25 Years of the US-China Commission: Taiwan, Tech Competition, and Over-the-Horizon Risks

[00:00:00] Welcome and Panel Setup

Ryan Vest: Welcome to *Horns of a Dilemma*, the podcast of the *Texas National Security Review*. Recently, the University of Texas hosted a panel called "The US-China Economic and Security Review Commission at Twenty-Five: Still Crazy After All These Years". Asia Policy Program Director Dr. Sheena Chestnut Greitens hosted the Honorable Randall Schriver, chairman of the board of the Institute for Indo-Pacific Security, and Mike Kiekan, distinguished visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution and commissioner on the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, for a conversation to discuss US-China economic issues.

On behalf of the Asia Policy Program, the Clements Center for National Security, and the Strauss Center for International Security and Law, we are pleased to present this panel on the *Horns of a Dilemma* podcast.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: Thanks for being here. Appreciate you taking the time.

[00:00:54] Commission Origins and Mandate

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: And wanted to start out by just asking you about this event title, "Still Crazy After 25 Years." And so I wanted to ask you if you could just tell us a little bit about the role of the commission, its history, and maybe also, you know, how each of you, with your careers in public service and in policymaking, got involved in the commission's work, and why you think it's important to have the roles that you do with the commission today.

So maybe Randy, I'll turn it over to you first.

Randall Schriver: Sure. Well, thank you. Thanks Dr. Greitens, and thank you for the three organizations that are helping host this. I really appreciate the opportunity. Yeah, we–I think I chose the title, but Mike is usually the–

Mike Kuiken: We did trade texts on it.

Randall Schriver: We traded texts. And he's the one who usually comes up with the creative-sounding titles. But we were founded 25 years ago. I'm going to steal some of his lines too, because he talks about the formation of the commission. It was when Congress granted permanent normal trade relations with China, which then paved the way for WTO entry for China.

And in the process of doing that, they lost the annual MFN–most favored nation trading status debate. And an annual MFN debate was where everybody aired their concerns about China, whether that be human rights, trade practices, security issues, whatever. And so channeling Mike, as he would say, when the commission was created, it's because Congress didn't trust two entities: China and the US administration.

And so we were really created to keep an eye on all things related to China. And the interesting thing is, when it was started, the real China hawks back in the day were human rights, religious freedom, and labor. The security hawks, that was sort of a little bit of a later development as the PLA grew and started behaving more assertively, et cetera.

But it was really human rights and labor. And the original China Commission was filled with people that were quite hawkish. And so if you looked at where the commission was versus the general population versus the Congress, it was extremely hawkish and therefore, some people would say even a little bit crazy.

And I would say the commission hasn't budged an inch, but over time, we've sort of become the center of gravity in a way. And somebody not long ago said, "You guys used to be really crazy. You're not really crazy anymore." And I took umbrage to that. I said, "Hey, come on, we're a little bit crazy. We're just crazy in a different way."

[00:03:28] Randy Schriver Background

Randall Schriver: And I think the way we're different is we really focus on the at-the-horizon or over-the-horizon issues. We try to do the deep dives on things that are maybe relatively obscure, but we see as emerging as quite important, quantum, biotech, and the like. And so we're really trying to pave the way for

Congress to gain literacy, understanding, and think about potential actions to help address the competition with China, in these various areas.

I spent a career working in the Indo-Pacific, a lot of it China-focused. And so when I left my last executive branch job as Assistant Secretary of Defense, I was appointed by Senator McConnell to a two-year term. We represent congressional leadership in both chambers, so 12 commissioners–6 Republicans, 6 Democrats.

Right now, Senator Thune gets three picks, Senator Schumer gets three picks, Speaker Johnson gets three picks, Jeffries gets three picks. So I was a McConnell appointee and appointed for my third term by Senator Thune, and Mike can tell you about his background. But for me, it's an excellent way to really have that broader conversation about the nature of China and the challenges it presents, and have a platform to give Congress some input on potential responses, actions, legislation, and so on.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: That's great. I have some questions about some of the cutting edge issues that you mentioned the commission's covered but I'll come to that later.

[00:05:01] Mike Kuiken Career Path

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: Mike, maybe if I could ask you about how you got involved, and what you see as the role of the Commission in American policy toward China.

Mike Kuiken: Thanks for having us, first of all. Thanks to our wonderful hosts. It was very smooth of you, Randy. I forgot to do that. Started on the Senate in July 2001. I started at a job called a staff assistant, answering phones. Thankfully, I only did that for six weeks, and got promoted to a guy named Carl Levin's legislative staff six weeks later.

I spent two and a half years there. Moved over to the Senate Armed Services Committee, which is, if anyone's familiar with, is basically the only committee in the Senate that still legislates on a regular basis, other than the Appropriations Committee. Spent twelve and a half years there, till Senator Levin retired.

Senator Reed, who's now the Democratic ranking member on the committee, kept me on. It was very nice of him. And then in 2016, I got a call from the Schumer operation, and then they asked me if I'd consider applying for the job, and I said, "Absolutely." It was one of the dream jobs in the Senate.

So I moved over to become then Democratic leader Schumer's national security advisor in January–on January 3rd, 2017. So his first day on the job was my first day on the job, and it was a fantastic opportunity. The national security slots, national security advisor slots for the four leaders are incredible jobs.

You're a gang of eight staffer, so you get all sorts of the exquisite intelligence, and you also have this ability to sort of commandeer all of the committee staffs to sort of come up with big ideas and do some really cool things. One of the things I was part of was the CHIPS and Science Act, which originally started as the Endless Frontier Act, which if folks are familiar with the Endless Frontier, it was an idea that came up at the end of the Truman administration, when a guy named Vannevar Bush basically said, "We gotta figure out what to do with all these people that have been part of the American war machine," during World War II.

He created the National Science Foundation. Most of the science and technology funding that folks think about these days is really part of that Endless Frontier, and the investments we made after World War II.

[00:06:57] Bipartisan Secret Sauce

Mike Kuiken: During my time in the Schumer operation, you're always trying to find places to get information and ideas.

And Randy touched on some of this, but one of the places you could always reach into reliably for ideas that were, to Randy's point, sort of over the horizon, or on the horizon, was the China Commission. And they're, you know one–great staff, two–a lot of good commissioners.

And then Randy didn't touch on this, but one of the things that the commission does, and it's sort of the secret sauce of the commission, is that it's a consensus document, and that means it's bipartisan and all 12 commissioners are agreeing on the outcome. That doesn't mean it's the lowest common denominator produ- product.

There's obviously a robust debate among the commissioners on a lot of the recommendations, but that is the secret sauce of the commission. It's bipartisan, it's consensus. So you can have a senator talk about the work of the China Commission in a statement on a floor speech or something like that, and you can say, "This idea has the bipartisan sort of stamp of approval of 12 commissioners that are actually appointed by the four leaders."

So it's a really sort of cool way to take ideas from these folks that work their butts off. A lot of the staff are Chinese language speakers. They've actually gone to the source materials. So the level of fidelity and confidence you can have in the information is a lot different than some of the other things you can get in Washington, and that's sort of the origin story of my sort of contact with the commission.

And when I was finally deciding to get out of government, I asked Leader Schumer if he'd appoint me to this commission in one of his slots, and he was very gracious and appointed me. That's my story. What did I miss?

Randall Schriver: I'm going to remember this secret sauce comment when you threaten consensus at the end of our annual report process this year.

Mike Kuiken: I would never do that. I just always–I want to write a dissent at some point. I mean, it's very Scalia-esque, right?

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: I was going to say, that sounds very Supreme Court-esque.

Mike Kuiken: Yeah.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: 12 commissioners.

[00:08:47] Taiwan Focus and 2027

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: So let me ask about an issue that I think is probably on a lot of people's minds, that you all have looked at intensively, that's maybe not quite an emerging issue, but an enduring one, and it's also one where Congress has played a role in sort of backstopping, or making sure that the administration didn't overreach in its outreach toward China, and that's Taiwan.

I mean, so Randy, I know you've written about this. You've talked about the origins of the Taiwan Relations Act, that it emerged out of Congressional concern over the normalization of relations with the People's Republic of China in the 1970s. But, so there's this longstanding Congressional interest, maybe independent of, or in conjunction with the administration and the executive branch, in making sure we get Taiwan policy right as a country and as an international community. And so I wanted to ask you a little bit about the commission's work on Taiwan during the time that you two have been involved,

and both kind of how you see the commission shaping conversation about Taiwan, but also where you think that's going in the next year. We're not that far from 2027, which is a year that's the 100th anniversary of the PLA, and a potential milestone that Xi Jinping has given the PLA to be ready for a Taiwan contingency.

So, you know, how have you seen Taiwan policy change when you've been at the commission, and where do you see it going?

Randall Schriver: Well, if you look at our annual report, there's basically two bins. One bin is the chapters we do every year, and another bin is filled with things that we decide in a given year we want to take a close look at.

We always do a Taiwan chapter every year. I think it was part of the original legislative mandate. So it is something that the commission has consistently looked at year, after year, after year. I think around the time I joined the commission was around the time of then Speaker Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, and we saw military activity ramp up significantly, to what is now sort of a new normal.

If you look at military activity around Taiwan, for example, flights across the center line, that used to be a very rare thing. When I was a deputy assistant secretary of state, if a PLA plane went across the center line, that was a phone call in the middle of the night to wake you up and tell you that something very provocative had happened.

Now we're getting about 60 a week of flights, and we're getting surface naval coast guard maritime militia activity all around Taiwan, including persistent presence on the eastern part of Taiwan. So it's quite significant, the military pressure and coercion. Admiral Paparo has said, "This is no longer exercising. This is rehearsal." So I think the biggest change is this intense military intimidation and pressure.

[00:11:35] Deterrence and Defense Capacity

Randall Schriver: So as we've continued to look at this, we've tried to develop recommendations that are fit for purpose and what we're seeing. And so this last year we talked about the part of the Taiwan Relations Act that is sort of less talked about usually, people talk about arms sales.

We were required by law to provide Taiwan with weapons of a defensive character for sufficient self-defense. People talk a lot about arms sales to Taiwan.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: You sound like you've said that a few times.

Randall Schriver: I've said it a few times, yeah. There's another part that said–

Mike Kuiken: It's always very interesting when we do this to see if he's saying something new.

Randall Schriver: Yeah, well, and then you'll call me out on it if I am. But there's a second part that is–we must maintain the capacity to resist force if asked to do so by national command authority. So we have to be able to defend Taiwan. Separate and apart from a political decision, would we, if Taiwan was attacked, commit forces?

But we have to have the ability to do it. We think, even before Ukraine, even before Iran, that was being tested. Now we have this significant munitions depletion due to the Iran conflict. So one of our recommendations was–Congress should ask the DOD enterprise, INDOPACOM–prove it. Show your homework.

Prove that you can defend Taiwan if asked to do so. That has been picked up by a couple of members in a legislative proposal. We'll see how that goes, but it's part of the conversation now as people are more aware–Oh, we have this law that says we've gotta be able to defend Taiwan–and that means an op plan, but that also means all the hard power–the platforms, the munitions, et cetera, et cetera.

So we're taking a look at that. We're taking a look at posture issues in the region. We had another recommendation that said INDOPACOM should be supported with posture initiatives in places like the Philippines and the Southwest Island Chain, and maybe Taiwan could contribute to that. It's, after all, it's for deterrence and potentially their defense, so why shouldn't they contribute to some of the infrastructure requirements there?

So it's a dynamic environment, and we're trying to, again, keep pace with that and not just do the inbox stuff, but beyond the inbox stuff, and think about how Congress can play its role. As you rightfully point out, from the time of the TRA, they wrote themselves into this policy process, and it's, you know, I

imagine we'll be doing the same thing next year as 2027–August 1st is a be ready by date, not necessarily a go date.

So our job is to advise the Congress to maybe be directive where necessary with the administration and with INDOPACOM, to do the things that they need to do, to uphold deterrence. Was it, did I change my–

Mike Kuiken: You did. Yeah, you had some new material there.

Randall Schriver: Really? Okay.

Mike Kuiken: Yeah, no, it was good.

[00:14:12] Taiwan Chips and Cyber Threats

Mike Kuiken: Let me leave you with a couple things.

I forgot to ask Siri how many days it is until 2027, but it's not many anymore. And so as Randy talks about the be ready by date, you know, folks need to sort of think about just how close 2027 is. Again, whether it's a be ready by date or a go date, either way, it's very soon. I recently read this book, it was by a guy named Russ Shorto.

It's called *The Island at the Center of the World*. It's a book about the colonization of Manhattan Island. New York obviously became the island at the center of the world. As we sort of look forward to 2027, and we think about just all the things that are happening with respect to Taiwan right now, think about Taiwan for a moment as the island at the center of the world.

And the reason I say that is, you know, look at the camera that's staring at Randy and I right now. Look at the timer that's on the back wall. All of those have legacy chips in them, okay? Most of those come from Taiwan. As you think about your iPhone, it doesn't have the highest end chips in it, but it has among the highest end chips.

Where do those come from? Taiwan. Now, think about your conversation with Claude this morning, ChatGPT, or whatever your preferred large language model is–if you're allowed to use them here at UT Austin, I'm not sure. That was powered by chips that come from Taiwan. Now think about Taiwan no longer being a provider of chips to the United States and the democratic world.

Where are we going to get our AI chips? Where are we going to get our iPhone chips? And where are we going to get our chips to power the lights, the camera, and all those other things? That is really the kind of thing that we're talking about, when Randy talks about all of the sorts of changes in the status quo in Taiwan.

And these are real problems that the democratic world will have to confront in the event that President Xi decides to move on Taiwan. The second thing I wanted to put in your mind is, Salt Typhoon and Volt Typhoon. These are two things that are still happening to the American infrastructure, telecommunications infrastructure more right now.

There's a concept for this in the military parlance. It's called operational preparation of the environment. President Xi has made it incredibly clear, General Secretary Xi is, Randy will always correct me, is doing operational preparation of the environment. The intent of operations like that is to make sure that you can hold the environment, that you can tend to conduct a military operation in sort of a state of paralysis, and that's essentially what those are designed to do.

And they are living right now on our telecommunications infrastructure. And so just think about that, as we get closer to 2027, as we think about chips, and we think about sort of what operational preparation of the environment looks like, and it is happening to us right now.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: So one of the things that the commission's report does is to cover some of these enduring issues and these new issues.

And I would just commend the commission's report to anybody who's interested. We assign pieces of it in my China class every year here.

Mike Kuiken: That's good. We can send hard copies.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: I have a hard copy, but if you'd like to send more, we'll take them.

Mike Kuiken: I mean, you know two people.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: Great. I'll hold you to that later.

But one of the things that's really useful is to have this really comprehensive resource on the state of play on some of these key issues, both enduring and

emerging in the US-China relationship. So just a resource for any students or anybody listening, would really commend the commission's work, because this bipartisan consensus report is hundreds of pages of information that's been exhaustively researched and–

Mike Kuiken: 20 fewer pages than last year, though.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: Okay. Congratulations.

Mike Kuiken: Right.

[00:17:41] Choosing Hearings Made in China

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: So I wanted to ask you about one of the hearings that both of you were involved in, and that was the hearing on "Made in China 2025," because I think it speaks to some of the issues that you just mentioned. And maybe using that as kind of an example of like, how do you pick the issues that the commission chooses to hold hearings on, and chooses to feature if they're not the regular staples of the report?

And why "Made in China 2025"? What did you learn? What came out of that particular hearing?

Mike Kuiken: No, no, please I'll hold the chair.

Randall Schriver: No.

Mike Kuiken: So how do we come up with hearings? It's actually kind of–so when you leave one of the congressional leaders offices, you know, you're like in a constant knife fight with the opposition essentially.

So whether you're in the House, you're, you know, Jeffries and Johnson staffs are sort of arguing over things all the time, and the Schumer-McConnell operations are obviously fighting over things all the time. So when I got to the commission, I had sort of assumed that we were all going to like, you know, get our knives out and start, like, fighting each other, and the first time we started talking about hearings for the following year, I mean, it was like puppies and unicorns.

It was amazing.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: I don't think people have used that phrase to describe DC in a while.

Mike Kuiken: I mean, it was totally bizarre. It was jarring to me. I mean, yet it was sort of refreshing at the same time, where it was somebody like, "Oh, I'd like to talk about, Made in China 2025," and somebody's like, "I'll do that with you."

And we're like going to hold hands and, like, walk out or something. It was absolutely incredible. Anyway, so Randy graciously agreed to do this "Made in China 2025" hearing, and the thing that I always try to do when you come up with hearings is, like, in Washington, we're always focused on the alligator closest to the boat.

So in Congress, everyone's talking about the thing happening today, and Randy touched on this, this sort of over-the-horizon issue. So "Made in China 2025" is not sort of a new thing, right? It's something the Chinese have worked on for a long time, over a decade, and it just happened to be that we were in 2025.

So I said, "Randy, let's do a hearing on Made in China 2025." If you look at the actual program that the Chinese came up with, it's incredible. And one of the things that we focused on a lot was the biotech space, and the reason we did that is because the Chinese have made incredible strides in biotech.

And if you look at the original "Made in China 2025" plan, I have got to come up with an acronym for that, so I don't have to keep saying it. They said, "We're going to kick butt at pharmaceuticals," was basically the bottom line of what it said. And they made incredible investments and they succeeded largely.

The ambitions of "Made in China 2025" are incredible. The byproduct or consequence of the focus on pharmaceuticals though, is that they created an infrastructure layer that allows them to advance not just in pharmaceuticals, but across the biotech space. If folks are familiar with biotech and the opportunity that it presents, think about chemicals that can be replaced with biologicals.

Think about things that you can grow that replace materials. Think about bioindustrials. Think about–and this is really far out there–there's a University of Washington professor that's working on this, growing semiconductors. But it's sort of been proven that there are ways to do these things.

So China now has this incredible infrastructure layer in biotech because of "Made in China 2025," and they are just starting to grow on it in advance. That space, and it was one of the areas of focus, we had one of my colleagues at Hoover actually testify. And I mean, he sharpened all of our minds, in terms of the urgency of this particular space.

We did, also did quantum. What else did we do, Randy?

Randall Schriver: Well, space, but that sort of also was a different hearing.

[00:21:19] Innovation Leapfrogging Lessons

Randall Schriver: Yeah, I think in terms of what we learned, I'll speak for myself. You know, we have very different systems and different historical approaches to innovation. Whereas China historically–theft of IP, and fast follower, fast adapter–but cutting-edge innovation maybe not on par with the United States.

I think what we learned through this hearing and the research is, they've leapfrogged in a lot of ways by being very intentional, and by prioritizing. And if there's something that their system does well, it's they can identify national priorities, and commit resources and energy to it. And so in certain areas, they said, "This is a national priority."

We're going to corral state-affiliated enterprises around it. We're going to do, you know, sort of the whole stack, if you will, to use a phrase from technologies. You know, we're going to put money into primary education. So we're working on this today, but we're also gonna be a leader on this well into the future.

And if you look at the chart, they didn't get all their goals, but even falling short in some areas, they made very significant progress, and really positioned themselves to be competitive going forward. Our system is different, and we–there's a role for the US government, but typically, much of the innovation is in the private sector.

It's a result of venture capital, combined with research, combined with entrepreneurs, and that's certainly served us well, and certainly you don't want to jettison that. But I think we had some recommendations that the US

government does need to step up, and really be a more important influential player when it comes to this innovation cycle, on our side of the ledger.

Is that fair?

Mike Kuiken: Yeah, absolutely.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: Yeah. There's definitely a lot of interest in that, given the tech sector in Austin and in Texas more generally. So I, you know, I wanted to maybe do a DC thing here, so apologies in advance if that's what I'm doing.

[00:23:25] Iran Conflict and China Dynamics

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: But I wanted to ask you about a couple of alligators that are close to the boat, because I think there's probably a lot of interest in them, and that is the conflict with Iran that's going on today, and the second-order effects on US-China competition, and on American foreign policy toward China.

Because there's been a lot of discussion in the news about how much of this– what the effects on China, good, bad, or otherwise will be. And then, you know, that war is now playing out in the sort of run-up to President Trump's visit to China, which got postponed when the conflict first started, and is now scheduled to happen shortly.

So I wondered if you could talk a little bit about how you see those two things– the current regional, global conflict–and how that plays into US-China dynamics today, particularly with the president's visit. If you were to give him advice, what would you–you two have advised senior national policymakers on how to form and execute China policy.

What would you say at this moment about what's going on, and how to navigate it?

Mike Kuiken: Go ahead, Randy. I mean, he's the Republican, so I'd probably get kicked out of the Oval Office.

Randall Schriver: Well, even prior to the conflict, a year ago we did a hearing on the Middle East–China activity in the Middle East.

Mike Kuiken: Axis of Autocracy.

Randall Schriver: That was, yeah, that was last year. But we did a whole Middle East thing the year before. Anyway, and it positioned us to really do the deep dive on the China-Iran relationship, which is interesting. I mean, China was buying about 90% of Iranian oil. Clearly sanctionable, but they were also going to lengths with–carve out companies with ship-to-ship transfers, all kinds of things to avoid the outward appearance of sanctionable activities.

But 90%. That's pretty significant. Now, for China, Iran's oil represents about 12% to 14% of their oil, so not as important to China, as China is to Iran, but not insignificant. I think the most honest answer is too soon to tell, but I think if you kind of disaggregate and look at this in pieces, I think there's a shock-and-awe effect.

I mean, China sees time and again that the US military is pretty damn good at certain things and, you know, whether it's Venezuela, a snatch operation that, you know, the Venezuelans really didn't have any defense against, including, you know, some of the Chinese systems that they had acquired, didn't seem to do much to help prevent that operation.

And now the military operation in Iran being very devastating, and very effective, and very lethal. So I think there's a bit of a shock-and-awe effect, but the countervailing effect also might be, well, they're seeing the US committed elsewhere. They're seeing the US pull certain platforms out of the Indo-Pacific to help with the effort in the Middle East.

They're seeing munitions depletion. So I think they're sort of calculating all this and trying to understand, you know, the net sort of effect on the US capabilities in the Indo-Pacific, that they care more directly about. But I think it probably gives them some pause on the military side.

On the sort of geopolitical and greater competition side, I do think they're seeing us bogged down without a clear end state that's easily achieved. I mean, we, you know, we may get something out of negotiations. But Iran gets a vote, and so far this has been dragged out, and it appears there's not a good exit strategy other than negotiating something that, you know, if the President tires of this, and wants out, and wants out well in advance of the midterms, so that whatever happens to oil prices is on the favorable trajectory come November, then we may end up with a worse deal than, you know, even the Obama deal that the President pulled out of.

I mean, we've got to understand what's going to happen to the highly enriched uranium and what the plan is going forward, because if we don't do that, we're going to be in a worse position, not a better position than before this started. So I think the Chinese are trying to understand all that, and calculate that.

The interesting wrinkle now, I think is, and we've documented this in the commission's work, but more and more are coming forward about how much material support China's actually giving Iran. And even the president, he doesn't tweet, he truth socials–so he truth socialed that–

He truth socialed that a ship we boarded had a bunch of Chinese equipment bound for Iran, which he described as–not a very nice thing to do. I have stronger words for that, with the Chinese providing military means for the Iranians to kill American service members. But I would think that would be a complicating factor regarding their upcoming discussions.

Now, the President is very focused on trade and economic issues. The only work that's being done that resembles interagency preparation is in the trade and economic space. He's got a trade truce that goes back to Busan, South Korea, when he met Xi Jinping. They want that framework to be something more permanent and more durable and, from the President's perspective, more favorable to the United States.

I'm sure the Chinese will bring up Taiwan. I'm sure they'll bring up other issues they care about. But if the president has his way, this will be about trade and economics, and we'll have a more durable framework, and then all the other stuff can sort of be managed.

[00:29:08] Military Lessons and Tech Fusion

Mike Kuiken: I have a couple observations.

The first I would say is no matter how you feel about the JCPOA, once President Trump left it, this sort of outcome of some sort of conflict, armed conflict with Iran, I feel like was a certainty. The other thing I would say is there's this great *Economist* cover, which was, you know, had President Xi and, or General Secretary Xi and, President Trump, and it was like, "Don't do anything when your enemy is making a mistake." I thought it was a fantastic cover. And then I can't remember who told me this, but it was a fantastic line,

which is: “The one thing China's learning from everything going on in the world right now is what a quagmire looks like.”

Whether it's Ukraine or whether it's the situation in Iran, as they look towards Taiwan in 2027 and beyond, they know what they don't want it to look like. And so from a planning perspective, I'm sure that the PLA is doing all kinds of work to sort of rethink, or just refresh, how they look at a potential Taiwan scenario.

And Randy is absolutely right. One of the things we've seen in Iran is the fusing of technology and traditional military operations in a way that, I mean, has always happened on sort of an iterative basis, but has really accelerated with the ability of the Pentagon to deploy some of the advanced language models that we have right now.

And the outcome has seen the pace of operations really accelerate, which is incredible. So the Chinese are absolutely watching that and learning from that. And so that is something that, you know, we're going to have to want to sort of remember that they're learning from. And one of the things I did early in my time on the Armed Services Committee is I worked on the–what was then called the Joint IED Defeat Organization.

These are the improvised explosive devices that were killing all kinds of American service members. And one of the things you saw as you worked this account was one–just how much the Pentagon really was, already back then, bringing technology to bear on all kinds of problems, change detection, ways to sort of leverage machine learning, to get ahead of the adversary.

But the other thing you really sort of sharpens your mind on is, this idea of measure-countermeasure cycles in warfare. And so, I don't know, and we don't know what this is going to look like as we turn towards, or turn back towards the Indo-Pacific, but that measure-countermeasure cycle is going to be very interesting to watch the Chinese sort of measure up their own forces, and how they might respond.

So that's sort of how I think about this. Mm-hmm. Just moving forward, I think Randy's assessment is absolutely right as well.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: That's really interesting, if fairly sobering. But thank you.

[00:31:38] Taking China Policy Public

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: Maybe before we open it up, I have kind of one final question, which is, you know, we really appreciate the two of you being here.

I don't know that I recall the chair and the co-chair doing the kind of public outreach that the two of you have done. I know you made a trip to California and shared some of the commission's findings and did some outreach there, and you're here in Texas. Can you talk a little bit about, you know, how you think about engaging the public in American China policy, and how that shapes the way you approach the chair and the co-chair position?

Randall Schriver: He just keeps pestering me to travel and do these things, and I, you know–

Mike Kuiken: Call him my work wife sometimes.

Randall Schriver: It's interesting. The commission clearly has a mandate to inform Congress, recommend things to Congress. They're our client. But more and more, I think we understand that the challenge is a broader one, and that there are very fundamental foundational things that are missing, which is literacy on some of these really important key issues.

And, you know, our role in getting out and doing things across the country, I think, is still in support of Congress. Who elects Congress? The people. So having a conversation that's more accessible, that's broader and more diverse geographically, our hope is not just to elevate the work of the commission, although we're very proud of the work the commission does, very proud of the product, and happy to have as many people know about it as possible, but it's really still ultimately in service of the Congress to have potentially a better-informed public.

And, you know, some of these issues are, you know, biotech, quantum, you know, semiconductors–very technical, very niche kind of issues, but they're critical. And so if we can help raise the literacy just a little bit and have a public that's better informed when they vote, when they communicate with their members, when they bring questions and concerns to their members, then, you know, it's mission accomplished.

[00:33:44] Bipartisan Work and Civility

Randall Schriver: I also think, you know, people might have a particular view of Washington right now, and if that view is informed by certain television stations and certain media outlets, you might think Republicans and Democrats can barely stand to be in the same room with one another, let alone work with one another.

And as Mike said earlier, one of the things that I'm most proud of, and I think I can speak for fellow commissioners, is the bipartisan nature of our work, and so getting out and showing that, you know, we can have a polite conversation and– Have we disagreed yet?–I mean, there's plenty of stuff we can–

Mike Kuiken: Not, not publicly here today.

Randall Schriver: Earlier over breakfast. Yeah. But, you know, I think if we can just play a small role in modeling that–that's a benefit too.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: Anything to add?

Mike Kuiken: We're road testing this. We've talked about this back and forth, but we've never actually sort of shared views here, so it was good to hear Randy say that.

I would add a couple things. One–I agree–I'm sorry, I don't disagree. A couple things.

[00:34:43] Why Get Out of Washington

Mike Kuiken: One–I was in Washington a long time. Randy was, too. I mean, the incentive structure of think tanks in Washington to me is a little skewed, and so I feel like we need to get out of Washington, first of all.

One of the coolest things I did when I was with Leader Schumer and on the Armed Services Committee staff was travel the world or travel the country, whether it was universities, businesses, research and development centers, and everything like that. There's a lot of good ideas outside of Washington. I don't know if you know this.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: We think there are a few in Texas.

Mike Kuiken: Yeah. I mean this is my first time, or second time at UT Austin, but you're absolutely right. Like Georgia Tech is one of these places where I

always wanted to visit. I still haven't gone. But every time these folks in Georgia Tech would come up and see me and sit down and brief me on something, I was like, "Wowzas! We gotta get down to Georgia Tech." So there's a lot of good ideas outside of Washington, and like one of the things Randy and I sort of agreed on is we gotta, you know, sort of meet people where they are, instead of dragging everyone to come and see us. And so that's one of the reasons we're doing these sorts of events.

And then the other thing is, that in doing the education work that Randy talked about, the literacy work and the education work, on the things that are being talked about in Washington, and sometimes being talked about in a way in Washington that's partially informed, and not fully informed.

And so that's something that I think the commission does a good job of bringing to bear, in a way that doesn't have the sort of complicated incentive structure that some of the think tanks in Washington have, which I affectionately refer to as the think tank industrial complex. And so, getting outside of Washington and doing that work, I think is really important.

Randall Schriver: Sounds like I need to tell my wife I'm going to Atlanta next.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: Well, US-China policy is often described as one of the few areas where there is a larger amount of bipartisan consensus, and I think some of that probably is due to the foundational work that the commission has done to debate these issues in an informed and civil way, and come up with these detailed bipartisan consensus documents that form a lot of the foundation of policy.

So I mean, you know, appreciate your work on the commission and toward that end, but also, you know, it's really important to a lot of the [people] at UT to be able to disagree and debate policy issues in a reasoned and civil way, and to provide a way of educating the public, not just students, but, you know, the citizens of Texas more broadly, about some of these critical national security issues.

So, you know, we appreciate the chance to have both of you here today.

Mike Kuiken: Do you mind if I do one more thing?

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: Yeah, go for it.

Mike Kuiken: Randy touched on one thing that I really think is important which is modeling. The people that used to have the job that I had, when I was in the Senate, are like Mark Esper, Dennis McDonough, Steve Biegun, Rich Verma.

There's more, but like these are all people that for a long time had to argue over things, and just modeling like good behavior is something that sometimes doesn't get enough sort of attention in Washington. But like, you know, Randy and I do disagree on plenty of things but, you know, we can do that in a way that's sort of respectful, and enjoy each other's company at the same time.

And so I really just sort of want to echo that one point that Randy made. I think it is a valuable sort of thing to see, and to honestly do as well.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: Yeah. It's good to have models for that, whether you're, you know, kids in kindergarten or adults in Washington, DC.

Not making comparisons.

[00:38:08] Wrap Up and Credits

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: With apologies, I'm going to have to call it here because we need to wrap up.

But please, you know, again, thank you so much for coming and joining us today. We have a long list of questions we didn't get to, and again, my apologies, so if you all will please join me in thanking the co-chair and chair for their visit.

Ryan Vest: Thanks for joining us on *Horns of a Dilemma*. Our guests today have been Randall Schriver and Mike Kiken discussing the "US-China Economic and Security Review Commission at 25: Still Crazy After All These Years."

If you enjoyed this episode, be sure to subscribe and leave a review wherever you listen. You can find more information about this panel on the Clements Center or the Strauss Center websites. Today's episode was produced by *TNSR* Digital and Technical manager Jordan Morning, and made possible by *The University of Texas System.*

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