

Thompson: Thank you very much, Garrett. My phone is that while we phone and the government just silenced it anyways, so we're good. We have Mira Rapp-Hooper. She is a senior fellow at the council on Foreign Relations and she's senior fellow at Yale law school and she's the author most recently of an open world and actually optimistic title. Uh, in the recent issue of foreign affairs we have Bob Kagan. He is a senior fellow at Brookings. His most recent pieces, the title's a little less optimistic. We have springtime for strong men and the strong men strike back. Is that correct? Uh, we have Richard Haass who is the president of the council on Foreign Relations and the author of a world in disarray. So

Speaker 2: yes,

Thompson: are you at clapping for the whole panel or for the title about the world, which is genuinely in disarray, but we're going to get it back arrayed to this morning with three of the smartest people in foreign policy. So what I want to do with this conversation is to outline where we are with China, how that relationship is evolving, where it could go both in the rest of the Trump administration and afterwards relationships with Russia and then possibly get into Iran. So let's get going. And let me ask, Richard. Trump is meeting with Xi Jinping this week. Tell us the most important issues divided United States in China and where you think the Trump administration's policy on China, which has shifted a fair amount in the last two years is headed.

Haass: Well, thanks nick. And thank you all. Uh, let me take 30 seconds just to set it. The US China relations has had a historical evolution since it started. Uh, we were on opposite sides of the Chinese civil war. We found ourselves ultimately on the same side of the cold war, the classical enemy of your enemy as a friend. So the United States and China made common purpose there. And then at the end of the Cold War, we went to look for a new raise on debt and we largely founded an economic relations in the two countries became more economically intertwined. And what's happened over the last few years is this is a relationship that lost its foundation because the economics have become as much as source of friction as they have a foundation. We no longer find ourselves for the most part, with some exceptions strategically align and is trying to get some more and more repressive at home.

Haass: And as it didn't open up economically and the way that some things counted on United States and China increasingly find themselves in very different places with very different trajectories. And this is the backdrop to the, the meeting that's going to take place in, in Osaka where they can potentially cooperate. I think the most likely area will be North Korea. She's in Ping, just made a trip to Pyongyang last week. My bed is he picked up something that he can work. And I think what you, if I were a betting man, I would say there's a decent chance there'll be a third summit between Kim Jong Un and Donald Trump this year and this will be more carefully prepared and there's a chance it could, it could yield something in China. We'll use this as a chance to demonstrate that it can be a limited strategic, our partner, the what's going on inside China is not of great interest to this administration given the nature of its foreign policy.

Haass: The economic is the or I would argue probably of greatest uncertainty and their, my, the I, there's a possibility of progress towards a limited trade deal. But where I don't think it will, I expect we'll talk about this and I don't want to fill a buster where I think the structural problem is we'll be in technology that the United States and China have yet to come up with a formula for how it is we protect, uh, from our point of view, our technologies, given that China is both a competitor economically and is strategically using some of these technologies either for reasons of enhancing surveillance, uh, or for military purposes.

Thompson: All right, fantastic. I'm glad you want to talk about that. Cause that to me is the most important issue in the world right now. Let's move to Mira. Richard is your soon to be your new boss. Please tear his argument to pieces.

Rapp-Hooper: Hey, we'll absolutely not do that. Uh, not only because I want to stay of my job, but because I agree with everything that, uh, Richard just said, what I will do, however, is embroider upon, um, his terrific comments a little bit on and sort of pull them up a level, um, to give us a sense of where this relationship has gone in is going from a strategic perspective. So exactly as Richard mentioned, the sort of post cold war raise on Detra has fallen out of the bottom of the u s China relationship. Um, and the consensus about the fact that the United States and China are going to be great power competitors has really crystallized amongst elites in Washington in a very profound way. And that has happened over the course of just the last two years. I would say in some ways the fact that the Trump administration is very forward leaning on China and economic policy belies just how deeply rooted that consensus is and how very bipartisan it is at this point.

Rapp-Hooper: The idea that the u s and China are going to be great power competitors and as Richard signals there are some fundamental underlying assumptions about this relationship that many people believe to have been dashed in the last several years. Um, there was a strong perception certainly throughout the 1990s that as China continued to rise, it was going to liberalize and hopefully democratize. And there was also a strong hope that as China became increasingly ensconced in the international order, that series of rules, norms and regimes that govern international politics, that that order would change China more than China would change it. And from the perspective of many foreign policy, uh, thought leaders, both of those sets of assumptions have been dashed, um, in particular by the rise of Cision Jinping, the way he has ruled China for the past several years. What this leads to is the strong perception that we are now dealing with China.

Rapp-Hooper: That is both going to be a major global power and is going to be an authoritarian major global power. And that presents profound challenges that we have not wrestled with in some time. Certainly since the end of the Cold War and arguably, uh, since well before that because, uh, the Chinese economy is far larger than the Soviet economy ever was. Um, so that puts the United States in a position where it has to figure out how it is going to approach the world. Uh, when its major power rival is an authoritarian great power. Um, that has already

largely established itself as a regional major power in Asia and intends to be a super power on the global stage by mid century. Um, and I have argued, you know, you, you asked me to, to speak a little about this. I've argued that the United States has to come up with a strategy which it does not yet have, which is not represented in what we've seen in the Trump administration's policy, certainly for protecting its own interests for protecting its allies in Asia, um, for, uh, for continuing to advance its interests and its considerable power on the global stage.

Rapp-Hooper: Uh, but also must acknowledge the fact that international order, these institutions, rules and regimes are fundamentally going to be shaped by a strong China in the world. And China's continued rise and that one of the most crucial tasks for American policy makers is to devise a strategy for a new international order that has a stronger China as a part of it. Thinking about where we can accept Chinese power and where it is reasonable for China to make additions to the international order. Thinking about where we should try to co-op some of their efforts such as the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank, um, which China proper just a few years ago and where we must push back against efforts that fundamentally, uh, violate rules, norms and laws in international politics. This is one of the most defining tasks I think of foreign policy of our time. Um, and it's one that is simply not represented by tariffs and the trade war. It is something much bigger than that and as a task of many administrations to come.

Thompson: Bob, let's talk about the last half of Mira's statement there, which sounds like America's role in the world is not going to be as powerful as it has been since 1945 and in fact we shouldn't even have the objectives of trying to set up a liberal world order. We should step away from that. Is that a fair characterization?

Rapp-Hooper: I wouldn't say we shouldn't have the objectives of trying to set up a liberal world order that can remain an objective. We should not presume liberal universalism in the near term. Indeed. The idea that Russia and China are going to become

Rapp-Hooper: liberal states is basically, I hope that has been dashed for the near term, but you do think that America needs to be less aggressive? Yes. Okay. Bob.

Kagan: Well, I think it's important to remember how we got here in the first place and I have maybe just a slight variation on on what both Richard and Mira have said as a historical matter. I mean basically the, the world system that United States set up after World War II was designed primarily to put an end to cycles of conflict that had led to a two world wars in Europe and a, an endless cycle of conflict primarily between Japan and China in Asia and what the United States did by making itself an Asian power and a European power was bring peace and stability to those regions. And that's really what's at stake there. There were a liberal elements to this as well, but I just want to stick to the geopolitical elements because I think that is the, that is the driving force here and I think it's, it's worth, uh, understanding that we're the United States to pull back from that role in Asia.

Kagan: Uh, we're not going to transition smoothly to Chinese hegemony. What we're going to transition back to is Sino a Japanese conflict because the Japanese are not going to go quietly into that good Chinese night, even if China is a richer, um, you know, we already see rising signs of nationalism, a desire for a more normal foreign policy on Japan's part. And the more they feel that the United States is pulling back, the more they're going to have to see to their own defense. And then we're back into this kind of cycle of challenge and conflict between two nuclear powers because Japan would could, could make a hundred nuclear weapons in two weeks if they wanted to. Um, and that's the world that I think we need to try to avoid. So the question is how best to do that given the reality of China's growth. Now, the only caveat I want to put on China's growth is if you look at the Chinese history going back at least a few centuries, it's periods of stability marked by periods of utter turmoil and revolution.

Kagan: So I wouldn't just presume that we're on a steady trajectory toward a greater and greater wealth and greater stability in China. And I think even she's in Ping's seizure of sort of soul rule to himself. May I leave it to the experts, but maybe actually a destabilizing factor. But in any case, the challenge for us, it seems to me, and here I'd like to just pick up on what Mira said, is to try to contain China's geopolitical ambitions, uh, particularly in terms of power projection and I'm talking about hard power and encourage them to succeed economically. This is where I think I differ from not only this administration but the last administration and probably a huge portion of the American public. I don't actually think we can stand in the way of China's economic growth and economic a Gemini in the region. Um, we probably will end up shooting ourselves in the foot and we're probably likely to lead to increased tension with China on economic grounds while not being sufficiently powerful to deter them.

Kagan: Um, if they choose to respond to our economic pressures, uh, by projecting power. And so my goal would be to try to limit and deter them because I think the Chinese don't want to have a war with the United States. So effectively deter them from throwing their rate around militarily and saying to them, in effect, we want you to get rich. Now there are details, important details about technology theft. We're going to be in an AI race, which is going to have military implications, etc. Uh, but our basic message to the Chinese is we're not trying to squeeze you to the point where you can't make money anymore. I don't think that's the whole mark of a successful policy. So it's military containment and as you know, as we used to say, sort of economic engagement with an eye toward China's success cause everybody on stage agree with that. General Philosophy, military containment plus economic engagement.

Haass: Well, to me the, the, the first half is on, uh, I don't see how anyone could object to it. And indeed one of the, to connect this just to the real world for a second, some of the president's comments over the last week raising questions about the u s Japanese security treaty and musings about wouldn't be so bad if Japan sat out of war and they could watch it on their Sony televisions, I think is truly corrosive, truly corrosive, where we're, we're beginning to toy with some of the

foundation stones that have served us extraordinarily well. People, people take for granted too much about the European project that has brought x unprecedented stability and prosperity and democracy to Europe. And they take for granted too much about the, the balances and the, the Asian miracle, which is the economic strides that Asia has made, has taken place against the backdrop of a extraordinary stability and security.

Haass: And we ought not to tinker with it less. We find ourselves, shall we say back in a back in very ugly history. I think Bob raises really interesting way. I think it's actually the key to the debate. So let me just, uh, which is this question of how does the, I states do everything. He have a relationship with China where we preserve pockets of potential cooperation. We pushed back where we have to say on North Korea. Uh, we do, uh, we, we keep open cooperation. We discouraged the Chinese from using force against Taiwan. And I think that's the sleeper issue in the region. If there's one thing that keeps me up there is she's been paying, has embarked on a unification of China campaign. We see the pressure on Hong Kong and watch the pressure grow on Taiwan and they are calculations of whether we're prepared to do things there I think might be the single greatest key to what happens in Asia for the next decade or, uh, two I think on the technology side, and Nick, you're actually, you probably know more about it than any of us up here, so you should come out of your narrow presider role.

Haass: The issue is, uh, is this a cold question about whether decoupling this idea that the United States and China go separately on the Internet and technology one, is it desirable? And two, whether it's even feasible to two questions and you were basically arguing, I think is that it's not that desirable may not even be necessary because we still want to integrate China. And I think the question is, I think though it's, it's beginning to happen and the issue is can you manage this process? So there's, there's limited separation but not full decoupling. And that's, that's where I come out, that there's certain things I want to preclude from China getting hold of, or in some areas even, it's not even how to put, I'll stop here. It's not so much that we're anti China, we've got to be pro American. We've got to out compete with them. So we can't, we should not get up in the morning and say our purpose of is to stop China's rise that will, in that while 100% mean, we end up in a totally confrontational relationship with China. And one that I think can't succeed. We should though I think say where do we selectively have to either slow what China does or accelerate what it is we do?

Thompson: Right? So I'm going to very briefly step out of the presider role, but then I hope cleverly turn it back into a question so I can return to my whole. Um, is it desirable that this technology decoupling continued? No, absolutely not. It is a horrific possibility. So to me, one of the things that worries me the most is that the technology sphere splits into and you end up with a technology cold war where the entire technology stack of certain countries can only be built on Chinese technology or Western technology. Five g network is built by Huawei all the way up to, you know the software used by the government in the AI systems, embedded it into it is built by Chinese tech companies or it's built by

American slash European companies. That was a world that did not seem possible until a couple of years ago when the split started.

Thompson: It is a world that seems increasingly more likely and you see countries including and as well and Zimbabwe starting to move in that direction. You see other countries on the belt and road moving in that direction and then you see the actions by the Trump administration, particularly against Huawei pushing us more in that direction. So it is profoundly undesirable. Is it possible? Not entirely. I mean, one of the things we're learning in this Walway fight is just how deeply integrated is all the while we phones, they use the android operating system, they use Qualcomm chips. It is relatively hard to disentangle the two tech sectors, but actually it is possible and all that the United States has done in the last couple of months has made China work towards decoupling. China is going to start building their own phone operating systems. So they are not dependent either on Cupertino or on Google and that will have profound implications and only profound implications for Taiwan where some of the most important and sophisticated circuit boards are built.

Thompson: And we'll make Taiwan more, you know, even more important strategic asset and possibly a source of more attention. So it could be quite bad. So that is my answer now to flip it around, I have a sense that there is some chance that the Trump administration's hard line pushes us in a good direction, right? That actually it brings China to the negotiating table in a way that makes them stop stealing. Stealing the technology completes companies secrets, makes the technology companies realize what is at stake, allows Google to go into China. And the outcome is actually a positive one. Where at the end of this administration, we somehow are more integrated. I have a bigger fear that it's going to be much more negative and leads what I just talked about and I wonder how you three or whichever one of you wants to respond would assess the odds. What are the odds that what Trump is doing now on technology takes us to a good place? And one of the odds it takes us to a dark place.

Speaker 6: Okay,

Haass: I can start. I think the itch takes us to a good place would be exquisite fortune and statesmanship on both sides that we could at what are the odds of that?

Speaker 6: Uh,

Haass: on both sides because it's not just seriously on our side. Uh, but the idea that you could figure out, okay,

Haass: a degree of coupling and a degree of decoupling, it's much easier to be either or black or white, but to have degrees of economic integration, which to some extent are inevitable that China basically revisits its policy of, of constant intellectual, uh, theft. And that we figure out rules of the game possible. And I think what Donald Trump has done, I think w he'll be criticized a lot over these

next few days. I F I would expect, I think you're making a fair point. He just called China out and basically I think represents the emergence of what mirror was talking about this new consensus that this policy of integration hasn't worked the way its proponents hope for politically China is more closed economically. It's been more mercantile lists.

Speaker 6: Um,

Haass: that is, that is where I, I think it's possible we could get to what Bob wants. I just think you'd have to be an optimist and a, the real question, the real problem I think is that we, we can't work it out. Well, I'm not, I'm not saying we can work it out. I'm just saying that our general thrust should not be to squeezed China till the pipsqueak economically and that I don't, I don't think that that's ultimately in our strategic interests. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt you.

Rapp-Hooper: No, not, not at all. No. I would just add to these comments the fact that while it is theoretically possible for there to be upside from this sort of heartline, um, trade on tech policy, my deepest concern is exactly what Richard signaled earlier. The fact that we are pursuing these policies while simultaneously undermining our alliances in Asia. Because if we had any hope in really converting hard line policies into something fruitful, I think it would because we did those out, those policies alongside allies and partners, our partners in Asia also have deep seated concerns about intellectual property theft, about Chinese technology, about the terms of trade with China. And when we level tariffs against them alongside those that we're putting on the Chinese, when we make Huawei a competitive issue with our allies as opposed to sinking up our strategy for tackling Chinese technology and what it means, we're putting our allies in a position that they fundamentally don't want to occupy.

Rapp-Hooper: And that is a world where they're asked to choose between the United States and China. If you are a country in Asia, regardless of whether or not you have a 70 year long security alliance with the United States, you are economically deeply interdependent with Beijing and there is no way around that for you, even if the United States decides to try to decouple part of its technology sector. So my deepest concern is that to the extent that there is positive upshot from these policies, we've undermined them by failing to pursue them with the allies who are fundamentally vital to our continued position in Asia.

Thompson: All right. So to sum up, there is a chance of reaching the optimistic outcome I laid out, but it will require exquisite diplomacy, which does not exist at all and entirely new relationships with our allies. Excellent.

Thompson: Let me ask a related question. So one of the most important trends in the world right now is the overall decline in democracy meant the number of countries that are democratic has been dropping. And however you measure it by some degree for the last, I don't know, 15 years as China gains power. What are the things the United States can do to not change China, but to counter that trend where the sort of gravitational force of China's successful authoritarian system

leads or inspires other countries to be more authoritarian? What can we do to reverse the trend of democratic decline? Bob, why don't I start with you since it's something you've written about wonderfully for many years. Well, we could stop supporting dictatorships, which is, which is very much our policy these days. Um, especially in the Middle East. Um, and, and the reason I say that is because whatever else is happening, whatever's happening on the geopolitical front or the economic front, uh, the fact of technology increasing the capacity of, uh, dictators to control their populations, uh, is going to exist in any case.

Kagan: So as long as China is an autocracy and I wouldn't bank on, it's the democratization anytime soon, uh, it is developing with its technological skills, the means of controlling its population and its exports. Right. And it's exporting that technology. Can I pause you just for one second? So you think that overall technology empowers dictators more than it empowers Democrats? Well, I mean, I think it depends in, in theory, in it. I think if you're an open society, uh, empower, it further empowers, uh, individuals. If you're a closed society. Our expectations, if you go back to our, all our friend Tom Friedman's, you know, expectation that the Internet would undermine dictatorship. Uh, one thing we've learned is that actually, at least at the moment, I'm sure it's like any kind of weapons race between offense and defense. Uh, but right now I would say, uh, you know, when you have things like facial recognition software, which allows the Chinese government and any government really to know where everybody is, the fact that they can know who's talking of to whom, when, what they're saying, et cetera.

Kagan: That is a great means for a dictator maint to exercise social control. And so, yes, that in the, in, in autocracies the technology is helping and the Chinese are exporting this technology as are the Russians. So for instance, uh, a dictator by the way, an increasingly brutal dictator that we have decided is our ally. Uh, I'll see, see in Egypt is, uh, like many other dictators going to get this technology, uh, from China to control his own population. And the world is going to divide at least as in a, in a sort of rough, simplistic sense between a world that's a surveillance state and a world that is not the surveillance state. Uh, the world that is surveillance state is going to be all dictatorships regardless of how we may feel about them geopolitically. And I think what's happening in the world right now is the surveillance state world is growing and the non surveillance state world, uh, is shrinking. No, that doesn't even get into the problems that we have ourselves with these issues, which we're going to have to wrestle with. But I think that is a real threat that we're not dealing with. And one reason we're not dealing with it is because we, we don't seem to understand the risk that all dictatorships pose, uh, to our democracy.

Thompson: Um, that is a good moment for me to remind you that in about five minutes we'll move to question and answer and there'll be no need for you to introduce yourself because I already know, um,

Speaker 2: Mira

Thompson: you've written about China and authoritarianism and how to help make the world more democratic. Explain in your recent article what your hypothesis is for what the United States needs to do to prevent the continued spread of authoritarianism and respond to Bob's argument.

Rapp-Hooper: Well, so I think Bob is certainly right with the phenomenon that he's pointed out. I think it's just a phenomenon we are only starting to grapple with. And may be more complicated than one that solely redounds to the benefit of authoritarian. So for example, when we talk about digital authoritarianism, the export of China's closed Internet system, um, we're actually talking about a Chinese system that relies on a number of different aspects, right? We're talking about a closed internet, we're talking about a surveillance state that spies on it's own. People were talking about the use of facial recognition technology, um, to subjugate often ethnic minorities and populations. Um, but we're also talking about a massive CCP apparatus that has been put to the disposal of all those technologies. So while it is strictly true that Beijing run summer camps for, you know, mixed regimes, um, and authoritarians whereby it trains other countries to use this technology, it is not necessarily strictly possible to export the entire Chinese system to other countries around the world wholesale.

Rapp-Hooper: That said, there is no question that this technology is spreading, but it also may be spreading with liabilities built into the system, right? So if you, uh, construct a digital authoritarian system, you necessarily are collecting tons of data that may be corruptible by foreign powers or within your own country. You're necessarily suppressing your own population, um, in ways that may result in significant pushback. Um, so while I think it is strictly true that this is a new means of competition that we definitely have to grapple with, I don't think it's perfectly analogous to the role that ideology played, let's say during the Cold War. Um, when it was serving as an affirmative vector and affirmative ideology being exported by the Soviet Union through an international movement. Um, it is a fundamentally different thing and it necessarily contains within it seeds that are far more problematic for authoritarian regimes themselves.

Haass: I just want to say it's different, but it may actually be more dangerous and more effective cause communism, the spread of comments around the world was not actually that successful and democracy booned during the period when we were being challenged by communism. Uh, a couple of things. [inaudible] there's only a few years ago that we saw the new technologies far more optimistically and did a lot of people were saying just before the Arab spring that distributed technology cell phones in the, like advantaged individuals against the state and Bob's phrase, yet it's an arms race. Every technology basically in the history of mankind, depending upon how it's exploited, how has, has multiple, uh, implications. So this one will go on for awhile, but for the time being, it seems the authoritarian chef have moved, uh, moved ahead. But there's some other things going on. Let me just point out three about this. This, this, this competition.

Haass: What is the United States? The American political and economic model has lost a lot of altitude, whether it was the financial crisis just over a decade ago or gridlock in Washington or many other things that I need not enumerate. So one of the reasons I think that the balance has shifted towards the authoritarian just is we're not as in a an attractive alternative, more people looking at the authoritarian model saying it looks more stable, more capable, economically performing better. That's one. Two we have stopped promoting it as an element of American foreign policy. It used to be a competition of ideas and a big part of American foreign policy would be that we would, we would talk about what's going on inside of countries because we saw the connection between what's going on inside of countries and how they behave in the world and we've to do that. We have essentially unilaterally disarmed in the competition for ideas so our model isn't as attractive and we're not promoting it.

Haass: And third and Bob alluded to it a few minutes ago, don't assume a trajectory for China that its model is going to continue to impress. I actually think [inaudible] Ping understands the trouble there in his anticorruption campaign is abolition of term limits and some ways as a preemptive strike on his own political system. I actually think she's been paying, has concerns about China's future. He wants all the benefits of an an open economy without having an open society. Easy trick, if you can pull it off. It stuff traces tremendous demographic challenges and take both China and Russia. Right now we haven't mentioned Russia. Neither one has a real plan for succession. When you consolidate power, you've raised fundamental questions about what is the process of legitimate transfer of power. I would simply say it does not exist clearly in Beijing. It certainly does not exist in Russia. So we shouldn't go about our lives as suiting this linear future where these authoritarian rivals, uh, are, are, are prospering while we, you know, while we have our own difficulties. I actually think in both cases, certainly economically in Russia, but also politically, uh, and then in China, I actually think one of the foreign policy challenges we're going to wake up to one day is going to be internal instability in both countries.

Kagan: Can I just jump on that and make one more point

Thompson: please? As long as you also answered the question of whether we should help promote internal instability in Russia as a way of accelerating their succession, please answer whatever you were going to answer and then pull that out of Richards and answer that too. And then we'll move to audience questions. So we will have microphones that are being passed around. Um, please get your questions in hand. I just want to say, I just want pull

Kagan: out one of the themes that I think is in all of our comments, which is a tremendous amount of our problem is us. Um, our lack of confidence in our own values are under our failure to understand how important it is to maintain the coherence of the liberal world, order our, our alliances. Um, the things that bind us together because in my view, if we, uh, who believe in these values and which includes mo almost all of Europe, it includes, uh, much of Asia and this is a very strong foundation. If we are coherent, these rival powers Plos much less

of a threat. And I mean, I think Russia poses no threat basically. Uh, China is going to be an issue just because of its rising power. So a lot of this is really about us and about us sort of getting our act together in a, in a cosmic sense.

Kagan: Should we be destabilizing Russia? We should be doing what we did. It's not even a matter of destabilizing. As Richard says, we have long since given up on the idea of encouraging democratic forces in Europe and Russia, which are admittedly weak right now, uh, with some hope that they might have some success. We have really, and this is not something that just happened under Trump, we have really kind of entered a, uh, a kind of live and let live approach to the world because we don't feel like taking those kinds of responsibilities. Um, but I think that is one reason as Richard says, why autocracies have done so well. They're not feeling the pressure that I think we had been putting on them for seven decades.

Thompson: This is definitely not an autocracy. So we will have audience questions and promote democracy. Let's start there in the back up to a point or there we are.

Audience Member: Thanks. So of the many advantages enjoyed by America as a hedge head on geography is there to Shining Seas East and west Canada to the north Mexico to the south. Look at China, 17 land borders, 15 of them unsettled. How much of an inhibiting factor for China, how much of a vantage point for America to play that mosaic of, of land bordering interests of China?

Kagan: I mean, that's a critical point. I just, I'm only jumping in here because it's exactly what it kind of feeds into what I was just saying, which is we do enjoy a tremendously advantageous situation for precisely the reason that you're saying, I wouldn't trade strategic situations with China a for all the money in the world. They have huge for all the tea for all the tea in China.

Speaker 2: Okay.

Kagan: That's why he's Richard Haas ladies and gentleman.Rap

Speaker 2: Um,

Kagan: and, and so let me, I just think that we are positioned as so advantageous that we really have to work hard to screw it up, but we are working hard.

Rapp-Hooper: I'll just

Rapp-Hooper: to add to that that the, the geographic picture in Asia presents both sort of affirmative opportunities for the United States to deepen relationships with countries like India, which it has been doing for the past several administrations. There are limits there, but nonetheless remains very promising to uh, situations that are likely to present themselves through more passive mechanisms that we don't actually have to do anything about for them to come about. What I'm

thinking of there is the fact that China, um, has proffered this belt and road initiative, this massive set of infrastructure projects that pushes into South East and Central Asia and pushes it towards Russia's own perceived sphere of influence, the former Soviet Union. And for all that we sometimes talk about an authoritarian access between China and Russia. They also have a very long history of rivalry including over shared borders, um, and to have China increasing its power and influence in what Russia perceives as its own backyard may actually create some forces that were down to American interests.

- Thompson: Third Height. So 30 seconds. Yes, but let's give the next question to this gentleman here on the left. But first Richard is going to answer this and then wait for the microphone because it's much better for everyone.
- Haass: It's the importance of a alliances as a way to leverage American power and good relations. We'll take one example. One of the first decisions of this administration was for the United States to pull back from the transpacific
- Haass: partnership, essentially a geo-economic er network in the, in the Pacific while couches in Latin America, Asia. And that's a way of weakening our leverage visa via channel cause it would have forced China I believe, to raise its game rather than be able to set the rules of the game that helped China. One of the things that worries me is, I think I can remember was the Atlantic in The New York Times basically asked all the Democratic candidates what they think about GPP and you see very few willing to revisit that policy. So I I what it's, it's again, I think it's important to look, it didn't come up in last night's debate. Hopefully it'll come up in this and tonight's debate, but we, we've got to make sure we avail ourselves of the tools that are part of our, our structural advantages and alliances and institutions. Geography are all part of it. And when we, we basically call Canada, we use national security mechanisms to treat Canada as an adversary rather than an ally. We have the shorts are problems we're having with Mexico. We pull out of TPP. It's as if we're, we're systematically going about undermining the advantages we structurally bring to the game.
- Audience Member: Great session. Thank you. A quick question. We were anticipating something about a rain. Can we go there for a minute? Okay,
- Kagan: sure. Let's go to Iran. Where, uh, what should American policy, uh, be right now and how likely are we to slip into catastrophe?
- Speaker 2: [inaudible]
- Kagan: I have to say, and this is I think a minority opinion these days, I'm not actually worried that we're going to slip into catastrophe. I, and the reason I say that is I don't think either side wants a war. And unlike a lot of historians, I don't think nations together stumble accidentally into war. I think someone has to want to go to war. Um, and Trump I think does not want to, cause I think he rightly understands that the American people are not interested in a real war. I'm not

talking about strikes. And I am confident that Iranians do not want a full fledged war with Twitter accounts. No. Okay. What would that change my mind if I do it to mind? I wouldn't

Haass: disagree with Bob. I would say in principle, neither country wants to work, but I think we're actually most much closer to one today than we want. Chuck, we worked several days ago. The United States has a policy of putting pressure on Iran and we gradually turned up the pressure and it's working or economy last year, and this year collectively will shrink by 10% these sanctions have been far more effective than the skeptics are. Sanctions including myself would have, would have thought. But, but it's pressure. And what's the purpose? If it's regime change, regime change is not going to happen. So, and if it's trying to get around to change everything it's doing in policy, that's also not gonna happen. So the danger right now, and the reason I think we could slip into a war is we keep pressuring Iran. They're feeling the need to push back. They did it by shooting down drone.

Haass: The who tees or shooting missiles from Yemen and to Saudi Arabia, Palestinian Islamic Jihad is getting more, more active. What is going to happen is as we turned up, we added more sanctions the other day. I believe Iran will find ways to push back. They have to for their political purposes and if we're not careful, even though quote unquote, we don't want a war and I don't think this president does, I believe Iran will do something that then this administration will feel compelled to respond to less. We look wheat. It's one thing for the president to say, I'm not going to respond like he did the other day, but if if we have this kind of tit for tat escalation, I think we are going to feel compelled to, to act and then Iran is going to feel we're compelled to respond in kind with many battlefields and with many tools and I think we're actually much closer to this kind of a scenario.

Haass: Everyone will will be a workshop. What we should be doing. I think we should be offering Iran or revise nuclear agreement much longer duration include the missiles in exchange for a degree of sanctions relief. Essentially this administration with Iran and North Korea has to decide if its pressure will ultimately be translated into an achievable purpose. But if the purpose is to denuclearize North Korea or bring about regime change in Iran, that is not an achievable purpose. If we are however prepared to take limited agreements, I actually think we can avoid war and succeed. Can I just ask, what do you think about the fact that Trump appears to be virtually begging around to enter negotiations?

Speaker 2: Okay.

Haass: Well I think he, he's a great believer as you know, in personal diplomacy. He thinks when he sits down he can do something. He loves the idea that you could do something that no other administration could do at that level. But what he hasn't done, and I, I haven't seen come out of it, is articulate a potentially negotiable position. And that's what I keep waiting for. A, it's if, uh, again, we've

teed it up and he actually, he, if he wanted to, I actually think by the end of this year, he could have, he could realize significant progress in North Korea talks and Iranian talks. She couldn't solve these problems, but he could stabilize both. Uh, and if coming back to the rest of our conversation, if you really think China is the great strategic challenge, there's an argument for say, why don't we try to stabilize these more peripheral problems so we can focus our energies on things like China, but I don't see that degree. How would I put this gently of strategic coherence coming out of the administration? All right, let's shift to the a woman on the, that side of the room.

Audience Member: Hi. What is the strategic role of water given that China really controls the water and can weaponize it with, uh, Asia and we're moving our businesses to Vietnam. Um, but China basically controls the headways.

Rapp-Hooper: Do you mean the, the maritime domain? What I'm concerned

Audience Member: is is that they can weaponize the fact that the, what they can control the water for most of the Asian countries and uh, that gives them a lot of power. Did you read sea lanes for drinking water?

Speaker 2: Yeah. Great.

Audience Member: Drinking water, drinking water, but also the headways geographically are in China from what they told us years ago here at the ideas

Haass: there might be in selective cases with rivers, I actually think the biggest threat to water is climate change. And if there's an area,

Speaker 2: okay,

Haass: that I'm, I'm war to edge. If you see it in Cape Town, you see it now in major cities in India, I think the problem is less China. I think the problem is the combination of climate change and demographic increase and one area where we had better really pray for or work for technological breakthrough, we'd be on desalination. You're seeing elements of it. In Israel, it's probably the best of anybody, but there's still an enormous shortfall of a, of water. I think it's more of a, that kind of rub. I haven't heard a lot of, I haven't seen in the literature a lot of speculation on it being a geopolitical [inaudible]

Speaker 9: the gentleman in the center.

Speaker 2: Okay.

Audience Member: In, in light of the recent conversations here, in terms of the upcoming elections and as there are increasingly a global affair, um, if you are China, where do you cast your vote? Uh, a lot of the analysis so far has been focused on the, the recent trade war, but in terms of China transitioning from a regional power to a

global power and particularly the United States and our current president receding from the TPP. And of course the Democrats aren't necessarily stronger on that. Um, who do you vote for? Trump or other coming up

Speaker 2: [inaudible]

Kagan: I mean, yeah, that's, I don't know who the Chinese, the Chinese have their own way of looking at these things and they always used to like Republican presidents because Republican presidents were predictable, but, but I'm not sure that still applies in this case. If I were them, I would want to see Trump reelected precisely for the reasons that we've talked about, which is that he is, he is moving away from the alliances, he's creating doubts among the allies, uh, and therefore is, is eating away at the very, as, as one of the questioners pointed out the very powerful structure of the system and that it seems to me serves China's interests.

Rapp-Hooper: I would agree with that. I think, you know, the Chinese are obviously none too pleased about the trade war, but they do find a mentally think they can withstand it and that their ability to withstand it is actually greater than ours over the long term. Um, and all the while they see s out of American policies that are incredibly narrowly focused on punitive technological and economic measures with China while really seeding the field to China on all issues. The admit current administration has really not been able to put up anything that looks like a serious strategy by way of the South China Sea or Taiwan or a more holistic version for what the future of America in Asia looks like. And coupled with our own ability to undermine our alliances at every turn actually gives China a lot of wiggle room in the region at a time that it can use it. So if I were in Beijing, I cast my vote for Trump. I don't know if I were

Thompson: Beijing, I would look at the richest country in the world with all this nuclear weapons led by somebody who's entirely unpredictable and maybe irrational, who's kind of angry at us and be worried.

Haass: Yeah.

Thompson: Richard are you in agreement with everybody else here?

Thompson: China for Trump?

Rapp-Hooper: [inaudible]

Haass: I'm stalling because a, it wasn't a question I had I'd ever, ever posed to a look. I see. First of all, in certain areas, there's not that much of a difference potentially between him and some of his democratic challenges. Look at again, TPP and trade. Look at the desire to pull back from the world. Uh, endless wars and forever wars is a, a constant refrain. The, it began in some ways under the Obama administration, but the, the strategic trajectory of this country has been

to pull back from the world to embrace elements of protections of thought. My senses and I was just in China last week. When they look at us, yes they see Trump is as unique quote unquote, but they see certain trends. Yeah. They're, they're systematic in their analysis. So my own hunch is they don't see that big of a, of a difference.

Haass: Uh, but they see the, the general orientation of the United States is, is pulling back. Indeed. I think one of the, we can talk about changes here. My hunch is if the Chinese had in the back of their minds, I'm married, I'd be curious what you think on this. Essentially their own strategic timetable. My bet is they accelerated it. The United States has pulled back and change certain policies that informed us for seven decades at a pace they probably didn't anticipate and they may have felt the need to accelerate their own emergence opportunities emerged in Asia, in the world that my bet is five years ago or 10 years ago. They just, they didn't simply see an indeed the move away from the philosophy of dunk shopping. This idea of biding your time supporting external stability and this much more assertive policy of Shisha and Ping. It's quite possible that this reflects the Chinese assessment of a change world situation, surprisingly from their point of view brought about by the United States.

Rapp-Hooper: I'll just tack on and say, I think that's absolutely right. We heard from Chinese counterparts in particular right after the 2016 elections that this moment of opportunity with simply coming much too soon for them. In some ways they were exhilarated by the prospect of dealing with Trump because he so fundamentally understandable in his transactional ism and in his pursuit of personalist diplomacy. Um, but the idea of China getting launched onto the global stage as the alternative major power and even just as an alternative in Asia was coming at least a decade before it had been anticipated and um, sort of created a bit of vertigo at the highest levels of the CCP

Thompson: They also probably find them understandable because they are able to read everything on his phone. Indeed. We have reached the end of this conversation, I believe, having watched the democratic debate, that this is the best conversation about foreign policy in the last 16 hours in the United States of America. So thank you very much. Mira Bob and Richard.