



31ST PARLIAMENTARY INTELLIGENCE-SECURITY FORUM
WASHINGTON, DC

SUMMARY REPORT
DECEMBER 9-10, 2025



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RUSSELL AND DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDINGS
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OPENING REMARKS

The Honorable Robert Pittenger, Chairman, Parliamentary Intelligence-Security Forum

Congressman Robert Pittenger opened the Washington Parliamentary Intelligence-Security Forum by welcoming parliamentarians, experts, and diplomatic partners, and thanking them for their participation. He highlighted the Forum's global reach, noting it is the 31st PI-SF, with over 4,000 parliamentarians from approximately 130 countries having participated, and emphasized the importance of continued international collaboration.

He concluded by introducing a video address from Matt Pottinger, underscoring its focus on national security, technology protection, and the strategic challenges posed by China.

Hon. Matt Pottinger, former National Security Advisor (video)

The Honorable Matt Pottinger outlined the global threats posed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), emphasizing its role in undermining health, security, and liberty worldwide. Key points included:

- The CCP's coverup of the COVID-19 outbreak and its continued violations of international treaties.
- Economic disruption through state-sponsored intellectual property theft and predatory trade practices.
- Military threats, including support for authoritarian regimes and potential conflict over Taiwan.
- Efforts to export autocratic governance and influence global narratives through propaganda and technology.
- Hon. Pottinger called for unified global action to deter Beijing's aggression, defend democratic values, and protect international sovereignty.

ILLICIT FINANCE

Mr. Juan Zarate, Global Co-Managing Partner and Chief Strategy Officer, K2 Integrity

Mr. Zarate explained that illicit finance has evolved from a law-enforcement issue into a core national and economic security challenge. Initially focused on money laundering and drug trafficking, the field expanded after 9/11 to include terrorist financing, proliferation, and systemic financial risk, shifting emphasis from enforcement to prevention.

Today, illicit finance reflects a convergence of criminal groups, terrorist networks, and state actors, enabled by corruption, weak governance, and emerging technologies such as crypto and new payment systems. These dynamics blur the lines between crime, geopolitics, and economic competition.



Mr. Zarate concluded that countering illicit finance requires stronger international cooperation, preventive frameworks, information sharing, and responsible use of technology to protect the integrity of the global financial system while preserving innovation.

Mr. John Walsh, President and Chief Executive Officer, SightSpan Inc.

Mr. John Walsh emphasized that free markets, banking, and legitimate financial activity are essential to economic stability and should not be unfairly stigmatized through overregulation. Drawing on four decades of experience, he warned that arbitrarily restricting financial tools undermines economic freedom without effectively combating crime. Walsh highlighted a major enforcement imbalance, noting that money laundering—despite fueling the most serious crimes such as terrorism, human trafficking, and narcotics—is insufficiently prosecuted compared to lower-level offenses. He cautioned that excessive regulation disproportionately harms community banks and the underbanked, accelerates market concentration, and increases systemic risk. Concluding, Mr. Walsh called for collaboration between regulators, law enforcement, and financial professionals, urging practical, inclusive regulation that strengthens crime prevention while preserving market integrity and economic freedom.

Ms. Lilita Infante, Chief Executive Officer, CAT Labs, Former U.S. Department of Justice Special Agent

Ms. Infante introduced the concept of the “digital kingpin”—modern criminals who leverage technology, particularly cryptocurrency, to scale illicit operations globally, likening them to a technology-enabled version of Pablo Escobar. Drawing on her experience as a former DEA special agent and pioneer of the agency’s first task force focused on cryptocurrency and dark web crimes, she emphasized how crypto has evolved from a niche tool used by early cybercriminals into a central enabler for transnational criminal organizations, drug cartels, terrorist groups, and hostile nation-states.

She explained that cryptocurrency’s appeal lies in its ability to move value globally without traditional, subpoena-able financial intermediaries, allowing criminals to operate across borders with speed, anonymity, and scale. While this presents major challenges for law enforcement, Ms. Infante stressed it also creates unprecedented opportunities. With proper training, tools, and policies, investigators can identify private keys within seized digital data and rapidly seize illicit assets—often without arresting the perpetrator.

Using case studies from her career, including major dark web takedowns and multi-billion-dollar seizures, she highlighted that vast amounts of illicit cryptocurrency remain hidden in seized data worldwide. Her core policy recommendation was clear: governments should mandate systematic scanning of all law-enforcement-collected data for crypto assets, establish strict controls to prevent insider abuse, and use recovered funds to support public institutions—taking resources from criminals and returning them to society.

Mr. Dan Swift, Senior Research Analyst at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies’ Center on Economic and Financial Power



Mr. Dan Swift warned that China is assisting Myanmar's military regime in building a digital payment system that could significantly expand illicit finance and sanctions evasion. Referencing his recent article in the Wall Street Journal, he explained that Myanmar's political isolation following the 2021 coup, combined with its long history of organized crime, narcotics production, and scam operations, makes it an ideal testing ground for alternative financial systems operating outside international norms.

He described plans for a central bank digital currency that would convert physical kyat into digital wallets and link transactions to China's financial infrastructure. The system would rely on the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, China's CIPS payment network, and technology from Huawei, creating multiple layers of anonymity that obscure beneficial ownership. Mr. Swift cautioned that this could allow illicit actors and the Myanmar military to access global financial channels, including dollar clearing, through existing correspondent banking relationships.

Mr. Swift concluded that the risks extend beyond financial crime to strategic and intelligence concerns. A Chinese-controlled digital currency would give Beijing deep leverage over Myanmar's economy and visibility into domestic transactions, while proving extremely difficult to unwind even if democracy returns. He urged regulators and policymakers to scrutinize large banks' correspondent relationships and monitor exposure to alternative payment systems, warning that Myanmar may be a preview of a broader global challenge ahead.

LINKING THE INDO-PACIFIC TO THE EURO-ATLANTIC

The Honorable Carla Sands, Vice Chair, Center for Energy and Environment, America First Policy Institute; former US Ambassador to the Kingdom of Denmark

Ambassador Carla Sands highlighted President Trump's 2025 National Security Strategy as a transparent shift in U.S. foreign policy focused on alliance-building, conflict de-escalation, and shared stability. She emphasized that "America First" does not mean "America alone," but rather strong partnerships with sovereign allies that maintain secure borders, rule of law, credible defense, energy security, and reindustrialized economies. She warned that overregulation, net-zero policies, and mass migration threaten Europe's economic strength and NATO's future cohesion.

Ambassador Sands focused on economic corridors as tools of diplomacy, stressing the importance of building prosperity through trade, infrastructure, and energy cooperation. While noting opportunities and potential risks in the Middle Corridor that could benefit China, she identified the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) as another promising initiative. Enabled by the Abraham Accords and supported by President Trump, IMEC would diversify supply chains, bypass global chokepoints like the Suez Canal, enhance energy security, counter Chinese and Russian influence, and promote prosperity across Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and the Indo-Pacific.

Mr. John Sitilides, Geopolitical Strategist, Trilogy Advisors LLC, and Senior Fellow for National Security, Foreign Policy Research Institute

Mr. John Sitilides explained that the Trump administration's new National Security Strategy marks a clear departure from post-Cold War thinking, presenting a concise and unapologetic statement of U.S.



priorities. He emphasized a renewed focus on the Western Hemisphere through forward defense against narcotics trafficking, illicit finance, and malign influence from China, Russia, and Iran—particularly in Venezuela—while underscoring the strategic importance of the Panama Canal and Arctic security.

In the Indo-Pacific, Mr. Sitalides described a pragmatic approach to China: maintaining fair trade in non-sensitive sectors, reducing dependence on Chinese supply chains, and firmly deterring any aggression against Taiwan or disruption of key maritime routes, without seeking direct confrontation. He noted that Europe is addressed through “tough love,” urging allies to increase defense spending, strengthen sovereignty, and assume greater responsibility within NATO, while criticizing the European Union’s bureaucratic overreach.

He concluded that the strategy prioritizes economic development and regional integration in the Middle East and Africa to counter instability and external malign influence, and that a forthcoming National Defense Strategy will translate these goals into concrete military capabilities, stronger alliances, and a revitalized U.S. defense industrial base.

THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

Hon. David Malpass, former President, The World Bank Group and former Under Secretary of Treasury for International Affairs

Hon. David Malpass highlighted deep structural imbalances in the global economy, warning that capital continues to concentrate in advanced economies while underinvested developing countries fall further behind. He emphasized the growing dependence of global capital allocation on U.S. fiscal decisions, Europe’s persistent growth constraints, and the urgent need for investment, energy production, and infrastructure to shift toward poorer regions.

He underscored China’s expanding economic and strategic influence—particularly through Belt and Road debt, currency pressure, and digital systems—arguing that existing international debt frameworks have failed to address sovereign debt distress. Malpass also warned that economic coercion, cyber pressure, and control over critical materials and processing capacity pose serious security risks not adequately addressed in current U.S. strategy.

Finally, he pointed to digital payments and stable digital currencies as a major opportunity for development if supported by secure, non-Chinese supply chains and effective regulation. While acknowledging some U.S. legislative progress, he stressed that faster permitting, renewed manufacturing capacity, energy development (including nuclear), and digital infrastructure are essential to restoring growth, competitiveness, and economic freedom—especially across the Western Hemisphere and Eastern Europe.

BLOCKCHAIN / DIGITAL ASSETS

Hon. Brian Quintenz, former Commissioner, Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC)



Mr. Brian Quintenz highlighted the strategic importance of digital assets by linking economic prosperity directly to national security. He explained that Bitcoin represented a historic innovation by enabling a digital asset that is simultaneously unique, globally accessible, instantly settled, and transferable peer-to-peer without intermediaries—an unprecedented advancement in the history of value exchange.

Mr. Quintenz described how subsequent blockchain developments, particularly smart-contract platforms, expanded these capabilities by allowing composability, decentralized markets, and stable digital value transfer. He compared Bitcoin to digital gold, while likening smart-contract blockchains to developer platforms that enable the creation, ownership, and monetization of digital intellectual property.

Placing these developments within the evolution from Web1 to Web3, Mr. Quintenz characterized Web3 as a “read, write, and own” internet that restores permissionless access while enabling individual ownership through tokenization. He concluded by noting that the United States has transitioned from a period of regulatory hostility toward digital assets to a more innovation-driven environment, fostering rapid growth across speculative, financial, and real-world use cases with significant economic implications.

Mr. Dante Disparte, Chief Strategy Officer and Head of Global Policy, Circle Internet Financial, LLC

Mr. Dante Disparte highlighted how regulated digital money—specifically USDC—demonstrates the real-world potential of compliant blockchain-based finance. He explained that Circle has issued the world’s largest regulated digital dollar, with over \$78 billion in circulation and more than \$35 trillion in payments processed across 190 countries, enabling always-on financial access beyond traditional banking limitations.

Mr. Disparte emphasized that digital financial inclusion and financial integrity are not trade-offs. Blockchain technology leaves transparent “digital breadcrumbs,” strengthening law enforcement and compliance while expanding access to financial services for individuals armed with only an internet-connected device. He stressed that technology reveals where legacy systems fall short, but lasting progress depends equally on policy, regulatory, and legal innovation.

He pointed to the U.S. GENIUS Act as a major breakthrough that establishes clear legal protections for digital dollar users, ensures redemption rights even in issuer bankruptcy, and creates a level playing field for banks and non-banks alike. While America-first in origin, he underscored that the law is globally oriented, enabling regulatory reciprocity and international cooperation—exemplified by a new U.S.–UK partnership on modernizing financial markets. Mr. Disparte concluded that digital currency and blockchain infrastructure represent a critical opportunity for economic competitiveness, financial inclusion, and national security worldwide.

Mr. Gregory C. Johnson, CFP, Digital Asset Executive, Board Member, NYU Faculty

Mr. Johnson framed his remarks around the unprecedented convergence of digital assets, artificial intelligence, and emerging quantum technologies, arguing that these forces are inseparable and define an “everything, everywhere, all at once” moment for global finance and security. He commended the forum for long integrating these domains and stressed the need for greater imagination and creativity to



responsibly shape a rapidly evolving financial order, drawing historical parallels to the post–World War II Bretton Woods reset.

He highlighted ongoing experimentation by states and institutions—such as cross-border blockchain and wholesale CBDC initiatives—to illustrate how new financial architectures can function outside traditional paradigms. While noting the strong momentum in digital assets during 2025, particularly amid regulatory shifts in Washington, he cautioned that recent political and regulatory gains must be consolidated into durable, codified law to ensure these technologies deliver on their promises.

Concluding, Mr. Johnson emphasized the risks of underestimating stability in the global system, warning against unintended consequences of disrupting established institutions without clear alternatives. He underscored the responsibility of leaders to deepen their understanding of exponential technologies and seize the present moment wisely, noting that the choices made now will shape prosperity—or instability—for decades to come.

Mr. Kristopher Klaich, Senior Director, Operations and Policy, Chamber of Digital Commerce

Mr. Klaich outlined how artificial intelligence, robotics, blockchain, and the coming emergence of artificial general intelligence (AGI) are fundamentally transforming espionage, national security, and global power dynamics. He argued that AI now enables real-time intelligence collection, population-scale influence operations, and precision manipulation through deepfakes, synthetic identities, and psychological profiling—while also enhancing defensive capabilities such as anomaly detection and threat prediction.

He emphasized that robotics and autonomous systems are reshaping physical spycraft, enabling deniable, persistent operations with minimal human exposure, and that AGI could soon act as a strategic intelligence partner—or, in authoritarian hands, create unprecedented surveillance and control. In this context, Mr. Klaich positioned blockchain as essential infrastructure for securing truth, providing immutable verification of data, protecting AI training inputs, and transforming digital identity through biometric-linked, tamper-resistant systems.

Mr. Klaich concluded by warning that these technologies will dramatically disrupt labor markets, widen global inequality, and intensify geopolitical competition. He stressed that nations able to master and responsibly govern AI, blockchain, and autonomy will gain decisive advantage, while failure to do so risks instability on a scale comparable to the nuclear age.

CYBER SECURITY

Ms. Diana Furchtgott-Roth, Director, Center for Energy, Climate, and Environment and The Herbert and Joyce Morgan Fellow in Energy and Environmental Policy, The Heritage Foundation

Ms. Diana Furchtgott-Roth highlighted the serious national security and public safety risks created by society's heavy reliance on GPS and satellite-based positioning, navigation, and timing systems. She



warned that these satellites can be disrupted by adversaries, interference, or natural events, which would disable navigation, financial transactions, aviation, agriculture, construction, and emergency services. Drawing on her experience at the U.S. Department of Transportation, she noted that although viable backup technologies for civilian GPS have been identified, they remain unfunded and largely undeployed. She urged parliamentarians to prioritize resilient backup systems, stressing that governments have a responsibility to protect critical services if GPS is to remain a core public utility.

Dr. Paul Maurer, President, Montreat College; Co-author, *The Code of Honor*

Dr. Paul Maurer, President of Montreat College, argued that cybersecurity is primarily a *human and ethical challenge*, not just a technical one. He highlighted Montreat College's national leadership in cybersecurity education and its partnership with the U.S. National Security Agency, which commissioned the college to develop a formal ethics curriculum for cybersecurity professionals.

He stressed that as cybercrime is projected to cost the global economy nearly \$10 trillion annually, nations must be able to trust those who safeguard financial systems, healthcare data, and critical infrastructure. Technical expertise alone is insufficient without integrity, judgment, and accountability.

Dr. Maurer concluded by urging governments to embed ethics at the core of cybersecurity training, noting that ethical decision-making must be taught deliberately to build a trustworthy and effective cyber workforce.

Mr. MacDonnell Ulsch, Founder, MacDonnell Ulsch Cyber Advisory LLC

Mr. Ulsch warned that China is using social media, surveillance, and artificial intelligence as instruments of political control, citing South Sudan as a critical test case. He explained that China is actively supporting the continued rule of President Salva Kiir in order to protect its extensive oil and infrastructure investments under the Belt and Road Initiative, while working to suppress opposition movements through coordinated online influence campaigns.

Mr. Ulsch cautioned that China is exporting domestic surveillance practices—including predictive policing and mass data profiling—into developing nations, enabling repression under the guise of technology and security. He emphasized that these efforts are closely linked to the Chinese Communist Party's military-civil fusion strategy, which merges civilian technology with military objectives.

He concluded that South Sudan represents a proving ground for China's broader geopolitical ambitions, warning that success there could signal similar technology-driven interference in elections and governance worldwide, with direct implications for U.S. and allied national security interests.

PARLIAMENTARY PERSPECTIVES

Hon. Jaak Madison, Member from Estonia, European Parliament – “A Global Security Agenda for Africa”

Hon. Jaak Madison stressed Africa's critical geopolitical importance, noting that China has prioritized the continent by securing control over key resources such as cobalt, lithium, gas, and gold—materials



essential for green technologies and global supply chains. While China's resource-for-infrastructure model initially appealed to African nations, he argued it is increasingly viewed as exploitative and destabilizing.

He urged the EU and the United States to adopt a clearer, coordinated strategy toward Africa based on fair partnerships, security cooperation, and economic development, warning that failure to act will further expand Chinese and Russian influence at the expense of long-term Western and African interests.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Ms. Anne Basham, Founder and Chair of the Interparliamentary Taskforce on Human Trafficking

Ms. Basham stressed that human trafficking is not only a humanitarian tragedy but a serious global security threat, closely linked to corruption, cybercrime, organized crime, and conflict. She highlighted the growing use of forced labor within online scam and cybercrime operations, particularly in Southeast Asia, where victims are exploited through fraud, coercion, and violence to generate massive illicit profits.

She emphasized that trafficking thrives in environments of weak governance and instability and has become one of the fastest-growing and most profitable criminal enterprises worldwide, overlapping with drug trafficking, money laundering, terrorism, and financial fraud. Technology and digital platforms have further accelerated recruitment, exploitation, and payments, making trafficking a borderless crime.

Ms. Basham concluded by urging lawmakers to focus on systemic legal reforms, not only victim rescue, and highlighted survivor-centered legislation as a critical step forward. She encouraged global parliamentary leadership and the use of the ATIP Policy Library to strengthen effective anti-trafficking laws worldwide.

Ms. Tanya Gould, OSCE International Survivor of Trafficking Advisory Council member and Anti-Human Trafficking Director for the Commonwealth of Virginia

Ms. Tanya Gould emphasized that human trafficking is a critical national security indicator. She argued that a nation's true strength lies in how it protects its most vulnerable populations, noting that exploitation thrives where systems lack stability, accountability, and dignity.

Ms. Gould introduced the "dignity mandate," a framework that treats dignity as an operational standard in governance rather than a moral concept. She stressed that survivor-centered governance is essential, asserting that lived-experience experts provide indispensable strategic insight. Concluding, she urged nations to adopt dignity as a security metric, warning that systems failing to protect the vulnerable are ultimately failing to secure the nation itself.

Ms. Mary Vigil, Senior National Security and Foreign Affairs Advisor, Office of Rep. Chris Smith

Ms. Mary Vigil emphasized that human trafficking is no longer only a human rights issue, but a strategic threat to democracy, economic stability, and national security. Drawing on her government and civil



society experience, she noted that stronger democratic governance and rule of law are directly linked to lower levels of trafficking.

She highlighted three major state-linked threats tied to China-related actors: trafficking victims forced into large-scale online scam and cybercrime operations; forced labor embedded in critical mineral supply chains, particularly cobalt mining; and forced organ harvesting targeting persecuted groups such as Uyghurs and Falun Gong practitioners. These practices generate massive illicit profits while undermining global markets and human rights.

Ms. Vigil concluded by calling for coordinated international action, including sanctions, supply chain transparency, legislation, and law enforcement cooperation, stressing that state-linked trafficking is a global problem that affects all nations' security, economies, and values.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The Honorable Chris Smith, Senior Member, House Foreign Affairs Committee, Co-Chairman, Congressional Executive Committee on China

Chairman Chris Smith delivered a powerful address underscoring the escalating global crisis of religious persecution and the moral responsibility of the United States to respond with clarity and resolve. Drawing from personal faith and decades of legislative experience, he reflected on how accounts of persecution under communist regimes shaped his lifelong commitment to defending religious freedom and opposing indifference in the face of evil.

He warned that persecution of Christians is intensifying worldwide, citing data showing that hundreds of millions of believers face severe discrimination and violence today. Chairman Smith identified communism and radical Islamist extremism as the primary drivers of these abuses. He highlighted Nigeria as a grave example, detailing daily killings of Christians by Boko Haram, Fulani militants, and ISIS-West Africa, and emphasized the importance of designating Nigeria as a "Country of Particular Concern" to enable sanctions against both state and non-state perpetrators. He criticized past U.S. reversals of this designation and welcomed its restoration under President Trump.

Chairman Smith also condemned systemic religious repression in China, describing forced organ harvesting of Uyghur Muslims, Christians, and Tibetan Buddhists as crimes against humanity. He expressed deep frustration that bipartisan legislation to criminalize the organ trafficking supply chain has repeatedly stalled in the U.S. Senate despite overwhelming House support. Concluding his remarks, Chairman Smith urged sustained U.S. leadership, legislative action, and moral courage to confront persecution, uphold human dignity, and stand firmly with victims of religious oppression around the world.

TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

Mr. David Consoli, former Senior Strategy Advisor at the U.S. Department of State



Mr. David Consoli underscored that transnational criminal networks and terrorist groups are fast-paced, digital, and operate without borders across the globe. This requires an equally agile and coordinated response. Drawing on his extensive experience working for the U.S. government for over two decades across the globe, collaborating with international partners, he emphasized that organized crime, terrorism, and human trafficking are ultimately driven by illicit financial flows and corruption.

He highlighted how criminal groups collaborate across borders to maximize profit, even when rival groups are in conflict. Successful multinational cooperation—such as the regional effort against human trafficking and child exploitation in Central America and the Caribbean—demonstrate that information sharing and joint operations can outpace criminal organizations.

Mr. Consoli concluded that the “secret sauce” in countering transnational crime is elite human operators, regional collaboration on intelligence and legislation, and the use of emerging technology. By empowering operators with modern tools, tearing down barriers to information sharing, and enabling collaboration on regional task force operations, nations can build effective cases that deliver a blow matching the speed and sophistication of today’s criminal networks.

Mr. Richard Marianos, Executive Director, Tobacco Law Enforcement Network

Mr. Richard Marianos highlighted the rapid rise of criminal tobacco trafficking, warning that illicit vapes—largely manufactured by Chinese organized crime—now represent a sophisticated global criminal enterprise generating an estimated \$300 billion annually. He stressed that these products deliberately target children, fuel addiction, and finance broader criminal activity, including money laundering, cartels, weapons trafficking, and terrorism.

Drawing on his three decades of law enforcement experience, Mr. Marianos explained that what appears to be a minor regulatory issue is in fact a serious national security threat. He emphasized that enforcement must focus on shutting down illegal vape shops, disrupting supply chains, and cutting off illicit financial flows, rather than attempting to pursue overseas kingpins.

He concluded by calling for coordinated action among governments, law enforcement, educators, and regulators—combining clear legal definitions, intelligence sharing, community education, and targeted enforcement—to protect children, dismantle criminal networks, and stop organized crime from exploiting legal gaps.



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2025

NATIONAL SECURITY

Hon. Lesia Zaburanna, Chair, Subcommittee on Public Expenditures, Parliament of Ukraine – “*Future of European Security: Building a Stronger Transatlantic Architecture for Global Stability*”

Hon. Lesia Zaburanna stressed that Russia’s war against Ukraine is a decisive test for European and global security, with far-reaching consequences for the international order and democratic resilience. She argued that Europe must take greater responsibility for its security, with Ukraine at the center of a stronger Euro-Atlantic architecture.

She highlighted the immense cost of the war, warning that Russia seeks to revise the global order and expand aggression beyond Ukraine, making its defeat there essential to preventing a wider European conflict.

Hon. Zaburanna outlined four priorities for lasting stability: strengthened collective defense and security guarantees; coordinated economic and sanctions measures; deep technological cooperation with Ukraine; and accountability for Russian crimes. She concluded that a secure Europe and stable global order depend on a secure, resilient, and fully integrated Ukraine.

Hon. Oleg Dunda, Member of Parliament, Ukraine – “*The Future battlefield with unmanned technologies*”

Hon. Oleg Dunda argued that the war in Ukraine is transforming modern warfare, marking a shift from human-centered combat to unmanned, technology-driven battlefields where people are the most vulnerable and costly asset. He said drones and AI now dominate warfare, making much traditional military equipment increasingly ineffective and exposing frontlines as vast, lethal “kill zones” controlled remotely by skilled operators rather than massed troops.

At the strategic level, Dunda emphasized that victory now depends on logistics, production capacity, command-and-control, and technological superiority, including unmanned logistics and interceptor drones, long-range strikes on supply chains, satellite systems, cyber resilience, and domestic drone production. He concluded that existing military doctrines are becoming obsolete and warned that armed forces must transform into innovation-driven organizations to remain relevant in future conflicts.

Rear Admiral Mark Melson, USN (Ret.), former Commander, Logistics Group Western Pacific/Commander, Task Force SEVEN THREE

Rear Admiral Mark Melson, USN emphasized that maritime security is essential to global economic stability, warning that instability in the maritime commons threatens nations, populations, and supply chains. He stressed the need for sustained civil–military and multinational cooperation, highlighting lessons from Ukraine’s resilience and adaptability. Melson underscored the growing linkage between the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific theaters, noting that allied naval deployments enhance deterrence and reassure partners, while keeping sea lines of communication open in key chokepoints remains critical to global trade. He concluded by highlighting the importance of interoperability, logistics, industrial-base



cooperation, and strengthened maritime domain awareness through continuous multinational information-sharing and joint training to ensure long-term security.

Mr. Ilan Berman, Senior Vice President of the American Foreign Policy Council

Mr. Ilan Berman argued that the United States is facing the most consequential national security moment in at least two and a half generations, as the pace and convergence of global threats increasingly strain U.S. military readiness, defense industrial capacity, and alliance cohesion. Citing bipartisan assessments, he emphasized that today's threat environment is moving faster than the ability of traditional institutions to respond, creating systemic vulnerabilities for American and allied security.

Mr. Berman identified China, Russia, and Iran as three distinct yet complementary imperial adversaries whose coordinated actions aim to erode confidence in the Western-led international order. He explained that Russia seeks imperial restoration rooted in historical domination rather than Soviet revival, China is building an empire of economic dependency through initiatives such as the Belt and Road, and Iran has expanded an empire of influence across the Middle East through proxies and regional integration. While their ambitions differ, their strategies reinforce one another militarily, economically, and in the information domain.

Mr. Berman concluded that deterrence remains the foundation of U.S. strategy but is only credible through capable and responsive alliances. He warned against viewing these challenges in isolation, noting that Russia, China, and Iran treat global conflict as interconnected. He also cautioned that current U.S. strategy underestimates the role of ideology, arguing that America's principal adversaries prioritize ideological goals over economic gain—making them more resilient, more dangerous, and central to future global security competition.

VIEW FROM THE U.S. SENATE

The Honorable Thom Tillis, United States Senator – North Carolina

Senator Tillis emphasized that while U.S. leadership remains indispensable to global security, the United States can no longer confront today's threats alone. He argued that the modern threat environment—characterized by cyber warfare, hybrid threats, election interference, terrorism enabled by digital networks, and non-state actors—requires a fundamentally different approach to collective defense. Senator Tillis stressed that every democratic nation aligned with the West must share responsibility, noting that global security challenges have outpaced the capacity of any single country to respond unilaterally.

Drawing on the NATO alliance as an extended democratic “family,” Senator Tillis underscored the enduring U.S. commitment to its allies while candidly calling for greater burden-sharing. He expressed frustration that many NATO members failed to meet the 2% defense spending benchmark for over two decades, estimating a cumulative \$2 trillion shortfall that weakened alliance readiness, interoperability, and industrial capacity. He warned that this underinvestment has had real strategic consequences, particularly in Europe's ability to support Ukraine and deter Russian aggression, and urged allied nations to ensure the next generation does not repeat these mistakes.

Senator Tillis concluded by forcefully rejecting any notion of Russian success in Ukraine, arguing that Vladimir Putin's ambitions pose a direct threat to the future of democracy. He stressed that U.S. support for Ukraine must be long-term and resolute, while ensuring any resolution is on terms Ukraine can accept. Addressing broader security challenges, he acknowledged shortcomings in U.S. policy toward Afghanistan and counterterrorism, emphasizing the need for stronger allied capabilities in Europe so the



United States can address emerging threats in Africa, the Middle East, and beyond. He closed by reaffirming that sustained dialogue, unity among democratic nations, and mutual commitment to freedom are essential to ensuring democracy advances while totalitarianism retreats.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The Honorable Sam Brownback, former U.S. Senator, Kansas Governor and U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom

The Honorable Sam Brownback argued that religious freedom must be elevated from a secondary human rights concern to a central pillar of national and global security strategy. Drawing parallels to the Cold War, he emphasized that the defeat of the Soviet Union was achieved not only through military and economic power, but through moral clarity and truth, exemplified by leaders such as Ronald Reagan and Pope John Paul II. He asserted that confronting today's authoritarian threats requires a similar moral framework, particularly in the face of what he described as a modern "axis of evil," led by the Chinese Communist Party and aligned authoritarian regimes. He contended that religious freedom poses a unique threat to authoritarian systems because it enables people to organize independently of the state and challenge illegitimate authority. He highlighted China's systematic repression of Uyghur Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, Falun Gong practitioners, and Christians as evidence that the Chinese Communist Party fears religious freedom more than military power. He argued that widespread religious belief—shared by roughly 80 percent of the world's population—gives this issue unmatched global resonance and moral legitimacy, making it a powerful tool to undermine authoritarian control and ideological dominance.

The Honorable Sam Brownback concluded by calling on governments to integrate religious freedom directly into their national security portfolios, appoint dedicated senior officials, and actively support persecuted religious leaders and communities through diplomacy, public advocacy, and international engagement. He urged democratic nations to shine sustained public attention on religious persecution, host international religious freedom forums, and treat this issue as a strategic vulnerability for authoritarian regimes. He stressed that advancing religious freedom not only defends a fundamental human right, but also strengthens democracy, erodes authoritarian legitimacy, and contributes directly to long-term global security.

Mr. Manus Churchill, Executive Director, International Religious Freedom Summit

Mr. Manus Churchill emphasized that religious freedom is a critical but often overlooked factor in conflict prevention and global security. He noted that in many conflict-prone regions, individuals' core identities are deeply tied to their religious beliefs, yet policy discussions frequently avoid this reality in favor of more quantifiable economic or political factors. As a result, peace initiatives that fail to address religious freedom often prove temporary, leaving underlying divisions unresolved and conflicts prone to reemerge. Mr. Churchill highlighted the role of the International Religious Freedom Summit as a practical platform for addressing this challenge. He explained that the summit brings together a diverse global coalition of civil society leaders, government officials, and members of parliament to build understanding, share best practices, and develop actionable strategies to promote religious freedom as a pathway to peace and stability. He underscored the growing parliamentary engagement at the summit, including dedicated



training tracks designed to equip lawmakers with concrete tools to advance religious freedom within their own national and regional contexts.

Mr. Churchill concluded by stressing that the strength of the International Religious Freedom Summit lies in its diversity and shared purpose. He noted that nearly 2,000 participants from more than 80 countries and dozens of religious and belief traditions come together annually, despite profound differences in theology, politics, and worldview. What unites them, he said, is a shared commitment to the fundamental right of every individual to follow their conscience freely and securely—an approach he described as both morally compelling and strategically effective in advancing long-term global security.

ENERGY SECURITY

Hon. Krzysztof Bosak, Deputy Speaker of the Sejm, Poland

Hon. Krzysztof Bosak argued that energy security is a cornerstone of national sovereignty and economic resilience, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. Drawing on Poland's post-1989 experience, he explained that Poland rejected assumptions of lasting peace after the Cold War and instead invested early in energy diversification to reduce dependence on Russia—investments that proved critical during Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

He contrasted Poland's strategy with Western Europe's reliance on Russian energy, warning that projects like Nord Stream were geopolitical tools rather than purely commercial ventures. Poland's LNG terminal, Baltic Pipe, and regional interconnectors enabled stability when Russian supplies were cut.

Hon. Bosak concluded that Poland is now emerging as a regional energy hub supporting European and Ukrainian security. He cautioned that EU climate policies could create new dependencies, particularly on China, and urged the United States and Europe to apply Central Europe's lessons by prioritizing energy independence as a foundation for long-term security and transatlantic cooperation.

Dr. Sohan Dasgupta, Former Assistant Secretary for Trade and Economic Security, U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Dr. Sohan Dasgupta emphasized that access to critical minerals represents a significant 21st-century policy challenge, closely linking energy security with broader national security considerations. He noted the implications of concentrated supply chains, particularly our adversaries' leading role in processing rare earth elements, lithium, and cobalt, and the potential vulnerabilities that can arise when any single nation holds substantial influence over these materials.

Dr. Dasgupta called for a thoughtful "Liberty Minerals Doctrine" centered on diversified and resilient supply chains, enhanced domestic capabilities, and closer coordination with trusted allies. He underscored that critical minerals are vital strategic resources, and responsibly securing reliable access to them supports sovereignty, alliance-building across the Free World, our technological leadership, and our long-term prosperity.



Dr. Kevin Dayaratna, Director, Center for Data Analysis and Chief Statistician, The Heritage Foundation

Dr. Kevin Dayaratna emphasized that affordable, reliable energy is the foundation of human civilization, economic growth, and national security. He argued that energy availability underpins nearly every aspect of modern life—from transportation and healthcare to agriculture and technology—and has driven major gains in prosperity, life expectancy, and poverty reduction. Drawing on extensive data, he demonstrated a strong correlation between higher per-capita energy consumption and improved incomes, health outcomes, environmental quality, and overall human flourishing.

Dr. Dayaratna highlighted stark global disparities in energy access, noting that countries with limited energy consumption remain trapped in poverty, poor health, and low productivity. He stressed that expanding reliable energy access—particularly in developing regions such as Africa—is essential to reducing poverty, improving agriculture and healthcare, and promoting long-term stability, while warning that energy scarcity represents a strategic vulnerability as well as an economic challenge.

He concluded by outlining policy implications for the United States and its allies, arguing that expanding domestic energy production, especially oil and natural gas, can generate significant economic benefits with minimal impact on global temperatures. He advocated a market-based, technology-neutral energy approach and cautioned against dependence on hostile or unreliable energy suppliers, emphasizing that energy affordability and independence are critical to economic resilience, national security, and geopolitical stability.

Mr. Dave McMurtry, CEO, The McMurtry Group

Mr. Dave McMurtry highlighted the critical importance of battery energy storage systems (BESS) as a cornerstone of energy independence, grid resilience, and national security. Drawing on his experience as an investor and advisor across the lithium-ion battery supply chain, he emphasized that modern societies depend on battery storage far beyond electric vehicles—supporting power grids, hospitals, industries, and military operations. He noted that the United States operates the world's largest and most complex electrical grid, which faces growing threats from extreme weather and hostile state actors, making secure and reliable energy storage an urgent strategic priority. Mr. McMurtry warned that U.S. dependence on foreign—particularly Chinese—battery manufacturing presents a significant security vulnerability. He explained that China dominates over 70 percent of global battery production, controls approximately 94 percent of lithium iron phosphate (LFP) chemistry, and leads next-generation battery technologies. This dominance extends beyond battery cells to critical control electronics and software, creating risks of cyber intrusion, system manipulation, and supply chain coercion. He cited evidence of undocumented communication components discovered in Chinese-manufactured energy equipment and rising cyberattacks targeting energy infrastructure as indicators of an escalating threat to grid reliability and national security.

Mr. Dave McMurtry concluded by outlining a five-part strategy to address these risks: investing in end-to-end domestic manufacturing; extending and stabilizing tax incentives to support U.S.-based production; diversifying battery chemistries beyond Chinese-dominated technologies; strengthening cybersecurity standards and oversight for energy storage systems; and building resilient supply chains through partnerships with trusted allies. He stressed that developing a robust domestic battery energy storage industry is not merely an energy or climate objective, but a national security imperative essential to protecting economic prosperity, technological leadership, and the reliable delivery of power in the United States and allied nations.



Mr. Francois Baird, Distinguished Fellow, Energy Policy Research Foundation

Mr. Francois Baird argued that Africa's severe electricity deficit—affecting over 600 million people—is a root cause of poverty, instability, and rising insecurity, with direct implications for U.S. and allied interests. He warned that energy scarcity fuels extremism, corruption, and growing influence from China and Russia, while preventing industrialization despite Africa's vast natural resources.

Mr. Baird proposed a U.S.-led “Edison Accords,” energy diplomacy model, similar to the Abraham Accords, to replace aid and renewables only policies with investment-driven energy partnerships that expand affordable base load power across Africa through private sector initiatives in selective country partnerships. He concluded that energy abundance is essential to economic growth, stability, and global security—and urged democracies to act decisively in support of improved African energy access.

TELECOM/INFRASTRUCTURE

The Honorable Pavel Popescu, Vice President/State Secretary @ ANCOM; former Chairman of the Defense and National Security Committee in the Romanian Parliament

Hon. Pavel Popescu warned that rapid advances in AI, 5G, and digital services are transforming telecommunications into a central pillar of national security and democratic resilience, stretching the role of regulators far beyond infrastructure to include cybersecurity, AI oversight, and digital governance. Drawing on Romania's experience, he emphasized that telecom policy is now inseparable from the protection of democratic systems.

He called for a renewed transatlantic partnership, arguing that U.S. national security strategies should be seen as opportunities for alignment rather than friction. Hon. Popescu cautioned that excessive European regulation has weakened competitiveness, allowing China to expand its influence across telecom and space ecosystems. He underscored the concrete risks posed by Chinese vendors such as Huawei and ZTE, including espionage, data exposure, and strategic dependence.

Citing Romania as a model, he highlighted the country's 2019 agreement with the United States and subsequent legislation to exclude high-risk Chinese vendors from its 5G—and future 6G—networks, with full removal by 2026. He concluded by urging closer U.S.–European cooperation to promote trusted technologies globally, warning that failure to act collectively risks surrendering critical infrastructure and future growth to authoritarian powers.

Hon. Nathan Simington, former Commissioner, Federal Communications Commission (FCC)

Hon. Nathan Simington argued that traditional telecom policy is outdated as 5G, artificial intelligence, and national security increasingly converge. While 5G has delivered limited consumer returns, he emphasized that its real strategic value lies in industrial applications—powering factories, ports, logistics, mining, and critical infrastructure—where China has gained a significant advantage.



He warned that Chinese firms, particularly Huawei, dominate by offering heavily subsidized, end-to-end industrial systems that integrate hardware, software, and data flows at below-market prices. This strategy, he argued, is designed not just to win contracts, but to control industrial data, supply chains, and critical infrastructure worldwide.

Hon. Simington concluded that the United States and its allies must treat Chinese telecommunications dominance as a whole-of-government national security challenge. He urged policymakers to move beyond narrow regulation and invest in competitive Western alternatives, warning that failure to act risks locking the global economy into a Chinese-controlled technological ecosystem.

Mr. John Strand, CEO of Strand Consult, Denmark

Mr. John Strand challenged prevailing European media narratives on U.S. security policy, arguing that American national security priorities are largely aligned with Europe's strategic interests despite frequent mischaracterizations. He criticized Europe's uneven support for Ukraine, highlighting sharp disparities in military aid contributions and noting that a small group of countries—such as Denmark and Norway—have shouldered a disproportionate share while much larger economies have contributed relatively little, undermining credibility and deterrence.

Strand warned that Europe's vulnerabilities extend beyond military aid to critical digital infrastructure. He emphasized that modern societies depend entirely on secure digital networks, yet many European states continue to rely heavily on Chinese equipment in 5G, cloud services, rail communications, surveillance systems, and data storage, even near sensitive political and military sites, despite commitments to reduce exposure to high-risk vendors.

He concluded by warning that the rapid global expansion of Chinese digital infrastructure and AI platforms poses long-term strategic risks due to a lack of transparency over data control. Rather than immediate "rip-and-replace" policies, he urged governments to stop new procurement from high-risk vendors, transition gradually to trusted alternatives, and take greater responsibility for safeguarding digital sovereignty, transatlantic security, and democratic resilience.

THE MIDDLE EAST

Hon. Tzachi Mamo, Honorary Consul of Papua New Guinea in Israel

Hon. Tzachi Mamo argued that the Middle East is a strategic crossroads where global trade, ideology, and values converge. He said trade corridors linking Asia, the Middle East, and Europe reflect competing worldviews—particularly the ideological rivalry between the United States and China—using logistics and infrastructure to project power and values.

He highlighted the Suez Canal and emerging routes through Saudi Arabia and Israel as critical to global supply chains, noting that initiatives like the Abraham Accords seek to anchor the region in cooperation and openness, while rival corridors backed by China, Russia, Iran, and Turkey pursue different ambitions. Hon. Mamo warned of Turkey's expanding influence across Africa and the Red Sea and cautioned that sudden conflicts or rule changes can quickly destabilize the region. He concluded that sustainable global trade and stability depend on shared values, trust, and preventing any actor from unilaterally rewriting the rules of international order.



Mr. Joe Glover, Board of Advisors, Parliamentary Intelligence-Security Forum

Mr. Joe Glover argued that lasting stability in the Middle East requires shifting from military-centric approaches to economic, trade-driven, and faith-informed diplomacy that addresses root causes such as poverty and lack of opportunity. He outlined a vision for a transcontinental economic “peace corridor” linking India, the Middle East, Europe, and Africa, warning that excluding Africa would be a strategic mistake given its growing global importance. The corridor would rely on advanced infrastructure to boost connectivity, reduce dependence on contested trade routes, and limit rival powers’ leverage.

He further proposed innovation cities and free trade zones along the corridor to combine Israeli technology, U.S. capital and scale, and regional human and natural resources. Mr. Glover concluded that a peace framework grounded in trade, investment, and shared prosperity offers the most durable path to stability in the Middle East and beyond.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Gilbert B. Kaplan, Former Under Secretary of Commerce for International Trade; Co-Founder and Chairman of the Advisory Board, Manufacturing Policy Initiative, Indiana University

Hon. Gilbert B. Kaplan addressed the impact of international trade policy on the U.S. manufacturing sector, emphasizing that manufacturing has borne a disproportionate share of the costs associated with decades of trade liberalization. He noted that the erosion of domestic manufacturing capacity has severely affected American communities and now represents both an economic security and a national security concern for the United States.

He identified three core trade policy issues shaping manufacturing outcomes: the lack of reciprocity and persistence of unfair trade practices, limited access to foreign markets even for competitive U.S. products, and the growing role of export controls—particularly in strategic sectors such as semiconductors and advanced technologies. Kaplan stressed that regardless of the legal outcome of current tariff challenges, the United States will not return to its previous trade model characterized by broadly open markets and minimal safeguards against unfair competition.

Kaplan further emphasized that trade policy alone cannot restore manufacturing strength. He highlighted the need for complementary policies, including workforce development, targeted investment and subsidies, innovation and entrepreneurship support, secure supply chains for critical minerals, competitive regulatory and tax frameworks, and a strong energy policy. He concluded that the United States seeks to rebuild manufacturing in cooperation with trusted allies and partners, and that tariffs—while not a perfect solution—reflect a response to long-standing structural imbalances in the global trading system.

Hon. Angela Ellard, former Deputy Director-General, World Trade Organization

Hon. Angela Ellard emphasized the continued importance of the multilateral, rules-based trading system, arguing that the World Trade Organization (WTO) remains a vital institution for managing global economic relations despite current pressures from unilateral trade actions. Drawing on her experience both as Deputy Director-General of the WTO and as former Chief Trade Counsel to the U.S. House Ways and Means Committee, she underscored the critical role legislators play in shaping and overseeing trade policy due to its direct impact on national economies and citizens.



Hon. Ellard acknowledged that unilateral measures—particularly by the United States—have strained the system, but stressed that the WTO was never intended to prevent sovereign governments from pursuing independent economic policies. Rather, it provides a framework in which members act with an understanding of shared rules and accepted consequences. She noted that violations of WTO rules are not unique to any single country and that often countries undertake such actions in response to perceived violations by others. She also emphasized that, despite recent tensions, large-scale retaliation has been limited. She attributed this restraint to pragmatic assessments by governments that retaliation would impose greater costs on their own populations and disrupt global stability.

She further highlighted that WTO disciplines extend well beyond tariffs, covering services, intellectual property, industrial and agricultural standards, and emerging issues such as artificial intelligence and climate-related trade concerns. Ellard pointed to the recent entry into force of the Fisheries Subsidies Agreement as evidence that consensus-based multilateral cooperation remains possible, even on complex economic and environmental issues. While acknowledging institutional challenges—particularly the difficulties inherent in consensus decision-making—she noted that active reform discussions are underway to modernize the WTO’s governance, scope, and effectiveness. She concluded by affirming that the WTO is an institution worth preserving and strengthening, warning that a global trading system without shared rules would lead to a far more unstable and conflict-prone international environment.

Mr. Michael Taylor, Partner, International Trade Team, King & Spalding

Mr. Michael Taylor analyzed U.S. trade policy under President Trump, focusing on the strategic logic behind current tariff decisions rather than advocating a position. He traced modern trade policy to the post–World War II system, when the United States opened its markets expecting reciprocal access and shared prosperity through institutions like the IMF, World Bank, and GATT/WTO.

Mr. Taylor explained that Trump-era advisers argue those assumptions no longer hold, citing persistent U.S. goods trade deficits—about \$1.3 trillion overall—and continued non-tariff barriers that restrict U.S. exports. From this view, tariffs are a negotiating tool to restore reciprocity, leverage market access, and compel trading partners to contribute for access to the U.S. market.

He also outlined the expanding legal basis for tariffs, including MFN rates, Sections 232 and 301, and emergency authorities, noting that tariffs are unlikely to disappear even if specific authorities are challenged. Mr. Taylor concluded that the United States has entered a durable new trade norm in which moderate tariffs are politically sustainable and likely to persist across future administrations.

PARLIAMENTARY PERSPECTIVES

Hon. Michael Adhin, Speaker of the National Assembly, Suriname – “*Emerging Threats and Security Challenges in Suriname*”

Speaker Adhin emphasized Suriname’s rising strategic importance as it prepares for a major offshore oil boom expected around 2028. He stressed that early engagement with international partners—and the timely establishment of strong legislative, governance, intelligence, and security frameworks—will be essential to ensure stability, transparency, and long-term national benefit, drawing lessons from Guyana’s experience.



He highlighted Suriname's unique profile: a small, highly diverse country with most of its population concentrated on the coast and vast, forested interior regions that pose governance and security challenges. Speaker Adhin warned of interconnected risks—from drug trafficking, corruption, illegal mining, cyber threats, and climate impacts—while noting that significant oil reserves could transform the economy only if matched by strong governance and international cooperation, particularly with the United States and regional partners.

VIEWS FROM CAPITOL HILL

The Honorable Michael McCaul, Chairman Emeritus, House Foreign Affairs Committee, U.S. House of Representatives

Chairman McCaul emphasized that national security and foreign policy require sustained engagement by legislatures, not just the executive branch, arguing that Congress has a constitutional responsibility to shape strategy, oversight, and long-term resilience. Drawing on his experience as Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, he warned that the poorly executed U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan projected weakness, undermined deterrence, and contributed to a more aggressive global environment, including Russia's invasion of Ukraine. He stressed that any Ukraine settlement must include binding security guarantees, the return of abducted children, and safeguards stronger than past failed assurances, while urging Europe to continue increasing defense contributions and viewing threats from Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea as interconnected.

Chairman McCaul highlighted Taiwan as central to global security and economic stability, warning that conflict—likely involving blockade and cyber disruption—would severely disrupt semiconductor supply chains. He underscored the importance of deterrence through alliances such as AUKUS, advanced technologies, unmanned systems, and expanded industrial capacity among the U.S. and its allies. He also expressed cautious optimism in the Middle East due to increased pressure on Iran and growing regional cooperation, warned of adversarial influence and transnational crime in the Western Hemisphere, and noted emerging homeland security risks such as drones. He concluded by emphasizing that countering extremism requires more than military force and closed with a personal story from Afghanistan highlighting both the human cost of failure and the hope created by successful rescue efforts.

CHINA COMPETITION

Mr. Piero Tozzi, Deputy Staff Director, Congressional-Executive Commission on China, U.S. House of Representatives

Mr. Piero Tozzi argued that U.S.–China competition is fundamentally systemic, not merely economic or strategic, warning that the Chinese Communist Party seeks to replace the post–World War II rules-based order with a Sinocentric system dominated by Beijing. He stressed the need for intellectual clarity, contending that mischaracterizing the CCP as “authoritarian” rather than “totalitarian” leads to flawed policy assumptions.



Mr. Tozzi distinguished totalitarian regimes—which aim to control ideology, religion, society, and economic life—from authoritarian systems that may allow limited pluralism. He asserted that China clearly meets the totalitarian standard, citing religious repression, persecution of minorities, forced labor, censorship, overseas coercion, and centralized economic control. He rejected claims that China’s reform era represented genuine liberalization, arguing instead that economic openness was used to consolidate Party power and advance long-term hegemonic ambitions.

He concluded that decades of engagement normalized the CCP, eroded moral clarity, and enabled predatory trade practices that weakened Western industries. Mr. Tozzi warned that China has exploited participation in global institutions to undermine international norms and emphasized that understanding the CCP’s ideological nature is essential to developing an effective strategy of competition, deterrence, and defense of democratic systems.

Mr. Daniel Runde, Senior Advisor at BRG Group and Senior Advisor, Center for Strategic and International Studies

Mr. Daniel Runde stressed the importance of sustained international partnerships, noting that the United States cannot address global challenges alone. Drawing on his experience at CSIS and as author of *The American Imperative*, he described U.S.–China competition as spanning military, technological, and—most critically—multilateral institutions, especially in the Global South.

He warned that China has become increasingly effective at shaping international organizations by deploying long-term strategies and well-prepared diplomats, allowing bodies such as the FAO and WHO to reflect Beijing’s priorities. Mr. Runde argued that the U.S. should work with others to ensure these institutions into force multipliers for strategic competitors.

In closing, he urged the United States and its allies to actively compete for leadership roles, invest in skilled personnel, and frame multilateral engagement in clear national security and economic terms. Consistent engagement and coordinated burden-sharing, he concluded, are essential to protecting global standards and preventing adversaries from shaping the international order.

Mr. Carl Delfeld, Chairman, The Economic Security Council; President, North America Critical Elements (NACE) Corp.

Mr. Carl Delfeld framed the U.S.–China rivalry as a defining superpower struggle, drawing on his book *Power Rivals* and his work with the Economic Security Council. He argued China should be viewed as “two countries”—a large middle-income economy alongside a vast lower-wage developing sector—an approach that avoids misjudging its strengths and limits. He noted an upcoming “State of the U.S.–China Rivalry” report to be released in January.

Mr. Delfeld assessed that China is intensifying a mercantilist economic strategy, expanding military, nuclear, and cyber capabilities, and sustaining domestic repression. He warned the United States is losing ground not primarily for economic reasons, but because short-term political incentives undermine long-term strategy, while China plans with discipline. He emphasized Beijing’s push to leapfrog U.S. influence across global infrastructure, technology, and new domains such as the Arctic, and urged the U.S. to restore credibility through fiscal discipline, reliable leadership, and strong alliances—particularly in the Indo-Pacific—concluding that effective deterrence remains essential to peace.



Mr. Brent Sadler, Senior Research Fellow, Naval Warfare and Advanced Technology, Allison Center for National Security, The Heritage Foundation

Mr. Brent Sadler delivered an operational military assessment of the People's Republic of China's expanding naval posture, drawing on his experience as a U.S. Navy nuclear submariner. He described an unusually high tempo of Chinese carrier, amphibious, air, and naval operations across the Western Pacific, South China Sea, and Philippine Sea—often conducted alongside Russian forces—as deliberate shows of power aimed at intimidation and political signaling.

He emphasized that Taiwan is the core driver of China's military strategy, noting Beijing's growing belief that force may be required for reunification. Mr. Sadler warned that China has systematically studied U.S. and allied operations, especially Japan's role, while working to undermine U.S. and allied basing and access across the Pacific through coercion, corruption, and persistent military pressure.

He concluded by underscoring the significance of the 2027 timeline repeatedly cited by Chinese leadership, including directives from Xi Jinping. Indicators such as amphibious training, modular port construction, civilian-military integration, and nuclear expansion, he argued, point not to contingency planning but to active preparation for a potential conflict over Taiwan.

