MOHYELDIN: Hello, everyone, and thank you so much for coming to the Council on Foreign Relations.

My name is Ayman Mohyeldin. I'm the host of the *Ayman* show on MSNBC primetime on the weekends. I've been an anchor for about six, seven years. And before that I was a foreign correspondent for about fifteen years, where I covered everything from Ukraine to Central America to the Middle East. You name it, I've done it. And—

HAASS: And you've done it well.

MOHYELDIN: Thank you. I appreciate that. (Laughter.) And since then I've traded in my flak jacket for the comforts of the studio here in New York, but still very much try to keep an eye on everything that is happening overseas. And as we now know and as we've been seeing, there is so much going on.

So we are very lucky this evening to have the president of the Council on Foreign Relations to help us answer one of the most fundamental questions, and that is what is the state of the world. So that is actually what I will be starting out with. If there's anyone who can answer it, it will be you. So let's get right into it: What is the state of the world? (Laughter.)

HAASS: First of all, welcome. It's great to have you at the Council. (Laughter.)

So, state of the world. Reminds me of—it's an old Soviet story, appropriately enough, where Leonid Brezhnev, the general secretary of the Communist Party, was asked one day at a, quote/unquote, "press conference," such as it was in the old Soviet Union: Comrade Brezhnev, what is the state of the Soviet economy? And he goes: "In a word, good." (Laughter.) Comrade Brezhnev, could you expand a little bit? Could you give us a little bit more? "Not good." (Laughter.) That is the state of the world: Not good.

Ukraine is both a reflection of it and a driver of it, but you've got a couple of things going on here at the moment that really make this a remarkable moment in history. You've got the revival of the familiar stuff of history, what I would call geopolitical competition, obviously with Russia now in Europe; with China in Asia, sometimes increasingly called the Indo-Pacific; the North Koreas; the Irans; and so forth. We got all of that, a lot of it going on. And you know, three decades after the end of the Cold War, suddenly this is not necessarily the world that lots of people were expecting or hoping for.

But secondly, you've also got this whole other set of challenges from climate change to COVID and infectious disease and the rest. You've got these global issues. And what—the common characteristic of every global issue you can think of is the challenge is outpacing the consensus and the machinery designed to deal with it, and the gap is pretty large.

So if you add these two things up, geopolitical competition plus this growing gap between global challenges and collective responses, it adds up to a not good answer. The state of the world isn't good. The trends are not good. And so it's a big foreign policy challenge for the United States and it's a big challenge for the rest of the world. We can drill down and go into whatever, but the bottom line is if you're not concerned you're not paying attention.

MOHYELDIN: I'm glad that you ended on that note because, obviously, this is such a unique group of journalists that we have, and the truth is local journalism is the backbone of this country. Because we tend to think, certainly, of pockets and the communities in those pockets and how they get their information, and there's no doubt that local journalism provides the insight of what is happening in the world to local communities in this country, and with that poses a certain degree of challenges.

One of the things I was going to ask you about—and we'll get into it in just a second—is the infodemic that is happening, and people have used that word.

HAASS: What?

MOHYELDIN: The pandemic but the information pandemic; that there is such a distrust in information.

HAASS: Infodemic?

MOHYELDIN: Infodemic. That is not my word. I'm not going to claim it. But it's—for all intents and purposes for this conversation, I will. But what do—what do you think of just the information flow right now in terms of news—local news, national news, and international news when you're looking at some of these big challenges?

HAASS: There's something of a contradiction going on. Think about it. There's never been a moment in history where, if you wanted access to information, it was easier than it is now. You simply dial up Mr. Google and you go on the Google machine, as we call it, and you go find stuff. And so much of the great material of the world's libraries and all that—just the other day I was cleaning out my office and I had boxes and boxes and boxes of xeroxed papers of speeches and newspaper clippings and all that going back thirty, forty, or more years from when I—you know, fifty years ago when I was writing my doctorate. You don't do that anymore. So we've never had greater access to information and we've never had greater access to misinformation, and that seems to be the contradiction of the year.

And you go on the internet or wherever, and I don't know about your computer but mine doesn't come with yellow stick-em notes which basically said this is good and this isn't; trust this, don't trust that. You've got all this—all this material that you have access to but you don't necessarily know if it's any good, if it's information or misinformation, if it's fact. There's no such thing as alternative facts; it's either factual or it's not.

MOHYELDIN: (Laughs.)

HAASS: Sometimes there's only, you know, curtain A and curtain B.

MOHYELDIN: Don't tell that to Kellyanne Conway, though. (Laughs.)

HAASS: No, I know. There's no curtain C here. And that's, I think, the contradiction of our age.

So you've got—I mean, I grew—I'm old enough where I grew up, there were three networks, national, and I grew up in the era of broadcasting. We now live in the era of narrowcasting, whether it's cable, AM/FM satellite radio, social media of every site. You've got millions and millions of places you can go for information, and the problem is a good chunk of them are either inaccurate in what they present or incomplete—so incomplete as to be inaccurate in what they present. And the challenge for consumers—and you're, essentially—you're the intermediaries. You're a consumer, but you're also an intermediary between the information and the consumers—is to both vet it for accuracy but also vet it for incompleteness. And I think it puts an enormous responsibility on you all and your colleagues.

MOHYELDIN: Let's just kind of generally talk about some of the pressing issues as they relate to foreign policy. Obviously, Ukraine is front and center on everyone's mind. Climate change is something that is always hard to cover as a journalist just because you always are mindful of how people will digest it, how people will understand it—and it's—as everything else, unfortunately, in this country, has become so politicized. Before—

HAASS: Can I just interrupt for a second?

MOHYELDIN: Yeah.

HAASS: But climate change is another problem, too, and Ukraine is an interesting contrast. Six weeks ago we were not focusing on Ukraine. If this meeting had taken place six weeks ago or seven weeks ago, Ukraine would have been part of the conversation; would not have been THE conversation. What it is now is it checks the box both of importance and urgency.

The problem with climate change as an issue—I think for you all, for citizens, and all that—is it's—the metaphor is actually, strangely, apt: It's a slow-melting ice cube. And it's present, but it's—it was present yesterday, it's present today, it's present tomorrow. Every now and then you have a punctuation—you have a storm, you have a flood, you have a fire. But the day to day of climate change is now part of the—part of the woodwork. And I—and I think it presents a special problem, which is it's not simply the lack of consensus about what it is and more important how to deal with it, but it's the urgency issue. It's in danger of getting pushed off the news simply because it suffers from a kind of familiarity. Oh, well, if I don't cover it today it'll still be around tomorrow, I can cover it then. And I think that's part of the danger with—that's part of the difficulty of covering climate change, is our tendency is to kick the can down the road.

MOHYELDIN: Well, it's actually part of the reason why I wanted to ask this question in front of this particular audience, which is we tend to sometimes think in local news, as I was mentioning, about the relatability to the community. And so sometimes if we think our community is not impacted by climate change, it's not something we cover, and it may be not something that our audience, our readers, our consumers are going to turn to immediately. And you know, it seems very dangerous to have that mindset, you know, when it comes to something like climate change, as you were just saying.

HAASS: No, I think the challenge, then, is to connect dots and explain why it matters. I mean, to only cover Ukraine—we were talking about it before—in the context of we have some refugees coming and we have local members of this or that ethnic community and that's the story, OK, that's a chunk of the story, but it's hardly the core of the story. Or climate change, you might have an immediate effect with this or that, but again, that's not the larger story of climate change; that's simply a manifestation of the climate. So I think the challenge—and by the way, it's just as much a challenge for me. I'm not a journalist, though I sometimes play one on TV.

MOHYELDIN: (Laughs.)

HAASS: Yeah, I'll be playing one tomorrow morning at six a.m. on *Morning Joe*. But the challenge is to connect the dots.

We have a podcast we started here a couple years ago called *Why It Matters*, and the entire conceit of the podcast is to basically say you're all busy, you've got your lives, you have to make ends meet, we've got families, we've got friends, we've got jobs, blah, blah, blah, blah; this is happening. Why does it matter? Essentially, it's: Why should I pay attention? Why should I care? And whether it's climate change or Ukraine or terrorism—you know, we just marked the 20th or so anniversary of 9/11—a disease that—how many Americans heard of Wuhan, China, two-and-a-half years ago? About none. And now close to a million Americans have died from COVID. Something like 6 million people around the world. Probably three times that number, in fact, if one looks at excess-death statistics, have died from it.

So these things are happening. We live in a global world where globalization is a reality, like it or not. Lots of things get on these conveyor belts that connect and ignore borders. And I think the challenge is to explain why it matters, why you should pay attention. And I think it's essential for us as Americans—I'm an old-fashioned kind of guy, but you would go back to Jefferson and you read his—you know, the whole idea of democracy depends upon—you know, Jefferson was big on two things. One was the importance of an independent media. He actually thought it was the single most important component of a democracy, was having a free press. And the other was he said it's essential—that democracy lives and dies on whether its citizens are informed, and—

because citizens need to be informed to have the motivation to vote and to have the understanding of why a vote for candidate A as opposed to candidate B or C is serving their own self-interest. And I think the challenge is to constantly try to explain that, to get people to understand, to connect the dots, and then to be motivated that what they do makes a difference.

MOHYELDIN: Let's take advantage of some of your expertise on some of these issues around the world. And not to drill down on them and get bogged down in them, but right now—

HAASS: Before we finish tonight, could we have a vote on whether you think his shoes are cooler than mine and my socks? (Laughter.) I would like that. I think we should basically run a poll.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Your socks are making me laugh. (Laughter.)

HAASS: I should actually declare these look like Ukraine-sympathetic socks. (Laughter.) They're actually U.S. Navy socks, but I've double purposed them.

MOHYELDIN: (Laughs.)

HAASS: Just for the record, in case there was a misunderstanding. But I digress.

MOHYELDIN: I'm going with the neutral Calvin Klein—(laughter)—universal gym wear/formal wear. No sympathy here.

But let me ask you just to go through some of these issues that we were talking about—

HAASS: Yes, sir.

MOHYELDIN: —thematically. If we were to start on the big picture, you know, before we drill down on some of the country specifics, what do you think are some of the biggest national-security challenges that America faces today that we should all care about in the United States?

HAASS: There's a long list. I mean, we've already alluded to several of them.

One is the traditional stuff, which is the rise of great powers or medium powers—not just great powers; medium powers and even in some cases small entities—that can do a lot, have great—we live in an age of what you might call distributed capacity. It's really interesting. So you've got, yes, the Russias, the Chinas. You know, Russia still has thousands of nuclear warheads. China has hundreds but wants thousands. They have tremendous economic wealth and power, growing military. Their ability to shape events not just in their regions but around the world. You got North Korea, which is busy building lots of nuclear weapons and puts on missiles that can reach the United States. Iran is putting in place many of the pieces or prerequisites of a nuclear program. As we learned on 9/11 and other times, you've got terrorist groups that have global—there's all that stuff. You know, again, this is the stuff of geopolitics, and I think there's the issues there.

You've got global challenges. You've got cyberspace, which is in some ways the least-regulated domain of modern-day life. There's no rule and no—no rules and no enforcement, yet we're wildly dependent upon the internet and things digital.

Disease. What was so stunning was not that COVID-19 broke out, but the reaction was as slow as it was and as uneven as it was. And this year—COVID, by the way, it's called -19 because it was discovered—it was identified in 2019. So if COVID-22 at some point will be identified this year, I'm not sure the world's all that much better off in dealing with it.

And look at how much trouble we had in producing and distributing vaccines to much of the world, a real failure. I mean, one of the most common phrases in this business that I work in is international community. The deep, dark secret is there isn't one. There isn't an international community. If there were, we would have done much better at producing and distributing vaccines.

Even on something—the most basic rule of international relations—and I'll return to your question in a second, Ayman—is that borders are not to be changed through the use of military force. The most—indeed, it's been the most basic tenet, interestingly enough, of Chinese foreign policy since communist China won its civil war in 1949. And what did Russia do? It changed borders by force and it interfered in the internal affairs of another country, and lots of the world is sitting on its hands. They're not criticizing Russia, much less sanctioning Russia. So there's not a lot of consensus on the rules. We're the most powerful country in the world, but we can't impose our will on virtually anyone or anything.

And then you've got these other global issues. Climate change. You know, the world is heating up. Indeed, what we're seeing this year, you're going to have, what is it, COP-27 if my numbers are right at the end of this year in Cairo—

MOHYELDIN: Sharm. Sharm el-Sheikh.

HAASS: Oh, Sharm. It's in Sharm?

MOHYELDIN: Yeah.

HAASS: OK. In Egypt. If anything, we may have fallen farther behind compared to COP-26 that we just had, the climate conference late in 2021. And the—it's not just a future problem; it's a present problem. The implications already are bad and a lot is already baked into the cake. So it's going to get worse. The only question is how much worse, how fast.

So if you take things like infectious disease, you take things like climate change, you take things like an unregulated undisciplined cyberspace, and there are a lot of other things, not a lot of rules. Global trading—the World Trade Organization is increasingly irrelevant to most of what's going on in world trade. So, again, we don't have an even playing field or a common set of rules.

So you got all this going on, and what I think is the biggest challenge—and I put my money where my mouth is, and I'll explain in a second—is us. You know, for the last seventy-five, eighty years the United States has played an outsized role in the world. You know, yes, we've made mistakes and the rest, God knows, but all things being equal the United States has played a large and I think constructive role in building institutions out. First of all, being decisive in the winning of World War II, building a whole set of institutions in the aftermath of World War II. The Cold War stayed cold, not bad. It ended on—not just peacefully, but ended on terms that were wildly in our favor. Soviet Union came apart. If you look at virtually every measure in the world, the world today is far more—you know, you have all these countries that exist today that were colonies back in World War II and the immediate aftermath. The average lifespan in the world is several decades longer than it was seventy-five years ago, even with COVID and other things. Wealth around the world is far, far, far greater than it ever was. I kind of look at this, the last seventy-five years, and I go, not bad. We've avoided, you know, great-power conflict. The two world wars in the first half of the 20th century, we haven't had a world war for three-quarters of a century now.

And you have all these measures or indices of human—I mean, it hasn't been perfect. We've made mistakes. We can talk about all of the mistakes. But right now you have a United States that is as divided as it's been at any point since roughly, I would say, you know, in the runup to the Civil War. No consensus about our role in the world. Increasingly dysfunctional. And so if you add up this rise of geopolitical challenges and competition,

all of these global things that are—that are coming onstream ready or not, and the United States which has played this outsized role no longer willing and able to play it, that's a really toxic combination.

You know, my next book is not a book, you know, that you expect the president of the Council on Foreign Relations to write. I'm writing a book about American democracy. Why? Because every time I would speak before a group and people would say what keeps you up at night—is it China, is it Russia, is it terrorism—yeah, those all keep me up at night, but what really keeps me up at night is us, whether we're going to survive as a democracy and whether we're going to be able to function to meet our domestic and international challenges. And I'm not so—I'm not so sure.

MOHYELDIN: Yeah. I was just going to say, can you give us a preview of what the conclusion of the book is? Will the democracy survive, given what we're seeing play out—

HAASS: The answer is—the answer is it depends. And—

MOHYELDIN: Yeah. On what?

HAASS: Us. I don't think there's going to be top-down answers to what's going to protect—the idea that people in Washington are going to suddenly see the light and the lions are going to lay with the lambs and everything's going to be fine, uh-uh, ain't going to happen. Ultimately, politicians may not be responsible but they are responsive, and they're only going to be responsive to pressure from below, from the American people.

So even though I swore I wouldn't talk about this book yet—(laughter)—we will get not—the danger is we won't get the democracy we need; we'll get the democracy we deserve. So that's really up to us. And what happens in Washington, what happens in state capitals and the rest, in city halls, is really going to depend upon American citizens. And the reason I wrote this book—and I'm writing it so it can come out in January—is to get American citizens more involved in American democracy. And I suggest, you know, how they might go about doing that.

But, yeah, I'm genuinely worried. Which is different—if we had had this meeting a couple years ago, I would not have said that. I used to get up in the morning and I'd worry about a lot of stuff. I'm basically—I'm a pretty negative guy—(laughter)—as you sense. My default option is pretty pessimistic. But I didn't wake up every day worried about American democracy. That was kind of in the things I thought I could take for granted.

MOHYELDIN: Yeah. (Laughs.)

HAASS: Might not be perfect, but was good enough. I'm not so sure anymore. So I'm much more worried about it than I—I don't take a lot for granted anymore.

MOHYELDIN: Let me ask you a question against my better judgment which has to do a little bit with all of us, and that is—and something, as you alluded to, with Jefferson and the role of media in this. What is your critique of how American media covers foreign policy generally?

HAASS: Oh, I don't think you put people at the Council on Foreign Relations on enough, and I think that's a—(laughter)—that a terrible collective failure.

MOHYELDIN: I think you have more airtime than some of our own anchors on MSNBC, so—(laughter).

HAASS: So now a serious answer. Two things.

One is it doesn't get enough coverage, quite honestly. If you look at just content analysis, as I used to say, covering Princess Di didn't count as international coverage. And if you subtracted that away, I mean, the amount of serious—now, this last six weeks has been a total exception. But it's just that, it's an exception. And I think the issue is, you know, to what extent will it endure and all that. But putting the immediate crisis aside, one, it doesn't get enough coverage. You know, then it's—I get it. Media is to some extent a business, but I'm old fashioned enough to think it's also a bit of a public trust.

The other is when it is covered there's not enough explanation. To simply put a story out there and not—I think every—when I first worked for NBC, I first started doing stuff for NBC, it was—it was almost the black-and-white era. It was a good forty years ago. Tim Russert was the Washington bureau chief. Tim was a good friend. And when I left the—I can't remember what administration it was at the time. I think it might have been the Reagan administration in the early '80s. I left in the mid-'80s. He said, come work for us. And I said, great. And he said, I got one piece of advice for you. He said, when you stare at that lens, make believe your mother's watching it, and explain to her what is going on and why she should look up and pay attention to you, other than the fact you're her son and you're perfect. (Laughter.)

And I think that's what one has to do, particularly with foreign stories. I mean, you have to do it with economic stories to some extent to connect because it's no obvious. Anything—because one of the reasons you've got to do it is—and we've started a big program here—we call it global literacy—to make Americans—I don't mean about reading levels around the world, though it turns out around 15 percent—about a billion people around the world—can't read. When we talk about global literacy, we mean the awareness and understanding of the world. And you can graduate from virtually any college or university in the United States and never—never having taken a course about the world. They're offered on almost every campus and they're required on almost none. Most high schools don't even offer them, or they offer very, very incomplete things.

So you're—most of the people who are coming to you don't come with this background. You can't assume that they've read things or they know these things, or if they did study it and they're my age it was so long ago they've forgotten it or it's irrelevant because that was, you know, a different era of history. You can't assume that they read certain things every day. So I actually think it puts a real burden on you all about why it matters, how it matters, what's the connections. But I think just to present the story without some aspect of kind of shaking people up a little bit about why they should pay attention—I think foreign policy but any technical, economics, again, I'd say the same thing—you know, again, why it matters. I don't think anyone should have a story without one way or another in the story answering, so what? I think the "so what" question is a really important question.

MOHYELDIN: And I'm sure that a lot of the journalists in this room have been in those meetings with our editors and managers who have said to us: Why should I care? Why should our viewers care about what is happening somewhere overseas or somewhere far away from here? And I know that's a—it's a challenge that we even get sometimes in the national media when you're saying we should pay attention to what's happening in Central Africa or somewhere else.

I guess it leads me to the question about resources, because I think a lot of people in this room will also want to know, you know—we rely on you. You are our resident scholar, one of many, at MSNBC that we rely on regularly for distilling this type of information. The Council on Foreign Relations, we live in a city like New York. We have officials. There are people from the U.N. that are always readily available. We have a lot of think tanks and institutions. How do you get that information out to local communities so that people—reporters, local producers, editors—have access to that type of information as well?

HAASS: Again, the good news is there's a lot that's available, a lot that's available for free or for close to free. I think there's more and more explainers out there. More and more newspapers and others are putting—you know, we call them backgrounders or explainers.

But you know, take our—take what we do. So, on CFR.org, our website, the most-trafficked area of the website is explainers and backgrounders. So if you want to know the background to the Ukraine-Russia crisis, we've got all sorts of stuff, video and written, about it. Just to—we've also produced an entire curriculum called World 101—an entire curriculum for free, probably five hundred pieces in it, of—to each people the basics of international relations and foreign policy. Perfect for high school, college, or adults of—you know, citizens of any age. We also have stuff for younger people. We just did a game with iCivics for middle school.

But the answer is, you know, we have a lot. *Foreign Affairs* magazine; we produce the leading journal in the field.

MOHYELDIN: Incredible.

HAASS: And it comes out in hardcopy every two months. The new issue has a whole block of articles about Ukraine. But every day we produce a couple of pieces online, on ForeignAffairs.com. So it's the best analytical stuff.

So we have—we have things that I would call basic explainers, kind of primer-like things, and we have things that are one level up from that where you assume certain knowledge and then talk about different assessments or different debates about what policy would be better. Certainly, we do. Other places do it. Some think tanks are more ideological than we are. We're nonpartisan.

You've got, you know, certainly—I think the *Economist* is still a really good weekly read. I do think the major newspapers—our major—you know, I like the *FT*. I think it has really good international coverage. But you know, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and others I still think are valuable reads. Every once in a while I'll try to watch the *NewsHour* or I'll try to listen to NPR. You know, some of the Sunday shows are of value.

But, yeah, I mean, that's kind of where to—and I think also it's important to get more than one—when I—more than one source. When I used to go to the gym back in pre-COVID days, I had a rule when I'd go on the elliptical. I had at least half an hour on the elliptical: ten minutes MSNBC, ten minutes CNN, ten minutes Fox. And I found that a really—

MOHYELDIN: Was there an order you would do those in, or, no, just—(laughter)—because I think it matters really much about how—(laughter)—

HAASS: Yes. We won't go there.

But, yeah, so I got a pretty decent half-hour workout and just got exposed. I was always curious to see what was being presented and how it was being presented. And something I—particularly in this age of more politicized sources, I think there's a certain protection or safety in numbers and doing a little bit of shopping around rather than depending too much on any single source, no matter how much confidence you might have in it.

MOHYELDIN: Let me go back to two points that you made a little bit, broadly speaking, and then we'll open it up for questions.

HAASS: Sure.

MOHYELDIN: One, are we still a superpower? You said that we still are a superpower. And you talked about China, you talked about Russia, you talked about nonstate actors, but do you still see the United States—even though we're unable to impose our will on the world and our outcome on the world, are we a superpower?

HAASS: If I used the word "superpower," I misspoke. I do not believe there is a superpower. Superpower suggests a degree of not just power, but what matters about power is its ability to translate into influence. And to call a country a superpower suggests that it is able to have an enormous amount of influence over others, and I don't think that's the case.

MOHYELDIN: Anymore, or are we—

HAASS: Anymore.

MOHYELDIN: OK.

HAASS: Well, I think we had—I think there were moments in history where we've had more than we now, during the Cold War because individual—things were more concentrated in the world, more structured. Capacity hadn't proliferated into as many hands. I think after the Cold War ended the United States enjoyed a degree of primacy that was really quite unprecedented historically. It didn't last. In some ways, 9/11 was a bit of a shattering of it a decade later, and then we've seen with China's rise and Russia's alienation and other trends.

But right now, look, on global issues there's very little we can do alone. The United States could stop using energy tomorrow; climate change wouldn't go away. So there's—we're not a superpower when it comes to climate change. We're not a superpower when it comes to dealing with infectious disease. We can't regulate global cyberspace by ourselves. And the deep, dark truth of living in a global world is you need collective effort. We can encourage countries to do certain things. In some cases you have to encourage entities other than countries, corporations and all that. There's a lot of pushback out there.

And so, no, we're not—in that sense, we're not—we might be the single largest concentration of power in the world, but I'm saying superpower's a—it's an idea that actually is misleading. It suggests a degree of ability to dominate or impose one's will that has long since—that has long since gone, if it ever really existed. So I suggest people not use the phrase.

MOHYELDIN: Done. And then the other part of that question is, in the absence of a superpower or any superpowers, what is the role of international organizations, as weak as they are? Because have we shot ourselves in the foot by undermining sometimes—I mean, we talk about the international rules-based system. We don't necessarily abide by it ourselves. And so have we now realized that by not doing so we've also hurt ourselves when it comes to a country in a crisis like Russia and Ukraine?

HAASS: Well, look, at times we have bypassed the United Nations when it didn't serve our interests, so we can't get on our high horse. I get it. On the other hand, that's true of great powers or major powers all the time.

The U.N. was never invented in some ways to be used by great powers against other great powers. It was meant to be a venue where the major powers would come together to sort things out. So to expect the U.N. to deal successfully with Russia on Ukraine is a real misunderstanding of why the U.N. came into being. That's why Russia has a veto.

So institutions like the—when it comes to basic matters of war and peace, international institutions aren't worth much.

MOHYELDIN: Aren't worth much.

HAASS: No. I mean, the U.N.'s become basically, I think, a kind of—a piece of theater. It's a place where you have public diplomacy. I mean, what you see going on in the Security Council when it's televised, that's not diplomacy. That's public diplomacy. That's countries using their talking points, trying to make their case either back home to impress their own domestic populations or to try to win over support around the world. That's

not—if you want to—if you want to have a serious conversation, you don't do it in the Security Council; you do it privately, bilaterally or some other place.

We have all sorts of other international institutions. But again, in most cases there's not the requisite consensus to make the institutions succeed. There's no agreement on what to do with outliers.

I mean, see, we have something called the Non-Proliferation Treaty. It was signed, what, fifty-odd years ago. So a country like North Korea decides, hmm, we've about had it with this treaty. We're going to leave. And they leave it. OK. Well, then what? Then they go ahead and develop nuclear weapons and missiles to deliver them. OK. Then what? So we have an international arrangement. We have a norm. It's just violated. And before North Korea, you had India, Pakistan, and Israel all violate the norm, and Iran seems interested in doing so now.

So what increasingly you have in the world is not global institutions because it's too hard to get consensus. What increasingly you have are institutions of likeminded entities. Once I—years ago I came up with the phrase coalitions of the willing. That's really what you have. And you—those who are likeminded. That can be—it can be formal, like an alliance, like NATO. So if you remember, when you had the first—one of the big wars in Europe after the end of the Cold War was the war in the former Yugoslavia. It came to the Security Council. China and Russia wouldn't support international action, so we took it to NATO and NATO intervened. That was a workaround. Now there's no consensus in the U.N. Doesn't mean there's total immobilism; you just have workarounds. Russia does its thing. The United States, working with its allies and others does its thing.

On nonproliferation, you—Non-Proliferation Treaty itself has no teeth, so we set up supplier groups to try to control the movement of certain technologies or equipment. So, and virtually—on trade, you have the World Trade Organization, which requires consensus, can't agree on anything. So instead, you have bilateral/regional agreements that deal with things, you know, like the USMCA—the United States, Canada, and Mexico—or what was the Trans-Pacific Partnership around the Pacific. I think that's the way things go.

So I think increasingly you have a reality of globalization where things move from everywhere to everywhere, but the response to it is more and more localized. It could be national, subnational, regional, or selective groupings. And I think that's probably the way of the world.

MOHYELDIN: I'm going to open it up now to some questions from the audience if we haven't scared you completely with Richard's assessment of the world and where things are going.

HAASS: I apologize.

MOHYELDIN: (Laughs.)

HAASS: Actually, I'm saving the upbeat stuff for the end. I want you to leave happy. (Laughter.) So the last few minutes are really positive. (Laughter.)

MOHYELDIN: We'll work our way from the back if you can just please stand up and identify yourself and who you're with, and fire away.

Q: (Off mic)—for holding this. My name is Maria Recio. I currently write for the *Austin American-Statesman* from Washington, and most of my career has been Texas-oriented.

And keeping in mind that we're here representing many local outlets, I have to say that I was very struck by the fact that when Ayman asked you about national security issues you did not talk about the border. And there is nothing that consumes Texas politics more than the border.

MOHYELDIN: (Laughs.)

Q: So it is not just a Texas issue, of course. It is a national issue. And could you talk about that in terms of, especially now given the Title 42 lifting that has, you know, everyone in a panic, how you see that playing out and how you see the Biden administration handling it?

HAASS: Yeah, it was a mistake on my part, an omission. Should have mentioned it. And so how—it's a subset of the larger immigration issue. And I would just say that when I think of immigration there are several buckets.

There's legal immigration, and I think it's a big debate as to numbers but more important criteria, and it's very hard to have a thoughtful debate in this country. But immigration, I would argue—legal immigration has been a great boon to this society and economy, tremendous talent. Indeed, now I think we ought to be—if lots of talented Russians are leaving Russia, we ought to be thinking about how we get them here. It would be good for them and it would be good for us. But there's the bucket or basket of legal immigration. And we're in real competition with parts of the world like Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and others which are looking at education and so forth.

Second of all, there's the—there's the question of, what is it, 13 million, plus or minus, people who are already in this country who are not here—not documented, whatever word you want to use. And the question is, how do we normalize their situation? Well, how do we define normalization and how do we get from here to there?

And then there's the third bucket, which is the one you describe, which is the question of how we deal with illegal entry. And I believe that we have to. I think it's important. I would love to see immigration dealt with comprehensively, all three buckets. And I think, you know, there's various aspects of it. There is the question of what happens at the border, but I think if immigration policy is limited to the border it potentially will be overwhelmed. I think—you know, the vice president got ridiculed for it, but I think she's right; to some extent, you do have to go to the source. The problem is, that's a ten-, twenty-year challenge. But you do have to build up situations where people are less desirous of coming here no matter what.

Turns out the best immigration measure we ever had over the last thirty years was arguably NAFTA because it did so much to improve the economic circumstances of Mexico and with far less pressure. Again, if people are coming up to the border in large numbers, you're already playing defense. The real question, again, is how do you make these other societies, if you can, places where people want to stay? And that's a question of political conditions, economic conditions, social conditions. But that said, there's got to be a security dimension. I hear you.

And I think that I get nervous when people talk about immigration and they leave out any of the buckets. And so—and I think it tends to be more the progressives who leave out the security bucket, and it's got to—we can't lose control. It's not just that it's politically loaded; it's important for society. It's one of the definitions of a sovereign country is you have control over your borders. And we've got to do it in a humane way. You know, again, at some point I get beyond my expertise here about how you do it. And we've got to think about questions of, you know, in the age of COVID there are special new stresses.

But I—but I think—I hear what you're saying. I think this has the potential to be explosive. And I think this administration has created problems for itself. Some of the signaling during the transition and during the campaign about openness, I think, created certain pressures.

But ultimately, you know, how would I put it? I try to divide the world into problems for which there are solutions and conditions which—to be managed. I think immigration is more of a condition to be managed. And you've got various tools that you use, some at the border, some in the—some in the countries. Trade becomes an important tool and so forth. So that's where we are. But anytime you have large numbers of people showing up at your border, you're already way behind the challenge.

MOHYELDIN: Gentleman right there. Yeah. Oh. I'll get to you next. I'll get to you next.

Go ahead, sir. Go ahead. Yeah, go ahead. Right here.

Q: Hello. My name is Charles Robinson. I work for Maryland Public Television.

A couple of issues that I hope you'll be able to address here. One, that we know there are a number of authoritarian regimes across the globe. Many of them are being propped up by monies, resources, and others. I note that, you know, in this current climate these folks are being taken very seriously, and that a lot of us especially at the local level are getting a lot of pushback. I'm thinking about the Saudi Arabians, the folks in Tehran, and other Islamic states. How do you see that playing out as we move ahead?

HAASS: The statistics are pretty clear that the—in the years starting around 1950 through about 2005 or '10, but roughly in those half-century, there was a fairly stead increase in the number of people around the world and in the percentage of people—both—living in fully or partially democratic societies. And then about somewhere fifteen or so plus or minus years ago, what began then is what's called the democratic backsliding. And we saw a large—the percentage of people living in fully or partially democratic societies began to go down, and societies that had been pretty democratic became slightly less so. We see it in places like Eastern Europe, Hungary. You saw, what, the charade of an election the other day bringing Mr. Orbán back to power. We see it in parts of Latin America. There's been a bit of a recession there, if I can use, you know, almost economic language there. Africa's always been uneven. We see the Middle East has had real and continues to have real problems. And the United States, we're having some problems. If you—all the measures of American democracy shows something of—I guess to use another economic, a market metaphor—at best, we've had a correction in American democracy.

There's a whole interesting debate as to why. What role is social media playing? What role is economic inequality playing? What role is economic stagnation playing, technology playing? Big debate. Indeed, one of our fellows just published a book this week—next week, Yascha Mounk, about—called *The Great Experiment*, which talks about democratic backsliding. Larry Diamond at Stanford has written really well, other books—*How Democracies Die*. There's an entire literature out there. And I think—and I think it's been a real trend.

And one of the many reasons I'd like to see Mr. Putin not succeed is I think that would be helpful in slightly reversing the trend. I don't want to—I don't want to make it seem like the authoritarian systems are somehow on a roll.

That said, I think for American foreign policy, for Americans, it creates really, really difficult challenges. We need to understand a couple of things.

One is our ability to influence other countries, much less coerce them into becoming more democratic, is limited. There's nothing harder than trying to influence the internal dynamics of another society. Anyone who disagrees with me, think about some of the experiences we've had in the Middle East in recent years. It ought to humble you. Sure humbles me. Nothing harder than to do that. And you have to think really hard about what does it take for—where has democracy succeeded. Well, it succeeded in Germany and Japan after World War II. Think about maybe why. Places like South Korea and some other countries after—or Taiwan after years of difficulty. So one looks at the nature of the societies, the populations, education levels, demographics, all sorts of prerequisites. And a lot of those indices seems to—or indicators seem to be missing in parts of the world.

It clearly requires a lot more than elections. Indeed, to go to elections early on in the democratization process can be devastating. As someone said, you end up with one man, one vote, one time—

MOHYELDIN: (Laughs.)

HAASS: —which can be a really unhelpful recipe.

I also think for us it raises foreign policy questions, and not simply that it's hard to bring about. But we have to deal with the fact that we can't always bring it about, and then what do you do?

So, Saudi Arabia. How do we deal with a Saudi Arabia that, among other things, killed the journalist, imprisons lots of people, or worse? The other day you had, what, eighty-five beheadings in Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, we may need them to cooperate on global oil issues. We may need their—we want them to normalize relations with Israel and we're worried about the attacks they're getting from the Houthis in Yemen. How do you deal with that?

Or you can go around the world. You know, China. Obviously, we have massive disagreements there. On the other hand, if we're going to make—we'd like to pull China away from Russia because of Ukraine and other issues, and we want China's help on, say, climate issues or global health issues.

So I don't think we have the luxury. I mean, I actually disagreed with President Biden's speech from Poland—not just the ad-libbed part which I spoke out against, but also parts of the framing of the speech itself to divide the world into democracies and autocracies. I don't think we have—I don't think that's a very useful way to approach foreign policy. Again, I don't think we can necessarily get people to switch sides, and we often have to work with unattractive governments on behalf of other goals. That's what a grownup foreign policy is often about. And you've got to be willing to—you got to decide where you have to compromise on behalf of what ends.

So I think it's a—it's a really, really tough set of challenges. I think it's far more nuanced than a lot of our conversation in this country would—and it's a hard conversation to have in public. There's nothing harder, as you all know. You do it for a living. The public space is not an easy place—venue to have nuanced conversations. Very easy to get caricatured, attacked, misunderstood, what have you, even if people are well-intentioned and particularly when they're not.

So I this is—you know, this question that Mr. Robinson raised I think is a really tough set of issues. And so I think we can be a voice for human rights. We should be against atrocities, against genocide. We should be a voice for greater democratization. But we've got to think really hard about how we do it privately/publicly, and what priority we give it, and where we're willing to not put it aside but understand that desire has to coexist with other foreign policy desires.

MOHYELDIN: It sounds like you're saying an interest-based foreign policy, not a value-based foreign policy.

HAASS: I'd say both. I think you have to have both. And the question is, how do you get the—

MOHYELDIN: Balance.

HAASS: —balance right, and it may change from situation to situation. It may not be one size fits all.

MOHYELDIN: Gentleman there, you were going to ask a question. Yeah, right here, sir. Yeah, you. Thanks. (Laughter.) Yes.

HAASS: Fantastic. There we go.

Q: Phillip Martin, GBH News in Boston.

First of all, I've loved your show.

MOHYELDIN: Thank you so much.

Q: Absolutely loved your show.

HAASS: I like WGBH.

Q: Well, thank you. I appreciate that.

HAASS: I used to live in—I used to live there.

Q: I appreciate that.

Just one observation and then two questions.

HAASS: Sure.

Q: I think, obviously, elections are the response to illiberal governments—Orbán, Duterte, Bolsonaro, those governments—but what about this question: How do you punish a(n) individual like Putin in the context of what are being defined—not determined yet, but defined by many—as war crimes in Ukraine when we're not a party to the international court?

HAASS: Yeah.

Q: And that's first question.

The second question is: Within local communities you're finding extraordinary amounts of sentiment in favor of Russia. Where does that come from, in your view? How do you—how do you explain that on a local level?

HAASS: OK. The percentage of you I haven't already lost I'm now going to lose. (Laughter.) This is fair warning.

Look, Mr. Putin has clearly committed war crimes. To me, that is not an arguable—what you have is not the indiscriminate bombing of Ukraine. You have the totally discriminate, intentional bombing of civilian areas of Ukraine. That's the strategy. It's not a sideshow. It's not an accident. That is the purposeful strategy, to target cities and civilian populations. That's a war crime. These atrocities that were committed the other day, undisciplined troops do terrible things. They can rape, they can pillage. They do not do large-scale organized executions. That's not something unprofessional troops, conscripts do. Someone ordered them to do that. So I think the atrocities are there.

But do I think we ought to be putting it front and center? No, for several reasons. My priority right now is—I've got two priorities with this war right now. One is to stop it as soon as possible. And, two, if I can't stop it, I want to—I do not want to see further escalation. I do not want to see chemicals used, I don't want to see nuclear weapons used, and so forth. Those are my two priorities. To me, to emphasize war crimes at the moment, even though they're being committed, doesn't help me with those two goals. If Vladimir Putin thinks his goose is cooked as a war criminal, if he thinks that because of what Russia's done there's zero chance they're going to get any sanctions relief, we're going to prosecute him and others, whatever limited incentive he has to negotiate or accept limited outcomes I think goes out the window.

So my view is a time for every purpose under heaven. Right now, I want to stop this war, prevent escalation. If we ever get to that point, and I pray that we do, then we can start thinking about war crimes, we can think about reparations, we can think about under what terms we might or might not ease sanctions. That's that to me. But I

just think this is premature. And, again, I'm not overlooking for a second what's been done, but, again, I've got a—I think we've got to segue, sequence our priorities here. And let's be real, even if—again, even if the courts found at some point that Vladimir Putin's a war criminal, he's not going to be arrested. He's not going to travel. He's not going to get caught going through Dulles Airport and picked up. (Laughter.) It doesn't work that way.

So this is symbolic. Let's not get stuck on the symbolism. Let's stop the reality of people in Ukraine getting killed, and let's try to prevent the reality where things like chemical weapons are used that kill a lot more people. I think we've got to stay really focused and disciplined and not spend so much of our calories talking about these behaviors, whether it's, you know, talk about regime change, about war criminals. I get it. It's just not, to me—it's not within our ability to bring about, and I don't think it's our immediate priority. I think our priorities are to focus on what's achievable, not simply what's desirable. So I think I disagree. And you asked me one other half of it, and I forgot.

Q: It was in the context of—(off mic).

HAASS: Oh, yeah, about the—

MOHYELDIN: Local communities being pro-Russia.

HAASS: About pro-Russia. Look, I see it in certain local views. I see it on certain media outlets. I'm not naïve. I have very few rules. One of my very few rules is not to try to understand what motivates people, because you never quite know. And if you get into the business of ascribing motives, I think it's a—it could be a dangerous direction, why people, whatever degree of ideology or self-interest, or whatever it might be. So my view—or much worse than that. So my view is simply to try to educate and to basically say: Here's what's going on. Here's the facts. And the conclusions therefore are—rather than trying to attack people directly for what I think are misguided positions.

MOHYELDIN: Lady right here.

Q: Me?

MOHYELDIN: Yep.

Q: (Off mic)—with KUNM Radio.

HAASS: Where's that?

Q: It's in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

HAASS: I've heard of Albuquerque.

Q: (Laughs.) Yeah, I know, *Breaking Bad*, right? (Laughs.)

I am struggling a little bit with your characterization that, you know, mature foreign policy is having to work with unattractive governments for other goals because I feel like we've done that for a very long time. And I'll just use Central and South America as an example, in the '70s and '80s. We supported very unattractive people. That's not really an appropriate word, but I'll just stick with that. (Laughter.) And we helped, especially in Central America as a result, destabilize a region for generations. And the CIA calls it blowback. That is what we're seeing now coming across the border. And so I don't—I don't have a prescription and I don't disagree with you. But I am struggling with that because we've done it for a long time. And I get being pragmatic, but there are real world consequences for that.

HAASS: Absolutely. Take what the United States did in Afghanistan. We supported the Mujahadeen in order to defeat the Soviets in Afghanistan. We succeeded, but at a considerable cost. The people who we were supporting then ended up introducing a totally illiberal, repressive, violent society into Afghanistan. You mentioned things in Central America. So there's lots of places where I think we've gotten this wrong. My point is that—take China. There's lots going on in China with the Uighurs, the way they dealt with Hong Kong, they steal intellectual property, they militarize the South China Sea and lie about it, they threaten Taiwan. I got a long list of—on the other hand, China is the world's second-largest economy. On the other hand, it is 1.3 billion people. When China doesn't play ball with the World Health Organization, millions of people potentially die. If China continues doing what it's doing now, burning more coal than ever, it exacerbates climate change in really, really bad ways.

So that, to me—so the question is, do we put China in the penalty box? The answer is no. So the question is, how do you have a foreign policy that doesn't just take moral considerations into account but also, as you say, pragmatic? And I think we've really got to think hard, because at times during the Cold War we made some mistakes. We—now, at other times, though, we actually did some interesting things. If you remember going back to Jeane Kirkpatrick and some of her writings. And we stood by certain authoritarian regimes, and now they're democracies—South Korea being one, and some other countries in Asia. And I think that's an interesting question about—and it's just—again, I can't sit here and give you almost like a cookbook recipe. But I think you're right to ask the question. Every time we find ourselves in bed with regimes or leaders that are, to use your elegant word, unattractive—

Q: (Off mic.)

HAASS: Oh. (Laughter.) Well, that's not fair. (Laughs.) But you get the idea, OK, we all get the idea. That for whatever reason give us pause, and should. I just think we had better—it's one of those things where you want to check your math twice or three times to make sure and continue to check it. I think it's important to return to it and say, OK, it made sense when started down this path a year ago, does it still make sense? Do we still believe that the immediate or median-term or long-term benefits will outweigh the risks or costs we are running? And I think that's the right way to do it.

Sometimes in government you get in trouble—and I've made this mistake myself, and I've tried to get better at it; I worked in four administrations—where we don't revisit things enough. And it may have made sense—you know, often when policies are launched there's a big focus on them, but rarely in my experience is there a sufficient focus when it comes to review them down the road. It's probably not just true of government. It's true of lots of organizations, and all that. So I think what you say is a really good question.

MOHYELDIN: Can I, just really quickly before I open it up, doesn't that give the advantage to authoritarian governments in decision-making, when you have continuity. I mean, we change governments every four years, but every eight years you're going to possibly get a different Congress, and two years. They're going to probably scale the budgets, if they can, on foreign policy issues. Probably launch investigations that are going to bog down this administration in Afghanistan. Who knows? I mean, I can think of a few things that they can do to disrupt the foreign policy of the Biden administration. Does it become easier as an authoritarian government to conduct foreign policy?

HAASS: It's easier to be consistent and it's easier to be consistently wrong. And authoritarian systems don't have the review mechanisms. Putin's invasion of—there's zero chance, I would think—I could be wrong. That's too strong. I think there's negligible chance that Putin would have don't what he did if he knew six weeks later he'd be where he is today. I think he would have thought about another approach. So the question is, why didn't he? If he were the CEO of a major company, and he had bet the farm on so much and made such bad—I mean, he was wrong about Germany, wrong about the United States, wrong about Ukraine, wrong about his own army. There's a long list of things he got wrong. Some were underestimation, some were overestimation.

The question is, how? Or, China, with the One Child Policy or other things. It seems to me authoritarian systems have consistency but also often have trouble speaking truth to power, have trouble revisiting things, admitting mistakes. I think one of the reasons China is so reluctant to back away from Putin, Xi Jinping does not want to admit he made a mistake a few months before he wants to get coronated to get a third term. We're good at making mistakes. God knows we make them all the time. One of our advantages is our ability for self-correction. And, you know, whatever you think of some of the wars we've gone into—and I've got a long list of mistakes I think we made—in Korea going north of the 38th parallel, Vietnam, the Iraq War, Libya. I got a long list. But also we're slightly better at correcting our mistakes than authoritarian systems. And I think that's one of—one of the saving graces of democracies.

MOHYELDIN: Gentleman all the way in the back there, right in the middle. And then I'll work my way up to the front here.

Q: Well, Michael Puente, a reporter with WBEZ in Chicago, Chicago public media.

My question for you is that, you know, going back to Putin, what does it say to—about NATO and the United States, though, that Vladimir Putin's been able to crush Ukraine the way he has. I mean, there are sanctions, of course, but he's been allowed to do this. What—and there's been not a military response so far, but he's been allowed to do this. What are the ramifications of that?

HAASS: Well, again, he's done it but, a couple of things. He's not attacked a NATO country. So, so far, at least, the ability of the alliance to deter is self-evident. Indeed, I think he's unlikely to attack a NATO country simply because the disparity in capability is pretty obvious, I would think, even to Mr. Putin. He's been able to do what he did against Ukraine, but at tremendous cost. He's suffered an enormous number of casualties in his military, his economy has taken something of a hit, the country has diplomatically lost a little bit of altitude. And what we've been trying to do—we came up with, we, the United States, with what I would call an indirect response. It was basically how can we provide a robust response without risking direct military interaction with Russia, which is something we were able to avoid during the Cold War because the risks of escalation were too great. That was—you know, that was the calculation. I think it was probably a correct calculation.

Now, you could argue if—should we have acted long before this crisis, still had a presence in Ukraine, so that wouldn't have been the calculation? We can revisit history, but once—as this crisis evolved—you know, at the margins, yes, we could have pushed more military equipment sooner, and so forth. But I think the basic decision to provide what I would call an indirect rather than direct response to Russian aggression was right, under the—under the circumstances. But it has some real unfortunate costs. One is obviously the Russians are decimating parts of Ukraine. A quarter of the population is displaced, either internally or across borders when they become a refugee. I don't know how many thousands or tens of thousands of Ukrainians have been killed so far.

And I also think it's had a very unfortunate consequence for nuclear proliferation and nonproliferation. The fact that the United States has been so cautious, because of fear of a nuclear war—what the president calls World War III—I think, among other things, has persuaded China that the smartest investment they could make is to dramatically build up their nuclear arsenal. And in the context of a Taiwan crisis, we might be more careful. So I think we've got—and the fact that Ukraine gave up nuclear weapons that it inherited from the former Soviet Union in 1994 and now is invaded reinforces the sense that giving up nuclear weapons might be bad for your health. So I think there's certain costs that are associated.

But I think—look, I think it was a tough call. And I think, to me, given where we were in 2022, I think it was the right call. I think there's some really interesting history about how we got to this point. Among other things, I think the 2008 decision by the Bush administration at Bucharest to basically start the process of Ukrainian and Georgian membership in NATO, but without really doing anything about it, was the worst of all worlds. I would have said, don't start the process or get it done. But don't put it out there and then not give any capacity

for defense. So I think that decision was the—sometimes compromises are the best of all worlds, that was probably the worst of all worlds.

MOHYELDIN: Let's work our way up to the front. This lady right here. Yes.

HAASS: This one?

MOHYELDIN: That one.

HAASS: (Laughs.)

MOHYELDIN: I'm sorry. I wish I could see your names from here. I would call on you by name. I apologize.

Q: Thank you. Hi. I'm Ashely Murray from the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.

I'm wondering, in the process of writing your book on identifying the cracks in American democracy, and the backsliding, and how those might be fixed, how much time you're spending, or will devote in your book, to the role of media? And it's kind of a multipart question. What you see as you consume the media, things that make you cringe, things that—

MOHYELDIN: I don't know if we have enough time for that.

Q: How can—(laughter)—you know, how can journalists stay the course without fanning the flames of partisanship? And then I'm curious about your thoughts of the concept of solutions journalism in places that are ripped apart and then put back together.

HAASS: I don't know what that—I don't understand the last bit.

Q: So journalism that would have a conscious effort of not fanning the flames of factions.

HAASS: I guess I'm being really stupid. I apologize. Could you—

Q: That's OK, we talked about it in grad school. I've been looking it up because I moved to D.C. five months ago, and I'm disturbed by what I see.

HAASS: I'm not sure I understand.

Q: (Off mic.)

Q: Oh, OK, here.

Q: It's reporting under—solutions journalism is reporting on responses to problems, not just to problems. That's the core of it.

Q: How to solve them. How to solve them, not just fanning the flames.

Q: (Off mic.)

HAASS: Oh, OK.

MOHYELDIN: Like, prescribing a solution—

HAASS: I got it, OK.

MOHYELDIN: OK.

HAASS: Well, just trying to think. I married a journalist, so I can't cringe about—I have to be careful about what I say here. Some of my best friends are journalists as well. I like journalists. I get nervous when—look, I think the challenge is to keep the editorials on the editorial page and to keep the, as best you can, the opinions out of the news pages. And that has two dimensions. One is just a question of selectivity. What do you write about? And the other is how you write about it. So I think—so I get nervous when I see either selection bias or slanting in how things are written. And, again, that's why God invented editorial pages. I think there's a big—I get nervous also when columnists report news and they're not subject to the same standards as reporters. And I get nervous when reporters act as if they were columnists. I think it's kind of a church-state sort of thing. I'm now probably in dinosaur land here.

But I worry about biases in either direction. But if you want to be a columnist and you want to write great stories, then I think you ought to be subject the same standards as people in the news division. And I do think people on the news pages ought to stay out of the opinion business. And I think editors have a real responsibility not just to look at individual articles but to look at the totality of article selection or segment selection on radio and television shows to say: Are we biased either by putting so much or this or not enough of that? And I think one of the things in any job that's really useful to do is a kind of accounting every once in a while. Just take a step back. It's really interesting just to do a content analysis of what you're doing and not doing. So those are my—the things that scare me about that.

And the idea of going into prescriptions, look, I think—that, to me—that's fine for a columnist. If Tom Friedman or somebody wants to write a column about how to solve the Middle East problem, God bless them. That's why God invented columnists. Or someone wants to have, like, what was his name, Bill Riley (sp) used to do it in Boston, when I lived in Boston. He used to have a one or two-minute editorial on the air every night—I don't know if it was GBH or one of the other—or NBC. I can't remember what it was, ABC there. That's OK, so long as it's labeled as such. Then you have to think about whether you have kind of like an op-ed page, a range of views. I think that can be healthy. So my view? I can live with that.

I get nervous, though, when things are—I think it hurts media outlets when they get predictable. And the same thing—I run—you know, I'm the president of a think tank. I love the fact that we have scholars who represent all sorts of points of view, we're nonpartisan, and we can surprise people with where we come out. I think when outlets get to the point that they surprise nobody, then you end up narrowing your readership. You tend to get people who want confirmation rather than to be exposed to something. So I think you also do yourself—you get a more loyal following, but you get a narrower following. So I like places that are more willing to be a—you know, to be a broader church, so to speak.

But I think the main thing is just intellectual honestly and real, particularly the editorial function, to make sure it's accurate, to be aware of slants, and to be aware of selectivity bias. If you're going to talk about prescriptions and the rest, put it on the editorial side. And but then you've also, I would say almost—then you're in my world. You're in the public policy world. Then you've got to be pretty—you've got to test it. You've got to say, is this not just desirable, from your point of view, is it doable? What would be the resource implications? What are the downsides of doing it? So if you're going to do it—if you're going to enter the world of public policy advocate, then I think you've got to—you've got to essentially raise your game to that level, rather than just be an advocate.

MOHYELDIN: And this gentleman here.

Q: I'm Frank Lockwood. I'm with the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*.

We've seen President Trump, we've seen President Putin both talking a lot about religion, trying to use religious imagery and trying to argue that they're on behalf of the church, and the church is their ally. Wondered if you could talk about the role of religious nationalism, and also whether you think religion is becoming a more powerful force in foreign relations or less powerful.

HAASS: Really interesting question. I was struck the other day when the leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church were out there specifically endorsing Mr. Putin's policy. So clearly—and, in Russia, even in the Jewish faith there, you know, certain rabbis are associated with support for the regime. Others are not. I mean, what we're seeing is in authoritarian societies, religion is another powerful—is not totally independent. In some ways, it's associated with the state. We're seeing it a lot. And so I think it's there for—has domestic political consequences more than anything. I think as an international factor less so. But I think religion, in terms of this age of populism and nationalism we live in, I think religion can be one of the major fuels that gets injected.

It's often not the most liberal, as we've seen in Myanmar, as we—you know, I worry what's going on, to some extent, in India now with the illiberalism towards the 200 million Muslims. I think when religion gets involved, it introduced a degree of certitude into political conversation. And, you know, if compromise is essential to politics, and empathy is essential to civility and discourse, religious certitude and conviction can work against those things. So by and large, I think—I mean, religious principles can be wonderful for democracy. If you think about some of the stuff about looking out for your fellow, you know, man or woman, public good.

I mean, you could use religion, for example, would have been an argument to wear masks during COVID—your responsibility to the individual sitting next to you. So, you know, there's things that religion can be a wonderful source within a society, the principles of it. But it also can be an illiberal force. And I think what we've seen in recent years is more likely the latter. And a lot—I think it's a longer conversation which is why. So I'm mindful of it, but I think it's a fact of life not just in this country but around the world.

MOHYELDIN: This lady right here.

HAASS: I think it's important to give the front of the room a chance.

MOHYELDIN: Yeah, I was going to say, I think we probably have time for one more question and then we'll wrap it up. After this, we'll take one more and then we'll wrap it up.

Q: Thanks. I'm Kelsey Landis. I'm with the *Belleville News-Democrat*. It's a McClatchy newspaper new St. Louis. I cover politics and government, state and—

HAASS: My daughter worked for the governor of—Mr. Parson—for a year. She went out to Missouri to do that.

Q: Oh. How did that go? (Laughs.)

HAASS: She's now working for the mayor here. So she's—she's glad she went. It was interesting.

Q: Yeah. That sounds—yeah.

So I have two issues, as a local government reporter covering foreign relations. One, I can't observe it myself personally. We like to observe things, as journalists, ourselves whenever possible. And, two, other people cover it. So why should I spend my valuable time covering foreign relations when, you know, other people are covering it, and I have a lot of things to cover. And I have my opinion on why it's important and how we can connect the dots to local issues, but I'm curious what you think.

HAASS: Well, that's a really good point. And in some cases, you may not want to. You might say, the best thing you can do at the local newspaper, or local TV or radio station, is to get really quality AP or BBC or whatever you feed is. And you say, we can't afford to have people on the ground, bureaus and so forth, so we're going to choose the highest quality things and do that. And that might be—and where we have a comparative advantage, as you say, is covering the statehouse, or city hall, or this community. And we've got limited resources. And I think that's a totally legitimate thing.

I think it's different, though, for people who are columnists and some others who are editorialists who might want to—I think there there's a bigger argument for how they could say, OK, we're living here in Missouri, and this may seem far away, but here's why it's not. And I think that's a really valuable thing to do. But I think in terms of actual coverage, I think you make a—if you've got limited resources, I would rather have you be all over the statehouse, where you could put ten people and all that, and maybe have one person overseas because that would be the cost thing. I think that's a smart decision.

MOHYELDIN: All right. Last question, we'll take this gentlemen right here. And then we'll have a quick reminder before we—is that all right? Right here, yeah.

HAASS: I mean, there's no NCAA game you've got to run off to watch tonight. The Knick are not worth watching. The Masters is over for the day. So I don't know. I mean, yeah. Yes, sir.

Q: Patrick Clark. I'm with KPLR and KTVI in St. Louis. Kelsey is a great reporter at the *Belleville News-Democrat*.

MOHYELDIN: I can tell from the question. It was a very sincere question.

Q: I'm just curious, our job as journalists is to see trends and to try and see where things are going. It seems on social media I see a lot more advertisement for U.S. Army, Marines, and such. Are we at war with Russia? We're providing arms. We're providing money. We're providing training. And in your experience, working through different administrations, how do you see this ending?

HAASS: I would say we have—are we at war with Russia? Technically no. We've not declared war or we're not attacking Russia ourselves using U.S. soldiers. We're not in the area—or, not in Ukraine. We're not fighting. We're not attacking Russian forces. So what we have is we are giving Ukraine the means to fight a war. And we are, with sanctions and all that, trying to create a context to influence Russian decision making and capacity. So are we at war? I would say no. But are we simply an observer? No. We're a participant. We're a limited participant. Again, we have, what I would call, an indirect strategy rather than a direct strategy.

How will this end? I can only think of two scenarios. Might be a lack of imagination on my part. But we're already—to be clear, it's already changed twice in the last five weeks. Originally, when the war began, Mr. Putin had ambitions to take over the entire country at a minimum, quickly do it, maybe go beyond that. He clearly encountered a buzzsaw that he hadn't counted on. Strategy two was to start attacking en masse Ukraine, as I mentioned before, urban areas. Strategy three, because he was taking so many casualties, is to pull forces back to the East and basically control a chunk of territory. If you imagine a clock in some ways from roughly 12:00 or 1:00 to about 5:00 or 6:00, and a band basically going from northeast of Kyiv to around—to the Donbas in the east, down to Mariupol, ultimately to Odessa, and to have a band of—and I think what you're going to have is some very large set piece battles there.

How does this end? One way is it ends through negotiation. And I think that is highly unlikely, I'm sorry to say. But it would be—in order for negotiations to succeed you'd have to have both Ukraine and Russia basically decide that it's worth compromising towards that end. And the most Ukraine could offer would be enough for Russia to accept. I just don't see that. So I am pessimistic about a negotiated outcome any time soon. I think the

more likely scenario is how does it end? It doesn't. I think the most likely scenario is when you—is a year from now or two years from now this conflict is still going.

Now, the intensity of the conflict will change. But I think, look, there's been fighting the east for eight years now, ever since 2014. This is not—you know, what I'm saying is, shall we say, not without precedent. You've had a low-level war—not that low level. How many, like, five (thousand), ten thousand people?

MOHYELDIN: Yeah, 13,000 I think by some estimates.

HAASS: Have died in the east. And then the—in the Donbas over the last eight years. A lot of depopulation. What you're going to have is a continuation and intensification of that. And I would think that, again, it's easier for Mr. Putin to continue fighting a war than it is for him to accept a peace where he's charged with looking weak. He also doesn't believe if he ever did agree to an agreement—a peace agreement, that he would get sanctions relief and not be hunted down as a war criminal. So he doesn't have a lot of incentive. So my own view is he will continue and think that maybe over time who knows what could happen.

Russia has more mass. You have sanctions—the history of sanctions is usually they weaken over time, though some of these may make it tougher. The Europeans might be better able to reduce their dependence on gas over time—Russian gas. You could have fissures open up in the Western alliance, within Germany, between Germany and Poland, the United States. Who knows what the elections here in three years bring to power? So if you're Mr. Putin you would say, I don't have the result I was counting on. At the moment I don't feel it's sufficiently good that it would be politically safe for me to own it. So I'm going to keep fighting. And in the long run, we'll see.

So if you're—if I were a betting man, I would—I'm really sad to say—my own conclusion is there's not going to be a negotiated outcome anytime soon. This will become a so-called frozen, open-ended conflict. Doesn't mean it's an all-out war in all parts of Ukraine every day. I think, again, for the foreseeable future 95 percent or more of the war will be in the eastern areas, what I just described as kind of 1:00 to 6:00 on the clock. Every now and then I think the Russians will shoot a missile into Kyiv or some other city because they don't want Ukraine to be reconstituted as a successful liberal democracy and capitalist economy. And I think this will become part of the—this becomes part of Europe in the third decade of the 21st century. And I hate that conclusion. I hope I'm wrong. Good news is I'm wrong a lot. But I worry that that could be—I worry that that could be the case.

MOHYELDIN: You were supposed to end on a positive, optimistic note.

HAASS: Oh, yeah. (Laughter.)

MOHYELDIN: I just wanted to say, like, you were saving the optimistic part at the end. Now you've just concluded with he's not going to change. We're screwed. (Laughter.)

HAASS: That's kind of a—yeah. I'm sorry. First of all, I apologize. Look, it's his fault, first of all. Don't blame me. I was just—

MOHYELDIN: Always blame the journalist. Always blame the—like everything else in the society.

HAASS: I was just being uncharacteristically—being uncharacteristically responsive to—look, as we used to say, you're never supposed to answer the question you got. You answer the question you wish you'd been asked. (Laughter.) That's what they taught me when I was up for confirmation or I had to press conferences. And I blew it. I answered the question I was asked. And I'll never do that again. (Laughter.)

MOHYELDIN: Well, listen, first of all, thank you so much, Richard. Really appreciate your insights. Thank you to an amazing—

HAASS: No, thank you all for what you do.

MOHYELDIN: Yeah, no, honestly, thank you so much for all those great questions. Thank you so much for what you're doing. And that concludes it. I will have to just say one thing really quickly, a housekeeping thing. Breakfast tomorrow at 8:45 before the 9:30 session.

HAASS: Breakfasts here, by the way, are really worth showing up for. I mean, it's a part of my legacy is—

MOHYELDIN: Make sure you wake up for it. (Laughter.)

(END)