

Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT
Online Event
“A Beijinger in Washington”

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FEATURING
Wang Jisi
Professor, School of International Studies & President, Institute of International and Strategic Studies, Peking University

CSIS EXPERTS
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Transcript By
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Dr. Scott
Kennedy:

Good morning. My name's Scott Kennedy. I'm the Trustee Chair in Chinese Business and Economics here at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and I'm delighted to host this program live in person with our guest, Professor Wang Jisi of Peking University. So glad to have you here at CSIS in person, not on a screen with me. We are now live to everyone who's tuning in on the CSIS website and on Twitter, actually, the first time CSIS is live on Twitter.

Today's event is titled "Beijinger in Washington," which is borrowed from a 1991 novel written by Guilin Cao called "Beijinger in New York," which was about a Chinese couple who were trying to make their way in the United States as immigrants and the difficulties they faced and how they reacted. And I'm hoping that your visit this time in the United States is going a little bit better than their visit.

Wang Jisi's in the United States in large part because of a collaboration that we are having together to promote the importance of in-person scholarly exchange. He's going to be here for one month in Washington and New York, and then I will do the same in China in the spring.

I want to thank the Luce Foundation for their support for this project. I also want to thank Peking University and Wang Jisi and his colleagues, including Professor Chen Muyang, who made the trip with him, as well as the CSIS Trustee Chair team, led by Alyssa Perez.

Let me give folks a brief introduction for Wang Jisi, even though he needs no introduction, and then we're going to get to our discussion with several questions, and then we're going to take questions from the audience. All of you can go to CSIS's event page and type your questions in, and they will be beamed to me through cyberspace, and I will then dutifully get to as many of those as I can in this hour.

Wang Jisi is professor at the School of International Studies and president of the Institute of International and Strategic Studies at Peking University. He's also honorary president of the Chinese Association for American Studies. He is, in short, China's leading America watcher. He's written probably hundreds of articles and reports in Chinese and in Western publications, including one that maybe many of you in the United States and Europe have read in 2012 with Ken Lieberthal of the Brookings Institution on strategic distrust in U.S.-China relations. That came out in March of 2012, before China's current leader, Xi Jinping, was in power. He's been a visiting professor at Oxford, UC Berkeley, Michigan, Claremont McKenna, and Princeton.

We first met in 1994 – which is now 28 years ago, so already a long time – when he was at the Institute of American Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. And I should say, most importantly Wang Jisi is now a happy new grandfather, so congratulations.

Dr. Wang Jisi: Thank you very much, Scott, for your congratulations. I'm very happy to be not only a happy husband, a happy father, but also a happy grandfather. I also want to thank you and CSIS, especially Dr. John Hamre, for making all this possible.

And your introduction to me was a bit too long, but I don't have time to introduce you as a close friend and a good colleague and the leading China experts in the United States. So I'm very happy to join you and join the audiences in a very productive conversation between the two of us.

Dr. Kennedy: Well, terrific. Well, let's get started. And just maybe for a little bit of background for people, you know, the U.S. and China, we've not had the level of international travel that we've had in the – in previous years. I think in 2019 we had somewhere around 2 ½ to 3 million Chinese and Americans travel in both directions, something that was critical for scholars. Tell us a little bit about what it was like to try and watch the United States without visiting the United States and why this trip is important to you?

Dr. Wang: I think I have to look at the United States from a new perspective. We heard a lot of things about the United States' domestic politics, economy, and foreign policy. For instance, people in China are talking about political polarization in the United States, and the economy also has some problem like debts, inflation, and things are very interesting here. In the international relations, we have been watching very closely the Ukraine crisis – Ukraine crisis and America's focus on East Asia or what you call East Asia – Pacific-Asian region, whereas we refer it to – to it as the Asia-Pacific region.

So another thing, of course, I want to watch is COVID, how people deal with COVID in the United States. It is a common understanding that the United States has been fail – has failed to deal with the COVID crisis very effectively. Over 900,000 people died of COVID, and China's death toll has been fewer than 6,000. And people are also watching what is going on with Omicron. So people in China told me that you are going to the most dangerous country in the world from the safest country in the world. I personally don't feel this way. I think I'm pretty safe with the help of my colleagues and friends, and of course I'm very cautious.

Another thing I want to do is to explore opportunities of restoring academic communication and cooperation, like what I'm doing with Scott Kennedy.

And the most important thing for me to watch is the recent developments in U.S.-China relations.

Dr. Kennedy: Well, that's a big agenda, individually and each of those topics, and we're going to come back a little bit more to your visit. But I want to move around and make sure we've got enough topics on the table to discuss.

And you know, this week is the 50th anniversary of President Nixon's trip to China. A cold February; he visited Shanghai, Beijing, and Hangzhou. They issued the Shanghai Communiqué. I've seen some essays written about this, some news broadcasts. A Foreign Ministry spokesman said some – offered some remarks. Seen a little bit out of the U.S. government. But pretty quiet. Not a whole lot of discussion in either country about it.

If you could reflect back, your impressions of the evolution of U.S.-China relations since February of 1972, is that nostalgic memories for you? Is there lessons that you remember that you think we ought to remember from 50 years ago this week?

Dr. Wang: I recall my old days 50 years ago when Nixon visited China. I had absolutely no knowledge of what was going on then because I – the only thing I could get to know about the outside world, including outside of my village, was what we call a transistor radio, or bandaoti 半导体 (semiconductors). That is – bandaoti 半导体 now is a very common word.

Dr. Kennedy: Semiconductors, yeah.

Dr. Wang: Semiconductors. (Laughs.) But then, of course, we also read newspapers. One leading newspaper we could read at the time was the People's Daily, but it came only 15 days after its publication because of the remoteness of my village. I was shepherd on the grasslands of Inner Mongolia, very far from Beijing. It took a long time to get there. So the life was very primitive.

So that was what I – when I was and where I was. What did I do? I was grazing domestic animals like cattle, horses, sheep, goats. But later on, we received dissemination of party documents about Nixon's visit to China. We didn't understand, but we thought that Mao Zedong must be right. He was farsighted enough and he was very clever. So when we heard that he said I like conservatives, I like right-wing politician –

Dr. Kennedy: (Laughs.)

Dr. Wang: – Richard Nixon is a right-wing politician, I like him – still, I am thinking about what he meant.

Dr. Kennedy: (Laughs.)

Dr. Wang: But I think he, of course, knew that there were distinctions between Democrats and Republicans, and Richard Nixon was a Republican president. So it had some meanings even for today.

But what attracted our attention more and greatly was the Lin Piao affairs several months before the Nixon visit. We had heated discussions because we were wondering why Lin Piao was picked up as second one – second important leader in China and what was Mao's perception of him, and so on and so forth. So we didn't discuss Nixon. It also means that domestic politics are always more important than international relations in any single country.

But I personally met with Richard Nixon in 1989. It was a very strange, a very peculiar experience. Nixon visited China in – a few months after the June 4th incident in Beijing. So he was accompanied by a very good friend of mine, Mike Rofsenberg. Unfortunately, Mike passed away 20 years ago. So when I spoke to Mike, he said, are you interested in meeting the president? I said, of course. I was accompanied by a few friends of mine from Peking University, so we were a very small group. So Richard Nixon came down from the floor above us and he had a long conversation with us. So he asked me, what do you do as a professor? And I said, I study and teach political science. And his response was, oh, I studied that subject at the university as well, but it is not very useful. (Laughter.) And he said, politics is a – is not a science; it's an art. So it was very striking to me and I remember that phrase forever. As a scholar, I think politics is both a science and an art. But it's more important to remember that politics is more practical than theoretical.

And Nixon also said to me something, you know, as far as I remember, that when I visited China in 1972 there were no human rights to talk about, but we still made the breakthrough in the relationship. Then he went on to say something like political reform without economic reform would fail. I think he was talking about the Soviet Union. And he also said with – economic reform without political reform would also fail. I think he was referring to China. But I think China has prospered and has thrived, you know, since his visit, since even 1989. So we did not do that kind of political reform as Nixon suggested, but we succeeded. So it is a lesson we should keep in mind. Of course, political reform is still on the agenda, but not the political reform Westerners are thinking about.

And one other thing, if I could to mention, is that Nixon and Mao did not meet strong resistance or opposition from their respective domestic audiences to the rapprochement of China-U.S. ties. They conducted secret diplomacy like Henry Kissinger's secret visit to China in 1971, but this kind of secret diplomacy is not very viable – it's not very relevant in today's world

because of modern technologies, especially, you know, the telecommunications.

So very much today we are influenced by domestic factors in U.S.-China relations. A variety of interest groups, multiple dimensions are involved, and the situation is very complicated. So when you think about the old days, we could be somewhat nostalgic but there is no way for us to go back to the old days.

Dr. Kennedy: For certain. In 1972, our countries were about as different as they could be – levels of economic development, social, political systems. We only had really one thing in common: Our deep anxieties and worries about the Soviet Union, which is what brought us together then. We don't exactly have that situation now. If we just sort of set aside a little bit – I won't get into Russia-Ukraine right away – but is it that disappearance of a common foe or a common concern that has led to the - what you called with Ken Lieberthal in 2012 the increase in distrust? Or are there other things that have led to the growing challenges that you've, you know, witnessed over this time that has made it more and more difficult for the U.S. and China to get along? Is it just about changes in relative power or changes in domestic Chinese politics or changes in American politics, globalization? Is there – I guess there was a sort of a simple explanation for what brought us together. Is there a simple explanation for what's driving us apart?

Dr. Wang: Well, when Ken Lieberthal and I wrote the thesis on mutual distrust between the United States and China, we hoped that this distrust would be reduced or removed from the political agenda. But now I have a second thought about that thesis at all. I didn't have a chance to talk that in some detail with Ken Lieberthal. I met him a few days ago, but we didn't have a chance to discuss that.

So mutual distrust is very relevant, but it is there probably for a long time to come. And I'm thinking about the discourse of mutual trust or distrust. Can we have real mutual trust in politics? I, of course, watched the TV show "House of Cards." There, the Vice President and the President did not trust each other, you know, for the United States. And we recall also some discussions within the United States today between the – you know, in the last – latest administration, but I'm not going to give you any details about what I think. So the mutual distrust is there for a long time to come, and this is a new – this is reality not only between China and the United States, but also in international relations at large.

What we can do is not to remove the distrust or even to reduce the distrust, but to improve or stabilize relations with the knowledge that you don't necessarily trust me and you know I don't necessarily trust you, but we have

to build on our common interests and increase cooperation, reducing trouble. That is what I'm thinking about today.

Dr. Kennedy: Yeah. Well, I mean, we have President Reagan's famous statement vis-à-vis the Soviet Union: "Trust, but verify." And that may be not trust, so you must verify. I think also part of it is one way that distrust is reflected is anxiety not about different goals that the two sides have, but about the means and methods that you're willing to use. And the U.S. is oftentimes – and maybe this is an idealistic American point of emphasis, but accepting the rules of the game and competing according to the rules of the game. And if you do, I know someone who works on trade, that this is a common theme of the United States is that the U.S. wants China to comply with its various agreements – not necessarily stop competing with the U.S. or with others, but at least competing according to those rules. And I think just the – a lot of this distrust is about anxieties about whether or not China is willing to compete according to those rules or whether it's going to use a different rulebook. And I know from the perspective of Chinese their distrust is not about the rulebook, but about whether or not the U.S. is willing to let China become successful, large, and powerful regardless of the rules. So it seems we both have our different sources of distrust. And definitely in the last 10 years since you wrote that essay with Ken our level of distrust has continued to worsen.

In your – in the time that you've been here, the last couple weeks, what's surprised you the most? Or is it just like you've been seeing on the Web? What's your – what's your most important impression so far?

Dr. Wang: I have conducted more than 40 rounds of discussion with think tanks, officials, and people like yourself. Nobody says he or she is optimistic about the bilateral relationship today. I hear more pessimism than I heard in my previous visits before 2019, including the Trump years. Many say in the United States there is a consensus among Republicans and Democrats, between Congress and the Biden administration; that is, China's a major threat – not a major threat, a major problem or a major competitor, or THE major competitor, to the United States.

There are differences among the people I talked to as to the degree and scope of the so-called China problem or China threat. Some are more worried than others. Some focus on Taiwan. Some refer to Russia or the Ukraine crisis. Others discuss trade or technological competition. Still others mention human rights or Taiwan.

So, to me, China being a challenge is a given, but people have different ideas as to how to manage the challenge of competition. Some propose a tougher position, but some other emphasize that climate change and coping with COVID, and reviving the global economy, could provide the basis for China

and the United States to coordinate and cooperate with each other. So what surprised me? Not necessarily anything to me was surprising, but I found some small changes as compared to my latest visits.

For one thing, I went to CVS to buy some things for my family. I found that some counters are locked. People said to me, they're afraid of shoplifters. Would they have worried about shoplifters a few years ago? So what you see – what is a new situation here is the community is somewhat more – less secure than before. People are more worried about stealing or looting. So we observe a lot in China. And so I'm seeing today that things are changing. But I still have some confidence that the United States is doing well in its economy. And I hope the situation regarding safety and security would be improved.

The last thing I want to emphasize here is that deterioration of the relationship did not happen overnight and had not begun with the Trump administration. There are more similarities and dissimilarities between the two administrations' China policy. And so I want to watch and to make my own conclusion as to what the similarities are and what the dissimilarities are.

Dr. Kennedy: Let me just go back to one thing that you mentioned about the similarities and differences amongst – within this consensus that you – that you mentioned, where you're seeing differences. You mentioned differences based on what are the issues that people are mentioning. You know, some people focus on human rights, or Taiwan, or Russia. Another part of this conversation that we're having – we're a country that loves to have regrets. We talk about things that we should have done, shouldn't have done, in foreign policy, domestic politics, personal relationships. We're always reevaluating what we did.

And certainly, now there's a conversation in the United States, you know, should we have recognized China and established diplomatic relations? Should we have expanded trade? Should we have done something else? So there's a big question about sort of reevaluating the whole strategy of the engagement. Just from your perspective, do you – do you – if the U.S. hadn't pursued this strategy with China, to expand connectivity over the last few decades, would things have been any better? Can you – you know, from the Chinese perspective, engagement helped stabilize the relationship. Has it been genuinely win-win? Should Americans be going through this type of self-evaluation and reconsidering the whole enterprise of engagement?

Dr. Wang: Yes. I think you mentioned the consensus that is China's a challenger and China's a competitor. But how to deal with this competitor, I hear different voices. Some are more moderate, some are tougher, some propose that, you know, tougher positions toward China. But if I try to find some

dissimilarities between the Trump administration and the current administration, I think there is more expertise on China in the Biden team. We have some familiar faces, and some new younger expertise – experts are coming to the government. So does that mean that China should be more comfortable with the current administration? Not necessarily. Because they know more about China the pressures on China become more complex, and more comprehensive, and more systematic.

Trump focused on trade. Some Trump administration officials mentioned the Communist Party of China as a – as a problem. They tried to alleviate – eliminate the population from the Communist Party. The Biden administration doesn't repeat the same kind of phrase. And you are more concerned – I think this administration, more concerned about a lot of things, including climate change. But climate change and coping with COVID could provide, as I said before, some basis for cooperation. So this is a new situation we have to deal with. More complicated.

So we have also to be somewhat more sophisticated looking at the United States. So you might ask me, do we have debates in China? Yes. We also have debates in China among China's America-watchers. But in the Chinese way, that is not open, not very sensational. But we do have discussions of how we should deal with the United States. When the Americans say this is strategic competition, the Chinese say, well, yes, maybe this is strategic competition. But that would also be supplemented by strategic cooperation. That is the Chinese view.

Dr. Kennedy: Yes. And let me ask you a little bit about maybe the debate in China, or what do you think the different points of view might be. So ten days ago or so the administration issued its Indo-Pacific strategy and stressed, as you mentioned, strategic competition. And there is one sentence I want to read. And I'm curious how you interpret this, or how you think Beijing or others would. It's a key sentence from the report. It says, "Our objective is not to change the PRC," I think that means politically, right. "Our objective is not to change the PRC, but to shape the strategic environment in which it operates, building a balance of influence in the world that is maximally favorable to the United States, our allies and partners, and the interests and values we share." What are the – how would – how do you interpret that sentence in terms of the strategy or goals of the United States?

Dr. Wang: I think my understanding of that phrase is that the United States – no longer – United States sees the change of China's domestic structure as a possibility, or as a desire. Maybe some Americans still want to change China domestic – China's domestic structure. But I think that kind of hope is – has disappeared in the current administration. And they are emphasizing rule-based international order. The rules are different interpreted in China. We

emphasize more international rules, like the charter – the United Nations Charter, that is respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity.

So in that regard, the Chinese are critical of American position over the Indo-Pacific regional strategy, because China's strategic interests are not taken very seriously. And there is the American effort to mobilizing forces to strengthen U.S. military presence in the region. So there is strategic competition – security – strategic security competition between the two sides. And I hope the United States will give some more consideration to China's concerns about China's territorial integrity, especially China's sovereignty.

Dr. Kennedy: Well, we're going to come back to that in just a minute. China's also in Europe as well. But first, let me turn just a little bit – and we're getting a lot of questions. People are really very interested. And some of my questions are actually just reflecting what people are asking. For those of us who have not been to China in two years, which is the vast majority of Americans. I think travel has dropped 95 – I would think 99.9 percent. Very few Americans have been able to travel to China. What's changed? What's life like in Beijing and other cities, or in Inner Mongolia, or other places? What are we missing?

You know, China's gone through the COVID experience very differently than the United States. We had very few lockdowns. We've developed vaccines and as, you know, most of us are coming back to work these days. But we have a federal system, so we have, you know, 50 different states and even within each state very different reactions and treatments. I can tell you, in my – where I live, in Northern Virginia, the schoolboard has one view, the state government has another view. So what's it been like in China the last couple years?

Dr. Wang: I think, as you just observed, there are different practices and different recommendations in different states in the United States. But that is not happening in China. Everywhere in China, people are observing, you know, discipline and the rules. The most obvious change of this, of course, is related to COVID. Most Chinese citizens are cooperative with government regulations on social distancing, vaccination, quarantine, and so on and so forth. Everybody wears a mask. I observed that everybody wears a mask in Washington, D.C. But I was told that not everybody wears a mask in other states. So this is very interesting.

And some other things are happening in the last two years. For one thing, economic growth has slowed a little bit. It was – the economic growth rate in 2021 was 8.1 percent, according to my memory. And people say, well, we may have a lower growth rate, like 5.5 percent, this year. So there are some complaints I have heard in China about rising prices of food, clothing, and other products. You know, the prices are stable, but people are saying that

meat is more expensive, and they have to rely on meat and some other foods. That is interesting.

And politically, we had the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Communist Party of China. And there was a resolution of the party history. And there is a more solid political education at university, and primary schools, and middle schools. And we are talking about study sessions of Xi Jinping thought on socialism with Chinese characteristic for new era. And Xi's Communist Party has consolidated its power base among the people. And there are more patriotic feelings and what I would call triumphalism, that is, we are marching forward and the United States is not in very good shape.

So if you talk about win-win – (laughs) – and of course, we want to have a win-win situation. But we are winning more than you are winning. So that is what many people in China are thinking about. We are winning the struggle against COVID. You are not winning. You are not – you know, we are watching. So we are hesitating to say who is winning more systematically, China or the United States. That also is a debatable point in China.

Dr. Kennedy:

Well, it's certainly discussed in the United States as well, this competition with China. I note that in many – there are a few areas where the U.S. and China are near the top. Maybe size of economies, military power. There's other areas where we're not. Levels of economic equality, the social safety net, even in innovation we're both doing a lot better – China's doing a lot better than it was. It's ranked 12th now, according to the Global Innovation Index. But there are other countries out there who are doing even better than us on lots of different things. And so our competition – if we just focus on the competition with each other, we forget actually, you know, it's not just important to be ahead of the other guy.

It's also important just to be better in any – let me ask you about one thing about the Olympics. Because this is about competition. And I notice, when China reports how many medals it won, it puts China third, because it has the third-most number of gold medals, nine. And it puts U.S. behind it because it only had eight. But if you look at The New York Times or Washington Post, or U.S. Olympic – it'll list the total number – in the order of total number of medals. Now, the U.S. is also not first, but it had overall more medals than China.

What was – you arrived in the United States just as the Olympics were starting. But you were in Beijing in the run-up to the Olympics. What was the atmosphere like about hosting the Winter Olympics? I remember I was first in China in 1988 and watched on a TV when Chinese had few participants. I believe the Olympics were in Calgary in 1988. Excuse me if I'm making a mistake. But it wasn't – there were very few Chinese participants in those Olympics, and it was far away. But China hosted in 2008 a mega-Olympics,

announcing China's arrival on the global stage. What did – what was the atmosphere or feeling like in China in the lead-up to this Olympics?

Dr. Wang:

I left China when the Olympic Games began, so I didn't watch that very closely. I was more focusing on U.S.-China relations. So I watched some episode of the game in the fitness room of my hotel. (Laughs.) Western coverage of the games. So I confess, I don't know too much about specific results, or who was winning championships. But I notice I one thing I want to mention. The United States government said it could – it did not say many good words about China holding the Winter Olympics. There was some threatening remarks made by some people in the United States saying they wanted to boycott the games.

But I noticed recently, yesterday, your Secretary of State Tony Blinken had a conversation with Wang Yi, the Chinese foreign minister and state councilor. And he said to Wang Yi, we congratulate you on the success in holding the Olympic Games in Beijing. I think this is very exciting to me. And Wang Yi sent back the messages that he congratulated American athletes' performance. So I think that is a very good conversation between the two of them in talking about the Winter Olympics. I think the Chinese citizen are more enthusiastic than other people because it was holding – being held in Beijing, and some other places around Beijing. So, but of course, there are also very strict quarantine things. So people cannot watch that – it in the field. So this unfortunate for some enthusiasm on this topic.

Dr. Kennedy:

For sure. For sure. When the U.S., you know, announced on December 6th its diplomatic boycott, so it didn't send any senior U.S. officials, and over a dozen other countries made the same decision. I think one of the results – instead a full-blown boycott, not sending athletes. So they chose the middle path. I guess my own view on that is everyone got the Olympics they wanted. China got to host the Olympics the way they wanted and presented it in a narrative to its domestic audience in its way. The U.S. and others got to have their own Olympics, and frame it. And there was obviously a lot of conversation in the United States and the West about human rights, and lots of individual topics. The athletes got their Olympics. The only ones who didn't get their Olympics were the fans who couldn't go and had to watch on TV wherever they were, even in China.

Which brings me to another piece of news and issues that have arisen in the context – over the time the last few weeks, which is China- Russia ties. Just about the same time, on the same day the Olympics started, on February 4th, Xi Jinping and Russian leader Vladimir Putin met. The two governments issued a very long document, a joint statement. In some ways, it's the bookend to the Shanghai Communique issued 50 years before and now we are sitting today on the precipice of war in Ukraine, and I'm curious what you think it's most important for Americans to understand about these developments not just in U.S.-Russia relations but China's playing, a

potentially, a very critical role because of the improvement in China-Russia relations, this lengthy joint statement, which, I think, surprised a lot of Americans who thought maybe Russia and China would have a marriage of convenience. But it's lasted so long. The statement says their cooperation is without limits. What should Americans take away from this growing Russian-Chinese partnership, especially with respect to Ukraine?

Dr. Wang: I think you referred to the document – the agreement between China and Russia. It was a very lengthy paper. I read it also very carefully. It emphasizes cooperation. So China and Russia relations have been growing very rapidly in the last two years, especially in political and economic areas, and Russia and China cooperate with each other very closely on energy development, economic growth, and China and Russia are also cooperating on geopolitical issues. China supports Russia's legitimate security interests and Russia supports China's position over Taiwan. But the recent developments are very interesting in the last few – two days. If you want to know more about it I will give you some more answers.

Dr. Kennedy: For sure. Absolutely. One of the hallmarks of Chinese foreign policy centers around the concept of sovereignty, protecting China's territorial integrity as well as China's statements at the United Nations and others, and I think what many in the United States have wondered is, is China's growing collaboration with Russia - lead it to take a position on Ukraine which might justify violating Ukraine's sovereignty, which would then, again, go against, seemingly, China's long-stated position about the importance of sovereignty.

Is that where we are? Is China taking a position with regard to Russia and Ukraine and NATO that might undermine China's original views and positions about sovereignty or are these two things – am I – what am I missing?

Dr. Wang: And I think China-Russian relations have two parts. First is geopolitical concerns of the two countries. The other is the common ground in resisting Western calls for political changes in their two – in these two countries – domestic political changes in these two countries. So people are watching the first part of the relationship – the geopolitical concerns – and China says repeatedly that it should respect other countries, should respect Russia's legitimate security concerns. When the – in the most recent statements, as I read this morning from the foreign ministry and the from state counselor and the Foreign Minister Wang Yi, I see some more subtlety on the subject. China says, you know, all the security concerns should be noticed and people – all parties should be restrained in their relationships. We're against any warfare. We are in the favor of peace.

So that is very interesting that it more nuanced than before. I am not a spokesman for China so I don't want to interpret that subtlety, but I hope

you will notice the recent statement made by the foreign minister spokesman, Wang Wenbin, and the state counselor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

I think that is very important. Beijing is navigating a complex position as it attempts to balance deepening ties with Moscow with this practical foreign policy of staunchly defending state sovereignty –

Dr. Kennedy: Sure.

Dr. Wang: – state sovereignty of China, state sovereignty of Russia, and state sovereignty of some other countries, and I think that includes Ukraine.

Dr. Kennedy: So if – so it seems like – I wonder if Russia – if China feels like the way some American companies do in trying to navigate U.S.-China relations, that it's very difficult to thread that needle. You can't be – you can't say something that pleases Beijing and Washington at the same time and I'm wondering if on this issue how – is it possible for China to navigate a middle path that doesn't end up making its relations with one side or the other harmed indefinitely.

I think as long as there's no war then it sounds like it's, potentially, possible to have that type of subtle adjustments. But if there is a war, a wider war, between Russia and Ukraine, do you – my guess is Washington is going to criticize Beijing for not forcefully coming down on one side of this.

Are you concerned that this may be the last straw in stable U.S.-China relations that leads us into – back to the type of relationship we had in the 1950s and '60s? I was just – I mean, Ukraine, in some ways, seems like playing the role that the Korean Peninsula played in the early 1950s. How concerned are you that we're headed in that direction?

Dr. Wang: You asked me what surprised me. I think that include – my surprises include the strong sentiments of the United States over Ukraine – over Russia. I didn't notice that in – when I was in Beijing. But things have changed a great deal since I left Beijing, and I think there are something new and Americans are very much concerned, and they also may have made the conclusion that Russia's invasion of Ukraine is imminent, threatening, and it got the message. But China's observations of this situation is that Russia's military action is probably not that imminent as described by the Americans.

But, of course, we have been very cautious. We have to prepare for some worsening scenarios. So this is something we have to watch very closely – China, Russia, the United States. I think, strategically, China is moving closer to Russia and China-U.S. relations are deteriorating.

But it could be a crucial moment for the three countries to readjust relationships with each other. I don't think China will move from the previous and traditional approach to Russia and the United States. But some things might happen if things are happening dramatically in the Ukraine crisis.

Dr. Kennedy: Well, it sounds like we really are on the potential edge of turning a new page in history if there is a conflict. That might solidify a lot of the mistrust and anxieties and bring us to an era which we haven't seen.

On the other hand, if we are able to resolve these then we might have a positive turn in history that no one was expecting. I'm not saying that's the most likely. It sounds like we are headed down a more difficult path. But, nevertheless, as U.S. officials have said, they're going to keep up diplomacy until the very, very last moment if they can.

We're getting a lot of good questions and, hopefully, people recognize as I'm asking you that I'm also reflecting the questions that are coming in.

Let me turn – we only have a few more minutes left, so let me turn to another hotspot in the relationship, potential hotspot, and that's Taiwan. And 50 years ago, the U.S. and China came to a subtle agreement about how to manage the challenge of Taiwan in the Shanghai Communique, and that arrangement has held for 50 years. It's maybe the most surprising thing of the relationship, that it's endured without open warfare during that time, despite the fact that during that time China's become much more powerful. Taiwan's economy has thrived. It's become a democracy. It is – got a record on COVID and other issues that draw people's admirations. And of course, sense of identity in Taiwan has shifted over that time, too. Yet nevertheless, this arrangement has endured.

But of course, there's also really significant concerns. We're in Washington, D.C., so everyone is worried about everything. So maybe it's the same in Beijing, being political capitals. Are you worried about the inevitability of open military conflict over in the Taiwan Straits? Or there – and if you are worried about that, do you have some suggestions about ways we might be able to reduce tensions or increase communication to reduce the possibilities of conflict?

Dr. Wang: I don't think a war with Taiwan or with the United States is inevitable. I think there are many chances for China and the United States to talk to each other. And then cross-strait relations – cross-strait relations between the mainland and Taiwan, may also have some more chances, you know. We are still in favor of peaceful unification with Taiwan. War is the last resort. But before, again, all-out war and peaceful settlement, there are a lot of things we can do. For instance, I think China is – the mainland is still promoting economic

exchanges with Taiwan. And, you know, Taiwan – some people in Taiwan are in favor of independence, but some other people are very cautious about status of Taiwan.

You mentioned the Shanghai Communiqué. I can recite word by word what was said at the time. I – as I recall, the United States acknowledges the Chinese position that all Chinese across the Taiwan Strait think there's only one China, and Taiwan is part of China. The United States does not challenge that position. In Chinese, Meiguo 美国(United States).

Dr. Kennedy: Chengren 承认 (acknowledge)

Dr. Wang: Buchiyiyi 不持异议 (no objection) does not have a literal opinion. That has been the United States government position over all these years, for almost 50 years. I don't think it's – the essence of that the standing has changed dramatically.

But there are some changes. I mean, some people in the United States are favoring more contact with Taiwan, even some fringe views have it that the United States should have recognize the independence of China, and that would be dangerous. But I noticed most recently, as I said before, that between Blinken and Wang Yi, Blinken said, according to the Chinese translation, he stressed that President Biden has said many times the United States does not seek a new Cold War. The U.S. does not seek to change China's system – that is important – but opposes Taiwan independence and has no intention to engage in conflict or confrontation with China. So, my understanding is that the traditional American statement is that the United States does not support Taiwan independence. But this new – this is new to me that the United States opposes Taiwan independence. I don't know whether it is because of some new situation in U.S.-China relations in China's approach to Ukraine crisis. So, I think that is a – that's a positive development that the United States reiterates its position not to change the status quo. And also, I have the hope – as I talk to American colleagues and government officials – the hope the United States will be somewhat more consistent with the Shanghai Communiqué and say that not only you do not hope to see a military conflict between Taiwan and mainland, but you would support or you would acquiesce with peaceful unification. What's wrong with peaceful unification? If the unification happens peaceful, not militarily, the United States should welcome that kind of resolution. I am hoping that there will be more thinking about this.

Dr. Kennedy: Well, I know a cornerstone of American policy has been there needs to be a peaceful resolution of the of the Taiwan Straits issue.

Dr. Wang: That should include peaceful unification.

Dr. Kennedy: Even if – and it could include unification. It could include a whole variety of outcomes if it – as long as it’s peaceful. I think peace is the number-one priority emphasized by the United States. And therefore, its adjustments over time, at least as I see them, has been a combination of deterrence and reassurance toward both sides, right? And during certain circumstances it increases, emphasizes deterrence over reassurance and then adjusts. And certainly, we’re in one of those periods now where it’s primarily emphasizing deterrence against China, although that statement that you mentioned, I’d want to go check it to see again how we’re adjusting.

We’re – the hour has gone by very quickly. And I’ve really enjoyed this conversation with you. I’ve – extremely grateful for your visit to the United States. I know coming here – ain’t easy to prepare to come, to make all the – to do all the meetings, to even – and then prepare to go home. And I hope that you’ve benefited from your visits so far. And I know you still have some time here in New York, and I hope you continue to have constructive meetings. I hope you continue to feel safe, regardless of where you are. And I look forward to the opportunity to visit you in China in a few months. I was just wondering if there’s any final reactions or thoughts that you wanted to share about your time here, or U.S.-China relations.

Dr. Wang: I hope our exchange program marks the beginning of the restoration of academic exchanges between the two sides. I would warmly welcome in Beijing, although you will have to stay somewhere outside of Beijing for quarantine. I hope you will play it safe and enjoy your visit to China and hope other Americans and my friends and colleagues who have a chance to visit China, and also I hoped more visitors from China will be in United States. That will mark some kind of stabilization or restoration of the current relationship.

Dr. Kennedy: Well, I wholeheartedly agree. Whether we’re competing or cooperating, we’ve got to understand each other.

Dr. Wang: We are competing with each other. (Laughs.)

Dr. Kennedy: Yeah, so – (laughs). And we’re cooperating as well. And it’s just really important that we have this kind of independent scholarly exchange in person and to talk to each other. I think Washington and Beijing have echo chambers. And if you don’t get new information, you think of new ideas, and usually the worst. Not that talking and learning more necessarily solves any problems, but you better understand them. And that’s what the purpose of our exchange is about.

So again, thank you for joining us. I want to thank everyone who tuned in today. I want to thank my colleagues Wang Jisi’s colleagues at Beida for

helping arrange his visit, my colleagues here at CSIS for hosting, helping host him and for putting on today's program. You'll be able to watch this again soon online. And look forward to continuing the conversation with all of you and with Wang Jisi in the years ahead.

Dr. Wang: I should not forget thanking Peking University for its support to my visit.

Dr. Kennedy: Absolutely, to everyone, including Beida, CSIS, to Luce Foundation, and others. So, with that, thank you all and have a good day, wherever you are. Cheers.