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Paige Montfort: Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you so much for joining us here today. As you all know, the General Debate at the 76th Session of the U.N. General Assembly will begin on Tuesday, September 21st, and on that day President Biden will be delivering his first U.N. General Assembly speech as president. This assembly comes at a time when our world is facing a number of challenges, among these, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the complex challenge of climate change, various humanitarian crises, and Afghanistan's uncertain future.

So we're fortunate today to be joined by four leading CSIS experts, one to address each of these key topics that will likely be covered at the general debate. They'll each give brief opening remarks and then we'll move into a question and answer session.

So without further ado, I'd like to introduce our four speakers today. Starting us off will be Steve Morrison; he's senior vice president and director of the Global Health Policy Center at CSIS. And he will be followed by Joseph Majkut, the new director of the Energy Security and Climate Change Program here at CSIS. And after Joseph, we will have Jacob Kurtzer; he is the director and senior fellow at CSIS's Humanitarian Agenda. And last but not least, we will have Anthony H. Cordesman; he goes by Tony; he's our emeritus chair in strategy at CSIS. And with that, I will turn it over to Steve.

J. Stephen Morrison: Thanks so much, Paige. And thanks also to Andrew Schwartz for pulling this all together. My comments are directed to the global COVID-19 summit that President Biden has called for on Wednesday, September 22nd. I'm going to speak briefly to some of the background context and then to what we may expect and what we might make of what will happen next week.

In terms of background, a couple of key points: There is dire urgency surrounding the vaccine crisis for low- and middle-income countries, and 2022 is looking to be a pretty terrible year. Of the 5.9 billion vaccines administered thus far, eight in 10 were delivered in 10 powerful and wealthy countries, and that pattern remains. The gap, in fact, is worsening, not easing. The estimated need for the balance of this calendar year in low- and middle-income countries is 2.4 billion doses to achieve 40 percent coverage, which is the target. That's simply not going to happen. COVAX, the solidarity mechanism, has been beset by serious problems and missteps. It has adjusted its forecast for the balance of 2021 downward by 25 percent. The verdict is not yet in.

The United States stepped forward with 500 million doses of Pfizer back in June at the G-7. It remains to be seen whether COVAX is able to reset and regain its footing. The future's looking brighter after a policy

reset in June and improved supply situation. Supplies globally are expanding and, in theory, supply constraints should be eased. We're going to see 7 billion doses produced in 2021, 14 billion in 2022. We're now at 1.5 billion per dose per month, but that does not take into account that market calculations continue to dominate the decision of where they go and who buys them. Vaccine manufacturers continue to chase high-value and high-priced markets, and countries are still predominantly making decisions based on their own nationalist calculations.

How we bring about transparency and accountability in the vaccine marketplace has not been answered yet, and for low- and middle-income countries, not only is there a supply gap, but there's a finance gap and there's great concerns accumulating about the delivery capacity, absence of national plans in low- and middle-income countries that would account for what kind of management, what kind of health care providers' data systems they're going to need. The fear is rising that countries will be turning back vaccines or they will languish, the vaccines will languish at the gate as expiration dates pass.

We've had a radical revision in how we see the global situation. We're now seeing it as a long war, as an endemic war, Delta as far more pernicious and dangerous, and that runaway transmission across the world leads to runaway replication and the danger of new variants, and we're seeing a cascade of crises. My colleague Jacob Kurtzer will speak to this in terms of proliferation of famine and food insecurity, economic insolvency, humanitarian emergencies, and social instability.

Up to now – and this brings me towards the summit – there's been a shocking absence of meaningful high-level summitry. Nationalism's dominated; continues to dominate. The toxic meltdown in the U.S.-China relationship accelerated under Trump and not reversed under Biden is a major impediment. G-7 and U.N. Security Council were paralyzed throughout 2020; some signs of modest recovery since then. G-20 has generated some progress, modest but promising. And we'll see what happens in the October summit in Italy. The stalemate over the investigation of the origin of SARS CoV-2 persists. And a lack of U.S.-China cooperation remains a barrier in strengthening global health-security cooperation.

So what is the White House attempting to do in this summit? It's trying to reignite some form of high-level diplomacy and set a plan in motion for successive meetings. It's trying to create a bigger tent, trying to bring forward not just countries but pharmaceutical companies, philanthropists, foundations, NGOs. In some ways this broad tent is

modeled after the global health-security agenda that was launched in February 2014 by the Obama administration.

It's trying to set the agenda for the future in three areas – addressing the vaccine crisis, saving lives in term of key inputs needed, and investing in the future, particularly in terms of creating a Global Threat Council and creating a financing fund that would invest in long-term preparedness. They've laid out a menu, and they're trying to see what countries step forward and other interests to speak to the individual areas.

There's no macro plan. There's no big number attached to this. It embraces several goals. It wants to get agreement around 70 percent coverage in low- and middle-income countries for vaccines by this time next year. It's looking for a \$10 billion commitment over the next two years in terms of readiness in low- and middle-income countries. And there's a big emphasis, interesting emphasis, on private sector, on private-sector contributions around oxygen, therapeutics, and testing. There is reportedly a commitment within the works within the White House to bring forward another major donation of Pfizer doses, which we may hear about today.

What do we make about this? We need to wait to pass judgment. A lot of hard work went into this by the White House, State Department, Treasury, USAID, CDC. It's encouraging that President Biden has chosen to take this step at the same time as he's resetting the domestic approach, his six-point plan last week, and a 65 billion (dollar) pandemic preparedness plan laid out the week before that.

We are at a very tough spot at home, and that has not deterred President Biden from leading in the international sphere. That's a change. That's a major pivot. We'll see where it goes. This was organized in haste late in the day. That's not so unusual. It's uncertain what new – (audio break) – will be put on the table. But when the president commits, as he does in this way, others within the administration scramble to create deliverables that can build credibility and avoid embarrassment. We'll see what that brings. That's the pattern of action surrounding the G-7. I expect something similar to this.

There are, of course, many surrounding tensions – Afghanistan, boosters, controversy, pressures to invest in manufacturing capabilities, and, of course, the tensions with China and with Russia. There's a certain risk here if this is tasked as a preliminary step in the midst of a crisis, if there's a lack of big commitment, if there's a lack of strategy – (audio break) – target, and a leadership and accountability structure.

That could feed some skepticism in the way that the world and the world press looks at all of this.

We still don't have a clear leadership structure in the U.S. executive branch or international engagement and follow-through. It remains ad hoc, fragmented, and uncertain. That has to change if this agenda is to be moved forward.

Two last points. It's going to be very important to enlist bipartisan support in Congress behind this vision. And I do not expect much of a blowback among the American people. I believe that American – the American opinion climate has, in fact, swung behind the notion that the U.S. needs to expand its leadership and engagement for the reasons I laid out in terms of dealing with the threat outside our borders.

Thank you so much.

Ms. Montfort: Thank you so much, Steve.

And now we'll move on to Joseph

Joseph Makjut: Thank you. And good afternoon, everyone.

IBM looking forward to an interesting week when it comes to climate change and energy at the General Assembly. It comes at an interesting time. We're about a month and a half away from the Conference of the Parties, or COP-26, at Glasgow, where the world – countries of the world will come together and try and solidify the big gains that were made at the Paris Climate – with the Paris Climate Agreement and look toward the next decade of increasing ambition for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and responding to the risks of climate change.

So next week, I expect we'll see climate invoked not only in high-level meetings, both open and closed door, but also sort of regularly sprinkled throughout speeches and addresses to the whole thing, and we're going to – in those invocations, we're going to see the tensions and the opportunities that the countries are facing as they work towards success at Glasgow.

The UNFCCC released a report today showing that for the plans that countries have submitted in terms of naturally-determined contributions, or NDCs, emissions look – you know, were they to be met, emissions – or, warming by the end of the century it looks like it would imply about 2.7 degrees centigrade, which is – falls fairly short of what the Paris Agreement aims for. The Paris target is well – to keep warming well below 2 (degrees) C. And so the whole task and the

politics around climate at the moment are trying to figure out how to – how to increase ambition and get the world closer on track to 2 (degrees) C.

Now, there's a couple comments here I want to draw out. At the same time that that U.N. report doesn't look too positive, there are – we've seen over the last few years an increasing willingness of many countries to talk about net zero emissions. If we're going to stop global warming this century, emissions eventually have to go towards zero or, on net, have to be zero.

There was a paper released in Nature Climate Change yesterday reporting that net zero is under consideration at various levels in countries that cover 72 percent of total global emissions. If all that's realized, then projected warming will be something more like 2 (degrees) or 2.4 degrees C.

So the question that we're faced with over the next decade is how do we get fast enough emissions reductions that those long-term ambitions fall toward the lower end rather than the higher end. And for that, it's really a question of what are the big emitters going to do and how can they help developing countries grow economically without rapidly growing their own emissions.

In terms of what the U.S. is – what's going on in the U.S., I think President Biden has made a very – a big pledge. The question is whether he'll have the legislative success to meet it. So at the same time, he and Special Envoy Kerry and the State Department are negotiating with other countries and trying to extract larger emissions pledges – emissions reductions pledges, excuse me. They're faced with the domestic politics of – or fairly hard domestic politics. They had some bipartisan success in terms of an infrastructure package that has – is making its way slowly through Congress. Still faces a vote in the House.

But the key climate provisions in that package were really applied most to emissions reductions after 2030 and it's that next decade that really sets whether or not we're going to get to the bottom of our goals or the more – or the more moderate cases.

So, you know, the 2030 goal that Biden has aimed for, the one that he brought to the U.N., was a 50 (percent) to 52 percent reduction in U.S. emissions by the end of this decade in 2030. It looks pretty clear that his Build Back Better plan, the one that has been introduced and would be part of the budget package, is the device that would help our country realize that.

It faces partisan challenges, it's running through budget reconciliation, and a new modeling shows that even if it were to be realized, emissions probably wouldn't fall as quickly as he needs. And that – and that assumes that it passes.

Meanwhile, they're – you know, he's facing challenges from other emissions. China accounts for 27 percent of global emissions. I think there's a – there's a broad view that its NDC, its contribution, is – which would peak emissions near 2030, has a long-term net zero view, but doesn't imply reductions this decade in a way that would show us a strong acceleration of climate ambition.

And of course, the broader U.S.-China dynamics are at play. My colleague Nikos Tsafos wrote a piece for our website arguing the key there is not like it was at Paris, where there was a lot of bilateral engagement between China and the U.S., but really multilateral engagement is the strategy that the Biden administration has to seek here. There's no appetite to make the kind of concessions on other issues – human rights, Hong Kong – that China might seek out of the U.S., and China, you know, is also kind of looking at, I think, our domestic situation and seeing some cracks.

The last thing to watch as we think about the developing countries, and what I'm watching personally, is what role climate finance will help play in the transition for developing countries. The wealthy nations agreed years ago to make something like \$100 billion a year of investments or funding available for transition. The OECD reported today that they're missing that mark nearly 20 billion last year. This is a – you know, whether or not governments in the midst of COVID-19 are going to be able to provide more funding I think is an open question, provides a big opportunity for private finance to step up, but we'll definitely see that come up in the – in the conference next week and in the whole runup to Glasgow.

Thank you for your attention and I look forward to questions.

Ms. Montfort: Thank you so much, Joseph.

Now I welcome Jacob Kurtzer to speak.

Jacob Kurtzer: Thanks, Paige. And thank you all for joining us this afternoon.

It seems fitting, in a sense, to go after Steve's presentation on COVID and comments about climate. Every major humanitarian crisis now is

described as a(n) unhealthy confluence of climate, COVID, and conflict where the impacts of each exacerbate the felt – the felt impacts. And as a consequence, we're looking at a – at a humanitarian picture that is extremely bleak and, unfortunately, getting worse.

At the start of 2021, the OCHA Global Humanitarian Overview talked about some 235 million people in need of assistance, and that was before the coup in Myanmar, it was before the full effects of the conflict in Ethiopia were felt, and it was before the full impact of the Taliban offensive in Afghanistan and their subsequent takeover. So the number of people in need is surely higher than at the start of this year.

And in a very specific sense, we also know that, as Steve mentioned, the global hunger picture is extremely dire. David Beasley recently spoke about nearly 41 million people around the world being on the brink of famine.

And what the humanitarian picture shows us, it demonstrates that the system as constituted is failing to protect people and it's failing to respond to disasters in a meaningful way.

I want to highlight a couple of key contexts. Afghanistan and Ethiopia are surely on the top of mine and surely on the top of the agenda, but the enduring and ongoing needs in Venezuela, Myanmar, Yemen, and Syria I think speak to this inability of the U.N. system to effectively resolve political insecurity crises.

You read the statements like Martin Griffiths, the head of OCHA, or the country representatives, and there are just not enough superlatives anymore to describe the depths of the humanitarian disasters in countries like Yemen and Syria. These crises all have unique components, but I do think that they share a few key elements for the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council members to think about.

And one of those is the ongoing and inhuman denial of humanitarian access – the denial of humanitarian organizations the ability to respond to the needs of affected parties and the relative inability or impasse at the political level to resolve the conflicts. The humanitarian response is not meant to be a long-term response; it's meant to be a response to acute short-term needs while political solutions are found to conflict. And yet, all of these conflicts have endured because of the inability to find solutions.

And one particularly distressing trend has been the use of the Security Council or the General Assembly to negotiate humanitarian operations

and humanitarian access. These bodies should be focused on the political solution and not the day-to-day navigation of how many trucks, which checkpoints, which cross-line operations need to happen to respond to the needs of the affected civilian populations.

And so we have a lot of things on our mind as we look at the week ahead.

We saw today the administration in the United States announced a set of targeted sanctions on individuals in Ethiopia and Eritrea responsible for atrocities in that conflict. This is surely going to be something to watch in how it informs the debate next week. One important step that the United States government took in the context of announcing those sanctions was also the simultaneous announcement of a general license for humanitarian organizations from both the U.N. and the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, but also for nongovernmental organizations.

Which brings me to another point which I think is one that's worth watching, which is as there has been conversation around this idea of the end of these forever wars, we still have at the United Nations and at country level enduring sanctions regimes that create a very complicated environment for humanitarian organizations to operate. Nongovernmental organizations, U.S./European-based and others, including local organizations in the countries in which they operate in, are compelled to abide by a set of overlapping, complicated, convoluted, and sometimes incoherent sanctions and restrictions regimes that make it extremely hard for them to meet the needs of the affected populations without being at risk of legal – without being compliant with legal restrictions.

One point I wanted to raise, as well, was that the theme for UNGA this year – you know, building resilience through hope, recovering from COVID-19, rebuilding sustainability, responding to the needs of the planet – respecting the rights of the people comes pretty far down the line. And the reality is that none of these themes can be achieved, and particularly not the protection of the rights of the people, until there are political solutions to the security crises.

And so I don't want to get now into the specifics of the individual countries. I'm happy to answer any questions. But I would just reiterate that the humanitarian picture, the idea that in 2021 we're looking at more people in need than ever before because of political – the political inability to resolve complex crises, is a real tragedy and I think an unfortunate indictment of the system that's meant to be

preventing these humanitarian catastrophes. So I'll conclude there and happy to take any questions.

Ms. Montfort: Thank you very much, Jake.

And we will put a bit of a pin in that and open up to Q&A momentarily, but first I would like to welcome our final expert to speak, Tony Cordesman. So feel free to unmute yourself, Tony. He is an expert on Afghanistan, among other things.

Anthony H. Cordesman: Thank you, Paige.

I think that what we are watching right now is a country that doesn't as yet have even a claimed government from the Taliban. There seem to be more moderate, older leaders, but they have appointed one of the most radical, hardline younger leaders, the Haqqani sort of heir, to the Ministry of the Interior. There is no, as yet, structure for government outside Kabul, much less within it. And whatever is going to emerge is going to emerge over the next few days or weeks or months.

The history of movements that win and take over is often the history of movements that take a very long time to achieve any kind of stability or real control, even over the central government. And very often, that control does not extend to large areas of the country which come under the control of various warlords or other power brokers.

So, basically, as the U.N. meets, the question will be: Will there even be a claimed government? Will the Taliban follow that government? Will we see any kind of divided resistance? How will countries like the United States deal with the Taliban? Will we see tension with China, Russia, and others, as they try to compete?

What we can be sure of is the issues Jacob raised are immediate. These aren't humanitarian crises in the normal sense. Before the collapse of the government and the military forces, the rate of poverty in Afghanistan had doubled since 2014, had the highest rate of infantry mortality in the world. Basically, any effort at aid or organized humanitarian structures was confined to some cities, and that often was very inefficient. It is impossible to determine the degree to which the money disappeared in the form of corruption, but it is, by the estimate of groups like the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction, likely that a majority, or at least a very large faction, of any aid money was disappearing into waste and corruption before the collapse occurred.

Since the collapse, the financial system, such as it was, has effectively collapsed; even the informal financial structure has collapsed. The country was already in drought, one of the worst droughts in its recent history. As Steve mentioned, you had a COVID crisis. We have no numbers anyone can trust. There's no basis – or was no basis for collecting the data when there was what appeared to be a government, so any figures are basically estimates being made up by whoever wished to make them up.

In terms of the economy, you've already seen that prices for food, other items in cities like Kabul have essentially come close to increasing by 60 to 70 percent. The only reason they haven't risen far higher is no one has any money because there's no access to banks, and the people who could and really had made major amounts of money, had already sent it out of the country before the collapse occurred.

In terms of what's happening in terms of local structures, one great problem is that you can't put humanitarian aid into most of the country unless you can find a government and a structure of order, you have some idea of what's going to go on in given districts, and we don't have that information, and neither does anyone in the sort of central structure of the Taliban government.

I think the great problem for everyone is going to be, too, what do you do as the United States or anyone else, the World Bank, the IMF, aid donors, when you have absolutely no idea of who will get any money, what will happen when the money is transferred, what structure will actually exist in most of the government. And one of the things that the U.N. is going to have to now cope with is that for the last four years it has not released data from the parts of Afghanistan where aid efforts could actually be conducted. If it does, the results are going to create even more problems.

So with that rather bleak assessment, Paige, let me turn it back to you.

Ms. Montfort: Thank you very much, Tony. And thank you, everyone.

So at this time for our participants, for our attendees, we're going to open it up to Q&A, so feel free to add yourself to the queue. And in the meantime, while you all are getting lined up, I do have one question that was asked for Joseph that we'll start off with. It was asked: What do you make of the president's new goal of reducing emissions – from methane emissions from major countries by 30 percent? What do you make of that new goal that Biden has set up?

Mr. Makjut: Oh, yeah. Thank you.

You know, the Biden administration had the large economies convening today at the White House – virtual, I believe – focused on addressing this issue of near-term climate ambition and how to meet the targets that we’ve set for ourselves. It looks like one of the big key initiatives that they will be focusing on is reducing emissions of methane gas, which is a powerful greenhouse gas, 30 percent from major economies. I think this is a, you know, obviously constructive step. Methane emissions make up around 20 percent of global greenhouse-gas emissions sort of in a measured equivalent against carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. But it’s pretty clearly not enough to address the large ambition gaps that we see in the near term. So while it’s pretty helpful, I think there’s still quite a bit more to be done.

Ms. Montfort: Great. Thank you, Joseph.

And while we await the queue – OK, I’m having some –

Operator: Paige, would you like me to give the instructions at this time?

Ms. Montfort: Yes. That would be fantastic if you could do that, and then I will rejoin so I can view the queue and make sure everyone’s getting their questions answered. But if you would take it away, please.

Operator: Absolutely. Thank you.

(Gives queueing instructions.)

And we do have a question. We will go to the line of Aamer Madhani representing the Associated Press. Please go ahead.

Q: And thank you guys for arranging this call.

I was just hoping to get everyone’s take, or whoever’s willing to weigh in on this. After Biden came in with this idea of America’s back and that there would be more of a multilateral approach than we saw in the previous four years, I was wondering, how much does he have to make up or how much does he have to sort of push his credibility on this after a few high-profile issues that have kind of rankled on the foreign stage – AUKUS and the Australian submarine deal this week; bucking pushes from allies that wanted to go beyond the August 31st deadline with Afghanistan; differences, particularly earlier in the year, on how fast to go with vaccine sharing with poorer countries; and to a certain extent about how vociferous to be on China’s human-rights abuses?

Mr. Cordesman: Well, let me start simply with the security dimension. I think that there is something more to be done than to rebuild U.S. credibility. There is a need to react to China. It was recognized by Australia. The French objections over the submarine deal didn't quite mention the fact that there were major problems with the production of the French submarines. They also ignored the fact that if you're going to deal with a threat rising as quickly as China, you really do need the best nuclear submarines possible and you need to have allied commitment to meet them.

In terms of NATO, the movement the U.S. is making to implement a new NATO strategy, that is already making real progress. It hasn't had the visibility it should, but the U.S. has probably done more than most of its European critics understand.

The situation in the Middle East is far more confused, and that is an area where the U.S. has to at least choose what strategy and force posture it's going to have in the future, and it hasn't done it yet.

The other issues I think I should leave to my colleagues.

Operator: (Gives queueing instructions.)

Ms. Montfort: Also, Mr. Madhani, if you would like to repeat part of your question for Tony's colleagues – kind of the portions that were not able to be answered yet, feel free to do so now as well.

Q: I think Tony did a great job. Thank you.

Operator: And Ms.-

Ms. Montfort: Thank you. Then I will –

Operator: Nobody else is coming up at this time.

Ms. Montfort: Thank you. Yes, well, I do have some additional questions that were submitted previously.

So one would kind of be – Jake, you actually referred to this in your opening statement. You discussed kind of these enduring sanctions and restrictions with the regime. But what would be some alternate tools or mechanisms that could be applied to ensure that aid is getting to those who need it when these sanctions and other regimes are really not working?

Mr. Kurtzer: Thanks. I'll make reference back to an evaluation of the Biden regime – or the Biden administration question in the context of sanction regimes. One

very obvious and immediate differentiation between the Biden administration's approach to humanitarian and security crises and his predecessor's was the use of the Foreign Terrorist Organization designation on Ansar Allah, the Houthis in Yemen.

At the conclusion of the previous administration's tenure on January 19, one day before they departed office, the Houthis in Yemen were designated as foreign terrorist organization, which would have had and did have fairly devastating implications for humanitarian operations in that context. Even with the provision of a general license for NGOs to operate, financial service providers and private commercial vendors ceased providing services to NGOs for fear of running afoul of U.S. criminal and civil liability for providing support to a terrorist organization.

And in the early days of the Biden administration, sometime – I think it was around February 15, they revoked that designation, which was a fairly – an incredibly important step for humanitarian organizations and, quite frankly, a pretty substantial departure from, you know, 20 years of gung-ho-ness in terms of applying restrictions but the very few examples of removing them.

We have seen over the course of the last 15 to 20 years that when humanitarian circumstances deteriorate to a certain degree, the international community is capable of removing these restrictions to allow for humanitarian operations. The seminal example of this was in Somalia in 2011. And yet at that point in time, it took for a famine declaration and for people to be, you know, literally dying for the United States and the United Nations to create the framework that would allow humanitarian organizations to work.

So thinking about the question, the problem is, Paige and questioner, that you have sanctions imposed by the United States, sanctions imposed by European states, sanctions imposed by the EU, sanctions imposed by the U.N., and these overlap and they create an environment of incredible legal complexity. And particularly the United States' sanctions are incredibly difficult for humanitarian organizations to comply with.

U.N agencies have a certain amount of leeway by virtue of various immunities, but humanitarian organizations, non-governmental organizations – not only do they have to run through a lot of legal hoops to comply with them, but because of the United States' – the financial system's reliance on the dollar, and the amount of financial transactions that go through U.S. banks, it makes it incredibly complicated from purely financial access standpoint to run humanitarian operations in context with the presence of designated groups. And if you look at the top crises in the world in terms of where humanitarian needs are greatest, you are talking about

Somalia, Yemen, Syria, Nigeria, Afghanistan. These are all places with these designated groups.

It raises the question, I think – and I think this may have been part of the question – was, well, then, what tools are there at disposal if you – if you reduce the use of sanctions and these other restrictive measures? The sanctions on Ethiopia – on the Ethiopian individuals, I mean, I think the problem here is sanctioning groups or areas as opposed to individuals. When you sanction a group or a government, it's much more complicated than sanctioning individuals who are responsible for atrocities, human rights violations, creating humanitarian harm.

More to the point, though, I do think there are opportunities. I mean, we saw that the United States and the government of China have come to some sort of agreement on the seating of who represents Myanmar, that they will not – the current – the former government's – I don't know the former government – the individual who had been representative of Myanmar will not speak, but the junta will not be represented. It is – there are ways – there are opportunities for countries to come to diplomatic and political solutions to these crises without imposing what I believe are very blunt instruments like sanctions that have these second- and third-order effects that exacerbate the harms which they're trying to alleviate.

Ms. Montfort: Yes, thank you, Jake. And thank you for, you know, putting that kind of into the context of some other, you know, historical and current crises around the world.

I do have another question here now. This one is for Steve. You mentioned kind of a lack of U.S.-China cooperation right now in the global health sphere and why that is an issue for tackling COVID and other issues globally. What kinds of options are out there? You know, if the U.S. and China are not going to cooperate, then what can President Biden do, what can the U.S. do, what can international organizations do to really try and make some headway on vaccine distribution and other issues related to the pandemic?

Mr. Morrison: Well, what we are doing, in effect, is moving ahead without China for the most part. That's what we're doing, and that's a very imperfect solution. But at the moment, the stalemate over the origin of SARS-CoV-2 remains and there's little prospect that that's going to be fixed anytime soon. And that's a huge blockage on cooperation in almost any way.

So what is – what is evolving here is a fragmented approach – globally, a fragmented approach – where we are not able in our diplomacy, in our outreach to cooperate in any meaningful way with the Chinese. And we haven't – previously, cooperation on health matters enjoyed some sort of

special status in a way. It was insulated somewhat from some of the broader tensions in the relationship. The pandemic and the degree to which this became politicized by President Trump – former President Trump, but also by the Chinese themselves, and has continued to be in a very toxic phase, has meant that cooperation – whether we’re talking about research and development, vaccine cooperation and delivery points, manufacturing capacities, creating distributed manufacturing capacities, coordinating on the thinking about boosters and the like – is just simply not happening.

There is one minor point of intersection, which is where the Chinese have committed \$100 million and 100 million doses of their vaccines to the COVAX solidarity facility after they were qualified for emergency use with the WHO. That’s a point in which we are cooperating. Of course, we’re all members of – constituent members, sovereign constituent members of the World Health Organization. In that sense, there’s tacit or implicit cooperation. But we have not been able to even begin a discussion around the bigger picture and the degree to which we can cooperate to try to end this crisis through those different measures that we’re talking about – closing the vaccine gap in a very deliberate and strategic way, saving lives, and investing in the future.

If we’re going to create a Global Health Threats Council, we’re going to run headlong into this question, obviously, and I don’t think we have answers for that quite yet. In the G-20, of course, we are in the G-20 together with the Chinese. That is one area where you can say there’s some implicit cooperation. On the pandemic financing facility, that will be an issue as the G-20 meets in October and looks at that option of launching a pandemic intermediate facility.

Thank you.

Ms. Montfort: Thank you very much, Steve.

We also have another question from Aamer Madhani at AP, Associated Press. He asked, since the call has started – and this may be something we need to cover next week at our Quad summit press briefing, but if any of you would like to speak to it now – he asked, since the call has started, France has recalled its ambassadors to the U.S. and Australia, and he was wondering if there’s any concern that President Biden’s relationship with such a historically close ally is, quote, “quickly going south.” He said, is there any practical concern about this having a long-term impact on coordination on COVID, for example, Steve, or the Indo-Pacific or other areas that we’ve discussed today?

Mr. Cordesman: Well, let me just go back to the security dimension. Again, the French have not in any way commented on the fact that the Australians, basically,

shifted, because it's quite clear that one of China's key vulnerabilities is anti-submarine warfare. If they're going to project power and have any leverage over China, they have to have the most advanced submarines they can get.

So this kind of what I call a squabble or demonstrative diplomacy doesn't address the security issues there. Before all of this started, President Macron had talked about, essentially, the United States being unreliable and the need for the EU to potentially take over the security dimensions in Europe, ignoring the divisions in the EU and its absolute lack of ability to compensate for any absence of U.S. forces.

So there are tensions here that do affect really important security issues that go a lot further than a sort of diplomatic squabble. Exactly what's going to come out of it, I think, is a serious issue because they also have problems where Britain is pursuing a global rather than a European posture and we have no idea who the new leader of Germany will be, which is one of the key countries in the NATO Alliance, whether he can restore the ties with France, which have, to some extent, become more tense there, and whether Germany can actually increase its military readiness. Because for all of the problems the U.S. had in dealing with burden sharing, the fact is that Germany's forces have been cut in readiness and size, and critical weapons.

So underneath this sort of – sort of symbolic act, there are real security issues. But they go a lot further than simply confidence in the Biden administration. They affect very serious problems in redefining our security posture and that of our allies both in the Far East and in NATO.

Mr. Morrison: This is Steve Morrison.

On Madhani's question about the impact of the French reaction and withdrawal of ambassadors, it does – certainly, does not help when you look at the – at the situation that this COVID summit faces, which is the need to bring forward new and additional commitments from those that are in a position to make those commitments.

At the G-7 back in June, the United States committed to purchase 500 million doses of Pfizer – 200 million this year and 300 million by April of next year. That was intended to try and stir higher commitments from others. There was a \$100 million commitment from the U.K., 13 (million dollars) from Canada. It was a very disappointing response, and it was very revealing in terms of the hesitation, the limitations, the complacency, the lack of engagement, on moving forward in this fashion.

And so here we are, a few months later, coming back and testing the marketplace one more – once more – to see what has changed. As Tony

Cordesman emphasized, we've got the German elections in just a few days, September 26th. There will be a long period of forming that next government, it's expected. Macron himself faces elections in April. His star is fairly low at this particular moment.

We need these countries to be in a position to come forward around the type of agenda that has been tabled in the framework that the U.S. has put together. So the French being absent or not terribly engaged is a setback.

Ms. Montfort: Thank you, Steve. And thank you, Tony.

We are approaching our 4:00 p.m. end time, and so I did want to see if any of our speakers had any final remarks, closing comments you would like to offer, before I give my closing.

All right. Well, in that case, we ran four minutes early, so pretty much perfect timing. Thank you, everyone. And those of you who didn't get your questions answered, please don't hesitate to reach out to me, Paige Montfort. I would be happy to set up an interview with any of our experts who spoke here today, and we'd be happy to accommodate that for you.

I'd like to thank all of you for joining us today, including our speakers. And we'll have a transcript out shortly, within just a couple of hours at the most. I will send that out, and I will also be linking it to the briefing page on our website so you can refer to that. And again, please don't hesitate to reach out to us if you'd like an additional interview.

I'd also like to let you all know that we will be hosting another press briefing on Wednesday, September 22nd, at 8:00 a.m. Eastern. That will be previewing the Quad leaders' summit and also reflecting on the recent Australia-U.K.-U.S. alliance announcement. So please reach out to me as well if you would like to RSVP or submit questions in advance.

I just want to thank you all again, for our panelists as well, for joining us today. And have a great afternoon and weekend.

(END)

