

## America's Endangered Alliances

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## America's Endangered Alliances

**0:00:00:** Welcome back, ladies and gentlemen, we're gonna start our next panel: America's Endangered Alliances. I'm gonna invite to this screen, you'll see them shortly, Mira Rapp-Hooper, and Julianne Smith. Mira, Julianne and I have all spent significant amounts of time working on America's alliances. Mira Rapp-Hooper is a senior fellow at the Council in Foreign Relations. She's written a great new book, *Shields of the Republic: The Triumph and Peril of America's Alliances*, and she'll join us in just a minute. I said backstage in the green room, the virtual green room to Mira, every American family should have one copy, maybe more of Mira's new book, so please, consider buying and reading Mira's book. I also wanna introduce my friend, Julie Smith, Julianne Smith, who is with us, I can see her on the screen right now. She was formally on leave, now Director for the Asia programs at the German Marshall Fund. She's had an extraordinary career in government and out of government. She's been a contributing editor at foreign policy. She's been at the center for New American Security. She's had several important posts in government, including as Deputy National Security Advisor for then Vice President Joe Biden during the Obama-Biden administration.

**0:01:24:** Julianne is one of the country's great experts in my opinion on our transatlantic relationship, which is still so vital to us. Mira is an expert on many things, including, read Mira Hooper about the South China Sea and East China Sea crisis, about our Indo-Pacific alliances. So we wanted to have the three of us a good conversation about whether our alliances are endangered? And I ask that question because I think most people would say that our alliances are the great power differential between the United States and Russia, Russia having no real allies and the United States and China. So, my opening question, Julie and Mira to both of you is, I think we're in somewhat of a national debate. And that debate is rolling forward as we speak, is America stronger with our allies, or without our allies? If you listen to President Trump and all of us have listened to him, obviously, I think he has a sincere belief that the United States is probably stronger unilaterally on its own, unencumbered, that the allies slow us down. They don't pay enough. I certainly believe as a former US Ambassador to NATO that we're much stronger with our allies. If the only thing we can do is think about being with our allies in the future, but you're the stars of this panel. So maybe Julie, first you and then Mira, how do you see this big debate about how America should act in the world?

**0:02:52:** Well, thanks, Nick for the invitation. Thanks to Aspen for including us in this discussion. Great to be on a panel with Mira today. I think you're right. I think there is a bit of a national debate among the American public, among policymakers, even among our allies, curious about how Americans look at their set of alliances. For many, many years, over 70 years, this has been kind of a core feature of US foreign policy, bipartisan support for all of the alliances and our allied relationships. But in recent years, we've seen some questions being asked, wouldn't it be easier to just go it alone? Can't we move faster? Can't we maintain more control? Why should we try to operate by consensus in these age-old institutions that are feeling at times a little rusty and creaky? And those are some valid questions to be asked, particularly as US resources are being dedicated to some of these institutions, and most of them are in need of reform. But like you and I think many folks, I definitely land on the other side.

**0:04:00:** I land on the side of alliances and working with our allies for a couple of reasons. One, they bring capacity. And yes, we need to work with our European allies to make sure that they meet their defense spending commitments. But the reality is that our allies bring real capacity, even military capacity, particularly our European allies inside the NATO alliance. Secondly, these relationships and these alliances bring legitimacy. It's much easier for us that what they're doing is wrong, or it's in violation of international law when you bring the collective weight of a group of countries to bear on that particular problem. And lastly, a lot of these alliances provide a political forum where we can do some problem solving and get at the heart of some of these challenges before they become a crisis. And so, by sitting at the table together, we can share information, we can share intelligence in some cases. We can give each other unique insights that help us make collective judgments. And if not forge common policies, at least try to develop coordinated policies, so that we can bring our collective weight again together. So for me, the answer is obvious. But I appreciate that for other Americans, there are some questions about why we would continue to invest in these sets of relationships.

**0:05:22:** Thank you. Thank you very much, Julie. Mira, how do you see it?

**0:05:26:** Nick, I'll start by thanking you. It's a real treat to join you here at Aspen and to be on a panel with Julie, who's such an extraordinary transatlantic expert. I'll bring a little bit of history to bear. From the book that I just published, which you were so kind to reference. My answer is very much the same as Julie's. But I think it's useful to sort of unpack what alliances have done for the United States, and also to give serious credence to the argument that perhaps allies are slowing us down. These are two questions that I weighed pretty carefully in this book. So I'll just share some of what I found. First, the American Alliance system was formed 70 years ago, because the United States decided it needed it for its own self-defense. This was not a system born of altruism. This was not simply a desire to make common cause with European partners who we really liked. This was a recognition by strategists in the early Cold War period that the United States could no longer be safe if it tried to defend itself only from its shores. That is, with the Cold War bearing down on Europe and advents of new military technologies, like long-range bombers, and nuclear weapons, the entire way that the United States defined national security had changed, and it could no longer be safe if it waited for threats to land on its shores.

**0:06:48:** Now, this inspired not only the NATO alliance but the Hub and Spokes system of alliances in Asia, that is our bilateral pacts in that region. And the system has been remarkably successful over the course of its lifetime. The Cold War stayed cold. No US ally has ever been the victim of an attack, alliances have helped us to keep crises from escalating, they've helped us to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. They've turned former rivals into partners, and they have bought the United States more political goodwill on the international stage than it ever could have expected otherwise, making its foreign policy cheaper and more effective. But let's also take seriously the question of whether allies do put us in a bind from time to time. There is no question that historically allies have spent a bit less more than the United States on defense. But this is a problem, frankly, that US policymakers have been grappling with for decades, and have decided that they should deal with inside of diplomatic channels amongst friends, because the cost of breaking an alliance would be far higher than the cost of going in alone. That is, the cost of unilateralism would be far too high.

**0:07:57:** Second, I find almost no evidence that American allies entangle us in unwanted crises or jilt us when we need them most. That is to say that the record of America's alliances is incredibly positive for the United States, that the costs have been totally tolerable to us, and that the benefits have redounded for the last 70 years, even as they warrant substantial renovation in the 21st century.

**0:08:23:** Mira, thank you very, very much. And I wanna ask both of you a specific question and maybe I'll just divide it this way. Julie, I wanna ask you a question about NATO and then Mira, I wanna ask you a question about those bilateral alliances that we have in the Indo-Pacific. Julie, we had the esteemable John Bolton with us the other day, and he said to our Aspen Security Forum audience that he feared if President Trump is reelected, President Trump could well take us out of the NATO alliance, quit the alliance, which some people believe is the greatest alliance in modern history. How do you react to that?

**0:09:02:** Well, it sends a chill down my spine, because I would not wanna see the US walk away from this very successful military alliance that has served US interests since it was created, and Mira is right to point out that a lot of what motivated the creation of these alliances, of course, is what benefits the United States. These have not been developed necessarily out of the goodness of our hearts. And so, we would have to take a serious look at the consequences for US national security. But we also have to realize that right now, there are some countries, and China comes to mind in particular, but there are others that are waiting in the wings. Anytime the United States walks away, it abandons its seat at the table, in multilateral institutions, China is more than willing to either come in and take advantage of that situation or in some cases, assume our seat at the table and try to take over to push forward their own value set, their own political aims that they wanna be driving international norms and standards, not the United States, working with other democratic allies.

**0:10:09:** And so this would make me nervous, first and foremost, for the security of the United States and our friends and allies in Europe, this would worry me, because we would be missing out on all sorts of joint exercises and training that serves us well and serves our allies well. We would miss out again on the C2, the command and control structures that are in systems, that are in place, from which we draw in a crisis. And we would be lacking that political forum where we can take on again, challenges before they fester and turn into full-fledged crises. So I would hate to see this happen. I think for Europe, it would not be good news. I think some would look at this, and originally or initially see it as good news, because maybe, just maybe, the European Union could develop better capabilities in the defense sphere. But I have to say, I'm a skeptic in that regard.

**0:11:03:** Based on what we've seen in recent years, I don't think the European Union is prepared to take on the tasks and the responsibilities that NATO normally carries. And I think it would just open up more questions about how Europeans would care for and handle their own security environment. But lastly, I would say the US I would assume, as it pulls out of NATO would continue to pull force posture out of Europe, which again does not serve our interest. Having that posture there helps us not just with the threats in the European neighborhood, but also in further away places like the Middle East. So, for me, this is troubling, worrisome and something that I hope doesn't come to pass.

**0:11:47:** And Julie, I think you correctly say, "Is this good for the United States?" And you are making, in everything you said today, a national security interest argument that it's good for the United States, it's not charity. It is good to remember that the European Union countries are the largest trade partner of the United States. They're the largest investor in our economy, and the NATO allies, 29 of them, 28 of them, European and Canada, are the largest number of allies in the world. I would just say this. You know, I think I've told you this before, Julie, I was a very new ambassador to NATO on 9/11. And when we were hit very hard in New York and in Washington DC, I couldn't reach the Pentagon State Department or White House because they'd been evacuated, but my phone started to ring. The Canadian Ambassador, David Wright said, "Let's invoke Article five, we wanna help." And the German ambassador and the Polish ambassador and the French ambassador, and we invoked article five of the NATO treaty, an attack on one is an attack on all, the next morning.

**0:12:43:** And I tell people that when they ask me whether it's worth it for us, because those NATO allies all went into Afghanistan with us, the allies and the partners have suffered over a thousand combat deaths. And of course, the basis that we have in Germany and Italy, but Germany, in particular Ramstein, they're the jumping off point for what America has to... Does and do in really difficult places like the Middle East and Afghanistan. And so, from a national interest standpoint, if we didn't have the allies, would we have to recreate NATO, Julie, if we disbanded it?

**0:13:18:** Yeah, I mean, well, I guess if President Trump decides to abandon it, he doesn't feel the need to have something like that. But certainly, for all of our interests of trying to address challenges and hotspots and brewing crises around the world, it is definitely in our interest to have, again, allies that bring capacity. I know the headlines in the paper are all about Europeans not spending or certain allies like Germany not spending enough. But the reality is that even the countries that aren't quite at that 2% of GDP yet, that target that NATO has set for itself, still bring enormous capacity. You mentioned Afghanistan, our allies brought 10s of thousands of troops to that mission and stayed with us not just for the first year or two, but for over a decade, so we wouldn't wanna lose that type of capacity.

**0:14:15:** Thank you very much. And Mira, let me ask you about the Indo-Pacific. I think the Trump administration was right to call that region, the Indo-Pacific, which we used to call East Asia. We have bilateral military treaties with Japan, and South Korea and Australia, defense agreements with the Philippines and Thailand, a series of security relationships, most notably with India. How important are they for the 2020s and the 2030s, the immediate two decades in front of us, aren't they pretty important for our future?

**0:14:48:** They are indeed pretty important, Nick. And before I take us into Asia, I just wanna pause a minute on the really powerful story that you shared with us about your time in NATO. Because, as I mentioned in my first set of remarks, no US ally has ever been the victim of an unprovoked attack. It is in fact, only the United States, on whose behalf an article five guarantee has ever been invoked. So you are citing the sole example of this treaty system being activated on behalf of one of its members and that was done on behalf of the United States. And that is part of what we have to sort of keep front of mind as we consider the stakes here.

**0:15:25:** Mira, can I just say, it's a powerful point, because we know that in 1949, when Dean

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Acheson and Harry Truman were planning NATO, they just assumed that if the attack came, Europe would be attacked. That's the great irony of 9/11. And the Europeans and Canada came to our rescue, powerful.

**0:15:44:** It is powerful. And it should remind us why we still need the system today, right? Because it was formed at the beginning of the Cold War, when even just then military technology seemed incipient when it seemed overwhelmingly likely that it would be allies in either Europe or Asia who would be the victims of attack first. And now the way that threats present, whether in the form of terrorism, whether in cyberspace, whether in the form of disinformation campaigns, has multiplied in such extraordinary ways and transcends geography, such that it is equally possible that The United States going forward could be the victim of attack just as its allies might. So this is the case more than we've ever had for why the system needs to continue. But a brief trip to Asia, because that was the genesis of your question. I think there's no question that alliances are more central than they've ever been in Asia. Not only do we have a China that's continuing to rise, and in the last few months, especially over the course of this pandemic crisis has been extraordinarily assertive in its region.

**0:16:45:** We have a North Korea that's more dangerous than ever now having essentially perfected an intercontinental ballistic missile that could reach the United States. These are the threat conditions that international relations would tell us should make for the strongest possible alliances. When a rivalry gets more intense, the alliance is supposed to pull together. And yet, in a lot of ways, that's not what we're seeing in Asia. Some of this is due to China, China has developed both military strategies and coercive strategies that aim to undercut America's alliances, and we can talk a little bit more about those, 'cause they're really important. But the United States has also not helped the picture in the region much at all. In fact, it's made it quite difficult for allies to work with us at the moment that we're claiming to need them most in particular, vis-a-vis China. We've launched a trade war on China while also putting tariffs on our allies. We have shaken down South Korea and Japan for every last defense dollar, even at the compromise of Alliance readiness.

**0:17:45:** So at a moment when our allies in the region understand that they need collective defense more than ever, they're finding it increasingly hard to find it. And indeed, we see Japan, Australia, and South Korea all beginning to think about defense decisions that might envision them living in a world with a less predictable United States. If that happens, the system will begin to unravel, cooperation will be less effective, and the United States' own national security posture will be more expensive.

**0:18:15:** Mira, you make a compelling case that we have these big strategic interest in the Indo-Pacific and we've got allies who wanna work with us. We had Prime Minister Scott Morrison of Australia on with us. We interviewed him two nights ago for the Aspen Security Forum. I asked him about the quad and he was just committed, he said, to make sure the quad was strong and the quad could grow. Tell this audience about the new found importance of the quad, what is it?

**0:18:45:** Absolutely, Nick, and I wanna hear a little bit from you on this because you're our resident India expert on so many things. The quad is a quadrilateral security dialogue in Asia that consists of the United States, its allies, Japan and Australia, and a close partner who is not a treaty ally, India. Now the quad is really important for a number of reasons, but one of them is the fact that unlike in

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Europe, where we have a multilateral alliance in NATO, where NATO allies cooperate with one another and not just through the United States. The system of alliances in Asia is structured so that for a very long time, all of these relationships have run bilaterally. What the quad represents and what I hope it's just the beginning of is the advent of networking amongst our alliances in Asia. That is the sort of inter-relationship of these alliances. So that not only can the United States cooperate with allies, but allies can increasingly cooperate with one another, bringing capacity to bear on shared threats and challenges.

**0:19:48:** So in this case, we've started to see a lot of increasing cooperation between allies like Japan and Australia, and increasingly partners like India, that include defense agreements between them, but also include multilateral exercises and send really important signals to China around issues like the South China Sea. Showing Beijing that there is a lot more than just Washington with interests at stake in that part of the region. So I do hope that the quad is part of a renovation of America's alliance system in Asia, because there is no question that the China challenge, which is only going to be with us more with every passing year, requires an increased cooperation, not just between the United States and its allies, but among them.

**0:20:31:** Thank you very much, Mira. Julie. I wanna bring you into this discussion of Asia, 'cause I know that you, Julie, have been focusing on Asia for the last couple of years with the German Marshall Fund. Andrea Mitchell interviewed the ambassador of the People's Republic of China Cui Tiankai. And at the very end of that interview, I just suggested to him that I think there's a unity among most Democrats and most Republicans that China poses a genuine threat to the United States. And that its aggressive actions, Hong Kong, the Uyghurs, the India border, South and East China Sea, which you both know a lot about, have driven us to a competitive posture right now. How dangerous is this do you think, Julie? And are our allies, I'm leading with the question here, our secret weapon in trying to limit Chinese power?

**0:21:22:** Yeah, well, I totally agree with you. I think the debate here in the United States has shifted in a bipartisan sense. There's a lot that Democrats and Republicans have been arguing about in recent years. You can take pretty much any regional or functional issue and find great debate. But on China, while we will argue sometimes over the specifics and certain choices, I do find that largely, I think both parties have been reflective on some of the assumptions that we made long ago. That engagement with the Chinese, however you define that, would be productive. And that perhaps we could over many years, over a great period of time, find ourselves engaging with the Chinese in a more constructive way. And that the trend line would be more positive, that they would drift away from some of the authoritarian instinct, some of the developments that we were seeing, things that we were taking issue with, whether it's their human rights abuses or conduct in the South China Sea. But I think both parties now look back on the last decade and say, "Wow, not much has changed."

**0:22:27:** And PS, I think there's a lot more to worry about in terms of China's actions around the globe, China's behavior, how it's relating not only with some of our adversaries, but how it's relating to our allies. And that comes to your second question, would we be better equipped to tackle some of the challenges associated with China's rise in a much bigger room full of like-minded allies? I think the answer is a resounding yes. Tragically though, I don't think that this administration, despite putting competition with China front and center in its national security strategy and the National Defense Strategy and virtually everything that it says, it has not taken on the possibility or

the opportunity of working with allies as a major feature of its foreign policy.

**0:23:17:** Now, in recent weeks, we've seen some changes there. We've seen new initiatives being announced in EU-US dialogue on China. We've seen a flurry of activity, more visits. We had the National Security Advisor, the Deputy National Security Advisor flying off to Europe. There is this sense in Europe that something is going on. But frankly, I will tell you that a lot of what I hear from folks on the other side of the Atlantic is it's a little bit of a day late dollar short, and they still believe they're getting some mixed messages. As we opened with, the president seems to continue to push this more unilateral view but many people working for him and with him are saying more about the importance of working with allies. The bigger question here and the bottom line is, what do they have in mind when they say with working with allies? Is it we tell them what to do? "Don't work with Huawei. Come out and ban this particular investment that China wants to make in your country." Or is it more a positive agenda, where we can sit together at the table as equals and craft policies together? I would hope it's the latter, but honestly, I think many of our allies worry that it's the former.

**0:24:35:** Thank you, Julie. The three of us have all testified before Senate and House committees over the last couple of years on issues concerning US foreign policy, our allies. What has struck me is that if you didn't know who was a Republican and who was a Democrat, you'd be confused because... You might be confused because there seems to be uniformity in both parties on Capitol Hill that our allies in the Indo-Pacific and in Europe are really quite vital to us and for the future, not just for the past. Donald Trump appears to have a very different view of this. I actually don't think it's reflected in the party and in members of Congress. You see that in the big support for NATO. And I wanted you both to talk about that. And also talk about the public opinion polls, which consistently show strong American support for our alliances, maybe Mira you first and then Julie second.

**0:25:29:** Sure thing. It's a great question, Nick. And I think in my answer, I'll give you first some good news and then some bad news. So the good news is that you're exactly right. That public opinion on both sides of the aisle, that is folks who self identify as Democrats and self identify as Republicans, is generally quite favorable towards alliances. Alliances in general as a tool of foreign policy, as well as specific alliances when asked about NATO or the US-Japan Treaty for example. That's a good thing, and it wasn't always true. There tended to be a lot more by way of partisan polarization in earlier decades, over defense issues and alliances in particular. In the past, we might have expected Democrats, let's say in the 1980s or 1990s, to be a little bit less supportive of alliances. It's also true that on Capitol Hill, we see a lot of alliance defenders on both sides of the aisle. We've seen things like the NATO Support Act or recent efforts to put provisions into the NDAA to stop, prospectively, the administration from drawing down troops from Germany or from South Korea.

**0:26:31:** So you're right, there is this bastion of bipartisan support at both the elite level and the public level that should lead us to believe that our alliances may well be able to continue so long as leadership steers them in that right direction. The bad news, however, is that when it comes to alliance management, whether that is statements on behalf of alliances, decisions about the changes in force posture or even the fate of the alliance itself, almost all of the power rests in the hands of the chief executive as a constitutional matter. So if we have a president who is at his core adverse to



alliances and wants to dismantle them, there is relatively little the public and even Congress can do to stop it. The Congress' best bet comes in the form of appropriations, trying to hold up funds for things like troop withdrawals. But at the end of the day, history and again, the Constitution, shows us that much of alliance management power lies in the hands of the US president.

**0:27:32:** Undoubtedly true, the President has great authority under the Constitution. No question about it. And I would say I'm just gonna... In my own personal view, President Trump is the weakest president we've had in commitment or his lack of commitment to NATO and I'm really worried about our alliance with South Korea. I wanna ask Mira or you about that. But Julie, how do you see this issue of bipartisan support and public support, and if you could also tell us about this new decision by the president to move a significant number of American troops out of Germany. And then, while you answer that, Julie, I just wanna signal our friend, Ambassador Michael Polt would like to ask a question. So, Mike, we're gonna tee you up, and when Julie finishes her answer, we'll bring Mike in to ask a question of Mira and Julie.

**0:28:21:** Well, just quickly on polling, I mean, I do think on the NATO alliance, we've seen the numbers by and large hold for Republican and Democratic support for the NATO alliance. There was a slight dip in 2018, in some polls where you could see Republican support for the alliance was just starting to erode a little bit. And I think there that comes to the point that presidents can over the long term have an effect on public opinion, particularly with those in their own party. So if you have President Trump say in office for eight years, continually driving home this message that the alliance is obsolete. I do think that if we were to look at the end of the term, compare it at where Republican opinion was at the beginning, you would see a shift there. But I think right now, I feel reassured that generally, you're right, there is still that bipartisan support.

**0:29:12:** On the German troop withdrawal. I mean, this is a tragedy. First and foremost, let's get to the United States and what serves our interest. This was a decision that was taken without regard for what serves our interest. This was not a decision that was taken that's tied to some sort of strategic or military requirement, either driven by US force planners and military planners or by the folks inside the military, the NATO alliance that do this for a living. Instead, as the President confirmed in his tweet, this was a punitive, very petty punitive measure for a country that in the minds of the President deserves some action for failing to spend enough on defense. I mean, I will note that the Germans, by the way, have had a major increase in defense spending. Of course, they're not at 2%. But the shame around all of this is it was done without any consultation with some parts of the US interagency. It was done without consultation with NATO allies or with the Germans. And suddenly just came out of nowhere, and will have huge consequences for the US and for our allies going forward.

**0:30:26:** And Julie, I know you spent a year in Germany recently with your family as a Bosch fellow, so you know Germany quite well. It seems to a lot of people, this is actually spiteful, directed at Angela Merkel, a great leader, personally. Do you see it that way?

**0:30:41:** Absolutely. I mean, the President has had a very scratchy relationship with her from day one, not just on the defense front, but there have been all sorts of disagreements over things like energy pipelines, Nord Stream 2, our trade relationship. The list goes on and on. It's a shame because Angela Merkel is leading the way on a number of policies across the European continent

that matter to us and should matter to us. And we need to work with countries like Germany on a whole host of challenges that we face, ranging from the pandemic to climate to a variety of foreign policy challenges. And so again, this is a shame. I don't believe that Angela Merkel deserves to be treated this way. I don't believe any of our allies deserve to be treated this way. And it's disappointing that this isn't rooted in an actual military requirement.

**0:31:35:** Thank you, Julie, very much. Mira, well, I'll come back to you on South Korea. I'm anxious to get your opinion, but I know that if Ambassador Polt is still here, we'd love to hear from him. Mike Polt.

**0:31:48:** Thank you, Nick. Can you guys hear me?

**0:31:51:** We hear you fine, Mike. Nice chatting with us.

**0:31:53:** Okay. Nice to be here. Thank you very much for giving me a chance. Thank you Julie and thank you Mira for making me smile throughout your entire presentation. We are all in violent agreement on everything that you all have said and that is the core of my question to you. I would say to Mira that the presidential authority that Donald Trump has so lawfully executed is not just constitutional, but it's also based on a lot of popular support and popular opinion. That despite the bipartisan support for our alliances that we can definitely enjoy on the Hill. There are a lot of Americans who think that basically Americans have been the mercenary soldiers for our alliances, that our troops are the ones who have the serious capabilities, that our men and women are the ones who shed blood, because our allies sometimes can't even get themselves to the battlefield to go ahead and fight alongside us, even though nominally they are there.

**0:32:56:** So my point and as you know, I agree with all the things that you said. But maybe you could say a few things as to how could we do better to eliminate the influence that the Trumps of the world can exercise by getting that popular opinion, not on the Capitol Hill, but in Mississippi and in Tennessee and across the country to understand why this is important to the average American who does not breathe and live and think international affairs on a daily basis?

**0:33:27:** That's a fair question. And Mike, Americans have a right to want their tax dollars to be spent well and they want others, who are in alliance with us, to hold up their end of the bargain. That's a good question. Mira and Julie.

**0:33:41:** Well, Ambassador Polt, thank you so much. I think it's a great question. Part of to my mind, how we need to confront the challenge you're talking about in public opinion and general sentiment, even though public opinion does show a fair amount of support for alliances, is to change how we talk about alliances. Part of what I observed over the course of writing this book is that when policy makers, particularly in the present tense, defend America's alliances, they often do so in purely nostalgic terms. Talking about what we've accomplished together or our shared values over the years. But to my mind the thing that recommends them the best is that they work and they make our national security cheaper and more effective. It is a completely pragmatic case in the present tense on the basis of a long and successful record. So I'd like to see us shed some of the romantic language and be very blunt about the fact that we have done this all along, because it's in

our interest as well as our allies, that the record to commend it is extraordinary. And that in a world where we face huge challenges, not least the tragic pandemic that we are all living through, the United States will be less effective and more hard pressed to maintain a solvent foreign policy if it loses its alliances.

**0:35:04:** Julie.

**0:35:06:** Well, it's hard to top that. I mean, I think Mira really hit the nail on the head. I agree. We talk about this in historical terms with a lot of flowery language, but I think we need outcomes, results and a future-looking agenda. What can NATO do for us tomorrow? What can the quad do for us tomorrow? How are we gonna advance this agenda to look at emerging technology, to look at artificial intelligence, to take on space, to take on a whole array of new challenges? I think being forward-looking, focusing on the outcomes and the actual deliverables. What do we get? And then not just talking about in terms of US force presence abroad only serves others' interest. I think we have to have an honest to God conversation to explain why we're there. We are there because it serves our interest, ultimately, and give specifics. So Mira did a great job. It's hard to top that.

**0:36:06:** And I would just say that Mira and Julie and I and Mike Polt have all worked as American diplomats to convince the European and the Asian allies to spend more in defense, to be more capable. To defend them for a minute, and there's been a lot of misinformation about NATO. And the three of us were talking about this in our virtual green room, since 2014, since Putin's Annexation of Crimea, every NATO ally has seen a real increase in their defense budget, some quite small. Some as Julie said, in the case of Germany, quite significant. And there's been forward movement, and so generally in an alliance, when the allies are doing what you're asking them to do and when they're spending more and when the great majority should be at of 2% of GDP on the floor by 2024, you ought to encourage them and congratulate them and not castigate them.

**0:37:00:** And I really think it's been a shame to see the demonization of some of our allies. And Mira, that gives me the opportunity, and we're gonna tee up John Shermer to ask you both a question. But while we do that, Mira, there's a lot of concern right now among people in both parties that we are drifting away from our relationship with a vital ally, The Republic of Korea, South Korea. And that as one person said in an earlier session, we're nickel and diming them and we're missing the big picture of how important they are, but you're an expert, Mira, in that part of the world though. How do you see it?

**0:37:33:** Well, Nick, I think nickel and dimming it is putting it softly. This is perhaps the key example in Asia of the United States acting contrary to its own national security interests. The US is driving right now such a hard bargain with its South Korean allies in an effort to get them to spend more on defense, that it appears to be courting an actual rupture in the alliance, at a time when North Korea is more dangerous than it has ever been. Now, to give a little context about what we're talking about here, the administration has asked our South Korean allies to quintuple their spending on defense and towards the alliance. Now South Korea was already one of the cheapest places on Earth to base American troops, cheaper than basing them at home, because of the contributions that it makes to the alliance. But because of a lot of exigencies and the ways that these numbers are being calculated, a demand was made of our friends in Seoul to quintuple their spending. They simply cannot do this. It's not feasible for them, so it looks like a bargain that was set up to fail.

**0:38:42:** And what would happen if the bargain did fail? Well, it won't surprise anyone to learn that much as has happened in Germany, the President has on a number of occasions, threatened to draw down troops from South Korea. Now, while you can make a case for drawing down troops at a given place on earth if there's the right security logic for it. The security logic for the American alliance in South Korea has never been stronger. So the possibility of this spending standoff ending in an American withdrawal from South Korea at a time when North Korea is not only targeting the region with nuclear weapons but the US homeland, actually defies any national security logic whatsoever.

**0:39:22:** That's a compelling case. Since it's baseball season, I thought we might go into extra innings. We're supposed to end, but we have a number of people who wanna ask you questions. And if both of you can stay for a couple of minutes. It won't be two hours. It might be 10 or 15 minutes. Let's take some more questions. I think we had asked John Shermer to ask the next question, John?

**0:39:42:** Yeah, good morning or good afternoon. Good evening wherever you are in the world today. I just returned from South Korea, Mira, and so your comments on the special measures agreement negotiations resonate with me, and that was actually the focus of my question to the panelists at large. What policy recommendations would you have for stabilizing the physical streams that support these alliances? My personal observation is that they bring a diversity of thought and capabilities that the military would not otherwise have and give us additional options for combating what I see is an environment of mutually assured disruption without them. And then a second question for the panel, what opportunities do we need to consider for additional partnerships in the Pacific? Obviously, the quadrilateral security dialogue is a great first step, but are we leaving opportunities on the table out there?

**0:40:43:** John, those are excellent questions. Mira and Julie.

**0:40:48:** Great. I'm happy to take a first crack at this spending recommendations question. I think there is a lot to be gained, both in the context of these current negotiations and more broadly in expanding what we think of alliances as included. And I'll tell you what I mean by that.

**0:41:07:** First is the fact that when we think about our alliances, we're generally talking about cooperation against military threats. But threats in the 21st century are in many ways increasingly non-military. That is, alliances should increasingly be focusing on things like cyber threats, election interference, new technologies, and even supply chain security. And if we were to expand our alliances to include these types of domains, we would also expand what our allies can contribute and what we count when we count their contributions. They could do more in terms of taking on more responsibilities within the alliance, and they could also spend more. Because while many of them have prohibitions on raising their defense budgets too high, they may be able to do so inside their foreign ministries or within their intelligence communities. So my answer to this great question is basically that we should broaden our balance sheets, because we are all facing a far broader range of threats than we were when this system was crafted in the early Cold War period. And if we expand it to take on that full range of threats, we're actually gonna make it a lot easier for allies to step up and be counted where they are already contributing.

**0:42:18:** Second, on the question of other partners in the Asia-Pacific region. No question, India is hugely important. I would note that it's also, I think, a good idea to be modest about our expectations for India or any other partner. That is to say, not to expect India to become a full-fledged treaty ally, but rather try to harness the cooperation that we can in the Indian Ocean region and closer to India's borders, where it's more likely to take its deepest interest. I'd also point to Vietnam as a country we should be thinking very seriously about and continuing to tend ties with. As well as partnerships with Indonesia and Malaysia, that had hit any number of snags over the years but remained important to keep steady. Of course, we have an ally who doesn't hold a full-fledged security guarantee in the form of Taiwan, who remains absolutely crucial to the region. So when we look beyond our immediate treaty guarantees, we do indeed see a region full of promising partners who in many ways are starting to lead the way to the future of the security picture in Asia.

**0:43:23:** And Mira, I'd just say one thing before we ask Julie to comment. You're absolutely right about India. India is not gonna become a treaty ally. It's too big in its conception of itself, it doesn't want to have an alliance relationship, but particularly we've been talking Shankar Menon this morning and Tanvi Madan as well. After what happened high up in the Himalayas, earlier in the summer between the PLA and the Indian army, the Indians seem resolutely in support of a broader relationship with the US and the quad, and Australia and Japan as well, Julie.

**0:43:57:** Well, just to add to Mira's good points. I think we've got to get rid of this imagery in our head that America has a set of alliance relationships across the Pacific and America has another set of relationships across the Atlantic. And really start thinking of, I guess you could make it kind of a quad squared, because there is a quad... We use the term quad in government when we meet with the UK, France, Germany and the United States, or there are different variations. Sometimes a couple of other countries are added in. And yet, as we discussed earlier, there's another quad on the other side. I think when we think about the challenges, again, surrounding China in lots of different baskets, in the way in which China behaves in multilateral institutions, about its predatory trade practices, about the investments that it's making around the world and how it's trying to leapfrog us in technology, and really be the leading light on, again, setting those norms and standards. We would be better off by bringing together America's democratic allies broadly defined together on some of those challenges.

**0:45:08:** What's interesting is while we've been under the leadership of Donald Trump and he has taken a more unilateral approach and backed off or walked away from some of America's traditional leadership positions, other countries have started to get on the bandwagon with this idea that I'm mentioning. And to give one example, Japan and the European Union, these are two bodies or actors that have significantly enhanced their relationship on connectivity on the trade space. I mean, you name it. And similarly, Australia has been much more active in reaching out to Europeans. We see India working much more closely with the EU. The last India-EU summit was fascinating in terms of how quickly that relationship is evolving. So thinking more creatively, assuming the United States will return to these relationships and will want to rejoin the community, so to speak. I think thinking of some creative ways to widen the circle at the table and not get trapped into this kind of East versus West division would serve us very, very well.

**0:46:19:** Julie, you are so right. I mean, we're not gonna go back to 2012 or 2016. Either in a Trump

or Biden administration, we have to move forward in the way that you suggest. And certainly, in our relationship with the European Union, not just NATO, China is now probably the biggest issue. So you're absolutely right to help us think spatially, not in strict geographic terms, but in an issue by issue terms. We've got a question from Maria Spiropulu. Thank you, Maria.

**0:46:54:** Hi, can you hear me?

**0:47:00:** Yes, we hear you. Thank you.

**0:47:00:** Yes. Thank you. Thank you for this very useful discussion. I'm a professor of physics at Caltech and I'm a part of a international collaborations in science and technology at CERN, US collaboration with CERN, and also Fermilab with big science projects, where not only we have very strong alliances in terms of fundamental research and applied research, but we have leadership. And I was wondering what do you all think about, are we using optimally our scientific international alliances in policymaking and political alliances and military alliances and economic alliances that you have been talking about? The projects that we're leading truly draw from everywhere in the world and we are very well respected and we mark important scientific and technological discoveries that all nations are acknowledging. So I was wondering, how is this playing in your discussion? Thank you.

**0:48:11:** Maria, thank you very much. The line was a little bit scratchy, but I think we made out your question. And I would just say one thing and then ask either Julie or Mira or both to answer. One of the issues we've been looking at the Aspen Strategy Group, which is the parent organization of the Aspen Security Forum is; in the digital age, we're now in a competition with China for the next generation military power, military technology based on AI, based on quantum computing, based on biotechnology. And it's hard to know who's in front in that competition, but both the Obama... Certainly the Obama administration, which focused on it a lot, and the Trump administration are worried about our ability to work with our own tech companies to make sure that America does not become the number two power in the world. I, earlier in this conference, asked one of our panelists, "Is it possible that the United States could become the number two power in the world? That China could leapfrog us because of its command of technology?" And he said yes. So I pose that question to Julie and Mira as well.

**0:49:19:** Well, it's a good question. I think just speaking to the Europe and China piece, to the extent that the allies have been either arguing over approaches to China or trying to forge some sort of common position. We've been very focused on things like getting 5G right, where there's been enormous pressure from the US administration for European countries not to work with Huawei. We've had a number of conversations about the investments that China is making in Europe and the political influence that comes with it. And we've also talked a lot of late about what many referred to as masked diplomacy, the way in which China has behaved in the wake or during the pandemic of providing assistance but then asking for something in return.

**0:50:04:** What that list has been missing is we have spent less time, either in the think tank community or in among government officials or even in track one-and-a-half engagements, talking about R&D collaboration between China and many universities or research institutes. That has grown tremendously in recent years. There's less monitoring of this, less oversight, less of an

understanding of who even certain institutes are partnering with, because the line is so fuzzy in China between the public and private sectors. One never quite knows what's behind the curtain when you're dealing with friends in China.

**0:50:45:** And so I think one of the areas where we could do more work going forward is having the transatlantic partners, first of all, Europeans amongst themselves, but with a broader set of allies. And it doesn't have to just be the United States. Again, we could include our friends in Australia in this and Japan, to have a conversation about what type of practices we've seen in the space of R&D collaboration. What are the risks associated? When should we just accept that this is fruitful collaboration? Let's not call all collaboration with China in the R&D space or science a bad thing. In certain cases, it's absolutely crucial and important. But how can we be smarter about it? And I think there is so much more work to be done in this space, that this is an opportunity that's ripe for a conversation and more work among the partners, the democratic allies in particular.

**0:51:38:** Thank you, Julie. Mira, I'm sure you're watching carefully. This big race for technological power. Bob Work, the former Deputy Secretary of Defense and then Ash Carter, Secretary of Defense, they really focused on this. We did an entire conference on this at Aspen two years ago. How do you see it?

**0:51:56:** Well, I think that Maria's question is a paradigmatic reason for why we have to push forward with thinking about our alliances in these increasingly broader terms. Not just with respect to competition with China, but because of this horrendous historic crisis we are all living through today. We have seen front and center the fact that the worst threats may not always come from state actors at all, and we have seen the grievous costs of failing to work with allies to try to pre-empt and contain transnational threats when we have the opportunity. And this is exactly why we should not only be strengthening America's scientific partnerships with allies, but including those as part of what we think of when we think of alliances. Because this speaks exactly to the virtues of our allies in both Europe and Asia.

**0:52:53:** When this system was formed, of course, in the early days of the Cold War, America's allies were war-torn countries that had just been decimated. But today they are consolidated democracies, most of them. They are thriving economies in their own right, and many of them are scientific and technological leaders. And this is exactly the reason we should be fighting to hold on to this tool of statecraft to take us through the 21st century. They're exactly who we should want to be partnered with, if we had to start this system from scratch today. So I'll simply end by saying that Maria is pointing us towards the future of alliances, which is to say, deepening these types of relationships, bringing them inside the types of structures that we count as our alliance activities, and raising the prominence of cooperation that occurs in a far broader range of domains and against the threats that we really do face in common.

**0:53:47:** That's a powerful point. And thank you for making it Mira. The other night when we talked to Prime Minister Morrison of Australia. He made a point and I think he was saying twice, "We're increasing our defense budget, but we're also increasing our R&D spending, particularly related to these new technologies." And Walter Isaacson, the former president of the Aspen Institute, wrote a great article for us last year for a book that we published. And Walter says, "What made America great?" He asked the question, "What made us great?" He said part of it was the

innovation triangle. From the Manhattan Project, we're thinking about that today, the tragedy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. All the way through to Gemini and Apollo, and the creation of the internet. It was the federal government spending lots of money to invest in our research universities. And then, of course, a lot of those ideas spinning out to the other point in the triangle, the private sector. And Walter is concerned that triangle, that innovation triangle is breaking down.

**0:54:43:** And we have seen in the last several years a substantial reduction in the government support for R&D spending, and we're not seeing that in China. So I think Maria's question is a powerful and very good question. Mira and Julie, what we're gonna do is take, if you can stay a couple more minutes. We won't keep you longer than that. Rina Amiri and Kurt Samson both have questions. We're gonna ask them to ask those questions, and then ask both of you to respond to them, and then we'll call it a day. So let me call on Rina Amiri first and then Kurt Samson.

**0:55:20:** Thank you very much for a very important and very interesting discussion. My question is about the United Nations. Now the US policy towards the UN under the Trump administration has been characterized by one of retreat and withdrawal. The US has cut funding both from the UN Secretariat and field missions. It's withdrawn from UN bodies, most recently, it set in motion withdrawals from WHO. And many have suggested, within the UN, that this is diminishing US influence to the UN. And the expectation is that with the second Trump administration this would only increase. My question is that what would you view the implications both for the US and the UN? And second, would you consider this an aberration or the new normal? And this is one of the questions member states are asking. Thank you.

**0:56:16:** Rina, thank you very much. We will try to answer that question. Our guests will, but let's go to Kurt for his question, and we'll take them together. Kurt, please.

**0:56:27:** Thank you. At the beginning, Mira Rapp-Hooper began with a discussion on the history of alliances. Can any of you bring to bear the... Or any reflections on George Washington's policy of isolationism? I think his farewell address and its impact on policymakers today. How have we navigated foreign policy to successfully establish alliances that are so critical to America's defense, while dispelling the policy of our founding father? Thank you.

**0:56:54:** What a great and honest question, Kurt. Thank you. So, let me repeat the two questions for Julie and for Mira. Rina's question, very good, is reductions in US funding and US activity at the United Nations and its tributary agencies. We had Ambassador Kelly Craft, the current US Ambassador on with us, and she was a robust defender of the United Nations in that interview. I was very impressed by that. But what would be your perspective on that? And then Kurt's very good question, Washington's farewell address about beware entangling alliances. I would add to that, John Quincy Adams, July 4th, 1821, America should not go abroad in search of monsters to destroy. Are we straying from the wisdom of our founding fathers and mothers, or is it just that we're living 200 years later in a very different world? Another way of thinking about Kurt's very good question. Julie, maybe what we can do is, Julie, if you wanna take... Let's focus on the UN first, let's answer that question, both of you, then we'll focus on Kurt's question.

**0:58:01:** So, on the United Nations, I hope this isn't the new normal. I hope that this is a moment in time where we've had a chance to experience what actually happens when the US walks away from



some of these organizations. And I think we've seen in real time the consequences of that for the United States, for the institution, as the US has walked away from the UN in multiple senses. Just to give you one example, I mean, the United Nations has 15 different technical agencies. China now heads four of those agencies. No other nation in the world leads more than one. And I think what we've seen is China is definitely seizing any opportunity that it can find to assert itself and take on leadership roles so that it can not only shape the agenda of that organization, but make very consequential decisions on personnel, and on who gets very powerful positions inside those organizations.

**0:59:07:** And then again, back to something we've mentioned a couple of times, shape not only the outcomes and the policies, but the norms and standards that are associated with what goes on in these institutions, I mean, to the degree that the United Nations is shaping international norms and upholding them, one would hope. China now is in a position where increasingly it can exert influence over a lot of those decisions. And so, one would hope that we are going to return to the table, that we are gonna work with our allies to reassert ourselves in an organization like the UN, and admit that while it has warts and there are many things that do not work well inside the UN, we could spend another three hours, three days outlining the problems. In my mind, the benefits still outweigh... Or the pros still outweigh the cons.

**1:00:03:** Thank you, Julie. Mira.

**1:00:05:** I'll jump in with a brief additional flourish, 'cause I know we're short on time, and I wanna get to this great George Washington question too. So in addition to the great points that Julie has made about the United States leaving a power vacuum, I would also note that our withdrawal from multilateral organizations and agreements actually redounds back negatively in our alliances. Which is to say that if you look at elite opinion data in countries around the world, but allied countries in particular, about views of the United States and views of US leadership, you've seen the steepest drop in allied countries. So it's the Japans, the South Korea's, the Germanys of the world, who are the most shocked by the change in the United States' role on the global stage. And by and large, their shock comes not from any given bilateral wrong that we've done to them, but rather the abrogation of multilateral agreements and the withdrawal from multilateral institutions in which they thought we were firmly ensconced.

**1:01:06:** So whether you're talking about the Paris climate accord, the Iran nuclear deal, or our participation in UN organizations, it's the sort of jerking, breakneck withdrawal from this broader international system that has done the most to damage our reputation amongst the leadership of allied countries in the broader world. So I very much share Julie's hope that this is not the new normal.

**1:01:29:** Thank you. Let's use Kurt's very good and fair question as an ending, and let me add to its level of difficulty. Kurt says, Washington warned us against entangling alliances. Jefferson said we should be an empire, but only an empire of liberty at home, not an empire of conquest. John Quincy Adams, don't go abroad to try to slay monsters. But then you think of leaders now, I can think of two involved, one, our chair of the Aspen Strategy Group, Condi Rice, who said to me publicly in an earlier Aspen forum, "We've lost our self-confidence about who we are in the world." She's an internationalist. Jim Mattis, America he says has two great powers, the power of intimidation, that's

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the military and the power of inspiration, that's America in its global dimension as an exceptional and indispensable nation. This is a great question for two really smart experienced public servants. Maybe we'll go, Julie, you first and then Mira, second.

**1:02:40:** Well, I wish we had another hour, 'cause this is really... Thank you for this question. This is it, this is at the heart of it. But I mean, I think what you have to do today in comparing kind of the global landscape to what the world looked like then, I mean, we don't have... Americans don't have the luxury of being capable of isolating themselves from world events. We can't sit out terrorism. We can't sit out the pandemic. We can't sit out climate change. We can't build a wall high enough, there's the oceans that are on both sides of US territory, don't protect us from today's challenges. And thanks to globalization and new technology, I mean, it's unimaginable that you could even build Fortress America, It's just impossible. But I also think we look at American power differently today than we did from a few decades ago, and from hundreds of years ago, from our founding days.

**1:03:55:** And so, if you think about what America can bring to bear to take on those global challenges that know no borders, really what we need is a web of alliances and allies that can build up the defenses we need. We need to know, and we did not know when the pandemic first broke out, this is part of the problem in China. Had we had our antenna up and a better cooperative environment with all sorts of countries around the world, we could have gotten a leg up. But China hid initially some of what was happening. And so, the point here is that America needs to have a presence and a set of relationships around the world to be attuned to what's coming at it. So, thinking about American power, the nature of the challenges we face. And I would actually also add, what's interesting about social media is, we once operated in an environment where your average American wasn't aware, they had to wait for the newspaper to tell them what was happening. I mean, think about the explosion in Lebanon that just happened. Within seconds, all of us had a front row seat to that crisis. We understood intuitively the severity of it, the damage. I mean, it was breathtaking. But by giving us all a front row seat that can also trigger a call, "What are we doing? What's the response? Is that gonna happen here? Is that a danger to us?" And create a whole set of new questions that we didn't have to grapple with even 25 years ago.

**1:05:35:** So, so much has changed about the global landscape, the complexity of it, how threats cross borders, American power, its diffusion in some ways, and we don't have to say... We don't have to all be declinists, but let's admit that things have evolved. All of that contributes in my mind to just a new rationale for this web of alliances, and why I think, honestly, a country like Russia or China wishes it had that set of alliance relationships.

**1:06:08:** Thank you, Julie. Mira, you have the last word.

**1:06:12:** Well, Julie's answer is exactly right. This has been a delightful conversation, and I'll wrap us up here just by returning to some history, with thanks to Kurt for a really great question. When George Washington warned against entangling alliances in his farewell address, he was responding to a very specific alliance. That was of course, the Franco-American Alliance, without which the United States could not have won the revolutionary war. But by the time Washington was giving his farewell, that alliance had become rather irksome for the United States. So much so that it actually resulted in some foreign political interference in an election, right? So these are age old problems,

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unless we think we're living through something new. But Washington's admonitions were actually really focused at that alliance with the French, and he was really focused on ensuring that as a general matter, the United States would not become entangled in relationships with European countries, while it was still trying to develop its ability to self-govern. That is when the United States was a weak power in the early years of its independence. It was at risk for being entangled and losing its ability to really consolidate its own sovereignty and sense of its own national interest.

**1:07:31:** But his predecessors clung to Washington's gospel to such an extent for 150 years, that it was impossible for any other US President to form an alliance until World War II showed us that we could not live without them. That it was entirely impossible to keep ourselves safe in a world in which we simply relied on two ocean barriers and friendly neighbors. And that's what brought us to the transformation that resulted in the alliance system that we have today. So it's critically important to return ourselves to our forefathers admonitions, to think about where they came from, but also to understand why they changed. And Washington's farewell gospel also reminds us of something else, that is the fact that there has long been a strain of isolationism or unilateralism in American foreign policy, dating back from the founding, that we have time and again questioned whether we belonged in the world as a matter of national interest, but that we have again and again returned to the answer that we do, and that we keep ourselves safe through interdependence and cooperation. So I hope that by returning to these words and thinking about both why they have changed and why we continue to revive debates like these over the years, we will ultimately land back up where we always have before, which is that America belongs in the world with allies by its side.

**1:08:57:** What a way to end this conversation. So what Mira is telling us, is that history actually matters, and reading it and understanding it actually matters. And Mira has written a great new book, *Shields of the Republic: The Triumph and Peril of America's Alliances*. We couldn't have two better people than Mira and Julie to help us think through these really difficult issues. We thank them. I think this has been twice as long a session as we had planned, but we didn't wanna stop it, because we're talking about issues that really matter to the future of America. And as I think of our future, I know that Julie and Mira are gonna be back in public service at some point, and they're gonna help lead us forward. So I thank both of them for being with us at the Aspen Security Forum. All best, thanks Julie.

**1:09:44:** Thank you Nick, thank you.

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