Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT

Event

"Harnessing Progress: Strengthening the Indo-Pacific through Alliances and Partnerships"

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FEATURING

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Dr. Victor Cha: Great. Good afternoon. Well, thank you all for joining us this afternoon. My name is Victor Cha. I'm president the Geopolitics and Foreign Policy Department at CSIS, professor at Georgetown. And we're very happy to welcome with us today Dr. Kurt Campbell and Dr. Mira Rapp-Hooper to our inaugural CSIS Distinguished Lecture on Geopolitics and Foreign Policy.

Kurt Campbell, as you all know, is the 22nd deputy secretary of state. Mira Rapp-Hooper, special assistant to the president and senior director for the Indo-Pacific on the White House National Security Council. I don't want to embarrass you two, but there really are no two individuals who have done more in the U.S. government over the past four years to innovate U.S. policy and strategy in Asia. Let's give them a warm welcome. (Applause.)

So, during the Obama administration as assistant secretary for East Asia and the Pacific, Dr. Campbell authored the pivot to Asia, really a watershed moment when the United States declared that America's strategic future would be in Asia not in two wars in the Middle East and Afghanistan. The doctrine stated that the United States must reorient its military posture, its policies, its personnel, its resources, and its talent to prioritizing Asia and U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific. When he left government, he wrote a book to this effect. I think it was actually called "The Pivot," wasn't it?

Deputy Secretary Kurt Campbell: Yeah.

Dr. Cha: "The Pivot," that became an instant classic.

Dep. Sec. Campbell: Sold five copies. (Laughter.)

Dr. Cha: Sold five – probably more than five. I can attest to that. (Laughter.) Yeah, outside your immediate family probably more than five. I can attest to that. I've used it in my courses numerous times.

A few years later, Dr. Rapp-Hooper authored a seminal book, "Shields of the Republic," which really – you know, as I study alliances – really is a fantastic book on the history of alliances, and also became required text in many graduate seminars and courses on East Asia, as well as U.S. foreign policy. Together, in the Biden administration, with Kurt as White House coordinator and Mira on the NSC, the administration oversaw some of the most consequential changes in our alliance structure in Asia, including things we'll talk about this afternoon – the Quad, AUKUS,

Camp David, U.S.-Japan-Philippines, Partners in the Blue Pacific, IPEF, and the list goes on.

I think it's also important to note that in a very polarized environment in D.C., they worked very hard to build firm support on both sides of the aisle for the policy. And for that, you also deserve a lot of credit. So I think, without exaggeration, we can say that these things that we will talk about really amount to some of the most important changes to the alliance structure since the hub and spoke system was created at the end of the Second World War. And I think that's the way it will be written about. It will be written about as some of the most consequential changes. So thank you, again. Thank you, again, for joining us today.

So, you know, I think I just give about the nicest introduction you can give, so we're probably done now. (Laughter.) I think we've done now. But, you know, for the – since you did make the trip here, both of you, let me ask you a few questions. So, again, we said no one has worked harder to restore trust, innovate the alliances, multilateralize them in the Indo-Pacific. We've seen more change, again, in the architecture of Asia than we've seen in quite some time. So for both of you, like, what are you most proud of in terms of what's been accomplished over the last four years? And also, what do you feel is kind of left undone? Like, if you had more time, what else would you be working on? So – and thank you, again, for joining us.

Dr. Mira Rapp-Hooper: Thanks, Victor. And I will start by saying what a privilege it is to share the stage with both of you.

I hope you'll permit me just a moment of nostalgia. But when I was sitting at my first job out of college thinking about entering a Ph.D. program with the hopes of both becoming a scholar and then going on to government service I really thought about the future of my career, wanting to emulate three different people I saw in the field as giants and two of them are on this stage. So it really is a privilege to be a part of this conversation.

Victor has been such a warm supporter and incredible example of mine since I was in graduate school and our shared Ph.D. thesis advisor Bob Jervis would be smiling that this conversation is taking place.

Dr. Cha: Mmm hmm. Yes.

Dr. Rapp-Hooper: So thank you.

I'll put my academic hat on for a moment to take a first cut at this

question before passing the floor to Deputy Secretary Campbell and I'll say that when I reflect on what we've been able to achieve in the Indo-Pacific part of what I'm really proud of, what I think we as a team are proud of, is the fact that we actually have been able to design and implement a whole of government strategy for the Indo-Pacific which has, by and large, succeeded.

There are too many elements of that strategy for me to kind of review in detail here – I know we'll do that over the course of the conversation – but I'll just start by noting, as many of you are aware, how rare it is that an administration is able to author a regional strategy – in our case, two regional strategies.

We have both an Indo-Pacific strategy and a China strategy within the Biden administration, and even within the Indo-Pacific strategy we have some additional documents. There's an India strategy, there's a Pacific partner strategy, for example, and all of these fit together in a very specific and intricate way.

But much more than the writing of any one strategy document matters what matters is that over the course of the last four years the U.S. government has come together in a remarkable amount of consensus, almost unprecedented amount of consensus, to drive these documents to reality.

If you take a look at the Indo-Pacific strategy, it has a checklist of things that we intended to do in our first couple of years in the administration, and from somewhat to the surprise of someone who had a privilege of helping to author that document nearly all of the things on that checklist are done.

Now, that's not to say that we got done absolutely everything that we wished to do but it is to say that we actually had a top down effort that clearly stated a set of objectives. We identified the lines of effort that would support those objectives and we moved through those lines of effort methodically, and that all happened despite the fact that the international environment that we ended up facing in the Biden administration was very different than the one that we thought that we would face when we came into office.

So, certainly, in 2021 no one had a Russian invasion of Ukraine on their bingo card for the Biden administration's foreign policy and no one could have foreseen the tragic conflict that has broken out in the Middle East. And usually things like that would be enough to derail another administration's regional strategy in peacetime and this one has stayed the course in large part because there has been so much consensus and

commitment to it throughout the government.

Now, there's a lot more that we could have done or that a new administration could do. From my personal perspective, I'd like to see budgets move even more than they have to better support the long-term effort that we have stood up in the Indo-Pacific. But, by and large, I think everyone who has been a part of the strategy can feel proud of the work they've done.

Dr. Cha: Kurt?

Dep. Sec. Campbell: Thank you, Victor, and also just thank you. I join Mira in thanking you for having us over and we really appreciate the opportunity. It's great to see you all and to be here at CSIS, and we acknowledge the role that you've played helping us think strategically always about the Indo-Pacific, going forward.

I like very much the way Mira laid it out in terms of strategies and sort of building and the integration of a China strategy in a larger Indo-Pacific effort.

I do want to just underscore that, you know, there are struggles about, you know, how to formulate and execute American foreign policy. And in the Indo-Pacific, the – Victor and I have talked about this a lot – the dominant stream of strategic thinking for decades in the small group of people that think hard and deeply about the Indo-Pacific, for a substantial period of that time the idea was that the central convening relationship and discussion was between the United States and China, and that all the other relationships were secondary or tertiary and not as important in some sense. And this is not in any way to diminish the U.S.-China relationship, but a sense almost that that was high politics and the other set of engagements were less significant.

I think the challenge with that, of course, is that many likeminded countries that were worried about some of the developments – massive increase in Chinese military spending that became clear decades ago, other steps that created anxiety, more provocative actions in contested areas – left many allies and partners uncertain, ultimately, about where American strategic interests fundamentally lie. I'd say a group – a small group of people, frankly based largely here at CSIS – Victor Cha, Mike Green, Richard Armitage, Joe Nye – basically made the argument that working with allies and partners outside in was the best way to think about creating a strategic environment that allowed us to engage with greater depth and certainty with China. And I think that has largely been accomplished. And what's interesting is what was once a very small strategic cohort is now much more substantial, and I think

animates – Victor, as you describe – the lion's share of both the Democratic and Republican Parties. And so I think that is a major set of initiatives that has been fulfilled in a bipartisan way over the course of this administration.

There are too many things, as Mira indicated, to just point to any one. I've had the opportunity to work on a lot of these issues – AUKUS and the Quad, the technology engagements with Vietnam and India, the trilaterals with Japan and South Korea, Japan and the Philippines. All of them have had remarkably significant implications for peace and stability across the Indo-Pacific.

But I will also tell you, like, none of these things were predetermined. None of this. I've often heard people say, oh, well, this is easy stuff, like, you know, just putting these things together. That is not the case. They are very challenging. They're – you know, there are enormous difficulties in the initial phases of these engagements. Victor, it would be hard to describe how difficult it was when Mira and I were first working on the Quad to get consensus at the leader level to proceed forward. And now it's only three-and-a-half years later; it is taken for granted that this is the architecture going forward. And we've built massive capacities in each of these governments. We've built habits of cooperation. We've built a number of projects that are going to animate the relationship between these four great maritime democracies. But almost all of that was built from some initial decisions that leaders took to decide to take a risk and to collaborate going forward.

And, Victor, I know you played a role at the first time that the groupings got together after the tragic Indonesian tsunami in the 2000s. But being able to build on that and to see it come to fruition is extremely exciting. But at the same time, it's not – some of these things were actually really near run things, when you watch a leader, like, kind of making a decision before your eyes, should I participate in that? The most challenging, frankly, at that time, was India. India was uncertain whether it wanted to really engage.

Now, India is, in many respects, the driving force in the Quad, in a way that I think we can all be very proud of and also appreciative for the driving force of the Modi government to ensure that this degree of cooperation continues going forward. And so I do think it's been a significant period, Victor. But I will also say that we – at every step along the way we received encouragement from people like you, but also very much in a bipartisan fashion. I think some of our strongest supporters, frankly, are on the Republican side of the aisle. And I'm grateful for that. I hope it continues.

Dr. Cha: Great. Thanks. I just want to – I mean, since we have in the audience, and probably watching at home, a lot of aspiring policymakers – I just want to underline, underscore, one thing. And Mira kind of referred to it in the beginning when she talked about moving budgets and, you know, whole of government. I mean, in government it's very – it's relatively easy to block something, right? And it's pretty – and it's not easy, but it's, like, marginally less hard to refine and, like, add – incrementally add to something. But to create something new is extremely difficult, right? You probably all have scars on your back from the interagency fights to get things done.

And some things, like, you know, we really could not conceive of happening, you know, have happened. And so just want to – just want to underline, underscore that for folks who are listening. Like you said, I mean, people think, oh, U.S.-Japan-Korea, that should be easy, right? They're three allies. That should be easy. You know, that's like Roger Federer when he said people used to say, oh, you make tennis look so easy. And it looks easy because they work so hard behind the scenes to make it happen. So, anyway, kudos to you on that.

So this is a very good news story. And it's very positive. And a lot of work's gone into it. But, for both of you, if you could have had one thing go differently in the last four years, what do you think – what do you think that would be?

Dep. Sec. Campbell: Mira, why don't you go first?

Dr. Rapp-Hooper: So I've thought about this a lot. And it really depends how you frame the question. Looking at the picture that we see today, one of the things – you know, we all have pretty tough skin at this point. But one of the things that really does keep me up at night is the relationship between North Korea and Russia, and how far it has come so quickly. And I have often wondered to myself what, if anything, we could have done to change that trajectory. Certainly, if I had to pick one thing that's on my docket now, the DPRK-Russia relationship would probably be the thing that I would have go differently. But part of the reason this is a challenging question is because, as someone who's been very close to the policy, it's also very hard to locate a point where we could have changed this trajectory.

And what I mean by that is that for the first many years, and, you know, up until today, of this administration, the Biden team has reached out to North Korea on numerous occasions, through every possible channel, and demonstrated a willingness to engage on a wide variety of topics and without preconditions. And one of the most challenging aspects, I

think, of our shared portfolio over the years has been North Korea in an environment where Pyongyang was absolutely determined not to come to the table.

Now there has been – there have been many silver linings that we've gotten to see based on that challenge. Needless to say, the challenge posed by Pyongyang and by Pyongyang and Moscow together has catalyzed further really incredible trilateral cooperation between the ROK and Japan that we could not have imagined a few years ago. It has made our European friends really sit up and stand up to the challenge that Indo-Pacific threats can pose to Europe directly. And that, in turn, has forced further integration between our Euro-Atlantic allies and our Indo-Pacific allies.

But the North Korea-Russia relationship, once it got started, has really been on a dizzying trajectory, which, as you know very well, Victor, has resulted in Pyongyang sending millions of rounds of ammunition to Russia, now we know thousands of DPRK soldiers in Russia, and the Russians, you know, probably giving the North Koreans high-end technical assistance on an order that we could not have imagined a few years ago, as well as protecting them in international institutions, and seeking to legitimize their nuclear weapons capability. And that is going to be a formidable challenge for administrations, I suspect, for years to come. But it is a very, very difficult problem to figure out how we would have unfurled.

Dep. Sec. Campbell: So I very much would associate myself, Victor, with what Mira said. And I agree that this is not only going to be urgent, but it's going to be a growing issue that cannot be ignored. I'm also, frankly, vexed by a relationship that I think we have historically almost always gotten wrong. We did not, and we've never, really, fundamentally understood the relationship between the Soviet Union and China, and now between Russia and China. So it took us 10 years to fully understand in our own political domestic context that there was, in fact, a split between the Soviet Union and China. Then, obviously, a major strategic move by President Nixon and Secretary Kissinger and others to build this bridge to China, and have China basically choose to engage the West for economic development and the like.

Frankly, beginning in about 2012, when President Xi – then vice president – comes on the scene internationally for the first time, we begin to see a much deeper engagement by both leaders, by Xi and Putin, to meet and engage. I think we underestimated that. I think, you know, in certain cosmopolitan or internationalist circles they'll make the argument that the United States drove China to Russia. I would – I mean, obviously, there's a larger international historical context, but I

would say fundamentally it misses the point that in many respects these two leaders chose each other and believe they have a lot to offer to one another. And that partnership, while largely hidden and rarely fully unveiled, is animating itself in a number of ways that are going to be deeply concerning.

Just as Mira describes what's going on between Russia and North Korea, what China has provided Russia with respect to support for its defense industrial base is daunting: machine tools, new explosive capabilities, glide-bomb capabilities. You can go through a whole host of capacities that have been built up quietly, deeply beneath the surface between China and Russia, and it has changed the nature of the battlefield in fundamental ways. And it not only changes Russia's stance on the Ukrainian battlefield, but for decades to come it's going to create facts on the ground in Russia that we are going to have to deal with.

The fact that – Victor, that China has chosen this path, I think for now the Chinese leaders believe they'll be able to have it both ways – maintain strong commercial ties with Europe, and at the same time be involved in, frankly, a military effort that is going at the territorial integrity of Central Europe. And I think it is likely that they've underestimated how much the United States over time and Europe will find this threatening to our core interests, to our sense of strategic purpose.

And so, much as Mira describes, I'm not sure that we could have averted or dented or disrupted this growing alliance. But I will also say, Victor, we tried. And at an ultimate level, China and Russia have chosen this path together in ways that will animate global politics that are only now coming into view.

Dr. Cha: Interesting. Yeah. Very interesting. And we do see this in all the discussion, at least the academic discussion, about this growing axis of –

Dep. Sec. Campbell: Yeah. And there are people – like, I've got to give great respect to people like Fiona Hill and others who basically identified this earlier and recognized the challenge. There are also those people that said, nonsense, you're exaggerating this; there are so many tensions between the relationship they couldn't possibly work together. And in fact, it is remarkable how Xi and Putin have overcome huge areas of disagreement, including North Korea. Russia has essentially seized the dominant partnership from China, as you've written about and talked about, Victor. They have issues of competition in the Arctic, in the Stans, China moving in on building stronger relations with countries that had Russia as a traditional partner. Despite all those issues, despite them,

they have maintained forward momentum in their bilateral relationship, and I expect that to continue.

Dr. Cha: You've already given us – both of you have given us a good sense of the current relationship with China, you know, obviously, very complicated. But I want to go back to have you reflect, Kurt, personally on the article that you and Ely Ratner wrote a while back in Foreign Affairs that effectively stated that our five-decade experiment of China as a responsible stakeholder was over. And we did see a major change in U.S. policy and framing of the relationship with China thereafter.

So I'd like to ask you in retrospect – and this was coming off of your four years in the Obama administration – what was it that you saw back then that made you – right? Because, like, to write a piece like this is a big deal, right? It's a big statement and it's a big deal. So what was it that you saw that caused you to do that? And also, where do you think we're headed?

Dep. Sec. Campbell: So I will say – and thank you for that, Victor – I recently had a chance to go back and just look at it. I hadn't reviewed it in a while. And I'm struck at how obvious and noncontroversial many of the points are now, frankly. But that was not the case at the time, and I had a lot of people weigh in and explain why you made a mistake and why it would be bad for you to articulate this. But at the same time, I think what I saw quite clearly in the Obama administration, the United States was still and has I think demonstrated over a long period of time a patience in its commitment to try to build a stronger relationship with China, to try to build habits of cooperation. Now, many people will say, oh, no, no, no, I can give you lots of examples of American duplicity and, you know, steps that were antithetical to China's interests. But I would simply say, Victor, if you look at the larger picture – the larger picture – the United States provided some things that were absolutely essential to China's arrival as a great power.

First of all, we provided peace and stability, largely, in the Indo-Pacific for decades, and you should not underestimate that. That peace and stability that pertained for the late '70s, '80s, and '90s was the essential feature that allowed for the remarkable growth, innovation, and manufacturing innovation.

Second, the United States was the largest provider of external capital which allowed for the massive investment in manufacturing and the like.

And then – and then, third, we opened our markets and also sought other institutionalization at the WTO, which allowed China to play a

much larger role in the global economy, oftentimes at our disadvantage.

And I think during that period, I believe quietly China thought not as much about how to deepen the cooperation with the United States, but thought more about accumulating power and how to play a more dominant role and help the United States to the sidelines or to the curb. And at least I saw – during my time in government, I saw it at the Department of Defense and I saw it at the State Department, although it was rarely discussed, I think a growing frustration how difficult it was to actually make real progress in areas of what we would have considered to be common purpose; and the profound distrust, primarily in Beijing, that animated our bilateral engagements.

And so I myself became increasingly troubled by how difficult even basic kind of interactions were. And you know, the truth is, you know, facts matter. Beginning at the end of the Taiwan Straits crisis in 1995-1996, China embarked on what we can now say by orders of magnitude is the largest military development in history – not in modern history, but in history. And you know, that is something that we have to recognize has had a deep impact on the strategic calculus of our allies and partners. And I'm not saying here – there are those that would say, look, that means that we're destined for war. I do not believe that. But I do believe we are destined for strategic competition, and recognize with a clear-eyed sense that, you know, for over a decade China has believed that the United States is in hurtling decline and they are determined to try to take steps to replace many elements of American power.

I think one of the big debates in China, frankly – although, you know, these are not things that are openly discussed – is whether Xi Jinping went 10 years too early, because in fact China still needs to accumulate more power. And I think it is likely, even though some of his nationalist sentiment about China not being pushed around and asserting itself is deeply popular domestically, their actions have provided the impetus for some of the multilateral and bilateral and, frankly, domestic steps that we were able to take as a result.

Dr. Cha: That's actually a great segue to the next question I wanted to raise with regard to how the bilateral alliance network in Asia really has – what they – you've changed it, right? I mean, you've gotten – there are allies that are now talking about things that are happening in Taiwan and the South China Sea. We've already mentioned, like, Quad, AUKUS, the U.S., Japan and Philippines.

Mira, if I could start with you, if you could sort of talk to us a little bit about – first, you know, what was the cause for this change, right? I mean – like, so I look at Korea. I would have never imagined a U.S.-Korea

summit statement that talks about defense of Taiwan and freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. And yet, this is what we saw. So, you know, what do you think caused some of this? And also, again, thinking forward, like, what do you see as the next steps? You can pick which ones you want to talk about but, like, what is – what do you see as the next steps for some of these newly created multilateral groupings?

Dr. Rapp-Hooper: Yeah. It's a great question, Victor. You know, I think we can break the cause of some of this convergence of interest down into at least a couple of buckets. The first bucket is that external security environment, right? Where, you know, on the one hand you'd seen a much more aggressive PRC already by the time we came into office, including, you know, the use of wolf warrior diplomacy and some really troubling behavior during the COVID timeframe. And then, of course, in our second year we saw Russia invade Ukraine, with the Chinese having supported this no-limits partnership just a few days before. Which really felt like it dropped the veil for a lot of our friends around the world.

I think that contributed to a sense of convergent interest, and the idea that no one flashpoint or potential conflict was left to just, you know, those neighbors. But rather, had to be of global concern, based on what we were seeing in terms of global trends. But I would also say that, both through the bilateral management of our alliances but through some of these multilats that we have started to talk about, the work that we do together has encouraged a further convergence of interests. So if you look, for example, at the first place that the ROK government really revised its public position, on the South China Sea, it's in the Camp David joint statement in August of last year.

And the reason for that, of course, is that all three of our countries were prioritizing taking our relationships with one another to the next level. South China Sea is an area of the region that the U.S. and Japan have been deeply focused and engaged in for a long time. The ROK government had traditionally been a little bit less so, but all of a sudden you had an ROK president who not only wanted to radically improve his ties with Japan but was thinking about the security of the region as a whole. And knowing how important the South China Sea was both to both partners and to the way that the ROK was increasingly thinking of its interests as regional and global, this was the time to reframe that position.

And I think we can point to a lot of other examples, whether it's on Taiwan or other hotspots, where you saw an ally move to join the others, for the sake of multilateral consensus, inside one of these multilateral groupings. So that kind of habit of cooperation pattern that Kurt was talking about really isn't – you know, it's not just about

working together. It is about continuing to refine the way that we frame our collective interests as a group. Now, when it comes to the next phase I think we have done a very good job, as I've sort of been seeking to explain, of encouraging those close partners to see the region as similarly as we can and to pool our collective resources to support peace and stability, in spite of the challenges that we face.

But to keep pace with the types of challenges that we've been describing here. The next phase of this game really is a continued mobilization towards more seamless action, regardless of what the challenge is. We have to ensure that we are working together at every level of government across these partnerships. Not just, you know, when a summit is occurring or when there is a particular crisis, but on the day-to-day spadework that gets done to try to reinforce international law in the South China Sea, despite the PRC's challenges, or to continually reinforce deterrence against the DPRK. And we are doing that work. But to really be able to stay the course, we're going to have to continue to redouble those efforts on a year to year basis.

Dep. Sec. Campbell: Can I say one thing, just to build on what Mira said also, Victor? I am struck by one thing, that what's happened in many of these multilateral settings is that among all these leaders there is a thirst and a desire for real strategic discussion. And you cannot underestimate how in many of the more formal bilateral engagements the dominating nature of discourse is blah, blah, just – you know, and you have to sit in these meetings for long periods of time and sometimes, you know, leaders – and this often happens among democratic leaders – they get impatient and they find it, you know, not as compelling.

And so one of the things that is immediately striking about some of these gatherings is how honest the discourse is and how direct leaders are in sharing their perspectives and, frankly, I've seen that now and that quality of more honest discussion. And when I say honest discussion it is not just talking about the nature of the challenge, like, that comes from certain provocations in the South China Sea.

It's countries speaking up about wanting to see more from the United States with respect to economic and commercial policy. It's talking more directly about frustrations with other countries, about not putting aside certain kind of what they view to be petty issues for the larger good.

And so I think as much as anything, Victor, what I've seen is a much more honest, open, and strategic engagement among leaders in the Indo-Pacific in the last several years, and I hope more than anything that that culture of open dialogue and, frankly, what really are developing which are habits of cooperation, which are the essential

feature of global diplomacy, I hope that, more than anything, that that continues.

Dr. Cha: And on hard security issues.

Dep. Sec. Campbell: Very much so, and so –

Dr. Cha: On very hard security issues, yeah.

Dep. Sec. Campbell: So, like, you'll have countries now asking and having very tough discussions about cross-strait issues, about North Korea, about, like, why are we having difficulty engaging here or there. What are the strategies? Why can't we get a code of conduct after working for almost 25 years?

These are different kinds of conversations that we've had in the past.

Dr. Rapp-Hooper: If I could –

Dr. Cha: Yeah. Yeah.

Dr. Rapp-Hooper: Sorry to interrupt, Victor. If I could just sort of give us a term for what I think we're both trying to describe.

Part of what has happened naturally through this multilateralization process, I would say, is the increasing regionalization of the Indo-Pacific, right? So as opposed to kind of atomized areas of interest and concern amongst some of our partners in pretty much every conversation not only are we talking about the same set of challenges in hot spots but we're talking about our shared interests in South Asia and Southeast Asia and in the Pacific Islands and what we can do to better coordinate programs that work together.

So we really have sort of achieved an operating tempo where every partner and ally of the United States is expecting to have that whole of region set of discussions even though there may be different prioritizations and different sort of capability sets that each partner brings to that picture.

Dr. Cha: Sounds like you're thinking about your next book, you know? (Laughs.)

Dep. Sec. Campbell: We've talked about this. (Laughter.)

Dr. Cha: Can I ask you – I mean, we want to give a chance to the audience, but can I ask you – and you can choose how you want to take this, but two things that we didn't really have a chance to talk about; one is the Philippines and one is India.

I was in another conversation today with a former INDOPACOM commander where he said his biggest concern, going forward, was what's happening in the Philippines. So that's one, and then the other is I know – I mean, Kurt, I know in various discussions and conversations you've worked very hard on the India relationship – a great deal of potential there.

If you could talk a little bit about that and the opportunities and challenges there that would be great. So –

Dr. Rapp-Hooper: I'm happy to tee off on the Philippines –

Dr. Cha: OK.

Dr. Rapp-Hooper: – and I'll say I'm sure this commander, you know, meant the same thing. But from my perspective, I'm not concerned about what's going on in the Philippines. I'm concerned about what's going on in the South China Sea.

The government of the Philippines – the Marcos administration – has been a superb partner to the United States, and President Marcos is undertaking a series of modernizations across the maritime and military space that are long overdue and that, happily, we've been able to be a partner in, working on a bipartisan basis including through things like the Indo-Pacific supp to make sure that we are able to support the Philippines at appropriately high levels for the first time, given the challenges they are up against. And, again, I certainly hope that that will continue in the next administration.

But I certainly spend a huge portion of my time focused on the South China Sea. And I am greatly concerned about the PRC's increasing use of incredibly aggressive tactics, against not only the Philippines but other South China Sea claimants, that are blatantly at odds with international law. For a long time we were, of course, all focused on Second Thomas Shoal, which the Permanent Court of Arbitration has ruled the PRC has no lawful claim to, the Philippines has been resupplying routinely since 1999. But we faced a situation over the course of last year, really mounting into spring and early summer, where it seemed like the risk of inadvertent escalation was extraordinarily high because of the way that the PRC was attempting to interdict Philippines' resupplies.

The Philippines decided to act responsibly and engage in some diplomacy with the PRC to try to stabilize that hotspot. But no sooner did they do that than the PRC brought pressure to bear on Sabina Shoal. And we have seen it bring immense pressure against other claimants as well, most notably Vietnam where the PRC, or PRC fishermen, recently beat a Vietnamese fishermen in a very brutal way.

In many ways – and, Victor, you know this well, I started my career here at CSIS running a program related to maritime transparency, AMTI, which remains a superb program to this day. In many ways, what is happening is that PRC capabilities are meeting PRC interests when it comes to the desire to be able to use coercion and have its way in the South China Sea. You know, elbow other claimants around and demonstrate that the PRC can get its way, including by making their lives very difficult in going about their day-to-day lawful activities and operations.

There is a lot that we can continue to do, not only to stand up for our ally, the Philippines, where, of course, our mutual defense treaty applies in the South China Sea, but to support all of the South China Sea claimants and to support ASEAN and Southeast Asia's voice in advocating for the continued prevalence of international law in this incredibly important body of water. We have laid the groundwork for that, I would say, in the last year or so of this administration. But it's going to be vital for a new administration to continue that.

What you've seen this year diplomatically is a huge range of allies and partners, not only across Asia but across Europe, standing up – stepping up in support of the Philippines. That happens in public statements. It's also happened in some very important convenings. You've also seen us coordinate more operationally together with countries like, you know, the Philippines, United States, Australia, Japan, Canada, and others being increasingly interested in undertaking coordinated maritime operations to demonstrate our collective will to stand in favor of freedom of navigation in the South China Sea.

But, just as I mentioned, that in general the next phase of the game for all of this is to be able to operationalize the day-to-day spadework of coordination amongst allies and partners. That's going to be critical in the South China Sea. We are going to need to demonstrate that the PRC pays reputational costs when it takes coercive action that are inconsistent with international law. We are going to be able to demonstrate – have to demonstrate that we're willing to keep up the tempo of things like coordinated maritime activities.

And we also are going to need to support the Philippines and other South China Sea claimants as they use diplomacy and the legal tools available to them to settle disputes between them, to reduce the points of friction and leverage that the PRC may use to drive wedges amongst them. So this is a really tough area for potential conflict management. It is something that requires an incredible amount of focus. But I do think that if we're able to build upon some of this work we do have the toolkit we need.

Dep. Sec. Campbell: I think what Mira said is really excellent. I will say we see the pressure magnified and amplified primarily in the Philippines, but the truth is that China's activities extend beyond that, Victor, in every maritime domain around Indonesia, around Brunei, Malaysia, and Thailand, and Vietnam. They each have different strategies, though. And I think part of what we've tried to do is to make sure – or, to do what we can to make sure that countries are on the same page. China's determination is to try to cut its own bilateral agreements and extract a quid pro quo in each set of circumstances. And that puts enormous pressure on these small nations. And that's why American persistence, and presence, and consistency is so important.

Now, to your other good question, look, I am unabashed about this. I believe that the most important relationship for the United States to get right and to invest in over the course of the next 34 years – 30 or 40 years – is the relationship between the United States and India. I don't – there's no reason anyone would have necessarily focused on this, but I'm very pleased to say last month, for the first time, measurements indicated that Indian students are now the dominant group in the United States. They've surpassed other nationalities. And they're playing an active role in science and technology and the like.

We are both great powers. We are both complicated nations. Partnership is not easy, Victor. And I think it'd be fair to say in recent months we've hit some headwinds. Some of those headwinds have to do with domestic politics. Some of them have to do with different perspectives on the nature of their engagement in Russia, or how they think about the BRICS. I would simply say how important it is for us to keep our attention on the horizon and to recognize that we are bending the trajectory of the U.S.-India relationship in very positive ways. And I know everyone in the Biden administration, from the president on down, is extremely proud of what's been accomplished in the bilateral relationship, and embedding India more in a multilateral framework, and wants to see that continue in the next administration.

So I just want to underscore that I think this is a major achievement. And the many facets of this relationship, areas where we struggled

before on information or intelligence sharing, or on the maritime domain in the Indian Ocean, or on defense cooperation, or on much more support for their technology ambitions. In each of these areas, we've been able to take substantial steps. And I just want to just underscore, we're determined to turn over the totality of that relationship, the flourishing U.S.-India relationship, to a new administration so they can take it to ever higher goals and objectives.

Dr. Cha: Right. Excellent. OK. We have some – thank you both.

We have some time for questions from the audience. If I could ask you – I think we have mics. Yeah, we have mics there. So if you can just come up to the mic and ask your question. Please, yes, come up to the mic. And please introduce yourself. There's one here too. There's one here and there's one here. You'll need to walk up to the mic, yeah, if you want to ask a question. Just please introduce yourself and please ask a question. No speeches, just ask a question. Yeah.

Q: Hi. Yeah. My name is Iris Shaw. I'm DPP representative in Washington.

Really want to thank you for successively operationalize this let's work strategy concept. It is really, for Taiwan at least, a paradigm shift. And Taiwan has an important role to play, and with some early success in the South Pacific, in light of the backdrop of the U.S.-China strategic competition and technology competition. So I just want to know if you think this kind of a paradigm shift will continue to stay on.

Dep. Sec. Campbell: So, look, I would say one of the proudest arenas of bipartisan engagement has been on issues associated with our policy across the Taiwan Strait. And I think, through persistent, determined efforts, we've helped maintain peace and stability for decades. And, frankly, if you look – you know, you're always trying to figure out, are there areas that you can really say, yeah, I'm proud of what's been achieved. As you look at Taiwan, a flourishing, extraordinarily successful democracy with an incredibly enlightened, young population. If you ask many people, where do you go for the most innovative cuisine, fashion, innovations in technology, they say Taiwan.

And that's a remarkable thing. And it's something we can all be proud of, and that we're committed to seeing sustained. And I will say that rarely have I seen our unofficial relationship flourishing in so many different manifestations.

And I will also say when we face challenges in the cross-strait circumstance, as Victor indicated, it was often in the past only one country or two that would speak out about concerns about the

maintenance of peace and stability. No longer. Large majorities of countries in Europe and in the Indo-Pacific believe it is fundamentally in the interests of their populations and the global community for the Taiwanese people to be able to live in peace, and that the sustainment of that peace and stability is in the best interests of all concerned.

Dr. Cha: Mira, do you want to add anything?

Dr. Rapp-Hooper: Nope. Nothing to add.

Dr. Cha: OK. Great.

Yes?

Q: Hi. My name's Joel Fleury.

And my question is, regarding food and water security, as you know, in recent conflicts it's become very difficult in terms of providing enough food and water security for many nations around the world. However, we know that the Indo-Pacific is rich in fertile soils, rice, and various other products. So what steps do you think the U.S. can take, both this administration and maybe possible future administrations, to collaborate with partners in the Indo-Pacific to maybe launch a new agricultural innovation and revolution?

Dr. Rapp-Hooper: Yeah. I'm happy to tee off on that. We actually have been doing some of this work already, and I think that work may provide a prototype for the future. I hope it will.

We launched last year at the Quad summit that was held in Hiroshima an AI for Agriculture Initiative, whereby our different national science organizations are working together to bring new technologies to try to improve crop yields across the Indo-Pacific. And that's a really exciting and, frankly, very well-funded, innovative project that we've been very pleased to see move forward quickly amongst the four countries – United States, Australia, Japan, and India.

But very recently, President Prabowo of Indonesia was here. President Prabowo is prioritizing himself food security in his new administration, and we've extended the program to be able to work with Indonesia as well so that we can bring this same set of innovative technologies to try to help Indonesia make its food security goals.

So I think there is a lot of future work to do in this space. It's not just other parts of the world, but also the Indo-Pacific itself that is

demanding more focus, including through innovative technologies on food security. And I hope that we will continue to do this work, in particular in multilateral settings.

Dep. Sec. Campbell: I would just say, look, I commend you for asking his question, and oftentimes in these strategic discussions issues like climate change or sustainability get short shrift. But the truth is, in most of the places that we work in the Pacific and elsewhere, it is top of mind. I'm struck in every conversation in the Pacific the first issue, which is viewed as a national security issue, is climate change. And I just think that to be effective in diplomacy and engagement is just to acknowledge that reality.

What I have been focused on – and I've worked closely with Mira on this – we have, for the first time, been able to take some steps to deal with something that I think will take on added urgency in the period ahead. Some of the last relatively healthy fish pods of tuna and other major ocean species exist in the Pacific, and they are being overfished largely by vast Chinese fleet fishing, often fishing illegally. We worked with Quad partners, other countries in Asia to try to bring new technologies to allow the capacity to basically better have a holistic view of what countries and what shipping vessels are turning off their transponders and then sailing into territorial waters of other countries in the Pacific to overfish and to pillage these – the national resource, the heritage that these island nations have.

My hope is, when Victor asks what's next, I will say much of that work on illegal fishing was done initially by the Trump administration, some very able people at the National Security Council. My very sincerest hope is that it will continue. It's of manifest importance to us, but it is also to these island nations as well. So I commend you, please keep asking those questions and focus on that. Thank you.

Dr. Cha: All right. Thank you.

And this will be, I think, our – yes, our time. This will be our last question. Yes.

Q: Hello. My name is Fang-Yi Chao. And – (comes on mic) – hello. My name is Fang-Yi Chao, and I used to work in Taiwan's National Security Council, and now I study in Georgetown under Dr. Cha.

And just a quick and broad question, maybe, for both speaker(s): What is your biggest challenge you face in your government experience, especially dealing with Asia's security problems? Thank you.

Dr. Rapp-Hooper: Biggest challenge. There are many big challenges. You know, I think within my portfolio, which is all of East Asia, I think I've already named a few.

The DPRK, again, as Victor knows better than any of us, is a really tough challenge that we have been working on for so many successive administrations, and it feels like is just incredibly difficult to get one's arms around. That's certainly been true, in my experience.

The South China Sea is also a really very different challenge, in part because it involves so many different actors, so many different interests, and ultimately a set of global interests that we need to marshal not just our closest allies but partners all around the world to really be able to protect. So as a management challenge, that's a huge one.

But I'll give a third option, which is sort of the challenge as a strategist. And this is something that Kurt and I have spoken about a lot, and I referred to this in sort of my first opening answer. And that is the fact that strategic prioritization is a huge challenge for the U.S. government and something that is very hard to get right. I think the entire U.S. government agrees and has agreed from the beginning of the Biden administration that the Indo-Pacific is a theater of our long-term interests. And as Kurt has written so many time(s), the region in the world where the history of the 21st century is going to be written. And even as we have, I think, largely successfully implemented our Indo-Pacific strategy, we face day-to-day challenges when there are also devastating conflicts in Ukraine, a heartbreaking conflict in the Middle East putting pressures on our leadership's time, on resources, on the way that we think about our role in the world.

So one of the biggest challenges for anyone who cares about the Indo-Pacific and wants to continue to work in this field is to help keep us focused on the long-term importance of the Indo-Pacific and to help to ensure that we have the resources – we have the wherewithal, we have the commitment we need not only from within government, but outside government to keep that focus and keep that intention, because the broad range of challenges that we have been talking about today can only be addressed if we are not diverted from the path.

Dep. Sec. Campbell: Well, I very much associate myself again with Mira's answer.

I'm going to give you a different kind of answer, if I can, and this is probably as good a way as any to end our very useful discussion with real sincere thanks to Victor, who has been a partner. You cannot believe how much behind-the-scenes help and guidance and counsel that he and Dr. Hamre and others who have served here at CSIS – it's almost like

having counselors on standby.

But I will also just tell you, you see before us – you see a group of people who have devoted their lives to our national service. And you know, when we come in here, you think, oh my gosh, how interesting and cool. You have no idea how hard it is, just the most basic stuff. I'll just – and they're all smiling in the row because they understand. Imagine that you're hosting guests that come into the White House and you want to offer them a meal of something that would just be a normal thing. There's no budget for that. And so, you know, if you want a bottle of water, we can do that. (Laughter.)

It is also the case – no, it's – you know, to clear people in the White House, if you get one – just one little thing wrong, there's a space out of – that person – it could be a minister – will be left waiting in the cold outside while we rush to try to get them in. And then you start the meeting, you know, with someone being really angry with you. Every single day, in addition to the magnitude of the strategic challenges, the daily indignities, you just – (laughter) – you just can't – and we hide them, largely. We don't often display them. But I see Mira nodding with us. I mean literally, every day.

And so, you know, the president has his incredible, you know – you know, giant jet and car and stuff like that. We're lucky to be able to get a commercial, you know, economy flight, the middle seat, you know? (Laughter.) And so government has become increasingly hard. And it is not for the faint of heart. And so the people that you see sometimes you should really say thank you to because, like, literally they're taking salaries that 20 years ago were moderately competitive. Nowhere near, right? We came into government on salaries that, frankly, you wouldn't get at the lowest possible levels. But that's what you needed to do to come in to serve because we didn't have enough budget. Enormous challenges just on a daily basis that you have to put up with to try to fulfill these larger missions.

And so, to your very good question, like, I will tell you it is often the case that, you know, occasionally we will recruit someone from the private sector who will come into government. And then they're like, what? Like, is this – this is what you have to put up with? (Laughter.) And the answer is, yes it is. And the gap between what people experience in the private sector and what they have in government is – it couldn't be deeper. It's almost a chasm. And I think – I think it makes it harder for people to really – you know, you have to put up with a lot. You have to put up with people attacking you. If you go up for confirmation, you just never know what's going to happen to you. It's really not for the faint of heart.

In the end you can kind of say it's a good way to really separate the wheat from the chaff. And you got to know who really wants it and is prepared to do it. But there are moments when you're thinking, gosh, there must be an easier way to form a multilateral. (Laughter.) I don't know. Mira, do you want to?

Dr. Rapp-Hooper: Well, I was actually just going to suggest – I completely agree with all of it. But given that we do have so many people watching in the audience who may be interested in government service.

Dep. Sec. Campbell: Yeah, we want to convert you. (Laughter.)

Dr. Rapp-Hooper: Indeed. I'm going to pivot. Victor, we had talked about a prompt which maybe we could end on, if you're open to it, which is the question of if we had to pick one day of this four-year time in service that was the most memorable, what it would be. And that might be a nice place to end. I sort of suspect our day will be the same.

Dep. Sec. Campbell: Our day is the same day.

Dr. Cha: Is it the same day?

Dr. Rapp-Hooper: Yeah.

Dep. Sec. Campbell: And it's just – it's a day that Mira and I worked together. And, Victor, at one of your previous sessions we had a chance to talk about the trilateral engagement. What preceded Camp David was months, years of extraordinarily difficult, trying trilateral diplomacy, of which Mira and I were both involved, which other people here were deeply involved in. Many people really doubted whether this was fruitful. It could be very discouraging. But then we found ourselves to this moment in Camp David. And it was one of the most magical things.

At every moment – I mentioned this quick aside. When one of my jobs was to pick up the Japanese. The president had given Marine One to both the Korean and the Japanese delegations. So they landed and then came to the – you know, to the meetings. And as we had these little cards to go pick them up, the Japanese team – who were very professional and they, you know, know their place. Before they could see that we saw them, and they were leaping – doing leaping high fives. (Laughter.) Which was really quite wonderful and kind of evocative of the moment.

And there were moments during those two days that Mira – filled also with indignities as well. Like we – the morning of the – (laughs) – the morning – sorry. The morning of the summit, we decided we'd leave really early because we were staying quite a ways away from – a place that Mira had booked for us – (laughter) – about seven hours away from Camp David. (Laughter.)

Dr. Rapp-Hooper: Twenty-four minutes.

Dep. Sec. Campbell: Twenty-four minutes.

Dr. Cha: Was it, like, a Motel 6 or something?

Dr. Rapp-Hooper: Twenty-four – it was not. It was a lovely bed and breakfast.

Dep. Sec. Campbell: Oh, you hope for Motel 6. (Laughter.) But then, so – but thank God we got there early because it only took us, like, two and a half hours to get through all the security and stuff. (Laughter.) Finally, someone came to get us. And so we were there, basically, in time. But it was – it was an incredible thing. And I will always remember it.

Dr. Rapp-Hooper: No, no. I'll just sort of back up to add the story – a little bit of texture of the story that got us there. I think every close Asia watcher understands the importance of the rapprochement between the ROK and Japan, and the heights to which this trilateral relationship has now come. But it's important to kind of think back to where we were when the Biden administration was taking office. And in many ways, that bilateral relationship had fallen to its historic nadir – which, as a group of people who were really focused on strengthening our hands in the Indo-Pacific, was top of the list of things that we desperately wanted to help fix. And we had clear marching orders from the president, from Jake Sullivan, to do so, and Kurt started brainstorming ways that we could try to get two of our closest allies back together again just as soon as we got into the White House.

But a lot of that pathway was really rocky and at the beginning not at all successful. You know, we tried our hand at being strong supporters for the first couple of years and the time just wasn't right, and I think that's an important lesson that one learns in the practice of foreign policy – that you can want something and see it as strategically opportune but if the political moment isn't right you just have to put your head back down and keep at it.

But the political moment came once President Yoon was elected and was determined to improve his relationship with Japan. Prime Minister Kishida reciprocated and, really, this achievement was an act of extraordinary courage between those two leaders.

But once they had made their choice to move forward together the momentum that we were able to find in the trilateral relationship was extraordinary. I will always remember the moment in Hiroshima, a(n) extremely brief trilateral meeting that we helped to stage outside where the president asked President Yoon and Prime Minister Kishida to come to meet him that summer for their first next step trilateral leaders summit, and the work between then and when we actually arrived at Camp David that we were able to do was nothing short of remarkable.

It was the type of experience in government that one goes into public service hoping to have, feeling like you have an open moment where the wind is at your back and almost anything is achievable, and the thing that was so remarkable about that day is that it was fit to all that we had hoped it would be.

It was a sort of cool, beautiful summer day where it almost felt like the air was crackling with the promise of what this relationship could be. All three of these leaders were so happy to be there, with just an incredible understanding of the strategic significance of that moment and every single member of all three of our teams felt like they were a part of something extraordinary.

And, at least in my experience, those moments don't come along that often but they come along often enough to make really tough jobs worth it and all the better when you get to work with people like Kurt; my colleague Luke Collin, who's sitting in the front row who's our Japan director; my colleague Drew Arveseth, who did the Korea side of this for us; and so many others who were part of this along – effort along the way.

Dr. Cha: Yeah, I agree. And just to finish, that's a very important point, too. It's also – policy is about people, right?

Dep. Sec. Campbell: Yeah.

Dr. Cha: And who you work with, who your counterparts are are so important.

And so just to finish, I would – I explain to my students what it's like to work in government. It's like – it's like running a marathon but at the

pace of a sprint.

Dr. Rapp-Hooper: Mmm hmm. Yeah, that's right.

Dep. Sec. Campbell: Yeah.

Dr. Cha: And you guys have been doing that for four years and longer. I want to thank you for all that you've done.

Thank you for spending time with us. Please, thank everybody. (Applause.)

(END.)