

Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT

Online Event

“What’s Next for the China-Russia Relationship?”

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FEATURING

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Jude Blanchette: Well, good morning, good afternoon, good evening. My name is Jude Blanchette and I'm the Freeman Chair in China Studies here at CSIS. I'm delighted to be co-hosting today's event with my colleague Bonny Lin, who's the director of the China Power Project, and a senior fellow for Asian Security here at CSIS. I don't think our discussion today needs much setup from me. Events that have transpired over the last couple days and over the last couple months I think have given a clear enough indication of why today's discussion is really critical.

But we now have Russian troops again crossing the border into Ukraine. Ukraine has declared a state of emergency. And yesterday the Biden administration joined the EU in unveiling a new sanctions package targeting Moscow. We want to join that conversation, but by looking at a really critical and, I think, underexplored element, which is the role of China – what role is China playing in this growing crisis, which we want to address in the first part of our discussion. And then I'd like to zoom out, and we'll discuss possible trajectories for the China-Russia relationship that might occur in the months and years ahead. We've got a lot to get through in a short amount of time, so I'd like to get right into it.

We have an absolutely fantastic panel of experts joining us today to give us a real 360 coverage of events on the ground in Ukraine, China's response, but also the broader China-Russia relationship.

In alphabetical order, we've got Andrea Kendall-Taylor, who's a senior fellow and director of the Transatlantic Security Program and the Center for a New American Security. Previously, Andrea served as the deputy national intelligence officer for Russian and Eurasia at the National Intelligence Council.

We've got Manoj Kewalramani, who's the chair of the Indo-Pacific Research Program at the Takshashila Institution.

We have Ambassador Mike McFaul, who's the director of the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies and a professor of international studies at Stanford University. Mike was the ambassador to the Russian federation from 2012 to 2014.

We have Evan Medeiros, who's the Penner Family Chair in Asian Studies at Georgetown. During the Obama administration, Evan served for six years on the staff of the National Security Council as director for China, Taiwan, and Mongolia, and then as special assistant to the president and senior director for Asia.

And we have Angela Stent, who's the director emerita for the Center for Eurasian, Russian, and East European Studies, and a professor emerita of government and foreign service at Georgetown University. From 2004 to 2006 Angela served as national intelligence officer for Russia and Eurasia at the National Intelligence Council. And before that she served in the office of policy planning at the U.S.' State Department.

This couldn't be a better group of experts here and this couldn't be more timely for this discussion.

Quickly, before we start, just a few logistics notes. I'm going to moderate the first half of the discussion, where we're going to focus on events as they transpire right now and China's evolving role. I'll then turn it over to my colleague Bonny Lin who will moderate the second portion of the conversation, where we're going to broaden the aperture – open the aperture and look at the Russia-China relationship and where it goes from here. We also want to invite audience members to ask questions. At any point you can go to CSIS.org, click on events and find the events page for this. You'll notice a small button which says, "ask live question." Please send those through at any time. We'll be collecting these and we're going to do our best to hold 15-ish minutes at the end of the discussion where we can hopefully address those.

With that said, let me now turn to the panel. I'm going to go down the line here and ask for your thoughts on China's role in this emerging crisis.

Beijing seems to have really put itself into a difficult position by both supporting Moscow's underlying position on NATO expansion while also trying to maintain its traditional view on territorial sovereignty, saying now that it respects all nations' territorial sovereignty, which seems to be in – the intention with its support for Russia, and, of course, Beijing to this day continues to insist that a diplomatic solution be found as it continues to hold discussions with Russia on ways that it can mitigate sanctions coming through. So this is a have your cake and eat it, too, strategy by Beijing, and I'm curious if this is tenable.

So I want to, first, put this to the group of how do you assess this. And then, also, anyone who's willing to give some possible speculation on how we think Beijing will move forward here. How much support will it throw behind Moscow, the question of this potential lifeline to Moscow, helping to evade sanctions, these are all critical.

Is this 2014 all over again or has the Russia-China relationship grown to such an extent and has the China relationship with the U.S. and the West deteriorated to such an extent that Beijing may be willing to take on more

risk? Those are just thought starters. Would love to get folks' reaction on any of those or any other questions you think salient.

Manoj, let me, please, start with you. You're watching this as closely as anyone. What's Beijing's strategy here? What do you find important to notice and what's your expectation for things, moving forward?

Manoj
Kewalramani:

Thanks so much, Jude. I'm just thrilled to be part of this panel and I'm looking forward to hearing everybody's thoughts on what's, clearly, one of the defining situations of the next sort of decade or so and sort of the future shape of the world order.

I thought I'd sort of try and keep my initial comments to talking about two specific things – firstly, the February 4th statement between Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin. I think it really matters because it's sort of critical to what we're seeing play out today in Eastern Europe, and, secondly, my thoughts about the current sort of public position that the Chinese government has taken and, like you articulated, the sort of bind that, in some ways, it finds itself in.

On the joint statement, my sense is that while it wasn't the last piece of the puzzle for Putin before he escalated, so it wasn't, like, a proximate cause giving the green light, I think it did provide a certain sense of certainty about the political support that he would be receiving from Beijing.

We do know that when he travelled to China just around the time period for the Olympics opening, we do know that the Ukraine situation was discussed. It wasn't mentioned, particularly, in the statement but we know that Wang Yi met Sergey Lavrov and they did speak about Ukraine. So it was, clearly, a part of the discussion based on that.

To me, the Feb. 4th statement matters at least insofar as sort of the following points, right. Firstly, it established this – the contours of a strategic congruence between these two sides. Both sides have a somewhat shared vision of a future world order. I don't think it's entirely in congruence with each other, but there is a somewhat shared vision. Essentially, they want the major powers, as they see them, to have a greater say in the shape of the future world order, which sort of – you know, a precondition for that is that currently we're in a state of world disorder.

Secondly, from their actions it's clear that both sides believe that force and coercion to varying degrees and through various tools are necessary to shape this new order. So it's not necessarily that there is a – you know, there is some sort of shyness about the use of force, and I think China has done that in the Indo-Pacific.

In the statement, China formally backed the Russian position on NATO's eastward expansion and it drew a parallel to the Indo-Pacific, which, again, says that there is – you know, I think this was sort of China stepping much further than where it was in 2014, and this is a fundamental shift to me.

On security, I think the language that we're hearing today from Beijing – you know, the idea of the principle of indivisible security – it's reflected in the joint statement, so it's not something that's – you know, a path that it's suddenly carving out because of the way events have unfolded. I think it is – you know, it was part of the thinking for a long time. And also, there's been some sort of thought about, you know, that Beijing was somewhat caught unawares with how things have escalated.

I just wanted to quote a sentence from the joint statement to tell you that I don't think that's the case and I think assuming that would be completely incorrect. There's a part of the joint statement that says that "Russia and China stand against attempts by external forces to undermine security and stability in their common adjacent regions." I think that's quite clear what they're saying over that. So that's my sort of take on what the joint statement means in terms of what we're seeing right now.

On the Chinese leadership's public reaction to everything that's going on, I don't think it should come as a surprise if you've just gone through what they've declared in early February, but the situation is also an example of why when two sides have a strategic congruence over, you know, a broader sort of objective, over the strategic objective, that does not necessarily mean that they will not have differences over specific policy areas and specific actions and the potential outcomes of those actions. You know, that commonality of strategic purpose is not necessarily, straightforward sort of imply agreements and approaches and policies. To me, Russia and China have different stakes and interests in Europe and the Indo-Pacific, the structure of their economies is very different, and therefore, their actions will differ, and harmonizing that as – how they go about doing that is something that we will have to watch because that's going to be a source of tension.

In addition to me, what Russia has done in Ukraine implies – impinges on several sort of Chinese foreign policy goals and propositions. China doesn't necessarily want a Cold War-style confrontation. It would want to avoid it, although it's done very little in terms of its policies to reorient and avoid that. It wants to preserve its sort of economic and political interests in Europe and it wants to keep the developing world on its side, and if the reaction by the Kenyan, you know, represented by the U.N. Security Council was an indicator, it tells you that there are going to be tensions in this regard.

So my sense is that Beijing's messaging on Ukraine has so far been supportive of Russia while seeking to balance these broader interests. It's a difficult act to perform and the recent statements by European leaders at the Munich Security Conference tell us that it's going to be a difficult act to perform, and also, Beijing's ability to do this balancing act well will depend on the scale of escalation from Moscow going forward. That's an uncomfortable position I think that they find themselves in, too, but for the moment, I think it's still manageable. To me, all of this also allows China to watch what the West is doing. I mean, how closely does it rally? What tools does it deploy? What costs is it willing to bear? Will this unity persist over the long term, particularly given the nature of domestic politics and populism in large parts of the Western world?

So the current situation from that point of view to me, from a Chinese point of view is also a good test case – right? – to see – to test its belief of the West is falling and the East is rising. And to me, Beijing will draw some lessons from this with regard to how it uses force and how it operates in the Indo-Pacific.

I sort of leave myself – my remarks with that. I don't want to get into the bit of whether – I don't want to speculate right now whether they will be – how they will be – react to further escalation. Perhaps we can get to that later but I'd like to see – hear what others have to say.

Mr. Blanchette: Great. Thank you, Manoj. Those are excellent remarks and I think when – the second half of the discussion I'm sure will turn to this issue of what larger lessons Beijing may be learning by looking at the European, U.S., and NATO response to events in Ukraine.

Evan, if I could, I'd like to turn to you; same set of questions and any additional thoughts after hearing Manoj's opening remarks.

Evan S. Medeiros: Thanks, Jude. And many thanks to both you and Bonny for convening this. It's a great panel, very timely.

So, four points from me. First, I agree with Manoj. The convergence between Russia and China is very substantial. It represents a common vision, common interests, and common values. And that common vision of global affairs is, of course, at its core about constraining and balancing U.S. power, but importantly, it's more than that. Right? There are – there is clearly a set of shared ideas for organizing global governance, and I think while we often focus on the constraining balance in U.S. power, there's another part of it.

In terms of common interests, that's sort of casually thrown out there, but I think it's important when we talk about common interests to focus on

common material interests: high degree of economic complementarity, high degree of energy interconnectivity, and substantial sharing of military technology. And Sasha Gabuev at the Carnegie Endowment has done great work on this and I think it's important to recognize that the convergence of material interests is substantial and appears to be enduring.

In terms of common values, that's important as well: non-interference in internal affairs, primacy of the state, single-party systems, of course opposing democracy and so-called color revolutions, putting forward their own version of democracy, what the Chinese call whole-process democracy. So, again, this is a substantial converge of vision, interests, and values, and it looks to be, you know, enduring, even when we're past the Ukraine issue.

Point number two, this convergence of interest is not a recent development. It's certainly not a crash program. It's really a culmination of years of this, which experienced an accelerant in 2014. I was at the NSC in 2014. I saw the convergence between Putin and Xi Jinping institutionally as well as personally in the wake of his annexing of Crimea. And this timing of Putin being in control and Xi having just come to power I think played a very important role. And, you know, as a result, when we talk about the China-Russia relationships, it's important to remember that this language about no limits or no forbidden areas – you know, there are some scholars that say that that language goes all the way back 2017 or 2018. But of course, Wang Yi highlighted it most prominently in a speech in January of 2021.

Last year Putin publicly stated the fact that Russia was helping China to build an early warning system for their nuclear and missile capabilities. So this is a very substantial military-to-military relationship. If you look at their exercises, they're trending toward combined if not eventually some kind of joint military operations. So, again, not a crash program. Been growing for a while. And so while the February joint statement, I agree with Manoj, sort of brought this to the forefront, even absent Ukraine I think we would have, you know, been experiencing a very substantial cooperation between the two.

Point three, on Ukraine, I see China's position as driven by or characterized by, I should say, what I call a strategic trilemma, trying to balance three very difficult sets of interests. Not three interests, three sort of baskets of interests. The first, of course, is to stay aligned with Russia, to express sympathy for Russia, and concerns about, you know, U.S. actions, NATO expansion, which Manoj talked about and, you know, are captured in the joint statement. Second, a desire to maintain adherence to core PRC principles, right? In particular, the inviolability of sovereignty and territorial integrity.

And the third basket, it's a big one, it's basically to avoid incurring too much damage with major economic partners, the U.S. and Europe, minimize collateral damage from sanctions, and – to pick up a very important point that Manoj articulated – to sort of maintain strong ties with the developing world. And, like Manoj, I thought the statement from the Kenyan perm rep to the UNSC yesterday was sort of notable, you know, in that regard. And it just raises a question whether or not voices in the developing world will create a new complication for China.

So how are they going to do this? How are they going to manage this strategic trilemma? Well, Jude, you basically gave away the key in your opener, which is they're going to engage in what I like to call strategic cakeism, right? They're going to try and have their cake and eat it too. Which is, they're going to engage in pro-Russian neutrality, right? They're going to claim total neutrality, standing on the side of principle, but basically lean to the Russian side. And I interpreted Hua Chunying's comments as essentially that, standing on principle but basically blaming the United State, NATO, and European countries for provoking the Russians.

You know, and so at this stage I think the critical challenge, where the rubber will hit the road for China in managing this trilemma, will be in terms of sanctions and how much sanctions relief is China really willing to offer Russia. Because that's going to be the key test. Because it's going to be hard for them to balance this sort of alignment and sympathy with Russia on the one hand versus, you know, avoiding alienating the U.S., Europe on the other, if they provide substantial sanctions relief, because that obviously will, you know, create problems in the U.S.-China and the U.S.-EU economic relationship.

Fourth and final point, Jude and Bonny. What should the U.S. do about it? Well, our options are limited. And let me lay out the options as I see them. First, the U.S. could try a strategy of pulling them apart, but that looks pretty hard and maybe futile given the scope and degree of convergence, right? For Russia, the argument from the United States would be, look, you have an inherently unequal relationship with China. You're aiding your long-term rival. Let's cooperate together to restrain China. And for a whole variety of reasons that Andrea, Mike, and Angela will articulate, that doesn't seem remotely possible and certainly not one that I'm recommending.

For China, the argument would be Russia's a millstone. It's a depreciating asset. You're going to compromise your economic and security interests with the U.S., the EU, perhaps the developing world, and maybe even drag you into a cold war. So given substantial converging interests with the West, maybe you should just give up on them and let's sort of find a new modus vivendi for stable relations with the West. Again, I think that that is going to

be difficult and challenging given a variety of anxieties and perceptions of Xi Jinping about the United States.

Second strategy: You could try and isolate, criticize, and penalize China very directly for its willful, if indirect – and perhaps direct – abetting of Russia, including trying to use this moment to galvanize Europe, Japan, India, South Korea to criticize China and perhaps penalize China, especially if they provide sanctions relief, far more than was ever done in 2014. In essence, create a coalition that forces China to rethink its relationship with Russia as too costly, right, the big strategic barnacle pulling you down. Or, you know, the risk of that strategy is all you do is push Russia and China closer together and bring about a more pronounced split globally. I don't have an answer to that, but I'm just sort of laying it out you could do that.

Or the third option is you could basically focus your strategy on isolating/penalize Russia and with China adopt a much more narrow approach basically focused on trying to minimize the degree of comfort and relief China provides to Russia, but not really target China in any significant way. So sort of, you know, give China a pass more or less, but really focus on minimizing their relief.

Final final point is one thing that I think deserves a sort of double tap is there's an idea out there put forward most prominently by the journalist and commentator Fareed Zakaria on Friday that the U.S., if it was just smart and strategic, would just run the Kissinger-Nixon '72 play, right: pull China from Russia. It's difficult and complicated for the reasons I outlined above, but I just want to remind the audience that there were two proximate factors in '72 that simply do not exist today.

Number one, China and Russia had a high degree of antagonism and there was a very acute Chinese fear of Russian attacks on China, you know, most notably captured in the '69 border conflicts.

Number two, China was economically and militarily very weak in '72. And there was a group of Chinese leaders – not Mao per se, but more Deng Xiaoping and Zhou Enlai – who were actually interested in modernizing, and they knew that aligning with the U.S. in particular but the West more broadly was going to be key to their modernization.

So, you know, I think it's important not to casually engage in the, hey, just do what Nixon and Kissinger did, because the two proximate factors that probably were most influential in facilitating the success of that rapprochement couldn't be more different today.

Full stop there. Over to you, Jude and Bonny. Thank you.

Mr. Blanchette: Wonderful. Thank you, Evan. Fantastic comments.

Let me now turn to – I'll go Andrea, then Angela, then Mike, and maybe now shifting our lens slightly to looking at this from the vantage point of Moscow. And just hearing the two comments, let me just throw a few other questions out into the ether.

I think one is it would be helpful to get assessments on to what extent China's support in February 4th but before and subsequently have played into Moscow's calculations. And then, what might Moscow be expecting from Beijing moving forward? So, Andrea, those questions and any others that you might like to respond to here as it pertains to unfolding events right now. Let me turn it to you.

Andrea Kendall-Taylor: Great. It's great to be on this panel. Thanks so much for having me.

I'll just say I'm agreeing with both Evan and Manoj that obviously, Russia-China relations have really deepened significantly across all dimensions of their partnership. And the way that I've thought about it is their cooperation actually amplifies the threat that both countries pose to the United States. So, you know, especially from Russia's perspective, China's support really helps mitigate Western pressure in the wake of 2014, and that's been really important for Russia.

The deepening partnership, I think, helps explain the timing of Putin's aggression in Ukraine. It's certainly not a primary factor and I wouldn't want to suggest that it is, but I do think it contributes to Putin's sense of confidence and helps explain why Putin judges that this is his time to push his maximalist demands. He knows he has a partner in crime. He's got Xi in his corner. They're working together now to really push back and try to change the order that they view doesn't advantage either of them. So that relationship, I think, has been a factor that has kind of emboldened and contributed to Putin's confidence in doing what he does.

It is true also, though, that Russian actions, I think, pulls at one of the key fissures in the Russia-China relationship. You know, we have all spent a lot of time trying to think about what the limits of Russia-China cooperation are. What are the fissures that we could possibly exploit in order to limit the extent to which the two countries are doing together? One of those very natural fissures that has really nothing to do with the United States is the differing propensities or penchants for instability, right? So Russia does have a penchant for destabilizing actions while China has this desire to rise to great-power status on its reputation for prudence and stability. This is pulling directly at that seam.

And you know, I think it's – you know, when I think about how this relationship has evolved, so far their partnership has deepened without either country having to incur any costs for the other. They have been able – they've had just this strong natural alignment of interests. They have the shared interest, in particular, to undermine U.S. influence and power. But they've been totally free to pursue those objectives through their own preferred means. And so, again, neither country has had to incur costs, and now I think that is going to be put to the test in this case. China is going to have to decide if it's willing to incur costs to support Russia.

I really have appreciated Manoj and Evan's comments about this idea of China standing on principle but then supporting Russia. It's something that I've been thinking a lot about. I've been wondering, not being a China expert, how to interpret China's comments about – you know, saying that Ukraine enjoys the right to territorial sovereignty or that – you know, that they've refused – you know, they rhetorically don't endorse the invasion, right? I haven't understood exactly how to think about those comments. But the thought that has occurred to me, obviously, following Russia, is clearly that these countries lie, right? Putin lies all the time. He's lied all the way through this crisis. He said he would withdraw troops from Ukraine's border; he hasn't. He said Russia would end their military presence in Belarus; they aren't. And so I've wondered, you know, whether we might see China working from the same playbook in the sense that Beijing can say all of the right things and continue just with what they intend to do, which is to continue to work with Russia to undermine U.S. influence and power.

I think, you know, even if China doesn't support Russia on the sanctions, there are still a lot of things that they can do together in the defense domain and particularly in the democracy and human rights domain, which I think are the two areas that are most consequential for the United States. Ukraine doesn't really have any effect on that. And so, in my mind, even if there are some limits to what China's willing to do, it doesn't necessarily take away from the significance of this partnership, and so we should expect their alignment to continue just as it has. And if anything, you know, this may be Putin kind of plowing the ground, doing some of that front work for China and to – so that they can then kind of continue to push against the United States and challenge the order more aggressively moving forward.

So I don't know, all preliminary. It's so early to tell exactly how this will unfold, but happy to be part of this panel trying to make sense of it.

Mr. Blanchette: Great. Thank you. Excellent comments, Andrea.

Angela, if I can now turn it to you. A lot on the table, so anything that you want to pick up from what's been said or to some of the framing questions that I laid out at the outset.

Angela Stent: Great. Thank you and thank you for having me on this panel.

And I really agree with everything that the previous speakers have said, so I want to underline that Vladimir Putin would not have embarked on this aggression against Ukraine at this time if he didn't know that he would have Chinese support. It's not the reason he's done it, but I agree it's the timing and the fact that he knew that whatever happened the Chinese would be there for him.

In 2014, as we know, we, the West, tried to isolate Russia after the annexation of Crimea. It proved impossible. China stepped in. Now that relationship, as we – as everyone has said, is much stronger than then. We have a different Chinese leader. We're in a different world now. And so I think this is an essential backdrop for understanding what Putin is doing.

And I think, to pick up on some of the other things that were said, really the United States today finds itself in a similar situation to what the Soviet Union was in the early 1970s, having just had a border war with China and an antagonistic relationship with the United States. The then-Politburo decided that it would respond to U.S. feelers and embark on a détente with the United States because it didn't want to face these two major great-power antagonists. And today the U.S. is in a position where we see these two powers coming together. I think that it's impossible at this point to try and, you know, persuade Russia that it should weaken its ties with China, for all of the reasons that everyone said.

It's very important that these are two, you know, authoritarian leaders who support each other domestically, and are not going to threaten the other's domestic position, and then all of the other interests that they have in common. And I agree with Zakaria that in theory maybe the U.S. should think about, in fact, doing a similar 2022 version of Kissinger and maybe reaching out to the Chinese. Obviously, that's not where we are. We're in a completely opposite position. And that does not leave the U.S., I think, in a very – in a very comfortable position now.

Now, from the Chinese point of view, of course, and the Chinese were pushing, you know, the negotiation and we have to implement the Minsk agreements. The fact that the Russians have now recognized those two entities as independent states, that, of course, has killed the Minsk process. So that's one thing where the Chinese will now have to adjust at least their rhetoric. And I do believe that the Chinese do not approve of this specter of the violation of another country's territorial integrity and sovereignty. But, as everyone has said, they're still, of course, supporting Russia and blaming NATO and the United States for this crisis. So their talking points there are almost identical to the official Russian talking points.

Now, however, China does have, you know, not an insubstantial economic and political relationship with Ukraine. Ukraine is part of the Belt and Road project. So that, you know, if the Ukrainian economy continues to tank, if there's increased disruption and war in Ukraine, that does harm Chinese interests. And they will have to balance that with the kind of support that we see them giving Russia now. I think we'll have to watch the reaction to the sanctions. Don't forget that in 2014 the major Chinese banks in fact complied with the Western sanctions. China's economic interests are much greater, both with the United States and Europe, than they are with Russia.

And so China will have to very carefully balance its support for Russia with not trying to jeopardize its own economic interests with the West. And it will help Russia, to some extent, get sanctions relief. But, again, this is going to be tricky. And particularly if the Russians go further and the military conflict extends in Ukraine, and there are the massive sanctions that are being threatened by the United States and the European Union.

I think that the – and my final point is I think that the February the 4th meeting that's already been discussed, you know, underscore the strength of this relationship, its existential importance, I would say, now to Russia. Russia has – Putin has made the choice that Russia will remain China's junior partner going forward. He understands the limits of Russia's role in this. And I think as long as he is in power he will see China as a partner in pushing back against the West, in reordering the global order that both Russia and China criticize, and where they have substantial grievances.

My final point here is that whereas Russia talks about the possibility of a tripartite Yalta, dividing the world into Chinese, American and Russian spheres of influence, in the Yalta system at least, if you go back to the Cold War, there were rules. And the United States and the Soviet Union observed those rules. I think Putin – and Andrea has talked about this too – his interest is much more in a kind of a Hobbesian disordered world system, where there are no rules of the game, and where disruption is a key factor, and unpredictability. I'm not sure that that's the Chinese view. And there, they could have significant differences of interest. But that's really quite far down the road. And for now, China will remain a major supporter of Russia and enable it to do whatever it's going to still do in Ukraine.

Mr. Blanchette: Thank you, Angela. Those are really excellent remarks, and maybe in the second part of the discussion we can probe your final point there a little bit more because I think it's really important. You know, beneath the February 4th joint statement about – and I think Evan's right, sort of many shared worldviews – there's some very deep non-alignments, I think, in how they think about international order that might be worth exploring.

Mike, I'd like to ask you to bat clean up, if you don't mind. We've just had, I think, a lot of great discussion. There's a lot on the table. Worryingly, there's a lot of alignment, it seems like, amongst all our speakers. So I might ask you to – for any thoughts or comments on the above, any areas of disalignment just so we can make it interesting.

Over to you. You're on mute, Mike.

Michael McFaul: I look forward to the day when we don't have to say that to each other. Yes. Thanks. I'm not on mute anymore. Thanks, Jude, for having me. Terrific group.

I actually wanted to go last because I wanted to find things to disagree with because I do not have prepared remarks, and, tragically, Jude, I didn't find a lot to disagree with. So what I'm going to do in my couple of minutes here is just go through very telegraphically the way I see Putin's view of China on many dimensions and then get to what I think is really the fundamental one that Angela just ended with, which is the way he, in my view, sees the world in terms of revisionism and destruction of the liberal world order versus revisionism and what that means in terms of China-Russia. So let me just go through them quick.

One – and I'm saying this partly because I know we have a lot of China experts listening and we have a lot of China experts here. I'm not a China expert but I'm a huge consumer of knowledge about China and I spent a couple summers in China talking to their Russia experts. But I think it's important to understand, at least, Putin's worldview and some of it, I think, I share as it relates to China.

So, first, Putin thinks that Russia is a great power and I think he's partially right. I think there's too many assumptions sometimes. We just look at GDP and we say, oh, they're a, you know, Burkina Faso with nuclear weapons or a gas station. That's wrong, and, you know, if we have more time I could go through it. They're the third biggest power in the world. That's his view. He understands that they're the third biggest. But he has deliberately allied himself with China, the second biggest most powerful country in the world, to balance against the United States.

Second, Putin's Russia is an autocracy. That's an obvious statement. But it's way more autocratic than it was just a year ago and way more autocratic than it was 20 years ago. There seems to be some parallels there with China as well. And when you're as – as you turn as autocratic as Putin has, that means the United States as a democracy is a threat no matter what. It doesn't matter how much happy talk you're going to have and all that. The very existence of the United States as a democracy is a threat to his legitimacy as an autocrat. Seems like there's some parallels to Xi Jinping there as well.

Third – and this is more controversial – I think that Putin is an ideologue. I think he has a set of ideas about the world – he’s a nationalist orthodox populist autocrat – that he’s thought about. By the way, I’ve known Putin since 1991. I followed his career for a couple of decades and, obviously, I dealt with him for five years when I was in the government. He wasn’t always this way. But I think there’s a body of thought – you know, call it illiberalism. And I don’t want to get hung up on the word ideology. I think, you know, we spend a little too much time debating what’s a real ideology versus not.

But I think it’s wrong to think of him as just being about power and interests and money. I think he has a set of views about the world that animates what he does in the world, and that’s why sometimes these cost benefit analyses that we assign to him don’t work.

It’s different from Xi Jinping thought, however. I think that the ideological mission that they have domestically and internationally are quite different. That gets me to the fourth point. He doesn’t just have an ideology for home. He seeks to propagate it abroad.

I think he sees a nice division of labor between China and Russia. He’s focused on the developed world, China is focused on the developing world, and he has invested massive resources to propagating these ideas, and I think he’s had a lot more success than a lot of people in the West realize. Think of Viktor Orbán, Salvini, Le Pen, Donald Trump. They are more ideologically aligned with Mr. Putin than they are with Joe Biden today. And on that, there’s also a lot of commonality with Xi Jinping, you know, the anti- – you know, and it also is propagating its ideas of democracy, and that creates commonality, including, as it was underscored in the February 4th statement.

Fifth and finally, Putin seeks to undermine the liberal international order. I’m echoing what Angela said. He’s very comfortable to be in a – (inaudible) – 19th-century world redrawing borders. He’s already redrawn borders three times, everyone. Three times. He’s already gone to war four times, if you count Chechnya in 1999. He is very comfortable with the use of power that is not – you know, that does have a U.N. Security Council resolution giving it legitimacy. And I think he’s very risky. He’s gone to war four times: Chechnya 1999, Georgia 2008, Ukraine 2014, Syria 2015. I think he’s on the brink of another major war. He thinks he’s won all those wars, and by the way, there’s empirical data to suggest he has, and I think that makes him a very risky actor who’s willing to take risky actions to revise the international order in a way that, it seems to me, makes Xi Jinping uncomfortable.

I'm a big sports fan; I'm a big football fan. It kind of reminds me, you know, with Xi Jinping and Putin, it's like you want to win the Super Bowl so you take a chance on some kind of wild actors like Antonio Brown; you know, let's bring him in; he's a troubled actor but maybe he'll make our team better. Well, look at what this troubled actor is doing for Xi Jinping, and I think there's a fundamental divide between China that wants to reform the liberal international order and create pockets of order independent of that, and I think they're rather successful at that, versus Putin who just wants to break it down. And I'm not sure that this can last. I think that – you know, I think we need to think about – and I'll end on this.

We're all in the pre-invasion way of thinking about the world right now, and I hope I'm wrong. You know, let's be clear; I don't know what Putin's going to do and I don't think we – nobody else does. But let's start to think about some of the more worst-case scenarios; maybe there's a good place to kick around the second round. If there are tens of thousands of people being killed in the heart of Europe, is it going to be so easy for Xi Jinping to do – I love Evan's phrase – what did you call it, cake-ism, have-your-cake-ism? I actually think it will be much harder to do that than it was in 2014. I think it's going – and I think the Western world and President Biden is going to call on the world, are you with this war or against it, and I think that will be much harder to play cake-ism if it's a full-blown war, and especially if it has consequences beyond Ukraine, which I don't think is a zero probability.

And with that, I'll stop. Thanks for having me.

Mr. Blanchette: Great. Mike, those are excellent comments and some good provocations there and I think sets us up nicely for the next phase of the discussion. And just as – I would note, on a small point, you know, there's a lot of speculation right now about what China may be learning for its own territorial ambitions in Taiwan by watching events in Ukraine, and to get to your last comment, we're sort of solely focused on the upside lessons Xi Jinping might learn about how he sees ways to split NATO. Well, guess what. If there's a prolonged, protracted war with, you know, thousands of body bags heading home to Russia, Xi Jinping would do well to reflect on what a similar invasion and occupation in Taiwan might mean for China. So I think because we're trying to mobilize support, you know, here in the United States, we always play the upside of China or the China-Russia relationship, but if we fundamentally want to out-compete Russia and China, I think we need to start finding fissures in the relationship, fault lines and exploiting those, rather than just always painting it as 10-feet tall.

Anyway, diatribe out of the way, let me now turn it over to Bonny. We've got a good – we've got a half hour left, so behind schedule but still sufficient time to delve deeper.

So, Bonny, over to you.

Bonny Lin: Thank you very much, Jude.

And thank you, all the panelists, for your really excellent remarks.

So this portion we are focusing on the broader China relationship, but I'm also cognizant that much of this is already discussed in your opening comments, so I'll keep the questions briefer but maybe focused on specific topics that folks mentioned.

So let me go to Angela first. I was struck by your mentioning that Russia understands its role as a junior partner, and you commented on the Putin-Xi relationship. So my question to you is, what happens after Putin leaves? If we go with what Mike mentioned in terms of worst-case scenarios, is that a worst-case scenario for Russia in terms of the Russia-China relationship?

Dr. Stent: Ah, thank you. That's a great question. I mean, you know, first of all, I think the sum question here is, well, so how important are the personalities driving this relationship? And I think they're very important. First of all, in authoritarian regimes, anyway, the leaders play a disproportionate role in these kinds of relationships, and particularly because Russia and China are not natural allies. It's really taken particularly these two leaders to drive the relationship forward. And I just recall, a few years ago I was at the St. Petersburg Economic Forum and Xi Jinping and Putin were sitting on the stage together and they literally were saying how they were each other's best friends and they'd stayed up till 4:00 a.m. in the morning discussing things. You know, there's a lot of extravagant rhetoric, but that relationship, the ties between the two of them, is very important.

Now, if Putin were no longer around – I think that's your question – (laughs) – any Russian government now – I mean, Russia has set itself on a course of having – you know, of pivoting to Asia, and this didn't begin this year; I mean, it's something that Putin has obviously been working at, particularly since Xi Jinping came to power, and that pivot would still be there. I mean, Russia under a new leader might have a less antagonistic relationship with the West, and one would hope that it would, but that doesn't mean that it wouldn't still have strong ties to China. But, you know, I have to believe that, I mean, that a future Russian leader might want to balance these relations more than Putin himself is doing, but nevertheless, I mean, Russia now has, you know, embarked on a path where it has these closer military ties with China, high-tech ties, you know, economic ties which are growing, obviously important political relationship, and I don't think that's going to fade away, you know. But I think also a future Russian leader might have a different view of world order. But don't forget, Putin can stay in power, if he wants to, until 2036, and even beyond that. We know that Xi Jinping can stay in power

presumably as long as he likes, too, so we're talking about maybe a far-off scenario.

Dr. Lin: Thank you, Angela. If we have Putin in power until 2036, that's a long time to shape the Russia-China relationship and more or less set the course for the next generation.

So I wanted to now turn to Andrea to follow up on some of your discussion. You had mentioned some of the costs to China that it would incur in the event of a, I guess, further-escalated Russia conflict in Ukraine. I wanted to look a little bit more hypothetically in the future and flip it: Would Russia be willing to incur potential costs in the future, in the event of a potential Chinese contingency on its borders? We've talked a lot about Taiwan. You mentioned that earlier. And you also talked about how Russia but all authoritarian powers in general have a willingness to bluff and they might not be as credible. So do you think, from your perspective, that if China in the future was to find itself in a similar situation, Russia would be willing to incur costs for China?

Andrea Kendall-Taylor: I think the short answer is probably no, or not significant costs for either of them. I think they have an understanding that on their core security interests – so for Ukraine, for Russia, and Taiwan – excuse me, for China – that those are kind of their primary domains and I don't think either country would really expect the other to come to their aid directly on issues that are so kind of critically important to their core security. But I do think, you know, one of the areas where the relationship between Russia and China has been most consequential and I think problematic from the U.S. perspective is in the defense domain, and this was already mentioned by some of the other panelists. We already see the ties between them growing in that domain. We know that Russia is, for example, providing increasingly sophisticated weapons systems to the Chinese. There was the mention of the early-warning missile system, but they're doing a bunch of things. It's not just air defense but anti-ship and submarine capabilities. And through all of those ways, the way that I thought about it is that Russia's basically making it easier for China to keep the U.S. out of its backyard. They are kind of bringing the Chinese military along. They're doing all of these joint exercises, I think addressing some of the gaps in the Chinese military. You know, they're not battlefield-tested. Russian forces are, in Ukraine and in Syria and other places. And so they are also sharing some of their know-how that helps mitigate some of the vulnerabilities of the Chinese military.

So I think, you know, again, they're doing these joint exercises. The defense ties are deepening. And so, in that way, Russia is, I think, helping China in the Indo-Pacific, and I also would say I don't think it would be entirely beyond the realm of possible that, if there was a military confrontation between

China and the United States in the Indo-Pacific, that Russia could do – (background noise) – so sorry, one sec.

Dr. Lin: No worries. (Laughs.) Maybe as we're waiting for Andrea to come back I will – oh, are we good? No worries. Maybe in the meantime let me turn just to Evan and Mike next. I'll at least mention the question while we're waiting for Andrea. So we had mentioned quite a bit of areas of convergence and divergence between China and Russia. So one question I have for the two of you is, how much does U.S. or allied strategy factor into their growing relationships? In what ways can the United States do to prevent what we would – what we would view as the worst-case scenarios? And in what ways does our actions actually – or, have either in the past or the future – could we push the two countries to become even closer?

Maybe, Andrea, are you good to –

Dr. McFaul: I'm happy to jump in, or Evan, or?

Dr. Lin: OK, please, Andrea, let me turn back to you to finish up, and then maybe to Mike and then Evan.

Dr. Kendall-Taylor: Great. So sorry about that. So I was just saying I think it's not beyond the realm of possible that if there was a military confrontation between the U.S. and China in the Indo-Pacific that Russia could at least look to raise the cost to the United States. I mean, I don't think that they would be a critical piece, but you could think about how they could disrupt satellites or do things in submarine warfare basically to raise the cost that the U.S. would face for that military confrontation. So I think it just comes back to my point, the way that I have thought about this relationship is that, you know, they really do amplify the threat that they pose to each other. They are distinct challenges. But the way that they cooperate makes them jointly more dangerous and more threatening to the United States. It's like kind of this idea of a synergy between them.

And that's – but the one thing I wanted to pick up on is also kind of the point that Mike made. Obviously, the degree of violence associated with the Ukraine situation is going to be one of the key factors that I think that shapes how Beijing factors, you know, what they're willing to do for Russia. And in that kind of most maximalist, very bloody situation, clearly, you know, it would be ever-more costly for China to throw its weight behind Russia. But I think if it is something that, you know, militarily it's quicker or it is a less violent scenario, I want to go back to my sports analogy and to, you know, bring up something I'd been thinking about. The extent to which in a football analogy Putin is essentially the blocker and Xi is running with the football behind him.

I mean, I think there is – if we're talking about worst-case scenarios and getting our minds around in a kind of post-Ukraine world, if it's not an incredibly violent incursion into Ukraine, there it to me seems very possible that you could see these two authoritarian leaders really lean in in a significant way to try to kind of disrupt and undermine and really directly challenge the United States. And so in that sense, Putin may be kind of laying the groundwork for Xi to assume a more aggressive posture over time.

Dr. Lin: Thank you, Andrea. Mike, over to you, and then to Evan.

Dr. McFaul: OK. Well, I have 55 things I want to say, Bonny, so I'm going to try to just do two. One, I just want to – I want to get to this thing about what is in it and what's not in it. Before I do, though, I just want to underscore, if we're talking about the long term, because that's what we're supposed to do in this second set of questions, you know, it's very hard to think about change. It's really easy to think in status quo and equilibrium kind of ways. And I just want to remind you that it wasn't that long ago – actually when I was in the government. I'll tell this by an anecdote to underscore the point.

I remember it very vividly. It was a meeting at the White House, actually with the occupant of the White House – at the time he was the vice president – with a very senior Russian official, who I don't want to name. But, you know, one of the top people in the government at the time, 2011. Peak of cooperation between the United States and the reset. And he said: We know we're the junior partner in this trilateral relationship. We want to be on your side. We think that we have things that we can do for you. And I just tell you that. Then Putin came back in and, you know, the – he invaded Ukraine, and we're in this moment now.

But I want to get us away from the idea that Russia is fixed this way and it's going to be this way forever. It'll be this way as long as Putin's around, as Angela said. But remember how much volatility we've had with leadership changes. And this period reminds me a lot of the Brezhnev era. When Brezhnev had a lot of great victories, right? Marxist-Leninist regimes in Southeast Asia, and then in Southern Africa. And he was running the table. By the way, *zastoi*, as we call it, stagnation at home, just like is happening in Russia.

And then he decided, you know, the correlation of forces, if you remember – I know Angela remembers that phrase; I don't know if anybody else does – was on his side. And that's when he invaded Afghanistan. And then think about what happened after that. That turned out to be a horrific mistake. A new set of leaders came in in 1985 and changed things rather radically. So I don't want to get into the prediction game, but I want us to be cautious that this is going to be fixed for the, you know, 21st century.

Second thing, on Russia-China. I think we spent way too much time, especially in Washington – I think that’s where most of you are – thinking about how we need to divide Russia from China. Why? What is the big deal? You know, I think it’s good that Xi Jinping has to be around and defend this rogue actor. What – you know, what – you know, we – I think we need to ask much more concretely why is it so important for us to bring fissures to that relationship? What does it concretely mean? Xi Jinping is not going to send military forces to Ukraine. We all know that. Vladimir Putin is not going to send Russian soldiers to Taiwan. I will be shocked if that happens.

So then let’s get in – you know, the military cooperation thing that Andrea talked about is true, but it’s been going on for a long time. We don’t have a play there. I think rather than spending so much time thinking about how we divide them we should be thinking much more strategically about how to unite the democratic world, because in the long run – and this is where this debate among some China folks – this crowd’s way too sophisticated, but you know who I’m talking about when I say this. There’s some that say, oh, you know, Ukraine’s a distraction. We just got to focus on China. That’s where the real, you know, action is.

And what is so – what’s wrong about that argument is that the number-one instrument of power that the United States has, for decades, is not our chips and not our aircraft carriers and not our soldiers. It’s our ideas. That’s where we’re strongest against Xi Jinping. That’s where the world is on our side. Look at the public opinion polling on that. And if we don’t think about how to reinvigorate – (audio break) – and, B, I don’t think we have a lot of leverage to do it.

Dr. Lin: Mike, thank you. Many interesting points and much food for thought.

Let me turn it to Evan. I’m sure you also have 55 points to share, so welcome you to comment on anything that was discussed or if you want to comment on how you view the U.S. factor in China-Russia relationship.

Dr. Medeiros: Great. Thanks, Bonny.

So, first, Mike, great point that you ended on. The obvious retort or question I have for you is, so are you then prepared for basically a new Cold War? And do you believe that America’s allies in Europe and our allies in Asia are going to be prepared to make the kind of choices of strategic alignment simply based on values? And I ask that question not to suggest that I disagree with you, but as somebody that spends my time thinking about and obviously, like you, has experience negotiating with allies and partners in Asia and about Asia in Europe, not clear to me that the world is prepared to make those kinds of choices. So I’d love to get your reaction to that.

Point number two, your characterization of U.S.-Russia relations in the Medvedev era versus Putinism I think has some degree of applicability to Xi Jinping, right? We're very focused on Xi Jinping. And sort of, you know, to adopt your locution, sort of Xiism as you write about Putinism, you know, there clearly is a set of ideas that Xi Jinping has adopted about governance at home, political and economic, and governance abroad that align much more with Putin. Not perfectly, right. Not disorder, as you rightly pointed out. But a substantial degree of discomfort with the international political order, some aspects of the international security order. And Xi Jinping, right, he is not Jiang Zemin. And he's certainly not Deng Xiaoping.

So it is very much an open question, I would say as a China watcher, about whether or not the next generation of Chinese leaders would sort of be as open to, you know, a different relationship with the West, you know, as your senior Russian commentator did with then-VP Biden. You know, I don't know if there are similar voices in China about that right now. But what I do know as somebody that, you know, has spent quite a bit of time with Xi Jinping, met him with then-Vice President Biden beginning in 2001, is I think he does have a different set of ideas about China's political and economic future, about America's relative power, about his risk tolerance. He's clearly much more risky – risk acceptance than pretty much any reform-era Chinese leader. And I think we're seeing that play out.

But there's a big question about whether or not – you sort of portrayed him as, you know, he just wants to reform the liberal international order; Putin wants to break it. What I would say is the Chinese have a diversity of views on this. I think when it comes to the global political order, especially, you know, our ideas about the universality of rights, the Chinese don't want to reform it; they just want to revise it and eliminate it. So I would say the Chinese have a very different – they have a very agated set of views about what aspects of the liberal international order they like, don't like, tolerate, want to eliminate.

But the key point, I think, here is that the Chinese don't want a breakdown of global order. I don't think they're fundamentally disintegrationist, right? China's rise has been facilitated by globalization. They just want globalization more on their terms, increasingly in terms that disadvantage the United States and other, you know, Western economies.

But to your point, our ability to sort of manufacture a divide between them, especially when you have, you know, two autocratic leaders with very strong views and a strong personal relationship, I think it's going to be very, very difficult to do that unless external – the external situation changes in a way that materially increased the costs for China. So, you know, for us to talk about, you know, massive violence in Europe leading to a strategic conundrum for China, I absolutely agree but that's a very high-end scenario.

The question is, is if you don't have that kind of scenario and you have a situation in Ukraine that is more permissive to a continuation of strategic cakeism, you know, what do we do in that regard?

Final final point is, you know, picking back up on this, you know, playing the China card analogy. You know, what I see is that Putin played the China card on us, right? Putin basically took, you know, the play from Kissinger. He ran Kissinger's play on us in 2014 because of Xi Jinping's growing frustration, anxiety, disenfranchisement from the West, accelerated I think by a lot of Trump policies, and that's been very, very successful.

So, to your point, the challenges for us to try and divide them are substantial. The benefits are, you know, somewhat unclear at this point. But I do think that it's important to keep in mind that the Chinese, perhaps more than Putin, base their calculations, I think, on a pretty practical cost-benefit calculus, because I think Xi Jinping continues to be very focused on national rejuvenation. Of course, he has a party congress this year. The Chinese economy is facing a variety of structural headwinds. Now is not a good time for him to face an external security crisis. So I think it's important to keep in mind there are some sources of leverage there. But there are limits, given the ideas that Xi Jinping himself holds about global governance and domestic governance; his personal relationship with Putin; and I just think his deep skepticism of the West, democracy, our relative power, and China's positions globally.

Full stop there.

Dr. Lin: Thank you, Evan.

I do want at the end, potentially, to give Mike but also Andrea and Angela time to weigh in. But we also need to turn to Q&A shortly.

But before we do that, let me turn to Manoj for your perspective, particularly from your perspective on how India views the situation and would India view – does India believe it's important to keep Russia and China separate? Or, basically, whatever you want, however you want to weigh in from the perspective of India on the situation.

Mr. Kewalramani: Right. It's been fascinating. And I agree with a lot of what's been said, and I also disagree with a lot of what's been said. So I sort of just wanted to get to some of the points that I don't agree with because I don't want to repeat the agreements.

I don't think that there is a fundamental difference in the worldview of China and Russia. Sitting in India, when you look at China's use of force, it doesn't seem like there is – you know, the risk appetite hasn't increased. I think it

has significantly increased, and I think that's something that we need to be much more mindful of.

In terms of the extent of use of force and how that's used, yes, there is a difference in how China and Russia operate, but that's also a product of the external environments that they both face. Russia faces a historical environment which is very different. It has NATO right next door to it in some ways. China doesn't, and China doesn't want that to happen. So the use of force is focused on very different objectives, therefore, and I think that's what we need to keep in mind when we talk about how they use force.

In terms of, you know, how India views the Russia-China relationship, I mean, I want to echo something that Evan said, that, you know, I think if you look at it from a nascent point of view and you frame the discussion largely from the point of view of values of democracies and authoritarianism, to me, honestly, that's something that's not going to get you very far. You know, much of Asia and India specifically, there's a much more pragmatic approach. You know, if you've looked at Indian foreign policy historically, one of the biggest criticisms of Indian foreign policy domestically and perhaps internationally has been that, you know, it used to be far more ideologically motivated with a sense of idealism. Now, many will disagree with that, but at least what's happened right now is that there is much more pragmatism in Indian foreign policy.

How does India view the world? It views the world from a prism of – you know, of a sort of sense of disorder, a sense of churn that's taking place. And India looks at it, sort of this broader flux that we are witnessing, and says that, look, we have these tremendous economic challenges. We have an unstable external environment. We have a(n) extremely, extremely hostile security environment that we exist in geography – geographically. You've got Pakistan. You've got China. You've got Afghanistan on one side, which is in turmoil. And you've got potentially turmoil in Central Asia that can, you know, erupt at any point in time. So you've got a tremendously volatile security environment. In your maritime domain, you've got China entering in, potentially taking up ports. There's a big change that's taking place in that environment.

When you look at that, what you are looking at is, well, either you look for partners that you can ally with – but alliances come with costs. Can you and do you want to bear those costs? Are those alliances being offered at present? So, therefore, what India's fundamentally doing today is looking at pragmatic self-interest and saying, how can – in this world, where our options are shrinking and our threats are increasing, how do we expand our options and expand our room for maneuver? And that's the prism through which, I think, you know, the Indian government and the Indian foreign

policy establishment looks at the world at large, and including its ties with Russia.

In terms of the China-Russia relationship, my sense is that there is unease at present in New Delhi but there is – there isn't alarm. And if you look at India's reaction so far to this crisis and sort of speak to that, in terms of how it's balancing this deepening relationship between Russia and China, I mean, I think there are multiple things that they're doing within the framework of what I spoke about – of, you know, expanding their options.

There's expanding defense and economic cooperation with the United States, which is not a(n) immediate response to what's happening. There's an inherent logic with this and it's been happening for the past 20-plus years now. But recent events delivered greater impetus to do that.

There's engaging in issue-based coalitions. That's how we view the Quad, you know, and other sort of partnerships within the Indo-Pacific regional framework.

Expanding ties with sort of Central Asian countries. You had a historic summit with Central Asian leaders with the Indian prime minister recently. India wants to sort of have both deeper in Asia.

In sort of East Asia, you've had the sale of – you know, an agreement for sale of missiles to the Philippines. And those missile sale required, you know, cooperation with the Russians, because they developed them.

And finally, you've seen India engage in regional institutions, right? You've seen India engage with the BRICS, with SCO, and wanting to do that because this is an environment in which you have to have better options given the nature of the security environment and you can't be left off the table, therefore.

So with that sort of – that's, I think, largely what India – how India looks at the world, how it looks at the dynamic between China and Russia. There are sort of two points that I think I would want to highlight and end with.

First is that, you know, some of us here think that it's really important for New Delhi to start thinking about reducing its operational defense vulnerabilities by diversifying supplies or arms and ammunition. Currently, we are extremely dependent on Russian supplies and trade in that sense. And I think that's – you know, as with the pandemic and you realize the need for resilience economically, there's a realization, I think, that's setting in gradually with that also.

But, again, this is a long-term process. It's not going to happen immediately, and this is particularly critical, you know, when you're facing tensions on both, you know, your borders – both your land borders.

And, lastly, I mean, from the point of view of how Russia sees this relationship, my sense is that, you know – and we've spoken about this, that there is an asymmetry between China and Russia, and when you are in an asymmetric partnership you do want other factors and other actors to act as balances and I think that's somewhere how Russia also views, increasingly, the role of India vis-à-vis China.

I'll stop at that.

Dr. Lin: Thank you very much.

So Jude is reminding me we have five minutes left, and we did want to make sure that we went around the room and gave everyone time for final comments. So, Manoj, thank you very much.

Let me go to Mike first, followed by Evan, then Manoj and then Andrea, and end with Angela.

So, Mike, any last thoughts from your end?

Dr. McFaul: Well, I got lots of last thoughts – (laughs) – but you're not going to give me a chance to talk about them all. Fantastic conversation. We should do it again, Jude and Bonny, I think.

You know, let me just say two things that I think are food for thought for a longer conversation. Number one, Manoj, I want to be crystal clear. When I was talking about ideological powers around the world that was an analytic statement. You may want China to be pragmatic and the United States to be pragmatic and Russia to be pragmatic. But as I look at it – I just finished a book on this topic – they're not. They have ideological agendas and to pretend that they don't, I think, is an analytic mistake.

And number two, I actually think it's – you know, to say that it's pragmatic not to think about ideas, you and I can have a long argument about that. But I think it's in America's national interest to support ideas of democracy. I think that's served our security and economic interests for a hundred years. So let's be careful about using "pragmatic" to describe those things. It's not pragmatic, in my view, thinking about what Putin is about to do, to invade a country, the largest country in Europe. For what? I listened to Mr. Putin's speech. That was not a pragmatic speech. That was a very ideological speech.

Number two, Evan, you asked the best – for me, the hardest question. So, one, you say it analytically is there – what do we do prescriptively. And I take your point that mobilizing cold war – you know, I use different language when I write about this; not cold war, but whether we can shape that or whether that’s happening. Let’s just say we can shape it. Is it prudent or not in terms of policy?

And I would say two things. One, I think – I’m not sure we can because we are not the country that we were before. There are big parts of the Republican and Democratic Party that don’t want to have anything to do with that. They don’t care about Ukraine. They don’t care about that. That’s not our problem. That’s the first one.

And, secondly, I would just say, you know, remember, the Cold War we also had autocratic allies. We played a game that was – you know, sometimes we were talking about our values and sometimes we were allying with creepy crawlers and horrible regimes. You know, I think of the apartheid regime and Saddam Hussein. And I think what we need to do is learn the lessons from the Cold War for when that was necessary, because sometimes I think it was necessary, and when, I think, it led to undermining a grander strategy for how to be effective in this great power ideological world that, I think, we have now entered.

Dr. Lin: Thank you, Mike.

Evan?

Dr. Medeiros: Great. Thanks so much. Wonderful discussion.

Three points to end on. Point number one. The Ukraine crisis is a critical test for Xi Jinping. It’s hard for me to think of another foreign policy challenge that China has faced since Xi Jinping came to power in 2012 that tests so many different or – I shouldn’t say tests – stresses so many different Chinese interests simultaneously.

I framed it as a strategic trilemma. There’s all sorts of different ways to frame it. So this is going to be seminal and the choices that the Chinese leadership makes will tell us a lot about them.

Point number two, what it will tell us about them is the degree to which pragmatism – so cold cost-benefit calculations – versus ideology. And again, like Mike, ideology, small “I,” but a commitment to a variety of ideas about domestic governance and global governance actually inform how Xi Jinping makes decisions about foreign policy, right? The China foreign policy community where sort of we’ve all been raised and tutored on the Chinese – even Mao was sort of a coldhearted pragmatist when you tear away all the –

you know, all of the window dressing. But I think with Xi Jinping – and Jude and I are writing an article about this right now – I think with Xi Jinping there actually are a series of ideas that he's very committed to. And underneath those ideas are a series of assessments about the relative value of autocracy over democracy, and then more coldhearted calculations about an acceleration in America's relative decline. So I think that not only is this moment instructive, it's going to be instructive in a very seminal way about understanding ideas versus power in Chinese foreign policy, but also very specifically in the U.S.-China relationship.

Final final point – third final point is what should the U.S. do about it? And Mike and I might, you know, disagree about this a little bit. I do think we want to think about relative alignment. And Manoj and Andrea were right that the degree of violence that occurs over Ukraine and in Europe will be very important, because a higher degree of violence makes it more difficult for the Chinese and thus easier for us to sort of manipulate the Chinese. But absent that sort of high-end scenario, you know, the result may be that the approach the U.S. may have to think about taking is push them closer together in order to eventually bring them apart. And, you know, all of the commentators were absolutely right. There are points of convergence and divergence.

Some of the points of divergence, while, you know, very, very important – like Putin's affinity for disorder, Xi's, you know, desire for economic growth and ultimately rejuvenation – you know, those are fundamental, but they're also pretty far down the road. So it's unclear how quickly we're going to be able to operationalize them. But the reality is, is that the United States may have to be willing to tolerate a degree of, you know, friction and acrimony in the U.S.-China relationship, not wanting it or desiring it but tolerate it, in order to begin to affect Chinese calculations about relative alignment with Russia. Because, as I said, Putin ran Kissinger '72 on us. I don't think we should be trying to run Kissinger '72 on the Chinese right now, full stop there.

Over to you, Jude. Or Bonny. Sorry, Bonny.

Dr. Lin: Thank you, Evan.

So, Angela unfortunately had to leave already since we're two minutes over. But I still want to give one or two minutes to Manoj and then Andrea to close out.

Mr. Kewalramani: Thanks. Thanks so much, Bonny. I'm going to be really short here. So I was really happy to hear Ambassador Mike talk about the fact that, you know, I mean, I'd love to have this conversation with him further about the role of ideology. But what I wanted to say primarily was that when you look at it

from an Asian interests point of view, what is it that's going to attract a deeper partnership, is whether – you know, not whether democracy or this idea is going to serve your interests, whether your actual tangible interests are going to be met, whether your development goals, your security needs are going to be met. And, you know, ideas are critical, I agree. Yet, what is going to be prioritized is whether those immediate goals are going to be met, particularly when I look at it from an Indian point of view, given our hostile security environment and our tremendous developmental challenges.

Secondly, I wanted to make a point about, you know, we haven't spoken about the role of European states I think from a Chinese calculus. The response that Europe has and the level of pain and the level of – and the cost that the Europeans are willing to bear is going to be critical in terms of how also China responds to the situation. That's – considering we don't see massive escalation, even on massive escalation, I mean, it's silly to sort of think of individual lives in that sense, but, you know, if there is an occupation of Kyiv, I think we also have to think of how long does that occupation last, and what is the human cost of it. All of those, I think, are factors that will shape how Beijing will eventually respond or not respond.

And the final point is that, to me, I sort of say that this balancing act that we're seeing today, to me things are qualitatively different from 2014 for China and Russia. Things are qualitatively different between the United States and China. You know, you're not going to – a China, which is on a daily basis talking about how the United States is fundamentally looking to contain it, is not going to be pried away. You're not going to see a split. None of that is going to happen immediately.

And final final point, sitting in Asia, you know, we do think about how much of what's happening in Europe will divert American energies and resources away from the Indo-Pacific. I think that is a genuine concern that exists in Asia.

I'll stop with that. Thank you.

Dr. Lin: Thank you, Manoj.

Andrea, final words?

Dr. Kendall-Taylor: OK. I'll also try to be quick.

I'll just say I think the Russia-China partnership is consequential, as we've all said. I think after Ukraine it's going to continue to be consequential if not deepen in areas that matter quite a lot to the United States. And we talked about, I think, in the defense domain it's particularly important, as well as

the democracy and human rights. I mean, I think that is the area where there are the fewest limits on what they are willing to do together.

They're popularizing an authoritarian governance model. They're exporting their best practices. They're watering down human rights. They're backing each other up in multilateral forums. I mean, the list goes on and on. So I think even if China's not out front and blatantly backing up Russia, there's areas of their partnership that they can still continue to work together and deepen, and that are consequential to the United States.

I agree with Evan there are these natural fissures in the relationship that might eventually push them apart. But as all of the other panelists have said, that's a long ways away. And in the meantime, they have the ability to really complicate and push back against U.S. interests. And so we – you know, we have to think about what to do.

I agree with Mike that building kind of allies' coherence and unity is really important. Building resilience is really important. But I think it's not the – we can't just stop there. I think we have to think about how we disrupt the partnership. You know, we were – Jude was talking about how do we pull at the seams of their relationship. I think our goal has to be to limit the extent to what they're – they're willing to do together.

I really liked Evan's idea about, you know, showing China the costs for backing Russia, and I think one interesting approach to that is through Europe. And we know that China really cares a lot about Europe and they don't want a Europe that's in full alignment with the United States. And so if we can get the Europeans in particular to articulate to China that there will be costs, I think that's one way that you could put some brakes on, again, what China is willing to do for Russia in this case.

But again, I think that that's the goal. We're not going to pull them apart, but we just want to limit the extent to what – that they're willing to do for each other.

Dr. Lin:

Thank you very much, Andrea.

And thank you very much for the other panelists – Manoj, Mike, Evan, and Angela – for joining us. We had a very rich discussion today and I think we could have continued this conversation for at least another hour, but in the interest of time and since we're already seven minutes over we'll have to wrap it up here. Jude and I thank everyone for joining us and we look forward to future discussions.