

Episode 189 : "Ukraine Explained, Taiwan Explained" with Dr Stephen Bryen

Bill Walton ([00:00](#)):

You were on last year.

Stephen Bryen ([00:01](#)):

That's right, with Kyle.

Bill Walton ([00:03](#)):

With Kyle. I really felt like I had no idea how extensive your background was. You've done everything, and I've only touched the tip of the iceberg. So I can't get everything in your resume upfront or we'd spend all time reading your resume.

Stephen Bryen ([00:21](#)):

Yeah. I have to read it, too, to remind myself.

Bill Walton ([00:24](#)):

I'm at that point in life as well.

Stephen Bryen ([00:26](#)):

Yeah, right. Oh, really?

Bill Walton ([00:27](#)):

"I did that?" Let me write down the title of your book so I can say it again. It's called The Stopping of Taiwan Invasion. All right.

Stephen Bryen ([00:38](#)):

And it's exclusively on Amazon. Not that we really wanted to do it that way, but-

Bill Walton ([00:42](#)):

That's okay.

Stephen Bryen ([00:42](#)):

... that was the option.

Bill Walton ([00:43](#)):

As I said, we'll get to some of your biography. We can't do all of it.

Stephen Bryen ([00:48](#)):

Well, you can do what you want.

Bill Walton ([00:51](#)):

That's the gist what we want to cover.

Stephen Bryen ([00:52](#)):

Well, I gather you want to talk about Taiwan and China, and ...

Bill Walton ([00:56](#)):

And Ukraine.

Stephen Bryen ([00:57](#)):

And Ukraine.

Bill Walton ([00:58](#)):

I think the lead's got to be Ukraine.

Stephen Bryen ([00:58](#)):

Okay.

Bill Walton ([00:59](#)):

At least where we are right now, my concerns. Okay, we good to go?

Speaker 3 ([01:04](#)):

This is The Bill Walton Show, May 11th.

Speaker 4 ([01:11](#)):

Welcome to The Bill Walton Show featuring conversations with leaders, entrepreneurs, artists, and thinkers. Fresh perspectives on money, culture, politics, and human flourishing. Interesting people, interesting things.

Bill Walton ([01:32](#)):

Welcome to The Bill Walton Show. I'm Bill Walton. Today's show is about my growing concern about whether Joe Biden could lead us into a nuclear war over Ukraine while, at the same time, China looms in its ambitions to take over Taiwan.

Well, I'm not an expert in this, and nor are most of us, but we need to be paying attention. The Russians increasingly believe that they are at war with NATO, not just Ukraine. So much so that Sergey Lavrov, Russians' foreign minister, said the threat of nuclear war should not be underestimated, and that the danger is serious.

China is running a dedicated campaign to uproot the rules-based order that has existed in the Indo-Pacific region since the end of World War II, and is also continuing its largest military buildup in history. It's naval fleet projected to be about 460 surface warships by the end of the decade.

My view, Joe Biden and his foreign policy team is no way equipped to deal with these and other national security issues, including Iran. But I don't see Republicans offering any alternatives right now. In fact, most are mindlessly upping the ante alongside with Biden and what's going on in Ukraine.

With me, to help understand this, is one of the wisest national security experts around, Dr. Stephen Bryen. Welcome, Bryen. Welcome back.

Stephen Bryen ([03:08](#)):

Thank you. Nice to be here.

Bill Walton ([03:11](#)):

Stephen has over 50 years experience in government and industry. Senior Staff Director, US Senate foreign relations committee. Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Trade Security Policy. The founder and first director of the Defense Technology Security Administration. President and private sector CEO experience, which is important to me in any event. President of Delta Tech and President of Finmeccanica North America, and was commissioner of the US-China Security Review Commission. That's right.

Stephen's been called the Yoda of the arms trade. He was the Pentagon's top cop, the man whose job it was to ensure that sensitive technology would be kept from enemies, potential enemies, and questionable allies. His major study is technology security national power, winners and losers, that covers strategic issues, defense technology transfers, proliferation of weapons, the whole gamut of things that threaten our country. \.

And most recently, and what we want to talk about today in part, is this book Stopping a Taiwan Invasion. And it's something that we're not paying enough attention to, but it could loom much larger on our security screen than Ukraine does.

Stephen Bryen ([04:34](#)):

Yes.

Bill Walton ([04:34](#)):

So, Stephen, welcome.

Stephen Bryen ([04:35](#)):

Thank you. Nice to be with you.

Bill Walton ([04:37](#)):

So last time you were here, we talked about the debacle of us departing Afghanistan.

Stephen Bryen ([04:43](#)):

Yes, it was a while ago now. Almost ancient history.

Bill Walton ([04:46](#)):

Almost ancient history. Months ago.

Stephen Bryen ([04:48](#)):

Yes.

Bill Walton ([04:49](#)):

And it didn't seem like it'd get worse, but it has.

Stephen Bryen ([04:53](#)):

And in multiple ways it's gotten worse. I think the Ukraine thing's very dangerous for us, and I think we have baited it to a large extent. And the Russians understand it that way, too. Not that they were nice guys. They were awful. Totally awful.

But I think it's in our interest to maintain the peace in Europe and to not have things escalate. Not get to face the potential of nuclear weapons, which I think is a horrible potential. Something that we have to work very hard to avoid at all costs. And, unfortunately, we're going in the wrong direction, I believe.

Bill Walton ([05:41](#)):

So what's your assessment of where we are? It's very hard for those of us that don't know it.

Stephen Bryen ([05:47](#)):

Well, maybe we should go back and understand-

Bill Walton ([05:49](#)):

Let's go back. How did we get to where we are?

Stephen Bryen ([05:51](#)):

How we got to where we are. Yeah. Starting around 2014, when the Russians grabbed Crimea, the US and NATO, but mainly the US, started supporting Ukraine with the armaments. And more than that, with special military training. The Russians saw that increasingly as an attempt by Washington to build up enough capability in Ukraine to attack the Russian speaking parts of Ukraine, which are in the east, the northeast, and down into the southern part of Ukraine. And they saw it as a threat, plain and simple.

The Ukrainians, along with their two so-called republics in Luhansk and Donetsk in eastern Ukraine, which declared their independence, their separation from Ukraine in 2014.

And so in 2014, there was an attempt to reconcile that, and it didn't exactly work. The second one took place in 2015. Both of them were-

Bill Walton ([07:04](#)):

Who was at the table trying to reconcile-

Stephen Bryen ([07:06](#)):

I'm going come to that, yeah, because the people at the table were the Russians, the Ukrainians, the Luhansk People's Republic, and the Donetsk People's Republic. And the whole deal was overseen, and it was done in Minsk, by the way. It's called The Minsk Agreement. It was done in Minsk, the second agreement, in 2015. It was overseen by The Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe, which was primarily Germany and France. So they were kind of the brokers.

There were a number of provisions, including a cease fire, including exchanging of prisoners from both sides, and all that. But it seems to me the key provision was the following. It said that Luhansk and Donetsk should become not independent but autonomous within Ukraine. Autonomous. But they would still be under Ukrainian law, and that the Ukrainian parliament would pass a resolution approving this autonomy.

And that was the basis for a negotiation, because saying that is not saying what it is. You have to really figure out what that means. The Ukrainians thereafter refused to negotiate under The Minsk

Agreement, and in particular didn't want to talk about autonomy. Not at all. So they simply balked. They refused. And the US has, generally speaking, encouraged that, while the Russians have said, "Look, there's an agreement. We are in favor of the agreement. Let's sit down and negotiate it."

So the Russian position was this should be negotiated under The 2015 Minsk Agreement. The position of the Europeans, which is especially France and Germany, was more or less the same as the Russian one. "Let's sit down and negotiate," but the Ukrainians could not be persuaded to do that. Washington stayed out of it openly, but privately, I believe, Washington encouraged the Ukrainians to resist negotiating, saying that "We'll build you up sufficiently. You don't have to give away any territory. You're not-"

Bill Walton ([09:31](#)):

This was with the Obama administration.

Stephen Bryen ([09:32](#)):

Started with the Obama administration. But it continued. It's not just Obama. It was under Trump, the same thing. And it's now under Biden, the same thing and worse. And worse.

So that was the Washington position, so it was at odds with our friends in Europe, although it was not at odds with NATO, which is rather peculiar. But NATO backed the Washington position, more or less, and got in a very harsh mood regarding the Russians. And in fact, the Russians had a mission in NATO. About 10 people, if I remember right, sitting in Brussels, and the NATO had a mission in Moscow with about the same number of people. Basically NATO threw out the Russians from that mission in Brussels, so of course the Russians reciprocated, did the same thing in Moscow.

So the relationship with NATO became quite harsh over Ukraine. Over Ukraine, which is not a member of NATO. It is part of a NATO program, where states that have ambitions to join NATO are given special status, let's call it that. But they're not covered under the NATO treaty, which is basically a self-defense treaty that says ... The collective defense, which says if attack on one happens, all the others will respond. And that's under what's called Article Five of the NATO treaty.

So to make a long story short, which I think is probably a good idea right now, we have a situation where NATO is hostile to the Russians and supporting Ukraine. We have a Washington administration which is supporting Ukraine. But we have the Germans and the French under The Minsk Agreements, where they're guarantors ... It's called the Normandy Group, who are trying to broker some kind of deal based on what was agreed in 2015 at Minsk.

Bill Walton ([11:37](#)):

So why do we care about Ukraine? I want to compare and contrast to Taiwan that I think we ought to care a lot about [inaudible 00:11:46] but what's our strategic interest in Ukraine? Why did we feel like we needed to do this?

Stephen Bryen ([11:52](#)):

My interpretation of it is that we want to block the Russians in The Black Sea.

Bill Walton ([12:00](#)):

The only warm water port they have.

Stephen Bryen ([12:02](#)):

That's right. That's their only warm water port. In other words, as the Russians say, essentially to surround them. Because once their navy is blocked, they only have a serious port on the Polish coast, which is very much isolated, and then you have to go into the frozen areas of the north, the White Sea. So I think basically what you have is an attempt to keep them out of The Black Sea, to make it difficult for them to expand.

The threat was that Washington thinks that Putin and his government want to reclaim territories that they lost when the Soviet Union collapsed. So you had the Georgia mess, which the Russians were aggressors at, of course. And you had Crimea. And now you have eastern Ukraine.

And so the US position is we'll squeeze you back. The trouble is the Russians see themselves in a conflict not with Ukraine so much as they see themselves in a conflict with the United States and with NATO.

Bill Walton ([13:13](#)):

Well, that's increasingly clear they're correct.

Stephen Bryen ([13:16](#)):

I believe they're correct, yeah. From their point of view, they're surely correct. Now, I think the Russians, even as though they make some threats here and there, they've threatened some of the Baltic states, and they've threatened Poland a little bit. But I think basically the Russians don't want to see this war expand because they're going to lose if it expands. And we're all going to lose.

Bill Walton ([13:46](#)):

This is The Bill Walton Show. I'm here talking with Dr. Stephen Bryen about Ukraine and how we got where we are now. And we're going to go right now to talk about how we might get us out of where we are now.

Stephen Bryen ([14:00](#)):

Maybe.

Bill Walton ([14:02](#)):

But were you surprised that the Russians had such trouble dealing with Ukraine? Because you know the weapons and the capabilities.

Stephen Bryen ([14:11](#)):

Well, I was. I think everybody was surprised about how the level of competence was far below what we believed the Russians. We've watched the Russians do military exercises over the years, and, in fact, until the most recent Zapad exercise where they didn't invite us, but for obvious reasons. But we've watched them exercise, and they look quite formidable. But we're seeing all kinds of flaws in their approach, and they're missing a lot of technology. I'm a technology buff. I follow military technology pretty carefully.

Bill Walton ([14:55](#)):

Well, you're only the chief procure officer for the Pentagon.

Stephen Bryen ([15:00](#)):

[inaudible 00:15:00].

Bill Walton ([15:00](#)):

I would ... Yes.

Stephen Bryen ([15:02](#)):

I was the chief bad guy trying to stop technology from going to the Soviet Union. That was my mandate, and we did that. Very successfully actually. And maybe it's still successful, which is rather surprising.

But, in fact, we've seen cases where modern equipment's missing from Russian aircraft. It's missing from Russian tanks. Their air defenses aren't working right. There's a lot of things that are really not functioning the way one would've expected. Yes, so I was surprised. Quite.

Bill Walton ([15:36](#)):

Is that incompetence?

Stephen Bryen ([15:38](#)):

It's a mixed bag. Some of it's a lack of good doctrine. Some of it's a real lack of good training. I think that's a major issue here. Some of it's a lack of technology. They're missing pieces, like the SU 25s, which is a fairly old plane, but it was a Soviet ground attack airplane. Doesn't have targeting pods. How can you hit anything if you don't have a targeting pod? But they never put them on them. It's unbelievable.

And then, finally, I think there's a matter of corruption. I think the Russian system is corrupt front to back, up and down. We know that anyway from the top level leadership, but I think it goes deep and all the way through the military.

Bill Walton ([16:29](#)):

Where do we go from here?

Stephen Bryen ([16:32](#)):

Well, the question is do we want to let this thing grind on? At the end of the day-

Bill Walton ([16:37](#)):

I don't think we do. My world's economic. It's a catastrophe.

Stephen Bryen ([16:43](#)):

Oh, economically for Ukraine?

Bill Walton ([16:45](#)):

Well, bad for the United States. It's bad for Europe.

Stephen Bryen ([16:50](#)):

It's very destructive. And, of course, it's bad for human beings who are getting killed by the thousands in Ukrainian cities by bombings and other kinds of attacks. But right now, it seems to be slightly stalemated. Somehow, Zelenskyy has to decide ... I think he could get himself a good deal right now. Yes, he will have to give some form of autonomy to eastern Ukraine, but there doesn't have to be a Russian

army in eastern Ukraine. There doesn't even have to be a local army in eastern Ukraine. Doesn't have to be any army in eastern Ukraine. What autonomy may mean has to be defined.

One of the things that the Russians have made a case out of, and I don't know that it's totally justified, but in eastern Ukraine, the language is Russian. People speak Russian. And the Ukrainian Parliament said "You can't do that anymore when it comes to any official business. You can't do it in the schools. You can't teach Russian language. You can't teach Russian literature. You can't go to the doctors and speak Russian to the doctor." Those were the kind of things that were going on. And the Russians took serious umbrage that the Ukrainian parliament would do that, because they've always felt that there's a connection between Ukrainians and Russians.

So I think Zelenskyy could get a good deal today, but he's not willing. At least so far, he is really not willing to negotiate.

Bill Walton ([18:28](#)):

Well, the thing that troubles me, and I mentioned it in the open, none of our national security leaders seem to be remotely interested in trying to sit down and cut a deal.

Stephen Bryen ([18:39](#)):

They want to bleed the Russians. They've said it. Lloyd Austin said, "We want to bleed the Russians." Made it clear.

Bill Walton ([18:49](#)):

We'll send more weapons on down the line, and you've got Mike McCall saying ... And then you've got Nancy Pelosi in a press conference with ... Who's our favorite Congressman from Hollywood? Anyway. Adam Schiff. Telling us we're going to-

Stephen Bryen ([19:10](#)):

The word "favorite" threw me off.

Bill Walton ([19:11](#)):

Well, yeah, I didn't quite mean it that way.

Stephen Bryen ([19:17](#)):

I know.

Bill Walton ([19:20](#)):

They're standing on the steps with Zelenskyy saying "We're all in. America's totally committed to defeating Russia." Circling back to the guy in the room, Putin, we can see our people out piling on, upping the ante, saying we're going to reduce. And then we've got Putin that is operating a machine that didn't turn out to be quite the machine everybody thought it was, and he's least seeing his options increasingly limited. How does a guy like that react? Which leads to the nuclear question.

Stephen Bryen ([19:52](#)):

Or does he even survive? I guess somehow they think they can keep squeezing the Russians, and Putin will still be there, but that's not necessarily the case at all. He's got internal opposition. Not, I will call it, from the left, from the peace side, but from the right.

Bill Walton ([20:14](#)):

His fellow oligarchs?

Stephen Bryen ([20:16](#)):

I don't think it's the oligarchs. I think it's mostly coming from the military side.

Bill Walton ([20:21](#)):

And the military side wants to escalate.

Stephen Bryen ([20:24](#)):

That's right.

Bill Walton ([20:25](#)):

That's dangerous.

Stephen Bryen ([20:26](#)):

Of course it's dangerous because they have nuclear weapons. And if Putin's out of the way, I'm worried that we'll get some lunatic who will do things which I think will be disasters.

Bill Walton ([20:37](#)):

Quick refresher course on how lethal a tactical nuclear weapon is.

Stephen Bryen ([20:41](#)):

Well, I don't believe there's anything called a tactical nuclear weapon.

Bill Walton ([20:44](#)):

Okay. That's what I wanted to ...

Stephen Bryen ([20:46](#)):

I think there are big and little nuclear weapons.

Bill Walton ([20:50](#)):

This was the little one.

Stephen Bryen ([20:51](#)):

A smallish one. But a smallish one may be five kilotons. These are pretty dangerous.

Bill Walton ([20:58](#)):

How big was the one in Hiroshima?

Stephen Bryen ([20:59](#)):

18.

Bill Walton ([21:00](#)):

Okay.

Stephen Bryen ([21:01](#)):

Give you an idea. It took out a whole city. And then Nagasaki, I think, was 13.

Bill Walton ([21:09](#)):

So order of magnitude ...

Stephen Bryen ([21:10](#)):

These would be today's kind of tactical, if you want to think of it that way. But the nuclear weapon is not a very good war-making weapon because if you're using it against the other army, you need to be able to catch the other army in one place so you can knock them off.

Bill Walton ([21:31](#)):

And that's not Ukraine.

Stephen Bryen ([21:32](#)):

That's not going on in Ukraine. They're doing ambushes. They're running. They're not in one place at any one time. This is why the Russians are having so much trouble. So they can't use a nuclear weapon that way. What you would use it for is, a terrible thing, against a city. And that would be horrible. That would be a disaster, and it will trigger off possible nuclear war. Bigger war in Europe. So the whole idea is very, very unnerving.

Bill Walton ([22:02](#)):

Well, our side, our national security establishment believes that's unthinkable. But as I talk to people-

Stephen Bryen ([22:10](#)):

I don't know that's true.

Bill Walton ([22:12](#)):

Well, they may think it's-

Stephen Bryen ([22:14](#)):

Well, no. But the intelligence guys have been warning Biden that there's a danger of escalation here to nuclear.

Bill Walton ([22:23](#)):

What's your community saying? You know everybody in this.

Stephen Bryen ([22:28](#)):

I think they're scared. I think they're really scared that the Russians, if you squeeze them too hard ... The Russians have taken heavy losses. I don't know how many hundreds of tanks have been blown up, how many airplanes have been lost, helicopters have been lost. And killed and wounded is a very high number. Some say 20,000 killed. So you can multiply by four the number of wounded. So that's a huge number of people.

Bill Walton ([22:58](#)):

So what would you do? What would you advise President Biden?

Stephen Bryen ([23:06](#)):

I think the Biden administration should tell the Europeans and tell Zelenskyy that's time to sit down and figure this out.

Bill Walton ([23:16](#)):

I agree.

Stephen Bryen ([23:17](#)):

That's what I think should be done. I think the Europeans are dying to have this over with because it's threatening their economies and it's threatening war. They haven't worried about war in Europe for years and years, and it would be totally destructive of everything they've achieved. So they don't want it.

By the way, it also threatens NATO. NATO won't be here if there's a war. That'll be the end of NATO, I believe, because modern war, you can't win it. You simply can't win it. Especially on a highly industrialized landscape like Europe. So it would just be disastrous.

So, look, I feel for the Ukrainian people. I think it's terrible what's happened to them. Not that in many ways they didn't stimulate to some extent. They could have been more clever. They could have negotiated earlier. They've proven now that they can fight. They've proven that they want to protect their homeland. I think that's all great. But I think there are bigger issues, and those bigger issues affect Europe and they affect the United States and the world.

So we're at the point where instead of "rah, rah," we have to get serious and push for a negotiation. And I think the Russians are ready. They've been ready all along actually.

Bill Walton ([24:50](#)):

I want to shift gears to Taiwan and to China. But to segue, this is The Bill Walton Show. I'm talking with Dr. Stephen Bryen, and we're talking about how we think they ought to wrap this thing up in Ukraine and get to the negotiating table and make peace because the consequences of not doing that are unthinkable. But we've got some other unthinkable scenarios we want to talk about, which is China's intentions with regard to Taiwan. But to work our way into that, where is China in the Ukraine picture, the Russia picture?

Stephen Bryen ([25:29](#)):

Well, the Chinese have been very cagey because they don't want to be hit with sanctions. For their economy. And right now, the Chinese economy is a mess, as you probably may know, because of COVID.

Bill Walton ([25:47](#)):

The COVID lockdown, what they're doing in Shanghai and other cities is insane.

Stephen Bryen ([25:51](#)):

I've been trying to figure that out. A lot of people have.

Bill Walton ([25:53](#)):

I want to talk with you about that.

Stephen Bryen ([25:55](#)):

Okay. Now?

Bill Walton ([25:57](#)):

Well, yes. In the next 20 minutes, in the next 30 minutes. But I want get what they're thinking about Ukraine, Russia right now, so I can understand whether-

Stephen Bryen ([26:08](#)):

Well, I think the Chinese, first of all, they're thinking that they don't want to be involved. They're not doing anything that I know about of any importance in regard to helping the Russians. Period. Yeah, on an economic front, they're doing some things. They're taking more oil from the Russians, or buying more Russian grain, things like that. But from the war point of view, they're not doing anything.

Bill Walton ([26:33](#)):

And they don't want to have their trade with EU changed.

Stephen Bryen ([26:37](#)):

They do not.

Bill Walton ([26:37](#)):

The EU business for China is huge.

Stephen Bryen ([26:40](#)):

Huge. And it's not inconsequential here either, but the EU is more important. So, yeah, and they're trying to stay out of it. But there's a bunch of lessons for the Chinese in this thing. One thing about sanctions is that if there's a war with Taiwan, they're going to get sanctions all over. There's going to be huge sanctions on China. And that's certainly a factor that fits into their thinking.

And the other thing is they're seeing what the vulnerabilities of the Russians were so far in this war, and they're wondering if they have some of the same. Take, for example, Chinese tanks, which are based on Russian tanks, and have some of the same flaws. So I suspect that they're evaluating, or should think reevaluating everything they have, and how they're going to go about carrying on a military operation given what they've seen in the lack of coordination, the lack of interchange between the air and naval and the land components. A lack of coordination. Those things must be concerning the Chinese right now.

Bill Walton ([28:00](#)):

Has Xi lost his mind with this COVID-19 response? You're so much closer to it, but it seems like a little over two years ago, Wuhan happened, and then the Chinese claimed to lockdown Wuhan, and they stopped the virus. Now, some of us were deeply skeptical that really happened. They didn't report anything, but whether it was the success or not, he claimed a huge success. But I didn't really thought the virus was as lethal as they're seeming to act now.

Stephen Bryen ([28:33](#)):

Well, and it's not. We know that, because the variant that's going around now is not nearly as dangerous.

Bill Walton ([28:39](#)):

Number one, it's not as lethal. And number two, the jury's in on what works and what doesn't work in terms of stopping the virus, and locking people in their apartments and shutting down economic activity doesn't work.

Stephen Bryen ([28:51](#)):

Doesn't work. Right.

Bill Walton ([28:52](#)):

So you get these smart Chinese, and they are smart, acting in this incredible way.

Stephen Bryen ([29:00](#)):

In 1986, I was in Beijing with the Chinese Academy of Sciences. I was sent there by the Pentagon.

Bill Walton ([29:09](#)):

Well, that's when we were all going to be living happily ever after. Those were the good old days.

Stephen Bryen ([29:13](#)):

Living too happily. But, anyway, I had heard on the VOA that morning about riots in Shanghai and one other place, forget where. And we're in the car, going out to visit a landsat installation, which the US put there. And I have three scientists with me, all who spoke nice English, and the driver who didn't. And I said, "Did you hear about the riots in Shanghai?" And the scientists said, "No, no, no." And it was quiet, silence. We drive a little further, still silence. And the driver, in perfect English, who spoke no English, but in perfect English said, "Yeah, I heard it this morning on the VOA."

Shanghai is a very sensitive place. There were riots there in '86. There were riots subsequently in Tiananmen. There has been opposition to Xi in Shanghai. And I'm wondering, is this political? Is this something designed to shut down Shanghai? Because he's facing reelection soon, and maybe he's got opponents that we don't know about.

Bill Walton ([30:31](#)):

That seems to be a deep game he could be playing.

Stephen Bryen ([30:35](#)):

Could be a deep game. I don't have any-

Bill Walton (30:35):

Seems to be political and punitive rather than public health.

Stephen Bryen (30:38):

Yeah. It looks to me, too.

Bill Walton (30:39):

But didn't they have Politburo meeting, a small group of people that met last week? And if he has enemies, they're not in that room because they came out with renewed vigor to keep Shanghai shut down.

Stephen Bryen (30:52):

Right. I don't think they're in that room at all. Some of them are in jail.

Bill Walton (31:00):

Well, yeah, he disappears people routinely.

Stephen Bryen (31:03):

Right. And some of them are in the military. So I'm not sure what the deal is, but you have to get to a real China expert, which I'm not. But it seems to me that you shouldn't take this on face value as a COVID exercise.

Bill Walton (31:20):

Well, we do know that he wants to be elected for third term. There is the plenary thing or whatever, the big meeting that's supposed to be in fall. There's some chance he could accelerate that to July.

Stephen Bryen (31:32):

Oh, is there? I didn't hear that.

Bill Walton (31:33):

So he could get it done.

Stephen Bryen (31:36):

Before people riot completely.

Bill Walton (31:38):

Before people riot completely. And he wants to accelerate that. But the other deeper game was also the sanctions are really hurting Russia obviously, but they're also really hurting Europe, and they're really hurting United States. And food's expensive now and scarce now. Try next year when we don't have any of the fertilizer from the usual sources in Europe.

Stephen Bryen (32:03):

Corn is going to be a big issue. And Biden still wants to put it in your gas tank.

Bill Walton ([32:08](#)):

Yeah. Ethanol. Let's up that to 15.

Stephen Bryen ([32:10](#)):

Yeah, so you can pay \$6 a gallon instead of \$5.

Bill Walton ([32:14](#)):

Yeah. Sure Iowa likes that. Probably the only place it does.

So you've got the sanctions there. And then what Xi's doing though with Shanghai ... It's the world's largest port. Four times larger than Los Angeles.

Stephen Bryen ([32:28](#)):

That's right.

Bill Walton ([32:29](#)):

You've got thousands ... I don't know if "thousands" is the right number, but infinite number of cargo ships sitting outside there, waiting to move stuff in and out. But it's not just Shanghai. He's shut down 75 other cities in China.

Stephen Bryen ([32:44](#)):

Yeah, but Shanghai is the biggest one, and plus he shut down, by the way, not only the people's homes, he shut down the subway. So I don't know. Something much bigger is afoot. But if I had the answer, I would probably go over to The White House and tell them.

Bill Walton ([33:05](#)):

I'll go over there with you. I'm sure they'll be happy to see us. I bet so.

Stephen Bryen ([33:08](#)):

My crystal ball is not very good.

Bill Walton ([33:09](#)):

I've been saying so many nice things about Joe Biden, I'm sure he'll welcome me.

Though that settles down things. So we've got Ukraine maybe resolved, uncertain, but the thing that's looming is their ambition in Taiwan. For people, there's a pretty wide audience here of people that aren't subject matter experts. Explain what Taiwan is. What's its brief history?

Stephen Bryen ([33:37](#)):

Well, it was originally called Formosa. It was occupied by the Japanese from about 1895 to 1945. And then, of course, at the end of the war, it reverted to the Formosan people.

Bill Walton ([33:57](#)):

And all the people that [inaudible 00:33:59] defeated ...

Stephen Bryen ([34:00](#)):

Well, that came right after.

Bill Walton ([34:01](#)):

Later? Okay. '49.

Stephen Bryen ([34:04](#)):

'49. And the surviving nationalists Chiang Kai-shek evacuated, I guess is the right word, to Taiwan. And they formed a political group, which the same one they had in China, called Kuomintang. And that's the simple history of it, and they considered themselves the real government of China. So Taiwan is officially the Republic of China still. Something the Chinese really dislike.

Bill Walton ([34:41](#)):

Well, the Chinese have been assiduously working every country in the world to stop recognizing Taiwan.

Stephen Bryen ([34:48](#)):

That's right. Well, they've succeeded mostly.

Bill Walton ([34:50](#)):

And mostly.

Stephen Bryen ([34:51](#)):

Yeah.

Bill Walton ([34:52](#)):

What is it, Latvia decided not to?

Stephen Bryen ([34:55](#)):

And then they changed their mind.

Bill Walton ([34:56](#)):

Okay.

Stephen Bryen ([34:57](#)):

Yeah. After they were properly bribed.

Bill Walton ([34:59](#)):

But Taiwan is a real country. They've begun to identify themselves-

Stephen Bryen ([35:02](#)):

It's a terrific country. It's a democracy. It has a very lively political life. There are three major parties, but the two biggest ones are the KMT, the Kuomintang, and the DPP, the Democratic People's Party, which is the green party, which is in office right now, which is pro-independence. And it also has its own

language. The Taiwanese dialect of Chinese has become very popular, and is really what most politicians speak.

Bill Walton (35:37):

And, strategically, it's the home of the largest semiconductor manufacturing operation in the world.

Stephen Bryen (35:45):

That's right. Taiwan Semi. But, otherwise, strategically, it sits right in the middle of the first island chain, of course, the Taiwan Straits, which could block the Chinese navy.

Bill Walton (35:59):

And it's 90 miles off the Chinese coast.

Stephen Bryen (36:02):

Yeah. Something like that. Not much.

Bill Walton (36:03):

So it's close.

Stephen Bryen (36:04):

Yeah, but there are parts of Taiwan was called Kinmen or Kimoi, which is one mile from Chinese mainland. So it's pretty close by.

Bill Walton (36:15):

All the stuff we talk about here, it's complicated. It's complicated. So what's the stopping a Taiwan invasion?

Stephen Bryen (36:23):

Well, this is very important because the Pentagon and a lot of think tanks in town, and the CIA even as recently as yesterday, keep saying, "we're going to lose if we try to defend Taiwan."

Bill Walton (36:38):

Yeah, that's what I hear.

Stephen Bryen (36:40):

Yeah. You hear it all over. And it seems to me that shouldn't be the case. It's not the case if we do some simple things and we're serious. And so I got together a group with Lieutenant General Earl Halston, who was my co-chairman. We put together a group of real military experts who served in the Pacific in senior levels. Pacific air force commander, the naval commander, admirals and generals. And we put them all together. For three months, we hashed over this. And what can we do? Can we win? Will we lose? So on.

The first and most important thing I think that we concluded in our study was that ... Well, two things. First of all, we can't do it alone. The time has passed when the United States can come on an expeditionary basis and save Taiwan. We're not going to do that. We have to work with our allies,

including Taiwan. Including Taiwan. And if we put all our forces together and coordinate them in the right way, and that's the second point, then we can change the entire situation in regard to not only defending Taiwan but warning the Chinese that if they think they're going to intimidate Taiwan, they're making a mistake.

Because that's what they're doing. They're flying fighter planes and bombers around the island on almost a daily basis. They're running naval exercises. The most recent, just off of Okinawa, which is nearby. Threatening not only the Taiwanese but threatening US marine installations, and the Japanese southern islands, too. So they did more than a thousand takeoffs and landings off of aircraft carriers. This is the craziness that's going on. It's an intimidation campaign. Well, we can intimidate back if we organize.

So the main finding, the most important finding of our group is let's have a common command. We have at the political level something called The Quad now, which also includes India, Japan, the United States, Korea, but we need to include Taiwan. But we also need it at the command and control level, at the military level.

Bill Walton ([39:08](#)):

Australia's in that?

Stephen Bryen ([39:10](#)):

Australia. Right. Not South Korea. I think I misspoke.

Bill Walton ([39:14](#)):

Yeah. India, Japan, Australia, but interestingly not Taiwan.

Stephen Bryen ([39:18](#)):

Not Taiwan. Taiwans are nothing.

Bill Walton ([39:22](#)):

Is that because we didn't want to offend the Chinese?

Stephen Bryen ([39:24](#)):

Well, yeah. Part of the deal in '79 when Nixon and Kissinger did their deal with China was to de-recognize Taiwan.

Bill Walton ([39:36](#)):

It was '74. When was that?

Stephen Bryen ([39:38](#)):

No. Well, yeah, '74, but the actual Taiwan Relations Act was passed in '79 to try and compensate for that.

Bill Walton ([39:44](#)):

Okay. Yeah.

Stephen Bryen ([39:46](#)):

And that was to de recognize Taiwan. We used to have marines on Taiwan. We took them out. We had bases there, took them out. We had an ambassador there and an embassy there, took it out. And set up a strange system where we have retired state department people working in Taiwan at an embassy we don't call an embassy. That's really weird.

But, basically, what we're saying is we must include Taiwan, to include them both in command and control level, include them for training, include them in exercises. Treat them like a real country, which they are. Bring in the Japanese, who are dying to have this done, by the way. The Japanese are really concerned about China threatening Taiwan because they threatened Japan, and they understand that. So for the first time, we have a very sympathetic Japanese government that's not hiding. In the past, they used to hide, but right now, they're very much committed to try and do something.

The problem is in Washington.

Bill Walton ([40:53](#)):

Why am I not surprised?

Stephen Bryen ([40:55](#)):

Well, it's been that way for a long time. And it was terrible under the Obama administration. It got better under Trump, started to bring some officials to Taiwan, started to do a little bit of training there.

Bill Walton ([41:07](#)):

And the nature of the problem in Washington is ...

Stephen Bryen ([41:09](#)):

Fear of China.

Bill Walton ([41:11](#)):

Right.

Stephen Bryen ([41:12](#)):

Simple. Fear of China. But we shouldn't fear China. It's giving away everything up front. Why should we fear China? We should tell China that we're more than prepared to do what we need to do to oppose any threat to Taiwan or to anybody else the region.

Bill Walton ([41:34](#)):

So when we say "we," we mean the State Department?

Stephen Bryen ([41:36](#)):

We mean the US.

Bill Walton ([41:37](#)):

Well, but I always try to get this boiled down to which agencies, and I like find out which person at which agency.

Stephen Bryen ([41:45](#)):

Well, but it's The White House. The White House makes this policy. The State Department, of course, has executed it for years, and, unfortunately, happily so. But the world has changed.

Bill Walton ([41:57](#)):

Well, there are people who believe, and I think I'm becoming one of them, that Biden's compromised with regard to China. And we don't need to speculate on that. You've written a series. But there is that speculation.

Stephen Bryen ([42:08](#)):

We stayed away from politics in the book.

Bill Walton ([42:10](#)):

Which is smart. Okay.

Stephen Bryen ([42:11](#)):

Yeah. Totally away from it. The book is serious military and strategic analysis of what we can do to stop China invading Taiwan. And I think we've come up with a lot of suggestions and recommendations and findings. There were 34 of them actually in the book, and many of them, by the way, don't really require us to do anything that requires huge expenditures. It really requires us to get our act together, to take a one government approach. That means all the agencies work together.

And the Pentagon, I think, is more persuaded than ever that this is a fight waiting to happen. So they're trying to get ready, but they're not really supported by the State Department and not by the White House. And the CIA is on the fence. So I think we have to bring all these agencies together as a one government approach. The Chinese will understand that because they'll have no choice but to understand it. And that's the key point.

And to realize that we have to work with Japanese. They have a pretty good air force. They have F-35s, which is a stealth airplane. They have more than pretty good submarines. They have a small navy but an excellent one. Taiwan has a pretty large air force, and a small navy, and they have pretty good ground forces. But we have to get all that organized, and we haven't done it.

Bill Walton ([43:42](#)):

So we would have likely allies. We have every single major country in the region who would like to be part of it. And the problem is not that we don't have the technology or the theoretical capability. The problem is our willingness, the elites' willingness to recognize China as an enemy, not just a competitor.

Stephen Bryen ([44:05](#)):

That's right.

Bill Walton ([44:06](#)):

Which is [inaudible 00:44:08] trying to characterize it now. Well, they're just competitors. They're not really ever going to be an enemy. Well, you look at what they're doing.

Stephen Bryen ([44:14](#)):

Well, take a look at the South China Sea. Is that competitor or is that a threat? That seems to me when you put missiles and all the other things, naval equipment and whatnot, that's a threat.

Bill Walton ([44:26](#)):

So if we wanted to get a groundswell to support this, and these are good ideas, and we can find this book on Amazon. And it's on Kimble.

Stephen Bryen ([44:35](#)):

Kindle, yeah.

Bill Walton ([44:35](#)):

Stopping a Taiwan Invasion. Easy to find.

Stephen Bryen ([44:38](#)):

Yes.

Bill Walton ([44:40](#)):

The line of action here though is to get Washington to change our thinking about the nature of the China threat.

Stephen Bryen ([44:47](#)):

Well, that's why we wrote the book, yeah. We also made it short so that people won't get confused. Here it is.

Bill Walton ([44:59](#)):

You know what? I've had a lot of guys that have written books on this show. Thankfully, this is the shortest one I've ever pushed.

Stephen Bryen ([45:06](#)):

It reminds me when I was young working for the Senate foreign relations-

Bill Walton ([45:10](#)):

78 pages. We're good here.

Stephen Bryen ([45:13](#)):

I guess it was '74, I went to Israel ...

Bill Walton ([45:15](#)):

I'm including your appendix.

Stephen Bryen ([45:17](#)):

And I met with Moshe Dayan.

Bill Walton ([45:19](#)):

Yes. '74. Go ahead. Sorry.

Stephen Bryen ([45:23](#)):

So I was a young foreign relations committee staffer, and I got to meet the great man. And so in preparation, I read his biography. And it's, by the way, fascinating, and it's a great big, thick Penguin book, and I read the whole thing. And I went to see Dayan, who was then the defense minister, and sat across the table from him like we're sitting. And I was trying to be nice, and I said, "Mr. Minister, it is a great honor to meet you, and your illustrious career, and I read your autobiography, and it was absolutely amazing." He said, "Did you like it?" I said, "Yes, I did." I said, "Only that it's a really big book." He said, "Yes, it is." He said, "Do you want to know why?" I said, "Yeah, tell me why." He said, "They paid me 25 cents a word."

So we didn't get paid by the word. In fact, we didn't get paid at all. Everybody in this group-

Bill Walton ([46:28](#)):

This is a serious group of people. This is a very serious [inaudible 00:46:31]. V.

Stephen Bryen ([46:31](#)):

... Volunteered time, including myself. Nobody got paid a penny.

Bill Walton ([46:36](#)):

[inaudible 00:46:36].

Stephen Bryen ([46:36](#)):

And any proceeds, there would be very little proceeds from the book, but whatever there are will go to The Center for Security Policy. None of us will benefit from it. Our intention was to do something for public policy. And every one of these gentlemen, both the military and civilians involved, were generous with their time. We spent three months working on this and talking it out. We videoed every conversation. We used to Zoom to converse, and so we videoed it.

Bill Walton ([47:09](#)):

A big Chinese technology.

Stephen Bryen ([47:10](#)):

Yeah. Right. Well, we wanted them to hear.

Bill Walton ([47:12](#)):

Yeah. We do that all the time with the guys at YouTube.

Stephen Bryen ([47:18](#)):

We weren't foolish. They listen in, all the better. And we also made notes of each meeting, and then we went through all the notes. And then just to tell you the rest of the process, after I wrote the initial draft. I got help on the marine part because I'm not a Marine, so I got people to help me on that. And then we circulated it to all of them and asked for commentary. Got back a lot of commentary, a lot of

corrections, suggestions, modifications, some paragraphs. We incorporated all that. Sent it back out again so that everybody could go over it again. Then we did the editing job, the typos and things.

Bill Walton ([48:04](#)):

Any sharp disagreements?

Stephen Bryen ([48:05](#)):

None. No, everybody's on board 100% with this. As I said, there's 34 findings and recommendations.

Bill Walton ([48:15](#)):

So if you care about our security and you worry about China being an enemy and not a competitor, this is the place to start to understand how we can do something about it.

Stephen Bryen ([48:24](#)):

That's right. That's exactly its intention. And our guys, I know, are talking it up with their colleagues in the Pentagon now. Which was good.

But I want the public to read it. I want the defense gurus who write about defense matters to read it because that gets back in. And I want the State Department to read it because some of this is political in the sense that recognizing Taiwan as a real partner is absolutely crucial to the outcome of this problem.

Bill Walton ([49:02](#)):

I want to do a part two with you if you are willing to speculate. We've got to wrap this up, because we're about done, but it seems like we're now moving into how much of this is political versus how much of it's strategic. And I think I worry that we've got people in our leadership that don't take this problem as seriously as they should.

Stephen Bryen ([49:22](#)):

Or don't have the education and the background.

Bill Walton ([49:24](#)):

Okay. We'll help them.

Stephen Bryen ([49:27](#)):

There's a lot of ignorance out there. Let's face it.

Bill Walton ([49:30](#)):

Okay. Well, let's work. Okay. So to be continued.

Stephen Bryen ([49:33](#)):

TBD.

Bill Walton ([49:34](#)):

This our second shot. I can't wait to have you back on.

We've been here with Dr. Stephen Bryen talking about Ukraine, and China, and Taiwan, and maybe our enemy within, and what we ought to do, what we need to do to protect America's national security. Stephen, great. Thanks for being here.

Stephen Bryen ([49:55](#)):

Thank you very much for having me.

Bill Walton ([49:56](#)):

And we can find you where?

Stephen Bryen ([49:58](#)):

At the Center for Security Policy.

Bill Walton ([50:00](#)):

Center for Security Policy. Center for security policy. Frank Afney would kill me for not mentioning that.

Stephen Bryen ([50:08](#)):

Well, the book is published by the Center for Security Policy.

Bill Walton ([50:12](#)):

Okay, great.

Stephen Bryen ([50:13](#)):

And they did the beautiful design of the cover and the back cover and so forth.

Bill Walton ([50:18](#)):

That's nice. That's good.

Stephen Bryen ([50:19](#)):

Did a nice job.

Bill Walton ([50:20](#)):

Yeah. We'll see you again soon.

Stephen Bryen ([50:20](#)):

Thanks again.

Bill Walton ([50:23](#)):

Thanks, and thank you all for joining, and stay tuned for our next show on this and other related topics. And as always, we're here to find out what's true, what's right, and what's next.

Part of the reason why I want to do this show is that just there's so many of these so-called complicated things people don't understand, and they're really pretty simple if you can just get it out there.

Stephen Bryen ([50:48](#)):

Get to the heart of it, yeah. Well, I think people want to understand. It's amazing. I've talked to a number of groups both about Ukraine and about Taiwan, both subjects. Sometimes both at the same time, like we did. And I get very good reaction. So I think people say, "Oh, I hadn't heard that before."

Bill Walton ([51:11](#)):

Well, and I think also, I was guilty of this, a lot of us thought China 10 years, 15 years ago, private equity world, my world, "Well, we're going to go do business in China."

Stephen Bryen ([51:21](#)):

Make a bundle.

Bill Walton ([51:22](#)):

Make a bundle. They're going to make a bundle. They'll become more like us. They'll become democratic, and join the world order. We're all going to live happily ever after.

Stephen Bryen ([51:31](#)):

That's the same argument that Kissinger made about the Soviet Union back in the early 70s when detente was all the fashion. If we just give these big loans to the Soviet Union, build these fertilizer plants, build these truck plants, all that stuff, the Russians will become our friends.

Bill Walton ([51:56](#)):

Well, I'm just learning about a lot of this, because I was wasting all my time on Wall Street before.

Stephen Bryen ([52:00](#)):

I was fighting with Kissinger.

Bill Walton ([52:04](#)):

And as I understand it, the first Bush administration fought hard to keep the Soviet Union from collapsing. True? Condi Rice ...

Stephen Bryen ([52:17](#)):

I don't remember it quite that way.

Bill Walton ([52:21](#)):

How do you remember it? Because I'm trying to piece together these puzzles.

Stephen Bryen ([52:22](#)):

I think everybody together in Washington was completely in shock the thing collapsed. I think there was worry that this coup ... Remember the coup against Gorbachev?

Bill Walton ([52:33](#)):

I do.

Stephen Bryen ([52:33](#)):

That was pretty frightening to Washington because they saw that as ...

Bill Walton ([52:39](#)):

That was a coup from the hard line side.

Stephen Bryen ([52:42](#)):

Oh, yeah, for sure. KGB and the military. And I think Washington's reaction was, God, this could be really terrible. But it's turned out to fail. That was the good news of it. I don't know if it would fail again.

Bill Walton ([53:02](#)):

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