



### The Nuclear Threat in an Age of Terrorism (3/8/18)

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Jessica Chen: Good evening and welcome, everyone. My name is Jessica Chen and I'm the director of public programs here at the 9/11 Memorial & Museum. As always, I'd like to extend a special welcome to our museum members and those tuning in to our live web broadcast at [911memorial.org/live](http://911memorial.org/live).

Tonight we are joined by Dr. Graham Allison for a conversation about the evolving threat of nuclear terrorism. Dr. Allison is a leading analyst of U.S. national security and defense policy with a special interest in nuclear weapons, terrorism, and decision-making.

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He served as assistant secretary of defense under President Clinton and until last year as the director of Harvard University's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. For his service in the Clinton administration, he was awarded the Defense Medal for Distinguished Public Service for reshaping relations with Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan to reduce the former Soviet nuclear arsenal.

He's also the author of the recent best-selling book "Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?" We are especially fortunate to have him at a time, even today, when nuclear terrorism is an increasing global security concern. We'd like to thank Dr. Allison for sharing his time and insights with us.

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We are also deeply grateful to the Berg Foundation for their support of the museum's 2017-2018 public program season. So without further ado,

please join me in welcoming Dr. Allison in conversation with executive vice president and deputy director of museum programs Clifford Chanin.

(applause)

00:02:02 Clifford Chanin: Thank you, Jessica, and welcome, everybody. And certainly welcome, Dr. Allison. Thank you very much for taking the time to come speak to us.

Dr. Graham Allison: Thank you for having me.

Clifford Chanin: There is a lot to talk about tonight, including breaking news, and we will talk about that in the course of the evening. But the issues you raise sort of follow a spiral pattern, and I think it might be best to start at the middle of the spiral and spiral out to the larger questions. Because your book and much of your writing talks about the interrelationship among things that aren't necessarily, at first glance, seen to be related.

00:02:37 So the question of nuclear terrorism, as it exists now, would, at its surface level, seem to imply that the risk would come-- and you write about this-- from al-Qaeda or ISIS or a group that is inspired by that, and the possibility that they might get their hands on a weapon or on nuclear materials. So starting with that, talk about where you see that risk and where it comes from in the present moment.

00:03:06 Dr. Graham Allison: Okay, well, thank you very much and thanks, folks, for coming. It's a topic which is terrifying on the one hand, but, I think, crucial on the other. And especially, it's an honor to be here at the 9/11 Museum and Memorial, because for anybody who thinks about national security in this space, you can't remember 9/11 too often. And you all do a great job of trying to make it, to keep it, keep the memory alive.

Clifford Chanin: Thank you.

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Dr. Graham Allison: I mean, I regard this as hallowed ground. Uh, and I think the, uh... I'm sure you've heard and said many times, the principal finding of the 9/11 Commission that was empowered by Congress to try to analyze what had happened in that situation, their principal finding was that the major failure before 9/11 was a failure of imagination. So I'd say we need to stretch our imaginations about things that could happen, even horrible, horrible things, like nuclear terrorism.

So let me then go specifically to your question. I wrote a book in 2004 called "Nuclear Terrorism: The Ultimate Preventable Catastrophe." I brought you a copy.

Clifford Chanin: Oh, thank you.

00:04:28

Dr. Graham Allison: For the, for the group. So, in it, I try to analyze... who could perpetrate a nuclear terrorist act, what would they do it with, how could they get it to the World Trade Center or to Times Square or to Harvard Square, where, in Boston, I live-- so who could do this? To your question. Some terrorist, organized terrorist group. Who could have imagined that al-Qaeda crowd would have been able to be organizationally capable of such a remarkable attack that they conducted on 9/11?

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Not many people thought that, and actually, in... Assessed from an intelligence point of view, intelligence, you know, actions, it was brilliantly executed. Now, they had also some good luck. But still, the idea of, of hijacking airplanes, commercial aircraft, turning them into guided cruise missiles, and hitting iconic towers, and then it's on TV over and over.

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So as you, I'm sure you've watched the video of Osama bin Laden commenting on this after the fact. He was just thrilled that it'd been so

remarkably successful. And, uh... but they did think of this. So if we ask ourselves about the "who," in the period since 9/11, well, before 9/11, there was a very small group, the al-Qaeda group. There were some other possible ones.

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This is not the beginning of terrorism. Terrorism's been a phenomenon forever. But in the period since then, we have, uh... invaded and occupied Afghanistan. We've invaded and occupied... uh, Iraq. We have military forces operating today in seven Muslim-majority countries. And as a impulse for motivating people to want to do some harm to you, going and killing them where they are has that effect.

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Though, uh, I would say unfortunately, the number of potential purposes increased. If I try to assess it for the, for the "who," fortunately, the good news is that the group that was very determined to not just repeat 9/11, but trump 9/11, have been largely destroyed. That's one of the great successes, I think, of the reaction to 9/11, and...

Clifford Chanin: You're speaking of al-Qaeda and then, by extension, the recent moves against ISIS.

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Dr. Graham Allison: That's right. So basically, uh, destroying people who would otherwise be the "whos," the agents for doing this, is positive. But you have to ask yourself, and in the way you're doing it and how you're doing, what's the net effect of it? Don Rumsfeld once asked, during the middle of the war with al-Qaeda, he said, "Are we killing more of the bad guys than we're generating?"

So that's always a question that has to be, has to be raised. But I would say, looking at the scene today, there are more people and more groups who could be motivated to be the "who."

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Clifford Chanin: So let's talk about the "how."

Dr. Graham Allison: And then on the, on the "what," let me just do quickly the "what." The "what," they got to get a bomb, if they're doing nuclear terrorism.

Clifford Chanin: That's the how, too, yes.

Dr. Graham Allison: And then the "how" is, how do they get it to the target?

Clifford Chanin: Right.

Dr. Graham Allison: Okay, so, for the "what," in, in-- on 9/11, North Korea had no, uh... nuclear weapon's worth of material. There was maybe probably four, four bombs' worth of plutonium, but was still encased in the spent fuel that had come out of the Yongbyon reactor. And that was still under the terms of the deal. Today, the intelligence community thinks they have 60-- 60, six-oh...

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Clifford Chanin: Six-zero.

Dr. Graham Allison: ...bombs' worth, okay? And they have machine-- uh, they have factories both for highly enriched uranium and plutonium to produce more. So among the reasons for being more worried about nuclear terrorism in terms of the, of the "what," North Korea is the biggest new. Then in terms of the "how," how do they get it here, well, as I say in the "Nuclear Terrorism" book, every way that illegal drugs come to an American city?

Clifford Chanin: Right.

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Dr. Graham Allison That's a good path. Now, a lot has been done since 9/11, and especially here in New York City, where the police have done a

great job, and the fusion team with the FBI, to reduce the ability for people to bring especially dangerous things here. But if you were determined to do so, I still think that the, the hidiers have a better chance than the seekers.

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Clifford Chanin: Now, the, um... The North Koreans seem to figure very prominently in the threat of nuclear terrorism. Not necessarily-- and we'll get to what they might do under their own name...

Dr. Graham Allison: Right.

Clifford Chanin: But you quote former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates saying, "North Korea will sell anything they have to anyone who has the cash to buy it," which may be both ideological and a necessity given the, the strict boycott regime that they live under. So they have, at least as far as we can track, they have been involved in the spread and the proliferation of nuclear materials.

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Dr. Graham Allison: Right.

Clifford Chanin: So far as we know, that's only been two states. Do we have any evidence that they have been able or been interested in connecting with terrorist groups?

Dr. Graham Allison: Good, good questions. You're right on target. So the first thing is to understand the North Korean regime.

Clifford Chanin: Mm-hmm.

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Dr. Graham Allison: This is a regime that, as Bob Gates said, has historically sold everything it has to anybody who will pay. So that, that's the baseline. In terms of their sale to states, to start with, they've sold

missiles. So for a long time, they were known in the intelligence community as Missiles "R" Us. So the Syrians have gotten missiles from North Korea, the Iranians have gotten missiles and missile technologies.

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Then, to the nuclear piece, actually, they sold to Syria a reactor just like the one at Yongbyon-- their own reactor-- which was almost completed before the Israelis discovered it in 2007 and destroyed it. So had the Israelis not discovered the, the reactor that the North Koreans were building in Syria and destroyed it, it would've by now produced material for a half-dozen nuclear bombs in Syria with all the other stuff going on there.

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So, now, then, finally, with respect to terrorists, I don't have any... I mean, I, I think they certainly... They've sold a lot of things to terrorists, so they're in four or five businesses. Counterfeit \$100 bills, counterfeit Viagra, uh... Other drugs, uh, missiles... Uh... Other illegal things, and they certainly have had dealings, and did have some dealings with al-Qaeda earlier. But I haven't seen any evidence of them being prepared to sell, yet, to terrorist groups. You haven't had actually terrorist groups with a lot of money.

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Clifford Chanin: Right, right. Parenthetically, though, you mentioned the Israeli raid in 2007 on the Syrian almost completed nuclear facility.

Dr. Graham Allison: Right.

Clifford Chanin: They had, the Israelis, in 1981 I think it was, the Osirak.

Dr. Graham Allison: Did the same thing in Iraq.

Clifford Chanin: So is pre-emption in that sense effective, do you think, or is it... Of course, putting off that problem for the future is maybe a good

thing, also. But, you know, those are two examples, but the only two we could think of, I think, that shows the effect of pre-emption.

00:12:51 Dr. Graham Allison: Yeah, I mean, pre-emption in general is a bad idea in terms of trying to organize an international order. But I've teased my Israeli friends that the problem with Israel, from my perspective, is that there's not enough of it. That, basically, what they need to do is recognize that, you know, one little country, especially in a dangerous neighborhood, may be not enough. So they need to have an outpost in Northeast Asia. And if there had been an Israel in Singapore or somewhere...

Clifford Chanin: In Japan, for that matter.

00:13:26 Dr. Graham Allison: In Japan or in Okinawa, North Korea would not have a nuclear weapons program. So in the story, it's, it's a long saga, and I've participated in a number of the pieces of it, including the failures, but I was assistant secretary of defense in 1994, which was one of the big crossroads. North Korea had a Yongbyon reactor, it was producing plutonium. The plutonium, then, got... is in the spent fuel... The waste from the reactor goes into these pools to cool.

00:14:02 And all these were in—one little building was the reactor, one little building next door to it was the... was the cooling pod. And they were beginning to move the spent fuel to a reprocessing facility where they were going to extract the plutonium.

00:14:21 Now, this was in the Clinton administration in the summer of 1994. At the Defense Department, we were unanimous. Bill Perry was the secretary of defense, John Shalikashvili was the chairman of the JCS, Ash Carter was an assistant secretary, I was an assistant secretary. So we thought we should give them a fork in the road proposition. Either you eliminate this, or we will. It turned out that the South Koreans thought, "Over our dead body." Because if we attack this reactor, there's a chance that the North Koreans provoke a second Korean War, and most of the victims of that will be Koreans.



00:15:08            So the president of South Korea was not enthusiastic about that. And that, actually, if you take the long twisting road to how they get to 60 bombs today, and the edge of the ability to deliver a nuclear strike against San Francisco or Los Angeles, at every one of those crucial crossroads, when the American presidents have thought about this, they've thought about their South Korean ally and their Japanese ally, both of whom have said no, no, no, and they've deferred.

00:15:41            So I think it's interesting as we watch this current stage of the... It's kind of, like, act 12 of a drama that we've seen before, whether... Trump seems more credible in the threat to attack them than his predecessors have been.

Clifford Chanin: The, the policy on the U.S. and allies' side has never, then, been enough to convince the North Koreans that they needed to stop.

00:16:13            Dr. Graham Allison: Right.

Clifford Chanin: And that has shifted, the policy has, from negotiations and carrots and the stick of economic sanctions, quite stringent ones at many times. But is it fair to say that the Koreans-- the North Koreans-- have never really wavered from their North Star of, "We want nuclear weapons"?

(Dr. Allison stammers)

00:16:37            Dr. Graham Allison: I think that the... If you're drawing the line, it's a good... that they do have a North Star, they have actually achieved nuclear weapons. They have nuclear weapons. Short-range missiles to attack South Korea, they have those. Medium-range missiles to attack Japan, they have those. And they're on the verge of acquiring ICBMs that

could deliver a nuclear warhead against us. So-- but they've paused, interestingly...

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Clifford Chanin: Right now.

Dr. Graham Allison: From time to time... Well, now.

Clifford Chanin: Yeah.

Dr. Graham Allison: But they had a long pause in 1994, after the episode I mentioned. So the U.S. seemed credibly threatening to attack 'em. They became concerned, the South Koreans became concerned. Jimmy Carter, former president, became alarmed. He flew to North Korea on his own nickel. Nobody invited him, or nobody... The administration didn't authorize this.

Clifford Chanin: Right.

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Dr. Graham Allison: He then made some arrangements with them, which ultimately led to an agreement, and the agreement that was reached in 1994 was, they would close down Yongbyon, they wouldn't produce any more plutonium, and they would get a bunch of benefits from us and from the South Koreans and from the Japanese.

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That, that part of the deal-- that is, the verifiable component-- no production of any plutonium at Yongbyon, they held to, right through till 2002, when President Bush abrogated the arrangement, because they had gone to a second track of uranium and were working on that track. So I think you should assume they're, they got a goal, they're pretty determined. But the rate at which they move towards it, or the manner in which they do, may be a bit negotiable.

00:18:32 Clifford Chanin: So let's, um, look to the current situation with North Korea, and there is news, even as we speak, of an invitation that has been passed to the White House from the North Koreans through the South Koreans, an invitation from Kim Jong Un to President Trump. I'm not quite sure where they would meet, but to meet.

Dr. Graham Allison: Yeah.

00:18:54 Clifford Chanin: Um, this follows from the Olympics diplomacy and some sort of thawing between the North and the South, President Moon and so on and so forth. There seems to be a moment of-- on the surface, at least-- possibility.

Dr. Graham Allison: Okay.

Clifford Chanin: What does this look like to you beneath the surface, if you can see beneath the surface at this point?

00:19:12 Dr. Graham Allison: Okay, so, good. So let me go back one step, and then I'll come to the... to that. So at the beginning of the year, I wrote a piece in "Politico" on "Will Trump solve North Korea?" And I said, "In 2018, I believe we will see one of three futures." One of three and only three.

00:19:39 First option: North Korea will complete a set of ICBM tests, and C.I.A. will say they now have a credible threat to strike the West Coast. Option two: Trump will attack North Korea. Maybe even just a limited attack on the launchpads to prevent option one happening. And option three would be a minor miracle. So that's what I said in this article.

Clifford Chanin: Maybe not so minor.

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Dr. Graham Allison: And I... And I made my odds, I said, if I were an oddsmaker, just as a... I would say there's a 50% chance, the first option. Kim wins. And that's very dangerous, and I explained why, as it relates to the nuclear terrorism. But secondly, Trump attacks him. Maybe even a limited attack, and then does that lead to retaliation against Seoul, which they can destroy if they want to, or kill 100,000 people overnight, and does that produce a second Korean War, and if we have a second Korean War, are we back to a war between the U.S. and China?

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Clifford Chanin: Right.

Dr. Graham Allison: (inaudible) I made that to be 20% or 25% likely.

Clifford Chanin: What are the odds of a miracle?

Dr. Graham Allison: And then-- well, the miracle, I said, was about 15%. And ten percent left over for what I couldn't think of.

Clifford Chanin: Uh-huh.

Dr. Graham Allison: But, so I would say, this is a little bit of evidence for the miracle option.

Clifford Chanin: Let me ask this, though...

Dr. Graham Allison: So in this one, I think the, the, uh... While we should not assume that the Kim regime is not the Kim regime that we've... We know and love for all these many, many years.

Clifford Chanin: Mm-hmm.

00:21:14 Dr. Graham Allison: We shouldn't even imagine that they've given up on their North Star.

Clifford Chanin: Right.

Dr. Graham Allison: Well, I think that makes the... Nonetheless, if I look back at '94, they did postpone their plutonium path, so not a single gram of plutonium was produced between 1994 and 2002.

Clifford Chanin: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Graham Allison: Now, they had to be bribed.

00:21:48 Clifford Chanin: Right.

Dr. Graham Allison: But, any case, that's called eight years without a bomb. That's a lot safer than the alternative, and particularly since the South Koreans and the Japanese paid most of the bribe.

Clifford Chanin: Right. So would you say the... Supposing your second option were to come to pass, the U.S. would attack, and say effectively, these sites, and for whatever reason, the minor miracle occurs and there is not a generalized war that follows, and we-- I do want to get to China, but let's put that aside for now-- would an attack of any kind against North Korea by the U.S. and its allies, would that, in your mind, increase the chances of the North Koreans then turning around and looking for someone to give nuclear materials to for the sake of responding...

00:22:23 Dr. Graham Allison: Of its responding, yeah.

Clifford Chanin: ...without having their address necessarily attached to it, through terrorists?

Dr. Graham Allison: That's, uh, I... Again, this is a devilish problem, and I think that's a very good... a very good point. So if you just listen to the testimony of Secretary Mattis...

Clifford Chanin: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Graham Allison: ...the Pentagon has prepared a menu of options for President Trump, of attacks.

Clifford Chanin: Right.

Dr. Graham Allison: And they go from something quite small, like cruise missiles attacking ICBM launchpads.

Clifford Chanin: Mm-hmm.

00:22:58

Dr. Graham Allison: You can't launch a pad from a... You know, you need a flat facility with electricity, whatever, whatever. So can the U.S. do that? Yes, we can. And the question is, how does North Korea respond? So it's possible they don't respond. But every other time, they've responded in some manner. So if they were to respond by shelling Seoul with artillery, and they kill 25,000 or 100,000 people overnight, and we then have to respond by suppressing that artillery plus other rockets that could hit South Korea, pretty soon, you're into the second Korean War.

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Now, if you're in the second Korean War, the first question that arises is, well, what happens to their nuclear weapons and their nuclear weapons material? And, uh, unfortunately... I mean, that should be a topic of intense conversation between the American government and the Chinese

government. But as far as I can see, that conversation has not happened. But it should be happening, because the, the weapons that, and their weapon material, is within a couple of hundred kilometers of the Chinese border.

Clifford Chanin: Right.

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Dr. Graham Allison: Well, the Chinese might go in and do something. And if they would, I would say, if they could keep the weapons from coming loose... I mean, that was my problem when I was working for the Clinton administration after the Soviet Union disappeared.

Clifford Chanin: So-called loose nukes.

Dr. Graham Allison: Loose nukes, so I don't... I don't want any loose North Korean nuclear weapons or any North Korean commander who flies off somewhere and has a bomb or two or three worth of highly enriched uranium or plutonium, then sells it off to somebody-- you're into the black market, so I think it's gonna... I mean, you can do about ten different trails from this, and it's hard to, hard to assess which one.

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Clifford Chanin: But is it, is it more... I mean, we're talking about North Korea, but there are other potential sources of loose nukes and the failure of a regime that has nuclear weapons.

Dr. Graham Allison: Right, of which...

Clifford Chanin: And Pakistan is, is a salient example.

Dr. Graham Allison: Of which Pakistan is another candidate. But the Soviet Union, we actually have seen one version of this case...

Clifford Chanin: Right, right.

00:25:01

Dr. Graham Allison: ...where a great nuclear superpower disappeared. And it left, as I remember, every one of these weapons, 4,620 ICBMs were left in, uh... Ukraine, uh... Kazakhstan, and Belarus. And 12,000, about, tactical nuclear weapons that were scattered all around these places. And miracle of miracles, as far as we know, as of to date, certainly none of these weapons has exploded.

Clifford Chanin: Right.

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Dr. Graham Allison: And all of them seem to have been collected up and taken back to Russia, so... But could Russia lose some weapons or material? It could. And... or, or incidents occur. There's dozens and dozens of incidents every year of some kind of radioactive material that's trafficked. Rarely bombs' worth of materials, but sometimes bombs-usable material.

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And Pakistan, as you say, is another great candidate there, 'cause their, their nuclear program is expanding, and they have many militant groups, like the group that blew up the Taj Hotel in India, that operate quasi-independently within, you know, in their territory. Plus, you know, the headquarters for the Taliban is in Quetta, which is in Pakistan.

Clifford Chanin: In Pakistan, yeah.

Dr. Graham Allison: So...

Clifford Chanin: So, yes, so... (chuckles)

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Dr. Graham Allison: So, yes, There's a few... there are a few candidates.



Clifford Chanin: So there are other books for you to write, is basically what it boils down to.

Dr. Graham Allison: Well, I'm hoping not to write about it.

Clifford Chanin: So... And you make this point in "Destined for War," and you explore what you describe as the "Thucydides Trap."

Dr. Graham Allison: Right.

Clifford Chanin: But one of the factors in this, and this is where North Korea comes in, and the United States and China, as the real antagonists, if you will, is that the problems of surrounding a small state can bring larger states into a conflict that they don't particularly want, but for reasons that we'll talk about, they come into.

Dr. Graham Allison: Exactly.

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Clifford Chanin: So you've outlined the first potential scenario for this, which is, even in the case of a limited strike by the United States to protect itself, or the South Koreans and Japanese, against this North Korean capacity, the Chinese, who have a deep interest in what happens next door, would conceivably respond. Not necessarily because they are so concerned about North Korea, but because the buffer that North Korea provides for them could be eliminated if the United States acted this way.

Dr. Graham Allison: Exactly.

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Clifford Chanin: So let's talk about that dynamic, because we started with a spiral of potential weapons going to terrorists, that they would come from North Korea, that North Korea now would be in the possibility of a

confrontation-- as it seems to be testing-- with President Trump and the United States, and that, if that were to occur, the stakes get much, much higher, not because of North Korea and the United States, but because of China and the United States.

00:28:07 Dr. Graham Allison: Okay, great question. So just, uh, for... to frame it for the audience, so this book is called "Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?" Was published last Memorial Day, so it's been out for about eight months, and it's on all the best-seller lists and been selected for this and that. And it's made its way very rapidly into the policy conversation, both in Washington and in Beijing, where I was just before Christmas.

00:28:39 Clifford Chanin: Let me add, parenthetically... I will add, parenthetically, that it is, I won't say an easy read, but it is an engaging read.

Dr. Graham Allison: Thank you.

Clifford Chanin: And it is an easy read in that sense.

Dr. Graham Allison: Well, listen, I worked very hard to try to write it so that it's accessible to a general public, not for policy wonks. So basically, Thucydides had this big idea, and you got right to the heart of it. His big idea was, when a rising power—

Clifford Chanin: China.

00:29:05 Dr. Graham Allison: Athens-- he was writing about the Peloponnesian War in Classical Greece-- threatens to displace Sparta, which had been the dominant power...

Clifford Chanin: The United States.

Dr. Graham Allison: ...for a hundred years, or when Germany rises a hundred-plus years ago to threaten Britain, which has been a dominant power for a hundred years, or when China rises now to rival and potentially displace the U.S., in general, wars happen.

00:29:32            So in my book, I look at the last 500 years of history, I find 16 cases, one-six, 12 of them end in war, four of them in not war. And then, here, just the point you made, which is... many readers miss, so this is a big point: in Thucydides' story, it's not generally the case that you're the ruling power and I'm the rising power, and I figure, "I'm now big enough, it's time for me to fight you."

Clifford Chanin: Mm-hmm.

00:29:59            Dr. Graham Allison: Or, alternatively, you think I'm getting so big, "I'd better fight him now because he'll be bigger tomorrow." What happens is, in this dangerous dynamic, a third party's action, or provocation, becomes circumstances to which one of the other of us feel obliged to respond, and that creates conditions to which the other feels obliged to respond.

00:30:21            And one thing leads to the other, and at the end of the day you have a war between two parties who didn't want to have a war. So if you think about 1914, which I have a good chapter on, and I don't think you can study 1914 too much, the assassination of an archduke-- which would have otherwise been hardly consequential at all, and which would have easily been managed-- became the spark that burned down all of the great nations of Europe at the end, by 1918.

00:30:50            Clifford Chanin: And if I could add here...

Dr. Graham Allison: Yeah.

Clifford Chanin: ...it's a fascinating point you make, which is that none of them came out either intact or anywhere near what they were when they went into these wars.

Dr. Graham Allison: Absolutely. If you'd given-- as I say in the book-- if you'd given a chance for a do-over to every one of the principal players-- to the Austro-Hungarian emperor, to the kaiser in Germany, to the tsar in Russia, to France, to Britain-- nobody would have chosen what they did. But they did, and one thing led to the other.

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So in the North Korean case, North Korea simply wants to have the capability to strike San Francisco or Los Angeles with a nuclear weapon. That's what they simply want, okay? Trump, when he heard of this, when becoming president, said, this is crazy. I mean, what are you talking about? A little, isolated, impoverished country like that is gonna have the capability to destroy millions of Americans? No! So he, he went out and tweeted when he got the briefing. No, not gonna happen.

Clifford Chanin: Fire and fury.

Dr. Graham Allison: Not on my watch, yes.

Clifford Chanin: Fire and fury.

00:32:00

Dr. Graham Allison: Whatever is required, whatever... And at Mar-a-Lago, when he met with Xi Jinping, he told him in April, he said, I'm telling you, you can solve this problem. But if you don't solve this problem, I will solve this problem, and you're not gonna like it. And then he served him chocolate cake-- it was the opening dinner-- he excused himself, went to the room next door, announced that we had just launched 59 cruise missiles, against Syria, to punish Assad for the use of chemical weapons, and just to remind Xi Jinping how we might do this, okay? So, uh, is Trump bluffing?

00:32:35 We were talking about this before. I think nobody knows, okay? But Kim Jong Un has to take account of the possibility he may be serious. For sure, President Moon in South Korea has... This has caught his attention, because if there should be a second Korean War, Seoul, his capital, is gonna be destroyed. And most of the victims will turn out to be Koreans.

Clifford Chanin: Mm-hmm.

00:33:07 Dr. Graham Allison: So, uh... And we're watching this game in real time right now.

Clifford Chanin: Right, right.

Dr. Graham Allison: And it's, uh... And the idea that you... I mean, I know that the 9/11 Memorial & Museum has got great planning powers and acumen, but the idea that you got this organized just on the same night that we're talking about this, for Trump to make an announcement, I think that's impressive.

00:33:28 Clifford Chanin: Well, you—thank you, I mean, please, stay tuned for our future programs, because we've now established a rule here. But let us look at President Xi, which, and, you know, it's as current as anything, because a week ago, ten days ago, the announcement is made: there are no term limits in China anymore.

Dr. Graham Allison: Exactly.

Clifford Chanin: So he is eternal. And so...

Dr. Graham Allison: Well, not eternal, but at least he doesn't have, he doesn't have an expiration date, yes.

- 00:33:54 Clifford Chanin: He doesn't show any signs of not believing he's eternal. So what does that do to the equation? Because he is the voice of "China first," "great China policy," that China's greatness is now going to be reasserted on the world stage. I suspect that his ability to mobilize this is in part behind the power that he's accumulated. So that he is now the factor to deal with in terms of Chinese policy. How does that affect the calculations that we're talking about now?
- 00:34:28 Dr. Graham Allison: Well, that's a good question. So I wrote an op-ed for "The Wall Street Journal" just a week before the October 19th Party Congress, where Xi laid out his plan. He didn't include in it the absence of any term limits. That came just now, last week. Or is happening right now. But in the article, I... The title of it was, "Behold the New Emperor of China." Well, that's the beginning of October.
- 00:35:02 You can go-- just Google it and read it. And it's-- I said... which came right out of the analysis in my book-- Xi Jinping thinks he's the man who's gonna lead China to this great... he calls it... Before Trump's "Make America Great Again," his banner was "Make China Great Again." Right? So the great rejuvenation of the great Chinese people. He has a plan for doing this. And if you want to look at this, it's a plan, like, you would see, oh, I don't know, Jeff Bezos at Amazon, or something.
- 00:35:39 We got our goals for 2020, for 2025, for 2030, for 2035, for 2049. 2049, we're it, okay? And then we got these benchmarks as we go along. So... (coughs) If Thucydides were here giving us a commentary, he would say, "This looks to me like a classic rising power." So the syndrome for a rising power says, "I'm bigger, I'm stronger, I deserve more say, I deserve more sway. The current arrangements were put in place before I was, you know, I even counted. So they got to be rearranged. My interests deserve more weight."
- 00:36:24 So I think that dynamic will make this more dangerous. And similarly, I think Thucydides would say, both the election of President Trump and then a lot of the noise you hear now from-- policy and noise, from not

only the Trump administration, but now the, kind of, China-watchers' community, of alarm about China, is exactly... I mean, Thucydides' famous line was, it was the rise of Athens, the rise of assertive Athens, and the fear that this instilled in the ruling power, Sparta.

00:37:05

So the ruling power is looking like it's quite fearful, just like Thucydides would say, and in that dynamic, even smaller accidents or provocations, like North Korea, can drag people... I mean, what should happen among adults, you would say... If this was Britain and the U.S. and, I don't know, Ireland or Scotland or something, or North Korea-- it's not a very good analogy, but... Eh, the parties would sit down and say, the, you know, adults...

00:37:36

Clifford Chanin: Right.

Dr. Graham Allison: We're not letting this jerk drag us somewhere where we don't want to go. But let's talk about how we can deal with this problem together. And that's what I think we should be trying to do.

Clifford Chanin: But it turns out the adults are in the room much less frequently than you would think.

Dr. Graham Allison: Yeah, I'm afraid, I'm afraid.

00:37:52

Clifford Chanin: So let me quote from your book, because it, it, um... It sort of captures this. It-- you wrote: "This is not a book about China." (clears throat): Excuse me. "It's about the impact of a rising China on the U.S. and the global order. For seven decades since World War II, a rules-based framework led by Washington has defined world order, producing an era without war among great powers. Most people now think of this as normal. Historians call it a rare long peace. Today, an increasingly powerful China is unraveling this order, throwing into question the peace generations have taken for granted."

- 00:38:28            So, yes, of course, the rules-based order of the post-war world is an American-centered order, but the question is, does President Trump believe in that order? Everything, or many of the things he's spoken about, and some of the things he's done, seem to indicate that he does not put much confidence in that order or believe it is still valid.
- 00:38:50            Dr. Graham Allison: Now, that's a good question. So, uh, the point you read is about the underlying structural dynamics. So before Trump-- nothing to do with Trump-- the underlying structural dynamics are a China, which in 2004-- so everybody can remember 2004-- was 20% the size of the U.S. GDP. Was by 2014, as I explain in the book, as big as the U.S. in purchasing power parity. And will, by 2024, be half again larger, as their national economy. You think, "Whoa, wait a minute."
- 00:39:34            So this is, this is kind of structurally transformative. Now, then you have the psychology of the countries and the leaders, kind of on top of that. And the rising power, as we say, "I'm bigger, I'm stronger, blah, blah, blah," more assertive, and the ruling power thinking, "My God, what's happening here? What's happening to our situation?" So if you go back to the campaign, President Trump made China out to be the cause of our-- all our problems.
- Clifford Chanin: Right.
- 00:40:06            Dr. Graham Allison: And now if you look at the national security strategy that was published in January, or the national defense strategy that was published in February by Mattis, they identify China as our strategic rival or adversary who's trying to "undermine the American-led international order and put in place instead an order that will be inimical to our interests and our values." So that picture is what's going on. Now, Trump comes on top of this. So I would say, in part, he's a symptom, but he then brings his extra added plus up. Uh, and I think...
- 00:40:52            Clifford Chanin: But it seems on the one hand, on one hand, he's, he's-- or at least in his name, the administration is speaking on behalf of the order, but on the other hand, him personally-- or many of the policies...



Dr. Graham Allison: I think...

Clifford Chanin: ...seem to be a challenge to that order.

Dr. Graham Allison: Absolutely. Well, I think he's the most unusual and unorthodox president that I have seen and even that I've studied. And he is a wild card in that regard. And I think some of his impulses are-- for example, our alliances, which will become... I mean, if you're thinking about the U.S.-China competition, if China is gonna have an economy bigger than ours, well, we need some friends and allies.

00:41:37

So how about Japan? How about South Korea? How about Australia? How about maybe even India? But President Trump's instinct has been to say, "Well, these allies are just free riders. They should be paying their way, otherwise forget about 'em." Though, if you look, as the system has helped him appreciate, so if you hear what Mattis says about allies, or what Tillerson says about allies, they sound much more like, you know, traditional American conception.

Clifford Chanin: Right.

00:42:06

Dr. Graham Allison: The trade peace we're watching now, right now. And, uh, President Trump's instinct is to say, "Well, we've entered into a bunch of trade agreements, all of which have let people rip us off, but we're not doing that anymore." And the system is telling him, "Wait a minute, this thing is now so entangled that if you try to shoot the Chinese over steel tariffs, it turns out that, in fact, the Canadians are the biggest supplier." And so you may get the wrong target. So, you know, they're struggling with that. So I think his instincts are much more skeptical about that structure that we've been accustomed to.

00:42:48 Clifford Chanin: But you're, you're talking about-- and this has nothing to do with Trump-- you're talking about the growth of China that imposes great strain on this system, and may in fact overwhelm it.

Dr. Graham Allison: Right.

Clifford Chanin: And the... So the insight that the system is faltering, and may not be relevant anymore, is also something...

Dr. Graham Allison: Is before Trump.

Clifford Chanin: Right, it's before Trump.

00:43:09 Dr. Graham Allison: And independent of Trump, yes.

Clifford Chanin: But, so it-- exactly. So is Trump then picking up on this? Or is this...?

Dr. Graham Allison: Well, I think he... Partly, partly he senses this. So most Americans haven't quite awakened to the rise of China. But the first chapter of the book is called "The Rise of China." And I try simply in 20 pages, if you haven't been watching, to give you a jolt to try to get the picture. It's unbelievable.

00:43:36 Never before has a country risen so far so fast on so many different dimensions. And the consequence of that is, inescapably, a bigger, stronger entity is gonna feel uncomfortable for someone who's been accustomed to thinking, "Gee, I'm the number one in every regard and you're supposed to know your place."

00:43:56            So this is, this phenomenon you can see for the incumbent and an upstart, whether it's Uber and the taxi industry or Google and everybody, or Amazon and everybody. The news that we're... So this phenomenon is very natural and normal and uncomfortable. Trump expresses some of that, so certainly, right? But then I think he comes with some extra added, uh...

00:44:21            Clifford Chanin: Pizzazz.

Dr. Graham Allison: Pizzazz, yes, pizzazz.

Clifford Chanin: Let's call it that.

Dr. Graham Allison: It's a good word.

Clifford Chanin: There's really-- it's hard to find a word.

Dr. Graham Allison: That's a great word, actually.

Clifford Chanin (laughing): Um...

Dr. Graham Allison: I think he would like it.

Clifford Chanin: I bet he would. You know, one of those things that's striking about this is the pull towards conflict. If your 16 examples, three-quarters of them pull you towards conflict...

00:44:46            Dr. Graham Allison: Right.

Clifford Chanin: ...four of them, a quarter of them, can be resolved without conflict. So the pull seems to be towards conflict, and the pull also seems to be out of our hands at a certain point. You get caught up, as a leader, in a dynamic that you didn't set out to create, but all of a sudden, you're doing things... You cite the example of Woodrow Wilson in World War I. He was adamant, "No, no, no, no, no." And all of a sudden, the boys are over there. So, um, just, let's talk about that, you know, how we can or can't affect these enormous forces that tend to pull in the wrong direction.

00:45:25 Dr. Graham Allison: Well, I, I think the first thing is just what you said. Uh, we should recognize where there are powerful, structural forces that are creating gravity or, you know, a certain pull. Don't try to pretend like they don't exist or deny them. Recognize them, study them, analyze them.

00:45:45 But I think, at the same time, I believe there's still a big opportunity for human agency, for wise choices rather than dumb choices, and for imagination rather than, you know, business as usual. And I think if you look both at the case of Britain as it dealt with a rising U.S., when Teddy Roosevelt was leading the U.S. into what he was sure was gonna be an American century. Go to the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and you get a remarkable story.

00:46:20 And the British are adroit, agile, imaginative, adaptive. Uh, now partly, they are looking over their shoulder seeing the Germans rising at the same time-- and the Germans are a little closer, so they can't deal with everything at once-- but they're very adaptive. And they do so so agilely, that by the time you get to 1914, the Americans see their interests as aligned with the British. So right from the get-go of the war, the U.S. was the lifeline for Britain, both for supplies and for credit, and then when we enter the war, so a lot of lessons to learn from that one.

00:46:57 Similarly, the Cold War, uh, which is... I'm an old Cold Warrior, and I grew up in the, in the invention that occurred between about 1946 and 1950, when that, they had already set in place the Cold War strategy and most of us were the beneficiaries of it. But what was imagined between February of 1946 when George Kennan, the famous diplomat, wrote back

from Moscow the "Long Telegram," in which he said the Soviets are gonna pose a greater existential threat to the U.S. than the Nazis did.

00:47:38

So Harry Truman was the president. This is, you know, less than a year after the end of the war. "This man must be crazy. We're exhausted. We just fought a war in the Pacific and in, in Europe. We're bringing the troops home. We're not interested in slaying any more dragons." The conversation, though, began, and by 1950, in NSC-68, you then invented this amazing, uh, strategy that had six pillars, each of which, when, on the first hearing, you would have regarded as insane or just out of, you know, unreasonable. So George Marshall comes to Harvard in, in June of 1947.

Clifford Chanin: Secretary of State.

00:48:19

Dr. Graham Allison: Secretary of State. And he gives a speech. He says, I have a good idea. Why don't we tax Americans... This is now right after the war, when Americans are saying, "We need to build America at home," and Truman is saying, "We need health care." So he's the president. So, "Why don't we tax Americans one-and-a-half percent of GDP a year for as far as we... the next three, four years and send the money to Europe?" To help rebuild Europeans, including Germans who were just killing us. (laughs): Because, what? You're gonna do what? This makes no sense.

00:48:55

We did. NATO. George Washington and everybody who followed him said, "Do not get entangled with these Europeans. Entangling alliances will cause you trouble." NATO has Article Five, the centerpiece of it: "An attack on one is an attack on all." Amazing idea. Standing military. We never had a standing military. You know, we would raise the military, fight a war, demobilize, and then there would be just a little bit of, a little bit left.

00:49:28

Well, lo and behold, after 1950, we've maintained a substantial military capability for a lot of... So the elements of that became a strategy for Cold War. So in my category, it's kind of one of the four cases of no war.

War without bombs and bullets killing each other. And Americans persisted with it for four decades and the Soviet Union disappeared.

00:49:54            So I would say... I'm not fatalistic or even pessimistic about the situation. I think what it does, if we recognize the... With a good diagnosis of the problem, it says extreme danger requires extreme imagination, extreme adaptability, not, not business as usual. And the fact that we actually did manage that in the Cold War and that actually the Brits did manage that in dealing with the Americans, that's, uh, well, there are some cases that, well, give us some hope. Yeah.

00:50:30            Clifford Chanin: There's hope. You know, it's interesting the rise of China, and certainly on the economic front, in so many capacities the Chinese have developed, dwarf the Russians, but the Russians have been our traditional adversary.

Dr. Graham Allison: Yeah.

Clifford Chanin: And President Putin seems determined to maintain priority in that regard. But you, you sort of don't really focus much on them. They've sort of cast them off to the side.

Dr. Graham Allison: Well, no, I'm, I'm interested in them a lot and I'm, I'm, I mean, that's been the target of my interests, you know, during the Cold War, so...

00:50:59            Clifford Chanin: Where do they figure today, though, in terms of this dynamic that we've been talking about?

Dr. Graham Allison: Well, if, if we thought, and in my view, if we recognized that the Chinese juggernaut is likely to continue along on its current path, and that just as China gets bigger and stronger, this is gonna be the, the challenge for the U.S. over the next generation, then

we would... Our, our national interests would let us see who else could possibly be aligned with us to make a correlation of forces to which China would have to adapt, as opposed to us having to adapt to, to their predominance. And in that I mention Japan... South Korea, Australia, but why not Russia?

00:51:50

So in principle, Russia ought to be part of this coalition of sorts, but a combination of... I, I think there's enough blame to go around-- mistakes on our part, including the rapid expansion of NATO, I think, and... Putin's sort of demonic tendencies from time to time and inclinations, and then some mistakes made in cutting off communications after Crimea in the Obama administration, and now the Russian meddling in the American election and the politicization of that-- all those things together have allowed Xi Jinping very artfully to become Putin's best buddy and vice versa.

00:52:45

Clifford Chanin: Right, right, but it...

Dr. Graham Allison: So they, they've managed that alignment, to their credit, the Chinese, whereas, in fact, they should be more... If you were just a strategist from Mars looking at the scene, independent of the domestic politics, you would say they look like a candidate for, uh, you know, for our side.

Clifford Chanin: But it's interesting, 'cause in this alternative universe that I guess we now live in, but at least that we've been sketching out, the impulse-- and again, this was part of the Trump campaign-- the impulse to get closer to Russia in relation to China, it makes sense in the scenario that you're describing.

00:53:21

Dr. Graham Allison: Makes very good sense. And if it weren't for, for the... I mean, now the issue's gotten so politicized and caught up in our politics that I think it's very... And Trump's behavior in this realm as sufficiently... It invites the worst suspicions. So, I... I mean, I'm making my bet it'll turn out that there's much less there than meets the eye, but for whatever reason, if you look at the way he behaves, it doesn't make you

feel comfortable that there's not more there. So in our politics, that's become a, a juicy target. And the consequence, though, strategically for us, is negative, yeah.

00:54:09

Clifford Chanin: Okay, in fact, Dr. Allison is going to be leaving relatively quickly to catch a plane, so let's turn it over to see if there's a question or two before we close the program. So I'd ask you to raise your hand and hold until the microphone gets to you.

Dr. Graham Allison: Here's one.

Clifford Chanin: In the back there, please.

00:54:32

Man: Yes, uh, good evening. This is a two-part question. I'd like to get your opinion on...Well, your analysis on where you think this... There, there are credible reports that Mr. Trump, President Trump, is going to actually meet Kim Jong Un, and I would like to know what you think the... At the end of the day, Kim Jong Un, for his survival, he feels like he needs nuclear weapons, so I'm not sure, how does that pan out?

And, just secondly, who do you think is most to blame for the current situation in terms of either presidents or even on the international stage? Whether it's Japan, South Korea, so thank you very much.

00:55:12

Dr. Graham Allison: So, I'm sorry, the second question, who's most to blame for what?

Man: The current situation.

Dr. Graham Allison: In North Korea?



Man: Yeah.

Dr. Graham Allison: Okay, oh, okay. My goodness, two good questions. So, first, uh... Trump says, uh... I mean... The, the... One of the advantage Trump's had, Trump has, as being unorthodox and eccentric, and impulsive, is that when he says, "Well, heck, I would"-- as he had said earlier-- "I would be happy to have a hamburger with Kim Jong Un." So, you know, a meeting that you wouldn't have been able to organize any other way, because you'd have layers and layers of diplomats and staffers working on this thing, you know, could happen now. What will happen at the meeting?

(laughter)

00:56:06

Dr. Graham Allison: We would all love to be flies on the wall, 'cause... Because these are two pretty unusual people, if you're trying to...

(laughter)

Clifford Chanin: You, you do have a gift for understatement, I will say that.

Dr. Graham Allison: Uh, so... I think the-- I could be proved wrong-- but I think the likelihood that Kim Jong Un will "give up his nuclear weapons and this game is over" is very close to zero. But I think he may well be prepared to not have additional ICBM tests and not have additional nuclear tests for some period of time for something.

00:56:46

And then, whether Trump will buy that and for what price, we'll, we'll see. But if we bought two or three years of, of moratorium on any further testing while we continued negotiating about other items in order to, to begin to try to roll back things, I think, uh, that would be good. I, I would

accept that, as compared to the other alternatives, 'cause the other alternatives... I gave you option one, which is lousy.

00:57:15 Because if Kim Jong Un wins this game, so he conducts some more tests... I mean, if all these talks break down and he goes back to testing, he tests again, and if he has a capability to attack San Francisco, then how are you ever gonna persuade him that he can't sell a nuclear weapon to terrorists? You tell him, "Well, if you do that, he'll be... I'll be really angry." But I think, "Wait a minute, "you just didn't prevent me being able to drop a nuclear bomb on San Francisco." So your credibility's gonna be strained.

00:57:47 On your second question, when I was in China the week before Christmas talking to people across the whole government, I had a, kind of an epiphany. So I said to them, uh, "Look, "I agree that we Americans made a terrible strategic mistake"-- now, we didn't think about it-- back in the '80s and '90s when South Korea wanted to have nuclear weapons and Taiwan wanted to have nuclear weapons and Japan wanted to have nuclear weapons. And they each had serious weapons programs, and we closed them down. We should have come to you and said, ""You have this ally, North Korea. So we'll live with any arrangement with our allies that you'll live with with your ally.""

00:58:39 Chinese didn't like this argument very much. But I would say this is their failure more than it is our failure, though I would say there's enough blame to go around.

Clifford Chanin: Uh, that really is all we can do tonight, because...

Dr. Graham Allison: We can maybe do one more.

Clifford Chanin: One more, oh, good-- very good. Right there-- wait, wait for the mic, though. That's the, the only constraint to stretch this out. No,

here, here, here, here, here-- right here, right here. No, no, no-- yeah, that's it. That's it, yep.

00:59:07

Man: Thank you very much. My question was with regards to the Iranian nuclear deal, whether you think pulling out of it would be a good idea or, or not, and whether it will start another, you know, crisis in the Middle East.

Dr. Graham Allison: Good question.

Clifford Chanin: We, we may need to get you another plane, I think, if we're gonna answer this question.

Dr. Graham Allison: No, no, we're good, I'll just do a short version. I mean, the, the Iran nuclear deal is the worst possible deal, except for all the other realistic options. So the, uh... what the... What the... what the deal with... that President Obama negotiated with Iran does, is postpone Iran's nuclear bomb for at least 15 years. And that's a great thing.

00:59:50

Now, it doesn't solve the problem 15 years from now. That's right. But we have some time to be working on the problem. So had it not been for this nuclear deal, then either, by now, Iran would've had enough material for a bomb or we would've had another war in the region. And I think, given how successful we've been with the wars in the region so far, probably passing on that for now was a good idea.

01:00:15

Clifford Chanin: Okay, you can get your plane. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for coming and our guests here in particular. And please join me in thanking Dr. Graham Allison.

(applause)