

Description

Amid perceived US retrenchment from the Middle East, the recent Chinese-brokered Saudi-Iranian peace deal has added a win for China and another layer of complexity to an already intricate regional landscape. China's expanding role in the Middle East continues to be a major topic of discussion for US policymakers as the country seeks to present an alternative to the US-led global order. To shed light on these issues, we are joined by two esteemed US government officials from the US State Department, Dr. Julian Gewirtz and Chris Backemeyer, who join us in this thought-provoking podcast episode.

Our guests provide unique insights from a US perspective on the potential implications of China's growing presence in the Middle East. They examine the region's strategic landscape and China's efforts to replace US dominance in global governance and discuss the challenges and opportunities for cooperation between China and the US in the MENA region, as well as the priorities of the US in the Middle East. Tune in to gain a better understanding of how the US perceives and reacts to China's evolving role in the region and how recent developments may shape the region's future and US response.

Takeaways

- The priorities of the United States in the MENA region
- US perspective on China becoming a major player in the geopolitics of the region
- China's regional diplomatic and peace efforts
- Opportunities and challenges for cooperation between China and the US in the MENA region
- The impact of the China-Iran relationship on US regional interests

Quotes

The US is in favor of any action taken by China or other countries to lower tensions, decrease conflicts or prevent destabilizing actions in the region. - Chris

President Biden sees this decade as critical and has a strategy for China: invest, align, and compete. - Julian

The fundamental U.S. goal of our foreign policy is a free and open and prosperous and secure world. - Julian

Featured in the Episode

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Transcript

Jonathan: Welcome to the China MENA podcast. I'm your host, Jonathan Fulton, a Nonresident Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council and a political scientist at Zayed University Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. Throughout this series, we've looked at how China's growing presence in the Middle East looks from several vantage points, both within the region and beyond. One factor that has been at the heart of all of these conversations has been the tense state of relations between China and the U.S. Competition between the two countries is having a profound impact on the strategic landscape for the Middle East North Africa region. To give us the U.S. government perspective on China MENA relations, I'm joined by Dr. Julian Gewirtz and Chris Backemeyer. Julian is deputy coordinator for Global China Affairs at the U.S. State Department, which he recently joined after serving in the White House, where he was director for China on the National Security Council. He's written several books on Modern China, most recently *Never Turn Back China* and *The Forbidden History of the 1980s*. Chris is Deputy Assistant Secretary for Assistance, Coordination and Regional and Multilateral Affairs in the State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, where he oversees cross-cutting regional policy issues. Gentlemen, thanks for joining us.

Julian: It's great to be here.

Chris: Thank you, Jonathan.

Jonathan: All right. Well, Chris will start with you. Before we talk about China. Can you provide us with an overview of U.S. priorities in the region?

Chris: Sure. Absolutely. And thank you, Jonathan, for hosting. I'm excited to be on your podcast. One that I know well and one that's really first in class when it comes to this topic of China in the MENA region, the Middle East and North Africa has and continues to be a great strategic importance to the United States. But that's investments in human talent that are critical to ensuring that both of our regions can partner together effectively. It's an important voice on global issues like nonproliferation. It's important in helping to resolve longstanding conflicts, and it's important in maintaining the security of sea lanes that safeguard the world's energy resources. And so this is a very important relationship to the United States. And I think that is something that was reinforced when President Biden visited Saudi Arabia in July of, 2022, where he really took the opportunity to reinforce to the region how important as the strategic importance of it to the United States. In that trip, he articulated sort of five key priorities that are probably worth taking a quick a quick look at. First, I think first and foremost is strengthening our partnerships within MENA, and that's to help work together to advance on global priorities, things that matter to all of us, to advance the rules based order, to tackle global challenges that could be global health, nonproliferation, cyber issues, climate change and climate change, I think is a particularly good example of one that we work together in the region because in the MENA region is so acutely aware of the changing climate of food and water insecurity and the need to transition to a different or to a new, greener economy. And so those are areas where we think we can continue to partner and build on the longstanding relationships that we've had with the region. The second priority that the President laid out is one that's been enduring for a long time, which is which is deterrence and defense cooperation to ensure that no foreign or regional powers can jeopardize freedom of navigation or frankly, dominate others in the region through military buildups, incursions or threats. And I think we all know that this is a region where these sorts of threats have emanated regularly over the years and one where we have been committed through our security partnerships around the region to to help to help bring stability and security to the region. You know, the most obvious manifestation of that, one of only three global U.S. Navy fleets stationed abroad is in Bahrain. We have tens of thousands of U.S. forces there and across the Arabian Peninsula. And a clear demonstration of our of our commitment. You know, we have as you know, we've demonstrated that through our our Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS in a major U.S. and global effort to provide security to the region. The third principle that President Biden laid out is, one, to try to de-escalate the many conflicts. Building on the second, providing security and stability is to try to, in a clear eyed and a

proactive way to try to de-escalate many of the conflicts that plagued the region. You've seen already our efforts to try to build a cease fire and a more permanent peace inside Yemen. And that's the sort of thing where in our policy we're trying to or one of the things our policy we're trying to accomplish. Fourth, and this is one that we've really put a lot of emphasis on recently is regional integration. The Middle East is the least integrated region in the world. It has the most expensive and the slowest trade. It is hampered and development is hampered in security cooperation by not working by the countries, not working together in an integrated and efficient way. And so we really tried hard to build on that and to do more and and in support of further integrating the region for the for the sake of building prosperity and stability in the Middle East and North Africa. And then fifth and last, of course, a major priority. The United States will continue to promote human rights in the region, accountable governance and all of the values enshrined in the UN Charter promote the rule of law. And this is a longstanding, longstanding priority in the United States, both in our diplomacy. And in our in our programs. So I think that's a long way of kind of going through. But clearly, evidence that the United States sees a lot of strategic value. United States, we have placed a high degree of importance on our partnerships and our relationships that we have in the region.

Jonathan: Thanks, Chris. That was a really great overview because, you know, you hear a lot living here in the region. There's a lot of questions about the U.S. commitment to when you when you go through this list and you talk about all the different things America is actually doing in the region, it really hits home that, you know, a lot of this these concerns about what the U.S. is doing here, get very simplified pretty fast because because you guys are involved in a lot of different regional issues. Julian, let's get the China side into things here before we talk about how the U.S. government sees China in the region. Just we've got to look in the global context. We can't look at China in isolation in specific parts of the world because I think typically people look at it globally from the U.S. government. So how does the U.S. see China as a global actor? How does it challenge U.S. interests and what does it mean for U.S. preferences of global order?

Julian: Great. Well, thanks so much. I just want to echo what Chris said. It's really a pleasure to be here. And this, you know, in this podcast series, which is which has done great work. And, you know, I think, to, to answer your question, maybe worth starting by taking one further step back and saying the fundamental U.S. goal of our of our foreign policy is a free and open and prosperous and secure world. And that's a goal that we have in common with countries around the world. And what we've said and want to sort of explain a bit today is that China, the People's Republic of China, PRC, for short, is the only competitor that we see on the strategic landscape with the intent and increasingly the capability to reshape that international order in ways that affect the goal, again, of a free and open and prosperous and secure world. And so when we talk about international order, what we're talking about is the system of agreements and principles and institutions that were created by countries coming together after two world wars in the 20th century, really to manage the relations between states and prevent conflict and uphold

uphold rights. And so those foundational documents, like the U.N. Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that's where we see these fundamental principles like self-determination, sovereignty, peaceful settlement of disputes. And again, you know, these are reflections of the world's shared aspirations. And they've produced, you know, pretty extraordinary results, avoiding another world war. In the decades since, avoiding armed conflict between nuclear powers, billions of people lifting themselves out of poverty, advances in human rights. And so what Secretary Blinken has said is that our goal here is not just to preserve this order, but also to modernize it and ensure it represents the interests of all nations so that it can address new global challenges, whether it's climate change or pandemics like COVID 19. And the China challenge really sits at the center of that. China's not the only pressing strategic challenge we face. Obviously, Russia's aggression is another acute challenge to the international order, among others. But since we're here today to talk about China, let me just say a few more things about what the stakes are here and how the U.S. government is approaching it. At bottom, Beijing's vision is of a world where might makes right. And that vision, if actualized, would really move us away from those universal values that have sustained so much of the world's progress over the past 75 years. And I'd note China, of course, has itself benefited from the stability and the opportunity that this order provides. But it's striking that rather than using its power to reinforce those principles and institutions that kind of enable everyone's success, Beijing is undermining them. Fundamentally, over the past decade, the PRC has become more repressive at home and more coercive abroad. These are facts your listeners are obviously familiar with. It's true in the Indo-Pacific region, it's true in the MENA region and beyond. It really is a global challenge. So when we talk about US-China policy, that's the fundamental challenge that the United States and other countries around the world are responding to. That shift in the PRC behavior both at home and especially abroad. This is an intense strategic competition, but the United States is committed to managing it responsibly. And one way that we do that is by maintaining open lines of communication with the PRC. You know, I'm happy to talk more about that later if there's of interest. The other fundamental strategic premise here is that we cannot rely on Beijing to change its trajectory. So our objective is really to shape the strategic environment around Beijing, around China. To advance that vision I've been describing of an open and inclusive international system. President Biden's view is that this decade will be decisive in shaping the terms of that competition and many other challenges. And the strategy that we've put forward for our approach to the China challenge in this decisive decade, it really boils down to three words: invest, align and compete. And I'll just briefly say a bit about each of those. You know, this is investing in the foundations of our strength here at home, our competitiveness, our innovation, our democracy. And I just note that is a bipartisan agenda. It's critical to emphasize that. Second, aligning our efforts with our networks of allies and partners around the world so that we're acting with common purpose, common cause, and then harnessing those two key assets, competing with China to defend our interests and our vision for the future. And we're quite confident in our strengths in approaching this challenge. Let me just say one more thing, which is, you know, we don't expect every country to have the exact same assessment of China that we do. Our goal really is to give countries better choices so that, for example, the only option isn't, you know, an opaque investment that leaves countries in debt or harms the environment or makes it harder for countries to exercise their sovereignty. And we've heard firsthand, I've heard

firsthand, I'm sure all of you have, about some of the buyer's remorse that these deals can leave behind. There really is a growing convergence about the need to approach relations with Beijing with a very realistic, clear-eyed approach. And, you know, many of our partners know from painful experience, you know, that Beijing can come down hard when when they make choices it dislikes. And that really just reinforces that core point, why it's so important for us to be focused on strengthening the rules and principles that should benefit all nations, because that is what has enabled the prosperity and security that we really hold dear. So let me pause there. Thanks.

Jonathan: Okay. So going on to the Middle East, North Africa region. The U.S. obviously has been the most significant extraregional actor for decades. The U.S. has deep political, economic security and people to people cooperation with countries all over the region. China, on the other hand, is a relative newcomer. Until now, it's interested has been primarily economically focused with a comparatively shallow footprint on other areas like diplomacy and policy and security. How does the U.S. perceive China's growing presence in the Middle East? And maybe, Chris, we'll start with you on this. One of them will come to you Julian.

Chris: Jonathan, That's a great question. And I think, you know, really illuminated by what you said earlier on about, you know, really the United States commitment to the region being called into question on pretty frequently as a result of some of the sort of global narratives that are out there. And I think that's something that that we need to continue to work on. I've traveled around the region and talked a lot about this particular topic, but also, you know, the sorts of things that we can and are doing for the Middle East, North African countries with regard to our foreign assistance and and and lots of other initiatives. And it's clear that, you know, the United States, a very deep, broad and long-standing history, but it's one that we can't take for granted and one that we need to continue to nurture. And so, I think one of our objective s, one of the things we have tried to do is to reinforce some of the things United States has done and will continue to do and and compare them face to face with what that with what the PRC does. For example, when you look at economic investment, which is really the biggest driver of economic growth around the world, the United States has invested three times more than the PRC in MENA over the last ten years. And our investment in the region grew faster than in any other region in the world. So this idea that, you know, we're sort of turning our attention elsewhere doesn't always hold up when it comes to our foreign assistance, to the to the Middle East and North Africa. We actually provide twice as much financial assistance in the form of economic aid and and foreign aid to the Middle East and North Africa than the PRC gave to the entire world in 2020. And I think those levels are about what they are today. We have really we have really strong cultural ties. We have 2 million Americans that are either born and in the region or have some sort of an ancestry. We have 1.4 million, I think Middle Eastern North African students that have studied in the United States in recent decades. And so there's a lot of people to people ties, a lot of cultural ties and that's something that we want to continue to to build on. But that doesn't mean that, you know, for it's quite obvious that that doesn't mean that the PRC is not going to have a

role in the region. And we already, it's already clear that, you know, the PRC is bridging economic, technological and political ties that have been growing in recent years. And I'm sure we will come back to it and want to discuss a little more detail. But the recent announcement that the agreement between Saudi and Iran that was that was in part facilitated by the Chinese is something that that demonstrates sort of their diplomatic role in the region and something that you know overall could be a net positive if they're able to hold the Iranians to their side of the deal. At the same time, we've continue to express our concerns with our partners about the things that we that we do have concerns about, whether it is on the technological front, data harvesting and and things like that that come from their from their use of technology and the security, the very real sovereignty and security concerns that come from can come from engaging or from from adapting or adopting PRC technology. And so that's something that we're going to continue to continue to talk about. We want to make sure that our partners are in the driver's seat, that they're the ones deciding what what their partnership with the Chinese will look like in the same way that they decide what their partnership with the United States looks like. We've always had a partnership that is for mutual benefit and one that we hope that will also be the case when they engage with the PRC.

Jonathan: That's great. Julian, do you want to take a crack at it?

Julian: Sure. I mean, you know, I think I think, Chris, his answer is is terrific and agree with every word. You know, I guess the only thing that I would say is from a from a China focused perspective, we see that China sort of has a very clearly stated goal, which is to make countries more dependent on China. As China makes itself less dependent on the world. And that paradigm, which is explicit from from the PRC, this isn't, you know, reading between the lines is, I think, a paradigm that gets to the core of the concerns that Chris was highlighting about why some of these engagements need to be approached with with real scrutiny and, you know, need to be approached with a real sense of thought and care about their implications for for sovereignty, for ability to make choices free from coercion. You know, over the near medium and long terms. So, you know, I think that's an area where we have constructive conversations around the world where, you know, there's been a real, you know, growth and understanding around the world. And we're frankly, you know, as I alluded to earlier, China's behavior has driven increases in understanding in countries around the world because countries have had this very, very direct experience. And that's true there, you know, in the Middle East and North Africa, and that's true around the world.

Jonathan: Thanks, guys. You know, Chris, while you're going through the list of things the U.S. does here, I kept thinking and, you know, just friendly criticism from a neighbor. But I think the U.S. doesn't really do a great job of of messaging what it does here. It's so often reduced to security. You know, you keep hearing this binary in the Middle East that the U.S. does the

security and China does the economy. And, you know, as you're describing all the investment and the trade and the education of people-to-people stuff, the cultural stuff and foreign aid, it's it's really important, I think, that people in the region see this, you know, deeper level of engagement. You mentioned the recent Saudi Iran cooling down of temperatures. We're recording this on March 22nd. So this still is somewhat of a new story. So I want to maybe talk about this for a second, if we can. How is this recent disclosure of China's mediation between Saudi and Iran likely to alter how the U.S. views China's engagement, the region? And how does the U.S. expect China's role in the region to evolve based on this diplomatic outreach? Chris, do you have any thoughts on this one?

Chris: Yeah, absolutely. You know, quickly to your to your first point, we'll take the criticism from friends any time. And we can always do a better job of talking about what we're doing, whether it's in the Middle East or anywhere else around the world. And that's something that we always need to do more of and do better of. And I think you make a really good point in that regard. With respect to the Saudi Iran deal, I think, as I mentioned, you know, anything that that China or any other country can do to reduce tensions, de-escalate conflict or curb destabilizing activities in the region is a good thing. The United States supports that. That's our goal for the region. And we are always happy when other global partners decide to push in the same direction and support that goal as well. We've long encouraged dialog between the Saudis and Iranians. It is, you know, for obvious reasons would be difficult for the United States to to be in the middle of something like that, given the fact that we don't have diplomatic relations ourselves with the Iranian government. So the Chinese here play to play an important role. Now, the question is really what happens next? Will the will the Iranians abide by this? Will they reduce the level of of illicit activity, illicit arms shipments that it that threaten the security of the region and of their neighbors? Will they discontinue their meddling in other countries? That's a real in particular in Saudi Arabia that has caused quite a bit of of irritation and concern from the Saudis. You know, we're looking forward to seeing how this plays out. And I think it's I think it's important that China has taken responsibility for this and wants to try to to fix it. And that will be very important for them to keep their to keep the pressure on the Iranians to follow through on it. So I think it's I think it's a wait and see. We'll see how this how this thing proceeds.

Jonathan: Yeah, I couldn't agree more. I mean, living here in the region, I think everybody just kind of had a big long exhale when this was announced and thought, you know, thank God, you know, a little space to reduce tensions. And and I agree with your point that China has the diplomatic capital on both sides to to to engage in ways that other great powers couldn't. So, you know, it's really good to see something positive. We don't always hear a lot of positive news about diplomacy in the region. So we'll take what we can get. One thing that's always struck me looking closely at China in the region as I do, it's China's deep deepest relations in the Middle East tend to align very neatly with the U.S. I mean, their deepest partners tend to be U.S. allies or partners like UAE and Saudi and Egypt. This political cooperation between China and your allies and partners, I think presents a pretty interesting opportunity. Of course, I realize that

tensions between China and the U.S. might make that a little hard to achieve. But is this an opportunity to coordinate regional policies with allies and partners in China and try to solve regional issues together? Or does it present actually a challenge to us? Chris, maybe you first and then and then Julian.

Chris: Sure. Thanks, Jonathan. And I think I'll be really interested in myself to hear what Julian has to say on this as we balance cooperation with competition. And that's, I think, key to that when it comes to our region in particular, you know. We have, you know, long time security, economic, cultural, relationships with the region. And I think, as I said before, as long as we are continuing to push towards the same goals of prosperity for the region, security, stability, that in and of itself will be, it should be in both of our countries' interests. Neither of us have an interest in an unstable Middle East. Neither of us have an interest in a in an economically declining Middle East. We both have an interest in ensuring that there's prosperity, that they're free. The free flow, free flow of energy to global markets. And so if that's a space where where we have common cause, that's great. I think there's a lot of things that the PRC will need to continue to do better, though, before we get to that point. And you know as Julian laid out, some of the concerns that we do have, those are things that that we're going to need to see, see differently. I don't know that the, you know, sort of going back to our previous question that this one this one diplomatic development really is evidence that there's going to be a broader change or that we're going to really be able to to to cooperate in meaningful ways in the region. But but everyone knows there are plenty of areas that need cooperation on whether it is, as I mentioned before, climate, global health, water and food security. That's just in addition to the traditional concerns of security and stability and energy energy flows. And so certainly there is plenty of opportunity. And whether there is the capacity is a whole other question.

Jonathan: That sounded really good for the Middle East side. But I bet Julian, coming from the China side, you might have you might have a different take. So, I'd love to hear your your position on this.

Julian: Thanks. No, I think I think, you know, I fully agree with with what Chris said and would just say a few other things. You know, there are there are areas where we have overlapping interests, where our interests coincide. Those areas in some cases are regional security challenges and other cases are transnational challenges, you know, like, like climate, like global health security and food security and many others. And in those areas, it's important that the United States and China, as two of the world's largest economies, largest emitters and much else besides, are able to, you know, effectively coordinate and take action together when when appropriate. And so, you know, I'd say that from that starting point, our view is that it's critical to have this kind of intensive diplomacy between our two countries, between the United States and China. And our goal here really is, you know, this is a competition and we believe it should not it

need not veer into conflict. And it's a competition where, as I've said, we have some some areas of overlapping interest and for the world's benefit. But the world expects of us is that we're able to to work together in those areas. And so we have been, I think, quite, quite committed to maintaining those open lines of communication with China, you know, multiple levels.

Obviously, President Biden met with President Xi in Bali last November. Secretary Blinken met with State Councilor Wang Yi in Munich just last month. And you know what what Secretary Blinken has said about that is diplomacy with the PRC is how we have a better understanding of each other's intentions and each other's perspective. Make clear our concerns, obviously, whether that's the PRC surveillance balloon or PRC support for Russia or PRC actions that undermine peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, but also how we talk about where there are those areas of of shared interest. You know, I'd say, you know, it remains to be seen whether Beijing is prepared to continue down that course that our two leaders laid out when they when they met in Bali and that we've been alluding to at various points in this conversation. But as Chris said, we really do think that is in and would be in everyone's best interest in the in the MENA region and frankly, around the world.

Jonathan: Yeah, agreed. We were looking at China Iran a couple of minutes ago and I want to come back to that because it's always a topic here in the region. Wherever I go, people want to talk about this, this bilateral. It causes a lot of concern in the U.S. I know it caused a lot of concern in the Middle East. So I'm just wondering how you guys assess it. Are how are they impacting U.S. interests in the region and the interests of your allies and partners in the region? Chris.

Chris: Jonathan, I you know, I've heard those concerns, too, and my in my travels around the region. And that's, I think, a really important point to look at. I mean, we we have real concerns about it, and I've had for a long time real concerns about Chinese relationship with Iran. And it's and it's frankly, it's help in allowing Iran to continue its destabilizing activities around the region. Now, I was deeply involved in the Iran nuclear negotiations in the Obama administration, and the Chinese were part of the P5 plus one and played a productive role in that diplomacy. But at the same time, you know, as they do today, continue to buy oil from Iran, which lessened some of the pressure for Iran to make concessions with respect to its nuclear program. It continued to sell weapons millions of dollars a year to Iran, you know both conventional and for its missile program, which are deeply concerning and things that are that that are controlled through multilateral forum around the world. And so, you know, this just comes back to again, you know, we're obviously supportive of things that can be done that are positive for the region. But there's a lot of things a lot of things that are not positive. That are not helping when it comes to Iran's destabilizing activities that the China needs to do differently, and that's in particular in the space of of of helping the Iranians procure controlled technologies is one in particular that that plays a real destabilizing role and something that I think the region, the region is aware of.

Jonathan: Yeah. Yeah. Agreed. You know, we've been talking mostly about how tensions are between China and the U.S. feature in the Middle East. I've been traveling around the region quite a bit the past few months talking about these issues. And one of the things that keeps coming up is regional actors or commentators or just, you know, just professor or students I'm talking to keep hearing the same message. People are worried about this great power competition. They're focusing in the Middle East mostly on domestic development agendas, whether it's the Saudi Vision 2030 or the Egypt Vision or New Kuwait. You know, development is what concerns governments and people in the region. They're worried about developing sustainable economies. And in a lot of these cases, China's seen as a very important actor. You've mentioned early on how China's such a big trade partner does a lot of investment, a sort of contracting tech. So local actors don't really see it the same way. They often see China's pretty important partner in a lot of these these issues as they do the U.S. as well. So are there ways going back to this cooperation idea or coordination idea, the areas where the U.S. and China can cooperate to help Middle East actors achieve these goals? Julian, could you take a shot at this one?

Julian: Sure. You know, and I'd say first, you know, just to go back to some of those really, I think, quite, quite important statistics that Chris laid out at the beginning about the depth of U.S. engagement in the region. You know, I think the sort of the false binary there and some of the false narratives are important to push back on in no uncertain terms. And another important false narrative to push back on, you know, is this idea, which I think is implicit in some of what we see that, you know, China somehow, you know, doesn't interfere in countries' sovereignty, that these these deals, these economic opportunities, you know, don't don't come with strings. And, you know, I think we we just have seen so clearly that that despite a stated commitment to, you know, quote unquote, noninterference, you know, over and over again around the world, the PRC is willing to use for coercion, seemingly benign economic connections. And as I said before, is particularly focused on how it can leverage and create in order to leverage new forms of dependency in the economic and technological and security domains. But to the core of your question, you know, I think there certainly are areas where the United States and China can coordinate and can cooperate. We've discussed a number of them, you know, including, as I said before, you know, both regional security challenges and transnational challenges like climate. You know, as Chris mentioned at the beginning, those those climate challenges are real and pressing for the region as they are for for us and for our friends and partners around the world. But I think it's important to note that, you know, while we really are committed to working with all countries around the world to address the climate challenge, we've also seen sometimes a concerning willingness by the PRC to to treat that desire as some sort of leverage. You know, it was frankly pretty irresponsible last summer that before COP in Sharm, you know, the PRC went through you know, we went through this period where the PRC suspended climate cooperation with the United States quite publicly. And, you know, frankly, what we said at the time and is true is, you know, that didn't punish us, that punished the world, that punished countries around the world. So I would just go back to that core point that we really need to keep these channels of communication open. The world, I think, you know, has conveyed that that's the expectation that countries have around the world that as the two largest emitters, you

know, we will we will be talking, we will be engaging constructively and we will be sort of solutions and outcome oriented. And, you know, and I think that message is something that we hear loud and clear and that we hope very much that Beijing also hears loud and clear. And it affects its behavior because, as you say, countries around the region, countries around the world are concerned and, you know, do want do want to see that happening.

Jonathan: Great. Thanks. Chris, Do you have any thoughts on this one?

Chris: You know, I think Julian really hit this on the head, and I'm glad he brought up the climate change example, because that's one where especially the Middle East, we need Chinese leadership. And in the Middle East, you see really some of the worst effects of climate change, water scarcity, these really extreme rising temperatures. And those are going to lead to conflicts. They're going to lead to migration and they're going to lead to, you know, they're going to disproportionately affect women and girls. And so the people in the region are going to see these effects. And they need not just the United States to be a leader on this. They need the Chinese to be a leader in addressing climate change as well. And obviously, the region itself as a major energy producer has a role to play in mitigating against climate change, but is also going to be on the frontlines of adapting to climate change. And so with COP last year in Egypt, as Julian mentioned, and with the new with COP 28 in Dubai later this year, you know, this is an area where we should do where we, the United States, are committed to doing all we can to to combat climate change. And we would hope the PRC would be doing the same thing.

Jonathan: Absolutely. Okay. Well, this has been really interesting. We're winding down here. You guys are have no shortage of opportunities to talk to folks in D.C., But we've got a lot of listeners who are here in the Middle East. So any closing remarks for for just the broader audience. Julian, would you like to give some of your thoughts?

Julian: Thank you. And no, this is a it's been a really, really, I think, fascinating and fruitful discussion, Jonathan, and really grateful to you for doing it. I think that the final thing I would just say is, you know, my my work focuses on on China, but it's so clear around the world as I travel and talk to counterparts, you know, U.S. partnerships are anchored in the region, in the MENA region there. You know, as much as our conversation today is about China, our approach to the region is about the region and about countries in the region. And so, to me, you know, I think it's just important to to reinforce that we're talking about the challenges that China poses, but we're really here to strengthen our partnerships with with countries around the world. And I guess the last thing I'd say is, you know, sometimes it can seem like talking about the China challenge is is far away, you know, or is is a sort of a, you know, a distant matter either in time or in geographic space. But it really isn't far away for for the MENA region. It it matters for for every country. And

that's why we're so focused on engaging more deeply with every country. And when I say it matters, it's you know, it matters in the United Nations, it matters in bilateral and multilateral settings, it matters for the global economy and for so many of the transnational challenges that we've been talking about. So, I think when we talk about China as a global challenge and we talk about China in the MENA region, we're really talking about something that I hope feels like a like, you know, if not a kitchen table issue, at least, you know, what we call it, Main Street issue, an issue that matters for ordinary people and for governments in countries around the world. And so let me just stop there. Thanks.

Jonathan: It's a great point. You know, like talking to people here, China still feels far away. It feels like, you know, an Asian thing, know, people don't really experience China as as part of their everyday lives. But it's it's certainly in the region become it's become that even, if it's not obvious. Thanks for that, Julian. Chris.

Chris: Jonathan, That's a great point and I think I build on that on on sort of my closing remarks, which is that we in the United States need to continue to do a better job of talking to the people of the region. And we are going to be, we are going to do that, we're going to be committed to helping to resolve challenges in the region. If China seems far away, the United States needs to seem close. And we've got a lot of ties through the region, whether they are cultural ties, educational ties, financial, economic ties and security ties. We've invested a lot over those in those ties over the years going both directions. We have a lot of investment. We have a lot of ties here in the United States from the Middle East and North Africa. And so I think our goal is to continue to build on that. On the closeness of our relationship, regardless of whether regardless of whether the PRC is going to be involved in MENA or not, that is something that's a core strategic interest of the United States and, of course, inherent cultural and economic interest for the United States. And so that's something that that we need to continue to not a) take for granted, but b) really prioritize in our in our in our outreach and in the connections between our between our agents.

Jonathan: Great point. I like that point about, you know, focusing on the region regardless of other regional actors. I think that's something folks in the region really like to hear. Gentlemen, that's been really helpful. I know you're both really busy guys. I appreciate you taking the time. I'm sure you've given our audience a lot to think about. And I really thanks for coming on the show.

Chris: Thank you, Jonathan.

Julian: Thank you for having us. Great to talk.

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