**Podcast Episode: 2024 Foreign Policy Update Q&A with Tom Hanson**

**Transcript:**

**Nicholas Hayen**

Welcome to the Global Minnesotan podcast connecting and forming and engaging Minnesota with the world. Our mission is to advance international understanding and engagement in every corner of the state. We do this with a variety of programs, including our public events, K12 education programs, great decisions, discussion groups and professional exchanges. To learn more, visit our website @globalminnesota.org. I'm Nicholas Hayan, marketing and communications manager for global Minnesota. On January 31st Global Minnesota hosted our popular annual event, the US foreign policy. Update in this event diplomat and residence and retired career foreign Service Officer Tom Hanson discussed the latest foreign policy developments, trends and challenges facing the US this year. His insightful and wide-ranging discussion included topics like the repercussions from the ongoing war in Ukraine, concerns facing China's economy, renewed conflicts in the Middle East. And ongoing global struggles for peace and security. The full event recording is now available to watch at globalminnesota.org, or you can listen to it now on our latest podcast. Today's episode is a follow-up conversation with Tom Hanson, featuring questions submitted during the event. We received numerous questions for the special Q&A episode and have compiled a wide-ranging sample so we can hear more of Tom's unique analysis on all things foreign policy. Tom, thanks for a thought-provoking event earlier this year and for joining the podcast today to answer. There are many questions that we have for you.

**Tom Hanson**

Well, Nick, thank you so much for inviting me. You know, I really enjoyed the event at the end of January and a lot has happened since then. So, and I'm looking forward to hearing the questions that came from the audience.

**Nicholas Hayen**

Yeah. So, as you said, spent a little over a month since we gathered nearly 400 virtual and in-person guests for your presentation. So, let's start off with that note. What major developments in foreign policy have happened since then?

**Tom Hanson**

Well, I mean, there's been a lot right across the board. I would focus on just a few. In in a nutshell, the tide is turning on the ground in Russia's favor, even more than when we met a month or so ago, and we maybe can talk about that in more detail later. The basic issue is that US and NATO Are now contemplating very risky Strategies to try to offset the Russian advantage on the ground, and so that's, I think, a key development that's happened. On the bright side, Sweden now is coming into NATO. Finally, both Turkey and Sweden in the last few weeks now have lifted their blockage of Swedish membership.

**Nicholas Hayen**

Hungry and Turkey.

**Tom Hanson**

Ah. Hungary and Turkey. Excuse me. Yes. Hungary and Turkey for Swedish membership. And so that's a positive thing. And then obviously the key area is Gaza. And maybe this is a time to say a few things about that, you know, the basic goal is to, you know, tamp down the conflict, get a ceasefire at some point. Prevent escalation. Into a regional conflict, and all this is proving very difficult. You know, there's so much trauma on both sides, current trauma and past trauma. October 7th was a horrific event. Inexcusable. And of course, now. We've had. Over 30,000 deaths in Gaza. Although the administration is trying to press for a ceasefire, the signs right now are not good. Hamas has come back and said that even for a temporary ceasefire and they need an agreement that all Israeli forces will withdraw from Gaza. And of course, the Israelis are not about to give that give that kind of an assurance at an impasse and the Biden team has made it increasingly clear that it. Wants some form of ceasefire. Now both the President and Kamala Harris have been very clear on that increasingly in recent weeks. You know, we need to have some kind of movement eventually on a two-state solution and that's where, as I said, the Israelis are blocking. So, in the dangers of regional escalation. Are we still there? I mean, the hoodies are undaunted. They're still disrupting shipping. There are rumors now that that Israel. May attempt to push Hezbollah away from the border with Israel and the north and push it back, push Hezbollah back up past the tiny river. That that's still my own taste river from antiquity. And in other words.

**Nicholas Hayen**

Hmm.

**Tom Hanson**

Push them north of Tyre north of Sidon, and this the goal here would be to allow the 10,000 Israeli residents of northern Gaza to return to northern Israel. So, whether this happens or not is still up in the air, but there are indications that Israel is moving troops, more troops to the north. They've been increasing numbers of incidents along the border there. So, this really bears watching because even though Iran seems to not want an escalation of the conflict and it's pressuring its allies. To be somewhat cautious. An outright incursion into Lebanon. It would be a very unpredictable act and it would be very hard to know what would result from that.

**Nicholas Hayen**

I imagine that would be a fairly dramatic increase in hostilities, wouldn't it? Because Hezbollah has quite a large military force. And it'd be interesting to see what the United States would do in response to that. I imagine there's quite a bit of hesitancy towards Israel going into that encouraging incursion right now from the United States perspective, isn't there.

**Tom Hanson**

Yes, there is, and in fact you know the way we fully have embraced the Israelis since October 7th and they're providing all the military aid at great expense to our standing in much of the world. For better or worse and actually. Possibly in a way that's going to impact the Election. Our election is in November of 2024, because there's a lot of opposition to that policy. But the idea was to side with the Israelis and then use that to influence them to have credibility to. And so, the Biden administration said that one area where that didn't work, was that we were able to dissuade the Israelis at the outset to not take aggressive actions up along the border

**Nicholas Hayen**

And.

**Tom Hanson**

And so, there have been skirmishes, but there hasn't been any full-on attack, so that's what might be changing though potentially.

**Nicholas Hayen**

And you did allude to that this could cause certain issues for domestic elections. You know, as you said during your presentation, you know, 2024 is being called the Year of Elections with more people going to the polls across the globe than at any point in history. So, what have been the results of these elections so far?

**Tom Hanson**

Yes.

**Nicholas Hayen**

And as we look towards the rest of the year, what should people be paying attention to as these elections are taking place?

**Tom Hanson**

Yeah. So yeah, I mean it depends on how you define the democratic election, which of course there are many asterixis. But yes, an unprecedented year, it's estimated up to 3 million people will be going to the polls. The elections that have taken place so far have been. It is significant to Taiwan election in in on January 13. Which was seen as a possible flashpoint if the sort of pro-independence forces had a very strong showing, that might increase tensions with China, and in fact it was a mixed result. And so, some people feel this has tamped down the pressures. So that was a positive result. There have been examples of managed democracies having elections of Pakistan probably is the clearest example. On February 8th, they had an election and. The opposition candidate Imran Khan, who is in prison right now, he's a former Prime Minister himself. His party came out ahead. In the parliamentary vote, but under the influence of the Pakistani military, obviously the Electoral Commission of Pakistan made some decisions that that that allowed the current Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif to return to power. And it was clearly a managed result. And so, there's a lot of tension right now in Pakistan over that. Another managed election is coming up now in Russia. They will. They will vote March 15th to 17th. Obviously, Putin will win, but there was A and I mentioned this in the speech on January 31st a peace candidate who arose person that the Egyptian who seemed to be getting a fair amount of support. People were lining up in the cold to make sure he had enough signatures to go on the ballot. And of course, lo and behold, once again an Electoral Commission that seems to be important nowadays in managed democracies determine that a certain percentage, I think 50% of his signatures had to be disqualified for various reasons, and therefore he could. Not be on the ballot. That plus of course, now the Navalny death and observances in Moscow. There is some degree of discontent in Russia right now, but it doesn't show up in the polls. Putin still has strong support. And he's obviously going to be the winner going forward. Now. Mexico is an interesting election coming up on June 2nd, you know, Lopez Obrador is finishing his second term and thus will leave office. And two women, two very educated women, are vying as the top candidates. Claudia Sheinbaum, who was a physicist and former Mayor of Mexico City and who is a strong supporter of Lopez Obrador, is leading. Handily, and will most likely win the election and continue the Moreno parties dominance of politics. Her opponent, she's actually indigenous Mexican. She's a tech entrepreneur and she's the second leading candidate. That would be an interesting election to follow as well. I would also mention, and this is not a national election, but the European Union is having an election for their Parliament also in June. The European Parliament is still, you know, doesn't have as much influence as the national parliaments, but it's getting more and more responsibility within the EU system, and it's often seen as the bellwether for the politics in the European Union and this year it will be a clear bellwether for the populist parties. Those who are expected to do well, largely on the basis of the immigration issue, which obviously may be talked about a bit later, is a key factor.

**Nicholas Hayen**

This is populist parties from the far right or far left, or both.

**Tom Hanson**

Both, For example, Germany right now has two rapidly rising parties, one on the left, one on the right, both having questions on immigration and on EU. And so, especially from the right, it's mostly in the Le Pen's party is expected to. Do. Quite well as well. In France, that's another election to bear watching other ones coming up. You have South Africa on May 29th, Croatia, Georgia, some of the smaller European countries. And of course, the big one is our election, which is being watched with increasing trepidation around the world, because obviously, since we're still very much at the center of global politics, what happens here will have a huge impact around the world, especially on our NATO allies potentially. As I pointed out, you know on January 31st the Council on Foreign Relations, which issues a risk report every year and our election was the number one risk in their assessment this year. Yeah. Head of Gaza ahead of Head of Ukraine so you know it's in our hands to see to make sure that this goes forward peacefully, and we stay on an even keel. So anyway, those are the basic context contests that have taken place and that are looming now.

**Nicholas Hayen**

And is there still question about if Ukraine will be having presidential election this year?

**Tom Hanson**

It's pretty clear that they will not, and when we talk about Ukraine, maybe a little more in detail later. Zelensky has pretty much announced that they're in a war in wartime, a lot of normal democratic procedures are suspended, and that's actually the source of criticism.

**Nicholas Hayen**

Hmm.

**Tom Hanson**

Uh. Especially from some of our European allies about what's happening in Ukraine. But you know, it's a horrible war and that often happens in wartime. But there are signs of tensions within governance in Ukraine, and there may be a push for an election coming up. Depending on whether Zelensky is further weakened, as of now, they will not be holding an election.

**Nicholas Hayen**

And we did, unsurprisingly, receive a lot of questions about the war in Ukraine. So, I guess the big one is just how do you see this? Conflict ending.

**Tom Hanson**

Well, I mean, we're not there yet. There's a lot that will take place which I'll try to describe here, but I in a nutshell, I fear that the most likely ending is some form of frozen conflict in which Russia retains the real estate they have right now, perhaps a bit more. I think they would like to move on. I take harking the second largest city, which is in great in great peril right now, and perhaps even attempt to take Odessa down in the South, which would be a a bigger prize, but also more difficult to attain, and the only scenario where this would happen would be if the scale of losses and on both sides there is kind of an exhaustion. Including on both sides militarily, but also among supporters in the West. That finally it just grinds to a tragic halt and with a few issues unresolved, the thought that that some former negotiations would take place, of course, that was the idea with Korea too, and Korea has remained a frozen conflict. There are many frozen conflicts in the world, and this could be one of them, but that that's not. I think that's the most likely, but it's not necessarily because there are many shoes left to drop here.

**Nicholas Hayen**

Yeah. And just singling back on you mentioned Odessa is so the importance of that would be essentially to landlock Ukraine and to take the remaining coastline away from it. Is that correct?

**Tom Hanson**

Correct. And Odessa has been a Russian speaking city largely there were, there was violence there right after the change of government back in 2014. And so, you know, in General Russia is trying to Assimilate the Russian speaking portions of Ukraine. In other words, the parts of eastern Ukraine which voted for Yanukovich in the last election before for 2014, which historically have been part of Russia, where you have the Orthodox faith predominant, you know, western Ukraine. Even into central Ukraine is a very different history. And so, I think that the Russians probably I I'm. I'm skeptical that the Russians really intend to. I may be wrong move much further beyond acquiring the territory. They haven't a bit more I think that they would like to stabilize. That and kind of have a dysfunctional Ukraine that would continue. Because to try to. Go in and occupy and stabilize western Ukraine. Given the differences and given the very high degree of anti-Russian feeling in western Ukraine, I think would be a bridge too far and to attack a an Article 5 NATO. Country. We would also be a huge risk for for Russia, which is in demographic decline, 1/3 of their economy now is devoted to the military with this war, and they increasingly declare that that their priorities now are in the other direction, that they see themselves more and more as a part of Eurasia and they call themselves in northern Eurasia. They see vast opportunities working with China, with Turkey, with Iran and Central Asia. Now whether this is just propaganda, but this is this is the line and this is what the Russian people are being told. That's why I think this idea of a frozen conflict makes sense just because I don't think the Russians are going to push unless they're attacked. Directly, I don't. I don't see that is a possibility, and that's what I think we need to discuss, because the next stage of this conflict involves a lot of risk taking, potentially by the West.

**Nicholas Hayen**

Yeah. And because we have in the West, we have provided quite a bit of support. Do you think that that support would be enough, you know can Ukraine acquire the necessary equipment it needs to win this? War or is Ukraine just simply outnumbered and out quipped for such a long-term war of attrition?

**Tom Hanson**

Well, you know, with the failure of the counter offensive and as this war has ground on, you know, Russia is pursuing a strategy of what you might call aggressive attrition. They're not really trying to take a lot of. I mean, when you're on the Offensive you take higher losses. And so the Russians are being fairly careful. They're using their air power; they have totally air dominance. They're trying to reduce Ukraine's. Air defenses infrastructure as we see.

**Nicholas Hayen**

Is that something that can be resolved with F-16s or is it more complicated than?

**Tom Hanson**

That it's more complicated than that because the problem is on the ground and I'll expand this in a minute, but. On the ground at least, this is this. Is turned into. A rule one type of conflict of trench warfare. In which artillery? Is really an ammunition being key and many. More and the Russians have a tremendous advantage in both of those factors. Obviously in population and since the West has not geared up for this kind of war in in for decades, the US and our allies have been having to retool production to meet the ammunition needs of the Ukrainians. And for the moment, we're way behind the curve on that. Nothing is going to come in very soon. So. And of course, in Congress, through their aid for the moment at least, is blocked. So, what you've had happened in the last couple of months and even weeks is the 2 primary base. Options that Ukraine had set up in Donbas since 2014. These are not just towns that fell. These are military bastions that finally fell to the Russians and the defense lines between those bastions and the Newport River are very thin.

**Nicholas Hayen**

Hmm.

**Tom Hanson**

And so, there's talk. I think what we're advising the Ukrainians now is to forget about. Defenses get through the year 2024, go on the defensive. There's even talk about setting up an iron triangle around the Nipper River as they potentially fall back and then hope that aid will be on line, that we'll be able to supply. Ukraine by 2025, in a way. That. Would get them back in the game, but the problem is they're running out of personnel. It's estimated up to 1,000,000 young Ukrainian males of draft age have fled into Europe. For example, right. It's not just a lot of young Russians that left a lot of Ukrainians have left and more are leaving right now because there are rumors of a of a call up of up to 500,000 that in Ukraine. Given that situation on the ground and the fact that these tensions have arisen in Ukraine about. Governance and you see the elections are. Coming up. There's a discussion now in NATO of how we offset these disadvantages. The idea is to take the war to Russia as we're using on the ground. So, and then maybe go after depots go after shipping in the Black Sea, and the problem is that some of these systems are so complex that they must be managed by NATO personnel. And so, Putin gave a speech, he gave his state of the Union. Addressed this week, in which he said very clearly, if we are struck on our territory by weapons that are provided. And targeted, managed by NATO personnel, we will respond. What response that would take that kind of escalation that would lead to is it hard to know at this point? But NATO is seriously considering these steps, so it could do it. I mean it's going to be potentially dramatic. Going forward, given this, this discrepancy between sort of a negative trend on the ground and the need to somehow offset that in other ways.

**Nicholas Hayen**

Right. So, shifting gears a bit, we received some questions about global migration. So, global migration is projected to increase substantially in the coming years due to political instability, climate change, and other factors. How do you think this will shape global political movements in 2024 and beyond?

**Tom Hanson**

As we've already alluded to in discussing the European Union elections, it's going to be, yeah, immigration is a huge factor. In domestic politics, especially in the West, you know it's interesting. The other parts of the world for. Example, most of Asia. It's really not an issue because China and Japan don't really allow immigration that much, right? They have, I mean they never have and so a lot of the immigration that is arising out of the global South now, with its burgeoning demographics, the destabilized zone in the Middle East, it's heading for Europe primarily, and for the United States now, certain fairly high percentage of immigration takes place within the country, right? I mean about. Half of of Immigration takes the form of displacement. Internal displacement.

**Nicholas Hayen**

Yeah.

**Tom Hanson**

So, you know, it's not like everything is coming our way. You know, there's been a there's been quite an increase just this past year. Now the European Union has 1.1 million asylum seekers. In 2023, that's up almost 20% from the previous year. That's the highest since 2015, which was that you know that that was the tsunami that took place where under America said, you know, we can handle this. And of course they have handled it well, but there's. More. Coming now. When it comes to Europe, that the Largest. A number coming in as Syrians, it's up almost 40% Afghans, a lot of Afghans, more Turks are coming in and of course, coming up. The irony of our Military action in Libya when we got rid of Gaddafi, using responsibility to protect, but then continuing our assault is that it's become a a chaotic zone where immigration is free to flow up from Africa and now that you have several anti-Western crews taking place in Places like Niger. There, which are under already under climate duress countries like Nigeria, states all cooperation with the Europeans in in terms of trying to stem immigration coming through so that there's a huge flow now that's developing. It'll be more and more climate change going forward right now. And a lot of it is due to political instability. Also, you should never forget that immigration is based on push and pull factors, right? And so, you know, there are a lot of push factors that we've been describing climate chaos for military corruption. But there's also the cell phone. People all around the world now can see a better life and participated in it virtually. And so, the pull factor on immigration is also very strong though. So, we'll see where this goes. And of course, our summit border, we've had an unprecedented number, I think 300,000 in December. A country to watch here is Germany, because 30% of all the immigrants coming up into Europe now are going to Germany and the Munich Security Forum, which has an annual meeting, it had its meeting in March, sort of the world security and military elite. They always do a big study beforehand, and they found that the country that is under the most tension and where immigration is the greatest factor in politics is Germany right now. And so that's why the rise of the alternative for Germany party, which is is advocating. Not just stopping immigration but sending masses of. Wants back to their countries, including immigrants, that have become German citizens, and this is a such a controversial policy that there are people calling for the party to Be Banned. But the problem is they've got over 20% right now of the vote. They've got nearly 40% in parts of East Germany. Do you ban political movements? As questionable as it may be, if it has that degree of support in the electorate, and so Germany is under is under great stress there and on the left there's a new party headed by a very articulate. Former Left party member named Sarah Vaughan Connect, who her party is rapidly rising. The center parties. The Social Democrats are sinking like a stone right now here at home. Donald Trump, after his victory on Super Tuesday, his speech was all about immigration. Yeah, it was. It was a a harsh, very forceful statement on the immigration issue, which, I think.

**Tom Hanson**

Here too will be a factor and here too you could argue that Ukraine is fading. A bit. In in, in, in the popular discussion right now, coming up to that election, so how do you handle immigration even if you accept that it's needed, you still have the question of how do you organize it? How do you and? That's up for debate.

**Nicholas Hayen**

Yeah. What? What are some of the solutions that some of the some of those parties are proposing? I mean, we've heard, of course, what like alternative for Germany is proposing on the on the right, what is the counter argument on the left that's being proposed?

**Tom Hanson**

Great. Great. Well, I think that that. That there is a on the left in many Western countries there there's a sense that diversity is a. Strength. You know, there's a moral aspect of helping people in need then the argument that we're going to need the workers anyway. So, but even some of the left parties. In in Germany, for example, are and you've seen this in Scandinavia, where some of the parties were very open to immigration and now in a country like Denmark, you know the even. Even the Social Democratic Party. That's one to a much stricter, of course, these are countries with small populations that you know, where with large number of immigrants come in, it really has an impact. Canada is interesting cause they've been trying to establish a law that will encourage educated immigrants. I mean, immigrants, that clearly will contribute to the economy and to the Community. I mean however, you define that whether you can really make that kind of a triage, I don't know. There's some discussion of that here. But I mean, everything is so blocked in Congress, and you know, I mean, it's clear that there's an attempt being made to kick the immigration issue down the road so that it will be a huge factor in our November election.

**Nicholas Hayen**

And you alluded to this a bit, but you know the African continent is going to be big, not just in this sense of immigration, but because the population growth is expected to rapidly outpace that of. The rest of the. World. So, tell us what you see as the opportunities for US engagement here throughout all of Africa.

**Tom Hanson**

Select. Well, I mean they're, they're huge. I mean, there are 54 countries. Africa's huge resources, populations that are increasingly educated, the World Bank predicts now that among all the regions of the world, Africa will be #2 in growth. They're going to be the second fastest.

**Nicholas Hayen**

Hmm.

**Tom Hanson**

Growing a part of the world and 11 of the top 20 countries predicted for growth will be in Africa now. Obviously, they're starting many times from a lower level, right. And so, you have to see all in relative. Terms. But still, these are very encouraging signs and other countries are finding. Tremendous opportunity and advantage. You know China obviously with. It's Belton Rd. extends into Africa. They are opening up the bricks. Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa. Now six new countries came in last fall, and now there are 30 more waiting in line, some of them in Africa. South Africa is a very enthusiastic member of. The BRICS Russia is getting more and more involved. Turkey is very interested in Africa building infrastructure. So, there are tremendous opportunities, and the problem has been for us that just given the way our economy is organized, we cannot force the private sector to go in to take economic risks anywhere, right? We used to have a more active aid program in the 60s into the 70s, but that's pretty much defended now. Obama had a year of Africa. In this last year in office. The heads of major corporations in the US were there, and there was exhortation. OK, this is the future in many ways. Let's get involved and nothing happened. And the same thing. A Biden organized that rather hastily, an African summit. End of last year, the reason being that we discovered that apart from our allies in Europe and the G7, other countries out on the global S, we're not supporting us on Ukraine. They were they were demurring ignoring sanctions, this course is what has helped Russia to keep its economy relatively strong in, despite hobbling sanctions that we've. And so, there's a sense now. So I think in Washington, we even welcome to the political importance of Africa, right, that, that, that, that increasingly the global South will be or what the what the French and the Russians and the Chinese call the global majority because it's going to have about 80 something percent of the population later in the. We need to get involved and we're trying to get involved. Kamala Harris has been traveling in Africa, but to get the economic engagement going is much more difficult. I mentioned at the end of January and this idea that signaled in his final year, and that is that yes, the global South will be more and more important, and there's a resentment of lingering resentment. Among all these former colonies toward the West that will become more and more manifest, and you're starting to see it. And I think that's part of why we got so little support. On Ukraine, that's why on Gaza, most of the developing world, the global South is voting against us in the UN. On gauzy issues, Joseph Burrell. Just last week, you know, he's the head of the foreign policy establishment in in the EU, said global. S has growing influence the era of Western dominance is over. Ukraine and Gaza signal the ship that's going on, and finally this Munich security pole, which formed a discrepancy. In the West, they found great pessimism. About the future, a lot of Western populations are worried about immigration, war, Ukraine, crime, all kinds of things like this, the economy. And in contrast, great optimism among many countries in the global S where, yes, they're even though they're starting from a lower level, there are there are signs of things picking up and what is a very active trade environment developing oftentimes under Chinese auspices. So anyway, I just think I think there's increasing signs that maybe because of Ukraine, people are awakening to the importance of Africa and along with it, the global South. We are so. Focused on geopolitics now, right that everything is seen in that prism. You know, even the way we're organizing our economy now with a greater emphasis on national industrial policy. See, it's all about competing with China. It's all about the fact that they've gotten out ahead of us in, in certain technologies. The Africans that developing what they see this they see us coming at them in a kind of a geopolitical struggle that they don't want to be part of anymore. This is not the Cold War. They don't want to be a non-aligned movement. They won't. They see faith in themselves and are coming into a place in the sun. And so, if we keep coaching them on this sort of semi colonial geopolitical basis, we're going to get nowhere. China, you know. They come at them in a very pragmatic way. You know, offering infrastructure, all sorts of things in exchange for, for access to resources and such. We must up our game here and I'm I think a lot of younger Americans see that.

**Nicholas Hayen**

So, Speaking of China, during your presentation, you mentioned that the US relationship with China could provide unique opportunities for positive developments this year. Could you just expand on that a bit more and tell us what are the prospects for stability and global prosperity? Do you see 2024 and beyond?

**Tom Hanson**

Yeah, well, you know, a lot of those prospects. Will depend on. How we manage our relations with countries like China, because it is a global economy now and this is an example of where geopolitics is often at odds with sustainability and this is what I hear once again, getting back to my students again. But I hear that all the time from them. For that, for the new generation, sustainability is the key. That's the threat for their long lives ahead. It could be like China is really pursuing A geoeconomic strategy. It's like we're playing checkers and chess, right? They see their strength in economic relationships, the economic structures by which they would be at the center. They're not opening bases around the world and expanding a lot, that way they are spending to defend themselves in their immediate vicinity. And of course, looking at Taiwan but that's part of the problem with the optimism. So, I mentioned the Taiwan election which I see as something that actually had a somewhat calming effect on the relationship. Apart from that, for whatever reason, the US decided to make overtures to China that this was in November, when Biden met with Xi and that that unblocked a lot of areas of cooperation, which is part of the reason for my optimism, one being fentanyl. You know, the Chinese, the components of fentanyl, come, come over from China. They're so bold and you know. Distributed by Mexican cartels. But we've tried again and again to get a handle on the components to make sure that they don't come in that way. And China was cooperating on that until Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan as an example of geopolitics being linked to other issues and the relationship really was in the deep freeze. For about a year. And in November, it was decided to, to some extent, bury the hatchet and to cooperate more on fentanyl, on military-to-military contacts, which is very important for global stability. And this happened just before the climate meeting in Dubai. And so that Was a plus there. Why did we do that? Well, I think on the one hand. We're kind of overburdened right now. When you look at all we've gotten into with, with, with Ukraine. With Gaza now, I mean these are not going away anytime soon. We're very distracted. We don't want to overload the circuits right now with China, right? And so therefore I think there was, it was felt that let's reach a little more accommodation with China. You know, Blinken has gone to Beijing. Urging China to weigh in on our behalf with Russia. In the middle. East with Iran, with China, has very good relations and its example of how we are having kind of eased up a bit with China. Now we're hoping to engage them. You know, China is not going to abandon Russia but. But they are then also very cautious on supporting rush so. I guess this is what gives me some room for optimism, as I can see some US strategic reasons trying to keep things on an even keel. And Chinese want to keep things. They say their top priority is the US, and making sure the relationship doesn't totally deteriorate.

**Nicholas Hayen**

Yeah. I guess in looking at this, I'm reminded of studying the early Cold War, where the United States was very, you know, very concerned, almost obsessed with the idea that Russia wanted to, or the Soviet Union wanted to expand everywhere and to be everywhere. And it was this overarching US concern, but. Looking at the source material in the Soviet Union, that's not what they were concerned about. They were concerned about the United States. Doing essentially the same to them, and after several years after almost a decade, eventually a detente emerged where both sides realized. I don't think that's actually what the other side wants. Do you think that a similar type of thing could be occurring with China and could be possible with China, especially if these rumors of new Cold War begin to surface?

**Tom Hanson**

Yeah. Yes. Yeah, yeah, no, you know, it's the old security dilemma. That's what they call it. Where? Actions that one country perceives as defensive are perceived by the other as offensive and in a in an escalation gets underway, and that's certainly been happening with China. So, as I say they, they are pursuing more of a geoeconomic strategy. So, I don't think that we feel. Challenged by their force projection out in the world, the way we did with Russia right there was a sense that they would project force in many places. I mean, the Chinese have a small base in Djibouti, but everybody has a has a base in Djibouti, right? I mean it's. That's the way things are, but. As I say, they are. They are focused on their immediate periphery on Taiwan, and so that's the issue that we're going to have to manage because. For the Chinese, Taiwan is an unfinished civil war. Dating from World War 2 and you know the US Fifth Fleet did protect the Oman down forces that they fled from. From the Chinese mainland onto Taiwan. And China perceives, rightly or wrongly, that our interest in Taiwan in because we declared in the first year of Biden for the first time that Taiwan is a vital US National Security interest.

**Nicholas Hayen**

Hmm.

**Tom Hanson**

I mean the implications of that are. We want to we want to keep China, Taiwan. As part of our security structure. And so, it's at odds for the two China policy for sure. So, China perceives that we're using Taiwan as a proxy to weaken them. And just as frankly Russia. Considers what we're doing in Ukraine as a proxy war from their point of view, right. Rightly or wrongly, we perceive a lot of issues with democracy. Why should why should anybody tell the time monies or the Ukrainians what they can and can't do? You know, I mean we have arguments on our side too. It's the time 1 issue. We're going to have to wrestle with it. I think as we try to stabilize this relationship. So, it's not going to be easy to stabilize this and there'll be there'll be a. Have as I said, misperceptions on both sides, threats. And like you said during the Cold War, finally got to the point where each side began to say, well, wait a minute, maybe the threat isn't as great as we thought. I mean, the Russia was nowhere near as strong as we thought it was at the end. And my argument always is that there are graver threats right now out there than these geopolitical issues. I mean everything to do with sustainability is going to require global cooperation and to the extent that we can redefine the threats in a way where we see joint the joint interest with countries like China and making them a priority and that's a little bit of what happened last November between, she and Biden. So that's my hope.

**Nicholas Hayen**

Well, Tom, thank you so much for joining again for your incredible insights. I really appreciate it.

**Tom Hanson**

A lot of this in our Hands. You know, both in terms of our foreign policy and our domestic situation. I mean, in my view, we need, you know, we need to spend $900 million billion rather on defense that's necessary. But we've got to spend more on education. We need an educated Workforce which will solve. So many things we've got to get our inequality. To control it's in our hands, I guess that's what I would say and so, our country has always risen to the occasion in the past and I I believe that Lillian.

**Nicholas Hayen**

That's all the time we have today. Thanks again to Tom Hanson for joining and for his work to advance international understanding and engagement in Minnesota. If you want to catch the full video recording of the full event, the recording is available now on our podcast feed and at globalminnesota.org. Thanks, as always, to all the members of Global Minnesota who make our programs possible, be sure to check out our website at. Minnesota.org to find information about upcoming events, learn more about our international programs and sign up for our weekly newsletters. And don't forget to subscribe to this podcast if you haven't already so you can hear untold stories of international connections each month and catch recordings of our public events. Thanks for listening and we'll talk to you soon.