

Justin Bullock: (Music).

Justin Bullock: Welcome back to another episode of Bush School Uncorked. This is Justin Bullock.

Gregory Gause: And Gregory Gause.

Justin Bullock: And we are gathering again at Downtown Uncorked in historic Downtown Bryan for a live recording with a few audience members today joining us. Last week, or actually, was it last week?

Gregory Gause: Two weeks ago.

Justin Bullock: Two weeks ago. Weeks running together. We were here recording and we jumped right back into having some wonderful guests, Professor Taylor and Professor Kerr, and we were getting in some of the nitty gritty policy details of some of the output of the most recent legislature in Texas, talking a little bit about education financing and funding. What we didn't get a chance to do is spend some time recapping all the wonderful and fascinating-

Gregory Gause: And frightening.

Justin Bullock: And frightening stories from the summer's news. Professor Gause and I thought we would take this episode and deliver another Hot Takes to you, as we did with Season One after the midterms, and give you our hot takes, although, I don't know, our first topic is going to be a hot take, but some of these are probably a little cold.

Gregory Gause: I don't know. I think they're still pretty hot. The international stories of the summer, Hong Kong is ongoing and the attacks on the Saudi oil facilities are ongoing. Not the attacks, but the issue, so I think we'll have plenty of hot takes. This will be the international house of hot takes.

Justin Bullock: But before we get there, we're recording, and what? Maybe two hours ago, recording September 24th. Earlier today, the news broke that the House, under Nancy Pelosi, were going to begin formal proceedings towards impeachment. While we were going to start today focusing on stories from the summer, the hottest hot take is unfolding in front of us. Greg and I actually got to run into one another in the office a couple times today, and chat about this as it was unfolding, as it was, I guess, leaked earlier today.

Gregory Gause: Right, and folks should, we should understand that this is the beginning of a process. This is not the House voting tomorrow or next week on whether to impeach the president. I think what the Speaker, who has been reluctant to allow this to occur, finally decided, was the judiciary committee could begin hearings on writing articles of impeachment that would then be sent to the House floor. So we still have to see what the Judiciary Committee will come up

with, but it does appear that the issue that finally broke the dam within the Democratic caucus, where we know there had been a very strong, if minority, faction saying that the House should move to impeach the president almost immediately after the Democrats got the majority at the beginning of this year.

Gregory Gause: There had been a number of Democrats holding off, but at least some proportion of them, given the revelations of the president's discussions with the president of Ukraine, in which the president apparently was pushing the president of Ukraine to investigate former Vice President Biden and Vice President Biden's son's involvement in the politics of Ukraine, that broke the dam, the idea that the president would use the powers of his office, that is to say, withholding foreign aid that had been approved by Congress and signed into law by the president, to hold back that aid in an effort to get the Ukrainians to do some work to try to discredit Vice President Biden eventually pushed enough members of the Democratic caucus over the edge on that and Speaker Pelosi, who had been reluctant to move on impeachment, decided that it was time, so the politics of this are real interesting.

Gregory Gause: Aside from the merits, and we can talk about the merits, I think Nancy Pelosi remembers when the Republicans impeached Bill Clinton, back in the late '90s, and President Clinton's approval ratings only went up during the entire process, and I think that's what she feared. The politics of this are interesting. How do you think they'll play out?

Justin Bullock: I think one interesting piece about the shift, I was following along with some polls before the most recent story, or maybe right about the time the Hunter Biden story broke, and one of the articles I was reading was talking about how the public opinion on the issue was slowly changing in favor of impeachment, depending on what poll you looked at, but that there was a general shift towards more people being in favor of impeachment, and some polls showing as much as 50% support for impeachment.

Justin Bullock: As you were saying, what I thought about this case is I think, if the facts are as they seem to be, this is pretty egregious behavior. But what's interesting about it is the politics of it, which you mentioned. It's not the first round of egregious behavior.

Gregory Gause: No, it's not even the tenth round of egregious behavior.

Justin Bullock: There's been a long tale, I guess, of behavior that, in one way or another, there were calls for impeachment proceedings because they were so far out of the general, accepted behavior of a president. What's interesting is that now, with this most recent one, which is troubling and egregious is changing Nancy Pelosi's mind. I wonder how much of that has to do specifically with this case, which is pressuring an opponent with a foreign leader, and how much of it is her read of the polls as well, which is like, hey, she can see the trends and the data as well, she's really been reluctant at times that were kind of pretty serious to move

forward, and it seemed to me the whole time that she was waiting for her hand to be forced, so that she could say, "He forced my hand." Which is kind of what you're hearing, the early talking point on it is, "We had no choice." At some point, our hands have been pushed by the behavior in some way or another.

Gregory Gause: And one does wonder if the president is looking forward to this. He can't be looking forward to it in the sense that an impeachment inquiry will be much harder for him to stonewall. One of the issues which some House Democrats was impeachable even before the Ukraine thing was the reluctance of the administration to turn over documents that were subpoenaed by various house committees, and of course obstruction of justice was one of the articles of impeachment that Richard Nixon faced. Of course, Nixon was never impeached because he resigned before it got to the floor, but one does wonder if the president, thinking about the Clinton precedent, thinks that an impeachment proceeding will A. rally his base even more, B. bring, perhaps, lukewarm Republicans, not Never Trumpers, they're out of the game, but the lukewarm Republicans to his side in a partisan battle, and that the Democrats will alienate independent voters.

Gregory Gause: The president has had a horrible time getting those suburban independents, especially independent women in the Congressional elections in 2018. That's why the Democrats control the House right now, those suburban districts, some of which he carried in the 2016 election, that Democrats picked up. It could be a political calculation, although, of course, we have to be careful reading too much strategy into the president's actions. He goes with his gut.

Justin Bullock: I think one thing, whether or not he's looking forward to it or not, I think one thing that he does seem to look forward to would be the spotlight on it and dominating the storyline.

Gregory Gause: He does love the spotlight. This is a profound political choice the Democrats are making. I personally thought Pelosi was right to hold off on impeachment. Having lived through the Clinton experience myself, I was worried, because I'm no fan of President Trump, that this would make him appear a sympathetic figure, and it would make the Democrats appear that they cared nothing about legislation or anything like that, all they wanted to do was get Donald Trump. I feared what the consequences of that would be, electorally. I've always thought that the antidote to President Trump's obliterating of so many norms in our politics is for him to be defeated at the polls, and defeated soundly in 2020. I think impeachment might make it harder to get that result.

Gregory Gause: On the other hand, to use the power of the office to try to force foreigners to provide damaging information on your political rivals at home is, I doubt it's unprecedented in American politics, but the blatantness with which it was done, and the raw use of American foreign aid as leverage is, I think, unprecedented.

Justin Bullock: I was having the same conversation with one of my colleagues earlier today, talking about the politics of it and how it plays out to a general audience, the general population, because the reality of this is, he's not going to be removed from office.

Gregory Gause: No, he's not going to be convicted in the Senate, and everybody should remember impeachment is basically an indictment. The House votes by a majority to impeach the president, and, if it does, the Senate goes into a trial, literally a trial that the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court presides over. The House sends prosecutors over, the president appoints a defense team, and then the Senate votes as a jury, and you need two thirds, that would mean 67 of the 100 Senators to vote to convict, and that would then remove the president from office, which has never happened in American history. The idea that so many Republican Senators would defect from the president and vote to convict him is just, I think, a political impossibility.

Justin Bullock: Yeah, so no matter what the House does, he's not being removed from office, so given the political narratives, it's unclear, from a Democratic Party standpoint, whether going forward with impeachment proceedings are a net positive for them politically or not. I don't actually have, I think it could cut either way, depending on how [crosstalk 00:12:30].

Gregory Gause: I think it could cut either way, absolutely, depending upon what kind of new evidence is brought forward in an impeachment hearing, what else goes on in the world. It's a profound political risk.

Justin Bullock: The other part of it, which you highlighted on, which is the part that stuck with me is America is a system of institutions. It's a system of laws, it's a culture.

Gregory Gause: That's what we say.

Justin Bullock: It's all of these things that were designed, in a way, because we're not, there's no person above the law, and so we send different signals out as a larger institution about what our values are and how players in our systems are allowed to behave. One thing I worry about, we'll shift to the international stage in a moment, but I was in East Asia, in Taiwan for the summer, and I was talking with Taiwanese millennials, which isn't something I usually get to do.

Gregory Gause: Something I've never gotten to do.

Justin Bullock: Their reverence for freedom and democracy and for improving one's country and for basic freedoms of speech and freedom of expression was inspiring, and they built that model on our model of values and norms. What I do worry about is one of the major checks and balance tools that the House does have to say to the world, "This is unacceptable behavior by the players in this system," if we don't use that tool when it's appropriate, when there's repeated instances of bad behavior, even if short-term it's bad politically for one party or the other, it

seems like we're sending the wrong signals out to the rest of our citizenry and the rest of the world about how a president can behave.

Gregory Gause: But what's the signal we send if he's impeached but then acquitted? Does that mean that his behavior is okay?

Justin Bullock: No, but I think it at least suggests some pushback from the institution, from the legislative branch to an aspiring dictator.

Gregory Gause: One of the big political science books somewhat accessible to the general public of the last year is Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*. Those are two Harvard political scientists, very respected in the field of political science. I'm caricaturing a long and complex work to say that at least one of their conclusions was that it's not just institutions, it's norms that make democracy work. You can't impeach somebody for violating norms, I think, because they're not stated. But I think that the president has been extremely efficient in stretching and, at times, just obliterating the norms of American politics, some of which are, you don't do private business while you're president of the United States.

Gregory Gause: Was there ever any law that said that anywhere? No, it's not in the Constitution. The Constitution just says you can't accept emoluments from foreign governments, which, frankly, I think you could have impeached President Trump in the first week he was in office for violating the Emoluments Clause, because he retains his businesses, and foreign governments do business at his hotels, but let's set that aside. Just the domestic element of maintaining a private business while you are president of the United States violates a norm, but is it an impeachable offense? Well, it's not written down anywhere. Having a certain decorum in office, not using stupid nicknames to caricature your political opponents. Treating your political opponents as just that, opponents, not enemies. It doesn't appear that the president cares about that norm.

Gregory Gause: So you can't impeach somebody for violating norms, and yet, I think that, in many ways, the normative violations of this presidency, the norm that you should respect Congressional subpoenas, right? That's a norm. Congress doesn't have an army to send over the White House or to the Justice Department or to the State Department to grab those documents and take them back to Congress. The norm was that the president of the United States would respect Congressional subpoenas. That's a norm that appears to be fraying under this administration, so I worry about the norms which I don't know if we can recover, and I worry about an impeachment process that will end up in an acquittal that will then be used as a precedent to say, "What he did was okay, see, he was acquitted."

Gregory Gause: I come back to, not just for the political, but for the institutional reason that, for me, the best way to end this is a thumping defeat at the polls in 2020. Maybe that won't happen either, but I completely take your point that we're in

politically uncharted waters. Facing likely impeachment, Richard Nixon resigned in 1974. I'm old enough that I lived through that too, and that was high drama. That was high drama. We were all in front of the TV.

Justin Bullock: Hopefully now people are listening to podcasts.

Gregory Gause: Right, they're listening to podcasts while they're cooking dinner or doing the dishes. The Clinton impeachment raised the popularity of Bill Clinton, who could say, "I'm going about the people's business while these guys are doing nothing but trying to engage in the politics of personal destruction," and I bet we will hear the White House talk about the politics of personal destruction more and more.

Justin Bullock: The thing about the Clinton case, and then let's move on to some international, it would be interesting to see, as it does play out, whether the types of accusations matter in how it plays out as well. Clinton's accusations were-

Gregory Gause: That he lied under oath about the Monica Lewinsky affair.

Justin Bullock: Yes, but it was popularly, in large part, about the Monica Lewinsky affair, whereas this case will be, it'll be about a number of things, but it'll be about trying to pressure foreign government to attack his political opponent. It will be interesting to see how those narratives play out.

Gregory Gause: Right. That'll be one article. I think there will be an article on obstruction of justice about the refusal to submit to Congressional subpoenas, because I doubt the administration is going to turn over material, even to a Judiciary Committee that's considering articles of impeachment, and third, I think there will be an impeachment article on the Emoluments Clause, because his businesses are taking millions of dollars from foreign governments.

Justin Bullock: While in the land of uncharted territory, we've been focusing on domestic policy, let's make a shift to international affairs. One of us is a department head of an international affairs department.

Gregory Gause: And also one of the world's leading experts on Middle East politics.

Justin Bullock: He said it with a straight face, too. The audience saw it, right? Let's start there, then. There were a number of things going on that involved both Iran and Saudi Arabia and the US and rising tensions. Give me an overview.

Gregory Gause: Sure. I think the place to start is the attacks on the Saudi oil facilities a week ago Saturday, as I recall the date. This was an attack which I believe came from Iran, I don't know if it physically came from Iran, but I believe that the Iranian government was behind it. Of course, responsibility was claimed by the Yemeni group the Houthis, that are allied with Iran, that the Saudis have been fighting for five years in a brutal war in Yemen, but it appears to me that the Houthis

didn't have the technical capabilities to launch the kind of strikes that hit the Saudi oil facilities. These strikes, I'll call them the Iranian strikes from here on, even though I'm open to evidence that maybe they came from somewhere else, they struck the single most important facility in the world oil system. They struck Saudi processing plants at a little place called Abqaiq in Saudi Arabia that processes about seven million barrels of oil a day to get it ready for export. That's nearly 10% of the world's total oil production a day. There is no other oil facility that produces that much oil in a day.

Gregory Gause: It's the most blatant political assault on the oil infrastructure since Saddam Hussein set fire to the Kuwaiti oil fields in 1991, and the Kuwaiti oil fields only produce about two million barrels a day. I think it was incredibly serious military escalation. Why did we get to this point? This is where we bring in the Trump administration. The Trump administration withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal, it's called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action or JCPOA, and I'll refer to it as "Iran nuclear deal" or "the Iran Deal," as we go forward, that had been negotiated by the Obama administration in 2015, toward the end of the Obama Administration in which the United States and Russia, China, France, and Britain, the other four permanent members of the Security Council, plus Germany, plus the EU agreed with Iran that Iran would scale back its nuclear infrastructure, which it had developed to the point where people feared that they were moving toward being able to create nuclear weapons, and that Iran would accept particularly intense international inspections and would ship out some amount of its enriched uranium. It would reduce the number of centrifuges.

Gregory Gause: I'm not a nuclear physicist, but the consensus of opinion would this would move Iran at least a year further back from a nuclear breakout capability than they had before. In exchange, international sanctions, economic sanctions on Iran, which had been adopted by the United Nations because of worries about Iran's nuclear developments were lifted, and the United States stood back and allowed those to be lifted. Some unilateral sanctions from the United States were still on, but the Iranians basically could get back on the world market. They could sell their oil without problems. They could deal internationally without problems, economically, and that's why the government of Iran was willing to take these steps, to accept these restrictions for economic reasons.

Gregory Gause: So President Trump comes in saying the Iran Nuclear Deal was the worst deal that had ever been negotiated in the history of mankind except for NAFTA and the Paris Climate Deal and three or four other things, but he was surrounded, at the beginning of his administration, by, shall we say, more conventional foreign policy advisors, including General Mattis at the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Defense our Defense Department. Sorry, internationally we call these things ministries, usually, but in America it's the Department of Defense, and Rex Tillerson at State, and General McMaster, his National Security Advisor. So the president kind of said, "I hate the Iran Deal, I hate the Iran Deal," but he kept certifying it every six months that Iran was in compliance with it, which it was. But as the adults left the room, the president basically said, "That's it," and in

2018 he withdrew the United States from the Iran Nuclear Deal. I think it was 2018, I'm forgetting my dates, maybe. It was probably within the last 16 months or so.

Gregory Gause: The Europeans said, "Oh my God. We want the Iranians to stay in the deal and we're going to try to maintain the economic advantages that Iran got from maintaining the deal," and the Iranians said, "Okay, we'll try." But the United States applied a policy of what the Trump administration called maximum pressure on Iran. And that maximum pressure policy was extremely successful. Foreign business entities were unwilling to do business with Iran, unwilling to buy Iranian oil, for fear that, by doing so, they would be closed off from the American market and the American financial system completely, so this really was choking off Iran's ability to export oil, so here's where the Trump administration, I think, made its biggest mistake. The administration assumed, in an act of what I call analytical malpractice, that the Iranians only had two options. That they could either surrender and come to the table and negotiate a different kind of nuclear deal that might also restrict Iranian political activities in the Middle East and the like, or that the regime would collapse and would have revolution and regime change in Iran.

Gregory Gause: What they didn't take into account sufficiently, it seems, is that Iran had plenty of ways to hurt the United States and to hurt US allies in the region, so for the last, I'd say, four months, we've seen the Iranians escalate their efforts to hit American interests in a way that would draw in international attention and perhaps lead to some new negotiations. You saw the Iranians damage oil tankers just outside the Strait of Hormuz with mines. You saw the Iranians down an American drone that was flying in what the United States says was international waters in the Persian Gulf. You saw the Iranians impound a British oil tanker, and then finally, as none of these things led to any kind of change in the political situation, you saw this extreme escalation to hitting the Saudi oil facility in Abqaiq. If we're the Iranians, we're, on the scale of one to ten of pushing the US and trying to provoke something, if there were at a three or a four before, now they're at an eleven. I think that's how serious the attack on Abqaiq was.

Gregory Gause: It was this sequence of events that led us to this point. The question is: what's to be done? If this kind of attack had happened on this centrally important oil facility any time in recent decades, I think that you would have seen a huge upheaval in the world oil market. I think you would have seen oil prices doubling. If this had happened even just six years ago when all prices were over \$100 a barrel, the damage was about five million barrels of Saudi production, I think you would have seen oil prices at \$200 a barrel. That's a huge world economic crisis. Well, the world oil market's different. Fracking in the US, increased production in other parts of the world, limitations on demand because of trade wars and economic uncertainty. Oil prices went up \$10 a barrel, and now they're falling back down, so it's not as serious.

Gregory Gause: A lot of Americans say, number one, we don't want to fight any more wars in the Middle East. We don't want to provoke the Iranians anymore. Number two, the Saudis are horrible and they probably deserve it, and number three, we've got plenty of oil, so who cares? My problem with this is that the whole reason the United States has at least said it's been in the Persian Gulf since World War II, and, in an increased way, since the 1970s, is to protect the production and flow of oil, and this is the most serious threat to that. If we basically just say who cares, I think a lot of international players are going to look at the United States and wonder what good is an American promise down the road? I think it will embolden the Iranians in the future, maybe not immediately, but in the future, if they have problems with the Saudis or anybody else, to say "You know, if you keep doing this thing we don't like, we're going to hit your oil facilities, and guess what? The Americans won't do a thing." So I worry about the consequences down the road.

Gregory Gause: I think we have to respond strongly, if not directly militarily, certainly indirectly, cyber, covert methods to tell the Iranians, to impose some pain on the Iranians, or at least the Iranian military that did this, but at the same time, we have to sit down with the Iranians and say, "We've got to move away from these sanctions." We've got to get back to something like the nuclear deal, and the Trump administration has done exactly the opposite of these things, at least as far as we know, they haven't taken any actions to punish the Iranian military for doing this, and they say they're going to strengthen the sanctions even more, which basically means the Iranians are going to come back and hit something else. That wasn't short, but that was my take.

Justin Bullock: He is a professor, so it's fair.

Gregory Gause: It was a hot take. It wasn't a short take.

Justin Bullock: My takeaway from that was I thought we were cocked and loaded.

Gregory Gause: That's because you pay attention to what the president of the United States said. We were. We were 10 minutes away, apparently, from military strikes on Iran after the shooting down of the drone in June, and then the president said, "No, I don't want to do it." The New York Times, actually, this past Sunday, ran a very interesting kind of tick tock on how that decision got made, and it basically said that all of the president's aides were flabbergasted when the president backed away. Maybe that was a good thing, maybe that was a bad thing, but you're a professor of public administration. There wasn't much process in that decision.

Justin Bullock: Yeah. Just looking at the administration from an administration perspective-

Gregory Gause: An administrative perspective.

Justin Bullock: From an administrator's perspective, is troubling. I try not to do it way too often.

Gregory Gause: It's my job to think about these things, and I think about them way too much, way too often. You're a typical American.

Justin Bullock: Oh, I'm a typical American. All right.

Gregory Gause: Do you think there should be some kind of military action against Iran, given the circumstances, or is that just running too much of a risk of getting us involved in another Middle East war?

Justin Bullock: Yeah. That's tough. I sort of grew up in a pretty anti-war era, and so I-

Gregory Gause: Dude, I grew up during Vietnam.

Justin Bullock: Yeah, that's true. I guess maybe anti-violence era, at least in some ways, too. Yeah, I've stayed really torn on it. I would have a hard time authorizing military action. What I would be certainly in favor of is using similar types of economic warfare and [inaudible 00:34:36] or cyber warfare.

Gregory Gause: Economic warfare is what got us to this point, though.

Justin Bullock: Well, I meant like disrupting internal resources in the same way. What does Iran export? I guess not much.

Gregory Gause: Pistachios, carpets, and oil, and natural gas.

Justin Bullock: Yeah, I think I would be for some general responses that are painful, but I tend to not be in favor of strong military responses. But targeted responses, and the way we can do that with drones, I'm certainly open to [inaudible 00:35:15], which seem to be significantly targeted in their abilities.

Gregory Gause: Well, the Iranians certainly could target them. They were very precise in the way they hit these Saudi oil facilities, remarkably. After the Saudis had spent hundreds of millions of dollars, billions of dollars, on American weapons, some of which were supposed to protect these oil facilities against missile attacks. Turns out that they can perhaps protect against ballistic missiles that go up and come down, but not the low-flying ones. The drones, the cruise missiles that fly low to the ground.

Justin Bullock: I hear a remnant in your argument of this, of something of yours that I read last night, actually, we were talking about it. For those of you who don't know, Professor Gause, it's Survival?

- Gregory Gause: Yes, there's a journal called Survival, it's put out by the Internal Institute for Strategic Studies, and I, yes, I, yours truly, have the lead article-
- Justin Bullock: It's the lead article too.
- Gregory Gause: It's the lead article in the edition that's just coming out, the October/November edition, entitled "Should We Stay or Should We Go?"
- Justin Bullock: I thought I was going to get to say it, but I guess as the author you get to say it. I was really excited.
- Gregory Gause: "Should We Stay or Should We Go?: The United States in the Middle East," and it is an obvious reference to the Clash's iconic early 1980s song, "Should I Stay or Should I Go?"
- Justin Bullock: I won't sing.
- Gregory Gause: The Clash very famously sang, "If we go there will be trouble, if we stay there will be double." That kind of captured, I'm not sure the ratio, but leaving the Middle East there will be trouble, staying in the Middle East there will be trouble. It's just a matter of picking which is least worst.
- Justin Bullock: One of the arguments you made that I, you were talking about whether we were actually downsizing or not downsizing, and it depends on what your relative point is. Certainly it's down from early 2000s, but there's still a significant presence over and above 2003, I think. Are we actually downsizing, what's our role, with all the perceptions of the world leaders, and of our own government, of withdrawing, we're still as involved there as we were in the early 2000s. One thing you said earlier that made me think about it is what is, then we'll get [inaudible 00:37:42] to brand strategy with some of our friends at our next recording, but what's the approach? Given all of the strategic opportunities in the world and our own domestic ones, what's the real strategic approach to dealing with that?
- Gregory Gause: Strategy is making choices about how to deploy your limited resources, whether it's in foreign and military policy or getting the budget for your municipality. That's what strategy is, it's how you deploy your resources and for what ends. The article that I wrote tried to ask what would it mean to draw down on the Middle East, and I said, well, what's your reference point? If your reference point is when the United States had invaded Iraq in 2003, and we were occupying Iraq and we had well over 100,000 troops in Iraq, well yeah, we've drawn down from the Middle East. If your reference point was, say, 2000, we have a heck of a lot more troops in the Middle East now than we did in 2000. Both President Obama and President Trump ran saying they didn't want to get involved in Middle East wars. When President Obama left office there were almost 60,000 troops in the Middle East.

Justin Bullock: I think your comment was the dovish candidate won one.

Gregory Gause: The dovish candidate has won every election since 2008. Obama, Obama, and Trump more dovish than Hillary Clinton, I would argue, on the Middle East. Obama and Trump both said we've got to withdraw, we've got to draw down. For the Obama administration, we've got to pivot to Asia. For the Trump administration, if you look at their national security documents, they basically say we have to focus on Great Power competition, which basically means Russia and China. That's not the Middle East, and yet President Obama left office with 60,000 American troops in the Middle East, and President Trump, who said he was going to draw down the Middle East, has about 60,000 American troops in the Middle East right now and increasing them as a result of this attack on the Saudi oil facilities.

Justin Bullock: Why do you think that is? Why is no one able to pull the forces down? Is there just too many other stakeholders and forces moving it in a different direction? Why have US presidents been unable to draw down?

Gregory Gause: To some extent, it's because 9/11. There's this fear that, if we leave, and another 9/11 happens, that president will be directly blamed. I think partially it's, for decades the Middle East has been declared by American policymakers as absolutely strategic, and the Middle East has been exceedingly unstable since the 2000s, partially because of our own actions, like invading Iraq, like this severe economic pressure on Iran, that leads Iran to strike at Saudi oil facilities, and partially because of things we had nothing to do with, like the Arab Spring. I think the combination of the 9/11 hangover and this severe instability in an area that almost all American policymakers for decades have said is really important is the reason, but you have to ask yourself, how important is it? That's the debate we need to have. How important are these oil resources? Does fracking and changes in the world energy market basically mean who cares? That might be one of the lessons of these attacks that most Americans take. You can hit the most important oil facility in the world and it really doesn't make that much different.

Justin Bullock: Yeah, but it's not in their daily lives.

Gregory Gause: Right.

Justin Bullock: I want to move on to one more thing for this summer.

Gregory Gause: Oh yes, I want to ask you about this.

Justin Bullock: All right.

Gregory Gause: We tend to have short memories in short news cycles, but you were in Taiwan teaching for most of the summer, so you got a much closer view of the demonstrations in Hong Kong against the central government of the People's

Republic of China, after it [inaudible 00:42:28] citizens of Hong Kong to try to resist efforts by the People's Republic to try to impose, perhaps, greater limitations on the freedoms that Hong Kongers had had in the negotiated deal that brought Hong Kong back into the People's Republic of China. So what's your hot take on China and Hong Kong?

Justin Bullock: Yeah, maybe I'll enter it by way of story, which is, as I was mentioning earlier, I had some Taiwanese millennial friends, and one of the individuals that we spent some time with was a Hong Konger millennial, who had moved to Taiwan for college and had decided to stay and work and was working for the university. It was interesting, because we were connected on social media, and she was looking at social media apps that are different than the ones that we have in the US. In general we do Facebook, Instagram, Snap, these kind, and in China and in Taiwan and in Hong Kong they use some of those, they use some different ones, but some of those, they are censored. The social media platforms are essentially censored as you go.

Gregory Gause: Facebook, right? Censored in the People's Republic.

Justin Bullock: Even the one, I believe it's WeChat, where you send messages out and communicate, there are words that are censored live from that social media. Stories about Hong Kong would come out, they were kind of censored, and then pro-mainland China articles were put out in place of them. It was this bizarre thing, because as an American, you hear about censorship, but in general, it's not something that I experience. We're sitting here, allowed to say whatever we want about our world leaders-

Gregory Gause: About the president of the United States.

Justin Bullock: About the president. We have free information in general. What was interesting is a couple of them had social media apps that had, they overlapped with their mainland Chinese friends, because they have mainland Chinese friends, and the strings of information that were coming down from the social media apps from the free ones as opposed to the censored ones was like night and day.

Gregory Gause: Dramatically different.

Justin Bullock: Even within, when things were being censored, the use of deliberate, fake means was everywhere. For example, one of my friends screenshotted one of the memes that was floating around in one of the social media applications, and it was of Donald Trump on Twitter saying that the mainland Chinese government was gathering forces, they were about to attack, they were encouraging citizens to go to their homes, and they were sitting there like, is this real? It looks like a screenshot of Twitter, so I had to Google around for a few minutes, go to Twitter and look, and it was fake. It was deliberate attempts to stoke fear and anxiety in the people that were doing the protesting.

- Gregory Gause: And end the protest, go to your house.
- Justin Bullock: Exactly. So because of those conversations I was paying more attention where I was staying than I probably would have. My wife and I, we were in Hong Kong the weekend before they started. They've been going now for 16 weeks. At different points, they've been more or less organized, they've been more or less peaceful, and then there have been several strategies from just being in the streets with umbrellas, to sit-ins at the airport, to disruptions of their city hall equivalent. What's been interesting about it is, one, there's no leaders, really. They have Joshua Wong and a few others that have been parts of it, but they're actually using free internet, social media-type applications to organize in Reddit style, where they vote up and vote down things.
- Justin Bullock: There's aspects of how it's playing out on the ground of the protest in what is really clearly an information war that's being had. The war isn't even being had on the streets, really.
- Gregory Gause: No, it's an information war.
- Justin Bullock: It's an information war. We watch it play out in our own social media. It's not censored, but there are memes that are up-boosted by people with agendas, but to watch these millennials that I had become friends with, for example, Taiwan has not been a democracy for that long, so they watch this play out and they're worried about their relationship with mainland China. It actually had spillover effects where the conflict there, the Trump administration also sold some arms to Taiwan as part of this kind of tension that's going on, and China actually restricted Chinese individual visas to go to Taiwan just to visit. Here it's another tool, one, of just control of information, but just showing heightened tensions in there.
- Justin Bullock: Anyways, it was tragic. It was tragic to watch these people who had the same technological savvy that I do, they're in my generation, and they're on social media fighting an information war from all over.
- Gregory Gause: What was your sense of opinion in Taiwan? Was it overwhelmingly supportive of the protestors? Was it cautious because they have their own relations with the PRC?
- Justin Bullock: My read of it, now, my whole world was a [inaudible 00:48:30] part of Taipei, which is a college town area. I was hosted by a university, I was doing research on some of the artificial intelligence stuff, so my world was a subsection of Taipei and of Taiwan.
- Justin Bullock: A couple things. You see no Chinese flags in Taiwan. Zero. You see them everywhere in Hong Kong. So the first kind of just observation is that there's no flags of China.

- Gregory Gause: Well, but there wouldn't be. Taiwan is not part of the People's Republic of China. It's the Republic of China. It's its own-
- Justin Bullock: It's its own thing.
- Gregory Gause: It's its own thing.
- Justin Bullock: Which isn't always, I don't know if that's always entirely clear to everyone. Some of my conversations from being there, people are like, "Well, how do the Taiwanese people view themselves?" Historically they're Chinese, but the overwhelming majority of people and everyone that I interacted with were, "We're our independent state, we're Taiwanese. This is our-"
- Gregory Gause: Right, but the Taiwanese government will not assert that because that could be casus belli with the People's Republic of China. There's this great fiction that there's one China. There's one China, it includes Taiwan. For decades, the government of the Republic of China in Taiwan said, "We're the government of all of China," even though they only controlled Taiwan. And the United States recognized that. Back in the '70s, the United States changed and recognized the Beijing government, but the way this kind of uncomfortable situation of a part of China being governed by a government that wasn't the Beijing government, the way that was finessed diplomatically is everybody said, "Oh yeah, there's one China," and the trip wire was going to be when the Taiwanese finally said, "No, there's not one China. We are an independent country." Overwhelmingly you feel that people in Taiwan want that, we're an independent country, but the government holds off because of the diplomatic consequences.
- Justin Bullock: Exactly, and there's some active polling data the institution I was associated with and others are doing to get the exact pulse of how many people think of themselves as Taiwanese, Chinese, or both. It had a couple of effects, from what I could observe. One, I think it heightened everyone's anxiety. Everyone that I was interacting with was captured by the Hong Kong protests in one way or another, like following along, and waiting to see what that might signal about how China would treat them.
- Gregory Gause: If you eventually got to a one government, two systems, like supposedly you had in Hong Kong, between Taiwan and China, the Hong Kong example might be an indicator of how China would treat them.
- Justin Bullock: The other thing that happened while I was there is they ran military raids, press raids.
- Gregory Gause: They being?
- Justin Bullock: The Taiwanese government.
- Gregory Gause: The Taiwanese government.
- Episode 2
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- Justin Bullock: It was only once, but you had to vacate the streets, go into your home, and they landed a couple planes-
- Gregory Gause: On the streets?
- Justin Bullock: On the streets, to practice dealing with a Chinese invasion.
- Gregory Gause: Wow.
- Justin Bullock: Some percentage of the elite, some percentage of folks really think they're under some type of potential threat from invasion as a potential choice. They look at Hong Kong and worry about the longer term, their relationship with China, and how China might decide to interact if they want to keep their own two systems.
- Justin Bullock: Internally, there's two main parties, the KMT and the DPP, and the KMT was the historical party.
- Gregory Gause: Chiang Kai Shek's party.
- Justin Bullock: Yep.
- Gregory Gause: Kuomintang.
- Justin Bullock: The DPP is the other party. In general, the way it's kind of been related to me, DPP is, in general, for weaker ties with China, and KMT is in favor of stronger ties with China. One thing that study election stuff that I was talking to suggested is they had an election coming up, I believe it's in January, and it's kind of contentious-
- Gregory Gause: Presidential system or parliamentary system?
- Justin Bullock: I believe it's presidential. I don't remember for sure. They had kind of a populist style candidate and it's supposed to be kind of close, and so they are, it's supposed to be a tight election, but some of the internal discussion was that, because of China's actions in Hong Kong, that it might favor the DPP, the group that wanted weaker ties with China, out of kind of watching how they treat Hong Kong.
- Gregory Gause: So we're coming up to the endurance of our listeners.
- Justin Bullock: I think we're way past that, probably.
- Gregory Gause: What should the United States do about this, if anything? Sometimes the best thing is to do nothing. That's something that most people in Washington

wouldn't believe, but sometimes on foreign policy the best thing is to do nothing.

Justin Bullock: My take is that the Chinese system is different than the Taiwanese system. It's different than the Japanese system. It's different than the South Korea system. I was in all three of those places. Their societies, my take was, built around freedom and democracy and capitalism, and in some really significant ways, similar to the US.

Gregory Gause: Taiwan?

Justin Bullock: Taiwan, and South Korea and Japan. China's seems to be different to me, from a democracy standpoint.

Gregory Gause: That's for sure.

Justin Bullock: From a freedom of speech standpoint. I think we should find ways to support them.

Gregory Gause: Support who?

Justin Bullock: Support Taiwan and continue to support the other allies in the region, like South Korea, like Japan, and be strong allies with them as part of kind of containing China. But I wasn't expecting to have to give an actual position. I'm supposed to be able to say, "Think about these things, they're really hard."

Gregory Gause: They are hard.

Justin Bullock: But in terms of allies in the world that have wealth and power and freedom-loving societies, those are some of the most stable, reliable partners, so I'm glad that the Trump administration is selling them arms and supporting their independence.

Gregory Gause: Well, we have gone probably a little longer than we should have because somebody had to talk about Iran and the Middle East at great length.

Justin Bullock: And then somebody else had to try to share their whole summer experience.

Gregory Gause: Their whole summer experience in one podcast.

Justin Bullock: Which seems unfair.

Gregory Gause: But I think that we'll be back to our normal format with a podcast on US grand strategy, which will pick up some of the issues we're talking about vis a vis China, vis a vis the Middle East, with two of our colleagues. Our new colleague General Kimberly Field, who's the executive director of the Albritton Center for

Grand Strategy and Professor John Schuessler, who is the co-academic director of the center. So that'll be-

Justin Bullock: We are doing that on October 8th.

Gregory Gause: October 8th.

Justin Bullock: It'll be here at Downtown Bryant in historic-

Gregory Gause: In historic Downtown Bryant at-

Justin Bullock: We've been talking too much. I can't even remember the names.

Gregory Gause: Downtown Uncorked here in historic downtown Bryant.

Justin Bullock: One of these days.

Gregory Gause: So tune in then. We'll be better disciplined and we'll get questions from those who attend, which we unfortunately didn't have time for today.

Justin Bullock: But please join us for our next live recording. October 8th at 6:00 PM. We will be at Downtown Uncorked, and thank you for listening.

Justin Bullock: (Music).