

Marshall here. Welcome back to The Re-alignment.

Quick note before we jump into today's episode,

this Friday, Sagar and I are releasing the next edition of our Supercast,

Q&A slash Ask Me Anything, discuss an episode for subscribers to The Re-alignment's Supercast.

If you'd like to access the full episode, submit any questions or comments you have,

and of course, support the show, go to realignment.supercast.com or click the link at the top of the show notes in your podcast player.

We publish those episodes every other Friday.

On to today's episode, my guest is Evan Thomas, one of my favorite historians.

Evan and I are discussing his new book, *Road to Surrender, Three Men and the Countdown to the End of World War II*.

The book is about the decision to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki,

but our conversation hits on themes and ideas that are deeply relevant to today,

especially at a time when Putin has invoked the nuclear threat in Europe,

China expands its nuclear arsenal, previous arms treaties expire,

and other powers are interested in building their own nuclear arsenals given all of this context.

We hit a couple of different topics within that as well too,

how the US can successfully balance realism and idealism in foreign policy,

how nuclear brinksmanship could play out in a conflict over Taiwan,

and we speak to Evan's broader work on the post-war order that came about after Japan's surrender and how the end of that order today is playing out.

Lots of great stuff here, pretty high stakes conversations-wise given the nuclear topic,

but I think it's deeply important and there's plenty to think about.

Hope you all enjoyed this episode and of course a huge thank you to the Foundation for American Innovation for supporting our work.

Evan Thomas, welcome to the realignment.

Glad to be here.

Yeah, I'm glad to chat with you.

So the timing of the book is pretty obvious in terms of relevance to folks.

You've got the Oppenheimer movie coming out,

Putin is rattling the nuclear saber, China's expanding its nuclear arsenal.

Could you just contextualize your thoughts on what nuclear weapons mean to our present moment?

Well, they should mean more.

I grew up in the 50s, so I was scared of nuclear weapons.

And then it miraculously went away when along about 1990 and the Cold War ended, we really thought we're past that.

We're not going to have to worry about it.

But unfortunately, this is the real world, these terrible things come back and they are coming back.

Is it going to be the same as the Russia US standoff?

I don't think so, but it's could be worse in a weird way because so many countries have them.

We have to worry not just about Russia, but about China and you know,

Pakistan have them, the Israelis have one, Iran is building one.

So they're all over the place and we are getting closer to flash points.

And you know, Taiwan certainly could be one, Ukraine could be one.

You got Putin, you know, he likes to rattle at nuclear saber.

Is he for real?

Damn, if I know, but he's making a lot of ugly noises.

And unfortunately, we have to take it, we have to take it seriously.

So there's a there's a lot of, we're entering a murky, but real moment of nuclear apparel.

You've got a great quote about Henry Stimson at the start of the book that I'm going to steal for basically the rest of this podcast,

which is the argument that at its best, American foreign policy balances idealism and realism together.

If you do these two separate, they lead to disaster or they lead to ineffectiveness.

Could you contextualize that quote in the context of the nuclear?

Let's just say fear you just really introduced to listeners.

Yeah, I mean, Henry Stimson, or somebody most of your listeners have never heard of was the Secretary of War 1945,

but he had been Secretary of State, Secretary of War once before, and he is sort of the godfather of the East Coast established.

Walter Isaacson and I wrote a book called The Wise Men about 30 years ago.

He's the kind of potterfamilus of of of Council on Foreign Relations, all those people, basically liberal internationalists who were liberal, but liberal who also believed in power.

And their basic philosophy, which they articulated not well, I think really, was that yes, America is exceptional.

We do believe in democracy. We do believe in human rights. We do believe in freedom.

We're not colonialists. We're not imperialists. We're not just great playing the great power game.

On the other hand, if you really want to be the exceptional country and and spread democracy and freedom,

you have to be willing to use power. It ain't just going to happen naturally.

You have real enemies out there and you have to be willing to use power.

And when you use it as a difficult question and it can backfire as it often did.

But the formula and it's it's, you know, I wish it was neat and tidy. It's not because, as you said, there's a tension between idealism and realism.

They don't fit neatly together. It's more comfortable for a lot of people to be real Sony and purely idealist or Kissinger, you know, purely realist.

I don't think that reflects the real world and it doesn't reflect the world of Henry Stimpson, who is a hero, actually one of the heroes of my book.

And the specific thing that he is struggling with in 1945 is that he believes in a law of moral progress that things are going to get better.

But he's got this war that will not end. The Japanese just will not surrender.

They're beaten. Their fleet has been sunk. Their armies have been defeated. We are firebombing their cities, but they will not surrender.

And so it becomes necessary, necessary for the United States to use these terrible weapons.

This is hardly an easy decision. Henry Stimpson's diary, he kept a diary every day, and he would refer to the bomb.

It's code, code name of the bomb is S1. It's called S1. It's called tube alloys, which is the British code name.

But he also called it the terrible, the awful, the diabolical. He knew what he was getting into.

And on the day that he showed Harry Truman the photographs of Hiroshima after the bomb, what it looked like, which is like the inside of an ashtray just wiped out.

He had a heart attack. Now he's 77 years old, but I don't think it was a coincidence because it's hard to balance idealism and realism because you have to do some nasty things in the defense of liberty.

Yeah, and I think you just hinted at something which is, I think, desperately interesting and I think is probably a different reality today, which is that obviously Harry Truman, as you might was responsible in the buck in the buck stops here sense for the dropping of nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki,

but it was a decision of Stimson and others to actually utilize the weapon, which is interesting to me because obviously that's a military decision.

But in the post World War II era, nuclear weapons have taken on a resonance beyond just what we're deciding between a bunker buster and a JDAM or something like that.

There's a political resonance. So can you talk about the actual decision making process to use the nuclear weapons specifically?

You know, it was chaotic and actually hard to document.

And one reason why I wrote this book, you know, I think people would like to think, well, the decision makers will get in a room and they'll have a rational discussion about whether to use this weapon or not.

It didn't really work that way. Truman, the president was brand new.

FDR had never not even told amazingly the president Roosevelt did not tell his own vice president that we were building an atom bomb.

Now, I think Truman knew about it from Senate investigations, but he barely knew about it.

And, you know, he's confronted with the reality of this thing and there's a committee put together by Stimson and others to debate it.

But it's the debate's not very good because partly because they're in denial.

They don't really want to, for instance, they don't really look hard at radiation.

They're scientists there, but they don't really want to know how terrible the radiation is going to be.

So that's really kind of missing from the discussion.

It seems pretty basic, but they don't want to know because there's bureaucratic momentum here.

The scientists want to use this thing. They built it. They want to use it.

We've spent \$2 billion building it.

How are we going to explain to the taxpayer that we didn't use this thing so they don't really discuss radiation?

In retrospect, kind of shocking and even shameful, but that's the way it happened.

The most astounding thing to me from a policymaker point of view about showing how messy all this is,

Harry Truman on the night that he gives the order to drop the atom bombs, plural.

He writes in his diary that night, July 25th, 1945,

Ivan instructed the secretary of war, Stimson, and we are in agreement that the bomb should be aimed at a,

quote, purely military target, that the target should be soldiers and sailors, not women and children. Well, come on. The aim point, the aim point of the bomb in Hiroshima was a bridge smack in the middle of the city.

Yes, there were soldiers and sailors there.

The bomb instantly killed about 70,000 people, maybe 10,000 soldiers.

The other 60,000 are by and large women and children.

So what's going on here?

I don't really know. I think Truman was partly in denial.

He just didn't want to see it. Maybe he was writing a diary for posterity.

He's been briefed that day by Stimpson and what their focus is on.

Here's a reality and realism. Ideal is a moment.

What they're focused on is they've taken the city of Kyoto off the target list.

The military guy, Groves, who runs the Manhattan Project, General Groves, he wants to bomb Kyoto.

That's a good target. Got a lot of people.

And Stimpson removes it from the target list three times.

The civilian policymaker, the Secretary of War, removes the military choice three times because it's the ancient cultural capital of Japan.

And he just doesn't want to wipe out all those temples and just seems atrocious to him.

And I think he makes himself and I think he makes President Truman feel good or feel better that they're not going to blow up Kyoto. Instead, they're going to blow up Hiroshima.

Hiroshima is a military city. They're based there.

But the bomb is not aimed at the port or the military units around the city.

It's aimed at the heart of the city. This is realism because they were afraid it would miss.

This hard-dropping bomb from 30,000 feet. And so they aimed at the center of the city.

Well, that's a hard thing to admit that you're going to kill all those women and children.

It's messy. It's chaotic. That's the real world.

And speaking of the real world, I'd like you to address the total war aspect of the dilemma you're describing here

because it seems that, you know, having done a decent amount of reading on the topic, you could look at the fire bombings of Tokyo, you could look at the bombings of Dresden in Germany with similar means in the use of this nuclear weapon.

In the case of Hiroshima, you can argue that, well, look, this is total war.

Obviously, the civilian populace in this case oftentimes is engaged in munitions productions, apparently in Japan itself. Oftentimes, factories were not actually that separate from the actual construction happening in residential areas.

So talk to that side of the issue, which is that total war is just so different than these alternate forms of warfare.

It sure is. But, you know, again, if we're teaching this in a seminar,

we can have nice definitions about total war and civilian targets and military targets.

It just didn't work that way. To go back a little bit to the beginning, so to speak, at the beginning of the war, we didn't want to bomb cities.

The Germans had bombed some cities, and the Japanese had bombed some cities in China.

The Germans had bombed Belgrade and, you know, FDR and Churchill started out by saying,

we're not going to bomb cities. But the Germans bombed London. Well, the British bombed Berlin. Moral equality, tit for tat. And the British, they, they, British sort of go all in for city bombing right away. They, because it's technically hard, we don't, the Americans believe this is so American. The Americans, with our better technology and our higher ideals, we said we're going to do precision bombing. We're going to bomb by day, German cities, German targets by day, military targets. The British, they can bomb by night, hit cities, which they did, called area bombing. And they maybe have a more of a moral right, because after all, the Germans are targeting their cities. But we're Americans, we're better than that. We're going to do precision bombing. Well, precision bombing works if it's Kansas on a clear day and there's no wind. But over Germany, where it's cloudy and windy and the Luftwaffe is shooting at you and there's flak, we missed. I mean, I don't remember the exact statistics, but something like one bomb and five landed within a mile of the target at first. And so we still called it precision bombing. We called it that it wasn't. It really was area bombing. We were basically dropping the bombs and hoping they did something. And as you mentioned Dresden, at the end of the war, the Americans did participate in a raid of Dresden that used incendiaries and turned into a firestorm and killed tens of thousands of people. Now, one of the characters I wrote it right about, one of my three heroes in the book, Tuy Spatz, is the American air commander. And he's in charge of strategic bombing. And when the firebombing of Dresden happens, he's called on it and he's very unhappy about it. He's stiff upper lip about it, but a very telling detail. Two nights later, he relieves himself by gambling by poker. He loses \$1,700 at the poker table just because he's so upset about the firebombing of Dresden. I know about this because his granddaughter showed me a letter that his assistant had to write to Spatz's wife explaining why they just blown \$1,700. This is the real world. These guys didn't want to do it, but they had to do it. They really didn't have any other choice if they were going to win the war. We can debate back and forth about steps they took, but there's a lot of moral ambiguity here. One reason I wrote this book and why this subject appeals to me, we live in an age where people don't like moral ambiguity. The internet is, I'm right, you're wrong. My group is right, your group is wrong. I'm morally superior to you. You are morally inferior to me. Well, that's great on the internet, but in the real world, the people making decisions, hard decisions about how to project power and win the war and promote democracy and save the world, they have to do muddy, messy things and they're often not even asked that they're doing it, but they still have to do it. It's so interesting in your point around not getting overly tied up in quasi-academic debates when you're actually sitting in the room is well taken and deeply important. I think the thing I would question then to follow up is, what is it that makes a nuclear weapon?

In the American slash Western understanding, because I understand the Russians specifically think of these in a different context, what is it that distinguishes a nuclear weapon from other types of munitions? Because that is an example where at a norms level, the definitions do actually matter here. We use napalm still in Vietnam, so it's not as if we look at the fire bombings of Dresden and Tokyo and we say that was a tragedy, but there's not a norm against utilizing that form of weapon, but there is a norm against the nuclear weapon, despite opportunities.

I mean, I hope there is, but I'm afraid it's actually part of just scale.

Okay.

Just to talk about scale for a second here, the Hiroshima bomb was 12 kilotons, 12,000 tons of TNT. And today's typical nuclear warhead on an ICBM, like on a submarine, is 100 times more powerful than the Hiroshima bomb.

The Hiroshima bomb today would probably be called the tactical weapon.

Now, strategic versus tactical.

Tactical for battlefield use to win a battle.

We do, unfortunately, we're making tactical weapons again and so are the Russians and so is everybody else.

This is the idea of you use it in a battlefield setting, but even a 12 kiloton weapon is going to kill a lot of people when it's full of radiation.

So the scale is, even the tactical weapons, the scale is terrible.

And my, my own view on this, my own emotional view is that these distinctions are not very helpful because even the tactical weapons are so terrible.

And once you start using, once you start go down this road, I think there's a huge risk of escalation.

In 1945, there was no huge escalate, no risk of escalation because the other side didn't have one.

We were the only people who had a bomb.

Today, anybody where we fire off a tactical nuclear weapon, they got tactical weapons and they got strategic weapons and everything in between.

And so there's a risk, a real risk of escalation that didn't exist in 1945 exists today.

What am I thinking about Taiwan?

Let's just suppose that we start a little naval engagement over Taiwan with the Chinese Navy.

And, you know, the Chinese are launching missiles at our ships from the Chinese mainland.

So we bomb the Chinese mainland.

Now that's a pretty aggressive move.

And maybe, you know, somebody in there uses a tactical nuke.

Well, we're off and running.

There is a school of academic school that says you can have limited nuclear war.

You can stop and get to a certain threshold.

There was a game theory guy named Shellen who wrote about this years ago.

And there's a whole, there's a whole academic arm that believes in limited nuclear warfare.

I don't.

I really don't believe it.

Not that I would know, but I am more in the school of Dwight Eisenhower.

I wrote a book about General Eisenhower when he was president Eisenhower called Ike's Bluff. And his view in the 1950s was that if you start these wars, you can't stop them. Klausowitz famously wrote war is politics by another means. Eisenhower said that's not the real meaning of Klausowitz. Klausowitz also wrote that wars, once they start, they're very hard to stop, particularly if they're for national survival. And Eisenhower, during his presidency, was damned if he was going to get in any war. In fact, most people don't know this. Eisenhower is the only modern president never to lose a soldier in combat. He was determined not to get into a war, including Vietnam. And because he was afraid they would escalate and go through limited to all out to bam, the whole show is over. I fear we've forgotten that. We've forgotten the limitations. There was a taboo on using nuclear weapons. They talked about it openly in Eisenhower's National Policy Councils, National Security Council. They talked about the taboo. They remembered Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I think we kind of forgotten. We're beyond that now. People sort of forget. I wish they wouldn't. One reason why I wrote this book is because we need to remember how terrible these weapons are. So I worry about this. People are going to forget. You know, I think you're really giving the you're speaking to the realism side of the values dynamic. I think that the idealist not counter because once again, it's a balancing act, but I think the question becomes what's the limit on fear of nuclear weapons in the sense that obviously Putin rattled the saber when it came to Crimea. But at a certain point, it seems as if we're creating a situation where the obvious move from the Chinese perspective would before they launch an invasion or reclamation of Taiwan and they're telling they just say, hey, listen, this is a. This is a question of national survival. This is our territorial integrity. Tactical nuclear weapons could be could be in play. How do we balance the deterrence while also recognizing the real threat that you're describing here. I wish I had a good answer to that question because I've thought a lot about this and I'm torn by it. Part of me, this is going to sound terrible, but part of me is that take Taiwan, you can have it. It's not worth us getting into a nuclear war that's going to get me and my family killed because I have a fear that if you start fighting, it's going to escalate and end up there. I just read a book last week called 2034. Admiral Stavridis and Elliot Ackerman a fiction novel about a coming war with China, which of

course goes nuclear.

Now they do stop it, but after Shanghai has been destroyed in Galveston and San Diego.

And you know, that's not part of the scenario, which I fear is that the Chinese will just turn our lights off.

You want to say, you know, we want to talk about realism.

How about chaos?

How about turning off America's power grid?

How many days you think the United States would last before complete disorder seizes us?

I've been reading a little bit book by Robert Kaplan about the tragic mind.

He writes about how the ancients feared above all things disorder, disorder, dystopia, Dionysius.

And you start messing aside and leaving side nuclear now, but use cyber wars to turn off our lights.

We're going to have disorder on a scale that modern people can't even imagine.

And I fear that.

So it makes me kind of a coward about Taiwan.

On the other hand, who think we have to have a deterrent effect?

I think we have to have a strong Navy out there.

I think we have to make it hard the Chinese to walk over us.

We have allies out there.

You know, Japan doesn't want us to disappear.

I guess who goes nuclear in that example.

And this is where it gets complicated.

The and this is why it's a fascinating to your point about complication, because on the one hand, you could have the position that it's best not to risk nuclear conflict that forgive Taiwan.

But another factor needs to be kept in mind is, OK, does South Korea go nuclear in that context?

Does Japan go nuclear in that context?

If there's a war where you incentivize proliferation by de-escalating.

So it's so difficult to think about.

Yeah, and people I really respect are on the opposite side from me.

There's a book by a guy named Elbridge Colby, which is basically an argument for really ramping up so that we the Chinese don't even think about it.

Or if they do, we hit them right away.

We don't let we don't let China get a foothold on Taiwan.

This is an extremely well reasoned argument by a brilliant scholar.

He goes through the history of warfare.

He makes a very compelling case for defending Taiwan and it's related to our, you know, don't let Taiwan make Asia, you know, a lake for their own.

How about our allies?

How about free trade?

How about democracy?

We need to have, you know, vigorous, robust defense so we don't let that happen.

Bridge is a very persuasive writer and he knows his history.

And I blurb that book because I thought it was a brilliant argument.

But another side of me wants to run.

Let him have it because I am scared of nuclear war.

This is an emotional response.

It's not a policy makers response.

But I just think these are incredibly hard questions to work through.

And you've written about this period.

So you're the perfect person to ask in the non hypothetical.

How would you feel about Berlin in 1961?

In the sense that to a certain degree, you could argue that Berlin then is the Taiwan of today less of like an economic, you know, there's not the economic semiconductor debate.

But obviously you have a small, I could imagine us, let's put aside, you know, race, race and background and everything.

Having this conversation in 1961 and saying, look, at the end of the day, I'm not going to give up Austin, Texas where I am for Berlin.

So how would you think about a that situation then?

Well, two things come to mind there in 1961, when President Kennedy was trying to figure out this very question, what do I do?

About, you know, when, if the tank starts shooting at each other, when do I go nuclear?

And so he brings in a Mac Bundy, his national security advisor, with George Bundy, brings in Dean Atchison, my godfather, you know, the great Cold War Secretary of State is retired, but active.

And he brings him into the Oval Office and to get, basically, to get Atchison to give Kennedy a dose of stiff blood to make him stand up to the Russians.

He'd stand up.

But what Atchison says to President Kennedy is, well, you know, if I were you, I would think about this question, when am I going to go nuclear?

When am I going to use nuclear weapons?

I'd think about it really hard, and then I would tell no one.

In other words, don't telegraph what you're going to do.

You know, only you can really know.

Don't, don't be talking about it too openly, because you don't want to give it away.

You don't want to, you don't really want to say when you're going to use these weapons.

Think about the pressure on a President of the United States, who tells no one.

Eisenhower never told his closest people whether he would use nuclear weapons or not.

Why?

Because he didn't want to give it away, because that's the deterrence is, is to have some mystery about all this.

Now, Eisenhower, to answer your question about Berlin.

The Berlin crisis comes up in 1959, before 1961, when Khrushchev says, I give you six months, and then we're taking Berlin.

It's an ultimatum.

So what, so Eisenhower's advisors, they want to rush troops into Berlin, and they want to build up forces.

And Eisenhower says, no, no, we're not going to build up conventional forces.

It's not going to be some nice little war.

If it comes to that, we're pushing all our chips in, nuclear chips, all or nothing. Eisenhower actually cut the number of conventional troops going to Berlin. He wanted to make it clear it was all or nothing. It was the ultimate bluff to the Russians. If you come in, nuclear war. And that bluff worked. Khrushchev backed down. And Khrushchev basically. Why do you say bluff? So it was so he wouldn't have done it. Is what you're saying? Yes. I, but I don't know that because Eisenhower never said, but I, yeah. Oh, that's the point. Yeah. I'm pretty sure it was a bluff. I mean, and people, a general good pastor, you know, who's his military aid, he thought it was a bluff. So I think as we're nearing the end of the episode, I should just ask the obvious question that I think folks are probably wondering. End of the day, like, was it the right call to use nuclear weapons? We could separate the first and this is, I think, and you write about this clearly. There's a difference between the first nuclear weapon and the second nuclear weapon and the third nuclear weapon. So starting with the first, what do you think of the decision? We had to do it because the Japanese would not surrender. There's a whole revision in school that says, Hey, no, didn't need to do it. We could have let them keep their emperor and they were to surrender. No, I spent a lot of time looking into this on the Japanese side. One of the heroes of my book, Togo, is the Japanese foreign minister. I was diary. No, the Japanese were not going to surrender. And here's the proof. On August 9th, after we have dropped the Hiroshima bomb, the Supreme War Council of Japan is meeting. They get the word that we have just dropped a second Hiroshima style bomb on Nagasaki. And so what does the war minister, the most powerful guy say, wouldn't it be beautiful if all of Japan died like a flower? If Japan became a shattered jewel, they were, he said, let them drop 100 bombs. They were completely nihilistic about it. Finally, the emperor and my guy Togo is they maneuver around and take some five days. There's a coup attempt. I mean, it's really a close thing. We almost use a third one.

Harry Truman, most people don't know this.

Harry Truman told the British ambassador on August 14th.

Yes, I'm going to have to use a third bomb against Tokyo.

Four hours later, he heard that the Japanese would find the surrender.

So we were, by the August 20th, we were going to have a third bomb that we were going to drop on Tokyo.

It took that much to get the Japanese to surrender.

It was a very close thing.

What do you think about the debate over unconditional surrender and whether that was a mistake or not?

So obviously, the German version of that question is the Japanese version.

What do you think about the concept of unconditional surrender as a demand?

I think it's just a word.

It sounds good, but we didn't really mean it because we didn't actually, we said unconditional surrender,

but we let them keep their emperor now.

We let them keep their emperor under our control, but it's term.

We gave them a little bit of leeway.

There was a little tiny negotiation.

It really actually was not unconditional surrender.

That's a good word.

It conveys a kind of all or nothing thing, but at the end of the day, diplomacy necessarily creeps in there.

And the Cuban Missile Crisis, you know, Kennedy stood strong against the Russians, but he was negotiating behind the scenes with the Russian ambassador.

Yeah, it's just, I'm better informed on the German example of unconditional surrender, just like the counterargument that it created an incentive process for the Nazis essentially to fight until the very end.

So I'm curious how you think those, but you don't think in the Japanese example, the nuances are particularly as important.

I think they're important.

I mean, look, we use that word.

We, Truman said we, you know, we use it with Germany.

We're going to deal with Japan.

It's an important word.

The country wanted it.

They remember the Civil War.

But at the end of the day, we made, we fiddled with it a little bit.

So it really actually wasn't unconditional.

So, you know, unconditional, but unconditional asterisk.

Less of a compelling phrasing phrasing there.

Okay.

So another big question then comes from this is how do you think about just taking a step back and

looking at your, your, your vast writings on history?
How do you think about what makes a country surrender?
You see this debate mattering in the sense of obviously the nuclear weapons and how far do you go?
You see this in the case of the Russians, assuming the Ukrainians would give up after four days.
Just do you have like a grand theory?
And there's probably not a grand theory, but how do you think about the question?
I don't have, I don't have a good, I was mentioning President Eisenhower earlier because he's had real experience with us.
The Allied commander invaded Europe.
He was the one who had to make the Germans surrender.
So he had experience with us.
His experience was that people will fight to the death if their own country is invaded and threatened.
You know, getting them to surrender is really hard.
And so, and that was Eisenhower's view was that wars are easy to start and hard to stop.
So don't start them.
That's, that's my view.
You know, I have a kind of a dark view of human nature.
Maybe it's a glorious view in the sense that people gloriously fight to the end.
But I, you know, you look at Ukraine as heroic, but they're not going to want to give up.
They're going to, they're going to fight to the bloody end.
And unfortunately, Putin's survival depends on him fighting.
I hope there's a broker piece.
I hope the Chinese come in and lean on Russia.
We lean in the Europe.
It leads a little bit on Zolensky and they get a messy muddy, you know, Russia keeps to Crimea.
A little bit strip of just to end this damn thing.
But this ugly, I don't think that's a pretty thing.
I think it's an ugly thing, but it's better than a situation that leads up to the use of tactical nuclear weapons.
So here's the final question.
I'm not asking you this as a, I'm not asking this question in a policy sense.
I'm asking this in your historian sense.
It's still early, but you know, I've got a copy of the wise men back here.
So kind of, and that's obviously like a history of this early post-World War II period.
Constructing the war order that came after.
We're in a period where the conventional wisdom is that that war order is coming to an end on a couple of different levels.
Strategically, economically, politically, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.
How do you interpret just like the past few years?
If you were to write like the wise men of like 2015 to 2023 or 2008 to 2023, because the financial crisis would be a good place to start.
Or maybe with 9 11 end of the Cold War.
I guess who that's that's the real question.

Like how would you interpret this current moment?

Well, like everybody, I'm anxious about it.

I like the old order.

It worked.

The post-war order lifted all boats.

You know, Steven Picker has written about this.

Global prosperity, freedom, because of these U.S. imposed pox Americana, despite Vietnam, despite all sorts of problems, the whole world got better.

Not perfect.

And now we are regressing some.

There's more autocracy coming back, but things got much better.

So I like that order.

I like free trade.

I think it raises all boats.

I like the spread of freedom for all that.

Now, it can't go on forever.

It's going to have to be nipped and tucked.

But the basic idea I'm for, I don't want to retreat to a world of different spheres that are at war with each other or hostile to each other.

I want to talk to the Russians.

I want to talk to even if they're awful, I want to talk to the Chinese is Churchill said, jaw, jaw is better than war war.

I want to keep those lines open because the alternative is something darker.

Yeah.

And I think that's a good place to end.

I think you just spoke of the complicated dynamics because the, you know, a world where autocratic powers could threaten these nuclear weapons to secure their own spheres is also a world where we're likely not talking with each other either.

So really sums up the balancing act here and the not quite simple answers thing.

And it's up to statesmen, stateswomen politicians to figure out some way forward as the folks in the book did.

Evan, this has been so great.

Thank you for joining me on the real.

Thanks.

I really enjoyed talking to you.

Hope you enjoyed this episode.

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See you all next time.