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Fireside Chat with Roger D. Carstens

Roger D. Carstens, Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs, U.S. Department of State

Moderator: Courtney Kube, National Security and Pentagon Correspondent, NBC News Session recording:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2X2jq_zlb8k&list=PL7fuyfNu8jfPTKp6PJ2yJugSfxXEDyEqM&index=16

Courtney Kube

Thank you, Anja. So Anja is always right for starters, but she's especially right about this event, this panel. I'm super excited to be up here as a part of this, because I think the audience is going to find Roger and his job really fascinating. There are a lot of people may not even realize that this job exists, a Special Presidential Envoy for hostage affairs, and I imagine it's probably one of the most difficult, frustrating and rewarding roles in government. So we're really lucky that we have a chance to talk to Roger. Thank you so much for being here. His job is to bring home Americans who are wrongfully detained abroad. So as we just heard from wonderful Gordon Lubold, my dear friend, one of those people who we get a lot of gets a lot of attention, and you'll see a lot of reporters wearing buttons for is Evan Gershkovich, I guess. Could we just start by telling us what's the latest with his case?

Roger D. Carstens

Thank you for that question. And first off, I would like to thank Anja, of course, Professor Nye Niamh and everyone else at the Aspen security forum for setting up this event, giving us a chance to interact with you. Thank all of you for attending, but jumping right into that. You know, I think everyone knows that Evans many people know that Evans hearing is taking place tomorrow. It was scheduled for the 13th of August. The Russians have moved it up so that will take place tomorrow in Yekaterinburg, Russia. The US embassy will make an attempt to try to get in and observe. We were able to observe his last hearing on the 26th of June. We weren't able to talk and engage with Evan, but we at least had some people from the Embassy who were able to get eyes on it's obviously, it's a tough case. I think everyone here would agree that Evan is not guilty and that the Russians should really just let him go, both Evan and Paul Whelan. And that statement that I think the State Bar uses, we came up with for a reason, and I think the Wall Street Journal did as well, and that is, journalism is not a crime. But if you know what's going on in Russia right now, you'll know that there has been an increase in repression for not even just reporters, but those with independent voices. So we're wrestling with this. By way of Evan Gershkovich case.

Courtney Kube

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You mentioned Paul Whelan, former Marine. He was also convicted in 2020 I believe, but he's been detained since 2018 what I mean? Can you can you talk? I know you don't want to negotiate these deals in public, understandably, but what can you tell us about whether there's actually a deal on the table for either Paul or Evan, or perhaps the both of them at the same time?

Roger D. Carstens

I love that you get that I seem, I seem to have an angel on one shoulder saying, don't make news today. Don't negotiate in public. But the devil on this shoulder is telling me, Don't make news, don't negotiate in public.

Courtney Kube

Noticeably, I'm on the side of the devil of two as well, on his side.

Roger D. Carstens

But yes, I think you're right the way, sometimes, in fact, when I first meet a family, you know, when a case becomes mined, it leaves the Consular Affairs Bureau, someone's declared as a wrongful detainee, and it comes over to my office. Within about a week, we're in the air. We fly anywhere in the world to see the family of those who of that person that's being held. And in that first meeting, which usually goes on about like four hours, you can picture sitting in someone's living room talking about their loved one that's being held, trying to get a sense of what happened, see pictures. Eventually you kind of shift the conversation. You discuss how the US government is going to work and partner with the family to bring their loved ones home. And in doing that, I always say that there's going to come a time in the life cycle of every case where I can't talk about it as much as I would like to. You know, up to that point, we are, we are extremely transparent with the families. We give them lots of information. We actually have a person in my office from ODNI who works to declassify information so that we can give families the freshest, newest and recently declassified information. But there does come a time where you just can't talk about it as much because the negotiations in motion, and you just can't take the chance that that one errant word, that one wrong thing that you said, might somehow shift the negotiation in the wrong direction. And that's why, when I say that, you know, it's clear that we've had a channel with the Russians. Obviously, we've got Trevor Reed back, Brittney Griner came back a while back. So there is a way to talk to the Russians. But getting into the details, as much as in a way, everyone would love it, and I would actually be interested in telling you I can't. So, but that does sound positive, right? I mean, without saying anything about where that right, am I right? Come on. I mean, that sounded, that sounds like it's a positive development, right? I would, I would actually counter that. And here's why, I can remember, I told a family member that things were trending in a positive direction. We'll still, we'll still we'll still give them a sense, you know, of if we think things are going on up or down. But we were getting close, and I told that family member, I said, I said something like, Hey, I wouldn't plan anything for the next two weeks. And it's been years since I said that, and that person's still

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in the jail. So you think you're going to get someone home, and sometimes you just don't get them home, you know. So it's sorry. You just have to watch the optimism. Now, I only hire optimists. You cannot have a pessimist in this business. You really have to, like, look at the even when everything's going wrong and to an extent, hostage negotiation, it's always going wrong until the last second. But we try to be careful about saying, you know it's going in the right direction. What I would leave you with this, I know Evan and Paul will come home to the United States and step on to US soil. I just don't know.

Courtney Kube

Let's just all hope it's sooner rather than later. Well, I mean, you, how often do you talk to them? When was the last time you spoke with Paul Andrew Evan and can you tell us? How are they?

Roger D. Carstens

I'll give you a little color. So Evan was visited by Ambassador Tracy on the 23rd of May in La Florida prison. Paul Whitman had a consular visit in February with the United States government. Evans, he's just a different part of the process right now. So communications night is, I guess, doesn't happen as often, but Paul Whelan will call me every now and then. I think I spoke to Paul about 10 days ago. He called me. I was in Europe at the time. He gave me a phone call, and I just happened to pick a phone up, and we talked for probably about 30 minutes. But I can tell you about Paul Whelan. He's strong. He's resilient. He's been deployed many times, once or twice, he said, you know, Roger, this reminds me of a long military deployment, but I'm ready to come home. But he's a tough guy, and I can remember the one thing the story I'll tell you about Paul is when we brought Brittney Griner home, you know, Paul called me. I just, we just dropped Brittany off at 430 in the morning in San Antonio. Had some follow up. I finally got to a hotel room at 930 in the morning. I'd not slept in about three or four days, and I just, I only had, like, two hours, just gonna lay my head down and close my eyes. And as soon as I laid down, Paul called me, and the first thing he said was, what happened? How come I didn't come home? And I said, you know, Paul, that we had one deal. We wrestled with the Russians for months on end. We had one deal, and that was Brittney Griner for Victor boot. We did everything we could. We couldn't get you home, but we remain committed, and I'll remember he said at the very end of the phone call. He said, Roger, this is a great day for Brittney griner's family. It's a great day for Brittney Griner, and it's a great day for the United States of America. Keep driving on. I mean, what strength to sit there in a prison knowing that he didn't come home and yet still had positive things to say about Brittany, her family in this country.

Courtney Kube

But that, I mean, that opens up the possibility that you know now that there's Evan and there's Paul there, that the same thing could happen again. Is it, do you see? Is it? Is it possible that Evan could come home and Paul doesn't, or vice versa? That it could be that, that you could see another scenario or one of them is left behind.

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Roger D. Carstens

I mean, obviously anyone in the audience, if your loved ones were being held, you would not want me to say, Yes, I'm planning on failure. So my greatest answer, or my the most true answer, is the US government is going to bring both of them home. And when we go into negotiation with the Russians, we are intent on something that brings both people home.

Courtney Kube

I think one thing the audience may not because I have to admit, as we were I was getting to know Roger and I was studying preparing for this event, is I didn't understand why the State Department takes certain cases and doesn't take others. There's upwards of 6000 Americans detained or arrested overseas every year on average. Can you explain why you take certain cases and not others.

Roger D. Carstens

I can do that, but I would be remiss if I could jump back and parachute back into the Russia side. I'd like to thank everyone in the audience that's that's played a role. There's so many people, the Wall Street Journal team. There are a lot of journalists out there, a lot of NGOs. I think we have hostage us in the house. I'm sitting, Dave, are you out there? Somewhere back there we go. That right there. There are a lot of people that participated in this. We built this big community, and it reminds me of what Jane Harman said today and Mara about building that community so that everyone knows about it and everyone can participate. So for all those are working hard on Evan and Paul and all these other cases, thank you. To answer your question, though, on on why we take cases, there was a time from 2015 when my office was created, until about 2020 when we didn't really have much of a system. Eventually you'd come across a case where you knew that another country was using that person as a bargaining chip. And that was the no brainer. You would take that case. But we were very grateful in working with our allies and friends on Capitol Hill, Republicans, Democrats, Senate, House members, their teams, their staffs. We worked over some period to build out the Robert Levinson Act, which was passed in 2020 by the US Congress and passed into public law. And it gave us criteria with which to evaluate a case so that we could determine whether we that someone was wrongful or not, and in the 11 criteria that were given to us by the US Congress, it also stipulated that the Secretary of State has the discretionary authority to select the case as being wrongful. So what we did did at that moment is we took a look at 1000s of cases around the world to see if what happened in the past would somehow elevate them to be wrongful or not by applying this criteria. And in the current day and age, if an American is arrested anywhere on Earth in any country, members of the US State Department take a look at the facts of the case. They apply essentially, the criteria that was given to us by Congress through the Levinson act to see if there are indicators of wrongfulness. And if they seem to feel that there are those

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indicators. They send that up to Washington, DC, and then it starts the internal process within the building.

Courtney Kube

So take the case of Alsu Kurmasheva. She's a journalist. She was living in Prague. She came to Russia, I believe, to visit her mother. She's been detained there for about a year now. I don't believe she's been charged that we know of Radio Free Europe. Why is she not one of your cases?

Roger D. Carstens

That's a fair question. My answer might be unsatisfying. I mean, we've been following that case since it since it happened. I've had a chance to talk to her husband and frankly, her kids too, Pavel, and it's a case that the President United States has actually been has been made aware of. In fact, he called for Alsu's release, and yet, within the parameters of how we go about deciding whether a case is wrongful or not, it's a deliberative process, and we just don't discuss the details. I would say again, though, in general, if a case seems to be wrongful, it eventually comes up to the State Department, we take it through a more thorough process. And what I will share with you is there is no magic number, like, if I suddenly got 10 cases tomorrow and then 30 cases three weeks from now, the Secretary of State would say, hire more people so we don't fear taking more cases, but we want to make sure that we apply the law that Congress gave us in a way that ensures the purity of the process.

Courtney Kube

There's another case that's gotten a little bit of attention just recently, Mark Fogel, who's 95 year old mother. He's from Butler, Pennsylvania. His 95 year old mother met with former President Trump right before the rally on Saturday to talk about her son's case. He's also been detained in Russia. That's another one, and she has come out in the media and been very critical, saying that her son's been forgotten, whereas other Americans in Russia are being taken care of. So I mean, can you just explain a little bit where we are? How do you handle I mean, when a when a family member says something like that publicly, how do you respond to that?

Roger D. Carstens

The first thing that comes out of me is something from the heart, and that when a family is talking about their loved one, regardless of the facts of the case, I just have to show and feel empathy, you know, as being a member of the government. In fact, in a part of the government where we spend so much time with family members, you have to bring a huge dose dose of empathy to the game. And frankly, have to bring every part of yourself. This is not one where you go home at 515 and check out in the next morning, come in and check back in at 815 so when a mother is concerned about their son being held, I mean, you know, my heart goes out to them. In terms of his case, specifically, I can tell you that we've

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called repeatedly for Russia to release him on humanitarian grounds, but in terms of the case making it through the process, it's the same thing with all Sue we have a deliberative process. We're blessed to have this criteria that was given to us by the US Congress, and we're working through that. And the case has not yet come over to my desk yet, but he is. His case is still being monitored by the Bureau of Consular Affairs

Courtney Kube

Okay so his mom says he's in and his wife say He's in bad health, and that it's his health issues are not being addressed in the prison as well. So that's the humanitarian grounds that you've called for.

Roger D. Carstens

It's funny. It's, I'll let you draw your own inferences. There was something called the privacy the Privacy Act, where, if it's something that's happening, someone's individual, personal life is when they're being held. I'm, frankly, not allowed to talk about it, but we have called for his humanitarian release.

Courtney Kube

What about the hostages in Gaza? Are they your cases? And if so, if not, why not?

Roger D. Carstens

So our case handles. Case that come to me are wrongful detainees that are taken by a nation state, or it can be in conjunction with the hostage refuge, rescue, sorry, hostage recovery, fusion cell, a hostage case. Now the difference is a wrongful detainee is taken by a nation state like Russia, a hostage case. Think of Hamas JM al Qaeda, a terrorist group taking someone and the nation state cases come right to me, the hostage cases are owned by the hostage recovery fusion cell, but we participate when it comes time to work on the diplomatic negotiation. So with the with those that are held by Hamas in Gaza, those cases actually belong to the hostage recovery fusion cell, the diplomatic effort to get them out falls within my level of responsibility. However, since since really, October 7, this has really captivated the nation's attention. It's a whole of government effort, and I think everyone's been following the news. I would imagine to where you've seen the President of the United States go to Israel. My boss, Secretary Tony Blinken, has made numerous trips. Jake Sullivan CIA, Director, Bill Burns, Brett McGurk, there's a whole of government effort to negotiate for their release. And so in this case, I'm not necessarily the one sitting across the table negotiating, and I'm okay with that, because you can't have an ego in this business. In fact, we have a saying in our office that we don't care who comes up with a plan, who negotiates or who gets the credit, as long as the job's getting done. And with Gaza, our nation's definitely they have their foot on the gas and the car's moving forward.

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Courtney Kube

Since you like to talk about how the negotiations are going, can you give us any update on, I mean, What? What? Can you give us anything on the latest on the Americans in Gaza

Roger D. Carstens

I'll revert to the angel and the devil that are on my shoulders? It's one of those cases, it's just in motion. And the funny thing is, even if I did tell you when I look at my watch, things may have already changed, but it's best to just let the people that are forward do what they need to do and not talk about it in public.

Courtney Kube

There's another case that's coming up on another sad anniversary. It's Austin Tice. He's been in Syria for more than a decade now. Can you give us any update on what your office thinks? I mean, are you still in Are you talking to the Syrians about him? The Assad regime? About him at all?

Roger D. Carstens

I probably. Maybe. I'll refer back to some of the work that we've done, as was reported widely. We did go to Damascus and talk to the Syrians about Austin's case. We've we've been able to engage the Syrians about this, and we just continue to press probably, I same. I can't really get into the details, but it's not something that's fallen off our plate. We're very mindful that every case is urgent, and if Austin's been held for 10 years, that doesn't decrease the amount of urgency. That's not something that we put over here on the will do later, file Austin's case is to my mind, just front and center still.

Courtney Kube

I mean, these negotiations don't happen in a vacuum. So it's like, you look at something like the Austin Tice case. How do things world events like, you know, what's the tensions between the US and Iran October 7? Do those have an impact on your negotiations? Do you find that sometimes these especially when you're talking to a country, as opposed to, you know, when it's dealing with a terror group or something? Does that impact the negotiations?

Roger D. Carstens

Every case is different. So I think October 7 had some impact in some of the cases. And yet, there are countries with whom we have horrific relationships, like great tensions, and we've somehow found a way to sit down with them and bring Americans out, if you want to take it to the extreme, Russia, Ukraine right now shooting at each other, and yet they're still taking time out to conduct pow exchanges. There's something about this that sometimes allows you to silo this topic off and get the job done, even though those they're great tension, great tensions, and the geopolitical madness is just swirling around you.

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Courtney Kube

I mean, that's one of the focuses of the forum this year, is the idea of these collaborations with kind of unusual partners, right? So I You must deal with pretty much all unfriendly groups, right? I mean, yeah. I mean, is it, what can you take us into some of these negotiations? I know that you can't tell about, talk about specifics, but I mean, are you across the table from? Who are you sitting across the table from in some of these Right? Right? I mean, it's fascinating, right? Who do you talk to in these negotiations?

Roger D. Carstens

I'll answer that, but it's, I would like to say it's never really just me. Someone journalist once asked me, they said, Roger, you brought X number of people home. So I said, stop there. I never bring one person home. It's always this huge effort. There's, like, maybe 100 people in the US government. It could be NGOs, like hostage us or the Foley foundation. It could be another country cutter has been very helpful to us in many of these negotiations, members on Capitol Hill, the media, everyone plays a role. So when someone walks off into the United States of America and falls into the arms of their you know, their loved ones, there are usually maybe 100 200 300 sometimes 1000s of people. And if one of those people didn't do one action, that person would not be there, so I can't take any credit, but if you want to, if you're asking what it's like to sit across to these people, some of them are very normal, and the relationships with that country are really not that tense. Other times, you're talking to people who have stolen elections, they've killed their way to the top, and you do have to sit right across with them and get right to business and figure out a way to build a relationship and see if you can somehow get them to release that American we used to say in the army, you know, the enemy gets a vote. In this case, you don't mean that you come up with your brilliant, brilliant plan, and yet, the second you get off the helicopter, the bulls start flying your plans just out the window. And to an extent, it's the same way in hostage negotiation, you come up with your brilliant plan. You sit across from the person who's holding your American and things start getting dicey. You have to keep adapting and flowing with it. But at the end of the day, the other side holds the key to the jail cell, and that's what we're trying to be mindful of. If I would say, if Russia wanted to let Evan and Paul out tomorrow, they could.

Courtney Kube

Do you have any indication that Americans are increasingly being taken hostage or taken to be used as political pawns? Are there? Is there any evidence that that might be happening more

Roger D. Carstens

So, common sense would dictate, yes. I mean, we've made some trades to bring people home and so again, common sense would say, Well, this is a way that we can leverage the Americans. So let's go out and take a few more strangely, it's absolutely the other way around. There was a time when I had 54 cases on the docket. We're now down between 20

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and 30, depending on how you want to analyze that. So actually, my numbers are going down,

Courtney Kube

but because you don't take every case are, is that really true? I mean, is, like, your numbers of cases are down, but are the numbers of Americans that are being caught up in this overseas? Is there? Is there? Are there numbers on that?

Roger D. Carstens

We could probably turn data, but what I would tell you is that we don't, kind of we're not like keeping a pile of like 70 Americans over there that we don't want to deal with because it will somehow make our numbers look bad. It doesn't matter to us, if the facts of the case with 11 snack criteria essentially stacked over them indicate that there's wrongfulness, we're going to take the case. And so there's not a bank of Americans that are not really coming on to the I could say that the Excel spreadsheet, so in a way, my numbers are going down. I hope that remains to be the same, but I will say that we're also working on prevention and deterrence, so that one day, maybe 789, 10 years from now, I can dismantle a good chunk of my office, because we found, by working with a multilateral group of nations, we can raise the cost of taking people as hostages and make this problem go away.

Courtney Kube

What do you say to critics who say that by making these deals? And I'll point out the Iran the Iran deal about a year ago, five Iranians were released, five Americans came home from Iran, but the US also unfroze about \$6 billion in frozen and Iranian money that I understand is in an account that they can only use for certain things, and they aren't really using. But there are critics who say just making that deal incentivizes further hostage taking. What do you say to that? How do you address that?

Roger D. Carstens

I'll probably say a few things. First off, the numbers don't back that up. And there's Brian Jenkins and the RAND Corporation would show you that some of the data that he's been trying to turn the numbers just don't support that. Number two, I think if you don't make these deals, people just don't come home. So you got to picture it people that you love your son, your daughter, your wife, your husband, your grandfather, they get arrested, they're thrown into jail. And the United States of America just says, well, we don't make those deals, but there's no other alternative at times, and we'll spend years trying to try everything we possibly can to bring someone home. And no matter what that deal is, it's probably not going to be something that's that's too pleasing to everyone, but we're committed to finding a way to get it done. And what I can say is that we do a lot of mathematics. It doesn't just come down to saying, Oh yeah, we'll make that deal. We'll take a look at the personal if it's a personnel swap, like, you know, with Konstantin Yaroshenko, for example. How long was he in jail? When's he getting out? Is there a chance that he'll be out of jail? You're two or

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three, and yet, the Americans going to get out in 10 or 20 or 30 years? What were they in for? What do we think the intelligence community believes in the Department of Justice on whether they'll return to a life of crime. So we'll take a look at all these factors to try to eventually make that hard decision. Sometimes the decision is going to be no and other times, the president's going to assume the responsibility make that decision, and then we all execute. But under President Biden, we brought back 47 Americans, and a lot of that comes down to the President making some pretty tough decisions on behalf of Romeo's Americans. Home Secretary Blinken has this saying where he says, Look, I can't help it if another country wants to bring a criminal or a thug or a spy home, that's their value system. Our value system is different, and I'll take ours over theirs any day.

Courtney Kube

Do you have any indications that any of those criminals or spies or thugs that have been released for those 47 people have returned to crime or might even be in some way able to threaten the US right now?

Roger D. Carstens

So we track that and now? No, I think so far, everyone's gone back to their lives. Could that change in the future? It's hard to predict. We'll never know, but we do make very rational decisions about whether to let them go or not. And right now, there's no one that comes to mind.

Courtney Kube

All right, so we only have a couple minutes left, and again, I think you have a fascinating job. And so we're going to do something I like to do on a fireside chat called the lightning round. I know it's super fun. Just wait. This is where we get to learn a little bit about Roger. All right, first of all, what was your craziest moment during a negotiation?

Roger D. Carstens

I can't tell you, I've had so many things happen, but no, I'm going there. I'm gonna get I'm gonna use something, okay? But the one I can tell you that was, I thought interesting. There was a one country where they said they were never gonna talk to us. It was clear they were never gonna talk to us, and then they decided to talk to us. So we met in a third, third country. And the person I was talking to is known to be a master negotiator, like this guy is aimed for just squeezing people. And so I sat down across from him, and he said, uh, he very confidently said, you know, I hold X number of your hostages, and I could probably make 25% of your workload go away if we we can work on something. So he was taking charge of the negotiation, and I looked at him, I just kind of leaned back, and I said, No, let's not talk about our hostages right now. Why don't we grab that bottle over there and have a few drinks, because I want to get to know you, because there's going to come a time where your president's going to be squeezing you, and my president's going to be tough on me, but you and I have to have a relationship, because no one else is coming to do this. It's you

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and me, and we've got to figure this out. So why don't we go ahead, have a few drinks, get to know each other, and maybe it'll make sense in an hour two or three, just talk about our hostages or even the next meeting, and I swear to goodness, in ways that I can't tell you, that paid off in great ways, and that we were able to do just that, to build a relationship, even with someone who's coming from a country with whom we have bad relations, we built some semblance of trust, and in some very critical moments of paid off in Americans coming back.

Courtney Kube

It reminds me of Mattis Jim Mattis say that that he could do more rather than, you know, some of these in enhanced interrogations, he could do more with a pack of cigarettes and a cup of coffee talking to someone in the Taliban, what has been your most rewarding case?

Roger D. Carstens

They're all they're all rewarding to me. So let me just tell you of a case. The Iran one was special and that we we landed. It was dark. There weren't very many people there. The families were there. They had some CLeg lights on, so they had this really weird glow. And gonna try not to cry on this one too. But I was turning talking to someone, and then I looked over and I could see see Mach Namazi, you know, falling into the arms of his family members. And there were tears, and it was very emotional. And it's probably some of you might have heard me say this before, but it's so intimate and personal to watch a husband and a wife who've not seen each other connect that you really feel like you shouldn't watch it. You should just avert your eyes, but you're also stuck and captivated by this very human moment. So you watch it, you tear up. You watch a few more people connect, and in a way, it makes everything worth it. And I just wish we had more of those moments, because right now, there's still Americans in jails and their families waiting for them to come home, and we've not yet found a way to get that done, and that weighs heavily on all of us.

Courtney Kube

What are those flights like bringing people back? I mean

Roger D. Carstens

They're amazing. It's a I've been stunned every single time they want to talk. And so if you have a 17 hour flight from Country X back to San Antonio, Texas, you're going to be awake for 17 hours, and they're going to be telling everything raw about their experience. So their tears, hugs, explanations, news briefs. They'll ask what's going on in the elections. You know? They'll ask what movies are out, but they're fascinating times, and it's always a pleasure to stay awake and keep talking to these people.

Courtney Kube

One last quick one, what's been your toughest case?

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Roger D. Carstens

Yeah, I know they're all tough, and the reason that might actually be a legit answer is Canada holding any of our Americans wrongfully. The UK is not holding any of our Americans wrongfully. And so they're all tough, but I would say it's the ones that go on the longest. Iran was was pretty excruciating, because there's always the chance that your hostage negotiation is going to jump into the broader policy discussion, and that can be good or bad, but you lack some control there. But everyone has been absolutely excruciating, and I'm grateful for the team that we've brought that have people with empathy that want to talk to the families, that are willing to cry with the families, and I'm grateful for the leadership in this government that's willing to make the hard decisions to bring people home. And lastly, I'm grateful for all of you. This is one of those things where the more people know about what we do, the better it is. It keeps people safe from going to tough countries. It also allows you to support the president when he makes hard decisions. And so if you're here and you're listening to this, you're now a part of this community. And I'm going to encourage you to follow, watch and support what we're trying to bring these what we, all of us, are trying to do to bring these Americans home. And by the way, said you're going to end it. You've been amazing.

Courtney Kube

Roger Carstens. Thank you so much for your candor.