TRANSCRIPT

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- Vivek Ramaswamy, *Entrepreneur and United States Presidential Candidate*
- Michael Doran, *Senior Fellow and Director, Center for Peace and Security in the Middle East*

Disclaimer: This transcript is based off of a recorded video conference and breaks in the stream may have resulted in mistranscriptions in the text.

A video of the event is available: [https://www.hudson.org/events/presidential-speech-series-vivek-ramaswamy](https://www.hudson.org/events/presidential-speech-series-vivek-ramaswamy)

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John Walters:

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Betsy and Wally Stern Conference Center here at Hudson Institute. I'm John Walters, president and CEO of Hudson. Thank you for joining us for this event with 2024 Republican presidential candidate, Mr. Vivek Ramaswamy. Hudson Institute has invited all the major presidential candidates of both parties to present their views on national security at Hudson. While we have experts that do analysis and make policy recommendations in a full range of national security policies, we know that free and open debate is critical to a healthy democracy. So far we have heard from Vice President Mike Pence, Senator Tim Scott, governor Doug Burgum. Our future speakers include Governor Chris Christie and Ambassador Nikki Haley. Today we are joined by Mr. Ramaswamy. Welcome.

He is, of course, a New York Times bestselling author and a successful entrepreneur. As an entrepreneur he was a founder and was executive chairman of... Is it Roivant Sciences, a biopharmaceutical company focused on applying technology for drug development. He established Roivant in 2014, and led the largest biotech IPO of 2015 and 2016, resulting in successful clinical trials in multiple disease areas and FDA-approved products. He was born, as you many of you already know, to immigrant parents and raised in Ohio. Mr. Ramaswamy graduated from Harvard College and earned his JD from Yale Law School. 2015, he was featured on the cover of Ford Magazine for his contributions to drug development. In 2020, he emerged as a prominent commentator on stakeholder capitalism, free speech, woke culture. And as he notes, Mr. Ramaswamy is an example of American opportunity. He will make some opening remarks followed by a conversation with Mike Duran, Hudson senior fellow and director of our Middle East Center, and he will conclude with some audience questions. So without further ado, the floor is yours Mr. Ramaswamy.

Vivek Ramaswamy:

Thank you for the warm welcome, and I'm looking forward to the conversation. I am here principally to discuss a vision of my foreign policy, but wanted to ground all of you, many of whom I'm meeting for the first time, and the vision for our American revival and where my foreign policy agenda fits in. My view is that we are in the middle of a national identity crisis today. We lack a good answer to the question of what it even means to be an American. I'm 38 years old. I'm the youngest person ever to run for US president as a Republican. And I think if you ask most people my age, what does it mean to be an American, you get a blank stare in response. That is the vacuum. That is the void at the heart of our national soul. And I believe that if we deliver an answer to that question, revive the ideals of the American Revolution, that is how we dilute the poison to irrelevance, wokeism to transgenderism, to climatism, to Covidism, depression, anxiety, fentanyl.

These are symptoms of a deeper void of purpose and meaning. Now, one of my goals here domestically, it's not the topic of our discussion today, is to revive those 1776 ideals in our culture in the United States of America. But I also consider myself to be a George Washington, America first conservative when it comes to our foreign policy. Revive the Washington Doctrine, revive the vision in 1776, revive the vision of George Washington's farewell address when it comes to our foreign policy in putting American interests first. And that's what I'm going to talk about today principally as it relates to a new vision for realism in our foreign policy that departs from the consensus of the last 25 years. And I'm looking forward to a thought-provoking conversation with Mike Duran, as well as with all of you in the audience very shortly.
I'd summarize my foreign policy in a nutshell with three simple objectives. Avoid World War III, declare economic independence from China, and then secure the American homeland, protecting our own borders and bringing cyber defenses, super EMP, electromagnetic pulse defenses, nuclear missile defenses, space-based defenses, that were missing here in the United States. A few weeks ago I gave a speech in central Ohio at a manufacturing firm that was on shoring production from the US to China, laying out a pragmatic strategy for how we could actually declare economic independence from our enemy, communist China, in a way that doesn't really disrupt the US economy as much as we're taught to believe. Last week I visited the US southern border laying out a vision for how we ultimately fortify our homeland defenses right here at home. And the subject of my speech today is how we avoid a slow, but I worry, steady march towards World War III in a way that would not advance American interests.

I want to lay out my core pillars of what I consider to be a revival of realism in our foreign policy. The moral obligation of the next US president if I'm elected, your new next US president, my moral obligation to you, as the citizens of this country, is to put the interests of American citizens first, full stop, without apologizing for it. Of course, we're going to require allies to achieve that, but that is a means to the end of exclusively advancing the American interest. The decision to go to war, should we ever make one, should be a necessity, not a choice or a preference. Military engagement should never be a moral crusade or a substitute for social work, but a necessity, and perhaps most importantly of all, we require transparency and open debate, not just in normal times, but especially during times of crisis or during times of war.

I say this in part biased by the generation I'm a member of. I'm 38 years old, as I said. I grew up into watching the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan wondering, now six and a half trillion dollars in, thousands upon thousands of innocent American lives sacrificed, wondering to what end we entered these wars. In Iraq, we still have a hostile anti-American regime, vulnerable to Iranian incursion. In Afghanistan, a Taliban that is still in charge that was the same Taliban that was in charge long before we entered Afghanistan. I'm keen to make sure that we don't repeat those same mistakes here in the United States today, and I worry that we are paving the path to larger scale conflict that repeats those mistakes, not at the same scale, but at a larger scale than ever before. So I'm going to kick this off, foregrounding our discussion before I speak to Mike, I'm looking forward to that conversation. Going around a couple of the areas where I see the greatest risks.

It's certainly the areas that are at the top of your minds as well, offering my perspective, which run a little bit contrary to those of the rest of the Republican field, and that'll be a good way to practice what we preach when it comes to free speech and open debate as we head into potentially major conflict that I'm concerned about. Let's start with the war in Ukraine. I do not believe that this war advances American interests. To the contrary, I am deeply concerned that we are marching our way into major conflict with the nuclear power in Russia at a moment where we have, for the first time since the early 1970s, found ourselves in a moment of no nuclear non-proliferation agreement between the United States and Russia. I worry that the Russia/China Alliance is the single greatest threat to the future existence of the United States of America.

Russia outmatches us in its nuclear capabilities, in its hypersonic missile capabilities. China outmatches us in its naval capacity, and even more importantly, is an economy that we depend on for our own modern way of life. Today, those two countries are allied with one another, and I worry that our continued engagement, militarily in Ukraine, is driving Russia further into China's hands by the day, strengthening that Russia/China military alliance. I'm well aware that Vladimir
Putin is not a trustworthy partner of the United States. I do not trust Vladimir Putin. But just because Putin is an evil dictator, just because Putin is bad does not automatically mean that Ukraine is good. To the contrary, this is a country that has banned 11 opposition parties, that has consolidated all TV media into one state TV media arm, has implicitly threatened the United States not to hold its elections this year unless we fork over more money.

Its leader, Zelensky, even very recently, implicitly praising a Nazi in his own ranks. It's the Russian-speaking regions of Ukraine that are actually occupied now. You can see it in the map in front of you, regions like Luhansk and Donetsk, principally Russian speaking, where many of the people don't even view themselves as part of Ukraine. Russian-speaking regions that have not been represented in the Ukrainian Parliament for the better part of the last decade. Those are facts against the backdrop of which we have to make decisions about the future of US engagement. So my view is that the correct answer here is to provide a reasonable path to peace, a deal that would quickly end this war, that would, foremost, make a hard commitment that NATO does not admit Ukraine to NATO. Something that respects the commitment that James Baker made to Gorbachev in 1990, the not one inch commitment, that NATO would expand not one inch past East Germany. And further even, yes, freezing the current lines of control approximately where they are, ceding those Russian-speaking regions to Russia, but not for free.

To the contrary advancing American interests in the process by requiring that in return for that deal, Vladimir Putin and Russia exit its military alliance with China, thereby weakening and disbanding the single greatest threat to the United States of America today, that is the Russia/China Military Alliance. There'd be other elements of that deal we can talk about in the Q and A. I think it could be an opportunity for the removal of a Russian military presence in the Western hemisphere that doesn't help American interests, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba, and elsewhere. This is an opportunity for requiring that Russia remove its nuclear weapons in Kaliningrad, the region of Russia that borders Poland. But this is an opportunity for us to ask the question that we always must ask in any foreign conflict. How does US engagement further advance US interests? That's how we would do it in Ukraine, but instead I worry that we are escalating a conflict, increasing the risk of potential nuclear engagement by Russia, tactical nuclear weapons or otherwise, and pushing them further into a corner into China where right now.

I don't believe Putin enjoys being Xi Jinping's little brother. But we're forcing him to be that at a moment where still every time that they meet Putin will still send weapons to India and to Vietnam showing us that there are kinks in that armor. This is our moment to exploit the kinks in that armor to actually pull apart the two allies, Russia and China, that together threatened the United States today. At that same time that we're seeing an escalating conflict in Ukraine, we're now seeing, of course, as well known to everyone in this room, concerning conflict in the Middle East surrounding Israel. Now, what happened to Israel, what Hamas did to Israel, it was wrong, it was barbaric, it was medieval, it was immoral, and Israel absolutely has the full right to defend itself and its right to existence. The United States should support Israel's existence diplomatically, making sure that international institutions from the UN on downward don't create a false equivalence between Israel's right of national self-defense and the actions of the terrorists who attack Israel, creating the need for its national self-defense.

At the same time, I am very worried about the pending ground invasion in Gaza, which I do not believe will advance Israel's best interest, but that's not my job to pontificate about. My job is to ask whether this advances, or US involvement in such an invasion, advances us interests.
Here's what I worry is about to happen, and you can see the map in front of you. Many of you're familiar with it. As Israel proceeds to a ground invasion in Gaza, which looks increasingly inevitable by the day, I'm worried that will mire Israel in a war in the South that will leave it vulnerable to an attack from the north, from Hezbollah, who has made very clear that that is their red line for attacking. They may not do it instantly. They may wait to Israel's detriment for when Israel is mired in a urban conflict in some of the most difficult terrain to achieve military victory, to strike from the North. Israel's then in a two front war.

There's no reasonable scenario in which if Israel's own existence is on the line, the US isn't going to get involved militarily to protect Israel. However, that's a red line that crosses the pre-specified boundaries of Iranian backed militias from the Houthis in Yemen to the Badr brigade in Iraq. That will then cause them, as they've said, and they've already gestured accordingly, to strike us targets in the region. Keep in mind, we have our largest embassy in Baghdad. That has us once again, all over again, in a long-term, prolonged likely no win war in the Middle East all the while with Israel mired in the south and Gaza, effectively taking civilian casualties, that'll be unavoidable on both sides of this that cause international allies, even US allies to then turn their backs on Israel. And to what end? Even if Israel is successful in toppling Hamas with no clear plan of what fills the vacuum other than a likely Hamas 2.0.

So when you think about the range of criticisms of Israel entering Gaza, I want to be very clear about what my position is. You'll hear many voices on the left worried about concerns relating to proportionality or humanitarian concerns. I am actually prepared to put that to one side. Israel has a right to exist and a right to defend itself. But I worry about two separate questions that I don't believe have been debated sufficiently. Is Israel even likely to succeed in that ground invasion? And even if it does achieve its stated objective of toppling Hamas, will that victory merely be Pyrrhic in nature. When someone other than Hamas, just as Isis succeeded Al-Qaeda, what succeeds Hamas 1.0 might be a worse version, if history teaches us what might happen here all over again. So these are my concerns. I think that these are concerns that we ought to debate in the open.

I worry that many of my fellow contenders in this GOP primary, intelligent enough people, many of them are, are afraid to have this debate for fear of being labeled as I incorrectly have been, anti-Israel. To the contrary, the vision that I'm laying out here for our engagement or non-engagement in Israel, is actually a deeply pro-Israel vision that is consistent with the original Zionist project altogether. The idea that Israel was never supposed to rely on the fleeting sympathies of the rest of the world, but to say that this is the Jewish state that belongs rightly for all of history to now, to the Jewish people. And that is why Israel exists, is why came into existence, to be able to fully defend itself as it's capable of doing. And I worry that we instead now find ourselves in muddied waters, and we have played a role in muddying those waters in the worst of all worlds, where the US is, in some ways, if not expressly, at least implicitly constraining Israel's ability to defend itself while at the same time muddying the waters not enough for Israel to fully seek out its own well-defined missions.

And so we have a choice to make. I come out on the side of voting against, I'm strongly against it. I think I'm the first presidential candidate to be explicit about this, against the $106 billion aid package working its way through Congress right now as we speak. First on principled grounds, that we should not conflate these different conflicts where there are very different issues at stake. But even on the elements of each, against further funding to Ukraine. And yes, even against funding Israel in this conflict without a clear understanding of what the objectives are for success. It's not up to us as a big brother to demand that Israel answer to us. Israel doesn't owe
us any answers. Israel owes it to itself to defend itself. But if the US is going to be involved, then we need to understand with clarity what exactly are the objectives, what exactly is the plan for success and what exactly is the plan for succession after success. Without which we can't possibly decide what we're going to fund and what we're not, what we are or are not going to support militarily.

So this is a vision of foreign policy that yes advances American interests, but my concern is that as we are instead mired in conflicts in Ukraine that drive Russia further into China's hands, that we're mired in another no win war, prolonged war in the Middle East, the ultimate beneficiary of it is of course none other than our ultimate adversary, communist China. Communist China would be pleased to see us deplete our military resources. Look at the artillery, look at how much we've sent to Ukraine. One and a half million rounds of artillery. We're producing about 20,000 per month. It's a zero-sum game. Even look at the amount that was stored by the US and Israel, 300,000 rounds or so that we previously sent to Ukraine, that we might now regret. Communist China's the ultimate winner in this, and what I worry is that the window for potential invasion of Taiwan, or annexation of Taiwan, expands further, closer to the present, the more likely we are to be mired in conflicts elsewhere in the world.

And then if China does choose to invade Taiwan, this is the one instance in which it would be and is in the interest of the US to intervene, to make sure that Taiwan, in the foreseeable future, is not annexed by China. In that respect, and before wrapping this up, that'll be the final area that I offer you my views on before getting into discussion with Michael. I'm worried that if China invades or annexes Taiwan today, we will then forever have an economic gun to our head because of our reliance for our modern way of life on the semiconductors produced in Taiwan, the little chips that power these phones, those cameras in the back, these lights, that power our entire modern way of life. They're manufactured on a tiny island, tiny set of islands, off the southeast coast of China. And if China invades today, I believe that we have to depart from the current consensus position in both the Republican Party and the Democratic Party of strategic ambiguity to move to strategic clarity.

To be clear that yes, we the United States of America will defend Taiwan for the foreseeable future, at least until Taiwan has achieved, the US has achieved semiconductor independence from Taiwan. At which point we can then suitably resume our current posture of strategic ambiguity from a greater position of strength while fortifying our homeland in the meantime, cyber defenses, super EMP defenses, nuclear defenses on down, achieved semiconductor self-sufficiency, while also putting Taiwan on notice to appropriately increase its own military expenditures as a percentage of GDP from less than 2% where it is today to closer to 5% where it needs to be, which is what makes Israel such a good partner is that it actually pays for its own national self-defense. So this is a realist view of foreign policy. I'll admit I'm an outsider to politics. I built my career in the world of business. My parents came to this country with no money. In a single generation I've gone on to found multiple multi-billion dollar companies, did it while marrying my wife, raising our two sons, following our faith in God. I did not imagine that I was going to be running for US president, even if you asked me two years ago or a year ago. That being said, I think it is going to take an outsider coming in outside of that consensus establishment in both the Republican and Democratic Party alike, to not only bring realism to our domestic policy. There's a speech I gave a number of weeks ago, right in this town of how we're going to shut down 75% of the federal bureaucracy, how we are going to restore the integrity of a three branch constitutional republic that would make George Washington proud.
But also a foreign policy that yes would make George Washington proud too. A foreign policy that truly puts the interests of the American homeland and the American citizenry first, and does it in a way that not only achieves peace through strength, but achieves here at home, once again, our strength through achieving peace.

Thank you very much for the warm welcome, I'm looking forward to the conversation. Michael, thank you for the invitation as well, and I welcome the dialogue. Thank you everybody. Thank you.

Michael Doran:

Thanks a lot.

Vivek Ramaswamy:

Thank you, Mike.

Michael Doran:

Yeah, appreciate it. Okay, great to have you here. Where do we start? Let me ask you something that has nothing to do with foreign policy.

Vivek Ramaswamy:

Okay.

Michael Doran:

Oh, sorry.

Vivek Ramaswamy:

Fair enough. Thank you.

Michael Doran:

Why are you a Republican, or when did you become a Republican?

Vivek Ramaswamy:

Well, I'll be honest with you, I'm not a party man. Even now I'm not a party man. I'm using the Republican Party as a vehicle to advance what I see as a pro-American agenda that this country's hungry for, in need of. And I do cringe at the characterization of our domestic and foreign policy divisions through the caricature of this red versus blue or Republican versus Democrat vision. A lot of people wonder, as we speak, we don't have a speaker of the house and everybody's fretting over this, as though that was the main threat that we face in the United States, the absence of a speaker. These are symptoms of the fact that the Republican versus Democratic divide elides the real conflict in this country.
I think the real conflict in this country, the real divides between the 80% of us who believe in the ideals of the American Revolution, who believe in free speech and meritocracy, in the pursuit of excellence, in the rule of law, and a fringe minority, 20% or less in this country, who hates our country and the values that we're founded on. That's the real divide in this country. It's not black versus white or red versus blue. And so I have voted Republican more than... I've never voted Democrat. I voted libertarian in my first election back in 2004, but I consider myself an American. I consider myself a unapologetic American constitutionalist, and I'm using the Republican Party as a vehicle because we live in a two party system.

Michael Doran:

It's interesting the way you put it though, that you're using the Republican Party for the vehicle. Why did you choose that vehicle?

Vivek Ramaswamy:

Well, I think the Democratic Party is lost. I think it is beyond a lost cause, and a party that has pledged fealty to a new religion of race, gender, sexuality, and climate. It's almost bordering on an establishment clause violation of a religion of modern secularism, that's using the tools of the state and the private sector to foist onto the American people, a set of fundamentally anti-American values that are hostile to our national identity. And so there's zero chance that I find any alignment with the domestic vision of the Democratic Party. The Republican Party, by contrast, at least offers promise in that it is a blank slate right now. It is an opportunity to redefine what it means to be a Republican. And to me, I want to redefine what it means to be a Republican, to be unapologetically pro-American, unapologetically in favor of the ideals of the American Revolution. And I think it's worth remembering those are not moderate ideals. The idea that you get to speak your mind freely as long as I get to in return, the idea that we settle our differences through debate. These are radical ideas.

Michael Doran:

I don't get to be completely free. There are two things that Hudson, you can't be, you can't be pro-drug and you can't be anti-Israel. Other than that we have total freedom.

Vivek Ramaswamy:

Well, I think that's... But you're free to be at Hudson.

Michael Doran:

I am.

Vivek Ramaswamy:

I suppose that was a choice.

Michael Doran:

No, no, no, there's no other choice but Hudson. Everywhere else, the restrictions are greater.
Vivek Ramaswamy:

I see. Well, look, I think that these are, certainly the American landscape, these are extreme ideals, and I think that that's one of the things we need to get comfortable with embracing is my model of national unity is not one of showing up in the middle and compromising. First of all, that assumes that there's only two poles to the political spectrum. I don't think that's true. But second of all, the thing that unites us as Americans are the extreme ideals of the American Revolution, the radicalism of the American Revolution. And I think that we live in a moment where we would do well to revive those ideals that unite us across our skin deep differences. And so that's what I'm doing in this race.

Michael Doran:

Okay, I'm with you on everything you say up to when you start talking about foreign policy.

Vivek Ramaswamy:

That's why I'm here. I believe in open debate. We came here intentionally.

Michael Doran:

Let's start with your idea about breaking up Russian and China. And let me start asking you this way. Every president, since, I don't know, certainly Bush, maybe even before Bush, has come in saying, the guy before me didn't understand Russia, but I've got it. So you're in this tradition. Why do you think all of the guys from Bush on, what did they get wrong and how are you going to do it differently?

Vivek Ramaswamy:

So I'm a critic of George Bush on a lot of things, particularly the post 911 response as it related to Iraq in particular. But I will say one thing, before 911, actually the Bush administration did flag the risks of the 2001 treaty of good neighborliness and cooperation between Russia and China. Were it not for 911, I think the Bush administration was on track to prioritize further dismantling that alliance. So I'll give credit where credit's due. I think they, at least till 911, did recognize that threat. So I'm not sure that they had it wrong so much as that they were distracted by what was initially the necessity and then what was projected to be the necessity of a focus on the Middle East.

Now, part of my view is where have we missed it in the Obama years and even before Bush as well. I think our post Cold War policies of over expanding NATO, people obsess over the 1994 Budapest memorandum. I believe in keeping our commitments, but completely thrown out the window the James Baker, not one inch commitment that he made to Gorbachev, has consistently... NATO expanded more after the fall of the USSR than it ever did during the existence of the USSR, when supposedly, the whole point of it was to curb the USSR. That was part of the mistake.

Michael Doran:

Let's go with Obama because Obama had the same spirit that you have.
Vivek Ramaswamy:

I don't think so.

Michael Doran:

No? How does your-

Vivek Ramaswamy:

I believe in actually drawing red lines and keeping them, credible red lines. So I’m not going to make up some red line in Syria and then do nothing when they cross it. When I talk about... There were implicit, I’ll make them explicit, red lines in that speech right there. We draw credible red lines grounded in our self-interest. And there’s a reason why no other Republican has the spine to say we will defend Taiwan for the foreseeable future at least until certain conditions have been met.

Michael Doran:

What's your red line with Putin?

Vivek Ramaswamy:

The red line with... Well, that presumes that we haven't have a understanding of what those were in the first place. So my red line would come out of the deal that we would do. He does not touch a NATO ally. He doesn't touch a region of what would be a sovereign Ukraine that comes out of the deal that we would do. But we have to give each other a reason to enter that deal. To reopen economic relations is I think the key element of how we open that deal. Now as a moment where I think we have to do what Nixon did with Mao, and I use MAO as an example because Putin's bad, Mao was worse. We didn't trust Mao, just as we shouldn't trust Putin.

But Nixon as a person who shares my skepticism of the administrative state and the bureaucracy around him, pulled Mao out of the choke hold of Brezhnev led USSR. And I think Putin's like the new Mao. So we don't trust him, but we can trust him to follow his self-interest. And so opening economic relations with Russia and standing by the commitment we made in 1990 that NATO would not further expand combined with yes, freezing approximately those current lines of control, is a basis for getting far more in return at a moment where there are kinks in the armor in the Russia China relationship.

Michael Doran:

Wasn't that the theory of Joe Biden when he lifted the sanctions on Nordstream Two?

Vivek Ramaswamy:

I think we bombed the Nordstream Two. So I think that there’s nothing that's-

Michael Doran:
Vivek Ramaswamy:
Under Joe Biden, we bombed Nordstream Two.

Michael Doran:
No, when Biden came in, he took the sanctions off Nordstream two so that there could be economic relations between Germany and Russia.

Vivek Ramaswamy:
So Michael, with respect-

Michael Doran:
Whatever happened to Nordstream Two, I don't believe that Biden funded, but that happened after the Russian-

Vivek Ramaswamy:
I think we directly and directly consented to the bombing.

Michael Doran:
Well, we don't need to argue about that, but that happened after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. But the Russian invasion of Ukraine came we opened up economic relations between Russia and Germany.

Vivek Ramaswamy:
We didn't open up economic relations between Russia and Germany. Germany opened relations. We still have long had closed relations with Russia. And I think the other thing that I would say... Let's just sort of, I think a productive conversation because world of politics have gotten acclimated to this. I think that the impeachment by analogy to Democrat is I don't think really a particularly useful frame of whether it's similar to an Obama or similar to a Biden. It turns out my foreign policy is dramatically different from that of Biden and Obama as well as that of Bush and much of the historical Republican base. But let's just start without the partisan filters asking what actually makes sense. We've absolutely restricted economic relations with Russia. I don't think it's productive. There's a lot that happened before Russia invaded Ukraine. Angela Merkel made some disastrous comments about the Minsk Accords just being about biding time as we were arming Ukraine to the teeth in the meantime.

Putin asking for a instantiation of the commitment that we made in 1990 that NATO wouldn't expand, we couldn't give it to him. So there's a lot of factors that preceded, and I believe precipitated in part Russia's invasion of Ukraine. But the question is from where we are now, I'm not here to blame the people who came before me, Republican or Democrat. As the next president, what do I want to do? I want to lead us to advancing the American interest of
weakening, if not dismantling, the Russia China Alliance, but to do it while securing peace on reasonable terms that allow Ukraine's own sovereignty to come out intact, which I worry is not exactly the path that we're on, the spring offensive that became the summer offensive that became effectively the non-effective offensive that ever was. This is not on track to succeed even for the people of Ukraine and the Ukrainian boys who are dying there.

And at some point, I think we're allowed as human beings also ask the question about the Russian boys who were dying over there, and make sure we never get to the point of the American boys who will be dying over there. To ask the question of, to what end are we fighting or fueling a war for Russian-speaking regions, most of whom believe that they shouldn't be part of Ukraine. They haven't been represented in the Ukrainian Parliament for nine years. Either we believe in democracy or we don't. And so I think that in many ways that even if you're using the pro-democratic argument, that fails on Ukraine. But I think the national self-interest for the United States, that's where we more obviously fail flatly.

Michael Doran:

What makes you... So when I look at Russia and China, they look very happy together to me. What are you seeing in that relationship that makes you think we can do a deal with Putin?

Vivek Ramaswamy:

Sure. So I think that there are cracks in that relationship if we're opening our eyes and willing to see it. I referenced it in my opening remarks. I think it is not an accident that after the 2022 no limits partnership meeting, right after they part ways, Putin sends weapons to India and to Vietnam, both of which share a border with China. He was sending a signal. I think it's not an accident that in northeast China, they have yet to be able to complete the completion of a railroad, which would be an economic boon to northeast China, which is struggling in absence of that railroad able to make it to the sea, but for running through a part of Russia. So fundamentally, it is my belief that Putin does not enjoy being the kid brother in the relationship that he's in with Xi Jinping. But that's the position we've put him in when we've cut off relations from the West.

And when you describe someone as an enemy... It's one thing to call China our adversary in our enemy. I am comfortable with that, because I think it is grounded in truth, with respect to there's only two superpowers right now. And a World war requires two superpowers with allies, neither of which is obviously able to defeat the other. That's the state we're in. But if you then start calling everybody else an enemy, we can go down the list, but Russia's high on the list, you start incentivizing them to behave like an enemy. And that's exactly what we've done, as opposed to moving to what could be a trilateral international order between the US, Russia and China rather than the bilateral one that favors China currently with Russia in their camp.

And so I think that those are examples of evidence of cracks in that armor, that I think we should be exploiting now, and using the Ukraine war, more precisely the end of it, as one of the catalysts that helps us pull Russia out of its relationship with China, by renormalization economic relations with Russia making a hard commitment relating to NATO, not admitting Ukraine to NATO. Yes, territorial concessions that track what I think is actually the reality of pretty close to what self-determination there would look like anyway. And I think that would be a good outcome for the US. I think it would be a good outcome for Ukraine to come out with its own sovereignty, intact, backstopped by actual US interests at issue that's a far more secure
peace than whatever path they're on right now. And I think it would be good for Russia, which doesn't have to be a bad thing for the US. And I worry the main obstacle to doing this deal is that last part of what I said.

Would this be good for the US? Yes, it would this be good even for Ukraine? I think it actually would be good for the people of Ukraine. But the thing that's stopping us is the idea that there could be some good in this for Russia. And I think that that's a datedness to a Cold War mentality that presumes the USSR exists and that regime change in Russia somehow, though you're not supposed to say that out loud, the lurking agenda that's actually at work here. I think that that is not the way that we should be making decisions as US policy makers, as opposed to asking what's best for the US interest, which is part of my case for generational change in who leads this country from the White House. I do think it's going to take a different generation to lead us.

Michael Doran:

Let's move to Iran.

Vivek Ramaswamy:

Sure.

Michael Doran:

I want to keep you on Iran.

Vivek Ramaswamy:

Yeah. But this relates to Iran. Absolutely relates to it.
Michael Doran:

What are we going to do about Iran's aggression? The disagreement... What I'm getting at, the disagreement I have with you is that you say there are deals out there to be had without the application of-

Vivek Ramaswamy:

I'm talking About that in Russia's case.

Michael Doran:

Yeah, but I feel-

Vivek Ramaswamy:

Iran's different. Iran's different.

Michael Doran:

That's what I want to get at.

Vivek Ramaswamy:

Iran's different.

Michael Doran:

Because I don't think that these actors, Russia, China and Iran can be, that there's a dial that we can turn-

Vivek Ramaswamy:

I think Russia-

Michael Doran:

... and come to agreement with them without the serious threat of military force. That's where I think you and I disagree.

Vivek Ramaswamy:

I think one of the areas where we maybe have a different prism is I don't have an overarching theory that analogizes each of these regions to another because I think they're fundamentally different.

Michael Doran:
Okay, so let's go on Iran.

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

Analyze, not analogize. That'd be one description of my approach to foreign policy. So analyze the Russian situation. We had a deep discussion.

**Michael Doran:**

How do we stop-

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

Iran's a different discussion.

**Michael Doran:**

... Iran from attacking us and our allies?

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

So now let's independently analyze Iran. I think that the deterrence that the Arab nations, including Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Israel, which, let's just acknowledge, I don't know if you're supposed to say this or not, but has nuclear capabilities. Israel, Turkey and the Arab countries do not like Iran, and it is not in their interest for Iran to expand its sphere of influence. You're talking about a country in Iran, that's, what 3% of the economic might or might of any capacity of China. It's a sideshow compared to China. I think that that successfully, if we provide a diplomatic iron dome for Israel combined with Turkey and Saudi Arabia and other Arab nations in whose self-interest it already is not for Iran to expand. These are already... We have a balance of power. I'm not saying it's a comfortable balance of power, but we've had a balance of power in the Middle East that I think can work to contain conflict on its own. And even with the best intentions, our involvement has actually exacerbated the risks that the US faces.

**Michael Doran:**

That Iran has been expanding quite in a startling way and it's actually attacking Americans directly. How do we stop the attacks on America?

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

Well, I think that there's something baked into that premise that I'd like to challenge. It's that America should have been in the places that we were being attacked. Where are they attacking us? They're attacking us in places that we shouldn't have been. Why are we in Syria? Why are we in Iraq? We shouldn't have been in either of those places. So it comes back to my premise that we in the... I'm not saying it was bad intentions. I think there was some bad intentions involved, but I think it's mostly an outdated vision of foreign policy, of interventionist foreign policy, that put us in a place to be attacked that we couldn't have been attacked. And then ask the question of how we're going to stop that from happening. The best solution is we shouldn't have been there in the first place.
Michael Doran:
So we shouldn’t have been there in the first place, but we’re there-

Vivek Ramaswamy:
The Arab countries, Turkey and Israel can achieve their own deterrence.

Michael Doran:
But we’re there now. So we pull out.

Vivek Ramaswamy:
Well, I think that-

Michael Doran:
Doesn’t that reward Iran aggression?

Vivek Ramaswamy:
I’m not going to be pulling out in a moment where we’re being attacked. Right? But asking a fundamental question, the premise of it we’re never going to be leaving a region with guns to our backs. Okay? It’s not the ideal way to exit. It should be from a position of strength. But if you want to just understand how we think about Iranian deterrence, I think it would have been, and in the future can be most effective when it’s the Middle Eastern countries that have the, as neighbors, vested interest to protect against Iranian aggression.

Michael Doran:
We have to-

Vivek Ramaswamy:
To be left to themselves to do it.

Michael Doran:
But we have to-

Vivek Ramaswamy:
What do we do now?

Michael Doran:
We have a position of strength now. How do we establish that?
Vivek Ramaswamy:

I think the position of strength right now is let's just talk about what's at hand, right? This is not an academic discussion. We're in the middle of a serious imminent war right now. I think we should provide full diplomatic support and intelligence support for Israel to fully defend itself. And I think that's correct.

Michael Doran:

That's not going to deter Iran from shooting at us.

Vivek Ramaswamy:

I disagree with you. I think if Israel is fully defending itself and its national right to exist, I think that there is plenty of deterrence baked in. The US is nuclear equipped, Israel is nuclear equipped in a way that Iran is not even close to either of those nations. And so I do think that the threat, the idea that we're somehow at risk or our principle military risk is Iran somehow striking the United States of America is, I think, a straw man compared to where our actual threat is, which is communist China that has a far greater leverage over the United States, and every iota of further involvement in this conflict weakens us versus China.

Michael Doran:

Why do you think Iran is attacking us?

Vivek Ramaswamy:

I want to just ask you precisely, what are you referring to? You referring to Iranian backed militias hitting targets in other areas of the Middle East.

Michael Doran:

They hit two US bases in Iraq or more actually in the last couple of days.

Vivek Ramaswamy:

They're fundamentally hostile to Israel. We know that. And they're fundamentally hostile to the United States as an extension and a supporter of Israel. We know that too. And they're fundamentally hostile independently to the west and the United States of America. So we know that. So we have a hostile nation in the Middle East.

Michael Doran:

So what do we do with that?

Vivek Ramaswamy:

Well, the question is, I start with the principle of do no harm. We have done more harm to US interests over the last 25 years of our involvement in the Middle East than we have aided it. And
we have frankly a bigger objective to address that we're weaker in being able to address when we're drawn into yet another no win war in the Middle East. $33 trillion in national debt, six and a half trillion of which was attributable to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

**Michael Doran:**

We are where we are. They're shooting at us. We want them to stop. You said we have to have a position of strength. I want to see your vision of position of strength.

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

So I would say from the present, if you're hitting US targets, you will have hell to pay for it. We have to be crystal clear about that and say it, but against the backdrop of also being clear that our longer term plan is to exit these Middle East engagements that we should not have been in the first place. And I believe that will be sufficient.

**Michael Doran:**

What is hell to pay for it look like?

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

Well, I think that it depends on the scale of the attack. And this is also where you're going to get into telegraphing exactly what specific bombs you're going to drop where. No, we're not going to get into that discussion.

**Michael Doran:**

I want to make sure that I understand that hell to pay-

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

If you hit US-

**Michael Doran:**

Hell to pay is economic sanctions, military action, all of the above?

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

Here's my view, and I've said the same thing with respect to defending Taiwan. We will defend Taiwan militarily. I'm not going to get into this specific examples of what we're going to do where.

Let's stay with Iran. I'll move to the Taiwan-

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**
But I'm going to give you an example of what deterrence actually looks like. I think it's going to be every bit as effective here as well. You will have hell to pay for it if you're hitting US targets, but you could do so against the backdrop of knowing that also we are not going to be here forever. To the contrary, my goal is to exit our engagement in these regions of the Middle East that we should not have been in the first place. And I believe that will be more than sufficient deterrence to make sure US targets aren't hit.

Michael Doran:

What is the value of the Middle East and our positions in it to American foreign policy?

Vivek Ramaswamy:

I think that our involvement in the Middle East and our presence, physical presence in the Middle East has not served US interest.

Michael Doran:

So you'd get out entirely.

Vivek Ramaswamy:

I would look to a path for as much disengagement from the Middle East as possible.

Michael Doran:

And with all of those energy resources and the role that they play central to the economy of the world, if they fall under China and Iran, what happens to our economic security that is your fundamental-

Vivek Ramaswamy:

So I don't think they're going to fall under China and Iran. I think we actually again have it backwards in that framing. China's not a natural ally of any Muslim country. China is the country that has a million religious minorities, Muslims, in concentration camps subject to forced sterilization, communist indoctrination and worse. But it is the US involvement in the Middle East that actually is drawing China into what would otherwise be an unnatural engagement for China itself. Talk about energy security. We might find some common ground here, for sure. I do believe our energy security is national security. We have hampered our own ability in the name of this climate cult to shackle energy production here in the United States. I don't think Russia would have gone for Ukraine or had the confidence to, if we had been a net exporter of energy at the time that Russia made that decision. And our way of dealing with the Middle East is reducing its leverage that it has over the United States by drilling and fracking and burning coal.

Michael Doran:

Another issue.

Vivek Ramaswamy:
So that's the answer.

**Michael Doran:**

Another issue we agree on. We agree on attacking wokeness-

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

Unlocking energy.

**Michael Doran:**

... unlocking energy.

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

But unlocking energy affects... If we're really serious about doing that, this is where, I think, the Biden administration and the left badly fail. That reduces the stakes for what oil is or isn't coming out of the ground in Saudi Arabia or elsewhere in the Middle East.

**Michael Doran:**

But it's still going to be central to the economy of the globe.

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

And I don't think our presence there has helped the matter. That's the answer.

**Michael Doran:**

Okay. So now on Israel. I see a fundamental contradiction in what you said because you said Israel has the right to defend itself and we should support that, right?

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

An absolute right.

**Michael Doran:**

But yet you want to restrain it from destroying its enemy.

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

I don't want to restrain it from destroying its enemy. So I'm glad you're smoking this out because I could see where this could be soundbited into seeming like there's two talk tracks here.
Before you go, can I have another part of the contradiction?

Vivek Ramaswamy:

Please.

Michael Doran:

Because I think you're-

Vivek Ramaswamy:

Apparent contradiction, but I'll tell you what's not-

Michael Doran:

No, I think you're guilty of a double contradiction.

Vivek Ramaswamy:

I think I'm not, but I'll let you state your case.

Michael Doran:

Okay. So you want to support Israel.

Vivek Ramaswamy:

Diplomatically.

Michael Doran:

But restrain it.

Vivek Ramaswamy:

I don't want to restrain it.

Michael Doran:

And then also when we talked about Iran, you talked about empowering a coalition that will deter Iran, which means then that Israel has to use military deterrence against Iran, which when you were presenting the scenario that worries you the most about getting mired in the south and then having an attack from Hezbollah, you said, that could lead to war with Iran and then pull us in.

Vivek Ramaswamy:
If I’m not president, it will have that affect.

Michael Doran:

So your scenario for our withdrawal of building up allies who are going to deter Iran is really exactly the same scenario that you said you feared.

Vivek Ramaswamy:

So I understand your question. I’m glad you’re asking it because this is important and worth being crystal clear on. So my view is, absent US engagement, we have no business telling Israel what to do. If we’re not debating a $16 billion bill here in Congress to fork over 16 billion of our own money when we’re $33 trillion in the hole, and we have been sending annual aid of $3.8 billion to Israel per year, if that’s off the table, we have no business telling Israel what to do. And I actually worry, I think many people in Israel, sane voices in Israel, are frustrated by the fact that the US has had the effect of impeding Israel’s ability to fully defend itself by having something of a vague seat at the table. I worry we’ve muddied the waters. So against the backdrop of US disengagement militarily and financially, then I think the role of the US is to provide full diplomatic support.

You think about the UN and other institutions that have wrongly drawn, made it’s offensive false equivalences between these terrorists who attack Israel and Israel’s own right to defend itself. It's the job of the US militarily and then further as a friend, mutual intelligence sharing with Israel to help it defend itself fully. But now we’re going to enter a different scenario. If the US is going to be involved financially and militarily, if we’re talking about actual US resources being sent to Israel, that naturally then has to open the question of what exactly are Israel’s objectives for success that the US has to understand and know to understand here’s what we’re going to back and here’s what we’re not going to. So my view is let's be consistent. And this is, I think, a deeply pro-Israel view actually. At a philosophical level it is consistent with the essence of Israel's soul is that the Zionist project was all about the Jewish state’s ability to fully defend its right to exist without being reliant on the fleeting sympathies of the rest of the world.

And Israel absolutely has a right to do that, and I stand fully in favor of it. But once you muddy the waters and say, ”Hey, 16 billion here, 3 billion there, a little bit of artillery here, and move some fleets over there,” then I think we muddy the waters where the US has to then ask the question of, ”Okay, if we’re going to be involved, how much further are we going to be drawn in? And if Israel's in that two front war, is there a realistic scenario in which the US is actually not going to get involved militarily, which then crosses a bunch of other red lines that draw us further into prolonged conflict in the Middle East?” And against that backdrop, it is my opinion that this ground invasion into Gaza is not going to be good even for Israel. I think the probability of success is not nearly as high as it should be for them to have the confidence to go. And even if they're successful in toppling Hamas, whatever that means, right? That itself is a vague goal. But even if you're accomplishing that vague goal-

Michael Doran:

I think it's a pretty clear goal.

Vivek Ramaswamy:
Well, it depends on what Hamas is. What is a fractured group off of Hamas in the middle of that toppling? Is that Hamas or is that not Hamas? We've seen this movie before.

Michael Doran:

They're going to strip bit of military capability and they're going to destroy the leadership. That means they're going to kill the leadership and they're going to-

Vivek Ramaswamy:

Killing the leadership... So then we're shifting the terms of discussion. I think an in out operation that takes out the leadership of Hamas, take the top hundred, put their heads on stakes, line it across the southern border, Israel to Gaza to say this will never happen again. That's reasonable to me. But that's different.

Michael Doran:

There's no such thing as inn out without taking over the strip.

Vivek Ramaswamy:

Well, I'm not sure that that's true. I think you're... Not you purposely being vague. I think the discussion is vague right now.

Michael Doran:

I'm being specific.

Vivek Ramaswamy:

Toppling Hamas or destroying Hamas, ending it, destroy them is different. Because there are a lot of people even on that side of the debate who would say that if you take out the leadership of Hamas, there's no such thing as the leadership of Hamas. There's going to be the next layer that comes up. So I think we have to have what we're missing today, clearly defined objectives. Does destroying leadership... Whose leadership? What layers of leadership? What counts as actually success? What is the post succession plan of who governs in Gaza? We need those answers to those questions before financially or militarily supporting what happens here. And if we're not involved, that's fine, but Israel's free to decide whatever the heck it wants to do and we support them diplomatically.

Michael Doran:

But you've already stated that as president, you want to disengage from the Middle East. So the next step is if I'm Israel and I see America disengaging, I'm going to do exactly what I see the UAE already doing, and that is I'm going to go to China. And Israel has a number of things that are extremely attractive to China. It's a cyber superpower and it has advanced weaponry.

Vivek Ramaswamy:
Michael, can I just ask a question about this, because a second ago you were talking about your concern that China was going to go for Iran in an alliance, but now your concern is that China's going to engage with Israel. Which one is your concern? I just want to make sure I'm responding to it. You can't have both of those at the same time.

**Michael Doran:**

Sure, I can.

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

So you think your actual concern is that China's both going to enter an alliance with Iran and Israel, both of whom are enemies of one another in the region? And that's a contradiction in the premise of the question.

**Michael Doran:**

Not at all. Not at all. Because what I see happening is I see China empowering the most disruptive element in the Middle East, which is Iran.

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

But then you're also concerned that they're going to have an ally of Israel if we're not-

**Michael Doran:**

I'll explain, I'll explain. With its right hand, it is empowering Iran, which is threatening all of our allies and we, because I don't see anything different in your foreign policy premise than the premise of the Biden administration or the Obama administration.

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

I understand the impeachment, use an actual argument.

**Michael Doran:**

I'm making an argument.

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

of substance. Yeah.

**Michael Doran:**

I'm making an argument. I'm making an argument.

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

Put aside whether it's Obama or Trump or anybody else.
Michael Doran:

We're not providing a defense umbrella to our allies. And they recognizing that and they feeling that we're on our way out, that we're halfway out of the region already, are hedging towards China. And China understands that. China is exploiting the contradiction in our policy, which is precisely the contradiction that you are presenting, where we only give half a guarantee to our allies in the face of a rising Iran. And so they have nowhere to go. They're looking for a place to go. They go to China.

Vivek Ramaswamy:

I think you would have a different view. I think Iran and China-

Michael Doran:

China wants, it wants to be the leader in all of the industries that are going to drive military and economic innovation in the next century. And Israel is a great prize for them because it has all of that know-how, plus it's deeply embedded in the American security system.

Vivek Ramaswamy:

So I hear you, Michael.

Michael Doran:

So it's a blow to the American security system and an advantage to their-

Vivek Ramaswamy:

With due respect. And I think this is a healthy dialogue and I think that we'll having much-

Michael Doran:

How much respect am I due?

Vivek Ramaswamy:

I think a good amount of credit for bringing somebody who disagrees with you and talking to them. I'll give you credit for that, and I try to do the same because we're not having enough debate, critical debate about critical steps that are going to affect this country for the next 20 years. So this is productive in that sense. I do think it is not coherent to at once simultaneously worry that our retreat from the Middle East will somehow create a vacuum for China to at once ally with Iran, but also with Israel when the whole premise of the discussion was that Iran and Israel or Iran is fundamentally hostile to Israel. I don’t think Israel will work with China.

Michael Doran:

This happens in foreign policy all the time. The United States is the ally of Turkey and Greece. The United States is the ally of Saudi Arabia and Israel.
**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

I don't think that's... So of the scope of concerns, right? So if you have one menu of concerns that if the US pulls out that somehow China's going to both be allied with Iran and with Israel and somehow that's hostile to the United States versus-

**Michael Doran:**

It's called divide and rule.

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

... versus the alternative of the US wasting our resources and militarily distracted at a time when our own resources, stockpiles and financial capabilities are thin for China to go after Taiwan. That's the risk I worry about far more than the theoretical risk of through our retreat, when they no longer have those targets to hit, that the boogyman of China somehow is going to show up in the Middle East. Their top objective is to go for Taiwan, and they're much happier if we're wasting our own resources in the Middle East in the meantime.

So if I had to pick between those two sets of concerns, as it relates to China, it is abundantly clear to me that the US being mired in conflicts in the Middle East and elsewhere, and running thin on our own resources to be able to defend our interests elsewhere, to be able to go after Taiwan in the near term, which is a core vital Chinese Communist Party objective versus the vague idea that they might fill some void with Iran and Israel, but without even being really clear about what they're accomplishing for themselves or anybody's getting out of that relationship.

It's not even clear to me, which is the greater concern. And so that's the way I look at it. Which is why I think we need to have our eye on the ball. Communist China is what we need to focus on. Taiwan matters for the US national interest in a way that, for example, Ukraine does not. We need to be prepared to defend. But for me to stand up and say as the US president that we will defend Taiwan, it better darn well be credible that we can even defend Taiwan, and we're not going to be able to do that when we're in multi-front wars that don't advance US interests in the meantime.

**Michael Doran:**

China is heavily dependent on energy imports and those imports either come from the Middle East or transit through it to China. So if the United States is-

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

I agree with you on this.

**Michael Doran:**

If the United States is the dominant military power in the Middle East, it holds China's energy supply lines at risk. If we leave the Middle East-

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**
So this is a productive point.

**Michael Doran:**

If we leave the Middle East as you're saying, then we open up... It incentivizes China so it controls its supply lines. Just let me finish the argument please. And the supply lines of all of its adversaries in East Asia who are equally dependent on energy that comes from the Middle East or transits through it.

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

So you've put your finger on an important pulse, which is China's reliance on Middle Eastern oil. I agree with you on that. I'll make two points. One is, our presence in the Middle East is insufficient right now, we're in the worst of all worlds, to do anything about China actually being able to get Middle Eastern oil supplies. There are multiple routes for them to get it. Here's how we deal with that. Actually an alliance with India and upgrading of our alliance with India. The overwhelming majority of those Middle Eastern oil supplies go through the Andaman Sea, particularly through the Malacca Strait. I think we have a crystal clear opportunity, I laid this out at the Nixon library, we can talk about this more as well of the kind of agreement with India. India would be thrilled to get anything even resembling the kind of agreement we have with nations like Chile or otherwise economically.

That could be a win for the US to even decouple some of the dependence we have on China. But we should get more out of that, a hard commitment that India would block the Andaman Sea or the Malacca Strait, which is a far more reliable way to be able to choke Chinese Middle Eastern oil supplies in the event of conflict than some vague nebulous presence in certain parts of the Middle East, but not others. That's not going to accomplish the goal. And I think it's another one of these vague wishes that somehow by being present that's going to allow us to choke China's oil supplies. That's nowhere near realistic for where we are today, and having certain aid to certain countries in the Middle East and certain troops and embassies and bases in certain places, is somehow going to stop us from getting Iranian to Saudi oil all the way to China, is I think a myth that would prove false in the moment where we would need to call on it the most.

And so therefore measured against those two options, yes, I favor being out of the places in the Middle East where we shouldn't have been, shifting our attention to the real threat that we face. That is communist China, who we depend on for our modern way of life, whose naval capacity exceeds ours. Forgetting sometimes as we do, that the foundation of war is economics, industrial capacity. And so when it comes to munitions, look at the one and a half million rounds of artillery we've sent to Ukraine. We're not getting that back. We're producing 20,000 per month to replenish it. That math doesn't add up. Our naval capacity is not at a pace where it's going to put us in a competitive position to win in a war in the South China Sea with China. God forbid if that's a scenario that we're in. Now my job is to achieve credible deterrent strategies, but my ability to offer credible deterrence as commander in chief is diminished if we're mired in another long no win war in the Middle East. And I think that's exactly what China's rooting for.

**Michael Doran:**

Okay, we're going to move to... Do you have time for questions?
Vivek Ramaswamy:

Yeah, absolutely.

Michael Doran:

But before we do, I got one last issue I got to raise with you because it's dear to my heart.

Vivek Ramaswamy:

Sure.

Michael Doran:

In a number of your interviews, you've been talking about Azerbaijan and Armenia, and I am the most fervently pro Azerbaijan person in Washington DC, so I have to raise this. And you and I together here in this interview, we're going to do a service to the nation because we're going to make the term Zangezur Corridor, well not exactly a household name, but it's going to be-

Vivek Ramaswamy:

At least people could pronounce it.

Michael Doran:

It's going to be something that at least a few thousand people are going to understand what the Zangezur Corridor is after we finish this discussion. Because the Zangezur Corridor is 100% in your worldview. This is a realist position. We should be supporting the Zangezur Corridor. It's good for Azerbaijan, it's good for Armenia, it's good for America. It unlocks all of the resources of Central Asia so that they can make it to Europe without being controlled by Russia or China. Why are you against the Zangezur Corridor?

Vivek Ramaswamy:

So my position, and I was very clear here, to be consistent, I don't think the US-

Michael Doran:

Just for everybody there, if you could just say Zangezur Corridor about seven times.

Vivek Ramaswamy:

Yeah, the Zangezur Corridor. How about the Lachin Corridor? Although you'll... Lachin Corridor.

Michael Doran:

Lachin.

Vivek Ramaswamy:
Lachin. You're up by your pronunciations there too. These are corridors that connect potentially parts of Armenia with other parts of with let's just say the Nagorno-Karabakh region, that historically, and this gets into some complex history here, but it's historically been ethnically religiously Armenian Christian for a long time. There's a lot of history in all of these regions in the Soviet periphery. But 1994 onward has largely been viewed as a autonomous region governed separately that Azerbaijan has more or less just decided, in a way that is not dissimilar to how Russia decided to invade the regions of the Donbas its region that it's invaded in 2020 first through violence, and then September of this year, just a month ago, barreling right through and saying that we're not going to respect that anymore. This is ours.

And so I think that that's no more of violation of the 1994 principles that we set into motion, for example, during the Budapest memorandum that is fetishized in corridors not far from where we are today, yet completely forgetting about other 1994 agreements made in the post-Soviet era as well. And so to be crystal clear, I'm consistent on this. I do not think the US should be militarily engaging here. My problem is the US has been indirectly engaging by writing all kinds of exemptions. What is it, Section 907 exemptions or whatever that have allowed us to transfer arms to Azerbaijan that put Azerbaijan in a stronger position here. Special exemptions to the Transadriatic pipeline for the Iran sanctions that found their way through Iran. And so my view is, if I may just finish this thought.

**Michael Doran:**

You can finish it. We we want America to be aware of the Zangezur Corridor here.

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

That's just true. But I think this is no more in America's interest to get involved here, no less in America's interest to get involved here than we are in Ukraine. But I think part of the reason why is that Ukraine and Azerbaijan have very effective lobbies in the United States of America. I think what we are fed is the conflict of good versus evil that we engage in versus a different good versus evil conflict that we turn our blind eye to, I think is an example of what I'm highlighting is inconsistency. But in my case, I would say no military engagement in either. And so that's where I just want to be crystal clear about what my position is.

**Michael Doran:**

I think you're a hundred percent wrong on the facts. Three important facts. Number one, no arms are going to Azerbaijan from the United States. None. Zero.

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

None have gone? None have gone to the-

**Michael Doran:**

No arms. No arms. No arms.

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**
The United States has not transferred military equipment by sale?

**Michael Doran:**

Check me on this. Check me on this other... YouTube, Google, check me on this.

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

Via Israel or otherwise none have made no way to Azerbaijan?

**Michael Doran:**

Israeli arms make it. That's Israeli arms. Those are not American arms. Those are not American arms.

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

Okay, so this will be a discussion we're continuing.

**Michael Doran:**

Okay. No, US arms. Number two. I forgot what it was.

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

That's okay.

**Michael Doran:**

It's terrible.

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

It'll come back. We can take the audience questions too.

**Michael Doran:**

No, this is horrible because we have to educate America here. But the third one is that Karabakh is Azerbaijan.

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

Oh, no, no, no, no, no.

**Michael Doran:**

No, according-
Vivek Ramaswamy:
This is wrong.

Michael Doran:
No, Karabakh Azerbaijan.

Vivek Ramaswamy:
This is wrong.

Michael Doran:
Wait, no, wait. You got your word. Let me just get a word.

Vivek Ramaswamy:
It's like the Donbas saying the Donbas is Russia then.

Michael Doran:
No.

Vivek Ramaswamy:
It's Russia speaking.

Michael Doran:
No, Karabakh is Azerbaijan, recognized by the international community as Azerbaijani territory. Again, check me on this. You'll see. And it was multi-ethnic until Azerbaijan ethnically cleansed it.

Vivek Ramaswamy:
I think you meant to say Armenian, but yeah.

Michael Doran:
What did I say? I'm sorry.

Vivek Ramaswamy:
I think you meant to say Armenia.
Oh, thank you for correcting.

Vivek Ramaswamy:
And that's okay. I know this is a confusing issue, so I won't fault you for it.

Michael Doran:
Armenia... No, no Armenia. Armenia.

Vivek Ramaswamy:
But it wasn't an ethnic cleansing. But you meant to say Armenia.

Michael Doran:
Armenia... Thank you. I appreciate that. Actually. Armenia ethnically cleansed it in 1993 and it's recognized internationally as Azerbaijani.

Vivek Ramaswamy:
So we'll agree to disagree on the international recognition point.

Michael Doran:
And the corridor, the corridor, Azerbaijan is the only country in the world that borders both Russia and Iran. If there is no Zangezur corridor through Armenia, and we're just talking about a transport corridor, we're not talking about taking territory, an economic and transport corridor, which Armenia agreed to in the November 9th tripartite agreement at the ceasefire agreement at the end of the war. If that corridor opens up, it opens up the economy of Armenia. Mr. Pashinyan would like it. And if it's not opened up, then Azerbaijan has to connect to the west and to its exclave of Nakhchivan through Iran. So we strengthen Iran and we push Armenia into the arms of Iran as well if we don't open up that corridor. So that's in addition to all that it does for Central Asia. Oh, I know what it was. I know what it was. Sorry.

Vivek Ramaswamy:
Your second point. Your second point, and then we'll take some audience questions.

Michael Doran:
Yes, we will. We will. But that there's a strong Azerbaijani lobby and there's... You're the only person in American politics who doesn't think there's an Armenian lobby. This is just ridiculous.

Vivek Ramaswamy:
I think Socar has funded a very effective operation in the United States.
Show me where. Show me.

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

I mean the Podesta group. Let's start with that, right? Accelerate Clinton, go straight down the
you could go straight down the list.

**Michael Doran:**

Nancy-

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

I'm not doing the impeachment by Democrats thing, but I'm just saying these are the people
who lobby for Azerbaijan.

**Michael Doran:**

Nancy, Pelosi, Menendez, Shifty Schiff, all of them. There isn't a single... Your talking points are
the same as Schiff's.

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

Well, again, I'm not doing the impeachment by, "Oh, you said the same thing as somebody
else," thing.

**Michael Doran:**

No.

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

But look at the people who are lobbying for Azerbaijan, four of the most prominent lobbying
firms in the US, but put that to one side. You brought it up. I think that this does not directly, we
talk about Russia, Ukraine, talk about China, Taiwan, talk about, of course, what's happening in
Israel. These directly relate to the American interest. I want to be crystal clear, despite the fact
that I have tried to be educational about what's happening here to a lot of people who have no
awareness of it, this is an area where I believe we are being inconsistent for the good versus
evil crowd, right? I mean this is a battle between good versus evil. That's what you've heard
from much of the Republican Party. And I could tell you that probably the other Republican
presidential candidates, until I was talking about it and never heard of Nagorno-Karabakh.
That's just a fact of the matter.

And so if they're talking about good versus evil in the Donbas region, which they hadn't heard
about until four months before, then I think that it is inconsistent not to be talking about it in this
case, where I come from the school of thought that we should not, I said this in my principles of
realist foreign policy, our military engagement should never be a moral crusade. It should be
grounded in American self-interest. So I am not advocating for any American involvement here
in Armenia, Azerbaijan. But that's a principled position that's consistent with the same reasons
why I don't advocate for it in Russia and Ukraine either. That being said, I think that my top concern is what actually does advance American interest. And so far, thank God we're not sending money and resources and military resources over there, but I am keen to make sure that we stop sending them to places like Ukraine where we're on track with a bill to send $61 billion over there. So that's where I'm coming from.

Michael Doran:

I'm going to convert you to this.

Vivek Ramaswamy:

Okay.

Michael Doran:

All right.

Vivek Ramaswamy:

I look forward to the discussion because clearly you've been close to this for a while, so I always hear opposing views.

Michael Doran:

To the Zangezur Corridor. We'll open it up here.

Vivek Ramaswamy:

Thank you.

Michael Doran:

There's a lady in the back. I have no idea who she is, but she has a yellow dress on. It's very easy to see.

Carrie Sheffield:

Thank you. I'm a former Jerusalem Post reporter. My name's Carrie Sheffield. I'm a journalist. Great to see you, Vivek. I would love to know more. How are you going to convince China and Russia to dissolve their alliance? I understand that you would give some land to Russia, some Ukrainian territory, but number one, why would you trust that? And number two, how do you know that's sufficient leverage?

Vivek Ramaswamy:

Yep. So it's not going to be through persuasion and it's not going to be through trust, because we cannot and should not trust Putin or Xi Jinping to do anything. It's out of self-interest. So there will be consequences for non-adherence to an agreement like there is for any serious
agreement, and there will be incentives to enter that agreement. So if you put yourself in each of our shoes, this is an agreement that makes sense. Reopening economic relations with Russia with the West, including the United States, reduces its economic reliance on China. That's one of the things they get out of it. The end of this Ukraine war. Most importantly, the hard commitment that NATO won't admit Ukraine to NATO. This has been a longstanding objective for Vladimir Putin. But in return from that, we have to... Things we can monitor. No joint military exercises between Russia and China, dissolution of the 2001 treaty of good neighborliness and cooperation.

So these would be the basic principles and contours of a deal. Now is that going to be the exact deal that gets up? Of course it's not. These are complicated things, but these are the broad principles I would require from our side, removal of Russian military presence from the western hemisphere, Nicaragua, Cuba, Venezuela in particular. Removal of the nuclear weapons from Kaliningrad, and to the extent they're moving any to Belarus from there as well. This is a reasonable deal that if you put yourself in the shoes of either party of the United States or Russia, and even Ukraine, make sense to actually see through. Now I think that there's two schools of thought here. On the other school of thought, defeating Russia, ill-defined, whatever that ever means, is the mainstream thought amongst most of the Republican presidential candidates. I'm not going to be somebody who says that I'm going to get a deal done instantly without telling you what the contours of that deal are.

I believe in transparency in telling you what the principles of that deal are and that's why I've laid those out. But I'm confident that in a rapid amount of time we would be able to reach a deal that advances US interests and involves a big win for the US, but also small wins for each of Russia and Ukraine in the process, in the window that we're in, especially when there are at least signs of weakening or potential weakening or softness in the Russia/China relationship. So that's what I would say, and the economic lever is a big part of how we accomplish it. Thank you, Carrie.

Michael Doran:

This lady here in the black.

Speaker 5:

Nice to meet you. Nice to see you speak in person. My name is Amal Torres. I have a department of defense background. So national security and foreign policy rings true to my heart. So I'm going to bring up a topic that has not been discussed too much, but related to semiconductors, and it's about Africa. And China, as we all know, currently owns a significant portion of global rare earth metals, metals required to build advanced technology and weapons. African countries have large deposits of these critical resources and are actively partnering with China and Russia, and America seemingly refuses to make meaningful attempts to foster beneficial relationships with those African countries. As president, what is your plan to ensure America has access to these critical resources needed for advanced weaponry in support of our national security?

Vivek Ramaswamy:

It's a great question and I think one of the great risks to our national security is the reliance on rare earth minerals in China to make, among other things, our own military equipment. I think about what an F-35 fighter jet manufactured here requires. It's pathetic that we require reliance
on the very adversary who, God forbid, we're in a conflict scenario, we're going to have to fight, for the very parts required to fight them. That doesn't logically work. So I think there are other places to look. We'll come to Africa in a second. If you think about Chile, look at the amount of lithium. Chile is, I think, approximately, give or take the third-largest reserves of lithium that we're able, that are at least exporters are used. We could get our lithium from Chile, we're getting it from China instead. Chile exports eight times as much lithium to China as they do to the United States, which itself makes no sense.

So there's all the other partners we can explore, we can make use of here. Now as it relates to Africa, I think that what's happened is we've let them tug on our heartstrings a little bit much, many African nations, where they say things like, "When two elephants fight, the grass dies." Something like this is the expression. Well, I think that we should force them to choose, to say that if you're going to accept foreign direct investment from China, then we're out. But I think right now we have been, in many ways, allowed to be exploited. So we say that choose us or choose China, you can't have both. I think we come out winning in that. So from foreign direct investment, from deals been crippling debt deals that have capitalization table structures that cripple these nations on the backend.

It's an uncouth topic to talk about, but China absolutely has racist undertones in its relations with overtones, if we're able to call it that, with Africa, that the United States, despite what you'll listen to a given person say on a given day here in a college campus, doesn't exist in the United States, not in any relevant way compared to China's attitudes towards Africa. They're much more naturally, for the US to be an investment partner, an economic ally for many of those African nations that have those rare earth minerals relative to China. But we have to make them choose. And the mistake that we've made is allowing them to have both. But if we make them choose, we come out on the winning side of that, and I think China's going to be left holding the bag. That's the short answer to that question. Thank you for asking. It was a smart question. Thank you.

**Michael Doran:**

So a little bird came and told me that we have to bring this to an end.

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

Oh, is that because we're having too much fun. Okay.

**Michael Doran:**

Yeah, let me thank you. And I particularly appreciate that you have come to my view on Azerbaijan.

**Vivek Ramaswamy:**

I appreciate you for coming to my view on making sure that we end the war in Ukraine.

**Michael Doran:**

Yeah, I want to end the war in Ukraine too.
Vivek Ramaswamy:

Instantly.

Michael Doran:

With different methods. Yeah. Okay.

Vivek Ramaswamy:

Can I also just say something in closing, which is I want to thank the Hudson Institute for welcoming a presidential candidate that has views that may differ from that of, on certain of these issues at least, that may differ from that of the consensus of scholars here and other allied institutions. And I think it speaks to how we're going to revive this country. The way we're going to revive this country is, and I want to thank you for this, more conversations like this one, open conversations. Say in public what you'll say in private. And I'll just close on this because it's the centerpiece of this campaign. It's a centerpiece of the revival of this nation is that the best measure of our country's health, the best measure of the health of American democracy, we say this in Washington DC, it's not the number of green pieces of paper in our bank account. It's not the number of ballots that are cast every November. Those things are important, but they're not the most important thing.

It is the percentage of people who feel free to say what they actually think in public. Right now we are doing poorly in this country. The only way we're going to do it, is all of us, not just me, all of us. You're doing it too. I'm grateful to you, all of us starting to speak openly again. And it is in moments like these where we do have one thing we will agree on is serious and concerning conflicts brewing in other parts of the world, we are at our strongest when we have true and unfettered debate and discussion of open ideas. And I want to thank the Hudson Institute for being among the places that fosters the kind of debate that we're going to need to revive this nation. And if we do, then I have confidence that, one way or another, our best days as a nation can still be ahead of us. It's just going to take all of us starting to talk more openly again. So thank you for that. I appreciate the welcome.

Michael Doran:

Great.

Vivek Ramaswamy:

Thank you.

Michael Doran:

I can agree with that.