

Mary: That was President Nixon speaking on the White House south lawn on February 17th, 1972. Good evening, and welcome to The Nixon Seminar on conservative realism and national security. I'm your host, Mary Kissel, with Stephens Inc. We're honored to have Secretary Pompeo just back from Ukraine and Ambassador O'Brien, sharing tonight's discussion with our distinguished seminar members.

The topic tonight, the Russia-China rapprochement, the very thing that President Nixon worked so hard to prevent. How threatening is this burgeoning alliance, partnership, whatever you'd like to call it, to U.S. national security? How might it evolve? What can be done? Let's get started.

Secretary Pompeo, I'm going to you first. And let's start...we have to start with your trip to Ukraine. I understand that you left earlier today. You're now back in continental Europe. What were your impressions from that trip? Good evening.

Sec. Pompeo: Well, thank you, Mary, and thanks to everyone for joining us this evening. You know, these are connected issues. We're going to speak tonight about the Russia and China relationship as it exists today and the risks that that presents. The conflict in Ukraine has a connection. I went there. I traveled there. I was there for about a day. I took a group of American business leaders and then some folks from Samaritan's Purse and a couple of other humanitarian organizations, all focused on what one will do when this conflict ends. I hope it ends soon. But they were trying to help the government think their way through strategically, what this might look like, and how the United States and global partners in the private sector might be helpful in that moment.

I went through at the request of President Zelenskyy. I hadn't seen him for three years and change. We met with him and the entire team, the Ministry of Defense, the intelligent officials. We had a good chance to meet with the government, as well as a couple of hundred young people there in Ukraine. And you know, a few things were striking. First, it's been a long year. There is no doubt about that. You can see on the faces of the people that we interacted with, the cumulative stress of that time being at war, even in the capital city of Kyiv, having air raid sirens continue to go off from time to time, and they can feel it. They all have friends and family who are in the conflict. When I had the chance to go visit two military hospitals, one at a church, you could see the true impact of this terrible war.

Having said that, the only time I angered them in the remarks I was...I was, of course, as I had been pretty consistently supportive of the Ukrainian effort of American continued support for that effort, the only time I ever frustrated them was when I suggested that Crimea was going to be really hard to get back. They are determined, and this wasn't just the leadership. This was everyone I

encountered, from some people who'd lost their home and their husband, to the young people from the university that they brought to see me and speak with. You know, those kids don't even remember the Soviet Union. They never lived under Moscow's rule. And so they were incredibly determined to do this difficult arduous thing that they know their country needs to do for themselves and their families and grandkids.

Last, we traveled to Irpin to see the terrible destruction there. You know, you watch it on TV, and that is one thing to go there and to see the scale of what happened in just one place, just one camp, right? They're not even the town that was hardest hit. Reminds you of the responsibility that we all have and the fact that the world is self-ordering, that it takes leadership and work, and it is not simple nor free to actually achieve that. And the horrors that Vladimir Putin has inflicted on these people are real and continuing. It was a great day. We're only on the ground for about 16, 17 hours. Turned out we were there at a time a group of Republican congressmen were traveling there as well. It was a good day. I hope we provided encouragement for the Ukrainian people. And most importantly, I hope that all of us who were there that day, myself, and all those business leaders will come back home and remind America why this matters to us, what's in it for the American national interest. I think it was plain to any of us who were on the ground there.

Mary: Well, it recalls the Nixon quote, and I think we've said it in previous seminars, "If we do not exercise power for the good, there are plenty of men who will gladly exercise it for evil." It's a timeless quote and certainly true today. I just want to correct. I misspoke. Of course, Ukraine is part of continental Europe, many would say. So I want to make sure I get that on the record. Secretary Pompeo, I'm going to stay with you just for a moment so you can finish your thought. You said that, you know, going to Ukraine connects to the topic of tonight's seminar. Could you just sort of set the stage for us? And then I'll be sure to get on to the other seminar members and co-chairs. Thank you.

Sec. Pompeo: Sure. First, a couple of things. Xi Jinping is clearly watching. He's watching the conflict itself with a tactical and operational level to see how a conflict takes place, whether that's cyberspace, whether that's the capacity to jam, what impact missiles can have. How quickly people rebuild, that was remarkable. They've had energy issues, for sure, but the lights were on in Kyiv. The lights were on in most of the country nearly continuously, no matter the destruction. These resilient people have built it back. I'm sure Xi Jinping is watching that, thinking not only about how this might impact his potential acquisition of Taiwan, but make no mistake about it, they're in a conflict with India, they're in a conflict in the South Pacific. These are people who have fought with kinetically just about every one of their land and sea neighbors over

the last 25 years. They're avaricious and brutal, and they're watching a very brutal war play out to see who's victorious.

Second, I think they're deeply watching, can a coalition republic of democracies stick together in a fight that really matters to them but it seems awfully long way to some of the people that they have political responsibility to lead? And I think they're certainly watching for the political integrity and the resolve of the Biden administration and the leadership all across Europe as well.

Finally, the Chinese had picked a side. The Chinese Communist Party portrays themselves as neutral, but let's make no mistake about it. We know who they would prefer prevail. They would prefer that the authoritarian regime that invaded Europe be successful and that the people of Ukraine and those who are supporting them simply seeking national sovereignty, independence, peace, lose. They've chosen that side. I've heard the administration say they don't think there's weapons there that are Chinese. I suspect that's probably not true. I'll bet there has been lethal assistance provided. And we know that they have provided moral assistance, a very phony proposal for dialogue. I know Xi Jinping's watching what's taking place in Eastern Europe today very closely to determine how free he is to move about the capital.

Mary: Well, and they're not even hiding it. Former National Security Advisor, also our co-chair tonight, Ambassador Robert O'Brien, I'm going to pull you in here. Xi and Putin declared what they called the no-limits friendship back in February of last year. They just spent three days clinking glasses in Moscow, and they're not really hiding how close this partnership is becoming. Can you speak to, you know, what you saw when you were serving as national security advisor about the development of this relationship and how you see it evolving today?

Amb. O'Brien: No, Mary, it's a very serious thing. Xi visited Moscow from Taipei. I was in Taiwan for the week, meeting with President Tsai and Taiwanese across the political spectrum. And it was a wakeup call I think not just for the Taiwanese but for the world to watch Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin cement their unlimited partnership. And make no mistake about it, this unlimited partnership is a threat to our way of life. It's a threat to free speech. It's a threat to free religion. It's a threat to the rule of law. It's a threat to the right to keep and bear arms. None of these things are available in Russia or China, and we have to understand that... And, look, I would throw Iran into the mix as well. Iran is certainly part of this new real axis of evil, with three major countries, three hegemonic countries that all have designs on their neighbors. And they're working together now the same way that Japan and Germany and Italy worked together in World War II and in the lead of World War II. It's a very serious situation.

I spoke with a senior Swiss diplomat just recently who was back from Belarus, and the Swiss are always very unconcerned about things. They don't get as involved in great power competition as we do. And he came back and said he was afraid of this alliance that's developing between Tehran, Moscow, and Beijing. It's an unnatural alliance. It's an unholy alliance. The Russians have taken land for both Iran and China. In fact, I pointed out in Taipei the 1860 Convention of Peking. This is actually in the national museum in Taipei. It was something that Chiang Kai-shek took with him to Taiwan when he evacuated and when the communist took over. And the Russians forced the Chinese to cede thousands and thousands of miles of Chinese territory to the Russians, including the city of Vladivostok. Now, don't think for a moment that Xi Jinping isn't planning on getting back every acre of land that the Chinese gave the Russians. And the Russians know this. But for now, the Chinese and Russians have put aside their differences, and they've decided that they're both better off in the short term undermining American leadership, undermining the democracies, undermining freedom in the world.

And so whether it's currency deals that they're doing in the Arabian Gulf or with Brazil and trying to supplement the U.S. dollar reserve currency, whether it's arms deals. And some of us have got to be humiliated, and I think of Russian generals, proud Russian generals, having to go hat in hand to the Iranians, a country that they look down on with disdain and beg for weapons from the Iranians. But they're willing to do it because their territorial ambitions are so big.

Now, the good news is, and there are some good news out there, the Western alliance is strong and to see Finland join NATO yesterday and to see Sweden on the way into NATO. You know, though Vladimir Putin wanna weaken NATO, he got a stronger NATO. They're both very capable countries. They're going to help us in the Arctic. They're going to help us...Finland has a 250,000-man very highly trained, well-equipped army, well-hand army. That puts us in a better position to go out, to move troops from Europe to the Indo-Pacific where we need them. And the Western alliance of the Five Eyes, NATO, Japan, Israel, we've got great technical capacity. And so we're going to meet this challenge, we're going to defeat the challenge, but it's going to take leadership. And then that leadership is going to be not just in this country and with our allies.

It's going to be to bring India, a country that Secretary Pompeo mentioned and has had a land war within the last two years with China. We're going to bring India to the party. We're going to bring countries that value sovereignty but may not be democracies, like Vietnam and the Gulf Arab states. And we had great relationships in the Trump administration, and unfortunately, those relationships are fraying now. We've got to bring those countries that value their freedom and their sovereignty into the coalition to defeat this alliance.

And so it's the biggest challenge we've faced since the Second World War, maybe before. I do believe America will rise to it. We look weak. We appear weak now, but fundamentally, America is not weak. And I think we'll have new leadership soon, and when that happens, I think we're going to rise to the occasion and maintain our way of life. But it's going to be a heck of a challenge for us. And I want to thank Mike for taking a personal risk of going to Ukraine and Kyiv and supporting the people there and supporting President Zelenskyy and his cabinet.

One thing we've got to be very careful about it, you know, we pat ourselves in the back for the aid that we're giving Ukraine, and it's the sacrifice of the American taxpayers, but these great victories that have been won on the battlefield, those have been won by the daring and courage and panache and esprit de corps of the Ukrainian people, and we don't want to steal their valor. We need to recognize their hand in this fight and our role in supporting them. But I'm glad that Mike was there to buoy them up, along with the congressional delegation. So thank you, Mike.

Mary: I just want to remind the seminar participants to please mute when they're not talking because we're getting a little bit of feedback here, and we want the audience to hear absolutely everything. Ambassador O'Brien, points all well taken, and maybe it's, you know, not necessarily explicit but certainly strongly implied here that the fear is China, the greater partner, China, the global ambitions, how history has been twisted because, of course, Nixon was afraid that the Soviet Union would dominate China. So it's funny how that comes around. I wanna bring in Nadia Schadlow, a former deputy national security advisor who authored the very important national security strategy that flagged all of these potential problems from great powers, kind of moved us past the 9/11 era. It was a really seminal document. I recommend it to everyone. Nadia, speak, please, if you can, about the strategic thinking of a Putin, of a Xi, in this moment, because we spend so much time talking about what the United States wants, what we think. But what do we need to know about what they're thinking today?

Nadia: Thanks, Mary. Well, I agree very much with what Ambassador O'Brien articulated in terms of China's goals, and there are other members of this seminar that I look forward to hearing their views on this. I think, fundamentally, if I were to sort of identify one common goal of Russia and China, it's to create more dilemmas for the United States and to undercut American influence, right? So overall, their strategy is multifaceted, right? I mean, China, especially, wants to grow its economic, military, and political power, as we know, to advance the objective of the CCP. And as Secretary Pompeo and Ambassador O'Brien pointed out, this is a problem because it's inconsistent and incompatible. Their vision of the world, their vision of how the

world should be ordered looks different from our vision of the world, fundamentally.

But I think what they're doing really today are creating multiple dilemmas for us, right? I think it is hard to deny that China has been pretty successful diplomatically, although I'd love to hear from others on this call, Alex and Bridge, on this point. The Middle East looks a little bit different than it did before Xi's diplomacy, right? I think there are things going on in Latin America today too that we're really not paying enough attention to. They're still creating dilemmas for us in Europe. Well, in many ways, there's lots of progress there, and I urge you to listen to Ursula von der Leyen's speech recently on the EU and China. But there are still dilemmas in Europe.

We're seeing this sort of, I don't know what to call it, a non-aligned, a group of countries that have been on the fence a little bit, and this creates dilemmas for us. And while I'm positive overall, I think it does worry me, because I think our diplomatic statecraft sometimes is maybe not as agile and effective as it might be. So you know, I want Ambassador O'Brien's positive vision to prevail, but sometimes I worry that we're not kind of developing a counterstrategy now on these diplomatic maneuvers that Xi has made so well, really. And I think we'll continue.

Mary: Well, it is very disturbing, and you know, to that point, when Xi and Putin were, you know, shaking hands in Moscow, Xi said, and this is a direct quote, "Now there are changes that haven't happened in 100 years. When we are together," meaning Xi and Putin, "we drive these changes." So with that, Bridge...

Nadia: Good quote.

Mary: Yeah. Disturbing quote. Bridge, I'm going over to you as a student of history. You know, Nixon saw the potential problem of a combined then-Soviet-Chinese axis and what that would mean not just for our security but the security of our friends and allies. And so he, you know, worked on a trilateral, essentially, diplomacy. Is that possible today? Is there some lesson that we can learn from what Nixon did back in the '70s that's still relevant today?

Bridge: Well, thanks, Mary. I'm not sure. Unfortunately, there's too much in its way sort of wedge diplomacy that's too practical at this point, although, hopefully, in the sort of medium term, it might become feasible again. But I think that quote that you gave us from Xi Jinping, and I assume they had meant to be recorded, but it was striking because it had a kind of informality to it. It had a sort of conversational type. And I have to tell you, that visit, I mean, it really made an impression on me. As you know, Mary, I already was thinking they were in cahoots, and obviously, the Chinese had grand ambitions.

But in case there was any doubt on any of those fronts, I think they have been definitively laid to rest. I mean, not only did... Xi Jinping had not been outside of the country for three years or so, and he went first and foremost to Moscow for three days, just as Vladimir Putin was the object of the International Criminal Court, sort of whatever our views on the merits of that, but I mean, certainly, sort of relevant timing indictment or charge, and they had all kinds of discussions. And so, in case there was any question as to whether there was meaningful daylight between Moscow and Beijing, I think that's been laid to rest.

And I think that entente or whatever, personally, I think it is an alliance. I mean I think there's some semantics about it, but it's not exactly an alliance of the kind that we've had since the end of the post-war period, but it would have been recognizable as an alliance to pre-World War I Britain or France or Germany or Italy or Russia. And in some ways, maybe more, you know, stronger in some ways than some of our own alliances candidly. I think Graham Allison made that point. I think there's some truth to it.

And I think the Chinese have now put themselves in the position where one of two things probably is what they're pursuing, and there's some flexibility in how they do so. One is that the war in Ukraine goes on more or less indefinitely and distracts in my view and reduces American capability, which I think is now becoming increasingly evident that is what's happening. And the depletion of our own military stockpiles, and resources are trading against other capabilities, and we're not in a position, unfortunately, we're a defense industrial base, can quickly resuscitate as much as we might hope that to happen. In fact, Dave Norquist, the former acting Secretary of Defense, Deputy Secretary of Defense, very knowledgeable guy, pointed out in congressional testimony a short time ago that the situation is actually becoming worse. So there are things like multi-year contracts happening. So that's one possibility.

The other possibility is that China will be in a position of the sort of the party that can deliver Moscow, you know, whether Moscow sort of wants to or not. I mean, there have been reporting out of what Macron has been saying in his trip right now to Beijing, and it's pretty disturbing because...I mean, I can't say I'm surprised. It's basically, apparently, the Chinese are offering something like, "You don't get in bed with any of these American export controls, and yada yada yada, and join any kind of sort of balancing measures against China. And in exchange, we'll help you solve the Ukraine crisis." And who knows whether they'd actually deliver on that, and so forth, but that puts the Chinese in a very advantageous position. Meantime, they're also active in other parts of the world. I mean, there were all these sort of truisms of China watchers, like, "The Chinese would never do X, Y, or Z. They would never have single-man leadership anymore. They would never build up their nuclear forces. They

would never build overseas bases. They would never engage in a sort of aggressive great power diplomacy." Well, here we are, you know, cutting a deal between the Saudis and the Iranians, which says a lot, and active, as I think Ambassador O'Brien was suggesting, in Brazil with the new Lula government, and so forth.

So they're out there, and I think they're in a potent position. I've been looking quite a bit at the role of the dollar and the yuan and the potential challenge from yuan. I know a lot of people are dismissive of that. On the other hand, sort of, you know, partially because of the Russian's dependency, the impact of the sanctions, there's a lot of ways in which the Chinese are accumulating a larger and larger sort of currency and kind of commercial area that's really under their...you know, and the Saudis are conducting transactions in yuan now, of course, the Russians, the Indians, to some extent. So I think that the trends are very dangerous, and of course, at the same time, they're, you know, gangbusters for getting ready for 2027, you know.

I mean, a couple of years ago, I mean, I think Robert and I were talking about this in a recent one, that was a kind of fringe view, you know, when Phil Davidson said that people rolled their eyes and said, oh, you know.

Mary: Admiral Phil Davidson.

Bridge: Yeah, Admiral Phil Davidson. Now, it's Tony Blinken who said it to Bill Hagerty, Senator Bill Hagerty. He said, "Oh, yeah, they want to be ready by 2027." Okay, well, that's a lot of time under the bridge that we didn't get ready. And so I think this is the situation they're in. I would expect, if they decide to make a move, talking about multipolar. They will try to create as many problems as possible. They might use the Iranians, they might use the Russians, of course, the North Koreans. So that's the world, I think, that we're facing today.

Mary: Well, and that speaks to the "dilemmas" that Nadia just laid out so eloquently. Alex Wong, I'm wondering if this kind of condominium between these two nations was just kind of hiding in plain sight. I want to offer another quote to the audience. This is from Bill Bishop's really terrific Sinocism newsletter, which I also commend everybody. "Xi first put forward the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind in March 2013 in a speech at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations." Subsequent to that, and he made that speech in Moscow, subsequent to that, recall, Russia was the first country Xi visited. Xi and Putin have met about 40 times. China has been Russia's largest trading partner for 13 years. Alex, how can we array all of this in front of ourselves? Why didn't we wake up sooner? What happened?



Alex: Yeah. Well, it's a good question. I think we should look back on our own analysis and in government of this relationship. And I'll say, for a good part of the past 10 years and more, there has been a debate within the government, within policy circles, of whether there can be, as Bridge referenced, wedge diplomacy here, where we can drive certain wedges between Moscow and Beijing. I know, in the Trump administration, we tried to explore, you know, trilateral discussions on nuclear disarmament. But you know, I think it's become clear that the signs were there, going back more than 10 years. And if you look at the way China and Russia coordinate, for instance, at the UN, the way that, as you have mentioned, the high-level diplomacy between the two leaders and the frequency with which they meet. But overall, the base strategic desire that they share to revise the international order as it is, that is a strong shared identity of interest.

Now, folks will say, and I think it's true, that there are historical tensions, border tensions, cultural tensions, population mismatch along the borders between Russia and China, and that's not to be underplayed, but it's also not to be overplayed. I think it's clear what Russia and China have done is put aside those border tensions on China's western flank and Russia's eastern flank to concentrate on more strategically important theaters for them. So for Russia, that's obviously the border with Europe, and for China, it's the Pacific, a maritime theater. Those are strategically more important, again, to realize their grander objective of revising the international order. Perhaps, someday, they'll go back to resolve the border tensions, you know, in their mutual favor, as Robert mentioned. But for now, they've put that aside, because they have grander ambitions. And I think that's what we're seeing.

Mary: Well, if memory serves, Russia or then Soviet Union and China weren't always at each other's throats. There were a lot of exchanges between the two countries. I think Mao and Stalin signed a treaty of friendship in the early '50s, and I'm sure my viewers here will correct me if I'm mistaken about that. So there is some precedent for the two of them getting together. Secretary Pompeo, it sounds like the group is agreeing that the United States can't really use the kind of wedge diplomacy that, you know, Bridge mentioned to split apart these two. So, does that really suggest that the only strategic option or the best strategic option now for Washington or the capitals of free Europe is to bind more closely together? Are there ways to pull these non-aligned countries over to our side? I think, you know, the Saudi-Iran rapprochement was just mentioned just a few minutes ago. They seem to be drifting over into the Russia-China orbit. What strategic options do we have today? And sorry to ask you this. I know it's very early in the morning where you are in Europe.

Sec. Pompeo: It is, Mary, but it's just as difficult a question at noon as it is 2 a.m. So, look, we shouldn't abandon the notion that we can create some

difficulties, some struggles between them. I think it's still a worthy effort. There are a handful of ways. And as time goes on, I think some of these challenges will get greater for them. If you look at the population density map in Russia, 140 million people, 150 million people total, almost all in the west. There are lots of reasons that the Russian people will see themselves as a vassal state, and they react to that in a way that would drive them further away. But I agree with the premise of your question is that the real drive has to be to not present this as the United States versus China, but you know, those people who believe in the existing order, those nations who believe that their economies have benefited greatly from the rules as they sit, there'll be countries who choose the other one. I think now I'd be better off just taking money in brown paper bags from the Chinese Communist Party, and if I have to suck up the communists in Russia too, you know, so be it. But it is the case.

We should continue to extend efforts that we made during our four years, efforts that the Biden administration has tried to continue to build out a set of nations with both the political scope, enormous economies, trading systems that make sense for people who care about property rights and basic human decency. I do think that is the strategic model that, you know, the euphemism, "The West is imperfect," but those of us who understand that we have lifted billions of people out of poverty and we've had fewer wars as a result of the existing model, and the Chinese model is one that is fundamentally different than we shape every life here in America. That's the last thing I'd like to add at this moment.

We need to remind the American people why this matters. Some of this just seems like an awful waste to them. We need to talk to folks about Taiwan or you talk to them about Central Asia. I get it, they're busy living their lives, but this is at the center of what the next generation and the generation after that, how they will live their lives, in the same way that, for at least 75 years, we've lived on a model that has benefited the United States, people all across the country, from California to Florida, from Washington to Maine, has benefited the people of the United States enormously to give that up and to say, "Well, this is just a big problem. Who cares if the thousand nuclear weapons in Russia are paired with the Chinese arsenal? Who cares if the world trades something other than the dollar?"

It matters an awful lot if their space program, if their cyber program, if these all become the dominant model. And you know, Robert, you suggested it was an unholy alliance, it's really two for three, right? The Chinese are deeply unholy, the Russians pretend to be Orthodox, and the Iranians don't really know what the heck they got, but at least they have a religious leader, right? So it's unholy in the way that they do want to undermine the central thesis of the last 75 years how we built out a global model that mattered to the American people.

Mary: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. You know, a lot to contemplate there. I want to drill in a little further to the idea of rallying countries that believe in these values and don't want to live in this sort of Orwellian system that Xi Jinping has inflicted on his own people and is selling to nations around the world. And so Bridge Colby, I'm going to get you involved in this discussion. If you accept the secretary's hypothesis, then, to me, that says look for the nations that are right in the middle that don't want to be squeezed in the middle, the Kazakhstans of the world, the Indias of the world, the Tajikistans, all of the Central Asian nations that are strategically physically located between these two behemoths. Why not focus first on them or on the nations that are bordering China and Russia, and there are a lot of them, as a starting map for an energized diplomacy to push back against what can only be termed sort of an evil alliance?

Bridge: Yeah, that's interesting. Good point, Mary. I'll confess, I'm a bit skeptical about how much power the United States can really put into Central Asia just because of its...I mean, or essentially boxed out by Russia and China. I mean, you know, Secretary Blinken was there for one of the, I think, Central Asia summits recently. So, I mean, I think those are opportunities to kind of maybe sort of play up divisions and tensions between the two, given their shared... I mean, I'm really struck by, you know, the Chinese point paper, there was the actual sort of "peace plan," you know, not really a peace plan, but the peace plan for Ukraine. And then there was this sort of their thematic paper on their foreign policy, which was they've called...I mean, this is kind of the term I like to use, but they talk about anti-hegemony and going after the United States. And I think they and the Russians clearly feel, justly or not, that they share that interest.

So I think where we need...I think as you rightly put it, where we need to look is for countries that feel, you know, pretty acutely threatened and are willing to do something about it. So I think India, you mentioned Japan, hopefully, [inaudible 00:32:57] hopefully, South Korea, Vietnam. Philippines has moved a lot under the new Marcos government. So I think that's very promising. I think one thing I'll say, you know, kind of taking a page from President Nixon, and I want to flag Walter Russell Mead's column this morning in "The Wall Street Journal" I thought was very good, your old stomping grounds, Mary, that basically is saying, "Look, we need to modulate our message to actually compete," you know, to use the term I know Secretary Pompeo and Wess Mitchell used, kind of compete for positive influence, which is to say, you know, give a message that a wide variety of countries, whether it be Saudi Arabia, whether it be Vietnam, India, etc., not just the sort of halls of Western Europe, which I think, oftentimes, the administration's messaging is very popular in places like Northern and Western Europe but isn't even popular in all the places in Europe.

And I think that's something, you know, we need to listen to what the Chinese are actually selling, which is not usually Marxist-Leninism as far as I can tell. They obviously have a Leninist system, and it seems to me that Xi Jinping is a Marxist-Leninist by conviction in a lot of ways. But this message is a little bit different than what I think, you know, sort of the democracy versus autocracy framing. They're not selling autocracy. They're not selling Karl Marx. They're selling, you know, justly and honestly or not, they're selling something like sovereignty, prosperity, growth, these kinds of things. And so we need to be in a position where we're selling something that actually is matched to what their...I mean, you know, I'm preaching to the choir here, I know, but I mean, I think that's a very important thing where I think Walter's piece was very on point on this exact issue.

Mary: Well, they certainly aren't short of ambition. I mean, just in the last, I believe, year, Xi Jinping has laid out the global security initiative, his idea that, you know, the whole world should live under this sort of Orwellian system, the global development initiative, a second initiative, for top-down, state-led, China-led development, and the global civilization initiative, we should all just be subjects of the party. Nadia, I'm going to bring you in here. Speaking of the party, Bridge mentions they didn't think Xi was much of a Marxist-Leninist, and that's, again, another echo of the Nixon era. I mean, the Soviets and the Chinese split in the '60s over exactly that, you know, who was going to lead the global revolution, who was the real commie, and that was what split them. But ideology doesn't seem to be splitting them today. You had comments, follow-on comments, from Bridge.

Nadia: Well, I just also wanted to comment before we lose the track of how the United States navigates and kind of creates positive alignments toward us. There's a term that was used in the 2017 strategy, which I liked, called successful society, sort of looking at the foundations of successful societies. And if you look at that and sort of make a list of what they might be, and probably here, this group, we would agree some of the key elements, right, rule of law, treating people with dignity, freedom of religion, support for entrepreneurs, I mean, you know, fighting corruption, basic things. Those, still, if you had a ledger of those elements, they still would align much more closely to the United States, even given our problems, than most other countries in the world, and certainly more so than Russia and China. So kind of working with other countries and thinking through those elements of what the foundations of a successful society is just another sort of way of looking at that alignment problem, but I always like that phrase.

You know, Mary, your question about...you know, I'm not sure anyone else does, but your question about the alliance, it sort of reminds me of, and I'm really not skilled at quotes, you're excellent at quotes, but there was...25 years ago, Sam

Huntington wrote an article warning of American declinism. And he said, "You know, the first step is that you have to recognize declinism in order to take it seriously and do something about it." He said it a little bit differently, but that was the basic point. And in this sense, the China-Russia alliance, whether or not it's as strong as they think or as it might be, in some ways, it doesn't matter because we have to take it somewhat seriously, right? I happen to think it's more of an entente. I like that word a little bit more. It's more tactical, looser because of the ideological differences between the countries. But nonetheless, we still have to take it pretty seriously, right?

We have to look for ways, I think, to create wedges, to create the counter alignments, you know, whether or not, I hope we don't find out this. Obviously, it's pretty hard to fight in an integrated fashion, to work in a truly integrated joint fashion. So I think they too would face serious challenges in trying to do that, but nonetheless, I think we do have to take it seriously.

Mary: Well, that, in many ways, settles the follow-up question I was going to ask, which is, aren't Russia and China actually quite weak nations with declining economies and the rest of populations and corruption up and down the governance from the local level all the way up to the national level? It sounds to me like what you're saying is it doesn't matter what it is, we have to react to what we have right now. Ambassador O'Brien, just raising another idea here of strategy, if Nadia is correct that we have to deal with this now, we have to recognize it, and the secretary is correct that it's actually banding together free nations, and Bridge is correct that maybe there are certain nations there that we can focus on, why don't we also adopt the strategy of Xi Jinping? Why don't we create multiple dilemmas for Russia and China? Do you like that idea? And if you like that idea, you know, how could we do that?

Amb. O'Brien: I think one thing you're asking, Mary, is where's our energy, and as Secretary Pompeo and Alex and Bridge and Nadia were talking, I wrote down a note here, I just said the Chinese are relentless, and I just started making a list as people were talking. In tech, 10 of the top 20 big tech companies are now in Beijing. They've got their Beijing 2025 program, one of the others, you didn't mention that, that they plan to lead NEVs, and AVs, and robotics, and AI, and quantum. They continue with their IP theft. Their balloons are flying all over the world, gathering intelligence. They're buying farmland to this day. I mean, it's quite shocking that, today, they continue to buy farmland. They bought 1.8 billion in farmland in the U.S. last year, most of it near military bases. The Confucius Institutes are growing strong in America. There are only 18 left, but there are 50 that have just rebranded themselves and taken on a new name. And all those colleges still get federal funding.

They're working on the currency front. They're threatening Taiwan. They're in border skirmishes with India. They're taking Philippine islands as we speak and features. The influence operations in the U.S. are enormous. I mean, we've got that charm offensive that was started before the balloon in Wall Street, again, sucking up to the Chinese in ways that are unimaginable, with a genocide going on. We've got Ford Motor Company has now announced that they're going to take advantage of the Inflation Reduction Act, which is supposed to be a manufacturing home to build a massive battery plant where the CATL, the Chinese Communist battery manufacturer. Now, that's the plant that Governor Youngkin, to his credit, turned down in Virginia, but Gretchen Whitmer in Michigan jumped right at the front of the line to take the billions.

Mary: Ambassador, this is all what they're doing to us. What can we do to them? What are the dilemmas that we can create for them?

Amb. O'Brien: Well, that's the point. Look, they're doing it to Europe as well. Their diplomacy, as Bridge talked about, is relentless as well. So they're showing an energy. So we can talk about...you know, we always talk about the talking point with Russia, they've got a declining demographic, you know, Putin's ill. The Chinese economy is hurting from COVID, and yet they're able to master this robustness and this vigor that we can't seem to match. And we need to wake up and understand the challenge we're facing. We need to realize that the demographics are bad for the Chinese, but even as bad as they are, they're still going to have 800 million people 30 years from now and still outclasses, you know, population-wise. We need to pull our allies together, and the good news is that China can't be China without siding to India, without siding to Japan, without siding to Australia, without siding to Europe, without siding to the U.S. They don't have a big enough domestic market. We've got to come together as allies and make a decision that this is a threat to our way of life.

But the Chinese are very good at blandishing to private enterprise and our corporations here in Europe and to politicians, blandishing jobs and money. It's not as corrupt as it is in the Third World, in Latin America, in Asia, and Africa where they just pay off the leaders. To get them to sign up for belts and roads, they're gonna drop their recognition of Taiwan or to allow for a Chinese court or military base. But it's a similar type of bribery. I mean, there are a lot of houses in the Hamptons, and now in Florida, that are hedge fund and private equity and Wall Street guys-owned, because they're deals they've done with China. And you know, the same in Hollywood, the same in the gaming industry, and the same thing in Europe. It's just a different form of corruption. And unless we're willing to say, "Hey, these guys are committing a genocide right now," that Mike designated on I think it was January 19th, 2021, where he said there's a genocide taking place. You know, there's been a genocide in Tibet taking place

for years. Hong Kong, freedom has been wiped out. One of the great cities of the world has been really destroyed by the great economic [inaudible 00:43:24].

You know, if we don't take note of what's happening and gather our moral vigor and our martial vigor and decide that enough is enough and tell the Chinese, because we still have the power to do it, but this isn't going to play any longer, and until our people, our business leaders, and politicians have the courage to stand up to them, both here and in Western Europe and in Japan, and I think the Japanese are taking the lead on that front, we're going to lose this thing. We've got to show them that we can outwork them, we can out-diplomat them, we can arm ourselves, we can out-arm them, I mean, we can win this thing, but it's going to take a lot of energy. And we're lacking that energy right now. I mean, it's like Churchill said after Munich, "We've suffered a defeat without a battle, and we're gonna have to regain our martial bigger or we're going to pay. This is going to travel with us a long way down the road, and the consequences will be severe." And we're at that moment now.

Mary: Well, certainly, if our viewers want an example of what that kind of comprehensive strategic thinking looks like, the Nixon Foundation has declassified national security study memos that were produced during that era for the president, and they're fascinating to read just because of the nature of the questions that they posed, very probing and complex thoughtful questions about strategy and about how the United States could, as Robert suggests, and have come together with energy and vigor to confront the threats of the day. Secretary Pompeo.

Amb. O'Brien: Mary, can I just say one thing? The Nixon Foundation did not declassify those documents. Those were declassified by the federal government. We just released them. There was no declassification. The Nixon Foundation, which I'd share, that was all done by the USG, so. But your point is well taken.

Mary: I'd like to claim that I'm talking at 2 a.m. like Secretary Pompeo, but unfortunately, I don't really have that excuse. And speaking of the secretary, he is up at 2:00 in the morning, so I've got to bring you in here, sir, on this issue. You know, do you see any signs that these free nations of the world are starting to come together? You know, you see renewed, for instance, vigor out of Japan, with Prime Minister Kishida hosting the German Chancellor, going to India, going to Ukraine. You see the Philippines, I think as Bridge noted, welcoming us back to military bases. I mean, are we too down here? Are there kind of good positive trends here that we could, you know, really jump on the back of and ride?

Sec. Pompeo: Mary, I think there are. Like, in the end, I think we'll get this right to, I guess, just run a Churchill string. I'm always reminded that he said the Americans always do the right things after they've exhausted all the other

possibilities. And we're close. Yeah. You certainly see these other countries. I'll challenge your choice of describing them. This understanding of how the world needs to operate is going to have to extend beyond just free nations. So I think of the travels that I made to Vietnam. They would always remind me that they were good communists and that we were good trading partners with them as well. And so we will find places where the folks who want to be on the right side of this for the next millennium won't always have internal governance structures that Jefferson and Madison would have signed off on. And we should be prepared to accept that and do the right thing for America even though they may have a different view of how things operate inside of their own country.

Second, to really follow on something Bridge said and a question that you asked, I think there's two things that we often shy away from because they're difficult issues. And if you said, "What will drive our success in achieving causing problems for the Chinese and the Russians?" Two things, military power. I loved being the CIA director. I less loved being the secretary of state. Do love diplomacy. But in the end, the capacity to deliver, project power through the Pacific, and threaten Chinese capability is something that is...it may not be sufficient, but it's damn well necessary. And we aren't remotely close to that, and you know, Bridge talked about the fact, he suggested we're running out of 155 ammunition. When I was in Kyiv, that was the thing that I heard from everybody, "Send this. Send this." Not nuclear warheads, not high-tech software, not the complexity of Link 16. "Can you send us 155 rounds?" One-five-five rounds will matter in the conflict with China as well, right?

We should never underestimate the fact that a Navy that can project into the Pacific and a military that understands how to strategically solve the problems that China will inevitably confront should it decide on conflict is something that is absolutely a national imperative. We have to get that right. There are smarter minds than mine on all the military tools. We need to achieve that, but make no mistake about it. Increasing military power creates enormous complexity for Xi Jinping and for Vladimir Putin.

Second, we've talked about this a little bit. The dollar is among the most powerful thing. The dollar being the reserve currency for the world is among the most powerful tools to impact the world and protect things that matter to America, anything that we possess today, and we should not take that lightly. We still have the deepest most liquid financial markets in the world. We still have the currency that, if you want to litigate, if you want to protect property rights, it is the currency most likely to be successful at protecting capital that you provide to some other country. Those two tools, military power and a hard dollar, matter. You can't go to \$50 trillion in debt in the next 12 years and have a hard dollar. It seems unlikely to me at least. It would be, A, historical. So that means leaders who are prepared to explain to the American people why some of



the things we are spending money on today are no longer acceptable, and those are hard choices, I was in Congress, I watched it, no matter what program you cut, there was someone who didn't like it, grow the economy, reduce taxes, get spending back to a level where debt to GDP makes even marginal sense, and we will make life difficult for Xi Jinping as well.

Last thought, I think it was early on, Nadia, I think it was you, we shouldn't forget that this isn't all in Central Asia or in Southeast Asia or in the Middle East, and the Chinese are in Venezuela, the Iranians are in Venezuela, and the Russians are in Venezuela. And the president in Mexico is making his...what's the right term? I've never worried about being politically correct. He's batting his eyes at the Chinese in ways that are unbelievable and we have not seen from Mexico in a long time, nationalizing American assets in a way that we haven't seen for an awfully long time. This is not someplace far away. This is a stone's throw from San Diego and from El Paso. And we should make sure that those nations that are close to us understand that they have benefited enormously from the north. And we need to make sure that we do right by them so that we can protect the things that matter to us as well. There's three ideas about how we can create added complexity, strategic difficulty, and impose real cost on the coalition, the entente between the Russians and the Chinese.

Mary: Well, it's certainly a global conflict, and Xi Jinping, as we've quoted, you know, just earlier in the broadcast, has these global initiatives because he recognizes that it's a global struggle. There's an awful lot to unpack there, Mr. Secretary. I suppose I might just ask Bridge to comment very briefly on the very first point that you made, which is that it's not just free nations that we're going to have to partner up with. We will also need to partner with nations that don't share our values. If they further our national interest, Bridge, you know, we had several decades where we didn't really have to think like this. We could, you know, lecture other nations on human rights and shun them and say, "Well, if you don't do X, we're not going to give you Y aid," etc. Is it that kind of thinking that has led, for instance, to our split with Saudi Arabia? Have we lost Saudi, you know? Could we lose other nations if we continue to think and act in that way?

Bridge: I think so. If you don't mind, Mary, I'd like to kind of sort of underline a couple of things that Secretary Pompeo said that I really agree with. I mean, the first is, I mean, I think it's just the perspective of, as you know, we're on this seminar on conservative realism. Hard military power is the ultimate...like, it's not everything, but it's necessary. As you said, it's kind of like law and order, another unpopular thing to say, right? If you don't have the cops in the neighborhood, you're not gonna feel safe, you're not gonna make investments, you're not going to walk your kids to school, etc. So I think that's critical, and that cannot be just hand-waved into, in, or out of existence. It takes work. It

takes commitment. And that is ultimately founded on, in the modern world, real economic scale and productivity. And we are now spending, and I'm not an expert on this, but we're way beyond the realm.

You know, I mean, I think a lot of people have an analogy to President Nixon's successor, President Reagan, who's an amazing great president, but when he was president, elected in 1980, the fiscal situation was really different, and you had Volcker and all that. And we weren't facing an economy. You know, the USSR was...we didn't know this quite as well at the time, but it was ultimately a basket case. We were the world's largest industrial power as well as Germany and Japan, our allies. It's a different situation now, and I think we kind of, to use a biblical phrase, we need to sort of gird our loins more. And there's a lot of sort of, you know, kind of everything's great, you know, and the gang is back, and the rules-based international order kind of stuff. And it's like, "Wait a minute, like, we're just at the beginning of this."

I mean, I was struck. I read, and it's just a tiny point, but I mean, like, on the defense industrial base, which people say, you know, the 155-millimeter, "Oh, this can't be like that important," and it's like, "Well, actually, you know, for want of a shoe the kingdom was lost". If you don't have enough ammunition, you look at World War I, for instance, they didn't have enough ammunition and had a huge impact on the course of the conflict. You know, that stuff is really important. And the Chinese...you know, we have four naval shipyards, they have 13. One of theirs is larger than all four of ours combined. So that's the kind of...you know, that doesn't mean giving up and just taking our, you know, marbles and going home, but it's like...

And I think that's important just to kind of bring it back historically is Nixon was doing the opening to China, but even in the next administration, you know, especially with people like Jim Schlesinger, we were starting to think of resuscitating our position in Europe militarily after Vietnam. I think my understanding is we were starting to think about revising the economic arrangements. I mean, obviously, that really went into overdrive under Reagan. But, I mean, there was a sense that this wasn't just going to all be, you know, fancy diplomacy as important as that was. There were other things that were more about the power balance in our favor that were going to be critical elements of that overall strategy.

Mary: We're running very close to the time limit, but, Alex Wong, over to you for brief comments before we wrap it.

Alex: One thing I want to say here is, on a hopeful note, China and Russia provided us an opportunity here. As China gets closer to Moscow, as they become clearer in their backing for what is the greatest threat to European prosperity and in their vision for an ever closer union, this gives us an

opportunity to drop the scales from the European's eyes and say that they have to work with us on a global concept of strategy to push back against that. What do I mean by that? Economically, the EU and the European countries are large industrial capable modern nations, chief trading partners, chief investment destinations for the Chinese, chief technology sources. It needs work with us to undermine China's technology and economic strategy now that they are hopefully awakened to this competition.

But back to what Secretary Pompeo and Bridge said, on the military side, we need them not just to get more NATO members but to increase defense spending significantly so that they can take care of this front in Europe and allow us, the only nation that's able to spend and project power to the Pacific, because this is not just about Ukraine, it's not just about Europe. This is a global concept of security to, you know, bring a phrase from Xi Jinping into this, that we need Europe as a major industrial power together with us to counteract economically and militarily.

Mary: Well noted. Now we're moving to the closing remarks. Ambassador O'Brien, over to you.

Amb. O'Brien: Well, I think what we've realized listening to Nadia and Bridge and Alex and the whole team and certainly the secretary and yourself, Mary, we have a tremendous challenge ahead of us. America may appear weak now. It may not appear up to the challenge. I still believe, like Ronald Reagan did, that we're the last best hope for mankind and womankind on earth. And the Shining City on the Hill may look a little dimmer, but I think underneath, the furnaces that create that light are still there, and we need to soak them. And we need to bring our allies in, as Alex pointed out just now very eloquently. And I think, together, the free world and countries that may not be part of the free world, like Vietnam and the Gulf Arab nations, if we can bring them in and bring in some of the big democracies that previously were not aligned, like India and Brazil, we can win this battle and preserve our freedom and preserve our way of life and our individual liberty. But it's going to take a renewed effort, a renewed push that we're not seeing, unfortunately, right now. But I think that may be coming, at least I hope so.

Mary: That may be coming. Secretary Pompeo, any final thoughts?

Sec. Pompeo: No, I think I've said my piece mostly. Although, you know, here we are in Ramadan, Holy Week, we should be reminded that there are things that are bigger than us and that when we get this right, we will have done our service to all.

Mary: Well, with that, I want to thank our co-chairs, our distinguished seminar members, the Nixon Foundation team, and all of you for watching. That's it for

this month's Nixon Seminar on conservative realism and national security. I'm Mary Kissel. Good night.

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