Bill Kristol ([00:00:03](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/TnulVBps0ZppckD6lL4AGQhZeETmG_dbzlBMKacoKmTw2a4UnJ0Sq6Y_4ERwl0vBcZqALiSf81xd8gsa4wN0XxIE_UI?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3.39)):

Hi, I'm Bill Kristol. Welcome back to Conversations. I'm very pleased to be joined again today by Aaron Friedberg, professor of politics at Princeton, scholar of foreign policy and national security policy, serving the US government as well, expert on China in particular. I think your most recent book is Getting China Wrong, but Aaron has been getting China right actually, and this is a critique of his colleagues who've been getting it wrong. You really have been getting it right though, and if people go back and look at these conversations, I think you'd be vindicated in your earlier work, obviously, but also with things you've been saying over the last several years. So Aaron, thanks for joining me again.

Aaron Friedberg ([00:00:38](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/V1OfnEGPKG4UUUpeQ6PK-g2wKiVAbZNBJA-tp7jurFed5wrdMeN8oWquu2KWKpgjHPewl75ofPZtYao951fetNOflMg?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=38.4)):

Thank you very much, Bill. It's a pleasure.

Bill Kristol ([00:00:40](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/0Ud4kdfupUzqubYzvU_s1UAc3A-DOXHi6Xl3es1GBJlgBSuIB8Usc2g2SYe4ZAEHEyf6gYiYVA48KS73MB1Nsv7xRLM?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=40.8)):

So where do we stand? I mean, the last time China was in the news, for those of us who aren't experts at all, was the grand military parade that Xi Jinping hosted with Putin and Kim Jong Un, and Modi showed up the day before from India to show... I don't know what to show. You can tell me what to show. Anyway, I think it was just a moment, and it didn't feel like it particularly... Well, it felt like a demonstration of strength by China, but are they strong? What does one to take from not just the parade, obviously, but from everything that's...? What is their current state in the world?

Aaron Friedberg ([00:01:16](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/oqe1D5bZrhXPtMvzQyZEGxwzWpiMjOBZlNNdq8qv5RrMgjcBSSx798IfUwymB3vkoES1fsd0LF6ac80dtt4iS6REDkU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=76.74)):

Well, it certainly is intended as a display of strength, and it was quite a remarkable display of military capabilities. And maybe we can talk a little bit about that. Apparently, there were some new things that hadn't been shown before.

Bill Kristol ([00:01:31](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/YaxmjEGaRXUf9xEdMKwAWij3RAd7XDFTH7zSciOl5R07j2QJ1M1KWc9O7W0hAgE_QLmAHmJAjT3-5sY8QFRtBBAfgps?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=91.74)):

Well say a word about that because, I mean, people like me just thought, well, symbolically interesting, but it actually was real in that sense.

Aaron Friedberg ([00:01:38](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/PYenqPZUrpsoGnpxftlSO0Lc7u1uVTTqBb0EUQmCSiYtXFH31ZhUBIUtMkwpPwwj79Q7HFu0nDiCgk2UaK-OYOwVCV4?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=98.43)):

Well, yes, I think evidently there were some, I believe, over a dozen, might have been 14 systems that were thought to be new. Not all of them necessarily operational. I don't know if some of them are foam rubber, but they were clearly systems that China has been working on.

([00:01:59](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/igfTKWK1CZG4cyKQhDUd2-ZX1vKTGi4QePPSJd9ic37eBii8ikGV0hON2trnCdzauYbMz70DWMJaIjMqwnN5y6th7jg?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=119.34)):

I guess, that's one thing to mention just at the beginning in the parade as a reminder or an example of this, China doesn't do kind of large muscle movements and sharp deviations in policy. They grind away, and they've been grinding away on a billet of their military capabilities really since the '90s, but certainly in the last couple of decades. And this parade is just the latest installment, and it's a display of where they currently are in this ongoing military buildup.

([00:02:33](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/eIyjK8E-VVNj4zS5V4ZSgcc5fCjfXixW122SDeWs9z9R7jCodLblFAEKGVPj6Q7FVthSbhmx0br566fcYj5EfavDr1o?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=153.69)):

The people who follow this stuff very closely note that, I mean, among other things, there are various new drones and missiles and so on. The thing that struck me was what seemed to be primarily on display were systems that have two distinct missions, and first, there's a category of things that are pretty obviously intended, as we used to talk about, anti-access/area denial, so targeted at US forces, Naval and Air Forces operating in the Western Pacific. A lot of stuff there, hypersonic, conventional missiles, lots of drones.

([00:03:13](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/IxLSRH4pvrWkbnsZa3KX-2ND45FFx0BVzq6qgjs7QL9fHPK7bQlKyczlRIzsztBsurW7FZYwCqeXl1QFvh3-2Gd7TVc?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=193.56)):

They're experimenting with, I think they call it the Trusted Wingman drone that flies along with manned aircraft. It's not stuff that nobody else is doing, but they're displaying this. So all that stuff.

([00:03:27](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/u_xybzmpGtnZGVCd7Mx_8kYQ-WtQWg_32_Tqkj4GLHVxQBgCJhqpch6ArXfhaNgZ3xJV8qB2hymbz2Xr4rkXJ6iPqHg?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=207.6)):

But then in addition, they put on display a lot of long-range or intercontinental-range nuclear missile forces, and that stuff is obviously targeted on us. So you put those two things together, and I think what you see is first the product of this long ongoing effort to make it harder for us to intervene in a conflict in their neighborhood as they see it, presumably Taiwan, but possibly other contingencies. And secondly, a display of forces that presumably are intended to deter us from any contemplation of escalating to the use of nuclear weapons if we're in danger of being defeated at the conventional level. So they're kind of blocking off both at the conventional level and at the nuclear level.

([00:04:16](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/_ikWx-X1-LilXFAU1UdXgWZgMmtUistFI48tiL24-JJmDPP41DdRVzA3rNxNJQJZs1l7gN3scqDs4d5TlVu6mQ14tOo?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=256.83)):

On the nuclear forces, they apparently showed one variant of an intercontinental-range or long-range nuclear ballistic missile that had previously been displayed on mobile launchers, but looks like it's meant to go into fixed silos. As you know, over the last couple of years, these remarkable pictures have emerged that show China drilling hundreds of holes in the desert that are assumed to be the future locations of ballistic missiles. I don't believe they've officially acknowledged that that's the case, but these missiles that they displayed are clearly intended to go into those kinds of launchers. So impressive, impressive display of military capability, and again, an indication that whatever we're doing, they are grinding away at building up their capabilities.

Bill Kristol ([00:05:12](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/zmz-LBSL33txTBeS-7xgmeA7v-NNigArmkug11E1pN8Gj_n1rfNA1F1JRopVDBMESCA_Rx75rEqx6eAEvuXPDOoyfpk?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=312.81)):

And I want to get obviously to the broader diplomatic and the sort of political situation, but just to kind of finish up the military, perhaps, and military-related things, I mean, the buildup is both quantitative and qualitative. And how much ahead are we, if we are, I mean, how much is the gap closed over 5 years, 10, 20 years? I mean, give us layman some sense of the relative pace, I guess I would say. And then also tie in, if you want, some of the quasi-military things like cyber and...

Aaron Friedberg ([00:05:43](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/eQ9HrXyuA5Om32mGlLv1q7YEn8Xim_ErGuijmW7kI2hlkOTngurGK3wFwDgMikH414A0cqaPSxWZV3zqZzcRrnMU6Ek?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=343.11)):

Yes. It is both qualitative and quantitative. I don't think anybody doubts that. So they've got the systems that can do things that they couldn't do a few years ago, autonomous vehicles of various kinds.

([00:05:59](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/xKK2usGfon6ZISRthiprDuqcyZHC1uFgxWxzgvAEu4R9G9P5G9KB-VN7teu4A1JxUCn5WflqO0Iv0rKr7AEHWDrHgKc?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=359.43)):

As far as the comparison, I suppose there are at least two ways of talking about that. One is the capability of their missiles versus the capability of ours, or their drones versus the capability of our drones and so on. But what may be more meaningful is some attempt to assess their ability to perform what we think would be their military missions in a conflict versus our ability to do the things that we would need to do in a conflict. And there, we're talking about different things. So we have aircraft carriers and long-range aircraft and forces that are meant, as I said, to intervene on behalf of our friends and allies in that region.

([00:06:44](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/a2R2PTpyw3GtCuMyNgsdxWUGhGQe_7JtK6g_ylOHbTqmMTx5y5WWJElzqWhhO22ggRr0CWhBuB0OVxSB1shq4HJ2yMM?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=404.43)):

And what they've been doing over the last 20-plus years is developing weapons that are targeted at those systems. So they're not head to head, although they've started now, of course, to build their own aircraft carriers and so on. But they've been spending a lot of money on what are, in fact, relatively inexpensive conventional forces that are meant to counter our very expensive conventional power projection capability. And there, I don't see how anyone could say that the balance has not deteriorated, certainly from where it was 20 years ago because they were well behind. They had not done a lot of this stuff 20 years ago, and they've been continuing to do it.

([00:07:28](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/LQ5UvNTpHTNemKYf_pC5ehf3MUkETJr_BZSanMSpiuAIJX3aag20Bx-K7LlEmilWg7JkPuief3J37udI4kN79t7sKEg?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=448.74)):

We've been worried about their capacity to deny us access and to complicate our operations in the Western Pacific. But I don't think we've solved that problem. We've identified it, we've talked about it going back to 2011, the Obama administration talking about the AirSea Battle concept and so on. But I haven't talked to anybody who feels like we've hacked the code on this or come up with a solution that would guarantee us our ability to project power into the region. So it seems to me the balance has tipped against us.

Bill Kristol ([00:08:04](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/T92T_pCZKDMfAFP_eXajc4fNHh4CRbfK42LEJZ_TWTgy-LiALG7RrD73SSweA_8HLrEJ02_4LDWoaz96CAD38BOURAA?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=484.92)):

And unrelated sort of hard or semi-hard power sort of criteria like this, especially cyber and so forth. And I guess generally, well, we can talk about the chips and stuff now, or we can wait till a little later, that's also a trade issue, but I think it's a national security issue, right? I mean, how is that balance moving?

Aaron Friedberg ([00:08:25](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/LAE-u6Ql8jxN4uHMtQRokzCgqFoeAAt-SGpQ8DDRwPnGyhA-J2q6C-KNu1_ACni5wUi7p3boZmp2xesEQl9FOX1zC4Q?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=505.11)):

Well, there are a couple of things that have come to light just in the last couple of weeks, or the news stories about them that are, again, an indication of ongoing efforts on the part of the Chinese to interfere with our domestic politics and also to penetrate our, and not only our, but the systems of virtually all other advanced industrial countries that control power grids and water and the central axes of the internal telecommunication systems.

([00:09:02](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/0nhjn7t-imQBxITa4k79JYbPJocwTsdhSvx97xx2Jws0vyArStkmfSVEqhFcLS6ahjciDAq0IwCqwVr9_DSqLN22uxM?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=542.46)):

There was a remarkable document that was published just, I think it was just last week that was issued jointly by the US government and, I believe, six other allied countries that details the extent of China's ongoing penetration into telecommunications infrastructure, power grids, and so on, and provides a lot of detail, in fact. I mean, after page two, it becomes incomprehensible to a layman like me. But it's remarkable both in what it describes, and you may have heard discussion of the Salt Typhoon, which was a reference to a hacking group that was revealed to have gotten into our, I believe, into the systems of the major telecom companies in the United States.

([00:09:57](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/PqW_Yk2gw7NCD5lLPD-C5-Hk7o0FAMNGDnnKSkhas6_8DgvWJmRevHD5Oj8edMfgQQLYA2FKvBMWad5QIXOATdvQhAQ?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=597.9)):

That's been apparently going on longer than people had realized, and it's more extensive than people had realized. So they're being very aggressive in that regard. And the publication of this document was notable because I don't think there's been anything like it before where you've got multiple governments officially calling attention to this.

([00:10:20](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/zpLHrXJtNgMtjX8Sm7RkAhXhui6uSTJjx_aen99E3SW4IJYr8luUVUvOXi8C_loZoyxNqK1N_WjKUgIsYi8up52oqCc?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=620.79)):

I guess what concerns me is that there may be people who think, we used to talk about naming and shaming, we're going to point a finger at them and say, "We know what you're doing," and somehow that'll make them stop. They are not going to be ashamed.

([00:10:35](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/QykScjtkoAUCFt8hKqWCJzjrvbPT3rTXlQKynl294yX35fVOurlYZnHSbMKD6Ueo_bnSFwfSeVADnQgQ47az3a9T8fA?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=635.13)):

In fact, I don't know if you recall, but there was a story this spring recounting a meeting between US and Chinese officials at the very end of 2024 to discuss cybersecurity issues where apparently one of the Chinese participants, some high ranking military officer, basically acknowledged that they had been hacking into our infrastructure. And he didn't say in so many words that's what we're doing, but apparently, he said something like, "Well, whatever this is, it was a response to what you're doing to support Taiwan." So they're being more aggressive in what they're doing, and evidently, they are, at least in some settings, even willing to acknowledge that that's what they're doing. So that tells me that they're not really very much afraid of what we would do in response.

([00:11:23](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/ZVUHlGv63lsMLrxnDrBELwx8NbA8az1BLWrL3sHmkk9QccnwJUmG61CvaC52X8hmfoD-9fvrGwUQFlzt7tdr52EJizY?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=683.04)):

There've also been a couple of interesting stories about ongoing Chinese efforts to interfere in our domestic politics. There are these stories in the New York Times about the involvement of so-called United Front organizations or operatives supporting candidates in local elections to run against people in those elections who had taken positions that are countered to those that the PRC prefers and maybe express sympathy for Taiwan or visited Taiwan. And lo and behold, people emerge who then go to organizations of ethnic Chinese American citizens and encourage them to support alternative candidates, and money flows to those campaigns. That's not new, and I think it's probably more extensive than people have realized, but it's ongoing.

([00:12:18](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/Wo7lJ58iU4IK8rhkEtM8a6XfqyrTm0jku1337u8V1TckZw1sLoTSvqBBT81IbEDtCFciph8e1Bv6VxaY7FuexsCH88I?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=738.36)):

There was also a story about expressing concern on part of a couple of members of Congress about the activities of a Chinese company that evidently has been experimenting with artificial intelligence to create more effective and realistic simulated social-media content, presumably for purposes of influencing elections. And evidently, that's something US intelligence community has been or was tracking, didn't see evidence that it was used in 2024, but it looks like the Chinese are experimenting with techniques that would allow them to do that kind of thing.

([00:12:59](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/AQ5nWAcPQqDngeBMs6NzQ1V5r7AdXatjnet4N5jD9o8oe-hbtPwW_rq4Oa8_wDoNIpOUQYyd_QXDdgA6sfduPnweMJk?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=779.13)):

All of this is happening, of course, at the same time as we're making cuts in the budgets of the various US intelligence agencies and closing down offices in intelligence and in the State Department that were focused on trying to prevent foreign interference in our society and in our politics. So that's doubly troubling.

Bill Kristol ([00:13:25](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/IUDyW_lvv4kQgJ3u1NtXT9wESanpZuzDwaL6k2GQFLhEkhFv_R3ZBBx7y3tNnH3sYjjpW7DOkPsw2p3eFvzg6BS_lh0?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=805.38)):

Well, let's talk about the US side of the equation. You had said in our last conversation, which was almost exactly a year ago, so before the election in 2024, that Trump had had a mixed... you weren't for Trump, I believe, but Trump had had a mixed record on China in his first term and had done some directionally good things. And you thought the range of possible policies or outcomes from if Trump were to win, which he did obviously, in Trump's second term was hard to read at the time. And that seemed right to me. There was a lot of hawkish talk about China, a lot of desire for a deal, a lot of Trump's sympathy with dictators. But Trump also, the whole party seemed to be very anti-China and so forth, much more of a bipartisan consensus, I think, against China, which you've written about a lot. So what is the basic US situation here in the US now?

Aaron Friedberg ([00:14:17](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/HrtRlGWYiXhlWf2UWX3Nlq3jFfKPCIFMGcLc7CP1MB9SB8a42UfVGhh31ixNw-ZmGXHAd6EbpE4pgkqQaco7GrtU0Sg?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=857.85)):

Well, it is unclear at this point what our policy is going to be. And it's remarkable actually that there has been less discussion coming out of the administration about our policy towards China, which suggests it may be unresolved or unformed.

([00:14:33](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/2mNBru9bKwdLMw3GXzw34UzeQ5xQBlO762NnhbKuy_F9G027gx6e2LhfNOQTOLCVeDV_S1a4uLpREcD_blseceH_WkM?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=873.24)):

In the first Trump administration, you had people who were quite hawkish on China, on security issues, on ideological issues, and of course, also on economic issues. There were people who wanted to make deals with China on economic issues including, of course, the president himself, but there was nobody at that point who was making a strong case for accommodating China or pursuing any kind of detente with China.

([00:15:04](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/BECceXRjyk-JYWmJ3wmW6dI3lYKQ727dv6CwduNBRTpngDC_TgJDPKxs7UU3sNSywzWj5qovdVxpA8GoOy7yo_oDk6M?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=904.38)):

If you look at the cast of characters now... I should say, also in that first administration, there were a number of people who were pretty clearly leading the charge on all of that. Matt Pottinger in particular at the National Security Council was one, but he wasn't the only one. So there were middle-level people in the system who were very focused on the China problem and were trying to get the US government to do a whole variety of things. And there were people in the defense department, of course.

([00:15:34](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/yLnk3VNnVRNHr4Npz0dei0NOAvljEXdeBElJYImFaqL_Mz_pOcFYENwZiD1BcXmDU3rlvGOWDb_luLgPjjMePDJu5gA?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=934.17)):

Now if there are such people in the administration at more senior levels, I don't know who they are. At one time you would've said Marco Rubio would've been such a person, but it's not clear. I don't think he's expressed any views on China since he became Secretary of State. And there are also what are, to me, somewhat disturbing indications that the administration, presumably starting with Trump, thinks that there are possibilities of achieving some kind of deal with China principally over trade issues. And that would be like Trump won redux because the thing that Trump himself wanted was a deal which would have involved commitments on the part of the Chinese basically to buy a lot of American stuff. And they did make such commitments right at the end of Trump one, but they didn't follow through on them.

([00:16:34](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/hyPPY7nxkSO5yYv1QKMB6ax4whiT4V82msXwid6JtPBZpP7BsxWFH4kulR4cyIJAnJKhucnPzoiqYu_HAtjJcifyirw?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=994.2)):

So I don't know who the China hawks are in the new administration. There are some indications that this idea of making deals is reemerging. And then, of course, you have people who are apparently committed to the idea that the United States should pull back from some, if not necessarily all, of its global commitments, presumably starting in Europe, but maybe not ending there. So all of that seems to point in the wrong direction, and we'll see how it plays out. But I guess I would've said back a year ago, that was what, for me, would've been the worst possible outcome, and we seem to be heading towards that. I don't see indications that we're going in the other direction where I would've hoped that we would go.

Bill Kristol ([00:17:25](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/hT_ycVTeYHU7xoTIqXq5Id4FoYnGUFImna2HmFRjW6xFAuPjyE46hg_aV00PQZRSH02-M4oQggzBG3Xgffa7--jhm84?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1045.35)):

And I think a year ago, you stressed that the Biden administration didn't do everything perfectly by your lights, but it was reasonably tough-minded on China, and that it seemed to be a bipartisan consensus. Republicans were sometimes chastising Biden for not being tough enough, but they didn't seem to... And so it's, I guess, particularly striking that, well, how much has Trump fractured that consensus or how much is, at least, the failure to embrace it? Has he failed to embrace it?

([00:17:52](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/yDh9FmZ48W2o4zakgV4TERlN_r-R_kwR3UxNoistrIjpxjPCMkIHWuGMtoeAKV22m6CdFNqQiR63yOR_18LKYzJnKWY?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1072.38)):

And I am struck by your point about the so-called restrainers or this is true America first, which would be, I mean, somehow it got presented as we want to get out of Europe, but we're still tough on Asia, but why would that be really from a true America-first point of view? So anyway, talk a little bit about that.

Aaron Friedberg ([00:18:09](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/Ce9AP92ZIwx2Si63lnFF5z1uaU4EEKi1i03Xer73RSYdLQuxqCu_8BCxkSoAV5TiTH5UNm0zrJK920BjgHI_-HqvHmU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1089.6)):

Right. Well, just to start with that, that would have been the case, that was the case that people made for the idea that we need to basically cut Ukraine loose and we need to pull back from, if not pull out of Europe. And what was the grand theory behind that? Well, we're going to do a reverse Kissinger, we're going to somehow improve relations with the Russians and separate Russia from China to a degree so that we can focus on being really tough towards China. And I don't see any evidence of that. If they were thinking they would do a reverse Kissinger, and they seem to be trying hard to get along with the Russians, but it's not having any demonstrable effect on Russian policy and certainly isn't driving any wedge between Russia and China.

([00:19:05](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/qUs85HbBuj3HD8ay15fLIFd7e13LAujduxrv9jDIkcvaU2fdf8AOpcEvoG1FpG2UOf8rMrjOm_uyUPaQOBsnBi_ekvM?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1145.67)):

So that, again, that's sort of a worrisome indication about where things are going to go. But it's all unfinished at this point, it's unfinished business. And the optimistic view is, well, there are fights yet to be had and the policy has yet to fully emerge, and they've been focused and preoccupied with other things. But on China, the silence is really kind of deafening. I don't know that Trump has said much except about the trade issues, and he's run hot and cold on that.

([00:19:42](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/4tEOAxd23Tf5GfezphMHdqT5Pv9I0nldUgjw6evFgzlGnVWtDiuRitguGPB5cBn-N29HBR251_9_gtfwBZ7yb-QdWoA?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1182.09)):

There are rumors, at least, not only that he's very interested in the trade deal, but he's really anxious to get in the room with Xi Jinping and maybe even to make a visit to China. So that may be yet to come. And if that's the case, maybe that's the explanation for downplaying the China problem or doing-

PART 1 OF 4 ENDS [00:20:04]

Aaron Friedberg ([00:20:03](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/x74rX0sgVIW3GevvncOzUxQEgjjRF-IBjKdUKrMDBgEEmFZrmt9dMXeeFPdHtVRs8155TxxlOXFXWN9_Ujq5J33YBI4?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1203.45)):

... for downplaying the China problem or doing small symbolic things like not giving the Taiwanese president the right to stop in the United States on the way going to Europe at that point, little gestures that are meant presumably to suggest we want to get along, we want to cut a deal. So again, those are straws in the wind. We don't know how it's going to turn out. But to repeat, I don't see the personnel or the theory or yet the practical manifestations of policy that could be described as tough on China. You look back over the last eight years, Trump administration, in my view, deserves a lot of credit for breaking out of the conventional wisdom that had shaped a lot of US policy, certainly economic policy, clearly identifying China along with Russia as the principal, military opponents of the United States, and moving our policies towards China on a variety of issues including export controls and so on in the right direction.

([00:21:15](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/70IozCCmkdjes_l659qGChWqvnaSIn1pFZA4pnEq6AQ6OtOd9OSzLui2YWxGuXPjBEZuAhmnfAsH9w8b3SGJ1T-VI_g?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1275.48)):

It was kind of sporadic. It wasn't as well coordinated. It was disrupted in some ways by COVID and other things, but basically moving in the right direction. The Biden administration, as you suggest, I think, picked all of that up, basically didn't try to reverse course and was more systematic in its pursuit of strengthening alliances focused on China, even in the trade defense policies or export control policies. Again, in my view, continuing to move in that direction, moving in the right direction, maybe not going fast enough. Now it's not clear. And again, if we think back to the conversation we had a year ago, I think one of the possibilities was Trump II would revert to Trump I, and we'd see a continuation of that sort of hardline policy.

([00:22:13](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/saB8S9iA5Ot1DngNengDqEPHL28MzU_zzFpjl7pbFzfjCH2T3O5_vlLCpwtN8uJMid2Cmc9zOYIXwHyxilfbfvI0Ol0?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1333.95)):

It looks like that is not what we're going to get, at least there are indications that that's not where things are going. And the speed with which all of that has happened or the absence of any indications to the contrary is to me, kind of surprising because I would've thought it's sort of cheap, inexpensive, let's say, to make gestures to talk tough. And we haven't heard a lot of that. The interesting thing or the thing to watch is what you mentioned regarding the political consensus, because as many people pointed out, if there was one thing that both Democrats and Republicans had pretty much come to agreement on, it was the threat posed by China, both in the economic domain, military domain on diplomatic and political ideological grounds, lot of commonality, a lot of agreement on that, and it'll be interesting to see what happens now.

([00:23:13](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/lJS0Dp1A9J_AIclB9sg4b5xR68sCx6bTeYceHCxvhlkgf88DLVxeK0nIbASlaJTb4AomFVrOrGIgwM09oaMtyiXz2lM?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1393.5)):

If Trump himself doesn't go in that direction, will the rest of the party follow along with him? Or is this an issue where there could conceivably be divides between Republicans in Congress and the administration? There are a lot of people who've kind of made, I don't know that they've made a career, but they've made a point in recent years of being tough on China, as you said, criticizing the Biden administration for not being tough enough. What are they going to do now if Trump II doesn't continue in that direction, but goes in a very different one?

Bill Kristol ([00:23:51](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/ZsfCKWA3JByJj_cMrCO9XTD7O-Mn_FGNstlYFXXzyuYTCGApqlWudSq34S2bgYjHf_cBhNhShrwBe7YLQRCSrnEGi-Y?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1431.87)):

And I suppose the Democrats were, I think, thought they were doing the right thing, but were pressured a little bit by Trump and by the Republicans to be tougher on China. And if that pressure's not coming, they have a sort of natural tendency to focus a little more on domestic policy and focus on alliances. So that's okay, but are they going to be as strong as they seem to be under Biden? So I think that bipartisan consensus could end up being a little fragile, right?

Aaron Friedberg ([00:24:20](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/GnnVBnEFlp4L8UrqUpwHTF6vKo_hp2RWBDuNISh3jBTwy5Ru5Y0LFKpJExfp2DSRBwqg14Tb30wDdDhh2QyV8lLC9Yg?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1460.76)):

Yes. I agree, I think the Biden administration was pushed towards even tougher positions than perhaps they would've otherwise been inclined to take by the Republicans and also by the belief that this was an issue on which the American people were generally agreed, you weren't going to lose support in your district or in your state by being tough on China, and you were subject to criticism if you appeared to be soft. And so that's what was moving policy and what to me seemed to be the right direction. But if that impetus is not now coming from the White House, if the rest of the Republican Party, as they have on every other issue, goes along with Trump, if he now moves in sort of a softer direction towards China, what's going to happen on the Democratic side?

([00:25:18](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/tk5WJ_7sZ8nrpdp9Wc6rEea2hVFDTEEa4NkJ129VQ3y1LZsHo0YeJ-yMG1wLnaalUb-RzH9WxyO1Hb026nUMUruReyw?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1518.66)):

You always have in the Democratic Party, people who are more towards the left who don't never like this idea of new Cold War with China, certainly don't want to spend more on defense, sort of come home America, McGovernite wing or fraction a remnant in the Democratic Party. Presumably if the Republicans are splitting on this, you begin to see that on the Democratic side too. So we've had an unusual coalescence, an unusual consensus apparently, on part of both parties that could be supportive of a continuation, and I would've hoped an acceleration, an expansion of a tougher policy towards China, but it's not clear yet. Whether that's going to happen and the early indications are that it may not.

Bill Kristol ([00:26:11](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/WmXHR-0aAB9bc6vja2jX9TCAh8zey4KTRthxOtBwH9LeOekEJpbWYHdlw4Iid5S5Srk_5C-RBbVd8-8CHU2hpnkf7p0?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1571.13)):

Yeah, and I guess there are a couple of instances. I'm just thinking as you're speaking here, the Democrats could have attacked Trump for reversing himself on TikTok, reversing his entire bipartisan congressional vote, and actually law of the land, I believe, on TikTok to just let it go, eventually, allegedly it's going to be sold. I guess where this problem of it's being controlled or very susceptible to influence for the Communist Party by the Chinese Communists allegedly will be solved. Meanwhile, they're chugging along. And also when I did a conversation with our friend Eric Edelman a few months ago right after Trump's Middle East trip, all the headlines for that trip were obviously the plane from Qatar, but he was very struck by the NVIDIA deal or not. Well, you should explain it.

([00:26:59](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/1hu9ZOe_YvlXW7ikUjzrfh6QWQiTM_xgr-D1ozSX7UAjo-XiN3ZNdybb69RStBuONEJbM3n1MHIBDNhOU_D4_hkHkzU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1619.58)):

I mean, that also strikes me as the case where, and just to finish the point you were making before, though, it's not as if the Democrats have been criticizing Trump too much on these things either. So there, I think some of their toughness on closing TikTok or on not selling chips and so forth, or was, I mean, not simply a response to Republicans and Trump, but colored by the fact that they could get beat up if they went the wrong way. So talk about those questions.

Aaron Friedberg ([00:27:29](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/7CsHjxYGR4w2XM50ZLvG9b44ACJ8jj5OGjELZlTDuxiMikDrHfjkWULedRCN2-YppoFC_FW3O5KMUSxQB3fUoaAbhvs?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1649.28)):

Okay. I'm glad you mentioned TikTok because that really is striking. As you know, there was a long drawn-out battle about whether or not to regulate and to restrict TikTok, and there were arguments on all sides, but eventually, a bipartisan consensus emerged that the owners of that platform should be required to sell it and consensus also that it was being used or could be used to influence debate in other countries. And there's analysis of the content of TikTok that makes that, I think irrefutable, could also be used to collect information on American citizens. So long struggle, eventually a bipartisan consensus on the need to do that, a bill passed that would've required that challenges, legal challenges defeated in court. And lo and behold, as soon as Trump is elected, he puts up the stop sign.

([00:28:42](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/TAi3LOOdX_X0jS_kMWcjSldyNccUN9GtsXNraBeFgZDi8KwWJVzskegcgtPCsim3LYbiErLHnGdAutm1v_yjzdU1mpk?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1722.15)):

I'm not a constitutional scholar or a legal expert, but it seems like that was an exercise of presidential power that was extra constitutional. Congress passes a law in the courts, affirm it, the president presumably is required to implement it, but he's unilaterally refused to do that, at least temporarily. And it's pretty much crickets as far as I can tell. It's not something that, at least as I'm aware, that's attracted a lot of attention or criticism on either side of the aisle and certainly not from Republicans. So that's worrisome both on the substance and as an indication of what might be to come. NVIDIA is also an interesting case and it's a complicated issue and it's one that has not yet been fully resolved, but basically starting with the Trump administration and then accelerated and expanded and kind of rationalized and made more systematic under the Biden administration, the United States as a matter of policy, has sought to limit China's access to certain kinds of high-performance semiconductors and also the machinery that's necessary in order to manufacture those. And we put a lot of pressure on our allies to follow along, and for the most part, they have. The actual implementation of some of those controls has been problematic because the company's involved for one thing, initially said basically, okay, you've told us we can't sell chips that have a performance above this level, so we're going to design something that operates just below that level so that we can sell it to the Chinese market.

([00:30:41](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/6pZ_3OA8TiGhc0DPzpqhJKdIiuPe44A9gnT0pgxWyKnurZ6M5RpQ_iLJEj7NtAu52q6Doq-BKw7xE1QX1o4Q8BEeWkM?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1841.04)):

Okay, maybe you can't expect companies to do something differently than that. But the direction was pretty clear and Biden administration had pushed that hard. And the central part of the rationale for doing that was that the things we were trying to restrict were the elements that were necessary in order to improve or to develop artificial intelligence applications. And there's a debate about how effective the expert controls were. The Chinese succeeded in making some advances in artificial intelligence that weren't as reliant on the sort of raw computing power that those advanced semiconductors made necessary or made possible. But there was a strong strategic argument and both, and an economic argument for not wanting China to be able to take the lead in artificial intelligence. And the choke point as the Chinese referred to it in their capacity to do that was computing power and the essential ingredient to achieving the higher levels of computational capability that were needed were these semiconductors.

([00:31:56](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/vBOVY04JR5TITtz_KVde0oF-H-Wk2-x2bvqLauFF_wRMtFlBdAyud5eTEQp6gpLBXawp9Ng1jHrfUaFdjRGZdC_i6P4?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1916.34)):

And we basically had control over those because they were developed by American companies initially, designed by American companies and made with machinery, much of it based on American intellectual properties. So we could cut that off or constrict it, and we were in the process of doing it. Within a few months of the election, the Trump administration decided at least on one specific case, the H20, I guess, chip that's made by this company, NVIDIA, to reverse course and to say, in fact, we're not going to impose restrictions on that. Chinese companies should be free to purchase it. And the White House made a very unusual, maybe unprecedented deal with NVIDIA under which that company committed to pay a fraction of what it would earn from selling the semiconductors to China to the US government.

([00:33:08](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/CFzTg1wV9jc8kNatPrHxkcLjYjAvWDtf36KmOK79-0BrIdDdlRAij0qYxodU29yDhIYhBPaAupvTxO7Kw3NKPMS7jgg?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1988.19)):

Again, very strange arrangement, and I think again, sort of questionable on legal and constitutional grounds because sort of like a tax tariff on exports which we're not supposed to have. There's been a debate about that. There is an ongoing debate about that among experts and there's a case to be made for doing this, but there's also a pretty strong case against it that it's going to contribute to the further development of their computing capacity and their artificial intelligence capabilities. But the administration has chosen to grow in a direction which, although it might have a sophisticated underpinning and argument seems mostly to be motivated by desire to bring dollars into the US Treasury. I don't know too many people who follow this closely from the strategic side who think that this is a good idea.

([00:34:10](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/CaTBUAB6hus3hBeKWBl3s96EqGE_uKQWcCEOVa2SqJbZevcL6OYOEvdA_vHCwMScLQ2igPKENtYZKdct1EJ6s-zws9o?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2050.5)):

There are people who are more expert on the computing side who say, or on the semiconductor side who say, "Well, look, we want to keep them hooked on our semiconductors. Since we're the only ones who can make these, why not let American companies make more money by selling them to this huge market in China? And then they can take the profits and plow it back into research and development and allow us to stay further ahead." There are even people who have said, "If we do this we'll discourage China from doing what it had seemed to be doing," which was to pursue greater self-reliance, as they say, building up their own industry so that they can make these things themselves. That strikes me as a misguided argument in part for, because this is another area like in the military domain generally, where the CCP regime, Xi Jinping have set a direction and they've been pouring resources into it, and there's no reason that I can see to believe that they're just going to stop and allow themselves to remain dependent on semiconductors that we can control. They've said, this is unacceptable. We're going to have greater self-reliance. And they've put hundreds of billions of dollars into that. So it would seem to me if we're suddenly willing to sell them some of these higher-end, supposedly they're not the most high performance, but I guess they're still better than what China can manufacture. Why not just buy those and proceed as they're doing at the same time as they continue to work on developing their own independent capacity?

([00:35:59](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/txx0QREVvJ-RNrAz4rua1Yc1Tk9_8mJ-vjrnuW1J7iZfNJiOpOps2iVUA5bNI36ikyD5qwwBTKoYZMfE5iqskW5eObo?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2159.64)):

I think the notion that the Chinese regime as it's currently constituted is ever going to willingly accept a return to a condition of dependence and vulnerability, is totally misguided. Now, there is one, I don't really get this, but it's sort of almost comical twist in this story. The Secretary of Commerce Lutnick, made some statements, presumably intended to calm some of the critics who were worried about this decision, and he said, things to the effect that, "Well, don't worry. We're not going to really sell them our best stuff," which was sort of true. We're not selling the most capable chips. And then the Chinese government turned around and said, "We are offended by... This is an insult to us, and we're instructing our companies not to buy this chip, so you're willing to sell it to us, and now we don't want to buy it."

([00:36:57](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/MCutuwEusNAXO9hXphrz7hAyzRs2BUiGkRaSO4gC_SakwWSBb0VjFYJ0ytm6hahc7TQZUyomYhjw9q53845Ar1ihB1s?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2217.63)):

I don't know what the reasons for that might be, but one might be that they figure now they've got some leverage that they can use to persuade the US company that's manufacturing these things, to lobby the US government as they've successfully done already to allow them to sell even more high performance chips. So this seems like it's opening a floodgate and it's not doing what we should be doing, which is trying to slow down China's development and what we were trying to do.

Bill Kristol ([00:37:30](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/UuEEh65I10FyTcAnaITFAyMCPGvfK22jMNPVHxRv81apsTzQrEMAPoq0gILBb29zseyKfhiz2NscwQatCAjvhWYVnNk?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2250.57)):

And I think you mentioned, I think, allies briefly. I think that's something we were trying to do with allies, and you were, I think, somewhat heartened by some changes of attitude in Europe. So let's talk both about, we're at the center of European and Asian alliances, obviously formal long-standing ones. China's I guess at the center or pretty close, I guess, at the center of a kind of more informal axis of authoritarian states, some of whom we saw there in last week in Beijing. So talk about the two since it's geopolitical competition isn't just one-on-one, so to speak. Talk about the two sets of alliances or axes here.

Aaron Friedberg ([00:38:07](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/3Yccv1yAFA-N-YqskNYkxgbxXOVMUJS_mX6ZO3FyVX72nLYcgmOJyFGzNE6cOYv5bhDmdeaItr5UHgvq8QSlEqHSKMw?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2287.08)):

As of a year ago, right before the election, I would've said, I think I did say in our conversation that what had seemed to be emerging, particularly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which was an important accelerant to this, was a coalescence of liberal democratic countries in opposition both to Russia and to China. And the Europeans in particular who had at least in some cases not been inclined to see China as much of a problem, or maybe it's a commercial problem but not a strategic threat, were suddenly talking much tougher about China, both on economic and on strategic issues as well as on Russia. And the United States at that point was trying to promote the formation of that kind of grouping. To me, that made a lot of sense.

([00:39:03](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/xeizBVuey5xZ2rHTqWR6FWuYlzFahOs2Hhrf-gpqmk_7A7laseur8O3iRo_yKefJkTfBtj1cfBooQD29mk0PHONIfoI?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2343.27)):

On the other side of the fence, you had the continuing coalition of people have used various labels, access of authoritarians and access of disruption. I don't know, in my profession, you have to come up with a label if you really want to be somebody. But it was China, Russia, North Korea, Iran, principally that they seemed to be cooperating more. They were all doing things that were helpful to Russia and its fight against Ukraine. There were indications of increased cooperation between China and Iran, certainly between Russia and Iran, between China and Russia, certainly. And as always happens, there are then people who say, "Well, no, it's not really an alliance, and axes isn't quite the right term, and they have differences, and it's not a form...

PART 2 OF 4 ENDS [00:40:04]

Aaron Friedberg ([00:40:03](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/I_TaAO1MNGUMbKxwKx-pf_GqjM35E4NUI8SpsGOgTQRJBOXGWvnttwiaE-WEd2qLpJ-6qNBM6UVubq7dHF5OOmD9rzw?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2403.87)):

... they have differences and it's not a formal commitment that any of them have made to one another and so on. It's not NATO. And all of that's true, but I think it's just indisputable that they are cooperating quite closely and that they have been cooperating more over the last couple of years than they were even before. It's not something brand new, but it's accelerated and expanded on that side. Whereas on our side-

Bill Kristol ([00:40:33](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/zn4psvFnYulikiDtOzgGreRfD4lZfYDiRuFr_e69U6W5eIlWQbOKgpMFxC9oi3ppciVmd_R01jn4llvfAJIk8EhABoU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2433.51)):

And even in the last year or since the beginning of the Trump administration, if my sense is right, China's been pushing harder to sell things to Russia that we said they shouldn't. And some of the drone stuff and all that.

Aaron Friedberg ([00:40:46](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/oSv4A4xGuid1HAzgWbACNPNlADw30-pVIafiOlaAsgMwUSHKYI0hHkRkyYhBfN0_XD6bgo9Y6j9-KzbTRfDS-8mBWGw?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2446.44)):

Right. We said at the beginning of the war, and we and our allies said, if others sell arms to Russia that it would use in Ukraine, we're going to impose secondary sanctions on them. And the Chinese have been, up to this point, fairly cautious about that. As far as I'm aware, there haven't been major sales of actual weapon systems. On the other hand, they've done everything but to help Russia. And they've been critical in keeping Russia in this fight. I mean, without China, I don't think the Russians would still be on the battlefield. China's buying, it's buying Russian oil in greater quantities than it was before. It's been buying Russian agricultural products in greater quantities than before. And that's very helpful to the Russians. And they're also selling them components, integrated circuits, servo motors, all the pieces that you need to manufacture drones. Of course, the North Koreans have been selling them artillery shells and so on.

([00:42:02](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/cpmYmyPIbq1RoPo6VlxnLFEGOCeZin17b8NttTLZoCorMbxHOBZ1TgYU1Oe6t2zV5Axzyr-O3eYO7sN4MJtzy26TYD0?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2522.34)):

There have been reports just in the last year, this new type of drone has been introduced where instead of relying on radio signals and a transmitted basically television image to guide the drone to its target, all of which were susceptible to jamming because they used radio frequency signals. The Russians had developed a kind of remarkable new kind of drone that's guided by fiber optic cables. And so the signals, the image that the camera on the drone transmits to the operator and the guidance that the operator gives to the drone are all passed through these fiber optic cables. And those are not susceptible to jamming or interception of the signals.

([00:42:52](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/BIBr2m9jnEFapz1fLVLANPQX1V-H7z28ka636TCv_g8pCZUlOk-4MC5C1AK1bkakwtCjwWj9hynifcidP_Y09xdX3DQ?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2572.74)):

The one catch or the challenge here is that in order to have drones of sufficient range, you have to be able to pay out miles of fiber optic cable behind the actual drone. And lo and behold, it turns out that China is the source of much of the raw material that's needed to manufacture these fiber optic cables. And my understanding of the accounts in the press and the Ukrainians have also said things to this effect is that China has supplied Russia with this kind of raw feedstock for fiber optic cables and also some of the machinery that's used to make the cables. So are they selling them a weapon? Well, not quite, but all that stuff is intended to manufacture weapons. There has been one account, I believe it was over the summer to the effect that there was actually a weapon system that was of Chinese manufacturer that had been observed on the battlefield being used by the Russians.

([00:43:59](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/q5cHyZTk-obiKiiDPwmg1n44X5F6rzHj7V13F4YcbsDG88goUEQoGn_PtST8LJBolHrRWW2r-CoaINTmuYuV1eZ4_8U?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2639.13)):

And that was a mobile truck-mounted laser anti-drone system that came from China. So they're edging right up to providing them with arms, and they're giving them a lot of stuff that may be more valuable to them than the heavy iron that they can either manufacture or get themselves. And the Russians have also been more aggressive themselves. I mean, of course, they've opened up new offensive against Ukraine and seem to be having some success. And just in the last couple of days there had been reports for really since the war began of instances of sabotage and surveillance in Europe by operatives linked to Russia. And I guess, more recently there have been a lot of overflights by Russian drones, particularly over Poland, monitoring the transportation routes through which equipment is passing into Ukraine. And the Poles shot a bunch of these things down. So the Russians too seem to be emboldened and the Chinese as well.

([00:45:09](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/34tYvwmArDWzA1JQjNdVlMb2ge2aSy95fhkFxevgQO1a4vvCy_rNGrCq9oMi-SWoECMilcW9PEC2pC04jKf5w34oVVI?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2709.63)):

So all of that is not moving in the right direction. I recently saw reports that China was going to do things to help Iran rebuild its missiles, its offensive missiles, which it had expended in such numbers against Israel. And that there may be deals in the works to provide them with some of the components. And apparently they've sold them some large quantity of the chemical that's needed to make the propellants, which would allow them to make 300 or 400 new missiles. So there too, China is helping people who are attacking our friends, even if China is not attacking our friends or us directly, at least not yet.

Bill Kristol ([00:45:53](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/2CgnLcvdAPMbnw9J6TPoc2WOKWFGxCgMWpq0xs2vaUBn8M6wHKm3F-_3_LHvrSWLobJimpoqTOubX5qjiL-sl_JANWM?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2753.88)):

So close. Yeah, it's impressively close. And for all the talk... Of course, they all don't agree on everything and they're different nations and different views of life to some degree and of the world. But on the other hand, that doesn't stop them from World War. Imperial Japan was not really the same place as Nazi Germany, which wasn't the same place as Mussolini's Italy.

Aaron Friedberg ([00:46:15](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/GnPusNeisK-HGivImdAv34W4eaGQWoIzUrqVKS7mJ-u5bFxO6kvmZtaSp8-yvAIbugSOsOO9-CFn2lGu43E688jOPGQ?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2775.03)):

Exactly. Exactly.

Bill Kristol ([00:46:16](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/0eZ-ysnQqpm0xLyHTwvSzuL_B3u1eKdoue_idoEa9HZNRwXX70eC6QTdyC1qzr5F-Qh4x_w6uoA5y3pe5R_ljkPUC1I?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2776.35)):

Right? They can still do a lot of damage.

Aaron Friedberg ([00:46:18](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/oK-lFaEeZUhfztRy8M-HnOOfjFiF1jVFdxF5M2KPX3Ueu5AYYos1D4mCtMyaKWn-UsdYELMcwVL0cK-jmXzIKKc7dZc?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2778.78)):

Well, I don't know, it's like the joke about modern art or something. They know what they don't like and what they don't like is us. So I think I may have said this before, but the Soviet Union and China were ultimately divided by the supposedly common ideology during the Cold War. One of the reasons they fell out was over the interpretation of Marxism, Leninism, and so on. Well, these countries, they don't purport to have a common ideology, but they're united, I think, by common anti-ideology. And that's anti-Western, anti-liberal, anti-democratic. And that's a pretty powerful force, especially in a world where at least until recently, these countries felt that they were embattled, that the liberal democracies were ascendant and were acting in ways that were threatening to the interest and even the survival of these regimes.

([00:47:14](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/wNiDdrqJ9HbFwXXRykp4fC65M5WT_mUte1fH3NAokQu7-IoEsNdLHSvptuzMzs3TJh_EVEqPPGynMqBNfumyrEdtGns?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2834.19)):

So they've had a very strong reason to cooperate. And in my view, there's absolutely no question that they have been, and that cooperation has been increasing. And we certainly have not succeeded thus far peeling the Russians away from the Chinese. And I always thought that that was an illusion. But in the seven or eight months that this administration has been in office and it has tried to be more friendly towards Russia, the reaction from the Russians has been to pocket that and be even more aggressive. In Ukraine, for example, we have not peeled them away from China at all. Meanwhile, on our side of the fence, we've got all kinds of problems.

Bill Kristol ([00:48:01](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/85do7JOETVxXhvC98cQGJcU0YTJCNjp_H1RlmWE7xqJ9zQ_jfdNcVJoLFgI3VGOFzynWhDj8Dkbpcu-ma1K3VpgaXVg?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2881.26)):

Yeah. So let's talk about our side because that was also... I mean, I was struck just personally in Europe a little bit very early, even early in the war of Russia against Ukraine. You'd talk about China and they'd be a little bit of not eye welling exactly, but we'll deal with that later. We don't like some of their trade stuff, but we're just not up to... We're Europe, we're not, we're having enough trouble increasing our defense spending and liberating ourselves from dependence on Russian energy. And China's just a whole other world and you guys just got to deal with it, which wasn't totally crazy to be fair. But then it moved quite a lot I thought over the 2022, '23, '24 period. So where does that stand? And then we should talk about, of course, about the Asian allies.

Aaron Friedberg ([00:48:46](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/q78xMCg2_i2PV2-MJ-WL9R2NbONpODN-8xKpgaN_R5-6ergoHCpmpOYchGS-2FbnW1eTxaA81IY4RF-_RKk3IHRVTi0?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2926.68)):

That is certainly my impression and in conversations that I've had over the last, I guess, two to three years with European counterparts and colleagues. I've been struck at least before our most recent election, by the way, in which many people who might once have said, as you describe China's sort of your problem, or it's an economic issue for us but not a strategic issue. Or even go back a few years before then, you Americans are sort of provoking the Chinese. You didn't hear so much of that in recent years. But that seemed to be gone. And I was struck a trip to Europe, I guess, a year and a half ago, conversations with people. I'm thinking of wanting, being in one smaller European country and meeting with... That I would not have thought of as being hawkish on much of anything and having conversations with parliamentarians in which they were using language to talk about China and Russia that kind of sounded like the Cold War. I mean, it sounded pretty good to me.

([00:49:58](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/zYIDbyVV-v73FASbmC91QJnfUOwckl2t6h7c5aTekmiFhRUPj7aY4ZE4gKjPEdh4ICY9hV60gfejvNHpfS6u5FrE-M0?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2998.14)):

But they're saying the problem is the nature of the regime. These are dictatorial authoritarian powers. They can't be trusted. They're inherently aggressive. And we see that with Russia. We're experiencing it right now on our front door. But we see also that China is made of the same stuff. And when you Americans come and talk about cooperating in dealing with China, we now are much more inclined to listen to you and to take you seriously. Now, what they could actually do to help us directly in dealing with China is another issue. But I think the inclination was there. I'm not sure if that persists. I think in the case of Europe, there was also, and this I think may persist and maybe the saving grace. There was a growing recognition that in spite of what many people had said and thought over the years, increasingly China was becoming an economic threat to Europe. And that the outpouring, particularly of manufactured goods, the so-called China Shock 2.0 over the last couple of years was a threat to the survival of many companies in Europe. And whole sectors of manufacturing, portion of European industry were being swamped by cheap Chinese exports, subsidized exports. And so there has been an inclination to try to do something about that, even if it meant effectively violating WTO commitments. And so, I felt that there was an opportunity there for us to collaborate with the Europeans on trade issues in dealing with China. And in fact, I think there's a necessity in the long run for us to do that. Whatever the Europeans may be feeling now about us, I don't see much evidence that they are running to Beijing and think that they can get some good deal from the Chinese.

([00:52:09](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/5MBtzRJ948gW7RO3LCrHQtA2ssCbmismpmseWMHN55m1rz-jVJO4jbEBbyABFVPfzFyWMqY0unfrE2GL1i3hqXLnH5c?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3129.06)):

And actually it's been striking, and I'm sure there are things that I'm not seeing, but the Chinese don't seem really to be trying very hard to win them over. And if you stop and think about it a minute on the economic front, China really doesn't have much to offer them. They're not going to import a lot of European-made manufactured goods. They want to make all that stuff themselves. What they want is continued access to the European market to unload some of this vast quantity of manufactured goods that they have pouring out of their factories. They'd like to continue to have access to technology that's developed in Europe because it's another source of high technology, which is now increasingly difficult for them to get from us.

([00:52:57](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/odHqq4ny8DNTmmdkkM8G16Qyajm05G-QxYIflj-m0dMzqw-7bB7MAFhW54qWumI_rSSwkQblFgAdFAmQsqblf6z5Bj4?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3177.87)):

And what are they offering? They're saying, "Well, we'll come and we'll build an EV factory on your territory and we'll manufacture our EVs there." Which presumably will undercut efforts on the part of European manufacturers to build up their EV industries. And Chinese don't say this, but we see from their practice in other parts of the world, they're not going to be eager to hand over technology that would allow potential competitors to improve their capabilities and pose a challenge to Chinese companies. So they don't have much to offer. And I think, at least, some Europeans are increasingly aware of that.

([00:53:40](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/tqRf2rtF_ExnZ6OiSjto-2-BPqZUOs70DnTGEZusUEYQVZK3s0v-KA6OSx7MNvpOwl9U6gmiBl_w4XO1fNIFJcQQ1fs?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3220.44)):

Von der Leyen European Commission has been quite hawkish on trade issues. And with all of the frustrations and fears that they now have about the United States, we're not driving them into the arms of the Chinese. We're not helping ourselves. They're not eagerly coming to us with proposals on how to cooperate. But I think there's still a possibility for some convergence if the US administration backs away from some of the aggressive policies that it's adopted towards Europe. So there's still potential there. On the Asian side, it's more mixed. I think partly because it's not clear yet. It's not clear what the Trump administration's China policy is going to be. At least it isn't to me. And it is also not quite clear what its policies towards our European allies are going to be.

Bill Kristol ([00:54:53](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/Ph5byKI_wp9idmNC6Z8h5ovf_87ifh0BVO0PhvAkHuYchtLdysyCJvrtYQmEgM0MZqZUEcvkc-Zr021OaCbWaL8Iyg0?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3293.01)):

Those are Asian allies?

Aaron Friedberg ([00:54:54](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/WDf41ImtDLC8m1XNHoNHtX4F-nQtJnZMqOaQZMcDiZMfai6OhyiTIfkBqIzhmMystZkVYCRBtjMj6tevwrJdp3XFbIo?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3294.12)):

Our Asian allies, I'm sorry. So South Korea as an example, the South Korean president visited, and I guess, our president made some complimentary remarks about his friend, Kim Jong-un, which must have taken the South Korean president aback somewhat. The South Koreans have also been trying hard to offer things to us, which they know we would like, for example, offering to do some manufacturing of ships and to help the American ship manufacturers and also to manufacture ships for the United States. And of course, they've also been working to set up productive capacity in the US for electric vehicles and batteries.

([00:55:55](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/1jRddWHtvIF6CUBKLnIfBfu-oE61HxCvRJI8ifgACWL4L2-pBFgdzqs3lXnix31744kUKUdlsFAzxcTpycHnSumJQuo?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3355.11)):

And in the last week we had this remarkable incident, which is causing a huge furor in South Korea of ICE agents going and detaining several hundred employees of, I think it was Hyundai factory, I believe in Georgia, where they were working on setting up facilities to manufacture batteries. So what the long-term effects of that are going to be on the prospects of cooperation? I don't know. But they can't be very good. With respect to Australia, we've been pressuring all of our Asian allies to express a greater willingness to support us in the event of a contingency over Taiwan in fighting against China. Why any of those countries would be willing to do that when we, ourselves, don't say explicitly that we would come to Taiwan's aid is a bit of a puzzle. But we've been pressing them to increase defense spending as in Europe and various countries have made different commitments to do that.

([00:57:10](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/C9o1tGFiQz7VkyaVANREmOz6k2OYbBT2E-5Yet2vSo6KeDgx3sghlui8LCtu4A8MMrvKql92z_UAaoNnTlaW7rZcJlc?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3430.65)):

In the case of Australia, one of the first things that the incoming Trump administration did or the Defense Department did, was to say that we were going to review the so-called AUKUS deal. Which we negotiated in painstaking ways with the Australians to help them eventually to build up their capacity to manufacture nuclear-powered attack submarines, not nuclear missile submarines. And in the meantime, because it would take so long to do that, to begin to forward deploy US nuclear-powered attack submarines that might be joint crewed with Australians so they could gain experience. And also to sell them several of our Virginia-class nuclear- powered attack submarines. I think three and a possible two more to come. And the Trump Defense Department has said that it is now reviewing that deal.

([00:58:14](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/Py6yrdxxUvSy5Dfb2AVXLm11mLM_6g1c2i56BgZuJRx8M-6hE98Kyapwlb7x7N5CKwqCRMsXhrXjg3JpYsura6fZWCI?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3494.49)):

And there's some legitimate reasons, I think, why they might want to look at that and think about it. One, and I think this is the principle argument, is that we ourselves need more nuclear- powered attack submarines to deal with China. Do we have the capacity to make the ones that we need at the same time as we're selling them to the Australians? So there's legitimate questions to be asked there, but I think it has added to the sense in Australia that our commitment is unclear. And over time, there's been a debate in Australia about how much they wanted to rely on the United States, and those who have argued in favor of staying as close to the US as possible have been winning those arguments for the most part.

([00:59:10](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/5um88ujUXTOXSfIzVRTse5TeR71cPGsyTJJDL9uXqLv46cn7eyAoeXCnRSpAiVY0zjYRSfFK8BbnrFRTVFfoUOTa9aw?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3550.11)):

And even if the AUKUS review comes out favorably from the Australian perspective, and we indicate we're going to continue to do what we said we would do, it introduces an element of doubt and uncertainty. And I think strengthens the hands of people who say, in the long run, we need to be very careful about whether we want to rely on the United States. Japan is probably, I don't want to say the most dependable because I think the others are dependable too. But they are at the center of the bullseye. Taiwan maybe even closer. But Japan I think has figured out a long time ago that they couldn't cut any acceptable deal with China and they needed to defend themselves. And they've been making-

PART 3 OF 4 ENDS [01:00:04]

Aaron Friedberg ([01:00:02](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/XffyH-nEXOpZ4ILy_n_Ekgxa5s6yJjLcVzZIG567TxZCG50j4aSIyFbNLXL9TApPfYfzxXA9ClKu-d4Toxt9uwTSSiA?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3602.94)):

... they needed to defend themselves and they've been making dramatic increases in defense spending over what they were spending before and they also need to stick as closely to us as possible, and we're beating them up too over trade issues, but I don't think that's going drive a wedge between us or damage the alliance. The Japanese also feel that they handled Trump successfully in the first term, and they did, but that had probably something to do with Prime Minister Abe and the kind of personal relationship that he was able to develop with Trump and the fact that he was a golfer, which I guess really helped.

([01:00:42](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/A1q0i6HgZG43oIHq6D-5F3N1URiZ9MBATqXVPv0hxk__UoM8l_NvoC9V6nXN3PQSoeS3xyZmsYzOwsUz_a6eHpvih60?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3642.3)):

So there are questions in all those cases. I guess I would be more confident about the future trajectory of our relationships with our Asian allies than I am right now about that trajectory with respect to Europe. One of the things to mention regarding Europe, and this has been kind of below the radar because it's the sort of thing that only defense nerds pay attention to. Actually two things. One, there have been special programs through which we provided additional assistance to frontline states that were directly opposite Russia and in particular the Baltic countries which are very small but pretty feisty and determined to defend themselves.

([01:01:25](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/e9mzpQzBPx9xwrtlpldN5Us_R12yxp9faYU65r7pcwcWmP7nBCeGySMSGR6bDngjTSjyBOWdAsyV3CR0J-qunFBteBk?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3685.41)):

I think Finland was also included in this, but it was announced very quietly by the Trump Defense Department that that program is going to be terminated. I don't think it amounts to a very large portion of our overall defense budget, but again, it's a sort of a straw in the wind. The Defense Department is also engaged in a global basing study, which is similar I think, to the one that was conducted by Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld during the George W. Bush administration. And so it's going to look at the disposition of all of our forces around the world, and I think most people expect that that is going to be the occasion to announce pretty significant pullback of US forces, at least from Europe. So people are waiting with kind of bated breath for that.

([01:02:18](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/04e9NrRq8ETSr0TS2tcttzMZxZLucykQ_AuqBhaIY7FflHVEJbGtjVQ1BMNqijrt9PHj2SzVPOEs3rSRjL9D6zjYnBk?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3738.72)):

The other thing that they're waiting for about which there have now been leaked stories, but nothing definitive is the national strategy, National Military Strategy Statement, which has not yet come out but I guess is on the Secretary of Defense's desk for his review, which according to the press reports, which again, have to be taken with a grain of salt, begins from the proposition that the principal focus of our defense efforts should be on the continental United States and the Western Hemisphere. I don't think it necessarily says we're pulling out of every place else in the world, but it's going to feed that narrative in the sense that, for lack of a better term, the United States is headed back towards a kind of isolationist posture where it focuses most of its energy and intention on its own immediate vicinity.

([01:03:15](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/1RAKK4BnGnTrLSvKkXMEFfQT1ZSozmwEWjgKCVivSgCuaBjNgXRnNkxMKqk_Dcvps887q1NDbFXFGkZL5_U3aHG7iKM?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3795.24)):

And that's something that we have not done since the 1930s, and we made a very deliberate decision to reverse that tendency, which had been evident before between the World wars and to maintain a more or less permanent forward presence. And now that's I think being called into question. We'll see what the content of that report is and the global basing study that will go with it, but the arrows all seem to be pointing inwards towards, I mentioned the McGovern slogan, "Come Home America." Well, that maybe is the slogan of the second Trump administration too.

Bill Kristol ([01:03:56](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/HTSVTDeze-rgvCDHvvZfW6SzHj33H0Jm0aXaJj9VCTm_-Gxtk_KyqG6j5Bq_DdfVvwl7n6RgPIt-cXjMdWQNR_lnLrc?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3836.46)):

No, that's awfully helpful and very comprehensive too. I mean, I am struck by, I guess if you have an international order that you're the key to for 70 or 80 years and a lot of allies who like that order and would like it to be preserved, they'll bend over backwards to tolerate a lot from you. And clearly the Europeans and the Asians have done that with both Trump administrations, I would say.

([01:04:19](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/3sypDxFS9zmPUOmPH9AlpSeTHdO9PAz335aT8XdmzOiwfKNYAmBLHeq0vOTuW5ykJmH2pSwYma4y9s-dhJfDl7MgO68?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3859.71)):

But I think one just doesn't know, I guess listening to you, how much ... You don't know what straw breaks camel's back here at some point, just from their own point of view in domestic politics, someone ... This has happened a little in Australia, I think already. People say, "What are we doing here?" I mean, we're kind of swallowing hard and accepting all kinds of insults in some cases, but also just kind of bad deals and tariffs and so forth and not complaining much and we're not going to ... It doesn't mean they go to China, I don't think, does it?

([01:04:46](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/NxvGeeWof1tq-vgeKucyCamTGu1Zjq30AZYF2NjXNvip7PkQs0BH7ZUf8KrzDxBndUN3zXAQBmWx3jHSH-As6MJ4u5k?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3886.38)):

I mean it means they could just strike out on their own, have little regional alliances. Poland mentioned something about nuclear weapons a few months ago. So I think the degree to which our alliances kind of start to fracture and become more chaotic, which has its own downsides, God does down the road. They don't all get along with each other perfectly. South Korea, Japan and stuff, we're making their own relations to each other better or have mostly.

([01:05:13](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/ocaE8_KYEnt2CGTK1LQBl33_nW6tWvAmVQ0SUsm1MjBZpIX3rJlj6Y9J5PfwUXlETgxnnEXboYFov_vFTwpUQNRyMQ4?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3913.95)):

Anyway, I think that you don't see all the consequences of that until the consequences, until something happens. You know what I mean? We have a lot of political capital as it were, underlying that. And one other point, I'll let you maybe conclude on this. I was just so struck as you were talking, I thought back to ... I looked up that ... I mean, two things, people don't appreciate here, how much a small program, I think it's called the Section 333 program, which is our security assistance to Russia's neighbors, really, not a huge amount of money in our defense budget, obviously. I think we're probably selling, giving them things that we don't need anywhere anyway. I mean, it's probably not costing much.

([01:05:52](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/vq3YjhueHteezkTPuoyCJNxkU-kaiA4B7ZzL0VPE1F7H4nyoNFoa3KYMWtdVjrkYEqS1ktHogZc4GsE-o66eqvVd1D0?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3952.59)):

Those are big stories over there. And again, we are huge and we have a million things to think about, and these smaller countries, even their bigger countries are smaller countries compared to us, this thing gets cut and it's said, well, what are they signaling here? This is this program that's been going a long time. Everyone thought it was a good deal. Russia literally invades Ukraine, which makes the program more not less necessary. We're just going to kind of cut that out because as you say, it's so much of an atmosphere of Come Home America.

([01:06:19](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/0fMkYhVpwGcKWK03bvc5HrKyC4UZ2d_r7fJJwCuSHkv56H95SqmJUCxUqO7D97LDu6eSrkkn7MJNm36hXK-WIwFLlb8?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3979.41)):

And finally, just, I thought about this this morning, just September 10th, just so people, we have that on the record, writing my little newsletter about the Russian, the drones coming into Poland in a pretty big way, and I remember that the Section 333 thing, and then I don't think I ended up putting this in, but JD Vance said, in the course of defending not the very problematic thing, in my opinion, the attack on that alleged drugs boat a thousand miles away with the killing of those 17, 11 people without much evidence or argument about why this was either necessary or illegal.

([01:06:56](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/EjtmOabk4cgHRYNT2nEx7wZmOkJ7z_k2qzrCAAnTt1Hn7Ct3iQzGrgitPxvnf5sD0ODFwjA3qvPn6yQ1RkyCdgeWuVw?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=4016.91)):

But anyway, Vance got all indignant that people were criticizing the story, just raising questions honestly, and saying, "Why do we do this? Why did we board it?" Blah, blah, et cetera, et cetera. Said, "Well, this is the highest and best use of the US military." Did you see that? Remember that?

Aaron Friedberg ([01:07:11](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/_ecDVLN2loEuomGVsJbLeujkU6eQ6E63P6Hyur5Rs-qhZsLzi7C9-iwkBUvyWqZihLwS9Aq-wxp9EA1MJs9hulYTvZg?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=4031.25)):

Yes.

Bill Kristol ([01:07:11](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/FJfj6Ro-QxQfTqQpSrFAouw7gmDipal8PbOWh0wesImC_HQH-bPjdljJ2eZQ3WCPljoSARfIff6Z1jM2VyC7SNfJYbE?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=4031.97)):

I hadn't really been struck by that at the time. It's just some stupid JD Vance tweet basically. But [inaudible 01:07:17], if you're in Europe or Asia, this US military, which is configured mostly to help deter wars in Europe and Asia and to deter attacks out of the United States by other powers. Suddenly the vice president of the United States is sort of saying, "Well, actually our most important thing is to blow 11 person, kill 11 people in the Caribbean in some drug boat, alleged drug boat." I don't know, I've got to think ... I don't know. I guess we underestimate how much, if I were an ally over there, I'd be a little freaked out about this. I don't know, maybe I'm being overstating some of this, but anyway, I'm just curious how that fits in and then maybe close by talking, where do you think ... What to watch for in the next three plus years of the Trump administration with regard to China policy in particular?

Aaron Friedberg ([01:08:01](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/kc3euahgtI8tVXJx5KafjoiYmkEqj48Vl1-t7DMRmij58SyE3Adt5nY97tnNCUnniuG6eam3FZ2OqnSqQpfm_JNbsdE?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=4081.53)):

Well, I certainly think that these are big stories in other places, even if they're not here first, and they also, they contribute whether they should or not, they feed a narrative about an America that's sort of turning its back on the world. And I believe that that's probably exaggerated and it isn't going to go as far as some people fear, but the straws in the wind all seem to be blowing in that direction. I mean, the cuts in the support, the 333 program to support these frontline states, they're really, to me, inexplicable, and I haven't heard a justification for them as you indicate. I doubt that they're a very large fraction of our defense budget. They're supporting people who are very eager and have demonstrated their willingness to do things to defend themselves, including spending a lot of their limited treasure in order to do that, and also have been supportive of the Ukrainians in standing up to the Russians.

([01:09:08](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/BJqR1-rswaLeRelkgELe58vf7BboOBVFnkq3NRRkVGx8gAVu2rXIlZDHpz8syFCs0Uoev_pGzF4AJBW5nbSw6LfOUsg?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=4148.61)):

And it's what is the signal that sends to the Russians? I mean, we still concerned about deterring aggression and what are we signaling by talking about and then actually cutting support for people who thought of us as their principal ally who are right up front against the Russians. I guess a couple of points on that. One, it's just useful to remember that these other countries are democracies, and that means they have their own domestic politics. So things that may be a drop in the bucket to us are going to have a big impact elsewhere.

([01:09:52](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/2hubf3H_0ig7H27Xgps3huOfyhfEw2pkJxx4ahwtglImc8ve6hVMeygEAbhhWxEnsunvMJ4c1ogit0D1iYaBokybRPI?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=4192.14)):

I mentioned Korea before. I haven't followed the sort of ripples, the after effects of these ICE detentions, which are, I mean, it's objectionable on many grounds, but I gather it's a very big deal in Korea. I don't know what the impact of the announcement of the cutbacks in 333 programs is going to be, but I'm sure it will be a big deal in those small countries as well. Whatever else it does, it does not strengthen the hands of people in those countries who have been making the case for sticking close to the United States, being supportive to us in various ways that we need and relying on us, continuing to rely on us.

([01:10:35](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/rOYiJFEPU01Rz7_3UgwLYLQeyU19_FWuuckWlMDxd0r5aIrc9O1uEiN9sE9cyNNckG_fUbwYo58fqklxnqAY8x3Fxu8?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=4235.16)):

So we're kind of chipping away at the foundations of this whole structure. And it seems to me we are in danger of running a gigantic experiment or rerunning an experiment or running an experiment, which we have run in the past, the result of which was nearly catastrophic. We entered World War I kind of at the last minute tipped the balance enabled the Allied forces to win. We tried to make peace and restructure the world and everybody didn't want it. And so we pulled back and kind of huff and left people to their own devices, and then we had to come back in at the very last minute at great expense, cost and lives and treasure in order to prevent aggressive hostile forces from conquering our erstwhile friends and dominating Eurasia.

([01:11:36](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/eTwAAbSjc8vKLl6dv5-fNzVP7Rq0nnM_0a0rj_Z3LOZbUV1pwk7YiF_if7m4K50cAHfK3gE5W01G6x3MFYd9uEv539U?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=4296.84)):

Do we think that that is not going to happen ever again? Do we think that that doesn't matter to our security? What's the theory on which this is based? I haven't heard one. All I hear is a lot of grumbling about our free-riding allies and complaints that they aren't doing enough. And look, they haven't been, but they are starting to. The idea that the highest use of our power is to defend the American people from drugs. Well, yes, the ultimate purpose of American foreign policy is to defend the American people.

([01:12:14](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/yNoyYaD5UBum-8LqcPBuj30fsAiML50b6jVbWRm8hHjl-4rRmbkjeypnHzYhGZ1nkcbDzQfsfEQMR3gFeIVMbpZHpBA?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=4334.37)):

The idea that the best way of doing that is by hunkering down and throwing our weight around in the Western Hemisphere, but not being as present or active out in the world and out on the periphery of Eurasia, to me, is completely wrong and extremely dangerous. I mean, even if it's not wrong, even if pulling back doesn't result in these catastrophic consequences, there's no way that it doesn't increase the risk because it increases the likelihood of aggression in Europe, but also in Asia. If we're so concerned about Chinese aggression, are we impressing them with our resolve by undercutting the Ukrainians, by entering into disputes with our friends and allies? By raising questions about our reliability?

([01:13:12](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/xDo-HYGmmwO1LgC4cmF0AiZJ1nx8T61mvV2XM08i-BizTQEI6LC88EEjdsW4y3IKTK5-nQo9iMhhUJ0sg-9rd-Nvqyw?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=4392.99)):

No, we're tempting aggression, which may not happen immediately, but is more likely if we continue on this path to happen in the future. And if it does, will, I think, draw us back into those places at great expense and at great risk. Because if it happens, I don't think in the end we're going to sit back and simply say, "Well, it's okay if Russia conquers the..." Maybe we would say it doesn't matter if they conquer the Baltics, but well, maybe it matters if they get into a war with Poland or it doesn't matter if China takes Taiwan. We might say that or there are people who might say that.

([01:13:59](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/RGUQyDSrZ9zW55yZcG90CZ00k7hPB5yTq37VsHADQ2_9-Etp6eN51kFXBx1uqwtRwklw9raV2Mvh2wThjqGvLGddELs?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=4439.52)):

But if it happens, I suspect there would be a radical shift in public opinion and in our policies and we would wind up being dragged back into those places under much less favorable conditions than we have now. By the way, just on that point, I haven't tracked the public opinion polls on this, but one of the puzzles to me of all of this on the foreign policy side is that there's no evidence that this has been driven by public opinion. It's not like there's an upsurge of support for getting out of Europe or getting out of our alliances or even getting out of trade agreements. You look at the public opinion polls, public seems to be still kind of internationalist.

([01:14:50](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/j97_6-TQCMin_P15YDcNIv5iBbT-2fVDI7W-QxHV8vejZrTOTI5uh9LahHbXeO6egLSSmxDHoPK48tLcdcA-JEOhZ8c?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=4490.13)):

Now, maybe that's a wasting asset, and it's been built up over time because elites over many generations have believed this and talked about it. And there's been a kind of an educational process where American people have come to believe this and to be supportive of the policies up to a point that maintain that position. But if you have leaders in the United States who are constantly calling this into question, who are engaged in a bizarre attempt to say, black is white and white is black, and Ukraine is the aggressor, and Russia is the poor victim. Who are not willing to talk in terms of values and ideology and the bond that historically we felt we had with other democracies, over time that is going to erode public support.

([01:15:49](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/1mzHqYtcZu04xvvo6izTgYc5NXYsyCTcrA2yiTurA4SLtw-ih7_fNoAEpt49j-w20sz21R5jhXZVVHBDTJOZZLs6TQY?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=4549.68)):

And it probably is beginning to do that. And we've seen that with regard to Russia. People who identified as Republican voters were very anti-Russia until 2016, 2017, and then you began to get this strange inversion that still applies. Is that going to happen on China too? I don't know. My point is just that this is not driven by public opinion. What is it driven by? I mean, in some large part, it's driven by the preoccupations and ideas are notions of one man, Donald Trump, followed by a cavalcade of lesser figures who are providing sort of pseudo intellectual rationales for doing these things.

([01:16:45](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/tgVDMfIWZyxDvp0FVeBynd-wetjWyaq3z5i_6CexsEL0XeUbc3qejhJ1jiNBW6Nfd1uKMMG9S95FJxJA_0uA0lrprmA?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=4605.18)):

On the question of what happens if we pull back? I mean aside from the ... or even if we don't, if we look like we are in the process of doing it, a lot of things can happen, which will increase risks. If you could snap your fingers and tomorrow ensure that Japan has a secure nuclear capability or that Poland has one, it might not be a bad thing or Ukraine has one, but you can't snap your fingers. It's not something that would happen overnight. And if it happened, it would have follow on consequences. And we've worked hard to try to limit that process of proliferation. So we're chipping away at the foundations of our alliance, [inaudible 01:17:34] alliances, which we've believed have supported our interests, and we are increasing risks of aggression, which may drag us in. And we're also pushing people in other places to contemplate doing things that they would rather not do. Now, some of those things we want them to do, like spending more money on defense, but others we probably would prefer that they not do, like acquiring nuclear weapons or appeasing the aggressors in the hopes of cutting the best possible deal they can. None of that is good for us.

([01:18:13](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/sndTpKUgpM3bdAbUyKKSiddsa882JyeQtBD0ZZvDTsqXJ-DTbfR41d4w1les5r9vGRkwV39t9ycbGmVPVMaqA7aCyh0?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=4693.38)):

It's all bad. It's just the degrees of bad and how quickly the bad second and third-order consequences become evident. At least that's my view. Now, sometimes I think, well, this is old think and grew up learning about the second World War and lived through the latter stages of the Cold War, and you just can't shake that mentality. Maybe that's right, but it's also possible that those lessons and those beliefs growing out of that historical experience still apply, and I believe that's the case.

Bill Kristol ([01:18:49](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/1SZn7vHgq9BDWnDPIi7Vxse1DgTmP1IBxgl-7D0kwEx6klLkwKu2220fekXzsBjKk3kgexg3BWzNh2_iZfqhz2Iim0Y?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=4729.23)):

No, that's very sobering, but also eloquent and helpful, I think way to end really what's at stake here. So we will end with that. But yes, maybe the lessons of World War II and of the Cold War are real lessons, not myths that we just leave behind. But Aaron, thank you so much for taking all this time today. It's really been, I think, an excellent educational experience for me and I trust for all of our viewers and listeners. So thanks so much.

Aaron Friedberg ([01:19:18](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/rs2cV2Cj7GDrZ45W12wUh9zPQ0GrHNHpwtUvv2GzxXGUEA_U37nuiDUH1LmN8MbpJypCYDipND3zB1qUhp3RwEoRtaQ?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=4758.66)):

Thank you, Bill.

Bill Kristol ([01:19:19](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/ORb4ZOkdlECe_VSkk_uJ6uiehkQCENEg78GWy801Sl1NI9NeiES_7VWttGIFpWSMs5HbTxALI4wf91URgFXbi1LNNhk?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=4759.86)):

And thank you all for joining us on conversations. If you enjoyed this program, do hit follow and to let others know they'd enjoy it too. I'd appreciate it if you'd leave a five-star rating and write a review. I'm told these ratings make a big difference in the algorithm that recommends the program to others. Thanks.

PART 4 OF 4 ENDS [01:19:38]