Speech by Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs David R. Stilwell

“U.S.-China Bilateral Relations: The Lessons of History”

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Bonnie Glaser: Good afternoon, everyone. I’m Bonnie Glaser. I’m director of the China Power Project here at CSIS. Thank you all for coming today.

We’re privileged to have the Assistant Secretary of State, David Stilwell, to give a speech today. Assistant Secretary Stilwell assumed the post of the Assistant Secretary of State for the, of course, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs on June 20th of this year. I’m guessing it seems like a lot longer than that, but it’s just about over six months. His position immediately prior to that was as director of the China Strategic Focus Group at U.S. Indo-Pacific Command in Hawaii.

Mr. Stilwell served in the Air Force for 35 years. We were just chatting about linguistic backgrounds. So he began as an enlisted Korean linguist, learning Korean when he was 18, and retired in 2015 with the rank of brigadier general. His last position as a military officer was Asia advisor to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

Assistant Secretary Stilwell served multiple tours of duty, as you know, in Japan and Korea as a linguist, as a fighter pilot and a commander. And he served as the defense attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing from 2011 to 2013.

So given the growing complexity of the U.S.-China relationship, we definitely need to have a steady hand at the tiller at the Department of State, and we know we have that with Assistant Secretary Stilwell. Please join me in welcoming him.

David Stilwell: Good afternoon, and thanks for waiting a week. You know, things happen at the worst possible time.

It’s great to be here. I’ve been – I think it’s my third interaction with CSIS since I’ve gotten this job, in six months. That’s a good pace, I think, to go.

The title of today’s presentation is “U.S.-China Bilateral Relations and the Lessons of History.” If I were to translate it into Chinese, it would be shi shi qiu shi, “seek truth through facts.” The goal is to plow through a lot of misinformation and assumptions on both sides, and just sort of identify what has been a very productive interaction, you know, at least in one respect with the Chinese country, with the people, and with the government, and to clear the air – to help, you know, lay out the facts. In particular, I want to focus on a part of this history that’s hugely important and yet often overlooked, namely the vast range of official U.S. contributions sustained over decades that have empowered the People’s Republic of China and aiding in its development.

So why recount history? Well, I’m a historian. That’s what I studied in school. My master’s degree was in Chinese military modernization. That’s going to come up later in this speech. And it’s always good to take a pause and reflect. So if we don’t acknowledge this history, we can’t claim to understand the current state of U.S.-China relations.
Second, the history is colorful and dramatic. It involves secret presidential directives, sensitive diplomacy, some of the most consequential economic and technological shifts the world has ever seen, and it’s a very long history. Which means it’s going to be a very long speech, and I’ll apologize in advance, but I think you’ll enjoy hearing the story.

But the most important aspect of this is that recounting this history refutes false claims of propagandists who claim that the Trump administration’s competitive posture toward Beijing is motivated by some longstanding American animus or some desire to, in their words, quote, “keep China down.” The fact is that for decades American policymakers have extended the hand of friendship to the PRC, and yet that has not been reciprocated. This historical record will show that clearly.

When commentators occasionally discuss how American policy has contributed to Chinese empowerment, they often focus on America’s general role in sustaining a free and open Indo-Pacific, sea lanes, and all the rest. Their point is that, you know, like a more passive form, this international order provided by the U.S. is what allowed China and others in the region to focus on economic growth and trade and the rest. That certainly is a large part of this story, but – and to create and preserve that international order required enormous U.S. expenditures of blood, treasure, and ideas – but there’s more to that story.

China was not just the indirect beneficiary of all this; U.S. support for China’s development was deliberate, direct, and specific. It took many forms. In short – we’ll get to the details here – we provided military and intelligence assistance, we made generous technology transfers, we ensured preferential trade and investment access, we sponsored and arranged for vast educational exchanges – and we still do – and we provided development financing and organized government-to-government capacity building, and much more.

So before we get into details, I want to note that the primary drivers of China’s strengthening were the Chinese people themselves. China’s greatest achievements in recent decades reflect the intelligence, the talents, and the courageous and entrepreneurial spirit of the Chinese. Those traits fueled China’s growth when the Chinese Communist Party finally loosened the disastrous stranglehold that it had placed on the people in the PRC’s opening decades. Once Communist Party leaders recognized the failures of the Great Leap Forward, Cultural Revolution, and the chaotic fight for succession following Mao’s death, and they moved to liberalize China’s system, the Chinese people were able to get to work. And the United States and others were enthusiastic about offering our help. But acknowledging the centrality of the Chinese people in this story shouldn’t bind us to the important contributions – or shouldn’t blind us to the important contributions of others, especially to the contributions of the United States.

Unfortunately, the PRC has acted in recent years with increasing hostility toward the United States, our interests, and our principles. This has prompted the American people and the current administration to reevaluate these policies. As
Secretary Pompeo has said, “We accommodated and encouraged China’s rise for decades, even when that rise was at the expense of American values, Western democracy, security, and good common sense.” Unquote. So Beijing’s hostile behavior was not inevitable. It was not justified, and it is, in fact, a choice by Chinese leaders. It is by no means what American officials desired or expected 40 years ago when they initiated this multifaceted U.S. policy of intense support for Beijing’s modernization and its liberalization.

America’s willingness to help China achieve its ambitions was clear to leader Deng Xiaoping even before he inaugurated the era of reform and opening at a Communist Party conference in December of 1978. Indeed, on the very day that he presented and opened this concept of reform and opening, he also accepted an invitation from the U.S. government that had been tendered prior to become the first PRC leader to visit the United States. By the next month the U.S. and China had announced normalization of their relations and Deng was on an airplane to Washington.

I mentioned this story in another speech earlier this month, but I’m going to repeat it just because it needs to be restated. On that flight to the U.S., as historian John Pomfret records, Deng’s foreign minister asked Deng Xiaoping why he picked the United States for his first trip as leader. “Because,” answered Deng, “America’s allies are all rich and strong, and if China wants to be rich and strong it needs America.” Sound logic.

For Deng, the engineer of China’s modernization and prosperity, it was clear that America could be relied on to help. He was pushing longstanding PRC plans for the four modernizations – we know what those are – addressing science and technology, industry, agriculture, and defense. And the U.S. would help in all four areas, and then some. And this produced results.

So after the horrific privations caused by the Cultural Revolution, Deng Xiaoping intensely desired that Chinese students would study in the United States. I believe we have some here. When Deng received White House Science Advisor Frank Press in the runup to normalization, Deng insisted that Press call the president immediately with a request to accept 5,000 Chinese students. Awakened by that call at three in the morning, President Carter replied, tell him to send 100,000, and so he relayed that suggestion. By 1987, less than 10 years later, there were indeed 100,000 Chinese students studying in America, part of a boom in visas, scholarships, and other educational exchange that transformed science and technology in the PRC. And that process is still booming.

Technology was a key theme of Deng’s 1979 first trip to the U.S., and he visited Ford Motor Company, Boeing, and NASA. He signed an agreement for U.S. aid to science in China and he agreed with the White House to establish a joint intelligence station in northwest China known as Operation Chestnut. It led to deeper military and intelligence cooperation.
Several months after Deng’s trip Vice President Mondale visited China and he told Deng Xiaoping, we have insisted repeatedly – and I will state it again – we strongly believe in the importance of a strong China. Mondale showed it by previewing a major accommodation on trade policy and human rights: the United States would grant China most-favored-nation trading status, cutting tariffs on Chinese goods to the preferential level offered to friends and allies, even though Beijing did not meet the political and civil rights standards required for that status under U.S. law, kind of hoping. Creating this kind of exception for the PRC would become common U.S. practice.

The Carter administration also used America’s leading position at the World Bank to clear the path for China’s membership in 1980. Beijing began receiving World Bank loans the following year, and it has since received some $62 billion, making it the world’s second-largest beneficiary of World Bank support.

After President Carter left office many U.S. foreign policies changed, but the approach to aiding China’s modernization endured. It even intensified. The Reagan administration helped the PRC especially in the military and technology domains. In 1981 President Reagan issued National Security Decision Directive – NSDD – 11, opening the path to sell the Chinese air, ground, naval, and missile technology. This built on Carter’s 1980 authorization of the sale of PRC of nonlethal military equipment. In 1983 Reagan’s NSDD 76 authorized peaceful nuclear cooperation to boost Beijing’s civilian nuclear program. And by the mid-1980s the U.S. had agreed to sell the PRC hundreds of millions of dollars’ worth of torpedoes, anti-artillery, radar, and other military systems and equipment.

In 1986 the U.S. and China announced the Peace Pearl program to modernize Chinese F-8 fighters with sophisticated navigation, radar, and other electronics. Peace Pearl, the Pentagon said, would improve the security of a friendly country which has been an important force for political stability and economic progress in Asia and the world. Those are very optimistic and positive words. And if you have any questions on Peace Pearl, you can talk to Ken Allen back there, who has photos, stories – he’s got the entire program that he can relay to you, and I encourage you to talk to him because it is eye-watering.

The Reagan administration loosened controls on export of technology to the PRC in 1983, again furthering the work that began in the Carter years. Before a 1984 visit by PRC Premier Zhao Ziyang Reagan signed NSDD 120, directing the administration to lend support to China’s ambitious modernization effort, especially through our liberalized technology transfer policy. The classified policy document stated that the U.S. seeks a strong, secure, and stable China that can be an increasing force for peace both in Asia and the world.

In 1986 the Reagan administration even helped the PRC establish research programs in genetic engineering, automation, biotech, lasers, space technology, manned spaceflight, intelligent robotics, and supercomputers. That year the U.S. also worked with Japan and others to usher Beijing into the Asian
Development Bank, which later extended the PRC $40 billion in loans for transport, energy, water, agriculture, finance, and other projects.

So let’s recall that in the first decade after normalization in 1979, as in the years immediately before 1979, a key U.S. consideration in America’s China policy was, of course, the Cold War, in which the PRC was a counterweight to the Soviet Union. But even when the Cold War ended, U.S. policy toward China remained highly favorable. So as the Cold War was drawing to a close, U.S. leaders went out of their way to show their intention to remain committed to China.

Recall that George H.W. Bush response to the Tiananmen massacre of 1989. Here was a brutally violent refutation of the optimistic notion that modernization by the Chinese Communist Party would mean political liberalization, something I assumed all along. But nevertheless, President Bush decided not to fundamentally reassess U.S. relations with the PRC after 1989. The senior Bush suspended new arms sales, but he decided to follow through on many existing programs – to include Peace Pearl, which was terminated later by the Chinese and not the U.S. President Bush also opposed economic sanctions favored by a majority of members of Congress. Now is the time, he told the public, to look beyond the moment to important and enduring aspects of this vital relationship for the United States. Though the administration announced it had suspended high-level contacts with the PRC, Bush dispatched the national security adviser on a secret mission to Beijing carrying letters that stressed the importance of getting our relationship back on track. And so the two sides did.

The measured U.S. response to the massacre reflected a hopeful and accommodationist frame of mind that continued to shape U.S. policy toward China for years to come. Across decades, we accommodated the PRC’s human rights abuses without significant protest. We mostly shrugged at the PRC’s proliferation of nuclear and missile technology to Pakistan, Iran, and North Korea, and others. We largely overlooked the PRC’s division of U.S.-origin dual-use technology to the military. We offered little opposition to the PRC’s theft of intellectual property, piracy of trademarked goods, and countless other unfair trade practices. Policymaking requires balancing interests, and we often had reasons to let this or that PRC offense go unanswered. But the consequences mounted.

Following Tiananmen, one change that did come was the PRC leaders introduced a harsh patriotic education campaign in China into the schools and culture. The aim of this campaign was to shore up support for the Communist Party by playing to nationalism and vilifying foreigners, especially Americans and Japanese, as so-called hostile forces seeking to contain China and block its rise. Stoking this mythology of U.S. hostility was itself a hostile act against the U.S., but U.S. officials hardly took notice. Instead, we concentrated on producing the next chapter in our policy of support for the PRC. And this was probably the most favorable and consequential of all – PRC accession to the World Trade Organization.
President Bill Clinton entered office highly critical of Beijing’s human rights record. He promised to reestablish the link between the PRC’s trade privileges and human rights as the Jackson-Vanik amendment concerning most favored nation status had intended. However, by 1994 Clinton had dropped that insistence. He began to favor bestowing on the Chinese, on the PRC, permanent normal trade relations and backing its membership in the WTO, even if there weren’t improvements in human rights. He embraced an idea, long part of U.S. thinking about trade with the PRC, that became dogma: If we expand international trade links with China, it would inevitably liberalize politically, benefiting the Chinese people, the cause of human rights, and the world in general. And that’s a lofty ideal. And, you know, it’s very laudable that we pursued that.

Unfortunately, this view dominated U.S. thinking as U.S. played an indispensable role in bringing about China’s WTO accession. And WTO accession was rocket fuel for PRC’s ambitions, giving it the global market access that turned China into the world’s manufacturing and export powerhouse. No policy has strengthened the PRC more. And like so much else, helping China enter the WTO involved our purposefully ignoring PRC and proper trade practices and empty promises. As Secretary Pompeo has said, we encouraged Chinese membership in the World Trade Organization and other international organizations premised on their commitment to adopt market reforms and abide by the rules of those organizations. And all too often, China did not follow through.

So the friendly U.S. approach to China in the 1990s was evident when the Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan visited Beijing in 1994. It is very important to the United States, as well as the whole world, that China succeed, Greenspan told PRC Premier Zhu Rongji. Therefore, we’re willing to provide as much assistance as we can to your central bank in those technical areas where we have many years of experience.

Generous technical assistance was a U.S. policy priority for decades. Even before normalization, President Carter issued Presidential Directive 43, instructing federal agencies to support PRC capacity building in education, energy, agriculture, space, geosciences, commerce, and public health. Soon there was hardly an agency in Washington, D.C. without a program to provide training and know-how to strengthen PRC government capacity, to expand trade, and generally to aid PRC integration into global affairs. These programs lasted for decades and they continue to the current day. No other country has received such an outpouring of U.S. capacity building as the PRC has.

The U.S. government similarly helped American businesses help Beijing. In the 1990s, American investment banks worked with PRC leaders to create state-owned megafirms such as China Mobile, and then raised money via stock listings in places like New York and London. U.S. policy meanwhile allowed them to raise money from U.S. investors, despite not meeting basic regulatory requirements. Tens of billions of dollars flowed into PRC state coffers. The 1990s also said U.S. aid to Chinese civil society. At the request, I should stress,
of PRC government. The Asia Foundation and Ford Foundation partnered with PRC officials on economic reform, international relations, and Beijing’s own overseas assistance programs.

The Carter Center signed an MOU with Beijing’s Ministry of Civil Affairs in 1998 to help with experiment village elections. I think we all remember those. The American Bar Association spent two decades working with PRC judges, officials, and lawyers on criminal justice reform, legal training, and combatting domestic violence. Heifer International helped thousands of Chinese farmers raise livestock more sustainably. And such efforts often received funding from the U.S. government, transparently in alignment with Beijing’s own policies.

Unfortunately, the PRC has grown inhospitable to foreign civil society groups. Beijing today paints foreign NGOs as insidious subversives, not partners in Chinese development. It’s not that the NGOs have changed. Beijing has. It has lost its former enthusiasm for openness, transparency, and foreign links. Nor is the CCP keen to share any credit with outsiders for China’s development, less the starring role of the party be diminished. So Beijing today claims that U.S. civil society groups are a black hand, undermining China. Beijing also enforces a 2016 law designed to drive foreign NGOs out of China. And it has successfully done that, reducing the number of NGOs from 7,000 in 2016 to mere hundreds today.

These were not the outcomes sought by U.S. leaders before the 1990s, or since. Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama both had concerns about aspects of Beijing’s behavior, just as their predecessors had. And both took measures to hedge against risks posed by Beijing. But both ensured that the United States engaged the PRC fundamentally as a partner and a supporter. Both expanded trade and technology ties with the PRC. Even as Beijing cheated on the U.S. and trade – U.S. trade deficit with China soared to a cumulative $4 trillion. Both supported elevating Beijing’s status in important international organizations, even as Beijing often subverted the mission and spirit of these organizations.

Both believed that Beijing – bought into the line that irritants in the bilateral relationship could be worked out by an ever-more diplomatic pageantry and high-level dialogues. And both welcomed more and more PRC students, with some 270,000 in America by 2015. And just for the record, to clear the air and to counter the misinformation, the number of PRC university student in the U.S. is now a whopping 370,000, contrary to allegations of us closing down that pipeline.

So we’re proud of America’s long record of pursuing friendship with China and the Chinese people. In this 40th year since U.S.-PRC normalization it’s worth recalling that U.S. optimism and friendship toward China and the Chinese people dates back centuries. American missionaries established hospitals and universities in China in the 1800s. American diplomats backed the open-door policy in the late 1800s. And then they set up the Boxer Indemnity Scholarship in 1909 that seated Xinhua University. American soldiers defended China during World War II, sacrificing thousands of lives to support our alliance
commitment and resist an expansive and aggressive force. After the war, America insisted that China receive a seat among the founding members of the United Nations and a veto on the Security Council.

So, in conclusion, it’s natural that once the PRC turned to reform and opening 40 years ago, America would extend our hand in friendship. And it is altogether bogus that Beijing today claims that America’s new competitive posture toward the PRC betrays some long desire to keep, quote, “China down” as a nation. On the contrary, our posture today is based on disappointment that Chinese Communist Party leaders decided to respond to our good faith with such an aggressive and consistent bad faith.

Just want to relate a personal story on this. While in Beijing I became associated with a group that actually fostered U.S.-China relations through the memory of World War II. The exhibit that they put out is called Guójiā Jìyì, National Memories. It was here at the Reagan Building, sponsored by the Wilson Center, and then I sponsored it, and the Pentagon, in March of 2015. These photos began with a black and white photo handed to a friend of mine in 1999 of a funeral happening obviously in China, in southern China, with an American chaplain and an American officer, a Major McMurray being buried, and a bunch of Chinese soldiers are – or Chinese people in soldier’s gear.

He saw this photo. And based on the educational process he went through, it tilted his world. He couldn’t believe this actually happened. So he went into the Chinese archives to find the evidence that supported this. And he didn’t find anything. But someone said, you can go to the U.S. National Archives right here in D.C. and find more. He came here, he found 60,000 black and white photos of this very mutually beneficial cooperation during World War II. And being disappointed in the history that he was taught, intentionally has been spreading that word inside and outside of China ever since in the form of coffee table books, just full of these photos with stories, and these displays that I discussed.

We have to recognize this history. It’s key. It’s what we in the open press world and those who can read whatever we care to understand as our history. It’s the foundation for the relationship today. And I’d be happy to answer your questions further on this very important subject. Thank you for your attention. (Applause.)

Bonnie Glaser: Thank you so much for your tour de force of history.

David Stilwell: It’s long, yeah.

Bonnie Glaser: No, it’s important history. And I’m very glad that you told it the way that you did, because there is so much discussion officially in China today that is distorting that history and providing misinformation. And you didn’t, of course, mention more recent history in Hong Kong today, where Beijing is accusing the United States of instigating the protests that are going on in Hong Kong. And that’s also, I’m sure you would agree, history that needs to be corrected.
David Stilwell: Absolutely.

Bonnie Glaser: So if I can maybe ask you just a few questions, and then we’ll open it up.

There’s been some discussion about whether or not there’s a new cold war between the United States and China. We actually had an event here a couple of weeks ago to talk about that issue. And I’m wondering if you think that there are any elements of the cold war between the U.S. and the former Soviet Union that apply to the U.S.-China relationship, and whether there’s any lessons that we can draw from the Cold War in managing the bilateral relationship with China.

David Stilwell: You bet. I would really like to see the outcomes of that conference, that conversation, because I was just at lunch with ASEAN ambassadors. And that was my parting question to them, given that – you know, Vietnam and Southeast Asia were such major players in the Cold War of the day. I mean, I’ve given a lot of thought to this. People with my hairline grew up in the Cold War. I mean, Ken Allen’s, like, the ultimate cold warrior. I mean Francis Fukuyama plays into this. And I think that goes into the ideological aspect of it, whether you were free and open or closed and authoritarian. Those parallels exist.

When you say Cold War you think nuclear and missiles pointed at each other, and this uneasy détente. I would say that is mirrored today in some forms in the information world, some would say in the space world, and other places that are not kinetic, but they still very much could be existential. But there are other aspects of it, given – and, you know, thank you for teeing this speech up – is to say that there’s opportunities to cooperate. And the U.S. is always willing to reach out a hand of friendship and meet the other side where they are and show them a way – a better way. And unlike the Cold War, I think there’s many more opportunities to have this conversation. And so I thank you for having this opportunity. And if I had time I would stick around and continue that, because I could learn a lot more from you guys than you’re learning from me.

Bonnie Glaser: We’re definitely learning a lot from you and all of your colleagues.

Dialogue has been a critically important component of the U.S.-China relationship since the beginning. We started the dialogue really only at the highest level, and then through the years we developed mechanisms of dialogue to try to manage problems and address them. And of course, we had the economic relationship. I think there were 27, if I’m not mistaken, rounds of the JCCT, the Joint Commission on Commerce and Trade. We had the Strategic and Economic Dialogue and, of course, its predecessor.

And today we of course still have dialogue with China, but it doesn’t look like what it used to look like over really the last couple of decades. And particularly in the State Department, where there were dialogues on regional, functional issues. All of this, of course, fed into the S&ED. So what is then the nature of dialogue today? Are there any kind of mechanisms that you think are
particularly important and needed to address problems? Is this—the set of mechanisms that we had in the past, are they all now irrelevant and no longer useful?

David Stilwell: A lot of answers there. One, organizations like CSIS and others that conduct, you know, track two and track one-point-five dialogues are in every way as valid as track one. In fact, in some ways they’re more valid because they’re not susceptible to the same bias and unbalanced objectives that you get in the formal dialogues, especially when times are tense. And so I would hope that we don’t—just because that proliferation of dialogues out there with so many acronyms that, you know, we had, like, a decoder ring in the embassy as to which dialogue this was—S&ED, SSD on the sidelines—they have to produce something. And the track two, one-point-five do. You actually have people come in and share honest thoughts. Unfortunately, dialogue for dialogue’s sake doesn’t accomplish much.

The very fact of meeting demonstrates a willingness to cooperate. I think that’s important, being seen in that regard. But showing up without any intention of trying to work through problems or find solutions doesn’t benefit anybody. It raises hopes, and as you know over time those hopes have not really been met on our side. At least the ones I witnessed in Beijing and when I was in the Pentagon. So this is time to reset, rethink, and then approach these with a fresh set of eyeballs, and guarantee that something comes from it.

Bonnie Glaser: I’ll ask one last question before we open it up. I think one of the other issues that’s debated is whether or not the United States can still influence Chinese policy. I would assume, as a person working at the State Department, now a diplomat, that you believe that there are still ways to shape China’s choices, as Evan Medeiros used to say in the Obama administration when he was working at the National Security Council. So is this something that you believe going forward is possible? Are there still ways that we can influence Chinese policies so that they become more committed and adhering to the rules-based order, to supporting the system that China has benefitted from so much, and so that China can work to actually solve some of the problems in the world?

David Stilwell: Again, as the history shows, the U.S. has been very eager to help in this regard. However, the political distance has grown between what they see as their objectives and what the U.S. — here’s the crucial point—it’s not just the U.S. It’s the U.S. and most of the rest of the world. This is where likeminded engagement comes in. This is where encouraging EU and others to stand up for your own trade interests is helpful. And this is where I met this morning with an ambassador from Europe. I met last week with another ambassador from Europe. I meet, you know, with Southeast Asia. The way we get this function is to enlist the assistance of those likeminded, who also see the problem, and encourage them not to sit back and wait till we resolve it, but to join us. Because this is a multifaceted problem that, again, given the assistance of others and multiple voices makes it impossible to call this hostile U.S. policy. No, this is how the world works. So thank you for that question.
Bonnie Glaser: Terrific. That was a message that I just heard. I was in Delhi the last few days, and heard many experts and former officials, and current officials in India saying that we all have to work together in order to pursue our outcomes that all of the likeminded countries hope to achieve in the Indo-Pacific region.

David Stilwell: And lest the message be confused or twisted, that outcome is basically status quo. A system that’s worked very well for the world for the last 70 years, that we would like to see preserved. And the other side would like to change it to adapt to its particular worldview. So lest anyone confuse this as somehow trying to change things, no, we just want to preserve the system as it exists.

Bonnie Glaser: OK. I’m going to open it up to questions. And I’m going to ask you to please wait for the microphone, identify yourself, and ask one question. And please make it short, so that we can get in a number of them. OK, we’re going to start over there. This gentleman right there, yes. Yes? Go ahead. Ask your question.

Marvin Ott: Thank you. Excellent presentation.

This is really not a question, it’s just offering a quick –

Bonnie Glaser: Identify yourself, please.

Marvin Ott: I’m sorry. Marvin Ott, formerly federal government, longtime now with the Wilson Center and Johns Hopkins University.

A quick anecdote to add to your history, just think it’d be relevant. As a grad student – I should have the exact year; it was the last year of Dean Rusk’s tenure as Secretary of State, Johnson administration – I was invited to join a small discussion group that Rusk had as a visitor to Johns Hopkins in Baltimore. And in that talk he recounted as recent news that the Soviet Union had formally approached the United States with regard to a reaction from America if the Soviet Union attacked the Chinese nuclear installations, and the answer that Rusk reported was we would be absolutely and virulently opposed to any such attack. And I said I’ll offer it just simply as an anecdote, as one that’s relevant to the historical narrative that you presented.

Bonnie Glaser: All right. Thank you.

All right, this woman in yellow over here. Yes.

Rita Chen: Thank you for doing this. Rita Chen with Radio Free Asia.

Assistant Secretary, you mentioned that U.S. soldiers defended China during the World War II. And that China, which is now also known as Taiwan, is going to have another presidential election in the coming January. I’m just wondering, what’s your expectation or prioritized task of the U.S.-Taiwan relation and cross-relations? Thank you.
David Stilwell: So that’s a very good question and very timely, right? We’re about a month out from the elections.

Bonnie Glaser: Yes, we are.

David Stilwell: You understand U.S. policy has been one of dialogue, encouraging dialogue on both sides. Elections are a regular process in the Taiwan democratic process, and so these happen every four years. Unfortunately, tension tends to spike during these. It should not. And a concern always exists for somehow meddling – interfering in the internal affairs there.

So we’ll take you back to the Taiwan Relations Act and the Three Communiques, the intent of which is to ensure that the differences on the two sides of the Taiwan Strait are resolved through dialogue and without violence or coercion or threats. And so that’s our expectation for this upcoming event as well.

Bonnie Glaser: Great.

OK, woman over here on the end.

Haye-ah Lee: Hello, Mr. Stilwell. I’m Haye-ah Lee with South Korea’s Yonhap News Agency.

I just noticed on your public schedule today that you had a meeting with the Swedish ambassador, and I wanted to ask if the U.S. is trying to arrange another working-level meeting with North Korea in Sweden, and if you could just comment in general about the State Department’s efforts ahead of this end-of-year deadline imposed by North Korea. Thank you.

David Stilwell: Your dot-connecting has created something other than the initial picture we were trying to draw. But that’s pretty good, but no, that was not the subject. That was actually requested by the Swedish side.

But based on my open invitation to discuss the topic of trade, and in this case intrusion into Swedish internal affairs with the Gui Minhai issue. So no, the topic had nothing to do with North Korea, because that is not my remit.

Bonnie Glaser: OK. This woman over there in the black-and-white dress.

Miriam Sapiro: Hi. Thank you. Miriam Sapiro, recovering government official. Thank you for that terrific presentation and important historical reminders.

I wanted to ask you a trade-related question, especially with the Sunday deadline looming. But it involves Huawei, which has been a bipartisan concern for several years predating the Trump administration. But more recently the administration, at least the president, seemed to tie Huawei issues into the trade talks, then to separate them. The Chinese side at some point also considered them tied and then separate. So I was wondering as to your sense as to whether
or not these issues should be related or not be related as we approach not just this deadline, but presumably additional talks on additional phases. Thank you.

David Stilwell: The discussion on the exact objections to Huawei, I mean, clearly there’s the classified aspect of that which I’m not at liberty here. But I think many have covered the basic concern using China’s own laws, the law that came out recently that says all companies will on demand ship that information back to the government. And so it’s not that we don’t like any particular activity or company, but when those companies have these covert, coercive, or corrupt ties that aren’t being very clearly seen, you know, I would think it’s in everyone’s interest to identify what those are early, before large investments and others. It’s a hard subject, but I think the evidence is clear enough – I mean just circumstantial evidence, not to mention the rest. And we share that whenever we can.

Bonnie Glaser: Yeah, great. OK. Over here.

Gerrit van der Wees: Thank you. Gerrit van der Wees from George Mason University.

In your address you mentioned that in the past the U.S. turned quite a bit of a blind eye to human rights violations in China. These days China is increasingly aggressive towards populations within its own borders – East Turkestan, Tibet – and threatening democracies on its doorstep – Taiwan, Hong Kong. In what way are the policies that you would follow on human rights and democracy different from before?

David Stilwell: You know, the great thing about this job, as the speech showed, is that there are differences in administrations, but the general idea of human rights, you know, all the things we stand for – you know, all men are created equal, endowed with certain rights – life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness – those are consistent. And so we’ve been consistent on these things all along; we just haven’t been as vocal or sometimes we’ve sort of self-censored on this. But this administration has decided it can’t do that anymore. It’s gotten to the point now that it’s going the wrong way, and before we get faced with something really, really bad, somebody’s got to stand up and be counted.

And so at the United Nations General Assembly back in September the deputy secretary hosted a great event on the human rights issues in Xinjiang. Five sponsored and 31 countries represented there. And I think as you’ve seen in the news recently, the subject is getting the attention it deserves.

Bonnie Glaser: Absolutely.

OK. Woman in white over here.

Hyun-young Park: Hello. I’m Hyun-young Park with the Korean news media JoongAng Ilbo. Thank you for your great presentation.
You’ve mentioned that not only the U.S., but most of the rest of the world should stand up with the U.S. in preserving the value that we have enjoyed for the last seven decades. However, in some ways East Asian countries located very closely to China, they have their day-to-day living business, so they claim that it is a bit difficult to actually fully stand by the U.S. And you had the lunch with the ASEAN ambassadors, so is Korea. I think the issue is the same. What would be your advice? Because those countries say that they are actually neighbors with China; it’s not quite easy to actually stand up for the U.S. Thank you.

David Stilwell: So I would love to – this is a great opportunity to praise Korea’s decision in favor of its own sovereignty and its ability to defend itself, on the decision on THAAD. Despite the pressure, economic and otherwise, the Korean government did the right thing and stood up in the face of this thing – at great economic cost, too. And so, again, high praise for that. That’s an example I think other countries should look at.

And what we have seen – Australia, to me, is the perfect example of how – I mean, they were the ones on the leading edge of this, of how you eventually decide for your own, you know, who you are – democratic, liberal, trade, all those things – and you decide to understand that there will be consequences, but you stand up for your national ideals and then you get others to stand with you. And I think the more you can multilateralize – more voices saying the exact same thing – it will prevent this sort of behavior, so.

Bonnie Glaser: Great.

OK. Let’s go to this side. Gentleman in the back. All the way in the back. Turn around. Yes.

Salma Park: Thank you. Hello. I’m Salma Park from South Korea media MBC. I’ve got two questions about North Korea. With –

Bonnie Glaser: You only get one.

Salma Park: Let me be – OK. With respect to possible provocation by North Korea, are you concerned that North Korea will test ICBMs soon? And like Ambassador Kelly Craft said in United Nation yesterday, are you ready to be flexible with North Korea if they do their part? Thank you.

David Stilwell: So I will lead this by saying that Steve Biegun, who’s the special representative, is responsible and entirely focused on this issue. So I can speak to the broad contours, but I can’t get into details.

What I will say is that if you look at the record since, you know, January 2017 and the U.S. engagement with North Korea from a position of strength, that we have seen most of this unfortunate behavior drop considerably. Threat are threats. We’ve heard threats before. Whether they actually carry those threats
out in light of where the president has said he wants to go – he wants – he wants to work with North Korea, he wants to help build their economy. But there’s also the reminder that we can’t have any more of this unfortunate, ill-advised behavior, and that hasn’t changed. That position is the same.

Bonnie Glaser: OK. This gentleman over here.


The other day Russian foreign minister was in D.C. and he met with Secretary Pompeo and the president. One of the sticking points of the conversation was the extension of New START Treaty and the possible nuclear disarmament framework. So I’m wondering if you could share with us how the United States is going to reach out to China and to have them engaged in the potential disarmament talk. Thank you so much.

David Stilwell: Secretary Pompeo, he graduated first in his class at West Point, which is no small feat, and he can manage all this information effortlessly. It’s all I can do to manage the East Asia-Pacific account. So fully aware of the conversation, but I can’t say I’ve spoken or put a lot of thought into it, other than I know there is a desire, if we’re going to talk about strategic subjects, arms control, it really ought to include everybody that has a part in that, certainly the larger of them. And of course, China is one of those.

Bonnie Glaser: OK. All right. This woman in gray over here with the scarf. Yes.

Jong-an Kim: Thank you. This looks a lot like press conference. I, too, am from the media outlet, but I will try to be as prompt as possible.

Bonnie Glaser: All the hands are from the media.

Jong-an Kim: South Korean media outlet Tongyeong Daily in Channel 8 TV, Jong-an Kim, Washington correspondent.

Yesterday, when the U.S. led the Security Council meeting, right after that North Korea actually issued a statement today saying that they are extremely offended by such gesture and that they are now – they have decided which path to take. But at the same time, though, China and Russia yesterday actually insinuated that there has to be a little bit more flexibility from the U.S. side, more specifically lessening the pressure on sanctioning part. What’s the U.S.’s position if and when North Korea provokes with ICBM this year? Will there be a ramping up the sanctions to put more pressure on North Korea? And how will the U.S. deal with Russia and Chinese opposition to such measures? Thank you.

David Stilwell: Well, I think it’s good that this subject is, I mean, pretty much universal. This is probably – a nuclear North Korea is not something anybody really wants, and a long list of U.N. Security Council resolutions support that. And so your question isn’t a U.S. question; it’s a U.N. question, right? These are – these are
agreements by the five members, to include the PRC and Russia, on how to deal with this issue, because you just can’t have it spread any further. And we do have the opportunity to, you know, show North Korea another path that gets to what, again, the president said is helping them become prosperous, peaceful, and all the rest. So I’ll point to the U.N. on that question.

Bonnie Glaser: Is there a question from somebody who’s not from the media? All the hands go down. OK.

Angel: Oh, thank you for taking my question. My name’s Angel and I’m with Hong Kong Phoenix Television.

So my question

Bonnie Glaser: I tried.

Angel: So I worked at the United Nations before, though, so.

My question is, as you have mentioned there are opportunities still between the U.S. and the – and China. But today when we discuss about what are the opportunities, people focus on global issues – climate change or decreased nuclear weapons. What are the other areas that are not global issues, but the U.S. and China can still collaborate on bilaterally? Thank you.

David Stilwell: Well, the first one that comes to mind is peaceful use of shared assets like global commons, like oceans, fisheries, airspace. These are things that it would be good to have a conversation about. Again, I don’t have to go into detail on the South China Sea and all the rest.

You know, fentanyl, although I don’t really consider that a pure area of cooperation. I personally believe that there could have been more done a long time ago, but the fact that they have arrested somebody on this very dangerous and deadly problem demonstrates their willingness, or at least their understanding, of how serious we are on that.

I mean, the – there actually is nothing we can’t cooperate on, but there has to be a will from the other side. The U.S. has been wide open about that. But you know, we’re not going to have talks for talks’ sake. We need to have a conversation where both sides come prepared to find a, you know, mutual understanding.

Bonnie Glaser: OK. I’m going to try again: Any questions from somebody who’s not from the media? I think the entire room is from the media.

Questioner: Thanks for – thank you. I’m from media China Network.

My question is from highly viewed video interview to Professor Arthur Waldron, who is professor of international relations in U. Penn. He said in the interview that a very high-up man, a sort of an advisor very close to Xi Jinping, told him
that everybody knows that this system doesn’t work, that the system doesn’t work. We have reached “si hu tong,” which means that comes to an end. We don’t know what’s the next step to take. This is original quote in the video interview.

My question is to Secretary Stilwell, could you elaborate? American people have been fulfill their responsibility to help defend the freedom for people in other countries in the history. Could you elaborate how American people have been blessed by preserving the freedom and universal – and universal value from our Founding Fathers? And if you want, would you like to talk more about Americans’ principle in Asia and the Pacific theaters in the future? Thank you.

David Stilwell: Excuse me.

A form of this question came up next week about pluralism, as we were talking about. And there’s pluralism in the international sphere, which allows more than one country, one system, one idea to exist simultaneously. And then the question was, does that have to include, you know, pluralism in every country? Does every country have to be a democratic system? And the answer is no. Sovereignty is a key idea there. We would encourage countries to understand the benefits that come with having a system that accounts for the desires and the voice of all people, but it’s not my job or anyone’s job to tell the Chinese people or the Chinese government how to run itself.

But there are lines and there are things that are cannot abide. There are things we have to stand up for. And those are those – the basic human rights that in this case we are being – are discussing. Our goal not – is not to, you know, undermine or any of those things. It’s not a black hand. But this is standing up for something.

I mean, I go back to the Golden Rule. If you’re doing this to someone else, ask yourself, would you – would you like that happening to you? And if the answer is no, then you know, you shouldn’t – I don’t think you should do that.

Anyway, I hope that answers your question.

Bonnie Glaser: In Chinese there’s, of course, a similar saying, a cheng yu, that basically means the same thing, do unto others as they would do unto you.

OK. So this will be the very last question. Go ahead.

Dong Qu Yu: Thank you for giving me the opportunity. Thank you, Assistant Secretary. My name’s Dong Qu Yu with China Xinhua News Agency of Hong Kong.

In your speech you emphasized that the historic record shows that the United States was trying to help China rather than keep China down. So will you assure that right now the United States still have a kind of engagement policy toward China, rather than decoupling policy toward China, even though the United States has regarded China as the strategic competitor? Thank you very much.
David Stilwell: I will let the Chinese government speak for itself, but I would ask that same question to Chinese representatives here in D.C. or elsewhere, to describe their – to tell you how they feel about the relationship with the U.S. over time. What words they use to describe the nature of their relationship. And it’s not strategic competitor. So the fact that we’re acknowledging that there’s a competition does not lead to a conclusion that conflict is inevitable. In fact, the competition is there to prevent conflict by essentially saying: You’re about to cross a line. Don’t go any further. That’s the policy, is to stand up and, you know, demonstrate strength, and then insist that our interests are considered and respected.

Bonnie Glaser: We really want to thank you so much, Assistant Secretary Stilwell, for coming today and delivering a very important speech. We know that the Communist Party and the government in China want to make it difficult for the people of China to really hear the truth about the history, and to hear the truth that what we want is a cooperative relationship with China that serves both of our countries’ interests, that the policy of this administration is not one of containment of China, as you said. So I hope that since there’s so much media in the room today that you will help to amplify that message so that many people around the world, and also within the borders of the People’s Republic of China, will hear the very important message that Assistant Secretary Stilwell conveyed to us today.

David Stilwell: And my compliments to Bonnie. She just got off a plane. She’s been awake for 40 straight hours.

Bonnie Glaser: If I’m a little incoherent, you’ll know why.

David Stilwell: Thank you for the invitation and for staying awake.

Bonnie Glaser: Thank you.

(END)