Critical Issues Confronting China Series featuring Sheena Greitens – China's Approach to National Security under Xi Jinping, March 31, 2021

– Welcome to the Harvard Fairbank Center's weekly Wednesday seminar on critical issues for contemporary China. I'm Bill Overholt from the Kennedy School. It's a pleasure to introduce professor Sheena Greitens from the University of Texas, Austin. She's also a non-resident fellow of Brookings. She earned her BA from Stanford, her Master of Philosophy from Oxford as a Marshall scholar, and her doctorate from Harvard. Her book, "Dictators and Their Secret Police," is a study of why dictators in Taiwan, South Korea, and the Philippines structured their security services the way they did. I strongly recommend it. The book received the 2017 Best Book Award from both the International Studies Association and the Comparative Democratization section of the American Political Science Association. She speaks Chinese and Korean languages and is currently working on China and North Korea. Professor Greitens work on China is distinctive and particularly valuable because she brings to it a broad comparative perspective. Today she's going to use that perspective to explain China's approach to national security under Xi Jinping. Professor Greitens, over to you.

– I'm gonna jump in real quick there and just say 'cause I'm sure people will have lots of questions. So if you know how to use the question box, great. If not, it's at the bottom of your screen. And if you wanna ask questions at any point during the talk, just enter it into the Q&A box. If you'd like to remain anonymous, please check the Anonymous option; otherwise, let us know who you are and what your institution is so we know who's asking the question. All right, now I'll throw it over to you, Professor.

– Terrific. Well, thank you so much for having me today. I enjoyed and learned a tremendous amount from events like this one at the Fairbank Center when I was a graduate student across the street in the Government department, and so it is really a pleasure for me to be able to speak with you all today. So what I wanted to do is to talk about something that I think has really been central to Chinese politics and Chinese foreign policy in the time since Xi Jinping became China's preeminent leader. And I'll add that what I'm going to reflect on today is a book manuscript in progress that hopefully will be done later this summer, and also it appears in an edited volume that the Fairbank Center has organized, the companion or second volume of "The China Questions," which I think will also be coming out later this year. And so what I wanna do is to talk about how China frames and executes what it calls its National Security Strategy. And so today you will actually hear me use both the terms national security and the term grand strategy. And the reason that I use the term grand strategy is that if you look at how that term is defined, the sort of most commonplace or intuitive definition, one of the simpler definitions, is that it's just a state's theory of how to cause security for itself. And so I think that gives us a good lens through

which to view China's behavior that does also highlight places where China has some things in common with the approach to security and strategy with other countries and places where China's approach and experience are also distinctive and unique. And so I do wanna highlight here that most of the studies of grand strategy that we have come from Western democratic great powers, typically the US and the UK, at the times when those countries played major roles in world politics. And so as a result, a lot of our studies of grand strategy tend to focus on foreign policy and military power. And I think there are good reasons for that, but I do think we need to be careful and to say upfront exactly where that works and doesn't for discussing China's approach to these same questions. And China is, after all, a very different country with its own distinctive history and ways of approaching politics, both domestically and in the world. It's a non-Western country. It is what we call a late modernizer, which has some effect on how it organizes and manages its coercive forces. It's a socialist non-democracy with a party-state system. And so, for example, many of you probably know that the PLA is party army, not a national army, and that's a distinction that China has been quite clear and quite deliberate about maintaining. As a result of of some of these factors and of China's own history, there's also a really heavy focus in security on internal security questions. And so many of the tools and the approaches and the methods that China sort of has at hand to think about security questions actually focus on the role of civilian security organizations and the internal security apparatus, the political legal system, rather than the military and foreign policy and diplomatic tools. It's not that there's this sort of black and white and they only focus internally, it's just that there's a much stronger emphasis on these internal security questions, and, therefore, internal security actors and tools. And one of the other major differences, especially from the United States, is that until 2015, China did not have a codified National Security Strategy document. That is a change that was made to the Chinese policy process under Xi Jinping, and I think it's an important one, so I'll come back to it in a moment. So there's this question in among scholars who look at Chinese politics and at China's grand strategy about exactly how different Xi Jinping's grand strategy is, and there are some very prominent smart folks who have argued that actually there's a fair amount of continuity and what Xi Jinping is doing is not that new and different. So you see this book, for example, "Haunted by Chaos," that argues that Xi's grand strategy is essentially continuous with and not a fundamental break with that of his predecessors. Or a recent international security article by Avery Goldstein, who's written a book-length study of China's grand strategy, that also argues that, yes, there's some differences, but that Xi Jinping has not fundamentally broken with this strategy of national rejuvenation that's been pursued by Chinese leaders at least since the 1990s. And so these works tend to really emphasize that continuity. On the other hand, you have some work by folks like Rush Doshi, who's now a staffer on the National Security Council, but who did his PhD at Harvard, and

I would guess had some interaction with the Fairbank Center while he was doing that, that read through Chinese documentary sources and evidence and concludes that China does have a new grand strategy and that it's one that is aimed at displacing the United States from its position at the apex of the current international order. And so here you can see already that there's some debate. The argument that I'm gonna try to present and convince you of today is that neither of these is exactly right, that there is, in fact, a new grand strategy and a new approach to National Security Strategy and policy making under Xi Jinping, but that it's actually a much more internally-oriented strategy than the focus on displacing the United States in the international system might suggest. And then it's helpful to keep that internal security perspective front and center when we try to analyze and interpret China's contemporary behavior at home and abroad. So the first question that I wanna answer is this question of, is Xi Jinping's strategy actually new? And to decide what the answer is to that question, I would argue that we have to look at three different questions and conditions. We have to meet three conditions for there to be a new grand strategy. First of all, there has to be a change in China's perception of its threat environment, and it has to clearly articulate what is it exactly that is different. Second, in response to that new characterization of threats, there has to be a new approach. If strategy is the linking of ends and means, then you have to have a new way of tying those two things together in order to solve the security problems that are new. And then, third, this can't all be sort of pie-in-the-sky academic theory. It has to actually get put into political practice and practice on the ground. So we have to see that the strategy prompts changes in behavior. It could be changes in bureaucratic organization, in national security law, in personnel appointments, in budgets and procurement, or in policies themselves. And so I, my belief today, what I'll argue today is that, in fact, all three of these conditions have been met and that there is a new and distinctive approach to National Security Strategy or to grand strategy under Xi Jinping. That shift and that pivot to a new approach began, I think, in April of 2014, arguably, maybe the fall before. There was some brief mention in some party documents of national security, but really the first big moment in the timeline that's important is in April of 2014 when Xi Jinping announces this Comprehensive National Security concept and, in tandem with that, launches a new organization, a party body called the Central National Security Commission whose job it is to try to improve coordination and management of national security concerns. And I'll come back to the the importance of that organization in a moment. But that was followed in relatively short period in January of 2015 by the Politburo approving China's inaugural National Security Strategy, the first sort of codified document that lays out a National Security Strategy for China. Now, in the meantime, and since that time, Xi Jinping has actually written and said a lot about what national security is, what this concept is, how it needs to be operationalized, why it was important that it happened, where it came from, so much so that, as

you can see in this screenshot of a news article here, that there's actually been a full book of Xi Jinping's writings and commentary on national security questions that was published just covering the 2014 to 2018 time period. So this was released on the fourth anniversary of the launch of the Comprehensive National Security concept, and I would guess based on the the other things that I've read and seen online that we we are probably due for a second volume or a companion shortly here. And so what's important about this National Security Strategy is actually the way that China frames it. And Chinese sources tend to refer to it as a break with past practice and as a new thing for China, that this is something that is new, it's developing a theory of national security with Chinese characteristics, and comments like that that sort of consistently characterize it as an inflection point and it changed from precedent. Part of this is a leader who wants to put his individual stamp on national security policymaking, but it's important to realize that it is explicitly framed at the time as a change. And it's a change in the following ways. It does assess China's threat environment differently, and in some ways in a darker or more threatening way than Xi Jinping's immediate predecessors had. So in particular when this concept premiers, Xi Jinping talks about the fact that China is now facing the most complicated internal and external factors in its history, which is a pretty big statement when you think about the history of China in the 20th century, and it's really not necessarily the most difficult, but the most complicated. And so the idea here is that the internal security environment has grown increasingly complex and that it's marked by increasing threats and challenges and that those threats and challenges are interlocks and can be mutually activated. And so all of this comes back a little bit later because there's a very clear connection drawn here between internal and external security and the potential for these threats to interlock and to reinforce each other. And so in contrast to some of the things that have been written about China seeing an unprecedented period of strategic opportunity, that writing is there, right? And it does portray opportunity for China, but what's sometimes missing from that writing is that almost in dialectical fashion, that emphasis on opportunity is paired with increasing risks and difficulties. And you read things that explicitly say as China comes closer to its goal of being at the center of the world stage, the risks and the difficulties will increase correspondingly. And so this is a sense that the world is uncertain, it's less stable, it's more complex, and that the different types of threats, traditional and non-traditional, internal and external, are interlocking and can be mutually activated. So from there then, Xi Jinping goes on and outlines essentially a new approach, a new linking of means and ends to approach the environment that China faces. There are a couple of things that are important about that. First of all, the center of gravity of national security work is explicitly internal. That is stated very, very plainly. And, like I said, there is this explicit contrast, and you see things like, well, previously, even in the post-Cold War environment, China's leaders and party leaders focused on traditional security and on

external threats, and under Xi Jinping, we are we are rebalancing that or reorienting it to have more of a focus on the non-traditional and the internal dimensions of the threats that China faces. So, again, there's this explicit contrasting of the approach that Xi Jinping is taking with his predecessors. It's also very clear that the foundation is political security, which is typically defined as securing the authority of the CCP or the CCP Central Committee leadership with Xi Jinping at the core. And so it's very clear that this is about regime security and, in some ways, one could actually translate national security as state security, that the term can be translated. The term that Chinese sources tend to translate in English as as the Comprehensive National Security concept is the same phrase that appears, for example, in the Ministry of State Security. So either one, I think, is a legitimate translation, and if anything, perhaps state security is a little more intuitive for us to grasp because it gets at this idea of political and regime security as the foundation of this entire effort. I think that's important to remember because when I see tweets like this one from Xinhua following the Anchorage meeting a couple of weeks ago, there's this image that says, "Look, here's the red line that should never be crossed," and it's actually about questioning the governing status of the Communist Party of China and the security of China's socialist system. It's, again, the focus, and the referent here is regime security. Then after that, so that sort of clearly outlines where the focus of the new approach should be. And then if we think about, "Okay, well, what do you do with that?" then the phrase that Xi Jinping tends to use fairly often that's now sort of widely seated in a lot of policy documents is this focus on prevention and control. And so you see, for example, in the same month that the new National Security Strategy was approved, Xi Jinping speaking to the political legal apparatus at the annual work conference and using this phrase: "We must adapt to the new circumstances, strengthen forward-looking work, effectively prevent and control various risks." And so you see the link between the new circumstances and the need then to prevent and control risks in a highly uncertain environment. And that gets followed by folks like Meng Jianzhu speaking also to the political legal apparatus in this case, and actually implicitly drawing some contrast with the previous approach of stability maintenance, is too reactive and too suppressive, and instead, we need to treat both symptoms and underlying causes. There's a lot of medical analogies in this discourse and deeply analyze the sources of potential risks in order to intensify governance at their origin. And so then over time and over a series of documents and speeches and directives, the end that is outlined is often characterized as one of a multidimensional, information-based prevention and control system for public and social security. It's a mouthful no matter which language you say it in, but that is the goal, that is the desired end state, and so the tools for this are things like front-end social governance; there's this recurrent metaphor of immunization, which I'll come back to it because it becomes especially important in Xinjiang; the invocation of the

Fengqiao experience; and this sort of Mao-era experience as a lesson for today, the lesson being really, again, early prevention to prevent escalation either vertically in the Chinese political system or horizontally across different areas within China. The other thing that's very new and different about this approach is a rearticulation of the relationship between development and security. So particularly as it relates to places like Tibet, Xinjiang, less developed areas, the sort of implicit framing had often been, "Well, if we do enough work on economic development, that will in and of itself resolve the instability and the security issues that the party faces in governing those regions." And that's actually no longer the way it's characterized. Increasingly we see an emphasis, whether it's in Xi Jinping's own words or related commentaries, that security has is now a precondition for development. It's not the natural result of development; it's a precondition for it. And I can talk a bit more about that if people have questions about the implications of that. And then for the third step, so that's the first two test that I outlined. There's a revised characterization of the threatened environment, and there's also a new approach proposed, a new doctrine, a new way of linking ends and means to try to solve the problems that China faces in the new environment. And so then we see that this has prompted some pretty massive changes within China's national security architecture. And most of the time, those changes are explicitly linked to and justified in terms of the new concept, the Comprehensive National Security concept, and the new National Security Strategy. And so along with that, there's been a significant reorganization of China's national security apparatus. The creation of the Central National Security Commission was the first and earliest step, but that's been followed by reorganization within the People's Armed Police and the PLA and consolidation of the discipline and supervision apparatus, which is now sometimes referred to as the "sharp sword" of supervision. Occasionally, although not very often, in sort of an explicit triad with the gun and the knife handle, referring to the the internal security and the organs and the political legal apparatus. So there there's been significant organizational changes in the National Security System and bureaucracy. There have been a large number of legal changes, most of which have been reported individually as each law has been passed by the NPC. And these are a whole set of new national security laws that have both internal and external implications and that often don't clearly separate because the Comprehensive National Security concept actually urges people to see internal and external security as interconnected and interlocked. So here's one list. This actually isn't even all of it. The screenshot continues off the page. But this is a list of some of the earliest set of laws that were passed, again, in a process starting around the time that this concept and this strategy emerged into public view. And the latest of which, which was not on the chart a moment ago, is the Hong Kong National Security Law, where we're seeing increasingly the securitization of Hong Kong itself, but in particular, in this case, the tweet that's included in the screenshot here has to do with the

role of the new national security offices in Hong Kong in screening candidates for participation in Hong Kong's electoral system. And so the extension of the national security state that's been constructed and it's extension into Hong Kong itself, which was a process that was started and sort of legally enabled by the passage of the Hong Kong National Security Law. There have also been significant changes to the budget. Again, if you think about this goal of creating a multidimensional information-based system of prevention and control for social and public security, then surveillance technology plays a significant role in that, that aim of information-based prevention and control. And so by now, we've all probably read a bunch of different stories about the rise of procurement directed at surveillance technology, whether it's at the national level or, more often, at the provincial and the local public security budget level. And so things like this that will identify license plates or faces or the way somebody walks and link that to a national ID card or other information from elsewhere in the Chinese bureaucracy. And some work that I've done actually with a Chinese coauthor, we look at the fact that a lot of effort recently has been devoted less to the collection side of this, this sort of externally visible part, and actually a lot of effort has been devoted to creating backend platforms that can resolve what Lee Ka-chiu has referred to as "information islands," which is basically different parts of the party state collecting different information but nobody having the ability to integrate that data and actually effectively use it in governance. So for the last five years or so, there's been a real push, including at the national level, to try to resolve some of these problems of information islands. As many of you will know, in China's sort of fragmented authoritarian system, that is a real challenge, and some of the obstacles are political rather than technical, so we don't by any means claim that China has solved this problem, just that the party state is aware of it and is actively working on approaches to that with, again, the idea that information islands can block this goal of effective prevention and control. This is also an issue for global politics and a case where the development of certain surveillance tools and platforms in China have global consequences. This is a map from a paper I did about a year ago for the Brookings Institution, where we looked at places where China had exported these platforms, so platforms that had seemed to have some data integration capability, and found that cities in a wide number of countries, at least 80 or so by our estimation, were using some of these safe-city type platforms. So this is a case where the external manifestations of these developments in China become really important for global politics and global governance. A couple of other features or ways in which the strategy has been operationalized, one is via large scale personnel replacement and purges in both the military and the political legal apparatus, which have been major areas of focus in the anti-corruption campaigns. And that scrutiny, tightening of political discipline, and, in some cases, replacement of personnel is continuing to date under the rectification and education campaign that began earlier this year,

and it had a pilot last year. And then finally there are just policy changes that reflect this revised view of the relationship between internal and external security. One facet of that that I've been working on recently that hasn't gotten a lot of attention is the increased international activity of PRC law enforcement agencies, in particular the Ministry of Public Security, pursuit of extradition agreements, and other forms of police cooperation abroad. Again, reflecting the idea that the agencies that are in charge of policing and domestic security inside China need to know about international developments that affect things closer to home. And in the final one, which I'll mention simply because it's gotten a lot attention and has become central in the US-China relationship and in China's relationship with the outside world and the international community, has to do with China's changing internal security strategy in Xinjiang. One of the first areas where Xi Jinping applied the National Security Strategy to a sort of concrete security challenge was actually in counter-terrorism policy and in using that to frame the approach being taken to Xinjiang. This is a really complicated thing that I'm happy to get into more if people have specific questions about it, but in some work that I've done with a couple of co-authors, we argue that because of the environment created by the National Security Strategy, China was sort of unusually sensitive to smaller changes in external conditions, in particular connections that were made by a small number of members of the weaker diaspora with militant groups in Southeast Asia or in the Middle East and North Africa but particularly in Syria, and that there's a lot of rhetoric in China about the need to prevent reverse diffusion and the inflow of foreign fighters or funding or even just ideas. And coupled with that metaphor of immunization that is common in this prevention and control discourse, what you get is an attempt to quote, unquote, "immunize" the residents of Xinjiang through re-education and mass coercive detention. And the metaphor of immunization sort of ironically points out, right, we've all now thought a lot about immunization in the course of the past year, but, as you know, you immunize people before they're exposed to a potential virus, and China uses the language of political virus or political tumor. And so the very metaphor itself, even though it's intended to evoke a sort of curative and medically benign approach by the party state, actually does highlight that the people who are being targeted and treated are being treated before they're necessarily exposed to anything that's politically problematic, even by the CCPs own standards for that term, which include a lot of things that would normally be treated as simply religious piety or normal religious practice. And so I think understanding the backdrop of the National Security Strategy and the way that the concept portrays the relationship between internal and external security helps us explain what otherwise is a bafflingly disproportionate overreaction to events and conditions in Xinjiang itself. I think that that makes more sense if we look at the way that the National Security Strategy predisposes and urges Chinese officials to treat that threat. That is in no way a justification, but I think

it helps us understand a bit more about the worldview that has led to these events. And so with that, I'm running up on time here. I wanna make sure that I leave plenty of time to answer questions 'cause I've seen a few already in the chat here. But I wanna close by offering a couple of thoughts about what the implications are for future Chinese behavior and, in particular, for American or international policies in managing relations with the PRC and with the CCP. First of all, as a sort of basic point, even though the Chinese media and official translations call this national security, I think it's worth emphasizing, especially to a large number of people who work on American National Security Strategy but don't necessarily specialize in Chinese politics itself, but who are now working centrally and largely on China given where it falls in US national security calculus, I think given that, it's worth highlighting that when China uses the term national security, it's not an easy corollary or counterpart to the US National Security Strategy. They're not the same thing. At the same time though, I do believe and think there's good evidence that China's approach to national security under Xi Jinping can be thought of as a coherent grand strategy, and I've explained a little bit today about why I think that's the case; however, in that, internal security is better thought of as an end of CCP grand strategy, not just as a mean. So typically in the literature on grand strategy, it's about what do you want to accomplish in the world if you're the US or the UK, and domestic politics can kind of make you more or less able to pursue those external goals. And here, I think we have to remember that internal security is actually more of an end than just a means or a constraint on needs. And then some of the time, what we're seeing is a grand strategy and foreign policy behavior that is the externalization of internal security concerns and policies that are chiefly designed around internal security goals. Xi Jinping referred to this in 2017 as "a global vision for state security work," and reframing that, I think, sometimes helps us connect the dots on things that might seem disconnected but also might help us think about alternative interpretations to some of the behavior that we're seeing on the global stage or in foreign policy. One of the other implications is to think about why relations with the Chinese diaspora and Chinese populations abroad have become fraught and tense. And one potential answer for that is that this strategy does approach diaspora policy through a pretty securitized lens. And so one way of defining diaspora is that they are communities that are outside the state, outside the physical boundaries of the PRC, but still inside the body politic. Outside the state, but inside the people. So if that's the case, then people who exist on that boundary between internal and external or who have that crossover rule are going to get particular attention under a National Security Strategy that explicitly argues for a connection between the internal and external dimensions of security threat. And I think that's relevant and really important for the United States to grapple with, particularly at a time when you've seen really deeply problematic racism and violence directed toward the AAPI community. And then, finally, I think, and this is not an

optimistic note to end on, but I do think it's important to think about this as a challenge for American foreign policy as well as for the broader international community, is that one way to read this is, okay, this is about insecurity at some level. The CCP is seeking to make itself secure, and so is there anything that one could do that might provide reassurance? And I think the issue with this is that reassurance becomes much harder for the United States politically but also for a lot of other democracies in the international system if the referent is truly regime security rather than national security. And so that actually suggests to me a reason why some of our past attempts at reassurance as the flip side of a deterrent policy might have run into some trouble in the past and also some areas where this is going to be a difficult and thorny issue for US policymakers working on China to navigate in the future. So I think if we can diagnose some of these issues correctly, we have a much better chance of coming up with constructive policies for US-China relations, and that's clearly really a critical issue for people in both countries right now. So with that, I will close there and be happy to take questions. But, again, I really appreciate everyone's time and attention and interest today, and I'm really grateful to the Fairbank Center for having me. So thank you again very much.

- Sheena, thank you very much for a wonderful and wonderfully clear talk. Let me lead off by asking you how a couple of big issues fit into this framework of yours. Belt and Road, how does that fit into the national security framework? And then this question of trying to, joining the system versus trying to disrupt the system. To what extent do they see what we call the international system as supportive of them and threatening to them?

- Let me see if I can take that last question first. And the answer is I think there actually is still some diversity of thought. Maybe that's more implicit than explicit in Chinese writing and discussion of this topic. Certainly there's a sense that the international system was designed in an era when China's power to influence, it was more limited, that it was designed for a world in which the US was predominant, and that China should have a greater say in shaping the rules and the norms of international order. And I'm conscious as I'm using the term international order that you all are probably very familiar with work, for example, by Ian Johnson, that are used that there isn't one international order, there's a set of overlapping orders and that China's interests may be more revisionist in some of those places than others. And I tend to agree with that view, that it's helpful to desegregate that one concept of international order probably isn't, is a little bit too simplistic for the complexity that is really emphasized in China's portrayal of the international environment. That said, I think there are some areas in which China clearly wants to change the operation of the international system in ways that whether the goal is to take out the United States or limit the United States influence, that would be the effect. And so I

tend... Actually, when I think about China, I can't ultimately speak to what's in Xi Jinping's head. At that point, we're in the realm of psychology, which is not my field of expertise, or actual mind reading, and I'm not a psychic. So what I tend to try to look at is, what are the effects of China's behavior? And so particularly in some of the areas that I look at, for example, in surveillance technology, it's not clear to me that what China is doing is necessarily trying to incite... I don't see a lot of evidence that China is trying to install a Marxist, Leninist system of governance that copies China. I think Liz Perry has also made the really wise point that China's model itself relies on adaptability to local conditions, right? Even within China, the CCP is willing to have sort of an idea or a goal and to adapt a fair amount to achieve that goal in very different local contexts. And so I think the export of surveillance is a case where it's not a one-size-fits-all model that's being applied cookie cutter in different places, but we also do see that some of the folks who pick up and use that technology use it to make the societies that they're governing less liberal, less free, and less democratic. And so from the standpoint of effects, those effects may be concerning regardless of whether China has a sort of coherent strategic intent to accomplish that goal. It may actually be a by-product of market incentives and the CCP having more defensive political goals, but from the purpose of US policy, if the result is still to undermine democracy and liberal democracy worldwide, then, to me, that's still a reason to be concerned and to think very carefully about what the US strategy should be in response. So that probably sounds like the comment about the two-handed economist, on the one hand, on the other hand, but I actually think it's really important to keep both of those points in mind.

- Any comment about BRI national security?

- You know, I think that BRI, because... So, first of all, I think BRI is... I'm trying to figure out how to answer this question concisely in a way that won't take the rest of the time that we have. I think one of the things that has happened as a result of BRI, which developed kind of partly in tandem or in parallel with some of this discourse on national security, is that we do see that China is now present in more and more places around the world, and, therefore, in some ways more exposed to security threats in different parts of the world. And so actually what you see in some of the Chinese academic writing about BRI and the national security concept is that part of the reason for China to think about kind of pushing the boundaries of the national security concept outward, which is a phrase that's used in a couple of articles that I've looked at, has to do with, well, okay, the national security concept still has to protect Chinese businesses and interests overseas. And so I think BRI has been tied into the national security concept because it's sort of facilitated or created this environment in which the expansion of the national security state beyond the sort of the formal borders of the PRC makes

sense because that's still protecting China in the sense of Chinese companies and Chinese citizens abroad.

- Thank you. You mentioned Ian Johnson. He actually has a question for you.

- Oh, great. I'm sure it'll be a tough one. Now I'm terrified.

- Well, yes, about the extent to which the US is blamed for minority unrest, that they always talk about hostile external forces. And certainly there was a lot of talk about that in Hong Kong, and in Hong Kong, it did refer primarily to the US. How general is this?

- Yeah. That's a question that I want to be very careful answering because in describing the perceptions that are reflected in Chinese writing, I wanna be very careful that that's not in any way sort of providing a justification for the response. So let me just start out with that as a framing comment. There's a long history in the CCP's thinking about, even going back to the perception of the fall of the Soviet Union, that external forces could come in and destabilize single-party rule and in particular that religion, in religious activity or religious networks, were a vehicle for transmitting that influence. There's a lot of concern about the role of the Polish Pope in Poland and throughout Eastern Europe. And that seems to have continued down to the present day, where there's a lot of concern about channels that we would not normally think of as being foreign influence that would be politically destabilizing, but there's a heightened suspicion of a lot of those. And so we've seen that rhetoric paired with the language of a political virus, again, in Hong Kong, but also concern about destabilization in Xinjiang. As it relates to Xinjiang, the type of external influence that receives the most attention in Chinese thinking is actually, I would say, twofold. One is just the potential for people who have been particularly in Syria and active with military groups in Syria to somehow come back into China and with increased stability to pose an armed challenge to the party state or to engage in political violence. And so there's Chen Chuanghua has six things at one point that in a key speech he outlines the need to prevent, and it's about funding and foreign fighters. And so it's about there's the physical part, right? The physical manifestation of an external threat crossing the border. But the other piece of this is ideological and the idea that the root of political violence and extremism and separatist behavior, to use the CCPs three evils, is actually in ideology. And so that's where you get this focus on reeducation as the way of immunizing. It's actually about reeducating people to have the correct thinking, and that's because there's this idea that even the cross-border dissemination of ideologies that are counter to party leadership or that don't recognize the authority of party leadership could eventually manifest themselves physically in problematic behavior. And so this idea of intensifying governance at the source actually means going in and

trying to change people's ideological makeup and ideological beliefs. And that's what I was getting at a bit earlier when I talked about this sort of the extreme, the extreme form of prevention and control is an intervention at the level of ideology and people's thinking. And so that's the sort of the logic chain that leads you to the construction of these detention and reeducation facilities in Xinjiang. In that case, it's really more about the risk of sort of ideological contamination that will eventually spill over into physical harm, but the pathways is less direct than foreign fighters will come back and start fighting immediately. It's foreign thinking or ideology will infiltrate China and eventually that would manifest itself in a problem with physical security and damage and harm, but the pathway is much less direct.

- Following up on your comments about ideology, we have an anonymous question about how deeply does ideology play a role. You've explained very clearly that it's important to the regime that people think a certain way, but is it also, if I understand this question correctly, it's asking, is it also a very fundamental organizing principle of the way they actually do things? And the question references Carl Schmitt's jurisprudence and its increasing use as maybe an indicator that ideology really is important.

- So I don't think I can answer the question about how to interpret the use of Carl Schmitt's jurisprudence specifically just because that's a bit outside my... I'm not a legal scholar, and I wanna be careful to try to stay in my lane of expertise here. But in general, there has been an effort, and some of this is people trying to... You know, in an environment in which the Comprehensive National Security concept's been introduced, you have 11 different kinds of security underneath national security. And ideological security is typically actually described as a hybrid between political security and cultural security. Political and cultural security being two dimensions of the 11 that Xi Jinping outlined to begin with. And there has been some work largely within the folks who work more on party ideology and education and propaganda to think about even... There's a really interesting article that was actually translated by CSIS on ideological security that describes the need for ideological early warning mechanisms and identification of ideological risks. And so you see some of this attempt to figure out in the Chinese system, okay, we understand that ideology is important. We've had this sense going back to the fall of the Soviet Union. Xi Jinping appears to have a very particular set of beliefs about the importance of ideology and the important role that a lack of ideological fidelity and corruption played in the fall of the Soviet Union. And so we really have to pay attention to this. And we know that the goal is prevention and control, so how do we do this in the realm of ideology? And I don't think there's a clear objective set of indicators that have emerged, but what I find fascinating is that there is an attempt to say, okay, yes, there's an ideological dimension to this national security

challenge and to try to figure out what that means if the aim is this very early emphasis on that goal of prevention and control. But the issue is that that requires a lot of pressure toward conformity of thought and a narrowing of political space and a narrowing of the parameters for acceptable political discourse, which is consistent with some of what we've observed in China in policies on party leadership and higher education and things like that. But I also don't want to overstate how far the ideological push has gone, but I do think some of the reemergence of ideology has been connected to and incorporated into this national security framework.

- We have another anonymous question that asks, "Where does this pervasive sense of regime insecurity come from? They've been in power for 70 years. The polls show this tremendous support for the system, but all the time Xi Jinping is talking about the need to protect the party from all these risks. Where does it come from?"

- I think it comes from the sense that the international environment has become more uncertain and this almost dialectical argument that as China gets closer to the center of the world stage and the center of the international system that life actually becomes more dangerous. And so instead of power leading to security, right, in some ways, with greater power actually comes greater insecurity. And it seems to me that for reasons that I can't quite explain, Xi Jinping's personal risk tolerance for security threats seems to be a lot lower. It may be that he recognizes historically the ability of unexpected events to cascade and very quickly have regime ending or regime transformational consequences. That's speculation on my part, not sound political science analysis, but for whatever reason, his tolerance for contention and instability and potential political risk seems to be lower. And it may be that that's also because he perceives the outside world to be and China's external environment to be more uncertain. But what we see, what we can observe, is just this characterization that China's environment is highly uncertain, highly unstable, that there are a lot of risks and that actually becoming more powerful and growing an influence does not lessen those risks to the CCP. If anything, it heightens them. Now you could obviously sit down with somebody and say, "But why do you think that?" I don't know that we can clearly answer that question, but we can observe pretty consistently that that's the way China's environment and level of security get framed. That's probably a deeply unsatisfying answer, but that's probably the best I can do today.

- Oh, thanks. Let me just follow up on that. Is it possible that he's also seeing increased risk from within his own elite?

- Yeah, I think that's part of it. There is a sense, and in particular in some of the writings about ideological security, you see, I think, in the anti-corruption campaign a much deeper level of concern about corruption, not that it had been dismissed by the party leadership

before, but a characterization in some cases, as you know, that the corruption is the biggest threat to the CCPs ruling foundation. And so I think it's also possible that there are things that the previous leaders either were willing to tolerate or didn't have as much information on, and that this is a case because the Chinese system has become somewhat more personalized under Xi Jinping, that his sort of personal beliefs about risk, the levels of risk and risk tolerance, are playing a much greater role. So I think there's a little bit of interaction between sort of who gets to determine the risk and perception of risks and threats and then the way that those risks are characterized, and both have actually changed in China, as far as I can tell, in the last 6 to 10 years.

- Paul here has a related question. He first thanks you for your brilliant presentation. And he says, "Your analysis highlights Beijing's visceral fears of internal instability." He wonders how that fits together with the prevailing what Western narrative of Beijing being overconfident internationally.

- Yeah, I have a somewhat different take than the idea of overconfidence. Again, I tend to shy away from terms like that because that's a characterization of the internal subjective state of a country of 1.3 billion people or the leadership of a country of 1.3 billion people, which is a whole lot. And so I tend to get nervous about ascribing that to an entire leadership or regime that's composed of a lot of different people. There's no question that some of China's behavior looks that way from the outside, whether it's the so-called Wolf Warrior diplomacy, the particularly striking insults directed at Justin Trudeau this week, which made me do kind of a double-take, frankly, and bringing back the old Maoist-era epithet of being a running dog of the Americans and that kind of language. And, yeah, that can look like, that can look like overconfidence. I tend to see that as, again, China, there is this sense that China is more powerful in the international system, that it should have more of a say. So there is definitely, I think, that belief that we see reflected in Chinese thinking and writing. But at the same time, I think the other thing that we tend to overlook a little bit is the imperative that Xi Jinping has put to the party state, which is you have to go be more proactive to manage this uncertain international environment, or it's going to come home and generate instability here, and we can't have that. So I think there's actually a tension there even within China's own thinking and approach to its foreign policy behavior. China is more powerful. China deserves to have this say. There's no question that that line of argument exists and is present in some of China's international behavior, but I also think it's helpful to understand that internally within the party state, we're seeing a somewhat different justification that doesn't rule out this other line of argument but that just is different and runs in parallel with it. The world is dangerous. As we get more powerful, it's even less safe and even more risky, and, therefore, you have to go stamp things out very,

very early because otherwise they will translate into a fundamental threat to our political security here at home. And that duality is just a little, you know, it isn't an easy thing to wrap one's head around, but I very much see both of them happening at once and in both shaping Chinese foreign policy. I don't know if that answers Paul's question, but he can let me know in the chat if that's an answer that makes some sense.

- I think you've put together the not really schizophrenia combination of we're gonna be out there and more powerful, and because we're out there more, we have to be more scared and stomp on things.

- Yeah, when I see this question in the chat also about it, I think this also answers the question of how to explain why it is that China's leaders become more insecure as the country's influence grows. Again, I don't know if we can get at the psychological roots of why, but we can observe that consistently the framing is, as we get more influence, as we get more power, things get riskier, the stakes get higher, and, therefore, we have to be less and less tolerant of dissent or opposition abroad. And that duality is fascinating and leads to some real contradictions in China's international behavior, but I see it as a sort of reasonably coherent approach if you think of it as those dual threads intertwining in China's behavior.

- Tom Gold has a very specific question about how recent behavior fits into the overall strategy. They've gone for this tit for tat sanctioning, now including professors and think tanks, and so we've got a spiral. To many people that it looks pretty counterproductive. How do you see this fitting in within their overall view how to handle national security?

- So this is an area where I actually think China's behavior has changed pretty substantially in its approach, particularly toward foreign researchers and foreign academics. And I base that on the fact that I did a survey with a terrific colleague, Rory Truex at Princeton, in the summer of, well, in 2017 and 2018, where we asked academics and researchers, some in think tanks, some in universities, how often they encountered various forms of obstacles or repression in the course of trying to do research about China. And these were all social scientists, so we're bracketing the STEM fields and talking about people who are trying to understand political, social, cultural dynamics in China. And the way we characterized it at the time was that these repressive experiences were real but that they were relatively rare. And I'm no longer convinced that that description's accurate. I think that survey was at the time that we did it and wrote it up, but it strikes me that a couple of key things have changed. One is that China, Chinese authorities used to rely a lot on uncertainty as a way of incentivizing academics and researchers to engage in self policing and, to some extent, self-censorship. And on people's calculations about, "Oh, well, I don't wanna get a Chinese coauthor or

a Chinese colleague or my host institution in China in trouble, so if somebody there gets warned that what I'm doing is not okay, I'm gonna back off," which is an ethical response, right? To being a foreign researcher and trying to protect people in the country you are working in and have relationships in. And so what strikes me as new and different about this is, first of all, the use of legal tools, right? To put a legal framework around this. It's not just declaring someone persona non grata privately. It's not just saying, "Oh, you don't get a visa this time. Come back when you've caused less mafan last time, right? It's more that we're seeing now a much more explicit, "This is not okay. The content of the work is not okay." And also then the use of legal tools that could in some ways shift the burden of responsibility to some of the foreign researchers. "Well, you can come back to China, but there were charges, there's a lawsuit filed, and you need to deal with this in a court of law," which is a way of, I think, trying to frame the legitimacy of these boundaries differently, right? This is about adherence to Chinese law and the rule and the laws of the PRC, which is a very different issue than saying, "We just politically don't like what you did," right? If you can appeal to, "This is the law, and it was broken," it's just a different framing. But it also is a more explicit laying out of a boundary that had been really blurry for a long time. And people like Kevin O'Brien and Rachel Stern have written about the use of uncertainty in China's attempts to manage contention and potential challenges to the party state, whether local or larger. And so I think what we're seeing is that one of the big shifts is that those boundaries have become more explicit, and the use of law to really kind of lock in the parameters that are and are not acceptable strikes me as just a very different approach to the scholarly community that China has taken or that different parts of the party state have taken before. And Tom raises a really interesting question about then, okay, what is the Chinese system going to do when you have hundreds of academics who sign letters in support of their colleagues who have been either sanctioned or now told they can't travel to China because of research. And I don't think we know because the decision to levy those sanctions itself tells us that China's strategy toward managing this problem is changing, and so, therefore, I don't really know that we have a good baseline from which to predict how China will then handle the obvious second and third-order consequences of people wanting to protect academic freedom and trying to support colleagues who've been targeted by these tools. I think it's a very, it's a very rapidly changing approach on the Chinese side partly due to these national security concerns being applied to research, and I have a lot of concerns, but no clear predictions on where this is going to end up. But I think it's very difficult for those of us who want to go to China and understand China and to have relationships with Chinese colleagues and scholars. It's obviously pretty concerning.

- Thank you. Half a dozen people have asked about the big elephant in the room. Where does Taiwan fit into this national security

perspective?

– I actually think there may have been relatively less change on the Taiwan framework than in some of the other areas that I described today because Taiwan has always been such an important national security priority for the CCP. And it still is. It's not clear to me... That doesn't mean it's less important, but it seems like even though the framework has changed somewhat, it's not clear to me that Taiwan policy is actually all that different. The big concern, you know, obviously what we read in the news is a growing concern about whether China has a specific timeline for resolving the Taiwan issue. And Xi Jinping made some comments two, three years ago, he was in early 2018, where about wanting to have a resolution of the Taiwan issue, I think, in his lifetime, as it was reported. I'm not sure we actually have access to the direct text of the statement that he made. But there's been concern that there's been an increased tempo of activity around Taiwan, in the airspace around Taiwan. And I think the key question here, and this gets back to one of the implications at the very, very end of my presentation, is, to me, the big unanswered question is not about deterrence, right? There is a question of, okay, the United States, and I think the United States has really emphasized the need to deter Beijing from taking actions to coercively alter Taiwan status, and that goes back to the Taiwan Relations Act, to the Six Assurances, to these cornerstone principles of American policy toward Taiwan. But typically the flip side of that is some sort of reassurance that the Beijing will not have certain beliefs explicitly challenged, right? There won't be a... What's the word? A unilateral declaration of Taiwan's independence that then, from Beijing's perspective, violates the 2005 Anti-Succession Law and puts us into a crisis. The problem I think that we might have in Taiwan is the one that I alluded to at the very end, which is that reassurance is a harder problem when you're dealing with this regime security and the security of a particular political party and set of leaders than when you're dealing with the sort of classic approach to national security. And it's not clear to me how much of that is actually at play in Taiwan, but I think to the extent that Xi Jinping has sort of personalized the Taiwan issue, made it an issue of his leadership rather than of China's broader territorial integrity, I would actually be much more concerned if that issue has been personalized and made an issue about the security of the CCP because that suggests to me that it will be harder for the United States to pair deterrence and reassurance in any way that will actually affect Beijing's calculus. But, again, I think that's... In some ways, we're lucky because these are questions that the United States and China have a lot of interactive data on and can think about which signals send which messages, and there's just a lot of awareness that this is a really sensitive and difficult issue. So I actually worry a little bit more about the potential for miscalculation. It's not to say don't worry about it in the Taiwan scenario because of how central it is, but I've been looking a little bit more at some of these areas where I think we

don't really understand the drivers of Chinese policy and the way that internal security calculations may have changed China's international behavior, and I guess I still see that there's maybe a bigger delta between past and present in some of these other areas than maybe in the Taiwan issue. I think what I will keep an eye out for is how much this is framed as sort of in the classic language that the CCP has used versus the extent to which it becomes more personalized 'cause that's gonna suggest a shorter timeframe and a potentially shorter ticking clock for resolving the issue, at which point I would get much more concerned that time pressure could produce a crisis that neither side is equipped to handle well.

- Thank you so much. I've got a whole list of other questions, many of which are about very important issues, but we've run out of time. It's been a great lecture. It's clear, it's comprehensive, and your answers to questions really put things in perspective, so thank you very, very much.

- Well, thank you very much for having me. Those are great and some of the most difficult questions, I think, that we have to grapple with right now in US-China relations and in thinking about China. So thanks for pushing me to think hard about them, and I really appreciate everyone's time and attention today. Thank you.