

[Transcript] Lex Fridman Podcast / #399 - Jared Kushner: Israel, Palestine, Hamas, Gaza, Iran, and the Middle East

The following is a conversation with Jared Kushner, former senior advisor to the president during the Donald Trump administration, and author of *Breaking History*, a White House memoir. He's one of the most influential and effective presidential advisors in modern history, helping conduct negotiations with some of the most powerful leaders in the world and deliver results on trade, criminal justice reform, and historic progress towards peace in the Middle East. On Thursday, October 5th, we recorded a conversation on topics of war and peace, history and power in the Middle East and beyond. This was about a day and a half before the Hamas attack on Israel, and then we felt we must sit down again on Monday, October 9th and add a discussion on the current situation. We opened the podcast with the second newly recorded part. My heart goes out to everyone who has and is suffering in this war. I pray for your strength and for the long-term peace and flourishing of the Israeli and Palestinian people. I love you all. And now, a quick few second mention of each sponsor. Check them out in the description. It's the best way to support this podcast. We've got Inside Tracker for biological data, BetterHelp for mental health, Aidsleep for naps, and AG1 for health. She's wise with my friends. And now, onto the full ad reads. As always, no ads in the middle. I try to make this interesting, but if you must skip them, please still check out our sponsors. I enjoy their stuff. Maybe you will too. This show is brought to you by Inside Tracker, a service I use to track biological data that comes from my body and gives me lifestyle advice based on the very data that came from my body. It's hard to do these ad reads if I'm being honest as I'm thinking about everything that's happening in the Middle East today and all the people who are suffering, the Israelis and the Palestinians. I've traveled to that region recently and I will return to that region. And if there's any one thing I could say about those travels is I got to see just how beautiful people are. And I got to see as cliché as it may sound, the common humanity, the culture might be different, the perspectives might be different, but the hope and the pain and the anger and the love and the full spectrum of the human condition was all there in their eyes and the eyes of Israelis and the eyes of Palestinians. So my heart goes out to the people suffering there now. In some fundamental sense, I'm deeply grateful for having these sponsors, for having people that supported this podcast for several years now. It's been an honor. It's been a gift. Anyway, go check them out at insidetrapper.com. This episode is also brought to you by BetterHelp, spelled H-E-L-P, Help. I remember the first time a sponsor reached out wanting to support the podcast. It was hard for me to believe that anyone would care enough because with a lot of these sponsors, you know, the first step is believing in whatever the heck this is. And it just means the world that they would support it. It allows me to take big risks without any restrictions, without any constraints. Just the fact that we have way more sponsors than we can possibly have on the podcast. I get to be picky and I get to really choose great partners. And it just means the world that they care enough to support. There's a lot of people that have been donating money and forget donating money, even just sending love through emails and messages through all kinds of ways, running to me on the street and just, you know, giving me a hug, sending some love my way. Yeah, it means the world. Anyway, this is BetterHelp, you know, talk therapy. Really important to take care of your mental

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And BetterHelp is a really accessible way of doing that. You do it online with a licensed professional therapist. You can check them out at betterhelp.com slash Lex and save on your first month. That's betterhelp.com slash Lex. This episode is also brought to you by Eight Sleep and it's pod three mattress. It might be silly to say, but it's one of the things I thought about that I missed when I was traveling in the Middle East and thinking about America because the Eight Sleep mattress symbolizes home. The ridiculous comforts of home. It just cools down nicely, put on a warm blanket and just allows you to escape whether in a nap or full night's sleep from the chaos of the world. You know, take a nap, no matter what's on my mind, no matter how heavy the events of the world or just the events of my life are, a nap will just, will allow all that stuff to dissipate for a few moments. And as I slowly return to the waking state, I have this feeling of deep gratitude just to be alive. They currently ship to the United States of America, Canada, the UK, Australia and select countries in the EU. Check it out and get special savings when you go to eightsleep.com slash Lex. This show is also brought to you by AG1. I drink, I drink twice a day for nutrition, for health. It replaced multivitamins for me. I just drank it. I don't even know if I drink it just for the health or for the spiritual boost that it provides. I don't know. Like I mentioned with Eight Sleep, AG1 is a kind of forced break from the intensity of the work I do. I'll walk over the fridge, I'll make myself a cold AG1 and I'll sit on the couch and just sip on it for like five minutes and think about life. I don't know. There's something about the couch with cold drink, just silence allows you to really reflect on once again how amazing this damn life is. And if you're still listening to this, I just want to say thank you. Thank you. Thank you for caring enough to listen to this silly dude in the suit. I love you all. You can get the AG1 thing at drinkag1.com slash Lex.

This is the Lex Treatment Podcast and now dear friends, here's Jared Kushner.

We did a lot of this conversation before the Hamas attack on Israel and we decided to sit down again and finish the discussion to address the current situation which is still developing.

If I may allow me to summarize the situation as it stands today, it's morning Monday, October 9th on Saturday, October 7th at 6.30 a.m. Israel time, Hamas fired thousands of rockets into southern Israel. The rocket attack served as cover for a multi-pronged infiltration of Israel territory by over 1,000 Hamas militants. This is shortly after at 7.40 a.m. The Hamas militants went door-to-door in border towns, killing civilians, and taking captives, including women and children. In response to this, Israeli air force began carrying out strikes in Gaza, also fighting on the ground in Israel to clear out Hamas militants from Israel territory and preparing to mobilize Israeli troops for a potential ground attack on Hamas and Gaza. Now of course, this is what it appears to be right now and this along with other things might change because the situation is still developing. The IDF is ordering civilian residents of Gaza to evacuate their homes for their safety. Benjamin Netanyahu declared war in several statements and warned Israelis to brace themselves

for a long and difficult war. Just today, Israeli ministers ordered a complete siege of Gaza, interrupting supplies of electricity, food, water, and fuel from Israel to Gaza. As of now, October 9th, the death toll is over 1,200 people and over 130 hostages taken to Gaza by Hamas. So as I said, the events are rapidly unfolding, so these numbers will sadly increase,

but hopefully our words here can at least in part speak to the timeless underlying currents of the history and as you write about the power dynamics of the region. So for people who don't know, Gaza is a 25 miles long, six miles wide strip of territory along the Mediterranean Sea. It borders Israel on the east and north and Egypt on the southwest. It's densely populated, about 2.3 million people, and there's been a blockade of Gaza by Israel and Egypt since 2007 when Hamas took power. I could just summarize that Hamas is a Palestinian militant group which rules the Gaza Strip. It originated in 1988 and it came to power in Gaza in 2006. As part of its charter, it's sworn to the destruction of Israel and it is designated by the United States, the European Union, the UK, and of course Israel as a terrorist group. So given that context, what are your feelings as a human being and what is your analysis as the former senior advisor to the president under the Trump administration of the current situation in Israel and Gaza? So I think you did an excellent job of summarizing a lot of the context, but watching what's unfolded over the last 48 hours has been truly heartbreaking to see. We're still in the early stages of what's developing, but seeing the images on X of militants, terrorists going door to door with machine guns, gunning down innocent civilians, seeing beheaded Israeli soldiers, seeing young 20-year-olds at a rave dance party to celebrate peace with militants flying in and then shooting machine guns to kill people indiscriminately. Seeing young children captive and held prisoner, seeing 80-year-old grandmothers, a Holocaust survivor, also being taken captive. These are just images and actions that we have not seen in this world since 9-11. This is a terror attack on the scale of which we have not seen and it's been incredibly hard for a lot of people to comprehend. My heart goes out obviously to all of the families of the victims, to the families of those who are held in captive now and to all of Israel because one of the beautiful things about the state of Israel is that when one Israeli is hurting, the entire nation comes together. It's a shame that it's taking an action like this to unify the nation, but I have seen incredibly beautiful signs over the last 48 hours of a country coming together. The Jewish people have been under oppression before. The Jewish people know what it's like and seeing people rally together to fight for their homeland, to try to reestablish safety is a very beautiful thing to watch. I wish it wasn't something we had to watch, but it is. With that being said, though, the backdrop, I've been speaking to friends over the last couple of days. I have one friend I spoke with last night who was saying that a good friend messaged him saying, I'm going in, we're going to do some operations to try to free some of the hostages held in one of the cupits. He messaged him the next morning. He was one of the first through the door to try to free these hostages and he was killed by a Hamas militant. Sadly, we're going to be hearing many, many more stories of brave Israeli soldiers trying to get these terrorists out of Israel, trying to free innocent civilians who unfortunately are risking their lives to do it. They're all heroes, but some will have less good faith than others, sadly. It's a very, very heartbreaking moment. I do think that it's very important at this moment in time for the entire world to stand behind Israel. I think that Hamas has shown the entire world who they really are, I think what their aim is, what they're willing to do, and all of the strong security that Israel has put in place over the last years, which in some instances was criticized, I think is now being validated that there was a real threat that they were looking to deter. Short answer is my heart is broken, praying for peace, praying for strength, praying for Israel to do what it needs to do to avoid being in this situation again,

which is either eliminating or severely degrading Hamas's capabilities. There cannot be peace in Israel and in the Middle East while there is a terror group that is being funded by Iran that is allowed to flourish and is allowed to plan operations that are going to aim to kill innocent civilians. As somebody who was formerly in this position, who was intimately involved with Israel with the strategies to minimize attacks from Hamas and to try to turn the region around, and I think we did do a very substantial job under President Trump. The Middle East went from one of

the most chaotic regions in the world. You had ISIS in 2016. ISIS had a caliphate the size of Ohio. They're beheading journalists. They were killing Christians. They controlled eight million people. They were planning attacks all over the world from their caliphate. They were using the internet to radicalize people. We had the San Bernardino shooting in America. We had the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando. There was real threat. Then you had Iran, which was given \$150 billion in a glide path to a nuclear weapon. They were using their newfound riches to fund Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis, different rebels all over the region that were looking to destabilize further. Syria was in a civil war where 500,000 people were killed. Yemen was destabilized. Libya was destabilized, and it was just a mess. All of America's allies had felt betrayed. President Trump came into power. We rebuilt the trust and the relationships with all of our traditional allies. We were able to eliminate ISIS, the territorial caliphate, and then we were able to project strength in the region, really go after Iran's wallet. We were able to stop through crushing sanctions, a lot of their financial resources, which they were using to fund all these terror groups. We left the Middle East with six peace deals and a fairly peaceful world. Seeing what's happening, I think it was completely avoidable. I think it's horrible to see that it's occurring. I pray that those in power will make the right decisions to restore safety, but also to potentially create a better paradigm for peace in the future.

I have a lot of questions to ask you about the journey towards this historic progress towards peace with Abraham, of course, but first, on this situation, to step back and some of the history, is there things about the history of Hamas and Gaza that's important to understand of what is happening now? Just your comments, your thoughts, your understanding of Hamas. I think you did an excellent job, Lex, of really giving the summary. Just a couple things. Maybe I'll add to it is that Hamas was originally founded from the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, which is a group that's caused a lot of issues in the region. They've attacked Israel many times in the past. There's a lot of discussion about how Israel is in occupying power. In Gaza in 2005, they withdrew from all the land, and then they say Israel's an apartheid state. Israel then gave governance of the region to the Palestinians. Then what's happened is the Palestinian people's lives have now gone down, not up since then. I will say that under Hamas's leadership in Gaza, the people who have suffered the most are the Palestinian people. I've watched cries throughout my time in government from people saying we want to see the Palestinian people live a better life. I agree with those people. I think that the Palestinian people in Gaza are essentially hostages. In Gaza, you have basically 2.2 million people that are being held hostage by 30,000 Hamas terrorists.

That's really the problem. I would just encourage people to push their attention and energy in this moment and their anger towards Hamas. Those are the people who are killing innocent civilians, who

are murdering indiscriminately. Those are the people who have held back the Palestinians from having a better life. Finally, what I would say is what we saw with Hamas was that if you go back to 2007, they basically had just one plan that they did over and over. We were very careful to try to monitor very closely and stop the Iranian money and the resources from coming in. Again, we took a little bit of criticism from the international community from keeping the border tight. But unfortunately, every time you'd allow construction materials to go into Gaza, they'd use them to build tunnels, not homes. You would have equipment that would come in to build pipes. They'd turn it into bombs. It was very, very hard to figure out how do you get the resources into Gaza to help people have a better life, while at the same time the leadership in Gaza was taking all those resources and turning it into military equipment to attack Israel. What role does Iran play in this war and this connection to Hamas? Can you speak to the connection between Hamas and Iran that's important to understand, especially as this most recent attack unfolds? Sure. The correlation, I mean, there's reports that Iran is behind the attack. Hamas has thanked Iran for their support and it's been very well known that Iran supports the destruction of the state of Israel. I won't say Iran as a country. I'll talk about Iran in the leadership. There's actually a beautiful thing I saw on the internet where at one of the soccer games in Iran, they were trying to rally support for the Hamas terror attacks. A lot of people in the crowds were chanting FU to the regime because I think the Iranian people, the Persian people, generally are peace-loving people who don't want to see this focus on destruction and annihilation. But you saw this in 2015-2016, when the Iranian government had resources, the region was less safe. And since now, there's been more resources allowed to go to the Iranian regime by lack of enforcement of sanctions. And as a result, Iran is funding Hezbollah, Hamas. They were funding the Houthis. Now there's a little bit of a detente between Saudi and Iran, which has led to that going down, which only further proves that Iran was behind the Houthis, which is what the Saudis had been saying for years and Iran was denying. So there's a very strong relationship between the two. And we always knew that the way that Iran fights wars or fights conflicts is never directly. It's usually through its proxies. And in this case, a Hamas has been a proxy for Iran who wanted to obviously see the destruction of Israel, but also does not want to see the Israelis and the Saudis come together for a peace agreement. So the name of this operation, of the Hamas operation, is al-Aqsa Flood, referring to the al-Aqsa Mosque. How much of this attack is about the al-Aqsa Mosque?

In actuality, I don't think any of it is, but the al-Aqsa Mosque is something that all of the Shia jihadists have used for years in order to justify their actions that are aggressive towards Israel. So this is something I'll maybe even take a step back and go through when I was working initially in my first year on the peace plan. I was doing a lot of listening, and quite frankly, a lot of what people were saying to me didn't make sense. And the reason why I was trying to figure out, they were talking about sovereignty over al-Aqsa Mosque. The al-Aqsa Mosque is a mosque

that's built in the Holy of Holies, the Haram al-Sharif in Israel, where the Jewish Beyt al-Magdash, the holy temple, was built in a very religious place about after the temple was destroyed. Then there was a big mosque built there, and it's one of the more holy places in Islam now. So the big thing everyone was saying is, what do you do with this land where you have a mosque built over a very big Jewish site? And I was hearing all of the experts, and I always say

experts with quotes because only in Washington can you work on something for a decade and continue to fail, and then you basically leave and are considered an expert. But that's one of the problems with Washington, which maybe we could talk about later. But the notion here was, I went and I said, let me try to understand what the issue is with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with the people. I always felt the politicians were a little disconnected, so I commissioned several focus groups, one in Amman, one in Cairo, one in Dubai, and one in Ramallah. And I asked people, Muslims, what is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict about? And time and time again, the most popular thing that they said was that Israel was not allowing access to the mosque for Muslims to pray. And what was interesting was that Israel's policy is to allow anyone who wants to come and pray peacefully at the sites to come and pray. Sometimes they have security issues when there's provocations. But by and large, since 1967, when Israel was able to take back Jerusalem in a defensive

war, just to be very clear, they were attacked in the south and they were attacked from the east, and they basically were able to beat back the Jordanians and the Egyptians and then reconquer the old city of Jerusalem. And during that time, immediately after Israel then passed the Protection of Holy Places Law, which they basically took resources they didn't have, and they said, we're going to restore the Christian sites, the Muslim sites, the Jewish sites, and they've worked to allow everyone access to the mosque. So today, any Muslim who wants to come can come and pray at

the mosque. The mosque is, Israel's acknowledged that King Abdullah, the King of Jordan, is the custodian of the mosque. And as long as people want to come to the country and pray peacefully, they're able to do that. But if you look at a lot of the propaganda that's been used by ISIS or Iran to recruit terrorists or to justify their incursions, they often say they're doing it in the name of liberating the al-Aqsa mosque. But from an operational and pragmatic perspective today, any Muslim who wants to go to the mosque, you can book a flight to Israel now through Dubai because there's flights between Israel and Dubai. And as long as your country has relations with Israel and they'll accept your passport in there, you can come and pray and that's what Israel wants. Israel wants Jerusalem to be a place where all religions can come and celebrate together. But you have a lot of actors that look to find ways to use these religious tensions in order to sow division and justify violent behavior. I wonder how it's possible to lessen the effectiveness of that propaganda message that a lot of the war, a lot of the attacks about access to the al-Aqsa mosque. Is there something you can speak to why that message hasn't disseminated across the Arab world? So Israel's good at a lot of things. They're not very good traditionally with public relations. After the Abraham Accords, we made the first Abraham Accords deal in August 2020 and then we made five other deals. We first did United Arab Emirates, then we did a deal with Bahrain, then we did a deal with Kosovo, then we did a deal with Sudan, then we did a deal with Morocco. And then we got the GCC deal done as well, the tension between Qatar, Saudi, UAE, Egypt, and Bahrain. And that was allowing us to create a pathway to then pursue the Israeli-Saudi normalization. So we had so much momentum then that the goal was just keep getting more countries to normalize relations with Israel. Once you create the connection between people and create the ability for people to do business together, the ability for flights to fly between, then you would just start naturally having people coming and everyone has a smartphone today so they

can then post and combat the misinformation that's been out there. But this misinformation is not something that's new. One of the characters who played a very big role in spreading the anti-Semitism and the violence in Israel in the 1920s was a guy named Haj Amin al-Husayni who was known as the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. He was very close with Hitler and Mussolini and he was working

with them to try to get some claims to the Middle East once the Jewish people were annihilated. And what he did for a very long time was he did the same shtick only it was before you had smartphones

in YouTube where he would say the mosque is under intact, these imperialist Zionists are coming in to try to destroy the mosque and he would use that to raise money from Indonesia, from Pakistan, from all over the world and then use that threat to justify recruiting groups of young, vulnerable Muslim men and then getting them in the name of religious rights to go and kill people, which really is more of a perversion of the religion than I think the true essence of what Islam is.

I think Islam at its core is a peaceful religion and I think that's where a lot of the great leaders in Islam want to take it, but the people who use Islam or the mosque or as a justification for violence, those are people who I think are really, they are disrespecting the Islam religion. As you said, you helped make major strides towards peace in the Middle East with Abraham Accords. Can you describe what it took to accomplish this? And maybe this will help us understand what broke down and led to the tragedy this week.

Yeah, so I always believed in foreign policy. I learned very quickly that the difference between a political deal and a business deal is that in a business deal, you have a problem set, you come to a conclusion and then if you buy or sell something, you either have more cash or you have a company, so more to do, less to do. Political problem set is very different where the conclusion of a problem set is essentially the beginning of a new paradigm.

So when I would think about how do you move pieces around the board, you couldn't say, let me just solve the problem. You have to think about what happens the day after the signing and how do you create a paradigm that has positivity to it. So the biggest piece of what President Trump did during his four years in office was he really strengthened the relationship with Israel, number one. And he did things like recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. He moved the embassy to Jerusalem. He recognized the Golan Heights.

He got out of the Iran deal. We did an economic conference in Bahrain where we brought Israelis to meet with Saudi and Emirati and Qatari businessmen and everyone came together.

And each one of these instances were unthinkable previously and everyone said that if you did it, the world was going to end. And every time President Trump did one, the next morning the sun rose, the next evening the sun set and things moved on. And so by doing that, what President Trump did was he slaughtered a lot of the sacred cows of these false barriers that people had erected and showed people that the vast majority of the people in the Middle East, whether they're Jewish, Muslim, Christian, whatever religion they are, they just want to live better lives.

And so what we basically did was create a paradigm where the voices for peace, the voices for together, now finally had a forum where they were able to do it. And we did that in the backdrop. The way we were able to be successful was we severely limited the resources of Iran and they were focused more internally and they couldn't cause the trouble that they were causing everywhere else. Since we've left, obviously, the dynamics have changed. But the way you get to peace is

obviously number one through strength and number two by finding a way for people to be better off tomorrow than they are today. And what I found was that most of the voices looking for violence or trouble were people who were just focused on what happened two years ago, 20 years ago, 70 years ago, 1,000 years ago, people who were trying to solve those problems in that context often were looking more to use those past grievances as a justification for their power and for the bad behavior that they were looking to perpetuate.

So managing, as we have talked about extensively, managing the power dynamics of the region and providing a plan, this is something you did with the economic plan titled peace to prosperity, a vision to improve the lives of the Palestinian and Israeli people.

Can you first of all describe what's in the plan?

Sure. So this was something I took on. I was working on the political framework between the Israelis and the Palestinians and trying to understand what were the issues. And the issues were not very many. It basically was you had a land dispute. You had to figure out where do you put borders ultimately. You had a security paradigm, which I was much more favorable to Israel's perspective on. And obviously the events of the past 48 hours have fully justified that that bias. And then in addition to that, you had to deal with the religious sites, but I felt operationally that wasn't actually as complicated as people made it because you wanted to just leave it open for everybody. Then I went through and I felt that the Palestinian leadership was fairly disincentivized to make a deal because there was just this paradigm where for they had billions of dollars coming in from the international community. And I think that they feared that if they made a deal, they would lose their relevancy internationally and the money would stop flowing into the country. So what I tried to do is to say, my approach when I would get into a hard problem, say, how do I understand all the different escape hatches? How do I try to eliminate them? And then build a golden bridge that becomes really the only but also the most desirable pathway for the decision makers to walk through. And it wasn't always hard and sometimes

you have to go and hold their hand or you try to pick them up and walk them across. But a lot of these leaders are very reluctant to change. And the dynamics of the Palestinians also were such that I think they were fairly stuck where they were. So we developed a business plan for Gaza, the West Bank. We threw in some improvements for Jordan and Egypt as well. I was based it off of the Vision 2030 that they did in Saudi Arabia, which I thought was a visionary document. I went back through this process and I studied basically every economic project in the post-World War II period. So we looked at what they did in South Korea, why it was successful with some strong industrial planning. We looked at Japan, we looked at Singapore, we looked at Poland, why it was successful. We spent a lot of time on the Ukraine plan for the country and why it wasn't successful. And that was mostly because of governance and corruption, which actually resembles a lot of what's gone wrong with the Palestinians where there's no property rights, there's no rule of law. And what we did is we built a plan to show it's not that hard in the sense that between the West Bank and Gaza, you had 5 million people. And we put together a plan, I think it was about \$27 billion. We got together a conference. I had the head of AT&T. We had Steve Schwartzman from Blackstone came, which was very gracious of them. We had all the leading Arabic businessmen, the leading builders, leading developers. And the general consensus of that of that of that of that conference was that this is very doable. You know, we think that for Gaza

in particular, it would cost maybe maybe \$7 to \$8 billion to rebuild the entire place. We felt we could reduce the poverty rate in half, we can create over a million jobs there. The only thing that people said was holding it back wasn't Israel. What was holding it back was governance. And people wouldn't have confidence investing there with with the rule that that Hamas was perpetuating. So I encourage people actually to look at the plan. It was very thoughtful. It was 181 pages. We went project by project. Each project is costed out. It's a real plan that could be implemented, but you need the right governance. And all of the different Arabic countries are willing to fund it. The international community is willing to fund it because they've just been throwing so much money at the Palestinians for years that's never been outcomes based. They're conditions based. It's just been, you know, entitlement money. And unfortunately, it hasn't really achieved any outcomes that have been successful. So it's a great business plan. It just shows to rebuilding Gaza could be easy. But like I said, the problem that's held the Palestinian people back and that's made their lives terrible in Gaza has not been Israel. It's really been Hamas's leadership or lack of leadership and their desire to focus on trying to kill Israelis and start war with Israel over improving the lives of the Palestinian people. And the current approach of Hamas, the more violence they perpetrate, the more they can hold on to power versus improving the lives of people. So they, as you said, maybe you can comment on, they do not propose an economics plan. I mean, Hamas has been running it now for 16 years, and they don't have a lot to show for it. And, you know, our posture with them was basically a very simple deal. You know, if you think about what's the end state in Gaza, it's actually not that complicated. It's, you know, there's no territorial disputes, right? The border is the border. There's no religious issues there as well. You're not dealing with Jerusalem. You're basically just dealing with the fact that, you know, Israel wants to make sure that there's no threat from Gaza. So it's a demilitarization or some kind of security guarantee from a credible source where Israel doesn't feel like Gaza can be used to stage attacks into Israel or to fire rockets into Israel. And by the way, these are things I was saying, you know, three, four years ago, that that was the objective. And that was really the fear now that's been proven, you know, unfortunately, the fear has manifested. And in exchange, you can rebuild the place and you can give the people a much better life. But Hamas has not shown a desire for that or a capability for that. And I don't think there's enough trust to allow them to do that, which is why, you know, under the current circumstances, if you do want to have peace there, Hamas has to be either eliminated or severely degraded in terms of their military capabilities. I would love to ask you about leadership, especially on the side of the United States. What has the current administration, the Biden administration done different than the Trump administration, as you understand, that may have contributed to the events we saw this week? So all I can talk about are where we left them, right? We left them a place where they had tremendous momentum in the Middle East. I met with them during the transition and said, you know, look, you know, we even got the Qatar-Saudi conflict done, which was a big, no peace between Israel and Saudi would have been possible without that. So we even got that done in our lame duck period. And they came in and they said, look, we want to focus on the three Cs, which is COVID, climate change in China. And I said, that's great. But, you know, the Middle East, we have an

amazing place right now. It's stable. There's momentum. Iran is basically broke. We put such crippling sanctions on Iran that they went from about, I think it was 2.6 million barrels a day of oil they were selling to about 100,000 under Trump. So their foreign currency reserves were basically depleted and they were broke. Same with the Palestinians. We stopped the funding to to the to UNRA, the UN agency, which is totally corrupt. It's, you know, we've put \$10 billion in there over time. I did a poll in the Middle East in Gaza to say, okay, we've invested \$10 billion here as a country. Are we popular? Right? The US had a 7% approval rating. USAID had a 70% approval rating, but it just felt like a waste of our taxpayer dollars. And again, we wanted to make it conditions based. The Biden administration came in number one, they started insulting, you know, Saudi and Russia oil prices went up. At the same time, what they did was they stopped domestic production of oil. They made it, they disincentivized a lot of oil and shale production with regulations. They stopped pipelines. Oil prices went up. They stopped enforcing the sanctions against Iran, probably to get the oil prices lower to make up for what they were doing. They ran to Iran to try to make a deal. They started funding the Palestinians again right away. And I even said, you know, if you're going to fund them, if that's your policy, I respect that. Again, elections have consequences and you can take a different policy. But what I would recommend is get some conditions, make them do some reforms, make them give property rights to people, make them, you know, do real economic investments for people. But they just went right away. So they were funding the Palestinians, not enforcing the sanctions, and then overall just projecting a lot of weakness in the region. So one of the most embarrassing examples is what happened in the United Arab Emirates. Again, an amazing, probably one of America's best allies over the last, you know, 20, 30 years. They fought with us in Afghanistan. They were the first Muslim country to stand up and do that after 9-11 because they didn't want it to be a war of the West against the Muslim religion. So they joined the fight because they saw it as a fight between right and wrong. They have rockets shot into their country from the Houthis and they basically don't get a call from the U.S. for 17 days. They need their equipment that they buy from the U.S., which creates jobs in the U.S. They need it restocked. We don't call. So they've severely degraded the trust that we had to rebuild with our allies. I think they've been working now to get it back. They, after two years, started working with Saudi and Israel, which I think was good. You know, I think that they realized after a stint that maybe the process that President Trump had created in the region was the right policy. And keep in mind, you know, President Trump's policy was that I was working on was very strongly criticized during the first three years before we were able to achieve the results because it was departure from the failed policies of the past. And so first there was return to those policies, appease Iran, let's criticize Saudi Arabia. Then they started embracing and working on the Israel-Saudi deal, which I was really exciting. I think we were all very excited about it. But they did it in public. And I think that that also was something, and I didn't have access to their intelligence. So I assumed that by doing it so publicly, they thought that they'd either had a deal with Iran because they were letting them get all this revenue where Iran wouldn't be a problem. But one of the reasons with the Abraham Accords, we kept it so quiet during the whole time was because we always felt like the troublemakers

in the region, particularly Iran, who we thought would be disadvantaged by having UAE, Saudi,

Israel altogether. Israel's a nuclear power. You have other strong economies. Iran seeks instability. They seek looking to create division in the region. And if you can create that economic sphere where you have security from Haifa to Muscat from Israel to Oman all the way through with Saudi, Jordan, UAE, Qatar, Egypt, that's an incredibly powerful block. If you can make it secure and then get economic integration, that really could be a Middle East that thrives. So Iran obviously wanted nothing to do with that. And that's why they've been working to disrupt. So I think the administration has, they took an incredibly stable situation with momentum. I think they underestimated the way that Iran would approach the region to undermine. I think they gave way too much rope to Iran. And I think that they didn't seize when they had an opportunity of strength with the Palestinians to try to drive to a conclusion that I believe could have prevented us being where we are today. Not to mention that even just three weeks ago, I mean, it's a bad look that they just basically gave \$6 billion to Iran in exchange for hostages. And then Iran's basically funding these terror attacks are killing American citizens in Israel. And it's a heartbreaking situation, again, totally avoidable and one that I think has been very badly mismanaged

to date. If Trump was currently president and you were still working with him on this part of the world, what actions would you take? What conversations would you have? What ideas would you be working

with in order to unite the various allies that you mentioned in the Middle East over this tragedy? And not let it be a thing that divides the Middle East, but make it a thing that catalyzes progress towards peace, further progress towards peace.

So I want to say one thing Lex. I have a lot of friends who are fans of Trump or not fans of Trump. But one thing I want to say with absolute certainty is that if President Trump was in office, this never would have happened. And when President Trump was in office, anyone who supports Israel

or who wants to see, you know, Jewish people not be innocently slaughtered, he would never have allowed that to happen. It did not happen when he was in power. And I hope people recognize that as something that's very, very true. How I would play the ball, where it lies right now, keep in mind we transferred the ball, it was on the green, now it's almost like it's gone back, you know, 150 yards and it's in a sand trap.

I think the way that I would play the ball right now is number one is you have to show strength. I actually think President Biden's words were the right words. I see that they're moving aircraft carriers to the region. Again, the purpose of having a strong military I believe obviously, you know, if you get into a war, you want to win the war, but the purpose of a very strong military primarily is to avoid a war.

I don't know what kind of credibility the Biden administration has to show the strength, but right now you have to support Israel completely. You have to really let people in the region know that there'll be consequences if they try to escalate. Again, we saw a little bit of rocket skirmish from Lebanon, from Hezbollah, but again, this is the type of thing that they have to know. There'll be severe consequences if they make this a multi-party fight. I think sending a strong message to Iran, I think that they have to see some consequences

from this and know that they're not going to be allowed to have a free reign to cause instability and that Iran doesn't usually fight face to face. They usually do it through proxies, but let's just all be honest about where this is coming from and let them know that there will be a consequence if they instigate these actions. Again, at least with the Biden administration, they've had contact with Iran. They've been talking with Iran, but they've allowed Iran. Again, the number I saw last year, I think under Trump, the number was maybe like \$4 or \$5 billion of oil revenue. In total, I think last year, it was something like \$45 billion in revenue. This year, I think it'll be even more. That's a combination of them driving up oil prices, but also allowing much more sales. You would think that they would find a way to get them to behave and allow them to have this happen, or if that's not the case, then be tough. Go back to being tough. That's what you have to do. Building off of Abraham Accords, as you mentioned, Israel's Saudi normalization, there's been a lot of promising progress towards this. What does it take to not allow this tragedy to damage the progress towards Israel's Saudi normalization? I think right now, it's probably not the best to think about that. I think that we want to think about that after whatever is going to happen is going to happen now. I think right now, the number one priority for Israel has to be to fully regain security in the country. Then number two is to figure out how you can, like I said, eliminate or degrade the Hamas capability or other Iranian threats to make sure that you have your security apparatus. I think that the Israeli leadership right now should proceed with that. I don't think that they should be thinking about normalization with Saudi at this moment. My instinct, and I've been watching this Israeli-Saudi normalization play out, obviously just speaking with people and seeing what I've been reading and watching with great excitement. I think it would be a game changer for the region. I think it's one of Iran's worst nightmares to have Israel and Saudi interlink together. I think it'd be great for the Saudi people from a security perspective, what they're discussing with America would be very strong. The ability to get different elements across would be incredible. What I would say with it is that the industrial logic held yesterday, and I think it will hold again tomorrow. I always expect countries to act in their interests. I think that the deal that's on the table right now between Saudi Israel and America is in Saudi's interests, it's in America's interests, and it's in Israel's interests. What's going to happen now though is the political dynamics are going to shift. I think that as we've seen with political dynamics, they come and go. I think let's get through this moment. Then I hope at the right time that those talks will be able to resume and conclude in an appropriate way. It's funny, Lex, when I was working on the US-Mexico agreement for the trade, we would have every day there'd be a tweet that would go out or there would be an issue. People forget how intense it was between America and Mexico. I would speak to my counterpart in Mexico after a rough day and we were working on something, we were making progress, it'd get blown up. I'd speak to him and say, look, they're not moving America, they're not moving Mexico. Let's just stop for today. Let's pick up tomorrow and let's find a new way to bring this forward. I would just encourage everyone working on that not to give up, to keep working hard at it and to find a way. Like I said, I would take a little bit of a pause for the time being. Let's let the current situation play out and then hopefully there'll be a way for it to move forward. I just hope there's still people on the US side picking up the phone and calling

UAE, Saudi Arabia, just as human beings, as friends, as allies, and just keeping that channel communication going. Maybe you can correct me, but I just feel like there's just simple human dynamics that play out here that divisions can form and just run away from you over simple misunderstandings, over just inability to see a tragedy from the same perspective because of conversations that could have happened but didn't happen.

I think there'll definitely be communication, but words on phone calls is only worth so much.

It's really trust between people and power. Obviously, when you're in a position of power, you represent your country and your country's interests, but the ability to have trusting relationships where people feel like they're okay taking more risks to help each other, that's actually what's most important. Communication, I hope for, but deepening and trusting relationships, that's what I believe makes progress and keeps people safe.

We talk quite extensively about the value of trust and negotiation and just working with leaders, which I think is a fascinating conversation and you've taught me a lot about that. Let me ask you about the end here. What are the various trajectories this work can take in your view? What are some of the end states, as you've said, which are desirable and are achievable? I mentioned this earlier, but whenever I would get a problem set in government, I'd always

think through, from a First Principles perspective, what's the logical outcome and forget about all the reasons why it can't happen. That's what everyone in governments always rush to talk about, but I do think here, number one, Israel has to have a secure environment where they don't feel threatened from Gaza, and number two is the people in Gaza need to have an environment where they

feel like they can live a better life and have opportunities. That's the end state. I think that the international community should come together. I do think that the people who are usually putting blame on Israel should now realize that maybe they've been a little bit of harsh here and that Hamas has been as big a threat, if not an even bigger threat than Israel has been saying, and I do think that if the international community comes together and unites behind Israel and really forces Hamas and their Iranian backers to stop hostilities, to stop saber-rattling, to stop misrepresenting the history in order to justify their violent behavior, and if they say instead, we want to hold you accountable, no more money, and they all say that they're going to stand

behind Israel's efforts to eliminate their national security threats, and then we will all come together and only fund again into a framework that we believe can be a long-term solution where the Palestinian people really have a chance to live a better life. That's really the best way to get there. There's tons of complicated factors, but that's the end state that the global community should be looking to come together, and it's very achievable. It's very, very achievable.

So as we stand here today, there's a lot of different ways that this war can evolve.

If a ground invasion happens by Israeli forces of Gaza, and if the number is correct of 100,000 Israeli soldiers, do you worry about various trajectories that can take of the consequences that might have of an unprecedented ground troop attack?

So I think as a leader, you can change yesterday, but you have the ability to change tomorrow, and that's a very important fundamental. I mean, that's true for all of us, not just leaders, but we saw with 9-11 how America was caught off guard by terrorist attack. We acted

somewhat rationally, somewhat emotionally, which led to a 20-year war with trillions of dollars lost, I think almost a million lives lost, not just American, but all lives, and it was a total tragedy what occurred. I think right now the temptation is to be strong. I think that that's a necessity. I do think eliminating risk is the right objective. I think the goal should be to stay very clear about what the objective is, but also this attack was very well planned not to walk into another trap. I think you have to be very smart, very cautious. I've been happy to see that what they've been doing in retaliation so far has been somewhat measured, and they've taken their time to try to assess what's achievable. Again, I don't have access to the intelligence, and we're talking at a very early stage in this conflict, so a lot could happen even by the time this is published, but my hope is that they'll just stay very focused on what the objective is and try to make sure that they're acting appropriately in order to do that. I will say this, too, that this has been different than what I've seen in the past, in that the attacks were so heinous and so disgusting that I've seen the international community rally around Israel more so than I ever have, and I hope that Israel continues to keep the moral high ground and continue to communicate what they're fighting for, why they're fighting. I do hope that the international community supports the objective, and they can work together to achieve it. Benjamin Anyahu, Bibi, somebody you've gotten to know well

in negotiation and conversation. He has made statements, he's declared war, he has spoken about this potentially being a long and difficult war. What have you learned about the mind of Benjamin Anyahu that might be important to understand here in this current war?

Bibi is definitely a historic figure. I meet with a lot of different world leaders, and some of them I would say they're very, very special transformational figures, and some I would say, how the hell is this person running a country?

Bibi, somebody who has done a lot for the state of Israel, he has a tremendous understanding of the security apparatus, he has tremendous global relations. For a crisis like this, I think Bibi's the leader you want if you're Israel to be in that seat. I think he's ambitious in what he's going to look to achieve. He understands his role in history as somebody who's helped strengthen Israel economically, militarily, and I don't think he wants to see his legacy be somebody who left Israel more vulnerable than it had to be. I think in that regard he'll be incredibly strong, but I also think that he'll hopefully be calculating in the risk that he takes and not create more risk than is needed. That's easy to say, the two of us sitting here having a conversation when you're sitting in that chair as a leader in the fog of war. It's a very hard decision to make. He's been here before. He knows the weight of the situation. I'm sure he knows the moment. I pray that he'll do what's right here to bring the best outcome possible. I wonder if you can comment on the internal political turmoil that Bibi has been operating in and how that relates to the tragedy that we saw.

On the one hand, the political turmoil is a sign of a vibrant democracy. I think it's been actually nice to see how people have fought for their country and their beliefs in a democratic way. You compare that to the Palestinians where there's no democracy, there's no free speech, there's no free press. You can't disagree with the leadership in Israel. If you want to be homosexual, you can go to a parade and live your life. In Gaza, they'll throw you off a building and kill you. In Israel, you have the freedoms which I think make it a special place and you have

a very vibrant democracy. With that being said, the times in Jewish history where the Jewish people have been most vulnerable have been when there's been division and that's when the temple was destroyed, but that's not just with the Jewish people and with Israel, that's in all societies. I definitely believe that this division has left them less prepared for the situation than it would. I do think there's real lessons we should be taking from this here in America where we're in a time where we're very divided, but I do think that it'd be very wise for our leaders to find the areas where we do agree and find ways to secure our southern border to make sure that we know who's in our country, what risks we all face. I do think that division definitely creates risk for countries.

Let me switch gears here and just zoom out and look at our society and our public discourse at the moment. What do you make of the scale and nature of the Palestinian support online in response to this situation? This is something I've observed over the years since I got involved with the Israeli-Palestinian issue with a lot of interest. I think a lot of the people who are pledging support for the Palestinian people, I think that they want to see the Palestinian people live a better life and I actually agree with them in that regard. Unfortunately, I think many of them are incredibly ill-informed as to the facts on the ground. I think all of the people who are advocating online for the Palestinian people who are going to these marches in support of them, I think they'd be best served if they really care about effectuating the outcome of joining with Israel right now and directing their anger towards the Hamas leadership. I think that it's very clear that the group that's responsible for the Palestinian people living the lives that all of these people are angry about is Hamas. If they direct their anger towards Hamas and put the attention on the failings of Hamas and put forth a vision for what they'd like to see leadership in Gaza do and they respect that there's a real fear that Israel has and any country would have of having a group of terrorists next to them that's calling for their destruction. I think that that recognition of finding a way for Israel to be secure and then having an opportunity for the Palestinian people to live a better life is the right pathway to try and pursue. So to you, there's a clear distinction between Hamas and the Palestinian people in that Hamas is the enemy of progress and the flourishing of the Palestinian people. 100%. It's very, very clear and I think that if people were honest about the situation, if they spent a time to really understand it, again, if you follow the conference I did in Bahrain, we had all of the leading businessmen there and they said we can rebuild Gaza very easily. We all want to. The leading Arab businessmen, the leading American businessmen, everyone wants to. They're just held back by Hamas. And so I do think having an honest conversation about this at this point in time has really only one logical conclusion and my hope is that maybe this conflict leads to that conversation being had and if it is, then maybe that brings more unity and understanding and we kind of get to a conclusion better that could improve the lives of the Palestinian people. Pragmatic question about the future. Do you hope Donald Trump wins in 2024 and how can his administration help bring peace to the Middle East? I think when Donald Trump was president, we had a peaceful world. Everyone said if he was elected, we would have World War III. Meanwhile, he gets elected and he not only is the first president in decades to not start any wars, he's making peace deals. He's making trade deals. He's working with our allies, getting them to pay their fair share in NATO. He's having a dialogue with China, with Russia.

He's weakening Iran. And so I do think that the job he did as a foreign policy president was tremendous. I think now more and more people are starting to recognize that. Again, under President Biden, this is the second war that's broken out in the world. And when you have a weak American leadership, the world becomes a less safe place. And so my hope and prayers are that President Trump is reelected and that he's able to then restore order and calm and peace and prosperity to the world. From a place of strength. That's the only way he knows how to do it. What gives you hope about the future of this region, of Israel and of the Middle East? The Middle East for 20 years was an area of conflict. They spent all their money on bullets and bombs. You have young leadership now in Saudi Arabia and UAE and Qatar. And there's a much more ambitious agenda now for the region to make it an economic superpower and hub of the world. Israel is one of the most burgeoning and exciting tech economies in the world. And if you think about it, it's almost like having Silicon Valley not connected to California. The thing that's held the region back for all these years has just been the conflict and the division and the lack of connectivity. But if you have that region and if it can all come together, if you can create a security architecture, you have an incredibly young population. You have a lot of wealth and resources and a lot of capabilities and know-how. And so I think that if it's managed correctly and if Iran is able to be restrained and suppressed with their ambitions to cause destabilization, I don't mean Iran the country. I mean the Iranian regime. Because actually, once you have this economic sphere, if you could bring Iraq into it, if you could bring Iran into it, that makes it even bigger and stronger. And the Persian people are incredibly entrepreneurial and incredibly industrious. So I do think that the region has tremendous potential. It's just been held back by bad policy, bad leadership, bad objectives. And again, when President Trump left office in 2021, the Middle East was really on a very, very positive trajectory. And if the right things happen, it can continue to be so. So I'm praying at this moment in time that we navigate the current crisis, that the important objectives are achieved of eliminating the terrorists and their threats, and then allowing the leaders who are focused on giving their citizens and their neighbors the opportunity to live a better life, are able to work together and really dream and be ambitious and find ways to create a paradigm where humans can flourish. What is the best way to defeat hate in the world? Hate is a very powerful force. And it's much easier to hate people you don't know. It's funny, when I was working on prison reform, one of the most interesting people I met was a reverend, actually down in Texas, who negotiated the first truce between the Bloods and the Crips, two of the notorious gangs in America in prison. And I was very excited to meet him. And when I met him, I said, well, how'd you do it? And he said, it was very simple. He says, I got all the guys together. And I had a tremendous amount of barbecue brought in. He says, and I got the meeting says no drinking says drinking sometimes gets people a little bit more against each other. He says, but I got a meeting and they started sitting down together and they started saying, you know what? You're just like me. And all of a sudden they started finding areas where they were more together. Look, I've traveled all over the world now. I've been very fortunate to meet people from different states in America. I've different political persuasions, different ages, different classes. And what I found is that there's a fundamental driving amongst all of us where we all want to live a better life. And, you know, people don't want to fight naturally, but it's easy to fight when you feel wronged or you feel like somebody disrespected you or somebody

did something from hatred and hatred leads to more hatred, which sometimes just pushes that cycle further and further. So I believe that each and every one of us has the power to stop that cycle. And we don't do it by, you know, being on Twitter and yelling at people, we don't do it by just being critical. We do it by finding the people we disagree with, by listening to them, by asking questions, by sitting with them. And then if we each take responsibility to try to make the world better, then I think that there's no limits to the incredible place that this world can be. So as you've said, you've traveled all across the world. Do you think most people are good? Most people have love in their heart?

I do believe that. Yeah, and you have some bad people. I mean, you have some real evil people. I mean, a big part of the work I did was on prison reform. And, you know, previously the mentality was is that the prison should basically be a warehouse for human trash. And if you've made a mistake in this world, then, you know, we're going to throw you out and we're going to make the rest of your life incredibly difficult because you're going to have a criminal record, you're not going to have access to jobs. But what I found is when I would sit with people in prison, the people I've met through my father's experience and who I met along the way is that, you know, people make mistakes. We're all human. I think it's the right thing from a religious perspective to give people second chances. I always believe you shouldn't judge people by the worst mistake they make in their life. Unfortunately, now in the era of social media, people will say one wrong thing. It sticks with them forever. They get canceled or they get put out. We're all humans. We grow from our mistakes. We learn from our mistakes. And I think that some people are just evil. There are some evil people. But I do think the vast, vast, vast majority of people are good. And I do think that people sometimes also can be in a bad place and then society can push them to a worse and worse place. But we all have the power to make them feel loved, make them feel heard. And I think there's also tremendous power that we have as people to help people get to a better place. And so, you know, my wife and I, we've always tried to be a force for good. We've always tried to be, you know, we've always tried to provide a place where people can discuss with each other. When we were in Washington, we would host dinners at our house all the time or we would have Democrats and Republicans sitting together. You know, we just had, I saw Senator Feinstein just passed away. We had a great dinner at her house when she was a senator with her and her husband. And Mark Meadows, when he was on the Freedom Caucus,

we had actually a fascinating discussion about Iran. Mark was much more hard-line than me. I had to actually bite my tongue. I was impressed at how much he did. Whereas, you know, Feinstein and her husband were like super into, you know, they knew the Iranians well. They thought they were peace-loving. And it was an incredibly robust and respectful debate. And so, I don't think we maybe concluded anything that night. But it was interesting for people to get together. Having a dinner at my house where I had Dick Durbin, you know, the number two ranking Democrat in the Senate, Lindsey Graham and Stephen Miller, who's known to be a very hard line in immigration, discussing what an immigration reform could look like. I mean, they left that dinner saying, wow, you know, we hadn't spoken to people on the other side. And we actually agree on like 85% of things,

like maybe something is possible. And so, I believe that we should always be trying to push to make the world a better place. And you only do that by listening to people and connecting with each,

with people and by respecting people. And finally, I'll just say on this is that, you know, I meet people all the time who have so much confidence in their perspectives. And I'm very jealous that these people are able to be so confident about every single thing. Because for me, I have, you know, some degree of confidence in the things that I've studied and what I've learned. But I'm always trying to find, you know, people who disagree to kind of sharpen my perspectives

and to help me grow and to help me learn further. And so, I think that's kind of the beauty of the world is that, you know, the knowledge base continues to grow, the facts continue to change, and what's possible tomorrow continues to become different. And so, as humans, we have to continue

to thrive to learn and to grow and to connect. And if we do that, everything's possible.

Well, Jared, thank you for your compassion, first of all, but also your wisdom today on this very difficult, this tragic set of events, these difficult days for the world. It's a big honor to speak with you again. Every time I speak to you, I learned a lot about the world. And I deeply appreciate, like I said, that your humility and your understanding of the details of all the complex power dynamics and human dynamics that are going on in the world. Once again, thank you for talking

today. Thank you. And Lex, if I could say just one final thing, which is that my thoughts and prayers are really with all the people in Israel and the innocent civilians as well from the Palestinian side. And my prayers are with the IDF soldiers that they should be safe and they should be really watched by God to accomplish whatever mission will enable to make the world a safer place. Thank you for listening to this newly recorded segment of the conversation that addresses the current situation in Israel and Gaza. And now we'll go on to the second part of the conversation recorded on Thursday, October 5th.

Given your experience in negotiating with some of the most powerful and influential leaders in the world, what's the key to negotiating difficult agreements in geopolitics? Let's start with a big question. If I look back on the different negotiations I had when I was in government, either with leaders of countries, with representatives of leaders, or even with members of Congress to pass legislation, the most important thing I would draw back to would be trust. I think getting to know each other, understanding what was motivating the other party to get to the outcome, and making them feel like you weren't going to use whatever information they gave you

to benefit yourself at the expense of them, is probably what I would call table stakes to have a shot at accomplishing anything that was hard in negotiation. After that, I would say taking maybe a first principles approach to what the outcome of whatever problem you're looking to solve should be. Now you have different kinds of negotiations. I always try to create a framework in the negotiation where it wasn't me against you. It was always, let's agree on what the outcome is that we're trying to accomplish. Let's all sit on the same side of the table and say, we want to get to this outcome. How do we get there? Really try to create a roadmap. Once you understand the destination you want to get to, the endpoint, then you'd have to work backwards and really try to put yourself in their shoes and try to understand what were their motivations macroed. Most of the time, you have to assume that a leader's primary objective was to stay in power. All decisions made would be made through the framework of what it would take to do that and

how it would impact their ability to do that. Finally, I would just say that in any negotiation, you have to understand the power dynamics as well. You have to then wait your approach in order to maneuver pieces to accomplish the objective. In areas where we had stronger power dynamics, I'd always look at it and say, what are the potential escape routes where a politician would say, this is just the reason why we can't get there? I'd always think, how can you try to eliminate those escape routes or make them much harder to accomplish? Then ultimately think about,

what's the golden bridge that you want to create for them in order to get to the other side where they were motivated to get there because it was in their self-interest to get there, but also because it helped accomplish the different objective. I have many examples that I lived through with that, obviously negotiating in Congress for prison reform. I had to form a lot of trust with Democrats, whether it was Hakim Jeffries or Dick Durbin, and then also on the Republican side with Mike Lee, Lindsey Graham, I had Tim Scott, Senator Grassley, and then also Doug Collins in the House was tremendous. Every time we maneuvered something, we would get attacked either from the left. There was a time we were being attacked by Nancy Pelosi, John Lewis, for not being inclusive enough. Then there were times that we maneuvered it. We'd be attacked from the right for maybe going too far, and ultimately we had to find just the right place where we can get it done. The same thing happened with USMCA, where we were negotiating the biggest trade deal in the history of the world, which was \$1.3 trillion in annual trade between Mexico, Canada, and the United States of America. We were able to form good trust with the other side and try to say, how do we create win-win outcomes? Ultimately, we were able to do something in a record time that people thought was very hard to do. Both of them, in a divided time of the Trump administration, were bipartisan wins with big, big votes in the Senate and the House.

You have a lot of stories of this kind, sometimes a soft approach, sometimes a hard approach. I think the story where with BB, there was a potential dramatic election coming up and you had to say, no excuses, no delaying. We have to make this agreement. I know BB cares about Israel more than the particular dynamics of the election. You have to draw a hard line there. But in fairness to him, during the time that we were dealing with him, he was always in election versus election and then election. What he was saying wasn't wrong. I think he was more expressing his concerns given the dynamics. We never held those concerns against him. We just said those are real concerns he had. We respected those concerns, but then we helped him prioritize to help accomplish the right things. That's ultimately what the partnership is. My job was to represent America, his job was to represent Israel, and you had other parties representing their own interests. As long as you assume that people were acting mostly in good faith, you were able to navigate areas where you didn't have complete overlap of priorities and objectives. Just to go back to the trust thing, you sometimes see that with leaders where it looks like they're trying to screw over the other person when they're talking. Not having that, I think is a really powerful thing for earning trust. People actually can believe that your results driven are working towards a certain end. Is there a skill to that? Is that genetics? Are you born with that? Or is that something you develop? Basically, it requires you to look at the game of politics and not have a cynicism about it to where everybody's trying to manipulate you and actually just go in with a kind of open mind and open heart and actually speak truthfully

to people at a basic human level. I would say that I always would think about, how can I be a partner to others? I would want somebody to be a partner to me. A lot of it comes from just my different experiences in business. I've had great partners. I've had terrible partners. My father, again, a lot of my childhood was I was exposed to business. My father, on Sundays, he would take us to job sites and to the office with him instead of the football games like my friends fathers would do. We're exposed to business. What he would say about his father, who was an immigrant to America, came over with nothing and no formal education, but he would always say, a good deal with a bad partner will always be a bad deal. And a bad deal with a good partner, you'll figure it out. And so going through some of the challenges that I had in my life early on, whether it was the issue with my father that I'm sure we'll talk about, or even going through some tougher financial times during the great financial crisis, I really learned a lot about partnership and I always thought, how can I act in a way where I could be the type of partner or friend to others that I wish others would be to me? So when you look for a good partner, don't you think there's the capacity for both good and bad in every person? So when you talk, when you negotiate with all of these leaders, aren't there like multiple people you're speaking to inside one person that you're trying to encourage, catalyze like the goodness in the human? Yeah, so leaders are generally chosen by their country. And so my view was, if I had an objective, I didn't get to choose who is the leader of other countries. My job was to deal with that leader, understand their strengths, understand their weaknesses, understand their power dynamics as well. One of my greatest takeaways when I grew up, I'd read the newspapers about all these powerful, famous people. And then as I got older and had the chance to meet them and do business with them, and then ultimately interact with them in government, is I realized that they're just like you and me. They wake up every morning, their kids are pissed at them, their wife doesn't want to talk with them. And they've got a set of advisors around them, one saying, let's go to war, one saying, let's make peace, one saying, do the deal, one saying, don't do the deal. And they're all thinking, where do I get advice? How do I make decisions? And so understanding the true human nature of them and then the different power dynamics around them, I thought was very key. And so I didn't have a choice, do I deal with them or not? It was a function of how do you deal with them effectively in order to find areas where you have common interests and then work well together to pursue those common interests in order to achieve a certain goal. First of all, you're incredibly well read. I've gotten to know you and I've gotten to know Ivanka and the book recommendation list is just incredible. So first of all, thank you for that. You told me about The Guns of August by Barbara Tuckman. It's a book on World War I and I went down a whole rabbit hole there. It's like an incredible historian. But anyway, there's a bunch of stuff you learned from that, but one of the things you told me is it influenced your general approach to diplomacy of just picking up the phone and giving it a try. So as opposed to planning and strategizing, just pick up the phone. So this was a book I read way before the notion of serving in government was ever even on my mind or a reality. And I remember thinking about it, reading it and thinking how World War I started where you had somebody who was assassinated and then you had all these different alliances that were created. And then in order to accomplish objectives, it triggered all of these people getting in bed with everyone else because of documents that were created without the intent of going to a massive war. And I think in the

course of World War I, it was one of the greatest atrocities that we've seen as humanity. We've had 16 million people killed in that war. And I was reading the book, I remember thinking to myself, even though things are set in a certain way, go sit with somebody, go talk to them and say, this doesn't make sense, this is wrong, how do we create a better pathway? And as a civilian, all my life, I would read the newspapers, I would observe how different leaders would act. But when we had the opportunity to serve in government and have the position, you realize you're not a civilian, you don't have the luxury of sitting back and letting the world happen the way it's happening, you have agency and you have the potential to influence the outcome of things. And one thing I've seen is most political prognosticators are wrong. Anyone who tells you what's going to happen really has no clue. And it's not because they're bad or they're not intelligent, it's because nobody knows. And at the end of the day, the outcomes in the world are usually driven by the decisions of humans. And if you're able to come together, form relationships, listen to each other, you can do that. And one of the great examples that I speak about in the book is with North Korea. Whereas if you remember, in 2017, it was very intense when President Obama was leaving office, he told President Trump that the single biggest fear that he had, and this is a time when the world was a mess, you had the Middle East was on fire, ISIS was the heading journalists and killing Christians, they had to caliphate the size of Ohio, Libya was destabilized, Yemen was destabilized, Syria was in a civil war, where 500,000 people were killed, Iran was on a quad path to a nuclear weapon. Yet the single biggest fear he had was North Korea. And then it got compounded by the fact that we get into office and President Trump brings his generals around, and he's learning how to interact with all the generals and says, okay, what are my options? And they said, calm down, we've been using all of our ammunition in the Middle East, we don't have enough ammunition to go to war over there. And he says, let's not let that be too public, let's try to restock and come up with a plan. And at the time, there was a lot of banter back and forth. And I got a call from a friend who was an old business contact who actually had done business in North Korea. And he said, I'd love to find a way to solve this. And I was getting calls from friends at the time saying, I'm trying to go to Hawaii for vacation, should I not be going? Is it not safe? I mean, we forget the psychology of how intense that was at the time. And then through that interaction, he called some of his contacts in North Korea, and then we were able with the CIA to open up a back channel that ultimately led to the de-escalation, the meeting between Trump and Kim Jong-un, which led to a de-escalation. So that was really the mindset, which was whenever there's a problem, just pick up the phone and try. And I think President Trump had a very similar approach, which was let's give it a shot. And he wasn't afraid to go after the hard ones too. And I'll say one final thing on this, which is that in politics, the incentive structure is just much different than in the real world, in the sense that you have a hard problem. Then if you try to solve a hard problem, the likelihood of failure is great. Whereas in the business world, if you're going after a hard problem, we celebrate those people. We want our entrepreneurs and our great people to go after solving the big hard problems. But in politics, if you try to take on a hard problem, you have a high likelihood of failure, you'll get a lot of criticism on your pathway to trying to accomplish that if you fail. And then if you fail, it has a higher probability of leading to you losing your opportunity to serve. And so it's just one of these things where people want to play it safe, which is not the notion that really was taken during the time that President

Trump was in office. Do you think it has to be that way? I think there's something in the human spirit, in the public that desires politicians to take on the big, bold problems. Why is it that the politicians need to be so afraid of failure? I don't think it has to be that way. And that's, I think, one of the great lessons from the time of the Trump administration. He brought a lot of people from the business world into government. The business people have a much different mindset than government people. And there was a lot of resistance. And I think part of why there was so much resistance was because I think about it from my personal sense was that if I was successful with no traditional qualifications to do diplomacy, it meant that all the people with traditional qualifications and diplomacy didn't necessarily need those qualifications in order to be successful. And that same sentiment manifested itself in many areas in government. And I think that in the business world, it's outcome oriented, it's results oriented. And what we would see in New York is there, they would stab you in the eye and DC, they would stab you in the back, and it just became a whole different dynamic of how you work through these different areas. So the answer is it doesn't have to be that way. You just need the right courageous leader. And that's why I'm so optimistic about what the future of America and the world could be if you have the right people in power who are willing to take on the right challenges and do it in the right way. So if we just linger on the North Korea and the de-escalation and the meeting, what's the trajectory from this could be the most catastrophic thing that destroys the world to you find back channels, you start talking and start arranging the meeting? Is there some insights you can give to how difficult that is to do in that, in the North Korea case, which seems like to be one of the more closed off parts of the world and in the other cases that you worked on? Yeah, it's always very challenging. And especially when you're going against the grain of what's established, we did something different to think that an old business contact that I had could then do it. I mean, that's the type of thing that if the press knew what we were doing, they would have derided it and criticized it in every which way. But that was one of the benefits of operating very much below the radar is that we were able to try all these different things. And not all of them worked, but some of them did. But that is what's amazing about the world, right? This could be the biggest story on the front page of every paper and they're inciting fear in everyone. And it's not illegitimate fear. I mean, there were missile tests over Japan. I mean, you had a lot of very big challenges with that file. And then all of a sudden, we make contact, we go through negotiations to set a meeting. There's a meeting between President Trump and Kim Jong-un. And then all of a sudden, there's a framework to try and move things forward.

And again, I think that there's a lot of possibility there for what could happen if it's worked in the right way. I just want to know how you award that first email or text message, like what emojis to use, like the hugging emoji. It's just personally, I've gotten to know a lot of powerful and rich people. It's funny that they're all human, just like you're saying. And a lot of the drama, a lot of the problems can be resolved with just a little camaraderie, a little kindness, a little like, just actually just reaching out. We're all human beings and people want to be successful and people want to be good. And you're right too. There's way more emojis involved in diplomacy than I ever would have expected. And every leader, I'm sure, has their favorite emoji. This is also I learned about people. Everybody has their go-to emoji. I usually go to the heart very quickly,

emoji. There's some people who go to the hugging, whatever that, where you're like doing the hugging thing. Anyway, this conversation quickly turned to the ridiculous. But to do another book reference, you mentioned the book 13 days in September by Lawrence Wright

while in discussing all the work you've done in Israel and the Middle East. I just want to ask you sort of the interesting aspect of that book, which is the influence of the personalities and personal relationships on these negotiations. You kind of started to allude to that with the trust, but how much do the personalities matter in this? So going from North Korea to the Middle East here

to within Congress and all that kind of stuff. Yeah, completely in every way. I mean, that's an incredible book and it's a very entertaining read. It has obviously a lot of good historical context on some of the key players, whether it's on more Sadat or Menachem Begin or Jimmy Carter and Cy Vance and a lot of the others who were involved with those negotiations. And the thing that I kind of took from that experience was just how personal it was. And again, one of my favorite stories from that book was how Anwar Sadat, who was a big, big leader, he had a mystic who was, according to this book, again, history. I like reading it, but I always realize that you have to notice that this is just the perspective of a given author that's writing it. But the way that they write this book was that he had an advisor who was a mystic, and the mystic was having a back channel with the Israelis. And the mystic told Sadat, if you go to Israel and you make a speech at the Knesset, Begin is ready to give you the Sinai. And so he goes to Israel, they set this whole thing up, he goes and gives the Knesset, they go for their meeting after, and Sadat says, okay, well, are we going to do this thing? And Begin says, what are you talking about? Am I giving you an inch of our land? And it was just one of these things where it was a miscommunication that brought about the symbolic visit of Anwar Sadat to Israel. And that was one of these notions that just made everyone think that something was possible, that they thought was impossible a moment before. And actually, we had an example like that during our time in government

when we did the Abraham Accords. The first step of the Accords was really a phone call between President Trump, a Prime Minister in Netanyahu, and Hamid Ben Zayed, who at that point was the Crown Prince and de facto ruler of the UAE. But all we had was a phone call and then a statement that was released. And what was interesting after that is we said, okay, well, how do we integrate countries? Nobody's done this in a long time. And we were trying to figure out all the issues, and there's big miscommunications between Israel and UAE, and we were navigating through all the issues.

And so after a couple weeks, I said, you know, I've got to go over there and try to sort through these issues. So we make a plan to go to Israel, then we can go to UAE.

And then a young gentleman who worked with me named Avi Berkowitz says, well, if we're flying from Israel to UAE, instead of flying on a government plane, why don't we see if we can get an LL plane and we'll do the first official commercial flight.

And so I said, that's a great idea. Let's call, you know, Ambassador Otaiba Yusuf, who was a tremendous player in the Abraham Accords working behind the scenes, you know, day and night, and was really a big catalyst. So he calls Yusuf and he said, sure, no problem. Let's give it a shot. So we go and we do it. And he says, if we can work out these issues, we'll do it.

So we go to Israel, we do our meetings, we get everything back into a good place. We set up this trip over. We fly on an LL plane. We filled it up at the time it was during COVID with a health delegation. We had the financial ministry because we had to open up, you know, banking relationships. They could wire money between countries. We wanted to get, you know, health partnerships. Then we just had a lot of legal things and national security things. We wanted to start putting together. So we do this flight and we end up landing in UAE. And the picture of us coming off the plane, being greeted by, you know, Emiratis and Tobes with an LL plane with an Israeli flag on it, just captured everyone's imagination. And so it was one of these things where it's like, you work so hard on the details and the negotiation, I mean, hundreds of hours to kind of make sure everything's perfect. And the one thing that you do kind of, you know, yeah, let's give it a shot. That image ended up capturing everyone's heart. So going back to Sadat, that visit was very critical. And what was interesting was, is according to this book, it happened because of a miscommunication. That was the first part. The second part of the book, that's just amazing theater, and actually the book was based on a play, was just going back and forth with all of the different methodologies that they tried, that failed, but they kept trying out it. And then ultimately seeing how the personalities were able to find ways to make the compromise that ultimately was a very, very big thing for more stability in the Middle East. And so amazing book, I would highly recommend it. A very entertaining read and something that at least gave me encouragement to keep going when the task I was pursuing seemed so, so, so large. I mean, if you could just linger on the personalities, you write in the book that words matter, or you write in the context of saying, in the diplomacy business, words matter. And then you said that we're in the results business. It's a badass line. But if we just stick to the diplomacy business and words mattering, it seems like one of the things you really highlight that individual words can really have, like you can fight over individual words. So like, how do you operate in a world where single words matter? I think you have to be respectful to the craft that you're in, where words matter, but then realize that they don't matter as much. And then also focus on the fact that the actions are actually what's going to matter more than the words. And so you have a difference between leaders and politicians. Politicians are there to say the right thing and to hold the power. Leaders are people who are willing to do things that will be transformational from my perspective. And so when I would think about diplomacy, words without actions or without the threat of actions, and that was something that President Trump did very well was that people knew that he was willing to take action. He was very unpredictable in how he would act. And that made our words much more effective in what they did. So it's all a combination. But coming from the private sector, we are all about results. If you're in government, you can work on something for 10 years and fail and then retire and they consider you an expert in the private sector. If you work on something for 10 weeks and you don't have a success, then you're unemployed. So it's a different kind of notion. And it was just understanding the mentality and trying to adjust and bridging the divides between the different trainings. Is that the biggest thing you took from your business background? Is that just be really results focused? It was just the only way to be. If I was giving up a nice life in New York and if I was giving up the stuff that I really enjoyed, the company

that I'd helped build and the life that I was enjoying in order to do government, I was going there to make a difference. And we had to focus on it. The other skill set, so there was a couple skill sets that I found were quite deficient in government. First of all, there was a ton of amazing people. I mean, people talk about the bureaucracy. What I found was is you had incredibly committed, passionate, intelligent, capable people all throughout the government. And what they were waiting for though was direction and then cover in order to get there. And so there were a lot of tasks that I worked on, whether it was building the wall at the southern border where I was able to work with customs, border patrol, Army Corps of Engineers, military, DHS professionals, DOD. And we basically all came together. And then once we had a good project management plan, we were able to move very, very quickly. I think we built about 470 miles of border barrier in about two years basically. And that worked very well because we basically brought private sector project management skill sets, which were quite often missing in government. The second one is just, we spoke about negotiation earlier. I would say that most people in government is just a different form of negotiation than you see in the private sector and way less effective in that regard, which is why I think it's good the more we can encourage more people with private sector experience to do a stint in government and to really try to contribute and serve their country. That's how our founders, George Washington and all the founding fathers, they were working on their farms. They left their farms serving government and they went back to the farm. And that was kind of the design of the representative government. It wasn't a career political class. It was people coming in to show gratitude for the freedoms and liberties that they enjoyed and then do their best to kind of help others have those same opportunities that they had. And then they'd go back and live their lives. And so I think that there's a lot of opportunity with our government, if people with more business mindsets who are going to think about things from a solutions perspective, go and serve. Is that one of the main problems here? So you also mentioned the book, *The Great Degeneration* by Neil Ferguson, an awesome historian who's been on this podcast. It helped you understand the inefficiencies of government regulation. I'd love it if you can give an insight into why government is so inefficient at times. Like when it is inefficient, when it doesn't work, why is that the case? The bureaucracy that you spoke to, the negative aspects of the bureaucracy. So we don't have enough time on this podcast to go into it, but there's a lot of aspects that work as well, right? But I do think we've gotten too big. Neil's book that you mentioned, one of the things that I took from that, I read it I think in 2012, kind of in the middle of the great financial crisis, was he was talking about how government regulation often was put in place to deal with old crises, right? So it was never going to solve future problems. It was more to kind of create, to solve for problems that had happened in the past. And I remember thinking about that. One thing I was very proud of, of the work of the Trump administration was that you had four years consecutively where there was a net decrease in the cost of regulations. So to give you a context, in the last year of Obama in 2016, there were 6 million man hours spent by the private sector, complying with new federal regulations. And that's not really what the intent of our government was, right? If we have rules or regulations, those should be legislated by Congress. They shouldn't be put in by bureaucrats who are basically saying,

I want to follow this objective. So using kind of the power of the pen in order to do that. So the deregulatory effort was actually very critical to Trump's economic success that happened at the beginning of the administration. And then what I saw with regulation was anytime either there was legislation or regulation coming, the people pushing for it were usually the people who would benefit from the regulatory capture. So you had these, you look at the great financial crisis where you had this big banking reforms. Well, what happened during the big banking reforms? Then you had a big reduction in the amount of banks that occurred and the big banks became even bigger. Whereas I don't think that was the intention of the legislation, but the people who were writing the legislation and influencing it had a lot of the constituencies from those larger institutions. And then what happened as a result of that? A lot of these smaller institutions didn't have the ability to be as competitive. They had more restrictions, more costs, they became less profitable. But these were the banks that were serving small business, which is the biggest creator of jobs in our country. And then as a result, the bigger banks got more powerful. And what happened in the country as a result of the regulations that they put in place, the wealth gap in the country grew, it didn't shrink. And so I think oftentimes what they say these regulations are intended to be, the result often becomes the opposite. And so what President Trump did in his administration was they did a massive deregulatory effort. And I think they pledged that for every one regulation they put on, because you do need some regulation in an economy and in a society, they would take off too. And in the first year, they eliminated eight regulations for everyone. And so that was just something I took from it, which was, I thought, very interesting. And you had to really, I think you have to think through what are the consequences going to be of the different actions you take. And often government gets it wrong by taking an action that feels right, but has big negative consequences down the road. Let's go to some difficult topics. You wrote in the book about your experience with some very low points in government. You've been attacked quite a bit. One of the ones that stands out is the accusations of collusion with Russia. And you tell in the book in general, this whole story, this whole journey on a personal level and a sort of big political level. Can you tell me some aspects of this story? Sure. So to give the listeners some context, and people remember this now, it's been kind of swept away, because it turned out not to be true, was that after President Trump won the election in 2016, instead of the media saying, we were wrong. Because again, everyone thought he had zero chance of winning. They said, okay, well, we couldn't have been wrong. It must have been the Russians who worked with him. And so at first, when this started coming up, I thought this was ridiculous. I mean, I was very intimately involved with the operations of the campaign. I was running the finance of the campaign. I was running the digital media of the campaign. I was running the schedule for the campaign. And I knew that on most days, we had trouble like, you know, working, coordinating with ourselves, you know, let alone, you know, collaborating with another government, and colluding as they called it. And so we did a great job, I think, as an underdog campaign, very leanly staffed. And then they said that, you know, we were working with the Russians. And so at the time, I didn't take it too seriously, because I knew there was no truth to it. But it was amazing to me to start seeing all of these institutions, whether it was CNN, the Washington Post, New York Times, these were news organizations that I grew up having a lot of respect for, taking these accusations so seriously,

and then working themselves up in order to just cover it for two years. And then as a result, you had a special counsel, you had a house investigation, a Senate investigation. And I personally spent about, I think, over 20 hours just, you know, testifying before these different committees, again, spent millions of dollars out of my own pocket on my legal fees to make sure I was well represented. And the reason I did that was because I saw in Washington, it was like a sick game, right? It's almost like, you know, even though there was no underlying problems to the accusation, I felt like this is one of those things where they're going to try to catch you. And then if you step on the line, they catch you with one misrepresentation, they're going to try to put you in jail or worst of, you know, bid, bid, bid, bid. And so for me, that was a big concern. So, you know, it was amazing. I mean, my poor mom, you know, I told her to stop, you know, reading whatever. I said, well, I promise you, we didn't do anything wrong. It's good. But, you know, she'd call me and say, well, you know, our friends were, you know, on the Upper East Side, we're talking with Chuck Schumer, he says, Jared's going to jail. You know, we know for sure that he colluded with the Russians. And this is like a leading senator saying things like this. And so it was just interesting for me to see how the whole world could believe something and be talking about it that I knew with 1000% certainty it was just not true. And so seeing that play out was very, very hard. Obviously, you know, I was accused of a lot of things. There were times in Washington, I was radioactive. I remember one weekend, you know, it was all over CNN, you know, the people, they had panels on CNN, like the news organization that I grew up thinking was like the number one trusted name for news in the world, talking about how I'd committed treason, because I met with an ambassador and said, we'd like to hear your perspective on what you think the policy should be in Syria, where there was a big civil war happening and ISIS and a lot of different things. So it was quite a crazy time in that regard. But luckily, again, we were able to fight through it. It was a major distraction for our administration. I think we were able to kind of stay focused on the objectives and the policies. But it was a crazy time. And I learned a lot from that experience. It's crazy how just an accusation can be viral and can just go. One of the things that worries me is the effect on your mind, the psychology of it, to make sure it doesn't make you cynical. Like people that are trying to do stuff, those kinds of stories that can destroy their mind. So one of the things I'd love to sort of understand, you kind of rolled in from the business floor, and all of a sudden the entire world from CNN to everybody's accusing you of colluding with the Russians. Like what do you do? Like when you're sitting at home, how do you keep a calm mind, a clear mind, an optimistic one that doesn't become cynical and actually just keep trying to push on and do stuff in the world? So it was a surreal experience. I would say number one is I felt very confident that I hadn't done anything wrong. So I would always tell my lawyer, the good news is I've got a good fact problem, right? Like I need a good lawyer to get me through it, but it's much easier to be a good lawyer if you have a very innocent client. And so the fact that I knew that I didn't have, I didn't believe that I had any legal liability helped me kind of intellectually separate the challenge I needed to do to fight through it from it. And then I just basically said, like, and I'd had hardship earlier in my life where I dealt with the situation with my father. And what I realized there is that you can't really spend energy on the things that you don't control. All you can do is spend your time and energy worrying about what you can control

and then how do you react to the things that you have there? And so it took a lot of discipline, it took a lot of strength. And again, I give my wife Ivanka and even Donald a lot of credit for having my back during that time and encouraging me just to kind of fight through it. And then I also had to make sure that I didn't allow that to distract me from my job. I felt like I had an amazing opportunity in the White House to make a difference in the world. And if I would have spent all my time playing defense, you know, in politics, it's a time duration game. In business, you have whatever duration you set for yourself. In politics, it's time duration. We had four years. Every day was sand through an hourglass. My mindset was, I need to accomplish as much as I can in these four years. And I guess the traditional game that's played in Washington is whether it's the media, the opposition, their job is to distract you and then try to stop you from being as successful as you want to be. And so just fought through it. And it wasn't always fun, but we got through. And thank God, it's something people don't talk about. And it has been amazing to me, just the lack of self-awareness and reflection of a lot of the people who hyped this up for two years. They don't think there was anything wrong with it. And that's interesting. But you know, my view is, we got through it, it's good. So it's in the past. And then I started moving to the future. And that's really where I spent my time. Yeah. But I want to linger on it because to me, that has a really discouraging effect on anyone who's trying to do positive in the world. Like these kinds of attacks are intense. Yeah. I mean, you say kind of one of the lessons you learned is that you really have to be perfect. But I hate that to be the lesson. Like, I feel like you should be able to do stupid stuff, take big risks. And like people celebrate the big risks and not try to weave gigantic stories over nothing. I just want to kind of understand the two aspects of this, how to not have such stories of so much legs. And the other is how to stay psychologically strong. So you kind of waved it off that you didn't have a fact problem. But it can just have a fact in your psyche. Yeah. You seem to be pretty stoked about the whole thing. But like how, I mean,

just on the psychology side, how did you stay calm and not become cynical where you can continue to do stuff and take big risks? I didn't have a choice. What do you mean? I mean, I could have spent every day feeling sorry for myself or complaining or saying things aren't fair. But the general way I looked at it was that in life, every opportunity has a cost. And you know, you could look at it and say, maybe this was a massive cost either in dollars or in time or in reputation or in emotional drain. But you could also say that, you know, I had an opportunity to work in the White House and I had an opportunity to work on some of the hardest challenges. And you talk about how that's not celebrated, that is something very different. In the private sector, when you take on big challenges that is celebrated in government, when you take on big challenges, people want to see it fail or they want to criticize those people who are trying to take that on. And I think that's wrong. And I think that, you know, as a country, we should be thinking big, we should be dreaming big and we should be encouraging our politicians to try and to fail more and to, you know, to go and to take on big things knowing that there's risk of failing. Obviously we want them to succeed not to fail, but let's take on the big things. Let's try to do that. So I think it's just very basic that, you know, you're in a situation, I've made decisions, I can't go back and change decisions in the past. I still felt, you know, very blessed to be in the position I was in. And I knew that I just had to work through it. And like I said, I was very lucky to have, you know, support from my wife and from my family

and from good friends. Again, I think I'd chosen very good friends in life and my friends were with me. I had one friend who, you know, my lowest moment, you know, got on the plane, you lived in Arizona, got on a plane and came just have dinner with me to say, just pick your head up, I know you're down now, you're going to be fine, just fight through. That meant a lot to me. And again, I always think in my life, you know, you don't learn as much from your successes, you don't learn as much from your high points, you learn the most about who you want to be and how the world works from your lowest moments. And at those lowest moments, it just, it made me better. And it taught me how to be a better friend to people who are in tough situations. And I tried to just get, get tougher and I tried to just get better and work through it. Yeah, you said that you and Ivanka, this, this, this intense time brought you two together and helped you kind of deal with the intensity of the chaos of it all. So I think it was just number one, knowing that you had a partner and knowing that you had somebody who loved you and believed in you. I think that was definitely by far the biggest of anything. And love is the answer. Love is very important. But then there's also a lot that I've learned from her always, you're getting me to read different books or learn different things, which I love. But she's also, I think, an amazing role model. And I go through our time in Washington where there were so many people who were, I thought, very nasty to her unfoundedly. And I'm not talking about individually, because again, you know, most people interacted with her were super kind, but I would see people, you know, on Twitter, different places go after and she always stayed elegant. And I felt like that was something that she never stooped down to a lower level. She kept her elegance the whole time. And she really went to Washington wanting to be a force of good. And I see all the time that she follows her heart, she does what's right. And she has a very strong moral compass. And I feel very lucky to have her as a partner. And I respect her tremendously. Yeah, she walks the fire with grace, I would say. And she's recommended a bunch of amazing books to me. And she has an incredible, a fascinating mind. So, but one thing that jumped out to me is you both love diners, Jersey diners. So I lived in Philly for a while. And I've, you know, I traveled quite a bit and traveling from Boston down to Philly, maybe to D.C. You can drive through Jersey. It's something about Jersey. I know what it is. You listen to Bruce Springsteen, there's a Lucy K is this bit where I think it's part of criticizing cell phones today where people are too much on their phone. They don't just sit there be bored. But he uses that story to tell where he's just driving and the Bruce Springsteen song comes on. And he just wants to pull over to the side of the road and just like weep for an unexplainable reason. And I think that's true. Because life is difficult. Life is full of suffering or struggle or challenges. Sometimes it's always Bruce Springsteen, but like some kind of song like this can really make you reflect on life, that melancholy feeling. But that melancholy feeling is the other side of the happiness coin, where if you just allow yourself to feel that pain, you can also feel the highest joys. That's the sort of the point Lucy K makes. And there's something about Jersey with the diners often late at night. Now there's several diner experiences, I should say. Okay, there's like the family friendly, there's the nice waitress and just this is sweetness of kindness, like hello sweetheart, that kind of thing. There's also like the 3am diner, where you're like the ones that are open 24 hours. That has a romantic element when you're a young man or young

woman,
traveling the loneliness of that. This is all of it. The American diner is like, from like Jack Kerouac on, represents something. I'm not sure what that is, but it's like a real beautiful experience. And the food itself too. Always fresh, yeah. The thing with diners, there's so much to love about it. And I grew up, obviously in New Jersey, when I'd go with my father to business, he'd always stop and we'd eat at a diner late at night. I'd be coming back with my friends, we'd stop at a diner. And it's a tradition that Ivanka and I love doing as well. And I think there's a notion of, it's very egalitarian in that people from all places are there, you could order basically whatever you want. I mean, the menus at the diners look like the phone book. And it's amazing how they keep so much fresh ingredients to do it, at least the good ones do. I love as a Jersey guy, you get mozzarella sticks and an omelet at any hour of the day, because most of them are open 24 hours. And that's basically my Ivanka, my go-to. We'll throw in a milkshake or two as well. But for me as a kid, my father would take me. Sometimes I'd sit with him in the meeting. Sometimes I'd be at the table next to him. He'd give me a bunch of quarters to put in the music machine that they would have on the wall. And it was always just a great experience doing it. And I joke that if you grew up in Jersey, you grew up with just enough of a chip on your shoulder that you have to go and make something of yourself in life. It's a special place. I had an amazing childhood there and very, very proud to be from the state. And I will just give a little bit of a plug now because the state has now actually turned the corner and they had a \$10 billion budget surplus for many years. It was a state that was basically bankrupt and now actually under a pretty progressive Democrat governor, Phil Murphy, he's turned the state around and it actually has a very bright future ahead. And it's probably one of the best places to raise a family in the country. It's got very low crime, one of the best public school systems in the country, a pretty good healthcare system, a lot of green parks. People know the term pike, but it's got a lot to it. That's really great. So I'm a big, big fan of Jersey. I like how this is the first for this particular podcast. You literally gave a plug to a state. So in New Jersey, everybody, it's where it's at. South Jersey is North Jersey. I mean, there's all kinds of jerseys too. I mean, the whole thing. And don't get me started on the Jersey Shore, Lex. Jersey Shore is the whole thing. And I'm not talking about the snuggly part. I'm talking about the real nice parts where you have great food, great people. I mean, nice parts. It's all beautiful. The full range of human characters that are in New Jersey are all beautiful. I agree with that. And every time I travel across the world, there's always a meet somebody from New Jersey and you kind of give a knot of a deep understanding. It's the cradle of civilization. Anyways, okay. So back, I don't know how we got there. Oh, all right. Going back to the low points, you mentioned your father, if we could just return there, even just the personal story of your father, that you write about, all the betrayal that happened in his life, and then how he responds to that betrayal. And he was kind of after that arrested. Can you just tell the story? Sure. So my father is an amazing person. And we grew up in New Jersey. My father was a big developer, a great entrepreneur, built an amazing business. He got into a dispute with two of his siblings. And through that dispute, they basically took all the documents in his

company, went to the US Attorney's Office, and turned into, from a civil dispute into a real public dispute. My father did something wrong in that process. And when he got arrested for that, he basically said, what I did was wrong. And he took his medicine and he did it like a man. And he said, I'm going to go to prison. And he did that for a year. And so for me, that was a very challenging time in the family, obviously. It was a shock. It was a total change. I mean, I grew up, my childhood was, I think, a very nice childhood. My parents always said, do good in school, work hard. I was very focused on my athletics. I was captain of the basketball team, captain of the hockey team. I ran a marathon with my father. And it was always about pursuing, went to Harvard, graduated with honors, and that was in NYU pursuing a law degree and a business degree. And I was working at Manhattan District Attorney's Office at the time, actually thinking I wanted to go into public service. Because my father always taught us, we were always surrounded by politicians. And he always said, you know, my parents came to America, they lived in the land of opportunity. And they had these opportunities, because this is the progressed country in the world. And so you should, you know, be successful, work hard, don't ever let your opportunities become your disadvantages, because you have advantages in life, you have to work harder. And that's what he instilled in myself and my brother, and always pushed us to make the most of ourselves. And when we did that, you know, everything changed overnight when my father got arrested. Obviously, it's very embarrassing for a family when you're on the front page of the papers, I would see the newspapers writing all these things about my father that I didn't think were representative of the person that I knew. It was a big change for our family. And, you know, I was angry. I was angry, I said, you know, I could be angry at the prosecutor, I could be angry at my father's brother, I could be angry at my father's lawyers, I could be angry at my father for making this mistake. And then I kind of said, that's not going to change anything. And I had a real shift, and I do think that that was a turning point in my life where I basically said, let me focus on the things I can control, let me focus on the positive things I can do. And from that moment forward, I said, how can I be a great son to my father? How could I be a great older brother slash, you know, substitute father for my two sisters, my younger brother? How could I be there for my mother? How could I be there for my father's business? And I just went into battle mode. And I put my armor on and I just, you know, ran into it. And for the next two years, it was, every day was painful. I mean, I was dealing with banks, I was dealing with the company was still at subpoenas. I was still in law school. I tell my father I wanted to drop out of law school and business school, but he said, please don't. So, I would basically go to law school one day a week or maybe I'd skip it most days and I'd go to his office every day. And my friends would joke that if my professors wanted to fail me, the law professor would have to give me a test that had four pictures and say, circle who your professor is, you know, but I would basically take a week off, I'd read the books and I did well and I got my degrees. And it was just a very, very challenging time. But like I said to you before is that you learn the most about life and you learn the most about humanity and yourself when you're in your most challenging periods. And I'll say that, you know, that experience also changed, you know, the people I interacted with spending weekends with my father down in a prison in Alabama. I met the other inmates, I met their families. I spent time then trying to advise the children

of other people who were going through the same experience that I'd gone through on how to navigate

it, you know, correctly. And you just learned a lot about the world and you see that, you know, in life, everything could get taken from you, your status, your money, your friends. I saw that certain people were very disloyal to my father at the time who he thought were friends. It was only a handful. But again, I learned from those people, how can I be a true friend to people?

How can I be better? And I learned a tremendous amount through that experience.

You're right that your father told you about being humble. I'd love to ask you about this, that in life sometimes you get so powerful that we start to think

where the deal is of our own fate. Where not the dealer is God as the dealer. Sometimes we have to be brought back down to earth to get perspective on what is really important. What do you think he meant by that? What did you learn from that experience? The way I interpreted at the time, and those were very, very memorable words, and it occurred, I was down after I picked up my father from the arraignment, I drove him down, I drove the car and my father and I are very, very close. And he didn't say a word for the whole time. And I think he was processing, number one, what was happening to him. And I couldn't even imagine. But I actually think the bigger pain for him, because my father is such a committed person to the family is like, did I let my family down? Did I let my kids down? And I do think he felt at that moment like his life was over. He couldn't really see past what this challenge was going to bring. And if there would be a life for him after it, so I could see that he had a lot of fear. And he really wasn't saying much. And then I didn't know what to do. And so I just stood by him and stood close. And later that day, or the next day, he got up and started walking. He had an ankle monitor for whatever reason. The prosecutor was such a so aggressive, he was a flight risk. So they made him wear an ankle monitor. They were very, very aggressive and nasty. And at the time, my father was the biggest donor to Democrats. The prosecutor was a Republican. It was a very political thing. And what happened was, is he was walking around the pool and I just started walking with him. And he said to me, you know, Jared, in life, sometimes we get so powerful that we believe that we're the dealer. He says, but we're not the dealer. God's the dealer. And we have to, you know, come down to earth to understand, like you said. So what I took from that was that my father, with all of his success, had started to believe that maybe certain rules didn't apply to him. And I think that that's where he made a mistake. And I think he had a lot of regret that he made the mistake. And, you know, my father is a very humble person. He's a very moral person. You know, for me, with my humility, my brother and I joke that we give our credit for being humble number one to being Metz fans, because every year you have a lot of promise and then it never ends up paying off. Although now with Steve Cohen, hopefully we run a different trajectory. But the other thing is also our mother, you know, our mother really raised us to be very humble, to be, you know, we had, we knew we had a lot, but every Sunday morning, my mom was there clipping the coupons, the cereal we ate in our house was based on, you know, was based on what was on sale versus what we liked, you know, when we would have a problem with our teachers in school and I'd say, well, teacher doesn't like me. She'd say, well, I'm not calling them. It's your job to make the teacher like you. And so my mother gave us a lot of that. My father gave us a lot of the grounding. And I think during that time, my father was just realizing that maybe he had gotten disconnected from the grounding and the values.

And

again, I think he also accepted maybe he could have, you know, blamed others for acting inappropriately,

but I respect the fact that he took responsibility himself and said, I can't control the actions of other people. I can't control what they do is right and wrong. I can just control my actions.

And as I go on the next journeys in my life and I go to government, I go to Washington,

I mean, I even think through the craziness of going from, you know, visiting my father in a prison to 10 years later, sitting in the office in the White House next to the president of the United States. And like, I think about that story and that it's a story that only God could write.

And I really believe that you have to have a lot of faith because the lows and the highs are both so extreme and unbelievable that I feel like those low moments in some ways allowed me to keep my grounding and to understand what was truly important in life for when I ended up going through those other moments. Your father was betrayed perhaps over money by siblings.

Is there some deeper wisdom you can draw from that? Have you seen money or perhaps power cloud people's judgment? Oh, 100%. 100%. Is there some kind of optimistic thing you can take from that about human nature of how to escape that clouding of judgment when you're talking about leaders, when you're talking about government, even business. As you mentioned, there's a power dynamics at play always when you're negotiating. Is there a way to see the common humanity and not see the sort of will to power in the whole thing? Definitely. You mentioned about power, money, corrupting. There's a great quote I heard a friend of mine say is a guy, Michael Harris, who was one of the founders of Death Row Records. And he was being interviewed recently and they asked him about what happened with Shook Knight. And his line was, money just makes you more of what you already are, which I thought was a very elegant way of saying it. And I would see this time and time again in the White House where you had people who were now given a lot of responsibility

and power and it went to their head and they acted very crazily and maybe it didn't act in a way that I thought was always conducive to the objectives. So I think it's a very big problem that you have. Whether it's something that's solvable, I think it's about having the right leaders and hopefully for the leaders having good friends. I'm still friends with a lot of the people I interacted with when I was in government. And the number one thing I try to beat to them is just a good friend. I try to be somebody who they can talk about things with. I don't go in trying to tell them what to do on different things. And I think that that's a big thing, is that people just need friends and they need conversation. And if they have that, then hopefully that allows them to keep their head in the right place.

I think this is a good place to ask about one aspect of the fascinating work you've done, which is on prison reform. Can you take me through your journey of helping the bipartisan bill get passed? Just working on prison reform in the White House in general, how you made that happen, how you help make that happen.

Sure. So we passed a law called the First Step Act, which was the largest prison and criminal justice reform bill that's been done maybe in 30, 40, 50 years in the US. And so what it basically did was two things. Number one is it took the prison system and it took a certain class of offenders and allowed them to become eligible for earlier release if they go through the certain trainings that will allow them to have a lower probability of going back.

So stepping back, you look at the prison system, you say, what's the purpose? Is it to punish? Is it to warehouse? Is it to rehabilitate? And I do think that we're a country that believes in second chances. I saw firsthand when my father was a client of the system how inefficient it was and how much better it could be. And when my father got out, we didn't run from that experience. He started hiring people from Micro's Island and different prisons into the company into a second chance program, which we're very, very proud of doing. And what we saw through our micro experience

was that if you give people mentorship, if you give them job training, a lot of people leave, they have addiction issues, and they can't find housing. And so people leave prison with a criminal record and they're less likely to go back and reintegrate in society without help from different institutions that can help them do that. So we modeled the reforms of what they did in Texas and Georgia and other states where they basically put a lot of job training, alcohol, and addiction treatment programs in the prisons as a way to incentivize the prisoners to work on themselves while they're there in order to allow them to reenter society. It's turned out to be very successful so far. They just had a report that showed that the general population has had a 47% recidivism rate, meaning that people who leave federal prison, half of them go back, and people who have now taken this program, only 12% of them go back. So number one, you're making communities safer because if

people are going to now get a job and enter society instead of committing future crimes, you're avoiding future crimes. And number two, you're giving people a second chance at life. And so that was the first part of it. The second thing we did was there was a rule passed in the 90s that basically penalized crack cocaine at 100 times the penalty of what regular cocaine was. And I think a lot of the motivations of what people say in retrospect was that crack was more of a black drug and cocaine was more of a white drug. And so there was a really racial disparity in terms of what the application of these sentences were. So they then revised that to make it 18 to one. And what we did in this bill is we allowed it to go retroactive to allow people who were in prison with sentences under what we thought was the racist law to be able to make an application to a judge in order to be dismissed. And it was based on good behavior, being rehabilitated and the fact that they would have a low probability of offending in the future. And so that was really the meat of it. And there was a couple other things in there we did as well, which were also quite good. So we did it, worked very closely with the Democrats, Republicans to do it. At first, President Trump was a little bit skeptical of it because he's a big strong law and order supporter, but he made me work very hard to put together a coalition of Republicans and Democrats and law enforcement. We had the support from the policemen, we had the support from the

ACLU, and ultimately we were able to get it together. And it was an amazing thing. We ended up getting 87 votes in the Senate. This happened for me at a time, while the Russia investigation stuff was still happening. New chief of staff came in, John Kelly, he basically marginalized me in the operations. So I had kind of less day-to-day responsibilities in the White House. And so for me, this effort became one of my full-time efforts along with negotiating the Mexico trade deal and along with the Middle East efforts. And the reason why that was great was because it didn't have a lot of support from the Republican caucus originally. And people thought there was no way it would happen. So I really was able to be the chief executive, the middle

executive, the low executive, the intern. And through that process, I've really got an education on how Congress works, on how to pass legislation. I was negotiating text, I was negotiating back and forth. And I built a lot of trust. Again, I deal with whether it's Akeem Jeffries or Cedric Richmond that we built a lot of trust. We'd speak three times a day. These guys had my back, the ACLU. Again, I never thought they were suing our administration every day or every other day on something. But for whatever reason, we built trust and we're able to work together. And then also with the real conservative groups, because there was a lot, a big part of the conservative base that felt like we should be giving people a second chance. And in addition to that, this will keep our country safer and will reduce the cost of what we spend on prisons. And so it was a great effort. And I was very, very proud that we're able to get it done under President Trump. How'd you convince the Republicans? So they were skeptical at first. Are we talking about like just phone conversations, going out to lunch, just back to the emojis or what? Hand-to-hand combat, meetings. The cool thing about this is, so everyone always says, I always get frustrated when I hear a lawmaker say, oh, the Senate's not what it used to be or Congress isn't what it used to be. Things are broken today. I don't think that's true. I think going through the process, I think that our founders were totally genius in the way that they designed our system of government. And what I saw is you just have to work it. So everyone knows the power of their vote. Some would give it to me easily. Some wouldn't give it to me easily. Some would trade it for other things. Some would withhold it because they were pissed about other things. And it was just hand-to-hand combat. So it was just making calls, using the phone, going, walking the halls, going to lunches, hosting dinners at my house. It was just, it was a nonstop lobbying effort. And by the way, it was also adjudicating issues and making people feel like they were heard hearing their issues and then trying to find solutions that you don't put something in that then tips off where you lose a whole coalition. So it was really a balancing act. But it was an amazing thing. And we're very close in that with Van Jones and Jessica Jackson, who also gave me a lot of help on the left. And it was an amazing thing. Had a great team too. So you mentioned the importance of trust at the very beginning of the conversation. From the outsider perspective, just maybe a dark question, which is like how much trust is there in Washington? How much, did the flip side of that, how much backstabbing is there? Can you form like long-term relationships with people on a basic human level, where you know you're not going to be betrayed, screwed over, manipulated for, again, going back to the old money and power? The answer is yes and the answer is no. So I made some incredible friends, lifelong friends through my time in Washington. But the way I think about it from politics, and I think in geopolitics as well, is I would say that politicians really don't have friends, politicians have interests. And as long as you kind of follow that rule, you should be able to know how to rate where your relationship with a given person falls in the spectrum. But I do think I was the exception. I did make some tremendous friends. And again, I'd go back to what I said about negotiation where, you know, when you're in a situation where there's really nothing in it for any of you personally, but you're in a foxhole together and nobody in Washington could get anything done by themselves. So you have people coming from all different backgrounds, all different experiences, all different geographies, coming together, agreeing on an objective, creating a

plan, and then every day rowing together in order to get it done. It's a beautiful thing. And you really learn what people are about. And so when you go through an experience like that, you learn who's in it for themselves, you learn who's in it for the cause. And, you know, for every, you know, thing you read about in the press of a fight I had with somebody because we were at odds, you know, I have about, you know, 100 people who have become lifelong friends because I respect the way that when we were under fire together, they got better, they were competent, and they were there to serve for the right reason. And so, so I guess the answer is yes, it is, it is possible. You have to be careful because there are a lot of mercurial people there. I always say the politicians are like gladiators. I didn't have as much respect for politicians till I got there. But if you think about it, everyone who's got a congressional seat or a Senate seat, there's 25 people back at home who want their job. We think they're smarter than them who are trying to backstab them. And so I always say that the political dynamic, it's like in the private sector, you're standing on, on flat ground. You choose which fights you take on when you take them on, how you fight them. In politics, it's like you're standing on a ball. And what you have to realize is that there's maybe like 10 things that you have to do, but there's a potential cost to taking on each one that might destabilize you. You fall off the ball and then you lose your opportunity to pursue those. You have to always be kind of marking everything to market and going through your calculations to make sure you can accomplish what you want to without falling off the ball and losing your opportunity to make a difference. I guess people like power. And I just feel like to be a good politician, you should be willing like good meaning, good for humanity, be willing to let go of power. You know, try to do the right thing. If there's somebody back home that doesn't manipulate yourself, screws you over and takes power from you, it's okay. I feel like that kind of humility is required to be a great leader. And I feel like that's actually a good way to have long-term power because karma has a viral aspect to it. Just doing good by others, I feel like, I'd like to say that's true, Lex. I think it's just way more complicated. I mean, you look what happened this week with Kevin McCarthy, right? He did what he thought was morally right. He thought he did a bipartisan deal. He was told that they would have his back, and then the moment things got tough, they cut him loose. So again, I don't know if that was the right thing or the wrong thing, right? I've also seen leaders on the other end say, I'm going to do things that are short-term or selfish. But the way they justify to themselves is to say, I believe that myself staying in power is existential to the greater good. So I will do things that maybe are not in the greater good now because I believe that my maintaining power is. And so it's complicated. In an idealized world, I'd love to believe that's the case, but it's just way more complicated than that. Yeah. I wish it wasn't, but it is. Yeah. I do just wish people zoomed out and people in politics zoomed out a bit and just asked themselves, what are we all doing this for? Sometimes you can get a little bit lost in the game of it. If you zoom out, you realize integrity is way more important than little gains in money or little gains in power in the long-term. It's when you look yourself in the mirror at the end of the day and also how history remembers you. I just feel like people do some dark stuff in that moment when they're losing power and they try to hold on a little too hard. This is when they can do really dark things, like bring out the worst in themselves. And it's just sad to see, and I wish there was a machinery of government would inspire people to be their best selves in their last days versus the worst selves.

When that system gets invented, you'll share with me what it is, but it's a, look, let me give you another way to frame it, which is, and this was the revelation we spoke before about when I was getting my butt kicked by the Russian investigation and all the different areas. But the basic framework I looked at was I said, okay, this all feels tough, but I said, the game's the game. The game's been here way longer, but way before I came and it'll be here way long after I leave. And so I have two choices. I can complain that the game's tough, it's not fair, it's not moral, or I can go and I can try to play the game as hard as possible. And I think that there's two different things. You have people who are willing to sit in the stands and they're willing to yell at the players or make their points known, or you have people who are willing to suit up and get in the arena and go play. And I have a lot of respect for the people who suit up and go play. And again, some of them, I wish they would play for different means, but the fact that they're willing to put their name on the ballot, make the sacrifice, and go put on the pads and get hit and hit others, I think that you need those people. And I wish more people who had maybe the moral wiring that you discussed would be putting on a helmet and go into play, because it's hard. It's hard. I agree with you. I just would love to fix the aspect of the Russia collusion, accusation, the virality, the power of that, because that's a really discouraging thing for people. Maybe it's the way it has to be, but it seems like a disincentive to people to participate. It is, but I'll give you again an optimistic side of it, is that what you're seeing now with social media is I do think with what's happening at X, there is now more of a reversion towards more egalitarianism of information. And so for many years, the media publications were the gatekeepers, and then you had these social media companies that grew, they became so powerful, but then they were tilting the scales, why they were doing it. We can go through long explanations for that, but if there truly is a real forum and a democratization of information, then you would think that the marketplace of ideas would surface the real ones and discredit the non-real ones. And I think that as a society, we're starting to come to grips with the fact that the power dynamic is changing and that some of these institutions that we used to have a lot of faith in don't deserve our faith, and some of them will actually reform and maybe re-earn our faith. So I think that there could be an optimistic tone. Again, the years of Trump, I think that he was an outsider and he represented something that was existential to the system. You think about for the 30 years before, you were either part of the Clinton dynasty or the Bush dynasty. I think a lot of people in the country felt like that whole class, whether you were in a red shirt or a blue shirt, wasn't representing them. And Trump represented a true outsider to that system. And I do think that as he went in there, there was a lot of norms that were broken to try to stop him from changing the traditional power structure. So I think that we're at a time where maybe there will be an optimistic breakthrough where you'll have institutions that will allow for a lot more transparency into what truth really is. I'd love to go back and talk to you about the Middle East because there's so many interesting components to this. Let's talk about Saudi Arabia. And first, let me ask you about MBS, Mohammed bin Salman, the Crown Prince. So you've gotten to know him pretty well. You've become friends with him. What's he like as a human being? Just at a basic human level. What's he like? For the listeners, Mohammed bin Salman is now the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia. He has risen to that position over the last couple of years. And he's been a tremendous reformer for the country. He's gone in and he's really modernized the economy. He's put a lot

more investment into the country. He's marginalized the religious police. And he's really done a good

job to bring modernization and a lot of reform. So he's been a great reformer. What he's like as a person is he's very high energy. He's got tremendous candle power, very, very smart, incredibly well read. When he was younger, his father would give him a book a week and make him report on it on the weekend. He was trained as a leader and as a politician really by his father. He's not Western educated. So he grew up in the Saudi culture and he's a real Saudi nationalist. He loves their history, loves their heritage, has a steep understanding of the tribal nature of the region. And his father was actually known to be a tremendous politician. So when he was governor of Riyadh, people who I speak to today about him say that if they had a full election, he would have won in a landslide. They say every time somebody went to the hospital, he was the first person to call. Anytime there was a funeral, he was the first person to show up. He's a very, very beloved leader. Mohamed Ben Salman, he was a businessman before he got into Crown Prince. So he thinks really with a business mindset about how he runs the country. And he's brought, I think, a different mindset and energy to the Middle East.

You know, one thing I'll say that maybe that comes to mind here is that I remember early on talking with him about all the different initiatives he was taking on. He's building a big city called Neome in the desert in a place where there really was nothing on the Red Sea.

And a lot of people were criticizing the ambition of the plan. And I was sitting with him one night and I said, you know, why are you taking on all these things? You know, you've got a lot of different programs. But, you know, what most politicians do is they set lower expectations and then they exceed the expectations. And he looked at me without hesitation. He says, Jared, you know, the way I look at it is that in five years from now, if I set five goals and I achieve five goals, I'll achieve five things. If I set 100 goals and I fail at 50 of them, then five years I'll accomplish 50 things. And so it's a very different mindset as a leader. The way I got to work with him was Saudi Arabia was a big topic in the campaign. President Trump was basically saying during the campaign that, you know, we're going to, you know, they've got to pay for their fair share. They haven't been a great partner in the region. He's very critical of Saudi. And then during the transition, I was asked by several friends to meet with a representative of Saudi Arabia. I said, I don't want to meet with them, you know, but I came over and I met and they said, well, we want to make changes. And I said, well, you have to make changes, you know, to how you treat women. Then women couldn't drive. They had guardianship laws. So you got to start

working with Israel. You know, you have to be paying more if you're fair share and you have to be, you know, stopping the Wahhabism that's being spread. And again, I'd know knowledge. These were just kind of the traditional talking points about Saudi Arabia. So the guy I was with basically said, as a guy, Fatah al-Tunzi, who's a very respected minister there, he says, Jared, he says, you know, you don't know much about Saudi Arabia, do you? I said, no, no, no, I don't. Just really what I, really what I have kind of been told or what I read. And he says, okay, let me, let me do this. We want to be great allies with America. We've traditionally been great allies with America. Can I come back to you with a proposal on ways that we can make progress on all of the different areas where we have joint interests and keep in mind at that point in time, the Middle East was a mess. And probably the single biggest issue we had

after ISIS was the ideological battle. If you remember in 2016, there was the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando. You had the San Bernardino shooting and people were being radicalized

online with the extremism. And then there was a lot of crimes that were being, that were happening because of that. And it was a big topic in the campaign. And so that, when I was thinking about, you know, talking different generals and what capabilities the US had to really combat the extremism and the ideological battle, what we realized was that Saudi Arabia is the custodian of the two holiest sites in Islam, the Mecca Medina, that that would be the best partner to work with if they were willing to. But for years, they really hadn't been willing to kind of lean into this fight. So I said, sure, give a proposal. So they come back, give a proposal. And they said, look, if you make President Trump's first trip to Saudi Arabia, we will do all these different things. We'll increase our military spending and cooperation. We'll counter all the terror financing, unbelievable layer. So I took the proposal, I went to the National, then it was General Flynn, I said, if Saudi Arabia did these things, would this be considered a big, unbelievable, but it will never happen. I said, well, they're telling me they want to do these things. Again, having no foreign policy experience, I'm just saying I've got somebody telling me they want to do it. And that's kind of where we started. Again, to office, I don't think much more about it. And then I think it was like a baby a month in, President Trump has a call with King Salman. And before the call, we're in the Oval Office. And the president's basically saying, well, this is what we want to go through. And I have Secretary Mattis and Secretary Tillerson,

the Minister of Defense and the Secretary of State basically saying, you have to deal with MBN. MBN is the guy who's been our partner for all these years. He's the head of intelligence and he's been a great partner. I said, well, if he's been a great partner, then why do we have all these problems that you guys are complaining about with Saudi? I said, I've been told that we have this proposal from MBS who's the deputy crown prince. And that's who we should be dealing with on this. And so the phone call starts and President Trump listened to both of us. And on the phone call with King Salman, President Trump says, okay, we'll go through all these things. These are the things we want to get done. And he says, well, who should we deal with? And King Salman says, deal with my son, the deputy crown prince MBS. And so President Trump sent the phone, have him deal with Jared. Because I think he knew that if he were to put him with the other guys, they were not believers in what he had the ability to do. And that's how I got assigned to work with him. I get back to my office after that, have an email from him, spoke to him for the first time. And then we just went to work. And a lot of people were betting against that trip. They thought it wasn't going to be successful. And they've been betting against him. And he's been underestimated, but he's been doing an incredible job. And the whole Middle East is different today because of the work that he's done. Maybe it's instructive to go through the mental journey that you went on from the talking points, the basic narratives, the very basic talking points, understanding of Saudi Arabia to making that human connection with MBS and making the positive connection that it's actually possible to solve problems. Like, what was that journey like? Why was it so difficult to take for others? And why were you effective in being able to take that journey yourself? Maybe some of it came from my inexperience, but my desire to listen and hear people.

So I had this proposal. I was told that all of these things were good.

Then we're trying to schedule this trip. And the National Security Council calls a meeting where we're in the situation room and we have Homeland Security, Secretary of Defense, Secretary of State. And everyone's saying, this is going to be a disaster. They said, if we go to Saudi Arabia, the Saudis never keep their promises. And our Secretary of State at the time was a gentleman named Rex Tillerson, who'd been the CEO of Axsan. So he dealt with all these people very extensively. And he basically said, in my experience, the Saudis won't come through. And Jared, you don't know what you're doing. You're wasting your time. And I basically was at a point where I said, look, guys, but they're saying they want to do all these things. Shouldn't we at least give them a chance to try to do it? Like, why do we want to predetermine their direction by not giving them a chance to change just because things in the past haven't gotten the way you want them to? That doesn't mean they can't go that way in the future. So we fought the battle

and they basically deferred and let me go through with it. But when I do the planning meetings for the trip, nobody would show up because they all thought it was going to be an absolute disaster. And by the way, they probably weren't wrong to think that because I'd never planned a foreign trip before and I'd never done any foreign policy before. So during the planning, I'd speak to MBS almost every day. And I'd go through all the different details and the things that would be coming up. And I said, look, I really need to get these things in writing. He sent over a guy, Dr. Massad Al-Iban, who's a tremendous diplomat for them. And he came to Washington, stayed for three weeks, and we worked through all the different details of what we needed. And we ended up coming to an arrangement on what it should be. So I think about now, in retrospect, why I was so focused on getting things like this done and why I even believed that they could be possible. But the answer is really the people I was talking to on the other end were telling me that these things were possible. And so just because they hadn't been done before, and just because others around me didn't believe that they could be done, I wasn't willing to just say, well, let's not try. It just seems like that cynicism that takes over is paralyzing. And you sent me a great essay from Paul Graham, I'm a big fan of, that I think explains a lot of your success. That essay is called How to Do Great Work. And people should go, definitely read the full essay. There's a few things I could read from it.

Some quotes, having new ideas is a strange game because it usually consists of seeing things that were right under your nose. Once you've seen a new idea, it tends to seem obvious.

Why did no one think of this before? Seeing something obvious sounds easy and yet empirically having new ideas is hard. And like the steps you took seem trivial. And yet nobody was taking them. Or at least in the past, they weren't successful. So the successes you've had

were as simple as essentially picking up the phone or trying. There's a lot of interesting things here to talk about this aspect of doing this seemingly simple that seems to be so hard to do.

It, as Paul describes, requires a willingness to break rules. There are two ways to be comfortable breaking rules. To enjoy breaking them and to be indifferent to them. That's an interesting distinction. I call these two cases being aggressively and passively independent minded.

So again, that's to enjoy breaking the rules or to be indifferent to the rules.

The aggressively independent minded are the naughty ones. Rules don't merely fail to stop them. Breaking rules gives them additional energy. For this sort of person, delight at the sheer of

audacity of a project sometimes applies enough activation energy to get it started. The other way to break the rules is not to care about them at all, or perhaps even to know they exist. This is why novices and outsiders often make new discoveries. Their ignorance of a field, ignorance may be in quotes, or a field's assumptions act as a source of temporary passive independent mindedness. Aspes also seem to have a kind of immunity to conventional beliefs.

Several I know say that this helps them to have new ideas. So the aggressive and the passive is such an interesting way of looking at it. Perhaps some aspect of this, at least in the story you told is some passive aspect where you're like not even acknowledging, not even caring that there was rules, just kind of asking the simple question and taking the simple action.

I think that was an essay I read and we're doing just a snippet of it, but I would encourage anyone listening to go and find it and read the entire thing because it's something that really spoke to me as I was transitioning into my new career now. I just loved it. But when we were talking about why certain people who don't have traditional qualifications are able to come in and do incredible work and solve complex problems, it made me think of that essay, which is why I shared it. And I think that in the context of the work that I was doing here, perhaps not having the historical context became an advantage and obviously went back and then tried to study it. But if you go into a problem, I always find that especially in the political realm, my favorite political issues are ones where they're contrarian by being obvious. And sometimes they feel very intuitive and so you take them on. There's always a lot of resistance when you go against something that's been accepted as the way that you're supposed to do things. And I came to learn over the course of my time in government that when everyone was agreeing with what I was doing, then it actually made me more nervous because I felt like you have these problems, they haven't been solved for a long time. And then if you take the same approach as others, you're going to fail just like they did. So taking a different approach doesn't mean you're going to succeed, but at least if you fail, you're going to fail in an original way. And so I did like this a lot. And I think that what I saw was the people who were very good at getting things done that hadn't been done before were people who came with different qualifications, different perspectives, and they came in and really worked the problem in untraditional ways. And so I think in the Middle East, I came in with a very different approach than people before me, not because I came in deliberately trying to do it differently, but because I came in trying to listen and understand from people why the problem hadn't been solved and then think from a First Principles perspective on

what's the right perspective today, not based on what happened 50 years ago or not based on what somebody's feelings who were hurt, but what's the right thing to make people's lives better, to make the world a safer and more prosperous place tomorrow.

So if we can go back to MPS for a little bit, from the person to the vision, there's something called Vision 2030 about his vision for Saudi Arabia in the future.

Can you maybe look from his perspective, what is his vision for the region?

Sure. So it's fine. We were talking before about how we wish leaders would set big audacious goals and take on big things. Well, that's what he did with Vision 2030. When he was young, and again, this is something that was derided, and a lot of people were very skeptical of it, but the people who actually picked it up and read it said this is a very thoughtful plan

that's very achievable. So he studied his country and said, what's our place in the world? What are our advantages? What are our disadvantages? And then he set publicly KPIs that he wanted to hold his country to and then put in place plans and committees and really worked hard to push things in that direction, which was pretty remarkable. I think that it's something when I saw it, I thought it was very refreshing. I said, wait, in America, why don't we have set goals? Why don't we have KPIs? And I do think that it's something that most countries, if not all countries, should have. One of my favorite quotes was from the Alice in Wonderland where the Cheshire cat says, if you don't know where you're going, it doesn't matter which path you take. And so I think that that's something that really helped set them on a good path and they've been very successful with it. One of the things he told me about putting that together was he said, my father's generation, they created this country from almost nothing. They came here, they were a poor country, they were Bedouins in the desert, and then they look back and see what they've done over 50 years and they say, it's absolutely remarkable. He said, his generation, they come in and they say, we're very grateful for everything that's been done to date, but we have so much opportunity that we're not taking advantage of. And so he's now empowered the next generation to be ambitious and think big and grow with it. What that means for his vision for the Middle East is that the general architecture that should exist and now there's excitement in the discussions with Israel that have advanced was the general view of what we thought from a Trump perspective should be the new Middle East is having an economic and security corridor all the way from Haifa to Muscat from Oman to Israel, where basically you go through and if you can create a security area where people can live free of fear of terrorism and of conflict, the Middle East for the last 20 years has been a sinkhole for arms, for death, for terrorism. It's been awful. It's been a big national security threat for America, a big place where our treasure is gone. We've had a lot of our young, amazing American soldiers killed in action there and the same thing for the Arab countries as well. So if we can create a security architecture for that region and then we can create economic integration between all the different countries, I mean, the amount of innovation happening in Israel is unbelievable. Think of it like Silicon Valley is not connected to the rest of California. You have a very young population, a very digital savvy population. You have a lot of resources and so if you can get that whole set, the potential for it is unbelievable. I do think that that's his ultimate vision is to become a really strong country economically and then to become a place where you could be funding advancements in science, advancements in humanity, advancements in artificial intelligence and think about ways to be a positive influence in the world. So a difficult question. One big source of tension between the United States and Saudi is the case of Jamal Khashoggi. I was wondering if you can comment on what NBS has said about it to you. You've spoken to him about it and what NBS has said about it publicly in 60 minutes and after. Yeah. So what he said to me was no different than what he ultimately said on 60 minutes, which was as somebody helping lead this country, I bear responsibility and I'm going to make sure that those who are involved are brought to justice and I'm going to make sure that we put in place reforms to make sure things like this don't happen again. It was a horrible situation that occurred.

What I saw from him after that was just a doubling and a tripling down on the positive things he was doing, figuring out ways to kind of continue to modernize society, build opportunity in the kingdom and continue to be a better ally to all the different countries that wanted to be aligned with them. One thing I learned from this case is how one particular situation, a tragedy, can destroy so much progress and the possibility of progress and the possibility of connection between the bridges that are built between different nations and how narratives around that can take off and take such a long time to repair. You've worked with this in the Middle East, with Israel and so on, how the history, the narratives, the stories, they kind of have this momentum that's so hard to break even when you have new leaders, new blood, new ideas that come in and it's just sad to see that yes, this tragedy happens but it doesn't mean that you can't make progress. I don't know if you have kind of lessons from that, just how much of a dramatic impact it had on creating tension between the United States and Saudi and in general in the Middle East, that somehow Saudi is not a friend but is against the ideals and the values of the United States. So it definitely created massive tension and it became a very high-profile action that actually overshadowed a lot of the good work that was being done in the region and a lot of the progress we were making. But when you think about this or you think about the other issues that we've gone through today, I think the general framework that I always try to approach things with is you can't change what happened yesterday. You can only learn from it and then you can change how you deal with tomorrow. And when I think about the people in power, what do I hope that they're spending their time focused on? Number two basic things. Number one is how do I create safety and security for my people and for the world? And then how do I give people the opportunity to live a better life? And so when things like this happen, obviously, there are certain reactions that are appropriate. But ultimately, you have to think through how do you not allow the paradigm that you're creating in the world to lead to worse outcomes than would happen otherwise. And so when I would think about foreign policy in general, one of the differences between foreign policy and business is that in business, the conclusion of a problem set, you finish a deal, you either have a company or a property, or if you sell it, you have less to do and more capital, hopefully if it's successful. In a political deal, it's always about paradigm. So the end of a problem set is always the beginning of a new paradigm. And you're always thinking through how do you create an environment that leads to hopefully the best amount of positive outcomes that could occur versus creating a paradigm that will lead to negative outcomes. So bad things happen a lot in the world. And you have to make sure that when those happen, people are held accountable for it. But you also don't want to make sure that in the process of making sure that there's accountability for these actions, you don't set a lot of progress that the world is making back that will lead to worse off situation for many more people. If we can go back to the incredible work with Abraham Accords and Israel in the Middle East, first a big question about peace. Why is it so difficult to achieve peace in this part of the world between Israel and Palestine and between Israel and the other countries in the Middle East or any sort of peace like agreements? If I had to give you the most simple answer, I would say that it's structural. And if you go back to the incentive structure of different leaders, this whole peace process between Israel and the Palestinians, and again, I've gotten criticized for saying this, but it's what I believe. So I'm going to say it is that the incentive structure was all wrong. And when I went before the United Nations Security

Council to discuss the peace plan that I proposed, which again, was more of an operational plan, and it was a pragmatic plan. It was over 180 pages in detail. In politics, people don't like putting forward detail because it just gives a lot of places for you to get criticized on. Nobody actually criticized the detail of my plan. They just criticized the fact that it was coming from us and didn't want to debate the merits of the operational pieces of it. So I created a slide where I showed from the Oslo Accords till the day I was there, all the different peace discussions. I put a dove in the slide for those. And then I put a tank for every time there was a war because there was always skirmishes between Hamas and Hezbollah and the Palestinians. And then I showed two lines and they both went from the bottom of the page all the way up like this. One of the lines was Israeli settlements. So every time a negotiation failed, Israel was able to get more land. And then the other one was money to the Palestinians. And I said, every time a negotiation failed, the Palestinians would get more money. The problem with that money, though, was that it wasn't going to the people. Some of it would make its way down, but most of it was going to the politicians. You had leadership of the Palestinians who was basically, I think at that point, it was in like the 16th year of a four-year term, so it wasn't democratically elected. And a lot of what I tried to show was that there was no rule of law. There was no judicial system. There were no property rights. And there was no opportunity or hope for the people to live a better life. And so all of the envoys to date were basically trained to go and do the same things. And again, I got massively criticized by all the previous envoys for not doing it the same way they did. But I thought the problem structurally just didn't make sense. And so I felt like the incentive structure was all wrong. And I took a different approach. And so what's the different approach?

I started writing down a document. These are the 11 issues, but there's really only three issues that matter. I said, just tell me what you think the compromise is that you think the other side could live with that you would accept. And it was very hard to get them talking about this. Oh, you have to go back to 1972. You have to go back to 1982. You have to go back to 2001. You have to go to camp. And I was just like, I don't need a headache and I don't need a history lesson. Just I want a very simple thing here today in 2017. What's the outcome that you would accept? And I was dealing with their negotiators, their back channel secret negotiators, their double secret. And I was just like, this whole thing is like, it's a process created where nobody wants to talk about the actual solution. So coming from the business world, I said, okay, let me just write down a proposed solution that I think is fair. And let me have each side react. Don't tell me about theoretical things. Tell me, I want to move the line from here to here. I want to change this word. So I tried to make it much more tactical. And what I realized was the Palestinians, they'd worked so hard to get the Arab world to stay with the line of the Arab Peace Initiative. And so I went back and I read the Arab Peace Initiative. It was 10 lines and it didn't have any detail. So it was a concept. And so they liked that concept because it allowed them to reject everything. They kept getting more money. I mean, BB Netanyahu, who runs one of the most incredible economies in the world, who runs an incredible superpower militarily for the size of their country, he would fly to Washington to meet us and he'd be taking a commercial et al plane. Abbas, who runs a refugee organization, a refugee group, right, that claims that they don't have a state that gets billions of dollars in eight year eight every year from the global community would fly in a \$60 million Boeing BBJ. So the whole thing was just

very corrupt and off. And I do think that that's why it, I don't think people were incentivized to solve it, to be honest. What do you think an actual plan on that part, if we can just before we talk about Abraham Accords, if there is a peace plan that works between Israel and Palestine, what do you think it looks like? You have to separate it into two different issues. And I think that that's actually how we came to the Abraham Accords is that, I tell the story in the book and it was one of my favorite experiences during my time in diplomacy where I went to meet

with Sultan Qaboos, who was the Sultan of Oman. And we fly out there because he'd had a secret meeting with BB and I thought maybe he was open to normalizing with Israel. So after he meets with BB, he calls me and says, I want you to come see me. So I go over to see him. And again, I tell the story. It was a crazy night in all these different areas. But when I was talking to him, he basically says to me, I feel badly for the Palestinian people that they carry with them the burden of the Muslim world. And that line just like stuck with me. And a couple of days later, I was thinking about it. And I said, wait a minute, who elected the Palestinian people to represent the Muslim world on the al-Aqsa mosque? And so the reason why I felt like it had never been solved was it was a riddle A that I believed was designed to not be solved. But B, you were conflating two separate issues. You had the issue between Israel and the Muslim world, which really was the issue of the al-Aqsa mosque. And then you had just a territorial dispute, which throughout history, you have lots of territorial disputes and they're usually resolved in different ways. So if you go back to the Israeli-Palestinian issue, there's just a couple components you need to solve. Number one is territorial contiguity, right? You need to figure out where do you draw the lines? And that's something that, you know, you can talk about what people were owed 70 years ago, but it's much more productive to say this is what you can make

work today, right? And that's kind of what we did. I we literally spent months and months drawing a map and we put something out, probably change a couple lines here and there. But by and large, it was a very pragmatic solution that I think could work. And I think it could work for the safety and security of Israel, which was number one. So first issue is drawing a map. Second issue is security. Again, Israel, and again, this is one issue we were incredibly sympathetic with Israel, which is you can't expect, you know, a prime minister of Israel to make a deal where he's going to make his people less secure than before. So we worked very closely with them on a security apparatus. We laid something out that I think would keep the whole area safer and it would make sure Israel was safe and also keep the Palestinian issue safe. So you need security.

Number three was the religious sites. And that was one that was actually always made much more complicated by people, the Al-Aqsa Mosque, because you basically have Haram al-Sharif, which is a place where the mosque was built in the 7th or 8th century. But originally, it was where the the Holy of Holies were and the Beta Migdash for the Jewish people. So and then, you know, compounding by the fact that you have all the Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, it's a city that should be bringing everyone together. But in fact, it's become a place where you have, you know, wars and hatred and a lot of different conflicts that have risen because of it. But what I said was, instead of fighting over concepts of sovereignty, which is interesting how I got to the notion that this wasn't really the big issue, I basically said just operationally, why don't we just make it simple, let everyone come and be

able to worship as long as they're being able to worship peacefully. So that's really the contours of it. And what the Palestinians have done is they've kind of deflected from a lot of their own shortcomings. And a lot of the Arab leaders did that as well, kind of in the pre-Abraham Accord days, by kind of allowing this issue to be so prevalent. So one thing I'll say on the Palestinians is that, you know, what we tried to do by laying out a plan was we said, okay, what are the reasons why the Palestinian people are not having the lives that they deserve? And I'll give you a couple things. One is, I studied the economies of, you know, Jordan, West Bank, Gaza, Egypt, Morocco. This was, you know, numbers from like 2019. But what was interesting was the GDP per capita of somebody living in the West Bank was actually the same as Jordan. And it was actually more than somebody living in Egypt. And the debt of GDP that the Palestinians had was like 30, 40 percent compared to Egypt, which was at like 130 percent in Jordan, which was at 110 percent. And Lebanon was at 200 percent. And so, you know, you're in a situation where a lot of this stuff didn't make sense. But if you draw lines, create institutions where Palestinian people can now feel like they have property rights and have ownership over their place and let the money flow past the leadership ranks, you know, to the people, let them have jobs, let them have opportunity, and then let all Muslims from throughout the world have access to the mosque and Israel, making sure that they can control the security, which I think the Jordanians and a lot of others want Israel to have strong, you know, security control there to prevent the radicalists and the extremists from coming, you could have peace there very easily.

So there's a lot of things to say here. One is just to emphasize a lot some masks. So this is holy place. And this is something in our conversations and in my own travels, I've seen the importance of sort of frictionless access to those sites from the entirety of the Muslim world. And that's what Abraham, of course, took big leaps on. Okay, so we'll talk about that a little bit more. But that's kind of a religious component. That's a dignity in the religious practice and faith component. But then the other thing you mentioned, so simply, which is you have money flow past the leadership ranks. How do you have money flow past the leadership ranks in Palestine? So make sure that the money that's invested in Palestine, the West Bank gets to the people. So to date, all of the aid that's been given to the Palestinians has been an entitlement. It's not conditions based. It's always just we give the money and there's no expectations. It's very simple. You make the aid conditions based, you fight for transparency, you do it through institutions other than the PA, or you put reformers into the PA that will allow it to go down that way. PA being the Palestinian Authority, which is the leadership.

It's not hard to do. It just takes people who actually want to do it. But I think the mindset of the international community has not been let's solve this problem. It's like, let's just throw a little bit of money. The money is novocaine. Let's put a little novocaine on the problem and let's not have to deal with it. But nobody's ever said, oh, let's do an accounting of the \$20 billion we've given them and see how many jobs it's done and where it's gone. That just hasn't happened. Again, it's an incredibly corrupt organization. You think about the post-World War II dynamic. You had a lot of refugees. My grandparents were refugees post-World War II. Every other refugee class has been resettled and you only have one permanent refugee organization ever created. Why was this done? It was done to perpetuate the conflict so that a lot of Arab leaders could basically deflect from a lot of their shortcomings at home. I think for Israel, they view all these things as existential. They value their safety. They've been under attack for a long time.

I do think having a deal where we can say, how do the Jews and the Muslims come together? I think King Abdullah from Jordan's been an incredible custodian for the mosque. I think everyone in my travels recognized that he's the right guy for that, that the King of Jordan should be the custodian of the mosque. We should have some kind of framework to make sure everyone has access. The more countries that have diplomatic relations with Israel, the more Muslims and Arabs that should be able to come and visit. And by the way, the more you have these normalizations, think about what that will do to the economy of the West Bank, where they'll have great hotels, hospitality, tremendous tourism industry because of all the Christian, Muslim, and Jewish holy sites that they have there. So there's a lot of potential there. We just have to get unstuck. I believe that it's so possible if the leaders want to make tomorrow better that they can. And unfortunately, the people who suffer the most are really just the Palestinian people. And I think that in Gaza, their hostages to Hamas and in the West Bank, they're just held back because their leadership just is afraid or too self-interested to give them the opportunity to change their paradigm and pursue the potential of what they have. And by the way, it's an incredibly well-educated population. It's an incredibly capable population. And they're right next to Israel where the economy, they need everything. And so the potential should be incredible if you can just move some of these pieces. But again, there's still a lot of emotion and hatred you have to work through as well. But I do believe that you're not going to solve that by litigating the past. You're only going to solve that by creating an exciting paradigm for the future and getting everyone to buy in and then move towards that. And maybe increase the chance of being able to establish an economy where the entrepreneurs can flourish in the West Bank and so on in Palestine once the relationship across the Arab world is normalized. So one thing on that, which is very interesting, is when I got into my job in the Middle East, all the conventional thinkers said to me, the separation in the Muslim world is between the Sunnis and the Shias. And that's really the big divide. And as I was traveling, I didn't think there was any divide in that regard. The divide that I saw was between leaders who wanted to give a better opportunity for their people and create economic reforms and opportunity, and leaders who wanted to use religion or fear to keep their stronghold on power. And so if you think about who's not creating the opportunity for their people, is the Palestinian leadership and the Iranian leadership. All the other Arab countries were focused on how do we give opportunity for our people to live a better life. And there is a big foundation on which that framework can succeed, which I think is the, in general, the idea of Arab-Israeli normalization. So that's where Abraham Accords come in. Can you tell the story of that? Sure. So it's an amazing thing. And I said here today, somebody not in government, and every day I see another flight that goes between, or I see an Israeli student studying at a university in Dubai or a new synagogue opening up in Abu Dhabi, and it just gives me such, or Bahrain, it gives me such tremendous pride to see all of the progress that's been made. How it occurred, part of why I wrote the book was to put this down for history's sake, to go through all the different intentional, unintentional, circumstantial things that occurred. It's fine, we left government, there's a lot of people saying, well, this is why I said, I was kind of at the middle of it, and I couldn't even perfectly articulate why it happened, because it was in

evolution of a lot of things. And I joke that we made peace on Plan C, but only because we went through the alphabet three times, failing at every letter, and by the time, but we didn't give up and we kept going and we got it done. And maybe this is a good place to also step back and say, what is Arab-Israeli normalization? What is the state of things for people who may not be aware before the progress you made? That's probably the best place to start. So what we did is we made a peace deal between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, and then Israel and Bahrain. Then we did a deal with Israel and Sudan, then Israel and Kosovo, Israel and Morocco, where basically countries that didn't recognize each other before ended up recognize each other. All of these were Muslim-majority countries, and getting them to integrate with Israel was a very big thing. The traditional thinking had always been, was that Arab countries would not make peace with Israel until the Israeli-Palestinian issue was solved. And what we were able to do was separate the issues and then make these connections, which are leading to amazing interaction between Jews and Muslims. So when I think about kind of, obviously you have national security, you have emotional benefits from these things, but the single biggest benefit that I've seen from the accords is that if you were an Arab or a Muslim and you were willing to say positive things about Israel or the Jews before this came out, you would have been viciously attacked by the media or the hordes of influencers or the extremists in these different countries. What this did was it brought out into the public the fact that Jews and Muslims can be together, and they can be respectful, they can have meals together, and that the cultures can live together in peace. So just to link on this, it's like once subtle and in another sense transformative. So normalization means you're allowed to travel for a place together. That has a kind of ripple effect of that. You can now start talking in a little bit more accepting way. You can start integrating, traveling, communicating, doing business with, socializing. So the cultures mix, conversations mix, all of this. And this kind of has a ripple effect on the basic connection between these previously disparate worlds. I don't know if there's a nice way to kind of make clear why these agreements have such a transformative effect, especially in the long term. I would say the simplest form is just a mindset. And it's almost like you're taught all your life where enemies or we can't be friends with that tribe on the other side of the fence. And then one day the leaders get up and say, no, it's okay now. And there was never an issue between the people. The people were just taught different things and they were separated from each other. But again, one of the things that I respect about the work you do is you believe in the power of conversation and the power of human interaction. And these issues and gaps between us feel so big when we think about them, when we're told about them, when we read about them. But when we go and sit with each other, all of a sudden we realize maybe we have a lot more in common than we have that divides us. For me, what I've seen about it that's made the biggest difference is I've seen people who wouldn't have the ability to be together, be together. And that's now forming a nucleus of togetherness, which is a restoration. So you think about the modern Middle East from post-Holocaust to now. Again, in 1948 after that war of independence, you had Jews living in Baghdad and Cairo. Then they became so anti-Jewish that they then expelled all of the Jews from all these capitals of those cities. So you think about the Jewish history in Baghdad. I mean, I think the Talmud was written in Baghdad. It was a place in Babylon where the Jewish people thrived. I think in 570 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem, he took about 10,000 Jews back with him to Babylon because he thought it'd be good for his

economy.

And during that place, the Jews actually flourished and had a good life there. So for a thousand years before the Second World War, the Jews and the Muslims lived very peacefully together. So people say that what we're doing now is an aberration. I actually think it's not an aberration. I think it's actually a return to the time where people can live together culturally. And so this is the beginning of the end of the Arab-Israeli conflict and it's the beginning of togetherness, which again, you think about how much war, how much provocation, how much terrorism has been made in the name of religious conflict. This is, I think, the start of the process of religious respect and understanding.

We've talked about you being attacked in the press for the Russian collusion and other topics. One of the most recent set of attacks comes on the topic of Saudi public investment fund giving \$2 billion to your investment firm after you left government. So that includes a 1.25% asset management fee of \$25 million a year. Can you respond to these recent set of attacks? Sure. So left government obviously worked for four years. It was a very action-packed time. That's why I wrote the book. I wanted to put down all those experiences. I started thinking like, what do I want to do next? So my previous career, I'd been in real estate. I'd worked with my brother on some technology businesses that I'd started and then I got into government. So I kind of had a career shift. In my previous career obviously was very successful. The New York Times, they violated and they've published my financial statements. They showed I was making about \$50 million a year in the private sector before I went to government. I went into government and I volunteered. I didn't take a salary. I paid for my own health insurance for four years. My wife and I and then we went and I was thinking, should I go back to my old company or should I start something new? And my thinking was is that through my time in government, I'd met so many people. I'd learned so much about the world. I had a big understanding now for how the macroeconomic picture worked and I did feel like there was a

lot more that I could do than just going back to real estate. In the meantime, I was getting a lot of calls from different CEOs and companies saying, can you help me with this company? Do you help me with that company? Your knowledge could be helpful to help this company navigate this challenge or to expand internationally. And so I said, maybe I should create a business to do an investment firm where I can do something different, where I'm putting together geopolitical expertise and traditional private equity and growth investing and figure out how to do that, where I can do something differentiated, where I can invest in growing things and help with my navigation skills and relationships. So that was kind of the thesis of what I thought could make sense as kind of a next step. I called different friends. They were very excited to back the effort. Obviously, this was coming off the success that I just had in the Middle East where I did six peace deals there. And one of the notions I wanted to be able to do with the firm was to be able to take money from the Gulf and then to be able to invest it in Israel, to continue to build the economic links between the countries. Again, if countries have more economic ties, I think war and fighting is less likely. And then in addition to that, I wanted to figure out how do you bring the entrepreneurs together from both of those countries. So that was really the mission of what I set out to do. So far, I've been enjoying it. It's been a lot of fun. I've been learning a ton. I think we're doing very well with it.

In terms of the criticisms, I think that I've been criticized in every step of everything I've always done in my life. And so what I would say is this business is actually an objective metric business. It's about returns. So in three, four years from now, five years from now, see how I do. Hopefully, I'll do very well and judge me based on that. In terms of any of the nefarious things, I haven't been accused of violating any laws. And I haven't violated any of the ethics rules either. When I was in government, I every year submitted all my financials to the Office of Government Ethics. They certified it every year. And I followed every rule and every law possible. So to my critics, I'll say criticize me before, you'll criticize me now. I'm going to keep doing me and going to keep pursuing things that I think are worthwhile. And I'm very excited about this chapter of my career. Maybe this is a good place to ask. In working closely with Donald Trump, what in your sense, looking into the mind of the man, what's the biggest strength of Donald Trump as a leader? I would say his unpredictability. I think that as a leader, he consumes a ton of information. He doesn't like to be managed or have his information filtered. So he'll speak to a lot of people to draw his information himself. He's very pragmatic. I don't see him as terribly ideological. I see him as somebody who's about results. I think he wants to deliver results. And I think ultimately, I mean, he's an incredible fighter. He's a big counterpuncher, but he also wants to get along with people. And that's probably the biggest surprise that people found with him. I mean, you look at even situations like, I would always tell people, if you disagree with him, don't go on television and criticize him. Pick up the phone and call him and go see him. And he'll talk to you about it. He may not agree with you. But again, that's what Kim Kardashian did when she had a case of clemency with a woman, Alice Johnson, that she felt strongly about. We went through the case. I wouldn't have had her call if I didn't think it was a legitimate case. So we spent about eight months quietly working through the case, working through the details to make sure that it really was a worthy case. I brought it to President Trump, said she'd like to come meet with you to talk about this case. And he said, I recommend. So she came in, we went through the case, and President Trump ultimately granted the clemency to Alice Johnson, who was a woman who was accused of being part of a drug ring. She had basically a life sentence for doing it. She'd served 22 years in prison. While in prison, I mean, she basically was a grandmother and she was putting on the prison plays. She was mentoring young women in prison, somebody who, again, there's always a risk, but by and large had a very, very, very low risk of committing a crime in the future. And then it goes back to the notion of, are we going to judge people by the worst decision they make in their life? And so President Trump was willing to grant the clemency and it went. And I think that it just goes to the notion of like, maybe this goes back to his unpredictability in a positive way, which is, if you go sit with him and you make your case, he'll hear you, he'll listen to you, and he's not afraid to act, and he's not afraid to be controversial, which I think is a good thing. So from a foreign policy point of view in particular, his unpredictability just meant that everyone was always on their back foot. People were afraid to kind of cross America. And what I would tell people who don't like Trump is I would say, think about how crazy he's making you and his enemies. You know, he did that to the enemies of America. And yeah, so he was a very, very strong president and I think did a great job.

So in some of these agreements I've been talking about and speaking with leaders, how do you think the unpredictability helps? So in all the agreements that I was negotiating, I wasn't doing it as a principle. I was doing it on behalf of President Trump and people knew that I'd access to President Trump and they knew that, you know, I could say, you may say this that we don't like, but I'm gonna have to take it back to him and then we'll see what he does. And one of the biggest instances was on the USMCA trade deal where that deal happened because Mexico was legitimately concerned and smartly so that President Trump was going to impose tariffs on the car industry, which would have been decimating to their economy. And by the way, he was ready to do it. We were holding him back from doing it with every ounce of strength that we could. So it wasn't a bluff. I mean, that was actually real, but they were smart to read that it was real. And ultimately we created a great win-win deal. Tell you a funny story, just popped into my mind from the tariffs is we did also, we used a 232 national security exemption to protect our steel industry and we put tariffs on steel and aluminum. And again, I thought about this because we also negotiated them with Canada. And there was a very funny phone call where Trudeau

was calling Trump. And again, they got along decently well. And Trudeau's calling saying, you can't put national security tariffs on us in Canada. You know, we're your NATO ally. We fought wars with you. We do military together. And Trump says to him, didn't you burn the White House down in 1812? And Trudeau says, that was the French. He says, no, it was the Canadians. And so it was just, like I said, he's always keeping everyone on their toes.

But he wasn't afraid. He took very calculated risks. And like I said, everyone was outraged all the time with everything. But if you look at his body of work, people said if he was elected, he would start World War III. Meanwhile, we inherited a world filled with wars, no new wars. Right? Three years, he made peace deals. No new wars. He was tough. He was strong.

People respected him. He built relationships and got trade deals done, got peace deals done.

The economy was rocking. His body of work, I think, was pretty strong as president.

Like you said, no new wars. This makes me think if Donald Trump won the presidency,

what the current situation in Ukraine would look like. But let me just ask you,

zoom out and ask you broadly, do you think the war in Ukraine could have been avoided?

And what do you think it takes to bring it to an end?

I think 100%. It would have been avoided, not 99%. President Trump for four years had no problems with Russia. We were arming Ukraine, but we were working with Russia. And again, the first two years,

we had a little bit of issue working with Russia because they were accused of colluding with us since we had to go through that investigation. But in the second two years, we were trying to focus Russia on what are the areas where we can collaborate together. I think Russia, we thought it was in their strategic advantage to play US and China against each other because of the way that everything was done before. They were stuck with China, but not getting a lot for it. Under Bush, they took Georgia. Under Obama, they took Crimea. Under Trump, there was no problems.

And then under Biden, unfortunately, I think they misplayed a couple of things, which I think provoked Russia to go forward. Still no excuse to do what they did. I think that the invasion was a terrible thing and should not have occurred. But with that being said, I think 100%, if Trump

was president, there would not be a war in Ukraine today. Coming to the table and negotiating a piece, whether it's Donald Trump, whether it's Biden, whether it's anybody, what do you think it takes? Do you think it's possible? And if you're in a room, if Jared Kushner is in the room, Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelensky, what does it take to have a productive conversation? And what does it take for that conversation to fail? Like what are the trajectories that lead to success and failure? I think we go back to negotiations. Number one is trust. Both leaders have to have the ability to communicate what an off-ramp is without fearing it's going to lead to the public. So if you go to the posture of Zelensky right now, and by the way, President Zelensky, I have a lot of respect for the courage he showed, especially initially. You saw what Ghani did in Afghanistan. They were getting attacked by the Taliban. He took the cash and got the hell out of there. Staying in Kiev when he did, how he did, it was one of the most brave things we've seen in a long time. And he has a ton of my respect and admiration for doing that. But now he's promising his people we're going to win the war. And the military action has not necessarily coincided with that sentiment. And so there has to be some form of off-ramp, but he can't say that publicly. So for him to be able to work privately with somebody who can help create a new paradigm where both leaders can say, we're going to stop the bloodshed. We're going to stop the risk of nuclear war for the world. We're going to stop what's happening. That's really what it will take. How that occurs, again, it's not something I'm involved in now. So I don't know who the right broker is or how to put that together. But essentially, they need somebody in between them who can figure out how do you create a landing zone that works because neither party is going to jump until the pool is filled with water. And you have to outline what the go forward looks like, because you can't just stop it for then to get worse for both parties. You have to move it forward into what happens next that hopefully can start to turn the tide to benefit both sides where they can focus on the future instead of being stuck into the old paradigm of who started what, who's to blame for what, who did what to who. It's just a lot of tough stuff now that's occurred that's going to be hard to walk back. And it's a big task to get it done. But for the sake of the world, it'd be amazing if we were able to reach a conclusion to that conflict. Just going back to your earlier mention of North Korea, what do you think it takes to bring Vladimir Putin and Vladimir Zelensky to the table together? Leadership.

So you're saying like it has to be a US president.

It has to be somebody who's willing to put themselves on the line to go and do it. And you know, again, if you're the US president and you're the most powerful nation in the world, you should be trying. But I do think, again, the posture that the US has taken has probably been a place where they would be very hard for them to get the trust of Russia based on the way that they've played their moves to date. And I always thought from the beginning that Putin would try to bring in President Xi in China to resolve it, to basically give a big screw you to America to say, you know, China is now the one, you know, in charge of this, but that hasn't seemed to manifest

itself to date either. But it takes leadership. You know, the leaders have to get in and say, you know, let's get everyone together and let's try to get this done. Because every day it goes on, A, more people are dying. And B, you know, we do risk a nuclear war for the world, which is not

a good situation. Let me ask, since you helped set up phone calls between Donald Trump, Putin, and King of Saudi Arabia, if I were to interview Putin, what advice would you give on how to get a deep understanding of the human being?

So I didn't deal with Russia a ton. But in my interaction with Putin and with Russia, you know, I would kind of point out a couple of things. Number one is, when America was hit with COVID and New York was looking like we were going to run out of ventilators

and masks, Russia was the second country that sent us a plain load of supplies. And they didn't send that because they hate America. They sent that because we were starting to make progress together as countries. And they thought that they wanted to show good will to figure out, how can we start working together? And again, people may attack me for saying that that sounds naive. Again, the past, you know, 15 years may show that that's not the case. But I don't believe that countries have permanent enemies. And I don't believe countries have permanent allies. Right. Again, you think about the US and Russia and World War Two, we worked together to defeat the Nazis, right? And now we're great allies with Germany, who basically was our great enemy in World War Two. We're great allies with Japan, who was our great enemy in World War Two. So it goes back to the notion we discussed earlier of you shouldn't condemn tomorrow to be like yesterday if you're unhappy with yesterday. So number one is, I would definitely ask them about that. The phone call that you mentioned was after we did a pretty intense negotiation to create the largest oil cut in the history of oil production. So during COVID, demand just shut off like crazy. And it was stopping very quickly.

Saudi and Russia at that time were having a conflict. They created this thing called OPEC Plus, which goes back again, history between the two countries where they had conflicts. And then all of a sudden they were working together to try to stabilize the oil markets. But they couldn't agree on the cut. So Saudi actually increased production. So you had two things hitting at once where Saudi and Russia were both increasing production and demand was dropping. So you were

headed for a real crisis. And I was starting to get calls from a lot of the oil industry executives here in America saying, you don't understand, we can't just like flip a switch and turn off our oil wells. Like we're running out of storage here. And I said, look, I present Trump likes low oil prices. So he's not upset about what's happening. You have to call him. And if he gives me permission or the instruction, then I can try to intervene. But right now he's not inclined to intervene. After a little bit, he said, you know what? It's time. Get involved. Go do it.

It was right over Passover. This was during COVID. I spent three days nonstop on the phone with Kirill Dmitriev from Russia and with MBS directly. And I was dealing with Dan Berlet, who is our energy minister, going back and forth. And it was like, it was crazy. I mean, it was just one of the craziest negotiations. We ended up agreeing on the largest oil cut in the history of the world. But the story you went to before, which was pretty funny, was finally make the deal. And we set up a call between King Salman, Vladimir Putin, and President Trump to announce the deal. And I'm like, oh, this is great. So President Trump gets us congratulations. We have a deal. And then King's must is we don't have a deal. Mexico hasn't agreed to their cuts. And he said, what do you mean? And so they were part of the OPEC plus. And so I get a note saying, you got to go call Mexico. So I'm calling Mexico. They're saying, we're not doing any cuts. So why

I said, we're hedged to \$55. I said, why do you tell us that at the beginning? So I'm telling the Saudis. So we were working through this whole thing. So meanwhile, we were trying to find the compromise with Mexico. I set up a call with Trump and Putin so they can kind of talk this through. And he was always trying to play the game of how do we get Russia away from China? He always thought that that was not the right strategic framework for US interests. And again, we had no problems with them during that time. What I would say is that for Zelensky and Putin, any conversation

with both of them is about understanding their perspective. I think with Putin, he's a student of history from the things that I saw with him. If you look at Russia over the last 500 years, I think they were attacked by the Polish in early 1600s. I think they were attacked by the Swedes in the 1700s. I think they were attacked by Napoleon in the 1800s. And then in the 1900s, they were attacked by Germany twice. And so from his perspective, there is, in the early days of Russia, they were attacked by the Mongols. They were very vulnerable. And a lot of the geography of Russia today is really designed for defensive purposes that they have natural barriers that makes them easier to defend. And Russia is a massive landmass. It's twice the size of America. They have 11 time zones in the country. And so I do think that for Vladimir Putin, his biggest concern is how do we create a security paradigm in the west of his country that won't be a creep? And I think that there's two different parts of the mindset. The people who are most cynical of Putin will say, well, he's just trying to recreate the USSR. He's being expansionist. And the people who want to be sympathetic to him will say, well, if you think about it, the Russian perception of the NATO arrangement was that they wouldn't be expanding westward over the last years. They've included all these countries that they said they promised they wouldn't include, who knows what the promises were or weren't. But what I do know from his perspective is allowing Ukraine and to NATO was always a red line. And that's why we never offered it. We never provoked it. We never brought it up. We said, we're going to arm them. And we basically

said, just calm down. We don't want any conflicts there. We have bigger issues and bigger opportunities

to work from. So I do think you have to think through what's a paradigm that he can accept. And I do think that he'll give the justification for why he's done what he's done. And then I think the framework for a solution is about how do we move both parties forward? Tough job. I hope you get the opportunity to do it because I think it's a conversation that will only help the world hopefully find a pathway forward. And I should mention, because you mentioned geography, one of the many books you've recommended to me that gives a very interesting perspective on history is called Prisoners of Geography by Tim Marshall. And it has a very interesting perspective on the geopolitical conflicts and perspective of Russia from a geography perspective. And also for China in the second chapter. And there's a lot of understanding of why the expansion of NATO is such a concern for Russia. Because geography still, even in the 21st century, less and less so because of technology and so on, but it still plays a major role in conflicts between nations, rivers, mountains. And understanding the DNA of countries. It was one of the most phenomenal books. And I just found it on Amazon randomly, but I loved every minute of it.

The chapter on America is also incredible, going through the evolution of how we became the

country

we are, the different acquisitions, the different changes, why we have all these geographic advantages.

And it's an unbelievable book for anyone who's interested in geopolitics.

So I have to ask on several aspects of China. First on the president, the meeting, you helped set up a first call and first meeting between Donald Trump and Xi Jinping.

Can you tell the story of that? Because that's also interesting. Again, that first phone call, the reaching out, the forming the human connection, which ultimately leads to the connection between

nations and the possibility of collaboration. So during the transition, President Trump took a call from the head of Taiwan and that sent the Chinese into a real tailspin. And he didn't do it, I think, to be provocative to them as much as, just as a businessman, he felt the answer to your call. Somebody wants to speak to you, you speak to him like you, you want to have conversations here at their point of view. But it was taken as a very big insult and it was against tradition and norm. And so that was something that set us off in a wrong direction. My view at the time was that we are kind of entering a G2 world, whether people want to admit it or not. And that a lot of these countries in what I call the middle market countries were basically playing, this one China was being aggressive with their one belt, one road, they were basically playing US and China against each other. And I thought that by the two leaders coming together, there were some things they wouldn't agree on. But there's a lot that they probably could agree on, which could lead to resolutions to a lot of issues in the world. That was like my most optimistic view. My most more pragmatic view was that President Trump had very big issues on trade that he wanted to get to with China. He felt like China, their trade practices were unfair, they weren't following all the global rules of trade. He was a little bit nervous that they would be provocative with Taiwan. And I felt like the two of them getting together would be the best way to try and resolve that. So the Chinese are very proud and a lot of it is about face. And so in order to negotiate for that first call, we basically agreed on what would happen in the call. So now let's just have a call say hi, nice to meet you as a question of President Trump basically agreed that he would acknowledge the one China policy, which he didn't see as a big concession because you could always un-acknowledge it the next day. So yeah, I'll acknowledge it and then we'll go and exchange. President Xi was going to come over to the US for a visit so they could sit together. And they wanted to do it outside the White House and so we agreed on our logo, which I also thought was good because President Trump always felt much

more comfortable when he was hosting at his properties and he just felt at home. And so he liked having people as his guests and he loved, he loved it. He always felt really relaxed and it was great. So that was really what we did. Then the Chinese come over, very much anticipated visit and it was incredible. So they were supposed to sit together for 15 minutes and they sent about an hour and a half together. And during that meeting, President Trump, they said, look, let's just set some ground rules to this relationship. Like let's just not talk about Taiwan. Like, you know, just don't do anything. I don't want on the table. If it does, I'm going to have to do harsh things. I still want this to be a problem for four years. We got bigger issues. They basically just, again, you notice four years of Trump administration, no Taiwan talk

whatsoever. It was a non-issue. Started talking about the trade issues. They spent a lot of time on North Korea. President Trump was trying to get the perspective from President Xi about North Korea because that was, again, considered from Obama, the biggest national security issue that we faced at the time. And they just had a good feeling for each other. It also helped that, you know, my wife and I, we actually had a Chinese nanny and teacher in our house and our kids learned fluent Mandarin. And our daughter actually opened when President Xi and President Trump were

together with Melania and with Madame Pang is my daughter actually saying them a couple of Chinese

songs. And I thought that was a nice way to show, you know, we're tough, but we respect your culture.

Because the Chinese have an incredible culture that goes back thousands of years. They're very proud in how they do it. And I think that sign of respect also set things off in a very warm way. For President Trump to say, my granddaughter speaks Chinese and we're showing you the respect,

which I think is very important. And he did have respect for them.

The next part about the visit, I mean, obviously we had a lot of discussions on trade, but the part that was probably most impactful to me was President Xi basically did an hour monologue at lunch where he just went through Chinese history from his perspective. And he talked about with particular emphasis on kind of the treaty of unequals and then the 100 years of humiliation.

And then you go through from Mao all the way to today. And you had, you know,

China coming back and rising. And you could tell that he was learned the lessons from the past and was very committed to kind of seeing China go through. So that was a different time, right?

So China today is different than it was in 2017. In 2017, I remember President Xi was at Davos and he was feted by all the top business people in the world as the, you know, Donald Trump was the threat to the global world order. President Xi was the champion of free trade and the biggest champion of environmentalism and fighting for climate change. And what occurred was President Trump came in and basically said, like, I think China has not been following the rules-based order, took very, very drastic approaches with tariffs. Every time he would do the tariffs, again, you know, I had Mnuchin, our Treasury Secretary come to Ivanka, my house, if he does this, this is going to crash the whole economy. I mean, these, and by the way, he believed it. I mean, these were things that people were telling him would be very tough to do.

You know, President Trump had a gentleman named Ambassador Lighthizer, Robert Lighthizer.

He was really the tip of the spear on all of our trade negotiations. He worked very well with Secretary Mnuchin and they ended up, we ended up increasing tariffs to numbers that hadn't even been thought could happen. So we did the first round of tariffs. Then, you know,

the Chinese came back and retaliated very surgically, trying to hit us in all the areas that politically would have been difficult. And what Trump did was instead of backing down, he took some of the revenue from the tariffs, gave it to the farmers and said, I know that this is going to hurt your business, but I'm going to make sure you guys are made whole.

And then he doubled down and basically went back at the Chinese with even more tariffs.

So what we watched over a year and a half was probably the biggest hand of poker that was ever played. And it was an amazing experience to be a part of it. And the role I played was really

working for Secretary Mnuchin and Ambassador Lighthizer as a back channel with the Chinese to make sure we can just de-escalate things and get to solutions in the best way possible.

And so anyway, it was a fascinating time. But if you think about the global awareness of the bad practices that China was putting in place today versus what they were in 2016, I think one of President Trump's most successful policies was shifting the way the entire world understood the threat of China and then putting in place the beginning of a regime to try and rebalance the world so that we could have more economic parity.

So you mentioned to me the book *The Hundred Year Marathon* by Michael Pillsbury when we discussed China. And I've got a chance to read parts of it. And I highly recommend people read it because there's a few, it's definitely an eye-opening perspective.

I don't know if I agree with all of it. I don't know if you agree with all of it, but it certainly opens, it gives a very intense perspective on China. And you said it was instructive to how you thought, how Donald Trump thought about China. Can you describe the main thesis of the book and maybe with a hopeful view how it's possible to have a trajectory of these two superpowers working together in the 21st century versus fighting against each other? Perfect. So it's a very, very big book. And I think it's a book definitely worth reading.

Michael is tremendous. He speaks fluent Mandarin, so he spent a lot of time researching to do the book. So I highly recommend it to everyone. And it was considered more of a fringe perspective in 2016, but it really, I think, came to represent the underpinning of what the collective thought was of the Trump administration. And maybe you could argue that it was even more cynical. The whole thesis of the book was that China from 1949 to 2049 was working to reclaim their position as the global leader. So you had the Chinese empire, one of the things, I don't know if it's from this book or a different book that I read that spoke about how in the late 1700s, basically the emperor of China was offered some of the industrial capability from England, which was basically now becoming the industrial revolution. And basically, no, we're fine. We're the great Chinese empire. We don't need any of these things. We're better than that. And by rejecting that, the rest of the world got stronger. China remained weaker. Then you had the opium wars. The Chinese had big opium problems through all the trade back and forth. And then China from about 1840 to the 1940 at 100 years, where they really, after all these treaties, were really a second class country. And so then you have the People's Revolution that comes in. And he talks about how China, very strategically as a very, very poor country, would fight their way back and build brick by brick. And he proffers in the book that Nixon didn't go to China and open China. It was China that actually went to Nixon and was able to use Nixon in order to open up. And then they talked about how under Carter, they were able to get the US to contribute to a lot of there. They were able to kind of start borrowing the US know-how from our university systems, from our medical, from our science, from our research. And the whole notion that was the conventional thinking of American leaders was that the more we helped China advance, the more they would become a free market economy. And it was a great market. The only difference was that they weren't allowing us access. They were making our companies basically give them all of their technical knowledge. They were stealing our intellectual property. They were doing espionage

to steal a lot of the patents. They were just ignoring our patents. And they weren't following any of the rules of international trade. Then they started becoming the world's manufacturing

hub. They basically came to the world's factory. And then they started this whole initiative called the Belt and Road Initiative in order to start locking in their lines of trades. They were buying up all the ports everywhere. They were building railways thinking, how do we lock in our distribution

so that we can maintain the dominance as the world's global factory? And so it was a brilliant long-term plan that they were doing. And by raising awareness, by putting the tariffs, Trump slowed them down a lot. The real question is if they actually did achieve this full objective of becoming the world dominant country, what they would have done with it, whether they would have

been nefarious or not, I think from my perspective, even with some of the divisions and issues we have

now in America, I still would rather an American-led world order than a Chinese-led world order. But the notion was that they were playing a very zero-sum game and really going to be the dominant leader in this new world order. So that really framed the perspective. And it wasn't necessarily... People asked me, and the Chinese were always fearing, is Trump trying to stop our rise? And you have a great book also by Graham Allison that he writes about, are we destined for war between the US and China? And he goes through different historical times where you have a power

and a rising superpower. And I think more than half the time, it ends up leading to war. So the question is, what's going to happen here? And I do think that Trump's perspective, and this is my interpretation, because everything was always tactical day to day. And he was unpredictable to the Chinese, which they couldn't deal with. And he was unpredictable even to his team sometimes, because he was playing it day by day and issue by issue and always changing and adjusting, which is how an entrepreneur thinks. He respected the job they did by building their country. They moved 300 million people out of poverty into the middle class. They did it at the expense of a lot of other countries throughout the world, especially America. But Trump says, look, stupid politicians made deals. I respect China for doing what they did. But what I want to do is I want to change the paradigm so that for the next 20 years, we can maintain our advantage over them. We can maintain our competitive dynamic. And his general view was that America is the best private sector in the world. We have a lot of the best minds in the world. And if we can just have a level playing field with set rules, then America should be able to outperform. And so that's really what we were trying to do. We were trying to kind of get rid of some of their state subsidies, get rid of, make them follow some of these international rules of trade and not allowing them to do predatory investments that then undercut different industries that we had so that they can have global market dominance or monopolies in different industries and then have pricing power, but also geopolitical power. So one of the examples that people talk about now is China for the last 20 years was very advanced on seeing this electrification trend. They subsidized solar panels. A lot of the American solar panel players were put out of business. So now I think it's like 90 plus percent of solar panels in the world are manufactured in China. Then all the rare earths that you need in order to make these solar panels and to make these electric vehicles, China's bought up most of them in a lot of the refining capacities in China. So thinking through strategically, how do we create an even playing field so that we're not at the mercy of them and how you can have a rules-based world order, that was really kind of the thought of what we were trying to work towards.

So there's this SNL skit where Jimmy Fallon plays you and you're walking into the old office looking cool, wearing shades and a bulletproof vest to the song Unbelievable by EMF. I don't know if you've seen it, but it's pretty epic. And then Trump says that you've traveled the world representing the administration, but no one has ever heard you speak. So there's a lot of questions I can ask about that. One of them is, can you introspect why you choose this low-key approach of kind of operating behind the scenes and not speaking much to the public, at least at the time? You've spoken a little bit more and today you've spoken for a really long time, which I deeply appreciate. It's been a pleasure to do this. And thank you for the opportunity to talk about these things. So that was a really funny skit. And it's funny, the thing I got made fun of the most for that was the wardrobe. And that came from after three months in the administration, we were having dinner with all the generals and they were saying, updating us on the war with ISIS. And General Dumford said to me after, look, the president can't come to see how we're fighting this war, but I'd like to invite you to come with me to Iraq and come see and would you come with me? I said, no, that's great. I always learned in business that you can't make decisions from just an ivory tower. You have to go to the front lines and see what's actually happening. So I said, no problem. I'd love to go. Meanwhile, two days before I'm about to go, the doc from the White House stops by my office and says, we need to get your blood type. So what do you mean by blood type? You're going to an active war zone. I'm like, okay, so I guess I'll go to war zone. I didn't really think this thing fully through.

So I get on the plane with Dumford and we land in Iraq and he looks like G.I. Joe. He's a great general. He's very, very well respected in the military. And we go in and we get on Black Hawk helicopter. They said, today's a nice day. Let's take the sides off. And so I get on the plane and there's a guy, military service officer who then takes a machine gun, locks it into a thing, takes the bullets, puts them into the gun and is sitting there saying, we're ready to go. And then I'm looking out and there's like three other helicopters with guys. One was an Osprey with a guy buckled in also with a machine gun looking out. We take off and we're flying over Baghdad from the airport to the embassy. And as we're going, I'm sitting in an open air helicopter with the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, guys with machine guns everywhere. This is a new experience for you. I would say slightly. I mean, I was doing real estate like three months ago, you know, now I'm flying over Iraq. And the chairman says, that's Saddam Hussein's palace. And I look down, there's like a big bomb right through the middle. Then you see the area with the two swords in the hands. I'm saying to myself, like, how the hell did I get here? Like, what is happening? So meanwhile,

we end up going to the front lines to be with the service, the Iraqi military, which the US military is working closely with. And I had a meeting that night with the president of Iraq. And so I wore, what do you wear to the front lines in a battle zone? And also me the president. So I put a sports jacket on. We land at the front line and they give me a bulletproof vest that says Kushner on it. I tape it. I just, I put it on, I go out and cover the NER. So it just said Kush. And I went and I didn't realize they were taking pictures. And so- I think the picture looks pretty epic. You with sunglasses. I think I love it.

So anyway, so that was the funny story behind that. And then actually my brother was at some society event in New York and he ran into Jimmy Fallon. So the two of them took a selfie together

and Josh writes me says, hanging out with my older brother in New York. I'm trying to explain to him what your voice sounds like. So it was good. So that was a funny one. But I think just being behind the scenes for me just gave me more maneuverability in the sense that, again, it goes back to trust and people knowing that I wasn't going to try to publicize the things they were telling me. I think it just gave me more ability to operate that way. And I also realized too, like, communicating is a very important skill. Luckily in Washington, there's no shortage of amazing communicators. I think there were a lot of people who are much better at me than being communicators. So I was very happy that they were willing to do it because it wasn't something that I had a lot of experience with or necessarily I thought was very, I was very good at. And so I kind of just did my job and just focused on getting things done.

Let me ask you, you have a very interesting life. If you were to give advice to young folks on how to have such an impactful life, what would you say? Career and life. How to have a successful career and a successful life. Number one is, I would say, you just have to work hard at everything you do. Number two, I would say, never stop learning and always try to say yes more than you should. Go out of your comfort zone. And I think just you got to work hard at everything you do. And if you're going to take something on, do it the best you can. You know, one of the lessons I write about in the book from my father was, I remember I was going for a job interview and he asked me, he says, well, what time are you leaving to the job interview? Was that nine o'clock? I said, I'll leave at eight o'clock. He said, well, what if there's traffic? I said, dad, I've done this drive a thousand times. Like there's never traffic. So what if there's an accident? I said, I can't control that. He said, Jared, the only excuse you ever have for being late is that you didn't leave early enough. And I just think it's something where if you want to accomplish something, you know, a lot of people I hear they complain about what other people do or why it's hard or why it's impossible. And again, I say this as somebody who's been so blessed with so many things in life. But, you know, when I've had challenges or things I've wanted to achieve, I just focus and say, what can I do? And I'll read everything I can get my hands on. If I fail at one, the door closes, I'll try the window. If the window closes, I'll try the chimney. If the chimney throws, I'll try to dig a tunnel. It's just, if you want to accomplish something, you just have to go at it. And, you know, I think the most important thing I'll say, sorry, I'm kind of thinking my way into this answer, is just do the right thing. I think that's also right. And I saw that in my career, you know, be good to people, be honest, do the right thing. And if you do that, I think long term, it does pay off, maybe not in politics, but in the world at large it does. And my hope is in politics, it will as well. I wonder if you can comment on your process of learning in general, because you took on so many new interesting problems and approached them with a first principles kind of approach. So what was your source of information? So because you didn't seem to be listening to the assumptions of the prior experts. You were just taking on the problem in a very pragmatic perspective. So what was, how did you learn about the Middle East? How did you learn about China? How did you learn about Mexico? How did you, you know, like all of these prison reform, all of this that you've taken on and were extremely effective at? It really started with just talking to people. I would try to reach out to people who had been involved in different things and ask them, you know, what they did, what they thought of the problem, who they thought was smart on it, what they read that helped them get a better

understanding,

why they think something had failed. And then I would just, you know, read voraciously on every topic. You know, Washington, it was harder to get advice from humans, because I found humans had this weird tendency to talk to the media. And so, you know, I talked to somebody and I'd ask advice. And then the next thing I know is the Washington Post would call and say, Jared's an idiot, doesn't know what he's doing, and he's even going to this person to get advice. I'm like, yeah, I'm asking everyone. So books really became an amazing guide for me. Ivanka, she's an incredible researcher. She's just voracious. And so she gave me some of my best books and some incredible advice

as well. But that was really the process. And then I think that was kind of the first stage.

And then the second stage was just constant iteration and readjusting plan as you continue to get more learning. And one story I tell in the book as well is that on my first trip to the Middle East, where I met with Muhammad bin Zayed, who I spoke about earlier, the ruler of UAE, I spent two hours with him asking him questions and really going through the Israeli-Palestinian issue, the Israeli-Arab issue. And he said to me at the end of the meeting, he says, Jared, I think you're going to make peace here in the Middle East. And I was shocked because, I mean, first of all, he was at the time, I think, one of the most respected leaders in the region, somebody who I found to be very wise and super thoughtful and experienced. And I said to him, why do you say that? I was flattered, obviously, but not certain why he was saying that, based on the fact that I didn't know what my plan was, I didn't know what I was going to do, and I had no pathway to make peace. And he said, well, the US usually sends one of three different kinds of people to come see me. He says, the first are people who come and they fall asleep in meetings. He said, the second are people who come and they basically read me notes, but have no ability to interact on the message theory there to convey. And then the third have been people who have come to convince me to do things that aren't in my interests. He says, you're the first person who's ever come here and has just asked questions. He says, why have you done that? I said, because I figure this problem's been going on for a long time, you live here, I'll be gone at some point, you're going to have to live with the consequences of whatever my work is. And the US has a lot of power. And my question is, what would you do if you were me? And how would you approach this and help me think about it? And again, I wasn't going to then take his plan and then execute it, but I thought it'd be very provocative to understand from the people in the region and instructive how they would use the resource and the power that the US had to solve the problems that were having significant impact on their lives.

Yeah, there's a lot of power to the simplicity of that human approach where you're just listening. And one of my wishes for society is I leave government. I was living on the Upper East Side in a very liberal echo chamber. I then traveled the country. I met so many people who I never would have met otherwise on the conservative side, on the independent side, on so many different issues. I think that people benefit. If you have such a strong point of view, I would follow the John Stuart Mill marketplace of ideas and find people who disagree with you and don't call them names, don't say they're a bad person. Say, I want to understand why you feel the way you do. Let's have conversations in this country. And I think that that's probably going to be our best way to work through the issues that we have currently. When you zoom out and look at the 21st century from a human history perspective across the time

scale of many decades, maybe centuries, what gives you hope about human civilization? Everything you've seen, you've traveled the world, you've talked to some of the most powerful and influential people, and you look at the future. What gives you hope about this little planet of ours? What gives me the most hope is that anything's possible. If there's one lesson that I took from my time in government, it's that people coming together to try to make tomorrow different than yesterday can succeed. And if the right people in the right places focus on the right ideas, I think the advancement that we can have for human history and for society can be tremendous. And I think that right now, I see we're at a place in society where there's a lot of what I call squabbles between countries, which are really man versus man issues. And those are as old as time. We've been fighting about borders or religion or who wronged somebody a hundred or a thousand years ago. And these are what I call more tribal battles. But I do think that as we advance with artificial intelligence, as energy becomes cheaper, and it's more readily available, I think we're going to have massive industrialization. I think we're going to have massive advancement. I think in medical and science, we're going to have cures for diseases. We have the potential in 10, 20 years from now to enter a dawn for humanity that could be incredible. We could become multi-planetary. We can explore the wonders of the world. We can find things we didn't know. So I think that if we put our energy towards finding these advancements that will improve the lives of everyone on this planet, instead of figuring out ways to have these tensions between us, that for me is the most optimistic case for what's possible. And the reason why I believe it's possible is because somebody with no experience, somebody who all I really had was the faith of a leader, and I had the courage to try. And I went out there with other people, and we took on some of the most hopeless, impossible problems, and we succeeded. And if we were able to do that, then everyone else should be able to do that as well.

Well, Jared, thank you for having the courage to try. Thank you for your friendship, for your kindness, most importantly for your book recommendations. And thank you for talking today. This was fascinating, eye-opening. I hope to have many more conversations like this. Thank you very much, Lex.

Thank you for listening to this conversation with Jared Kushner. To support this podcast, please check out our sponsors in the description. And now, let me leave you with some words from Mahatma Gandhi. An eye for an eye will only make the whole world blind. Thank you for listening, and I hope to see you next time.