

Lex Fridman Podcast #414 - Tucker Carlson: Putin, Navalny, Trump, CIA, NSA, War,

Politics & Freedom

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Lex Fridman

The following is a conversation with Tucker Carlson, a highly influential and often controversial political commentator. When he was at Fox, Time Magazine called him "The Most Powerful Conservative in America". After Fox, he has continued to host big, impactful interviews and shows on X, on The Tucker Carlson Podcast, and on tuckercarlson.com. I recommend subscribing even if you disagree with his views. It is always good to explore a diversity of perspectives. Most recently, he interviewed the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin. We discussed this, the topic of Russia, Putin, Navalny, and the war in Ukraine at length in this conversation. Please allow me to say a few words about the very fact that I did this interview. I have received a lot of criticism publicly and privately when I announced that I'll be talking with Tucker. For people who think I shouldn't do the conversation with Tucker or generally think that there are certain people I should never talk to, I'm sorry but I disagree. I will talk to everyone as long as they're willing to talk genuinely in long-form for 2, 3, 4 or more hours. I'll talk to Putin and to Zelenskyy - to Trump and to Biden - to Tucker and to John Stewart, AOC, Obama - and many more people with very different views on the world. I want to understand people and ideas. That's what long-form conversations are supposed to be all about. Now for people who criticize me for not asking tough questions, I hear you. But again, I disagree. I do often ask tough questions. But I try to do it in a way that doesn't shut down the other person - putting them into a defensive state where they give only shallow talking points. Instead, I'm looking always for the expression of genuinely held ideas and the deep roots of those ideas. When done well, this gives us a chance to really hear out the guest and to begin to understand what and how they think. And I trust the intelligence of you, the listener, to make up your own mind - to see through the bullshit - to the degree there's bullshit - and to see to the heart of the person. Sometimes I fail at this, but I'll continue working my ass off to improve. All that said, I find that this "no tough questions" criticism often happens when the guest is a person the listener simply hates and wants to see them grilled into embarrassment - called "a liar", "a greedy egomaniac", "a killer" - maybe even "an evil human being" and so on. If you are such a listener, what you want is drama - not wisdom. In this case, this show is not for you. There are many shows you can go to for that - with hosts that are way more charismatic and entertaining than I'll ever be. If you do stick around, please know I will work hard to do this well and to keep improving. Thank you for your patience and thank you for your support. I love you all. This is the Lex Fridman Podcast. To support it, please check out our sponsors in the description. And now, dear friends, here's Tucker Carlson. What was your first impression when you met Vladimir Putin for the interview?

Tucker Carlson

I thought he seemed nervous and I was very surprised by that. And I thought he seemed like someone who'd overthought it a little bit - who had a plan - and I don't think that's the right way to go into any interview. My strong sense, having done a lot of them for a long time, is that it's better to know what you think - to say - you know - as much as you can honestly, so you don't get confused by your own lies - and just to be yourself. And I thought that he went

into it like an overprepared student and I'm - and I kept thinking, "Why is he - why is he nervous?" But, you know - I guess because he thought a lot of people were going to see it,

Lex Fridman

But he was also probably prepared to - to give you a full lesson in history as he did.

Tucker Carlson

Well, I was totally shocked by that and very annoyed because I thought he was filibustering. I mean - I asked him as I usually do the most obvious dumbest question ever, which is, "Why'd you do this?" And he had said in a speech that I think is worth reading. I don't speak Russian, so I haven't heard it in the original, but he had said at the moment of the beginning of the war, he had given this address to Russians, in which he explained to the fullest extent we have seen so far why he was doing this. And he said in that speech, "I fear that NATO the West, the United States, the Biden administration will preemptively attack us." And I thought, "Well, that's interesting." I can't evaluate whether that's a fear rooted in reality or one rooted in paranoia. But I thought, "Well, that's an answer right there." And so I alluded to that in my question and rather than answering it, he went off on this long from my perspective, kind of tiresome, sort of greatest hits of Russian history. And the implication I thought was, "Well, Ukraine is ours, or Eastern Ukraine is ours already." And I thought he was doing that to avoid answering the question. So the last thing you want when you're interviewing someone is to get rolled, and I didn't want to be rolled. So I, a couple of times interrupted him politely, I thought, but he wasn't having it. And then I thought, "You know what? I'm not here to prove that I'm a great interviewer. It's kind of not about me." I want to know who this guy is. I think a western audience, a global audience, has a right to know more about the guy, and so just let him talk. Because I don't feel like my reputation's on the line. People have already drawn conclusions about me, I suppose to the extent they have. I'm not interested really in those conclusions anyway, so just let him talk. And so I calmed down and just let him talk. And in retrospect, I thought that was really, really interesting. Whether you agree with it or not - or whether you think it's relevant to the war in Ukraine or not - that was his answer. And so, it's inherently significant.

Lex Fridman

Well, you said he was nervous. Were you nervous? Were you afraid? This is Vladimir Putin.

Tucker Carlson

I wasn't afraid at all and I wasn't nervous at all.

Lex Fridman

Did you drink tea beforehand?

Tucker Carlson

No. I did my normal regimen of nicotine pouches and coffee. No, I'm not a tea drinker. I try not to eat all the sweets they put in front of us, which is - that is my weakness - is eating crap. But you eat a lot of sugar as you know before an interview, and it does dull you. So I successfully resisted that. But no, I wasn't nervous. I wasn't nervous the whole time I was there. Why would I be? I'm 54, my kids are grown. I believe in God. I'm almost never nervous. But no, I wasn't nervous, I was just interested. I mean - I'm interested in Soviet history. I studied it in college. I've read about it my entire life. My dad worked in the Cold War. It was a constant topic of conversation. And so to be in the Kremlin in a room where Stalin made decisions, either wartime decisions or decisions about murdering his own population, I just couldn't get over it. We were in Molotov's old office. So for me, I was just blown away by that. I thought I knew a lot about Russia. It turns out I knew a lot about the Soviet period, the 1937 purge trials, the famine in Ukraine. I knew a fair amount about that, but I really knew nothing about contemporary Russia, less than I thought I did, it turned out. But yeah, I was just blown away by where we were, and that's kind of one of the main drivers at this stage in my life. That's why I do what I do, is because I'm interested in stuff and I want to see as much as I can and try and draw conclusions from it to the extent I can. So I was very much caught up in that. But no, I wasn't nervous. I didn't think he was going to kill me or something, and I'm not particularly afraid of that anyway.

Lex Fridman

Not afraid of dying?

Tucker Carlson

Not really, no. I mean - again, it's an age and stage in life thing. I mean - I have four children, so there were times when they were little where I was terrified of dying because if I died, it would have huge consequences. But no, I mean - at this point, I don't want to die. I'm really enjoying my life. But I've been with the same girl for 40 years, and I have four children who I'm extremely close to. Well, now five, a daughter-in-law, and I love them all. I'm really close to them. I tell them I love them every day. I've had a really interesting life.

Lex Fridman

What was the goal? Just linger on that. What was the goal for the interview? How were you thinking about it? What would success be like in your head leading into it?

Tucker Carlson

To bring more information, to the public.

Lex Fridman

Disinformation.

Tucker Carlson

Yeah, that's it. I mean - I have really strong feelings about what's happening not just in Ukraine or Russia, but around the world. I think the world is resetting to the grave disadvantage of the United States. I don't think most Americans are aware of that at all. And so that's my view, and I've stated it many times because it's sincere. But my goal was to have more information brought to the West so people could make their own decisions about whether this is a good idea. I mean - I guess I reject the whole premise of the war in Ukraine from the American perspective, which is a tiny group of dumb people in Washington has decided to do this for reasons they won't really explain. And you don't have a role in it at all as an American citizen, as the person who's paying for it, whose children might be drafted to fight it. To shut up and obey, I just reject that completely. I think, I guess I'm a child of a different era. I'm a child of participatory democracy to some extent, where your opinion as a citizen is not irrelevant. And I guess the level of lying about it was starting to drive me crazy. And I've said, and I will say again, I'm not an expert on the regional, really any region other than say western Maine. I just don't, I'm not Russian, but it was obvious to me that we were being lied to in ways that were just - it was crazy - the scale of lies. And I'll just give you one example. The idea that Ukraine would inevitably win this war. Now victory was never, as it never is, defined precisely. Nothing's ever defined precisely, which is always to tell that there's deception at the heart of the claim. But Ukraine's on the verge of winning. Well, I don't know. I mean - I'm hardly a tactician or military expert. For the fifth time, I'm not an expert on Russia or Ukraine. I just looked at Wikipedia. Russia has a hundred million more people than Ukraine, a hundred million. It has much deeper industrial capacity, war material capacity than all of NATO combined. For example, Russia is turning out artillery shells, which are significant in a ground war at a ratio of seven to one compared to all NATO countries combined. That's all of Europe. Russia is producing seven times the artillery shells as all of Europe combined. What? That's an amazing fact, and it turns out to be a really significant fact. In fact, the significant fact. But if you ask your average person in this country, even a fairly well-informed person of good faith who's just trying to understand what's going on, who's going to win this war? Well, Ukraine's going to win. They're on the right side. And they think that because our media who really just do serve the interest of the US government, period, they are state media in that sense, have told them that for over two years. And I was in Hungary last summer talking to the Prime Minister, Viktor Orban, who's whatever you think of him, he's a very smart guy, very smart guy, smart on a scale that we're not used to in our leaders. And I said to him, off camera, "So is Ukraine going to win?" And he looked at me like I was deranged or I was congenitally deficient. Are they going to win? No. Of course they can't win. It's tiny compared to Russia. Russia has a wartime economy. Ukraine doesn't really have an economy. No, look at the populations. He looked at me like I was stupid. And I said to him, "I think most Americans believe that because NBC News and CNN and all the news channels, all of them tell them that because it's framed exclusively in moral terms, and it's Churchill versus Hitler. And of course, Churchill's going to prevail in the end." And it's just so dishonest that it doesn't even matter what I want to happen or what I think ought to happen, that's a distortion of what is happening. And if I have any job at all,

which I sort of don't actually at this point, but if I do have a job, it's to just try to be honest, and that's a lie.

Lex Fridman

There is a more nuanced discussion about what winning might look like. You're right a nuanced discussion is not being had, but it is possible for Ukraine to, quote unquote, "win" with the help of the United States.

Tucker Carlson

I guess that conversation needs to begin by defining terms. And the key term is win. What does that mean?

Lex Fridman

Peace, a ceasefire, who owns which land, coming to the table with, as you call the parent in the United States, putting leverage on the negotiation to make sure there's a fairness.

Tucker Carlson

Amen. Well, of course, as A, and I should just restate this, I am not emotionally involved in this. I'm American in every sense, and my only interest is in America. I'm not leaving ever. And so I'm looking at this purely from our perspective, what's good for us. But also as a human being - as a Christian - I mean - I hate war. And anybody who doesn't hate war shouldn't have power, in my opinion. So I agree with that definition vehemently a victory is not killing an entire generation of your population. It's not being completely destroyed to be eaten up by BlackRock or whatever comes next for them. So yeah, we were close to that a year and a half ago, and the Biden administration dispatched Boris Johnson, the briefly prime minister of the UK to stop it and to say to Zelenskyy, who I feel sorry for by the way, because he's caught between these forces that are bigger than he is, to say, "No, you cannot come to any terms with Russia." And the result of that has not been a Ukrainian victory. It's just been more dead Ukrainians and a lot of profit for the West. It's a moral crime in my opinion. And I tried to ask Boris Johnson about it because why wouldn't I? After he denounced me as a tool of the Kremlin or something, and he demanded a million dollars to talk to me. And this just happened last week. And by the way, in writing too, I'm not making this -

Lex Fridman

Just for the record, you demanded a million dollars from me to talk to me today.

Tucker Carlson

I didn't. And you paid. No, I'm of course kidding. And I said to his guy, I said, "I just interviewed Putin who was widely recognized as a bad guy." And he did it for free. He didn't demand a million dollars. He wasn't in this for profit. Are you telling me that Boris Johnson is sleazier than Vladimir Putin? And of course, that is the message. And so I guess these are

really – it's not just about Boris Johnson being a sad rapacious fraud, which he is obviously, but it's about the future of the West and the future of Ukraine, this country that purportedly we care so much about. All these people are dying, and what is the end game? It's also deranged that I didn't imagine, and don't imagine that I could add anything very meaningful to the conversation because I'm not a genius. But I felt like I could at the very least, puncture some of the lies, and that's an inherent good.

Lex Fridman

Vladimir Putin, after the interview said that he wasn't fully satisfied because you weren't aggressive enough. You didn't ask sharp enough questions. First of all, what do you think about him saying that?

Tucker Carlson

I don't even understand it. I guess it does seem like the one Putin statement that Western media take at face value. Everything else Putin says is a lie except his criticism of me, which is true. But I mean – I have no idea what he meant by that. I can only tell you what my goal was, as I've suggested, was not to make it about me. He hasn't done any interviews of any kind for years, but the last interview he did with an English-speaking reporter, Western media reporter, was like many of the other interviews he'd done with Western media reporters. Mike Wallace's son did an interview with him that was of the same variety. And it was all about him. I'm a good person. You're a bad person. And I just feel like that's the most tiresome, fruitless kind of interview. It's not about me. I don't think I'm an especially good person. I've definitely never claimed to be, but people can make their own judgments. And again, the only judgments that I care about are my wife and children and God. So I'm just not interested in proving I'm a good person and I just want to hear from him. And I had a lot of – I mean – you should see. I almost never write questions down, but I did in this case because I had months – well, I had three years to think about it as I was trying to book the interview – which I did myself. But it was all about internal Russian politics and Navalny. And I had a lot of, what I thought, really good questions. And then at the last second, and you make these decisions, as you know, since you interview people a lot, often you make them on the fly. And I thought, "No, I want to talk about the things that haven't been talked about and that I think matter in a world historic sense." And the number one among those, of course, is the war and what it means for the world. And so I stuck to that. I mean – I did ask about Gershkovich – who I felt sorry for – and I wanted Putin to release him to me. And I was offended that he didn't. I thought his rationale was absurd. "Well, we want to trade him for someone." I said, "Well, doesn't that make him a hostage?" Which of course it does. But other than that, I really wanted to keep it to the things that I think matter most. People can judge whether I did a good job or not, but that was my decision.

Lex Fridman

In the moment, what was your gut? Did you want to ask some tough questions as follow-ups on certain topics?

Tucker Carlson

I don't know what it would mean to ask a tough question.

Lex Fridman

Clarifying questions, I suppose they would -

Tucker Carlson

I guess. I just wanted him to talk. I just wanted to hear his perspective again. I've probably asked more asshole questions than any living American. As has been noted correctly, I'm a dick by my nature, and so I just feel at this stage of my life, I didn't need to prove that I could be like, "Vladimir Putin, answer the question."

Lex Fridman

For sure. For sure.

Tucker Carlson

I think if I had been 34 instead of 54, I definitely would've done that because I would've thought, "This is really about me and I need to prove myself and all that stuff." No, there's a war going on that is wrecking the US economy in a way and at a scale people do not understand. The US dollar is going away. That was, of course, inevitable ultimately because everything dies, including currencies. But that death, that process of death has been accelerated exponentially by the behavior of the Biden administration and the US Congress, particularly the sanctions. And people don't understand what the ramifications of that are. The ramifications are poverty in the United States. So I just wanted to get to that because I'm coming at this from not a global perspective. I'm coming at it from an American perspective.

Lex Fridman

So you mentioned Navalny. After you left, Navalny died in prison. What are your thoughts on just at a high level, first about his death?

Tucker Carlson

Well, it's awful. I mean - imagine dying in prison. I've thought about it a lot. I've known a lot of people in prison a lot, including some very good friends of mine. So I felt instantly sad about it. From a geopolitical perspective, I don't know any more than that. And I laugh at and sort of resent, but mostly find amusing the claims by American politicians, who really are the dumbest politicians in the world actually, "This happened and here's what it means." And it's like, "Actually as a factual matter, we don't know what happened. We don't know what happened." We have no freaking idea what happened. We can say, and I did say, and I will say again, I don't think you should put opposition figures in prison. I really don't. I don't, period. It happens a lot around the world, happens in this country, as you know, and I'm against all of it. But do we know how we died? The short answer? No, we don't. Now, if I had to guess, I

would say killing Navalny during the Munich Security Conference in the middle of a debate over \$60 billion in Ukraine funding, maybe the Russians are dumb. I didn't get that vibe at all. I don't see it. But maybe they killed him. I mean - they certainly put him in prison, which I'm against. But here's what I do know is that we don't know. And so when Chuck Schumer stands up and, "Aaaah!". Joe Biden reads some card in front of him with lines about Navalny, it's like, I'm allowed to laugh at that because it's absurd. You don't know.

Lex Fridman

There's a lot of interesting ideas about if he was killed, who killed him, because it could be Putin, it could be somebody in Russia who's not Putin. It could be Ukrainians because it would benefit the war.

Tucker Carlson

They killed Dugan's daughter in Moscow. So yeah, that's possible.

Lex Fridman

And it could be - I mean - the United States could also be involved.

Tucker Carlson

I don't think we kill people in other countries to affect election outcomes. Oh, wait, no, we do it a lot and have for 80 years, and it's shameful. I can say that as an American because it's my money and my name. Yeah, I'm really offended by that. And I never thought that was true. And again, I'm much older than you, and so I spent, my worldview was defined by the Cold War and very much in the house I lived in Georgetown, Washington DC. That's what we talked about. And the left at the time, I don't know, the wacko MIT professor who I never had any respect for, who I know you've interviewed, et cetera. The hard left was always saying, "Well, the United States government is interfering in other elections." And I just dismissed that completely out of hand as stupid and actually a slander against my country, but it turned out to all be true or substantially true anyway. And that's been a real shock for me in middle age to understand that. But anyway, as to Navalny, look, I don't know. But we should always proceed on the basis of what we do know, which is to say on the basis of truth, knowable truth. And if you have an entire policymaking apparatus that is making the biggest decisions on the face of the planet, on the basis of things that are bullshit or lies, you're going to get bad outcomes every time, every time. And that's why we are where we are.

Lex Fridman

Does it bother you that basically the most famous opposition figure in Russia is sitting in prison?

Tucker Carlson

Well, of course it does. Of course it bothers me. I mean - it bothered me when I got there. It bothers me now. I was sad when he died. Yeah, I mean - that's one of the measures - it's one

of the basic measures of political freedom. Are you imprisoning people who oppose you? Are you imprisoning people who pose a physical risk to you? I mean - there are some subjective decision-making involved in these things. However, big picture, yeah. Do you have leaders in jail? It's not a politically free society, and Russia isn't, obviously. And as I said, a friend of mine from childhood, an American actually was a wonderful person, lives in Russia, in Moscow, with his Russian wife, and I had dinner with him. He's a very balanced guy, totally non-political person, and speaks Russian and loves his many Russian children and loves the culture. And there's a lot to love, the culture that produced Tolstoy. It's not a gas station with nuclear weapons. Sorry. Only a moron would say that. It's a very deep culture. I don't fully understand it, of course, but I admire it. Who wouldn't? But I asked him, "What's it like living here?" And he goes, "It's great. Moscow is a great city indisputably." He said, "You don't want to get involved in Russian politics." And I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, you could get hurt. You could wind up like Navalny if you did. But also, it's just too complicated." The Russian mind is not exactly the same - it's Western. It's a European city, but it's not quite European. And the way they think is very, very complex - very complex. It's too complicated. Just don't get involved. And I would just say two things. One, I'm not sure. I mean - I don't know, but my strong sense is that Navalny's death - whoever did it - probably didn't have a lot to do with the coming election in Russia. My sense from talking to Putin and the people around him is they're not really focused on that. In fact, I asked one of his top advisors, "When's the election?" And she looked at me completely confused. She didn't know the date of the election, okay? She's like, "March". And I asked a bunch of other people - just in Moscow - "Who's Putin running against?" Nobody knew. So, it's not a real election in the sense that we would recognize at all. Second, I was really struck by so many things in Moscow and really deeply bothered by a lot of things that I saw there. But one thing I noticed was the total absence of cult of personality propaganda, which I expected to see and have seen around the world. Jordan, for example, I don't know if you've been to Jordan, but go to Jordan. In every building, there are pictures of the king and his extended family, and that's a sign of political insecurity. You don't create a cult of personality unless you're personally insecure. And also, unless you're worried about losing your grip and power. None of that. It's interesting. And I expected to see a lot of it, like statues of Putin. No. There are no statues of anybody other than Christian saints. I'm not quite sure. I'm just reporting what I saw. So yes, in a political sense. It's not a free country. It's not a democracy in the way that we would understand it or I don't want to live there because I like to say what I think. In fact, I make my living doing it. But it's not Stalinist in a recognizable way. And anyone who says it is should go there and tell me how.

Lex Fridman

I mean - this question about the freedom of the press is underlying the very fact of the interview you're having with him. So you might not need to ask the Navalny question, but did you feel like, "Are there things I shouldn't say?"

Tucker Carlson

I mean - how honest do you want me to be? I mean - when I say I felt not one twinge of concern for the eight days that I was there. Maybe I just didn't - and I feel like I've got a pretty strong gut sense of things. I rely on it. I make all my decisions based on how I feel, my instincts. And I didn't feel it at all. My lawyers before I left, and these are people who work for a big law firm. This is not Bob's law firm. This is one of the biggest law firms in the world, said, "You're going to get arrested if you do this by the US government on sanctions violations." And I said, "Well, I don't recognize the legitimacy of that actually, because I'm American and I've lived here my whole life. And that's so outrageous that I'm happy to face that risk because I so reject the premise, okay? I'm an American. I should be able to talk to anyone I want to, and I plan to exercise that freedom, which I think I was born with." And I gave them this long lecture. They're like, "We're just lawyers." But that was - let me put it this way, I don't know how much you've dealt with lawyers, but it costs many thousands of dollars to get a conclusion like that. They sent a whole bunch of their summer associates or whatever. They put a lot of people on this question, checked a lot of precedent, and they sent me a 10-page memo on it, and their sincere conclusion was, "Do not do this." And of course, it made me mad. So I was lecturing on the phone and I had another call with a head lawyer and he said, "Well, look, a lot will depend on the questions that you ask Putin. If you're seen as too nice to him, you could get arrested when you come back." And I was like, "You're describing a fascist country, okay? You're saying that the US government will arrest me if I don't ask the questions they want asked? Is that what's you're saying?" "Well, we just think based on what's happened, that that's possible." And so, I'm just telling you what happened.

Lex Fridman

So you were okay being arrested in Moscow and arrested back in -

Tucker Carlson

I didn't think for a second - I mean - maybe. Look, I don't speak Russian. I'd never been there before. Everything about the culture was brand new to me. Ignorance does protect you sort of when you have no freaking idea what's going on, you're not worried about it. This has happened to me many times. There's a principle there that extends throughout life. So it's completely possible that I was in grave peril and didn't know it because how would I know it? I'm like a bumbling English speaker from California, but I didn't feel it at all.

Lex Fridman

But the lawyers did.

Tucker Carlson

Yeah. I mean - it scared the crap out of people. You're going to look - and you have to pay in cash. They don't take credit cards because of sanctions. And you have to go through all these hoops, just procedural hoops to go to Russia, which I was willing to do because I wanted to interview Putin because they told me I couldn't. But then there's another fact,

which is that I was being surveilled by the US government, intensely surveilled by the US government. And this came out, they admitted it, the NSA admitted it a couple of years ago that they were up in my signal account, and then they leaked it to the New York Times. They did that again before I left. And I know that because two New York Times reporters, one of whom I actually like a lot, said and called other people. "Oh, he's going to interview Putin." I hadn't told anybody that, like anybody. My wife, two producers, that's it. So they got that from the government. Then I'm over there, and of course I want to see Snowden, who I admire. And so we have a mutual friend. So I got his text and come on over, and Snowden does not want publicity at all. But I really wanted to have dinner with him. So we had dinner in my hotel room at the Four Seasons in Moscow, and I tried to convince him, "I'd love to do an interview, shoot it on my iPhone." I'd - just do an interview, shoot it on my iPhone. I'd love to take a picture together and put it on the internet because I just want to show support because I think he's been railroaded. He had no interest in living in Russia, no intention of being in Russia. The whole thing is a lie. But anyway, whatever, all this stuff. He just said, "Respectfully, I'd rather not anyone know that we met." Great. I didn't tell anybody and I didn't text it to anybody, okay, except him. Semaphore runs this piece reporting information they got from the US Intel agencies leaking against me using my money, in my name, in a supposedly free country, they run this piece saying I'd met with Snowden like it was a crime or something. So again, my interest is in the United States and preserving freedoms here, the ones that I grew up with. If you have a media establishment that acts as an auxiliary of, or acts as employees of the national security state, you don't have a free country and that's where we are. I'm not guessing, because I spent my entire life in that world, 33 years, I worked in big news companies and so I know how it works. I know the people involved in it. I could name them, Ben Smith of Semaphore, among many others and I find that really objectionable, not just on principle either, in effect, in practice, I don't want to live in that kind of country. People externalize all of their anxiety about this I have noticed. So it's like Russia is not free. Yeah, I know. Neither is Burkina Faso, most countries aren't free actually, but we are. We're the United States. We're different. That's my concern. Preserving that is my concern. They get so exercised about what's happening in other parts of the world, places they've never been, know nothing about, it's almost a way of ignoring what's happening in their own country right around them. I find it so strange and sad and weird.

Lex Fridman

So the NSA was tracking you? Do you think CIA was? Is people still tracking you?

Tucker Carlson

Look, one of the things I did before I went, just because the business I'm in, all of us are in, and just because we live here, we all have theories about secure communications channels. Like signal is secure, Telegraph isn't, or WhatsApp is owned by Mark Zuckerberg, you can't trust, well, okay. So I thought before I go over here, we were having all these conversations, my producers and I about this, and I decide I'm just going to actually find out what's really going on. I talked to two people who would know, trust me, and it's all I can say. I hate to be

like, oh, I talked to people who would know but I can't share who. But I mean it, they would know. Both of them said exactly the same thing, which is, "Are you joking, nothing is secure. Everything is monitored all the time." If state actors are involved, you can keep whatever the Malaysian mafia from reading your texts probably. You cannot keep the big Intel services from reading your texts, it's not possible, any of them, or listening to your calls. That was the firm conclusion of people who've been involved in it for a long time, decades, in both cases. I just thought, "You know what? I don't care. I don't care. I'm not sending a ton of naked pictures of myself to anybody."

Lex Fridman

Not a ton. Just a little?

Tucker Carlson

Not a ton. I'm 54, dude - probably not too many. The guys travel with three people I work with - who I love - who I've been around the world with for many years - and I know them really, really well and they all got separate phones - and I'm leaving my other phone back in New York or whatever. I just decided I don't care - actually. I resent having no privacy because privacy is a prerequisite for freedom, but I can't change it. And so, I have the same surveilled cell phone. I do switch them out. There it is. Because if you have too much spyware on your phone, this is true, it wrecks the battery. No, I'm serious. It does. It was, I don't know, five or six years ago we went to North Korea, and my phone started acting crazy. I talked to someone on the National Security Council, actually who called me about this, somehow knew that your phone is being surveilled by the South Korean government. I was like, "I like the South Korean government. Why would they do that?" Because they want more information, they thought I was talking to Trump or whatever. But I could tell because all of a sudden the thing would just drain in like 45 minutes so that's a downside.

Lex Fridman

You keep switching phones, getting new phones for the battery life. That's good.

Tucker Carlson

Yeah. I try not to do it. I'm kind of flinty Yankee type in some ways, so I don't like to spend \$1,000 with the freaking Apple corporation too often, but yeah, I do.

Lex Fridman

You say it lightly, but it's really troublesome that you, as a journalist, would be tracked.

Tucker Carlson

Well, they leaked it to Semaphore and they leaked it to the New York Times. Well, there's nothing I can do, so I have to put up with everything, but I would probably not be actively angry about being surveilled because I'm just so old and I actually do pay my taxes, and I'm not sleeping with the makeup artist or whatever so I don't care that much. The fact that they

are leaking against me, that the Intel services in the United States are actively engaged in US politics and media, that's so unacceptable. That makes democracy impossible. There's no defense of that. And yet NBC News, Ken Dilanian and the rest will defend it, and not just on NBC news, by the way, on the supposedly conservative channels too, they will defend it and there's no defending that. You can't have democracy if the Intel services are tempering in elections and information, period.

Lex Fridman

So you had no fear. Your lawyer said, be careful which questions you asked. You said, I don't have -

Tucker Carlson

Well, no, he said very specifically, depending on the questions you ask Putin, you could be arrested or not. I said, "Listen to what you're saying. You're saying the US government has control over my questions and they'll arrest me if I ask the wrong question. How are we better than Putin if that's true." By the way, that's just what the lawyer said. But I can't overstate, one of the biggest law firms in the United States, smart lawyers we've used for years so I was really shocked by it.

Lex Fridman

You said leaders kill, leaders lie.

Tucker Carlson

Yeah. I don't believe in leaders very much like this whole, "Oh, Zelenskyy's Jesus and Putin's Satan." It's like - no, they're all leaders of countries. Grow up a little bit you child. Have you ever met a leader? First of all, anyone who seeks power is damaged morally in my opinion. You shouldn't be seeking power. You can't seek power or wealth for its own sake and remain a decent person. That's just true. So, there aren't any really virtuous billionaires and there aren't any really virtuous world leaders. You have grades of virtue - some are better than others for sure. In other words, Zelenskyy may be better than Putin. I'm open to that possibility. But to claim that one is evil and the other is virtuous - it's like - you're revealing that you're a child. You don't know anything about how the world actually is or what reality is.

Lex Fridman

That's quite a realist perspective, but there is a spectrum.

Tucker Carlson

There's a spectrum, absolutely. I'm not saying they're all the same. They're not.

Lex Fridman

And our task is to figure out where on the spectrum they lie and the leader's task is to confuse us and convince us they're one of the good guys.

Tucker Carlson

Of course. Of course. But I actually reject even that formulation. I don't think it's always about the leaders. Of course the leaders make the difference. A good leader has a healthy country and a bad leader has a decaying country, which is something to think about. But it's about the ideas and the policies and the practical effect of things. So we're very much caught up in the personalities of various leaders, not just our political leaders, but our business leaders, our cultural leaders. Are they good people? Do they have the right thoughts? It's like, no, I ask a much more basic question, what are the fruits of their behavior? I always make it personal because I think everything is personal. Does his wife respect him? Do his children respect him? How are they doing? Is the country he runs thriving or is it falling apart? If your life expectancy is going down, if your suicide rate is going up, if your standard of living is tanking, you're not a good leader. I don't care what you tell me. I don't care what you claim you represent. I don't care about the ideas or the systems that you say you embody. It's dogs barking to me. How's your life expectancy? How's your suicide rate? What's drug use like? Are people having children? Are people's children more likely to live in a free or more prosperous society than you did and their grandparents did? Those are the only measures that matter to me, the rest is a lie. But anyway, the point is we just get so obsessed with the theater around people or people, and we miss the bigger things that are happening and we allow ourselves to be deceived into thinking that what doesn't matter at all matters, that moral victories are all that matters. No, actually, facts on the ground victories matter more than anything. You certainly see it in this country. Black Lives Matter, for example, how many black people did that help? It hurt a lot of black people, but in the end, we should be able to measure it. How many black people have died by gunfire in the four years since George Floyd died? Well, the number's gone way, way up and that was a Black Lives Matter operation, defund the police. So I think we can say as a factual matter, data-based matter, Black Lives Matter didn't help black people and if it did tell me how. "Well, these are important moral victories." I'm over that. That's just another lie, a long litany of lies. So I try to see the rest of the world that way. But more than anything, I try to see world events through the lens of an American because I am one. And what does this mean for us? It's not even the war, it's the sanctions that will forever change the United States, our standard of living, the way our government operates. That more than any single thing in my lifetime screwed the United States. Levying those sanctions in the way that we did was crazy. For me, the main takeaway from my eight days in Moscow was not Putin. He's a leader, whatever. None of them are that different actually, in my pretty extensive experience, no, it was Moscow. That blew my mind. I was not prepared for that at all and I thought I knew a lot about Moscow. My dad worked there on and off in the 80s and 90s because, a US government employee. And he was always coming back, "Moscow, it's a nightmare," and all this stuff, "no electricity." I got there almost exactly two years after

sanctions, totally cut off from Western financial systems, kicked out of Swift, can't use US dollars, no banking, no credit cards. And that city just factually, I'm not endorsing the system, I'm not endorsing the whole country. I didn't go to Lake Baikal. I didn't go to Turkmenistan. I just went to Moscow, largest city in Europe, 13 million people. I drove all around it and that city is way nicer, outwardly anyway, I don't live there, than any city we have by a lot. And by nicer, let me be specific. No graffiti. No homeless. No people using drugs in the street. Totally tidy. No garbage on the ground. And no forest of steel and concrete soul - destroying buildings, none of the postmodern architecture that oppresses us without even our knowledge. None of that crap. It's a truly beautiful city. That's not an endorsement of Putin. By the way, it didn't make me love Putin, it made me hate my own leaders because I grew up in a country that had cities kind of like that, that were nice cities that were safe, and we don't have that anymore. How did that happen? Did Putin do that? I don't think Putin did that actually. I think the people in charge of that, the mayors, the governors, the president, they did that and they should be held accountable for it.

Lex Fridman

I think cleanliness and architectural design is not the entirety of the metrics that matter when you measure a city.

Tucker Carlson

They're the main metrics that matter. They're the main metrics that matter. The main metrics that matter are cleanliness, safety, and beauty, in my opinion. And one of the big lies that we are told in our world is that, no, something you can't measure that has no actual effect on your life matters most. Bullshit. What matters most, to say it again, beauty, safety, cleanliness, lots of other things matter too, a whole bunch of things matter. But if I were to put them in order, it's not some theoretical, well, actually, I don't know if you know that the Duma has no power, okay? I get that. Freedom of speech matters enormously to me. They have less freedom of speech in Russia than we do in the United States. We are superior to them in that way. But you can't tell me that living in a city where your 6-year-old daughter can walk to the bus stop and ride on a clean bus or ride in a beautiful subway car that's on time and not get assaulted, that doesn't matter. No, that matters almost more than anything, actually. We can have both. The normal regime defenders and morons, John Stewart or whatever he's calling himself, they're like, "Whoa, that's the price of freedom." People shitting on the sidewalk is the price of freedom. It's like you can't fool me because I've lived here for 54 years, I know that it's not the price of freedom because I lived in a country that was both free and clean and orderly. So that's not a trade off I think I have to make. That is the beauty of being a little bit older because you're like, no, I remember that, actually. It wasn't what you're saying. We didn't have racial segregation in 1985. It was a really nice country that respected itself. I was here. I think with younger people, you can tell them that and they're like, well, 1985 you were selling slaves in Madison Square Garden. It's like, no, they weren't. You're going to Madison Square Garden and not stepping over a single fentanyl addict.

Lex Fridman

It is true, there doesn't have to be a trade off between cleanliness and freedom of speech, but it is also true that in dictatorships, cleanliness and architectural design is easier to achieve and perfect, and often is done so you can show off, look how great our cities are while you're suppressing -

Tucker Carlson

Of course, of course, I agree with that vehemently. This is not a defense of the Russian system at all. If I felt that way, I would not only move there, but I would announce I was moving there. I'm not ashamed of my views. I never have been. For all the people who are trying to impute secret motives to my words, I'm like the one person in America you don't need to do that with. If you think I'm a racist, ask me and I'll tell you.

Lex Fridman

Are you a racist?

Tucker Carlson

No. I am a sexist though.

Lex Fridman

Great

Tucker Carlson

Anyway. No, but if I was a defender of Vladimir Putin, I would just say I'm defending Vladimir Putin now. I'm not. I am attacking our leaders and I'm grieving over the low expectations of our people. You don't need to put up with this. You don't need to put up with foreign invaders stealing from you, occupying your kid's school. Your kids can't get an education because people from foreign countries broke our laws and showed up here and they've taken over the school. That's not a feature of freedom, actually, that's the opposite. That's what enslavement looks like. I'm just saying, raise your expectations a little bit. You can have a clean, functional, safe country, crime is totally optional. Crime is something our leaders decide to have or not have. It's not something that just appears organically. I wrote a book about crime 30 years ago. I thought a lot about this. You have as much crime as you put up with, period. It doesn't make you less free to not tolerate murder. In fact, it makes you unfree to have a lot of murders. But it makes me sad that people are like, "I can't live in New York City anymore because of inflation and filth and illegal aliens and people shooting each other, but I'm glad because this is vibrant and strong and free." It's like that's not freedom actually, at all.

Lex Fridman

Your point is well taken, you can have both. But do you regret -

Tucker Carlson

Had both. That's the point, we had both, I saw it.

Lex Fridman

Do you regret to a degree using the Moscow subway and the grocery store as a mechanism by which to make that point?

Tucker Carlson

No. Look, I'm one of the more unself-aware people you will ever interview. So to ask me how will this be perceived, I literally have no idea and kind of limited interest. But I was so shocked by it. I was so shocked by it. To the extent I regret anything and to blame for anything, it would be not, and I've done this a lot, not giving it context, not fully explaining why are we doing this. The grocery store, I was shocked by the prices. And yes, I'm familiar with exchange rates, very familiar with exchange rates and I adjusted them for exchange rates, and this is two years into sanctions, total isolation from the west. So I would expect, in fact, I did expect until I got there that their supply chains would be crushed. How do you get good stuff if you don't have access to western markets? I didn't fully get the answer because I was occupied doing other things when I was there, but somehow they have and that's the point. They haven't had the supply chains problems that I predicted. In other words, sanctions haven't made the country noticeably worse, okay? So again, this is commentary in the United States and our policymakers. Why are we doing this? It's forcing the rest of the world into a block against us called bricks. They're getting off the US dollar. That will mean a lot of dollars are going to come back here and destroy our economy and impoverish this country. So the consequences, the stakes are really high. They're huge and we're not even hurting Russia. What the hell are we doing, one. On the subway, that Subway was built by Joseph Stalin right before the second World War. I'm not endorsing Stalin, obviously. Stalinism is a thing that I hate and I don't want to come to my country. I'm making the obvious point that for over 80 years you've had these frescoes and chandeliers, maybe they've been redone or whatever, but somehow the society has been able to not destroy what its ancestors built, the things that are worth having, and there are a lot. Why don't we have that? Even on a much more terrestrial plane, why can't I have a subway station like that? Why can't my children who live in New York City ride the subway? A lot of people I know who live in New York City are afraid to ride the subway, young women especially. That's freedom? No, again, it's slavery. If Putin can do this, why can't we? What? This is so obvious. I'm a traitor? Okay, so if I'm calling for American citizens to demand more from their government and higher standards for their own society, and remember that just 30 years ago, we had a much different and much happier and cleaner and healthier society where everyone wasn't fat with diabetes at 40 from poisoned food, I'm not a traitor to my country, I'm a defender of my country. By the way, the people calling me a traitor, they're all like, whatever. I would not say they're people who put America's interest first to put it mildly.

Lex Fridman

There's many elements, like you said, you don't like Stalinism. You're a student of history, central planning is good at building subways in a way that's really nice. The thing that accounts for New York subways, by the way, there's a lot of really positive things about New York subways, not cleanliness, but the efficiency, the accessibility, how wide it spreads. The New York network is incredible.

Tucker Carlson

It is.

Lex Fridman

But Moscow, under different metrics, results of a capitalist system. And you actually said that you don't think US is quite a capitalist system, which is an interesting question itself.

Tucker Carlson

That's for sure. We have more central planning here than they do in Russia.

Lex Fridman

No, that's not true.

Tucker Carlson

Of course it is.

Lex Fridman

You think that's true.

Tucker Carlson

The climate agenda, of course. The US government has, in league with a couple of big, companies, decided to change the way we produce and consume energy. There's no popular outcry for that. There's never been any mass movement of Americans who's like, "I hate my gasoline powered engine. No more diesel." That has been central planning. That is central planning. You see it up and down our economy, there's no free market in the United States. You get crossways with the government, you're done. If you're at scale, maybe if you've got a barbershop or a liquor store or something, but even then you're regulated by politicians. And so, no, I actually am for free markets. I hate monopolies. Our economy is dominated by monopolies, completely dominated in -

Lex Fridman

What do you mean?

Tucker Carlson

Google. What percentage of search does Google have, 90? Google's a monopoly, by any definition. Google is just rich enough to continue doing whatever it wants in violation of US law. There's no monopoly in Russia as big as Google. I'm not, again, defending the Russian system. I'm calling for return to our old system, which was sensible and moderate and put the needs of Americans, at least somewhere in the top 10. Somewhere in the top 10. I'm not saying that standard oil was interested in the welfare of average Americans, but I am saying that there was a constituency in our political system, in the Congress, for example, different presidential candidates are like, "No, wait a second. What is this doing to people? Is it good for people or not?" There's not even a conversation about that. It's shut up and submit to AI. No offense. And so I'm just -

Lex Fridman

Offense taken. I'll write, "We will get you." When it's strong enough -

Tucker Carlson

I have no doubt.

Lex Fridman

- you'll be the first one to go.

Tucker Carlson

Well, as a white man, I just won't even exist anymore.

Lex Fridman

Right, so much to say on that one.

Tucker Carlson

I bet when you Google my picture 20 years from now, I'll be a black chick. A 100%.

Lex Fridman

Well, I hope she's attractive.

Tucker Carlson

I hope so too. It'd probably be an upgrade.

Lex Fridman

So, well, the central planning point is really interesting, but I just don't know where you're coming from. There's a capitalist system - the United States is one of the most successful capitalist system in the history of earth. So just -

Tucker Carlson

It's the most successful. I'm just saying that I think it's changed a lot in the last 15 years and that we need to update our assumptions about what we're seeing.

Lex Fridman

Sure.

Tucker Carlson

And that's true up and down. That's true with everything. It's true with your neighbor's children who you haven't seen in three years and they come home from Wesleyan and you're like, "Oh, you've grown." That is true for the world around us as well. Most of our assumptions about immigration, about our economy, about our tax system are completely outdated if you compare them to the current reality. I'm just for updating my files and I have a big advantage over you because I am middle aged, and so I don't -

Lex Fridman

You've called yourself old so many times throughout this conversation.

Tucker Carlson

I don't trust my perceptions of things so I'm constantly trying to be like, is that true, I should go there. I should see it. I guess just in the end, I trust direct perceptions. I don't trust the internet, actually. Wikipedia is a joke. Wikipedia could not be more dishonest, it's certainly in the political categories or things that I know a lot about. Occasionally, I read an entry written about something that I saw or know the people involved, and I'm like, well, that's a complete lie or you left out the most important fact. It's not a reliable guide to reality or history and that will accelerate with AI, where our perception of the past is completely controlled and distorted. I think just getting out there and seeing stuff and seeing that Moscow was not what I thought it would be, which was a smoldering ruin, rats in a garbage dump, it was nicer than New York. What the hell?

Lex Fridman

Direct data is good, but it's challenging. For example, if you talk to a lot of people in Moscow or in Russia, and you ask them, "Is there a censorship?" They will usually say, "Yes, there is."

Tucker Carlson

Oh yeah, of course there is. Well, I agree. Just to be clear, I have no plans to move to Russia. I think I would probably be arrested if I moved to Russia. Ed Snowden, who is the most famous openness, transparency, advocate in the world, I would say along with Assange, doesn't want to live in Russia. He's had problems with the Putin government. He's attacked Putin. They don't like it. I get it. I get it. I'm just saying, what are the lessons for us? The main lesson is we are being lied to in a way that's bewildering and very upsetting. I was mad about it all eight days I was there because I feel like I'm better informed than most people because

it's my job to be informed. I'm skeptical of everything and yet I was completely hoodwinked by it. I would just recommend to everyone watching this, if you're really interested, if you're one of those people, and I'm not one, but who's waking up every day and you've got a Ukrainian flag on your mailbox or whatever, your Ukrainian lapel pin, or this absurd theater, but if you sincerely care about Ukraine or Russia or whatever, why don't you just hop on a plane for 800 bucks and go see it? That doesn't occur to anyone to do that. I know it's time consuming and kind of expensive, sort of, not really, but you benefit so much. I could bore you for eight hours, and I know you've had this experience, where you think you know what something is or you think you know who someone is, and then you have direct experience of that place or person and you realize all your preconceptions were totally wrong. They were controlled by somebody else. In fact, I won't betray confidences, but off the air we were talking about somebody and you said, "I couldn't believe the person was not at all what I thought." Well, that's happened to me -

Lex Fridman

In the positive direction.

Tucker Carlson

In the positive direction. By the way, for me, it's almost always in that direction. Most people I meet, and I've had the great privilege of meeting a lot of people over all this time, they're way better than you think, or they're more complicated or whatever. But the point is, a direct experience unmediated by liars, there's no substitute for that.

Lex Fridman

Well, on that point, direct experience in Ukraine. I visited Ukraine and witnessed a lot of the same things you witnessed in Moscow. First of all, beautiful architecture.

Tucker Carlson

Yes.

Lex Fridman

This is a country that's really in war. So it's not -

Tucker Carlson

Oh, for real,

Lex Fridman

- for real. Where most of the men are either volunteering or fighting in the war, and there's actual tanks in the streets that are going into your major city of Kyiv and still the supply chains are working -

Tucker Carlson

Yes.

Lex Fridman

- just a handful of months after the start of the war. Everything is working. The restaurants are amazing. Most of the people are able to do some kind of job, like the life goes on. Cleanliness, like you mentioned.

Tucker Carlson

I love that.

Lex Fridman

Security, it's incredible. The crime went to zero. They gave out guns to everybody, the Texas strategy.

Tucker Carlson

It does work.

Lex Fridman

When you witness it, you realize, okay, there's something to these people. There's something to this country that they're not as corrupt as you might hear.

Tucker Carlson

Right.

Lex Fridman

You hear that Russia is corrupt, Ukraine is corrupt, you assume it's just all going to go to shit.

Tucker Carlson

I haven't been to Ukraine, and I've certainly tried. They put me on some kill him immediately list so I can't. I've tried to interview Zelenskyy. He keeps denouncing me. I just want an interview with him, he won't, unfortunately. I would love to do it.

Lex Fridman

I hope you do.

Tucker Carlson

I do too. But one of the things that bothers me most - I love to hear that, what you just said about Kyiv, but I'm not really surprised. One of the things that I'm most ashamed of is the bigotry that I felt towards Slavic people, also toward Muslims, I'll just be totally honest because I lived through decades of propaganda from NBC news and CNN where I worked,

about this or that group of people and they're horrible or whatever. And I kind of believed it. I see it now, we can't even put the word Russia at Wimbledon because it's so offensive. Well, what does the tennis player have to do with it? Did he invade Ukraine, I don't think he did. Stealing all these business guys yachts and denouncing thing was oligarchs, what do they have to do with it? Whatever. Here's my point. The idea that a whole group of people is just evil because of their blood, I just don't believe that. I think it's immoral to think that, and I can just tell you my own experience after eight days there. I think it's a really interesting culture, Slavic culture, which is shared by the way, by Russian and Ukraine, of course, they're first cousins at the most distant. I found them really smart and interesting and informed. I didn't understand a lot of what they were saying. I don't understand the way their minds work because I'm American, but it wasn't a thin culture, it's a thick culture and I admire that. I wish I could go to Ukraine. I would go tomorrow.

Lex Fridman

I think after you did the interview with Putin, you put a clip, I think on TCN, your analysis afterwards.

Tucker Carlson

It wasn't much of an analysis.

Lex Fridman

No, but what stood out to me is you were talking shit about Putin a little bit. You were criticizing him.

Tucker Carlson

Why wouldn't I?

Lex Fridman

It spoke to the thing that you mentioned, which is you weren't afraid. Now, the question I want to ask is, it would be pretty badass if you went to the supermarket and made the point you were making, but also criticize Putin, right? Criticize that there is a lack of freedom of speech and freedom of the press.

Tucker Carlson

In the supermarket?

Lex Fridman

Yes.

Tucker Carlson

Oh, you mean if I also said that? Well, yeah, of course I think that. I guess part of it is that because I have such a low opinion of the commentariat in the United States and the news

organizations, which really do just work for the US government, I really see them as I did Izvestia and Pravda in the 80s. They're just organs of the government and I think they're contemptible and I think the people who work there are contemptible. I say that as someone who knows them really well, personally. I think they're disgusting. I'm a little bit cut off kind of from what people are saying about me because I'm not interested. But - cut off kind of from what people are saying about me because I'm not interested. So I try not to be defensive like, "See, I'm not a tool of Putin." But the idea that I'd be flacking for Putin when my relatives fought in the Revolutionary War, I'm as American as you could be, it's like crazy to me. Anne Applebaum calls me a traitor. I'm like, "Okay." It's just so dumb. But no, of course, they don't have - no country has freedom of speech other than us. Canada doesn't have it. Great Britain definitely doesn't have it. France, Netherlands, these are countries I spend a lot of time in, and Russia certainly doesn't have it. So that's why I don't live there. I'm just saying our sanctions don't work. That's all I was saying. We don't have to live like animals. We can live with dignity. Even the Russians can do it. That's kind of what I was saying. Even the Russians under Vladimir freaking Putin can live like this. No, it's not a feature of dictatorship. That's the most, I think, discouraging and most dishonest line by people like Jon Stewart who really are trying to prepare the population for accepting a lot less. He is really a tool of the regime in a sinister way, always has been like, "How dare you expect that? What are you, a Stalinist?" It's like, no, I'm an American. I'm a decent person. I just want to be able to walk to the grocery store without being murdered. Is that too much? "Shut up, you don't believe in freedom." It's really dark if you think about it.

Lex Fridman

So there is a fundamental way which you wanted Americans to expect more.

Tucker Carlson

You don't have to live like this. We don't have to live like this. You don't have to accept it. You don't. Everyone's afraid in this country, they're going to be shut down by the tech oligarchs or have the FBI show up at their houses or go to jail. People are legit afraid of that in the United States. My feeling is, so? Show a little courage. What is it worth to you for your grandchildren to live in a free prosperous country? It should be worth more than your comfort. That's how I feel.

Lex Fridman

We should make clear that by many measures - you look at the World Press Freedom Index. You're right. US is not at the top. Norway is. US's score is 71.

Tucker Carlson

Norway is.

Lex Fridman

Same as Gambia in West Africa.

Tucker Carlson

Really? So let me just ask.

Lex Fridman

Hold on a second. Hold on a second. Hold on a second.

Tucker Carlson

Now you're making me laugh.

Lex Fridman

Ukraine is 61 and Russia is 35, the lower it is, the worst. Close to China at 23, and North Korea at the very bottom, 22.

Tucker Carlson

Didn't Ukraine put Gonzalo Lira in jail until he died for criticizing the government? How can they have a high press?

Lex Fridman

Yes. That's why they're 61 out of 0-100.

Tucker Carlson

What I'm saying, look, I don't know what the criteria are they're using to arrive at that, but I know press freedom when I see it. I try to practice it, which is saying what you think is true, correcting yourself when you've been shown to be wrong, as I have many times, being as honest as you can be all the time and not being afraid. Those are wholly absent in my country, wholly absent. People are afraid in the news business. I would know since I spent my life working there. They're afraid to tell the truth. They're under an enormous amount of pressure and a lot of them have little kids and mortgages, I've been there, so I have sympathy. But they go along with things. You are not allowed, if you stand up at any cable channel, any cable channel in the United States and say, "Wait a second, how did the Ukrainian government throw a US citizen into prison until he died for criticizing the Ukrainian government? We're paying for that. That's why it's offensive to me. We're paying for it. That happens all the time around the world, of course. But this is a US citizen and we're paying the pensions of Ukrainian bureaucrats. We are the Ukrainian government at this point. If you said that on TV on any channel, well, you'd lose your job for that. Norway is at the top. Really, Norway? If I went to Norwegian television and said NATO blew up Nord Stream, which it did, NATO blew up Nord Stream, the United States government with the help of other governments blew up, committed the largest act of industrial terrorism in history, and by the way, the largest environmental crime, the largest emission of CO2, methane, could I keep my job? No. So how is that a free press?

Lex Fridman

Well, we don't know that. I mean the whole point of this -

Tucker Carlson

In Norway?

Lex Fridman

Yes.

Tucker Carlson

Well, as a Scandinavian, and I can tell you they would not put up with that in Norway for a second.

Lex Fridman

It's been a while.

Tucker Carlson

You're deviating from the majority, no.

Lex Fridman

Well, deviating maybe is frowned upon, but -

Tucker Carlson

Frowned upon. Yeah.

Lex Fridman

But do you have the freedom to say it if you do deviate? That's the question.

Tucker Carlson

Can you keep your job? That's one measurement of it.

Lex Fridman

Can you keep your job, yeah.

Tucker Carlson

Yeah. It's not the only measurement. Obviously being thrown into prison is much worse than losing your job. I've been fired a number of times for saying what I think, by the way. It's fine. I've enjoyed it. I don't mind being fired. I've always become a better person after it happened. But it is one measurement of freedom if you have the theoretical right to do something, but no practical ability to do it, do you have the right to do it? The answer is not really, actually.

Lex Fridman

You mentioned Jon Stewart, the two of you have a bit of a history. I don't know if you've seen it, but he kind of grilled your supermarket and subway videos. Have you got any chance to see it?

Tucker Carlson

I haven't seen it, but someone characterized it to me, which is why I pivoted against it early in our conversation about how the price of freedom is living in filth and chaos.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, that was essentially it. So in 2004, that's 20 years ago, Jon Stewart appeared on Crossfire, a show you hosted. That was kind of a memorable moment. Can you tell the saga of that as you remember it?

Tucker Carlson

I mean - for me, as I was saying to you before about how it takes a long time to digest and process and understand what happens to you, or at least it does for me, I didn't understand that as a particularly significant moment while it was happening. I just got off a plane from Hawaii. I mean - I was out of it as usual, and I was very literal as usual. So from my perspective, his criticism of me, to the extent I remember it, was that I was a partisan. Well, he had two critiques. One that Crossfire was stupid, which it certainly was. In fact, I'd already given my notice and I was moving on to another company by that point. Crossfire was stupid. Crossfire didn't help. Crossfire framed everything as Republican versus Democrat, whatever. It was not helpful to the public discourse. I couldn't agree more, and that's why I left. So that was part of his critique, fair. I'm not sure I would've admitted it at the time because I worked there and it's sort of hard to admit you're engaged in an enterprise that's fundamentally worthless, which it was. But his other point was that I was somehow a partisan or a mindless partisan, which is definitely not true. It is true of him. He is a mindless partisan, but I'm not. I really haven't been since I got back from Baghdad at the beginning of the Iraq War, and I realized that the Republican party, which I'd voted for my whole life to that point, and had supported in general, was pushing this really horrible thing that was going to hurt the United States, which in time it really did. The Iraq War really hurt the United States. I realized that I had been on the wrong side of that. I said so publicly immediately from Baghdad, I said that to the New York Times and I really meant it. I mean it now. So to call me partisan, you can call me stupid, you can call me wrong, I certainly had been wrong, but partisan, I just didn't think it was a meaningful - I mean - that's just not true. It's the opposite of true. So I didn't really take it seriously at all, and I never thought much of him. So I was like, "Whatever. Some buffoon jumping around on my show grandstanding." By the way, that happened right at the moment that YouTube began. I think that was one of the first big YouTube, it was one of the first big YouTube videos. So it had a virality that, if that's a word, it went everywhere in a way that didn't used to happen in cable news. I mean - by that point, that was 20 years ago as you point out, I've been in cable news for nine years. So

before 2004, we would say something on television and then it would be lost. People could claim they heard it, but you'd have to go to I think the University of Tennessee at Knoxville archives to get it. Suddenly everything we said would live forever on the internet, which is good, by the way. That's not bad. But it was a big change for me, and I just couldn't believe how widely that was discussed at the time, because I thought he was not an interesting person, I think he's obviously a very unhappy person. I just didn't take him seriously then and I don't now. But so anyway, that was it. It was a smaller thing in my life at the time than other people imagined.

Lex Fridman

Okay, you said lot of words that will make it sound like you're a bit bitter even if you're not. So you said unhappy person, partisan person.

Tucker Carlson

Well, I think he's an unhappy guy. Well, he's definitely partisan for sure.

Lex Fridman

So can you elaborate why you think he's partisan?

Tucker Carlson

Well, so I think that, and I see this a lot, not only on the left, but people who believe that whatever political debate they're engaged in is the most important debate in the world. So they bring an emotional intensity to those debates, and they're inevitably disappointed because no eternal question is solved politically. So they're kind of on the wrong path and they're doomed to frustration if they believe that, and many do. He certainly does, that whatever the issue is, so Clarence Thomas should not be Supreme Court justice, and the implication is, well, if someone else's Supreme Court justice, we'll live in a fair and happy society, but that's just not - it's a false promise. So I think that people who bring that level of intensity to politics are, by definition, bitter, by definition, disappointed, bitter in the way the disappointed people are. That the real questions are like what happens when you die and how do the people around you feel about you? Those are not the only questions in life, but they're certainly the most important ones. If we're spending a disproportionate amount of time on who gets elected to some office, not that it's irrelevant, it is relevant, but it's not the eternal question. So I feel like he's not the only kind of bitter silly person in Washington or in its orbit. There are many, and a lot of them are Republicans, so. But I just thought it was ironic. I mean - everything's ironic to me, but being called a Russia's sympathizer by a guy who calls himself Boris, it just made me laugh. No one else has ever laughed at that. Boris Johnson's real name is not Boris, as you know. He calls himself Boris. It's his middle name. So if you call yourself Boris, you don't really have standing to attack anyone else as a Russia defender, right? I think that's funny. No one else, as I noted does. But Jon Stewart, there are a lot of things you could say about me, but he's much more partisan than I am. So to call me a partisan, it's like what?

Lex Fridman

He would probably say that he's not a partisan, that he's a comedian who's looking for the humor and the absurdity of the system on both sides.

Tucker Carlson

He's a very serious person. I will say this, and he shares this quality with a lot of comedians, I know a lot of comedians, I know a cross section of people just having done this job for a long time, and a lot of them are very serious about their views, and they have a lot of emotional intensity. He certainly is in that category. That's the silliest thing. Yeah, he's a comedian for sure. He can be very funny for sure. He has talent, no doubt about it. I've never denied that. But he's motivated by his moral views, "This is right. That is wrong." I just think that it's a misapplied passion.

Lex Fridman

Do you think I'm just a comedian? Is -

Tucker Carlson

I don't think any person thinks that. I mean - if you're just a comedian - and I - look, I'm not trying to claim - I couldn't claim that I haven't said a lot of dumb things. And one of the dumbest things I ever said was when he was on our set lecturing me. He's a moralizer - which I also don't really care for as an aesthetic matter, but he was lecturing me about something and I said: "I thought you're here to tell jokes." - which I shouldn't have said because he wasn't there to tell jokes. He was there to lecture me and I should have just engaged it directly rather than trying to diminish him by like, "You're just a little comedian." Well, he doesn't see himself that way. But I would just say this. Jon Stewart's a defender of power. Jon Stewart has never criticized - what's Jon Stewart's view on the aid we've sent to Ukraine - the \$100 billion or whatever? What happened to that money? What happened to the weapons that it bought? He doesn't care. He has the exact same priorities as the people permanently in charge in Washington. So, whatever. He's not alone in that - so does Mika Brzezinski and her husband and all the rest of the cast of dummies. But if you're going to pretend to be the guy who's giving the finger to entrenched power, you should do it once in a while - and he never has. There's not one time when he said something that would be deeply unpopular on Morning Joe. That's all I'm saying. So, don't call yourself a truth-teller. You're a court comedian or a flatterer of power, okay? That's fine. There's a role for that, but don't pretend to be something else.

Lex Fridman

I'll just be honest that I watched it just recently, that video and -

Tucker Carlson

From 20 years ago?

Lex Fridman

From 20 years ago. I watched it initially, and I remember it very differently. I remembered that Jon Stewart completely destroyed you in that conversation. I watched it and you asked a very good question of him, and there was no destruction, first of all. You asked a very good question of him, "Why when you got a chance to interview John Kerry, did you ask a bunch of softball questions?"

Tucker Carlson

Yeah.

Lex Fridman

I thought that was a really fair question. Then his defense was, "Well, I'm just a comedian."

Tucker Carlson

So I thought that was disingenuous. I haven't watched it. I never have watched the clip one time in my life, and I don't like to watch myself on television. I never have. That's my fault and I probably should force myself to watch it though, of course I never will. But I think the takeaway for me, which was really interesting and life-changing, was I agree with your assessment. I've lost a lot of debates. I've been humiliated on television. I'm not above that. It certainly happened to me. It will happen again. But I didn't feel like it was a clear win for him at all. Maybe A TKO, but it was not a knockout at all, and yet it was recorded that way. I remember thinking, "Well, that's kind of weird. That's not what I remember." Then I realized, no, Jon Stewart was more popular than I was, therefore he was recorded as the winner. That was hard for me to accept, because that struck me as unfair. You should rate any contest on points. Here are the rules. We're going to judge the contest in the basis of those rules. No, in the end, it's just like the more popular guy wins. Every TV critic like Jon Stewart, every one of them hated me, therefore he won. I was like, "Wow, I guess I have to accept that reality." You do, like the reality of the sunrise. You're not in charge of it. So that's just what it is.

Lex Fridman

Unfortunately it's a bit darker, I think. The reason he's seen as the winner and the reason at the time I saw as the "winner" is because he was basically shitting on you, like personal attacks versus engaging ideas. It was funny in a dark way and making fun of the bow tie and all this kind of stuff.

Tucker Carlson

That's fair, the bow tie.

Lex Fridman

I understand.

Tucker Carlson

It was fair to call me a dick. I remember he called me a dick, and I remember even when he said that, I was like, "Yeah, I'm definitely a dick, and that's not my best quality, trust me."

Lex Fridman

I thought Jon Stewart came off as a giant dick at that time, and I'm a big fan of his, and I think he has improved a lot.

Tucker Carlson

That may be true.

Lex Fridman

So we should also say that people grow, people like -

Tucker Carlson

Well, I certainly have, or changed anyway. You hope it's growth. You hope it's not shrinkage, but -

Lex Fridman

It is cold outside.

Tucker Carlson

Yeah. I mean - look, I haven't followed Jon Stewart's career at all. I don't have a television. I'm pretty cut off from all that stuff, so I wouldn't really know. But the measure to me is, are you taking positions that are unpopular with the most powerful people in the world and how often are you doing it? It's super simple. Not for its own sake, but do you feel free enough to say to the consensus, "I disagree." If you don't, then you're just another toady. That's my view.

Lex Fridman

Well, I think he probably feels free enough to do it, but you're saying he doesn't do it.

Tucker Carlson

On the big things. Look, the big things - this is my estimation of it, others may disagree - the big things are the economy and war, okay? The big things government does - can be - I mean - there are a lot of things government does - government does everything at this point, but where we kill people, and how, and for what purpose, and how we organize the economic engine that keeps the country afloat. Those are the two big questions. I hear almost no debate about either one of them in the media and I have dissenting views on both of them. I mean - I'm mad about the tax code - which I think is unfair. The fact that we've a carried interest loophole in the tax code and people are claiming that their income is investment, income and they're paying half the tax rate as someone who just goes to work

every day, it discourages work. It encourages lending at interest, which I think is gross, personally. I'm against it. Sorry. The fact that we're creating chaos around the world is the saddest thing that's happening right now. Nobody feels free to say that. So that's not good.

Lex Fridman

How do you hope the war on Ukraine ends?

Tucker Carlson

With a settlement, with a reasonable settlement. You know what a reasonable settlement is, which is a settlement where both sides feel like they're giving a little, but can live with it. I mean - I was really struck in my conversation with Putin by how he basically refused to criticize Joe Biden and to criticize NATO. I will just be honest, as an American, it would be a little weird to be pissing on Joe Biden with a foreign leader, any foreign leader, even though I don't think Joe Biden is a real person or really a president. I mean - the whole thing is ridiculous. But still, he is the American president technically, and I don't want to beat up on the American president with a foreigner. I just don't. Maybe I'm old fashioned. So that's how I feel. So I didn't push it, but I thought it was really interesting. Because, of course, Putin knows my views on Joe Biden. He knew I applied to the CIA, so they've done some digging on me, but he didn't mention it, and he didn't attack NATO. The reason is, I know for a fact, because he wants a settlement. He wants a settlement not because Russia's about to collapse despite the lying of our media, that's just not true, and no one is even saying it anymore because it's so dumb. He wants to because it's just bad to have a war. It changes the world in ways you can't predict. People die. Everything about it is sad. If you can avoid it, you should. So I would like to see a settlement where, look, the thing that Russia wants and I think probably has a right to is not to have NATO missiles on its border. I don't know why we would do that. I don't know what we get out of it. I just don't even understand it. I don't understand the purpose of NATO. I don't think NATO is good for the United States. I think it's an attack on our sovereignty. I would pull out of NATO immediately if I were the US president, because I don't think it helps the US I know a lot of people are getting their bread buttered by NATO. But anyway, that's my view as an American. If I'm a Russian or a Ukrainian, let's just be sovereign countries now. We're not run by the US State Department. We're just our own countries. I believe in sovereignty, okay? So that's my view. I also want to say one thing about Zelenskyy. I attacked him before because I was so offended by his cavalier talk about nuclear exchange because it would kill my family. So I'm really offended by that. Anyone who talks that way I'm offended by. But I do feel for Zelenskyy. I do. He didn't run for president to have this happen. I think Zelenskyy's been completely misused by the State Department, by Tonia Nuland, by our Secretary of State, by the policymakers in the US who've used Ukraine as a vessel for their ambitions, their geopolitical ambitions, but also the many American businesses who've used Ukraine as a way to fleece the American taxpayer, and then by just independent ghouls like Boris Johnson who are hoping to get rich from interviews on it. The whole thing, Zelenskyy is at the center of this. He's not driving

history. NATO and the United States is driving history. Putin is driving history. There's this guy, Zelenskyy. So I do feel for him, and I think he's in a perilous place.

Lex Fridman

Do you think Zelenskyy is a hero for staying in Kiev? Because I do. To me, you can criticize a lot of things. You should call out things that are obviously positive.

Tucker Carlson

I just tried to a second ago, I don't know the extent that he is in Kiev. He seems to be in the United States an awful lot, way too much. You can do a satellite interview. You don't have to speak to my Congress. You're not an American. Please leave. That's my opinion but -

Lex Fridman

You got many zingers, Tucker.

Tucker Carlson

No, no, no. It's just heartfelt. It's bubbling up from the wellspring that never turns off. But I would say this about Zelenskyy, yeah, to the extent he's in Ukraine, good man. George W. Bush fled Washington on 9/11. I lived there with three kids and he ran away to some Air Force base in South Dakota. I thought that was cowardly and I said so at the time, and man was I attacked for saying that. I wrote a column about it in New York Magazine where I then had a column, hard to believe. But I felt that. I felt that. I think the prerequisites of leadership are really basic. The first is caring about the people you lead, that's number one. In the way a father cares for his children, or an officer cares for his troops. A president should care for his people. That leads inexorably to the next requirement, which is bravery, physical courage. I believe in that. I'm not like some tough guy, but I just think it's obvious. If you're in charge, I'm at my house and I feel like someone broke in, I'm not going to say to my wife, "Hey, baby, go deal with the home invasion." I'm going to deal with it because I'm dad, okay? So, if you're the president of a country and your capital city is attacked - as ours was at the Pentagon - and you run away? "The Secret Service told me to." Bitch, are you in charge? Who's daddy here? The Secret Service? Do you know what I mean? I found that totally contemptible and I said so, and man, did I get a lecture, not just from Republicans, but from Democrats. "Oh, you don't know. Put yourself in that position." I was like, "Okay." I don't know what I would do under that kind of stress, enormous stress. I get it. I know one thing I wouldn't do is run away because you can't do that. If you're not willing to die for your country, then you shouldn't be leading it. So yes, to the extent, if Zelenskyy really is in Ukraine most of the time, amen.

Lex Fridman

Well, hold on a second. Let's clarify. It's not about what he's in Ukraine most of the time or not.

Tucker Carlson

Well, I thought that was the whole premise of the problem.

Lex Fridman

No, at the beginning of the war, when a lot of people thought that the second biggest military in the world is pointing its guns in Kiev, is going to be taken. A man, a leader who stays in that city and says, "Fuck it." When everybody around him says, flee, everybody around him believes the city will be taken or at least destroyed, leveled, artillery, bombs, all of this, he chooses to stay. You know a lot of leaders, how many leaders would choose to stay?

Tucker Carlson

Well, the leader of Afghanistan, the US backed leader when the Taliban came, got in a US plane with US dollars and ran away, and of course is living on those dollars now. So yeah, there's a lot of cowardly behavior. Good for him. I mean - I guess I'm looking at it slightly differently, which is what's the option? You're the leader of the country. You can't leave. Stalin never left Moscow during the war. It was surrounded by the Germans, as you know, for a year, and he didn't leave. When I was in Russia, they're like, "Stalin never left." It's like he's the leader of the country, you can't. I mean - that's just table stakes, of course. I would say, but you raised an interesting by implication question, which is what about Kiev? You think the Russians couldn't level Kiev? Of course, obviously they could. Why haven't? They could, but they haven't.

Lex Fridman

Well, there's military answers to that, which is urban warfare is extremely difficult.

Tucker Carlson

Do you think that Putin wants to take Kiev?

Lex Fridman

No, I do think he expected Zelenskyy to flee and somebody else to come into power.

Tucker Carlson

Yeah, that may be totally right. I don't know. I have no idea what Putin was thinking when he did that about Zelenskyy. I didn't ask him. But it's a mistake to imagine this is a contest between Putin and Zelenskyy. This is Putin versus the US State Department. That's why I said I felt sorry for him. I mean - as I said, we're literally paying the pensions of Ukrainian bureaucrats. So there is no Ukrainian government independent of the US government. Maybe you're for that, maybe you're against it, but you can't endorse that in the same sentence that you use the term democracy, because that's not a democracy, obviously.

Lex Fridman

Well, that's why it's interesting that he didn't really bring up NATO extensively.

Tucker Carlson

He wants a settlement, he wants a settlement. He doesn't want to fight with them rhetorically and he just wants to get this done. He made a bunch of offers at the peace deal. We wouldn't even know this happened if the Israelis hadn't told us. I'm so grateful that they did that, that Johnson was dispatched by the State Department to stop it. I mean - I think Boris Johnson is a husk of a man. But imagine if you were Boris Johnson and you spend your whole life with Ukraine flag, "I'm for Ukraine," and then all those kids died because of what you did, and the lines haven't really moved. It hasn't been a victory for Ukraine. It's not going to be a victory for Ukraine. It's like, how do you feel about yourself if you did that? I mean - I've done a lot of shitty things in my life, I feel bad about them, but I've never extended a war for no reason. That's a pretty grave sin in my opinion.

Lex Fridman

Yes, that was a failure. But it doesn't mean you can't have a success over and over and over keep having negotiations between leaders.

Tucker Carlson

Well, the US government's not allowing negotiations. So that for me is the most upsetting part. It's like in the end, what Russia does, I'm not implicated in that. What Ukraine does, I'm not implicated in that. I'm not Russian or Ukrainian. I'm an American who grew up really believing in my country. I'm supporting my country through my tax dollars. It's like I really care about what the US government does because they're doing it in my name, and I care a lot because I'm American. We are the impediment to peace, which is another way of saying we are responsible for all these innocent people getting dragooned out of public parks in Kiev and sent to go die. What? That is not good. I'm ashamed of it.

Lex Fridman

What do you think of Putin saying that justification for continuing the war is denazification?

Tucker Carlson

I thought it was one of the dumbest things I'd ever heard. I didn't understand what it meant. Denazification?

Lex Fridman

It literally means what it sounds like.

Tucker Carlson

Yeah. I mean - I have a lot of thoughts on this. I hate that whole conversation because it's not real. It's just ad hominem. It's a way of associating someone with an evil regime that

doesn't exist anymore. But in point of fact, Nazism, whatever it was, is inseparable from the German nation. It was a nationalist movement in Germany. There were no other Nazis, right? There's no book of Nazism like, "I want to be a Nazi. What does it mean to be a Nazi?" I mean - Mein Kampf is not Das Kapital, right? Mein Kampf is - to the extent I understand it - it's like he's pissed about the Treaty of Versailles - whatever. I'm very anti-Nazi. I'm merely saying there isn't a Nazi movement in 2024. It's a way of calling people evil, okay? Putin doesn't like nationalist Ukrainians. Putin hates nationalism in general, which is interesting. Of course he does. He's got 80 whatever republics, and he's afraid of nationalist movements. He fought a war in Chechnya over this. So I understand it, but I have a different - I'm for nationalism, I'm for American nationalism, so I disagree with Putin on that. But calling them Nazis, it's like, I thought it was childish.

Lex Fridman

Well, I do believe that he believes it.

Tucker Carlson

So that's so interesting. I agree with that. Because I was listening to this because in the United States, everyone's always calling everyone else a Nazi, "You're a Nazi." But I was listening to this and I was like, "This is the dumbest sort of not convincing line you could take." I sat there and listened to him talk about Nazis for eight minutes, and I'm like, "I think he believes this."

Lex Fridman

Yeah. Having had a bunch of conversations with people who are living in Russia, they also believe it. Now, there's technicalities here, which the word Nazi, World War II is deeply in the blood of a lot of Russians and Ukrainians.

Tucker Carlson

I get it. I get it.

Lex Fridman

So you're using it as almost a political term, the way it's used in the United States also, like racism and all this kind of stuff. Because you know you can really touch people if you use the Nazi term.

Tucker Carlson

I think that's totally right.

Lex Fridman

But it's also to me a really disgusting thing to do.

Tucker Carlson

I agree.

Lex Fridman

Also to clarify, there is neo-Nazi movements in Ukraine but it's very small. You're saying that there's this distinction between Nazi and neo-Nazi, sure. But it's a small percentage of the population, a tiny percentage that have no power in government, as far I have seen no data to show they have any influence on Zelenskyy and Zelenskyy government at all. So really, when Putin says denazification, I think he means nationalist movements.

Tucker Carlson

I think you're right. I agree with everything you said. I do think that the Second World War occupies a place in Slavic society, Polish society, Central Eastern Europe that it does not occupy in the United States. You can just look at the death totals, tens of millions versus less than half a million. So it's like this eliminated a lot of the male population of these countries. So of course, it's still resonant in those countries. I get it. I think I've watched, I don't think I know, I've watched the misuse of words, the weaponization of words for political reasons for so long that I just don't like, though I do engage in it sometime and I'm sorry, I don't like just dismissing people in a word. "Oh, he's a Nazi. He's a liberal," or whatever. It's like, tell me what you mean, what don't you like about what they're doing or saying? What don't you like about what they're doing or saying? And Nazi especially, I don't even know what the hell you're talking about.

Lex Fridman

What troubled me about that is because he said that that's the primary objective currently for the war. And that because it's not grounded in reality, it makes it difficult to then negotiate peace. Because what does it mean to get rid of the Nazis in Ukraine? So he'll come to the table and say, "Well, okay, I will agree to do a ceasefire once the Nazis are gone." Okay, so can you list the Nazis?

Tucker Carlson

I totally agree. Plus, can you negotiate with a Nazi?

Lex Fridman

Right, exactly.

Tucker Carlson

I totally agree with you.

Lex Fridman

It was very strange. But maybe it perhaps had to do with speaking to his own population, and also probably trying to avoid the use of the word NATO as the justification for the war.

Tucker Carlson

Yes, that's all - of course, I don't know. But I suspect you're right on both counts. But I would say it points to something that I've thought more and more since I did that interview, which was two weeks ago, I guess. I didn't think he was - as a PR guy, not very good - not good at telling his own story. The story of the current war in Ukraine is the eastward expansion of NATO scaring the shit out of the Russians with NATO expansion. Which is totally necessary, doesn't help the United States, NATO itself doesn't help the United States. And so I'm not pro-Russian for saying that, I'm pro-American for saying that. And I think that's a really compelling story, because it's true. He did not tell that story, he told some other story that I didn't fully understand. Again, I'm not Russian. He's speaking to multiple audiences around the world. I'm not sure what he hoped to achieve by that interview, I will never know. But I did think that, this guy is not good at telling his story. And I also think honestly on the base of a lot - I mean - I know this. Very isolated during COVID - very. We keep hearing that, "He's dying of this or that disease. He's got ALS." I mean - I don't know. I'm not his doctor. There's a ton of lying about it. I know that. But one thing that's not a lie, is that he was cloistered away during COVID. I know this - and only dealing with two or three people. And that makes you weird. It's so important to deal with a lot of people - to have your views challenged. And you see this with leaders who stay in power too long. He's been in power 24 years effectively. There's been upsides I think for Russia - the Russian economy - Russian life expectancy - but there are definitely downsides. And one of them is you get weird and you get autocratic. This is why we have term limits. Very few kings don't get crazy in old age.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. And you said some of this also in your post-Kremlin discussion while you're in Moscow still - which was very impressive to me - that you can just openly criticize. This was great.

Tucker Carlson

Well, I don't care.

Lex Fridman

I understand this. I just wish you did some more of that also with the supermarket video, and perhaps some more of that with Putin in front of you.

Tucker Carlson

Putin in front of me, it would be like, "I'm such a good person."

Lex Fridman

I know you see it as virtue signaling.

Tucker Carlson

Yeah, it is. Have you seen some of the interview he did with some NBC news child?

Lex Fridman

Yes, I understand. So I think you're just so annoyed by how bad journalists are, that you just didn't want to be them.

Tucker Carlson

Yeah, that's probably right actually.

Lex Fridman

Some great conversations will involve some challenging. You were confused about denazification.

Tucker Carlson

Well, first of all, I accept your criticism, and I accept it as true, that in some way I'm probably pivoting against what I dislike. And I have such contempt for American journalists on the basis of so much knowledge, that I probably was like, "I don't want to be like that." Fair, that is a kind of defensiveness and dumb. So you're right. As for the Nazi thing, I really felt like we were just speaking so far past each other that we would never come to - I was like, "I don't even know what the hell you're talking about." And especially when I decided or concluded that he really meant it, I was like, "That's just too freaking weird to me." I can think of many other examples where you're interviewing someone, and they'll say something that's like - I was interviewing a guy one time and he started talking about the black Israelites and, "We're the real Jews." And it wasn't on camera, but it was so far out to me that I was like, "We'll never understand common terms on that."

Lex Fridman

So you mentioned there's a bunch of conspiracy theories about Putin's health. How was he in person? What did he feel like? Did he look healthy?

Tucker Carlson

I'm not a health person myself, so I can easily gain 30 pounds and not know it, so I'm probably not a great person to ask. But no, he seemed fine. He had his arm hooked through a chair, and I heard people say, "Well, he's got Parkinson's." And Parkinson's can be controlled I know for periods with drugs. So it's hard to assess. One of the tells of Parkinson's is gait, how a person walks, I think. And his walking seemed fine, and I walked around with him and talked to him off camera. He's had some work done, for sure. He's 71 or two.

Lex Fridman

You mean visual purposes?

Tucker Carlson

Yeah, I'm 54, he's almost 20 years older than me, he looked younger than me.

Lex Fridman

What was that like? The conversation off camera, you walking around with him, what was the content of the conversation?

Tucker Carlson

I feel bad even with Putin or anybody talking about stuff that is off the record. But I'll just say that when I said that he didn't want to fight with NATO, or with the US State Department, or with Joe Biden because he wants a settlement, that's a very informed perspective, he doesn't. Say whatever you want about that, believe it or not, but that is true.

Lex Fridman

So he's open for peace, for peace negotiation?

Tucker Carlson

Russia tried to join NATO in 2000. That's a fact, okay? They tried to join NATO. So, just think about this. NATO exists to keep Russia contained. It exists as a bulwark against Russian territorial expansion. And whether or not Russia has any territorial ambitions is another question. Why would it, it's the largest landmass in the world? Whatever. But that's why it exists. So if Russia seeks to join NATO, it is by definition a sign that NATO's job is done here, we can declare victory and go home. The fact that they turned him down is so shocking to me, but it's true. Then he approaches the next president, George W. Bush - that was with Bill Clinton at the end of his term in 2000. He approaches the next president and said, "In our next missile deal, let's align on this, and we'll designate Iran as our common enemy." Iran, which is now effectively in league with Russia, thanks to our insane policies. And George W. Bush to his credit is like, "Well, that seems like kind of an innovative good idea." And Condi Rice, who's one of the stupidest people ever to hold power in the United States, if I can say. Who's monomaniacally anti-Russia because she had an advisor at Stanford who was, or something during the Cold War, "No, we can't do that." And Bush is just weak and so he agreed, it's like, "What? That is crazy." If you're fighting with someone and the person says, "You know what? Actually our interests align. And you've spent 80% of your mental disc space on hating me and opposing me or whatever, but actually we can be on the same team." If you don't at least see that as progress, what? If your interest is in helping your country, what's the counter argument? I don't even understand it. And no one has even addressed any of this, "The war of Russian aggression." Yeah, it was a war of Russian aggression, for sure. But how did we get there? We got there because Joe Biden and Tony Blinken dispatched Kamala Harris, who does not freelance this stuff, fair to say, to the Munich Security Conference two years ago this month, February 2022. And said in a press conference to Zelenskyy, poor Zelenskyy, "We want you to join NATO." This was not in a backroom, this was in public at a press conference, knowing because he said it 4,000 times, "We don't want nuclear weapons from the United States or NATO on our western border." Duh. And days later, he invaded. So what is that? And I raised that question in my previous job, and I was denounced as of course a traitor or something. But okay, great, I'm a traitor.

What's the answer? What's the answer? Tora Nuland - who I know - not dumb - hasn't helped the US in any way - an architect of the Iraq war - architect of this disaster. One of the people who destroyed the US dollar. Okay, fine. But you're not stupid. So, you're trying to get a war by acting that way. What's the other explanation? By the way, NATO didn't want Ukraine because it didn't meet the criteria for admission. So why would you say that? Because you want a war, that's why. And that war has enriched a lot of people to the tune of billions. So I don't care if I sound like some kind of left-wing conspiracy nut, because I'm neither left-wing nor a conspiracy nut. Tell me how I'm wrong.

Lex Fridman

Who do you think is behind it? If you were to analyze, zoom out, looking at the entirety of human history, the military industrial complex, you said Kamala Harris, is it individuals? Is it this collective flock that people are just pro-war as a collective?

Tucker Carlson

It's the hive mind. And I spent my whole life in DC from 85 to 2020, so 35 years. And again, I grew up around it in that world. And I do think that conspiracies - of course, there are conspiracies. But in general, the hive mind is responsible for the worst decisions. It's a bunch of people with the same views, views that have not been updated in decades. Putin said something that I thought was absolutely true, I don't know how he would know this, but it is true because I lived among them. So the Soviet Union dissolves in August of '91 on my honeymoon in Bermuda, I'll never forget it. And it was a big thing, if you lived in DC. I mean - the receptionist in my office in 1991 was getting a master's in Russian from Georgetown, he was going to be a Sovietologist. And he was among thousands of people in Washington on that same track. And so the Soviet Union collapses, well, so does the rationale for a good portion of the US government, has been dedicated for over 40 years to opposing this thing that no longer exists. So there's a lot of forward momentum, there's a huge amount of money, the bulk of the money in the richest country in the world, aimed in this direction. And it's very hard for people to readjust, to reassess. And you see this in life all the time. I love my wife, all of a sudden she ran off with my best friend. Holy shit. I didn't expect that this morning. Now, it's a reality. How do I deal with that? Well, I got stage 4 cancer diagnosis and it's all bad, but just saying, "That's the nature of life." Things that you did not anticipate - never thought you'd have to face - happen out of nowhere - and you have to adjust your expectations and your goals. And people have a hard time with that - very hard time with that. So, that's a lot of it. If you're Condoleezza Rice - sort of highly ambitious mid-wit - who gets this degree from Stanford - and you read Tolstoy in the original. Sure you did. And you spent your whole life thinking that Russia is the center of evil in the world. It's kind of hard to be like, "Well, actually there's a new threat and it's coming from farther east. It's primarily an economic threat." And maybe all the threats aren't reduced to tank battles. That's the other thing - is these people are so inelastic in their thinking - so lacking imagination and flexibility that they can't sort of imagine a new framework. And the new framework is not that you're going to go to war with China over Formosa - Taiwan. No, the framework is that

all of a sudden, all the infrastructure in Tijuana is going to be built by China and that's a different kind of threat. But they can't kind of get there because they're not that impressive.

Lex Fridman

So, you actually have mentioned this. It's not just the Cold War. It's World War II that populates most of their thinking in Washington. You mentioned Churchill, Chamberlain, and Hitler - and they're kind of seeing the World War II as kind of the good war and successful role the United States played in that war. They're kind of seeing that dynamic - that geopolitical dynamic - and applying it everywhere else still.

Tucker Carlson

Yeah, it's a template for everything. And I think it's of huge significance to the development of the West, to the civilization we live in now, to world history, was a world war. And so I think it's worth knowing a lot about, and being honest about, and all the rest. But it's hardly the sum total of human history, it's a snapshot. And so you keep hearing people refer to - not even the war, no one ever talks about the war. How much does Tony Blinken know about the Battle of Stalingrad? Probably zero, he doesn't know anything. Largest battle in human history, but I bet he knows nothing. But he knows a lot about the clichés surrounding the '38 to '40 period, 1938 to 1940. And everything is kind of expressed through that formula. And not everything is that formula, that's all I'm saying. And the Republicans have a strange weakness for it, particularly the closeted ones, the weird ones who have no life other than starting more wars. Everything to them, the most vulnerable, I would say, among them, emotionally, psychologically vulnerable, the dumbest, they will always say the same thing. And it appeals to Republican voters, unfortunately. That every problem is the result of weakness. Everyone's Chamberlain, Germany never would've gone in to Poland - Czechoslovakia - if England had been stronger. That's the argument. Is that true? I don't know, actually - maybe. It might be totally true. It might not be true at all. I really don't know. But not everything is that. That's not always true. If I go up to you in a bar and I say, "I hate your neck tie." I'm being pretty aggressive with you - pretty strong. You might beat the shit out of me actually or shoot me if I do that. An aggressive posture doesn't always get you the outcome that you want. Sometimes it requires a more sophisticated Mediterranean posture. I mean - it kind of depends. It's a time-and-place thing. And they don't acknowledge that. Everything is this same template and that's not the road to good decision making at all.

Lex Fridman

Since we're on the time period, let me ask you a almost cliché question, but it applies to you, which you've interviewed a lot of world leaders. If you had the chance to interview Hitler in '39, '40, '41, first of all, would you do it? And how would you do it? I assume you would do it given who you are.

Tucker Carlson

Man, it would be a massive cost for doing it. It may destroy my life to interview Putin, though I can tell you as much as I want that I'm not a Putin defender, I only care about the United States. That's 100% true, anyone who knows me will tell you what's true, I keep saying it. But history may record me to the extent it records me at all as a tool of Putin, a hater of America. That seems absurd to me, but absurd things happen. What would I ask Hitler? I don't even know. I guess I would probably ask him, what I asked Putin, which is what I ask everybody, "What's your motive? Why did you do..." I mean - if he'd already gone into Poland, "Why are you doing that? What's your goal?" And then the question is: Is he going to answer honestly? I don't know. You can't make someone answer a question honestly. You can only sort of shut up while they talk and then let people decide what they think of the answer.

Lex Fridman

Well, just like in the bar fight, there's different ways.

Tucker Carlson

There are different ways, that's exactly right. Man, is that true? That is absolutely right.

Lex Fridman

I mean - your energy with Putin, for example, was such that it felt like he could trust you. I felt like he could tell you a lot. I think -

Tucker Carlson

I just wanted to get it on the record, that's all I wanted.

Lex Fridman

I think it was a extremely - we have to acknowledge how important that interview was, for the record, and for opening the door for conversation. Opening the door to conversation literally is the path to more conversations in peace talks.

Tucker Carlson

Well, I would flip it around and say anyone who seeks to shut that down by focusing on a supermarket video of four minutes versus a two hour and 15 minute long interview with a world leader, anyone who doesn't want more conversation, who wants fewer facts, fewer perspectives is totalitarian, and probably doesn't have good intent. I mean - I can honestly say for all my many manifold faults, I've never tried to make people shut up. It's not in me, I don't believe in that.

Lex Fridman

So Putin's folks have shown interest for quite a while to speaking with me. So you've spoken with him, what advice would you give?

Tucker Carlson

Oh, do it immediately. How's your Russian, by the way?

Lex Fridman

Fluent.

Tucker Carlson

Have you kept up with it?

Lex Fridman

Yeah, fluent, so it would most likely be in Russian. So that's the other thing is I do have a question about language barrier, was it annoying?

Tucker Carlson

It's horrible. I mean - I don't have much of a technique as an interviewer other than listen really carefully, that's my only skill. I don't have the best questions, I certainly don't have the best questions. All I do that I'm proud of and that I think works is I just listen super carefully. I never let a word go by that I'm not paying - it exhausts me, actually. But you can't do that in a foreign language because there's a delay. And here, I'm just whining. But it's real.

Lex Fridman

It's not whining. Can you actually describe the technical details of that? Are you hearing concurrently at the same time?

Tucker Carlson

Yes, but there's a massive lag. So what's happening is - so, the translators - so, we were, of course, extremely uptight about the logistical details. So we brought our own cameraman who I've been around the world with, who worked at Fox, came with me now, amazing. And he did our cameras, lighting, everything, we had full control of that, and we had control of the tape. The Russians also had their own cameras, and I don't know what they did with it. But we had full control of that, and we brought our own translator. We got our own translator, because I don't trust anyone. So I think we had a good translator, we had two of them actually, because they get exhausted. But the problem is, from my perspective, as someone who's trying to think of a follow-up and listen to the answer, Putin will talk, and you can in part of your ear hear the Slavic sounds, and then over that is a guy with a Slavic accent speaking English. And then you can hear Putin stop talking, and then this guy's answer goes on for another 15, 20 seconds. So it's super disconcerting, and it's really hard. And the other thing is, it doesn't matter how good your translators are. I'm interested in language, I speak only English fluently, but I'm really interested in language, and I work in language. It doesn't matter how good your translator is, in literature and in conversation you miss so much if the language is moving - I mean - you see this in Bible study. You see it in Dostoevsky. You see it everywhere. If you don't speak Aramaic, Hebrew, Russian - you're not

really getting - I mean - even in Romance languages. I like Balzac - who obviously wrote in French. You read "Père Goriot"? It's an amazing novel - hilarious - and you're not really getting it. And it's not that French and English are not that far apart. Russian, what?

Lex Fridman

Plus conversation. So, the chemistry of conversation, the humor, the wit, the play with words, all this type of -

Tucker Carlson

Exactly. And my understanding of Russian as a lover of Russian literature in English, is that it's not a simple language at all. The grammar's complex, there's a lot that's expressed that will be lost in the translation. So, yes. I mean - the fact that you speak native Russian, I mean - I would run, not walk to that interview because I think it would just be amazing. You would get so much more out of it than I did.

Lex Fridman

And we should say that you've met a lot of world leaders, both Zelenskyy and Putin are intelligent, witty, even funny. So, there's a depth to the person that could be explored through a conversation - just on that element - the linguistic element.

Tucker Carlson

For sure. And Putin speaks decent English. I spoke to him in English. So, I know that. But he's not comfortable with it at all. But Zelenskyy is, I think.

Lex Fridman

No, he is - well, he's better than Putin at English, but the humor, the wit, the intelligence, all of that is not quite there in English. He says simple points, but the guy's a comedian, and he's a comedian primarily in Russian, the Russian language. So the Ukrainian language is now used mostly primarily as a kind of symbol of independence.

Tucker Carlson

I'm aware of that, it's a political decision. No, I know.

Lex Fridman

Really his native language is Russian language.

Tucker Carlson

Of course, as a lot of people in Ukraine.

Lex Fridman

But you can also understand his position, that he might not want to be speaking Russian publicly. That's something I've -

Tucker Carlson

I don't think they're allowed to speak in Russian in some places in Ukraine. That's one of the reasons that Russia was so mad, is that they were attacking language. And that's a fair complaint, like, "What?" And by the way, if you haven't been to Moscow in a while, you should see it, and you will pick up a million things that were invisible to me, and you should assess it for yourself. And my strong advice would be, even if you don't interview Putin, go over there, spend a week there, and assess what you think. I mean - how restricted does the society feel? I mean - it would take a lot of balls to do this because - I mean - whatever you decide, you will be sucked into conversations that have nothing to do with you, political conversations. You're obviously not a political activist, you're an interviewer. But I think it would be so interesting.

Lex Fridman

But for an interview itself, is there advice you have about how to carry an interview? It is fundamentally different when you do it in the native language.

Tucker Carlson

Yes, I mean - I think I approached - and maybe I did it incorrectly, but this was the product of a lot of thought. I was coming into that interview aware that he hadn't given an interview at all with anybody since the war started. So I had a million different questions, and as noted, I didn't ask them because I just wanted to focus on the war. But I mean - there's so many - I'll send you my notes that I wrote, I was like a diligent little girl.

Lex Fridman

That would be amazing, but I think -

Tucker Carlson

All these questions, and some of them I thought were pretty funny.

Lex Fridman

In your case, I think the very fact of the interview was the most important thing.

Tucker Carlson

Yeah, that's probably right. The question that I really wanted to ask that I was almost going to ask, because it made me laugh out loud. I was sitting drinking coffee beforehand with my producers, and I was like, "I'm going to go in there. My first question is going to be, Mr. President, I've been here in the Kremlin for two days preparing, and I haven't seen a single African-American in a position of power in the Kremlin." I thought that's too culturally specific and dry. And he'd be like, "This guy's freaking crazy."

Lex Fridman

Yeah, you don't want to open with humor.

Tucker Carlson

I know.

Lex Fridman

Alright.

Tucker Carlson

Doesn't translate.

Lex Fridman

It doesn't. Oh, yeah, and there'll be a small delay where you have to wait for the joke, to see if it lands or not.

Tucker Carlson

Like, "What? This is not America."

Lex Fridman

At Fox, you were for a time the most popular host. After Fox you've garnered a huge amount of attention as well, same, probably more. Do you worry that popularity and just that attention gets to your head, is a kind of drug that clouds your thinking?

Tucker Carlson

You think? I live in a spiritual graveyard of people killed by the quest for fame. Yes, I have lived in it. I mean - I would say the two advantages I have. One, I have a happy family, and a stable family, and a stable group of friends, which is just the greatest blessing, and a strong love of nature that my family shares. So I'm in nature every day. And I have a whole series of rituals designed to keep me from becoming the asshole that I could easily become. But no, of course, I mean - that's what I - and I don't want to beat up on - I'm grateful to Elon who gave me a platform, and I mean that sincerely. But I definitely don't spend a lot of time on social media or on the internet, for that exact reason. Well, first of all, I think it's, as I've said, a much more controlled environment than we acknowledge, and I don't want lies in my head. But I also don't want to become the sort of person who's seeking the adulation of strangers, I think that's soul poison. And I said earlier that I think that the desire for power and money will kill you, and I believe that, and I've seen it a lot. But I also think the desire for the love of people you don't know is every bit as poisonous, maybe more so. And so, yes. And it's not just because I've obviously spent most of my life in public. And in fact, I don't spend my life in public, and I'm a completely private person. But professionally, I've spent my life in public. It's not just that, it's social media makes everybody into a cable news host. And we were talking off the air, my new - I'm obsessed with this. I don't know enough about it, but here's what I do know. South Korea, amazing country, great people. I grew up around Koreans - probably no group - if I can generalize about a group - that I like more than Koreans - are just smart, funny, honest, brave. I really like Koreans. I always have my whole life - growing

up in sunny California with Koreans. South Korea is dying. It's literally dying. It's way below replacement rate in fertility. Its suicide rate is astronomical. Why is that? It's a rich country. Of course, I don't know the answer. But I suspect it has something to do with the penetration of technology into South Korean society - is I think certainly one of the highest in the world. People live online there. And there was a belief - for a bunch of reasons - in South Korea that western technology would be a liberating progressive force and I think it's been the opposite. It's my sense - strong sense. And I think it's true in this country too. And I don't understand how people can ignore the decline in life expectancy or the rise in fentanyl use. It's not just about China shipping precursor chemicals to Mexico, it's like, "Why would you take that shit?"

Lex Fridman

I hope those two things aren't coupled, technological advancement and the erosion -

Tucker Carlson

Well, let me ask you - and I know you're a technologist and I respect it. And there's a lot about technology that I like and have benefited from. I had back surgery and it worked, okay? So, I'm not against all technology. But can you name a big technology in the last 20 years that we can say conclusively has improved people's lives?

Lex Fridman

Well, conclusive is a tough thing.

Tucker Carlson

Pretty conclusively, that we can brag about.

Lex Fridman

Well, you've criticized Google search recently, but I think making the world knowledge accessible to anyone anywhere across the world through Google search.

Tucker Carlson

Well, I love that, I love that idea. Are people better informed or are they more superstitious and misled than they were 20 years ago? It's not close.

Lex Fridman

Well, no, I don't know, I think they are more informed. It's just revealing the ignorance. The internet has revealed ignorance that people have, but I think the ignorance has been decreasing gradually. And if you look, you can criticize places like Wikipedia a lot, and very many aspects of Wikipedia are very biased. But most of it are actually topics that don't have any bias in them, because they're not political or so on, there's no battle over those topics. And most of Wikipedia is the fastest way to learn about a thing.

Tucker Carlson

I couldn't agree more. You can very quickly imagine - you're an expert and that may be the problem, I think. No, I just experienced it in Moscow. Again, I feel like I'm in the top 1% for information, certainly intake, because it's my job. And I had literally - and I'm always out of the country, I've been around the world many times. I feel like I know a lot about the rest of the world, or I thought I did. And how did I not know any of that? And maybe I'm just unusually ignorant or something, or reading the wrong things. I don't know what it was, but all I know is the digital information sources that I use to understand just something as simple as, what's the city of Moscow like? Were completely inadequate. And anyway, look, I just am worried that we're missing the obvious signs. And the obvious signs are reproduction, life expectancy, sobriety. If you have a society where people just can't deal with being sober, don't want to have children, and are dying younger, you have a suicidal society - an extremely sick, you have a suicidal society. And I'm not even blaming anyone for it. I'm just saying objectively that is true. And the measure of a health of your society is the number of children that you have and how well they do. It's super simple. That's the next generation. We all die and what replaces us? And if you don't care, then you're suicidal. And maybe other things too. But that's all I'm saying. So what happened to South Korea? Why can't anyone answer the question? They're great people, they're rich, they have all these advantages. They're on the cutting edge of every American - for a foreign country, they're more American than maybe any other country other than Canada. And what happened?

Lex Fridman

And I mean - your fundamental worry is the same kind of thing might be happening or will happen in the United States.

Tucker Carlson

Well, let me just ask you this. I think North Korea seems like the most dystopian, horrible place in the world, right? Obviously it's a byword for dystopia, right? North Korean. I use it all the time. And I mean it. If in a hundred years there are more North Koreans still alive than there are South Koreans, what does that tell us?

Lex Fridman

Yeah, that's something to worry about. But also -

Tucker Carlson

But how did it happen? But why? I'm interested in the why. This is a question I asked Putin. Sometimes we don't know why, but why does no one ask why?

Lex Fridman

I've seen a lot of increased distrust in science, which is deserved in many places. It just worries me because some of the greatest inventions of humanity come from science and technological innovation.

Tucker Carlson

Okay, then let me ask you a couple quick questions and perhaps you have the answer. I've always assumed that was true. And I should say that when I was a kid, I lived in La Jolla, California, next to the Salk Institute named after Jonas Salk, a resident of La Jolla, California, who created the polio vaccine and saved untold millions. And so my belief, which is still my belief, actually, that's a great thing. It's one of the great additions to human flourishing ever. But if technology is so great, why is life expectancy going down? And why are fewer people having kids? And why would anybody who has internet access ever use fentanyl? What is that? What is going on? And until we can answer that question, I think we have to assume the question of whether technology is a net good or a net bad is unresolved at best. Right?

Lex Fridman

At best, perhaps. But technology is the very tool which will allow us to have that kind of discourse to figure out to do science better.

Tucker Carlson

I mean - I want that to be true. And when you said that the internet allows people to escape the darkness of ignorance, man, that resonated with me because I felt that way in 1993, 4 when it was first starting, and I first got on it and I thought, man, this is amazing. You can talk for free to anyone around the world. This is going to be great. But let me just ask you this. This is something I've never gotten over or gotten a straight answer to. Why is it that in any European city, the greatest buildings indisputably were built before electricity and the machine age? Why has no one ever built a medieval cathedral in the modern era ever?

Lex Fridman

Well -

Tucker Carlson

What is that?

Lex Fridman

- indisputably? You have a presumption. We have a good definition of beauty is. There's a lot of people -

Tucker Carlson

Right. Let's be specific. Pick a European city or any city in the world and tell me that there's a prettier building than say Notre Dame before it was set fire to.

Lex Fridman

There's other sources of prettiness and beauty.

Tucker Carlson

Purely in architecture. Of course. Trees are prettier than any building in my opinion. So I agree with you there.

Lex Fridman

Well, but also there could be, I grew up in the pre-internet age, but -

Tucker Carlson

Good.

Lex Fridman

Good. But if you grew up in the internet age, I think your eyes would be more open to beauty that's digital. That is in a digital -

Tucker Carlson

I'm not discounting the possibility of digital beauty at all. And the Ted Kaczynski in me wants to, but that's too close-minded. I agree. I'm completely willing to believe there is such a thing as digital beauty. I mean - I have digital pictures of my phone, of my dogs and kids. So I know that there is, but purely in the realm of architecture because it's limited, and it is one of the pure expressions of human creativity. We need places to live and work and worship and eat. And so we build buildings and every civilization has, but the machine age, the industrial age seemed to have decreased the quality and the beauty in that one expression of human creativity, architecture. And why is that?

Lex Fridman

Well, I could also argue that I'm a big sucker for bridges and modern bridges can give older bridges a run for their money.

Tucker Carlson

I like bridges too. So I agree with you, sort of. But the Brooklyn Bridge - I don't know that there's any modern bridges that was built in late -

Lex Fridman

19th century.

Tucker Carlson

- 19th century. Very much in the industrial age. But I'm just saying the great cathedrals of Europe -

Lex Fridman

Sure, yeah.

Tucker Carlson

Even the pyramids, whoever built them. It seems like it's super obvious. I'm dealing on the autism level here, just like, well, why is that? But that's a good way to start. If all of a sudden you have electricity and hydraulics and you have access to - I mean - I have machines in my wood shop at home that are so much more advanced than anything. Any cathedral builder in 15th century Europe had. And yet there's neither I nor anyone I know could even begin to understand how a flying buttress was built. And so what is that?

Lex Fridman

And the other question is also consider that whatever is creating this technology is unstoppable.

Tucker Carlson

Well, there's that.

Lex Fridman

And the question is how do you steer it then? You have to look in a realist way at the world and say that if you don't, somebody else will. And you want to do it in a safe way. I mean - this is the Manhattan Project.

Tucker Carlson

Was the Manhattan Project a good idea, to create nuclear weapons? That's an easy call. No.

Lex Fridman

For me, it's an easy call in retrospect. In retrospect, yes. Because it seems like it stopped world wars. So the mutually assured destruction seems to have ended wars. Ended major military conflict.

Tucker Carlson

Well it's been what, 80 years? Not even 80 years, 79. And so we haven't had a world war in 79 years. But one nuclear exchange would of course kill more people than all wars in human history combined.

Lex Fridman

Your saying 79 makes it sound like you're counting.

Tucker Carlson

I am counting. Because I think it obviously, it's completely demonic and everyone pretends like it's great. Nuclear weapons are evil.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, no, absolutely.

Tucker Carlson

The use of them is evil, and the technology itself is evil. And in my opinion, I mean – it's like if you can't, that's just so obvious. And what I'm saying is I'm not against all technology. I took a shower this morning. It was powered by an electric pump, heated by a water heater. I loved it. I sat in an electric sauna. I'm not against all technology, obviously, but the mindless worship of technology?

Lex Fridman

Mindless worship of anything is pretty bad.

Tucker Carlson

But I'm just saying – so you said, "Let's approach this from a realist perspective." Okay, let's. If we think that there is a reasonable or even a potential chance it could happen, maybe on the margins, let's assign it a 15% chance, that AI, for example, gets away from us, and we are now ruled by machines that may actually hate us. Who knows what they want. Why wouldn't we use force to stop that from happening? So you're walking down the street in midtown Manhattan, it's midnight. You've had a few drinks, you're coming from dinner, you're walking back to your apartment. A guy, a very thuggish looking guy, young man, approaches you. He's 50 feet away. He pulls out a handgun, he lifts it up to you. You also are armed. Do you shoot him or do you wait to get shot? Because all the data, look, he hasn't shot you. He's not committed a crime other than carrying a weapon in New York City. But maybe he's got a license. You don't know. It could be legal, but he's pointing a gun at you. Is it fair to kill him before he kills you, even though you can't prove that he will kill you?

Lex Fridman

If I knew my skills with a gun because he already has the gun out.

Tucker Carlson

Right, but it turns out that you have some confidence in your ability to stop the threat by force. Are you justified in doing that?

Lex Fridman

I just like this picture. Am I wearing a cowboy hat? No.

Tucker Carlson

No. But you are wearing cowboy boots and they're clicking on the cobblestones. Actually, you're in the meat packing.

Lex Fridman

Okay, great. I like this picture. I'm just, I think about this a lot, no. Yeah, I understand your point. But also I think that metaphor falls apart if there's other nations at play here. Same as

with the nuclear bomb. If US doesn't build it, will other nations build it? The Soviet Union build it. China or Nazi Germany.

Tucker Carlson

We faced this. I mean - we faced this and the last president to try and keep in a meaningful way nuclear proliferation under control was John F. Kennedy. And look what happened to him.

Lex Fridman

But what's your suggestion? Was it inevitable?

Tucker Carlson

Well, hold on. Well, their position in 1962 was no, it's absolutely not inevitable. Or perhaps it's inevitable in the sense that our death is inevitable as human beings, but we fight against the dying of the light anyway, because that's the right thing to do. No, we were willing to use force to prevent other countries from getting the bomb because we thought that would be really terrible. We acknowledged that while there were upsides to nuclear weapons, just like there are upsides to AI, the downside was terrifying in the hands of - I mean - that's the thing that I kind of don't get. It's like the applications of that technology in the hands of people who mean to do harm and destroy. It's so obviously terrifying.

Lex Fridman

It's not so obvious to me. What I'm terrified about is probably similar thing that you're terrified about, is using that technology to manipulate people's minds. That's much more reasonable to me as an expectation, a real threat that's possible in the next few years.

Tucker Carlson

But what matters more than that?

Lex Fridman

Well, I think that could lead to destruction of human civilization through other humans, for example, starting nuclear wars.

Tucker Carlson

Yeah. Well, I mean - this is one of the reasons I wasn't afraid in the Vladimir Putin interview. It's all ending anyway. You know what I mean?

Lex Fridman

Yeah. Well -

Tucker Carlson

Might as well dance on the deck of the Titanic. Don't be a pussy. Enjoy it.

Lex Fridman

I think we will forever fight against the dying of the light as the entirety of the civilization.

Tucker Carlson

Someone the other day said that Biden ascribed that to Churchill. That was a Churchill quote. That's kind of what I'm saying. It's like if you live in a society where people don't read anymore, people are by definition much more ignorant, but they don't know it. I do think the Wikipedia culture, and I think there are cool things about Wikipedia, certainly its ease of use is high and that's great, but people get the sense that like, oh, I know a lot about this or that or the other thing. And it's like the key to wisdom, again, the key to wise decision making is doing what you don't know. And it's just so important to be reminded of what a dummy you are and how ignorant you are all the time. That's why I like having daughters. It's like it's never far from mind how flawed I am. And that's important.

Lex Fridman

In the same way I hope to be a dad one day.

Tucker Carlson

You should have a ton of kids. Are you going to have a ton of pups?

Lex Fridman

Five - oh, pup? You mean kids?

Tucker Carlson

Children.

Lex Fridman

Yes. But also I've been thinking of getting a dog - but unrelated. I would love to have five or six kids. Yeah, for sure.

Tucker Carlson

Have you found a victim yet?

Lex Fridman

You make it sound so romantic, Tucker.

Tucker Carlson

I'm just joking. I love it. No, you should totally do that.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, 100%. But also in terms of being humble, I do jiu-jitsu. It's a martial art where you get your ass kicked all the time.

Tucker Carlson

I love that.

Lex Fridman

It's nice to get your ass kicked. Physical humbling is unlike anything else, I think, because we're kind of monkeys at heart and just getting your ass kicked just really helpful.

Tucker Carlson

I agree. I've had it happen to me twice.

Lex Fridman

Twice is enough.

Tucker Carlson

It got me to quit drinking. I was good at starting fights. Not good at winning them, but no, I completely agree with that.

Lex Fridman

Let me ask you, you've been pretty close with Donald Trump. Your private texts about him around the 2020 election were made public in one of them. You said you passionately hate Trump. When that came out, you said that you actually no, you love him. So how do you explain the difference?

Tucker Carlson

My texts reflect a lot of things, including how I feel at the moment that I sent them. That specific text I happen to know since I had to go through it forensically during my deposition in a case I was not named in. I had nothing to do with whatsoever. It's crazy how civil suits can be used to hurt people you disagree with politically. But I was mad at a very specific person. I mean - really I - you're asking me - I'll tell you exactly what that was. It was the second the election ended and they stopped voting, stopped the vote counting on election night. I was like, well, this is, and it's all now mail-in ballots and electronic voting machines. I was like, that's a rigged election. I thought that then, I think now. Now it's obvious that it was. But at the time I was like, "I feel like that was crazy what just happened". I want, but I don't want to go on TV and say that's a rigged election because I don't have any evidence it's a rigged election. You can't do that. It's irresponsible and it's wrong. So I was like, the Trump campaign was making all these claims about this or that fraud. So I was trying my best to substantiate them, to follow up on it. Everyone was like, "Shut up, Trump, you lost. Go away. We're going to indict you." But I felt like my job was to be like, no, the guy's, he's president, he's claiming the election just got stolen and he's making these claims. Let's see if we can - well, the people around him were so incompetent. It was just absolutely crazy. And so I called a couple of times, I finally give up, but I'd call and be like, "Alright, you guys claim that these inconsistencies and this whatever, this happened, give me evidence and I'll put it on

TV." It's my job to bring stuff that is not going to be aired anywhere else to the public. It was insane how incompetent and unserious -

Lex Fridman

So they weren't able to provide like -

Tucker Carlson

Here's the point of the story and of that text. So then they come out and they say, well, dead people voted. Well, that's just an easy call. If a dead person voted, we can prove someone's dead. Because being dead is one of the few things we're good at verifying because you start to smell and there's a record of it. It's called the death certificate. So it was like, give me the names of people who are dead who voted, and then we can get their registration and we can show they voted. Five names. So I go on TV and I say this Caroline Johnson, 79 of Waukegan, Illinois voted. Here's her death certificate. She died. And the campaign sends me this stuff. Now in general, I don't take stuff directly from campaigns. Because they all lie, because their job is to get elected or whatever. So I'm very wary of campaigns having been around it for 30 years, but I made an exception to my rule and I got a bunch of stuff from them. Well, of the six names, two of them are still alive. What? I immediately corrected it the next night. CNN did a whole segment on how I was spreading disinformation, which I was by the way. In this one case, they were right. I was so mad. I was like, "I hate you. I'm not talking about you. I'm so mad." Anyway, that's the answer. That's what that was.

Lex Fridman

Who were you texting to?

Tucker Carlson

My producer and I was venting. It's like a producer I was really close to, and I've known him for a long time. He's really smart. And he's like, he was someone I could be honest with. And I was like, and by the way, it was so funny. I mean now I'm doing what was me, which I will keep to a minimum, but it's like stealing someone's texts? And by the way, I was an idiot. I should have said, "Come and arrest me. I'm not giving you my freaking text messages." But I got bullied into it by a lawyer - I didn't get bullied into it. I was weak enough to agree with a lawyer. It was my fault. Never should have done that. "Fuck you. They're my texts." I'm not even named in this case. That's what I should have said, but I didn't. I said I was mad on the air the next day, but not in language that colorful, but whatever. I try to be transparent. I mean - I also think - by the way, if you watch someone over time, you don't always know what they really think. But you can tell if someone's lying. You can sort of feel it in people. And I have lied. I'm sure I'll lie again. I don't want to lie. I don't think I'm a liar. I try not to be a liar. I don't want to be a liar. I think it's really important not to be a liar.

Lex Fridman

You said nice things about me earlier. I'm starting to question. I have questions. I have a lot of questions, Tucker.

Tucker Carlson

I hate Lex Fridman.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. I'm going to have to see your texts after this.

Tucker Carlson

My texts are so uninteresting now. It's like crazy how uninteresting they are.

Lex Fridman

Emojis and gifs.

Tucker Carlson

Yeah, lots of dog pictures.

Lex Fridman

Nice. You said some degree the election was rigged. Was it stolen?

Tucker Carlson

It was a hundred percent stolen. Are you joking?

Lex Fridman

It was rigged to that large of a degree?

Tucker Carlson

Yeah. They completely change the way people vote right before the election on the basis of COVID, which had nothing to do with -

Lex Fridman

So in that way it was rigged, meaning manipulated.

Tucker Carlson

One hundred percent. Then you censor the information people are allowed to get, anyone who complains about COVID - which is like, by the way, it might've hurt Trump. But I mean it's like whatever. I mean you could play it many different ways. You can't have censorship in a democracy by definition. Here's how it works. The people rule. They vote for representatives to carry their agenda to the capitol city and get it enacted. That's how they're in charge. And then every few years they get to reassess the performance of those people in an election. In

order to do that, they need access, unfettered access to information. And no one, particularly not people who are already in power, is allowed to tell them what information they can have. They have to have all information that they want, whether the people in charge want it or don't want it or think it's true or think it's false, it doesn't matter. And the second you don't have that, you don't have a democracy. It's not a free election, period. And that's very clear in other countries, I guess. But it's not clear here. But I would say it's this election that - it took me a while to come to this, but it's this election that's the referendum on democracy. Biden is senile. He's literally senile. He can't talk, he can't walk. The whole world knows that, leave our borders. Everybody in the world knows it. A senile man is not going to get elected in the most powerful country in the world unless there's fraud, period. Who would vote for a senile man? He literally can't talk. And nobody I've ever met thinks he's running the US government because he's not. And so I think the world is looking on at this coming election and saying - and a lot of the world hates Trump, okay? It's not an endorsement of Trump, but it's just true. If Joe Biden gets re-elected, democracy is a freaking joke. That's just true.

Lex Fridman

I think half the country doesn't think he's senile, just thinks -

Tucker Carlson

Do you really think that?

Lex Fridman

- he's speaking -

Tucker Carlson

They don't think he's senile?

Lex Fridman

Yeah, I think he just has difficulty speaking. It's like -

Tucker Carlson

Why do they think he has difficulty speaking?

Lex Fridman

- gradual degradation. Just getting old. So cognitive ability is degrading.

Tucker Carlson

What's the difference between degraded cognitive ability and senility?

Lex Fridman

Well, senility has a threshold of is beyond a threshold to where he could be a functioning leader.

Tucker Carlson

That may be a term of art that I don't fully understand and maybe there's an IQ threshold or something, but I'm happy to go with degraded cognitive ability.

Lex Fridman

Sure. But that's an age thing.

Tucker Carlson

But he's the leader of the United States with the world's second-largest nuclear arsenal.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, I'm with you. I'm a sucker for great speeches and for speaking abilities of leaders. And Biden with two wars going on and potentially more, the importance of a leader to speak eloquently, both privately in a room with other leaders and publicly is really important.

Tucker Carlson

I agree with you that rhetorical ability really matters. Convincing people that your program is right, telling them what we're for, national identity, national unity, all come from words. I agree with all of that. But at this stage, even someone who grunted at the microphone would be more reassuring than a guy who clearly doesn't know where he is. And I think everyone knows that. And I can't imagine there's an honest person in Washington, which is going to vote for Biden by 90% obviously because they're all dependent on the federal government for their income. But is there any person who could say, out of 350 million Americans that's the most qualified to lead, or even in the top 80%, like what? That's so embarrassing that that guy is our president. And with wars going on, it's scary.

Lex Fridman

But it's complicated to understand why those are the choices we have.

Tucker Carlson

I agree. Well, it's a failure of the system. Clearly it's not working. If you've got one guy over 80, the other guy almost at 80 - people that age he should not be running anything.

Lex Fridman

You have on the Democratic side - you have Dean Phillips. You have RFK Jr. Until recently - I guess he's independent. And then, you have Vivek - who are all younger people. Why did they not connect to a degree to where the people vote?

Tucker Carlson

It's such an interesting, I mean - I think it's a really interesting question. There are a million different answers. And of course I don't fully understand it even though I feel like I've watched it pretty carefully. But I would say the bottom line is there's so much money vested in the federal apparatus, in the parties, in the government. As I said a minute ago, our economy's dominated by monopolies but the greatest of all monopolies is the federal monopoly which oversees and controls all the other monopolies. So it's really substantially about the money. It's not ideological. It's about the money. And if someone controls the federal government, I mean at this point, it's the most powerful organization in human history. It's kind of hard to fight that. And in the case of Trump, I know the answer there. They raided Mar-a-Lago. They indicted him on bullshit charges. And I felt that in myself too. Even I was like, come on, come on. Whatever you think of Trump - and I agreed with his immigration views and I really like Trump personally. I think he's hilarious and interesting, which he is. But it's like, okay, there are a lot of people in this country. At the very least, let's have a real debate. The second - messed up your cameras there, sorry, I'm getting excited. But the second they rated Mar-a-Lago on a documents charge, as someone from DC I was like, I know a lot about classification and all this stuff and been around it a lot. That's so absurd that I was like, now it's not about Trump, it's about our system continuing. If you can take out a presidential candidate on a fake charge, use the justice system to take the guy out of the race, then we don't have a representative democracy anymore. And I think a lot of Republican voters felt that way. If they hadn't indicted him, I'm not sure he would be the nominee. I really don't think he would be.

Lex Fridman

So now a vote for Trump is a kind of fuck you to the system.

Tucker Carlson

Or an expression of your desire to keep the system that we had, which is one where voters get to decide. Prosecutors don't get to decide. Look, they told us for four years that Trump was a super criminal or something. I've actually been friends with some super criminals. I'm a little less judgy than most. So I didn't discount the possibility that he had - I don't know. He's in the real estate business in New York in the seventies. Did he kill someone? I don't know.

Lex Fridman

Yeah.

Tucker Carlson

No, I'm not joking. And I'm not for killing people, but anything's possible.

Lex Fridman

It's good that you took a stand on that.

Tucker Carlson

No, I'm not joking. I was like, well, who knows?

Lex Fridman

Real estate.

Tucker Carlson

And I didn't know. And what they came up with was a documents charge. Are you joking? And then the sitting president has the same documents violation, but he's fine. It's like, it's just crazy this is happening in front of all of us. And then it becomes - at that point, it's not about Joe Biden. It's not about Donald Trump. It's about preserving a system which has worked not perfectly, but pretty freaking well for 250 years. I know you don't like Trump. I get it. Let's not destroy that system. We can handle another four years of Trump. I think we can. Let's all calm down. What we can't handle is a country whose political system is run by the Justice Department. That is just, you're freaking Ecuador at that point. No.

Lex Fridman

So speaking of the Justice Department, CIA and intelligence agencies of that nature, which - you've been traveling quite a bit - probably tracked by everybody. Which is the most powerful intelligence agency do you think? CIA, Mossad, MI6, SVR? I could keep going. The Chinese?

Tucker Carlson

It depends what you mean by "powerful". Which one bats above its weight? We know which one -

Lex Fridman

Mossad, just to be clear, I guess is what you're talking about.

Tucker Carlson

Well, of course. Tiny country - very sophisticated intel service. Which one has the greatest global reach in comms? Which one is most able to read your texts? I assume the NSA, but Chinese are clearly pretty good. Israelis pretty good. The French actually are surprisingly good for kind of a declining country. Their intel services seem pretty impressive. No, I love France, but you know what I mean and all that. But the question - I grew up around all that stuff, that's all totally fine. A strong country should have a strong and capable intel service so its policymakers can make informed decisions. That's what they're for. And so as Vladimir Putin himself noted, I don't talk about it very much, but it's true. I applied to the CIA when I was in college because I was familiar with it because of where I lived and had grown up and everything. And I was like, seemed interesting. That's honestly the only reason. I was like, live in foreign countries, see history happen. I'm for that. I applied to the Operations Directorate. They turned me down on the basis of drug use actually. True. But anyway,

whatever. I was unsuited for it so I'm glad they turned me down. But the point is I didn't see CIA as a threat, partly because I was bathing in propaganda about CIA and I didn't really understand what it was and didn't want to know. But second, because my impression at the time was it was outwardly focused. It was focused on our enemies. I don't have a problem with that as much. The fact that CIA is playing in domestic politics and actually has for a long time, was involved in the Kennedy assassination, that's not speculation. That's a fact. And I confirmed that from someone who had read their documents that are still not public, it's shocking. You can't have that. And the reason I'm so mad is I really believe in the idea of representative government. Acknowledging its imperfections, but I should have some say, I live here, I'm a citizen. I pay all your freaking taxes. So the fact that they would be tampering with American democracy is so outrageous to me. And I don't know why Morning Joe is not outraged. This parade of dummies, highly credentialed dummies they have on Morning Joe every day. That doesn't bother them at all. How could that not bother you? Why is only Glenn Greenwald mad about it? I mean - it's confirmed. It's not like a fever dream. It's real. They played in the last election domestically, and I guess it shows how dumb I am because they've been doing that for many years. I mean - the guy who took out Mosaddegh lived on my street - one of the Roosevelts - CIA officer. So, I mean - again, I grew up around this stuff, but I never really thought - I never reached the obvious conclusion, which is that if the US government subverts democracy in other countries in the name of democracy, it will over time subvert democracy in my country. Why wouldn't it? That is, the corruption is like core. It's at the root of it. The purpose of the CIA was envisioned, at least publicly envisioned, as an intel gathering apparatus for the executive so the president could make wise foreign policy decisions. What the hell is happening in Country X? I don't know. Let me call the agency in charge of finding out. The point wasn't to freaking guarantee the outcome of elections.

Lex Fridman

I'm doing an Israel Palestine debate next week, but I have to ask you just your thoughts, maybe even from a US perspective, what do you think about Hamas attacks on Israel? What would be the right thing for Israel to do and what's the right thing for us to do in this? If you're looking at the geopolitics of it.

Tucker Carlson

I mean - it's not a topic that I get into a lot because I'm a non-expert and because I'm not - unlike every other American, I'm not emotionally invested in other countries just in general. I mean - I admire them or not, and I love visiting them. I love Jerusalem, probably my favorite city in the world, but I don't have an emotional attachment to it. So maybe I've got more clarity. I don't know, maybe less. Here's my view. I believe in sovereignty as mentioned, and I think each country has to make decisions based on its own interest, but also with reference to its own capabilities and its own long-term interest. And it's very unwise for - I'm not a huge fan of treaties. Some are fine - too many bad. But I think US aid, military aid to Israel and the implied security guarantees, some explicit, but many implied, security guarantees

of the United States to Israel probably haven't helped Israel that much long-term. It's a rich country with a highly capable population. Like every other country, it's probably best if it makes its decisions based on what it can do by itself. So I would definitely be concerned if I lived in Israel because I think fair or unfair - concerned if I lived in Israel because I think, fair or unfair, and really this is another product of technology, social media, public sentiment in that area is boiling over. I think it's going to be hard for some of the governments in the region, Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, to contain their own population. They don't want conflict with Israel at all. They were all pretty psyched actually for the trend in progress, the Saudi peace deal, which was never signed, but would've been great for everybody. Because trade peace, normal relations, that's good, okay? Let's just say. I know John Bolton doesn't like it, but it's good it, and it's kind of what we should be looking for. But now it's not possible. If you had a coalition of countries against Israel, I know Israel has nuclear weapons and has a capable military and all that and the backing of the United States, but it's a small country, I think I'd be very worried. So there's that. I don't see any advantage to the United States. I mean - I think it's important for each country to make its own decisions.

Lex Fridman

But it also is a place, like you said, where things are boiling over and it could spread across multiple nations into a major military conflict.

Tucker Carlson

Yeah. Well, I think it very easily could happen. In fact, probably right after Ramadan, if I had to guess. I pray it doesn't. But again, I don't think you can overstate the lack of wisdom, weakness, short-term thinking of American foreign policy leadership. These are the architects of the Iraq War, of the totally pointless destruction of Libya, totally pointless destruction of Syria, and the 20-year occupation of Afghanistan that resulted in a return to the status quo, of the Vietnam War. Their track record of the Korean war even going back 80 years is uninterrupted failures, one after the other. So I just don't have any confidence in those leaders to - when was the last time they improved another country? Can you think of that? Oh, the Marshall Plan. Well, you look at Europe now and you're like, "I don't know if that worked." But even if it did work, again 80 years ago. So when was the last country American foreign policy makers improved? Netanyahu's in a very difficult place, politically impossible. I mean - I'm glad I'm not Netanyahu, and I'm not sure he's capable of making wise long-term decisions anyway. But if I was just an Israeli, I'd be like, "I don't know if I want all this help and guidance." So yeah, I actually think it's worse than just having just returned from the Middle East and talking to a lot of pretty open-minded sort of pro-Israeli Arabs who want stability above all. The merchant class always wants stability. So I'm on their side, I guess. They're like, "Man, this could get super ugly super fast." American leadership is completely absent. It's just all posturing. People like Nikki Haley, you just wonder how does an advanced civilization promote someone like Nikki Haley to a position of authority? It's like what? Adults are talking. Adults are talking. Nikki Haley, please go away. That would be the appropriate response. But everyone's so intimidated to be like, "Oh, she's a strong woman."

She's so transparently weak and sort of ridiculous and doesn't know anything, and it's just thinks that jumping up and down and making these absurd blanket statements, repeating bumper stickers just like leadership or something. It's like a self-confident advanced society would never allow Nikki Haley to advance. I mean - she's really not impressive, sorry.

Lex Fridman

I just feel like you hold back too much and don't tell us what you really think.

Tucker Carlson

Sorry.

Lex Fridman

I think you just speak your mind more often.

Tucker Carlson

I mean - you can completely disagree with my opinions, but in the case of Nikki Haley, it's not like an opinion formed just from watching television, which I don't watch. It's an opinion formed from knowing Nikki Haley, so.

Lex Fridman

Strong words from Tucker, well felt too.

Tucker Carlson

Well, the world's in the balance. I mean - it's not just like -

Lex Fridman

Yes, yes. This is important stuff.

Tucker Carlson

Yeah, it's not just like, well, what should the capital gains rate be? It's like, do we live or die? I don't know. Let's consult Nikki Haley. So if you're asking should we live or die and consulting Nikki Haley, clearly you don't care about the lives of your children. That's how I feel.

Lex Fridman

Not to try to get a preview or anything, but do you have interest of interviewing Xi Jinping? If you do, how will you approach that?

Tucker Carlson

I have enormous interest in doing that, enormous, and a couple other people and we're working on it.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. I should also say, it's been refreshing you interviewing world leaders. I think when I've started seeing you do that, it made me realize how much that's lacking.

Tucker Carlson

Well, yeah, it's just interesting. I mean -

Lex Fridman

From even a historical perspective, it's interesting. But it's also important from a geopolitics perspective.

Tucker Carlson

Well, it's really changed my perspective and I've been going on about how American I am, and I think that's a great thing. I love America. But it's also we're so physically geographically isolated from the world, even though I traveled a ton as a kid, a lot, more than most people. But even now I'm like, "I'm so parochial." I see everything through this lens and getting out and seeing the rest of the world to which we really are connected, that's real, is vitally important. So, yeah. I mean - at this stage I don't kind of need to do it, but I really want to, just motivated by curiosity and trying to expand my own mind and not be closed-minded and see the fullest perspective I possibly can in order to render wise judgments. I mean - that's like the whole journey of life.

Lex Fridman

I was just hanging out with Rogan yesterday, Joe Rogan. I mentioned to him that as me being a fan of his show, that I would love for him to talk with you and he said he's up for it. Any reason you guys haven't done it already.

Tucker Carlson

I don't know. I've only met Rogan once and I liked him. I met him at the UFC in New York. He was with somebody, a mutual friend of ours. Rogan changed media. I mean - maybe more than anybody. What I admire about Rogan without knowing him beyond meeting him that one time, I mean - I'm still in media, but I've always been in media. It's not a great surprise. I'm doing what I've always done just a different format. But Rogan, he's got one of those resumes that I admire. I like the guy who was like, "I was a longshoreman. I was a short order cook. I was an astrophysicist." You know what I mean? You use to call it a man of parts. This guy was a fighter, a stand up comic. He hosted some Fear Factor. How did he wind up at the vanguard of the deepest conversations in the country? How did that happen? So I definitely respect that and I think it's cool. Rogan is one of those people who just came out of nowhere. No one helped him. You know what I mean?

Lex Fridman

He was doing the thing that he loves doing and it somehow keeps accidentally being exceptionally successful.

Tucker Carlson

Yeah, and he's curious. So that's the main thing. There was a guy, without getting boring, but there was a guy I worked with years ago who kind of dominated cable news, Larry King. Everyone would always beat up on Larry King for being dumb. Well, I got to know Larry King well, and I was his fill in host for a while, and Larry King was just intensely curious. He'd be like, "Why do you wear a black tie, Lex?" You'd be like, "Because I like black tie." "Why do you like a black tie? Everyone else wears a striped tie, but you wear a black one." He was really interested.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, genuinely so, yeah.

Tucker Carlson

Totally. I want to be like that. I don't want to think I know everything. That's so boorish and also false. You don't know everything. But I see that in Rogan. Rogan's like, "How does that work?"

Lex Fridman

100%.

Tucker Carlson

It's so funny how that's threatening to people. It's like Rogan will just sit there while someone else is free balling on some far out topic, which by the way might be true, probably truer than the conventional explanation. People are like, "I don't know, how can he stand that?" He had someone say, "The pyramids weren't built 3,000 years ago, but 8,000 years ago, and that's wrong." It's like, first of all, how do you know when the pyramids were built? Second, why do you care if someone disagrees with you? What is that? This weird kind of group think, it's almost like fourth grade, there's always some little girl in the front row who's like acting as kind of the teacher's enforcer. Whip around and be like, "Sit down. Didn't you hear Mrs. Johnson said sit down." It's like the whole American media, "How dare you ask that question?" Rogan just seems like completely on his own trip. He doesn't even hear it. He's like, "Well, really where the pyramids built?" I was like, "Oh, I love that."

Lex Fridman

Yeah, curiosity, open-mindedness.

Tucker Carlson

Yes.

Lex Fridman

The thing I admire about him most, honestly, is that he's a good father. He's a good husband. He's a good family man for many years. That's his place where he escapes from the world too and it's just beautiful.

Tucker Carlson

Without that man, you're destroyed.

Lex Fridman

Yeah.

Tucker Carlson

If I had a wife who was interested at all in any way in what I did, I think I would've gone crazy by now. When we get home, she's like, "How was your day?" "It was great." "Oh, I'm so proud of you." That's the end of our conversation about what I do for a living. That is such a wonderful and essential respite from, you said how do I not become an asshole to the extent I haven't, I kind of have. How have I not been transformed into a totally insufferable megalomaniac who is checking his Twitter replies every day or every minute? It's that. Yeah. The core of your life has to be solid and enduring and not just ephemeral and silly.

Lex Fridman

So, the two of you have known each other for what, 40 years?

Tucker Carlson

We've been together 40 years.

Lex Fridman

Together 40 years.

Tucker Carlson

40 years, yeah, 1984. Was the hottest 15-year-old in Newport, Rhode Island.

Lex Fridman

Wow.

Tucker Carlson

It sounds dirty, but I'm talking about myself, I was the hottest.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, you were. Just looking in the mirror.

Tucker Carlson

Yeah.

Lex Fridman

Very nice. So what's the secret to successful relationship, successful marriage?

Tucker Carlson

I don't even know. I mean - no, I'm serious. I got married in August '91, so that's our 30 year of being married.

Lex Fridman

The collapse of the Soviet Union.

Tucker Carlson

Yeah, yeah, yeah. As noted. Yeah. So you hear these people, it's actually changed my theology a little bit. Not that I have deep theology, but I grew up in a society in Southern California when I was little. That was a totally self-created society. I mean - Southern California was that root of libertarianism for a reason. It was like that's where you went to recreate yourself. So the operative assumption there is that you are the sum total of your choices and that free will is everything. We never consider questions like, well, why do children get cancer? What do they do to deserve it? Well, of course nothing, right? Because that would suggest that maybe you're not the sum total. Your choices matter. If I smoke a lot, I get lung cancer. If I use fentanyl, I may OD. Got it. If I don't exercise, I might get fat, okay. But on a bigger scale, you're not only the sum total of your choices. Things happen to you that you didn't deserve, good and bad. Marriages, and I'll speak for myself, in my case, just one of them. I mean - clearly spending time with the person you're married to, talking, enjoying each other. I have a lot of rituals. We have a lot of rituals that ensure that. But in 40 years, you're like a different person. I did drugs. I was drinking all the time when we met. It's been a long time since I've done that. I'm very different and so is she, but we're different in ways that are complementary and happy. We've never been happier. So how do we pull that off? Just kind of good luck, honestly. Then I see other people - no, I'm not kidding. But that's true. I think it's so important not to flatter yourself if you've been successful at something. The thing I've been most successful at is marriage, but it's not really me. I mean - I haven't -

Lex Fridman

So I think what you're indirectly communicating is it's like humility, I think.

Tucker Carlson

It's not even humility. Humility is the result of a reality-based worldview, okay?

Lex Fridman

Sure, right.

Tucker Carlson

Once you see things clearly, then you know that you are not the author of all your successes or failures. I hate the implication otherwise because it suggests powers that people don't have. It's one of the reasons I always hated the smoking debate or the COVID debate. Someone die of COVID, didn't have the vaccine. They'd be like, "See, that's what you get." You smoke cigarettes, you die. Well, yeah, if you smoke cigarettes, you're more likely to get lung cancer. Whatever. Cause and effect is real. I'm not denying its existence. It's obvious, but it's not the whole story. There are larger forces acting on us, unseen forces. That's just a fact. You don't need to be some kind of religious nut and they act on AI too - and you should keep that in mind. The idea that all - it's missing why you said that. No, it's true. It's demonstrably true. We're the only society that hasn't acknowledged the truth of that. The idea that the only things that are real are the things that we can see or measure in a lab. That's insane. That's just dumb.

Lex Fridman

In the religious context, you have this two categories that I really like of the two kinds of people, people who believe they're God and people who know they're not, which is a really interesting division that speaks to humility and a kind of realist worldview of where we are in the world.

Tucker Carlson

Oh.

Lex Fridman

Can atheists be in the latter category?

Tucker Carlson

No. There are very few atheists. I've never actually met one. There are people who pose as atheists, but no one's purely rational. Everyone - I mean - this is a cliché for a reason. Everyone under extreme stress appeals to a power higher than himself because everyone knows that there is a power higher than himself. So really, it's just people who are gripped with a delusion that they're God. No one actually believes that. If you're God, jump off the roof of your garage and see what happens. You know what I mean? No one actually thinks that. But people behave as if it's true and those people are dangerous. I will say, by contrast, the only people I trust are the people who know their limits. I was thinking actually this morning in my sauna, of all the people I've interviewed or met, this is someone I've never interviewed, but I have talked to him a couple of times, the greatest leader I've ever met in the world is literally a king. It's MB Sheikh Mohammed of Abu Dhabi, who is Muslim. I'm definitely not Muslim. I'm Christian, Protestant Christian. So I don't agree with his religion and I don't agree with monarchies, but he's the best leader in the world that I've ever met, and by far, it's not even close. Why is that? Well, I could bore you for an hour on the subject, but the reason that he's such a good leader is because he's guided by an ever-present

knowledge of his limitations and of the limits of his power and of his foresight. When you start there, when you start with reality, it's not even humility. Humility can be a pose like, "Oh, I'm so humble." Okay, humble brag is a phrase for a reason. It's like way deeper than that's just like, no, do I have magical powers? Can I see the future? No, okay? That's just a fact. So I'm not God, but I've never seen anybody more at ease with admitting that than MBZ, just a remarkable person. For that reason, he is treated as an oracle. I don't think people understand the number of world leaders who traipse through his house or palace to seek his counsel. I'm not sure that there is a parallel since, I don't want to get too hyperbolic here, but honestly, since Solomon, where people come from around the world to ask what he thinks. Now, why would they be doing that? Because Abu Dhabi's military is so powerful? I mean - he's rich, okay - massive oil and gas deposits. But so is Canada. You know what I mean? No one is coming to Ottawa to ask Justin Trudeau what he thinks. No, it's humility. That's where wisdom comes from. You start to think, I spent my whole life mad at America's leadership class, because it's not just Biden or the people in official positions, it's the whole constellation of advisors and throne sniffers around them. It's not even that I disagree with them. It's I'm not impressed by them. I'm just not impressed. They're not that capable, right? So that's what I was saying about Nikki Haley. I don't think Nikki Haley's the most evil person in the world. I just think she's ridiculous, obviously. Everyone's like, "Oh, Nikki Haley or Mike Pompeo." What?

Lex Fridman

Great leaders are so rare that when you see one, you know it right away.

Tucker Carlson

It blows your mind. What blows my mind about Sheikh Mohammed in Abu Dhabi is that everyone in the world knows it. I've never seen a story on this, and I'm not guessing, I know this is true because I've seen it. Everyone in the world knows it. So if there's a conflict, he's the only person that people call. Everybody calls the same guy. It's like he runs this tiny little country, the UAE, in Abu Dhabi there are a bunch of Emirates, but he's the president of the country, but still, and it's got a ton of energy and all that wealth and all that. Dubai's got great real estate and restaurants, but really it's a tiny little country that wasn't even a country 50 years ago. So how did that happen? Purely on the basis of his humility and the wisdom that results from that humility. That's it.

Lex Fridman

What advice would you give to young people? You got four, you somehow made them into great human beings. What advice would you give people in high school?

Tucker Carlson

Have children immediately.

Lex Fridman

Oh that.

Tucker Carlson

Including in high school? Yes, I think that. That's all that matters in the end. Again, these aren't even clichés anymore because no one says them. But when I was a kid, people always say, "On your deathbed, you never wish you'd spent more time at work." I mean - everyone said that. It was like one of these things. Now, I don't think Google allows you to say that. It's like, "No, you're going to wish you spent more time at work. Get back to your cube." But I can't overstate from my vantage how true that is. Nothing else matters but your family. If you have the opportunity, and a lot of people are being denied the opportunity to have children, and this messing with the gender roles, and I'm not even talking about the tranny stuff, I mean - feminism has so destroyed people's brains and the ability of young people to connect with each other and stay together and have fruitful lives. It's like nothing's been more destructive than that. It's such a lie. It's so dumb. It's counter to human nature, and nothing counter to human nature can endure. It can only cause suffering and that's what it's done. But fight that. Stop complaining about it. Find someone. By the way, everyone gets together, or most people get together on the basis, in a Western society where there's no arranged marriages, they get together on a basis of sexual attraction. Totally natural. Get off your birth control and have children. "Oh, I can't afford that." Well, yeah, you'll figure out a way to afford it once you have kids. It's like it's chicken in the egg, but it's actually not. When you have responsibility, when you have no - this is true of men. I'm not sure if true of women, but it's definitely true of men. You will not achieve until you have no choice. Because I always think of men - men do nothing until they have to. But once they have to, they will do anything. That is true. Men will do nothing unless they have to. But once they have to, they will do anything. I really believe that from watching and from being one. I would never have done anything if I didn't have to, but I had to and I would just recommend it. By the way, even if you don't succeed, even if you're poor, having spent my life among rich people, I grew up among rich people, I am a rich person. Boy, are they unhappy? Well, that's clearly not the road to happiness. You don't want to be a debt slave or starved to death or anything like that, but making a billion dollars, that's not worth doing. Don't do that. Don't even try to do that. If you create something that's beautiful and worth having and you make a billion dollars, okay, then you have to deal with your billion dollars, which will be the worst part of your life, trust me. But seeking money for its own sake is a dead end. What you should seek for its own sake is children. Talk about a creative act. Last thing I'll say, the whole point of life is to create, okay? The act of creation, which is dying in the West, in the arts and in its most pure expression, which is children, that's all that's worth doing while you're alive is creating something beautiful. Creating children, by the way, it's super fun. It's not hard. I can get more technical off the earth if you want.

Lex Fridman

Can you? Yeah, please.

Tucker Carlson

I have a lot of thoughts on it.

Lex Fridman

Do you have documents or something?

Tucker Carlson

No, I can draw you a schematic.

Lex Fridman

Oh, thank you.

Tucker Carlson

But yeah, that's the greatest thing. The fact that corporate America denies, "Oh, freeze your eggs. Have an abortion." What? You're evil. Are you kidding? Because you're taking from people the only thing that can possibly give them enduring joy. They are successfully taking it from people, and I hate them for it.

Lex Fridman

You founded TCN - Tucker Carlson Network.

Tucker Carlson

Yeah.

Lex Fridman

What's your vision for it?

Tucker Carlson

I have no vision for myself - for my career - and I never have. So, I'm the last person to explain.

Lex Fridman

You just roll with it.

Tucker Carlson

Yeah, I'm an instinct guy - 100%. I have a vision for the world, but I don't have a vision for my life - for my career. So really my vision extended precisely this far, I just want to keep doing what I'm doing. I just want to keep doing what I'm doing. There was a five hour period where I wondered if I would be able to, because I feel pretty spry and alert, and I'm certainly deeply enjoying what I'm doing, which is talking to people and saying what I think and learning, constantly learning. But I just wanted to keep doing that and I also wanted to employ the people who I worked with at Fox. I've worked with the same people for years, and I love

them. So I had all these people and I wanted to bring them with me so we had to build a structure for that.

Lex Fridman

But this feels like one of the first times you're really working for yourself. There's an extra level of freedom here.

Tucker Carlson

Totally, totally. You don't want me doing your taxes. I'm good at some things, but I'm really not good at others, so. One of them would be running a business. No idea. I'm not interested, not a commerce guy, so I don't buy anything. So it's like the whole thing I'm not good at. But luckily, I'm really blessed to have friends who are involved in this who are good at that. So I feel positive about it, but mostly I am totally committed to only doing the things that I am good at and enjoy and not doing anything else because I don't want to waste my time. So I'm just getting to do what I want to do and I'm really loving it.

Lex Fridman

What hope - positive hope - do you have for the future of human civilization in say 50 years, 100 years, 200 years?

Tucker Carlson

People are great just by their nature. I mean - they're super complicated, but I like people. I always have liked people. If I was sitting here with Nikki Haley, who I guess I've been pretty clear I'm not a mega fan of Nikki Haley's, I would enjoy it. I've never met anybody I couldn't enjoy on some level given enough time. So as long as nobody tampers with the human recipe, the human nature itself, I will always feel blessed by being around other people. That's true around the world. I've never been to a country, and I've been to scores of countries, where I didn't, given a week, really like it and the people. So yeah, bad leaders are a recurring theme in human history. They're mostly bad, and we've got an unusually bad set right now, but we'll have better ones at some point. One thing I don't like more than nuclear weapons and more than AI, the one thing that really, really bothers me is the idea of using technology to change the human brain permanently. Because you're tampering with the secret sauce. You're tampering with God's creation, and totally evil. I mean - I literally sat there the other day with Klaus Schwab. I was with Klaus Schwab. He was like a total moron, like 100 years old and has no idea what's going on in the world. But he's one of these guys who, speaking of mediocre, everyone's so afraid of Klaus Schwab, I don't think Klaus Schwab is going to be organizing anything. Again, he's just like a total figurehead - like a douchebag. But anyway, but he was talking and he's reading all these talking points. All the cool kids are talking about - at Davos and whatever - and he starts talking about it in his way - his accent. He was saying, "I think it's so important that we follow an ethical way - always in an ethical way, of course - very ethical. I'm a very ethical man - that we follow using technology to improve the human mind and implant the chips in the brain." I'm like, "Okay,

you have no idea what you're talking about. You're as senile as Joe Biden." But what was so striking is that no one in the room is like, "Wait, what? You're with people's brains? Oh my God. What are you even talking about? Who do you think you are?"

Lex Fridman

I mean - you're right - the secret sauce. The human mind is really special. We should not mess with it.

Tucker Carlson

It's all that matters, dude.

Lex Fridman

We should be very careful. Whatever special thing it does, it seems like it's a good thing. Human beings are fundamentally good. These sources of creativity, the creative force in the universe we don't want to mess with.

Tucker Carlson

Oh, I mean - what else matters? I don't understand. I mean - I guess, look, I don't want to seem like the Unabomber and I'm not.

Lex Fridman

We are in a cabin in the woods.

Tucker Carlson

No. Well, I'm sympathetic to some of his ideas, but not of course sending mail bombs to people because I like people and I don't believe in violence at all. But I think the problem with technology, one of the problems with technology is the way that people approach it in a very kind of mindless heedless way. I think it's important, this idea that it's inexorable and we can't control it, and if we don't do it, someone else will. There's some truth in that, but it's not the whole story. We do have free will and we are creating these things intentionally, and I think it's incumbent on us, it's a requirement of - a moral requirement of us - that we ask: Is this a net gain or a net loss? What - to the extent we can foresee them - will the effects be? Etc. Etc. It's not super complicated. So, I prize long-term thinking. I don't always apply to my own life, obviously. I want to, but I prize it. I think that people with power should think about future generations and I don't see that kind of thinking at all. They all seem like children to me and like don't give children handguns because they can hurt people.

Lex Fridman

Fundamentally, you want people in power to be pro-humanity.

Tucker Carlson

By the way, you don't want people who are 81 who are going to die anyway. Why do they care? By the way, if your track record with your own family is miserable, why would I give you my family to oversee? I just don't - I - like - again, these are autistic-level questions that someone should answer.

Lex Fridman

Well, thank you for asking those questions first of all and thank you for this conversation. Thank you for welcoming me to the cabin in the woods.

Tucker Carlson

Thank you.

Lex Fridman

Thanks for listening to this conversation with Tucker Carlson. To support this podcast, please check out our sponsors in the description. Now, let me leave you with some words from Mahatma Gandhi: "When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love has always won. There have been tyrants and murderers. And for a time, they can seem invincible. But in the end, they always fall. Think of it - always." Thank you for listening and hope to see you next time.