

Kathy Gilsinan ([00:15](#)):

Hello. Should we get started? Let's do this. It's great to be here. I want to thank the Reagan Institute for putting together this wonderful panel of lots of intellectual firepower on a very serious problem. Also wanted to let everybody know that, as with most of these panels, you can submit questions via the RNDF app or via Twitter at the hashtag RNDF. I've got my little iPad here. And so, I can take your questions as the panel gets going.

Kathy Gilsinan ([00:50](#)):

You will know, I think, probably everyone on this stage, but very quickly, Senator Jack Reed is obviously the Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Army Secretary Christine Wormuth is the Army Secretary. General David Berger is the Commandant of the Marine Corps. Bridge Colby, the father and/or godfather of the National Security Strategy of 2018. And Kathy Warden, CEO, President of Northrop Grumman. So thank you all for being here.

Kathy Gilsinan ([01:19](#)):

This panel is dedicated, of course, to the China pacing challenge, which is a phrase that, I think, has come into vogue just in the past few years or so. So I have a few questions about what we think about when we're talking about the pacing challenge, why we speak about it this way, and where we're going while we're pacing China. But I wanted to start with a question that I thought was original when I came up with it but have heard posed to several panelists today, but I think that means it's a good one, which is, what keeps you up at night? And I just want to go down the... hear it from everybody.

Jack Reed ([01:53](#)):

Well, what keeps me up at night is the technological advances that the Chinese are making, and also the question of, can they operationalize those? Because there's a difference between having great technology and being able to use it in effective way.

Jack Reed ([02:11](#)):

And that drives the other question that keeps me up at night, is, what are we doing in terms of technology, and are we operationalizing our technology? And my sense is that you have to have both, and we have to put the pedal to the metal, because I think we were in a period of time where we thought we could cruise along at 30 miles per hour and stay ahead of anybody else, and now China's really accelerating.

Kathy Gilsinan ([02:39](#)):

Secretary.

Christine Wormuth ([02:40](#)):

Kathy, I think two things also keep me up at night in particular. One is the progress China has made in terms of their cyber capabilities, which are substantial. And I'm particularly concerned about them in terms of what they might do in terms of cyber attacks on our critical infrastructure here in the United States.

Christine Wormuth ([03:02](#)):

I think there is a real possibility that if we ever got into a conflict you could see attacks on our power grid, for example, or the transportation sector, which would have implications not only for how we would be able to project our military power out of the country, but also would have, I think, very substantial consequences for the American public here at home. And I think we need to do a lot more to work with the private sector, which has 85% of our critical infrastructure, to make ourselves more resilient for that kind of a challenge.

Kathy Gilsinan ([03:34](#)):

General Berger.

Gen. David Berger ([03:37](#)):

Tactically, probably nothing new, but it would be a miscalculation, an accident, bad decisions between a couple of commanders, a couple leaders forward that quickly spins into something, and we're trying to figure it out quick.

Gen. David Berger ([03:53](#)):

I think, on a bigger scale, it's probably not much different than the senator's. We are not moving fast enough, so you constantly think, we think every day there's something, some obstacle that's slowing us down. The urgency is there. I think for me, just something that you overlook, something that you didn't do that you know the generation of leaders today is going to need and the ones to follow them just not moving fast enough.

Elbridge A. Colby ([04:24](#)):

Well, first of all, thanks, Kathy, and thanks to the Reagan Institute. It's an honor to be on this panel. I would say what actually really worries me, what keeps me thinking and up at night is something a little bit different than what the secretary said just now where he said nobody wants a war in Asia. And I think that's true in a narrow sense, but I'm actually not convinced that that's true in a way that's more meaningful, which is, he mentioned, he talked about China's enormously growing military capabilities. We know they have revanchist aspirations against Taiwan, and their ambitions are far greater than that.

Elbridge A. Colby ([04:53](#)):

And, from what I can tell, we're heading into a position where China will have the ability to fight and win what they call a local war or under informationalized conditions. And I think we would be naive if we assume that they don't want a war, because I think if they are going to achieve their hegemonic goals in Asia, which they appear to be intent on doing, they are going to have to confront us at some point.

Elbridge A. Colby ([05:16](#)):

And if they can win without fighting by being clear about who would prevail, so much the better, but if it involves the risk of war, I think they will be prepared to countenance. And if you look at Xi Jinping, he's a man who lived in a cave for five years. I believe he's resolute. He's tied the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation to the resolution, the Taiwan issue. So what worries me is that it might actually... if I were advising the leadership in Beijing, I might actually recommend precipitating a conflict or risking a very serious conflict in the coming years. And that's what really worries me.

Kathy Gilsinan ([05:45](#)):

Ms. Warden.

Kathy Warden ([05:46](#)):

What keeps me up at night is a common theme that you've heard through the panel, and that is the speed at which China is both innovating and amassing capability.

Kathy Warden ([05:54](#)):

And I'm reminded often that this is not just a competition of the US military against the Chinese military. It's a competition of the US industrial base against the Chinese industrial base, and the responsibility that we have to ensure optionality for the others on the stage, as well as, the ability to deter conflict often comes because there is a perception that our nation is capable of out-innovating others, and that would deter us from getting to conflict in the first place. And that's what the role we want to play in the industrial base is.

Kathy Gilsinan ([06:29](#)):

So, Elbridge, I want to turn to you since we're talking about the successor National Defense Strategy to the one that you shepherded back in 2018, and back then you folks identified what you called an eroding competitive military advantage and said we're emerging from strategic atrophy.

Kathy Gilsinan ([06:48](#)):

So it's three years later, and my question now is, in your view, have we emerged yet from strategic atrophy? And also, in the interim, I hear us saying we're not going fast enough, but we've been thinking about these problems for three years. So, what, to your mind, have been the biggest missed opportunities, and what do you think needs to be in the next iteration of this strategy?

Elbridge A. Colby ([07:13](#)):

Well, thanks for asking. I think the answer is no. In fact, we may even have, relatively speaking, fallen behind, because what matters is the relative context, not absolute. We might be moving faster, but if the Chinese are accelerating and we're still behind them, that's not good enough.

Elbridge A. Colby ([07:28](#)):

And so, I think what the National Defense Strategy, as I understand it from Secretary Mattis, was attempting to initiate, was an overhaul of the US military to sustain or restore our conventional edge for our alliance and partnership network in the Pacific in particular. China is the top challenge. And I'm not just saying because he's sitting next to me, but I think the Marine Corps is leading the way.

Elbridge A. Colby ([07:47](#)):

That's the kind of thing that I think we were trying to initiate, because it's not going to be the Pentagon that's going to solve all the problems. It's going to be the creative application, the force redesign, force posture redesign that is going to involve fundamental changes. And I think what the Marines have been doing in retiring politically popular parts of the force, they are the pacing service as far... I mean, I think General Brown and the Air Force are now very vocal in this way as well.

Elbridge A. Colby ([08:13](#)):

But, I mean, I have to tell you that a key underlying point was great power competition focused on the most significant powers and focus on war fighting, not the other missions. And, in some sense, I detect a little bit of an erosion, and I detect an erosion of the sense of urgency even as the situation is becoming more perilous.

Elbridge A. Colby (08:30):

And so, at this point, I think we may need to... we really need to consider things that seem extreme, because if we're not going to do that now we're going to continue in this... in a sense, not even sleepwalking, but just walking towards disaster, which is... seems to be what we're doing right now.

Kathy Gilsinan (08:45):

General Berger, are you seeing this erosion that Bridge is talking about? And also, can you comment on what it's been like for you trying to reorient a service in this direction rapidly?

Gen. David Berger (08:57):

I think if you separate conventional deterrents from strategic, I think you could make an argument that the forms of deterrents that we've been using for the last several years are not working, that China is advancing their strategy, and although there's not a hot war, they're moving forward on their goals. So, if we continue to do the same thing for three more years, I'm not sure that it's even going to be status quo. So, we have to operate in a different way for sure.

Gen. David Berger (09:33):

And I think you heard the secretary, and I think his team has described the approach of integrated deterrence, which he mentioned at lunch today. And I think the other part that we talk about in terms of campaigning, that the services and the secretary talk about and that we are not very good at, we haven't done that in a long time either, really the active sort of, every week, what are we doing to deter and how do we measure that? There's a lot of conversation. It probably didn't happen three years ago, but now it's centerpiece.

Kathy Gilsinan (10:07):

Can I just follow up on that? In what specific ways do you think deterrence is failing right now? We're not involved in a large scale conflict. What are they doing that we should have been deterring?

Gen. David Berger (10:19):

If the metric is a large scale war, then you could make that argument that deterrence is working, but that isn't, at the essence of our strategy, protecting our national interests and stabilizing, providing the free and open seas and skies and all that goes along with it. That's the erosion, I think, that was reflected in 2018 and that the secretary spoke about this morning.

Gen. David Berger (10:44):

They've expanded into the South China Sea. Their coercive activities are definitely not slowing down. If deterrence is more than just the prevention of a hot war, if it's a broader definition than that, then we have to change the way we're operating.

Kathy Gilsinan (11:02):

Secretary Wormuth, I know you've addressed this in recent days at CSIS, which is great. There have been many questions about the army's specific role in the Pacific, especially should a conflict break out, but even in terms of things like deterrence. Can you discuss with us a little bit, your vision for the army of the future, given this context?

Christine Wormuth ([11:24](#)):

Sure. I think in the campaigning phase of things, if you will, I think one of the key roles that the army plays is making sure that our relationships on the ground in host nation countries are really, really strong. Most of the countries in the Indo-Pacific have large armies or their army is their core service. In many cases, their equivalent to the chairman is often an army general. And so we have a real, I think, advantage in terms of building on those relationships, being present on the ground.

Christine Wormuth ([11:59](#)):

The army, a few years ago, established a type of unit called a Security Force Assistance Brigade. We have our fifth SFAB, which is always hard to say, is aligned to INDOPACOM. And elements of that unit are dispersed in countries all around the theater, working every day to build an interoperability and to set the conditions for us to expand our access, if you will. So I think they're very useful in deterrent and in trying to deter an actual conflict.

Christine Wormuth ([12:28](#)):

If we were to get into a conflict, I think there are a few roles that the army can play. I like to call us... I think we would be the linchpin service in terms of going in, establishing, and securing staging bases, joint operating bases, providing protection for those bases so that our air and maritime forces can operate and do the kinds of things that they need to do.

Christine Wormuth ([12:53](#)):

I think we would have a big role to play in terms of setting up the distribution network to sustain the joint force. We are well positioned to provide command and control, because our division and core headquarters have such great planning and operational capabilities. We would bring, from an offensive perspective, long-range fires.

Christine Wormuth ([13:13](#)):

One place where I think we have been in the army having a lot of urgency and having quite a bit of success is developing our long-range precision fire systems like precision strike missile, the long-range hypersonic weapon, the mid-range capacity systems. And then, last but not least, if we were needed, we would provide maneuver forces for counter attack. So, I think there's a role to play, but it's very much in enabling the joint force.

Kathy Gilsinan ([13:42](#)):

Got it. And I want to stay on the joint force for just a minute, because it is a nice opportunity since we have both the Marines and the army on the stage here. I feel very safe and very free. Can you speak a little bit more, General Berger, I can kick it back to you, about your vision for joint operations in the INDOPACOM theater should conflict breakout.

Gen. David Berger ([14:07](#)):

It's not my vision, first of all, but I think we've come a... First of all, we've come a long way in 30 years in joint operations, period, in a very good way. Which, obviously, if you look at the PLAN they're trying to catch up. They're mimicking us, because they see the value of fighting as a team, fighting as services. So, come a long way.

Gen. David Berger ([14:30](#)):

I think the whole depth of what the US military can provide, Admiral Aquilino in INDOPACOM, is really powerful. It's not, in other words, one dimensional. It's not just up close or not just at a distance. It's the whole depth. The ability to stitch all that together, which the secretary spoke of, logistically and command and control, nobody else can do that.

Gen. David Berger ([14:56](#)):

In terms of deterrence, we have to make it a calculus for them to make... when they look at the response from the US, that's going to be really wicked hard. We have to make it that hard for them. But I think it's more than the individual capabilities of each service. It's the ability under a combat and command to fight as one, one unit.

Kathy Gilsinan ([15:16](#)):

And do you feel that you're sufficiently integrated at this point? I'm trying to get, I guess, the specifics of, if there were a Taiwan contingency, where do you see right now that there is work to be done in integrating the services?

Gen. David Berger ([15:33](#)):

For me, I think we are very comfortable, all the services working as a joint force, and I'm including special operations forces SPACECOM and CYBERCOM. We're very comfortable. It's not forced, not awkward anymore at all. That is the way that we operate.

Kathy Gilsinan ([15:53](#)):

Is that how you see it as well?

Christine Wormuth ([15:55](#)):

Yes. And I would put out there, the army just recently hosted and concluded what we call Project Convergence 21. And we looked at seven different scenarios to the operational challenges in terms of getting after the anti access area denial challenges that we're facing. And that was a joint effort.

Christine Wormuth ([16:15](#)):

The Marines were there with us. The Air Force was there. The Navy was there. The Space Force was there. And we really were looking at, in some very specific ways, how do we connect our sensors and shooters collectively across our various platforms? And we still have a lot of work to do. And I think scaling up what we were experimenting with in Project Convergence 21, there's a lot of work to be done there, but it was very much a joint experimentation exercise that I think was very valuable. And the feedback I got from my service peers was that it was very valuable.

Kathy Gilsinan ([16:52](#)):

And the sensors point brings up, obviously, the cybersecurity domain. And I know Senator Reed you've spoken publicly about your... I think you said you'd bet money on it, that in the event hostilities broke out the first thing that would happen is a major cyber attack. Can you tell us how you see that playing out and where you see the United States needing to better prepare for something like that?

Jack Reed ([17:19](#)):

Well, the secretary alluded to many of the aspects of that answer, one is, there would, I think, be a cyber attack. In fact, there are probably low level cyber operations going on constantly, but it would be a major, I think, attack, and it could be very disruptive to American society so that you'd have the American people confused, upset, and that is not a very good situation.

Jack Reed ([17:49](#)):

I think also too, it would be targeted at critical assets. We have a reserve aviation fleet which would be required to ferry troops into the... They could attack those systems and those planes might not be operational. Same with our maritime fleet reserve. They could be attacked and you would see all those things, I think, going on.

Jack Reed ([18:13](#)):

And looking at the issue of Taiwan in particular, I don't think it would be the traditional D-Day, because that would take months to organize your landing forces, and we would know that, and we would have time to either take action or to negotiate. So it would be more like, I think, what we saw in Crimea, which would be cyber operations, infiltrating, getting people in their quickly by air, but cyber will be a big part of it throughout. And we have to build out offenses, which we're trying, and to be able to counteract what they're doing.

Kathy Gilsinan ([18:56](#)):

And you've also worked very much on the Pacific Deterrence Initiative and spoken a lot about it. And I understand that it's modeled, at least to some extent, on the European Deterrence Initiative, which, as we're looking now at the European theater, deterrence also seems likely to fail, so what lessons can... or possible, it's possible that it could fail. What lessons can we draw from that as we're-

Jack Reed ([19:23](#)):

Well, I-

Kathy Gilsinan ([19:23](#)):

... thinking about it?

Jack Reed ([19:24](#)):

... think the first issue is it focused attention. And, in some respect, it was a breakthrough moment for the Congress where we finally said, not just rhetorically, but in legislation, China is the pacing threat, as the secretary of defense says, and we have to do something about it.

Jack Reed ([19:41](#)):

And, working closely with Senator Inhofe, we put together a way which we could assess the resources that were going into the Pacific. And we also emphasize, and I think it reflects the comments of General

Berger and the secretary, is that joint operations are the key. And a lot of the resources we put in place were designed for actual joint operations, starting with tabletop exercises, moving to the fleets, and then getting our allies together also, because I think in terms of deterrence we are much better off, and the Secretary Austin said it today, we're much better off with a coalition that is capable to operate together.

Jack Reed ([20:26](#)):

I don't think we have that quite yet, but the more exercises we do, the more we try literally to practice what we hope will work, we'll learn more about what's effective, what technology we need, what technology one service has that may benefit all services. And you don't find that out usually by sitting around a table in Washington talking about the problem.

Kathy Gilsinan ([20:53](#)):

What about if you're sitting on a stage in Simi Valley, would you find it out?

Jack Reed ([20:56](#)):

Well, I'd like to organize this side as Chinese, and, General Berger, you're in charge of the American forces. And then at the end of the day we'll see who won. Okay?

Kathy Gilsinan ([21:10](#)):

The technology piece of it, obviously, brings us to industry and Ms. Warden and your role in this. Obviously, in the Cold War Russia had the conventional advantage, which we offset with the tech advantage. And I wanted to put to you, can we rely on our tech advantage in the China competition now, and can the US defense industry compete with China's industrial effort?

Kathy Warden ([21:35](#)):

I believe we can compete. I wouldn't limit it just to the contribution of the defense industrial base. So I think this is a whole of country activity, just as it has been when we have faced great challenge and competition in the past. And so, the defense industrial base is open and actively engaging and partnering with commercial technology companies. And when I look at the talent base that we all draw upon, it's not what industry individuals are working on. It's, what problems are they trying to solve?

Kathy Warden ([22:05](#)):

And when we put the best minds in this country up against the toughest challenges, I'm very confident in our ability to drive innovation at the speed that we need it. What we as leaders need to do is break down the barriers that keep that innovation from coming to the forefront, from getting the resources that it needs, from being adopted because we're too risk averse to want to embrace the change and the innovation that is available to us.

Kathy Warden ([22:31](#)):

And so, if we're to say what the greatest challenges to speed of innovation are in our country, it's not the talent base or the industrial base. It's the way in which all of that capability is brought to bear on national security challenges.

Kathy Gilsinan ([22:48](#)):

That's an interesting point about barriers, because in the tech space the innovation that you need, that we need for national defense isn't necessarily residing with the big dogs anymore, with Northrop. And so, I'm curious how you see the relationship with some of these companies dispersed through Silicon Valley that are working on things that we need that may or may not be reluctant to step into the defense space but that arguably should be encouraged to do so.

Kathy Warden ([23:20](#)):

Well, on behalf of all of the great Americans who have chosen to work in the defense industrial base, I would challenge you on the first point that you made and say that we have great talent in the defense industrial base, just as we do in the great commercial technology companies in this country. And so, we can't have it be an either or equation. It needs to be both.

Kathy Warden ([23:40](#)):

And there is phenomenal mission expertise that the defense industrial base has built over decades that is highly relevant to partnering with commercial companies to ensure that we can integrate these technologies in ways that are relevant and solve the problems that those on the stage represent.

Kathy Warden ([23:59](#)):

So, can we do that? Absolutely. Are we doing that? Yes, we are doing that today. Do we need to break down the barriers that exist by providing information not over classifying programs that could use access to technologies but we can't involve people because things are over classified?

Kathy Warden ([24:19](#)):

These are all things that we could work on together to break down barriers to getting the best talent in this country, no matter what company they go to work for. And that's the kind of mindset I think we need if we're going to move at pace, and it can't be a this part of the industrial base is good, this part is bad discussion. It has to be, how do we tap into the talent of the entire industrial base?

Kathy Gilsinan ([24:44](#)):

The other question I wanted to raise which was brought up, I think, by Secretary Austin's speech earlier... He spoke about competition. Obviously, there's been a lot of discussion on all these panels about the China pacing threat competition, competition not necessarily leading to conflict.

Kathy Gilsinan ([25:01](#)):

He spoke about competition with guardrails. And I'm curious, for your thoughts, Bridge, having thought a lot about what this... I mean, everybody on this stage has thought about this competition, but you just wrote a book about it. What do you see as the guardrails that would keep this in the deterrent and competitive realm versus the conflict realm?

Elbridge A. Colby ([25:23](#)):

Well, look, I think that everybody should want guardrails. The question is how much the rhetorical emphasis and deliberate pursuit of that as a part of our policy with China makes a lot of sense. I think rather, I actually believe that we should be clear about our long term goal, which I believe is actually something like detente with China. And I differ with some of my friends on this point.

Elbridge A. Colby ([25:43](#)):

But in order to get to that point we need to be negotiating from a position of strength. What we don't want to do and what I'm fearing and sometimes I hear from people in the administration, is that there's going to be competition and cooperation at the same time, as if it's this sort of... I think the term actually used in the New York times was like, there's going to be jousting in the South China Sea but then cooperation on these other things.

Elbridge A. Colby ([26:02](#)):

And the Chinese have been clear. They were clear to Deputy Secretary Sherman that they don't accept that model. So I think what we need to do is actually really focus on building up our strength. The best source of Chinese restraint will be their confidence that they will be frustrated in their goal. Not just that they will suffer cost, but they will be frustrated and suffer costs.

Elbridge A. Colby ([26:22](#)):

And then, at the same time, we manifest our restraint in our overall goals, that we're not trying to collapse the country or dismember it and so forth. But I believe that's actually more of a linear thing, that we need to go through a period of strengthening and confrontation and then we'll be in a good position for a more collaborative relationship, which I do think is possible.

Elbridge A. Colby ([26:42](#)):

But I think right now, if we don't focus enough on our strengthening part, we're already so behind. I mean, Harold Brown famously said about the Soviet Union, "Yeah. There was an arms race, but they were racing and we weren't.", after the '60s and '70s. And that's, to some extent, people say, oh, there's an arms race in Asia. Well, our posture has barely changed in Asia. They've been increasing by something like 10% for 25 years.

Elbridge A. Colby ([27:04](#)):

So, I think our much more serious risk right now is that the Chinese will perceive an opportunity and particularly a window of opportunity. As our defense establishment is clearly shifting but it's doing so somewhat slowly, divest to invest makes a lot of sense, but it does potentially lead to vulnerability. And if you look back at why major wars have tended to happen in the past, they've really often been because an aggressor perceives a window of opportunity that may be closing.

Elbridge A. Colby ([27:31](#)):

I fully back that we should be restrained in our goals, in our object, in our rhetoric, but I think we really need to emphasize much more the strengthening part right now. And that's also part of coalition formation. People are talking about allies and partners, but everybody in Asia is wondering whether it's prudent to stand up to China, because they don't want to be put under the microscope by Beijing like Australia is now.

Elbridge A. Colby ([27:55](#)):

And so, it's very critical to show them we are strong and resolute enough for them to do so, and that will form the coalition that will then allow us to take a more, in a sense, moderate approach. But I think that's more of a question of sequencing, not at the same time.

Kathy Gilsinan ([28:10](#)):

Do the military services see any specifics in terms of guardrails that could telegraph to the Chinese that our intentions are purely deterrent and not... I mean, we hear people say this at conferences, but what are we communicating to the Chinese through our actions?

Gen. David Berger ([28:31](#)):

I can't recall a discussion specifically on guardrails using the term. We have talked a lot about making sure that actions don't spill out sideways where we don't have a means to communicate to our counterparts, for example. Guardrails, in other words, through one lens might be her ability or our... so our ability to communicate to our counterparts going, don't misread this, or vice versa.

Gen. David Berger ([28:54](#)):

So guardrails can help things from spinning sideways just because we didn't have a good way to communicate back and forth, not in terms of limiting our will to do something, but in terms of making sure that both sides understand what we're doing.

Kathy Gilsinan ([29:11](#)):

How do you think, Senator Reid, about this competition versus cooperation dichotomy and whether... I am curious about the extent to which this really is zero sum. Does the idea that we need to be building up our strength necessarily preclude things like negotiations on climate agreements, trade deals, things like that?

Jack Reed ([29:34](#)):

No, I don't think so, but I think the point that Bridge made is that if they perceive us increasing our military potential in the Pacific at a rapid rate, that it will give them pause in terms of doing something they might otherwise do. But I think we still have... the reality is that they are a huge commercial force throughout the globe. They will not deal successfully with these climate issues without some type of support or cooperation of China.

Jack Reed ([30:08](#)):

I don't think you put them off, but I think, at the same time, as we've, I think, all suggested, we have to organize ourselves, not just within the services, but with our allies. I think AUKUS, in terms of what's happened recently to send a signal to China that it's a new day, when we took AUKUS together with Britain, Australia, and the United States building submarines for or nuclear submarines for Australia, that is beginning to operationalize what we were thinking about in the Pacific Defense Initiative, i.e. let's get our allies together.

Jack Reed ([30:43](#)):

Again, you get them around the table, get them out at sea, but when you now have a system that was jointly produced and can communicate much more effectively with other systems, both British and United States, that adds to the forces the Chinese are trying to deter. And some of the programs that we invest in they must be concerned about. Submarines are still a significant factor in the Pacific, and we have those, and we're building more of them.

Jack Reed ([31:14](#)):

So we are trying to pursue strengthening rapidly. But I think, again, we have to recognize, and this makes it much different, I think, than the concept of The Cold War, this is a very globally sophisticated economic power, which the Soviet Union wasn't, and also, we're now in a situation where we have much more, obviously, a global crisis of climate change, which might be more, not only destructive in the long term, but more destabilizing. What does China do when populations start moving in or around them et cetera because of drought and other situations? So, again, I don't think

Jack Reed ([32:06](#)):

And one last point I want to make is that we have got to have a way to communicate directly to their leadership in a crisis situation, because without that you go to the point that General Berger said, some Colonel decided that his mission is to go blow up something, and oops, you've got to be able to have that communication. So I would set that up very quickly.

Kathy Gilsinan ([32:33](#)):

And we don't currently have, what is this-

Jack Reed ([32:35](#)):

I don't think we have the kind of... and I'll defer to the secretary.

Christine Wormuth ([32:41](#)):

I mean, my understanding is it's not always very real time communication. I mean, there is a hotline type of configuration, but we don't have the kind of pick up the phone, talk in a crisis capability that we would like to have. And I think that's because China is reticent to have that, given their style of governing inside the communist party.

Kathy Gilsinan ([33:02](#)):

Yeah. That was going to be my question. What would it take to set something like that up? I mean, from a layman's perspective, it sounds like a pretty simple thing to do.

Jack Reed ([33:12](#)):

Unfortunately, culture is very much determinative of things that are easy to do and hard to do. I think you've got to start. That's my point. You've got to go to them and make the point. And we would be supported, I think, by everyone, including the Russians, that this is just a basic predicate, particularly as they expand their nuclear capacity, and for their protection, as well as ours.

Kathy Gilsinan ([33:39](#)):

The other question I have, and this is potentially for you Senator Reid, potentially for you Bridge or anybody else who wants it, because I'm detecting a little bit...

Kathy Gilsinan ([33:47](#)):

I mean, the security dilemma, I think, is a concept that remains salient today, and I'm hearing it come out in terms of, okay, well, we need to do a rapid buildup in the Pacific and INDOPACOM to show that we're serious. But then, at the same time, Bridge, you said the likeliest chance for conflict is where the power sees the window closing for an opportunity to do something like a Charge of the Light Brigade across the Taiwan Strait or something.

Elbridge A. Colby (34:16):

It could be more successful.

Kathy Gilsinan (34:18):

So how do you think about the security dilemma in this context? And again, I suppose this gets back to guardrails. There's a question from the audience about whether we're stumbling toward an eventual war with China despite what's being said publicly by officials.

Jack Reed (34:38):

Bridge brought up an excellent point. Are they looking at us and saying... the irony is they finally figured out that we're going to do something, but they're going to, if we give them time, they'll come toward us. The other side, and it's, again, life is complicated, is they're also looking down the road internally in China with incredible demographic challenges, economic challenges, et cetera.

Jack Reed (35:04):

And the other part of the calculation might be, well, not only are they building up, but we're reaching perhaps zenith of our power, or at least what we can devote to military versus just taking care of our people. So this is an issue I don't think there's, frankly, a good answer to, but that's why I think it's necessary to take away the idea that this would be easy, whatever they wanted to do, whether it's Taiwan or elsewhere, and second, to begin to talk about, how do we reach some type of understanding and collaboration? So, the two have to be joined.

Elbridge A. Colby (35:44):

Yeah. Well, just to build on the chairman's point. The other thing here is, and this is why the Pacific Deterrence Initiative that he's led is so important, is not only that it helps fill the gap, but it's manifestly defensive. I mean, at the end of the day, they can say what they want, but this is, in what General Berger and General Brown and others are doing, this is not a force that's meant to intrude onto Chinese mainland and dismember the territory.

Elbridge A. Colby (36:08):

It's strike, what Secretary Wormuth was talking about, long range strike. These are manifestly defensive weapons. Now, they could be used to strike the mainland, but they couldn't realistically be used to project and sustain ground power to hold territory. So it's very clearly designed, and for instance, some of the long range fires and the capabilities that are in PDI and that the army and the Marines are working, their ranges can be limited. So it's limited what they can do.

Elbridge A. Colby (36:34):

And I think that's the kind of area where the security dilemma is very real. I mean, it's real, as the chairman was putting it. I mean, life is complicated. But we have to say... To me it's like the federal reserve, you can't go too far one direction or the other direction. And now we need to err on the side of strength in order to get to a place where we can be more moderate. But I think that's the key challenge.

Elbridge A. Colby (36:58):

But I really think, and PDI is very relevant now because it's also designed, as I understand it, and he's the expert, of course, but to help us get through this nearer period, which has tended to be neglected for a

variety of institutional and other reasons, but the Congress has really led the way on that. And I think it's so critical that that happen, because we do need to worry about the next few years, and for some of the reasons that he mentioned, as well as the one I mentioned.

Christine Wormuth ([37:23](#)):

I think we also have to remember another really important piece of the deterrent picture is Taiwan itself and what Taiwan does to make itself much less easy to swallow, if you will. Some people use the word porcupine or what have you.

Christine Wormuth ([37:41](#)):

But I remember I actually went to Taiwan a hundred million years ago when I was a young action officer in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. And the Taiwanese then were very much attracted to buying all of the shiny objects, fighter planes and things like that, when really now, when you talk about urgency in the way that Bridge is talking about it, we need Taiwan to be investing in things like sea mines, in anti ship missiles, in coastal defense, and really working on the readiness of their forces.

Christine Wormuth ([38:14](#)):

I mean, at what level of unit can the Taiwanese army, for example, really... what's their readiness at the battalion or brigade level. So that's something I think we need to all be messaging to the Taiwanese government. It is past time to get after it.

Elbridge A. Colby ([38:33](#)):

Absolutely.

Kathy Gilsinan ([38:34](#)):

And this is another question from the audience. I'm sorry to pick on you chairman, but the question is, how do we keep pace with China under a budget process that hasn't changed since Robert McNamara instituted it in the 1960s?

Jack Reed ([38:47](#)):

I submitted that question. You're absolutely right. We have in language of an NDA that we're currently negotiating a commission first that's going to go and take apart PPBE, and we have to come up with a different way to do business.

Jack Reed ([39:13](#)):

I think everyone who spoke today on this issue said it's too long. The valley of death the secretary of defense said. That's one of our major priorities, one of my major priorities in the committee, is to try to make it simpler and more effective to get things done in the Pentagon.

Jack Reed ([39:34](#)):

We've made some small adjustments. We gave the services freedom to spend up to what? I think the total now is 5 million or 15 million.

Christine Wormuth ([39:43](#)):

I think so.

Jack Reed ([39:44](#)):

Yeah. So they can do small acquisitions, but we have to think beyond that. Maybe it's a much larger total where there's autonomy for the agency, there's service to do it, but no, the PPBE, we're in a 1960 model which worked very well in the industrial age, but this is the cyber age and two years... I'm sure that back in 1960 Secretary McNamara could design a Ford for five years and then market it.

Jack Reed ([40:14](#)):

You can't do software for five years and market it, forget it. So we have to get there. We understand that. And I think you're going to see both in the department, because the secretary is concerned about this too, he mentioned it, and in the Congress, ways that we can cut out some of the unnecessary paperwork that you have to do.

Kathy Gilsinan ([40:34](#)):

And I'm assuming you're no fan of CRs either. What are the prospects for getting a defense budget passed in a timely fashion?

Jack Reed ([40:46](#)):

I'm not a fan of CRs for all the re... My estimate is that the department will lose \$36 billion if there's a CR for the year. That's a rough estimate. But it also parallelizes, and I think many people say, their ability to do anything.

Jack Reed ([41:01](#)):

Ironically, we've been talking about China. I think they're really big fans of CRs. They like CRs. We've got to get a budget pass. We're out to February now, and we can't go beyond that. We've got to get it done, and we've got to get the resources to the department, and the authorization also.

Kathy Gilsinan ([41:22](#)):

But I mean, as an elected official, what... because here we hear a lot about, oh, how bipartisan it is that everybody's finally, you saw that graph, everybody's finally waking up to the China threat. And yet when it comes to nuts and bolts in Congress, somehow that bipartisanship evaporates. What do you think it's going to take to...

Jack Reed ([41:43](#)):

Well, I hope it doesn't take a serious wake up call. I hope we can get up on our own. And one of the things that I believe will help us get, ultimately, our omnibus budget is the realization that defense spending cannot be squeezed so significantly. In fact, the leverage on our side is the defense budget. And then, we also want to fund other programs, but I think that would probably get my Republican colleagues more interested in being supportive than anything else.

Kathy Gilsinan ([42:25](#)):

I would like to turn to the survey results from the Reagan Institute's poll that they did. I think it generally takes a few seconds to get the slide up here. So, I'll just tee it up while we... Oh, there we go.

Kathy Gilsinan ([42:40](#)):

So this one is a little bit confusing, so I'm just going to... I'm going to give some context to it and the questions that were asked surrounding it. The Reagan Institute asked the question of the single greatest concern Americans have regarding China, again, given the slide we all saw earlier that it's a bipartisan concern and China's overtaken every other nation as a perceived threat to Americans. The greatest concern of five options given, the prospect of China invading Taiwan is the bottom of the concern list. So 7% were worried about it.

Kathy Gilsinan ([43:18](#)):

Six out of 10 Americans view Taiwan as an ally. However, assuming a Taiwan invasion, 71% of respondents support recognizing Taiwan as an independent country, and then, other results, it drops off for other types of military responses. What we see on this chart here is it's actually showing the movement from the last time they did this survey, the movement of people who oppose this or don't know what they would like to see.

Kathy Gilsinan ([43:57](#)):

And so, what you're seeing is that opposition to some of these responses is going down, but more people are moving into the don't know category, which makes sense to me because it speaks a certain kind of confusion about what we're actually about out there. And so, I just wanted to put to all of you what you think the appropriate message is for the American people with regard to our commitments, ambiguous as they may be, toward Taiwan and why this is in our interest. Yeah.

Jack Reed ([44:31](#)):

Well, I think the most important message is that it's not specifically about Taiwan, and in some respects, it's not about China. It's about maintaining a system of international law and interaction which has persisted because of the United States primarily for decades and decades and decades.

Jack Reed ([44:53](#)):

It's freedom of navigation. It's being able to move about. And it's also to advance, not principally by coercion, but by example, our ideals of freedom, of individual respect and autonomy, et cetera. And that is a notion that we share with many other countries.

Jack Reed ([45:18](#)):

And so this is basically maintaining the world that we grew up in, which is one of law and not autocracy, and one of free trade, with prosperity that is fairly widely distributed, including United States. And that's what we're trying to do. I think focusing in on specific issues people... that category of don't know grows a lot.

Jack Reed ([45:52](#)):

And the only final point is that a lot of, I think, what is being seen now in China is... or another fallout from the pandemic, associating China with the pandemic, we don't like those people, et cetera. And that factor has to be put in.

Kathy Gilsinan ([46:11](#)):

Secretary, do you think there's room for clarity? What would you want to explain to move people out of the don't know category?

Christine Wormuth ([46:18](#)):

Well, I thought one of the most interesting things about the survey results was it seemed to me to indicate both an openness and an interest in wanting to better understand what the stakes are for the United States and the Indo-Pacific and this is framed, obviously, around Taiwan, but also, the fact, I think, that it shows that we probably need to be doing more to talk about to the American public what the stakes really are for the country and why a small island called Taiwan matters to Americans all around the country, I mean, for example, in my hometown, College Station.

Christine Wormuth ([46:55](#)):

And I think when I think about it one of the other things that keeps me up at night is the possibility that China continues to... and Secretary Austin, I think, talked about this in his keynote, continues to export the tools of authoritarianism and a surveillance state, if you will. And I think I certainly don't want to see that spreading around the world. I don't want to see them eroding the current international order, which I think has helped raise everybody's boats.

Christine Wormuth ([47:30](#)):

And, to me, it's making it clear to China that they can't violate the laws of territorial sovereignty is why Taiwan matters, because we want the Indo-Pacific to remain stable and free. But I think that that's not talked about very often. We don't talk enough about the stakes for our country in the Indo-Pacific.

Kathy Gilsinan ([47:53](#)):

And it's also difficult, by design, difficult to talk about Taiwan's sovereignty, which is not something we formally-

Christine Wormuth ([47:58](#)):

Absolutely.

Kathy Gilsinan ([47:58](#)):

... recognize. General Berger, do you...

Gen. David Berger ([48:01](#)):

Perhaps a couple thoughts. First, I think it's the wrong question.

Kathy Gilsinan ([48:07](#)):

I worked so hard.

Gen. David Berger ([48:08](#)):

This assumes... Well, by that I mean it's probably helpful to some, but this assumes strategy has failed. This assumes deterrence has failed. More important or before that is, what are we willing to do to prevent that from happening? So, this assumes strategy failure, which we don't.

Gen. David Berger ([48:29](#)):

But, that said, maybe a couple of other thoughts, there's nothing on there I saw about what we would do to rally the allies partners part. This paints it as bilateral, us, China.

Christine Wormuth ([48:41](#)):

Great point.

Gen. David Berger ([48:41](#)):

Very dangerous. I believe we would be pretty active with everybody in a region in a collective manner what's our response, not the US response, but what's the collective response? Third part, I think it is healthy though to start to have a menu to think about this as a whole of government response, not just, what are we going to do with our military if they invade Taiwan?

Gen. David Berger ([49:03](#)):

This starts America to think about, okay, we have other tools. We're going to need all of them. Against this pacing threat we're going to need all of that and more. It's not just, what would we do with our military? From that aspect, I think, it's healthy.

Elbridge A. Colby ([49:21](#)):

Well, I think... and it's a very interesting poll. I think the overall growth in the perception of China as the primary threat is very noteworthy across the political spectrum, but also, what's interesting to me and from this really important poll and how the Reagan Institute has tracked it over a number of years is actually that you could have a situation which people saw the threat of China rising but didn't... the support for intervening on Taiwan's behalf did not grow, and that's not what happened. Actually, they do move in tandem it seems.

Elbridge A. Colby ([49:49](#)):

And I think what you show actually that don't know, and we were talking about this with some of the Reagan Institute people earlier is, I mean, I actually think that's reasonable. I mean, these are pretty technical issues. I mean, even people in this room may not know all the various bells and whistles politically and diplomatically associated with some of these things.

Elbridge A. Colby ([50:05](#)):

So I think what it's saying is, actually, to general Berger's point, okay, what's the strategy? And then what secretary Wormuth was saying about, all right, how does this fit into the bigger picture? And then, what's the plan here? But it's showing to me that the American people are willing to consider this very seriously, and they understand the challenge from the primary rival, but they intuit the importance.

Elbridge A. Colby ([50:28](#)):

I don't know. I mean, Chairman Reed deals with people, more direct voters, but I mean, I get the sense actually that the China sense, and I think this poll shows it, people get it out there. They felt the impact of the industrialization, obviously, the pandemic that he mentioned, so forth. So they get it and now they're willing to hear, okay, well, what's the way that we do this?

Elbridge A. Colby ([50:47](#)):

But that's, ultimately, on the national security establishment, whatever you want to call it, to come up with a coherent plan. It's not people's job to come off the factory floor or the law firm or whatever and figure this out. It's our job writ large to say, this is the coherent plan, and we're going to get ahead of the problem. And that's what I think we've really got to focus on, is trying to get ahead out there so we don't get, to your point general, that we don't get to this point, God forbid.

Kathy Gilsinan ([51:14](#)):

I should also say just quickly, since these are relative numbers, half of Americans, according to this poll, would support establishing... Again, in the unlikely event the strategy fails, half of Americans would support establishing a no fly zone over the area, which is a pretty large number, although, again, 25% didn't know, and only four in 10 would support committing US ground troops to the defense of Taiwan.

Elbridge A. Colby ([51:38](#)):

But, sorry, Kathy, I think the number opposing the use of ground troops in Taiwan is actually lower than that. So it's, right, it's kind of... Isn't it? If I'm not mistaken.

Kathy Gilsinan ([51:47](#)):

35, good point.

Elbridge A. Colby ([51:48](#)):

Right.

Kathy Gilsinan ([51:48](#)):

35% would oppose. Yeah.

Elbridge A. Colby ([51:51](#)):

To me it suggests like an unsettled... and, I mean, ground troops is obviously... is a huge-

Kathy Gilsinan ([51:56](#)):

Huge.

Elbridge A. Colby ([51:56](#)):

... escalation actually. It's one of the three red lines which... But it just shows you that, to me, that, not to quibble, but that people are kind of, okay, we're willing to do some hairy stuff, but give us a plan.

Kathy Gilsinan ([52:07](#)):

Ms. Warden, do you have any more comments in our last few minutes?

Kathy Warden ([52:09](#)):

I do on this matter, and we saw this morning the increase in the American public saying they don't know what the appropriate response is is a message to us that we need to be discussing national security matters more with the American public, not less. And I go home at night and read the DOD's military report on Chinese capability. Most Americans don't do that. And I talk to very learned individuals, other CEOs, they're not doing that.

Kathy Warden ([52:39](#)):

So we have to serve up information in digestible ways to the American public if we want them to be able to be informed when we ask a question like this, if we want them be informed as voters about what their representatives in Congress should be supporting from a budgetary perspective, and if we want them to support our military and other senior leaders in taking action when necessary. I just think this is a really important issue for us, not specific to this question, but much more broadly.

Kathy Gilsinan ([53:09](#)):

I suppose the media has a role to play in it. Well, I think we're just about running out of time. If you want to do a lightning round of like, what country are we ignoring or what big thing have we left out? No?

Jack Reed ([53:25](#)):

Why not?

Kathy Gilsinan ([53:26](#)):

[crosstalk 00:53:26] come on.

Jack Reed ([53:27](#)):

If you want a lightning round, when we think about conflict with China, we also better think about escalation. Because when you get there, the options diminish quickly and significantly, and that's something we have to worry about. That's another stay up late at night thought.

Kathy Gilsinan ([53:47](#)):

All right. One minute, any...

Kathy Warden ([53:51](#)):

Escalation's already happening, particularly in the cyber and the space domain. And that, again, is an area that isn't very public but very important for us to recognize that this isn't a red line that is going to be crossed, and we all know it. I think it is a gradual escalation, as the Senator said, and one that is quite finessed.

Elbridge A. Colby ([54:13](#)):

Maybe I'll just say, building on Kathy's point. I mean, I think it's critical to explain to the American people but also to be concrete with them about the urgency, about the scale of the challenge, to be real, because the escalation risks, the costs, et cetera, are very real, but I think the American people will understand it, but it's going to be very costly and risky.

Elbridge A. Colby ([54:34](#)):

But if we ignore the problem it will be much worse. So I think we have to do, and I'm sure you agree, but we have to do it in a spirit of realism and not just a hoarditory foggy way. It's got to be, this is very real, it's the first time we face a arrival that's our own size economically ever basically.

Christine Wormuth ([54:53](#)):

And one that we're much more economically entangled with-

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Elbridge A. Colby ([54:55](#)):

Exactly.

Christine Wormuth ([54:56](#)):

... than we ever were with the Soviet Union.

Elbridge A. Colby ([54:57](#)):

Right. Exactly. Yep. Much more important.

Kathy Gilsinan ([55:00](#)):

All right. On that happy note, please join me in thanking our panelists, and thank you all for coming.