

Foreign Policy Choices: Recommendations from Past National Security Advisors

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00:05: Thanks so much, Anja, and thanks to Stephen and Tom, it's a real honor to be grouped with you. Seven years together as National Security Advisors, but many years, of course, beyond that in government and dealing with these issues. And in my interactions, as I'm sure many folks listening today will say, both Stephen and Tom proved themselves to be not only smart and knowledgeable but also very fair and open-minded. I've certainly always appreciated that. So I look forward to hearing your insight on so many of the things that we're facing today. I just only wish we were in Aspen, but 2020 is the year of the endless Zoom calls, so here we find ourselves again.

00:50: I might ask just to begin, is to imagine yourselves back in your roles as National Security Advisors to the next president or a re-elected president, and a meeting with them the day after the inauguration in 2021, and what would you lay out to them as the biggest threat... Famously, Barack Obama communicated to Donald Trump in 2017, it was North Korea, most immediate biggest national security threat. So picture yourselves in that position, the day after the inauguration in 2021, what would you say to the re-elected president or the new president is the biggest threat to the country? And what would you recommend... How would you lay out the world to them in that conversation, and brief if you can? And Tom, if I could start with you just since you happen to be next to me in the window and then Stephen next.

01:44: Great, okay. Alright, thank you, Jim. And Steve, nice to be with you today. Thank you, Anja, for the introduction. Jim, you've gotta get the book a little more centered in the picture here, so people can see it there. There we go.

01:57: I'll just put it on display over my shoulder.

[chuckle]

01:58: There we go. Okay. Super. You know, Jim, I have I think a couple of responses to that good question. One is sitting here today, I hope we move through the challenge we have in front of us here, which is really through a very important moment for our democracy and the pressure in our democracy, and that is to have a competent and vibrant election with an agreed upon outcome and strong support for the next president, whoever that is. I think that's really our challenge right now. Our leadership in the world is really, in many ways, dependent on both our being and our being seen as a vibrant and, importantly, competent democracy. Competence has been a very important part of the United States' place in the world, its authority in the world from World War II until today. So I bet, hopefully, we will get through that moment.

02:55: On January 20th, Steve and I have both had these sessions many, many times with presidents. I'd have two or three things, still very briefly, we can come back to them. One would be, even though it's a national security briefing, the focus would have to be on domestic renewal and meeting what is still going to be, I think, the tripartite challenges in finance, economics, employment and health and social justice. These will be with us going into next year, for sure. That

I think requires an investment agenda for the country. Both Steve and I and Anja have written about this. And it's interesting, I think, that a sharply targeted smart investment agenda can actually address a number of the challenges that we have, including the economic challenges, including China, and we'll come back to that, I'm sure, during the course of this discussion, and climate in terms of climate investment in climate infrastructure and technology.

03:54: Second, would be and what will be, I think, the most important diplomatic national security challenge as far as the eye can see in this century would be to develop a coherent and comprehensive approach with respect to China. I know we'll come back to that, but I hear we're too reactive, defensive right now, and we're not using all the elements of national power. And I would think as a National Security Advisor to the next president, developing that kind of all comprehensive power approach to the China challenge would be absolutely critical. I'll just mention a couple of others which haven't gotten a lot of attention, I think, but would be certainly in my mind if I were giving this briefing.

04:42: Next would be cyber, we don't talk about it a lot of late, but if you look at the Director of National Intelligence threat assessments for the last five or six years, it's at the top of the list. I think it's even greater today. I say that for a number of reasons, including, by the way, exemplified by the way in which we're having this meeting today. We have a lot of our nation's, and indeed the world's, GDP online right now, and virtually with all kinds, I think, of vulnerabilities. We have increased tensions with states that have high caliber cyber capabilities like Iran, China, Russia and Iran. We have an entire new area of a tax base growing and the Internet of Things. So I think we have not given such a... We're not really structured, I think, the way we should be in the White House on this, for cyber.

05:20: I would be looking at non-proliferation as well. Now, I heard that it was touched on during the course of the... Or addressed during the course of the session to date. I think we're on a path right now which could end up with more countries with nuclear weapons and more nuclear weapons period, and this includes, obviously, I would have moving to re-do or re-up the new START Treaty. I think you've seen the reports today, Reuters reported on the UN, report today on Korea, North Korea making progress on its program during the pendency of the negotiations with the administration. Iran is closer to a nuclear weapon today than it was two or three years ago. And I don't think we're working as hard enough on fissile material and locking it down the way we should.

06:07: And the last couple would be... Well, not the last, but climate would be an important focus, I think, for the next... Should be an important for the next president. It's interesting, the United States has kind of been out of the climate... Addressing the climate policy game for the last three and a half years, that's not where the world is right now, though, and if you live in the investment world and the economic world, talk to Europeans and even more so increasingly in Asia, climate is at the front of the agenda. Increasingly, CEOs around the world see climate risk as investment risk, and we should certainly see it as a risk here.

06:47: And the last two things I'd say is this, and it hasn't got a lot of attention. One of the great fire storms coming out of COVID is in the emerging world. We obviously have to deal with our issues here, but going forward, the emerging world and the southern hemisphere especially, are in the middle of a perfect storm on COVID. We're going to have, I think, a debt crisis for a long time,

require a lot of international work. And last, I think we need to look at reinvigorating, kind of restoring our national security institutions, and maybe we can talk about that later. That would be the briefing I would give if I were there on January 20th at whatever time in the morning the president comes in. I had it a little easier than Steve, George W. Bush came in very early in the morning.

[laughter]

07:31: Stephen, your briefing.

07:34: So I would agree with everything Tom said, but I thought... I think, before I got to those, I would have a little conversation, "Mr. President, what's going on in the world right now. Why so much chaos?" And I think I would step in through with what we all know, that the international order and international system we've had for the last 70 years, is really under attack, and it's under attack for the things we all know. The reemergence of great power and competition. The reemergence of an ideological struggle between authoritarian state capitalism at the heart of Russia and China versus the democrats. New technology challenges that are increasingly revolutionizing our world, beyond our ability to cope and adapt. Global challenges like pandemics and climate that we don't seem to be in a position to manage.

08:28: So all of these things are going on, but more fundamentally, we have a problem here at home. We have a democracy that does not seem to be delivering what democracies deliver, not only the best way of life that is consistent with the highest aspirations of the human spirit, but democracy used to deliver economic growth and administrative competence. And we don't seem to be doing that so well right now. And there's a certain crisis of confidence among our people in our institutions, in our system, and if you look internationally, our brand doesn't look so good. And in addition, the American people have gotten a little tired of American leadership and always leading the way.

09:12: So if you put all those things together, we're at one of these inflection points where the system we lived with is really breaking down. And we, as there is always inflection points, you have choices. And in some sense, the choice we have before us, is this going to be 1919 or is it going to be 1945? Are we going to pull back from the world, focus internally, look to our own problems and let the world in some sense deal with its own? Or is it going to be 1945 where we are going to help found with our friends and allies a revised and adapted international order. I would hope we would make that second choice. But if we're going to do that, we need to fix our institutions at home, we need to reconnect with our allies, we need to start leading and engaging in the world, we need to start revising and adapting international institutions. And we need to start, in some sense, refreshing our brand in the world and our values in the world.

10:18: So Mr. President, you have a huge task before you, and we've got to address all the things Tom talked about, but we have to somehow explain to the American people what is this moment and what the most fundamental choice is and then you have to make a case for the American people that fixing at home, engaging abroad and leading the world is still in America's interests.

10:44: Thanks to both of you, thought-provoking on so many levels. It's interesting, as you were

speaking, I recalled a conversation at Aspen, I believe it was three years ago, and I did it with Jim Clapper, and he raised a concern then, this was three years ago, about the fragility of US institutions. And that... 'Cause I had asked him at the time, I said, "Kind of apply your intelligence brain that you often apply to other countries, measuring stability, etcetera, to look at the US and what concerns you," and that was his concern and, listen, I think borne out in the last several years about crisis of confidence, etcetera. So to that point, Aspen is a continuing conversation. So I certainly felt that there. Okay, it's a lot to cover. We will, in a few minutes, get to participant questions.

11:37: On the question of Russia. Tom and Stephen, as you know, there is a discussion now, often led by the president, of another reset, finding a way forward. I've had long conversations with Fiona Hill about this. At the root of a lot of President Trump's outreach to Russia is his conviction that he can somehow get this relationship right, which he's not the first president to believe that. Tom, you first and then you, Stephen. Is there the ground work now, the potential for somehow improving that relationship? How does that match up against Russia's increasing aggression on so many fronts? So what's your view? And then Stephen, I'll get yours.

12:19: Yeah, great. Ten seconds on your point, Jim, on Jim Clapper's observation. It's exactly right. If you do kind of an old-fashioned net assessment of the United States' position in the world, you would bet on the United States moving forward here, for sure. But there are challenges and you can't take it for granted. And we have system issues that Steve... The system breakdown, we have investment issues, we have inequality issues in the United States, we have some big policy choices on things like immigration to ensure our demographic advantage going forward. Those are choices, they're all in front of us, though, as Steve said. We work from a strong base but it can't be taken for granted.

12:56: On Russia, a couple of things. I would put it fairly directly. Number one is that, Russia is actively hostile to the United States pretty much across the board, right? And we have had this latest reporting on bounty... The bounty issue in Afghanistan, but it's well beyond that and virtually across the board. We can talk about the individual instances. And by the way, that's not the first instance in Afghanistan. We've had General Nicholson talking about this publicly with respect to supplying arms to the Taliban. So, actively hostile across the board. And I think that at least the public presentations from our intelligence community seem to be unanimous that we can expect additional attacks and interference and trying to upset the United States elections in 2020, first point.

13:52: The second point is that I think that the United States should address Russia from a better position of strength. Dean Acheson had that phrase in his memoirs called Situations of Strength. The United States should build situations of strength in Europe with respect to Russia. And that means... And I heard at least some press reports about Ambassador Bolton's conversation at this forum today speculating about whether or not a second term of President Trump would have him pull back further from NATO. This is... Dividing the United States from Europe has been both a goal of the Soviet Union and indeed Russia for a long time, and pushing back on that and addressing that, I think, is really quite important. This will depend, I think, going forward here on Russian conduct.

14:46: I think we should move forward to build obviously these positions of strength, but Russian

conduct will matter a lot, I think, during the course of this election, and I do think we do... In the opportunity cooperation category we do have an opportunity, I think, to go back to the table and renew the new START Agreement, which provides for a renewal period of up to five years if the two sides agree. For the life of me, I don't know why we wouldn't do that. We have a discussion going about whether or not we should add the Chinese to some sort of very complicated tripartite global arms control agreement; that's not on the table right now, but what is on the table is, I think, to not have us get to a place for the first time in half a century without any constraints. So I think those would be kind of the elements of an approach that I'd put forward. Thank you, Jim.

15:35: Stephen.

15:37: I don't disagree with much of that. I think, though, it needs to be put in a framework. So if you're talking to the president, one of the questions is, "Well, what can we expect of a relationship with Russia? What should we be shooting for?" I think they are hostile. They are a spoiler almost across the board. And so what is the kind of relationship we can hope for with a country that really has become an adversary? And I think the American approach to that has been really of long-standing administration after administration, and it's not complicated. It is basically to cooperate with a potential adversary where we can. We cooperated with arms control in the worst days of the Cold War with the Soviet Union. We should have a strategic stability conversation with Russia to develop all of these issues. So cooperate where we can, oppose them and stand up for our principles where it is in our interest to do so, but manage those differences so that they don't result into permanent confrontation or a military conflict.

16:49: That's kind of the formula we have with adversaries. We're off the page with Russia on that. The question is, can we get Russia back on that page? I think a couple of things are required. One, they've got to not interfere with this election. If they interfere with this election as they did with 2016, we're going to go into the deep freeze again. Second, we need to try to make progress on beginning to solve Ukraine, initially addressing the Donbass issue. I think there's a possibility there, there's a ceasefire in place, shaky though it is, that should be addressed. And again, I would try to begin things like a strategic stability dialogue. But at the same time, we have to deter Russia from their intervention and interference with their neighbors. That means a strong relationship in NATO, and that means being more aggressive ourselves in checking Russian behavior. And it's not that hard. Putin has been brilliant, taking tactical advantage of situations and enhancing Russians' interests with very modest investments. We can counter that. So it is trying to engage Russia in a sensible way, but also deterring and in some sense taking away the... In some sense the free ride Russia has had in some areas for their interference. This is something we can do.

18:19: It's interesting listening to just the overlap between both of your analysis and emphasis. What is notable, of course, is that we have a president who disagrees on many of those fundamental points. One, being the importance and sanctity of alliances, and that extends to NATO. We're still in it, Bolton's concerned about leaving it, but just general questions the President has raised about, for instance, Article 3, defending NATO partners. But not just limited to NATO. You've had a weakening of the South Korean Alliance, just a dispute there again over money, will the US withdraw troops as a means of applying pressure. But even again, raising questions about the US nuclear umbrella, for instance, for Japan. So you have a current administration, or at least the top of the administration, that questions the immutability of those alliances, but also the importance of

them. So I wonder if I could ask both of you, what is the lasting damage to those alliances from those questions being raised? They're confidence pieces, right? And confidence is easily lost and difficult to regain. Stephen, perhaps I start with you on this one, but is there long-term damage? Can it be turned around with a new approach, a new president?

19:46: I think it can be turned around, whoever is elected, whether it is Biden or Trump. And I think Jim and I will... Tom and I will probably disagree a little bit on this. Look, I'm less worried about a re-elected President Trump pulling out of these alliances. I think there are a lot of people who... In his administration who understand that, particularly in a competition with China, the big advantage we have is our system of alliances, treaty allies, but also friends and folks with whom we have security and other relationships, that this is a huge and important US resource. So if you're worried about competition with China, the last thing you want to do is throw it away. What the President has tried to do is to get the allies to do more, that's been an objective of Republican and Democratic administrations for the last 20 years.

20:40: The President has been willing to be much more forthright about it and threatening about it. We can discuss about whether that was the right tactics or not. In some respects, he's gotten some results out of NATO in terms of their increase in their defense expenditures. But I think... Look, this is a president who was elected to be a disruptor, on oh so many ways he has been a disruptor. I would hope both a Biden one administration and a Trump two administration, the President would become a bit of a builder now, having disrupted relationships, renew those relationships, and then use our close allies with us to address these challenges we have. It's the only way we're going to address them successfully. And I think people around the president understand that, and I hope both Vice President Biden and President Trump understand that in their bones.

21:39: Tom, do you agree?

21:41: Not with everything, but a couple... I agree on the fundamental analysis. You know, one big point is that at the end of the day, presidents typically get the people and the policies that they want. And that's... I think we've seen that during the course of the Trump administration as we've moved from, "Well, he won't pursue a lot of the things he said he was going to pursue during the campaign because he'll have advisors around him who may mitigate that and bring back in place different perspectives." That hasn't been the case, obviously. Ultimately a president, I think, will drive towards what his goals are. And the President has a different view of alliances. I think that's a fair assessment. I don't think that's a partisan state. I think that if he were in the chat room with us right now, I think he would say that, that in fact it doesn't seem... It's a more transactional approach. It doesn't have the same sense of history and the same sense of importance to the United States in terms of the global... As Steve pointed out, the global benefits to the United States we get from alliances including in any competition with China, not just security, but also in trade and economics as well.

22:51: The administration has chosen a different way, it's chosen bilateral trade approaches, and it's chosen a more unilateral approach on security issues. So this transactional approach is a very different approach than you've had by presidents over the last half century. And by the way, it doesn't put aside the issue as Steve said of contributions by allies. It was President Obama in 2014 at the Wales NATO Summit who put in place the goal of having a 2% contribution of GDP for

defense. The other thing I worry about here, Jim, is popular support for the Alliance in allied countries, that has dropped. And that's not healthy for the United States, and it's not necessary. So I do think, as Steve said, I think there's a... Whoever gets elected president, there is an opportunity to come back and kind of reinvigorate our alliances, but there's been a different tack taken in the last three and a half years, and again, a... Not a... A very straightforward difference in approach, which I don't think works to our long-term advantage. It is this more... Don't you think it's this more transactional approach on things, and so you have... So if I'm dealing with a... I'm dealing with the head of an ally company or an adversary, it's kind of the same thing.

24:04: Yeah.

24:04: And it's not the same thing when you think about kind of the long-term interests of the country and what we've gained from these alliances over the last 70 years.

24:11: It's interesting, for my book, I... By the way, I interviewed only folks who serve in the Trump administration. And when I asked everyone to boil the President's foreign policy approach down, transactional was the most common description. Some see that as folly and others see it as wisdom, right? You know, as you described, getting more out of those relationships, whatever the pressure applied. We're two minutes away from going to the audience. And folks, just so you know, you'll use your raise hand function to do that. Before we get there, I wonder if just very briefly, I could ask each of you what is a big picture question, so I'm being a little bit unfair to you. But if you can, on drawing down US troops from not just in Afghanistan but in Syria, ending the endless wars or finding a way to extract ourselves from them. Can each of you make an argument that it is time, for instance, to come out of Afghanistan, for instance? Tom, perhaps you first, and then Stephen will...

25:09: Yeah, a couple of points on that. I have argued for, if you will, a rebalancing of our defense forces globally. And I think... And again, we've gone a different direction, frankly, during the course of the Trump administration. The President has argued for and argued in the campaign, no more endless wars. And it's part of a core message that he put forward during the course of the 2016 campaign, but in fact, we've probably... I think we've sent... You'll check me on the numbers, 40,000 or 50,000 additional troops to the Middle East...

25:42: Yeah.

25:42: During the course of the Trump presidency. My own view is that that takes attention from the kind of defense and security rebalancing we need to do towards Asia, frankly. Where I think we have not put in place the proportion of assets, the doctrine weapons systems, coordination systems I think that we need in Asia, so I am for a rebalancing out of the wars in the Middle East. The second piece of that, of course, is it's exceedingly expensive. I think that the so-called OCO account, the account in the defense budget that is devoted just to the war efforts in the Middle East, I think, again... Well, someone in the audience will check me on this, I'm sure. But I think it's around \$19-20 billion a year at this point. That is close to the entire budget of the State Department. So it is tremendously expensive. And so, I do think it makes sense to take a hard look at this and to rebalance, draw down to what's essential, probably having the key policy focus on counter-terrorism, frankly, and keeping your eye on that threat.

26:54: Last 10 seconds on the Middle East, I would say that you're in these jobs and you have to decide what's important. What's important in the Middle East right now I think is the Iranian nuclear program, and we can talk about that maybe in the chat. That is, if you're going to make a list of what's important there, in addition, obviously to getting the troop levels right, and I am for moving those troop levels down. I think that's a correct direction. I think the Iranian nuclear program is, from a US perspective, the most important thing in that region.

27:27: Stephen, your view?

27:31: So we talk about these bringing an end to the endless wars, and at one level, those endless wars are already over for the United States, because we have already done a lot of the rebalancing Tom has already talked about. We have something like 5000-6000 troops in Iraq, we're down to about 8600 in Afghanistan, we have literally only hundreds in Syria. So in some sense, we've already rebalanced, and it is our allies, the strategy which we developed of working by, with, and through other allies is now what we're doing in those areas. Now, I don't minimize the fact that our men and women in uniform are at risk, and some of them are being killed, and every one of them is one too many. But from... The fact is, from the US perspective, we have already rebalanced. And if you look at those deployments, if you're concerned about Iran, not just the nuclear deal, but also Iran's disruptive behavior in the region and threat to Israel and all the rest, if you're going to check Iran in the region, Iraq is one of the few places you're going to be able to do it in terms of US troop presence and a country that actually wants to be freer of Iranian influence.

28:52: In Afghanistan, you have the first opportunity in 20 years to see if we can get a peaceful settlement of that war. The last thing you want to be doing is dramatically reducing our forces and undermine the ability of an Afghan government or an Afghan society to negotiate with the Taliban. And in Syria, I would say we have too few people, and the tragedy of Syria, people say that Iraq shows the consequences of a sin of commission. I think Syria is consequences of sin of omission and the destabilizing migration flows that almost destabilized Europe. So I think they were, in some sense, under-resourced in Syria, if we don't want that situation to even be worse. I think we've already rebalanced, we have it about right, we can afford it, and it is proportional to our interests.

29:51: Yeah, it's interesting. We've done a lot of work on the military's effort to maintain just the smallest foothold in Syria to do with the maximum they could do and try to push off the President's desire to pull everybody out and it's tough. It's been tough, but they managed to keep some on the ground. Listen, thanks to both of you. I learned a lot, even in that 34 minutes right there before we go to the audience. So we're going to go to the audience now, and the first person who I see raising his hand, is Chad Manske, I believe. If you're ready for your question, we'll all be able to hear it.

[pause]

30:43: Hey, there Chad. Here's your chance.

30:44: Hey, hi. Thank you very much. Very thought-provoking presentation. I'd like to ask the two gentlemen, based on their experience as National Security Advisors, in addition to the briefing

items that they noted at the outset of the presentation, what kind of recommendations would they make regarding the size, structure and organization of the National Security Council to best serve the next president?

31:18: So, Tom has, I think, probably more developed views than I. I would just make a couple of points. One, I think it needs to be rethought and restructured. People talk about we need a whole of government approach, bringing all elements of national power, diplomatic, economic, military to bear on a problem. Things like the competition with China, we need a whole of society approach because the private sector, the civil society, there are a whole series of societal groups are going to be required, including individual citizens, as we resist China's efforts to disrupt our politics. So it's going to require a concerted effort, and we don't have the institutions to pull together a whole of society approach. We have a big issue about how... Since China is going to affect almost everything, how do you organize the National Security Council to deal with the issue of China? A China Czar? Does that really make sense? Or is it actually something that has to be top of the mind for all the National Security Council principles? The impact of technology, which has revolutionized how we do business, and I think we still haven't caught up to where the technology is. So I think there's a huge amount that needs to be done. We need to rethink how we do business, both in the inter-agency, but also I would say in the individual agencies, and a number of people have talked about and written about what should be done with the State Department, for example.

32:52: Yeah, I've a... Chad, thanks for that question. I have a couple of points on it. I'm not so sure the National Security Council is too big. There are... We can go back through the history of this. It's taken on a lot of additional coordination responsibilities over the years, including Homeland Security, and some of these all of government issues that Steve talked about. Specifically, though, I do think there needs to be some restructuring and re-emphasis around three or four items. Item number one, Steve references technology. We do not do a good job in the United States government today of integrating technology and national security policy. And some of it is because of the kinds of people, frankly, that are in policy and the kinds who are in technology and bringing them together, I think, is a really important aspect. I think we'll have a ton of issues as first impression. It is absolutely essential in our effort to meet the China challenge to get this right. We have all manner of issues with our technology sector in the United States that affects national security. So my recommendation would be to have an assistant to the president level, a Deputy National Security advisor who coordinates these issues for technology and cyber security. As someone who can use the 75-year-old or 70-year-old muscle memory in kind of institutions and processes of National Security Council to try to get that together and do that right.

34:19: I don't think, for example, today we have that kind of broad-based look at the technology competition with China, for example. So technology, cyber and health, for sure, I think that you'll need to have in the National Security Council a much more focused effort on international... On health issues, international health issues. And I think the refurbishing of international institutions will be an important focus of the National Security Council going forward. So I'm not so sure. I'm in the minority on this, I think. I don't think if I look at it, the National Security Council is too big. There are a lot of issues that need to be brought together and you cannot drive these big cross-cutting issues except from the center. I know that my agency... And I've been the chief of staff of an agency at the State Department. I understand that dynamic between the White House and the agencies. But the truth is that the president's policies need to be driven from the center on an

interagency basis, and as Steve said, I think with another challenge which we need to give a lot more thought to which is how do you get other stakeholder input as well, an all of society effort? But I don't think it's too big. I do think it should be reorganized around some of these key challenges we have, particularly in technology.

35:33: Yeah. Well, it's interesting you see technology at loggerheads rather than cooperating now more and more. Guys, we're down to the last minute. I did want to get to one more audience question, Steven Keenan has his hand raised. Maybe, Steven, if you just keep it quick and given the time, if you have one of our guests more in line to ask the question, otherwise I'll give them both a chance for a quick in.

35:56: Yes, thank you for... Can you hear me?

36:00: Yeah, yeah.

36:02: So thank you very much for an informative discussion. I've been busy with Ukraine but I also was in Afghanistan, remember Afghanistan before the last 42 years of war started and was there when the war started with Soviet Union, teaching English. Both of you are familiar with the word, "Loya jirga." You both worked on encouraging Afghanistan having loya jirga. We have a president right now that prides himself as being a great communicator. I came up with a word one time during the cold... At the end of the Cold War after '89, when the Berlin Wall went down, thankfully, of tele-jirga the Jihad. And what I mean by that with the 1100 clans inside Afghanistan, why don't we have the President give each of those clans a telephone and encourage that even though we live in a democracy where we have one vote for each person here in the beautiful, wonderful United States, that's not necessarily how Afghanistan relates to things. And I think that if we gave them the telecommunications capability as a gift, a satellite, free mobile service, telephones to each of the clans, and we could create a modern-day loya jirga for them that they could have every week if they wanted to. I'm not a big fan of the Taliban, but I feel that we need to stay with some sort of presence. But I think now, especially with President Trump being gifted as being a good communicator on TV especially, this could be a good time for that. How do you feel about that, please?

37:53: Okay, Stephen, you want to take that one?

37:55: Well, I.. The specifics are interesting. But I think the broader point you're making is that technology offers enormous opportunities that we did not have before, and one of things we're learning in this post COVID-19 world is how to be more adept at using technology, and you've just given one example. There are lots of examples, and that's why I think Tom is right, that we really... The next president, whoever it is, needs to have someone in the NSC at senior levels who can work at how to utilize technology, both within our government but also in our diplomacy.

38:31: Yeah. We really do need to bring science and technology really to the center of policy making in the United States. As we did, by the way, after World War II.

38:42: Yeah. Sadly, we have an anti-science movement going on now, but that's on another topic.

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Tom and Stephen, thanks to both of you. I enjoyed taking part. I'm going to throw this back to Anja who's going to help wrap things up.

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