

[00:00:21.160] - Sam Harris

Welcome to the Making Sense podcast. This is Sam Harris. Just a brief housekeeping to tie up some loose ends from the last podcast. I got a fair amount of pushback, which to my eye rests on a misunderstanding. I'm slightly embarrassed that I didn't see the grounds for this misunderstanding when I recorded the last podcast. But it really does seem like a misunderstanding. So let me clear this up. I've gotten a fair amount of grief for my claim that the police response at the Capitol would not have been much different had that been a BLM protest that became a siege.

[00:01:06.570] - Sam Harris

I was pushing back against the claim that the behavior of the cops at the Capitol was a sign of white supremacy, white privilege, you know, the general racializing of the interpretation of the the failure to protect the Capitol, which was happening everywhere and, you know, from Biden on down. And I stand by everything I said there, but I didn't recognize that this concept of police response was open to two meanings. And many people took it to mean something that I would call police presence rather than the behavior of the cops who were actually there.

[00:01:47.790] - Sam Harris

Many people allege that there simply would have been more cops there had this been a BLM protest and that the fact that there weren't is a sign of racism, racism because they were assuming that white people would be well behaved and they would have assumed that black people would have gone mad and attacked the Capitol. That's a very different claim. It's not one I was responding to in the last podcast. I think a racial interpretation of that assumption is also unfounded, but I don't think the assumption itself is obviously wrong.

[00:02:24.960] - Sam Harris

So let me just clarify that. I think it's quite possible that many people would have assumed that a pro Trump rally would also be, by default, pro police. That would not have been a crazy assumption given all that has preceded us. So therefore, the idea that maybe they don't need a massive show of force from the cops to prevent an insurrection because these people are generally pro cop, maybe that factored into the decision making around how many cops should be there in the first place.

[00:03:03.120] - Sam Harris

That seems entirely plausible to me. Again, I don't know what's true there. And I don't know that there aren't other more nefarious reasons why there was such a weak police presence there. Again, it could have been something that Trump ordered. We will find out if there's any true conspiracy there or if it's just negligence or negligence based on bad assumptions. And I do touch upon this topic in today's podcast with my guests. But there's no necessary racist implication from that difference in assumption.

[00:03:38.490] - Sam Harris

And you can see that if you just imagine what the cops would have assumed of an Antifa protest had there been the biggest Antifa rally in human history massing at the Capitol, what would have been the posture of the cops? Well, I would bet more or less everything that it would have been every bit as risk averse as it would be in the case of a BLM protest, which is to say that the obvious animosity of antifa to law enforcement would have dictated exactly what people are claiming would have happened in the case of a BLM protest.

[00:04:18.840] - Sam Harris

And this strips away the variable of race almost perfectly. Antifa certainly seems to be an almost entirely white phenomenon. So anyway, that's a counterfactual we just have to imagine. But I think viewing any part of this failure at the Capitol in terms of race is just deeply unhelpful in addition to very likely mistaken. And this would not change if we found, as we almost certainly would if we went looking, that some of the cops or some of the decision makers are avowed racists and Trump supporters.

[00:04:58.740] - Sam Harris

None of that changes the general picture of what happened here in the same way that finding a few

antifa goons among the insurrectionists will not change our basic understanding of what happened there, right. This was a pro Trump insurrection, even if you can find some anti Trump far left BLM loving people in the crowd. So I hope that is clear, this is not at all to suggest that we don't have a problem with white supremacy and a larger movement here.

[00:05:36.670] - Sam Harris

We obviously do. And 100 percent of those people, for all intents and purposes, are part of the MAGA cult that we now need to deal with. So I am not saying that racism isn't a variable, generally speaking, but to view what happened at the Capitol, specifically the level of force that was marshaled and used or not used by the people who were there. This notion that, again, seems to have been endorsed by more or less everyone on the left from Biden on down, that what we saw at the Capitol was proof positive of white supremacy.

[00:06:17.650] - Sam Harris

The fact that the insurrection wasn't put down better than it was was a symptom of racism. There is just no way to look at this where that conclusion seems reasonable from my point of view. And as I said last time, even if reasonable, I would argue it's the wrong point to be making now. And everything else that is racialized in this moment is also the wrong thing to be doing now. The fact that Joe Biden just announced that his covid relief package would be targeted to non-white people suffering the economic effects of the pandemic, many of you have probably seen that video.

[00:06:59.680] - Sam Harris

He stepped before the cameras and said that this aid would preferentially go to people of color, Latinos, he threw Asians in there as though Asian-Americans were an especially beleaguered bunch, even though in the aggregate they're doing better than anyone. This was an act of breathtaking political stupidity, given the political needs of the moment, given the need to figure out how to build a bridge right of center at a minimum, given the need not to confirm the paranoia of everyone, right of center, that there's a tsunami of woke-ness now breaking over all of society and the future for people who want to get beyond racializing every question in American life will be one of reeducation by pink haired lesbians.

[00:07:56.050] - Sam Harris

There is a culture war that needs to be won here and racializing everything isn't the way to win it. And I defy anyone to justify a skin color preference in the doling out of covid aid when the only ethical basis really is economic need, right? And if you don't think there are white people who suffered the utter destruction of their economic lives during the pandemic, you're living in some kind of malignant fantasy world. Again, it's the own goals that we should find absolutely unacceptable.

[00:08:35.470] - Sam Harris

And judging from how this went off on social media, this was a Lionel Messi style bicycle kick into the wrong goal. It's just incredible. Why do it? And finally, I want to further contextualize my support for the Twitter ban of Trump, about which I have absolutely no misgivings. There's nothing that has happened in recent days that has given me cause to rethink that. But obviously, the banning on social media has proceeded apace there, you know, many, many accounts that have been purged.

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And there was the seemingly coordinated dismantling of the parlor app parlor's the social media, or was a social media platform favored largely by conservatives and no doubt some conservative lunatics. Let me just say that all of those further iterations of deplatforming seem far more complicated to me and merit serious debate about the role that social media companies play in our lives and the power of these platforms. And in the case of Parla, it's not just social media companies here. We have the very infrastructure of the Internet, in particular Amazon's cloud services, deciding to disgorge a whole platform and a business that was probably valued at a billion dollars at that point from the Internet itself.

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This is a kind of digital exile which may or may not have been warranted. A surprising number of

erstwhile libertarians seem very comfortable with the idea that private corporations should be forced to keep people on their servers so as to not show any political bias and be forced to provide tools for people who are avidly spreading misinformation that is fragmenting our society. This kind of thing has to be argued for, and there's no straightforward move to make from the First Amendment to enforcing the behavior of people who run these businesses is just to say that my mind is really not made up on many of the specifics there.

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I think it's going to be a fascinating and consequential debate to have. But as to whether or not the various digital platforms are justified in trying to contain the damage that Trump may yet attempt to do by essentially regurgitating him and his digital life into the abyss, given what's at stake here and given what a bad actor he has been, that just seems to me to be a very easy call. And it's not made more difficult by the apparent inconsistency of not being able to close all the other accounts that arguably should be closed at the same moment, you know, whether it's the Chinese Communist Party or any other malicious source of misinformation, there's an enormous mess to clean up.

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But Trump was an all too identifiable piece of that. And any case, those are my two cents. As I said, there's much more to talk about generally about the power of big tech, and I'm sure I'll pull together several conversations on that topic in the future. OK, well, today I'm speaking with General Stanley McChrystal and his colleague, Chris Fussell. Both of whom have been on the podcast before we spoke last year, just as the pandemic was beginning to get rolling and what a quaint conversation that was in light of all that's since happened.

[00:12:19.510]

General McChrystal is a retired U.S. Army four star general who served more than thirty four years in the military, and he was the commander of all American and coalition forces in Afghanistan. That was his last assignment. He's written several books, including a memoir titled My Share of the Task, which was a New York Times bestseller. And he's a senior fellow at Yale University's Jackson Institute for Global Affairs. He's also the founder of the McChrystal Group. And his partner, Chris Fussell also teaches at Yale.

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And he and General McChrystal wrote Team of Teams New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World, which was also a New York Times bestseller. Chris was a commissioned naval officer and he spent 15 years in the Navy SEALs at various points around the globe. And he served as an aide to camp to General McChrystal. And Chris is also on the board of directors of the Navy SEAL Foundation, and he's a lifetime member of the Council on Foreign Relations. And both of these guys have a podcast they do together called No Turning Back.

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And that should be available wherever you get your podcasts. And given the gravity of today's topic, this podcast is yet another episode that is not paywall. It's a PSA of sorts. But if you want to support the podcast and you want to get full episodes in general, you can do that by subscribing at Sam Harris TAG. And as always, if you can't afford it, you can request a free account through the website. And now, without further delay, I bring you General Stanley McChrystal and Chris Fussell.

[00:14:01.170]

I am here with General Stanley McChrystal and Chris Fussell. Gentlemen, thanks for joining me again. Thanks. Thanks for having us. We were on the podcast nearly 10 months ago. We were about a month into the pandemic. So this was the beginning of April. And I remember being quite sheepish, even asking you guys about the possibility of civil unrest. I think I framed it as something that we would have a responsibility to at least touch on, you know, given your expertise.

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But, you know, I think I hasten to say something like, you know, obviously I don't I don't expect this. We don't want to be scare mongering. Right. And I look back on that conversation and I think, oh, how

naive I was. It's hard for me to even reclaim that view of the world, given all that's happened in the intervening months. So I don't think we need to focus on it. I just perhaps will be relevant to some part of the conversation to acknowledge how much social unrest and occurred over the summer around the Black Lives Matter protests that many of which devolved into riots, all of the craziness in Seattle and Portland, all of the the very weird political responses to that, you know, especially on the left, the calls to defund the police as though that's what we needed at that moment.

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All of that is just the context in which I want to talk to you about what has now happened in Trumper and what happened at the Capitol last week and the prospects that we may be facing some kind of insurgency in our society coming from the right. So I guess let's just start with last week. What were you guys thinking when you saw what was unfolding at the Capitol on the 6th? Yes, and thanks, I'll start by what I was thinking about was an experience from my youth.

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I grew up most of my school years in Arlington, Virginia, right across the street from the Capitol and from Stonewall Jackson Elementary School, where I went a short walk away was an area now called Ballston, which is a built-up shopping center. But back in the mid nineteen sixties, it was also the location of the headquarters of the American Nazi Party. And you could walk to a white frame house that had a porch on the front and you could stand in front of it and you could see a large painted sign that was about 20 feet across.

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That said, white men fight, smashed the black revolution. And then periodically a young man would walk out, you know, early 20s wearing a brown stormtrooper uniform with a swastika armband. And I remember watching that and then is what I saw last week. As I saw some of the activities around the capital, I thought about, we have a history in the United States. Of extreme thinking. And you remember in nineteen sixty five, you could have an American Nazi party, but you certainly would not have seen that in Germany it was outlawed because they had a bad experience with it.

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And so as I watched what happened around the capital, I thought about the danger of very radical thinking and people who become energized and in some ways consumed by very extreme ideas. And so I started to think of what's happened, why it happened. You know what's going to happen next and what we could do about it. For me, it was a reflection on, you know, experiences in the counterterrorism world dealing with threats like al-Qaida, et cetera.

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It took me a while post 9/11, being on the battlefield, et cetera, to really dive in and say this isn't just this didn't start yesterday.

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There's a there's a decades long history to stands point on to how how these movements get to the point where they've turned into something that is extremely violent and dangerous. And you've lost a lot of your other lovers by the time it crosses that threshold. And so what I spent time doing then was diving in and studying that history. And what I saw when I was watching on the news, et cetera, like the rest of us, what I was seeing was we are we are danger close to that edge, at which point the measures and responses are going to reach a threshold that we're going to be very uncomfortable with as a free society.

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And we have to work really hard over the next six to 12 months to pull it back from that brink. Yeah, I want to talk about the underlying problem of, you know, what people believe is true about the nature of the world and how unreachable certain people seem to be at the moment by dialogue. But let's just focus on what actually happened to the capital and everything that is still mysterious about that. And I think many people marvel at the fact that there was such an inadequate police presence and they're looking for reasons why that is so.

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And some are conspiratorial and seemingly fairly sinister. Some are just can be ascribed to bad assumptions or bad luck. I'm wondering what you think about let's just take that single variable of why there was such an inadequate staffing and just why there was there was a basic assumption that more security wasn't required, given all that had preceded that day.

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If you remember in the 9/11 Commission report, probably the most memorable line is they say that it was a failure of imagination, of intelligence people to imagine that an organization like al-Qaida could do a plot and operation as detailed and as ambitious as if 9/11 assault was. I would say that if we spend a lot of time worrying why there weren't enough Capitol Police or enough barricades around the capital, we run the risk of missing the forest for the trees. The thing that was difficult for most Americans to imagine as you would assemble thousands.

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People, many of whom were very radicalized in the nation's capital, have the president of the United States address them and invite and encourage them to walk down and confront. Congress, where it works, I think it was difficult for most of us to imagine that occurring and and I don't think we could possibly imagine that they would then try to break in to the Capitol. And so I think we need to we as a people and a government need to avoid the temptation to immerse in a lot of the details, step back, blur our eyes a bit and say, now, wait a minute, this is the big problem, the fact that this could even frame up as a potential situation.

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Yeah, and watching the.

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You know, Stan, I spoke with this vocalised that's during the during the day and afterwards and, you know, trained individuals, trained units are less frightening in many ways than a mob. And that's what we saw. A mob mentality is completely out of control.

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Right? It takes on a life of its own. And that's what we that's what I witnessed that that day, coupled with lack of creative thinking.

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Why would you assume this would happen, et cetera. And so as soon as they breached the front walls and came in mass, then it was the outcomes were completely unpredictable. There's no way that that Capitol Police force could have reacted in a way to hold that back. It was determined to get into the building. Now, hindsight being 20/20, of course, but we all remember the days when we were we flew around the country, around the world in aircraft with an easily open and closed cockpit door.

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And that would seem ridiculous in today's environment. So that was a blink moment. We will never look at those things the same.

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Yeah, well, so one thing that's been said a lot in response to this question is that this is a sign of racism in our society and white privilege and white supremacy. The full allegation being that had this been a Black Lives Matter protest, there would have been much more of a police presence there. And this is often combined with a distinct claim, which is that. And when I addressed previously on a podcast that police presence aside, the police would have behaved themselves differently had this been a black lawyer, largely black mob assailing the capital, which is to say more people would have been killed, more people would have been beaten up and bloodied and certainly arrested at the end of it.

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And I think that the first assumption may have some truth to it. But I think in both cases, bringing race into this question is profoundly unhelpful and almost certainly misleading. I just want to just bounce my thinking off of you guys, not to take the conversation far in this direction. But I think this is a truly toxic way of framing what happened at the Capitol. And it is it's making the people, you know, it's still in Trump's base harder to reach because, as you know, it's again, this is basically saying that, you know, all of you are in the Ku Klux Klan who have in any way supported this president, as we saw on the first point, that the question of police presence, the fact that there is just there simply weren't more cops called in advance, I think it's easy to see.

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And again, there could be many other explanations for this, and some of them could be totally nefarious. Right. I mean, it could be that Trump decided he wanted to leave the capital unprotected. You know, this is the kind of thing people are thinking now. But leaving all of that aside and leaving aside the prospect that we may discover that some of the people in the police force at the Capitol were actually, you know, quite sympathetic to the mob and let them in without with just a wave and a nod.

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And some video suggests that that was going on. Leaving that aside, just the question of could it have been that there was an assumption on the part of people who were deciding to staff the Capitol that a pro Trump rally would essentially be, by default, be pro cop? You know, these are people who have been supporting law enforcement by and large. And this can be obviously contrasted with a BLM rally where the much of the animus is explicitly directed against law enforcement.

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The reason why I think you can strip race as a variable completely out of that problem is that whatever assumption would be made about a BLM rally would have been made perhaps in triplicate against an Antifa rally and antifa. You know, it's certainly mostly a white organization. Right. So it's like the variable here is the attitude toward law enforcement, not the color of people skin or at least that that would be my claim. But I'm wondering if you think that played a role here.

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Just a few reactions, one on the main, I'm not an expert in this space at all, but the there's there is an equity discussion that will be had on the backside of this. And I've had that like yourself a few times over the last week with different friends. But I've always reacted to it is like there's a conversation to be had there.

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But if two helicopters go down on the battlefield, you don't walk into the general and say, I don't think they had enough seatbelts on the first helicopter. Right. Get solve the problem that's in front of you. And we will solve the bigger issues behind that on the on the back side.

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But the you know, the house is on fire. Let's let's let's save the other discussions for for further down the road, which are are important wants to have.

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I think there's one variable that isn't yet including this these conversations, which is the an exposure bias from the Capitol Police. Right. I up until six months ago lived a mile from the front of the Capitol building.

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And every other day there's some sort of protests surrounding the Capitol, Supreme Court, etc. That's the world that those officers live in day after day.

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And if that was your exposure and none of them in your eight years of working in the Capitol Police had ever stepped through even a simple metal barrier. You can understand, I imagine in the planning rooms they're thinking, OK, it's going to be a bigger crowd. Here's how we respond to those not saying it's right, but you get normal routinized into how these crowds react. And certainly there was a moment when they all realized they got it completely wrong.

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But I, I would assume there wasn't a calculated discussion in the planning at the rank and file level about this group versus this group.

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Sam, I think that the bigger question that Chris hinted at there was this is a group that wouldn't be expected to cross a police line, wouldn't be expected to get violent against people that they've got a lot of connections to and wouldn't be expected to storm the Capitol. And yet they did a largely white crowd of people that the policemen have been interviewed have described as true believers. One, use the term rabid dog, people who have become so fervent in their outrage and their sense of loss that they have got to take an action that theoretically would be very counter to a law and order attitude in their part of society.

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So to me, what is causing this part of largely white population to get to this point and to take these kinds of actions?

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Yeah, I want to get into the the ideas here, but I just have another question about what was happening at the Capitol, because I think, first of all, the video is so varied, but in aggregate, it is kind of mystifying. And I'm left with the feeling that it is something close to a miracle that more people weren't killed. What's surprising to me is not that five people died, but that 50 or more didn't die. Because I guess I want to ask you about the rules of engagement in a situation like that.

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We granted that the crowd was so varied that I could imagine that the experience of some cops in various parts of this siege was quite unlike the experience of other cops. I mean, there could be confronted with a weird group of people who are not really looking like combatants. I mean, they're they're dressed in weird costumes. Some of them are surprisingly old. You know, you have this some footage of a cop taking selfies with one group. And like that is quite unlike imagery of cops being beaten over the head with with American flags and being crushed in doorways.

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And you just kind of the surging violence that we see in other videos. But I guess my question was, once the capital was breached, I mean, once people were breaking down doors and climbing through windows and the cops were the only thing standing between them and our nation's leaders. And you have some people calling for the deaths of Mike Pence and Nancy Pelosi. I'm just amazed that there weren't scenes where every single person who came through a door got shot from the cop's point of view.

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I mean, I can see that there's an element of self-preservation here, because if you start shooting people and you don't have enough ammunition to shoot, everybody will then eventually you're going to be killed by a mob. But to not have shot people at that point, at some point in the inner sanctum of that building, to not have really just said this is actually war is to have placed the safety of our congressmen and women in the hands of a mob that had just shown a willingness to overwhelm police officers and risked their lives in the process.

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That just seems totally untenable to me. So I guess I'm just, you know, it's a very long way of asking. Are you surprised from state a use of force perspective that more people weren't killed by cops?

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I'm really not salmon, and it's because.

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You know, if I learned anything from my years in the SEAL teams, the the exposure that even an extremely well-trained individual needs to that level of violence and uncertainty, to be able to think really clearly in the moment is it's difficult.

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Right. And I think the situation probably changed on them so quickly that they were overwhelmed, surrounded.

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And from what I've heard, some of the interviews after the fact made several made the right decision, realizing if I draw my weapon right now, I will shoot eight people and then I'll lose my firearm. I will certainly die. And then they'll be armed and they'll have my other two magazines. And now I have armed armed masses.

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So I think the clearest heads we're trying to do that decollete, which is extremely difficult to do in a mob.

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And I we we run the risk of sort of a Hollywood image of what it looks like, you know, the barrel chested guy with a gun who can take on the big crowd. But if they hadn't been exposed to that before and what happens to one, there's countless studies out there about this. An individual's white space shrinks down to survival in the moment.

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Now, compare to the forces that that stand led, I was I was part of there were operators that had been in violent situations hundreds of times. You know, I knew an operator who pulled a pin on a grenade in the middle of a gunfight realized there was a child in the room repin the grenade while getting shot at. Like, that's that's super human mental behavior. Right. And we assume and expect that of a D.C. police officer who suddenly surrounded by 400 people who's there trying to crush him to death.

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Right. So I didn't see anything in there that I thought was completely irrational behavior. There will be, I think, unfortunately, probably some sympathetic findings that people were more on the side of the protesters than than they then on the side of the members of Congress, which will be terrible. But to the person I understood, the responses that I was seeing for the most part, it seemed I would add there, I think Chris nailed it.

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I believe that had the Capitol Police been told to expect violence, had they been depicted as the 300 Spartans holding the line against thousands of Persians, that they would have been much more mentally focused on responding, probably with lethal force. But as Chris described, they didn't expect this crowd to do that kind of activity at the Capitol. And so I think as it came and then they were largely atomized. You know, in many cases, police were in very small groups and it was more difficult to feel like you were part of a cohesive organization that could effectively, truly resist.

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Yeah. So let's talk about some of the the underlying causes of this, which really, to my mind, rests on this seething cauldron of ideas, most of which are almost certainly false and should be easily judged false. And yet we're dealing with people who seem to have kicked themselves loose of the earth and are now apparently unreachable by argument. I mean, we have a personality cult around Trump that seems to be wrapped in uncountable layers of conspiracy theories and lies.



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We have Kuhn, which is the kind of crazy Cristol and core of this movement. And, you know, that is has point of contact with a much older phenomenon of white nationalism and Christian identity. And we have a kind of quasi religious commitment to the idea that, you know, in the proximate case, the election of Joe Biden is a total fraud. Right. We have this election fraud, fraud being perpetrated by the president and by his enablers and by some prominent people in Congress.

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And so we have people who are absolutely sure that their country has been stolen from them and that this is all now just American history has become a a dangerous farce. And there's no there's no institution that can be trusted. Right. Except for the personality of Trump on some level. And then just this tissue of conspiracy theories that spread over social media and now which every effort to contain this misinformation is seen as, you know, yet another sinister sign of global control right by our overlords in Silicon Valley or by a cult of crazy liberal cannibals who are molesting children.

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Really, the sky's the limit in terms of what you can believe, apparently. So I want to talk about this general phenomenon and what you think we can do about it. But I'm especially concerned about some reports. We hear that there are, for instance, Kuhn sympathizers or, you know, True-Blue cultists in our nation's military and in law enforcement. I mean, like that the ideas are, you know, the call is potentially coming from within the house at certain of these moments.

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What do you think about this and how do we begin to talk our way out of this? Great. Chris and I had a conversation before the podcast and. One of the things that he pointed out that I thought was a great analogy was this isn't a brain aneurysm. This isn't a condition that just suddenly appeared in US society. In reality, this is a lifestyle health problem that we've had over time that began decades ago. And as we talked, there's there's a history of periods of extremism, the ism of the United States, such as the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s, which a lot of people don't realize.

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But I would say that the hardest part of this really probably goes back to the 1950s. We came out of the Second World War and we were in the early stages of the Cold War. And suddenly white men, which were the predominant demographic there at the Capitol, white men started losing ground. They started losing their privileged position. And what that meant was they lost some of it to the equal rights movement for gender, for women. They lost some of it to the civil rights movement.

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They lost some of it to the globalization of the economy. So the relatively and maybe undeserved privileged position that a white worker had for generations was suddenly under threat. And that caused great frustration. That caused a sense of loss. And we've seen that for several decades now. It was also matched by fear, fear that they would be displaced in society, in fact, be in a position of the oppressed versus the oppressor.

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You know, such as they had seen minorities before, and so when you put together frustration and fear, you get the combination of desperation or you get the output of desperation. And so suddenly they become fertile ground for accepting things that they want to believe. They want to believe that all of this is the result of a conspiracy. They want to believe that there are evil people doing this to them and they want to believe that there are relatively simple fixes to it, like a demagogic leader who comes and is able to say, I will give you the solution to your problem, will build a wall, will do various things.

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And so what we've seen now, I think, is a fairly evolved radicalization of part of our population.

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And it's accelerated by things like social media, the ability to communicate so quickly and the ability to limit what you hear of information sources to those which you already agree with. And as you become more radicalized, what we see is you become more and more. Of a tendency to listen to those things, which makes you it's a self reinforcing loop. So I think what we've got now is a significant part of our society that believes what they believe and they believe it fervently and they believe it to the point where they are willing to do violence.

[00:39:27.630]

If we go back to The Turner Diaries from the 1970s, which Timothy McVeigh had a copy with him when he in Oklahoma City. What we see is it's not new, but it's been evolving in American society.

[00:39:40.110]

And I think we've now got a much worse physical condition in our society than that.

[00:39:45.310]

We have yet admitted Savar just build on that by analogizing to our as our understanding of al-Qaida Deepend and other extremist movements. We started to look at it through sort of a Venn diagram, three three circles on a page. The biggest circle, if they're moving, say, left or right, the biggest circle being those that sort of can can be broadly empathetic. I don't agree with their actions, but I get it. I understand. I know why they're angry.

[00:40:16.200]

The middle circle being those that are willing to donate to the cause, somehow support it and oftentimes through, you know, a third cut out charity, etc. But they kind of know where it end up. And then the for the final circle being those that are willing to take action. And it goes, you know, big, medium, very small. And I would for most of the fight against al-Qaida and others, the overlap between those three circles was very much on the fringe.

[00:40:42.900]

Right. Just a small overlap between broad empathy and and support. And then very few of those supporters actually willing to take action. What is scary now and I think social media has a huge negative role in this and they need to come to to account for that and talk about how they're going to change and work on the algorithms that drive those circles together. And the scene on the capital was a physical manifestation of those three circles overlapping. And you have you have the extremist action arm in the mix with, you know, an elder couple that drove from the middle of the country because they thought they they were being told this was an important action for them to take as good Americans.

[00:41:26.040]

And that's a frightening place to be. When those three overlap, you have a much deeper problem on your hands than you thought you did. So what do you think we should do now? I guess I guess let's before we jump into that, let's talk about the challenge, the immediate challenge that's before us, which is securing the inauguration and, you know, finally accomplishing a peaceful or semi peaceful transfer of power. What are your expectations for the next few days who are recording this on the Friday before the inauguration?

[00:41:58.350]

We will release this almost certainly a day or two before the inauguration. So many people will be hearing us before the the final shoe has dropped and just simply hoping that the inauguration is brought off without anything terrible happening. What are you guys thinking about and expecting at this point? Yes, ma'am. From experience, I would tell you, we need to lock it down, we need to prevent violence and we need to make it obvious to everybody that there is not an opportunity for violence.

[00:42:32.960]

And those who try to do it will be dealt with, maybe with deadly force immediately. We have to do that because my experience back from Afghanistan, interestingly, taught us that when there is violence in an area, whether coalition forces caused it or whether Taliban forces caused it, it created more

violence after it. It created an atmosphere where it just became easier for people to to be violent.

[00:42:59.750]

And so in the near term, what we've got to do is absolutely lock it down. We've got to go after the perpetrators from the last event. We've got to make it clear now that's not a long term solution. That doesn't solve the problem of radicalization. But what you can't do is let the idea that this is a, you know, a riot after a soccer match that can go on with drunk patrons doing it. You just can't let that keep going.

[00:43:26.210]

So what do you do with the the unhappy juxtaposition between our current security concerns and the again, it has a kind of a quasi religious status in our society, the primacy of the Second Amendment, such that in many places, I'm not sure where D.C. falls here. I would imagine the laws are stricter. But as you know, there there are threats or at least concerns around, you know, all 50 state capitals as well in the coming days. Many of these are states where, you know, open carry is legal.

[00:44:01.250]

I mean, it's legal to walk down the sidewalk with your AR 15 proudly displayed. The dysfunction of this seems fairly on ignorable, given our current situation. How do you view the gun rights issue and gun safety issue in the current climate? Well, to what we were talking about earlier, there's a we want to prevent the point of no return here and I say that from experience, it's the reason that a lot of military leaders that I've known and respect when they go into senior positions as civilians are the doves because they know look at a certain point this is going to get out of control.

[00:44:45.470]

And if you send in those that are that are designed to enact violence, it's going to get violent. And so let's expend all means before we get there. I don't think we're at that point yet, but we are we are dangerously close. And so to stand point, I think the immediate action is to make it obvious and uncomfortable for those that would want to show up armed, obviously, that you can't you can't do that in Washington, D.C. But in other states, if they feel that threat, they have to make it a physical presence obvious enough immediately to say this is this is going to be bad.

[00:45:18.530]

If you if you try to go down that road, it's it's going to be bad. But that's only one of multiple levers that have to be pulled. I think the the move that the big social media platforms any of us have made to push folks off of those platforms is the right one. I think they have to start diving into their their algorithms, as I mentioned earlier, to really stop aiding the coupling of these networks. And in some ways, that is a digital manifestation of that Physick make it physically difficult.

[00:45:52.920]

One of the. One of the things we had in combat zones like Iraq and Afghanistan, we referred to as T. Walsh, you may you may recognize them from pictures of battlefields in combat zones in urban areas.

[00:46:05.390]

And it's just to imagine a big concrete slab that looks like an upside down T, so we call them T walls. They're about six feet wide, 15 feet high.

[00:46:14.450]

And if there were two parts of the neighborhood that were just going to kill each other, no matter what all rationality had left the scene, you just ran a wall down the middle and you said now it's physically difficult for you, to you, to size the city, interact with each other. That's not respectful of your civil rights, that's not respectful of your freedom of maneuver. That is simply there to prevent you from killing each other, because we think you're completely irrational at this point.

[00:46:38.540]

And we have to do that in the cyberspace now, separate these groups out, make it really hard for them to connect and grow.

[00:46:44.990]

That will push the smarter, more sophisticated ones into deeper encrypted platforms, et cetera. We're already seeing. But that's a much harder task than following somebody, someone on Twitter or in a larger sort of public forum. And so that that is one step of many that have to take place in the cyber world, which is that in the physical world as well.

[00:47:05.150]

And the next 15 days, let's say, is critical to that, tamp it down aggressively locally, nationally, et cetera, because if we tip that next wire and we see suicide bombers, et cetera, the escalation of things we saw in the battlefield that we thought were unlikely, then the levers you have to pull get even more draconian.

[00:47:29.870]

And we don't want to see that. The problem I'm perceiving here, though, is that we have a kind of positive feedback loop, you know, otherwise known as a self-fulfilling prophecy, which you could see in miniature with something like, you know, the Branch Davidian and the siege at Waco. Right. So you have a group of people who are paranoid that the government will one day come in and subjugate them and in particular seize their guns.

[00:47:59.710]

And so they begin buying guns and ammo with abandon so as to prepare for that eventuality. And they're very preparations put them on the radar of the ATF and the FBI and so that the feds do come knocking out of concern that we have a crazy radicalized cult and a compound filled with children arming itself. And that very intrusion is viewed in is no surprise in the most sinister way as a perfect confirmation of prophecy. And it's just then it spiraled out of control from there.

[00:48:37.990]

And so everything you're proving that we have begun to do, you know, kicking people off of social media and trying to make it more difficult for those platforms to be a medium of radicalization that is being viewed as not only an expression of hostility to their cherished beliefs, which it is, but precisely the kind of Orwellian overreach that their paranoia is the antidote for. It's a confirmation of a worldview that we're seeing and it's so hard for people to pass this moment that people who are who are, you know, miles away from from this ideology, but who just have, you know, kind of basic, you know, libertarian attachments.

[00:49:25.810]

Right. You know, Silicon Valley billionaires are worried about the fact that Trump was kicked off Twitter, setting a bad precedent for free speech. Right. There are free speech. You know, the First Amendment has essentially been privatized, given just that, the overwhelming importance of having a digital town square where you can speak and if you start getting kicked off all the platforms, what does it even mean to say that we have a First Amendment? So there are literally billionaires who think we have already massively overreached in kicking Trump off Twitter and finding all the Kuhn accounts and closing those down as well.

[00:50:03.790]

And so it's there's a war of ideas here that has to be won. And it's I mean, we're still, you know, cleaning up the crime scene at the Capitol and we're all to my eye. We're already losing this war of ideas. Yes.

[00:50:16.530]

I'm the reason this is so hard for security forces or the government as well, cause it is because the aim of insurgence or opposition or terrorist forces is to get the government to overreact. It's to get the government to come in and do things that upset the population, which then drives people toward the insurgents. If we go back to April 1775, colonies gathered munitions west of Boston. The British, probably with a abundance of caution, wanted to go seize those munitions.

[00:50:51.340]

And of course, it produced Lexington and Concord with a lot of blood spilled and a hardening of positions on both sides. And it caused a tremendous number of people to join the revolutionary cause. You can't say that the British were completely wrong. They were trying to prevent the use of those munitions, but their actions do that. And this gets to the point of what needs to be done now, has to be done with a very deft hand. And that's what we found in Afghanistan and Iraq, because many of the things you may do, which makes sense from a very simplistic standpoint, to go get the bad guy or blow this up or to close this road, actually make the disease work.

[00:51:31.160]

And so it's got to be done as part of a holistic campaign. But you do have to stop the violence. If you don't stop the violence, the fire grows and it becomes uncontrollable. So you've got to simultaneously stop the violence. But you've also got to go after things like the information sources. You've got to provide a counter narrative that is, in fact, compelling. You've got to convince the average person that it is in their interest that peace and law and order be re-established.

[00:52:02.360]

But but it isn't easy. There isn't a single solution that works here. No silver bullet.

[00:52:08.270]

So let's again, let's move from the capital outward. What should be done on the basis of, you know, now the hours of footage we have of that crime, just how aggressively should people be prosecuted? What's the scope for, you know, forgiving more or less everyone who wasn't, you know, caught walking out with a lectern or some other trophy and saying, OK, you all of you see the multitudes get a mulligan here. We're just going to prosecute, you know, seventy five people or whatever it is.

[00:52:44.570]

Just how would you deal with with the aftermath of that specific event? Yeah, I think it has to be aggressive across the board, but I would expand my view on that to say, as should video of rioting in Seattle or pick your city like that, if you there are laws, laws are laws. And if you cross that, you should be held accountable for it. And so I don't isolate that. Just the capital. This is an extreme and front of mind case, but that we need to send the message right now that it won't be tolerated regardless of political spectrum, regardless of race, etc.

[00:53:25.200]

, if you are willing to be in that extreme. Action oriented edge of the bell curve, you will be held to account for it, that is the foundation of a nation based on law and order.

[00:53:37.390]

Well, then what do you do with the the messaging that really is the underlying cause of that radicalization? I mean, it seems to me inescapable that the claim in defiance of every procedure used to validate it, that the election was a fraud, that we've had, that Trump won in a landslide. And yet by virtue of incentives that simply do not exist, we had largely Republican election officials and secretaries of state and governors and judges collaborate with the Democrats to steal this election for Biden and a Supreme Court, the character of which has been largely determined by Trump himself, didn't help for their own diabolical reasons.

[00:54:28.600]

All of this is a vast conspiracy, and this messaging has come from either explicitly and implicitly, from literally hundreds of congressmen, some some congressmen and women whose own election was won on the very ballots they're claiming were fraudulent. Right. I mean, it's like this is it's a patently insane position to be arguing from if you're a member of Congress. And yet we still have people like Ted Cruz who have tied themselves to the mast of this sinking ship and seem to be content to disappear beneath the waves with their last words being that this election was stolen.

[00:55:11.140]

Right. So clearly, there's responsibility there. What do we do in the face of that? It's an interesting problem because we've never really held people to account for lying unless it was under oath for a legal issue and we've certainly not prosecuted people for stupidity or the prisons would be even more full.

[00:55:32.690]

So this is a unique period where I think we have got to hold people to account for their responsibility as elected officials. You like the election electoral process to do that, but the nature of gerrymandering and different areas doesn't make that possible. But I think that that may be the most difficult tasks we have to undertake here. How do we make it absolutely unacceptable to do something that is so cravenly opportunistic and incorrect and let people get away with that? But I want to pass it to Chris because there's an interesting longer term thought on this.

[00:56:12.280]

I think. Education of the population, I mean, that sounds sort of Pollyanna ish, but it has to be it has to be a deliberate effort moving forward. You're never going to debunk the you know, if I have a cosmic view, return to the golden era. I'm at that one percent left or right on the bell curve. You're just you're not going to change my mind. Right? I'm just I'm hardwired to think like that. When I think about us deepening our understanding of al-Qaida as an extremist network that was expanding very quickly, there was the temptation out of the gates to stand's earlier point to say this is a brain aneurysm and we need to cut it out.

[00:56:51.620]

And it took us a long time to recognize know this is this is diabetes and has been going on for decades. And we're just the latest chapter in the evolution. And there is that golden era extremist inside their network. But it's much bigger than that. Right. And so we had to study and understand so that we could radicalize folks that have gotten pulled into that, but have an appreciation for where it started from. And so with al-Qaida, you had to go all the way back to the post-colonial era and the rise of pan Arabism and the failure of Pan Arabism.

[00:57:26.000]

And under that very draconian, draconian rule of of Nasser in Egypt, the radicalization of the Muslim Brotherhood and Zawahiri, who goes on to be the thought leader in al-Qaida, bin Laden, they fight the Soviets on the back side of that, al-Qaida is created as a rational. I would disagree to it, but a rational argument saying we need a global army that can defend Muslim populations wherever they may be, and then the Gulf War happens and they're not invited to the fight.

[00:57:55.760]

The US is. And now we're in Saudi Arabia and his cause becomes we need to get the foreign invader out of the Holy Land. It's a rational argument, but somehow in a matter of then 10 or 15 years, both series events take place and al-Qaida turns into a death cult. Right. Zarqawi and other young leaders come in and say, like what you've done here. 9/11 was a great way to demonstrate to how many people we can kill around the world for this cause.

[00:58:26.990]

And you know what I'm going to do? I'm to start a civil war in Iraq between Sunni and Shia using the most barbaric violence we can come up with. And I think it's going to attract like minded sociopaths to this fight. But that was that was when we showed up and we wanted to see this this acute group of psychopaths. And it took me personally a while to recognize. Wait a second. They are the last chapter in a 60 year history.

[00:58:53.990]

And so if we don't understand and appreciate that, how can we possibly be radicalize the fringe of that hardcore inner cell? And we have to take the same approach here. We have to go back in our own history and say, look, this is there's a hundred, two hundred years of history as to why this group is willing, this middle circle is willing to show up and actually be part of the action.

[00:59:16.220]

How do we keep them from getting radicalized and becoming the next real violent threat? Who's willing to put their own life on the line?

[00:59:24.490]

I'm wondering, do you think there's anything Trump could say that could close Pandora's box here? I'm not suggesting that there's any chance he would say it, but if he got a proper firmware update to his brain and had a full mayor culpa here where he said, listen, guys, you know, I'm I'm a reality TV show star and I'm a bit of a con man and I've been lying all my life. And I'm sorry to say I was been lying about election fraud, too.

[00:59:52.160]

And there really is you know, it's there's every sign that Joe Biden really did win. I mean, I got the second most votes in American history. There's no doubt about that. I am great. But the truth is, I've just I fought long and hard for this and I probably fought a little too long. And I wish Joe Biden well and all of this Kuhn stuff. I'm not the guy who's who's going to save you from the pedophile cannibals, because as far as I know, there are no pedophile cannibals.

[01:00:17.270]

And I'm just going to go play golf. And I'm sorry I made such a mess here at the end, some four hour version of that with appropriate weeping. And you know that the prospect that he might commit seppuku at some point along the way, would that do any good or would that all just be wrapped up in yet another layer of conspiracy where obviously the lizard people got to our dear president and now we have to fight all the harder?

[01:00:43.490]

Sam, I have a feeling you must have been drinking early today to even entertain that thought. Here's what I think.

[01:00:49.590]

I don't think it would make one bit of difference. I think Donald Trump is a an obese New York developer with funny hair who has become a symbol. I don't think he's ever led this group. He got out with a tuning fork and he found out that it resonated with the existing frustration and fear in this group. And so he became a symbolic leader for them and he was convenient for them. In some ways they helped him. They they were something that gave him a base that caused other Republicans to fall in line.

[01:01:23.810]

But he was also very much useful to this group because now you had a persona that was relatively legitimate as the position of the president of the United States would be, who was saying things that added the. Intimacy to this radical movement, I think at this point, we're he to come out and give a discussion. I think they would simply say that aliens have come down and they've taken the beloved leader and he's no longer himself. And what we've got to hold true is to the ideas.

[01:01:55.910]

And they would continue to go their own way if he genuinely tried to change the direction of this movement now. I don't think he'd have any effect on it.

[01:02:06.150]

And and, you know, Sam, we saw something similar in in the relationship between bin Laden and Zarqawi, the first real violent actor in al-Qaida in Iraq, who was able to drive the movement. And, you know, you think Zarqawi would have been, you know, you're the great leader. What should I do next? And as we were just discussing, he went down a different path. We saw the correspondence back and forth and bin Laden tried to do that.

[01:02:33.860]

And it was the sorcerer's apprentice. You know, the buckets are running around now and you can't

control it.

[01:02:38.660]

And Zarqawi's response to bin Laden when bin Laden was sitting in his home office in Abbottabad saying, hey, you're cutting heads off, you're burning people in pits.

[01:02:48.080]

This is not the intent of the movement. We are here to fight the far enemy that's over there in the United States. That was the point of 9/11. And Zarqawi's response was essentially, come say that to my face. We are the new generation. We own this. And you're no longer relevant to what's happening on the battlefield. What about the relevance of what could happen to Trump, right? I mean, like what do you think should happen and what do you hope would happen in terms of just the optics of, you know, the kind of unraveling of his presidency or just how we move forward?

[01:03:21.110]

I mean, he's been impeached at the time. We're recording this, but there has not yet been a schedule of a trial in the in the Senate. It's almost certainly not going to happen before the inauguration. But, you know, whether there will be one has not been announced. Is there any emphatic and ignominious closure to his presidency that could make this whole collection of of ideas less attractive to people? Or do you think it's uncoupled from from anything that's going to happen in that space as well?

[01:03:56.270]

Yes, Sam, I think the answers on two different levels on the level of the groups that have been radicalized, Trump has already been martyred. Trump is now somebody who's had the job stolen from him. So he serves their purpose now, almost as though he no longer is alive. And so he is going to become this symbol in this idea. I do think, however, holding him to account, while it will give a little bit of fodder to those groups, is very important for the other opportunist politicians.

[01:04:28.160]

I think what we've got to do is make it very clear that his kind of behavior, the dishonesty that we've seen, the leveraging of radical ideas and whatnot for his own purposes doesn't pay. And so I think there's a generation of existing and up and coming political leaders who need that lesson and they need to see it very clearly.

[01:04:51.650]

Do you guys have a sense of of how the military in aggregate views this situation? Traditionally, I have assumed I'm sure there's polling on this, that the military has skewed Republican and and has been I'm sure it was sympathetic to Trump up until a certain point. And I'm just wondering if where you think we are with respect to the perception of the military around what has been happening.

[01:05:19.220]

So based on my own experiences in the service there, inevitably there's going to be reports about this Army sergeant, this special operator, ET with a Kuhn account or who was in the mix in the Capitol protest that just the law of averages tell us that will happen. But it's important to remember a few things that our military, as it stands, which makes it unique around the world, is it's a cross section of our our society. So you have a cross-section of opinions.

[01:05:48.710]

It skews conservative historically.

[01:05:51.770]

That's where a lot of the support for the military comes from and the economic support for growth of the military. So a lot of that is understandable.

[01:05:59.750]

But I don't think we should get distracted when those stories come up that says that's what the military thinks. I get those questions all the time, as does Dan. What does it what does the military



think about that decision like? Well, I don't know. The military is it is it a person? The military is a range of people. So you'd have to ask a lot of them to get a sense, just like you would in the general population.

[01:06:20.030]

I think the the amazing thing about the US military is and the most beautiful thing about it is that it doesn't have a collective opinion. It will do what it is asked to do and its leaders will come back. And, you know, if we're talking about just normal international affairs and say, here's the risk calculus on that, here's the range of your options, here's what it will cost. Here's how long it will take. Does this meet the intended end state of our civilian elected officials?

[01:06:49.640]

I learned the most about the relationship and that the respect for civilian authority that the military needs to have from the senior military leaders I worked for when I was in the service. It takes you a while to get senior enough to understand there's a relationship between four star generals and admirals and civilian elected officials, even though that elected official might be, you know, thirty three years old. There's a demeanor to differentiation to the civilian side of the Constitution. And the military will be the first to stand up and say that's that's the absolute point.

[01:07:25.190]

So it is at its best and collectively very unbiased in that view. And so I think the biggest risk is we'll get distracted by the story of the former special operator that was somewhere in the mix and take that as representative of the the broad military.

[01:07:40.790]

In recent days, there has been obvious concern around what Trump may yet do in his remaining days in office, and I think it's been reported that there was a a phone call from Nancy Pelosi to someone in the Pentagon trying to seek out some assurance that the nuclear football is not quite as available to Trump as it might have been during the rest of his time as president. I wonder if this is the the moment that we ran into at the end of the Nixon administration when he was drinking a lot and I forget who it was.

[01:08:17.740]

I might have been his secretary of state. Someone said, if you get any calls from the president in the middle of the night about initiating a nuclear first strike on anyone, come to me first. Right. And I'm wondering what you think the posture is of the military in this last week of Trump's term with respect to any orders that might come from the the White House to engage anything of substance militarily?

[01:08:49.450]

I would say, Sam, that they are thoughtful. I would say they are always thoughtful. You know, whatever you're going to use military power. If it was something as extreme as launching nuclear weapons, they're going to be extraordinarily careful as they always are. I think that the conversation between the speaker of the House and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs was no doubt substantive, but it was also made public. And I think it was made public for a reason that people wanted to know that that conversation had occurred.

[01:09:23.990]

And so I think that there is a always a concern for a decision which might be made in haste or in anger by any leader. But I think that now we are close enough to the end of President Trump's administration that. People are more thoughtful than ever, and so maybe not Donald Trump, but certainly the people around him are more thoughtful than ever. So I don't think the danger of that is one of the higher risks right now. So if you guys were advising the Biden administration, what should their priorities be in the first 100 days, given what's happened?

[01:10:07.900]

Let's assume the inauguration comes off without a hitch. And obviously, you know, he's got massive challenges. Responding to covid, responding to the economic unraveling born of covid, dealing with

an increasingly aggressive China, restoring our stature in the world with respect to foreign policy. Generally, he's got a lot to do. But he but it seems to me that there's some post-mortem on this great unraveling we've experienced in recent months, you know, around the election fraud and just having half of a society believe that their government has been stolen from them.

[01:10:49.620]

This requires some tending to what do you what would you advise? Sam, I'll beat the drum that I've been beating for nearly 20 years now, which I watched happen in in the counterterrorism community really under McChrystal's leadership and then generations beyond. Now, I worked underneath a generation of leaders who were willing.

[01:11:11.900]

They came into a fight when it literally looked like sort of all is lost. Right. We're not going to be able to beat al-Qaida, just overwhelming odds and looking at the brink for the force. Right. And we're in a similar state right now. If I was in that incoming administration, you know, things look pretty bleak every direction you you observe.

[01:11:33.410]

And so. There was a recognition at that time in the military, we need to start doing things differently. We need to communicate in a completely different fashion with honesty, with transparency. Don't show me what the org chart looks like. Don't show me case studies of how we did in the 90s. We're going to rebuild this thing on on the fly because we're losing because we are in a lot of trouble.

[01:11:56.140]

And I watched McChrystal and others put themselves at the center of that and communicate with forces, civilians, host nation allies all around the world on a 24/7 cycle for years on end. Now, I wouldn't put the president in that, but his team needs to start thinking like that. Who are the people that need to be at the table and how do we get honest information into that mix so that we're all having a dialogue about how we solve these problems?

[01:12:25.390]

What the president can do is enter into that mix and reintroduce ideas of honesty and competency and fundamentals of what it means to be a servant leader. That's a process, plus a cultural change that was critical for us. And I think it's absolutely what is needed right now, a focused inter-agency whole of government. Effort that breaks a lot of rules, don't tell me you can't share in that information. Don't tell me you work for that person. But we are all Americans right now and we need to lean into that.

[01:12:59.560]

And the president can set the tone.

[01:13:01.720]

It's nothing if not interesting. There is a lot of blue sky. If you want to reinvent civilization at this point and we'll get to a place where we're doing things differently and better and cutting through just bad assumptions that have led us to the place where we're digging out from. So I I'm certainly no one has ever accused me of being an optimist. But I you know, I have my moments. But it will be it'll be quite a relief to get to the other side of the Trump administration and see something like a resurgence of competence and professionalism and civility.

[01:13:38.680]

And, you know, all of it, all of the qualities you just you just enumerated. Chris, it's I want to thank you both for taking the time to help educate me and my audience on the kinds of things we should be thinking about and looking for going forward.

[01:13:52.660]

Absolutely. Our pleasure, Sam. Thanks for having us. Great discussion, Sam. Thanks. Thanks for trying to get the message out there. But.

