Ms. Glaser, Mr. Blanchette, fellow panelists, as well as the online audience joining us today, good morning. It is an honour to take part in this seminar hosted by the CSIS with the support of our TECRO in the United States.

I would like to thank Bonnie and Jude for the opportunity to share my thoughts on cross-Strait relations and possible challenges ahead. Starting with where we stand now, there are three points I would like to address.

First, China’s increasingly authoritarian nature has led to higher risk for decision making and misjudgment.

Under President Xi Jinping, who heads tens of commissions and leading small groups, China has undergone a striking centralization of power. In March 2018, the National People’s Congress voted to amend the Constitution to remove presidential term limits. Such moves overturn the rules of succession established by Deng Xiao-ping and the decades-old collective leadership.

Although some could argue that this works in favor of power consolidation, excessive centralization of power in the hands of one person as well as the lack of checks and balances greatly increases the likelihood of policy misjudgments and exposes the country to serious political succession problems often seen in authoritarian regimes. This being said, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) may be at risk of falling into the so-called Mao Zedong’s trap where leaders tend to focus on personal rather than overall public interests. The fact that decisions are made by a few handfuls of individuals within the inner circle and the intolerance of different opinions only serve to further increase the chances of misjudgment.
Over the years, we have seen the CCP making a series of missteps in its decision making and propaganda campaigns. From underestimating Washington’s determination to launch a trade war, to imposing controversial legislation on Hong Kong which have ignited a storm of protest, and to pushing forward the “Xi’s five points” that not only increases the bitter sentiment of Taiwanese people against China, but also undermines the stability in the Taiwan Strait and the region beyond. In addition, China’s failure to report COVID-19 cases timely and the concealment of the gravity and seriousness of the pandemic outbreak, along with its new brand of “wolf warrior” diplomacy, further show that Beijing continues to turn its back on freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

China’s deviation from democratic values and respect for human rights will not only trigger both internal and external instability but is also of no benefit to regional peace. This brings me to my second point, how such deviation happens to be the root cause of regional instability.

Freedom and democracy are universal values, regardless of national borders and race. With its recent and rapid rise, Chinese leadership somehow feels entitled to claim the so-called “China model” and “China solutions”. However, we all know better that the Chinese society remains tightly controlled and closed-off. The sad reality is that without democracy and freedom, the Chinese people can never enjoy true happiness.

As the CCP authorities double down on political repression through carrying out mass detention and surveillance at home and exercising economic coercion abroad, China is only moving further away from the path to democracy, freedom and upholding human rights. This is truly worrisome for the international community and harmful to regional peace and stability.

The legitimacy of the CCP’s rule has long been based on two major pillars; one is the economic growth enjoyed over the past 40 years while the other is nationalism, or patriotism. However, China’s economic growth has been slowing amid economic structural reforms, with pressure compounded by an escalating trade war with the United States and
the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. With a negative 6.8% GDP growth in the first quarter, the first contraction seen in four decades, and Premier Li Keqiang confirming that China has 600 million people living on a monthly income of barely 1,000 yuan, roughly 140 US dollars, it seems like economic slowdown is becoming China’s new normal.

Therefore, as high rates of economic growth can no longer be sustained, Xi Jinping will not be able to seek his third consecutive term with his current economic performance scorecard. Consequently, Xi is more than ever in need of nationalism, or patriotism, to consolidate his power. Through rallying support for internal unity, suppressing oppositions and resorting to expansionism, Xi ensures his stamp of authority on the government remains unchallenged. While vowing to never be swayed by threats or subdued by pressure, the CCP has been placing an ever-stronger emphasis on spurring nationalist sentiment behind closed-doors and hijacking patriotism to mobilize domestic support. This has made China the major source of regional instability.

For instance, the CCP continues to flex its military muscle and exert political suppression over Taiwan. At a recent conference on the alleged Anti-Separation Law, Beijing authorities stressed the use of legal and even non-peaceful means to force Taiwan into accepting the “one country, two systems” initiative by which more than 90 percent of the Taiwanese people oppose. Additionally, the situation in Hong Kong is also disturbing. From the extradition bill to the new national security law, Hong Kong’s “one country, two systems” is at risk of failing. Unrest and discontent are rising across society, risks faced by foreign nationals in Hong Kong are increasing and Hong Kong is in danger of losing its status as an international financial center.

Against the backdrop of the proposed extradition bill and the new national security law, along with criticizing the call for freedom and democracy as separatist activities seeking independence, the CCP attempts to use patriotism fanned by “independence forces” in Taiwan and Hong Kong to deflect domestic pressure. This in turn poses serious challenges for subsequent cross-Strait affairs and regional stability.
Last but not least, as cross-Strait relations reach a historical turning point, it is most critical to acknowledge Taiwan’s cross-Strait policy is in the best interest of the region and the need to strengthen the value-based Taiwan-US alliance.

The United States vice president, Mike Pence, Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, and political figures across the aisle have praised Taiwan’s constitutional democracy as a model for the entire Indo-Pacific region and emphasized Taiwan’s role as a beacon of democracy in Asia. Taiwan’s democratization progress has become an important core value cherished by the society and a shared value between Taiwan and the United States. Even though Taiwan has stood at the forefront of CCP’s military coercion, diplomatic offensives and united front work operations over the past seven decades, we have never backed down nor compromised under pressure.

Since President Tsai Ing-wen took office, she has been stalwart in her efforts to maintain the peace and stability of the Taiwan Strait. In her 2020 inaugural address, she once again stressed that Taiwan will not accept the Beijing authorities' use of "one country, two systems" to downgrade Taiwan and undermine the cross-Strait status quo. President Tsai also reiterated "peace, parity, democracy, and dialogue" as the guiding principles for benign cross-Strait relations and that leaders on both sides of the Strait must shoulder equal responsibility.

In order to maintain the development of cross-Strait relations, we stand firmly to safeguard national sovereignty and security, while continuing to ensure healthy cross-Strait exchanges and review the implementation of the signed cross-Strait agreements in order to protect the rights and interests of the peoples from both sides. We welcome Mainland tourists and students to Taiwan and have devoted to creating a friendly living environment for Mainland spouses in Taiwan. At the same time, we have mapped out a plan to better provide humanitarian assistance for the Hong Kong people in Taiwan. These policy stances are in the interest of, and in line with, security concerns of all parties in the region. To that end, we call on the Beijing authorities to cherish and help sustain the hard-earned cross-Strait achievements.
In conclusion, as we look to the future, the CCP authorities are likely to continue consolidating the political core of power centralization as well as tighten social control. On the external front, they will further pursue China’s strategic goals and emphasise all attempts to weaken democracies around the world. This anti-democratic and non-peaceful nature of CCP’s authoritarian regime poses great challenges and threats for Taiwan.

We hope that the United States, along with the international community, continues their support of Taiwan’s freedom and democracy and closely observes related developments in Asia. Firm support for democratic Taiwan and our policy of maintaining peace in the region is no doubt the best practice to confront the CCP’s authoritarian regime and its aggressive expansionism. In the meantime, we believe it is of great importance for the United States and the international community to maintain engagement with the CCP. We look forward to seeing Beijing modify its assertive posture through meaningful interactions with other global powers and institutions.

With these few remarks, I thank you for taking time to join us today. Although the pandemic outbreak has prevented us from meeting face to face, it surely does not stop us from paying attention to the common challenges we all face. Thank you.