

Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT

Online Event

## **“Toward a Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis?”**

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FEATURING

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Jude Blanchette: Well, good morning, everyone. My name is Jude Blanchette and I'm the Freeman Chair in China Studies here at CSIS. Thank you all for joining us this morning for this important discussion of the events surrounding Speaker Pelosi's recent trip to Taiwan, Beijing's response, and some discussion about where we go next.

This event is a joint production of CSIS and the Brookings Institution, and I'm really delighted to be co-hosting this with comrade Bonny Lin, the CSIS China Power Project; and comrade Ryan Hass, who's the Michael Armacost Chair in Foreign Policy at Brookings.

I think everyone who's dialing in for this event will be well aware of the reason for this discussion, the context, and will have followed the basic outlines of events over the past few weeks and days. So I'm going to spare everyone a recitation of that, and instead make use of the 90 minutes we have here to help facilitate a discussion amongst a truly all-star panel. When Bonny, Ryan and I were thinking about this event last week, we put together a list of who would we want, what are some sober, objective minds who could help us think through this really important time with objectivity and far-sightedness. And Bonnie, Bill, and John were the three first names we thought of.

So, delighted to be welcoming Bonnie Glaser, who's the director of the Asia Program at the German Marshall Fund here in the United States, and a former colleague here at CSIS.

Bill Klein, who's a consulting partner with FGS Global. But many of you will know him as a career Foreign Service officer, whose most recent posting from 2016 to 2021 included deputy – acting deputy chief of mission, chargé d'affaires ad interim, and minister counselor for political affairs at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing.

And John Culver, who is currently a non-resident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council's Global China Hub, but before that a career intelligence officer – analyst – excuse me – at the CIA, including from 2015 to 2018 serving as the national intelligence officer for East Asia at the NIC.

So, the three individuals here bring decades and decades of experience looking at the relationship between the U.S.-Taiwan, the cross-strait relationship, and U.S.-China relations. So, we are – couldn't be better positioned.

In terms of logistics for today's event, I'm going to moderate the discussion, passing questions back and forth between our panelists and also, I – because

we have Ryan and Bonny Lin as well, I want to utilize their talents and perspectives. So, we're going to draw them in as quasi-panelists as well. In terms of participation from the audience, we welcome questions at any point. If you go to the CSIS website, go to events, click the link for this event, you'll see a little button you can click that will say "ask questions here." Please send those at any time, and we'll be culling through those. And I'll layer those into the discussion if they're in the same direction as where the conversation is going. Otherwise, I'm going to try to reserve the last 20 to 30 minutes for Q&A. And then we'll wrap up with some concluding remarks by Bonny Lin and Ryan Hass, helping to pull together some of the threads of this discussion, and then maybe offering some thoughts on where we go from here.

But I wanted to start by just turning the panelists in succession, and asking for – first of all, some top-line thoughts. This has been an incredibly fast-moving story. It's both helpful that we're doing the event today, but also unhelpful because tomorrow things could be in a different place. So, with that caveat in mind of we're sort of looking at a moving target here, how do people assess Pelosi's trip? I think especially what are we seeing from Beijing right now in terms of their response? And what is that telling us about how Beijing is assessing the trip, its significance? And what is Beijing trying to accomplish with its actions over the past 48 or so hours?

John Culver, if I may, I'd like to start with you. You've gotten a jumpstart on most of us this morning in looking at events of just the past few hours. So, what are your initial thoughts, reactions? And also, it might be helpful for the audience if you might catch us up on what some of the events of just the past few hours are.

John Culver: OK. I'll start with – well, first, thank you, Jude and Ryan, for having me on this panel with some very respected colleagues and former government officials.

I think that we are in a new period. I think part of the main purpose of China's actions, which commenced this morning with at least five ballistic missiles fired into the military-exercise area they announced a couple of days ago that ring Taiwan, which is itself unprecedented, it looks like at least one of the missiles overflew Taiwan, almost right over Taipei, if the reporting this morning via the Japanese Ministry of Defense is accurate.

And I think that this is the new normal. The Chinese want to show, as they have in previous Taiwan Strait crises, that a line has been crossed by the speaker's visit. We can debate if we think that's a legitimate beef by the Chinese. But I think we're in a new era. And I base that on a couple of things. One is the trajectory of U.S.-China relations, where the prospect that the U.S. will, you know, retreat from the precedent – it's not the mid-'90s anymore. The context is entirely different.

Also, really since at least 2002, the Chinese have not done these – you know, military, loud, noisy military demonstrations haven't been their modus operandi, as we saw in the South China Sea, where they built islands and large military bases in the mid-2010s, the Senkaku issue in 2012 that also came to a head just before the 18th Party Congress.

What China did in those and on the Indian border has been to permanently alter the status quo, where they can have more sway over the trajectory going forward. I mean, in the Senkakus, for example, the Chinese responded in 2012 for the first time by sending Coast Guard vessels inside territorial waters around the Senkakus. They continue to do that to this day, regularly.

So I don't know how this ends. We have seen how it begins. There's no natural end date, as there have been in past cross-Strait crises tied to a Taiwan election or an upcoming leader-level visit with the United States. So I think we're in kind of an open-ended period here. We're just going to have to wait and see how it plays out over the next few days as these Chinese military exercises ringing Taiwan continue, and then in the ensuing weeks and months.

Mr. Blanchette: Great. Thank you, John; very sobering opening remarks.

Bonnie Glaser, if I could turn to you next.

Bonnie S. Glaser Sorry. I was unmuting my mic. Good morning, everyone.

Great summary by John Culver as to what is going on in the military realm. I want to make a couple of points. One is that, from conversations I've had over the last couple of days with Chinese experts, I'm told that there is a great deal of frustration and disappointment, not only in the sort of public opinion, but in the Chinese sort of scholarly community.

There has been a groundswell of support for a very, very strong reaction by China. Now, whether or not they knew in advance that China was going to fly missiles over Taiwan and then perhaps in all of these areas very close to Taiwan, where they are splashing down, so maybe that will change. But my – from what I was told, there was quite a bit of dissatisfaction. There's a sense that the United States has crossed China's red lines.

What I've seen is a really effective use by China of the statecraft, that China has been amassing these tools for quite some time. And of course, there was a long period in the runup to this visit, so China had quite a bit of time to prepare. And we have seen some, I think, use of economic statecraft against Taiwan, not just boycotting large numbers of agricultural goods, which come

from southern Taiwan – and of course, this is then intended to influence the voters in southern Taiwan not to support the DPP – but also, essentially, sanctions on companies who are providing support to the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy and the development assistance arm of Taiwan's government. So this is relatively new. We'll probably see more rolled out. We have not seen any diplomatic action yet. But so far, the coordination of the government and its various actions, I think, have been quite effective in putting pressure on Taiwan.

But I want to agree with John here that this is not just to take punitive actions against Taiwan. It really is to change the status quo, and if we look at the prior episodes that – in which China has done this, of course, John mentioned the Senkakus in 2012; 2015, and '16 where the island building in the South China Sea was absolutely a change in the status quo in China's favor, and I think that, perhaps, China signaled its intentions when it said that it does not view Taiwan Strait as international waters. So I think some people saw this coming.

This is a moment in U.S.-China relations – again, I would like to agree with John on this – where we are at a very – really, a low point but a dangerous, acrimonious state of the relationship. Distrust is at an all-time high. There, of course, is some dialogue taking place but it's not problem-solving or even problem-managing dialogue. There's exchanges of lists and talking points, primarily.

So I am concerned. I'm particularly concerned about the Chinese lack of confidence in U.S.'s One-China policy in its statements on Taiwan. So when you have the president say things like, we don't support Taiwan independence and we still adhere to our One-China policy, if that rings hollow in Beijing then we are at a very difficult point.

So I think the Chinese took these set of actions – just to conclude – to shore up their red lines, to signal that future incremental actions by the United States, as they would say, to slice the salami, will be extremely dangerous and that the United States and Taiwan have to stop here, that we are sort of looking over the precipice, and I hope that our two governments will find a way forward to talk about their intentions, their red lines, their concerns, and prevent a continuous downward spiral in the relationship.

Mr. Blanchette: Thank you, Bonnie. Great, great comments. I think I'll stop saying sobering comments because I'm sure after everyone's remarks I'll end up saying sobering comments.

Bill Klein, if I could turn to you next.

William Klein: Yes. Good afternoon from Berlin. I'm very delighted to see you all and very, very honored to be part of this conversation today.

You know, given that events on the ground are changing so rapidly, I would like to take, perhaps, one step back and share with you my perceptions of how I see Chinese views and perceptions evolving over this topic over the past few years because I think this is very, very important to shape how China has viewed the Pelosi visit and is shaping the reaction that we see unfolding before us now.

So, you know, the idea that the United States wants to contain China, that the United States wants to disrupt China's modernization aspirations, has always been part of mainstream Chinese strategic thought. When I worked in Beijing, I saw how this became mainstream majority opinion during the Trump administration. I also observed how it became a near consensus opinion and hardened these views during the initial months of the Biden administration.

For that reason, as China now looks at the United States, it does ascribe to the Biden administration the intentions, as I said, to contain China and also to disrupt China's modernization aspirations. And there are no shortage of examples that the Chinese use to connect the dots – American actions, American statements – that they use, then, to underscore their view about U.S. intentions.

Given the fact that Taiwan is so central to Chinese nationalism, to Communist Party legitimacy and to U.S.-China relations, these perceptions have also, then, shaped how the Chinese view U.S. intentions towards Taiwan. I am very confident that there is now a strong mainstream view within the leadership, but also within broader Chinese society that the United States does aspire to separate Taiwan from China indefinitely; that, as Bonnie said, that the One-China policy is ringing hollower and hollower in the view of many, many Chinese. I am not saying this to somehow either support or express sympathy with the Chinese point of view, but I'm trying to categorize what I experienced and what I continue to see in Chinese actions and words.

So, against that backdrop, indeed, the Chinese have seen the visit of Pelosi as one mosaic stone in a broader constellation of U.S. efforts, and the Chinese have responded commensurate to the risk and the threat and the challenge that they see to their ultimate aspirations for Taiwan.

We may, from a U.S. or from a broader European perspective, believe that China's concerns are exaggerated, that they are unfounded, that they are a misreading of U.S. intentions, but the fact of the matter is, this is what China now sees and this is the reaction that we are seeing.

Moving forward, in the next couple of days I would be very cautious to speculate about what the Chinese will do next. I would, however, wager the observation that I do not believe that the Chinese are interested in a conflict, in a military conflict with the United States over Taiwan at this point in time. I do believe that the Chinese leadership sees that it needs a stable and predictable external environment for its domestic modernization aspirations and that it will aspire to react at a threshold below the risk of direct military confrontation with the United States. I may live to regret that statement in the next couple of days, but I'm very, very confident that that is the most likely scenario moving forward.

Having said that, I would fully agree with John and Bonnie's assessment that we are in a new era, that this has shifted the context of engagement. I would argue that if a year ago China suddenly did what we are observing now, right, the entire world would be in uproar and there would be a very, very strong U.S. response. Well, what are we seeing? We'll see in the next couple of days, but it does appear that the world will wait and observe all of this, figuratively and literally, fly over in the coming days. So China has elevated the stakes, has demonstrated again where its red lines are, and that moving forward we will continue to see uncertainty characterize the entire relationship, that this will continue to feed the distrust, the strategic distrust, and the competition at the heart of the relationship.

The only way out of this is for the two sides to acknowledge that they have a common interest in not allowing this, these differences and these tensions, to descend into conflict and confrontation. My assessment is that the two sides understand what is at stake and that moving forward we will see them engage in activities to prevent what we are observing now from escalating.

So those are just a few initial observations. Again, thanks very much for being part of the discussion today.

Mr. Blanchette: Great. Thanks, Bill.

I'd like to now turn to my fellow co-hosts for their – any initial thoughts or comments. Bonny Lin, if I could turn to you first.

Ms. Lin: Thank you, Jude. Just some initial thoughts building on John, Bonnie, and Bill mentioned.

I guess the first thing I would point out is, so far, the Chinese retaliation response to Speaker Pelosi's visit has been mainly targeted at Taiwan, right? And we're seeing very limited actions so far against the United States. Most of the military action that China has engaged in, China timed to occur after Speaker Pelosi has left.

I would note that as we're looking at the Chinese response, particularly given my focus on military response, it's important to look at what China has done, as well as what it hasn't done. So Bonnie mentioned the significant Chinese sentiment among its netizens, right, to take significant action against Speaker Pelosi. There were a number of folks advocating that – Chinese citizens advocating to shoot down Speaker Pelosi as she was flying in.

But the Chinese did not do that. And we saw, in some ways, much more caution in terms of its operations when we were flying in. It's also interesting to note that when China released information about its military exercise on August 4th, that notice was given on August 2nd. So there was some time for civilian airlines, maritime traffic to redirect. It wasn't exactly a very quick, snap exercise they organized in 12 hours. It was much more timed for the international community, as well as Taiwan, to potentially rescind.

What was interesting was when China first released that exercise announcement, the actual timing of the exercise was supposed to start at 6:30 a.m. But as we've seen over the days, the timing for the start of the exercise actually shifted to noon. And my sense of this is – my understanding of – well, my interpretation of why China might be doing so is if China were to commence significant exercise at 6:30 a.m., it might involve flowing assets to particular regions during the dark, in the wee hours of the morning, which would have been more difficult for us to – as well as Taiwan – to interpret what was going on.

So, what I'm trying to say is as we look at what China is doing, I completely agree with John, and Bonnie, and Bill that we're entering a very dangerous moment. But we're still seeing some degree of caution that China is exercising. And I would say that that degree of caution is mainly against the United States, not so much against Taiwan. So, as we move forward, I would pay a lot of attention to in what ways China's escalating against Taiwan, how that differs from the actions that China is taking against the United States.

Mr. Blanchette: Thanks, Bonny.

Ryan.

Ryan Hass: Well, there's already so much wisdom that's been shared, I'm not sure how much more there is to add. But I will try to offer two perspectives. The first is, what is China trying to do with its response? My sense is that they really have a couple of objectives. I think, as Bonnie was suggesting, they want to find a way to punish the people of Taiwan, to show them that there are costs and penalties for saddling up so closely to the United States. I think they want to try to convince the people of Taiwan that the United States is impotent to block or obstruct the pressure that China is placing upon them.

And I think they also want to try to show their own people that they're reacting strongly and firmly in the face of the speakers' visit.

All that said, you know, I think it's also worth just taking another step back and thinking about the situation that China finds itself in, because they also face a strategic dilemma. They don't have a sellable proposition to the people of Taiwan. The one country, two systems formula that they have used is – the predicate for the path to peaceful reunification – is basically not sellable after China's actions in Hong Kong. A military operation to seize Taiwan by force would be an existential roll of the dice with a very uncertain outcome, that could really put in peril the continued longevity of the Chinese Communist Party.

And so they're left with this unsatisfying middle ground of coercion without violence, of trying to wear away the psychological confidence of the people of Taiwan, and to try to persuade them that resistance is futile, and that the only path to peace and prosperity runs through Beijing. And I think that's what we're seeing take place right now. These exercises, these demonstrations of force, they're significant, they're troubling, they're concerning. But they fall within that realm, up to this point. And so that should inform the way that the United States approaches this as well. If Beijing is trying to wear down the psychological confidence of the people of Taiwan in their future, that should be a guidepost of where the United States should focus its efforts – on mitigating the corrosive effects of these campaigns.

And I guess my proposition to you all would be that the United States will have more space to make meaningful progress by occasionally demonstrating visibly its strong support for Taiwan, but more often saying less and doing more. You know, adhering to Teddy Roosevelt's dictum to speak softly and carry a big stick. I think we've inverted that equation a little bit in recent days, and it'd be nice in the coming period for us to get back on track.

Mr. Blanchette: Thanks, Ryan. And thanks, everyone, for some initial opening remarks.

I wanted to just swing back around, just because this is kind of happening in real time and I suspect will be where the conversation is this morning, to these short-range ballistic missiles that were fired. Ministry of Defense is now putting out – thanks to the wonders of the internet, I can multitask here, host an event, and then have the internet up here. But it appears the ministry of defense is – you know, has put up a map showing where the missile landings were. And you've got sort of 16 – it looks like 16 missiles in total, with a good chunk of those out in the sort of eastern closure area.

An overfly of the island is a significant escalation. And the base line – you know, many have been using is '95-'96, of course, because that's the last one. But it's just civil-military relations are far different. The capabilities of the PLA are far different.

I wanted to come back around to the significance of this as an escalation. I think – you know, later on in this conversation we're going to talk about maybe the implications of the Pelosi trip, what it says about our position and the clarity of the One-China policy, but to put that aside for a second, because we now have the PLA overflying the island with missiles

So, John, maybe I'll circle back around to you. I wanted to get thoughts on the implications of this. What does this tell us about where China is on the escalation ladder? Twenty-four hours ago I was hearing some people telling me the initial reaction from Beijing was muted; you know, was carefully calibrated. And I think, because I was parroting what I had heard, you know, you and Bonnie Glaser say, I was saying back – it's early days yet. We don't know where this is going. We're now day two and they're overflying the island.

Implications of this? And to your point on changing the status quo, now that we have sort of broken the seal on an island overflight, what does that mean for where the new threshold of expectations and escalations are for China? And then, finally – I know this is beginning to be a very long question – what is our appropriate response here, given that this is something we've always had as a what-if has now just happened?

Mr. Culver: Yeah, that is a lot. Let me – I'm careful about the unprecedented, because all it tells you is the first time they did something, not that what they've done necessarily leads to a deepening crisis or war.

As far as I know – what did you say, the total was 13 missiles fired?

Mr. Blanchette: Sixteen; and just to say that, looking at the link that you sent through the Japanese ministry of defense, it sure looks like one went over Taipei, broadly looking at the flight path.

Mr. Culver: So these are – as far as I know, these are all ballistic missiles. I say that because it's hard to see low-flying cruise missiles if you're on a Japanese or U.S. warship or in Taiwan. So when these are launched, if they're the DF-15s and DF-16s, they fly exo-atmospheric. So, when they're over Taiwan, they're in outer space briefly. And then they fly a straight ballistic arc, with some maneuvering near the target, to evade missile defenses. There aren't any in this case.

So it's significant. It's unprecedented. But what would be more significant is if China followed up, you know, if what we're seeing might be a rehearsal of kind of the standard war plan, which begins with a joint firepower strike carried out largely by ballistic and cruise missiles, and then is followed by naval and air exercises, if what they are kind of rehearsing or demonstrating here is the ability to use joint firepower strikes for a blockade, the next step should be air and naval maneuvers.

So it'll be significant, you know, after – you know, we've got two more days of this, based on their announcement of the closure areas on August 2nd. If they follow up with significant air and naval activity in these closure areas or exercise areas or newly announced exercise areas, then I think the benchmark for things the Chinese don't intend to take back goes up.

If you see manned aircraft fly over Taiwan or drones or unmanned aircraft fly over Taiwan and its offshore islands, some of which are right off the coast of China, then that raises this definition of new normal. These are the kind of things they're going to be doing, if not routinely, at least more regularly if the U.S., or especially Taiwan, take new actions that they believe deserve or need a response.

So – but the thing is we're focusing on the military. I'm glad you kind of slapped down the '95-'96 example because that was a very long 27 years ago, I guess, if I'm doing math right. It's a very different PLA. This is a very capable, highly modern, well-equipped military that's been preparing for this mission – the Taiwan mission – for all of those years since the mid-'90s when China had little capability to actually effect military force to compel unification.

The problem is, is some of the most significant things like ones Bonnie mentioned – Bonnie Glaser – and, I think, Bill references, China has myriad ways across the entire kind of spectrum of diplomatic, economic, information, cyber, in which to alter the status quo. They won't get as much attention as missile launches around and over Taiwan, but they could be more significant for the longer-term trajectory of cross-strait and in Sino-U.S. relations, and those are going to be harder to track and won't get the kind of public attention that they deserve.

For the United States – well, I know Ryan invoked Teddy Roosevelt. I'll follow his example and evoke Winston Churchill – never let a good crisis go to waste. You know, the problem with U.S.-China rivalry as it's kind of mushroomed over the last five years has been that it's sort of competing for the sake of competition and it's now kind of devolving toward adversarial enmity and, you know, we should be able to use this crisis similar to the way the Cuban missile crisis aftermath played out where the two sides found a

reason, and Ryan alluded to these, which isn't about improving relations necessarily. It's about preventing war.

It's about putting in some firm guardrails and means for crisis communication so that even if we don't want – we don't think China has anything meaningful to say through normal diplomatic channels it's important that we have a path to express our views, to shape their thinking, not speak around them only through allies or third parties or to the multinational arena, but to talk directly to them so we are heard clearly, and then try and lay some foundation under the descent of the relationship so that we can, again, work toward preventing war.

Mr. Blanchette: I want to keep just on this for a minute and, Bonnie Glaser, I want to go to you next.

I want to – I was going to say some might say, but usually when someone says that it means what they're thinking. So I'll just be honest and say I just heard what John said at the initial part of his remarks and because he is an expert in this he was able to tell me where the flight path would go and how that there might be more truly escalatory maneuvers they would make.

Being hoi polloi, though, I see that the PLA is now firing short-range ballistic missiles over the DF-15s over Taipei, and being hoi polloi, I think wow. And because a lot of the point of these actions is symbolic and is about political messaging, while I'm sure John is right that there's a lot more that the PLA could do that would really significantly up the ante from the view of most of us, this looks like a significant escalation.

Am I missing it or did John just move the goalposts on us a little bit about where actual escalation is?

Ms. Glaser So, Jude, I think that the Chinese started with the notion that they absolutely had to do something that they had not done previously. I think that they wanted to demonstrate resolve, as I said earlier, and I think they also wanted to respond to what they knew was this domestic upsurge of anger at the United States and Taiwan.

And I want to mention that I heard from somebody in China that there were millions of people on WeChat, so much so that, apparently, it crashed. There was so much attention in China to this visit everybody was watching and trying to track the episode and her plane just landing, you know, in Taiwan.

So, my view is that there are two things that are very worrisome. Flying the missile over Taiwan – I think John correctly flagged whether we'll see naval and air activity. Will the Chinese fly fighter jets inside the territorial airspace?

But what also concerns me is this rehearsal for a blockade. This is very different than '95-'96. The closure zones surround the island. This is the signal that China is trying to send, that they have the capability to implement a blockade around Taiwan. And so, I think that also is worrisome.

You asked what the U.S. should do in response. And I do want to say that allies and partners, particularly in the region, I think are worried about the potential escalation to a U.S.-China conflict, and want to avoid that, of course. But they also don't want the United States to be seen as weak. The Chinese are using their military to bully and intimidate. And as John reference earlier, there's even Chinese missiles that are falling in the East China Sea, that's close to Japan. So I think that the United States will use its military assets in the region to conduct some exercises of our own. And we have a significant amount of military assets that are deployed there.

So I'm a little bit more concerned than John is. Of course, he said – to be fair – it's not over yet. We have days to watch. And this may roll out over the coming weeks and months. But I also am concerned about the possibility that this is not just a one-off series of exercises. That, as John and I both said earlier, that this is the new normal. This is changing the status quo.

The last thing that I want to say is, although I completely agree with Bonny Lin that the punitive actions that Beijing has taken so far has been against Taiwan, and that this is consistent with long-standing practice of primarily punishing Taiwan for efforts that the United States is taking to strengthen Taiwan's security. Nonetheless, it is, I think, important to at least note that China's Foreign Ministry spokesman yesterday, Hua Chunying, said China's countermeasures will be continuously felt by the U.S. side and Taiwan independence forces. So it might be a little bit premature to conclude that Taiwan is going to be the only target. So we'll have to see what kind of measures China takes against the United States going forward.

Mr. Blanchette: Yeah, and just – I know we're going to put aside comparisons to the '95-'96, but I'd just say for a moment that did last from July of '95 till, you know, March-ish of '96. So there's – if we can borrow some precedence, what we're seeing here may just be, you know, the opening salvos of a – of a prolonged campaign.

Bill, you were in the embassy up until – the Beijing Embassy – up until last summer. If you were there now – so you've now got – some of the exercises, as John was just texting us, are now into Taiwan territorial waters. You have an overfly of Taiwan. Again, rough look at the flight path on a map, it's near Taipei. Japanese press is reporting that some of the short-range ballistic missiles have fallen into Japan's EEZ. That's not territorial waters, but clearly given the precision of these is now implicating Japan on this. What would be

your read of the messages and signals China is trying to send here? And where do you think we are on the – sort of the alarm spectrum of escalation?

You're on mute, Bill. Or you're speaking very quietly.

Mr. Klein:

Sorry. Jude, maybe one observation up front: When we woke up this morning, having conversations with friends, partners in China, there was a mood there like: Is this – is this all? Is this it? What, she landed? We didn't prevent this? So there was a – let's say, a mood in China, an expectation in China, that the government, the PLA, would prevent Pelosi from landing. And so, I think the initial reaction was one of surprise. And there was a lot of criticism, as we have seen.

Now, whether the government is taking this into account and calibrating its response is anybody's guess at this moment. But what we do – what we can observe, is that a political or a public opinion had gone perhaps beyond where the government is willing to take this episode. So from a perspective – again, from a Chinese perspective, I mean, everything I am seeing and observing continues to lead me to believe that the Chinese are reacting pursuant to their risk assessment – that they saw this visit as a game changer by the United States, that this was an elevation of the relationship beyond a threshold that China was willing to accept, and that it needs to respond accordingly.

I still think that they are – that they will calibrate this response in order to assure that it does not risk escalating to direct military conflict with Taiwan or the United States. Again, it's very, very early. We are seeing some very dramatic moves. But I still sense that the political calculation behind the – behind what we are seeing is still one of a calibrated and measured response.

Obviously, from a Western perspective, this may seem very, very aggressive. But I think, from a Chinese perception, it can still be perceived as a calibrated response.

As Bonnie mentioned, indeed, I think that the bluntness of the Chinese response will be felt by the people in Taiwan, that this is what we have generally seen in responses to perceived violations of Chinese red lines, that a lot of effort will go into trying to shift the risk assessment on Taiwan, not only through these military activities but also through other gray-zone activities that we're going to be seeing, I think, in the coming weeks and months.

Generally, you know, moving forward, you know, what are China's options? And what should the United States response be? (Audio break.) If we look at what the U.S. interests are, these are preserving peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait. This is about ensuring that neither side can change the status quo unilaterally, that any evolution of the status quo across the Strait

is done with the support of the people on both sides of the Strait, including the people in Taiwan through the institutions of their democracy, and that the United States continues to protect Taiwan's democracy, its freedoms, and its unfettered access to the outside world.

In short, if those are indeed the U.S. – if those indeed are still the U.S. objectives – I believe they are – then, if you look at all the options, then the most viable and successful option, in my view, continues to be the traditional adherence to the One-China policy. That includes sufficient military deterrence. That will change over time. And I defer to our two Bonnies, who are the experts on this, to outline what that means as China's capabilities and determination grows.

It's also supporting Taiwan, as Ryan had mentioned. But it is also about communication with the Chinese, not only to underscore the old red lines, but also – and it's been my experience that communication does lead to a deeper understanding of the other side's intentions. It does lead to a deeper understanding of the other's red lines – which red lines are flexible, which red lines are hardwired – and that this allows a far better response.

Without this type of communication, the risk of misunderstanding the other side's perceptions and intentions grows. And then also the ability to make calibrated judgments and responses diminishes, and thus the risks increase.

So moving forward, there is no alternative, in my view, to communication between the two sides. As John said, perhaps this is an opportunity to recalibrate the relationship or to readjust the conversation about the intentions to ensure that what we are seeing now does not descend into conflict and confrontation.

Mr. Blanchette: Bill, what I'll do – I want to use that helpful segue you just made and sort of pivot the conversation a bit to some of the context around Pelosi's visit and what it tells us about Beijing's assessment of where U.S. policy on Taiwan is moving, and then a genuine question about where is U.S. policy on Taiwan moving.

One of the comments I've been hearing around the Pelosi visit, which I will just up front say I find ahistoric, disingenuous, and lacking context for events that have happened over the past few months and years, is that, well, what's the big deal from Beijing's point of view? We've done this. You know, Newt Gingrich went in '97. And so that has framed this as if this is an extraordinary overreaction by Beijing to what is a routine CODEL and that there's nothing to see here.

You know, Ryan and Bonny Lin, I'd like to turn to you next, but I'll editorialize for 14 seconds. You know, my view is – and as Bonny Lin and I

have talked about before – you know, Beijing has been messaging frustration with, as Bonnie Glaser said, you know, some of these slices of the salami for quite some time now and I think has grown genuinely unsure about what the U.S. – the broad U.S. position is under what we would call the One-China policy and if that was shifting and support for that was collapsing. You know, the challenge with the One-China policy is although we always say, well, it's the TRA, it's the three communiqués, it's the six assurances. It's really more of a dynamic, you know, understanding that has been arrived at, and so a precise definition of it is difficult.

But part of it depends on the ability of both sides to have a consensus view on what the other's position is, and I could forgive Beijing for a moment for thinking that things are undergoing a shift here in the United States. And you know, we could point to the long list of actions that have occurred on the U.S. side over the past months and years that do indicate, I think, that the position is moving – whether these are statements from President Biden; whether this is Nancy Pelosi's own op-ed in The Washington Post which dropped the second she landed, which talked about our – the TRA as a framework for our, quote, “diplomatic relationship” with Taiwan, which of course we do not have a formal diplomatic relationship.

So that was an editorial/question, Ryan, that I'm going to put to you first, which is: What's the big deal with just a normal CODEL going to Taiwan? Why the histrionics by Beijing?

Mr. Hass:

Well, thanks for the softball, Jude. (Laughter.)

I will – I will agree with you. I think that it's not very persuasive to suggest that Newt Gingrich traveled in 1997 so, therefore, this is no big deal. The context of Gingrich's visit was very different from the context of Pelosi's visit. Gingrich traveled to Beijing first. He was a member of the opposition political party, not a member of the president's party. The parity in military capabilities was much different than it is now across the Taiwan Strait. And the overall nature of the U.S.-China relationship was different then than it is now. So I would like to see us move off of this issue and talking about it because it just doesn't sell in China and it doesn't sell anywhere in the region. All we're doing is talking to ourselves when we make this point and it's not entirely persuasive on its merits.

What I would like to see us do is, you know, get to sort of a sensible, right-minded approach: move away from being righteous and ideological about these issues. That's what I think the region wants. That's what our allies and partners want. They want to see the fact that, yes, we recognize that Beijing's throwing a temper tantrum, and that we will respond steadily and resolutely to the temper tantrum, but we will remain focused on the real acute challenges to the lives of people in the region as well. Whether it's economic

issues, COVID issues, food security, energy security, we're not going to allow ourselves to become trapped into this tit-for-tat spiral game with China. We're going to be steady, we're going to be strong, we're going to be resolute, but we're going to keep our eyes on the biggest issues and priorities of the region. That's where I would like to see us go. I'm not sure if we'll be able to do so or if events will allow us to do so, but that's directionally I think the place that we should be aiming towards.

Mr. Blanchette: Bonny Lin, can I turn to you for any thoughts on this? I won't make you pick up where I just editorialized, but your assessment of Beijing's view of U.S. actions over the past few days, months, and even – and years, and how those might be affecting Beijing's own calculus for – in and around Taiwan.

Ms. Lin: So building off, Jude, what you and Ryan have mentioned, I do think Beijing is interested in using a relatively out-of-the-ordinary event to showcase to the United States and Taiwan that what they view as salami slicing from our end is not acceptable to them. So if it wasn't the Pelosi visit, I would be wondering if there were some other occasion that they would try to think about a way to escalate dynamics to show that they are – they are set on defending what they view as their interests on Taiwan.

What I would note is that what became more and more difficult for Chinese folks to understand was if Speaker Pelosi was going actually on a visit of her own, of a congressional visit to Taiwan, why was she being supported, for example, by various U.S. military assets, right? Why were we sending some of our most advanced warships and carriers to the region? Chinese citizens were tracking the locations of this. And as they saw these military assets appear in the region, it became increasingly difficult for them to sustain the belief that Speaker Pelosi was going there just by herself.

I want to jump on – really quickly – on a comment that John made earlier in terms of potential escalation. We have seen in the past week for the first time, according to Japanese media, an armed drone – a Chinese drone do a circumnavigation of Taiwan. We've also seen Chinese drones fly over Dongyin Island and, I think in the last 48 hours, a Chinese drone fly over potentially either Kinmen or Matsu. So one additional step we could see is a drone flying over Taiwan's main island. And that would be a less-risky next move than versus a manned aircraft that could be shot down. And so if I was the PLA, I would be thinking on maybe that as a next step, before sending an armed aircraft over the island.

Mr. Blanchette: Thanks, Bonny Lin.

Bonnie Glaser, can I turn to you next?

Ms. Glaser:

I wanted to comment briefly on the issue of how China itself is seeing the One-China policy, and whether there is any legitimacy to the concerns that they have. And so, essentially, I'd like to raise what is an unanswerable question, and perhaps a rhetorical one. But if the U.S. had not taken many of the moves that we have taken – and let's go back to the Trump administration. This did not begin in the Biden administration. But this erosion of the One-China policy. And I'll just mention a couple of things.

You know, in the Trump administration there was a Defense Department report that referred to Taiwan as a country. There were higher-level visits. Early in the Biden administration there was a sitting U.S. ambassador from Palau that visited Taiwan. We recently had an episode with the State Department page that describes U.S. policy toward Taiwan was changed for a brief period. And the statement that the U.S. does not support Taiwan independence was removed, and then it was put back in.

So I would say U.S. policy has been a bit confusing. And it looks like, from the perspective of China, they tend to think that the United States is doing things in a very deliberate way, in a coherent way. It's all done in ways that maybe looks like it's confusing, but they probably conclude that we are intending – or, the intent being important, to abandon the One-China policy, or to fundamentally redefine it in ways that are – that is unacceptable to Beijing.

So against this background, Nancy Pelosi goes to Taiwan. Of course, I've only mentioned a few things. Jude, you also referred to President Biden's statements, who has – of course, he has repeatedly said he would defend Taiwan. He's also said we have a commitment to do so, which last I read the Taiwan Relations Act we do not. So there's been some misstatements about U.S. policy.

But my question is: If all of these things had not occurred, if we had been more consistent, and disciplined, and coherent in our policy, would the Chinese have reacted to Nancy Pelosi's visit in the way that they are reacting? And my view is no.

Mr. Blanchette:

Yeah, thanks, Bonnie. That's a good counterfactual. Something that has been – and, by the way, I just have two recommendations. One is for folks who are on this – watching this. You've outed yourself as someone interested in these issues. So I'll say, Bonnie's recent – Bonnie Glaser's recent short half-hour interview on the CFR President's Inbox podcast I think is a really great primer both on what's happening here, but I think some of the broader issues that Bonnie was just discussing on Chinese perceptions of One-China policy. So I'd recommend that.

And then I was also just thinking, Richard Bush's book, "Difficult Choices," which is – a lot of the folks, I've noticed, in this discussion – the pop-up

experts are – many of them, security-focused, and don't focus a lot on Taiwan domestic politics. And so Richard's is a great one-stop shop, I think, for a lot of – for a lot of the important discussions, including on the One-China policy and the history of it.

I wanted to shift the discussion again and I'm actually going to now combine a lot of the questions that have come here. Many of them are – want to understand a bit more, hear some more analysis on the role of Chinese domestic politics, and I think, specifically, some of the timing around this for the Communist Party and Xi Jinping and some of the assumed pressures that may be shaping his decision-making.

We've talked about some of them here. Some of them have been so much popular attention to this that it's crashed Weibo. Some of this is disappointment at that's it from the Chinese response – why didn't we force her plane down.

What I've noticed on domestic politics in China and, specifically, atmospherics around decision-making in Beijing are this great empty void that you can fill whatever your preexisting opinion is because they're all unfalsifiable.

So you could come out of this saying Xi Jinping is – because of economic headwinds, you know, because of the upcoming party congress, he, quote, "can't look weak" and, therefore, has no room. He's sort of forced to do something.

You could also see this as Xi Jinping is large and in charge. There's no question he's going to get a third term and he's going to use this – you know, he's going to use this to his advantage, as John was saying, to sort of permanently alter the status quo; never let a good crisis go to waste.

We, fundamentally, can't answer those questions because we're not in Zhongnanhai and this is not like a temperature gauge where you can see, you know, exactly where this is. But we also can't be nihilists about this and say, therefore, because it's a black box, you know, shoulder shrug emoji.

So, John, I'd like to turn to you to ask if you can think out loud a bit on what do you think is occurring in and around Zhongnanhai right now that may be shaping how they're thinking about this moment? And I'm going to read one from – a question from someone who I know all of us here know, which is, do the discussants believe that the fundamental problem is that Xi feels he needs to show progress towards reunification at a time when PRC actions have helped create an atmosphere in Taiwan where progress is inconceivable? You know, was Pelosi's visit that much of a game changer or merely one more step along the road of increasing PRC pressure on Taiwan?

Did they, as you – John, you said sort of use this, not let this crisis go to waste?

So I'd just love to hear your thoughts on what the, sort of, atmospherics around the politics in Beijing are.

Mr. Culver:

It's been a tough, you know, couple of years with COVID and lockdowns after most of the West was coming out of our most restrictive measures. Real impact on Chinese economic growth. The latest quarterly results are pretty bad, both in business growth – of course, there's been a crackdown on property by the regime that's also taken a hit.

So, you know, not that long ago – I think, at the beginning of the year they announced really optimistic growth targets based on a COVID rebound. Those all seem unachievable now. You know, they were predicting 5 (percent) or 6 percent growth for the totality of 2022 and they'll be lucky if they aren't in a technical recession if they aren't already.

I don't subscribe to the view that Xi Jinping is having to fight his way to a third term. I think that the steps he's taken over the last 10 years have, really, kind of stripped any plausible challenge to his rule and continued rule away and, in a way, you know, part of his logic is that the rising adversarial nature and the struggles that China must conduct in order to maintain peace, stability, and achieve China's goals and even the China dream require a Xi Jinping type of leader whose father was a revolutionary elder.

But I think, you know, I'll pivot here and say any Chinese leadership is always careful about public perceptions and the possibility of unrest, and we've seen them, you know, allow public demonstrations over sensitive issues, especially sovereignty in 2012 and the various episodes with Japan. You've had major street demonstrations in Chinese major cities to the extent that the leadership had to order security forces to wind them down because once a protest starts in China it's hard to control where it goes. That's part of what drove the Tiananmen crisis.

I've never, though, in looking at China and Taiwan for 35 or more years seen a street protest over Taiwan, and I always attributed that to the fact that the public view China's policy as sufficiently tough and that's always part of the benchmark of how they judge the efficacy of policy. Is it tough? Does it look hard? Does it look like it's defending China in a rigorous manner?

And so one thing I'd look for in the ensuing weeks and months is if you see even the inklings of public protest about insufficient toughness in response to Taiwan and the United States, if you see street protests in major Chinese cities over this issue that are directly steered more toward the United States than Taiwan, then I become more worried about the internal environment

because all these pressures and lack of outlets, when things rise to the top where it puts people in the streets, it becomes an outlet for everything that's been aggravating 1.4 billion people or especially the hundreds of millions who live in major cities for about five years now.

So it's a risky time in that sense, that – the ability of the regime to absorb the totality of these challenges and then on top of that the most serious cross Strait situation, you know, in 27 or, you know, 20 years, then I think we're out of my comfort zone. We're out of my experience zone.

I think that we have to be careful that we don't rely too heavily on past precedent as some guide to what's going to happen going forward.

Mr. Blanchette: Bill, can I ask you kind of same question? Put your Beijing whisperer hat on.

What is your sense of the various pressures that might be operating to shape Xi Jinping's calculus right now? And just weigh in on the – you know, you hear this sort of "Wag the Dog" – wag the tail, wag the dog – "Wag the Dog" analogy of, you know, this might be actually useful for Xi Jinping if it can channel some nationalist, you know, sentiment in a way that distracts from, you know, as John mentioned, you know, the accumulating pile of challenges that Beijing is dealing with, not least of which is weakening economic growth.

How likely do you think that is as an operative strategy for Xi? And if not, what do you think is driving – how are domestic political factors driving his decision-making?

Mr. Klein: So I think what John said is absolutely correct, that policy towards Taiwan has to be perceived as sufficiently tough, sufficiently assertive, and this has grown – the sentiment has grown quite remarkably in recent years.

I do remember a time when people in China tended to look up to the people on Taiwan, tended to look up to Taiwan as a model for modernization, for economic growth, for innovation, for cultural creativity – all of these things.

I think that as China has caught up with Taiwan, as it were, as the people from China were able to visit Taiwan and see it with their own eyes, that – and as political sentiments towards China on Taiwan moved away from where China wanted Taiwan to go, that the public mood in China has changed and that it has become far more critical of Taiwan.

It has become far more dismissive of Taiwan, and this has strengthened overall the view that many of the people on Taiwan, certainly, many of the dominant political forces on Taiwan, are unappreciative, unthankful for

everything that China has done, and pose a fundamental risk to China's nationalist aspirations with respect to Taiwan.

So this mood is very, very much there. My sense is that with everything that has transpired in the last couple of years with the management of the narrative or the lack of management of the public narrative in China in the run up to the Pelosi visit, that public opinion has gotten far ahead of where the Chinese government is willing to take this dispute and what we are seeing now is the system trying to rein that back in. My expectation is that they will be able to do that with the tools that they readily and effectively deploy.

Having said that, they must channel that aggression. They must channel those sentiments. And I think that we will see that in the response overall to Taiwan, not only in the physical actions that we are observing in these days, but also how these actions are portrayed domestically in China, because most of the people in China depend on the local media, on local social media, for their information, and so it is possible then to shape these perceptions that China is getting very, very tough.

Looking forward, Jude, I think that China still looks at the Taiwan issue very strategically and in a very, very long-term perspective. I am very, very skeptical of people who either see specific timelines that – whether this is 2027 or 2035 or 2049. I don't think that China views it in that sense. Also, I think that China has sufficient tools to manage public opinion that you could see that the likelihood of Xi Jinping deeming it in his interest to be more aggressive towards Taiwan as an outlet for other domestic frustrations.

And so I would expect that moving forward you will continue to see strategic patience on the part of the Chinese and that the response – their activities moving forward will reflect their perceived risks. But I see that the other colleagues want to chime in here, so I'll stop there.

Mr. Blanchette: So I'm going to open it up, but I want to say to my comrades on the call I'm going to ask a very specific timeline question in a minute. So did anyone have any non-timeline thoughts that they wanted to chime in with? Ryan, you were first. Did you have a non-timeline thought?

Mr. Hass: I was just going to try to build very briefly on what John and Bill were suggesting because I think the Chinese are actually, you know, searching for the sweet spot. As John was describing, they want to stay ahead of public opinion, but I don't think that they want to trigger a crisis that leads to uncontrolled escalation. And so where is that space in between? And that's what they're trying to find right now.

It's going to be hard for the Chinese to find that sweet spot. And I expect that what we will watch in the coming days, weeks, and months is efforts to dominate the information narrative inside China and, to the extent that public dissatisfaction continues to bubble, and that bubble grows, you know, a reliance on repression to assert control over events inside China. So it's not only going to be a space to watch in the Taiwan Strait, but also inside China. And I'm glad that we're focusing on this question.

Mr. Blanchette: Bonnie Glaser, non-timeline thought.

Ms. Glaser: Quick comment directly related to the question that was posed by you, Jude, when you read out the listener's question. I think that there is nothing in this episode so far that has indicated that Xi Jinping's priority has shifted away from preventing independence to promoting unification. I don't rule out that that could take place, but from what I have seen of this episode it really looks to me like it is aimed at preventing independence, not promoting unification. We could see at the maybe 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress or NPC next year, as they flesh out this new comprehensive plan for resolving the Taiwan problem in the new era, perhaps we could see more movement toward trying to promote reunification, but I don't see that in this episode.

Mr. Blanchette: Bonny Lin?

Ms. Lin: Sure. I just wanted to jump in on a comment that Bonnie Glaser made in which, Bonnie, you mentioned that if the U.S. was more consistent in our Taiwan messaging and perhaps less in some cases and specific instances less forward-leaning on Taiwan, we might not see this episode right now in terms of Chinese reaction to Speaker Pelosi's visit. I'm not sure I completely agree with that scenario because, in that case, if Speaker Pelosi were still to visit and we were demonstrating less support for Taiwan and the Chinese still assessed that, from their perspective, the DPP seeks to promote Taiwan independence, I'm not sure in that situation necessarily that the Chinese would be more restrained. So I'm not exactly sure how they Chinese would react, but I do want to put that on the table that we – it is possible that regardless of how consistent our position on Taiwan was that China may be responding to what they see as problematic events on Taiwan.

Mr. Blanchette: I'd like to now pose my favorite question, which is the timeline question. And I'd like to get – I'd like to go around the horn. We've got about 10 minutes for Q&A and then I want to give space for Ryan and Bonny Lin, so if I could get somewhat concise. But if I can channel a lot of these questions and, indeed, a lot of the discourse we hear, outgoing INDOPACOM head Phil Davidson made a comment that soon became one of the very near term or very specific articulations of a, quote, "timeline" that Beijing had for what I – when it was going to unilaterally invade Taiwan. As Bonnie Glaser and I have spoken about with growing frustration, there has over the last week now been a new

timeline that has been introduced coming off the reporting of David Sanger that is now saying there are growing concerns that it is in the next 18 months. Some people point to the fact that Xi Jinping has made, as far as I can tell, two statements that relate to a non-specific specific timeline – that is, at the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress report, when he tied it to rejuvenation, which is 2049 that they had to resolve the Taiwan issue; and we’ve also seen Xi Jinping make a statement that this is a problem that cannot be handed down to successive generations.

So there’s a lot swirling around right now, and so I wanted to go down the row and just get a, first of all, yes or no on, you know, does China have a specific timeline that it’s – that it’s thinking about for this? And if not, how do you read this swirl of signals that is coming from Beijing where there is an element of time that seems to be operating here – they speak about it in time, whether that’s, you know, we can’t pass this down and/or this has to be tied to rejuvenation? Because I think this is a question that’s really provoking a sense of urgency and I would say anxiety here in the U.S. and is leading to, I think, those calling for a disbandment of strategic ambiguity because, if it’s inevitable that China’s going to do this and they’re going to do this soon, why are we pretending like this is, you know, 1987 and that we’ve still got a lot of time?

So, Ryan Hass, I’m going to go to you first. Timelines: Is China hellbent on an invasion? How should we think about this?

Mr. Hass: Well, I’ll take my cues from the director of national intelligence and the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, neither of which have affirmed that there are any timelines in place or that there are any indications of imminence of invasion. I think it’s actually unhelpful to our friends in Taiwan to appear so reactively anxious. You know, bedwetting insecurity is no more attractive in countries than it is in individuals. And I would much prefer for us to be steady, calm, confident, and assured of what our objectives are.

To your question, Jude, I think that this anxiety is driven by an assessment of capabilities, which are rapidly expanding on the part of the Chinese, and I think there’s probably a desire to inject a sense of urgency among our friends in Taiwan to adjust and upgrade their defensive capabilities.

Mr. Blanchette: Bonny Lin, to you next. And I should – you know, I should note that it’s not just – to be fair, this is not just the United States who is – I think is – or, some in the United States who are pushing this idea. We’ve heard – I know, Bonny, you and I have been in the room where we’ve heard others from outside of the United States make similar assessments, that Xi Jinping sort of has to resolve this Taiwan issue, you know, to secure or cement his legacy, and that he may want to do it sooner than later. How do you assess that very specific thing of timelines and confirmed intention to use military force to compel?

Ms. Lin: So I think the 18 months might be partially driven by the election cycle, both in Taiwan as well as the United States. But my personal sense is timelines are less important, but more important is what China views as U.S. or Taiwan crossing redlines. So I don't want to say that there's no chance that in the next 18 months that China could launch a major military operation, whether that's a blockade or another major military operation against Taiwan. It will depend on how – for example, how what we're seeing right now escalates and how that – how that moves forward. But I don't think, in my mind, that Xi Jinping has set a firm timeline for any particular – for example, in the next 18 months it is possible that in the – in the eyes of Chinese observers or strategists that 2049 may be a, what is it, non-timeline timeline in their head because that has been linked a couple of times. But even then, it would not be abnormal for Chinese leaders to not meet timelines or specific timelines.

So, I mean, there's a lot of flexibility on Xi's end. The main thing from the Chinese perspective is what they assess to be U.S. and Taiwan crossing redlines and when they would need to act.

Mr. Blanchette: Bill?

Mr. Klein: Yeah. I fully agree with Bonny Lin that it would be very untypical for the Chinese not to declare a timeline. But we have seen in the past that when they've hit those timelines, they've always declared victory irrespective of what reality looks like on the ground.

I also agree with Bonnie Glaser that China's approach to Taiwan is still focused on deterring outcomes that China does not want. I believe that what China's policy is is using not only military but also diplomatic, economic, gray zone communication measures, to delegitimize outcomes that China does not want, to disincentivize players in Taiwan, and the United States, and elsewhere from adopting or for propagating outcomes that China does not want. And that over time, narrowing the universe of acceptable outcomes for Taiwan, to the point that it is a – that they have very, very little say in the matter.

I think that is still their strategy. I view the reaction that is unfolding in front of us as a reaction, as an attempt to deter what they fear, namely pushing the envelope on Taiwan independence and/or on elevating the state of the – the nature of the relationship between the United States and China. I think that they will remain strategically patient. I think that this episode shows that if they perceive these red lines to be threatened, that they will act decisively. I think that is in the nature of this Chinese leadership. I think it is something that Chinese political opinion will expect from this leadership.

But I also think that this leadership perceives that the risks to their goals have increased significantly in recent years. But also, I think that they are increasingly confident that they are more and more obtaining the means – not only the military means, but also the political and economic means – to thwart outcomes inconsistent with their interests. So I expect them to be patient. All of the rhetoric of timelines notwithstanding, I would – I think the most likely scenario is that we’re not going to see any compulsions by the Chinese to launch an unprovoked invasion of Taiwan anytime on the horizon.

Mr. Blanchette:      Thanks.

Bonnie, to you. And also, I know you and Brian Hart did a piece a couple years ago looking at the – what was 2027 and what was it not. So any thoughts you have from that you might want to sprinkle in would be appreciated.

Ms. Glaser:            Yes. Thanks, Jude. I’d like to add a couple of things. That piece was basically about 2027 being a goal for developing military capabilities, but particularly because it’s the anniversary of the founding of the PLA. It’s a political goal. We have not seen anything in Chinese writings or statements that suggest that 2027, even if it is a goal for developing military capabilities, that it is military capabilities for a specific purpose related to Taiwan. So there’s been nothing specific that has said 2027, we have to have the capability to seize and control Taiwan, or to successfully conduct a blockade, or anything like that. So it’s not tied to Taiwan. But in my view, this is more of actually a political goal than it is a military goal. But I’m going to wait and see if John Culver disagrees with me, which is fine.

I’d like to say a couple of other things. First, there’s a context to a statement that you referenced, Jude, that people often forget. And that is Xi Jinping’s statement, which he has made twice, that the two sides should not pass on the differences from generation to generation. This statement was first made by Xi Jinping in 2013 at the APEC leaders meeting when he met with Taiwan’s representative, Vincent Siew. And the statement was, as it was quoted at the time, that in the long-term, political differences between the two sides must be resolved and not passed on from generation to generation.

But note the context. 2013, there was a very good relationship between Taiwan and China. We were not in the state that we are today. And I doubt that it was intended as a threat. So one should have a good conversation with Vincent Siew about the context of that statement. It was repeated by Xi Jinping in January of 2019. But of course, when speechwriters go to write speeches, they go back first and say: What has the top guy said previously? Let’s repeat that, and it was repeated verbatim.

The last point that I'd like to make is that the statement that reunification is a requirement for national rejuvenation, which was said at the 19th Party Congress in 2017. And yes, we have heard that repeated by many officials, including by Xi Jinping. This, to me, is a really interesting statement because certainly Xi Jinping will not be China's leader in 2049, at least according to actuarial tables. I think he'll be – (laughter) – he'll be 95 by then? So as – Jude, as you have written so eloquently, Xi Jinping is more concerned – prioritizes the 2035 goals probably over the 2049 goals. So to me, this is – if you want to call it a deadline or a timeline, just sort of like a soft deadline.

But really importantly, in my view, is that actually Taiwan has been an enormous factor in China's process of national rejuvenation. And Shelley Rigger's written a terrific book on this. There is so much that Taiwan has contributed to China becoming this really strong country. And therefore, it's actually hard to even make an argument that unification is necessary, other than in political terms. You know, it's China's territory. Hong Kong's been returned now, and so now Taiwan has to be returned. And I think that there are ways that a future leader can alter this language and not make it a hard deadline.

But my final point is, we do need to listen to what Xi Jinping says at this upcoming 20th Party Congress. Is he going to make this a firmer deadline? Is he going to say something that is maybe – even brings that deadline forward? I don't think that that's going to happen, but I think we should pay attention to whether this language changes, whether it's repeated, and whether it becomes more worrisome. But I don't see it was a hard deadline, no.

Mr. Blanchette: And just – you know, political figures and political leaders usually don't like to box themselves in with affirmative, clear deadlines that you then have to deliver on. And Xi Jinping seems to be a leader who likes to keep his options open. So –

Ms. Glaser: So one final point, Jude, is on this recent 18-month statement, which came from The New York Times. And I've talked to one of the reporters who wrote it. It is apparently, as I understand it, not driven, as Bonny Lin suggested, by the election cycle, but by growing concern in the intelligence community that what China sees is a U.S. effort to build Taiwan's capabilities through asymmetric weapons. And they think that the result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine will further accelerate this. You know, building Taiwan into some kind of a fortress, enabling Taiwan to defend itself more successfully. And that that has led to a concern in China that if they wait too long, that they might lose this window of opportunity.

Last point is that it, I was told, is not a function of some piece of raw intelligence, but is rather an analytical product, based on many things that

they have seen. But that's the language The New York Times used, was that China could move on Taiwan within the next 18 months. I, myself, think that there is no real 18-month timeline. But I am not in the intelligence community. So to turn it over to somebody who was formerly in the intelligence community and can help us to understand what that might – 18 months might mean, I really want to hear John's views.

Mr. Blanchette: And, John, just you have said something which sticks in my mind, of it's conditions, not calendars, that will drive Beijing's decision-making. Can you just unpack that a minute? Because I thought that was a really useful framework.

Mr. Culver: Sure. I think we'll keep our eyes on the events of the next few days, weeks, and months. But I still believe that for Xi Jinping and the Communist Party Politburo Standing Committee, Taiwan is a crisis to be avoided not an opportunity to be seized. And that they react to these things when they are compelled to react. And the metric they use to judge the efficacy of their policies, their statements, is whether they're satisfying public opinion. I don't want to overstate that, because they, of course, have the means to control and shape public opinion. But also, can they point to the overall situation over a long horizon, beyond 18 months, and say: We are still on track to achieve our goals? Because their goals, of course, are not just based on Taiwan.

I would add that it's a problem inside sort of the echo chamber of the U.S. pundit community to talk about military – China's military options as solely limited to do nothing, rattle sabers loudly – like we're perhaps witnessing right now – or invade Taiwan. They have a variety of military, economic, et cetera capabilities. We're seeing some of them demonstrated this week. They have – you know, I still believe that if – you know, I'm not saying that the current or even the next government of Taiwan would do this – that if they saw Taiwan backed by the United States and other international actors, support a permanent break from China politically – not just de facto independence and autonomy but de jure independence and recognition – they would go to war tomorrow. It would be a different kind of war than they would conduct, say, in 10 or 20 years, or into the misty future, when their capabilities would be quite different.

What I'm not seeing, and I'll revert to my old military analyst paradigms, if you – if they're on that track – and some of the other panelists have mentioned this – you will see different behaviors and statements out of the Chinese leadership. They will invoke the 2005 anti-secession law and start to talk – because one of the things they're going to have to do is prepare their own population for the fact that the long stretch of economic growth could be coming to an end, that a full war with Taiwan, that they have to plan,

would include the United States, is going to have to shift the basis for Communist Party legitimacy from prosperity and international standing to defense of sovereignty.

And that would be a stark reversion, you know, even, you know, since the Deng Xiaoping era. I think you'd see them build a different kind of force if they're bent on invasion. They have enormous industrial capacity and defense industrial capacity. It's telling that despite all that wherewithal, we haven't seen them build the naval amphibious invasion fleet. I don't want – you know, Chinese don't underestimate, nor should we, exactly how difficult a full amphibious invasion across a minimum of 110 nautical miles of ocean would be for any force, including the PLA.

But as I said earlier, they have enormous capability to cut Taiwan off from the outside world, to disrupt its information, to drop the power grid, to strike every significant military target on the island, and to strike every U.S. base in the region, and to attack U.S. warships that ingress beyond – within the range of Chinese long-range precision strikes. So, you know, that's kind of why I go back to my earlier statement when I talked about the need for, you know, all sides to focus now on preventing war. It doesn't mean pleasing China, but it also means – you know, we never use that as a benchmark of will some action displease China. It might, but we should do it anyway if it's in American interests and in the interests of our partners and allies.

We should also avoid, though, the temptation to do things just because they will displease China. That's really a path toward escalation and to a path toward instability, especially in a region that I think is the largest driver of global growth. This will be – if there is a war between the U.S. and China over Taiwan, it will not just affect our militaries or our countries or Taiwan's; it will affect the world.

Mr. Blanchette: Thanks, John.

Ryan, I want to turn it over to you just for – to close us out with a few, sort of, final thoughts and comments. I wonder if you could, though, just pick up on what John was just saying. One of the really worrying things around events of the past few days has been I noticed the – anyone who shows a tendency to try to understand how Beijing is interpreting events is – you're kind of labeled as, you know, parroting the, you know, CCP talking points. And this has been really worrying because if we're just going to, as John was just saying, assume that anything we can do that is, quote, "tough" is something we should do – and I'm now just ripping off from Bonnie Glaser and her great podcast – and that if you don't do the action you're therefore being weak, is going to get us into an unproductive escalatory spiral where we're not advancing our own interests nor helping – nor helping Taiwan. So maybe that was more of a comment than a question to you, but if you could – if you

could take us home here in the next couple minutes, you know, with any final thoughts.

Mr. Hass: OK. Well, let me just associate with the fact that it's absolutely essential to be able to understand our counterpart in order to be effective in advancing our own interest, and I think that was the core of John's point, and I don't think any of us should shy away from that exercise.

There are – there are a few things that really stood out from the last hour and a half of this tremendous conversation. The first is that the situation in the Taiwan Strait is as tense as it's been in decades. It looks as though China is seeking to use this moment as an opportunity to tilt the status quo in their preferred direction, much as they did around the Senkakus and the China-India border previously. China's response thus far has been focused on Taiwan, but I think that all of the analysts here were right to note that this is early days. The last cross-strait crisis lasted eight months. And so we're going to have to measure events in the course of days, weeks, and months to come.

I also think that the conversation brought out the point that, you know, a real objective of American strategy is to elongate timelines as long as possible to create as much space as possible for cool heads and wise minds in Taipei and Beijing to find an eventual resolution to their differences. On America's part, we have a role to play. It's going to require strong deterrence, and also strong discipline from us in order to elongate that time horizon. Those are factors we can control and those are factors that we should be focused on.

It's really been a privilege to have an opportunity to co-host this with you, with CSIS, and with our friends. Thank you so much for such rich comments. Back to you, Jude.

Mr. Blanchette: Great. Thank you, Ryan.

Bang on time. It's 10:30. We really didn't get to most of the questions, which shows that this could have been a three-hour event rather than an hour and a half. But I see – I know Bonnie Glaser, who has probably had one of the more busy weeks in recent times, is testifying in just about, what, an hour, so we've got to let her go. But I just want to genuinely pick up, Ryan, what he just said. I want to really thank Brookings and Ryan for co-hosting this with me – with me and Bonny Lin. Incredibly grateful to John, Bonnie Glaser, and Bill Klein for making time out of what I know is just a really busy week for this, unfortunately, very small coterie of genuine experts on these – on these issues, of which Bill, Bonnie, and John are three of just, sadly, a handful who can help us navigate what is tense times now and, as Ryan was just saying, is likely to be tense times ahead.

So thanks to everyone who joined us today. Thanks to the amazing staff at CSIS who make all of this possible and do so with such aplomb and good cheer. So thanks to them. And look forward to seeing everyone at a future – (end of available audio).