Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT

Event

"New Frontiers in UFLPA Enforcement: A Fireside Chat with DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas"

DATE

Tuesday, July 9, 2024 at 11:30 a.m. ET

FEATURING

Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas

Secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security

CSIS EXPERTS

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John J. Hamre: OK, everybody. We've got standing room only, but we'll see if we can get a few more seats in here. Thank you, everybody. Thank you for joining us. My name is John Hamre. I'm the president at CSIS. And I'm so glad to have all of you here today, because we're going to have a real opportunity to listen to Secretary Mayorkas.

We were just standing back there and I said he's the most undecorated veteran of combat operations of anybody I've ever met, huh? (Laughter.) He's been in constant combat, you know, for the last year and a half. I just don't understand it. But sadly, it's part of the world that we're in right now.

We're going to talk today about an issue that is – it's not the recognized part. I mean, everything – when you hear Homeland Security, it's all about the border and all that kind of stuff. It's a far larger, more important remit that the secretary has than just the southern border. That's important, no question about it, but it's a far larger remit. And we're going to explore that today.

First, before I say my last substantive words, I just want to say Michelle is in charge of your safety today. So if there is an incident, you'll follow her directions. If it's safe to go out through that door, we'll go down in the front. If otherwise, we're going to use this exit. And you have to go around. We'll post people there so that you can get to the fire escapes.

If anybody needs a bathroom, it's right down the hall and to the right. You have to walk a little bit, but no problem if you want to do that. But please follow Michelle's guidance. We're going to take care of everybody. We'll meet across the street in the park and there'll be ice cream by the time you get there, OK? (Laughter.)

So let me just say, I am – this topic, you know, the forced – the incarceration and exploitation of the Uyghurs, is just deeply personal to me personally. We – back in October of 2019, we, CSIS, published the first images of the concentration camps and mapped out, showed where these things were, and said this is real. You know, when you think about how oppressive governments will exploit vulnerable populations, it just burns in you. Doesn't it? It just burns hard. And we were helpful ultimately in the passage of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act.

We're going to talk today about its enforcement; much more important, because you get the act passed but you need the government to follow through on it. And Secretary Mayorkas has personally made this a commitment.

And I just have to tell you how grateful I am that you are leading at this

time, Secretary. This is a man who's dedicated his life to us in law enforcement in America; started off as assistant attorney general – assistant district attorney, I think it was, in California was his first job. And he's been in government for half of his professional life – more than half of his professional life – dedicating every minute to the security of America. And we owe him a great deal of thanks.

So with your warm applause, would you please welcome Secretary Mayorkas. (Applause.)

Michelle Strucke: Well, thank you, everyone, so much for being here today. My name is Michelle Strucke. I lead our Human Rights Initiative and our Humanitarian Agenda here. I'm also pleased to be the Khosravi Chair in Principled Internationalism, a theme and a banner that I hope all of you share my commitment to for being here today.

And it's my absolute honor and delight to have Secretary Mayorkas here, a distinguished, dedicated public servant whom all of his colleagues that I've spoken to with when I served in the administration and heard about his work and worked with him and his team on Operation Allies Welcome and other issues, just talked about how humble and dedicated and effective and what an incredible person to work with. So we're just delighted to have him here today at CSIS.

For those of you who are joining us in the room, there will be a reception afterward. It will be off the record. And we invite you to attend right after this event. And for those who are joining us either in the room or online, should you like to submit a question, you have the whole event to do it. You can use the Ask Live Questions button, which is located on the event page, and we will – I will magically get your questions here on the screen and I'll be able to ask the Secretary that toward the end.

So without further ado, I will get started.

So Mr. Secretary, the UFLPA has been called a game changer for forced-labor compliance, showing companies that the U.S. means business when it comes to cracking down on goods presumed to be made with forced labor by the Uyghur population in the PRC. So when it was first introduced, it was met with great optimism. It's a point of pride for human-rights advocates and for Uyghur activists who know that this is real, tangible enforcement. It's not a nice to do. It's something they have to do. It was also viewed with an equal degree of skepticism by some members of the trade community.

So since it came into effect in June 2022, which is now, as you know, two

years ago, DHS has played a significant role in denying entry of goods presumed to be made with forced labor into the U.S. So we would love to hear, in opening, what are some of the challenges and the successes that you've seen so far?

Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas: Michelle, so thanks very much for having me. Thank you all for being here.

I should take a step back and mention that crimes of exploitation generally, which, of course, includes the UFLPA, the fight against forced labor, but encompasses much more – human trafficking and other scourges have become one of our six priority missions in the Department of Homeland Security; the first time in over a decade we've added a mission to the priority list.

That is because of the tremendous need for attention to the suffering around the world, but also possible because of the great work of our people. I want to recognize AnnMarie and Eric – AnnMarie and Eric and the entire DHS team who are here, who dedicate their lives – not half of their careers, but their entire careers to this work and make it possible that I be here before you.

So I would say, you know, in terms of the challenges, let me start with that. The opaqueness sometimes of identifying the supply chain, the global supply chain, is one significant challenge. The other significant challenge is to make sure that we do not in any way impair or infringe upon legitimate trade, the legitimate movement of goods.

In terms of the successes, it's quite frankly extraordinary what our team has been able to do in just two years. Two years may seem like a long time, but in terms of taking a new piece of legislation, actioning it, and demonstrating results, two years is very quick. And we have been very quick.

We have stopped 9,000 shipments from entering the United States because of a connection to forced labor, worth $3.4 billion. We have added 68 entities to the entities list, creating a presumption of ineligibility to enter the United States. We have built international partnerships. We have built tremendous partnerships with the trade industry. And I emphasize the word partnership because enforcement of this law requires us to work in partnership with industry, and we've been very successful in that regard.

Ms. Strucke: Thank you so much. That's really stunning – I mean, $3.4 billion. I know 68 for the entity list is something. I know people are pushing for you to add even more, but it's a great number. And I know you recently added

new entities.

In your view, what has made the implementation so effective? Has the UFLPA substantively changed the way that companies view their supply chains? And do you have an example of a way you recall that working?

Sec. Mayorkas: I think it is a combination of both the law itself, the UFLPA – and good citizenship drives adherence to the law – and also our enforcement actions and the fact that people understand that we have a mission, a commitment to enforce the law, and we will. And we will do so aggressively. And we do so aggressively because that is our remit, and also because of the fact that human suffering is at the core of this law.

And so we have seen companies begin to shift their supply chains in very, very significant ways. And that is in a number of industries. If we take a look at polysilicon specifically, AnnMarie, Eric, and I work very, very closely with the solar industry with respect to solar-grade polysilicon. And we've seen a tremendous amount of movement from a reliance on the Xinjiang province, which is a major producer of polysilicon, solar-grade polysilicon. We've seen them shift the supply chain to a point where, by 2026, I believe, we're going to see a 200 percent increase in the manufacture of solar-trade polysilicon in North America and India.

And so we've seen the law and our enforcement of it drive good citizenship to alter their supply chains in very meaningful ways.

Ms. Strucke: That is such an important point. And I think that, you know, as generations are changing in the U.S., as citizens are demanding more accountability and responsibility in supply chains by companies, this is such a sea change. Although it's only, you know, limited to one small region, that is an area that it would be great to understand better.

Do you – you know, it's – the law itself is limited to this area. What are some of the limitations of the UFLPA in terms of enforcement? And how have – how has DHS worked to try to expand that and respond to the natural tendency that's happening right now where, in the PRC, they're just moving around populations; they're moving where the forced labor is happening? So how are you responding to that?

Sec. Mayorkas: Well, you know, we have information and we have intelligence. But let me make an important point, that the UFLPA specifically is, of course, focused on the Uyghur population, but our work in combating forced labor is much more expansive than that. And we regrettably and tragically see products produced in whole or in part by forced labor in other parts of the world.

One of the challenges that we have is the de minimis exception and the exploitation of that exception. And we are working towards and hoping to receive a legislative fix to give us greater authorities to address – to address that.

Ms. Strucke: And is that something, then, that would require congressional action to be able to address?

Sec. Mayorkas: It would. I mean, we are working within our powers to enhance our regulatory authorities, but ultimately we need statutory authority.

Ms. Strucke: That definitely makes sense. And I know the de minimis exception has been something that has had quite a bit of scrutiny and calls for it to be eliminated. Are there other – are there other challenges that you wanted to highlight that are – you know, it could be with the companies as they are looking at their supply chains or any other area of enforcement that you've found to be a challenge for DHS.

Sec. Mayorkas: Well, let me – let me say that we understand the difficulty in identifying a global supply chain. We have seen companies harness technological innovations to assist them. We are very hopeful that artificial intelligence and the developments there will assist. We are ourselves looking at how to use AI to harness and, you know, enhance our enforcement capabilities.

At the same time, we understand how difficult it is to move a supply chain. We understand the impacts for a business. You know, in some industries, we've given advance warning of the fact that we have seen forced labor. We've seen some companies heed our advance warnings; we've seen other companies, frankly, not heed them in a timely fashion and suffer the enforcement consequences. And I must say we take a – we take a tough – we take a tough stand on that. We're not very accepting of a failure to address an enforcement and humanitarian imperative in a timely fashion.

Ms. Strucke: Thank you for making that point. I mean, as a – as a person leading a human rights program that's concerned about human rights, that's one of the most impressive pieces, that this legislation has such a strict standard. And it's requiring companies to really take a hard, real look at what is happening in every level of their supply chain.

I know that there are similar efforts happening with supply chain, you know, due diligence laws like the new EU CSDDD, and a forced-labor piece of legislation in the EU. One of the kinds of –

Sec. Mayorkas: And we've been instrumental – I'm sorry to interrupt, Michelle.

Ms. Strucke: Oh, please.

Sec. Mayorkas: But we work very closely with the EU. We work very closely with Mexico and Canada. We view this as a global responsibility.

And I just want to touch upon why my prior statement might have struck some as unforgiving.

Ms. Strucke: (Laughs.)

Sec. Mayorkas: You know, we understand that there may be certain goals of certain industries that are very important, and that actually advance an agenda that we ourselves share.

Addressing climate change – let me give just a perfect example. The solar industry, you know, a significant percentage of solar-grade polysilicon was, in fact, manufactured in the Xinjiang province. And solar panels and the importation of solar panels advance a clean energy agenda that we very much share and embrace and promote. To allow solar panels from – polysilicon, to allow it to be – to be imported from the Xinjiang province to meet that particular agenda, I would ask, looking 10 years down the road, we have met our clean energy objectives and we've done so on the backs of forced labor, would we consider ourselves a success? If we do not meet a clean energy agenda in 10 years but we stood up against the fight against forced labor, I would respectfully submit we are successful in the most important endeavor.

And so it's – I cannot overstate the importance of what underlies the UFLPA, and what underlies your work, Michelle, and our work. And that is a humanitarian imperative. There are collateral benefits of this work. For example, ensuring that the marketplace is a fair – is a fair one. That companies that pay sub-standard wages, that exploit workers and advantage themselves by being able to reduce their costs, that is unfair competition, that is a collateral – fighting that is a collateral benefit of the humanitarian imperative.

Ms. Strucke: I really appreciate that. Especially this idea that this – you know, building on the – on the backs of disadvantaged populations is not the way to conduct ourselves in terms of American values. And also the idea that people increasingly in the U.S. don't – especially younger people – don't want to be enablers. They don't want to be participating in a market economy and using their dollars to fund things that they don't agree with. So I fully appreciate that.

Sec. Mayorkas: Hopefully, that's not restricted to the younger population.

Ms. Strucke: That's true. I hope not too. (Laughter.) That's true. I am pointing out the trend lines, but that is – there are a lot of folks in this room that maybe don't fit that, and are still just as committed. (Laughter.) I will say that, you know, in – and along the lines of this idea of kind of distinguishing the U.S. in terms of its values, I know that's a big part of the National Security Strategy. And you've come here in the past and you've talked about DHS' work and how that aligns with national security. How do you see this work – you know, this imperative to have humanitarian objectives and promote human rights through DHS' enforcement, as a way to advance our national security?

Sec. Mayorkas: So I think I've spoken here previously about the fact that I find the line between homeland security and national security to be thinning significantly, given an increasingly globalized environment in which we operate, where the social media, online platforms, the cyber domain, the expanse of international trade. What is international is increasingly domestic, and what is domestic is increasingly international. And so I just think it – that line is blurring and thinning increasingly.

Ms. Strucke: Thank you. And thank you for the work that you do to advance both homeland security and national security. One of the things that people have talked about with UFLPA is the idea that, you know, much of the efforts to address forced labor could essentially create these sort of split economies where clean goods – so-called clean goods, that are not made with forced labor, end up coming to countries with strong regulations – be they the U.S. or the EU now, with their forced labor directive – forced labor law. And then, these sort of dirty goods would be shipped everywhere else.

So how do you kind of address concerns that goods could be essentially – you know, if they're turned around, if they're detained and then released, or if the kind of shipping just goes back once they realize it could be enforced, how do you address concerns that they could be routed through third countries or that they may – or just that, you know, the notion of split economies doesn't actually become a reality?

Sec. Mayorkas: Well, when you say "routed through third countries," do you mean routed through third countries for ultimate destination in the United States?

Ms. Strucke: To avoid additional scrutiny.

Sec. Mayorkas: I turn to AnnMarie Highsmith, and Eric Choy, and the team. These are incredible professionals with incredible capabilities and unrelenting dedication to this mission, to which they've dedicated their careers. We know how to address a direct line of importation. We know how to address an angled line of deportation, a circular line, and the likes, importation. And so we have extraordinary tracing capabilities. And we are always advancing those tracing capabilities.

With respect to dirty goods, as you framed it, reaching other countries, that is why our work, our international engagement, is so important, and our work with trade associations is so important. I cannot overemphasize the importance of partnership here. This is not something that we do unilaterally. We do it in concert with the industries, our stakeholders, our partners. I'll give a – I'll give an example. I heard – I had an engagement with the textile industry, and learned quite a bit about how much the textile industry is suffering by reason of this scourge. And we – in that, in real time, committed to the development of an enforcement strategy to assist the textile industry. That enforcement strategy was developed in concert with industry and has been implemented since.

Ms. Strucke: That is very helpful. I think that it sounds from, you know, everything I've learned, and what you're saying, that the – your engagement with the private sector is proactive. It's practical, is what I'm hearing. Could you talk a little bit more about how you've worked – DHS has worked with the private sector as well as – and perhaps even about the FLETF. I know DHS leads the FLETF, the Forced Labor Task Force. If you could talk about how – you know, what changes should businesses be making, and then how has DHS worked with the private sector to help prepare them and communicate what these requirements look like practically?

Sec. Mayorkas: So, in terms of what, you know, industry needs to do, industry needs to understand its supply chains. It needs to make sure that it is utilizing latest tools in helping it identify its supply chains. And it needs to ensure that its supply chains are free of forced labor. And that may require some very significant shifts in where one – from where one derives source materials, where one manufactures certain things. I mean, it can require a significant paradigm shift. But that is – it is not elective. It is compulsory. It is what the law requires if, in fact, one supply chain – supply chain is infirm.

We have had, I think, over 800 engagements with industry, and let me – let me share with you why engagement is so very important. I remember in 2009 or '10, when I was director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, we issued a policy memorandum in a very different sphere. We issued a policy memorandum that I was assured

was going to be met with unanimous praise and embrace, and we issued the memo and it was met with great discord. Not unanimous condemnation but bumping up against – bumping up against that.

And what it taught me very, very forcefully, very compellingly, is that we need – we don't have a monopoly on information, on impacts – real-life impacts. We need to partner with the communities we serve to make sure that we are achieving the right objectives.

And so back then what we did was we began a process that was not unanimously well received within the agency of publishing our memoranda in a draft form and actually getting feedback. That is why we engage with industry because we recognize the significance of the actions that we take.

We want to get it right. We have no interest in being wrong. We just want to enforce the law in a – in its – to achieve its intended effect in an effective way and that requires partnership and communication, understanding industry's concerns, understanding their goals, what obstacles they might face, and working together to overcome them.

Ms. Strucke: Thank you. That is so important.

And so I asked a little bit about the FLETF. So I know that's, you know, a very important interagency body that sets the strategy. It sustains attention at a high level across the federal government. I know we have many of the principals that are actually here today in this room for whom I'd like to thank for attending.

Sec. Mayorkas: Me, too. That's the Forced Labor Enforcement Task Force, and I should emphasize this task force is not a DHS enterprise. We chair it. We're very privileged to do so. It is a multi-department multi-agency – it is an all-of-government effort and I'm incredibly grateful to and admiring of its members – the people who lead it.

Ms. Strucke: That's wonderful. And how does the FLETF plan to advance the UFLPA strategy, especially the goals – the big goals that are outlined in there?

Sec. Mayorkas: Developing our enforcement strategy and how we can more effectively enforce the UFLPA, whether that's in the issuance of withhold release orders, whether that's in adding entities to the Entities List.

I mentioned we have 68. 48 of those have been added in the last 12 months. Whether it's strengthening our partnerships with trade associations and other industry leaders, whether that's working in the international fora, working with our partners bilaterally, multilaterally.

Just it's a very holistic encompassing approach.

Ms. Strucke: And I know that recently they announced new entities and some of those even went into new sectors. Would love to hear more about that, and sort of as we titled this the new frontiers in UFLPA enforcement, just given the speed with which the DHS has – and the interagency has increased the number of entities, some of the sectors that are touched by it, and I know that as companies – as you're getting credible evidence that you're seeing evidence of forced labor in these different products you're sharing that information. So it'd be great to hear more about that effort.

Sec. Mayorkas: So we identified aluminum, PVC, seafood as sectors that warrant enhanced focus and, therefore, we are enhancing our focus. We identified those sectors not unilaterally. We receive feedback. We gather information and we make our determinations based on it.

We are – we try to be very, very nimble and address the dynamism that exists in industry and we are unrelenting in that regard.

Ms. Strucke: And then you're mentioning the different sources of information and the fact that you have intel and then the intel will help determine what some of these new areas might look like – new frontiers. Some folks say understand –

Sec. Mayorkas: Intel and information.

Ms. Strucke: And information. Some folks have, you know, asked for more transparency – greater transparency from DHS.

Sorry, I keep getting a call and I can't turn off the sound. I apologize. The –

Sec. Mayorkas: We can help with that. (Laughter.)

Ms. Strucke: Turning off the sound. There's nothing I can do.

Thank you. So the – some people have – you know, when they talked about transparency they've wanted to know if DHS can share even more of that information about, you know, everything from what kinds of shipping companies to maybe look for and be suspect that are – that could be implicated or what new areas as you mentioned – aluminum, seafood – DHS has evidence and is looking at.

Could you tell us more about some of those efforts to bring that transparency into the – into industry?

Sec. Mayorkas: So we're very focused on that. We've heard concerns. I think – and, by the way, it's very, very important that our stakeholders communicate their concerns to us.

You know, I have a maxim inside the Department of Homeland Security which is do not shrink from criticism – just work very hard not to deserve it. So we need to hear the concerns. We have really emphasized and put a lot of effort into enhancing our transparency where it is possible to do so.

I mean, you know, the Entities List is, quite frankly, a tremendous vehicle of transparency which puts everybody on notice with respect to 68 entities that if you're doing business with them, you know, frankly, beware. OK.

So the Entities List is a vehicle of transparency. There are areas where we cannot be transparent, where our law enforcement objectives would be compromised by it. And so it's not a balance. They're just two very – there are parallel streams and we are very focused on enhancing – increasing our transparency.

Ms. Strucke: I appreciate that.

Sec. Mayorkas: And that requires a robust dialog and a candid dialog.

Ms. Strucke: And I can imagine at times it may be frustrating when you have to say that statement of, well, this is information that we can't share. But I do understand that.

Sec. Mayorkas: Quite – we're quite accustomed to it.

Ms. Strucke: (Laughs.) That's right. So another area that would be, I think, really exciting for our viewers online, our audience here to hear, is sort of what – you know, what do you see as your vision for how to do, you know, even more on this?

I know that most public servants I've worked with are impatient to do more, always thinking about what's next, and just given the scale of the challenge the fact that forced labor by the Uyghur people continues to fuel the production and manufacture of goods today, what more can be done?

So some have called for a greater expansion of the entity list – as I mentioned earlier, fines for repeat offenders. Can fines be levied? Or

leveraging DHS authorities to prohibit imports produced with forced labor to be – from being reexported elsewhere.

What are the kinds of things – what is – that DHS open to exploring, to be creative about leveraging its authorities and working with the interagency to make implementation more effective?

And, you know, stacking onto this just, like, five years from now if you had a vision for what greater impact, what tools you'd bring to the table, what would that look like from your perspective?

Sec. Mayorkas: So we have the capability now to impose fines. We do impose fines. The first thing that comes to my mind I would defer to the experts here but, you know, I think it is – I think we receive 4 million packages a day under the de minimis exception – 4 million packages a day – and the de minimis exception is built on the – look, we can't screen all 4 million a day, although AI is going to enhance our capabilities significantly.

But it's built on a false premise that low value means low risk. If anyone here would join us at a facility at one of the airports or one of the mail facilities and watch the assembly line of packages in our screening and see what we discover, it is stunning.

It is stunning from a point of view of forced labor and goods produced in whole or in part. It is stunning from a point of view of narcotics, controlled substances, and what enters, and ghost guns, and all sorts of contraband. And so the de minimis exception is built on a false premise that a low value means low risk. That is one area where we hope to make some advances.

Ms. Strucke: That makes so much –

Sec. Mayorkas: And also, if I may –

Ms. Strucke: Of course.

Sec. Mayorkas: – I'm sorry, Michelle – also just increasing the partnership internationally so there are no safe countries to which one can export goods made by forced labor.

Ms. Strucke: Is that something – I know we're sitting here today maybe snarled in traffic getting here because of the NATO summit that's happening. Is that something that you are also working with the EU on to strengthen that partnership?

Sec. Mayorkas: We are, and not only the EU. We work with countries in other parts of the world, our partners to the north and south as part of the USMCA. We work very closely with Canada and Mexico to join us. It's something – it's an element of my bilateral and multilateral engagements everywhere I go.

Ms. Strucke: That's so helpful, just to be able to create – hopefully create a world where the U.S. leadership is – and EU leadership in this case –

Audience Member: (Sneezes.)

Sec. Mayorkas: Bless you.

Ms. Strucke: Bless you – (laughs) – is leading the way to try to eliminate the scourge of forced labor in all of our jurisdictions.

And I want to appreciate what you said about this de minimis standard and the idea that low value – right now the assumption is it means low risk – I think that's especially important from a human rights perspective because the whole point of human rights is it's individual. So that individual person that created that very small good that meets the de minimis exception, even if it's just a fiber or a dye, or a button on a shirt, anything that could be made with forced labor, it matters to that person.

And I think in D.C. often our conversations are so high-level and policy-oriented that we forget about those individual people that are the victims of forced labor that this entire enterprise is centered around protecting. And I know we even have some Uyghur human rights activists that are here in the room today, and I want to honor that because that – their efforts to think about people that are experiencing this right now is so crucial.

You know, one thing, Secretary, that you mentioned is that DHS has a broader human rights set of tools that you use. Is that something you could also share just as – to an interested audience that cares about human rights enforcement?

Sec. Mayorkas: Sure, and then I would like to just mention something about those who are advocates, who dedicate themselves to advantaging the weaker population specifically.

But to your very important point, Michelle, about, you know, the impact on an individual, that is precisely why – with respect to crimes of exploitation – we take a victim-centered approach, whether it's in

human trafficking, online child sexual exploitation and abuse, or what we are addressing this morning.

With respect to the Uyghur community, one thing that we might – if somebody would yank me aside afterwards – I'm very focused on insuring that the asylum process is actually more facile for that community of people.

Ms. Strucke: Well, thank you. That's an extremely important statement, and I know people would be eager to speak with you more about it.

So I'll go to my last question before I start to take audience questions. You've answered so many already and really told us much more about what you are looking for in terms of implementation. If there is one piece of hope that you have, really, for the way forward for, you know, DHS's role in building a future for Americans in which goods made with forced labor don't enter the American marketplace – I know that's a very high standard that we probably can't meet right now, but the idea – what about your work gives you that hope?

Sec. Mayorkas: The people with whom I work, and the underlying reason why they do that work, and I think the fact that everyone is here today. That's it. (Applause.)

Ms. Strucke: Thank you. So thank you so much.

So I will take my noisy iPad and see what questions we've had come in during this event. Here we go – oh, quite a few.

So we've got a couple minutes, so I will ask a few of these. So one is specifically – you've talked about solar panels a couple of times. Considering 90 percent of the world's solar panels are manufactured in China, and most of those are produced in Xinjiang, which is the region of China that the Uyghur are primarily living in, how can the U.S. government reasonably ensure that we're not importing PV panels that are manufactured using forced labor?

Sec. Mayorkas: Well, our enforcement work in that domain is very significant – very significant. That was actually – I believe it was my introduction to the UFLPA in 2022. And the solar industry has really focused its efforts on shifting its supply chain. As I mentioned, I think, at the outset, I think by 2026 we expect a 200 percent increase in the manufacture in North America and India of solar-grade polysilicon. That's a momentous change. And I don't recall the figures, but we're seeing a tremendous focus on solar industry's effort to alter its supply chain, in light of that very compelling fact.

Ms. Strucke: Well, thank you. And then, how engaged in DHS in working with our trading partners to encourage the adoption of import bans that are comparable to the UFLPA?

Sec. Mayorkas: I don't know the answer to that question.

Ms. Strucke: I definitely don't either. (Laughs.)

Sec. Mayorkas: About other efforts parallel to the UFLPA. I'd want to – I'd want to ask a question to the questioner about what exactly are they thinking of.

Ms. Strucke: If you heard that, questioner, you can – you can send it in. We'll try to update your question.

Sec. Mayorkas: But I should say this, as I think I articulated earlier, the UFLPA is not the only vehicle that girds our fight against forced labor. We have a more expansive effort to ensure that goods made, in whole or in part, by forced labor don't enter the United States. That is a remit that is broader than enforcement of the UFLPA. The UFLPA is a shining example of legislation that equips us with tools and mechanisms that are needed.

Ms. Strucke: And it's thanks to the bipartisan support in Congress that that happened. So I also want to express my gratitude for that.

Sec. Mayorkas: Indeed.

Ms. Strucke: In a town that can often be gridlocked, we had bipartisan support for this.

There are other departments and agencies in the U.S. government, of course, that focus on promoting businesses – U.S. businesses abroad. So how does DHS engage with Commerce, the Export-Import Bank of the U.S., so that lessons learned by DHS are integrated into requirements for companies that work with or are supported by the U.S. government more broadly.

Sec. Mayorkas: So it's – so it's not lessons learned just by DHS. The fact of the matter is departments across – and agencies across the government learn a great deal. And it feeds into the Forced Labor Enforcement Task Force. These are – that is precisely why it requires an interagency effort. It is not the DHS receiving and then disseminating. It is all of us working in parallel with one another. This is – this is a task force in the truest sense of the word. We couldn't do it otherwise.

Ms. Strucke: That is excellent to hear. And I do hope that that is a – the task force is a lasting entity. It's legislated, right? So it's a – it's something that will continue, regardless of any policy changes.

Sec. Mayorkas: Yes.

Ms. Strucke: What guidance would you give to companies seeking to proactively ensure that their supply chains are free of forced labor? And if you know of any tools that are available to them.

Sec. Mayorkas: Communicate with us. Engage with us. Learn your supply chains as vigorously as you can. Make changes where changes are due. Harness technology to learn those supply chains. And honestly, engagement with us is absolutely vital and we do have resources available.

Ms. Strucke: Thank you. I'll just ask you two more from this list. So one is about NGO and INGO partners. So nonprofit organizations sometimes don't have the technical expertise to conduct supply chain research. However, they advocate very strongly on UFLPA enforcement. And they're asking, you know, where are those voices most needed? What is the most – what is a role for those organizations that is helpful?

Sec. Mayorkas: Oh my gosh, I mean, we work with the nonprofit organizations all the time to understand what they learn. They have direct contact with victims of forced labor. They teach us very important lessons that guide our work and help shape our enforcement actions. They assist us not only in developing or refining our enforcement actions, our targeting and the like, but they also assist us in ensuring that we're providing humanitarian relief to the victims in a timely and encompassing fashion. That is why I asked to maybe a pull-aside with some with respect to the asylum relief, to which so many are entitled.

Ms. Strucke: And is that something you'd like to say more on now, or do you prefer it after?

Sec. Mayorkas: I just – you know, I'm a – I'm a believer in justice delayed is justice denied. And I recognize some of the challenges in providing swiftness of relief, at a time when our – one of our agencies is still climbing out of financial distress and a lack of investment. And I mean, that in an encompassing way. And so I just want to see what we can do to bridge the divide.

Ms. Strucke: Well, thank you. I'll ask you one more on UFLPA. Fast fashion. So there's such a demand for fast fashion. A lot of – this questioner is saying that,

unfortunately, a lot of the American public still don't know whether products they are buying or using are made in whole or in part with Uyghur forced labor, or just forced labor generally. So –

Sec. Mayorkas: Fast fashion is a – I think I know to which that refers. It's not a term I've heard, but I – (laughter) – but I know what it is.

Ms. Strucke: Yes. So clothing that is –

Sec. Mayorkas: Yeah, no, no, no –

Ms. Strucke: Exactly.

Sec. Mayorkas: Yeah.

Ms. Strucke: Ready to be thrown away after one season. And so how –

Sec. Mayorkas: Or sooner.

Ms. Strucke: Or sooner. That's true. (Laughter.) It could be immediate – if it rips right away out of the bag.

Sec. Mayorkas: Look, there's – there are a number of concerns that have been raised with that. Not just a risk of forced labor, but also there are environmental concerns and the like. And we are – let me just say this, without saying too much. We are well aware of those concerns. And we tend not to drive by concerns, but actually address them.

Ms. Strucke: I hope that's a hint for all of us that DHS will be addressing this. That's great. I will – I will – my words. (Laughs.)

Well, thank you so much. I think that, you know, the last one I have on here is quite a hard question because it's really just about the overall impact, you know, with Chinese PRC counterparts. I know that you engage with them with others, or high-level officials in the – in the U.S. government engage with PRC counterparts. Is there – do you think that this effort is being effective in helping to apply pressure? And does it help you when you do engage those counterparts about their hopeful end to the forced-labor practices that they're committing?

Sec. Mayorkas: You know, I want to – the UFLPA is, of course, focused on a discrete population. I do want to just widen the aperture here and emphasize the fact that forced labor is not country-specific. Tragically, we see it in different parts of the world. And we address it wherever it exists, and we certainly address goods that emanate from different parts of the world.

I have engaged with my counterpart from the People's Republic of China. We have areas of agreement; we have areas of disagreement. And we continue to dialogue and see what progress we can make. And it's a – it's a process.

Ms. Strucke: I accept that answer. (Laughs.)

So I want to thank everyone so much for coming to our event today. I want to especially thank Secretary Mayorkas for your generosity of your time.

Sec. Mayorkas: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. (Applause.)

Ms. Strucke: Thank you.

Just a few other thank-yous: our CEO, Dr. Hamre, for his remarks in the beginning; Lauren Burke and Aly Senko of my team, of the Human Rights Initiative; our wonderful External Relations, Events and Conferencing, Streaming and Broadcasting teams, and – for all the work they do behind the scenes to make events like this possible; our audience here in the room and online for your robust engagement on this important issue, your commitment to fighting for an end to forced labor around the globe, and of course the Uyghur activists and advocates that are fighting every day for recognition of the atrocities that are happening to the Uyghur people to try to make changes in the world that will better their situation; and of course, DHS staff – your staff, sir – including Maria Goodman, Patrick Schmidt, Naree Ketudat, Alexandra Schmitt, Fayrouz Saad, Emily, and many more that are in the room and working on these issues, as you said, day in and day out.

So I want to invite everyone here to please stay engaged with CSIS, with our Human Rights Initiative and our other programming more broadly. And of course, I'd like to invite you to stay for this reception right now where you will be able to engage with one another, and learn more about each other's work, and forge connections that I hope will increase this community and make it even more effective. So please join me again in one more round of applause for Secretary Mayorkas. (Applause.)

Sec. Mayorkas: Thanks, Michelle. Thank you all. Thank you. (Applause.)

Thanks a lot.

Ms. Strucke: Appreciate it.

Sec. Mayorkas: Thank you.

Ms. Strucke: Thank you so much. (Applause.)

(END.)