Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT

Online Event

“Advocates for Democracy in Closed Spaces”

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FEATURING

Senator Chris Coons (D-DE)
Chairman, Appropriations Subcommittee on State and Foreign Operations

Representative Michael McCaul (R-TX)
Ranking Member, House Foreign Affairs Committee

Ambassador Isobel Coleman
Deputy Administrator for Policy and Programming, USAID

Anna Dobrovolskaya
Executive Director, Memorial Human Rights Center

Glacier Kwong
Political and Digital Rights Activist, Hong Kong

Sopheap Chak
Executive Director, Cambodian Center for Human Rights

Luciano Garcia
President, Hagamos Democracia

Alex Magaisa
Former Chief of Staff and Advisor to the Prime Minister of Zimbabwe (2012-2013)

CSIS EXPERTS

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Transcript By
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Good morning and welcome to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, I'm Marti Flacks, Director of the Human Rights Initiative here at CSIS. And I'm delighted to be cohosting this roundtable on civil society organizations promoting democracy in closed spaces with my colleagues from the CSIS America's Program and the Congressional and Government Relations Office. I think it's appropriate as we kick off the Summit for Democracy week that we begin it by elevating the voices of activists from countries not invited to the summit. Even as we rightly focus on the urgent need to address democratic backsliding in fragile and established democracies, including our own, we cannot lose sight of the places where democracy has yet to be achieved. While the Summit for Democracy process works to build stronger coalitions among democratic countries, it should also be working to expand the number of countries included in its ranks, including, one day, the countries represented at today's event. And so today we'll have an opportunity to hear from pro-democracy and human rights activists on the frontlines of this difficult work, who are griding it out every day trying to make progress against what may seem like impossible odds. It almost goes without saying that these activists work to promote and democracy under incredibly difficult and often dangerous circumstances. According to frontline defenders, 331 human rights defenders were killed last year as a result of the work they were doing, and thousands more were subject to arrests, detention, physical attack, online and offline harassment, and smear campaigns, and expensive lawsuits designed simply to stop them from doing their work. Inevitably, the speakers we have with us today represent only a fraction of the activists from dozens of countries around the world working on these issues. But I hope they can give us a glimpse into the challenges they and their peers face, and in particular the ways that the United States and likeminded countries, as well as the Summit for Democracy process itself, can support them. The U.S. government deploys many tools and resources from ongoing long-term technical support to public and private advocacy, and financial support in times of crisis. And I’m sure we’ll hear about some of those strategies and their effectiveness over the course of today’s discussion. I was glad to see the State Department issue last week updated guidance for its missions on how to best support the work of human rights defenders around the world, and to monitor closing civic space. And on Capitol Hill, support for this work has always generated bipartisan support. We’re honored that we will have two members of Congress to address today's event. Later in our program we’ll hear from Senator Chris Coons of Delaware, who will provide us with closing remarks, but we will kick off today's discussion with remarks from Congressman Michael McCaul of Texas. Congressman McCaul serves as the ranking member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and a long-time supporter and advocate for pro-democracy and human rights advocates around the world. We appreciate him taking the time to record some remarks for us today. Congressman McCaul.

I want to thank you for allowing me to speak at this important event at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Next Thursday and Friday the Biden administration is hosting the Summit for Democracy. This is supposed to be a launching point for the United States and our allies and partners to
actively work to promote and defend democracy and human rights around the world. This summit will be an opportunity for the Biden administration to bring our allies and partners together to counter the greatest threat to freedom that we face today, the Chinese Communist Party. Right now, the CCP poses greatest geopolitical, economic, and military threat to the United States and our allies, whether through their debt trap diplomacy, through the Belt and Road Initiative, or their brutal oppression of Hong Kong, or the looming threat they pose to Taiwan, or the genocide they are committing against the ethnic and religious minorities. The CCP is successfully spreading their malign influence around the world. And they’re using technology, technology they’ve often stolen from the United States, to expand their power. This is especially true of the emerging technologies like 5G and artificial intelligence. These emerging technologies will continue to have increasingly profound consequences on geopolitics and military capabilities, as well as economic competitiveness. We already know the CCP is using Huawei’s 5G to infiltrate networks of other countries. And we have proof they are using AI to assist in their genocide. And that’s why I sent a letter to President Biden this week, along with 18 other House Republicans, urging him to prioritize cooperation with our democratic allies on these critical emerging technologies, and also why I’m urging the Biden administration to use this democracy summit to establish frameworks for the development of AI and other emerging technologies in a manner that is ethical and consistent with our democratic and moral values, to establish coordination with our democratic allies, to use our shared influence in international standard-setting bodies like the International Telecommunication Union, which sets the 5G standards, which also the CCP tried to take over at the United Nations. We want them to assist our democratic allies in establishing their own bodies, like the Committee on Foreign Investment that we have in the United States, to review foreign transactions and prevent the transfer of technologies to authoritarian states, and to coordinate with allies and our partners on a data framework to protect sensitive data of U.S. citizens, such as genetic information. As authoritarian leaders continue to leverage emerging technologies to spread their malign influence, we must work with our allies and offer a better alternative. I hope the Biden administration does not squander this opportunity. We need to see real progress with concrete actions and not just rhetoric. So thank you again for hosting this important event and for having me and allowing me to participate. And I want to thank CSIS for all their great work. I remember many years ago running with Jim Lewis, the CSIS – one of the best pieces we’ve written on cybersecurity, and it was a pleasure working with CSIS. I appreciate all the great work that you do. Thank you.

Ms. Flacks: I want to thank Congressman McCaul for his remarks, for taking the time to be with us, and to particularly the spotlight that he put on the role of technology and the importance of adopting practices and policies to prevent the misuse of technology for abuse of human rights and attack of human-rights activists. So, thank you so much, Congressman McCaul. I now want to turn to Isobel Coleman. Isobel is the deputy administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development for Policy and Programming. She guides USAID’s crisis response, leads its work countering the influence of Russia
Isobel Coleman: Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to join you today. I’d like to start by thanking the democracy activists who are with us and the countless others around the world for their courageous commitment to democratic governance and human rights. Thanks to CSIS for hosting this important Summit for Democracy event and for its longstanding commitment to democracy and human rights. I’d also like to thank Representative McCaul and Senator Coons for their continued contributions to democratic renewal at home and abroad. As we all know, civil-society organizations, activists and other democratic actors are on the front lines in the battle for democracy around the world. Amid rising authoritarianism, human-rights defenders, entrepreneurs, independent journalists, and legal advocates are pushing back against efforts to manipulate the judicial system, undermine elections and silence dissent. These are the voices of accountability and reform. Those working for democratic change in closed countries often do so under pressure, facing trial, prison, physical and digital abuse, and attacks against them and their families. Despite the rising number of NGO laws designed explicitly to make democracy work difficult or illegal, civil-society organizations persist. At least 21 countries have enacted restrictions on foreign funding of democracy programs since 2002, targeting support to civil society in particular. Since civil-society organizations often rely on international donor assistance to do democracy work, repressive regimes point to that support to claim that democracy activists are foreign agents or spies undermining national security. Meanwhile, many advocates forced from their countries continue their efforts in exile. The courage of these actors and the importance of their work demands worldwide attention.

USAID has a long history of supporting civil-society advocacy, including in politically restrictive environments. In the Kyrgyz Republic, for example, USAID provides support for several local-partner newsrooms to fact-check and combat disinformation related to countering malign Kremlin influence, as well as help monitoring publications that require special attention from groups, such as lawyers, fact-checkers, and the Internews website team. Globally, USAID’s Greater Internet Freedom project provided capacity-building support to 29 civil-society organizations and human-rights defenders during the program’s first year to help respond to cybersecurity incidents across multiple regions and contexts. And just last month, Administrator Power announced the launch of a global defamation defense fund to protect independent journalists against lawsuits designed to deter their work. Through decades of programming USAID has learned that long-term approach – long-term support to local civil society actors, coupled with appropriate diplomatic and multilateral pressure, can be effective in strengthening civil society organizations to advocate for democratic change. Their early identification and quick action before the passage of repressive laws can help scale back such efforts. We know, too, that empowering local voices and strengthening domestic philanthropy are building blocks for
expanding civil space. But we also know the world has changed dramatically. The ripple effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on democratic norms has, in many cases, allowed autocrats to clamp down further, and the plague of mis-and disinformation perpetuated by increasingly sophisticated authoritarian regimes is a growing challenge. As we take stock of democracy this week, it’s easy to lament authoritarian encroachment over the years. This problem is real but not the whole story. Today, citizens are fighting for their democratic rights all over the world, arguably more than ever, and even in the most repressive environments. International IDEA reported just this month that in 2021 protests have continued in 82 percent of countries despite the pandemic. During the year of action, the next year, this year leading up to the second summit, countries will have the opportunity to engage in a consultative process with domestic and international civil society, the private sector, and philanthropies to deepen collective action and bolster commitments toward democratic renewal. Here at USAID, we will continue working to build networks of civil society activists by supporting follow-on events, programming, and ad hoc support to help eliminate forced labor, promote migrant rights, free political prisoners, work with individuals and organizations in exile, and help with survival strategies. One of USAID’s summits “announcables” is powered by the people, an initiative focused on forming connections among activists or dissident movements so that they can share vital knowledge and practices with each other, without direct involvement by the U.S. government. Through initiatives like Powered by the People, USAID will continue working to build networks of civil society activists and peaceful movements, raise awareness on country-specific situations, share best practices, and track progress on human rights work. We always need to learn from current experience and would welcome any advice from fellow defenders of democracy who are working in the many closed or closing countries that are not represented here today. So I thank you for your time, and I look forward to the presentations of our colleagues. Thank you.

Ms. Flacks:

Thank you so much, Deputy Administrator Coleman, for being with us today and for all the work USAID does in this space. And thank you for helping to frame our discussion, both as a question of what’s working and what has worked in the past, as well as helping us, reminding us to look forward into what more we could be doing during this year of action and going forward. So, I want to thank our introductory speakers, and I will now turn the discussion over to our senior vice president, Dan Runde, who’s going to moderate the conversation with our panelists. Dan, over to you.

Daniel F. Runde:

Thanks, Marti. Thanks so much. Let me start with reading something from my favorite book on this topic, by Natan Sharansky, “The Case for Democracy.” This book changed my life. I met Natan Sharansky, one of the great heroes of our time. There’s a myth that though we love freedom others don’t that our attachment to freedom is a product of culture, that freedom, democracy, human rights, the rule of law are American values or Western values. Ours are not Western values. They are the universal values of the human spirit. And anywhere, anytime ordinary people are given the chance to choose, the choice is the same: freedom not tyranny, democracy not
dictatorship, the rule of law not the rule of secret police. This is quoted in his book, and it's quoted from Prime Minister Tony Blair. The conviction that freedom is a universal desire is not the property of any political camp. Its proponents cannot be neatly divided into left and right, Democrat and Republican, or even American and European, or others. Its detractors are equally diverse, coming from all sides of the political spectrum. But democracy ultimately can win out, and the folks who are here are witnesses to hope and that we need to support folks in these enclosed spaces. AID does incredible work in these enclosed spaces. Laura McKechnie from the DRG Center asked us to help convene this. We're happy to help AID and the network of folks that they work with around the world, including the activists here. I think there are several questions I want to get at with this group. One is we're going to have this democracy summit. What's the homework assignment? There is this so-called year of action. That's great. Give us specific homework assignments for the United States, for the West, for civil society, for philanthropy. That's, I think, one of the organizing questions for us to have this discussion. We've got a number of really incredible people who are going to speak. I'd like to first hear from Ms. Sopheap Chak, who's the executive director of the Cambodian Center for Human Rights and – the organization in Cambodia. Her work was previously recognized by President Obama at the Clinton Global Initiative in 2014. Let me start with her, please.

Scott Miller: Thank you so much, Daniel, and greeting to everyone. It is my pleasure to join with the panelists today. And indeed yes, you know, like, looking at the democracy in Cambodia, indeed, it has become a word on paper rather than reality on the ground. And you know, with the – absent the viable opposition to the ruling Cambodian People's Party and the curtailment of the fundamental freedom have led us to the suffocation of democracy in Cambodia. However, a surge in youth activism have been noted in recent years as the Cambodia growing increasingly informed youth have expressed their refusal to be complacent in the face of injustice. While this youth mobilization represents a glimmer of hope for a brighter future for human right and democracy in Cambodia, and abuse, and a number of activists have been arrested, have been convicted, and there have been a massive crackdown on civil society actor in recent years. Judicial harassment, physical attack, and monitoring of activists' activity have become too common in Cambodia. So, as I mentioned, the government have a renewed crackdown on criticism and dissent so that – so that, you know, the recommendation by the civil society actor and international organization are falling on deaf ears. And therefore, in light of this, we believe that stronger action is needed to promote democracy in Cambodia. We hope that, you know, like, with the coming summit – democracy summit hosted by the United States and other participant will, therefore, include, you know, adoption of a conclusion of – sorry, adoption of the strong and targeted action that come with the concrete way to help addressing the human right and democracy in – not just in Cambodia, but in country where democracy are at concern. And it is important for the United States, of course, you know, to respect human right back home as well so that it set example for other and do a powerful way for you to, you know, convey that in the region but
also at the global. So, in coming year, Cambodia will have the coming national election. Therefore, if we all wish to see Cambodian status quo challenged, we call on the – on the U.S. and likeminded country to join Cambodian civil society actor in denouncing the – you know, the internal stifling of democracy and apply pressure on the – you know, the authority that, you know, it is necessary to see this improvement in Cambodian political landscape. And I would count on your support to Cambodian civil society. Thank you so much.

Mr. Runde: Thank you. You really inspire me. Thanks for all you’re doing. It’s really incredible work under very difficult circumstances. Thank you so much for that. I’d love to hear from Mr. Alex Magaisa, who’s a researcher and lecturer in law at the University of Kent and the former chief of staff to the prime minister of Zimbabwe from 2012-2013. I would be so grateful, Mr. Magaisa, if I could hear from you in providing an African perspective on this. Sir, Mr. Magaisa, go ahead.

Alex Magaisa: Yeah, sure, thank you very much. I hope you can hear me. I was having trouble with me – excellent. Thank you. So, you know, it’s important to understand the fact that, you know, a country like Zimbabwe, like various other countries around the world, are, you know, countries which are suffering from, you know, an increasingly authoritarian system of government. You know, the use of repressive laws. And, you know, it’s important for, you know, countries – actually, as the U.S. and other, you know, countries that are promoters of democracy, to really, you know, take up the challenge to try and support, you know, organizations and individuals that are working in these countries. What you often find then is that in these countries the ruling parties are very powerful, not only because they control the levers of power but because they’ve got huge access to resources – financial resources. And another factor that should also be taken into account is the influence of countries like China, which are coming up with a very different model of government. Coming up and providing support to authoritarian regimes. And in the process, civil society organizations, civil society actors, opposition political parties and activists, they find themselves sandwiched between the authoritarian regime at home and authoritarian regimes abroad. The problem that you have is that pro-democracy movements in countries that have previously been supportive of democratic movements in these countries have been either lukewarm or reluctant in recent years. And that has given more power for these organizations which are authoritarian to become even more repressive. So the example that I was getting from Cambodia, and I have been listening to conversations with colleagues from other countries, is very much the same that you will find in Zimbabwe, that you will find in Equatorial Guinea, that you will find in Swaziland, and in, you know, Uganda, in Sudan – the increasingly sort of militarization of the state and militarization of politics. And that becomes very difficult. The other factor is the issue of institutional decay. So institutions that are supposed to be political referee. I’m very happy, Dan, that you referred the book that you cited at the beginning as your inspiration. One of my own great inspirations in recent – in recent years is a book by Steve Levitsky and Dan Ziblatt, both political scientists. I’m sure
there are many people here aware they wrote a book, "How Democracies Die," you know about three years ago. And I found it utterly fascinating in the way that it described the way that things were going in the U.S., and what needed to be done in order to rescue the U.S. And I think it's very important because a healthy American democracy is very important for the rest of the world. It is an example to many people who are watching. When things decay in one of the biggest democracies, then it becomes very difficult. And even our own dictators, they celebrate, and they say: Well, you know, look at what you aspire to. And I found it fascinating also because it also gave lessons on what needed to be done in order to promote democracy in – not just in America, but also promote democracy around the world. And I think a lot of people – a lot of us, you know, those of us who are fighting for democracy can learn a lot from that. But we do face serious challenges, Dan, in our environments. Like I said, the state is very powerful. It's backed by the military. They use both legal means and nonlegal means. They can sue you until you get broke. They've been using legal instruments to basically disempower the opposition political party. And when you ask them, they'll tell you, it's all legal. You go to court, and you try to challenge it, the courts say it's all – it's all legal, because the courts have been compromised. So a lot of people, democracy activists, really have nowhere to run. You know, they are in their countries trying to fight, but they are fighting a system which is so thoroughly encapsulated, so thoroughly, you know, taken up by the regime that there is not space. Right now, if you look at Zimbabwe, they are planning a number of laws, the Private Voluntary Organizations Act, which is designed to give government more intrusive powers into civil-society organizations. They were planning what they call a patriot bill, which is supposed to make all of us Zimbabwean's patriots, apparently, as if patriotism is something that can be legislated. They also have a law to try and control social-media activity for reasons, of course, that we know that social media has given a lot of space to democracy activists, space that they never had before, where the media was controlled. And you realize that the state is trying to control social media in order to stifle voices of democracy activists. We need a lot of help here. You know, countries like the U.S., that host technology companies which are powerful – and maybe later on, Dan, we shall be talking about technology. I know you've got a question on technology. I'd like to say a little bit more about what I think technology companies can do when that moment comes. Thank you.

Mr. Runde: Alex, let me just take advantage and just give you a minute. Give us one homework assignment that you want coming out of this democracy summit.

Mr. Magaisa: Absolutely. I would like to see the U.S. government doing more to try and stop enablers of authoritarianism. Those enablers are both within the authoritarian regimes and also in the Western countries. My good example, as I mentioned earlier in another session, is the role of PR firms and lobbying firms. You know, these firms are basically cleaning; they're laundering the reputations of authoritarian regimes. They need to be stopped. And I think that it's a waste of money. It's a waste of taxpayers' money in authoritarian countries, but also taxpayers' money in the U.S., because the U.S. apparently funds a lot of these countries to try and promote
health, education and poverty reduction. The money that should be used in these countries is being used to pay these PR firms, these lobbying firms, which are run by people who are already wealthy anyway. And I think that we need to see something being done there. And I would like to see more being done to promote the role of technology companies in promoting democracy. But like I said, I will elaborate a little bit more, Dan, when the time comes. Thanks.

Mr. Runde: Thanks, Alex. I'd love to hear now from Anna Dobrovolskaya – Dobrovolskaya. I think I got it. And she is the executive director at the Memorial Human Rights Center in Moscow. She's been fighting for human rights in Russia since 2007, working for nearly a decade with the International Youth Human Rights Movement, reform movement. Thank you, Anna, for being here. Thanks. I'll turn the floor over to you.

Anna Dobrovolskaya: Thank you, Dan. And thank you, all the colleagues from CSIS and other organizers of the summit. I'm very happy and honored to be here. I was asked to present what it's like to be an activist in today's Russia. And I will try to do this – do my best to describe it. As Dan has mentioned, I'm currently executive director for Memorial Human Rights Center. It's one of the legal entities for the very broad human-rights and civil-society movement that started working in Soviet Union and then in Russia since 1988. And currently the two largest legal entities that are in the service of this movement are facing the threat of liquidation due to violent offending of the foreign-agents' laws in Russia. As we all see and as analysts see it, this will be a very important gesture for the whole civil society in the country. And for us it means that we won't be able to continue our work as we used to do. Most probably the liquidation will come by the end of the year or probably in the beginning of the next year unless some miracle happens. This foreign-agent legislation in Russia is being very actively used to put very particular threats on the civil society, on media, on human-rights organizations, and also on individual people, mostly journalists. And it's also used to send a very clear signal to the rest of the society that whenever you want to do something, you will be in danger. And in order to somehow save yourself from this danger, you should either leave the country or just be shut up. And it's not just the foreign-agent legislation. We also have this very vague legislation, so-called, on undesirable organizations, where I think USAID is one of the members, and also a bunch of other legislative initiatives which are very vaguely used in order to repress particular opposition leaders or sometimes just ordinary people. And it also sends a signal to the rest of the society that you cannot be safe from those very randomly targeted repressions. In my NGO we run the list of political prisoners, which currently involves more than 400 people. And unfortunately, this list continues to grow. Again, unfortunately, after we will be liquidated it is a large question who will be able to run such campaign for recognizing somebody, political prisoners, and this institution or organization should be really, really trustworthy, as trustworthy as Memorial was. But it's also important to remember, regarding Russia, that it is quite dangerous to be an NGO activist or an independent journalist, but also over the years it became more and more dangerous to be working with the government to do really
independent business and to be somehow involved in huge political parties. We see the growing trend of members of elites of all levels being imprisoned, harassed, put behind bars, and also subjected to all the other kinds of repressions. And it’s actually a very worrying trend, especially because we don’t know what can change the situation in countries like Russia. Political analysts say that regimes like one that we have now in Russia usually die when elite members understand that it became dangerous for them, so probably we already have this moment right now. I would say that the recent years became even more challenging because of the COVID situation, and it happens not only in Russia but everywhere in the countries. Probably, this is something for us to talk about later on. What can be done for you, what can be your work assignment, is that I think that you should really keep all the parties who are currently involved in the promotion of democracy. You should really make sure that human rights and democracy with countries like Russia are being kept the basis of all the business and political negotiations, that there can’t be any decisions made without – which can be neglecting human rights or fundamental freedoms and other protections. We also have the very close example right by our borders, which is Belarus. And whenever there won’t be proper international reactions and sanctions regarding the situation in Belarus, also included with human rights defenders or civil society activists with opposition leaders, unfortunately, the situation in Russia will only get worse and worse. At the same time, people in Russia, they do not feel desperate as far as I see, and a lot of them are actually looking at the state countries as some kind of example. And I think especially now it is very important to give those people some examples and to keep those connections that already exist between Russia and the European countries and between the states and some other foreign powers, because it is important to demonstrate that the situation can be different and there is so much that we can learn from other democratic states. And I fully agree here with Alex that if you are a good example, it makes easier to all of us to see what are the process of democracy and what we all are fighting for. Also, whenever we raise the question of the foreign-agents legislation in Russia, immediately everyone says, well, take a look at the United States; they have this Foreign Agent Registration Act. And we are trying to explain that this is something completely different, not aimed to suppress independent voices but rather to name political lobbyists and stuff like that. So probably if something can be done with FARA in the United States, renaming it or readjusting the concept to modern realities, this would be really, really helpful not just to civil society in Russia but I think to all the other countries where similar initiatives are taking place, because whenever this concept is introduced in the country it became so successful that people are actually buying it – I mean, buying in a bad way. Yeah, technology is also a large question, but I would say that it’s not at the moment a huge challenge to Russia. I think it’s, rather, the challenge to China that we are afraid of, and also the challenge that we all face all over the world that social media companies and other companies are just getting so much power that there is no one to even negotiate with them on particular issues. And maybe there should be some kind of binding document or institution within those companies that would be dealing with human rights and with the expression of minorities and with similar issues, which are the basis of democracy that
they can be somehow addressed, because we can say that Facebook is currently maybe more powerful than certain states, but they don’t have any quasi-human rights document to obey to. I would probably stop here, but I will be happy to answer to any kind of questions. Thank you.

Mr. Runde: That’s amazing. Thank you, Anna. Let me just push just a little bit more on – so would you – I think I heard you say encourage ongoing people-to-people ties and connectivity. So, I would assume, for example, you would be open to and supportive of more Russians coming to study in the United States. Right? That would be a –

Ms. Dobrovolskaya: Yes. This is one of the examples. I myself is a fellow of several fellowship, including the one at Stanford University, and I think that’s what makes sense, because the regime in Russia is currently going into stagnation phase, which can – it can be as long as possible, but we all have to make sure that there will be someone to lead the country after – when anything finishes. There is a very similar program, again in Stanford University, about Ukraine emerging leaders. So, I think study programs, political exchanges also for party leaders and all kind of academia exchange are very, very – would be really, really helpful. But please make sure that you also involve those people who are currently working with the government or who are, I don’t know, somehow related to in the official structures because this will make them included – because they are the ones who needs to get the message, what is democracy, and they have to be educated as well.

Mr. Runde: That is really interesting. Thank you, Anna. That is really helpful feedback. OK, Glacier Kwong, Glacier is a political and digital rights activist from Hong Kong and a Ph.D. candidate in law at the University of Hamburg. She’s currently the digital rights research fellow at Hong Kong Democracy Council, a leading organization for the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong and was previously a spokesperson of the nongovernmental organization Keyboard Frontline. Glacier, we’d love to hear from you, please.

Glacier Kwong: Thank you very much. And thank you for inviting me to speak about Hong Kong. I’m Chung Ching Kwong Glacier, a pro-democracy activist from Hong Kong and am now currently living in exile in Germany. And I am also a Ph.D. candidate studying law but I have been increasingly skeptical about my choice to focus on law because the national security law has turned the judicial and court system in Hong Kong into part of a scheme of repression since its adoption. And since this national security law’s adoption, the situation in Hong Kong has dramatically shifted from a relatively free space, where people hoped to retain their way of life, to an authoritarian police state. And Hongkongers are now kind of silenced because they have no right to freedom of expression. And earlier this year, 47 pro-democracy politicians and activists were arrested and charged over their participation in the legislative council primaries; a majority of them were not allowed to extend their bail, which constitutes pretext of imposing arbitrary detention on the regime’s political opponents. And I witnessed my friends Joshua Wong, Gwyneth Ho, and many other democratic campaigners arrested and
imprisoned. So Beijing has actually weaponize the concept of national security to erode our freedoms. And the police and the government now enjoy impunity under the law, and any actions demanding democracy could be interpreted as endangering national security. But even in such dire straits as now, Hongkongers still manage to demonstrate our desire for freedom. We’re not giving up this fight because we want our city to become a place where we can all be free. And in the context of this panel, I think there are a lot of things that the government can do but are only focused on one thing; that is, not to be directly or indirectly involved in human rights violation at all costs. For example, the governments of the West can hold big tech companies accountable for indirectly involving in human rights violation. For example, are they practicing content moderation in a problematic style that will hinder the freedom of speech in Hong Kong? Are they turning over Hong activists or Hongkongers’ data under the national security law to government agencies? Because Google have been recently found that they have breached their own promises and turned over certain users’ data to the government. And are they participating in blocking access to certain technology, as Apple apps are doing in China? That is, they’re blocking access to encrypted communications sold to VPNs and to foreign media so that there are no access to these tools in the mainland China. And these things shall happen to Hong Kong, the same – Hong Kong will be – will be put into a black-box situations where information cannot come in and go out. And on the other hand, is government trying their best to avoid being indirectly or directly involved in human rights violation? For example, are they still importing goods from the Xinjiang, which is the East Turkestan region of China, that has been increasingly involved in forced labor? Because, according to statistics, the U.S. have imported increasingly – the important percentage have increased by 161 percent for the last year, and we are pushing for more renewable energy. Are we aware of the fact that polysilicon are – basically, 45 percent of the market share came from the Uyghur region, which is where forced labor is happening? Are we aware of that? And are we able to tackle this kind of problem? And thirdly, on the context of technology, are we able to do – to do enough on data protection? That is prohibiting data transfer from a place like the U.S. or the EU to places where insufficient protections are offered? Because under current judgement issued by the ECJ and the European Union’s data transfer can actually take place between the EU and China under standard contractual clauses. Which means that may data as an activist, that is being targeted by the Beijing government, run the risk of being transferred without me being able to stop that, because it will be nearly impossible to gather back the data that I have put outside to engage in different services. So in general, I really hope that Western democracies will not take what they are enjoying, freedom and democracy, for granted and always remain vigilant of the threats to freedoms, because all of these things can be taken away from us very quickly. And Hong Kong is a lesson to learn from, that is a lesson that should never be repeated. Thank you.

Mr. Runde: Thank you, Glacier. So, Glacier, what is the homework assignment you want to come out of this democracy summit?
Ms. Kwong: I think it’s to come up with very concrete regulations and projects that will – especially will hinder big tech companies from involving indirect or direct human rights violation. For example, hold them accountable if they’re applying with authoritarian regimes, especially when it comes to the situation in Hong Kong. If they turn over data or if they facilitate a state of hindering access to certain technologies, they have to be held accountable because this is not a value that we should promote at all. We should always promote the access of technology and democratic values in general. So I’d say this is my expectation for the summit.

Mr. Runde: Thanks. Thanks, Glacier. Thanks for all you’re doing. You inspire me. Thank you for what you’re doing. Luciano Garcia is the president of Hagamos Democracia, an NGO working to promote a return to democracy and citizen participation in Nicaragua. Luciano has been living in exile in Costa Rica since 2018 and continues to be a leader in the opposition to the Ortega-Murillo regime. Luciano, mucho gusto. Le doy la palabra.

Luciano Garcia: Muchas gracias por permitirme (Continues through interpreter) Thank you so much for allowing me to be here with you today to talk about a crisis in my country to see how we can strengthen collaboration to exit this this dictatorship and Central America. I would like to say that civil society Nicaragua is about to be extinct and democratic scaffolding is destroyed in Nicaragua nowadays. We’re living in a state of terror. From the crisis of 2018. We, the close three TV channels, and 55 NGOs were closed and more than 350 people were assassinated. More than a million political prisoners and 100 over 160 of them. still incarcerated, many come from civil society, and they’re incarcerated. Along with business owners there are more than 300,000 Nicaragua’s in exile in the world and the number keeps rising. The laws that activate and put into action, a call to action against population are cemented in the laws against foreign agents of crimes against sovereignty and also laws against going after money laundering schemes. For them are legal and their constitutional really. There are seven candidates who are incarcerated. And there are laws that showed the opposite and there we have about 15 percent participation of citizens in the ballots. And this is an illegitimate regime that is backed by armed forces. It’s a system that is based on corruption, where political power is basically backed or – and we also hope to have an international – they’re hoping for international isolation. We have different sectors, like the church, and we need more international pressure as well. But he’s not willing to budge. Each one of the leaders are – you know, of the opposition – are either in jail or in exile. What is Ortega doing? The United States has to be clear that Ortega is providing territory and support to attack the United States. This is a geopolitical weapon. They are seeking to become the greatest power against the United States. And they’re using migration towards the United States to that end. And this is scaling their threat. What can we do? We have to reinforce humanitarian aid. We have to maintain the defense of the fundamental human rights beyond the political narrative. We have to focus on nonviolent exit of the government. We don’t want to go back to a war. We have to provide that peaceful exit. We have to coordinate with the international community. Actions that can reestablish democracy in our country. How can you help us? Don’t allow
Ortega to keep obtaining resources, even with humanitarian ends. They take those resources from the Nicaraguan treasury to remain in power. We also have to bring those supporters to justice. We have to provide hope. We will never see change towards freedom. And unfortunately, many of us will have to go through the valley of tears, the valley of death, before we reach the summit of those – of those wishes. That's a reflection that Nelson Mandela left us with – or, an insight.

Mr. Runde: Muchas gracias. I’m going to ask you a few questions in English, and I know we have a translator. So, I wrote a piece saying that the United States should reject as a farce the elections from last month in Nicaragua. And they did that. And there were several things that I suggested. One was that we ought to kick Nicaragua out of the Central American Free Trade Agreement. And another was to cut off funding for the Instituto de Prevision Social Militar. So I’d be curious about what are some steps that the United States should be taking to respond to this terrible situation in Nicaragua. I mean, it’s outrageous. At least six or seven pre-presidential candidates were arrested, all the things that you listed. It’s just outrageous. It’s a total – it’s disgusting. So, Mr. Garcia, I turn the floor back over to you.

Ms. Garcia: Yes, first of all, when I refer to fresh resources, I’m not only referring to resources we obtained from multilateral banks, but also the fresh resources we can obtain through international trade up and use for regression. To resume the majority of Nicaraguan businesses are operating under the fiscal terrorism of Nicaragua. And they are benefiting from trade with the United States like the CAFTA CAFTA should be a weapon against Nicaragua because it’s concerning the national security of the United States you’re broken. I believe the resources financed internationally have been obtained over time. And finally, various countries have put what I’m saying and should listen in terms of economic, economic, in terms of an economic regime. Unfortunately, the people suffer but we prefer this more if you have to then returning to a bloody war. In the past 30 years and has cost us more than 150,000 Nicaraguan casualties and wars that have not gotten us out.

Mr. Runde: Thank you. So, I’ve heard several things from the various speakers. The United States ought to be a good example or be a better example. One is that there is a conversation we had about technology. Another is that in small countries, whether it’s Belarus or Nicaragua or small places like Hong Kong or Cambodia, that these places matter, that they have – they’re not just important in and of themselves, but they also – other countries are watching. Russia’s watching what’s happening in Belarus. China is afraid of what happens in Hong Kong. Venezuela – the Venezuelan regime and the Cuban regime watches what happens in Nicaragua and sees if they can get away with things. So these things matter; also that there’s a role – there’s been a negative role of Russia and China that’s been referenced in several of the Russian regime’s – of the Chinese Communist Party and Vladimir Putin’s regime have been – forces have been very negative and have contributed to backstopping authoritarians. So I guess let me move to the question of technology. Twenty years ago there was great hope – let me repeat the name
of the book; someone asked me to repeat the name of it. It’s Natan Sharansky – S-H-A-R-A-N-S-K-Y – “The Case for Democracy,” and for me it’s the most important book in the democracy space. There are many others, but I think it’s the most inspiring one. But let me come to the question. I want to hear from each of the panelists very briefly on technology. Twenty years ago there was hope that technology was going to be only an enabler of freedom. It’s turned out in the last 15 years it’s not necessarily been the case. But in some instances, it has. Some of you have talked about technology being a force for good and that you’ve used it. So could you talk a little bit how you’re using technology as a force for good and how we can potentially mitigate technology being a force for bad in the democracy space? Let me go back to Ms. Sopheap please.

Sopheap Chak: Yes. Thank you, Dan. It is very important, and especially with COVID pandemic, we can see how technology is useful, as we did with our panel across the globe as well. So of course, technology assists our work a lot. And therefore, you know, more investment of such technology and knowhow is important. And I think a civil-society organization like this, we start to, you know, like, benefit from the tools. So, unfortunately, you know, like, compared to the business sector, we are quite far behind. So, I think more investment, more support is necessary. But at the same time, I think technology also have – is – when it comes to the technology, security is also important. And therefore, you know, like quite different stakeholder to take part, especially for the private sector to involved. And, you know, like with many platforms developer, mainly in U.S. or in developed country, have to bear in mind that, you know, they have to, you know, like, allow their technology to support the democratic movement, not to further. And they should not assist the government, you know, where the government have to, you know, like, call out, you know, like, civilian on the human-rights activities. There have been case, for example, when it comes to for example, you know, like with the case where a lot of accusation or conviction against activists, and then the government try to follow suit to the – to the activists. So it’s important for the company like Facebook or other to understand that, you know, security and protection of the – of the activists are their core value, not to cooperate with the government, because there have been reports that, you know, the government request to Facebook or some of the tech company on the identity of the activists as well. So, this is one example. But second, yeah, there are tool where I think some technology allow the government to surveil on NGO operations. And you know, like, therefore, the U.S. government and other likeminded countries can work with the private sector to ensure that they would not supply the technology that will jeopardize or harmful against the human-rights operation. And that is the role to play, I think, from the state and private sector. And for us as civil society, we have to take up with the technology and enhance our capacity at how to use exactly. And therefore, we rely on the likeminded country to stand with civil society, you know, in this challenging time as well. Thank you.
Bill Reinsch:
I think your members are conflicted because they're making decent money in China, a lot of them, but they're also at the mercy of the Chinese government in ways that you've heard many stories about. To me, the real battleground, we're never gonna win in China. The battleground is third countries. We're gonna take them on in all these sectors in a level playing field. What are we doing in India? What are we doing in Europe? What are we doing in Latin America? What are we doing in Africa? What I think we-
those communities in which they operate, so that they're able to pick up the
nuances where there is hate speech, where there is violence being
promoted. I think it would be very good for them to do so. Thank you.

Mr. Runde: Thank you, Alex. Glacier Kwong, this issue of technology, how should we
think about technology?

Ms. Kwong: I think technology in the Hong Kong context, it actually enabled the 2019
movement, as we’ve all seen on media and on televisions, how – it enables
how it came to be leaderless; that is, protesters and participants of the
movement were able to organize among themselves without actually having
a decision-making body, which made it very difficult for the government to
completely crack down on the movement while it was still actively
protesting on the street, because there were no specific body or no specific
people to go after, because there would be no one telling participants what
to do. People just were enabled by technology, by the internet, by social
media and different tools, to arrange among themselves so it’s much more
difficult to completely destroy the movement and its organization in a way.
But at the same time, the more we rely on technology, the more tools that we
use, the more footprints that we left. That means we’re more vulnerable, in a
way, if we don’t have sufficient knowledge and knowhow in how to
minimize or protect ourselves. For example, we have to engage in certain
digital hygiene practices, which not all of the people at the time were
familiar or were well-equipped to do that. And there have been a lot of
fundings and trainings being put into that aspect, trying to improve that. But
I think when it comes back to the context of the summit, I think it’s proven
that “technology will open China up in a way that makes it more
democratic,” it’s basically false. China just managed to implement the Great
Firewall in its internet and block a lot of access to technologies, access to
polls so that it can, like, stabilize their society in the way that it wants to see.
And China cannot do it without the help of technology companies from the
U.S., basically. Our poll apps were actually banned, dozens of apps on the
Chinese app store. It bans apps for dating – dating apps of homosexuals. It
banned apps related to the Dalai Lama. It banned New York Times. It banned
Washington Post. It bans the access to VPNs and to different communication
tools. And it recently banned, for example, the app Clubhouse because it
enabled an online community to join together to share experiences when
they're living in China. And so the task of the Western world, it’s now
actually how do you hold these accomplices of the Chinese government
accountable? Because Apple should not be – as a U.S. company, should not be
seen as indirectly involving in human rights violations in that sense. So how
do we hold them accountable? Are there going to be laws and regulations
holding them accountable? Are there going to be hearings requesting them
to provide information why they are doing it, how they’re operating this, and
so on? Apple actually have given up their encryption of the whole iCloud
drive in China. In Guizhou, the data center basically have the keys in the
hands of the Chinese government. How could a U.S. company let that
happen? Because by law, they cannot be sharing this kind of sensitive data
with the Chinese government. And so, these things all come back to the
theme of the summit: We are going to take action. These are the actions the
governments in the world should take to prevent these things from happening so that companies will not be indirectly involving or directly involving in human rights violations in that sense, and also tech companies should not be turning over users’ data because they know so much about us. I’m pretty sure Google knows more about myself than I do know about myself, in a way. What if Google turned over its whole data to the Hong Kong government? Then I – basically, I am doomed in that sense because they will have so much data to do so much about me and know so much about me, which would be undesirable for anyone who is basically freedom-loving and values democracy in general. So I do hope this will be an issue that the summit would address.

Mr. Runde: Great. Thank you. OK. Anna, please.

Ms. Dobrovolskaya: Yeah. Just not to spend any more time, I would second whatever Glacier just said. I completely agree. And I think that China is currently the country with the most frontline battlefield for technology versus human rights, and I think that just – I just would like to support everything she said. Regarding Russian neighbor countries, yeah, we use technology a lot because it’s just a beautiful tool to use. And all the challenges that have been mentioned already we also face regarding media literacy, informational security, online data protection, and everything. So just let’s do something with it.

Mr. Runde: Luciano, the issue of technology, how does it play out in the Nicaraguan context?

Ms. Garcia: For us, technology is a new tool, before 2018 in our country and up to date, the usage of technology and social networks, because we were a very poor country and Latin America didn’t have coverage. We have tried to fight this in a conventional way and move ourselves to the digital platform, and it’s been very difficult to do it. But thanks to all the efforts, we’ve been able to maintain activism online. And we’ve been doing this, and I think the narrative in social networks and online should be strengthened. We are not at the level to be able to see if Facebook or Google, in this case, are allies or not. We are just using these platforms of this new technology to keep going with our battle. But we have a lot of the efficiencies, and I think that we need to strengthen our social media and social activism and organize ourselves better so that we can keep fighting. And the regime invests a lot of money in cyber activism through corruption. So, for us, technology right now is priority to fight and be able to establish democracy again. We don’t have any other alternatives right now. And that has allowed us to keep reporting all the things that have been happening in a very efficient way, but 40 percent of the society in Nicaragua do not have access to this technology – do not have telephones, do not have smartphones – so they do not have a way to enter the social media. So, we need to strengthen this and try to help them out. Right now, we still have limits in very poor areas in our region because they don’t have access to true information. And we believe that this is very important.
Mr. Runde: Thank you. So, I would ask Luciano, Glacier, Chak, and Anna, because you followed Alex’s example, but one thing – on specific thing you want out of the Year of Action, put it in the chat while the others are talking. I have a final question, then I want to turn – I know Senator Coons is with us. I’m so pleased he’s with us. Here’s a conundrum that the West has, the United States and Europe has. The bad guys have gotten better at being bad, and they’ve spent a lot of time comparing notes with each other. Authoritarians have a network of being better at being authoritarians. And one of the problems has been that in the last 10 years many countries – so Zimbabwe, for example, in the last couple of years I wrote an article saying we ought to delay giving a grant – a loan to the – from the World Bank to Zimbabwe until they met some democratic promises. They said: Well, that’s fine; we’ll just look East. Right, Alex? You’ll remember this. Right? And in Luciano’s case, in Nicaragua, Nicaragua recognizes Taiwan. I love Taiwan. And at the same time, they get – Nicaragua gets a lot of help from Russia, and so they – the Ortega regime gets support from Russia. And in the case of Cambodia, the current Cambodian regime gets lots of support from mainland China. So, one of the problems has been is that some of these – you know, the democracy space, the human freedom space has become held hostage somewhat to great-power competition, where regimes can hide behind the financial support or the military support or the political support of the Putin regime or the Chinese Communist Party. So I’d welcome if each of you could talk about how should we handle this or grapple with this. Let me start with you, Alex, because I remember this, the regime in Zimbabwe saying, well, we’ll just look East. How should people in the West respond to those sorts of, if I can call them, threats?

Mr. Magaisa: Well, I think it’s a big problem. I don’t know what it is like in other parts of the world, but I think for people in Zimbabwe and many others in Africa, they seem to be caught up. You know, it’s almost like the old Cold War situation, you know, only that in this instance the other party, China, has become very powerful and it has many, you know, carrots that it continues to offer. But of course, it’s at a very high cost, as many people, you know, are beginning to see, especially the ordinary people. My view is that I think it’s very important to – for Western democracies, for example, to really up the game as well. I mean, look at the situation with the COVID-19 pandemic. We’ve been watching it with great fascination because China has come up and it is almost using vaccine diplomacy, if I call it that way, to try and worm its way in and, you know, really establish itself in the hearts and minds of the regimes. But we have a problem, because I think that Western countries could do more to try and, you know, give out more, help more, be seen to be actually willing to support the people in these many different countries. That’s one point, Dan. The second point, in my opinion – (laughs) – I think that it’s very important to try and promote – you know, Anna was talking about people-to-people contact. You know, people coming from Russia to the U.S. Similarly, it should be, you know, in connection with African countries as well. I think that I’ll be good to have this cross-education system between the two. It’s important, because people learn. I know that when I came, for example, to the National Endowment for Democracy for my fellowship I found it very useful, because it helped me to see, you know, things that I
probably would not have been able to see from my end of the world. So that was very, very important. So, I think more on that can be done to promote more awareness and knowledge. Thank you.

Mr. Runde: You know, I would love to hear from all the other panelists, but I’m just cognizant of the time. So, can I ask the panelists, please put some additional thoughts in the chat, please? I apologize. But I need to pivot to Senator Coons and give him a chance to make some remarks. I’m so pleased to have Senator Chris Coons here, who’s the chairman of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State Foreign Operations, which is a very important committee that funds democracy works, funds diplomacy, funds foreign assistance. He’s a U.S. senator from the great state of Delaware. I think you all know that President Biden is also from the great state of Delaware. He’s also the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs. Senator Coons has been a long-time supporter of Africa and is a person who works in a very bipartisan way. He’s a very important person in the Senate and we’re so pleased he would take time out of his schedule to be with us. Senator Coons, over to you, sir. Oh, maybe we’re having a tech issue, Senator Coons?

Sen. Chris Coons: Thank you, Daniel. Can you hear me, and can you see me?

Mr. Runde: Yes, sir. I see you now.

Sen. Coons: Great to be on with you. And thank you to the panel. I’ve been listening to your deliberations and discussions over the last dozen minutes and, frankly, Daniel, I was trying to figure out how to tell you: Don’t interrupt everybody. I’m happy to keep listening. Because, bluntly, you’ve got more wisdom assembled here, more personal investment and engagement in the fight for democracy, than you will hear from me. But thank you for the opportunity to join you. And, Daniel, let me just in particular thank CSIS, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, for hosting this conversation today. And I’m also grateful to my colleague, House Foreign Affairs Committee Ranking Member McCaul, with whom I’ve traveled and with whom I’ve worked to advance democracy. Although we have, you know, differences in terms of our view of American political policy issues, we are standing together in terms of the importance of continuing to invest in our work to help support and advance exactly the kind of difficult work in defense of democracy that the four panelists who are with us have been talking about, and that others have discussed this morning. I’m also grateful to deputy USAID administrator who spoke, Ms. Coleman, who was a part of this conversation, if I understand correctly. And, Daniel, in terms of your support in laying the groundwork through this conversation for the upcoming Biden administration-hosted Summit for Democracy. I think this is one of many important panels and conversations that are happening before 110 countries convene virtually. The summit, the idea that we’re delivering on this promise from the campaign of my friend and my predecessor in the Senate and my fellow Delawarean – and, yes, folks, that’s the Delaware flag over my shoulder – President Biden. But I’m going to join you in stating: This
can’t just be a one-off event. Convening heads of state and convening folks from different levels of government from more than 100 countries for two days to discuss democracy and the ways in which authoritarianism is on the march around the world, and the ways in which we have to come together to defend and support democracy, that’s valuable. I see it as important. But it has to begin a year of action. It has to begin a global mobilization in which we are calling for action. And my hope is it’ll conclude, God willing, depending on the trajectory of this pandemic, with an in-person global summit for democracy near the end of 2022. In my view, countries like the United States, which is principally acting as convener, also have to do so with some humility and some transparency. Obviously, the incident of January 6th, in which an angry mob stormed the Capitol of the United States attempting to overturn the results of a free and fair election, was a very gravely concerning moment, both for those of us here in the United States and, I think, for those around the world who have thought of the United States as a – as a democracy of some sustained promise. We also have to be transparent and humble about the ways in which our own system has fallen short. We have, as we all know, ongoing grave inequalities based in the racialized history of slavery and oppression in this country and have been manifested in a number of tragic events involving police action in Black and brown communities. But more broadly, in terms of access to education, and credit, and opportunity, and education. The United States has hard work left to do. And in that front, I’m grateful for the leadership of our president and vice president, and look forward over this coming year, hopefully, to being able to report on real progress in democracy here in the United States. The agenda items that I hope we will focus on in this coming year are principally how do we defend against authoritarianism? As you were just discussing a moment ago, folks around the world who are trying to develop and deploy sharpened tools of authoritarianism, tools to access technologically the data and the movements and the activities of those who are advocates for democracy. They’re getting better at it. And we need to figure out how to get better at defending those who are risking their lives and their roles in society in defense of democracy. Second, we have to fight corruption. We have to push back on the enablers of authoritarianism. We have to push back on PR firms that help, you know, to pretty-up authoritarian regimes. We have to push back on banking and security transactions that help those with ill-gotten gains support themselves, their families, and their regimes. And we have to find ways to implement global standards. We are, I think, about to reauthorize the Magnitsky sanctions, which have been an important tool against the corrupt and corrupting. And then last, we have to respect human rights. We have to fight for and advocate for human rights as a core part of American foreign policy – U.S. foreign policy, forgive me, and as an important part of what the U.N. has been all about, and what all of you are fighting for. And that means holding our government accountable for its respect of human rights here at home and abroad. And it means holding the governments of the countries represented here and elsewhere around the world accountable for the ways in which they violate fundamental human rights. I know that we’ve got a panel here of folks who have put their lives on the line, who have put their own time and effort and energy into this. And in the time I’ve had in the Senate in the last decade or more, and in my role as
the founder and the co-chairman of the Senate Human Rights Caucus, I’ve really been struck at just how many people around the world continue to believe that democracy is the best alternative, the best path forward for all of us, and in how many countries that fight has gotten tougher in the recent year. So let me briefly talk, if I can, about some of the actions I’m taking. Today I am introducing legislation, the Democracy in the 21st Century Act, with Republican Senator Lindsey Graham. I am the chairman, as you just heard a moment ago, of the State and Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee, which is responsible for about $60 billion a year in State Department and Foreign Assistance funding. Senator Graham is my ranking member. He’s the most senior Republican. And this bill, if we can get it signed into law – and I’m optimistic that we can – it would modernize the United States’ tools to defend democracy, to lift the voices of civil society, and to advocate for the safety and the campaigns of human rights activists around the world. It would increase our investment in promoting democracy globally by about $3 billion. And it would provide increased support for journalists, for activists, for civil society workers, for artists and writers, and for those who are at risk in repressive societies. In particular, it would provide support – I know this was discussed a few moments ago – for global internet and technological freedom, that would allow advocates and activists to counter the emerging digital threats that face you. And that would include countersurveillance and censorship tools to defeat the efforts of authoritarian governments to track and target those whose independent voices threaten them the most. We also have to do more to improve the social and economic conditions that are critical to sustain pro-democracy movements. As was just mentioned a few minutes ago by Alex, the United States has a role to continue playing as we try to come out of this pandemic. Just to be clear, the United States has already donated more doses of vaccines than all other countries combined. But as China and Russia engage in vaccine diplomacy and do a lot of trumpeting their distribution of vaccines – which, by the way, are less effective and often come with strings attached – the United States can and should do more to distribute the mechanisms of manufacturing of vaccines globally so that countries like South Africa and Colombia might be centers of vaccine production going forward, so that it’s not all concentrated in the United States and the EU. And, second, to make sure that any advances or developments in vaccines that are required – whether to deal with the Omicron variant or others – are made available equitably globally. A key part of the funding for that comes through my subcommittee. It is something I have fought hard to prioritize and to reduce the extent to which there are gross inequalities in vaccine access around the world. One other bill I’ll briefly mention. The global fragility act is a piece of legislation that I crafted some time ago. It is now law. And I am working with ranking member McCaul through the Global Fragility Act to address the root causes of violence and extremism in countries around the world. Countries like Mozambique, for example, where there’s growing instability, particularly in the far north, and where there has to be a better organized, better coordinated regional strategy both to promote security and transparency and accountability on the part of the government in Maputo. Last, one of the bills that was signed into law by President Trump, of which I’m proudest, was the Build Act that developed
the new international Development Finance Corporation, or the DFC, which will allow the United States to engage in the financing of infrastructure projects in the developing world with far greater standards of transparency, human rights, labor rights than is currently available from one of the world’s leading financiers of infrastructure in the developing world. I think we have to have competition, so that if advocates and countries decide that instead of taking Belt and Road money, which has got very little in terms of transparency or accountability and a lot in terms of complicating strings, that they have an alternative. And that sovereign countries can make a decision that is in the better interests of the long-term of their people. So it’s been my honor to have the opportunity on the ground to advocate for democracy in countries like Zimbabwe and Sudan in recent years. We rely on activists, including those who are on this call but others around the world, to inform us about what more we can and should be doing. The United States doesn’t have all the answers, but in looking with you towards a future that is more open, more tolerant, more inclusive, and more just, there really is a chance that we can reverse the current tide of authoritarianism around the world and move forward. So I am looking forward to what bold and hopefully ambitious commitments dozens and dozens of countries will bring to this week’s summit. I look forward to participating in the hard work of defending democracy and advancing human rights with all of you in the year ahead. And I very much look forward to a continued conversation and engagement with CSIS and with this remarkable group that’s joined us on this panel today. Thank you very much.

Mr. Runde: Thanks, Senator Coons. I want to thank the panelists. You are my heroes. You inspire me. And you inspire us here at CSIS. And thank you so much for all you do. And thank you for taking the time and being with us today. We’ll end it here. Thank you all very much. Thank you. And thank you, Senator Coons, for all you’re doing.