Discussion

- Senator Ted Cruz, U.S. Senator for Texas
- Michael Doran, Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute

Hudson Institute, Washington D.C. Headquarters
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TRANSCRIPT

Please note: This transcript is based off a recording and mistranslations may appear in text. A video of the event is available: https://www.hudson.org/events/1716-interventionism-vs-isolationism-a-conversation-with-u-s-sen-ted-cruz92019
JOHN WALTERS: Welcome to the Stern Policy Center at Hudson Institute. I am John Walters, the chief operating officer here at Hudson. Today we have the honor of hosting Senator Ted Cruz. Former solicitor general for the state of Texas, Senator Cruz came to the Senate for the first time in 2012, receiving enthusiastic support from the Tea Party at that time. Thanks to his promotion of small government fiscal responsibility, he quickly established himself as a leading conservative voice in Washington. On the strength of that reputation, he led a very strong campaign for president in 2016, finishing second in the Republican primary process.

Senator Cruz will be speaking to us today on foreign policy. I can't think of any one better place to discuss this subject. He is, of course, a leading member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, but he's also a man who describes himself as a non-interventionist hawk. The senator will - that is to say, has fashioned a novel approach that seems especially suited to our time. While he remains committed to promoting American ideals of freedom and liberty, he also exhibits a deep skepticism regarding military interventionism. He - his leading role in foreign policy has received recognition from a surprising quarter. The parliament of Iran recently moved to sanction him for his role - the role he played in urging the Trump administration to abandon the Iran nuclear deal.

Senator, I trust you and your family can withstand the pain of Iranian economic sanctions. But Iran is also one area in which the senator's influence is being felt. Last year, there were others. He took successful legislative actions that imposed mandatory sanctions against Hamas and Hezbollah for using human shields, cracked down on Chinese espionage in the United States, and restricted international assistance to Nicaragua. In Congress this year, his advanced legislation that will sanction participants in the Nord Stream 2 project and that will increase pressure on Maduro regime in Venezuela. Clearly, Senator Cruz's influence is being felt far and wide on more foreign policy.

To start off this event, Senator Cruz will make some opening remarks. Following his statement, he will sit down for a conversation on interventionism and isolationism with Hudson Senior Fellow Mike Doran. Following his discussion, he will take some questions and answers from the audience. Let me just mention as a housekeeping matter, at the end, Senator Cruz has to meet an airplane so if people have questions from the press or others, please allow him to leave. Ask your questions during the session so that we don't disrupt his schedule that he's been generous enough to give us a small portion of. But thank you, Senator Cruz, for being here. Please join me in welcoming the senator.

TED CRUZ: Well, thank you very much John, and thank you to Hudson for hosting me. Thank you for the terrific work y'all are doing. These are challenging times in the United States and across the world. We have to be candid that we have enemies in the world. I have categorized the countries we face in the world into four groups - enemies, allies, problematic allies, and rivals. Let's talk about each.

Iran seeks nuclear weapons. North Korea already has them. Both have repeatedly called for the destruction of the United States of America. In South America, we have disintegrating and failed states controlled by anti-American thugs such as Ortega in Nicaragua or Maduro in Venezuela who use their resources and their powers to sow chaos across the western hemisphere and beyond. We also face hostile rivals such as China and Russia, qualitatively different from our enemies in that we trade with them, we compete with them in the economic sphere, and yet more often than not, their interests are antagonistic to our own. And they have the resources to
be developing next-generation weapons platforms and sophisticated weaponry including hypersonic weapons, weapons that will be fielded in space, and weapons that leverage artificial intelligence.

The long-term geopolitical chessboard features prominently China and Russia as our principal rivals, and we are lagging too far behind in counteracting the new technologies they are developing. And then there are entire parts of the world where we rely on, at best, problematic allies who often work against American interests - allies like Saudi Arabia, or Pakistan, or Lebanon, or Turkey. Each of these alliances is important for our national security interest and yet each of these alliances poses serious and ongoing challenges as these problematic allies far too often have demonstrated a willingness, as the old saying is, to feed the crocodile in hopes that he might eat you last.

And then we have our friends - countries like Great Britain, and Israel, and Canada, countries that America has stood side by side with for a long time, countries with whom our alliance was at times sorely weakened in the previous administration - the Obama administration - countries with whom our alliances have been strengthened in the last 2 1/2 years. In the face of this complicated world sphere, there are two traditional frames in which Republican foreign policy is often understood - that of interventionism and that of isolationism, typically, two binary points into which Republicans have been categorized.

On the interventionist side, there are those who advocate using U.S. military force to promote American values, those who advocate promoting democracy throughout the globe and being willing to risk the lives of young American men and women to do so. Some have said these interventionists have never seen a war they didn't like. Politicians who had been associated with this brand of foreign policy include my late colleague Senator John McCain and current colleagues like Marco Rubio and Tom Cotton.

The other point on the spectrum is isolationism - a concern of foreign entanglements, a reluctance to engage in the world, a desire to pull back behind our shores and not put our sons and daughters in harm way - harm's way. The political leader most frequently associated with this view - Senator Rand Paul. I have long described my views as a third point in the triangle. I disagree with neither of those two heretofore binary approaches to politics.

My view has been described as that of a noninterventionist hawk. Now, what does that mean? What it means is that I believe the overarching objective of U.S. foreign policy, the touchstone for any military involvement, should be defending the vital national security interests of the United States. It should not be promoting democracy. It should not be promoting abstract values. It should be keeping Americans safe. Now, what does that mean? What does that mean in practice? Because in abstract, that can sound quite general.

Let's go with some specifics. When President Obama proposed military intervention in Syria, I initially kept an open mind. I wanted to hear the commander in chief articulate how it would benefit U.S. national security, how it would make America safer. If you recall, the Obama administration's articulation careened between points of incoherence. At one point, then-Secretary of State John Kerry said the objective was an unbelievably small strike, which immediately begged the question, then what on earth is its purpose? But on the other side, a question that I asked repeatedly both in public briefings and in classified briefings is, if a military strike is successful, if Assad is toppled - and let me be clear. Assad is a monster and a butcher
who has murdered hundreds of thousands of his own citizens. I have no illusions about what kind of man Bashar Assad is.

But the question I asked is, if you succeed in toppling Assad with a substantial cache of chemical weapons, how do you prevent those weapons from falling in the hands of radical Islamic terrorists? At the time Obama was posing the military strikes, there were nine major rebel groups in Syria. Seven of those nine had significant ties to radical Islamic terrorists al-Qaida, al-Nusra, the very beginnings of ISIS. And at each of those briefings, I couldn't get a coherent answer from the administration, how you prevent chemical weapons from falling into the hands of terrorists who would use them, who would want to use them both against Americans and our allies - an unequivocally worse situation than the status quo.

When the administration couldn't answer that question, I came out publicly opposing military intervention in Syria. In that - agreed with me on that policy issue was Rand Paul, although for very different reasons. Likewise, in Libya, the Obama administration led a coalition of nations to topple Gadhafi - Gadhafi, like Assad, a bad, bad man with a horrible human rights record. And yet we topple Gadhafi, creating a vacuum into which stepped warlords, radical Islamic warlords that made Libya, by any measure, more dangerous and a greater threat to U.S. national security interests.

And then there is, of course, Iraq. Saddam Hussein was yet another monster, and yet, in hindsight, it is hard to dispute that toppling that strongman opened the door for ISIS, opened the door for radical Islamic terrorists who had as an even greater objective of carrying out acts of terrorism and murder targeting American citizens. In all of those situations, I believed U.S. military force and the use of military force did not further our national security interests. So what is the counterpoint to that?

And the counterpoint to that I would point to is Iran. I believe the threat of a nuclear Iran poses the single greatest national security threat to the United States of America. The Ayatollah Khomeini, when he chants death to America, when he chants death to Israel, I believe it. I don't believe that is mere empty rhetoric, but rather it is a radical religious commitment, a zealotry, that, if backed by nuclear weapons, could result in the annihilation of millions. I believe we should use every tool we have to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Now, what does that mean? That means diplomatic tools. That means economic tools. That means sanctions. And that means, yes, military force if necessary.

Some time recently, a reporter asked me a question that he thought was a gotcha question, which is he said, would you be willing to use military force against Iran? I said, absolutely. That's a gotcha question. That one is easily - if Iran is on the verge of acquiring nuclear weapons, we should not hesitate to use military force to prevent them from doing so. Now, let me be very clear. When I talk about that potential, I mean bombing their nuclear facilities into absolute rubble. I have zero desire to see an invading ground force that tries to turn Iran into a democratic utopia. If our objective is to turn Iran into Switzerland, that in all likelihood will prove a mirage - an impossible objective. If our objective is to stop a radical theocrat from acquiring weapons to be used, potentially, to murder millions of Americans or millions of our allies, that is an achievable and direct military outcome.

May I note as well - too often, if one is a skeptic of using military force, the only option given then is retreating into not being engaged. I think that is a parsimonious view of the levers of the tools that we have for American foreign policy. When I describe myself as a non-interventionist
hawk, that does not mean we should ignore the world because, as the world's only superpower, we ignore the world at our peril. The most powerful tool that any American president has is the bully pulpit of the presidency. The bully pulpit of the presidency - the ability to articulate freedom, to speak for dissidents.

If you think about it, in eight years of his presidency, what was the biggest country Ronald Reagan ever invaded? Grenada. President Reagan was exceptionally reluctant to put our sons and daughters in harm's way, and quite rightly so. And yet, he understood the power of the American bully pulpit. Some time ago, I had the chance to visit with Natan Sharansky in Jerusalem, famed Soviet dissident who described his days in the gulag where prisoners would pass from one cell to another notes - did you hear what President Reagan said? Evil empire, Marxism, Leninism will end up on the ash heap of history. Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall. The latter, I believe, are the most important words uttered by any leader in modern times. If any of you come to my office here in D.C., the dominant feature is an enormous painting - larger than this backdrop - of President Reagan standing before the Brandenburg Gate and, above him, the words, tear down this wall, in German in the style of the graffiti. And many don't know the backstory of that speech. Three times the State Department edited those words out of the speech, and three times President Reagan handwrote them back in. And the State Department argued to him, Mr. President, you don't understand. You can't say this. This is too belligerent. This is too provocative. This is too hostile. And Mr. President - this is our kicker - this is too unrealistic. It will never, ever, ever happen. The Berlin Wall will stand for all eternity. And Reagan, with a twinkle in his eye, he said, you don't understand. This is the whole point of the speech.

When President Reagan gave those remarks, within less than three years, the Berlin Wall was torn to the ground. And if you value peace, if you value liberty, that moment should stand as a pivotal and transformational fork in the road because it wasn't American tanks that knocked down that Berlin Wall. It wasn't Minuteman missiles that bombed the wall to the ground. It was instead the incredible battering ram of truth. It was the battering ram of ideas. And because President Reagan understood the moral clarity, the bully pulpit of the presidency, because he spoke without fear and called out evil by its name, we won the Cold War without firing a shot.

It is one of the great disgraces of the Nobel Peace Committee (ph) that Ronald Reagan was never awarded the Nobel Prize for peace. No decision in modern times has resulted in the liberation of more human beings than winning the Cold War. And yet, the same intelligentsia who, throughout the Reagan administration said, the Soviet Union cannot be defeated, immediately said, Reagan, you're - was a crazy cowboy for calling them out. As soon as the Soviet Union collapsed, they said it was inevitable - it was always going to fall. The bully pulpit of the presidency is powerful. So is the economic leverage of the United States. Using sanctions, using them strategically, using them directly to defend American interests, is a powerful, powerful tool.

Last year, I passed into law NICA legislation sanctioning the Nicaraguan government communist Daniel Ortega as long as they deny human rights, deny free and fair elections. That same week, I passed into law separate legislation imposing economic sanctions and mandatory penalties on organizations and nation-states that use human shields against America or allies, organizations like Hamas and Hezbollah - using the leverage we have.
And just a few weeks ago, on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, we took up legislation that I introduced to stop the construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, a pipeline being built right now to flow to take natural gas from Russia to Germany which, if it is built, will enrich Putin, will harm Europe and will harm America, will make Europe even more dependent on Russia. And one thing to understand about Russia - John McCain used to describe Russia as a gas station with a country attached. Putin is a petro-tyrant. If you're concerned about Russian aggression, if you're concerned about military adventurism by Putin, the very best thing we can do is deprive him of the resources to fuel that military aggression.

So how does my legislation stop Nord Stream 2? Well, it turns out there are only five companies on the face of the earth with the technology that is capable of laying the deep-sea pipeline needed for Nord Stream 2. My legislation imposes sanctions on any company building that pipeline. The Russians have hired two, a French company and a - a Swiss company and an Italian company. That legislation just passed the Foreign Relations Committee by a vote of 20 to 2, an overwhelming bipartisan majority. By the way, the Russian disinformation campaign - they're telling Europe, this will never pass into law. Well, I think a 20-to-2 vote is a pretty compelling refutation of that. And if and when that legislation passes, the Nord Stream 2 project will stop in its tracks. That will hurt Russia's aggressive militarism. It will benefit Europe. It will benefit America. It will benefit freedom. We can use the tools we have.

And let me use one final example - Iran sanctions. I mentioned before that I consider the threat of a nuclear Iran to be the greatest national security threat facing America. Hand in hand with that, I believe the greatest national security blunder of modern times was the Obama Iran nuclear deal. It literally gave $100 billion to a theocratic zealot who wants to murder as many Americans as possible. Concomitantly, the single most important national security decision made by the Trump administration has been withdrawing from that deal. Pulling out of the disastrous Iran nuclear deal, saying, we are not going to fund the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism. We are not going to send billions of dollars that will be used to develop nuclear weapons, that will be used to spread terrorism, that will be used to murder Americans.

Within the Trump administration, there was a major battle over whether to pull out of that agreement. Both the State Department and Defense Department argued for staying in that agreement. I argued vigorously directly with the president, pull out of this agreement. It is a terrible national security decision for the United States. Thankfully, the president made the bold and courageous choice and pulled out of the agreement. However, the battle was not done yet. There may be some folks here who have heard of the deep state. I'm here to tell you the deep state is alive and well and has circled the barricades around Washington, D.C. And the No. 1 objective of the deep state - it's the Department of State; it's the Department of Treasury - is to preserve the disastrous Obama Iran nuclear deal. Every single day, the deep state at Treasury and State is working to frustrate President Trump's decision.

Now, how did they do so? They did so, first of all, when the president pulled out of the agreement by convincing the administration to issue a series of waivers, to issue oil waivers - oil waivers allowing Iran to sell a million barrels a day of oil - because when you've got the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism who wants to murder you and is trying to amass the tools to do so, it's a good idea to let him sell a million barrels of oil a day. This was lunacy. Hand in hand with that are what are called the civilian nuclear waivers, which are waivers that lets Iran do so-called civilian nuclear work at sites like Fordow, a bunker literally built into the side of a mountain that the ayatollah put there to develop nuclear weapons to use to murder Americans.
We have right now today a waiver saying, go right ahead at Fordow. Those waivers were a mistake when they were granted.

Some months ago, there was a battle over the oil waivers. The very same lines occurred. You had the State Department and the Treasury Department arguing, keep the oil waivers in place. In fact, they argued, if you revoke the oil waivers, the price of oil will skyrocket. Now, the Energy Department, which one might think would know something about energy, rightly argued, no, they will not. There is more than enough supply in the marketplace, both U.S. supply and supply of other producers, to more than fill that void. Well, I engaged actively and aggressively. And fortunately, the administration, the president agreed with me, ended the oil waivers. And, by the way, not only did oil not go up, it went down. So State and Defense were wrong. They were totally wrong, and the facts have proven they were totally wrong. So then the battle shifted to the civilian nuclear waivers.

The United States revoked three of the seven civilian nuclear waivers, but unfortunately, at the urging of State and Treasury, reissued four of them. That was a mistake, a serious mistake. As we sit here today, the French foreign minister is in town meeting with Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and urging a plan, a plan to effectively give $15 billion to the Ayatollah Khamenei. And I'm sorry to say, in the leaking sieve that is Washington, the reports are rampant that the White House might be fooled into accepting this deal. I hope and pray that is not the case. I hope and pray that Steven Mnuchin is not deceived and that he does not go down a path that would lead him to be the Neville Chamberlain of the modern day.

There is a reason that nobody studies at the Neville Chamberlain school of foreign policy - because appeasing a lunatic rarely ends well. So I call on Secretary Mnuchin to have a clear and simple answer for the French, which is, no matter how much a handful of French companies may stand to make from doing business with the ayatollah, America is not going to be part of funding the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism, nor are we going to fund the development of nuclear weapons and ICBMs that could see their manifestation in a mushroom cloud above Tel Aviv, or New York or Los Angeles. And let me say to President Trump, you are surrounded by the deep state in Treasury and in State. Their overarching objective is to prevent this administration from dismantling the Iran deal completely because they believe one of the 2020 Democratic presidential candidates is going to win. We've all seen the debate stages - Tweedledum and Tweedledumber (ph). And every one of them would eagerly reinstate the Obama Iran deal.

If we finish the job and end the waivers, there will be no deal to reinstate. And indeed, what we should do is exercise the snapback sanctions - that the U.S. has a unilateral right to do - to impose United Nations sanctions on Iran. That's what we should be doing. But Mr. President, the deep state doesn't want you to do that. And they are arguing to you with everything they can, you just got to issue a waiver. These are the same people that told you you couldn't pull out of the deal to begin with. These are, by the way, the same people that told you we couldn't move the embassy in Israel to Jerusalem. They are urging weakness and appeasement. And if the Trump administration takes their advice, they will have undone the single biggest national security victory President Trump has had in his entire tenure in office.

I hope and pray that doesn't happen. Don't fund theocratic zealots who want to kill us. And I believe the president will know enough not to listen to these voices that keep being proven wrong over and over and over again, and yet, they have an ideological commitment. They are
trying to convince President Trump to adopt the Obama foreign policy. It was a disaster when Obama implemented this policy. And if the deep state prevails, they will have deceived President Trump into making the same mistakes. I hope and believe that won't happen. Thank you.

: (APPLAUSE)

MICHAEL DORAN: Well, thank you very much. There's a lot to talk about here. But before we get to Iran, I thought maybe I'd start with a touchy-feely question. I spent the morning...

CRUZ: That's good because I'm a very sensitive guy.

: (LAUGHTER)

DORAN: That's what they told me. That's what - the - I spent the morning actually watching speeches of yours.

CRUZ: OK. Michael, you really got to get out more.

: (LAUGHTER)

DORAN: OK. That's what my wife told me. I think I noticed something in watching this. And when you talk about certain subjects, you clear - there are moments when you get very animated and emotional. And I think I saw two, and you reinforced one of them here today. One of them is Reagan at the Brandenburg Gate. The other one is Israel. And I wanted to know, first, do you think I'm right about that, that there's something emotional about these questions for you? And then the second question - this is the touchy-feely one - is, why? Where's that coming from?

CRUZ: Absolutely. And both are powerful and profound to me. Let's take Israel first. So when I was elected to the Senate, the very first trip I took was to Israel. I've been to Israel four times in the last seven years serving in the Senate. I have to admit, growing up in Texas as a kid, I always had a strong connection to Israel, and I remember, in particular, the Entebbe raid. Now, I was 5, 6 years old when the Entebbe raid happened. But the Entebbe raid to me as a Texan, what it said to me was that Israel was saying to its enemies, if you take our citizens hostage, they may die, but you're going to die. I have to admit that was a very Texan approach to foreign policy. It was clear and unequivocal. Israel is our ally because they share our values. They share our commitment to liberty. They stand with America.

By the way, the $3 billion in military assistance we provide Israel each year provides massive national security and military benefits to the United States. If we tried to recreate the military benefits that come from that alliance, if we tried to do it ourself, it would cost orders of magnitude more. And when it comes to Reagan - you know, I have described - there's a generation of elected officials that are all within a few years of each other who came of age with Reagan being in the White House. I was 10 years old when Reagan became president. I was 18 when he left the White House. And just like the FDR - the World War II generation would refer to FDR as our president. I'll go to my grave with Ronald Wilson Reagan defining what it means to be president.

And the generation of leaders we've seen - you know, Mike Lee, Marco Rubio are six months younger than I am. Paul Ryan is a year older than I am. Tim Scott's just a couple of years older than I am. You see a generation that I've referred to as the children of Reagan because we
learned watching, that's how a president can lead. We learned watching the president say, Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall. And we saw the criticism of the intelligentsia. We saw the criticism of Washington, and we saw that the clarity had power.

I also think at, a very personal level - listen. All of us are the products of our own family stories, our own journeys. For me, my - you know, my dad grew up in Cuba, fought in the Cuban Revolution, actually fought with Castro - did not know Castro was a communist, but he fought against Batista, who was cruel and corrupt. And my dad was imprisoned and tortured by Batista's goons. My aunt, my Tia Sonia who was there later - she was his younger sister. Once Castro took over, declared he was a communist, everyone discovered he was even worse than the guy that preceded him, my Tia Sonia fought in the counterrevolution against Castro. She was imprisoned and tortured by Castro's goons. So my family got it on both sides.

That is sadly not an unusual story in Latin America. It's not an unusual story in these countries that have seen tyranny and had gone from one tyrant to another. And I remember as a kid, my cousin Bibi - Bibi is five years older than I am, and she's Sonia's daughter - she and I used to sit literally at the feet of my dad and my Tia Sonia. And we'd hear stories about being freedom fighters, and it was inspiring. It was - the freedom we have here, it is special. It is unique. It is precious. And so when I talk about Reagan winning the Cold War and doing so without firing a shot, that is liberating people from oppression and misery and poverty and suffering and death. That's inspiring stuff.

DORAN: Now, when - it's interesting, given your - the - your approach that you laid out, the non-interventionist hawk approach, you're laying claim to Reagan's legacy. A lot of people, especially among neoconservatives, would not associate Reagan with the ideas that you're associating him with. And I wonder how you would respond to them because they would have a more, I think, expansive notion of American power.

CRUZ: Look. I think Reagan had an expansive notion of the American bully pulpit. He also understood the power of truth, that truth cuts through. It clarifies. But Reagan was exceptionally reluctant to put our soldiers in harm's way. Reagan didn't send our troops in to engage with the Soviet Union. Reagan didn't invade Cuba. Reagan didn't - Falkland Islands, Reagan and Bush didn't engage in that. Instead, Reagan understood military strength.

Look. What foreign policy is associated with Reagan more than anything else? Peace through strength. I believe in that emphatically, and it's where much of the media and much of the academy gets it wrong. They believe in what is essentially peace through weakness. So when you get a Democratic administration in, if one of these 2020 Democrats get in, every one of them is going to want to gut the military because they say, gosh, we won't have military fights if our military is really weak. I think it's exactly the opposite.

Reagan understood that if we have the most formidable military force on the planet, that nobody in their right mind is going to want to mess with us, and you don't have to use it. So for example, SDI, Strategic Defense Initiative, more than anything else, I think, broke the Soviet Union's back. They simply couldn't keep up with it. And Reagan was derided relentlessly. Remember Star Wars? Remember the example that was given? And look, I remember this as a teenager. I - look; I was kind of an odd teenager because I was watching all this and deeply engaged - but you remember the analogy that was used? OK, this is ridiculous. This is the crazy Hollywood cowboy. And the idea of intercepting a missile in the sky is like a bullet hitting a bullet. It can never happen.
There is a wonderful video. Let me encourage y'all to watch it and Google it. It's - you can find it - it's called "Iron Dome Wedding" (ph). It's a video of a wedding in Israel, and there's celebration. There's wedding music. And just someone, you know, filming on - I don't know - on a phone or a camera or something, and suddenly, you see missiles coming across the sky. And Iron Dome missile interceptors hit them, and they explode. And it's like watching fireworks in the sky. And if you think about it, without the Iron Dome missile defense system, that wedding could have ended with horrific carnage, had one of those missiles struck the wedding and killed many of the people there.

But instead, it looks like fireworks, and you can hear the music in the background. That was the culmination of the vision Reagan laid out. And Gorbachev faced a situation where the Soviet Union tried to keep up. I mean, there's a reason, at Reykjavik, Gorbachev's No. 1 ask was, give up SDI. We'll give in on everything else. And Reagan had the commitment - No. 1, he wanted to make peace - but he had the commitment to get up the table and walk away. No, we will not weaken our military to do so. And so, look, Gorbachev got heralded for glasnost and perestroika, all of which, quite rightly. But he did so because he had very few other choices. The Soviet economy simply could not keep up with the roaring American economy. And so I - peace through strength is the understanding that if we have the capacity to defend ourselves, that we minimize the risk of having to use that capacity.

And listen; when we look at China, China is investing in a massive degree in building up their military. And if China gets to a point where they believe they can win a military conflict with the United States, well, God help us because the odds of that military conflict skyrocket when they believe they can prevail. When they know unequivocally there is no hope of prevailing, that's when you avoid the conflict altogether.

DORAN: Let's move to Iran. The - I think if you made an - a headline...

CRUZ: Well, thank you.

DORAN: (Laughter) Yeah, you're under sanction there. The - let's start with that, actually. Why are you - why have you been sanctioned? Why are they - of all the senators, why are they sanctioning you?

CRUZ: Look, you'd have to ask the ayatollah. I will confess, I did go to Twitter and said - when Iran proposed sanctioning me - and I said, damn it, I guess Heidi and I are going to have to change our Christmas plans.

DORAN: Yeah.

CRUZ: Look. I have tried very hard to be clear and unrelenting in assessing and describing the mortal threat that a nuclear Iran poses. Apparently, they don't like that.

DORAN: A few months ago, in July, I believe, you - I guess a month ago - you, Senator Rubio, Senator Cotton, sent a letter to the president saying what you said today, basically urging the snapback and also the end to the civil nuclear waivers. I'm curious, given that President Trump obviously agrees with you about the nuclear deal and obviously agrees that his decision to renounce the deal is an achievement of his administration, how are they explaining their failure to get totally out of the deal? What are they saying to you behind the scenes?
CRUZ: They're not giving explanations. And it is, as I described a minute ago, I think it is the deep state. And their objective is keep the deal alive, keep it on life support so it can be switched back on in a Democratic administration. At this point, their objective is, just wait out Donald Trump. They're convinced he's leaving in January 2021. And so it's a waiting game. And unfortunately, both the Treasury Department and the State Department, I think, have been less than helpful in this regard.

DORAN: What would you - what would you imagine they're thinking at this point? I'm talking not about the lower-level level officials, but the more senior officials. You mentioned Secretary Mnuchin. Are they afraid of getting sideways with the allies? Are they afraid of - do you think that there's a fear about war with Iran? Is that a concern? What would you imagine it is?

CRUZ: I think their principal argument is that our European allies want the deal back because their companies stand to make money. By the way, I have been around long enough that I remember our European allies sitting in my office in the Senate asking for help because, they said at the time, this Iran deal is terrible. It is a terrible idea. But the Obama White House is twisting our arms so much that we have no choice but go along with it. So that wasn't that long ago.

But now the Europeans - look; part of their slavish devotion to the Iran deal is they hate Donald Trump. I mean, that's the irony, is that you have world leaders who detest President Trump trying to convince him to give up his biggest national security victory as a way - they want to say to the world, you see, Obama was right and Trump was wrong. And yet, the deep state in the U.S. is pushing the White House to go that way. I think that would be a massive, massive mistake.

And look. I get there are some European companies that want to do business with the Iranians 'cause they'd make a few more pennies. So what? And by the way, none of them will do business with Iran if the sanctions are vigorously enforced because no rational actor, given a choice between access to Iran or access to the American markets, no one is going to choose Iran. So we have the ability - we're seeing the Iranian economy in a free fall. And what the Europeans are trying to do is, let's step in and salvage the Iranian economy.

By the way, you know, if you look at the incredible Israeli operation that discovered the cache of secret documents in Iran - and by the way, this thing is a James Bond novel in terms of the Mossad's mission to discover this - where we learned, to the surprise of nobody, that everything Iran had been saying was a lie and that they had been actively working to develop nuclear weapons and ICBMs, which they continue - have continued to work to do - to develop - it's worth pausing and reflecting. An ICBM is not to get to Israel. You don't need an ICBM to get to Israel from Iran. An ICBM is designed with one target and one target only, the United States of America. There is a reason the ayatollah calls Israel the Little Satan and America the Great Satan.

And - let me pause and make a different point about Iran. And let's step back with a little bit of context of history. Let's go back to the Bill Clinton administration. Bill Clinton administration with North Korea led the world in lifting sanctions against North Korea. Kim Jong Il, Kim Jong Un's father, made a promise, said, we won't develop nuclear weapons. In exchange, send us tens of billions of dollars. And the Bill Clinton administration convinced the entire world to do that. Now, the lead negotiator, as you know, for the North Korea deals, a woman named Wendy Sherman. She cut the deal, billions of dollars in exchange for a promise not to develop nuclear weapons.
Now, we all know what happened. They got the billions of dollars. They used them to develop nuclear weapons. Today, we're dealing with Kim Jong Il's son, Kim Jong Un, with a significant stockpile of nuclear weapons. The deal was a disaster. It was a train wreck. Now, fast-forward to the second term of President Obama. The Obama administration recruited out of retirement Wendy Sherman to be the lead negotiator of the Iran deal.

Now, I want you to pause and think for a second because you can't make this up. She is literally the only person on the planet who has already screwed this up once. There are over 7 billion people on planet Earth. You could stop someone in the street, say, excuse me, sir, have you negotiated a deal with a dictatorial tyrant that sent billions of dollars to them that ended up resulting in their getting nuclear weapons? No? You're more qualified to negotiate this than Wendy Sherman. And to the shock of nobody, she came in and negotiated the same deal. And in fact, the Iran deal is even worse. It is designed to end up with Iran getting nuclear weapons. And the reason it's more dangerous - listen, North Korea is a profoundly dangerous place. Because there's an unstable dictator with the ability to murder millions in the flash of an eye.

But Kim Jong Un, at least we know, he's a megalomaniacal narcissist. We know he desperately wants to stay in power. What is truly - which means maybe, just maybe, let us hope, some degree of rational deterrence is possible, that he knows if he ever uses a nuclear weapon that the result would be stunning and overwhelming retaliation that would end his regime that very day. The danger with Iran, when you take religious zealotry into account, when you have zealotry that embraces death and suicide, if the ayatollah ever used a nuclear weapon over Tel Aviv or New York, he could murder millions of Jews, millions of Americans. Now, even if he knew the result would be overwhelming retaliation that would cost many, many Iranian lives and topple his regime, the danger with religious zealotry is that cost-benefit analysis might be acceptable to him. And none of us should want to roll the dice of allowing him to have the weapons to find out just how he plays out that cost-benefit.

DORAN: I noted that you called Iran the single greatest threat to the United States. I think you're probably - a lot of people would probably put China ahead of that, China or Russia, perhaps. But you know what? Let's not - I see we're late on time here. We've only got about five more minutes. Let me see if I can open it up here to anyone. This gentleman here in the yellow is Tom Duesterberg.

TOM DUESTERBERG: Tom Duesterberg at Hudson Institute. Following up on China, you identified it as a rival. It's militarily expansionist. We're trying to exercise some leverage through the use of economic means.

CRUZ: Yup.

DUESTERBERG: And one of the major actors in China is Huawei. It's an enabler of the surveillance state. It's an economic rival. Its products are going everywhere. It's been identified as a national security threat. Yet it appears that the Trump White House is willing to negotiate the sanctions on Iran in return for, perhaps, purchase of agricultural commodities. Do you think that's a good deal? Should we pursue that?

CRUZ: I think that would be a serious mistake. When it comes to China, China is clearly our long-term most significant geopolitical rival. And as between China and Russia, China is far more significant. China has a much, much greater population, much stronger economic
strength. They're investing more. Russia at - now, Russia is a real threat, and we need to take it seriously.

But if you look at the long-term threats, China's objective is global dominance. And they are investing billions of dollars in producing global dominance. They are investing it militarily. One of the areas - two theaters that worry me very significantly are space and cyber, both of which they're investing very significantly. China has tested technology to destroy American satellites in space. I can tell you, I spent six years on the Armed Services Committee. I asked many commanders. I said, when's the last time you trained in a spaced-out environment? It's all fine and good to have this incredible technology, to have an F-35, to have an aircraft carrier.

But what happens when GPS is down? What happens when you're incredible targeting isn't working because you can't access the satellites? When's the last time you piloted an aircraft carrier using a compass and the stars? That vulnerability of taking out our space architecture, I think, is significant. And I think China poses the greatest nation state threat to that. Cyber, likewise, poses some of those same vulnerabilities. Theft of intellectual property is something that China is investing massive amounts in, state-sanctioned theft of intellectual property, including espionage within the United States, especially our universities.

I've passed legislation to counter Confucius Institute on U.S. universities. Passed that into law as part of the National Defense Authorization Act. I've introduced subsequent legislation to deal more directly with the threat of Chinese espionage. And when you look at Huawei, I've introduced legislation to deal with - Huawei is a state spy agency masquerading as a technology company. And our allies in particular are flirting with Huawei being part of the critical infrastructure in their countries. Why? Because China is willing to invest billions, saying, we'll give you free or below-market equipment. And the only cost is the Chinese get to hack in and see everything that you're saying and all your communications, particularly for the Five Eyes partners. If we're going to be sharing intelligence, sharing intelligence with nations that have allowed their infrastructure to have a direct backdoor to China, that is beyond foolishness.

And so I think this is a threat we need to be absolutely clear-eyed about and use every tool we can to make clear to our allies, no, you can't go down this road. And in many ways, the discussion about relaxing on Huawei because of pressure from our allies is not that different from the fight over Iran and relaxing on Iran because of pressure from our allies in both instances. I describe my views as a non-interventionist hawk. Part of being a strong president is absolutely clear-eyed of the threats to America and not being willing to allow the enemies of America to endanger the lives of Americans. And I think making concessions to let Huawei get even greater perch among our allies or in America - I think would be a serious mistake.

DORAN: Next to Tom, we got Peter there.

PETER ROUGH: Hi. I'm Peter Rough, also from the Hudson Institute. Thanks for being here. I want to take you back to your opening frame. You mentioned - I think this is very interesting on the Republican side - the interventionists, the isolationists and you as the third point in that triangle - and maybe ask you to put on your analytical hack and look at the - hat to look at the Democrats and see whether or not there is equal variety in different streams within the Democratic Party too. We used to talk a lot about the Scoop Jackson Democrats - Senator Lieberman, among others. Do you think that's still there, or are we really with Tweedledum and Tweedledumber, as you put it earlier? Thanks.
CRUZ: Look; I wish there were. Scoop Jackson Democrats used to be a vibrant part of what it meant to be a Democrat. Joe Lieberman - Joe is a friend. I like and respect him. It's very hard to see a Joe Lieberman or Scoop Jackson left in the Democratic Party. If you look at the debates, very little of what they've talked about is foreign policy. They're busy just offering to socialize the entire economy. But to the extent they talk about foreign policy, it has been almost universally anti-Israel and weakening our military, that that - you take, for example, the opening of the American Embassy in Jerusalem.

That is something that I led the fight for. I've introduced legislation repeatedly (ph) to do so. There was a battle in the Trump administration. Just like the Iran deal - same battle lines. State and Defense said, don't move our embassy. I argued vigorously to the president, we should move our embassy. The day we opened the embassy, it was the 70th anniversary of the creation of the modern state of Israel. I was there in Jerusalem for the opening of the embassy. I went with three other senators - all Republicans - and just about a dozen or 15 House members, all Republicans.

Not a single Democratic member of the House or Senate went to the opening of our embassy. The one who did go is Joe Lieberman, who got chased out of the Democratic Party. You go back and look at John F. Kennedy, who got elected in significant part on being willing to stand up to communists. Today, we see Democrats who are apologists for communism, including, just recently, Bernie Sanders. And it really did - this flabbergasted me. Bernie did an interview where he said the Chinese government has done an enormous amount combating poverty. Look. I will confess, as someone whose family has been imprisoned and tortured by communists, my first three reactions to those comments were not repeatable in polite company.

But my fourth reaction was, I tweeted out a response. And I said, well, if you look - I guess Bernie may have a point. Yes, the Chinese government has imprisoned, has tortured countless people, and yes, they're responsible for the murder of at least 65 million people. But I guess it's right; if you're dead, you're not poor anymore. I mean, what kind of apologist sanctions repressive, dictatorial, communist regimes? And that is today's Democratic Party. I wish someone on the Democratic side would emerge with a willingness to stand up and defend U.S. national security interests. That is an almost nonexistent - that's almost a null set.

DORAN: Do you have time for another one?

CRUZ: Yeah. We'll do two more fast.

DORAN: We have a gentleman here who is very eager to ask a question. I'm always reluctant to let the eager ones ask, but let's find out.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thank you so much. Senator Cruz, you introduced a bill to designate Muslim Brotherhood as a terror organizations. Also, President Trump promised to do the same. But so far, nothing happened. Why?

CRUZ: A terrific question - the Muslim Brotherhood - its conduct, its charter, its operation, it is explicitly a terrorist organization. They don't hide it. They don't hide it in their founding documents. A number of our allies, including Egypt, designate the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization 'cause they've seen firsthand the consequences. And by the way, the Muslim Brotherhood has killed far more Muslims than they've killed Christians or Jews. I mean, they are a terrorist organization that has demonstrated a willingness to murder anyone who
does not accord where they're - with their jihadist world vision. I think we absolutely should designate it.

It's the identical forces - it's the deep state that is nervous. It's the State Department and Treasury Department that argues, don't do it; don't designate the Muslim Brotherhood. I think acknowledging reality has real power and potency. And let me give an example from a different part of the world. Let's actually connect an earlier question here. At some level people, say, all right, look. What difference does it make if the Muslim Brotherhood is designated and acknowledged? Let me give an example in China. So I introduced legislation several years ago to rename the street in front of the Chinese Embassy, Liu Xiaobo Plaza.

Now, it was after Liu Xiaobo, the Nobel Peace laureate who was wrongfully imprisoned in China. Where I got this idea, by the way, was from Ronald Reagan. Reagan, in the midst of the Cold War, renamed the street in front of the Soviet Embassy Sakharov Plaza. Now, at some level, people say, oh, come on. What difference does a street name make? Well, it actually makes a powerful difference. I want you to think about it. Every time you write a letter to the embassy - Soviet Embassy, you were forced to write Sakharov's name, the famed dissident. You were forced to acknowledge his existence. In today's Internet world, if you went online to figure out where is the embassy located, they have to put the address if that's the street it's on.

Well, in the Senate, I repeatedly went to the Senate floor to try to pass my legislation about Liu Xiaobo Plaza by unanimous consent. And multiple times, Senator Dianne Feinstein from California stood up and objected. And we argued back and forth, and she argued on the Senate floor, well, doing this will embarrass the Chinese government. I said, yes, exactly. That's not a bug. It's a feature. Well, in the Senate, just like as I said with U.S. foreign policy, there are lots of levers of power. In the U.S. Senate, there are also lots of levers of power. And so this was during the Obama administration, and so I placed a hold on every Obama nominee to the State Department; just said, shut down. You have no more nominees.

Now, unsurprisingly, the state party was pretty dismayed about this, and so they came and said, all right. What can we do to get you to lift your hold? Now, I'm perfectly willing to be reasonable. I said, look. I'm more than happy to lift my hold as soon as you pass my legislation renaming the street in front of the Chinese Embassy Liu Xiaobo Plaza. They said, well, what about just doing a resolution? I said, no. I want legislation mandating it. They agreed, and so my legislation passed the Senate unanimously. Senator Feinstein did not object. It passed the Senate unanimously.

Now, sadly, the Republican House killed it. And that's a whole other story, which, I think, is - does not reflect well on the House leadership at the time. Fast forward to 2017. Let me finish this story because it's very interesting. Rex Tillerson is secretary of state. I had breakfast with Rex, I think, mid-2017. Rex said at the time that when he met with his Chinese counterparts, he said among their top three objectives were prevent the street in front of their embassy from being renamed. Now, at the time, Liu Xiaobo had passed away. So part of what I was pressing to do to get - was to get him released from China. But his widow, Liu Xia, was still there, and she was not allowed to leave. And not only that; that meant that she'd never connected the money from the Nobel - from winning the Nobel Peace Prize, that she couldn't go and collect the money.

And so here's what I told Tillerson. I said, I'll tell you what. You tell China if they release Liu Xia, I'll step back and stop pushing this. But until they release her, I'm going to keep pushing it. And
if you don't believe it's a credible threat, I passed it in the Senate once unanimously, so they
know I can do it. I'm going to keep pushing. I said, look. You treat me as the bad guy, as the
threat. And in a couple of months, they released Liu Xia. That's the power of shining a light, and
that's why designating the Muslim Brotherhood is so important because speaking the truth has a
power that tyrants and terrorists and murderers - they fear.

DORAN: OK, the gentleman in the back - you need to wait for the microphone. And is this our
last one?

CRUZ: Yeah, it's our last one.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thank you very much.

DORAN: Make it a good one.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thank you very much for your time, Senator. How do you see the
Kurdish situation, both sides in Syria and in Iraq post-ISIS? And, Senator, do you believe the
Kurds in Iran will be U.S. ally like the Iraqi Kurdistan and Kurds in Syria? - because we have
more - 12 million Kurds in Iran. Thank you very, very much.

CRUZ: Thank you for your question. As you know, I have been outspoken, calling for a free and
independent Kurdistan. The Kurds have stood with America over and over and over again. The
Peshmerga have proven to be very effective fighters on the ground, fighting the enemies of
America, killing the enemies of America so that they're not killing Americans. And I will say I
think U.S. foreign policy has too frequently failed to stand with the Kurds, that their bravery, their
loyalty has not been repaid by the same consistency of U.S. foreign policy.

Look. I understand that free and independent Kurdistan drives the Iraqis crazy. It drives the
Turks crazy, doesn't thrill the Iranians. Going back to the principle I laid out, our focus on foreign
policy should be focused directly on protecting U.S. national security. The Kurds have bled and
fought and died to stand with America. And I think it is right not because we're in the business of
promoting democratic utopias but because our objective should be keeping America safe and
standing with those allies who fight with us against our enemies that we should support a free
and independent Kurdistan. And I hope that we see that.

DORAN: Well, thank you. Before we thank Senator - I was going to call you President Cruz.
You're not President Cruz - Senator Cruz. Can I ask you all to stay seated? We have to get him
off to a plane. And please join me in thanking him.