11092022 CenterView Partners Rt Hon Boris Johnson

**CenterView Partners**

**Rt Hon Boris Johnson**

**Introducer: Mark Robinson**

**Moderator: Richard Haas**

**Scottsdale, AZ**

**Wednesday, November 9th**

**MARK ROBINSON:** (In progress) to have Boris Johnson. I was thinking of how to introduce him, and then I came upon it. He is the longest serving prime minister in recent British history. (Laughter/applause.)

**RICHARD HAAS:** It has the virtue of being true. Just before we get going, I’m old school and I don’t feel comfortable calling you Boris. But once, I had a conversation with one of your predecessors, with Tony Blair, and he said, “You can’t keep calling me Mr. Prime Minister, because unlike in the United States –”

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah, yeah, no, my title’s defunct.

**MARK ROBINSON:** Right. So here, you’re always Mr. President, once you’ve been president, but you’re not always Mr. Prime Minister.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** No, no, no, nor am I Mr. Mayor or Mr. (inaudible). (Laughter.) It’s all over.

**RICHARD HAAS:** Boris, how’s it going?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** For now. (Laughter.)

**RICHARD HAAS:** Yeah, for now.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, can I call you Richard?

**RICHARD HAAS:** No, Dr. Haas. No, sorry. (Laughter.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, please call me Boris, okay. It’s going well, and I just want to say what a huge honor it is, well, to be interrogated by you, first of all. (Laughter.)

**RICHARD HAAS:** Interrogated?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, I hope you’re going to interrogate because I haven’t prepared a speech. And if you want me to give you my 45-minute monologue about why London is the science capital in the UK, the science capital of the world and is the place to invest for bioscience, I could do that. I mean, I could do that, but I was told that you would prefer to have a more –

**RICHARD HAAS:** To be clear, the speaking to is directly correlated to you’re not giving that speech. (Laughter.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Thank you, thank you. Thank you. Look, it’s a real honor to be and in this kind of human bioreactor in which all the afflictions of humanity are going to be cured, I feel. (Laughter.) And it’s wonderful to see people who are motivated not just by commerce, but also I think by changing the world for the better.

**RICHARD HAAS:** This is surely the do well and do good crowd, so it’s great to – and by the way, we were talking about it walking up here. I don’t know any other sector of the economy or society where people who interact, in some ways, as competitors as well, actually seem to like one another and get along. And it’s really quite unique, and the only explanation is that there is a larger calling there. So, thank you for what you all do.

You’re just back from Sharm El Sheikh?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes.

**RICHARD HAAS:** COP27, for those of you who are counting, but the Conference of Parties, the global efforts to do something about climate change. COPs 21 through 26 kind of fell short. Do you have any reason to believe that COP27 will make a serious dent in what many of us think could be still the defining issue of this century?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah, well, look, I hesitate to correct you about anything, Richard, but COP26 actually did quite well. I happen to know that because I was there. And it was at Glasgow, and I just want to stick up for it. Can I do that for 10 seconds on COP26?

**RICHARD HAAS:** Okay. Yeah, sure, go ahead.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** At COP26, we agreed to take out 6 gigatons of carbon from the atmosphere, which is quite a lot, and various other things as well. I think 145 countries agreed to (start?) to reverse deforestation by 2030. Twenty-four countries agreed to get rid of internal combustion engine cars by 2040.

**RICHARD HAAS:** Yeah, but –

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Wait, wait, wait, you just think – because I was in charge of it, so I’ve got to defend it. (Laughter.) It was a high watermark. But there’s no doubt that what’s happened since then, the whole net zero campaign is in bad shape right now. There’s no doubt about that.

**RICHARD HAAS:** But basically, even with COP26, a lot of the commitments were rhetorical. We’ll see how many of them are executed. You did have some interesting things, not from governments, from the private sector.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah.

**RICHARD HAAS:** I actually thought that was the most interesting part of COP26. The industry is in some ways stepping up more than government. But so far, and just this week, the *New York Times* had a big story, either today or yesterday, where this report about the state of climate change in the United States. And the whole thrust of it is we have to stop thinking about as a future reality. It’s now, and it’s awful, and it threatens our way of life. And the world is not catching up to the challenge.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah. As Mark said earlier on, it’s the first time in 24 years at this event that it’s rained in Phenix. I don’t know whether that’s a result of climate change. But I can tell you that in London this year, it was so hot. We’ve never had temperatures like it, 40 degrees in London, which is a lot.

**RICHARD HAAS:** That’s Celsius, by the way, in case you –

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah. Sorry, 40 degree Celsius, which is a lot and may have explained the political convulsions that took place. (Laughter.)

**RICHARD HAAS:** (Laughter.) Fevers.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah. You have to wonder about the rationale, people’s ability to make rational decision in Britain in 40 degrees of heat.

**RICHARD HAAS:** There’s actually a school of thought in history that one of the important inventions explaining the progress such as it is that we’ve made is air conditioning.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah, I agree completely. I think the American… Sorry, are you saying the air conditioning is very important to the U.S. economy?

**RICHARD HAAS:** Just also for the (crosstalk/inaudible) for people getting along.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I agree with you completely. I see. You mean it’s averted lots of unpleasant incidents?

**RICHARD HAAS:** Actually, it was until air conditioning became common – sorry for this digression – British diplomats posted to Washington as recently as I think the late ‘50s or early ‘60s, used to wear their colonial uniforms, the long socks, the shorts, the khaki, whatever, because the air conditioning was not sufficiently widespread. It was considered a tropical assignment.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah. I didn’t know that, Richard. (Laughter.) I didn’t know that.

**RICHARD HAAS:** (Laughter.) The value of an Oxford education.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah, yeah, I get you. And so, why did they dress up in all that stuff?

**RICHARD HAAS:** Because that’s what these guys did. (Laughter.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah, okay.

**RICHARD HAAS:** (Laughter/inaudible.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah, no, I’m willing to be educated on that.

**RICHARD HAAS:** There we go. So, President Biden is about to jet off to Bali for the G20. And there, he is going to meet on the side with Xi Jinping. And this will be the first meeting between them in some time, obviously, the first meeting between them after the 20th party Congress. Xi got his third term, consolidated power to a rather remarkable degree.

I have two questions. The first one is you’re watching this 20th party Congress. You met with Xi, obviously, when you were prime minister.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I talked to him on the phone. But I think COVID had done such damage to his ability to move around, I don’t think I met him in person.

**RICHARD HAAS:** Let’s just ask you the basic question. This is not the China we thought we were going to be facing 10 or 15 years ago. What is your sense about where China is and whether it’s possible to have a reasonable relationship with it? You’re a student of history, or is China embarked on a trajectory that in many ways precludes a constructive relationship?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Look, I have arguments with my colleagues about this because I don’t think you can entirely turn your back on a country that is a fifth of humanity, that contains so many brilliant people, many of whom, by the way, in the industry that are meeting here tonight. You can’t just push them away. You’ve got to engage with China, and you’ve got to have the trade relationships in the UK and China’s been going up 45 degrees, in contrast with our relationship with India. It’s grown massively.

You’ve got to be tough with China. You’ve got to make sure you don’t allow them to have too much of a presence in your critical, national infrastructure. We had a big discussion with the U.S. about Huawei, which I’m sure everybody will remember. It was very extensive, and we made the wrong decision and had to go around grubbing up with high tech.

But I think there’s a very interesting thing about China right now, and about Xi Jinping. He sort of proves to me why democracy isn’t actually such a bad system. And you look at what he’s doing with the zero-COVID strategy, I think it’s absolutely nuts. And why is he sticking – I rang my father a few weeks ago. He was in a hotel in Chengdu on the 24th floor. He’d been there for 10 days watching *The Godfather* part one, part two, and *Meet the Fockers*, which is apparently even more hilarious in Chinese. (Laughter.) And he hadn’t been allowed out at all.

And then finally, they ended his quarantine. And he was told he could get into Chengdu, and then they locked down the whole of Chengdu. And parts of China are still in lockdown, which is, it seems to me, absolutely insane. And why is he doing it? Because he’s got no one to tell him that it’s a terrible policy. People like me, they have lots of people, advisors such as yourself, going, this is a terrible thing, or backbenchers who rebel against that.

**RICHARD HAAS:** Thank you for giving us all that material.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Exactly. And this guy’s got no constraint on his power. His ego is driving this zero-COVID policy because he’s invested in it, and it’s an obvious – anyway, that’s my argument for (inaudible).

**RICHARD HAAS:** I agree. Are you worried – I think you went through the searing experience of Hong Kong. You had the agreement made in the late ‘90s, all sorts of understandings, one country, two systems. And basically, China changed the rules and said it’s going to be one country, one system.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah. Yeah, and that’s why it’s so important to be strong when it comes to the rule of international law. And that’s why I think it’s such a (read?) across between what’s happening in Ukraine and what’s happening in East Asia. And I think if the Ukrainians are crushed, Xi will unquestionably draw the lesson that he can get away with whatever he intends to do in Taiwan, never mind Hong Kong, because there are other, bigger problems that the U.S. and UK have to face together.

**RICHARD HAAS:** I want to pivot to Ukraine in just one second, but you raised (audio drops). There’s a lot of consensus in the business that I worked in that probably before his third term ends in five years, the 2026, 2027, he is going to feel compelled or unable to resist doing something about going after Taiwan. I’m not asking you to predict so much as to say if he were to do that, do you think the United States and the United Kingdom, we ought to be in the business of resisting that?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I think that the policy of the United Kingdom over Taiwan, when you actually look at the details, and I’m sure you know very well, Richard, is weaker, the official policy than the policies of the U.S. And we simply say that we hope that both parties across the Taiwan Straits will resolve issues peacefully.

But I think that that’s no longer adequate. I think we’re living now in a world where people simply won’t accept it. If the Taiwanese want to be independent and want to have an existence that is separate from mainland China, and are just engulfed, I don’t think people will accept that. And I think, yeah, we’re going to have to help them.

And by the way, I think that it would be a colossal mistake if Xi were to do that, because as far as I can see, the military consequences of trying to take Taiwan will be very, very severe. I don’t think it’s by any means a walk in the park, I mean, any more than taking Ukraine was a walk in the park for Putin.

**RICHARD HAAS:** Clearly not. They’ve got to go across water. It’s just, people forget China has not fought a war since the late ‘70s, and that one didn’t go so well.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Correct.

**RICHARD HAAS:** They’ve got an entire military that has no experience on the battlefield.

You mentioned Ukraine. Let’s talk about it. You were, early on, one of the first people to side with President Zelensky. You made an early trip there before traveling to Ukraine became something relatively frequent or common. Say something about it, about how – almost walk us through. I mean, you had the intelligence. Did you think it was going to have – the Russians were going to act? Did you think if they were going to act, they were going to act big as the way they did? And how did you get to then walking on the streets of Kiev with President Zelensky?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah. Well, I did loads of trips to Ukraine. And the reason why I was interested in it was I’d gone very early in my time as foreign secretary in 2016. And I’d noticed how passionately patriotic the Ukrainians were. And I’d been to these pubs and bars, where the Ukrainian soldiers put up all their memorabilia.

And I thought when we started to see the intelligence, and it was unbelievable, the intelligence that the U.S., it was clear that Putin really did intend to do something. But it was also clear, to me, anyway, that this was mad because I could see that the Ukrainians were going to fight. And don’t forget, in the Second World War, there were 10 million Ukrainian soldiers in that Soviet army beaten up. And they were very tough guys. So, I could see that this was going to be a massive mistake by Putin.

I was talking to experts, and I’m sure you know about it. And when I went to see Zelensky just before, so just after – just before Munich, the Munich conference, I went to see the Zelensky to talk about what he thought was going to happen.

If you remember, he was in a very difficult position where he didn’t want to sound the alarm. He knew that his – he had 115 battalion tactical groups on his border, but he didn’t want to say to the people of Ukraine, we’re about to be invaded by the Russians, because he was frightened, first of all, of the economic impact on the on the currency. But also, he was worried the people, particularly north of Kiev, would flee and they could get out of the way of the Russian invasion.

And so, that trip in January before the war was very mysterious. I couldn’t under – we kept warning him, but he didn’t seem to acknowledge the warnings. I can now see why he wasn’t.

And then later, yeah, I went a couple of times during the war, maybe two or three times. And he hadn’t been out of his bunker for six weeks when I arrived in Kiev. But I was under terrible pressure because I had got all the way from London, the train in the Sean Penn carriage for these trains. (Laughter.) And they love Sean Penn, by the way, there in Ukraine. (Laughter.)

**RICHARD HAAS:** We’ll support them all the same.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah, no, no. Anyway, I went in the carriage that Sean Penn had gone in. And I got there and poor old Vladimir had not, as I say, been out of his bunker for six weeks. But I had to get a photograph. I had to prove that I’d been. And so, we did. We wandered around, but there could have been something dangerous, but there wasn’t.

**RICHARD HAAS:** Here we are, the war began in February. Here, it’s November. Right now, we’re kind of in the heavy rainy season there, as well as here. Then you’ve got the winter. Russians today apparently announced they’re leaving the city of Kherson. My view is to get into more defensible positions. So, just say it’s spring war. We’ll celebrate – we’ll mark, we won’t celebrate. We’ll mark the one year anniversary late February. Are we in for a long slog here? Have we reached the point where Russia can’t gain a lot more territory, if any, but Ukraine probably can’t eject Russia from much of the territory? Is that kind of where we are?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I don’t know about the second bit, and I don’t know about the first bit, either. And maybe Russia could get more territory. What I do know is that I don’t see a solution. I don’t see a negotiated solution that involves some trade of land for peace. I just don’t see that, and I don’t know whether you do. But Zelensky can’t do such a deal. The Ukrainian people wouldn’t allow him to do that. And nor is Putin offering any such deal.

The only way forward right now is to keep backing Ukraine, and to keep giving them the financial, diplomatic, and above all, the military support that they need.

**RICHARD HAAS:** Let me interrupt you for a second. The biggest argument against that, besides the cost, is the fear that if Ukraine were to ultimately get a situation where the momentum decidedly turned against Putin, and Russian forces were being routed in the east to the south, that would be the scenario where he might turn to weapons of mass destruction. Is that something that you take seriously?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, that’s what he wants us to think, right? And he keeps wanting us to reduce this to a kind of nuclear standoff between NATO and Russia. But we mustn’t get into that mindset. That’s a complete rabbit hole.

I mean, if he were to do that, it would be a complete catastrophe for him, for Russia. He would lose immediately all the kind of tacit support he now has from the swing voters in the world, if you look at India, you look at Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa. And tragically, there are a lot of countries that are pretty ambivalent about the rights and wrongs of the Ukraine war.

For me, it couldn’t be clearer. It’s absolutely Manichean; it’s black and white. What Putin has done is completely evil and wrong, but other people don’t see it like that. He’d lose all those people. He’d lose the Chinese, and I think he’d lose a lot of the support of the Russian people, to say nothing of all the cryogenic economic punishment that he would use.

I don’t think he would do that. I think he wants us to keep talking about it. I’ve already spoken about it for far too long. He want us to talk about the threat of nuclear weapons. He’s like the fat boy in Dickens, he wants to make our flesh creep. And he wants us to think about that, but I don’t think he’s going to do that. We’ve got to focus on helping the Ukrainians win by conventional means.

And so, to your point about, are they able to expel the Russians from large tracts of territory, well, plainly, they are. You saw what they did in (inaudible), and you mentioned Kherson. And that’s a huge strategic win, if they finally take it. You’re right, of course, about what you say about the Russian tactics. They can do it, and I think that we’re all in this kind of mental funk about Putin, a mental funk about him, because Russia won, defeated both Napoleon and Hitler. There’s a lot of sentiment in Europe that he’s basically unbeatable or Russia’s unbeatable, and that’s not true. That’s right, that’s not true. And believe me, the Ukrainians are going to win.

**RICHARD HAAS:** But what does win mean? I mean, that’s what I want to know. Do you feel it is essential that Ukraine recover, as the president, President Zelensky, kept saying, every square inch of territory? Do they need, for example, to recover all of Crimea? Ought that to be a prerequisite to peace? And if that is their position, ought that to be our position?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Look, you can’t be more Ukrainian than Ukrainians, and you’ve got to let them decide what they think.

**RICHARD HAAS:** But can we be less Ukrainian than the Ukrainians?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I think if you listen carefully to what Zelensky says about Crimea, it’s plain that he says different things at different times to different people. But it’s plain to me that he considers the actual peninsula of Crimea to be in a different category from the territory that Putin has conquered since February the 24th. And so, what I certainly think he could not sell to the Ukrainian people is anything short of a recapture of everything that’s been taken since February, and particularly, I mean, the land bridge to Crimea.

**RICHARD HAAS:** You mentioned international law before, so let me raise one other international issue before I turn to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, which is Vladimir Putin. Let’s put aside the nuclear question. I tend to think he won’t do it, but he’s done some horrific things already, the war itself, the atrocities in Bucha and other cities.

Basically, is he someone who, if you were prime minister, you would be prepared to meet with? I mean, if he suddenly were to sue for peace and say, I’m willing to accept Ukraine under these territorial things, should we basically be willing to deal with them or has he made himself into such a pariah, to use that word, that he essentially is irredeemable?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, there are throw lines out to the Kremlin the whole time. And it is clear from what Jake Sullivan said the other day that the White House is talking to it to the Kremlin. You would expect that (inaudible) Khrushchev and everybody else. And after all, Emmanuel Macron is scarcely off the phone to (laughter/inaudible). And I don’t hold that against him. Let’s be clear. I mean, there are reasons that people shouldn’t be talking to. But I don’t see the shape of the deal. I really don’t see the shape of the deal.

And I don’t think it’s our (inaudible) the land for peace deal. And I think, yeah, it’s good to talk to him. Fine, but it’s not our job to be his kind of spin doctors or to manage his future political career or to worry about what happens to Putin if and when he faces significant military reverses of the kind that you described. That’s the hit. He’s got ample ability, seems to me, to present whatever happens as a success in some way or another.

He’s got very solid support from the Russian people at the moment. All he needs to do is say that he’s decided, in the interests of Russia and Ukraine, the future friendship and partnership, the de-Nazification of Ukraine has been accomplished. Well, like *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the final scene, all the Nazis have been vaporized in Ukraine – (laughter) – not that they ever existed, but he can say that. And then he can say that there’s agreement on language, on protection of minorities and culture. But that’s for him to do. He can construct that.

What we can’t do is try to impose on the Ukrainians some land for peace arrangement that simply won’t work, and will put Putin in a position where he can continue to threaten not just Ukraine, but plenty of other parts of the former Soviet Union.

**RICHARD HAAS:** I want to touch on a few other things before we open it up. I’ve been thinking at some point about some of the questions you might like to ask for the former prime minister. Let’s talk about your country for a second.

When people will write about you in the future, obviously, the words “Brexit” will come up. Several of us tried to play golf today, unsuccessfully in the rain. But one of the concepts central to golf is the notion of Mulligan, a do over. If you could do over anything to do with Brexit, would you, be it a basic decision or how it was implemented?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Do it over again, you mean?

**RICHARD HAAS:** Yeah, or do it differently? Would you do it if you were – would you make –

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I’d do it faster. I’d do it faster. It just took far too long. I’d get it done faster. It took 3-4 years.

**RICHARD HAAS:** The negotiations part?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, the whole – if you remember what happened, the UK had voted to leave. The establishment of the UK then spent an awful lot of time trying to avoid the implications of that vote, and trying basically to stay in the ambit, the orbit of the EU. And that wasn’t going to work.

**RICHARD HAAS:** But you have no doubts about the basic wisdom. Preparing for this, I read a lot of economic reports. It’s slightly hard to disentangle the causality of the economic wreck of the last few years, given COVID and so forth. But it’s not obvious to me that there’s a powerful economic case for Brexit that shouts out at you. You have no doubts about the – is it your sense that I’m wrong?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes. Yes.

**RICHARD HAAS:** That’s okay. I’m going to give you another –

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Let me – let me (inaudible/laughter).

**RICHARD HAAS:** I was going to give you another choice. (Laughter.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Come on. I mean, honestly. Look, for starters, I’m sorry to say that there’s a lot of nonsense talked about. But let me give you one example of why Brexit was of value. And actually, it’s something that’s relevant to everybody in this room.

We were the country that was first able to have a license approved COVID vaccine. And I think we approved both Pfizer and AstraZeneca. The Mental Health Research Agency came out of the European Medicines Agency, and was able to take a decision whether to advance to the rest of the EU.

And as a result of that, as I may have mentioned before, but we had the fastest vaccine rollout anywhere in the developed world, and we vaccinated our population faster. And we were therefore able to come out of lockdown on July the 19th last year, faster than any other major European economy, and faster than most other people around the world. That would not have been possible if we remained in the EU, in the European Medicines Agency. I can just give you that as one example.

What Brexit does is it basically allows you to have control of your legislative system, your regulatory system. For an industry like bioscience, is I see enormous potential. I see our ability to do things differently on chemicals regulation, on genomics, on that creepy Frankenstein food stuff. (Laughter.) Fine, be my guest. If you want to do that in the U.K., we should be able to. If companies can find a justification for that, we’re going to do it.

There’s already been a considerable economic dividend from Brexit, just in the (crosstalk/inaudible) –

**RICHARD HAAS:** (Crosstalk/inaudible) –

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** (Crosstalk/inaudible) come out of lockdown, but it was. We were the fastest growing economy in the G7 last year.

**RICHARD HAAS:** (Inaudible) that you were the fastest declining economy at the G7.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Because we were able to come out of a lockdown so fast. And I think the… I had this argument with John Kerry just after the Brexit referendum. And I was foreign secretary at the time. We went out into Boston Harbor and –

**RICHARD HAAS:** Dumping tea?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah, that’s the point. (Laughter.) And he said – because you guys, like all the American foreign policy establishment, they were horrified by this. And he said, “Can’t you guys walk this thing back? Can’t you go back and be run by Europe again?” And I pointed to Boston Harbor, and I said, “Well, look, in 1776, if I missed my guess, when you guys decided you didn’t want to be ruled from overseas. And we’ve taken a decision.”

And on the economic front, never forget, I think there’s a guy called Bastia. Anyone remember Bastia, French economist, who said, there are things that are seen and things that are unseen, right? There are all sorts of opportunities that will crop up for us because of what we’ve done.

And yeah, it’s that there have been frictions at borders. That’s true, but I don’t believe that in the end, they will count for much by comparison with the opportunity to do things independently, to do things that you think are in the interest of the UK economy, such as having the first COVID vaccine.

**RICHARD HAAS:** Do you think there’ll be a UK in, say, 20 years, given, say, Scotland or –

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Do you think there’ll be a UK?

**RICHARD HAAS:** Yeah. Do you think the – well, Irish unification, that one of you will have, between the demographic changes in the North, as well as a desire to be part of Europe, you could actually have a growing number of people in the North who want to have unification with the Republic of Ireland. And one of the drivers of that is clearly Brexit.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** No, I don’t think that. I think all the evidence that I’ve seen suggests to me that if there were to be a border poll now, it would be overwhelmingly won by those who want to remain, both communities, Catholic, of course. And they want to remain part of the United Kingdom. And in Scotland, actually, over the last three years, the appetite for independence has gone down.

Look, we heard all this before the Brexit referendum. People said that the UK would split up. It seems to me to be in robust health, and you should not believe everything you read. Much as I love the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, they seem to be populated in staff by mainly British journalists who love bashing me. (Laughter.)

We have the lowest unemployment in the UK. You talk about the economic data. We have the lowest unemployment in the UK for, I think, 40 years. I’m here before an audience of tech geniuses and tech investors. As far as I can remember, we have three times as many unicorns as France, I think more than France, Germany and Israel combined. We have a new unicorn. You know what I mean by unicorn, right?

**RICHARD HAAS:** Unfortunately, not personally. (Laughter.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** No, no, no, but all these guys, all these, you can see the horns sprouting from the audience. (Laughter.) We have about a new one every two or three weeks. And the campaign that we were running was to make sure that these happened across the country.

I respectfully disagree with the analysis of Brexit has been (awful?). COVID was a big problem. Inflation’s a problem, but Brexit truly was (inaudible).

**RICHARD HAAS:** In addition to having a certain ability, shall we say, with a mobility, not nobility, of our prime ministers of late, also, obviously, the monarchy. You had the passing of Her Majesty and the ascension of King Charles. Would you say something – as prime minister, you used to see Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, what, once a week?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah.

**RICHARD HAAS:** Without asking you to give away confidences, can you talk a little bit about the nature of those interactions and whether they actually were useful to you as prime minister? And if so, why?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Because she was… Her Majesty, the Queen, the late queen was an absolutely brilliant woman. And I think Barack Obama said that of all the statesmen/women that he’d ever met, she was the one that impressed him the most. I think I’ve got that right. I think he said something to that effect. She knew it; she knew it all and she’d seen it all. And I think she’d met and every one of the American presidents since Truman, with the exception Lyndon B. Johnson.

And she was just a fantastic font of information and support, because you’re in this sort of confessional. You know that she’s not going to report anything you say. (Laughter.) You sincerely hope, and nothing ever came out of it. And you can pour forth your most appalling confessions.

**RICHARD HAAS:** Like therapy?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah, totally. (Laughter.) And she would listen, and because of her experience, she could be immensely sympathetic and reassuring. And I remember the last time I saw her, which was two days before she died, and she was she was totally honest. And that was why it was such a completely heartbreaking thing, because I could tell that she was not at all well, and she told me as much.

But she was absolutely extraordinary in her grasp of what was going on, the historical memory and remembering details about me and my family, all sorts of stuff.

**RICHARD HAAS:** (Audio drops) of the convention stuff. Obviously in public, she was always incredibly discreet. In private, could she say, Prime Minister, that’s a really terrible idea, or it just doesn’t go that way?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah. Look, I mean, I don’t think it… I will tell you one thing, okay. No, I’ll tell you two things that she told me, which I don’t think are kind of a breach of the protocol.

The first was, back to your Brexit point, I will say nothing about her views on that issue, except that it was very, very important to make sure that her broodmares could get to France, and meet their French boyfriends. (Laughter.) And that certainly did come up.

**RICHARD HAAS:** Did you discuss that with Emmanuel Macron? (Laughter.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I’m not going to go into that (inaudible/laughter.)

The other thing that she said, which I always thought about, and now act on in a sort of crazy way, she said – who has a magpie phobia? Do you worry about magpies? Maybe it’s a purely British thing. Here, I mean, if we see a magpie in the UK, you have a one for sorry, two for joy, etcetera, etcetera. Seeing a magpie on its own is a bird of ill omen, right? No? This is not a thing in America?

**RICHARD HAAS:** Not a big thing, no.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** You don’t worry about magpies? (Laughter.) Well, then I can tell you the whole thing. It won’t make a bit of difference to you. (Laughter.)

In the UK, if you see one magpie, it means you’re about to have bad luck, right?

**PARTICIPANT:** (Off-mic.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Like a crow, maybe.

**PARTICIPANT:** (Off-mic.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** No, you don’t salute it. What she said you’ve got to do – you’re the first audience ever to hear this. And actually, this is a totally harmless thing.

**RICHARD HAAS:** Chatham House rules. (Laughter.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Chatham House rules. There’s no reason why we should know this. What she said you’ve got to do is you’ve got to say, hello, Mr. Magpie, it is Wednesday, the 9th of November. And then you’re okay. (Laughter.) You’ve just got to be swift=witted enough to know the date, and then the magpie won’t bring you bad luck.

And I have to tell you, ever since she told me that, I go around. And when I see a magpie, I don’t know (what day it is?). And I have to remember in order to appease the possible bad luck.

**RICHARD HAAS:** This is truly what we used to describe as news you can use. (Laughter.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Anyway, I’m giving you a world exclusive there. (Laughter.) But it’s the foremost thinking on that matter.

But I’ll tell you what. You mentioned the succession, and you’re right. I think she did a lot of extraordinary things, but the most important thing that she did was to modernize the monarchy and to protect it. And it was incredible. In the House of Commons after she died, it was incredible to see the complete consensus across all parties, including members of the Labor Party I would have thought would be absolutely rabid Republican, absolute consensus that King Charles should succeed, and that nothing should interfere with the institution of the monarchy. And I think that was her achievement.

**RICHARD HAAS:** Is he off to a good start?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I think he is, yeah. And I was just watching some footage of him today, and people cheering for him.

**RICHARD HAAS:** You’re someone who has great fondness for this country of mine and ours. When you look at us, you look at things like what’s going on? You look at January 6th. We’re about to mark the two-year anniversary. Do you say to yourself, I don’t recognize this? Do you say to yourself, I am genuinely worried? Churchill had the famous line, “Americans can be counted on to do the right thing, but only after they’ve tried everything else.” Do you still feel that? Do you basically feel that?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I love America. Look, one more reason I wanted to come, I wanted to get the message across about Ukraine, right? I mean, I think America having exhausting all the options, other options, although I think you’re doing the right thing in Ukraine.

And on the January the 6thstuff, I’ve got to admit, I wasn’t happy about that. I’m one of those people who can’t help admiring the way Donald Trump winds people up, okay? That is a terrible thing to say, but I kind of like the way he enrages liberal opinion. And that’s just me. It’s my life.

But I thought when it came to the election, that was a very serious business. And I thought that it was really not right to contest the result of that election. And democracy matters intensely. The argument I’m making tonight is that democracy matters in – well, it matters in Ukraine. If you have the President of the United States of America seeming to cast doubt on what was plainly, it seemed to me, to be a pretty clear result, then that is corrosive. And I did worry.

**RICHARD HAAS:** Did you ever talk to – this happened on your watch when you were – this was about two-thirds of the way, give or take, to halfway through your tenure as prime minister. Did you ever have a conversation with him about January 6th?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** No, because I think he’d gone through (inaudible) logically, even though (inaudible).

**RICHARD HAAS:** Talk a little bit, actually, on him and more broadly, you worked with him and you worked with President Biden.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah.

**RICHARD HAAS:** What about the similarities and the differences?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, look, I had very good relationships with both, but just on the Russia point and on Ukraine, I think a lot of people have been anxious that – I’ve certainly been anxious that the news in the Republican Party might be against supporting the Ukraine.

But you never forget who actually gave those Javelins, correct, to the Ukrainians. It wasn’t Barack Obama. Obama did nothing after 2014, right? It was Donald Trump who gave the Javelin anti-tank weaponry, which paved the way, by the way, for the UK to give the (inaudible), another form of anti-tank missile. Both of those were absolutely vital to the Ukrainians in the early stages of the recent conflict.

It’s a complex picture with Donald Trump on Russia and Ukraine. I don’t know which way he would have – he would go.

**RICHARD HAAS:** I have my haunch, but fortunately or unfortunately, we’ll never know. But could you have –

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, what do you think, Richard?

**RICHARD HAAS:** You’re right, that it’s actually 100% right. He provided lethal means to Ukraine, where the previous administration would not. Do I think he would have gone all in? No, I do not think he would have gone all in with Ukraine, Donald Trump, not for a New York minute. I saw nothing in his presidency – actually, at times, what was very curious was almost the difference between the Trump administration and Trump, the president –

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Let me leave aside Donald Trump, and let me just say that I think that Joe Biden has been quite remarkable on that issue. And I’ve just got to say, speaking as somebody who cares a lot about this issue, I think that the United States has been decisive. I mean, $44 billion, $12.5 billion of military aid. That is an absolutely decisive contribution.

And the thing I want to get over is that this is a pivot moment, right? The Russians, Putin, he’s been having it all his own way for a long time, Syria, Libya, Mali, all these places where he’s kind of getting away with heaven knows what. And no one’s really been standing up to him.

**RICHARD HAAS:** And Ukraine in 2014.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** And Ukraine, correct, the most glaring, Ukraine in 2014. And then suddenly, there’s this moment where he’s plainly miscalculated, and overextended and got it wrong. And there’s a moment for the Western democracies to show that we actually care about democracy. And lo and behold, America is there, making this unbelievable difference.

And so, and this gets back to what we were saying right at the beginning, look at what’s happening in East Asia. And you mentioned Hong Kong, Taiwan, and so on. This is a massive lesson for the world.

And if the Ukrainians win, and I think they will win, then the people who will be most profoundly affected will not just people in Europe, but governments, people around the world will think, well, actually, after all that, they were prepared to stick up for democracy. And they did believe in something. And actually, all that stuff that Francis Fukuyama said all these years ago, maybe there is a grain of truth in it, after all.

Do you see what I mean? There is a huge, huge amount at stake here, and it’s not the future of Ukraine.

**RICHARD HAAS:** Let me just ask a few more questions, and then we’ll open it up again. Say something about governing in the age of social media. There, you’re prime minister. I mean, I think –

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** (Most of them?) laughing so richly at that. (Laughter.)

**RICHARD HAAS:** (Laughter.) But seriously, I mean, the context –

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** No, this is a reasonable question.

**RICHARD HAAS:** Yeah, it’s not a bad question. The challenges. I mean, essentially, was being prime minister different than you thought it would be? Was it tougher? Has it become more difficult to succeed in these positions?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Look, I think everybody was faced with a very big, sudden challenge, which was COVID. And managing a pandemic like that in a very complex democracy with a very, very vibrant media was always going to be tough. And we got some things right. I’ve banged on about the vaccines. We got something wrong. It was always going to be difficult.

I think one thing that people don’t think about enough, we talk a lot about online harms, right, and the damage that social media can do to kids. And we try to protect young people from abuse online. What we forget or what we don’t talk about enough is the psychological impact of online abuse on MPs. (Laughter.) I’m serious. And on – I’m absolutely serious – and on politicians generally, because it’s very, very oppressive. They keep being told, you’re immoral, you’re wrong. And it’s very extreme, the vituperation that they get.

And I think that has started to affect democracies. And we need to think about how to (inaudible) people up, give them therapy. I think they need – people need help understanding how to deal with the – because I promise you, MPs are constantly watching their Twitter, and their Facebook, and their Instagram, and every other means by which they interact with the electorate.

And when there’s a concerted campaign on something, the MPs are very psychologically and emotionally vulnerable. I know for a fact that makes things tough.

**RICHARD HAAS:** Has this discouraged you from the possibility of returning to politics, electoral politics?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, I’ve spent 15 years doing a lot of wonderful jobs. Right now, I need to get on and do some other stuff. I’ve got some books to write. I want to travel around and talk to people, do some things like that. But yes, I’ve not relinquished my interest in politics. (Inaudible.)

(Break for direction.)

**RICHARD HAAS:** If anyone wants to ask a question, raise your hand. I’ll do my best to recognize you. Keep it short, keep it direct, and we’ll see if we can get the former prime minister to evade your questions as well as he evaded mine. (Laughter.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** (Laughter.) Hang on, that’s not fair. What question did I evade?

**RICHARD HAAS:** Don’t make me laugh. I’m just giving you a hard time. (Laughter.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I thought I tried to answer your questions in some detail.

**RICHARD HAAS:** You actually did. Thank you.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** (Crosstalk/inaudible) detail.

**RICHARD HAAS:** I appreciate it, and we appreciate it.

Sir, I can’t see that far, so I can’t – tell us who you are. Just make sure everyone knows who you are.

**PARTICIPANT:** (Off-mic.)

**RICHARD HAAS:** The question was about the rise of nationalism in liberal democracies and its consequences.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah, thank you. Well, I wonder, when you say nationalistic tendencies, do you mean sort of chauvinistic and aggressive towards other countries? I don’t see that in the UK. In fact, I looked at a lot of data, talking about Brexit. I looked at a lot of data, post Brexit, and it took a lot of the heat out of people’s feelings towards other countries, and immigration and so on.

Where do you see nationalism on the rise particularly?

**PARTICIPANT:** (Off-mic.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Hungary. Okay, someone says Hungary.

**RICHARD HAAS:** Turkey, Hungary.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah, yeah. I mean, look, Turkey is a very interesting country and in a very interesting position. It’s critical for the world. They have some difficult issues with other countries, notably in the Mediterranean. But I don’t think that they’re noticeably, the Turks are noticeably more nationalistic than they used to be.

I mean, the Hungarians, yeah, I take that point, but they’re still signed up members of the EU. They take their (bay?). I didn’t see any…. They have a particular view about Putin, and Russia, and gas and so forth, but then that’s entirely predictable.

It doesn’t seem to me that – well, we’re not in a 1930 situation, put it that way. Very far from it. And on the contrary, I think there’s an opportunity in Ukraine to stand up for our values and show that democracy, freedom, the values that we believe in, they are still going to be protected.

**RICHARD HAAS:** Let’s get a few more questions. Question here.

**PARTICIPANT:** (Off-mic.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Oh, China. Yeah.

**RICHARD HAAS:** But the rise of nationalism in China.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** You were thinking of China, were you?

**PARTICIPANT:** (Off-mic.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah. But again, I mean, I don’t think China wants to rule the world in any… and I don’t think they’re capable of it, by the way. I mean, you get back to COVID. They couldn’t even produce – and who had Sinovac, or Sinopharm, right? Did anybody have Sinovac?

**RICHARD HAAS:** They wouldn’t be alive in here today.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Did you? Yeah, exactly. They’re a long way off the pace. And I remind you what I said about the zero-COVID policy. There are big issues with China, and you’ve got to be very careful, and you’ve got to be very cautious about the relationship. But I don’t personally sense an aggressive Chinese nationalism.

**RICHARD HAAS:** There is a school of thought, just to say, that’s growing that as the economy, which used to grow double digits now is down to 3%, given COVID, given drought, given tens of millions of unemployed, there is a growing concern that Xi Jinping will ultimately turn to nationalism as a way of generalizing his party’s rule. And I say that that concern is out there, and I don’t think it’s unfounded.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** No, I can see that. I can see that. All the more reason for everybody to work hard to contain China. And that’s what we’re doing.

And by the way, you talk about Brexit, one of the things that I think we were able to do that we certainly couldn’t have done otherwise is the AUKUS Agreement with the U.S. and Australia, which is a big deal on submarine technology in the Pacific. The Chinese don’t much care for it, but it’s the right thing to do.

**RICHARD HAAS:** You know who cared for it even less?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Say again?

**RICHARD HAAS:** Know who cared for it even less? Your good friend, Emmanuel. (Laughter.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes, he wasn’t too thrilled. Yeah, that wasn’t our fault.

**RICHARD HAAS:** (Laughter.) I know. Yes, ma’am, I see right there.

**PARTICIPANT:** (Off-mic.)

**RICHARD HAAS:** The question was about the much lower death rate of gun violence in the UK as opposed to this country. And what do they know that we don’t?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah, well, look, I’m afraid I’m a bit of a liberal squish on this. I mean, I just cannot understand how you could allow a world in which people can go in and buy semi-automatic weapons from stores. And just I don’t get it. We have a lot of operations to round up guns, and they’ve been very effective. It’s actually quite hard to get a usable gun in London. And that’s one of the reasons why gun crime has come down.

And I know that that is completely antithetical to the live free or die, or both, not necessarily in that order. (Laughter.)

**RICHARD HAAS:** Sort of live free and die. (Laughter.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Live free and die. (Laughter.) But that’s where I am on this thing. And America’s history is very different, and I think I can’t see it going on forever. I mean, how many times can you have these things where kids go to school and shoot each other up before there’s some change? I mean, but it’s not for me to –

**RICHARD HAAS:** What’s interesting about this – I see lots of hands – is just how conservatism in various Western democratic societies manifests itself differently on various issues. And it’s just interesting to hear someone in the Conservative Party have those views. And it’s obviously so different from the conservatives.

I see a gentleman there at that table who’s been waving his hand with some enthusiasm for some time. But you two can arm wrestle, whichever one it is.

(Break for direction.)

**PARTICIPANT:** (Off-mic.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I’ve always been in favor of the UK being able to welcome people who want to come to our country, provided it’s done in a controlled way, and the government and people of the UK are welcoming people that they bargained for and they know about. That’s why the stuff that’s happening in the Channel is so catastrophic. And it’s patently not in (North’s?) control. And people are risking their lives, and these gangs are sending people to sea, literally in kids’ paddling pools to try to cross the English Channel, which is very dangerous stretch of water. And that’s got to end. What that’s doing is undermining people’s natural willingness to welcome people from other countries.

And so, look, I’m pro talent coming to the UK and have been ever since I was running London. And that’s just talking about the biotech and biosciences area, we’re doing a lot of work to make sure that our Visa system is suitable for those who want to come and invest in tech, and set up tech companies in the UK.

Look, I’m broadly pro-immigration, but I’m pro control.

**RICHARD HAAS:** That’s something I should have asked. You were mayor, you were foreign secretary, you were prime minister. Which was your favorite of the three?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Hmm. Oh, look, it’s got to be being prime minister. It’s a fantastic job. There’s no question. Being mayor was pretty good, too. (Laughter.) I think foreign secretary, you know…

**RICHARD HAAS:** (Laughter.) The foreign policy thing’s a drag, I know.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, there’s a lot of meetings. (Laughter.)

**RICHARD HAAS:** We meet, therefore, we are. Yes, ma’am?

**PARTICIPANT:** (Off-mic.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, look, I’ve said what I’ve said. But by the way, I hope I am off the record. I really don’t want to be quoted about all this, but I saw quite a few people who won were people who said that the election in 2020 was is null and void, whatever. I do regret that. I think it was important for the United States and the world for everybody to stick up for democracy as practiced in the United States.

This is the shining city on a hill. This is the arsenal of democracy, literally, in the case of Ukraine. And it was dismay to see a proper democratic election undermined.

**RICHARD HAAS:** We have time for just about two more, give or take. I see one in the back. Yes, sir?

**PARTICIPANT:** (Off-mic.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah.

**RICHARD HAAS:** To piggyback on that, the question of the protests in Iran.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes. Well, I mean, you’ve got to wish them every possible success and bless them for what they’re trying to do. And it’s so interesting that for so long, Putin has been hand-in-glove with Iran, whether in Syria or elsewhere. Now, what’s he using to take out these Ukrainian electricity substations? He’s using Iranian drones. And by the way, that’s what we’ve got to do, is help the Iranians shoot those things down.

I take a pretty conventional view of this. I think that Iran is a pretty malign actor in the region, and they need to be contained. And I think that I’m in favor of a JCPOA, right? I think that’s not a stupid thing to try to do.

**RICHARD HAAS:** That’s the 2015 nuclear agreement, for those of you who don’t remember.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah, that’s the deal where you try to stop the Iranians getting a nuclear weapon. I think that would be a catastrophe. And so, we should do that, but we should continue to be very tough on the Iranians.

And so, what I really hate the way so many people, so many otherwise sensible governments, friends of ours, friends of both of our countries, whether in the Middle East or wherever, they’ve cut Putin so much slack at the moment. And we need to fix that.

**RICHARD HAAS:** Just as an aside, I think the 2015 agreement, the JCPOA is, if not dead, it’s actually on life support because of the military tranche, as you mentioned, and because of the protests. The idea that now, the United States would relieve economic pressure on Iran that would help, I think there’s zero chance of it.

Ian Bremmer?

**PARTICIPANT:** (Off-mic.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah, I do. And I think that, actually, one of the miracles of the whole thing has been the unity of the EU and the Europeans. And I really wasn’t sure that that was going to happen when this whole thing kicked off. And when we were at Munich, it was clear that Emmanuel was going in one direction, and that Germany had this massive dependance on Russian gas. It wasn’t at all clear that the EU would (inaudible).

And I remember Mario Draghi, at one point in one of those early conversations, putting his hand up and saying, “Look, we just cannot wean ourselves off Russian gas. It’s impossible for Italy.” But they did, and they are. And I think that what the EU is doing on its energy strategy is great. I think what they did on sanctions is great.

Look, I hesitate to say it, but I think – well, I don’t hesitate to say it; I’ll say it. I think that it was a good thing – let me put it this way. It was a good thing that Brexit Britain, this irritating state that decided to do this thing, was out there way in front taking the moral high ground on Ukraine from the beginning, in a way that I think, and people may want to correct me, that I think helped to bring the EU with us, because I think they thought, we can’t have the Brits on the moral high ground. (Laughter.) We can’t have old Johnson claiming to be bathed in the odor of sanctity because he’s sticking up for Ukraine.

And I think that actually, it was, paradoxically, the fact that we were not in the EU at the time was helpful in bringing the EU with us.

**RICHARD HAAS:** I want to thank the former prime minister for being so generous with his time tonight, for his candor. (Applause.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Thank you, thank you. (Applause.)

**RICHARD HAAS:** And also, I want to thank you for your public service. I asked about it. It’s not easy, and it’s not… There’s enormous satisfactions, but also enormous sacrifices in public service in any time, particularly now. And anyone who puts himself or herself through the wringer deserves our thanks. So, thank you, sir. (Applause.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Thank you very much. Can I just say, look, how long did we go on for, Richard?

**RICHARD HAAS:** About an hour and a half. Hour and a half, Mark, hour fifteen?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** That’s fantastic. Well, good. Thank you, all, for listening with such incredible patience. But also, just the key thing is come to the UK. Invest in UK, invest in bioscience in the UK, and stay strong on Ukraine. Stay strong on Ukraine. Thank you. (Applause.)

(Break for direction.)

END