just – what was your own personal evolution to become interested on the issue of China? I’m curious, you know, in the lead-up to actually taking the position as the ranking member, how much were you thinking about China? What were your concerns? And just how did you get interested in this topic?

Rep. Krishnamoorthi:
I think probably there are three sources of, I guess, areas of interest for me with regard to China. One is I was a small businessperson in a past lifetime and actually visited China for
my business. We were also, by the way, the subject of hacking. And we were a target of intellectual-property theft.

Mr. Blanchette: Join the club.

Rep. Krishnamoorthi: Yeah, exactly. It’s a big club, unfortunately. Obviously, I’m Asian American. I’ve had extensive interaction with the Chinese-American community over the years and have always been concerned about, for instance, the rise in anti-Asian hate, which we actually saw skyrocket during the Trump years.

And then I think a third area is I’m on the Intelligence Committee, in addition to being the ranking member of this committee. And on the Intelligence Committee, we routinely are seeing kind of a proliferation of issues with regard to the CCP from a national-security standpoint. And so when you combine all of those three different sources of interest, it made a lot of sense for me, you know, wanting to be in this particular position.

Mr. Blanchette: So this is not a permanent committee. It’s – it has an end date in 2025. Am I correct?


Mr. Blanchette: So as you look at the year-plus ahead in the remaining time for the select committee, you mentioned work you’ve been doing on Taiwan, on the genocide in Xinjiang; a lot of focus now on – which I’ll come to a little bit later on – thinking about the economic relationship and the role of U.S. companies.

What are the big gaps that you see the committee still has to – outside of that agenda we’ve just discussed, are there any other issues that you think are likely to be a big priority area?

Rep. Krishnamoorthi: I think the economic issues. I think they’re really complicated. They’re messy. I think there are a lot of different constituencies and stakeholders who are giving us input on a constant basis with regard to this. But I think that’s one area where we’re hoping again to put out a bipartisan report and then legislative recommendations that we can then shepherd through the committees of jurisdiction. And I’m hoping that we can find the boldest common denominators, if you will, of the different ideas on both the Republican and Democratic side for how to deal with this economic competition.
Mr. Blanchette: None of the issues that you’ve worked on – Xinjiang, Taiwan – U.S. companies in China are uncontroversial, right. There’s a lot of pushback. There’s a lot of heated views. Thinking about the economic relationship in the period ahead, one of the things that’s been a noticeable focus for you and Representative Gallagher and the committee as a whole is thinking about where U.S. companies are acting in ethically challenging ways, whether that’s on the human-rights abuses in Xinjiang or where there’s technology leakage into the Chinese ecosystem that can then, again, be channeled into significant or even marginal advantages for the People’s Liberation Army.

You led a group, a CODEL, up to New York City in September to talk with Wall Street executives, financial-industry leaders. You’ve obviously been having a lot of those conversations here. Can you just give us a sense of what are some of the feedback you’re getting from them which gives you pause and makes this more complicated than you thought? And then, going the other way, where do you think are the areas that the committee has done a good job of educating companies, investors, about some of the risks they might have underappreciated?


I think where we received feedback was, you know, please provide us with guidance as to what’s legal, what’s not legal, what’s ethical, what’s not ethical, because when we look at the rules and regulations with regard to investments in China right now, it’s very confusing. And I think that was actually useful feedback. And, quite frankly, it’s kind of obvious once you start looking at the different lists of companies and how they’re not consistent. I’m talking about the entity lists, the different – (audio break) – lists that forbid investment in – (audio break) – in different sectors China and so forth.

I think the second question with regard to where we were educating them is one of the pieces of feedback they gave to us is, well, look, if we are not going to send money to China, if we’re not going to invest in China, you know, others will, including the Saudis, including Gulf countries, including others. So what do we accomplish by not investing in those companies? Because all that’s going to happen is that someone else is going to make money and we’re not.

And so that’s where we kind of pushed back a little bit and did some education and basically said, look, it’s not just about
money. It's also about technology, know-how, and values. If you were to talk to my constituents in Illinois or, for that matter, really, anywhere in the country and told them that, for instance, the Thrift Savings Plan – the federal Thrift Savings Plan, which is the world's largest retirement savings plan – 401(k) plan, what have you – actually has funds that are invested in companies or subsidiaries of companies that are associated with modernizing the People’s Liberation Army or involved in perpetrating the Uighur genocide they would say that’s wrong. I don’t want the return. It’s inconsistent with my values, and stop it.

And so we were trying to tell them that that's kind of what people in our constituencies feel. We're also trying to say that where, for instance, venture capital funds or private equity funds are providing not only money but potentially connections, know-how, prestige, networking, that also has an influence that goes far beyond just the money.

Just one final follow-up on this. In that feedback you're getting from the private sector of we want certainty is that possible in the sense that – and this is – conversation in the past few weeks have been, and I've heard the volume turn up on this, is frustration with the framework of small yard high fences and the criticism is the size of the yard keeps expanding and the fence keeps moving up.

You know, we want certainty and my, you know, personal view is that’s going to be hard to give because this is such a rapidly evolving space.

New technologies are coming online that we didn’t dream of when we defined national security five years ago. There’s new utilizations of those technologies –

So China will do something. You know, the release of the Huawei Mate 60 while Secretary Raimondo was visiting Beijing and, you know, the nationalist chest thumping that –

Mr. Blanchette: – you know, we’ve circumvented your export controls inevitably necessitate some sort of response.


Mr. Blanchette: So that was probably more of an editorialization than a question about what I think but do you think there – we will be able to get to some sort of equilibrium where companies have the certainty they need to make longer-term investments or do you think this will be necessarily sort of a fuzzier, more volatile investment environment?

Rep. Krishnamoorthi: I’m hoping that we can get to more of an equilibrium. I’m hoping that we can give a little more predictability than we do right now. I think that ideally Wall Street would like lists. You know, they want to know names. They want to know, you know, exactly what is their description and then they give it to their compliance department and the compliance department screens all those entities off of their potential investments.

But what we find with regard to the PRC and the CCP is that, you know, it’s like whack-a-mole. You know, you put one name on the list and then you put that – you say that that’s a forbidden investment and then all of a sudden another name pops up with the same owners and so they evade those lists.

And so I’m glad that the administration took more of a sectoral approach than a list approach and a country wide approach as opposed to just a region or a place. All that being said, you are absolutely correct that it’s going to be slightly iterative because we are still learning about the uses of AI, for instance – artificial intelligence.

We are still learning about how certain technologies could, you know, metamorphosize into being weaponized and I think industry and, you know, private investors are going to have to probably wait a little bit to see how that iteration takes place to have real certainty. But I don't think that certainty is going to be there at the start.

Mr. Blanchette: Final question on the –

Rep. Krishnamoorthi: Can I say one other thing on that?
Mr. Blanchette: Please.

Rep. Krishnamoorthi: I do think that there are a number of investment funds and we talked to some of them, for instance, in New York City that they basically said, we know – you know, we want to be a little bit far of the line between what is a civilian use and a military use. And I think there’s going to be a little bit of kind of assessment of whether fusion is going to be – military-civil fusion is really a practice that is followed by the target investment as well.

Mr. Blanchette: Yeah, and then just – I know there’s a lot of frustration about the lack of clear lists, negative lists, boundaries, and I think those criticisms are fair and that’s part of the messy policy process here. I do think it’s worth just stating ultimately, though, the reason we’re having this discussion and this challenge is because the lines in Beijing have become so blurred –


Mr. Blanchette: – between what is civilian, what is strategic, what is military, what is civilian? So it’s just put those who are interested in following a rules-based, you know, economic integrated order in a very difficult position of trying to navigate terrain which has been defined by China, which is intentionally designed to blur these distinctions. So for all the frustration that is, you know, directed at lawmakers, I think it’s worth pointing out who ultimately is responsible for this mess.


Mr. Blanchette: Final question in this section, and then I want to turn to U.S.-China policy more broadly, but this is maybe a good bridge to that.

The select committee is focused on strategic competition with the United States and the CCP. This is a common question, it’s a hard one, but if we’re thinking about a competition, most competitions have, you know, binary competition end states, right, that you are – there’s a finish line, the clock runs down, there’s a scoreboard. What is your – what is the committee’s mental map of this or what’s your own personal mental map of how will you know in 20 years that we are winning or have won the competition?

Rep. Krishnamoorthi: I think if we’re in more of an equilibrium in terms of our
relationship, one that’s more stable than it is right now. I think right now we’re kind of sliding a place where no one wants to go, in my opinion, which is – you know, I was just looking at a survey of Americans showing that a majority of voters think that within the next 10 years, there’s a 50-50 chance of an armed conflict between the U.S. and China. And it turns out – you know, it shouldn’t be a big surprise but three-quarters of voters, Republicans and Democrats, don’t want a war. (Laughs.) So I think, like, not having a war –

Mr. Blanchette: Who’s the one-quarter that does? (Laughs.)

Rep. Krishnamoorthi: I know! (Laughs.) I’m not sure, but they might have come to my recent town hall, but we can talk about that later.

I think that when we’re in this kind of disequilibrium, where we’re sliding toward a potential armed conflict, you know we’re in a wrong place. And I think that hopefully is a signal that we need to do something different. We need to prevent aggression on the part of the CCP, protect our values, continue with engagement, but also up our game. And I can talk about that in more detail, but this CCP committee I think is that moment, you could say almost like a Sputnik moment, where we have to get our act together on this issue.

Mr. Blanchette: Well, why don’t we just, while you’re on that, let me ask you an assessment of both within the committee and then looking across the entirety of our political, economic, military system. Where do you think are the real key areas where you look at this and you think, we’ve really, really got to prioritize these two or three areas and massively step up our game? What would be that short list? Again, this is both either within the committee or you look across the entirety of our political military system.

Rep. Krishnamoorthi: Do you have an easy question for me? (Laughs.)

Mr. Blanchette: (Laughs.)

Rep. Krishnamoorthi: This is a tough, good question. In terms of prioritization, I think the number one thing is we have to prevent military aggression, this moment. I think that right now there is a situation in the South China Sea, in the Taiwan Strait that is untenable, which is you have the CCP actively throwing its military elbow, so to speak, at its neighbors, claiming whole swaths of territory which is otherwise international airspace or international waters as its own, and trying to resolve its differences not at the bargaining
table but through coercion. So I think on the military front, we have to bind with our partners, friends, and allies to prevent aggression. That means, for instance, making sure that Taiwan has what it needs to prevent an invasion or any type of coerced reunification.

And then secondly, on the economic front, we have to do a number of things to protect our interests, and that goes to, for instance, dealing with dumping, dealing intellectual property theft, dealing with cyber hacking, dealing with those outbound investments that are problematic, also making sure that we do whatever we can on the human rights front, which is an area that we’ve kind of walked away from over the last 30 years.

I was talking to a very senior Democrat the other day who’s been working on this for decades. And this person basically said, I’ve given up on human rights in China. I don’t see how they’re going to change their behavior unless we link it to our own policies here.

So those are some of the areas that I think we have to – we have to prioritize. I would just say one last thing. I’m sorry for adding to this list. But if we think that this is all about just preventing the CCP from doing things and not making sure that we up our own game and fix our, you know, immigration system to retain and attract the best talent in the world, upskill our workforce which is not prepared for all the jobs that are necessary for the technologies of the future, or investing in those technologies to maintain our innovative leadership, then we’re not going to be doing the full job either.

Mr. Blanchette: That’s a good transition to, I hope, a slightly easier question.

Rep. Krishnamoorthi: Thank you. (Laughs.)

Mr. Blanchette: Which is, the – China is one of these issues that is often framed as bipartisan. You often – the framing in the newspaper articles is something, like, you know, of all the political rancor in Washington, one issue that unites the political parties is China. Hearing your last response though, it struck me that that’s a note I hear coming more often from Democrats up on the Hill. You know, workforce upskilling, human capital, CHIPS Act, which was – if I’m correct, I don’t think any of the Republicans on the select committee voted for the for the CHIPS Act. Do you see this as a bipartisan issue? If there are areas where you see a
discrepancy or a delta between Republicans and Democrats, where are those areas?

Rep. Krishnamoorthi: I think it’s largely a bipartisan issue, in this sense, which is I think everybody understands that there are a set of challenges that need to be dealt with. And they need to be dealt with now. So there’s a sense of urgency. I think where there are differences, I think there’s more difference in terms of emphasis rather than just wholehearted, you know, disputes. I’ll just point to a couple.

One is, I think that some of my Republican colleagues are a little uncomfortable with the amount of dialogue that’s happening at the highest levels between our two governments. I think it’s a very good thing. I applaud the Biden administration for the amount of engagement that’s happened recently. We must do everything we can to communicate, for instance, our concerns about aggression, whether it’s military, economic, or on human rights, face to face and explain exactly where we stand.

Also, I think the second issue where there’s a difference of – you know, maybe a little slight disagreement is industrial policy. You are correct that I think the CHIPS and Science Act is heavily supported by Democrats, even though a number of Republicans supported it and it got through the Senate in the House in the last Congress. But I think that some of our Republican colleagues fear that, OK, is this a road toward picking winners and losers in our economy, and doing some of the things that we are concerned that the CCP does? I think there are legitimate good responses from Democrats like me to those concerns, but those are a couple areas where I do see a little bit of divergence.

Mr. Blanchette: Final question before I – well, speaking of engagement, I wanted to spend a few minutes talking about the upcoming meeting between President Biden and President Xi. But let me ask you, just look at the geopolitical map right now. If we were to rewind in time three years ago, the United States had the ability to focus really on the Indo-Pacific. We didn't have – Vladimir Putin hadn’t invaded Ukraine. We hadn't had the horrific October 7th attack by Hamas on Israel. We now have an incredibly complicated geopolitical landscape.

The administration is signaling it’s not going to tone down the tempo on the Indo-Pacific. But, as we see, Secretary of State Blinken was just out – is out in the region now. We’re having a congressional, you know, fight over thinking about the future of
funding on Ukraine. This feels like we’re at a moment where we say we can walk and chew gum, but it does feel like we’re really getting strained now. So as you think out about making the necessary investments we need to be making to position ourselves well for the Indo-Pacific, keeping sufficient bandwidth of an already stretched thin Congress, which is not only dealing with foreign issues but is dealing with a whole lot of domestic challenges. Are you worried about our ability to have a long-term competition with China as we deal with these exigencies of an international order which feels like it’s under an extraordinary amount of strain right now?

Rep. Krishnamoorthi: I am concerned, although I think the Biden administration has done a good job of balancing the different challenges and trying to deal with them simultaneously. But at the end of the day, you need Congress to be a good partner in terms of formulating legislation and providing resources to deal with those challenges.

Maybe I’ll take a couple, because, you know, they, I think, require urgent action. One is our military-industrial base is stretched. I think that even just looking at Ukraine and Taiwan, it became clear that we have some issues with, for instance, manufacturing enough bullets and artillery shells and other types of armaments that are in high demand that are really in great need all over the world, but especially in these particular theaters.

And I think that unfortunately we didn’t do the multiyear appropriations in Washington, D.C. to make sure that, even at the same time we were making new guns, we actually made enough bullets for those guns, so to speak. And so that’s something where we have to invest in our military-industrial base to provide the capacity to be the, you know, as it were, the arsenal of democracy today.

I think a second issue is we have to continue to focus on these supply chains and diversifying or de-risking these supply chains. I think that if we don’t keep our eye on that ball, we are going to find ourselves in an even more tenuous position, whether it’s in the, you know, the fight against climate change or whether it’s in regard to active pharmaceutical ingredients or whether it’s even with regard to energetics, which are the propulsive force in our ammunition.

And so I think that we have to kind of walk and chew gum on some of these issues urgently. Otherwise we’re going to find
ourselves in an even, you know, worse position, you know, in a couple of years and we're not going to be able to deal with all these things the way that we can right now.

Mr. Blanchette: When you go back to Illinois and you meet with constituents, I'm curious for the flavor of the conversations you're having about China. And I'm also, just to try to tie it to this question – this might be something which, of course, you feel more acutely when you're in Washington and you're surrounded by, you know, people working in the national-security space.

This feels like one of these moments where – and this is not a partisan issue. I think if there’s any other, you know, president, political party in office, they’d be dealing with war in Ukraine, attack by Hamas. This is just a – these are events that are occurring outside of U.S., you know, control. But I think it does put us in this challenging position of we’re potentially looking at a very, you know, dramatically changing geopolitical landscape moving forward.

Do you get the sense that your constituents share some of the sentiment here in Washington about the world we face over the next year? And I guess the narrow question is if we do think about these big new investments we’re going to have to be making in the, you know, defense-industrial base – I don’t want to call it industrial policy, but let’s say things like the CHIPS Act. Do you think Americans are prepared to be able to support those and make some of the sacrifices necessary to support those?

Rep. Krishnamoorthi: Potentially, but you have to explain it to them and you have to elevate the issue so that you can connect it to their everyday concerns.

A couple of issues I think that people are concerned about are, for instance, the hacking and the IP theft. I hear about that almost all the time from my constituents. Almost everyone has been hacked, it seems like, and they’re worried about their personal information being in the hands of the CCP.

It turns out, by the way, that there was testimony at our hearings that 80 percent of Americans’ personal information is in the hands of the CCP, and probably the other 20 percent as well.

Another issue is IP theft, which I talked about earlier. Almost all of my businesspeople, small businesspeople, medium and large businesspeople, others, have experienced this and they want it
to stop. And they feel like this is something that really hurts their ability to succeed as an entrepreneur or as a sustaining business right now.

Human rights – I hear about that a lot from different constituencies as well. And they’re concerned about the slave labor that is being used to create consumer products and that’s being sold on Temu and Shein, and that’s undercutting the bricks and mortar stores that exist in my constituency. So you hear about all these. And I think what they want is they want to see smart action that leads to progress on those, without leading to some kind of spiraling conflict with the Chinese.

So it’s kind of like a balancing act, where we have to – we have to pursue smart, informed policy that lowers the temperature, but at the same time produces progress. And I think rhetoric is something that they are concerned about as well. They don’t want to hear rhetoric that could be provocative or that, worse, could lead to anti-Asian hate. So those are the kind of disparate kind of concerns or comments that I get.

Mr. Blanchette: Could you just unpack that a bit more in terms of some of the concerns or feedback you get from members of Asian Americans, members of the AAPI community? I’ve heard just informally, as the competition with China has heated up over the past three, four, five years, growing concerns from Americans of Asian descent. How do you think about that issue? How do you think about putting in place guardrails that constrain that, even as we potentially move in towards a much more fractious relationship with China?

Rep. Krishnamoorthi: So I think the good news is that Chairman Gallagher from the outset, along with other members of the committee on the Republican side, made it very clear that they want to make – they want this committee not to be about a quarrel with the Chinese people, or Chinese-origin people, or Asian people, but with the CCP. And that we, you know, abhor any kind of hate or prejudice or bigotry toward any of those groups. And so I applauded Chairman Gallagher when on Face The Nation he actually said that his colleague’s remark condemning Judy Chu, my colleague, Congresswoman Judy Chu from California, as somehow a spy or somehow affiliated with, you know, the CCP, was wrong. And I think that was a good way to set the tone.

All that being said, we have to be careful going forward how we talk about this issue. Because after the Trump years, where, you
know, former President Trump kept calling COVID Kung-flu, and so forth, I think that it’s kind of spurred that anti-Asian hate to a level where, you know, even the, the most, you know, maybe a legitimate concern could get transformed into bigotry. So, just as an example, we are concerned about the CCP purchasing land in the United States near sensitive sites. And that has happened.

But we don’t want a law like they passed and signed into law by Governor DeSantis in Florida prohibiting anybody, even an innocuous purchase of a home by a grandfather from China near his grandchildren, merely because he’s Chinese. That’s wrong. And I think so we have to avoid those situations where the rhetoric gets transformed into legislation or laws that could really go down the alien – you know, alien land laws of California path.

Mr. Blanchette: Yeah. And without – on those state-level land bans, without minimizing what is fundamentally the ethical problems there, I would just make this secondary note that those actions also feed directly into party propaganda, which is trying to paint the United States as, you know, bigoted, xenophobic. And then when you have some states adopting legislation which basically affirms that, it’s a – it’s a propaganda gift.

Rep. Krishnamoorthi: Hundred percent. You know, the Chinese – you know this very well – one of their theories of the case, so to speak, about why America is so weak, in their view, is that we are divided. And that we are bigoted, and we’re prejudiced against each other. And so when we, you know, play to type, so to speak, it just feeds that propaganda machine. And they then trot that out around the world. And so we’re really hurting ourselves in the process.

Mr. Blanchette: Let me – in the few remaining minutes we have left, let me turn now to a very short-term issue, which is just the proposed upcoming meeting between President Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping at the margins of APEC. Your colleague, Representative Mike Gallagher has – in a previous Wall Street Journal op-ed, has blasted the administration for what he calls a zombie engagement.

I’m curious, you’ve already indicated you see this as good and these meetings between the White House and Xi Jinping as important. But I’m curious, how do you – when you hear criticisms of the administration that it’s sort of pursuing this dead engagement strategy that we’ve all moved on from do you see any of that in what the administration is doing? If not, what
do you think the theory of the case is for why these high-level convenings are important?

Rep. Krishnamoorthi: I think they’re extremely important. I respectfully disagree with criticism of this type of dialogue because only through this type of dialogue can we clearly communicate, you know, our message about why, you know, lowering the temperature and not taking aggressive military moves in the South China Sea or Taiwan will help the Chinese and, you know, the region as a whole develop and become stronger.

Only by having this dialogue can we explain what the consequences would be if the CCP continues with some of its more provocative actions and it also gives us an opportunity to do some positive things such as reengaging on the people-to-people front. For instance, I think that the Fulbright Scholars program in China has been paused. I think we want that to continue. We want flights – commercial flights to continue in both directions.

We also want to talk about human rights. Unfortunately, for years we stopped talking about human rights and we have to bring it to the fore again. I think there’s any number of reasons why this dialogue is important but having that person-to-person connection and saying, look, for instance, wouldn’t it make more sense for us to open a military-to-military communications channel right now when just the other day, you know, a bomber – one of our bombers was approached within 10 feet by a J-11 fighter of the People’s Liberation Army and almost had a collision. Imagine what would have happened if those – if there was a fatality.

It’s not going to be a repeat of what happened 23 years ago when Shane Osborn went down in China off Hainan Island. By the way, Shane Osborn became treasurer of Nebraska after that incident. He left the military and became state treasurer.

Anyway, we have to think ahead and we have to have some, hopefully, concrete deliverables that come out of this meeting. I’m very hopeful. I think all of these meetings before this Xi – Chairman Xi-President Biden meeting will, hopefully, feed into a good session.

Mr. Blanchette: You know, some of the concerns about the meeting are that basically what China is trying to do is pull the administration in and leverage further dialogue and discussion as a way to slow
down competitive actions. I think that’s what the good faith concern is here. I get the sense you don’t see that as an issue with this administration.

Do you have any concern about our ability to withstand China’s strategy of essentially dangling the prospect of cooperation on fundamentally critically important issues like climate change, like AI governance and safety, like food security? Do you see any tension there or do you think we’ll be able to essentially walk the competitive game and chew the dialogue gum at the same time?

Rep. Krishnamoorthi: (Laughs.) I like that. Yes, I think we can. I think we’re not going to be pulling punches.

You know, when I talk to Jake Sullivan or Gina Raimondo or others I think – I get the sense that we are simultaneously pursuing our interests and protecting our interests and working with our allies to do the same and engaging in dialogue, and I think that’s what you have to do.

If you only do one and not the other I think that you really, you know, leave some tools on the table. And so let us pursue both tracks. I think this administration can do it skillfully and I think that’s what the American people want.

Mr. Blanchette: Probably the final question, looking at the time, so I don’t know if this is easy or this is hard. But let’s imagine we have a successful meeting between President Xi and President Biden. We’ve got a list of deliverables. Everybody looks at them and says, not bad but we think about we’ve got an election coming up in Taiwan on January 13th with key questions about how China is going to react to a democratic election. We have, again, ongoing conflict in the Middle East, which is contained right now but with no certainty that it will be in a day, a month, six months. We have the war ongoing in Ukraine, with growing concerns from President Zelensky about the strength of U.S. support and signs of wavering. We have our own election coming up.


Mr. Blanchette: Oh, your election. When I say the election, I mean THE election –

Rep. Krishnamoorthi: (Laughs.)

Mr. Blanchette: – which, of course, is yours. No, we have a presidential election, which is highly consequential for us.

Mr. Blanchette: So I think the question for many is, OK, we have a decent meeting; then what?

A final sort of curveball is, of course, we had a meeting between President Xi and President Biden in Bali, and then this –

Rep. Krishnamoorthi: Balloon. (Laughs.)

Mr. Blanchette: – dirigible floated across the United States, which I think you mentioned – you referenced the EP-3 spy – you know, collision from 2001. Just shows you how, as Mike Tyson said, you can have a plan until you get punched in the face. And in this relationship, it is so contentious that the prospect of some event occurring in the Second Thomas Shoal, Taiwan Strait collision. Could be a collision between one of our allies, Japan –


Mr. Blanchette: So I think the question is, how do we get through this next year or so? What does this meeting give us of certainty that we’re going to be able to navigate these extraordinary choppy waters?

Rep. Krishnamoorthi: Well, look, I think there’s that old saying, when you’re fighting you’re not – I’m sorry; when you’re talking, you’re not fighting. And so – but, obviously, words need to lead to action. And so I think that’s what people are going to be looking at following this meeting: What action is taken by the CCP to lower aggression, whether it’s economically, militarily, or technologically? What can they do, for instance, also in other respects to lower temperatures, whether it’s with regard to Iran and Hezbollah, or whether it’s with regard to Russia in the Ukraine? I think that there are any number of dimensions where there could possibly be progress that helps us and helps them at the same time.

The one thing that we didn’t touch upon which I think is kind of coloring everything right now is just the economic tailspin that’s happening in China right now. I think that Chairman Xi is under tremendous internal domestic pressure because of 22 percent youth unemployment rate, because consumer confidence is at an all-time low. I think that we have to be mindful of that because I do think that, just as he on the COVID-19 zero-tolerance policy, zero-COVID policy, changed course 180 degrees from what he
was before, may take actions, may take steps that could alter his trajectory on these other issues and lower aggression. We have to give that possibility a chance, even at the same time that we hedge and protect our interests. And so that’s what I’m hoping we also see come out of this meeting.

Mr. Blanchette: You and I sit down in 2030. If we get through the next six or seven years avoiding conflict, with the United States having avoided some of its own domestic challenges, and you feel like we’re at your equilibrium that you articulated earlier, what will be the – what will be the key factors which will have gotten us there, do you think?

Rep. Krishnamoorthi: Is Xi Jinping going to still be the chairman?

Mr. Blanchette: The actuarial table? He’s young by our standards; he’s only 70.

Rep. Krishnamoorthi: (Laughs.)

Mr. Blanchette: So probably.

Rep. Krishnamoorthi: OK. Well, maybe in seven or eight years my hope is that we will have done a few things.

One is, as you said, avoided conflict, avoided a situation that escalated into armed conflict.

Secondly, that we did our part with regard to the economic issues to diversify our supply chains; to deal with the IP theft and the hacking; that we invested in technologies of the future; upped our own game; fixed some of our governance issues.

And then, finally, that we see some progress toward those human rights aspirations that we have with regard to the Uighurs, the Tibetans, the Hong Congers, dissidents not only there but also abroad, that transnational repression is curbed – that we see signs that the CCP, or at least the PRC as a whole, is moving a little bit closer to the original aspirations that allowed us to agree to their accession to the WTO. Bill Clinton said to all members of Congress at the time, a vote for the WTO is a vote for more openness and freedom in China. That never happened. We were wrong about that bet. But now we have to protect ourselves and our interests and then give a chance, maybe, for something positive to happen in the future, and I think that’s the best that we can do at this moment.
Mr. Blanchette: I think that’s also as best we can do for a somewhat optimistic way to end the discussion.

Rep. Krishnamoorthi: (Laughs.)

Mr. Blanchette: Congressman, I want to thank you very much –


Mr. Blanchette: – for your time. I want to thank you for your leadership on this issue, not only on the select committee but as a member of Congress. And I think we’re lucky to have someone like you in this critical position at this critical time.

Rep. Krishnamoorthi: Well, thank you, Jude, and thank you for all the work that you did, including your book, “China’s New Red Guards.”

Mr. Blanchette: This is not a paid plug, by the way.

Rep. Krishnamoorthi: (Laughs.) Available at Amazon. (Laughter.) But thank you for your incredible scholarship and for having me on your show.

Mr. Blanchette: Thank you. And thanks to all you joining us for the event here today. Listeners of the “Pekingology” podcast will be listening to this conversation a few days later, but really appreciative of everyone’s time and joining us for this important discussion. And have a wonderful start to the week.

(END.)