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FLASHPOINT AT FIERY CROSS: CONFRONTATION IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

Moderator: Timothy Nichols

Panelists: Andrew H. Card Jr., Andrew S. Natsios, Larry C. Napper, General Mark A. Welch III

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For the White House Transition Project
Martha Joynt Kumar, *Director* (202) 285-3537
Terry Sullivan, *Exec. Director* (919) 593-2124
http://whitehousetransitionproject.org

For the Baker Institute
Mark P. Jones, *Senior Fellow* (713) 348-2107
http://BakerInstitute.org

A TRANSITION RESPONSE TO THE FLASHPOINT AT FIERY CROSS

October 18, 2016

Moderator: Timothy Nichols, *Visiting Associate Professor in the Practice, Sanford School of Public Policy, Duke University; former Contingency Planner, U.S. Department of Defense*

Andrew Card Jr., *former Secretary of Transportation; former White House Chief of Staff*

Larry C. Napper, *former Ambassador to the Republic of Latvia and to Kazakhstan*

Andrew S. Natsios, *Executive Professor and Director, Scowcroft Institute of International Affairs*

General Mark Welsh III (Ret.), *Dean, Bush School of Government and Public Service, Texas A&M University; former Chief of Staff, U.S. Air Force*

MR. NICHOLS:

—introduce myself: Tim Nichols, professor at Duke University. I am going to be moderating today's panel.

Wow, okay. See if that—that's a lot better. Thank you.

I would ask you to turn your attention to the pamphlet. There's a map in the pamphlet that shows you actually where Fiery Cross Reef is, and I'm going to talk a little more about that.

In November of 2014—what's that?

MR. CARD:

We're ignorant.

MR. NICHOLS:

There you go.

In November of 2014, Fiery Cross Reef, the above-surface, above-water part of it, was about as big as this middle seating section. And in August of 2015, it's now large enough to land—to accept and receive China's largest strategic bombers. So they have built a huge airfield and they—they have built a deepwater harbor, all from a spit of land about the size of this seating section. So this reclamation project has some strategic significance.

And that's why I chose Fiery Cross as an example. And after I submitted this to Terry, the International Court of Justice ruled that Fiery Cross Reef belongs to the Philippines. And China has publicly stated that they don't agree with that ruling and they continue to occupy it.

So that's the reason, and I just wanted you to understand.

You have everyone's bios in the pamphlet, but I thought I would just do a brief introduction.

You've heard Andy Card's comments. And he brings to this panel the inside-of-the-White-House experience over a number of administrations and dealing with a number of crises. And I'm so glad that you mentioned the Hainan Islands, the EP-3 crisis, because that's an example of an unintentional conflict that needs to be contained and controlled. A pilot who was probably—a Chinese fighter pilot who was acting beyond his scope and his direction collides with an American jet or an American collection aircraft, and it's an international crisis that, thankfully, the pilots were returned home in very short order, due to the Bush administration's outreach and engagement with the government of China.

And as many of you know, Ambassador Napper, 31 years in the Foreign Service and dealing at the highest levels of diplomatic national security input. So functionally trying to help the president deal with issues from a diplomatic perspective and lots of expertise in that area.

You've already heard from Andrew in his perspective, having been an elected official in the legislative branch and worked a number of key issues. Also something that we neglect, the developmental role, which is so important in not only a national security crisis but what we call consequence management: once the crisis has abated, how do we prevent it from happening again?

And then General Welch with his many years at the senior levels of the U.S. Air Force and the Joint Staff.

And so what I would now like to do is just go over the simulation and then ask each of our panel members to respond with the answers to two questions. First, what would you advise the president?

Now, remember, this crisis is happening in December of this year and the election has already happened, we have a president-elect and will be turning over the White House in approximately a month. So how would you advise the sitting president and then how would you address the crisis for a transition process? How would you bring in the incoming administration and help them, talk to them, advise them what you're doing, or perhaps discuss with them what they think you should do, because they'll own the problem in about a month. So it's that type of transition that we're hoping to tease out today.

So just to sum up the crisis, and again this has unfortunately happened a couple times recently, not specifically in this area, but the navy engaged incoming missiles last weekend in the Bab-el-Mandeb Straits, someone taking a shot at the U.S. Navy, the commander of the ship not asking permission but just responding as he's been trained. And there have been a number of incidents in the South China Sea.

But for today's example, on the 7th of December, the *San Jacinto* is engaged by a Chinese frigate. The *San Jacinto* is damaged and some sailors are killed. That's a U.S. cruiser, a U.S. Navy cruiser. And in doing so, they sink the Chinese frigate, and approximately 85 Chinese sailors are in the water. Unable to rescue the Chinese sailors because the flight deck of the U.S. ship is damaged, the *San Jacinto* returns home and the numerous ships, mostly merchant vessels in the area, help with recovery operations. That's on the 7th of December.

China immediately accuses the United States of aggression, and the United States immediately, specifically Admiral Harris out of Pacific Command, says that they were—there was an unprovoked attack against the United States vessel.

So we know that will take a number of days to sort through. Politics, diplomacy, teasing out those issues. But then something else happens.

On December 12, there's a cyberattack against the United States forces in the Central Command region, and the cyberattack has even more casualties. We have a plane that lands with false telemetry injects, so it tells the plane it's at a certain altitude when it's actually at a different altitude and a number of U.S. soldiers are killed; an Air Force plane crashes. A number of drones crash. And, more importantly, there's a number of server fires, computer server fires in the Central Command basement, where they keep all of their data repositories for all the actions in the 25 countries in the central region. So a pretty sophisticated attack and, sure enough, the DNI—the Director of National Intelligence and his experts determine that the source of that attack is the U.S. Consulate in Shanghai, the Consulate General in Shanghai.

So now we have information that isn't known to the public: that the United States has linkage between two separate crises, perhaps a tit for tat, we don't really know Chinese intentions. But that's where we are when it's time to discuss the scenario.

We have as evidence the Chinese have conducted a cyberattack. We don't really know why. We don't know if it's related to the ship or it's related to the South China Sea. But we know it's them. The public does not know that.

So, Andy, could we start with you?

MR. CARD:

More questions than answers. So, in the executive branch, it would be, tell us what's going on, and it would be, where are our counterparts? How do we reach them? And you would want to first open a line of communication very, very quickly to the Chinese. It would be very serious. And our ambassador should have to play a role. And I would think that the secretary of state would be playing a significant role.

At the same time, you would want the military to be put on alert, and so you would ask the military, what should we do to be prepared to do that which we don't want to have to do, but what are we doing? And what defenses are in place, especially on the cybersecurity side? Have they—are they compromising other aircraft, other command centers? And let's at least understand there are no more opportunities for attack. Or, if there are, which ones we have to—so the first thing would be to try to understand what's going on, and you'd want to demarche the Chinese and you'd want to rally our allies very, very quickly, because they will be just as unsettled as we are.

MR. NICHOLS:

Okay, so restorative actions and trying to understand what the heck is going on, first steps.

MR. CARD:

So the White House would be on highest alert, and it would be all hands on deck. And I would suspect the Pentagon would have already been on all hands on deck, probably before the White House hardly even knew about it, contemporaneous with the White House knowing about it. And the State Department, I'm sure, would be just completely agitated, because they don't like to see anything that happens outside of the norm.

MR. NICHOLS:

Over to you, Larry. (Laughter.)

AMBASSADOR NAPPER:

There are worse things than the norm, Andy. (Laughter.)

As a matter of fact, I would think one thing that would be critical for diplomacy, the role for diplomacy here, is to try to help the president stay off of an escalatory ladder that he doesn't want to be on. Now, he may eventually decide that, yes, there has to be some kind of retaliation or a response in the military vein. But the first thing is to—one of the first things is to make sure that you don't get into a cycle that's out of control.

MR. CARD:

I agree with that. And, by the way, it should be the first—how do we stop—how do we make sure that it's not continuing, where we put up our defenses, especially on the cyber side. But I would not hint at the offenses yet.

AMBASSADOR NAPPER:

Exactly. And I do think that it's important, as you say, to spin up our ambassadors and embassies in the field to go in and do a couple of things. One is to reassure the allies, especially those who are going to feel under the gun in particular, the Japanese and South Korean allies, because we may not know whether it is—this is some part of a pattern. Or whether an actor such as North Korea may take advantage of this kind of thing to, you know, create additional—additional trouble.

So it's important to get their assessment and to reassure them that the United States decision-making apparatus will make the necessary decisions, even though, yes, we're in a presidential transition. We only have one president at a time, and as long as he's president, the current president will—is in charge of the decision-making process and will—and will see it through.

In addition to those allies, it seems to me that because we now have an Afghan—Afghanistan element to this, that we're going to have to try to reassure our NATO allies who are in this fight with us in Afghanistan, and the Afghan government that we're not going—that we're not going to abandon operations in Afghanistan because of this cyber event that has occurred, that we are going to try to get—get back into normal operations as soon as it's possible to do so in Afghanistan.

There will have to be—we'll have to think—so there will have to be a consultative process at NATO to make sure that our European allies and NATO allies are also part of this process. And you'll have to prepare for a United Nations contingency.

There will—this will be brought to the Security Council of the United Nations. We may want to bring it there ourselves. The Chinese may get there first. And it's not that the United Nations or the Security Council is going to be the solution to this problem, but you don't want it to be part of the problem. You'd rather for it to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem, so you are going to have to manage that aspect as well.

Now, as regards the transition, I'm glad to hear that the transition in 2008 went better than in previous iterations, because I think that the normal—and it's good that we are overcoming, if you will, the natural tendency on both sides. On the side of the sitting or incumbent president, the natural tendency, I think, is to say, look, we are in charge here, there is only one president at a time. I—we have to make the decisions necessary to protect the national interest until noon on January 20.

And I think the natural tendency on the other side, the incoming side is, look, we want to be kept informed, but don't try to bring us, you know, don't get us into a position where we are ratifying decisions made by you that weren't our decisions.

And so if you can mitigate that distance, if you can get into a more productive dialogue than that, then I think that's a positive and constructive development about which I am very glad to hear.

MR. NICHOLS:

Andrew?

MR. NATSIOS:

Well, everything in foreign policy, at least in my experience, is related to everything else. You have an incident in China; it doesn't happen in isolation. We might be negotiating with the Russians on Syria or something in Latin America, and they're all watching this saying, oh, really? The United States is either acting too weakly or too aggressively, and it can affect other things.

I remember during the attempt—not attempt, the successful taking out of Gaddafi in Libya, everybody said, well, we'll just have to focus on Gaddafi. But we were trying to get the North Koreans to negotiate an end to their nuclear program. And the foreign ministry issued a statement in North Korea from Pyongyang and they said, quote, we now know what happens when people give up their nuclear weapons, as Gaddafi did: the United States takes them out. And so that's a message to us we have no intention of negotiating this, because we know what's going to happen to us.

I don't think anybody intended that message to get out, but it was sent nevertheless by them reading the newspapers.

So the first thing I would do is ask, what's the message? What are the reactions around the world to other events that are going on where there are crises which could escalate into something because they are misunderstanding what's going on?

The second, wars have been started—I mean, World War I was started—that no one intended. World War II was a little different, but World War I was a set of events that were based on alliance relationships, and we had a war that killed 20 million people that set the stage for World War II that is still having consequences now. So we do not—what I think we need to do is counsel caution. We do not want to get

into a major war with China unintentionally, which was neither their intention nor our intention, but that could happen.

I sat once on a simulation of North Korea, one of the areas of study that I have engaged in] the last 20 years, and I'd only participated in a couple of them. And there was a retired general and he was in every one of these. And I said, "How many have you been in on?" He said, "24." I said, "How do they all end?" How do the simulations—he said, "Every single one of them has ended in war." And they don't mean a little war. I mean, Seoul is right next to the DMZ. If there's a war starts, there will be 10 million people who will be dead because of the amount of weaponry on both sides. It will be a catastrophe.

So I said, "Isn't that a little scary?" He said, "Yes, that's why we always try to tamp things down when they get—incidents like that happen." So this is similar to that, where it escalates, and then one side does one thing and then the other side thinks they have to do—and so all of a sudden, you're in a hot war that could be disastrous.

The third thing I would do is to ask the CIA for an analysis of what's going on inside the Chinese government. They are in economic crisis, even though people are not talking about that as much now as they were before. Their economy has slowed down. Xi Jinping is the greatest and most powerful figure in Chinese history since Mao Zedong. He has absolute control to a much greater degree than even Deng Xiaoping did.

And so the question is, is he having trouble with the military, controlling them? Did he—is he aware of this? Does he want this to happen? Are there factions in the military that are out of control?

There was an incident just before Hu Jintao, the last president, retired, where he was at a retirement party for some four-star general and apparently two—a couple of generals—this would never happen in the U.S. military, this just happened in China—

GEN. WELCH:

Couldn't possibly happen. (Laughter.)

MR. NATSIOS:

So one of the generals had too much to drink, and he had been denied a promotion, apparently by Hu Jintao. This was in the *New York Times*, and there were several other news sources. And apparently he went up and almost physically assaulted the president of China. This is his own general.

And so if you watched what happened, in the next six months Hu Jintao removed almost all the senior generals because the joint staff in China apparently was almost out of control. They were a separate government.

What's the case now? The CIA needs to tell us what is going on inside the Chinese government that we need to be aware of.

And the final thing I would do is to try to get the campaign of the victor in the elections to issue a statement there can only be one president at a time. But privately reassure them, we're not going to dump this all on you, even though—

MR. NICHOLS:

For another month.

MR. NATSIOS:

I don't know how you do that and be believed. But it also depends on who wins the election. You know, if it's the same party and they're close, then it's a little bit different than if it's a hostile—you know, the opposition party wins the election.

But trying to get unified messaging by the outgoing and incoming administrations, at least—even short messaging, so that it does not appear there is some kind of quarrel going on within the U.S. government, because that's the last thing you want, a message to be sent out to the world that the United States doesn't have their stuff together.

MR. NICHOLS:

Mark, one of the things I find fascinating with the DoD is they plan until they fall over, just plan and plan and plan and plan. So I'm pretty confident that we have plans in place to deal with a Chinese threat.

In this case, there is an admiral that oversees the Pacific region, and one of his ships had been attacked. And he has already—he was quick to the microphone to say that it was an unprovoked attack. But now you have the Pentagon as perhaps a liability to the administration if they get in front of what the administration wants to do.

Could you perhaps answer your question in that context, about kind of the Pentagon supporting the president's decisions, vice* forcing the president's decisions?

GEN. WELCH:

Yeah, clearly you can set the path and putting up a situation where it's hard to go any direction other than the path you've already set.

The first thing though, Andy mentioned earlier what the stakes are. There have already been people killed. We've already lost members of the military. So emotions are high there to start with.

And so the first step for the military, and it starts at the local level, it goes to the theater, that navy admiral you talked about, who is going to want the White House to validate the rules of engagement going forward. Because rules of engagement can either escalate or deescalate a crisis. And so the first thing the military leaders are going to want to do is make sure we understand what they are and then get validation from the White House that the president supports those rules of engagement. That's what your senior military people are going to do.

The other thing they're heavily involved in is the intelligence collection that helps decide what actually happened. Somebody on the ship knows exactly what the timing was, and they have the electronic data to prove it. Sometimes it's not moved fast enough so the people in the White House have the information they need quickly enough to be definitive about who was at fault here. Because it's hard to tell from this far away.

Anybody who reads whichever media release comes out first can form their own opinion. And reversing that opinion is very, very difficult, especially in the international eye.

The next thing that the military is going to do is get a very clear idea of capability and capacity for next steps. Because the job is to present options to the president, not to give the president an answer. The president has factors that are much greater than the tactical scenario or the military risk involved. He's got a tougher job than the military commanders do in this case, in every case. But their job is to give him the realistic options for what he could do using his military instrument of national power, should he so choose.

And in this particular scenario, there are not as many options as you might think there are. The great majority of U.S. assets right now militarily are tied up in the Middle East. And by tied up, I mean tied up. It's going to take 30 to 45 days to move some of them. Most of your intelligence collection capability at the tactical and operational level of war is attached to the Middle East. All of the pipes are oriented that way, all the analytical support is oriented that way.

There are some—there is intelligence going on in the South China Sea, clearly. But not to the level you would want to prevent a crisis from expanding rapidly that's already started with shooting. And so the question is, what do you shift? Who do you move? How does that impact other activities that are ongoing, from the fight against ISIS to the concern about Iran and the Gulf to concern about what's Russia doing in Eastern Europe? It's all connected because it's all the same stuff that's used to respond to those things.

And the president has got to be in the discussion of how do you shift, where do you lower priority, where do you refocus, or not. And so the work for the Department of Defense will be to get the secretary of defense, the chairman and the Joint Chiefs to the president with the proposals for what you could do, based on what you see as the priorities for the nation, not to give him an answer.

MR. NICHOLS:

But the premise to that would be, in order for us to do these options, we need to have a demonstrable shift in assets. So what we really want first is the decision to put capabilities in place.

GEN. WELCH:

Where is your priority?

MR. NICHOLS:

Right. Which is something that's visual, something that will be seen and covered in the press. We're moving forces from this country to this country—

GEN. WELCH:

Right.

MR. NICHOLS:

—in order to provide the president options. Which is escalation, which has a flavor of escalation. But without that, then your response is, Mr. President, we don't have a lot we can do unless you let us posture.

GEN. WELCH:

Well, which is why it's a much broader discussion than just the commander in the Pacific. Because you need the commanders from the Middle East, the commanders from other parts of the world to say, well, here's the impact if that happens, and here's the opportunity it creates for other people who want to behave badly in this region. And so that's—but that's the job of the Joint Chiefs, to provide that kind of advice through the chairman and secretary to the National Security Council.

By the way, while that's happening, the chairman is talking to every chief of defense in that region. If you look at the map and go to all the countries around there, we work very hard to build connectivity between military leadership in all these countries. It will probably never be the centerpiece of bilateral agreements, but we work hard to build connective tissue.

So we have a very strong relationship with the Vietnamese Air Force, actually, an emerging one. The Malaysian Air Force is kind of a new growing relationship. The Philippines, although it's at risk right now, the military connection is still there, there's trust there.

And so the chairman of the Joint Chiefs is calling their chiefs of defense in those countries. He's probably asking the service chiefs to call their counterparts. He is going through his three-star assistant, who travels with the secretary of state, to make sure that the ambassadors, the State Department regional desks are connected to this information flow, so that we get as well rounded a picture as we can as quickly as we can, eventually to get to the White House. So that's all ongoing in the background.

From a perspective of the new administration, two things I'd mention. The first one is, while this crisis may be new to the administration coming in the door, there are a whole lot of professionals in government, in lots of different parts of government, to whom crisis is not new. And one of the things that can happen if we're not careful in transition is that the new administration wants to be seen as different from the old, and to not accept advice, even from people who served the old administration who were professionals in government.

And so good advice, sound practice, even in crisis, is sometimes rejected out of hand as old think. A little bit more trust during the transition, which it sounds like we've been trying to build here and this project is all about, a little bit more trust will possibly create less crisis.

And so we would want to be very engaged in at least making sure the new administration knew the expectation. I don't think any current administration, as Larry said, is going to hand over responsibility or tell us what you think we should do. That's just not going to happen. And the military leadership is certainly not going to go to the administration and offer them the options. It will go to the president, our commander-in-chief.

But we would ask permission from the White House to spend time with the new administration to the maximum extent possible so they fully understood the impact of the decisions that the president is going to make.

If you start shifting all these resources from one part of the world to the other and then a month later get told, no, send them back, now you've got two or three times as much dead space where somebody can behave badly somewhere else. And so that's kind of what we'd be focused on.

MR. CARD:

I would think the history would help, and one of the first things I would think the president would want to know is, have we seen the Chinese doing anything that's unusual right now? Are they mobilizing their forces? Are they sending their ships out, have they got their brand new aircraft carrier already in the region? What are others doing to provoke us? Is this an intended provocation? And that makes a big difference.

And the intelligence on that plays a huge role in what decision the president would make. Were the Russians—were they acting before we even knew about this? Had they been involved? So the state of play around the world would have an impact.

I would also—President Reagan was kind of presented with this scenario with the bombing of the Beirut hotel that killed all those Marines. And there was a bit of a bloodthirst in the country. What's the retaliation? What are you going to do?

And there was no retaliation militarily. It was all diplomatic. It was military without being hot. And so, yes, there are ways to judge—that was the second-largest killing of Marines in one spot in the history of our country. And it was the second-biggest attack to September 11 in terms of number of people killed. So that was a very big deal, that Beirut, Lebanon, attack that happened.

And then I'm reflecting on another bit of experience. When President George H.W. Bush was getting ready to leave office, there were two international crises going on. One was in Somalia as a result of famine and destitution. And it was a real crisis, a real crisis that resulted in a hot war. And then we also had a Haitian boatlift that was happening at the same time. And there were thousands, tens of thousands of people were leaving Haiti, trying to get to the United States. The Coast Guard is picking them up, and they're being sent to Guantanamo.

And President-elect Clinton made a public statement that was very critical of President Bush. And President Bush, to his credit, said—and I was in charge of the transition out, so he said this to me: poor President-elect Clinton; he doesn't have the facts.

So we sent a team to Little Rock to brief the president-elect, brief Warren Christopher, the person in charge of his transition. Shared with them satellite photographs, letters from governors about saying we won't take the Haitian refugees, what our allies were saying in the region about not taking refugees, and why we were putting them at Guantanamo.

And President-elect Clinton never said another word that was critical, embraced what President Bush was doing, and continued to do it. So that was one means of

communicating with knowledge so that people don't make assumptions as an incoming president based on misinformation; they have the benefit of understanding what the president himself is seeing or herself would be seeing in making an informed decision.

MR. NICHOLS:

Larry, yeah.

AMBASSADOR NAPPER:

Well, I was going to say that one thing you'll have to decide at some point fairly early in the process is whether or not and when and in what way to get the president personally involved in the diplomacy here.

In other words, in order to reassure the Japanese and South Koreans, in order to engage the Chinese properly, it may be—it may be necessary for him to pick up the phone and call them, as 41 was certainly inclined to do in almost every case.

Now there's risk. I mean, there's an upside and downside to that. You—there's nothing like hearing from the president. And particularly so, perhaps, in a transition when the president, part of what he will be saying, whether he says it or whether it's simply by virtue of the fact of the phone call, is, look, we're not paralyzed here because this is a transition. I'm on the phone. We are going to make the necessary decisions. And I think that can be a real positive.

Now, the downside of it is, you never know what's going to happen in a phone call, because there's somebody else on the other end of that line. And you sometimes can shoot off on a tangent. So the president will have to be properly briefed about what the other guy is—what his concerns are likely to be.

MR. NICHOLS:

The next question I have kind of links two pieces of information. One is, in this scenario, the American people haven't made the linkage between the cyberattack and the crisis at sea. So there is—already the president is getting beaten up. You know, two days after the attack, timid, weak, indecisive. Normal congressional, you know, daily talk in Congress about whoever is sitting in the White House. But the release of this information to show that China actually attacked us twice in a period of five days may inflame the Americans and put the president in an awkward situation or paint him into a corner.

So here's my question. The administration in the White House right now knows that ultimately this information will be released. We can't keep a secret. Should they get in front of it? They know the incoming administration is getting the PDB, the President's Daily Briefs, so they are now seeing this information. Are they worried that they will leak it? How do they deal with that piece of information, the linkage?

And then the follow-on question is, okay, how do we message publicly to the American people who will be incited?

Andy, do you want to—

MR. CARD:

First of all, in peripheral vision, December 7, a day that will live in infamy. So there will already be a number of people in the country that are saying, whoa, here it comes again.

MR. NICHOLS:

I predicted this, yeah.

MR. CARD:

So this is—also, that first week in December is when the new Congress caucuses. So you're going to have all of the new members of Congress coming in with the old members of Congress, who are going to hang around, and deciding who is going to be on what committee and who is chair of what committee and all this kind of stuff. So Congress is reorganizing. They're disorganized, they're angry with each other, they're tribal. And they're also all egomaniacs who want to stand in front of a klieg light. So they will want to say something. And they'll be in one spot, so the media can easily find lots of contrarians. So there will be lots of opportunity for the president, the sitting president and the incoming president, to be questioned as to their competency, passion, follow-through, whatever it is.

So this is a bad peripheral vision to have, it's really bad. And the world will be watching to see how will the incoming president react to what the outgoing president is going to do? So this is about as bad a scenario as you can come up with.

MR. NICHOLS:

You're welcome.

AMBASSADOR NAPPER:

Another aspect of the peripheral vision here is if you just had a situation—because you're going to have the lame duck session of the Congress, which is probably—if both campaigns are going to be believed on this, for the Trans Pacific Partnership, which has been years in the making, you know, to be accepted. I don't think that's going to happen. But if you've just walked away from that, right, in a very demonstrable fashion, then what's the reaction of all of these allies that you are going to need in the Pacific to deal with this crisis? What are they going to say about the reliability of the United States, its ability to follow through on commitments made?

GEN. WELCH:

I want to also add that it kind of helps to frame the discussion that's going on now to remember that—keep in context what's actually happened. There's no threat to the homeland at this point. There's been a loss of life in the Pacific, which is a long way away, and people tend to forget about that quickly, sadly. There has been an airplane crash in the Middle East and some unmanned airplanes crashed in the Middle East.

So is this a military threat to the security of the country? No, it's not. That's not the issue right now. This is really a diplomatic issue, at this point, in my mind still, and that's what the administration should be focused on.

And if you think of it that way, there's less vitriol, there's less emotion that comes up into your throat and makes you want to scream. But you've got to deal with it, and you've got to deal with it immediately. But this is not the end of America as we know it.

MR. CARD:

And that's the responsibility of making sure that the White House recognizes that, rather than responds to the emotional gin-up that's taking place. Just because of the confluence of a date that we promised never to forget, an incoming team that doesn't know what they're doing yet, and a Congress that's reorganizing.

MR. NATSIOS:

Two comments. I was in charge of the Somali humanitarian relief operation during the Bush 41 presidency at the end. President Bush, remember, sent 30,000 troops in, there was a famine, a quarter of a million people had died. And I ran the part of USAID that does emergency response, crisis management.

So I stayed until the date President Clinton was sworn in, and then I resigned. And I didn't have a job, so I called Gordon Sullivan, the chief of staff for the army, who actually comes from Quincy, Massachusetts. He's—Andy and I are both from Massachusetts originally, we served in the legislature together—

MR. CARD:

It was another incestuous relationship.

MR. NATSIOS:

That's right. And so I called up Gordon, I knew him. And I said, "Do you want a lieutenant colonel who is an expert on Bosnia and Somalia?" And he said, "Well, who is that, Andrew?" I said, "Me." He said, "You outrank me, Andrew." I was assistant administrator, so I was equivalent to an assistant secretary. I said, "I am just a lieutenant colonel now, in the Reserves." And he said, "I'll get you on staff."

So I went to the Pentagon the next Monday, on active duty, for three months, during Bosnia and—that's what I was focused on.

The interesting thing to me was to watch the transition. I learned several things. Do not start a crisis if you can avoid it in a transition. Because there's no one in charge in terms of senior people to make decisions. The people making decisions on Somalia, without mentioning names, there was a senior executive service person, Andy and I know him—in fact, I think we all know him well. He had never been to Africa, let alone Somalia. He had never been in a civil war. He had no idea what famine was going on. He was making decisions because, frankly, there was no one else there.

And I—I saw the decisions coming across, and the J5, I was on the J5 staff, kept coming in and saying, is this a good idea, Andrew? I said, this is nuts. I mean, this is a terrible idea. Why are they making these decisions? And this was just after President Clinton took office. And this person was not a political appointee. He is a career SES, not a Foreign Service officer, not a military officer.

And so they started sending us all of these things and they expanded—there was massive mission creep. The first thing we got was they wanted the U.S. forces, which

had—we had allies there with us—they wanted to disarm all the rebel groups. And I had negotiated with the rebel leaders, and I said, this is the stupidest idea I've ever—we're going to take massive casualties, these guys are not going to give up their weapons. We're going to have a bloodbath. Why? And what will we get? Because you'll never get all their weapons in Somalia.

And they said, well, we'll never have peace. I said, well, that may well be the case, but it is a very bad idea to expand the mission to do this.

So we kept doing this back and forth, and I kept saying, can you find some—you know, go to Warren Christopher or the national security advisor, Tony Lake, and just say, who is writing these papers? And it occurred to me that very junior-level people were doing it because the State Department hadn't been staffed.

Now, the other thing that's interesting in transitions is that people tend to promote career people, in any administration, that they think are sympathetic to the direction they're moving in. That's what I did at AID when I ran USAID. I promoted the career officers who were sympathetic to where I was going to go. And I knew who they were because I knew AID before. That's true at the Pentagon. It's true at the State Department as well. It doesn't mean someone has a partisan letter on their head if they're a career officer. But if you know your business, you know some people are very hostile to what you want to do and some people are—well, if it's a party change, then you have people who you are a little suspicious of from the old administration still in place who are career officers. So you're not entirely sure you want to trust all of them.

So I—it took me six months to move all the people out that I—or suggest they might retire. And that's a—that complicates this, since you don't have any political appointees in the early stages to help you.

The second thing that I would comment on is that there are second-, third-, and fourth-order consequences to everything you do. And once you start taking decisions, you need to understand what's the next consequence of what you're deciding to do and what's the consequence after that. I mean, this is something that Ryan Crocker used to talk a lot about and, I think, most diplomats, senior diplomats. Keep asking the question. What's the second, third, and fourth? You have to keep thinking way ahead as to what's next in terms of the process.

And if you get that right, you can tell the president, the new president, here are the options, but here are the consequences. And one thing you have to think about is, is China a greater threat right now to us than North Korea? Because we need China to get North Korea to restrain them. They actually voted with us in the Security Council to sanction North Korea when they exploded their two nuclear weapons this year. Do you want to alienate China enough that they will do everything in their power to stonewall everything we do in the future? Because we need the Chinese in other circumstances. And in my view at least, I would tell the president that the risk from North Korea is much greater than the immediate risk from China.

So you need to understand, if you take aggressive action, you embarrass Hu Jintao—I mean, Xi Jinping, the current president, too much, then the message sent out is that we will not be able—the Chinese will not be able to cooperate with us.

One other story. When President Bush took over—President Reagan took over, Drew Lewis was the secretary of transportation. He had been the deputy national chairman of the Republican National Committee, and I was Republican chairman in Massachusetts from 1980 to 1987, so I knew him well. And he told me this story.

He said when the air traffic controllers went on strike, Reagan said, "If you do it, I will fire every one of you." And they didn't go back to work, and he fired every one of them.

And I said, so what was—he said, this was a domestic matter. He said, "We did not realize this, but the Russians were watching this." They had not taken Reagan seriously during the campaign. After that incident, Drew said, the State Department reported—the Pentagon—I mean, the Kremlin took a very different view of who Ronald Reagan was. And they said, "We cannot afford to have—to go toe to toe with this guy, because he actually may do what he's threatening to do."

So even domestic—it can affect things domestically.

MR. NICHOLS:

Right. And so I want—I want to touch on two points. The first is that don't you think that the Russians and the Chinese and the North Koreans will be watching this particular incident very closely, and the new administration will be cognizant of that? And so even if the outgoing administration chooses to tamp down and try to deescalate, you have—you are going to have the funerals, you are going to have the airplanes coming into Andrews, you are going to have the repatriation of caskets. And you are going to have American fervor. So a transition would mean that the people watching see some type of American policy that they can understand and then shape their own opinions and shape their own actions.

So now we go to messaging. How are you going to talk about this? And are you—is the outgoing administration going to say something like, we have brought in the administration to keep them fully apprised of what we're doing? Is that the extent you would go a month before the inauguration?

MR. CARD:

I would say yes. I would think that the—the outgoing president knows constitutionally, he couldn't be president if he wanted to be. So I think that he would be inclusive rather than exclusive. I think they would be very sensitive to the—to whom the information is given in the new team. But I would think that they would want to deliver the message to whomever the new president suggested they should deliver it to. And that the new president would get an in-depth briefing about what was happening.

However, none of that would compromise the sitting president to be the only president. Again, there is one president at a time. But I would think that they would be relatively transparent and inform rather than consult. So I don't think this would be consulting; it would be informing.

And I think that if I were the outgoing president, I would probably want to send a very high-ranking official literally to China. I wouldn't want it just to be the ambassador in China to go to see the leadership. I would want to send an emissary.

And I might solicit a similar response from some of our allies, to send someone to Beijing to say, you don't want to go there, you don't want this to escalate. Don't do anything stupid on your side. We're trying to make sure that we have a measured response, but there is a consequence. And there are consequences on your side. But we're going to try to have this done in such a way that it does not escalate.

I would think you would want to make that effort, and I think that it should be personified by an individual who shows up from Washington, D.C., rather than just be someone told to hop in a limousine and drive over to the—

MR. NATSIOS:

And you would—someone maybe who already had a relationship with the Chinese government?

MR. CARD:

Ideally, you would. Or the sitting vice president or someone with the gravitas.

GEN. WELCH:

If you're the administration walking out the door, though, the nearest wolf to the sled is a really big wolf. So your concern with messaging is going to be about your initial response. What are we going to do?

In reality for the nation, the more important task is, what is the end state going to be? And in crisis too often, especially during transition, we focus on that initial response and not nearly enough on the end state which, maybe not to the administration but to the nation, will have a much greater impact over time.

And so anything that you can do, I think messaging, as either the outgoing or the incoming administration, about what is the end state that we are seeking is really going to be important. Because it will set the tone for everything that happens from this point forward.

MR. CARD:

Ideally, I would think you'd want the sitting president to be cool, calm, and collected, objective, and feel the passion of America, which is a hard thing to do, a very hard thing to do.

GEN. WELCH:

Right.

MR. CARD:

But at the same time, do nothing that would be provocative.

I would think that the invitation for the incoming president would be, say as little as you can. We are working closely with the president, he is keeping us well informed, appropriately well informed. There is only one president at a time, and I support the sitting president.

AMBASSADOR NAPPER:

Right. And I don't think you're going to have a lot of problem with that, because the incoming president is going to be—will be cautious about, you know, committing to

a strategy that's been worked out without his direct participation. But he also doesn't want to appear to be pulling the rug out from under the sitting president, either.

So I don't know in our current—in the current environment whether that would somehow be violated. I would hope not, no matter who wins or not. But I think that's the best course of action that one could hope for.

MR. CARD:

And you would significantly upgrade the security obligations for the inauguration.

GEN. WELCH:

And get the new administration focused on that long-term goal. That's where they need to be thinking.

MR. NICHOLS:

One of the terms that Martha brought up when we were discussing this panel is legacy agenda. Is there a legacy agenda and would it influence the transition? The outgoing administration kind of has a bad week a month before they turn over, they're provoked by China, and then they're literally attacked through cyber by China and—

MR. CARD:

I would hate to be the staffer that walks into the president and says, hey, I'm really worried about your legacy because of this. I mean, that's a quick way to not be invited into the Oval Office again.

MR. NICHOLS:

Are they thinking about it?

MR. CARD:

I can't imagine a president would be thinking about the legacy. Are there other people around the president that would be? Yes. I think the president would be like, "Darn it, I have an oath to keep and it doesn't diminish by time. It's exactly the same burden I had when I accepted it eight years ago, and it will be that way until I pass the baton to my successor. I own this, I have a responsibility. I will meet the responsibility and the legacy is what it is, I'm not going to worry about it."

AMBASSADOR NAPPER:

I mean, we've already been subject to a cyberattack. The intelligence community has come out and said that there's a cyber effort under way to undermine the American—confidence in the American election. And so the question is, what do you—you know, what can be done about that?

The first thing is, what's the attribution of the cyberattack? That can be hard to, you know, to be sure of. Yes, you may think that the ultimate source is China, but I don't know enough about the cyber world to be definitive about this. But I think, you know, the question of attribution may still be out there. Right?

MR. NICHOLS:

Okay.

GEN. WELCH:

Andy, you know, to your comment, I don't—I completely agree with you. I don't think presidents worry about that. The people around them do. And what that tends to do, at least from the Department of Defense's perspective is, the normal means of communicating things through the National Security Council to the White House start to close. In a crisis, you can still get there. I mean, the secretary of defense can still go talk to the president. The chairman can still go directly to the president, and the Joint Chiefs can do that. But the normal flow of communication that gives a counter view or a counter opinion tends to get shut off at a lower level as you approach the end of an administration.

MR. CARD:

I think that's a reality. People who work in the White House are no different than work anywhere else. They're always worried about the next job they're going to get. And if you're leaving office on January 20, believe me, in the middle of December, you're worried about where you're going to be on January 21.

AMBASSADOR NAPPER:

And in the world of diplomacy, that takes on a particular cutting edge because every ambassador worldwide has to submit their resignation on January 20. Yes, every single sitting ambassador has to submit a resignation because constitutional—it's the president who appoints ambassadors and then some other folks, too. But ambassadors.

MR. CARD:

Let's hope the president is reviewing every resume.

AMBASSADOR NAPPER:

No, no. But there has to be a decision: do I pick up that resignation or say, no, you stay, you stay in place?

And the way it normally works is that third of ambassadors who are non-career, they pick up the resignation and you're out, right? But what if you're—what if that ambassador in China is a non-career? Probably, you're going to pick up the resignation anyway. But you have to do that and the realization that it's going to take you six months to get a confirmed ambassador back out there.

MR. CARD:

This is like a really bad scenario that we've been presented. But it is one that we should be thinking about.

MR. NICHOLS:

There have been a number of provocations. The Chinese have stayed very clear of the United States to date, and I'm hoping that that remains true. But independent, young ship commanders sometimes make decisions on no sleep, and so I worry about this.

But let me ask one more question, and then if we could turn it over, students, if you have questions, there's going to be some microphones here. Perhaps there's something that you really want to ask this distinguished panel.

Intelligence. So the incoming administration is going to have an incessant appetite for intelligence. The administration is trying to figure out what's going on. And as Ambassador Napper said, a lot of it is, what's going on in China? Were they behind this? Are they covering something up? Are they trying—is it the nationalist movement to try to dissuade people from worrying about economic issues? What's going on?

But what if the incoming administration has questions that they would like to have answered so that they can start framing their policy design? How would you respond to—how would you respond to that in the sitting administration?

MR. CARD:

If the incoming administration has questions, first of all, I suspect that they would be invited to ask questions. So I don't think this is just giving them information. I actually think that there would be—here is information, do you have any questions? And I have found virtually every intelligence officer who is in an analyst position loves to be asked questions. So it's not that the government comes in and doesn't want to be asked questions. They like to be asked questions, and they like to be challenged, and that's very helpful, very, very helpful.

So I suspect that the incoming team's questions would be most welcomed by the outgoing team and they will try to help get them answers. And they may learn something from the answers because, even though all of these people are very smart and they don't think there's—they're not narcissists to the point they don't think anybody else doesn't have knowledge to ask questions or get information. So I think they will accept questions that help to give them more information, a better understanding.

The second thing is, time is of the essence. And that is something that is very difficult to measure when you're at the White House. And I can't speak about any other president with direct knowledge. But President George W. Bush was always very good at asking me, "When does this decision need to be made? Have I got two minutes, 20 minutes, 10 days, 20 days, six months or a year? You know, when does the decision have to be made? I will be ready when you tell me I need to make the decision. Don't make me make the decision too early. And for God's sake, don't let me make it too late."

And a decision made too early sometimes can be just as bad as a decision that wasn't made at all. And that's a very difficult thing to measure.

So I would find myself asking the military, "When does this decision need to be made?" And sometimes, well, if we're going to drop the bomb, we've got to put it on a plane, and the plane has got to then be fueled and has got to fly there, and so it will take X to do this, so we need the decision X-plus. And diplomacy, same thing.

So when is a decision necessary is a big part of the challenge of organizing a White House around a decision-making process.

AMBASSADOR NAPPER:

When do I have to make the call to the Chinese prime minister or president or to the Japanese prime minister or whatever?

MR. CARD:

And peripheral vision helps on that, because if it's a Jewish holiday and you're calling Israel, things are different. If it's a Chinese holiday and you're calling Beijing, things are different. So that all goes into the mix.

Even when the decision is necessary, it is impacted by things that are happening in the world. A simple thing is—poor presidents, if they have to make a decision during a Super Bowl game and expect people to pay attention to the phone call, it's hard. Because even when you call White House staffers, oh, the phone rings and rings and rings. Will they pick up the phone? I know they're watching the football game.

So you have to have some peripheral vision about what's happening where the audience is that has to be engaged in either the decision-making process or its implementation.

GEN. WELCH:

This is where I mentioned rules of engagement early on. While we're trying to decide—

MR. NICHOLS:

If you could explain what that means to them, rules of engagement?

GEN. WELCH:

Yeah. Rules of engagement are how are your military forces going to respond if this happens again or something like it happens? If Chinese naval vessels approach a U.S. vessel, are we still going to just let them do it, now that they fired once at our vessels and killed people? Are we going to fire first? Same thing with airplanes. Because those—there are still ships out there, and probably more are moving in that direction. There's airplanes overhead right now. And there are Chinese airplanes overhead. So what are the rules that we're going to follow right now while we figure out the time lines for the big decisions that have to be made?

But some decisions have to be made immediately. They're not usually the ones that are being discussed in the media. It's the stuff that either escalates or deescalates quickly. And so our view is, always deescalate where possible. Give the president decision space. Unless that's just not possible in this scenario.

This would be a scenario where I can't imagine it wouldn't be possible.

MR. CARD:

Let's put it this way: the question should be asked.

GEN. WELCH:

Right.

MR. NATSIOS:

On the timing issue, just one observation is, I used to have a rule in AID—now, they were different kinds of decisions, they were not crisis management decisions—is when I got a decision memo as opposed to an information or briefing memo, I would try to make a decision within 48 hours unless there was something wrong with the options. Then I would send it back and say, "This is not acceptable; here are four more options you need to consider, and then I will make a decision."

Because the system gets very paralyzed if you sit on it for a long period of time—and I know some people in senior positions who have never been an executive will have a decision memo on their desk for three months. And the whole bureaucracy is saying, when in heaven's name is he going to send me an answer to this, because I've got to make all these budget decisions.

Now, in a crisis, the longer you wait, the greater you risk another event taking place that could happen and could limit your options. And so I understand what you're saying, Andy. You don't want to make it too early or too late. But in order to keep control of the momentum, keep control of the process, you have to kind of make a decision or then you forfeit in some ways.

MR. CARD:

One of the challenges for a president is when they make a decision, there's an expectation that there will be change consistent with that decision very quickly. That's a little different than making an administration decision over a budget.

MR. NATSIOS:

Yes, it is. It is, yeah.

MR. CARD:

I'm trying to think of a couple different examples where plenty of time to make a decision allowed President Bush to make a very well-informed and controversial decision about stem cell research, funding stem cell research.

And I remember going to him and saying, "This is a big issue. You care about it. There's lots of different views. And you have to make a decision." And he said, "How much time do I have?" And I said, "Well, it ends up being a budget decision, and the budget will have to go to the Hill in August." So—and this was in February. And I said, "You've got until August to make a decision."

And he could say, "Good, I want to do all of this stuff to be well informed." And then he made the decision.

On the other side, I remember as we were getting ready to go to war in Iraq, obviously very controversial. And the game plan called for us to have kinetic action happening on a certain day. And I remember the chairman of the Joint Chiefs and the CIA director coming into my office as chief of staff saying, "Hey, we've got an opportunity." And it was before kinetic action was supposed to start.

"We think we know where Saddam Hussein is, if we can get the—kill the head of the snake—cut the head off the snake right now, it would make a big difference." So everybody gathers, you wrestle through everything. And the president said, "Yes,

let's pursue it." And, bingo, the wheels of motion start, and we're going to have kinetic action before we planned, which means lots of logistical challenges. And then the president is being briefed kind of real time, meetings in the Oval Office. This is happening, this is happening, this is what we're seeing, we've got to move quickly, otherwise we'll lose the opportunity.

And, you know, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs is saying, "Do we tell the planes to go or not?" Because right now, they're running out of fuel; we're going to have to refuel them again, and that means we have to take more time to do it.

And the president says, "Go." And the planes go and kinetic action starts. And a whole war starts before we had planned for the war to start.

So those are the real challenges that you have. And it was the right decision, but we didn't cut the head off the snake.

MR. NICHOLS:

I think we brought up some good points. So maybe in summary, Mark, you're—it sounds like the DoD is going to be the neediest the earliest. They're going to need these rules of engagement, a presidential decision on whether we're escalating, deescalating, staying the same, evacuating from the area, staying in the area. Because there's risk associated with that change.

And the second piece is that you, in order to provide options, need to purportedly escalate. You need to move forces. You need to pull them and shift them and position them before you can even provide any options. So now, the president is going to have to make that quickly because of the number of days it would take to have a capability in place. So those are going to be immediate decisions.

GEN. WELCH:

I would just add on the first part of that, that those decisions are going to be made by somebody. They have to be made. Because there's people taking off in 10 minutes.

MR. NICHOLS:

Right.

GEN. WELCH:

So the idea is that the administration needs to understand what those decisions are and, if they disagree, say something now.

MR. NICHOLS:

Right. Because there's other ships out there and they're going to get close to Chinese vessels.

GEN. WELCH:

Right.

MR. NICHOLS:

So those immediately.

And then we heard a number of decisions about engaging our regional counterparts and the government of China in a very high level, trying to gain an understanding.

And then the other decision is bringing in the administration—the incoming administration, not only giving them full access to the intelligence, but the ability to ask and have questions answered.

And then the second part of that is to let them know very clearly what the president's objectives are and the policies that are being undertaken to support those objectives.

And you feel you can give that to them before they take over without really garnering input. It's like working with Congress. I'm here to inform you of what we've decided to do, to make that delineation very clearly.

MR. CARD:

I think it's even more significant than, quote, working with Congress. Working with Congress does not require real-time transfer of knowledge. Working with an incoming administration, I think it does require real-time transfer of knowledge. So slight difference. I would inform Congress appropriately, but I would be less energetic about doing it.

MR. NICHOLS:

Good, good.

Let's see if there's any questions in the audience. We're supposed to end here in a few minutes. Larry, do any of your specific students have questions?

AMBASSADOR NAPPER:

I don't know, they're out there.

MR. NICHOLS:

Just point at them, and then they can ask the question.

AMBASSADOR NAPPER:

I don't want to put them on the spot.

MR. NICHOLS:

That's exactly what they want. (Laughter.)

MR. NICHOLS:

Okay, any? Yes, please. Heather.

AMBASSADOR NAPPER:

Heather.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

So I am Heather Ba. I am the research coordinator with the White House Transition Project. And I am also completing my Ph.D. at UNC, so I am posing this question as an academic to practitioners, very experienced practitioners, all of whom teach. It's a little bit of an academic question.

But I'm wondering what variables do you think are most influential in crisis situations, right, when it comes to resolving them effectively? So this is very general.

What inspired this question, I'll just say, is I listened to Mr. Card today, and you talking about the fog of war, talking about the need or your desire to recruit emotionally grounded people. And as a student of foreign policy, what strikes me kind of absent in the literature is this discussion of human variables, or circumstantial variables that end up having—being very influential but oftentimes make the situation quite different than what academics often believe it to be, which is one of complete information. And so there's oftentimes circumstances that make the context very difficult to operate in or to make decisions in.

So I wonder if it's possible for you to kind of take a few minutes and think about, in all your experience, are there variables? This could be personality variables, things about the personality of the president or his advisors. Maybe structural things about how the president might have organized his advisors or how he might relate to them. Or even circumstantial or contextual variables that then are influential in how a crisis situation gets resolved.

MR. CARD:

A complicated question. My answer has several parts to it.

Number one, a president must be an optimist. You don't want to have a president who believes they're making a bad decision, so they've got to be an optimist. They also have to have unbelievable courage, because they have to have the courage to be absolutely, completely alone in their decision. So that means they have to be schizophrenic, because when they run for office, they're love magnets. When they serve, they're lonely.

So they have to have the courage to be optimistic, which is not courage; they just have to be innately optimistic. Because if they make a decision and believe it's the wrong decision, they shouldn't have made that decision, because others are going to react to it and make sacrifices. So they've got to be an optimist.

They have to have the courage to make the decision and believe it's right with the knowledge they have. Which means that they have to recognize that they will never know everything that they want to know. They do not have an infinite amount of time to get information. They have only as much time as they're given to make the decision. So there's always more information they could have had, which causes the second guessers to criticize them. And they accept that. That's a reality.

The other thing is, they cannot—I don't even think they should invite, but they cannot expect a consensus that their decision is right, even from their advisors. So they can't say, are all of you in agreement? They can say that; they can ask it. But if there is not all agreement, they still have to make the decision.

So much of the academic world is looking to find a consensus; everybody agrees, do we have all of the information? If we don't have all of the information, let's go get some more information. And presidents don't have that luxury.

So that's how I would answer your question.

Will there be people who will not agree with the president's decision who are in the room when the president made the decision? Yes. Will those people generally respect the decision that is made and proudly and enthusiastically help implement it? Yes. If they don't, they shouldn't be invited to the next round of discussions.

And they also have to respect that it's the president's decision to make. It's not anybody else's. So this is not a situation where I think that people should be invited to lie down on a couch and have some psychiatrist analyze them. No, the president—you've been given—Mr. President, this is the decision that you're facing. I don't know what the right answer is. There's probably no right answer. But that still means you have to come up with a decision. And you've only got 15 minutes; otherwise it's completely irrelevant. Do you have a decision? And the president will say, "Yes, I do. And it's the right decision." "Yes, it is, Mr. President. We look forward to implementing it."

MR. NATSIOS:

One thing that does make a difference, particularly in a transition, is the relationship of the president to the people that he or she has appointed to the senior positions. When 41 became president, he had his best friend, the secretary of state, and his second best friend as his national security advisor. There was not a lot of question in his mind as to what their skill sets were, how much he could rely on them, because he had known them for a long time and knew what they were capable of. And they were in high office.

When Bill Clinton got elected, I don't think he knew Warren Christopher intimately before he became secretary of state. He had served as deputy secretary of state under President Carter, and I think people recommended him, and he certainly had diplomatic skills. But President Clinton didn't have that close a relationship because he was just taking over.

So I do think it makes a difference who—and the interesting thing was in the 43 administration, the vice president, the secretary of defense, and secretary of state all had extensive experience in foreign policy and national affairs.

MR. CARD:

And with each other.

MR. NATSIOS:

And with each other. And it wasn't always a happy experience with each other.

And so President Bush 43 did not know them all personally. I mean, he knew them from the campaign and Dick Cheney, of course, was the head of the team to choose the vice president, and then the president made a decision that he should be the vice president. But he really didn't know them from years of work in high office.

And that changed over time. As you saw, the administration's senior officials changed, where the president developed confidence in certain people and they rose up.

So it does make a difference what the confidence level is on the skill set. And I realized when I was in office that certain people—I watched them under stress. And

if they performed very well, I would gradually move them up. And then I developed high confidence in them. And other people, some of them had very good reputations, but I didn't interact well with them, and they were sent out to the field, so to speak.

MR. NICHOLS:

Any final questions? Yes, please.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

Hi, my name is Kirby Davis. I am a first-year student in the Master of International Affairs program here.

And my question had to do with how presidents would deal with precedents in managing international affairs. For example, historically, we have often used escalatory actions with China to resolve crises like this. For example, sending in aircraft carriers during the 1996 Taiwan Straits crisis. However, like the threat environment in the west Pacific has greatly changed, you know, has greatly changed since then.

Would a president feel pressure to follow precedent even if the threat environment had changed? And would that increase tensions with the transition team if they disagreed about deviating from that precedent?

MR. CARD:

I'll answer that question. The presidency is not like the Supreme Court with stare decisis, which helps dictate the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court, you're predisposed to follow the decisions made in the past. That's kind of an expectation when you go for confirmation to be on the Supreme Court.

Presidents don't do that. They don't promise to follow that which was done before.

They are obligated—they are obligated to keep America's word. So where there's a treaty, you keep the word. If there's an executive order that you don't repeal, you keep the word.

But in terms of precedent itself dictating the result, it does not dictate a result, and there should be no expectation that it would. However, there is a credible expectation that the president should know what every precedent was. Now, he doesn't have to know it personally, but his national security advisor or his domestic policy advisor or his legislative affairs advisor or whatever, somebody should know this is the way it's always been, this is the way it was the last time. That's informing the president. But they should not be obligated to follow a precedent just because it was a precedent.

And I don't—I think you would actually offend them if you told them they had to because it was always a precedent. And even when there's a familial relationship between the president and a former president, ah-hah, yes, George W. Bush and his dad. George W. Bush was not predisposed to do everything that his father did. He was predisposed to learn from what his father did, but he wasn't predisposed to do what his father did. And he wasn't bashful about acknowledging that. So it's okay.

GEN. WELCH:

Kirby, the first question on the military side when we start planning is always, any precedent here? It's the first question somebody asks. And we start with that.

The example you gave, that was escalatory in the eyes of China. It was reassuring in the eyes of Taiwan. So a lot of it depends on just which perspective you want to take as you go into your discussion.

I think one of the most important things for the administration, though, and for a president, I am not somebody who has been in the inner circle of a president. I mean, I knew the president, I got a chance to advise the president, I appreciated the way the president received us and we were able to tell the truth to him. But I was not, day to day, beside the president, really understood his personality, what the facial expressions meant. I wasn't that guy.

But what I appreciated was having a senior executive who, as the heat of the crisis rose, his blood pressure seemed to drop. Now, it probably didn't. But to everybody watching, it became more—he became more receptive to information and input. That's a really valuable thing if you want good information coming to you for decisions.

If you tend to be an emotional personality—and there have been great emotional presidents in the past as well—but you have to understand that if you carry that into the crisis discussion, you're not going to get some people in the room speaking up the way they would otherwise because it sounds like you've made up your mind.

MR. CARD:

It's interesting how many times the president will be in a room where he asks a question and someone says, "Yes." And how does he read that?

MR. NICHOLS:

Good. Other questions from the audience? (No response.)

All right. Well, please join me in thanking our distinguished panel for their great comments.

(Applause.)

Gentlemen, thank you as always.

Note: A video of this panel discussion is available on the White House Transition Project website: http://www.whitehousetransitionproject.org/experts-news/events/455-2/.