

**TRANSCRIPTION/TRANSCRIPTION
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LOCATION/ENDROIT: Westin Nova Scotian Hotel, 1181 Hollis St., HALIFAX, NS
PRINCIPAL(S)/PRINCIPAUX: Jeanne Meserve, Member, Homeland Security Experts Group, Moderator;

Yascha Mounk, Contributing Editor, The Atlantic and Associate Professor, Johns Hopkins University;
Dr. Nancy Okail, Executive Director, Tahrir Institute;
Steve Tsang, Director, China Institute, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London ;
Isadora Zubillaga, Ambassador, Deputy Commissioner for Foreign Affairs, National Assembly, Venezuela;

SUBJECT/SUJET: Plenary 1 at the Halifax International Security Forum entitled "Revolutions of Our Time: Freedom Without US"

Jeanne Meserve: Another great Steve Markel film. Welcome to Halifax. We are running a little bit behind, half an hour I'm told, so just adjust your schedules accordingly. And for those who wondered what this handshake was that took place a moment ago, can I tell them?

Unidentified Male: Of course.

Jeanne Meserve: Angus King and I used to be co-anchors on a show on main public television more decades ago than either one of us would like to admit, but that we would spend an hour talking about things like spruce budworm infestations is simply amazing to me now. (Laughter) Anyway, great to see you again. But we're here to talk about something, of course, very different. There's been a lot of hand wringing about the retreat of democracy and the advance of authoritarianism and in Nancy Lindberg's wonderful piece, her Halifax Paper, she mentioned the Freedom House ratings and that the ratings for democracy are sliding backwards.

But there are, of course, protests taking place all across the globe, from Asia to the Middle East to Europe to South American and beyond. So what are those protests about, how do they connect with one another, where are they going, and what's the impact of US policy? That's what we're going to talk about today. And Steve, I have to talk with you because President Trump gave an interview this morning in which he was asked about Hong Kong, and he said this: "If it weren't for me, Hong Kong would have been obliterated in 14 minutes." As someone – and by the way, this is Steve Tsang, who is Director of the China Institute, the School for Oriental and African Studies at the University of London; I was remiss in not introducing everybody.

Let me start at the end, Yascha Mounk is Contributing Editor of The Atlantic, Associate Professor of Johns Hopkins University; sitting next to him, Dr. Nancy Okail. Nancy is the President of the Board of Advisors at the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy; Steven Tsang, who I just mentioned, is Director of the China Institute at the University of

London. And Ambassador Isadora Zubillaga. Thanks so much for joining us. She is Deputy Commissioner for Foreign Affairs of the Venezuela National Assembly and Ambassador of Venezuela to France, of the Guaido government.

So Steve, back to you. the President's remark, "If it weren't for me, Hong Kong would have been obliterated in 14 minutes." Your reaction to that?

Steve Tsang: I think it is a wonderful thing that President Trump thinks that he has saved Hong Kong, even if it's not true. (Laughter) It is important that we actually understand that people in Hong Kong have been at this for quite a long time. International support will not change the future of Hong Kong. Ultimately, the future of Hong Kong is in the hands of people in Hong Kong as well as the government in Beijing. But when international leaders also say that yes – or in this case, President Trump says that yes, I stand with Hong Kong, but I also stand with my buddy, president Xi Jinping – then you've got a bit of a problem there.

The message get very, very mixed. The Chinese government will pick up the second part of the message, which is that President Trump will stand with not just General Secretary Xi Jinping, which is his official title in China – nobody in China calls him President Xi, by the way – and yet, he's elevated to a status almost like that of an elected leader of China, and that will be the part that's being played, that Hong Kong people will still cherish the thought that yes, something is happening. And of course, for people in Hong Kong, what they're also looking at is what triggered the interview, this meeting this morning, which was the Congress passing overwhelmingly of the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act.

Jeanne Meserve: And we don't know yet whether President Trump is going to sign it or veto it. He's equivocated about that. Members of Congress who are here, if he were to veto it, would there be an override? I'm seeing nods.

Unidentified Male: Probably.

Jeanne Meserve: Yes. Okay. What will the impact of that be, if anything?

Steve Tsang: Well, if President Trump were to veto the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act, I think that would be the single most important thing, simple biggest mistake we can make, because it will send a very clear signal to the Chinese government that at the end of the day, the US administration doesn't mean it that President Trump can flip and can turn, and at the end of the day, he will turn in favour of China so China can do whatever it wants in Hong Kong. That 40 minutes certainly comes back.

Jeanne Meserve: We'll get back to, to Hong Kong, but I do want to go around and get everybody's perspective here. The Trump administration has opposed sanctions in Venezuela. The President has even, at one point, he threatened military action possibly against Maduro, and yet, Maduro is still in power and the result has been an even more severe economic situation. So has US policy there been totally ineffective and what would you like it to be?

Isadora Zubillaga: Well, thanks for the question. And before I answer, I want to thank Canada for hosting this and specially for accompanying Venezuela and the Venezuelan fight and the Venezuelan people in, in this struggle that has over a decade at least.

I have to say that tonight, there will be people in my country, parents and grandparents that have to decide which children they will feed because there isn't enough food. And I want you to understand that I'm speaking here tonight not only as the Deputy Commissioner from President Guaido and his ambassador, but mostly as a Venezuelan woman, an activist for democracy and human rights who had to leave my country because of the political persecution of the regime. And I need you to sympathize with the millions of Venezuela that are suffering today. That's my first message to you.

The sanctions from Canada, from the US as well as Europe are the most important instrument that we have today to get the regime to negotiate a political solution. I believe that are not enough because —

Jeanne Meserve: More sanctions?

Isadora Zubillaga: — sanctions, well first of all —

Jeanne Meserve: Different levers.

Isadora Zubillaga: — well first of all, the individual sanctions are very important because they are targeting the very people that have stolen the money of the Venezuelan people, not, sanctions are not, are not prohibiting the food and the medicines to come in and damaging the people. That is Maduro, the dictator is what's damaging the, the inflow of food and medicine into the country and they should be responsible.

What I mean about not enough is that US and Canadian sanctions should be accompanied by the rest of the world. And when I see that freedom or the role of the US in the, in, in, given the right conditions for the rest of the world to, to enjoy freedom and democracy, I think that's a fundamental error conceptually because I think that it's the role of the international community and all of the rest of the members of the different governments that are here today, and elsewhere, that have the responsibility to actually accompany the pressure on a regime that it's a criminal state, and it has the responsibility collectively.

So I think that that's a very important message that I would love that everyone takes home today.

Jeanne Meserve: Nancy, switching over to the Middle East for a moment, the US has taken a hands-off approach largely to the various protest movements that have erupted in your part of the world and you're from Egypt; you yourself were jailed, and the President says that President Sisi is a great leader and is his favourite dictator. What's the impact of that?

Nancy Okail: (Laughter) Well, you can get the reaction from the room here.

Jeanne Meserve:

But let's hear yours.

Nancy Okail:

Just before I moved to Egypt, I want to touch upon, like, important points that Steve and Isadora has, has raised, and they tell a lot about the power of the United States in, the power of democracies in the northern world. The issue of, like, whatever, it's going to be a grave mistake to actually take the action or whether, like, the threat of, like, even having, like, military intervention against Maduro. The thing is you are not powerful by what the status of things is in terms of the power of your economy, your army and your status in the world. You're only as powerful as your ability to lose that power.

And this is one of the main issues with the United States, not just in this administration, but the previous one, and we've seen that, the ability to actually to act upon what you have in terms of power, not just threaten with it. And more often than not, this doesn't happen. And it doesn't happen because of factual issues like policy makers have to measure the consequences and they have to act upon what's going on. But for example, if we go to Egypt and, and you referred to me being jailed and all this and this was part of, like, the foreign funding issue case that was in Egypt and, like, 43 of us, 17 Americans were there with a country that the United States gave \$1.3 billion of military aid., yet they could not at that time, stop the prosecution of all of us, including the 17 Americans.

Why is that? Because even though there's this static power, there's always the fear of rocking the boat. That would rather be comfortable with what we know, the, whether that the strong man we know or the system we are used to in terms of the relationships we have rather than we deal with the unknown and long-term issues. It's the same things like what we are seeing with Maduro and the same thing what we're seeing right now with Sisi. And I don't think there's any doubt in anyone here in this room about atrocities that Sisi has had over the past period and the incredible crackdown on civil society. But the issue is that there is always this (inaudible) since, like, do you want another Syria in the region?

Jeanne Meserve:

Exactly.

Nancy Okail:

So the, the question is not whether we should or should not think that this is a good or stable regime. Are we able and do we have the political will to actually face and not just look at the immediate moment and look actually in the long term because such regimes are not sustainable and something that we have to face.

Jeanne Meserve:

Yascha, do you see a connection between all of these movements in these various parts of the world, and what is it?

Yascha Mounk:

Well, there's certainly some connection, but I think when you look at the video, which is very fun and, you know, had a good soundtrack, I think it makes it a little bit too simple. It looks like the protest in Hong Kong, the protest in Venezuela and Bolivia and the climate strike are all sort of part of one vague protest movement, sort of going over the world. And it's sort of all the same thing. I think there's very important distinctions between them. I think there's three types of protests that are happening at the moment in the world.

The first is within countries that clearly are democratic. So when you think of the Yellow Vests in France, when you think of what's going on in Chile at the moment, those I think are part of the larger populist wave that is spreading around the world. Clearly, there's something about our democratic systems which leaves a good portion of the population, dissatisfied, disenchanted, angry with the status quo and it can sometimes take productive form, but it often takes a very destructive form. And that's true, it's the (inaudible) protest does, burning public property in the centre of town squares in Paris and other cities or when it is some of the political leaders who've come into office in democracies over the last years.

Now, I think when you start looking at what's going on in, in Venezuela, what happened in Bolivia over the last weeks, even the first signs of similar developments in Russia, in Hungary, in Poland, the Czech Republic, that's something quite different. So we used to underestimate, speaking of the political scientist, the extent to which these populist movements could actually undermine democracy. If we'd been sitting here 10 years ago, we would have assumed that these liberal democracies are forever stable. I think we've now realized, and we're seeing in these protests in Paris, in Santiago, that these democracies are much more brittle than perhaps we imagined.

But I think now we're in danger of making a second inverse mistake. We're in danger of thinking that these populists are so successful that once they're in power, they're so difficult to dislodge that they're going to be in power forever, that they can actually dominate the countries for a very long time.

But the problem with a lot of these populist governments is that they are based on a very false premise. They say I am the true representative of the people. I'm going to return a lot of power to the people and that's why you should trust me. But what they actually do is to arrogate more and more power in their own hands. And what we're starting to see is that, not in the first years when it's elites and journalists and so on warning about the danger of that, but after 10 years, after 15 years, the people start to realize that. They start to see that the leaders who claimed to give power back to the people actually are just concentrating it in their own hands, and they're very corrupt.

And so what we've seen, especially in Bolivia and Venezuela, is very courageous people standing up to regain their liberties. And that's something that's inspiring and that should scare these populist dictators in Hungary, in Turkey, in many countries around the world. But what we also see, when you're following the news about Bolivia, for example, is how difficult it is to then actually re-establish democracy. How divided these societies become, how many stumbling blocks there are on the way from a people clearly turning against dictators, as happened in Venezuela to making sure that the dictator goes, because Maduro's still in power, or to making sure that there's a democratic transition, as we're seeing at the moment in Bolivia.

Jeanne Meserve: Nancy, you wanted to chime in here.

Nancy Okail: Yeah. I very much agree with Yascha, but I just want us to look at the issue from the other side. I think most of the time, we also kind of look at liberal democracy as the goal where actually it should be the mean. And when we think —

Jeanne Meserve: Should be the what?

Nancy Okail: The means to justice and stability, which actually, I mean, like everyone in the world now acknowledges is an essential issue, like looking at the SDG, the Sustainable Development Goals, SDG 16 is mainly about the issue of justice and without it, there's no development in the rest of the world.

But looking at the issue of the rise of populism, I really enjoyed reading the piece in foreign policy on, like, the outside of populism and what it, like, reverse in terms of the situation is that we always see is, like, how those people will be able to overtake, how they were able to manipulate the people. But we really should stop and think that this has happened in many countries where democracy was actually the system, and that requires us to sit back and reflect, I mean, just like this system, like the liberal democracy and what it promises to people because if we look at countries like, yes, Egypt in the Middle East, this is problematic, but in Chile for example, this was height of liberal democracy.

Jeanne Meserve: So is this about democracy? I mean, I think in Hong Kong, clearly that's what it's about, but in many places, isn't it about economic inequality? It's about corruption.

Isadora Zubillaga: Can I, can I just mention something? For, in Venezuela, for example, it's a great example of how democracy was used to destroy democracy. And what's happening, because you mentioned Bolivia and Chile and I want to (inaudible) also the thought and the preoccupation that there is a spillover effect. And even if it's from different perspectives and you analyse them correctly from a political scientist point of view, the fact of the matter is that we are seeing a very dangerous situation that it's, this is stabilizing the region and that it's putting in jeopardy the demo-, the democratic, the freedoms and the stability of many countries in this hemisphere and, and this is something that we have to take very much into account.

I think that we need to work together and I insist and I will insist throughout the, throughout the, the whole weekend because there is a real possibility of, of actually being successful at bringing democracy back to Venezuela and having the correct effect in, in some of the (crosstalk) —

Jeanne Meserve: What makes you optimistic? You've talked about the —

Isadora Zubillaga: Well, yes. And —

Jeanne Meserve: — international community (crosstalk).

Isadora Zubillaga: — you know, glad you ask because first of all, because this process is irreversible. The deterioration of the economy, of the social rights in Venezuela, of the humanitarian crisis and the refugee crisis in the region, it's irreversible. Maduro people cannot reverse the economy, cannot, cannot, doesn't have the solution. It's irreversible also because of you, because more than 56 countries have recognized President Guaido as the legitimate interim President, and it's probably one of the greatest coalition to defend a country's democracy ever since World

War II. So I thank you. And also if there are, as you said, Senators or representatives of the US in a bipartisan representation, I thank you also because this gives a very important signal for other countries to work together because this is, this is a matter of dignity, as it was mentioned here before.

It's a matter, it's the moral thing to do, but it also is the right thing to do, the economic thing to do. We want, you know, we want a region that it's healthy, that it's vigorous and I think that we have the opportunity to make a difference.

Jeanne Meserve: An optimist. Steve, I have to ask you about Hong Kong. How does this end? This seems like it could become an endless conflict.

Steven Tsang: Hong Kong's my home town. I lived and work in the US, but I was born in Hong Kong, so I have a vested interest to see a good prosperous future for Hong Kong. This is not what I'm seeing. What I'm seeing is that the policies Xi Jinping has put in place will, in the end, (inaudible) in the destruction of Hong Kong as we know it. I'm not saying that Xi Jinping wants to destroy Hong Kong. I have no doubt he doesn't want to do that. But the policy being put in place will deliver that result because he fundamentally refused to recognize that the problem in Hong Kong is a political problem. This is very, very clearly articulated at the recent top-level meeting of the Communist Party, they call this fourth panel, which essentially is the fourth meeting of the central committee of the Communist Party after the (inaudible) party congress.

And at the end of that congress, they issue a statement in which they essentially say government policy in Hong Kong has been right. The problem was that the policy has not been implemented vigorously enough and there were other elements of, that should have been implemented that were not implemented, like patriotic education. Now, those were the very problems that set Hong Kong into the current situation. Patriotic education campaign that was imposed by Beijing in 2012, the year Xi Jinping became leader of China was what get the young people in Hong Kong politically active, the generation of (inaudible) was born as a result.

Jeanne Meserve: So now they're in the streets, calmed down for the moment because their election's coming up on Sunday, but is there the risk of Tiananmen 2.0?

Steven Tsang: I think we are not going to see a Tiananmen 2.0 in the sense of Chinese tanks rolling in the streets of Hong Kong and machine gunning young protesters. Something's changed. In 1989, the Chinese government had really no effective authority than deploying the Beijing Garrison, and the Beijing Garrison was the most elitist, most elite of the Chinese Army units in 1989, which meant in that tail end of the Cold War period, the most heavily armoured unit. So they went in with tanks. As a result of that, they have created a one-million strong people's armed police specifically to deal with similar kinds of challenge.

So when we are looking at Hong Kong, we are going to be looking at the deployment of the people's armed police who will be beating people up very, very harshly. They will still be carrying automatic weapons, but they will not be riding into Hong Kong in tanks. So your global visual presentation of it will be very different. That's why I think when

Chinese leaders hear President Trump saying it the way he say they will calculate it if they are not doing a Tiananmen 2.0, but a very different kind of police reinforcement operations. China will get away with it.

Now I think when that happens, many of you here will take a very different view about that and things will change much beyond the imagination of the Chinese but they don't see it until that moment.

Jeanne Meserve: And you have some tactical advice for the protesters too.

Steven Tsang: Well, I mean, my advice to the protesters in Hong Kong has always been follow Chairman Mao's basic teaching. Use guerrilla warfare. Go out and protest and defend the values you want to defend. But you are defending your values against overwhelmingly superior and well organized and well supplied force. Don't stay in one place. Put your demands forward. Ask them to be (inaudible) with a timeframe, if they are not being met. But then you pull back with your protest. If they're not being met, you go back for more protests. You can keep that thing going for much longer without the evil day coming.

Jeanne Meserve: But in the end, is the outcome going to be any different?

Steven Tsang: Well in the end, the outcome will not be any different if at some point, Xi Jinping says I'm going to send in the people's armed police to Hong Kong. He will send in the armed, people's armed police. No general in the Chinese hierarchy will say with our deepest respect, sir, that is really not very wise and all kinds of reasons. He (inaudible) he is going to essentially become defence attachés at Timbuktu. So that's not going to happen.

But what we can do is that we can, we can make it very clear to the Chinese government, even when Chinese officials are not saying it, that the calls to China over Hong Kong would be really as high as it's going to be and then the risk of miscalculation on the part of the Chinese leadership will be significantly reduced.

Jeanne Meserve: Yascha.

Yascha Mounk: Well I think, look, we've been thinking a lot about the future of democracy for the past years. That's what my last book's been about because of the extreme transformations we've seen in countries, from the United States to Italy and Brazil and places around the world. That's been the nature focus. But I think now that you have this erosion of democracy in many countries, that dictators seem to be in the ascendant, that democracy seems to be threatened, it's worth thinking a little bit about the future of dictatorships.

And the paradoxical thing about dictatorships, of course, is that dictators have all of the power, but they don't tend to be particularly stable political regimes. So even for one person that's concentrated power in their own hands, it is actually very difficult for them to hold on to that power. Now, there's a few different kinds of strategies they can take. One of them is, as China did in Tiananmen, to shoot protesters down. I do worry that

in the case of Hong Kong, that might be an option because Hong Kong is not part of the co-territory of China. So the loss of legitimacy is not quite the same.

But in many places, when dictators try to shoot at their own people, they see that members of their own political movement, they see that members of the armed forces aren't willing to go along with that. So that's a very, very risky strategy. Now the other strategy is that you try and keep the semblance of democracy while actually undermining it. This is what Erdogan tried to do when he cancelled the outcome of the Istanbul elections, claiming there'd been some problem of legitimacy and rerunning it, but suddenly, 10% of the vote shifted to the opposition because people said hang on a second, it's absolutely blatant you're trying to rig it and they got very angry. That's what happened in the streets of La Paz in the last weeks when it became very evident that Morales had tried to rig the elections there.

So I think the real question is how long will these dictatorships be able to sustain their legitimacy? Because without that legitimacy, they're always going to be in trouble. And I take a lot of these protest movements we've seen to be a sign of a kind of double impasse. On the one hand, Francis Fukuyama's optimism that liberal democracy would prove uniquely capable of solving its internal contradictions has been proven wrong in the last decade. Clearly, those internal contradictions are much bigger, much more challenging than we realized. And on the other hand, it's also becoming very clear that these dictatorships do even worse at managing their internal contradictions.

So I think that means we're going to have a lot more turmoil in the coming decades, a lot more complicated standoffs as we're seeing in all of the countries that are represented on the stage here. But I do also take a lot of optimism from that, that the basic values of global democracy are still retained a lot of fervor, a lot of commitment in people not just in the west, not just in Canada or the United States, but in Hong Kong, in last parts of Latin America, in Asia, in Africa, everywhere around the world.

Jeanne Meserve: I'd love to start mixing in some audience questions. I think we have a couple of runners with mics. Here we have a question right here. I think they're up here in the third row. And please tell us who you are and keep the question short so we can get a lot of them in.

Question: Hi. My name is (inaudible) from Japan. I think the most countries you have mentioned to need the – they suffer from the lack of strong leadership for pro-democracy movement. There should be efforts either from the inside and also with (inaudible) support to strengthen the pro-democracy leaders. Thank you.

Jeanne Meserve: Any thoughts on that, strengthening the pro-democracy leadership within these movements? You had one in Venezuela.

Isadora Zubillaga: Well —

Jeanne Meserve: The President.

Isadora Zubillaga: — yes, well we, we have been fighting for over a decade, as I said. Actually, the President right now comes from the student movement

that was fighting on the streets for so many years. If I understood your question correctly, I believe that the solution in Venezuela should be political and not military. I strongly believe that there is a possibility to put pressure on the military that sustain Maduro in order to then, for them to, to come to the right side of history, to defend the constitution, which is what they should be doing.

I, I think that also it's important to mention that dictators don't only sustain themselves on the threats that link them to some kind of democratic forms. We have cases and that is the case of Venezuela, where we passed from a dictatorship to a failed state to a criminal state. So, so we're dealing with a situation that it's certainly not pretending to be a democracy anymore.

Jeanne Meserve: We have another question right here.

Question: Thank you. (Inaudible) Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister. Well, I would like to hear maybe briefly from speakers and maybe we could start with actually Egyptian colleague. It's very nice, of course, to argue that authoritarian regimes will fail because they are getting weaker, etc., but you see, if they are weak or they are getting weaker, we should not be so much concerned. I would be a devil's advocate and I would like to hear actually why such kind of populist movements are rising in the countries you mentioned, and also in a bunch of Western European countries, including United States. So what are our weaknesses? What did we do wrong if liberal democracy is failing?

Jeanne Meserve: Well that's a big one. Nancy.

Nancy Okail: Yeah, that's a, that's a great question actually. It's one of the things that we keep on thinking why is this happening? I think one of the reasons for optimism that I, I would say is that authoritarian regimes always play from the same playbook. And on the opposite side, that people are actually evolving all the time. Some people are reading the situation as just like oh what people do is just like they go to the streets and they protest and what's next? And the most difficult thing is how to shift from the street to real governance and change.

But actually, the protests have changed and it has changed significantly in a way that threatens those very authoritarian regimes. So for example, if we look what's going right now in the Middle East, the main narrative of the authoritarian regimes is always that those people are either agents of the West and they are always, like, promoting ideals of Western cultures that are not as important as putting bread on the table of the people, just like the whole thing about, just like freedom of expression, these are not priorities. And we have to actually maintain stability in order to provide that.

Now, what happened right now is, like, a direct threat to such narrative because first of all, people surpassed their main issues that were mainly the main label of the, of the protest. If we look at Lebanon, and particularly we also look at Iraq, they have first of all, surpassed the sectarian divide, that they are protesting with the label of corruption, bad governance and the requirement for accountability. And that hits the authoritarian regimes right in the heart because you can no longer say those people are protesting for, like, unnecessary ideals because they are protesting for actually being able to have the minimum basic issues for living.

And the, the interesting thing is that triggers are so minimal that you would think it was just like such strong governments, like for example, the trigger for the protests that just, like, have been going on for weeks and weeks now, it's just like an added tax, tariff on What's App. That's certainly not the case, that it's not just about What's App, but it's just like a reflection that people have had it with tolerating unfair economic conditions and instability. And what's more interesting, that is not just regional, that it's across the globe.

And if you look at Chile, for example, and, and that is also, it's not just about, like, the, the national government. It's actually about global governance. When you think that there's, in one week, there are 16 million people protested at the same time about climate change across cultures, time zones, generations. So that's really where I think the optimism is where, and the real threats to authoritarian regimes.

Jeanne Meserve: Yascha.

Yascha Mounk: So I think, look, if you see that these populist movements are rising in many different countries around the world at the same time, what I'm struck by is that each country I go to, people tell me these very (inaudible) stories about their particular political systems. That doesn't seem to me, to make sense. If you're seeing very similar developments in so many different places, they probably have some common causes. It seems to be that there's three primary causes for that crisis of liberal democracy, which we've seen in the last years.

The first is economic stagnation or economic disappointment. It's very obvious in countries like the United States where citizens have always been used to very rapid economic growth. From 1945 to 1960, the living standard of an average American doubled. From 1960 to 1985, it doubled again. And since 1985, it's basically been stagnant. So of course, people who used to say you know, those politicians in Washington, are they the best people? Do I completely trust them? Are they (inaudible) virtue? Perhaps not, but they seem to be sticking to their end of the deal. So let's give them the benefit of the doubt.

That's no longer the case. And what you're seeing particularly is that not, it's not people who are making less money who are voting for populists all the time. But it is people in economic regions that are doing far less well. If in their neighbourhood and their town and their part of a state, there's no economic growth, no investment, they feel like I still have a good life, but my kids are going to have to move somewhere else in order to do well. That's when they vote for populists.

Now, there's some countries like Central Europe or some countries like Latin America where there has been economic growth, but the geographic pattern is exactly the same. In Prague, nobody votes for a populist. All around Prague, everybody votes for the populist. So there's a similarity there.

The second point is about rapid cultural and in many countries, demographic changes, which mean that certain groups that had a kind of an unearned status advantage no longer have the same role in society they can take for granted. So in a lot of North American, Western Europe, that is really about immigration and demography, but in

some other countries, it's about the changing world of gender, for example, the growing visibility and acceptance of homosexuality. So the one thing we find everywhere is that if you ask somebody picture society as a ladder with 10 steps, where would you place yourself on it today? And they say you know, fourth or fifth step. You ask them and where you or your parents 30 years ago? And they say the seventh or the eighth step. Those are the people voting for populists, the people who feel like they don't have the same importance that they used to.

And the third, very quickly, the one that's clearly completely universal, is the rise of the internet and of social media, which makes it much easier for people to exploit the anger, the disappointment that people have about these other factors in order to organize.

Now, I do think, and here my optimism comes in, that the success of this populist movement is premised on a false claim. It is premised on the claim that they can solve all of those things, which most of the time they can't do, while actually deepening democracy. But what we see time and again that populists, because they say that they alone truly represent the people, are not capable of accepting independent institutions. I'm not capable of accepting a free press. I'm not capable of accepting free democratic competition. And over time, that becomes evident to citizens.

And because they had never accepted to give up the basic values of liberal democracy, because they thought they could turn back the clock on a bunch of these things, while still having individual freedom or collective self-determination, when they realize the nature of the game, they get very angry. And so that's my qualified optimism because it takes a long time and it's not at all obvious, but it's easy to get back to democracy (inaudible), as we're seeing Bolivia, as we're seeing Venezuela.

Jeanne Meserve: Steven, Isadora, you both want to weigh in. Let's keep them short so we can get more questions.

Isadora Zubillaga: I'll be very short cause I agree with the description but I think there is one element that it's missing and that we have lived it firsthand, and it's the role of some international players. In the case of Venezuela, there's no doubt that Cuba and Russia and countries like Iran or Turkey have played a role, and I believe that that can be said if you analyse it because they, I mean, there is interest in disrupting the democratic values of the western democracies. Just to (crosstalk).

Steve Tsang: I'll try to keep it brief. If we look around the world and look at which are the really successful countries, you have the usual suspects, but there is also China. The most powerful, one of the hardest of authoritarian states on Earth, which is, as Peter said at the opening, dedicated to make the world safe from authoritarianism. And it's doing it. It's doing it in Venezuela, it's prop up Mugabe in Zimbabwe. It's to get all over the world. When that is happening and it's got so much resources that it can throw (inaudible) around and when democracies are not doing so well, why are we surprised that we are in this particular predicament?

Jeanne Meserve: And why aren't democracies doing more to counter it?

Steve Tsang: Well, the problem there is that we, we are ourselves in the phase of transition because of the (inaudible) changes. The old fashioned

democratic system we have in place is not enough to meet the expectations of people who are in the digital age. And therefore, we are in that sense, falling short. Somehow, we will muddle through and find ways to address that. But that's going to take a fair bit of time in the normal democratic process.

In the meantime, you have a very powerful state which has a, a (inaudible) policy and huge amount of resources to try to take advantage of it at this time, but I hope that this will be a passing phase.

Jeanne Meserve: We have another question, right here.

Question: Thank you very much. My name is Yamaguchi from Japan. And my question goes to Professor Tsang about tactics. And I, I feel quite the same thing whenever I saw a Hong Kong event. I feel like don't be engaged in the decisive engagement, and to, to have what decisive thing to (inaudible) the most (inaudible) position. And that is how Mao Tse-Tung won, won the victory. But at that time, outside us, outside us, outside actors made a contribution too. My question is what is a (inaudible) mid-term plan after taking a protracted sort of, in political activities?

Steve Tsang: Okay. The reality is that people in Hong Kong are locked into a situation where it can only be doing strategic retreat. It has no change of doing an offensive and win because you're talking about a small democratic enclave of seven million people against a country of (inaudible) four billion with a (inaudible) party state which now sees the Hong Kong's economy accounts for about 3% of the Chinese economy, a bit less. Therefore they can afford to completely crush it if it comes to it. So you cannot, you cannot go and win in that game, but Hong Kong has an advantage of having signed (inaudible) agreements which is meant to give Hong Kong a guarantee that a system could remain in place until 2047.

And the retreat is to make sure that until 2047, Hong Kong should be able to keep its own system and way of life and its value, democratic values in place as much as possible. Now, the Chinese Community Party has never agreed, never understood it in the terms that people in Hong Kong understand it. They always believe that before 19-, 2047, Hong Kong will just become another part of China. But fight that and make a (inaudible) of it until eventually you can't do so.

Jeanne Meserve: We have another question right here.

Question: Thank you. I'm Michael Bociurkiw, I'm a Canadian global affairs analyst contributor to CNN Opinion. A question for Professor Tsang, if I may. I'm very sad about Hong Kong. I used to live there, report for South China Morning Post. A few weeks ago, I wrote an article that said Hong Kong has reached the point of no return. Do you agree with that in terms of the divisions now in society are so deep, especially the hatred towards the police and the brutality, and also it's losing its status as an international business centre. You probably read that the Chinese courts may now overrule the Hong Kong courts. So hard to come back from anything like that. Thank you.

Steve Tsang: I don't think we have reached the point of absolutely no return, but I share your pessimism. The first part of refusing to say that we are past

the point of no return is that there's really nothing in the (inaudible) in Hong Kong which is so divisive that no political solution is possible. Political solution is, I think, still possible provided the players will, the key players will act on it. And you have here the problem with leadership that the Hong Kong protesters don't have an organized leadership so it's very difficult for them to organize a strategic retreat.

You have the Chinese government which will, which has already decided it will be repressing Hong Kong if it comes down to it. In the middle, you have the Hong Kong government and that is where the most critical failure lies. If that government is prepared to broker a political solution against the instruction from Beijing, what is Xi Jinping going to do with Carrie Lam? Nothing. She will be (inaudible) anyway, whatever she does or doesn't do in a matter of months. But if a political solution can be found, Xi Jinping would actually tolerate it because he doesn't actually want to completely quash Hong Kong, destroy Hong Kong, for personal and party reasons. So I think that is still theoretically possible, but realistically, with the leadership in place in Hong Kong, it's not going to happen.

Jeanne Meserve: We have another question on this side of the room. Right there.

Question: Thank you. I'm Duncan (inaudible) of the congress. I'm of Uyghur origin. My question to Steve. We have seen almost more than five months as Hong Kong democracy is going on, and now is the CCP, the Chinese government, use the force to crack down this democratic movement. So, but it is, as we say, almost (inaudible) we haven't any visible supporters in mainland China. We thought maybe this democratic movement of Hong Kong will maybe spread to the mainland of China. What is the reason why is the Chinese people in mainland China still silenced and ignored the Hong Kong democratic movement?

Steve Tsang: Well, thank you. A couple of things here. Before I answer your question, and I will, I would like to say that since you underlined that you are yourself a Uyghur person, I would like to underline that much as I am worried about Hong Kong and think that we need to do something about Hong Kong, I think what is happening with the people in Xinjiang, to the Uyghur people is even more horrendous. And that is something that we need to acknowledge and we need to confront and the work is not doing enough about that.

Now, in terms of the people in China, I think you actually have a very, very small minority of people in China who understand the issues in Hong Kong and they're actually sympathetic with Hong Kong, but they're not, they're completely silent because speaking up is extremely dangerous. For the overwhelming majority of people in China, they only get the government-approved (inaudible) version of events in Hong Kong. So on the same date when you have a policeman who, unprovoked, pulled a gun and shot a teenager at point blank range, all the footage was the other atrocity which was a pro-China person that was being torched by some pro-democracy protesters. And when they only see that side of the picture, of course, they are on the side of the Chinese government.

Jeanne Meserve: I would very much like to get some questions about other parts of the world, (laughter) as fascinating and absorbing as Hong Kong is. I see a hand back there. You promise me it's not a Hong Kong question?

Question: Not (off microphone).

Jeanne Meserve: Okay. You're up then. (Laughter)

Question: It's not. I'm Matt Bryza from the Atlantic Council. It's an environmental question or issue. It hasn't really, this issue hasn't really popped up, although there were some clips of one of the most democratic movements in the world today, the children protesting and demanding a better future for their own kids, for themselves.

Jeanne Meserve: Nancy brought it up actually, briefly, but go ahead with your question.

Question: So, so the, one of the elements coming out of that movement is that maybe there are limits to economic growth, right? We all believe, and economists believe, the key is growth. And Yascha, as you were saying, the key to getting out of this malaise in democracy is to restore economic growth. But is that a conundrum, is that a dilemma that's unresolvable, the potential limits on economic growth for the sake of the environment?

Yascha Mounk: Yeah, so I think this is a really important question. It's a question I'm starting to get all of the time now, and you just asked, I think there's a trifecta of questions, you asked the first of them. I keep now hearing well, in order to really deal with climate change, then we have to give up on economic growth. The second question is in order to deal with climate change, don't we have to give up on capitalism? And then the third question, surprisingly often, especially in Europe, in order to deal with climate change, then we have to give up on democracy. This is too messy and complicated.

I think that all three of those questions are, are completely wrongheaded. First of all, for political and strategic reasons. In order to deal with climate change effectively, we have to command broad consensus within our democratic societies, you need 80% of Canadians, 80% of Americans, of US Americans saying we actually want to deal with this and we agree on a broad set of programs. And you're never going to do that by (inaudible) the fight against climate change against the political view that less than 10% of a population (inaudible) You're never going to do that by saying you know what, in order to deal with climate change, all of you people who, you know, live in suburbs and have big cars have to become (inaudible) hipsters who ride bicycles and at farm to table restaurants. Right?

And so I think for those who care about climate change in a realistic way, we need to put forward a much more optimistic vision that says we can precisely use (inaudible) state regulation. Of course carbon taxation, of course tools of a regulatory economy but also the tools of the market economy in order to make sure that renewable energy is cheaper than oil and gas, in order for all of the innovative power of the economy to help us transition to a zero carbon economy and for us to be able to have cars that are nice

and big, be nicely comfortable, cool in the summer, nicely comfortable warm in the winter and yes, fly to visit our relatives, have international conferences, (inaudible) of France, have a nice vacation.

I think the idea though we should give up on all of those things is such a small bold vision of how we can have a better world, and this is too much to go into, but there's very good research that shows that that is absolutely feasible, that if we put the research in, if we put the resources in, and we have a (inaudible) regulations, we can transition to an economy that's much more (inaudible) than it is today while dealing with climate change.

Jeanne Meserve: Another Middle East question? Venezuela question? Hands, hands? Okay, I'm going to surrender to you over here. Right over here we have a question. You signaled me it's probably going to be about Hong Kong.

Question: No, my question is broader actually. It's about the attitude of outsiders vis-à-vis all those revolutions. There is a moral hazard. One has the greatest respect for the people in Hong Kong, the people in Venezuela, the people in all places where, in Egypt. The question is we saw what happened in 1956. Being cheerleaders in situations where the balance of power is radically against those who stand up, one has to be careful and I think there's a real question of keeping principles and we saw with Helsinki how third parties, how the international community could give courage to the people who are living under dictatorships. But there is a fine line between doing that and being cheerleaders of movements that sometimes can just lead to bloodshed, the consequences of which the cheerleaders won't have to, to suffer.

And the other issue is that as we do that, there are many double standards. We cer-, there's certainly not the same amount of reactions vis-à-vis, let's say Egypt because Egypt is a strategic ally of the United States, as there is vis-à-vis other dictatorships. And that double standard creates cynicism and feeds extremism. And so I would, I would be interested in having the speakers' view, the panel's view on what should third parties do to keep their moral integrity without being sort of cheaply supportive?

I forgot to give my name. I'm Jean- Marie Guéhenno, I used to be the head of peacekeeping at United Nations and years ago, I wrote a book which is called *La fin de la démocratie*.

Jeanne Meserve: Nancy?

Nancy Okail: I would answer the question differently. I would say what third parties should not do. But basically should stop supporting authoritarian regimes. And I understand it's not as simple as that. It's like as you rightly pointed out, like people who go to the streets and protest and stand up for their ideals, they pay a very high price, like in terms of lives and ability, like I personally did, and a lot of us have, but those authoritarian regimes and, and leaders, they don't get their strength just from internal dynamics.

They do draw their strength from the international dynamics and the narrative of the international dynamic is what pushes how things go. And when we think always that we need to deal with the immediate situation, we just need to contain the conflict within

those borders, we just need to defeat ISIS and just prevent the spillover of the issues. This is when we realize that such policies, it would only embolden those authoritarian regimes, which means that they will breed actually more of the radicalization and all the issues that the world is trying to keep and maintain by the politics of containment that they have.

Jeanne Meserve: Let me flip it. If the world supports the democracy movements, the protest movements, particularly the United States, does it undermine the credibility of those movements at home?

Nancy Okail: Well again, I would say it depends on the narratives and, and it also depends on, like the form of support to those people. When we say that we stand by the people, it doesn't mean that we just influence their direction or dictate what they're doing. The standing by the people, it means that instead of always standing by the government, it's just support for civil society. And change has always had to come from within and it has to be locally driven in order to have any, some authenticity and real change. But if the, that it's seen that is an influence that is coming from outside for particular interests, national interests of the superpowers, it will only lead to what we're seeing now, it's just that proxy war that's happening on the Middle East.

Jeanne Meserve: We're just about out of time and I want to wrap it up by asking each of you to project a little bit into the future. In 10 years, when Freedom House does its ranking of global democracy, are we going to have more or are we going to have less? And you might want to bring it back Isadora specifically to Venezuela and what's going to happen there, but if we could give –

Isadora Zubillaga: Yeah. Well, I will, if you don't mind, I will stay in today's time —

Jeanne Meserve: Okay.

Isadora Zubillaga: — not in 10 years. In 10 years, you know, I definitely want to be on the top rank for, you know, recovering freedom and being an example for the rest of the region. But today, today, we're at a situation where things can actually flip and change.

And to answer to your question, indifference should be avoided, should be, the word indifferent should be taken away from this room and from every multilateral organization, and you should be focusing people that are in, you know, in the responsibilities of foreign policy and, and security and defence should be concentrated on the fact that if we accompanied the movements, specially sustained on the law, on the constitution, because with the law, you know, there is less possibilities of going wrong, right?

And to actually not leave it only to the US. When I, when I saw the title, again, it's like freedom without the US or freedom without us. I mean, freedom cannot happen without all of us.

Jeanne Meserve: (Crosstalk) there.

Isadora Zubillaga: And, and we have to take that responsibility because what happens in the country next door affects what happens in your community as well, in your society. I mean, we, we live in a global place and we take, you know, a lot of proud to that. So let's please be, not be indifferent to what happens in all of these countries, in all of these movements. I can assure you as a Venezuelan that if we can go together, we can actually make change happen.

Jeanne Meserve: Steve, briefly, your prediction on global democracy and where we'll be in 10 years. Up, down, even.

Steve Tsang: If the Chinese economy roughly stays in its current trajectory for the next 10 years, I'm afraid it will be down, but it's, a linear projection like that is never reliable. The next 10 years will be extremely eventful. A lot of things can happen, so there you go. (Laughter)

Jeanne Meserve: Middle East? Up? Down?

Nancy Okail: Well overall, I mean, as you posed the question at the beginning, like in 10 years, I don't think Freedom House or any other organization would be rating the state of democracy based on isolated countries or borders, because the world is becoming, like, far more decentralized that we would like to even categorize it in, in that manner. But I just want to say, like, one thing about this. If you just, like, watched the testimony of Mark Zuckerberg, and defending Libra as a currency, what he was saying if the United States is now going to do it, China's going to do it.

So we're in a situation that we are not in the position of having the choice, but actually trying to keep up with what's going on rather than determining what is the policies and a completely different work configuration.

Jeanne Meserve: Yascha, quick last word.

Yascha Mounk: First of all, I think it's important to defend the national basis of democracy. We need international cooperation, international institutions, but if we tell people that they have to give up on the nations to have democracy, then we're going to have a problem in each of these countries. I think that if you look at this in the next 10 years, you're going to see a composite of three different trends. The first trend is that a lot of the countries that still look like relatively stable democracies today will have had very serious declines in the quality of democratic governance. I think the populace will continue to make real inroads in ways that will damage some of the countries in which we now take democracy for granted.

I think secondly, we will see in some of the countries now ruled by populist uprisings against them that actually lead to them being quashed and to populist regimes becoming even more oppressive, becoming even more extreme dictatorships. But third, I do think we will start seeing a number of countries, perhaps in Hungary, perhaps in Turkey, perhaps in Venezuela making a recovery, seeing some of these protest movements succeed and actually managing to re-establish democracy. How the balance of those three factors plays out, I'll leave to Michael (inaudible), but I think what all of us should do is to try and protect the democracies to minimize the first trend and

then in these moments of decision as we're seeing Bolivia at the moment, to do what we can to encourage those democratic transitions.

Jeanne Meserve:
you all. Appreciate it.

Please join me in thanking this great panel. Thank

(Applause)