

## Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes

### **QI Panel:**

#### Trump Returns to Beijing: A New Opening for US–China Relations?

May 11th 2026

10:00 - 11:00 AM ET

#### **Kelley Vlahos 0:42**

Good morning. My name is Kelley Vlahos, and I am the editor in chief of responsible statecraft, the online magazine of the Quincy Institute, which is hosting this important panel today. If you do not know much about Quincy, it is an action tank dedicated to refocusing US foreign policy towards diplomacy and project positive engagement with the world and away from coercion and military solutions to Geopolitical Problems.

In that vein, we have a topic today that gets right to the thrust of Quincy's mission this week's planned summit between American President Donald Trump and China's President Xi Jinping. To say there is a lot on the line is an absolute understatement. The US Israeli war launched against Iran on February 28 has not gone as planned. What was supposed to be a swift destruction of the regime and its nuclear military capabilities has become a standoff over the Hormuz Strait, where 20% of the world's oil and natural gas travels, mostly to Asian countries. There are an estimated 800 to 1500 commercial vessels, including oil and gas tankers, bulk carriers and container ships, still stranded in the strait, which affect energy prices, access to energy supply chain issues that will likely affect the world economy for months, if not years, depending on this war ends, China has been watching, in some cases quietly as Trump has demanded help from allies and partners in the region and in Asia, including China, to try to force open the strait to no avail.

China, meanwhile, imports about 15% of its crude oil from Iran, and China accounts for, like, 80% of Iran's oil exports. This drew Trump's ire last week, and he then tried to slap sanction sanctions on Chinese oil refineries, and China reacted by telling refineries not to comply. Meanwhile, China holds cards as the US faces supply chain blockages, particularly for weapon systems, now in shortage, according to Fortune Magazine, China supplies refines and has under license a host of critical minerals that weapon systems like the Patriot missile interceptors, the F 30 5j Sam and Tomahawk cruise missiles heavily depend on. Even before the war, China US relations already had a number of tension points, tariffs, export controls, fentanyl and most importantly, Taiwan topped the list. This isn't a Trump issue. These tensions are long standing, whether this week we'll see any breakthroughs, is not a good bet.

But we will ask our esteemed panelists today in this meeting, at this time important, regardless of outcomes, and if there is a chance to make incremental steps in a more positive direction, where on the map of these issues would they likely happen. So let me introduce our panelists first, and we'll get right into the conversation. We have a Q and A so if you're on board to ask

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

questions, please put them in there, and we'll try to get to them by the end of the hour. Jake Werner is the director of our East Asia program at the Quincy Institute. Prior to joining Quincy, Jake was a postdoctoral global China research fellow at the Boston University Global Development Policy Center, a Harper Schmidt fellow at the University of Chicago, a Fulbright scholar at the National Xiangtan University in Taiwan, and a full brought Fulbright Hays Fellow at the East Asia Normal University in Shanghai. Michael Swaine is a senior research fellow at the Quincy Institute's East Asia program. Previously, he was at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, where he worked for nearly 20 years as a senior fellow specializing, specializing in Chinese defense and foreign policy US, China relations and East Asian international relations. Before that, Swaine served as a senior policy analyst at the RAND Corporation. Has authored and edited more than a dozen books and monographs, including a restraint approach to US China relations, reversing the slide towards crisis and. Conflict with Quincy co founder Andrew Bacevich, and last but not least, Denis Simon is a senior research fellow at the Quincy Institute's East Asia program focusing on global science and technology issues and US China science and technology relations. He also holds a senior faculty appointment at the Schwarzman college at Tsinghua University. Previously, he has served as executive director of the Center for Innovation Policy at Duke School of Law, and has served as professor of practice for China Business and Technology at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business and executive vice chancellor at Duke Kunshan University in China.

Thanks to the three of you for joining us. This makes Quincy really proud to have all three of you on board and you know in attendance to talk about this very important and much anticipated meeting between Xi Jinping and Trump this week, which I understand begins on Wednesday, and he'll be going through Friday with a number of meetings, a state dinner. So anything can happen, and I appreciate you all three being here. So Jake, let me start with you. You were recently in Beijing and Shanghai meeting with officials, academics, government connected researchers on questions of foreign policy and US relations. What were you hearing about from the Chinese side on Trump's visit and the US relationship more broadly?

### **Jake Werner 6:44**

Yeah, well, I think, well, thanks Kelley for moderating for us today. You're absolutely right. This is very important meeting in the world's most important bilateral relationship. And just as you say, anything can happen. And I think what I was hearing from the Chinese side is with Trump. Anything can happen. They're kind of exhausted by that. There has been very little preparation that's been put into the upcoming summit between President Xi and President Trump. It's not clear on the Chinese side what the United States wants exactly. There have been a couple of issues, and I'm sure we'll, we'll go into more detail in these but a number of issues around the tariff war from last year that almost severed the relationship between the United States and China overnight and then was brought back down and eventually ended up in a trade truce after Xi and Trump met in Busan, South Korea towards the end of last year.

So there's questions about advancing that, putting the truce on a more solid foundation, responding to some of the complaints on both trade and investment that the United States has

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

raised. There is, of course, as you mentioned, the issue of Iran. There is, of course, the issue of Taiwan. And this is something that I heard emphasized on the Chinese side, that the reports out of the Busan meeting between Trump and xi were that Taiwan was not raised. And if it was, it must have been quite a minor point in those discussions. And subsequent to that, there was a sale of us, sale large sale of weapons to Taiwan that the Chinese side felt sort of burned by and and now regrets that they did not raise Taiwan more clearly at that at the Busan meeting. So they're determined to raise the Taiwan issue. They are trying to figure out, I think.

But overall, the most important thing I heard is just that the Chinese side is open to making agreements with the US side. There's the sense that on the Chinese side, that the relationship does not have to be in the gutter, it does not have to be a conflictual relationship. They're searching around for ways to put it back on a solid foundation. They're searching around for ways, even just to routinize the discussions on the two sides, which there used to be a very robust scaffold of diplomatic contacts between the two sides in the George W Bush and Obama administration, the first Trump administration, dismantled that the Biden administration barely revived it. And even that has been neglected under Trump. There's just been these high level, a handful of high level meetings.

So there's a desire to kind of get talks back on track. So the two sides can, can start to formulate agreements that then might rise to the level of leaders to sign off on. But there needs to be a lot of detailed preparation for that. So there's a hope that that might be put in place, but more broadly, just a desire to stabilize the relationship. They're worried about the United States, sort of failing around. Hitting China. The United States has been targeting Chinese interests in third countries in an exclusionary fashion. Of course, the trade war almost went off the rails last year, so there's a desire not to return to something like that. And then, of course, there are these, the US interventions in Venice. Kelley and Iran that are of concern to China, that will will be discussed, but, but it's really the bilateral relationship, rather than what the United States is doing elsewhere in the world, that the Chinese leadership is most concerned about, and is determined to try to find a way to stabilize.

### **Kelley Vlahos 10:17**

You know, in talks that you've given internally to the rest of us, Quincy folk, about typical US China meetings, you have said repeatedly that, particularly the Chinese, like to do a lot of preparation. They don't want to be surprised before walking into these major top level summits. Do you get a sense that there was a lot of preparation for this meeting, or is this one of those things where nobody really knew that it was going to come off until now? I mean, what is your sense of where this falls in the line of normal summit preparation in the in typical U.S.-Chinese relations?

### **Jake Werner 11:03**

Yeah. Well, I think it's pretty normal for Trump to not have preparations, but compared to other presidents, this is highly abnormal. In the past, both sides would have had multiple rounds of

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

lower level meetings. They would have formulated very clear deliverables that the two leaders could announce, to prove that they're making progress in relationship, they would have worked on a joint statement. So there would have been all of this groundwork that was laid. And as far as we can tell, and reporting supports this, there hasn't been much of any of that kind of groundwork there were. So Scott Besant, the Treasury secretary is has, sort of is in charge of this portfolio. He did have a meeting with his counterpart on the Chinese side, Kelley Fung, but, but again, the sort of preparatory work to generate proposals that the two sides could sign on to.

That's not there, but, but at the same time, this is how Trump does business. I think the Chinese side is sort of sort of inured to this. Now, they're willing to follow Trump's lead if they think they can get to that point of stabilization. And it may be that this meeting could sign off on the kind of regularization of diplomatic exchanges that would allow the next meeting, and there's been discussion of up to four meetings between Trump and Xi Jinping this year. So there's, there is a lot of space, potentially, to work these agreements out and then have the leaders sign up, if we can get that routine eyes contacts in place.

### **Kelley Vlahos 12:36**

Yeah, Michael, everybody's wondering about the role that the Iran war is going to play in these meetings. China's position on the war has been a matter of widely diverging views in the US, some say the US is seriously damaging China's credibility by showing it can't stand up for an ally. Others say Iran is not a major priority for China. Then there's Trump, who has repeatedly demanded that China help out, slapped sanctions on the oil refineries, after which China said no and told his refineries not to comply. Can you talk a little bit how you expect the Iran ward to affect these meetings this week?

### **Michael Swaine 13:35**

Sure. Thanks. Kelley, well, let me, let me just say a word first about how China looks at the Iran war, I think it's its views on this are shaped, really, by a series of different priorities that are somewhat overlapping. They certainly want to preserve energy security to the extent they can. They want to avoid a wider regional conflict. They want to, I think, in some ways, discourage us strategic gains through the Iran war. And they want to protect China's image as a stabilizing power rather than a military block participant. So I think they see the Iran war as both a kind of danger and opportunity. The obvious danger is regarding energy flows and a possible larger conflict in the Middle East, but the opportunity is to show that the US, not China, is a volatile, unlawful, increasingly predatory nation, in contrast to China's stance as a self proclaimed, peace oriented, restraint based, law abiding nation.

So that contrast is, I think, what China is interested in highlighting, but its stance towards the war has been very cautious and very pragmatic. Its relationship with Iran is really very pragmatic. Dramatic, not ideological. It is not like the dominant relationship, bar none in the Middle East. China has a lot of relationships with other countries in the Middle East, and wants to preserve good relations with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, etc. So I think what we're

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

going to see though, in the summit is that Trump is probably going to try to push China on purchases of the Chinese purchases of Iranian oil, for example, on sanctions evasion through Chinese refineries and shipping networks, alleged Chinese technological or intelligence support for Iran and all of that. And I think Xi is likely going to counter pressure, say that US military actions really are destabilizing energy markets, that that there are sanctions on Chinese firms that he doesn't think are justified, that there's a danger of us escalation in all of this, etc. So I don't think China is going to respond to to any real strong pressure from Trump to squeeze them on Iran in a way that appears to subordinate China to American demands. He's not going to make deals like that. He doesn't want to be seen as being under pressure from the United States and from a US led bloc. That would lead to the impression that China is really subordinate to the United States in dealing with this problem, whereas China actually feels like it's in a pretty strong position. So I think, you know, Trump's going to try to pressure Xi Jinping on the Iran issue, but I don't think he's going to get much in response.

### **Kelley Vlahos 16:49**

You know, at the beginning of the war, I got the sense that Xi Jinping would likely not want to meet with Trump because it might look like he was endorsing what was happening in the Gulf and Iran, the US, Israeli war on Iran. I'm not sure if that's still a consideration, you know, two months in to this, but I mean, if I, if I was a big card player, I would say that possibly it looks like China holds most of the cards here, whereas if Trump was clearly winning the war, if he had gotten all he wanted within the first few weeks, had ably destroyed the adversary, in This case, Iran, he would be going to this meeting with a lot more confidence. Can you talk about a sort of political dynamic and the optics of him coming to Beijing this week after two months and a very indecisive war, to put it lightly, in in the Gulf right now?

### **Michael Swaine 18:02**

Well, yeah, I think actually that that China is in a stronger position in general in this summer, that in this summit, that it was in the past, precisely because of the kinds of failures that Trump has encountered in the Iran war and in the inability of Trump to really pressure Beijing in a major way on the trade front, Trump has encountered all kinds of problems. In that regard, his tariffs have been rejected by the Supreme Court, and China has rejected efforts to try to sanction Chinese companies and ordered them to resist efforts by the United States to do this. And so I you know, and Trump has encountered all these problems in the Iran war, so he's not going to have a whole lot of leverage in this summit, in my opinion. But I do think the Chinese, in reference to your first observation, I do think the Chinese want this summit very much, and that the Iran war is not going to derail it. I mean, the first possible meeting was postponed by Trump because of the deeper involvement in the Iran war at the time when they were shooting at each other in a major way. Now the Chinese, I think, can not put the Iran war aside, but can definitely focus on the larger issues that they want to address with Trump in the bilateral relationship. As Jake said, that is their primary importance and primary interest in dealing with Trump is to try to stabilize the overall relationship, and they think that they can do that with Trump right now, because Trump certainly doesn't want to have a continuing downward spiral or greater tensions

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

in the sino us relationship while he's dealing with the mess that he's created created in the Middle East.

### **Kelley Vlahos 20:01**

Right, okay, we'll get we'll probably get to a little more of that later, but I wanted to talk to Dennis about AI, because AI is absolutely one of the issues that I have been reading. Is going to be top of mind during this meeting. Many voices in the United States, including the administration, say that winning the AI race against China is crucial to national security and economic prosperity. Meanwhile, China has encouraged the US China cooperation to limit the dangers of AI, and Treasury Secretary Besant has said that AI will be on the agenda when they meet. Is there an AI race going on? Could the US and China actually be working together on this? Or is it impossible, considering the scare mongering and other policy driven initiatives in Washington that are very much about the adversarial context of AI today?

### **Denis Simon 21:13**

That's a great that's a great question. I, as you know, I'm here in Beijing, and I can tell you, over the last two to three months been no less, at the four major workshops, conferences in which AI was the central focus. And it's very clear on the Chinese side that there is a strong interest in trying to find some sort of mechanism by which the United States and China can work together in order to manage what's going to happen with AI? I don't think there's much chance that we will have co development of the technology, but I think that the focus of this is really on trying to manage the utilization and the impacts so that we don't have a kind of Dr Frankenstein outcome in which some terrible catastrophe happens. And I've even heard some Chinese say, you know, we may need a small problem in order to facilitate the coming together of these two countries.

But don't forget, AI is not just a US China issue. There's lots of talk these days about a third leg to the stool, that being in the Middle East, and that the Middle Eastern countries, because they have huge power supplies and they have a whole series of new universities and an influx of talent, that this could be much more of a global issue. And also, don't forget, we're looking at perhaps the proliferation of AI technology, because the Chinese have shown us that there's a way to get at this technology without having to invest billions and billions of dollars. So I mean, the idea of a race probably is a mistaken notion for a number of reasons. When I think of a race, I think of the Boston Marathon, 26.2 miles, in which basically there's a fixed finish line, and everyone knows there's a clear winner, whoever gets to that finish line.

But right now, for AI, we have its development. We have no agreed endpoint. The rules and the metrics are constantly evolving all the time. And as I mentioned, there are multiple actors involved, not just two competitors, all of these, of whom are going to shape the shape the outcome. So we look at the differences between China the United States. They're clearly, in many ways, playing two different games. The US is very much interested in the frontier areas of AI and pushing to define that cutting edge. The Chinese are much more interested in application and implementation and diffusion of that technology as quickly as possible. So their emphasis is

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

very different, and in many ways, the emphasis is complementary. So if we look at this as a game changing technology for the 21st Century, it is indeed reasonable, at least it's not, you know, pie in the sky that the two countries could decide it's in their mutual interest to try to begin speaking about a regime of some sort. I know the Chinese have indicated they would like to work through the United Nations.

And there was a recently, a hearing at the US Congress, led by Senator Bernie Sanders, in which two Chinese friends were there and their their favorite pathway was going through the UN, which obviously in the United States, that's not a good starting point, given the suspicions about the UN. But I think that if President Xi and President Trump can sit down and have a reasonable conversation about this, I think it's in the interest of both countries to come to some kind of agreement. And I would say that, you know, we have track two talks going on already about this, it would be at least I think lots of people in. The scientific communities in both countries would be pleased to see this discussion move to a higher level.

### **Kelley Vlahos 25:07**

When you say in agreement, is there some sort of starting point that both sides could walk away with, or away from this meeting with, in terms of like signaling to the world, both the United States and China that they are willing to work together is there is, what would you like to see them actually agree to, or at least signal when leaving this meeting, where, where, where AI is and right?

### **Denis Simon 25:34**

I think the big area, obviously our military applications there is a huge concern, I think, not just in China, but elsewhere, as we're including in the United States, about some nefarious use of these technologies for, you know, for, I just use this word, evil purposes. I think that we've got to get get beyond that. So I think it's very plausible to think that the two sides might try to start a process. And I think, as Michael and Jacob indicated, this meeting is about process. A lot of it's about process getting more comfortable with one another to be able to sit down, and whether it's trade or tariffs or technology, we can sit down together and begin to come up with some reasonable pathway to discuss some of these very thorny issues, because otherwise they're going to fester. And I think that that is, at least, from what I'm hearing here in Beijing, that would be not very satisfactory to the Chinese side. So I think the US has a real opportunity here to work out something that would be beneficial to both countries.

### **Kelley Vlahos 26:45**

You know, Jake, Denis brings up a great point about Washington and you know, here at Quincy, we are calling for rational, reasonable, realist foreign policy towards China, not seeing China as an adversary, but a potential partner to solve the world's problems. But as we know, in Washington, there's a much different vibe, and I know that you and Michael and Dennis are often following what people are saying here. They're criticizing Trump for not being aggressive

## Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes

enough with China. And Congress is constantly introducing bills about cutting off China from whether it be export controls are not, you know, purchasing land here in the United States for factories and business. Can you talk a little bit about the pressure that's not only on Trump, from international pressure to when he goes into this meeting, but the pressures that he's feeling here in Washington? Can you know? Can you update us? Because we have a war going on in the Persian Gulf, but as far as Congress is concerned, the real enemy is China.

### **Jake Werner 28:12**

Yeah, yeah. Very interesting. The the the United States turned quite abruptly against China. There was this sort of like building sense of frustration and pressure in the relationship over the course of the 2010s but in the middle of Trump's first term, 2018 2019 under cover of the trade war. But I think something that is different than the trade war. The foreign policy establishment really moved very rapidly to the conclusion that actually China is our primary rival. We need to focus our entire strategy on restricting China's power and preventing it from gaining influence and status in the global system. And that has that set us on a course for great power conflict. Just there's no question if the United States and China can't find a way to imagine them themselves, successfully seeking their national interest in the same world, then that forces us into a zero sum framework that leads us straight into conflict. And if you read there's a resolution that Senators Coons and rickets came out with last week, week ago or so, that more or less was meant to to preemptively signal to Trump that he better not do anything constructive with Beijing when he's there.

So if you read the text of this, of this resolution, it basically says China is our biggest enemy. China threatens the United States across the whole range of issues, the security, economic, technology, cultural, democracy, all of these issues is China is the primary threat to the United States, and we need to be. We need to be focusing our efforts on blocking them, countering them, sabotaging them, undermining them. So it's a very it's a very kind. Confrontational, adversarial approach to the relationship. To me this, this is quite strange. I think the United States and China actually share a range of very deep interests. They're the two most important powers in the world, and they gain their power from the way that the global system works.

So they have a real interest in maintaining stability in the global economy and security issues. This is a matter of economic growth, but it's also just a matter of political stability. We don't want to see huge population movements. We don't want to see pandemics running out of control like but all of this is is kind of notional. And on the one hand, you have Trump who, for example, doesn't believe in climate change. I think one of the core shared interests United States have in control line. On the other hand, you have the foreign policy establishment that thinks that actually anything that China wants is probably bad for the United States, so we better not work together on and we're kind of, we're kind of stuck in this the So, as I said earlier, Trump is, you know, the way that Trump prepares for his summits is unusual compared to other presidents, but, and I think that's a real problem for the relationship.

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

On the other hand, Trump also just has no time for this kind of conventional wisdom that comes out of the foreign policy establishment. I think that does give us kind of an opening. So it is a problem because I think Trump is not able to explore the full range of potential shared interests that we have with China, but there are ideas like ways that the United States and China could reconnect economically in a way that would work for both countries. And so, for example, there has been a proposal that the United States find ways to welcome more Chinese investment in the United States, and this could be particularly powerful in some sectors, say, battery technology, robotics, electric vehicles. These are places that American companies have fallen behind Chinese companies.

And if the United States were to put conditions on China bringing investment in these sectors that include localization of supply chains, wage and benefit standards for the workers, technology transfer that would help strengthen American companies. That's something that would work for both sides, and this would actually just mimic, in a lot of ways, the methods that China used to develop when it welcomed foreign investment in but placed conditions on that investment so that it benefited China. And it wasn't just a matter of exploiting local labor and then leaving once, once they started making some demands on them. So this is, I think, a very promising idea that Trump himself has expressed some interest in. And the you know, many of the sort of mainstream voices say this is unacceptable. This is like a plot by China. They're going to de industrialize us. They're going to, you know, if they want to do it, then it must be bad.

I think this is, this is quite misguided. We seem to have lost a sense of confidence in the United States. We're so insecure in ourselves that we can't imagine coming up with ways to mitigate so there are real national security risks with contacts with China, but in the past, we've mitigated them and been comfortable with them, and today, in Europe, in Japan and South Korea, they're looking people are looking into ways to mitigate those risks so they don't have to cut off contact with China. They can maintain access to advances on the Chinese side, technologically, or the competition that Chinese companies bring that is healthy for local businesses. So this is, this is a path that I think we really need to put more emphasis on and more energy into exploring, and not just dismiss it out of hand because of this sort of conventional wisdom that that that got into place without a very serious critical analysis.

### **Kelley Vlahos 33:42**

I totally agree Jake and I think the biggest challenge is the messaging challenge. I came across an article last week by Oren Cass, basically titled, is Trump about to invite the biggest predator into the world, or invite the biggest predator in the world to the United States. And he talks specifically about potential Chinese investment in America. And it seems to me that when you talk about some of the restrictions, the limitations, the agreements that would create jobs and protect middle class workers if these factories did come in. That has to be emphasized, because you have a whole messaging campaign out there that basically holds China as a predator that will come in, establish factories, bring in their own workers, not pay them a living wage, you know, skirt, you know, OSHA, whatever, and put Americans out of work?

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

### **Jake Werner 34:50**

Yeah, this is just, this is so common and and we it should be emphasized that there are these dangers. Chinese companies cannot be trusted to treat their workers well or to help benefit local businesses. But you know, that's true of any companies. That's true of American companies too. American companies have gone to other countries and exploited the labor and then left when they started asking for higher wages. It's it's not a question of the nationality of the companies. It's a question of whether you're imposing some regulation on them to make sure that investment works for the community that is being invested in, as well as the businesses that are doing the investing. And now there are, as I mentioned, there are some, there are some over and above that there are national security considerations that need to be taken into account. But it seems like people have just thrown out, thrown out that that question from consideration, it's like, well, it's China. We already know that China is the opposite of America, and our interests are fundamentally incompatible, and so there's no way that we can consider increasing our connectedness or benefiting from China. It's just ruled out by definition. And this, to me, does not do justice. I don't think most China experts share this view, even though it's kind of the consensus in the US foreign policy establishment. Certainly the the American people as a whole do not share this view.

And as the as the demonization of China within Washington has quieted down simply from from distractedness, rather than, I think, the changing view of China. But as it has quieted down, public opinion has also become less hostile to China, and it was never. There was always a lot of popular concern about the possibility of conflict between the two countries. And I think we need to recognize this is not costless if we are going to define the second most powerful country in the world as incompatible with with a successful future of the United States, then we are on the path to conflict. And we have to recognize that, instead of treating that as as a big joke or as like, as something that's useful politically, or something like, I have to guard myself against my primary opponent. So I better say something tough on China. This is this is not just unserious. This is dangerous.

### **Kelley Vlahos 37:01**

Well, speaking of danger, Michael, let's shift to Taiwan. You wrote a piece today for a responsible statecraft talking about the role that Taiwan will play in this upcoming summit. You know, Jake mentioned at the top of the hour that Taiwan will invariably be one of the top issues. Some people are fearful that Trump is going to make concessions on Taiwan and in return for some gains on trade or critical minerals or fentanyl. Can you talk about where the US stands on on Taiwan today, whether that has been affected by recent developments in the war in the Gulf, and whether this meeting like, what do you expect to happen at this meeting to address some of those dynamics?

### **Michael Swaine 38:02**

## Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes

Sure. Thanks. Well, in terms of the larger situation regarding Taiwan, we're on a bad course, and I don't think this summit is going to change that in any really significant and lasting manner. I mean, Beijing and Washington and Taiwan as well, are all engaged in activities that are increasing the likelihood of a future confrontation and possibly a crisis or even a conflict. And this is really expressed most clearly in the fact that the original understanding between Beijing and Washington regarding Taiwan is being eroded, has been eroded and continues to be eroded. And that was the exchange really, essentially in effect, of the US one China policy, as it was defined at the time, and the Chinese assertion of a preference for the peaceful unification of China and Taiwan, without completely abandoning the possibility of a use of force. Now what's happened is that the United States has undermined its one China policy in a variety of different ways.

And, you know, I won't go into all the details of that, but they have basically left it very unclear as to what the American commitment is to the kinds of ideas that the Chinese originally accepted, either tacitly or explicitly, regarding the US position on Taiwan, which allowed China to be less alarmist, less concerned, that is being eroded, and then, in similar ways, the Chinese themselves have started to emphasize more military deterrence, doubling down on military activities around Taiwan, posing exercises, preparing for different types of military actions against Taiwan. Even though the Chinese still say that there are emphasis on peaceful unification, they're doing an awful lot to re. Force fears that they are preparing for some kind of military action. So and in the meantime, Taiwan itself has shifted very much away from a general recognition or understanding of some type of one China relationship, regarding its relations with China, to a de facto one China, one Taiwan, type of situation, even though the constitution of Taiwan is still the Republic of China, but the political changes on the island and the changes in attitudes of the people on the island, it's really going in the direction of a very separate Taiwan. And Taiwanese officials are encouraging the kinds of erosion of the One China policy that I just mentioned. S

o all of this dynamic is really moving us towards more danger. And equally important to this is the fact that in Japan, Japan has really gone through the ineffective sea change in its stance towards China, moving towards a much more hawkish position, as reflected in the views of the current prime minister, Takeshi. And this, along with the very sharp Chinese response to these actions, have left the sino Japanese relationship in the worst situation that has ever been in since normalization. And there could be some kind of crisis, if not clash between China and Japan in the future, if these trends continue. So really, action needs to be taken to try to stop or reverse a lot of these political trends and military trends that are moving us closer to crisis over Taiwan.

Now what will the summit bring? I don't think we're going to see any major breakthrough on Taiwan at this summit. The most likely option is going to be that there's going to be signals of mutual reassurance on a verbal level, and mutual restraint. The two sides might, for example, affirm continued opposition to any unilateral change in the status quo. They could speak for restoring crisis communication dialog, which is very important. And if they were to do that, that would be significant, that they really get serious about crisis communication dialog, which has

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

not been the case, that they avoid provocative actions, at least over the near term, but they'll leave the ambiguity and the underlying tensions and the underlying suspicions in place. They're not going to really change.

Now, you could see more extensive actions coming out of this summit, but I think they're much less likely. You could see some kind of declaratory statements by Trump that are really unprecedented. Some people are very fearful that he will come out and explicitly say the United States is opposed to Taiwan independence. I think if he were to say that, he should certainly say any unilateral moves towards Taiwan independence, and I certainly wouldn't oppose the idea of the United States saying it opposed that. But I don't know if Trump will go that far. He has also there's been some talk that the Trump is being might be pressured by the Chinese to state that he's in favor of unification between China and Taiwan. I don't think under current conditions that would be advisable. So there are different things that he might say, but I think the pressure in the Congress, the pressure in the Pentagon, probably the pressure from some people who might be advising Trump. I don't know exactly who this would be, but the general sentiment is that some these sorts of declaratory statements that are really unprecedented are not wise at this time.

And I don't think Trump wants trouble at home on this issue. He wants to stabilize the Taiwan issue. He wants to put it off the front burner. He wants to put it to the side so he can focus on what he thinks is more important. So I think he's probably unlikely that he will make any major new statements. And I don't think the Chinese are going to be doing anything really major on this issue either. They might respond by a lessening of their military activities around Taiwan, a lessening of some of the rhetoric about this, but I think in order to really change this dynamic, there has to be some much more fundamental shifts in the US, one China policy towards its original understandings, and some much more fundamental reassurances by the Chinese about their commitment to a peaceful unification. No timeline for Taiwan, that they're willing to be patient on this issue, as long as conditions remain stable.

### **Kelley Vlahos 44:49**

You know, one of the questions that I've heard, or assertions, or people trying to read the tea leaves in terms of how militarily the. So the war in Iran has impacted the tensions between US and China over Taiwan. And one of the things is there is either China is looking at the trouble that the United States has had and vanquishing its adversary Iran and saying, well, maybe there's somewhat of a paper tiger, and we shouldn't have to worry about them if we want to reunify with Taiwan forcefully or not. Or they might take this to as the message that, well, just because we are the bigger, stronger power, we might not be able to take Taiwan if we want, because, you know, the US is proving that a larger power can't, not always get what it wants, military, militarily, with the lesser power. Do you have any thoughts on what China is drawing from the lessons of us, Iran, right now in the Gulf?

### **Michael Swaine 46:00**

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

Well, I think the biggest lesson that the Chinese probably draw from the US and Iran in the Gulf is how erratic, unpredictable and dangerous Donald Trump is. You know, his behavior clearly, in causing this war, this illegal war, and in resorting to so much military destruction, really just shows that he's relatively dangerous on this issue. However, I hasten to add that at the same time, I don't think the Chinese believe that that level of threat, that level of danger, is something that Trump wants to aim at them. I think I think they don't feel that Trump believes that some greater confrontation and crisis with China over security issues like Taiwan is in his interest. I think they believe that the Trump really isn't that interested in pushing the Taiwan issue. As I said before, he's focused on transactional issues regarding trade, technology, investment, that sort of thing.

And I think the Chinese want to focus on that issue as well and deter Trump from thinking that the Taiwan situation needs to be addressed in any major way. So I don't think the Iran war has altered that calculation in any significant way. It's just made the Chinese much more cognizant of how, how, causing conflict around the world in places that could affect how China's interests at least indirectly, if not, if not directly. Now, some people have said, Well, the fact that the United States has expended so much armaments on the Iran war that they're now in a weaker position, and China could use this as an opportunity to attack Taiwan. I think that is virtually groundless. I don't think the Chinese measure the likelihood of their attacking Taiwan on how many munitions that the United States has at any moment in time, and many of those munitions may not be that relevant to a Taiwan conflict. So I don't think the Chinese are putting great emphasis on that sort of issue. So I think it's very much overblown in much of the media.

### **Kelley Vlahos 48:09**

Thanks for that, Michael. I know a lot of people have been talking about it, so I do appreciate your answer, Dennis. I want to go to where your expertise lies in science and technology. Michael, just mention that the President would probably rather talk about technology and trade and cooperation in those areas. But recently, a lot of the Trust for those cooperative agreements have dissipated a lot of the programs that had existed in the past with exchanges of science, scientists and and students have been cut off their visas. Can you talk a little bit about, I don't know, the opportunities that we can renew some of those ties is, is there fertile ground for that? Is this the wrong time? But can you kind of bring us up to speed on on what we have lost and what we might be able to gain through more of these meetings? Like Jake said, maybe this is a first of several meetings to sort of like reestablish some some trust measures.

### **Denis Simon 49:16**

And I think that highlighting the fact that there still is a huge trust deficit between the countries is really an important starting point about about anything that we might consider. You know, we originally signed this science and technology cooperation agreement in 1979 it was the first agreement signed after normalization, and for almost 40 plus years, it served as a symbolic umbrella under which not only did the two governments collaborate, but our universities collaborated. Corporations collaborated on research, think tanks collaborated. It served as a

## Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes

kind of gesture that the closer the two countries got, the better it was for both countries and. Don't forget, when we normalize relations, there was a simple declarative sentence, a stable modernizing China was good for China, good for the United States and good for the world. And that carried our policy through all the way up until the period that that Jake described. And if we look at what actually happened, we actually built a series of what I would call ecosystems of collaboration. We signed over 40 protocols between the two countries and many of these areas, despite the claims of others, really were mutually beneficial, truly mutually beneficial. We had collaboration in clean energy that again benefited both sides, air pollution, Agricultural Science and Technology, Health and Biomedical cooperation, oceanographic cooperation, and perhaps the one that gets a lot of attention, but should even get more, is folic acid to prevent have pregnant mothers take so To prevent birth defects in their newborn. All of these are areas in which we could likely move ahead and pursue continued cooperation.

So in 2024 in December, the Biden administration actually renewed the bilateral agreement. It needed to be not only renewed, but rewritten, and we needed to have inserted in it, which was done reflection of some of the new concerns. So it talks about guardrails the new agreement. It talks about data security, it talks about personal security, reciprocity, continued concern about intellectual property protection. In other words, this new agreement is a good agreement, and it could serve as a vehicle or a mechanism. And so we're trying to get people to think more about moving away from this binary way of looking at the relationship in science and technology and education.

And what that really means, at the end of the day is that if we want security, it doesn't mean we have to have less openness. We can have openness and security side by side, sort of walking on two legs, and we, I think I've written a paper about this called Smart openness, which is designed to say there's a green light area, a red light area, and perhaps a amber or yellow light area. And we could move forward now, whether or not the Trump administration, is going to pick up on this opportunity after that agreement was renewed in December 2024 it has languished. It's more or less dormant right now, and no new monies have been made available. And to be really honest, American universities are shy now about renewing collaboration with their Chinese counterparts, and increasingly, what I've discovered here over the last several months is that the Chinese side also is becoming apprehensive. People are worried about getting their visas if they come to the US or maybe they'll be sent back. They're worried about other kinds of problems that are legacies from the China initiative that had been launched in 2018 and even though it was curtailed, there's still a kind of cloud over a lot of Chinese American scientists, inappropriate, but nonetheless, that cloud still remains, and we started to see an exodus, in some ways, of Chinese American scientists, many of whom either, if they're not going back to China, they're going they're leaving the United States and going back to other parts of the world.

But the biggest casualty is in American students going to China. Estimates are that there are only about 2000 American students in China today, from a height of about 15,000 in the 2011 2012 period. And the question I get has most often is Professor Simon, at some time you're going to retire, who's the next? Dennis Simon? On Michael Swain, whoever you know, people who spend considerable time on the ground in China, who understand the language, the

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

culture, who've worked with Chinese officials, etc, that's a big worry for us, and we have to start to think about ways we can move the relationships that we understand, cooperation in science and technology or education exchanges. There's a talent force multiplier the United States benefits greatly from the talent pipeline that we have that brings smart, educated Chinese into our graduate programs, into postdoc positions, and the US research system, I think, frankly, in STEM, across stem, would suffer considerably if all of a sudden that relationship was curtailed.

And just to give you an indication, we were at a high of 372,000 Chinese students in 2019 we're now down below 250,000 so there's been a big decline in the number of students. And even though, of course, much larger than the numbers of us students, it's still headed for the decline. And one wonders if there's a way to resuscitate that you may have heard. You know that President Trump at one point may have said, well, if the Chinese buy 500 Boeing airplanes. We'll let them have 600,000 students coming to the United States. Obviously, that was half hearted, and that's not going to happen. But the point is, is that Chinese students coming to us, our students going there, is really part of the foundational element. If we want to have a relationship with China in the future, we're going to have to have people on both sides of the Pacific who understand one another and hopefully overcome this trust deficit that we've been talking about this morning.

### **Kelley Vlahos 55:31**

Absolutely. Thank you, Dennis. So we only have about five minutes left, and I have some extra questions on my end, but also a few Q and A from the audience. So I'm going to just put these questions out to every any, all of you, whoever wants to to answer them. We have a question from Paul here in the Q and A and he's asking about Prime Minister, Japan's Prime Minister, Taki Ichi, and her increasingly aggressive policy towards China. He suggests that she will ask Trump about this, and he wants to know how Trump will respond. I would also like to add to that, you know, will Japan get more assertive because they don't feel that the United States is equipped to defend it like is it? Is it? Is it moving towards more defensive autonomy because of what is happening on the world stage, and it's under the governance of a woman who is willing to take it in that direction, Michael?

### **Michael Swaine 56:47**

Yeah, maybe I can say a word about that. I don't think that that Trump is going to criticize whatever Prime Minister Takaichi has said about Taiwan. He regards her as a friend. She has flattered him endlessly, which always tends to work with Trump. And I don't think he's going to come out and criticize her, but the Japanese position I said earlier is becoming very, very worrisome, and the level of criticism of China is very deep, and the movement towards Japan needing to become involved in a Taiwan crisis or conflict seems to be growing, but much of this is really dependent upon the US position and the China the Japanese watched the US position very closely.

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

Now, If Trump were to come out and say things that looked like he was really trying to moderate the the issue of Taiwan, that he would come out and say something about opposing unilateral changes towards Taiwan independence, or he was to say something else that sounded like it was a less hawkish approach towards Taiwan, then towards China rather then, I think the Japanese would begin to be a little concerned. They might begin to not be quite so committed in the direction in which they're going. So it's much of this depends upon what the United States does, and if the United States can come through with certain actions that really reinforce the credibility of the One China Policy no longer make statements or have policy documents that say Taiwan is a strategic location for the United States, for example, which has been done if they, if they say that that is not the case. I

f, if China comes out and says there's no timeline, explicitly, if Xi comes out, and I'd like to see this actually, at the summit, that President Xi would come out and say publicly, which I don't think he himself has ever said publicly, that we have no timeline for unification with China and Taiwan, I think that would be a very positive element, and that would have an effect in Japan as well. So this is very much of a three sided type of relationship here, that Japan is operating under, and a lot of what the United States is going to do is going to have great influence over Japan.

### **Kelley Vlahos 59:24**

Anybody want to add to that?

### **Denis Simon 59:27**

Just add this one point. I think the last thing that China wants to see is any kind of impetus for Japan to go further in rearming, rearming itself. And I think that everyone doesn't in the game does not want to see Japan have any kind of incentive to say, well, you know, the China and the American nuclear umbrella or the American protection or something of that sort, has weakened, and we have to have greater resolve for ourselves. So I think the Chinese probably will be very happy if Trump doesn't say. Anything publicly that might give the Japanese make them more nervous and more apprehensive about the situation.

### **Kelley Vlahos 1:00:08**

Absolutely. Well, I have one last question as we wrap up here, and it's from Charles Smith, and I think this is an appropriate conclusion to our event today. He says there's been plenty of speculation about Trump looking to find a face saving way to declare victory and get out of the war in Iran. To what extent could China facilitate an off ramp for the US to wind down the war and blockades, and would China be likely to provide help if such help is sought? Jake, would you like to tackle that one?

### **Jake Werner 1:00:43**

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

Yeah, China would be happy to help. But it really, really depends on what kind of help it is. And so at one point, Trump was inviting the People's Liberation Army to join the United States in the strait to secure it, and that is not what China is going to do. China has been, you know, contrary to a lot of loose talk in Washington, China has been extremely, extremely cautious in the way that it has thrown around its growing military power as it has gained in stature and capacity. And that's reflected in the fact that that China for for for pushing 50 years, has not been involved in a military intervention, and so for a rising power that has not asserted itself militarily. Now, that's not to say that China doesn't push countries around. It does, but I think it is significant, and something that is very rarely acknowledged in Washington, China has not involved itself militarily in the rest of the world, only, only. The only conflict that has had was a border conflict with India, and that was, and that wasn't, didn't even use guns.

So China has been very restrained in the way it's used its military that's very self-conscious. And so even if the United States wanted to pull China into military sport. It wouldn't do that. But that's that is not to say that China wouldn't be happy to do, I think, very fairly ambitious kinds of involvement in trying to end the war. It has already been involved in the diplomatic process and behind the scenes, but backing up Pakistan, which has served as the main mediator between US and Iran so far, and and in past, China was involved as a guarantor in the normalization of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. And I think it's very easy to imagine China acting in a similar way, where Iran feels like it has no security guarantors. China is not going to give an explicit public security guarantee, but it will come in and and and provide economic support for Iran. A sense that Iran might have some confidence in this, if China can have some confidence in the US side, which is a, you know, as a pretty big if. But I think there is a real there is real possibility for China to play a constructive role here, if, if the US can work out what it wants. I think that the big block here just is, is whether the US is willing to agree to something that Iran can also agree with. But if that's the case, then I think China could be involved in a very constructive way.

**Kelley Vlahos 1:03:20**

Well, if Dennis and Michael, do you have anything to add?

**Michael Swaine 1:03:26**

No, I think we're already over time.

**Kelley Vlahos 1:03:28**

Well, thank you. Then I'll give Jake the last word, and thank you, Jake, Michael, Denis, for joining us with all of these insights. And look forward to talking with you again on these and other issues relating to Quincy's agenda in East Asia. Jake is the the director of our program. If you want to see more about what they are doing on a daily basis, please go to [Quincyinst.org](http://Quincyinst.org) and check out all of the events. We have a bunch coming up. We have book talks. We have webinars. We have a webinar about the European reaction to the Iran war webinar coming up

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

next week. Please check out times, panelists and where to find us at [Quincyinst.org](http://Quincyinst.org), and we'll see you all soon.

**Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**