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Friday, July 21

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A View From the Hill

[Chris Coons](#), U.S. Senator for Delaware

[John Cornyn](#), U.S. Senator for Texas

[James E. Risch](#), U.S. Senator for Idaho

Moderator: [Peter Spiegel](#), U.S. Managing Editor, *Financial Times*

Peter Spiegel:

Thank you very much, Anja. It's a, it's a great honor and pleasure to be seated up here, uh, with this group of senators. Um, not only, uh, as Anja said from, from, uh, two, from the House Foreign Relations Committee and, uh, Senate for Relations Committee, and one from the Intelligence Committee, um, but also a bipartisan group. And as Joe and I told us, uh, a couple days ago here on the stage, um, the Aspen Security Group was set up in the spirit of bipartisanship. So it is nice to have a bipartisan group up here, but I did bring my pen, uh, just in case if the pen is, might even sword. So Senator Coons, you warn me, you wouldn't try to scare anyone on stage. So if anyway, 50 cup breaks out. I am, I am armed. Um, um, uh, Senator Rich, lemme me start with you.

You are as, as Anja said, uh, the, the ranking member of the, the Senate Foreign Affairs Foreign Relations Committee, uh, a job that a certain former Delaware Center who is now on the, uh, other end of Pennsylvania Avenue. So, uh, used to have, and so perhaps a launching pad. But, uh, I wanna start with you, um, and talk about something that, that, um, was discussed with, with, uh, uh, Senator, with with Secretary Blinken, which is the counter offensive. Um, and by way of context, I just wanna say that, that Senator, um, RIS was in many ways one of the most outspoken, uh, senators in advocating for not only arming the Ukrainians, but for some of the weapons now that are produced. Uh, I would say not only having effects, but have produced some controversy, shall we say. Um, you were very strong advocate months ago on cluster munitions, uh, on attack them, um, by way of context.

I wanna put that out there. But also then get to what Andrea asked the senator, the secretary, which is, there does seem to be a growing voice in Washington, and obviously secretary, uh, Blinken did not share in that concern about, shall we say, OPTEMPO, um, that the Ukrainians just aren't getting at it just yet. Um, the counterargument, which we've heard, um, both here at the forum, and I suspect from, from President Lindsay later today, is we still don't have all the weapons we need. Um, let me throw you in the middle of that debate. Um, do you think that the Optempo is not sufficient? Do you think they are not being armed properly with the weapons they have? And how would you couch that?

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James E. Risch:

Well, first, let me say, uh, every time I see the gentleman on the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue, I always congratulate him for having been the second best chairman of the foreign relations committee I ever had, in which he's very generous about. I might add, uh, look, I, um, uh, first of all, I'm glad to be here. Uh, it's good to be here with, on a bi bipartisan basis. You'll be able to see the great animosity that we have in the United States Senate amongst the parties, uh, and how, uh, we don't get along and fight a lot. Uh, so you, that will be on clear display here, I think when, uh, we're done. But look, on foreign relation, I'm, I'm, uh, also, uh, the most, most senior Republican on the Intelligence Committee haven't spent the 15 years I've been there on Intel. And those two committees are probably the least, uh, of the partisan things that I do.

Although I'm also on, unfortunately, on the ethics committee, which is also a pretty, uh, non-partisan sort of thing. Um, I, I wanna do, I, I got a thousand things I wanted to say after listening to, uh, uh, Tony. Uh, but, um, let, let's focus on, on the Ukrainian, uh, matter. Look, uh, most Americans don't understand this, and I, I have issues in my own state where people say, what this, you know, Ukraine, I can't even find Ukraine in a map. I don't know why, why is this, why is this our fight? Back up very briefly for a little history. Ronald Reagan spent eight years trying to bring down the Soviet Union. He was successful. Not only did he bring it down, all those countries got their, uh, their independence and freedom. Most of them took it. Uh, but when it came apart, four countries came out of the Soviet Union.

Nuclear armed. One of course was Russia. One was Belarus, one was, uh, Kazakhstan, and the fourth one was Ukraine. At that moment, Ukraine was the third largest nuclear power on the planet. It's a policy of the United States. Then it was, it's a policy of the United States. Now, it's always been the policy. It's a great policy that as few countries as possible have nuclear weapons. So what did we do about it? We sat down with the Ukrainians, uh, on, uh, December the fifth, 1994 in Budapest. And we said, look, Ukrainians, you, you guys shouldn't have nuclear weapons. Why don't you give up your nuclear weapons? And we can't do that. We're right on the border of, of Russia. We're, you know, we're in a bad neighborhood. We got all this stuff going on. We said, listen, don't worry, we'll defend you. And we put it in writing.

And you know what the Ukrainians did? They gave up their nuclear weapons. And so, here we are today. We have not only a moral obligation to do this, we got a legal obligation to do that for all you lawyers in the room. You know what a contract is, uh, when, number one, it's in writing. But secondly, when one party asks another party to do something, and they do it in, it's changed for consideration. So, so there's that reason. Obviously, it's the right thing to do, is another reason. The, and one of the most important reasons is if you think she isn't watching every single thing that goes on as far as our commitment to see this thing through, you're badly

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mistaken. He is watching this. And I have reason to believe that for a fact, uh, very, very closely. And watching every utterance that comes out of the United States Congress and out of the united, out of the, uh, uh, administration and out of the American people as to what kind of a stomach, uh, they've got to see this, uh, this thing through that we committed to do. So When this started, I said, give 'em everything that shoots other than, other than nuclear weapons. I said, give 'em clusters. Give 'em the, the high Mars. Give 'em the attack. 'em, give 'em everything short, short of nuclear weapons. Give them f sixteens. I said, give f sixteens, because you remember, we fought a little, uh, uptick in, in both, uh, Vietnam, uh, and in Korea. The Russians gave migs to our opponents there, trained the pilots and flew against us. It's time to return to favor for crying out loud. Don't, I'm tired of hearing about escalation. Stop talking about escalation. If you don't escalate, you're gonna lose. I want Putin to wake up in the morning worried about what he's gonna do that's gonna cause us to escalate instead of us ringing our hands and saying, oh, we can't do that. Look, everything we I said we should have done at the beginning, they've done now. God bless 'em. I wish they'd have done it a year ago. Thank you.

Peter Spiegel:

Can I just push you on that? Because that was a, that was an incredible, uh, but you didn't necessarily answer my question. Um, <laugh>, Why do you

James E. Risch:

I'm a lawyer. A politician.

Peter Spiegel:

If you were to look at the counter offensive, and again, the two poles are not Yeah,

James E. Risch:

Let me, yeah, let me talk about that. Uh, you know, the, there's a lot of people that, that you're getting this mostly from people who aren't really supporting this thing anyway. But, uh, look, if you watch what they're doing, they're doing this carefully. This isn't a thing that happened, like with the Russians when they marched on Keith. I mean, he bogged down. They really, truly bogged down. That's not what, what's happening with the Ukrainians. They're testing here, they're testing there. They don't have the manpower that Russia has to be able to throw it all at, uh, at, at one place at one time. Uh, look, this is Zelensky. He's war. He's got really, really good people running that war. We ought not be looking over his shoulder, particularly if we're not trained in, uh, battlefield techniques. Thank you.

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Peter Spiegel:

Senator Corning, can I ask you to, to address something that, that Senator Rich pointed out? Cause I've heard you also say this, that you go back to Texas, you talk to your constituents and they say the same thing. I can't find Ukraine on a map. What are we doing over there? And you're forced to make the argument. Um, now we had Phil Ko on this stage, um, two days ago, maybe it was yesterday, that day's being run together. Who warned? He, I think the phrase he used was winter of disc's intent. Um, it is possible that the counterfeits does not go as well as we had hoped. It is possible. We saw even this morning, grain is being bombed in Odessa. There could be hungry people in Ukraine. They're clearly targeting the electricity, uh, grid we could be in for a tough winter. Are you concerned to get to, to, to set a Rich's point that the American people may begin to question even more? Why we doing this? This is going badly, and you have a harder job with your constituents making that case.

John Cornyn:

Well, this always happens as, uh, in, in military conflicts. As there as it goes on longer and longer than, you know, public opinion turns and become, people become fatigued. They say, well, we have other priorities in the United States. Why can't we spend that money elsewhere? But I thought, uh, Jim made an eloquent, uh, jury argument, uh, for, uh, why w why this is in America's best interest. And, uh, my constituents, uh, get it. They may not be able to pick out, uh, Ukraine on the map. I remember the old Allen Jackson song after nine 11. I don't know the difference between a Iraq and Iran, but it's our job and it's a President's job to explain to our constituents why this is an America's best interest. And that's, uh, what I try to do, what we all try to do.

Peter Spiegel:

Let me push you a bit on this, because you have been almost uniquely, I have to say, a Republican senator who has stood up when occasionally members of your own party, even presidential candidates, have questioned our, our strategy. And back at the Ukrainians, uh, when Senator, when Governor Sandis came out, you were one of the first people to speak out. Even when, when President Trump, you've spoken out, I think you to, to quote you. I think you said something along the lines of, I'm looking for a Reagan Republican to be president of the United States. Are you at all concerned that the Republican presidential candidates, and even, let's be honest, members of the House Republican Caucus, are undermining the attempt you're making to make that case to the American people?

John Cornyn:

Well, I'm proud to be a part of the Coalition of the Rational. And, uh,

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And look, this is, this is, uh, this is America. We have these debates, but the, the important thing is we have at least two sides to the argument. And we not abdicate our responsibility and, and leave a vacuum that's filled by people who are perhaps misguided, perhaps misinformed, or just have ideological convictions that I disagree with and think are not in America's best interest. So, uh, that's one of the great privileges of, uh, being in the United States Senate. Uh, but it's also a tremendous responsibility too, to push back where you think that, uh, these arguments are, are misguided.

Peter Spiegel:

Senator Coons, same topic. I mean, you are, uh, in many ways an old, old friend of, of President Biden. You talked to him with some regularity. Um, I know he is concerned. He has said how concerned he is about maintaining domestic political support for the war effort. Um, any concern that you or he have in your conversations about maintaining that through what could be a pretty brutal winter?

Chris Coons:

Um, thanks Peter. And, um, thank you for the opportunity, uh, to be here with two great colleagues. Um, and there's spouses. Um, part of what makes service in the Senate rewarding is the chance to work so closely, uh, with folks we disagree. Sometimes we have differences of opinion. Um, Jim ados me on the ethics committee, but, uh, we also serve well together on foreign relations. We serve on judiciary and our co-chairs of the law enforcement caucus. We have a wide range of bills we've introduced together. We've traveled together. We need strong bipartisan voices. One of the facts I'm trying to get out to the American people and to my constituents after a recent bipartisan trip to meet with EU and NATO leaders is all the rest of NATO has delivered a little more than \$72 billion in direct support to Ukraine, military and economic. We've delivered about 77 billion in support.

This is a few weeks old now, but our European partners and allies are pulling their weight. 47 countries around the world are supporting Ukraine. This is not an effort that the United States is bearing alone. And when John is willing to stand up and challenge others in his party and corral some of those voices, and when Jim shows such low energy and limited passion about this, that really helps sustain this. But we are going to have to deliver another supplemental appropriation to sustain Ukraine's war effort. We need the Ukrainians to keep at it, to keep pushing. I support the latest delivery of weapons, and frankly, wish some of them had gotten there earlier, but think we're now in a very strong position. This is the strongest moment for NATO in 75 years in some ways, and I think in some ways, the best chapter of President Biden's leadership and a real demonstration of bipartisanship in the Senate, that minority leader McConnell and majority leader Schumer, are right alongside each other in this.

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Yes, there are worrisome voices at the margin in both parties and every foreign minister and head of state I've met with since the war began, worries about the sustainability of American support. If Europe keeps pulling their weight, we'll keep pulling our weight. The other thing I am focused on is the global south, and the ways in which lots of other countries in the, in the world do not see the war in Ukraine the way we do. And we need to hear and respect their concerns and engage. We are losing some of our currency and our engagement and our reputation with critical developing countries that just don't see this the same way we do. Um, in the bill that's just come out of the appropriations, uh, committee that I, where I lead the relevant subcommittee, we're putting more money into pushing back on disinformation, into investing in sustainable development, and in making sure that we're good partners in the global south at the same time that we're really joining the fight in Ukraine.

Peter Spiegel:

I wanna get back, back to Ukraine before we leave. Yeah, go ahead.

James E. Risch:

I'm, before we leave Ukraine, let me, let me say this. For those of you in this room, and I know there's a lot of influencers in here. When people come to you and say, we shouldn't be in Ukraine, we should get out. Look, I respect a, a, uh, dissent. I really, really do. But the question I always ask is, okay, how do we do that? What do we tell our friends? And what do we tell our enemies that when United States puts on paper, don't worry. We'll defend you. What does that mean? That, that, you know, how are you gonna explain an extrication from this? Uh, there's, there is no answer to this. You may not like it, but my golly, let's all pull the wagon together when, when there's no other choice but to go forward.

Peter Spiegel:

Can can I follow up on that? Because you mentioned in your opening remarks that very point, and you said the extent to which, uh, Xi Jinping is watching results there. And you, you implied that you have some, some either briefed or, or had a hearing on that. Can you share with us anything that you, have, you have gleaned from what we think Xi Jinping is learning or, or schooling himself on this from the, from the Ukraine War?

James E. Risch:

No, I, I could, I gotta try. I could, but I, I, I can't do that. But look, we let, let, let me tell everybody here, our intelligence agencies, we got 18 of them. They get a lot of heat. These people do a really, really, really good job. Whenever they're in the news. Whenever they're in the news, it's because something fell through the cracks. But, uh, we have countries that are

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hard targets. We have countries that are not so hard targets. These people gather information. We could not do our job without the kind of information that they give us. But thanks for the question. Yes, sir.

John Cornyn:

Can I mention just one other thing that, that I think is really important? I think, you know, the lesson we learned time and time again is things do not happen without American leadership. I mean, if America wasn't accepting the responsibility to lead this coalition and to see NATO transformed, I mean, this has been a huge, a huge mistake by Putin. Unfortunately, he's gonna just keep grinding until he thinks he gets, gets what he wants. But this would not happen. You wouldn't see two, uh, Finland and Sweden as part of part of nato. You wouldn't see us them doing more for their own defense and contributing to our joint defense in Europe. So I just think American leadership, once again, is indispensable.

Peter Spiegel:

Can I push you on this though? Because the famous quote by which I keep referring to by the First Secretary General of nato, was the purpose of NATO was to keep the Americans in the Russians out, and the Germans down as, as you say, as you said the Americans are in. But let's remember, there was a president just three or three years ago who may be back in two or three years from now, who was not quite enthusiastic about NATO and the Transatlantic Alliance. Or you worry that this point of American leadership, um, that it may not be sustainable. And our allies are beginning to question whether that is a, a permanent thing now.

John Cornyn:

Well, the, uh, I think it was Lewis Brandeis said the, uh, the best thing to, uh, to deal with, uh, bad information or bad argument is more information. And so what we have to do is continue to engage like, uh, Jim and Chris have said, and to make the case. And look, I mean, we work for the American people. We, I work for 30 million Texans. If I can't make the case to them something I sincerely believe to be true, shame on me. That's a failure of mine. But it's our responsibility to make the argument. And I don't think we should be disturbed when people disagree. I mean, this is, like I said, this is America.

Peter Spiegel:

I wanna stick with Ukraine. But, but, but Senator Coons, you, you mentioned the global South, and I just wanna pick up on that very quickly and slightly detour on that, because we did have three weeks ago, four weeks ago, uh, prime Minister Modi in the White House. Um, and again, this is the competition for the global South, that they have not been hugely enthusiastic, frankly,

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on our side, on, on Ukraine. Um, and he was, let's be honest, state Dinner showered with, with all the diplomatic niceties. And this is a Prime Minister who has in many ways degraded democratic, uh, uh, principles and values in, uh, in India, treated at the and privileged minorities badly. Um, are you at all concerned that in the effort to win the battle of the global South, that we were sometimes putting our principles aside, um, to make sure that they're on our side, on Ukraine and China?

Chris Coons:

Look, the challenge, uh, of global leadership is to have and hold to core values, in particular human rights. And being a country that can be a beacon for democracy, despite our own real domestic challenges around this. Um, and yet to engage with Brazil, with South Africa, with Pakistan, with India, with countries in Southeast Asia, I could give you a list of 20 and recognize, um, their warts and their challenges and their leaders' challenges and privately, um, criticize and challenge each other. Uh, but frankly, we're also in a period of some, uh, needed humility. Um, the president of Kenya, uh, reached out to me not long after January 6th to say, for the next American election, we'd be happy to offer you election observers if that would help avoid election related violence, <laugh>. And, you know, I simply had to say thank you. I appreciate the offer, the number of conversations I had with leaders of other countries after January 6th, where they sort of looked at us and said, it's not so easy, is it?

Um, a little bit of humility in our conduct on the world stages called for, but also a little bit of recommitment. Democracy is hard hearing each other, respecting each other better, educating our young people on, on civil society and on civics, and finding a path forward that reinvigorates our democracy is the best response to that. Not simply pounding on other countries and providing and development, um, and open hand and a credible alternative. Um, that same former now president of Kenya, we had a, a vigorous argument about why he was taking Chinese money to build a railway instead of letting, um, American or other European bidders. And it was, there really wasn't a comparable offer on the table. So if we don't show up, if we don't show up and contest the narrative of Russia and China, if we don't show up and provide a real partner, uh, in combating climate change, in growing sustainable crops, in helping with energy and helping with urbanization, we can't be surprised that we're not heard.

Peter Spiegel:

Lemme follow up on this just, just, just a little bit. This may be one of these theological arguments that's not even worth pursuing, but I'll do it anyway. Um, this is both Secretary Blinken and, uh, president Biden himself on the campaign trail Executive Blinken writing in, I think Foreign Affairs Magazine. Um, uh, president Biden talked about the campaign trail, talked about putting human rights and demo democratic values back at the center of American

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Foreign Policy. And there has long been in the Democratic Party a debate on values versus interests. And I think it's fair to say that under the Obama administration, the, the it swung towards interests, um, there was really not a huge amount of democratic values and, and democracy at the center. President Biden has promised to do that, and yet the Indian example, Saudi, because of, of oil issues, we had to really engage with them. Um, where would you fall on that spectrum and or am I, am I making a false dichotomy here that it's always a bit of values and a bit of interest in that, that I'm, I'm oversimplified.

Chris Coons:

I'm the co-chair of the Human Rights Caucus with Senator Tom Tellis. We regularly hold events to highlight the critical human rights challenges that communities and countries around the world face. We have to continue to strike a balance between our critical national interests and human rights. Uh, I don't think that we can have a successful security policy and foreign policy that says human rights is the only thing we care about. And we're gonna pursue that even at the harm of our own people in our own national security. We have to make complex and difficult arrangements around the world in order to protect the American people and in order to have a leading voice in the world.

Peter Spiegel:

Fair enough. Senator Risch, I wanna get back to you, get back up to Ukraine, and it's one of the policies that you've been advocating recently, which is using seize Russian assets as a way to rebuild Ukraine. And let me, let me be a little bit of, of a contrarian on this one, because there is a history in the last century of using a, forcing a defeated nation, um, to use reparations, uh, to pay for the, the victor's rebuilding. And that was Germany, 1919. That didn't turn out so well. Um, regardless of how this war, uh, is proceeding now, it will end at some point and Vladimir Putin will leave. And at some point we have to welcome Russia back in the Family Nations does seizing their assets and forcing them to use those assets to rebuild. Doesn't that set up as a 1919 situation potentially?

James E. Risch:

Yeah, that, um, I I would not put it anywhere close to the terms that you just laid out. Look, this war is over, is far as who's lost. Russia has lost, Ukraines haven't won, but Russia has lost, their objective was to occupy that country. They are never gonna occupy that country. They'll fight him with sticks and stones in the streets, which, which Putin has now figured out and which the rest of the world has figured out. So that's over. Uh, the question is, is how does the shooting stop? Um, and I, I can't make a prediction of what happens there, except history tells us wars end when one or both sides, uh, get exhausted and sit down at the table and, and

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resolve. Let me tell you something. Neither side is close to that point here. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, um, Zelensky will tell you he's not gonna give up a square inch. And after all, that's his judgment to make, not ours. Uh, it's, it's their country. So they, they've gotta, uh, take that as far as they're gonna take it. But I can tell you when this thing is over, this is, this is a unique situation. It, it isn't like other wars that, that have happened. There is not gonna be a reconciliation commission sit now with what the Russians have done in that country with the rape, with the kidnappings, with the torture. This, this is not gonna go away. What we really need is an international court to do real justice for the people that pulled the trigger here. Now they, that it's gonna take a lot of money to rebuild, um, uh, to rebuild Ukraine. Uh, out as a side note, the Chinese are licking their chops cuz they think that the cash that's there, they're gonna get their hands on because they can outbid anybody. But, uh, we're, we're not gonna let that happen anyway. Um, there's gonna be cashflow in there. Uh, look, Russia's gotta pay the price for this. It's easy to say, oh, this is Putin's war, blah, blah. And I have no doubt that when Putin's gone, Russia's gonna say, oh yeah, this was his war. It was a terrible mistake. We had nothing to do with this, uh, that Ukrainians are not gonna buy that they believe this is the Russian people's war. And so they're, they're gonna insist that the Russian people pay the price of this. Now they can't do the whole thing. But this is gonna be different than, uh, i, I think, than, uh, other, uh, instances.

Peter Spiegel:

Senator Coons, do you wanna jump in there?

Chris Coons:

One of the more inspiring things I saw bipartisan group of senators get done near the end of last calendar year, travel to the Hague, meet with the International Criminal Court, write, introduce, and get passed and signed into law a change in our law to allow for us to support the ICC in investigations, uh, in protecting witnesses, in actually engaging, in delivering some accountability for the conduct, uh, of Russia and Russia's leaders in this conflict.

Peter Spiegel:

Can I, I, I'm probably losing this argument here, but I'm gonna make it anyway. Um, I'm trying to think of a couple of examples. And the two that come to my head, my head right now are the taking peace accords and the Good Friday agreement, both were peace agreements where we had to sit down with people, we detested Ilo Iovich, and for the Brits, it was Hitler and the IRA at Wars. And because you have to have peace with people, you detest sometimes Russia is not going to disappear. It will always be at the periphery of Europe. Um, and some would argue part of the problem that we, we went through in 89 is we weren't very serious about trying to

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integrate Russia into a new European security architecture. Again, it's a very unpopular argument, I guess, to make in this crowd. But I would just say, did anyone have a thought about a way that we can reintegrate Russia in a post Putin environment without punishing them in a way, Senator, frankly, that, that you have argued for that. Would that you, I think what you're arguing for is a bit of a punishment there that may not allow us to do a Dayton piece Accords, or, or Good Friday. Or am I just barking for the wrong tree on this one?

James E. Risch:

Yes, you're barking up the

Peter Spiegel:

<laugh>. Fair Enough.

John Cornyn:

Can I just, can I just make an observation?

James E. Risch:

This is ugly. I mean, this is not, this is not like, uh, the, these other things. I, I don't think the, the examples that you've given are, are comparable to this. This is bad. I mean, this is really bad. And to integrate when this is over, it's an over, it's gonna be generations before the world. The free world trusts Russia again. Look, when the, when the Iron Curtain came down, we all made a huge mistake. We thought, eh, you know, they're Russia's now gonna take its place on the stage. Ah, they poison people once a time once in a while, and they interfering elections. Eh, you know, that's, that happens, you know, but we can, we can do business with them. We can't do business with them. The, the Europeans will, will blush, but tell you that just like everybody else, they made a horrible mistake. They tied into all their energy. And I gotta tell you, when this thing started, all of us were very concerned about what was gonna happen on that front. The Europeans and the world together with the Europeans have really extricated them from that. And that's never going back again. There's nobody gonna make a contract, uh, with Russia again to, to do reliance on them.

Peter Spiegel:

Senator Gordon, let me west cause I wanna get to China before we we run outta time.

John Cornyn:

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Yeah, I'll, I want talk about China and Russia, but I don't think we're ever gonna invite, welcome the, uh, welcome Russia into the family of Nations. Um, but it's interesting to me, um, just from a larger perspective, um, that, um, you know, we, we decided that we needed to contain Russia. George Keenan, the author of the Containment Theory, among others that said, we know we can't change the China, the Russian Communist Party, so, uh, we need to contain them. Our approach to China was exactly the opposite. We naively assume that if they became part of the World Trade Organization and they opened themselves up to, to us investment in, in China, if we, if educated their, uh, uh, you know, generations of Chinese students here, that somehow they would become like us. To me, the contrast is just striking. And I just think we need to throw off some of our naivete when it comes to dealing with, uh, countries like, uh, like Russia and China both.

Peter Spiegel:

Fair enough. It's a very good transition. Yes, please. Um, Senator Kunz, lemme start with you on China cuz I think you, uh, recently traveled to Taipei. Um, and, um, one of the things I've seen read about you talking about is your concern about Taiwan's own ability to defend itself. Um, the Senator Rich was talking about Xi Jinping sort of learning, uh, some of the elements, uh, from watching Ukraine. One of the things that some of the intelligence people I've talked to said, the one thing they learned is don't do this piecemeal, go in big. Um, how confident are you that as we sit here today, if Xi Jinping is planning for award in 2027, that Taiwan has the defenses, um, that, that it needs and are the things that, that Congress can do both in, in supplies and in training or advocating for training for the, for the Taiwan militaries that we need to be doing? Right. Right now,

Chris Coons:

I'm not confident right now that in a 27 to 30 timeframe, if there is a willingness on the part of Xi Jinping and the pla to go absolutely all in and put every resource they have, bear any cost, and that this is sort of an existential choice for them, that we'd be able to successfully partner with the Taiwanese and our regional allies and defendant, but, which I suspect surprises no one. Um, but there are lessons that we can and have learned from Ukrainian Ukrainian defense, um, that I believe the Taiwanese are learning. Um, and there are significant investments being made, um, in this year in our appropriations bills to strengthen the whole region and to begin to really align around, um, pushing back on China's actions in the South China Sea, pushing back on China's economic coercion on small and large countries, whether Lithuania or Australia. Um, and in making sure that we maintain a critical technological edge. Everything about Chinese doctrine history approach says they would far rather win that war without firing a single shot. And they have a number of good means by which they could accomplish that. Um, we need to

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pay even more attention than we have been artificial intelligence, quantum computing. Some of the ways in which space, uh, and subsea security are gonna be critical, um, to what China's able to do in the coming decades. Um, I'm sitting with two gentlemen who played a central role in getting the bipartisan Chips and Science Act passed, which significantly invests in our security and in our rebuilding, uh, of a robust semiconductor chip in industry in the United States. I do think that we need to be less breathless and more focused on what does it actually mean to prepare Taiwan to defend itself and to be willing to build a different security architecture and alignment for the Indo-Pacific.

Peter Spiegel:

You mentioned something that's very interesting, so I wanna jump on where you said it's not just the, the, the Taiwanese that we're working with and, and I was just in, in Asia myself. You have in the treaty allies alone, Japan for the first time, uh, looking at double its, its its military budget. South Koreans we just saw, uh, at, at their request, we've sent a nuclear, uh, armed, uh, submarine to their, to South Korea because it's a renewed push in South Korea to, to nuclearized, um, even the Philippines, um, which kicked us out of Subic Bay and Clark Air Force Base inviting us back in. Um, this, in my sort of tours of Asia, the one thing that struck me was the reason they're doing this actually is about Ukraine. That the rules that we thought were in place no longer in place. The question I have for you then is we have our allies re-arming, add the Australians with Aus as well, which is something in our interest. However, what we clearly are re-arming massively without a replacement for the rules based order we had beforehand. That strikes me as very, very dangerous. Um, take me to what, how you, how you analyze that, that situation.

Chris Coons:

Well, look, this is centrally about deterrence, right? None, none of us want to barrel towards, uh, an unnecessary military conflict with China. Um, I I'm reading Kevin Rudd's book, avoidable War at the Moment, um, but to be ill prepared for it. Uh, as we were upon our entry into the first World War, the second World War, the United States was wildly unprepared and those wars went longer than they needed to, and were more deadly than they needed to because the United States was not well equipped or well prepared. And that partly came out of a period of intense isolationism in the United States. There are strong, um, currents of isolationism in both parties and in talking to leaders both in Japan and Germany, about their choice to significantly increase their defense spending. Part of it is to, to match our investment, but part of it's also because they are uncertain about our future direction.

We need to be more reliable. We need to elect a next president of either party who is clearly committed to internationalism and to our alliances. I have a favorite, he happens to be our

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current president. Um, but I couldn't agree more with Senator Cornin, that a Reagan Republican who also sees our role in the world as essential to our security, um, would help reduce some of those tensions and concerns. So a lot of us noticed a remarkable commitment to increased defense spending by the Japanese. That is a big change in the region. I saw it both as an encouraging sign of burden sharing, but also a worrying sign that they are not yet confident that we're committed to a path together.

Peter Spiegel:

Yeah. And, and now talk openly about long-range strike to China, which, which even preview Ukraine, they would have to talk encoded ways, which they don't do anymore. Senator Corn. Can I, can I ask you, um, the CHIPS Act was mentioned. I want to talk to you a bit about China's the view of China from the business community. I mean, you are a, a pro-business Republican. I've been slightly shocked at the, on this stage by the views expressed by some of the business community. We had the CEO of Intel on this stage. We had, uh, a, a director of the business round table, um, both of which I'm gonna put words in their, in their mouth slightly. Um, but both of expressed, I think, concern that the bipartisan consensus in Washington, which is very hawkish, um, is going to do what what Senator Coons warned was drag us into war at a time when both in New York and I think in Silicon Valley, they still wanna do business there. Um, I mean, the CEO of Intel basically said, I still wanna ship ships there. It's 25% of my of of us exports. Um, and I don't want to have a chip ban. Is there a tension building between Washington and New York, Washington and Silicon Valley, Washington and the business community over our approach to China?

John Cornyn:

Well, the CEO of American Corporation has a fiduciary duty to their shareholders, but it's not about national security. That's our job. And we're, our job is to convince these leaders of American industry, which are very important, that, uh, they need to, they need to work with us to take that into account. But two years ago, I guess it was, we had a hearing in the Senate Intelligence Committee to open committee hearing where one of the witnesses documented that the current market value of American based investment in the PRC is roughly worth 2.3 trillion. Ting Jing and, and, and his other and other leaders of China have been marvelously strategic and effective. Hide your motives, buy your time. They have, uh, induced us to invest huge amounts of money in that country by which they've not only built their economy, but where they've rebuilt their military causing this potentially existential threat, uh, to Taiwan and a conflict that nobody knows or nobody wants. So, um, I think, uh, you know, Senator Casey and I have a bill that hopefully will get voted on on Tuesday that creates transparency in terms, not a

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prohibition, but transparency in terms of US investments in, uh, in China. Uh, I don't care how many, uh, you know, burger Kings or uh, Starbucks, uh, people want to build there. But I do s

Peter Spiegel:

Strategic Burger Kings and

John Cornyn:

Strategic Starbucks. But I do care a lot about our competition on quantum computing and things like ai. And they, we know there's no firewall between the private sector and, and the, the government there. Everything that the private sector has access to, including the state owned enterprises, supposedly, um, basically are an arm of the, uh, of the Chinese Communist Party. And we just need to be clear-eyed about that. Can me,

Peter Spiegel:

Lemme take,

James E. Risch:

Oh, sorry. Put run at that. Um, first of all, the bad news is we're, we're only gonna scratch the surface on China in a little bit of time we have here. But as far as the captains of, uh, of industry that we're here and talking about their, their, uh, uh, desires for China, there's no bigger supporter of the, of the capitalist free enterprise big corporations than I am. But if they were sitting right here, you know what I'd tell them? If you guys think your future's in China, you're making a big mistake, you are gonna be so disappointed. You're gonna have tears running down your cheeks and you're gonna have the stockholders saying, how the hell did this happen? And I'm telling you, those people are, are, uh, not to be dealt with. Uh, when you think you're gonna be able to get 'em to do something that's in your interest.

The Chinese Communist Party is as tough an entity as there is on the face of this planet. They will do whatever is in their best interest. They have lured us, starting with chips, starting with our, our, uh, semiconductor industry and pulled them in there. That was a huge mistake on our part. I voted, I I was one of the supporters of the chips thing. For a conservative, hard-nosed free enterprise Republican to put 52 billion in the private sector was a very difficult, uh, situation for me. But it was a ma matter of national security, a real matter of national

Peter Spiegel:

Security. I probably have, should have learned my lesson by now not to ask a follow-up question, Senator Rich, but I'm gonna do it anyway. The, the, the, the nuance that they were making was, you know, on the one end you have Starbucks and Burger King, and on the other

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hand you have clear dual use, high-end microprocessors. The problem, you know, and what Sullivan has talked about is the, this the small yard and the high fence. The problem is how do you defend, define the middle because the creep in dual use could be half of the Chinese economy. Or are you not worried about that?

James E. Risch:

It doesn't matter. Um, the corporations are there, as the senator pointed out on a fiduciary basis for one purpose and one purpose only. And that is to make money for their stockholders. God bless 'em. That's what's made this country strong. It's the free enterprise system. It's the profit motive. Go get 'em. We're interested in national security, then the American people should be, uh, in interested in national security. I don't care whether you're selling burger, uh, burgers or whether you're making, uh, microchips. You're gonna have the same problem with the Chinese Communist Party. They want it all.

John Cornyn:

I would just, can I just point out that, uh, that the, we're anticipating an executive order out of the administration on export controls and, um, Senator Casey and I have been trying to work with the stakeholders to come up with some sort of consensus approach. And we've agreed upon a transparency provision, which merely requires just that. So we have, so the policy makers have some insight into exactly what's happening and where the money is going and how it's being used in China. Uh, we're not interested at this point in, uh, prohibitions or restricting, um, foreign, uh, in investment in in China, per se. Uh, we just want to know what's going on.

Peter Spiegel:

Okay. Transparency. We only have about four minutes left. I wanna tackle one last, uh, topic and it's probably not enough time, but, um, uh, particularly your set, your your committee, uh, Senator R is the one that reports out, um, confirmation for four star generals and diplomats overseas. And everyone know there is one senator from Alabama who is, who is uh, blocking those. Um, Senator Corder, lemme start with you cause you're right at my left here. Is there anything that National Security Republicans can do to try to get over this hurdle that, that Senator Tuberville has put us in?

John Cornyn:

Well, Senator Schumer could, uh, file for cloture on the new command down of the Marine Corps, get 60 votes and get 'em confirmed, um, uh, next week. Uh, but he's chosen to, he and, and we, many of us have talked to Senator Tuberville and tried to figure a way to accommodate his concerns, which I think are legitimate. Look, the, the Hy Thehy amendment's been the law of

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the land since the mid seventies. But for the Department of Defense to say we're gonna use taxpayer funds to provide transportation and other reimbursement to service members for abortion at taxpayer expense is I think beyond their authority. So he does have a point, but the instrument he's using is rather blunt. Yeah. And so I think, cause Senator Schumer, what I, what I have recommended to him is let's get this rolling and after a while I think it's, uh, would be resolved.

Peter Spiegel:

Can I just ask though, I mean this

Chris Coons:

Does to, to which Peter, if I might, yeah, a counterpoint would be, with all due respect, there are hundreds of four star generals and admirals. One at a time. One at a time, which would take up all the time we have left so well that we may need to do one or two really high level and then hope that the caucus will push for a clear,

John Cornyn:

Well, my expectation would be that once we break the dam, um, that things would be able to flow and, you know, hopefully then Congress could speak to, uh, to this, uh, ex ex this exercise of authority that the Department of Defense doesn't have. And if, um, if the department and the Biden administration win and it's the will of the, of the Congress and the American people that these expenses be reimbursed, then you know, we have to live with that cuz that's our system.

Peter Spiegel:

Can I just ask, I mean this is maybe a slightly boring Senate procedure question, but what you're advocating basically, is it, it pushing Senator Schumer to do a one by one is in some ways an abrogation of senatorial privilege? I mean, it is the right of a senator to hold up nomination for various reasons. Is that not a a going against precedent? Going against tradition?

John Cornyn:

No, no. Uh, every senator, I mean, it's basically the only power a senator has to put a hold on legislation or nominations, but it can always be overcome by, uh, the majority leader filing for cloture on a nomination getting 60 votes. I get Chris's point, we're not gonna do this for 200 nominations, but I think if we got the ball rolling, um, the, the dam would soon break.

Peter Spiegel:

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Senator Rich, can I ask you to weigh in cuz it is sort of the work of your committee that's being stymied on the floor, if you have any views on that, but also that Senator Corman's point, I wonder if you could address the issue of, of the, of the, the policy issue here separate from the, from the nomination process because as, as Senator Cordran argues, um, there ishy amendment, there is longstanding precedent that the federal government should not be funding abortions and whatnot. On the other hand, you have the administration arguing, um, with significant support from, from female service members and, and families that this is a retention issue. Um, this is a, a duty of care issue. Talk to me a little bit about how you see that issue.

James E. Risch:

Well, first of all, let me clear up, it's my, not my committee on, on any military. We, we, we do all the, uh,

Peter Spiegel:

The ambassador ambassadors,

James E. Risch:

All state department stuff, all, all that, but we don't do the, the military ones. Uh, look, the, the process has been in place for many, many, many years. There is a legitimate difference on each side. Each side's pointing the finger at the other, uh, i, I side, uh, with Senator Corn's point, and that is we have the policy of the United States been the Hyde Amendment for years and years and years. And the military changed that without asking Congress about it. And, uh, that was a mistake. And so now, uh, they're going against what, uh, what, what's been the policy maybe that may, maybe if you get a vote on that it changes. But right now that's policy of the United States. I and I side with, with the side that says, you know, I watched Austin saying, oh, this is terrible. It's, uh, it's, it's something, uh, uh, that's affecting national security. He can change it. He can change it in a minute and, and say, we're not gonna do this until we get Congress to, uh, to uh, uh, say what we should do on this very simple.

Peter Spiegel:

Senator Coombs, given we've had two Republican views on this, I'll give you the last word. We only have about 15, 15 seconds. Um, I mean, what what has been remarkable about this, about this panel is the amount of agreement we've had on Russia policy on, on China policy. And it does remind me of the good old days when there was a bipartisan consensus on a lot of national security issues, including the confirmation of fourstar generals and ambassadors. Now that seems to have gone out the window. Is there anything, a group like this, which has, does

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sort of invokes or the old school bipartisanship that, that our national security used to used to engender can do to convince tuberville or, or get around this, this, this hurdle?

Chris Coons:

Look, Peter, at the end of the day, um, a bipartisan group like us that have deep differences on reproductive rights issues and see choice versus life very differently are the only kind of engagement with our colleague Senator Tuberville that's gonna get this result. It is unprecedented for a US senator to hold up the promotion of flag rank officers as a means to accomplish an end. And I did ask Senator Tuberville about that. I said, look, I, I understand we have a fundamental disagreement about reproductive rights and, and what is or isn't federal policy and what's appropriate. You have a right to hold a senior nominee. Why are you picking generals? There's lots of others who are currently being held. There's ambassadors that are being held. There's other senior administration and I did not get, for my view a satisfactory answer. I'm just gonna close with this thought.

We are gonna scare the hell outta you. We we're really good at that. On the debt ceiling on default, we came right up to the end. Uh, we're gonna have a government shut down cuz we're gonna fight between the House and Senate about appropriations. Maybe, maybe I sure hope not. Um, we keep coming right up close. But in the end it is exactly these kind of gentlemen with whom I am able to work and where we are able to continue to deliver sustained strong, uh, forward-leaning initiatives around strengthening our country, our defense, our military, our manufacturing, and our system. And it's really only because of the personal relationships that are at the core of the Senate that we're still able to work. So thank you for the chance to be with you today. Thank,

Peter Spiegel:

Please help me thank Senator for.