McFaul: Okay I have three questions. We’re going to talk about global threats all over the place: climate change, democracy, China and Taiwan, the Middle East, Russia and Ukraine.

But the first question: we’ll start with Amichai and work on down. Lots of news, lots of commentary about all the issues we’re talking about today. . . if there’s one thing you wanted Stanford alums to know, you wanted Americans to know, that you wanted the world to know that you think they’re getting wrong about these issues, what would that be?

Amichai?

Amichai Magen: Well, thank you, good morning everyone. FSI was my intellectual home at Stanford. Although I did my doctoral work at the law school, FSI was really the place that
nurtured me. And I know we want to keep things very short, but I have to share with you the last thing that I remember as a graduate student here at Stanford before we returned to Israel, I had a conversation with Professor McFaul before he became Ambassador McFaul. And he said to me, "Remember Amichai; once you go to Stanford, you spend the rest of your life trying to come back." And he was right, and we are all here.

What's the one thing that we crucially must understand about the tragedies that are once again unfolding in the Middle East, right now, at the moment? The answer in two words is: what is at stake in the region, and the second word is interconnectivity.

Framing is really important in international relations. We've been watching these horrific scenes from what has been described as the Hamas-Israel war, but that is one concerted circle. There is a regional struggle happening, and in many respects, what is unfolding at the moment in the Middle East and what is at stake is a grand struggle for the future of the international system, no less.

We have the evolution of two opposing axes: an axis that we might call an axis of chaos, of destruction involving Iran and increasingly involving Russia and China, and a whole variety of proxies from Hezbollah, to Hamas, to Palestinian Islamic Jihad, to the Houthis in Yemen, to a variety of proxies in Iran.

And the Biden Administration understands that and is trying to construct and maintain an opposing axis, what we might call an "axis of stability," of sanity, that would involve the United States, but also Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, the Gulf kingdoms, and the state of Israel. That is, I think, a much accurate framing for us to understand what is happening in the Middle East right now.

McFaul: Perfect. Marshall?

Marshall Burke: So, quick class participation — there won't be a grade, but this is a quiz. So, I'm going to talk about climate change and the question is: are CO2 emissions in the U.S. going up or down?


They're going down and they're going pretty substantially down and have been for almost the last 5 to 10 years, and they're hopefully about to go down much more quickly. And I think people don't actually realize the progress that we're making on climate change.

About 18 months ago, it looked like we were in a terrible place in terms of climate policy in the U.S. We just did not have our act together. Nothing was going to get done. It looked like Manchion was going to kill any progress. And then from the ashes rose the Inflation Reduction Act, which was by far the most ambitious piece of climate legislation ever passed in this country
by an order of magnitude and it has set us on a path that is just completely different than again where we thought we would be two years ago.

And so we are making remarkable progress. It's actually hard to understand how large this bill is going to be. The way it is set up is to incentivize both clean energy supply and demand. So, if you want to go buy an EV, the government wants to help you do that. If you want to start a wind farm or a large solar project, the government wants to help you do that. So, more people do that, the government's going to help you more and more and so we don't know if this bill is $500 billion, we don't know if it's a trillion dollars, but anyway it's very large right. So again, it's just a monumental policy shift, and, in my view, a positive one in our ability to do something about climate change.

That's the good news. We're making a lot of progress. Implementation is going to be a mighty challenge here. We have already seen this. About 70% of the benefits from the inflation Reduction Act depend on boring but important things like permitting reform. I mean just feel your eyes glaze over when someone says permitting reform, right? But this is exactly what we need. We are going to need to build so much transmission, so much wind and solar to meet what we can do under the Inflation Reduction Act. But so much of that right now is held up in local fights about permitting. And so the implementation part of this is going to be absolutely key. It's going to be hard. It's going to be a slug. We're on a great path but we have a lot of lot of work to do.

McFaul: Great, Marshall. Thanks. Didi?

Didi Kuo: I want to continue this spirit of optimism and talk about democracy in what we call advanced industrial democracies, including here at home in the United States. Despite the fact that the global outlook looks really bleak — a lot of instability and geopolitical conflict and what we would think of as autocratization of autocracies — democracy has been pretty resilient.

Sure, we don't have a Speaker of the House right now, and Trump is the leading front runner for the Republican nomination, but he's also under indictment. People have been prosecuted for January 6th. There are examples from around the world that when illiberal or anti-democratic leaders are elected to democracies, they don't govern effectively, and they get punished.

In 2023, Jair Bolsonaro did not win re-election in Brazil. Marine Le Pen made it to the final round of the French election but did not win. Very recently in Poland where there was a very successful illiberal party — the Law and Justice Party or Peace, they just lost as well because the opposition were finally able to coordinate enough to capture pluralities in Parliament.

So, there are signs that people are fed up with bad government and that made them turn towards populist and illiberal leaders, but they also ultimately want stability. They want
effective parties and leaders, and that means that there's going to be more resilience in democracies.

President Biden has made democracy one of his top agenda items, hosting two democracy summits as well as trying to pass political reforms. They ultimately didn’t pass, but they're very much a national conversation topic in ways that they weren’t in the past. So, I am hopeful about the state of democracy.

**McFaul:** Great. Thanks, Didi. Larry?

**Larry Diamond:** So, I'll build on what Didi said by beginning my short comment by saying that Taiwan is one of the most resilient and successful liberal democracies that has emerged during this remarkable "third wave" of global democratization that began in the mid-1970s and really started accelerating (maybe not coincidentally) right around the time he graduated.

And it is an inspiring example that a lot of people in the Chinese-speaking world on the mainland, in Hong Kong, and so on have taken deep note of. And it's become part of not an alliance — and I wouldn't use the word "axis," Amichai — but certainly an informal network in Asia. Because we have alliances too, with Korea and Japan, of democracies that do share common underlying values that give the lie to the idea that democracy is just a Western concept. And you can see it in the evolution of public opinion and values in Taiwan, and actually throughout East Asia. And this remarkable democracy is now very existentially threatened by the growth of military power, military provocation, and really an ongoing, constant gray zone-type warfare by the People's Republic of China.

I actually think the single most existential threat that the United States is facing is the breakneck pace of military expansion, technological advance, and relentless theft of our technological secrets in the United States and our intellectual property by the People's Republic of China. And what you may not know is that China's pace of penetration of Taiwan's air defense identification zone is just constantly expanding. China is in a continuous cyber war against Taiwan to undermine its public confidence and weaken its infrastructure. Taiwan has actually become one of the more resilient countries in figuring out how to repel that, and its Minister of Digital Affairs, Audrey Tang, has become an international figure in this regard.

So, the current crises we know where they are: in the Middle East and Ukraine. But this is the one that's over the horizon that we need to pay more attention to.

**McFaul:** Great, thanks Larry.

Let me say two things about Russia-Ukraine. I think the one thing that is missing in our debate about this horrific, barbaric invasion and occupation, and most certainly in foreign policy circles and debates here on campus and in Washington is an under appreciation of Ukrainian resilience, and an overestimation of American power to solve that problem or to tell the Ukrainians what to do.
I hear a lot of talk about, "They should do this; they should do that, they should settle, there should be a peace agreement ceasefire, we should not give them weapons, and that will force them to negotiate." Those are part of the debates around our country and around Europe.

I was just in Ukraine last month. And my giant, overwhelming impression was the deep consensus that they are going to fight for as long as it takes to remove the Russians from their country.

Now, that may not be true. I want to be clear: that may not happen. As an analyst, we have to think about other possibilities. But I think we underestimate how focused they are on that, and we overestimate the levers we can pull. Like, are we going to pull back military assistance and force them to negotiate? No. They won't negotiate. They'll just fight with fewer weapons and worse weapons.

I met two people who made a giant impression on me. They're both Stanford alums, both people that spent here. One was a former prime minister Oleksiy Honcharuk, a 37-year-old economist. We all knew him and talked about these abstract things like about the relationship between democracy and development when he was here at Stanford. Today, he runs a drone company. And I toured his drone company. I was told by my family I was not allowed to go to this company, but I did just for 10 minutes, and then I got back in a safer place. But that's what he's doing. And they're going to build those drones with or without us, because they're in it for the long haul.

And the second story I want to share with you is about another alum from one of our programs, Andriy Shevchenko. He was in our Summer Fellows program. He later became the ambassador to Canada. He's a very mild-mannered, intellectual guy. I've talked to him for 20 years. He lost his brother three months ago, and he wanted to tell me the story of what an incredible historian his brother was, who then volunteered to join the army. And at the end of that, Andriy made clear to me that he's going to fight forever because of his brother and his attitudes towards Russians have changed radically.

So, when we think we can tell the Ukrainians what to do, remember what I just told you about Andriy.

Alright, back this way: I worked in the government for a while, and every now and then you get these moments in these sometimes awkward spaces where you're suddenly with the president of the United States.

Suddenly, you get two minutes with President Biden. And you can talk about Stanford football, or maybe you should use your moment to tell him something that you would like him to change with respect to American policy about our issues. Let's go the other way around.

First Larry, start with you.
Diamond: Well, what I'd say first is, "Mr. President, thank you for saying on four different occasions — even though three times your National Security Council raced out to contradict it — that if China attacks Taiwan, we will be involved."

Secondly, I would say deterrence, deterrence, deterrence. It's not inevitable that the People's Republic of China is going to launch an all-out military assault.

We deterred — as you know better than me — the Soviet Union for decades from moving against West Berlin and much of the rest of Europe. And deterrence can work, but only if you have a superior force.

Frankly, we need to preposition more military force in the region. There's now a $12 billion backlog of weapons that Taiwan has ordered and paid for and hasn't received yet because — and this is the other thing I would say to Mr. President, which he knows but we're not getting fixed: our defense production system is completely broken, which is why we can't get weapons to Ukraine at the adequate pace that we need to.

One of the things that my colleague Admiral James Ellis, who actually led the two aircraft carrier battle groups that President Clinton deployed to the Taiwan Strait in the 1996 crisis: he and I have proposed in an article we wrote in the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists recently, is to actually license the production of some of these weapon systems such as Stinger missiles to Taiwan. Their ability to produce this stuff rapidly and to build plants — if I may say so, Marshall, I think you made an extremely important point that we emphasized in our recent volume Silicon Triangle, about the global trade in semi-conductors. One reason why we can't get plants built more rapidly here is because of the same permitting obstacles.

So, I think we need to license the production of some of these weapons to Taiwan as rapidly as possible and really deepen our cooperation with allies throughout the region.

McFaul: Great idea. Didi, how about you?

Kuo: I know President Biden is interested in political reform because he's talked about it, and he's proposed legislation about it. He negotiated and fought really hard for it, even though it didn't pass, like the Freedom to Vote Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Act.

But if I had two minutes with him, I would say that one of the main problems that people feel is that their voices aren't heard. And part of that is because — to actually link to this permitting discussion — we live in what our colleague Frank Fukuyama calls a "vetocracy."

We have a lot of veto points in our system. In a lot of other democratic institutional configurations, you have rule by the majority. It's pretty easy to have a principle of majoritarianism where the most votes win. There's a recent book out by two political scientists Daniel Ziblatt and Steven Levitsky called Tyranny of the Minority. We have an institutional
configuration in the United States that lets a very small group of people — like 15 people in the House of Representatives — hold up government in various ways. And this trickles down to the local level, where you get these permitting hold-up issues as well.

What I would say is: instead of the huge bill you proposed with all these different political reforms, let's do one simple thing which is just to reform the Electoral College. Americans feel that institutions can't be changed, but it is crazy we are really one of the only advanced democracies that has this indirect system of elections. If all the votes counted equally and all the presidential candidates had to treat all of us the same and go to all of our states and mobilize voters in those ways across the 50 states, I think that it would show all of us that the popular vote is what matters and that principle of majoritarianism is one that we should seek in our institutions.

McFaul: Great. Marshall?

Burke: I wouldn't bore him with permitting reform, although that would be my first choice. So, I'll go with my second choice. I would say, "Mr. President, there are three things we can do in response to climate change: we can mitigate — we can reduce our missions, we can adapt, or we can suffer."

So, mitigation. I already mentioned that we're off to a good start, but we have decades of long slog ahead of us to get that right. And it's not just us, right? Even if we do a good job, we depend on other countries also doing a good job. And so, there's an important global diplomatic effort on that front, and the Biden administration has been engaged there.

But we're going to muddle along, and we are not going to be as fast as we want, and we are not going to mitigate our greenhouse gas emissions as quickly as we need to avoid climate change. We're going to have to live with some climate change, so that's adaptation, right? And if we can't adapt, then we're going to suffer. So, we need to figure out how to adapt. The key point is we are very poorly adapted to today's climate, much less the climate we're going to have 30 years from now, or 50 years from now.

If you've lived on the West Coast in California, you've experienced monumental wildfires in the last few years. This is something I study, and we see negative health impacts. We see it even at my house with people who should know better. You see a lot of wildfire smoke getting inside people's houses. We see people exposed to extreme heat and suffering. We're just really poorly adapted already to the current climate, and things are going to get a lot worse.

So, I'd say, "Mr. President keep your focus on mitigation; that's really important. We've got to get that done. But at the same time, we need to figure out how to live with the changing climate that we're going to experience. We need to learn how to adapt.

McFaul: Excellent, thanks.
Magen: "Mr. President, people speak about the 20th century as the American Century. The 21st century can also be the American Century. It's in our hands. It's in your hands.

Just a few short years ago, we were all talking about the decline of the United States. I think that's far from inevitable. Be bullish on America. Be confident in America. Rediscover the spirit of America for adaptation and innovation and entrepreneurship.

Larry, we might not think about ourselves as an axis, but our adversaries certainly are thinking about themselves as an axis. In fact, they call themselves the "Axis of Resilience." So, we need to wake up from the break from history that we have taken in the post-Cold War era.

We need to rally once again in our spirit, our research, and our intellect, and we need to find new solution structures to the great challenges of our era: environmental challenges, AI, biotechnological challenges, nuclear challenges. And we can do it. China is on the verge of demographic decline and economic decline. Russia is not a global superpower, although it's a very dangerous international actor. We must reinvent the institutions and the alliances that we need for the 21st century in order to make sure that we continue a journey towards greater peace and prosperity for all of mankind.

McFaul: Great.

I've actually had the chance to speak to the president a few times on Ukraine and I would reiterate what I said the last time: more and better weapons, faster. More and better sanctions, faster. That is the way to speed the end of this war. And in particular, Mr. President — this is actually something President Zelenskyy said to me last month — it is crazy, absolutely bad policy that we allow American technology to be exported and go to places like Kazakhstan and Hong Kong, that then show up to build rockets for Russia that we then shoot down with interceptors that we spend hundreds of thousands of millions of dollars giving to the Ukrainians. That is irrational. If you're an American taxpayer, that is your money being wasted. So, Mr. President: stop that insanity.

Alright, last question: we’re all engaged in all the issues we're talking about here at FSI and here at Stanford, but we're obviously not doing enough. These are big, huge problems, and I want your advice to us, but also to everybody here. This is a question to you all; this is not just a question to our panelists.

What should Stanford be doing more of and better to help address the problems we're talking about today?

Didi, let's start with you.

Kuo: I think the thing that makes Stanford such a special place especially places like FSI is that we are not just academics trying to write for small academic audiences but are really trying to think about what the problems in the world are and how academic research can be brought to
bear on those. I think that we should honestly just do more of the same of what we're doing now, which is applied research where you take a wide stock of what your colleagues are doing, what the sort of empirical findings are but try to think about how to make them actually tractable to the public. There are any number of really wacky American political reform proposals that Larry and I hear about every single day that will never see the light of day, and they honestly shouldn't.

I think that being in our communities, engaging with activists and reformers on the ground and members of democratic civil society, hearing what it is that people need to see from the governments and leaders who represent them, and trying to understand how best to facilitate that kind of change is what we as researchers should be doing.

McFaul: Fantastic. Marshall?

And before Marshall speaks, by the way: we've been on these panels from time to time over the years and since then you all did start the Doerr School of Sustainability. Marshall is one of the leaders of that Doerr School. So, we translated, chitchat at these things — I don't know if we did, Marshall — but we helped, and you are now central to building one of the faculties there over at the Doer School. But what more beyond the Doerr School?

Burke: Yeah, that's right. I was going to mention the Doerr School. So, we have a new School of Sustainability. Really exciting. It's the first new school at Stanford in what, 75 years? And really focused on sustainability, so we have a lot of researchers that were already on campus focused on sustainability, but we have large aspirations to bring in you know 60 or 70 new researchers on again, focused on global sustainability issues and how they intersect with a lot of the topics we discussed today.

So, that's an opportunity. If we're going to move the needle as a school, we need partners, right? We are not going to be able to do this in Stanford, by ourselves. We need partners. And we want to partner with you. What we have found — what I have found, personally — is the Stanford network is incredibly deep in things that touch on sustainability. You can see that in the number of clean tech companies that have come out of Stanford.

But broader than that, the people engaged in government in the private sector, in the nonprofit sector are just going to be really instrumental for our success as a School of Sustainability. So, please come get engaged. Come talk to us. Come work with us, because that's the sort of partnership we're going to need to really make this happen.

Magen: Stanford is not just an institution of national importance; it is an institution of global importance. The young women and men who come here for an education go out and truly change the world. That is true in the Middle East. That is true in Africa. That's true in Latin America. It's true in Europe. It's true all over the world, which means that we have a profound unique responsibility to nurture future generations of leaders not just for the United States but for the world.
And if there's an area where I think we should be doing more is . . . it derives from the understanding that influence is not just a matter of material capabilities. It is about capabilities. It is about technology. But it's also about spirit. It's also about a sense of moral responsibility for the world. It's also about the need for young people to have a sense of historical context and to have a sense of public duty, whether that's local public duty, national public duty or global public duty.

And I really think that we need to invest more in equipping the young women and men who come here with the historical, ethical, moral, and analytical tools that would allow us to combine with technology to make the world a better place. Technology can tell you how to do something. It doesn't tell you what's the right thing to do, and we really need to invest much more in that.

**McFaul:** Great.

**Diamond:** Well, I would stress two things. Number one: we have to do what we can as a university to renew, revive, and deepen open, extensive, frank dialogue and exchange between the United States and the People's Republic of China.

I want to be really clear about this. It's the single most important thing I can say here this morning. A war between China and the United States would be the most devastating thing that has happened to our country and the world, I think, since World War II. And I think that pretty much covers the adult lifetime of everyone in this room. And so dialogue and exchange, at least on the margins, can help. We've got to reduce the temperature.

Secondly: part of deterrence and part of the American success story is technological innovation. And so, I think we need to continue to welcome and accelerate in welcoming the best talent from all over the world. I continue to fervently hope that Stanford will go to need-blind admissions on an international basis, and part of that as we say in our report, The Silicon Triangle, and as our beloved late colleague George Schultz said so often, including from this stage, is that we should stamp a green card to the diploma of every graduate in science, technology, and engineering.

And then, the third thing is I think Stanford has an opportunity to engage Taiwan more deeply. The Asia-Pacific Research Center as FSI has programs on China, Japan, and Korea, and as you know, Mike, they're now going to start one on Taiwan. And we're doing more teaching on Taiwan. We'll be hiring someone who will be teaching about Taiwan. There's great hunger and curiosity among our students to engage Taiwan. And since the opportunities right now to study Chinese language on the Chinese mainland have shrunk, and then we lost our overseas campus in Hong Kong, which we retreated to — I think we should think about starting an overseas campus or a Bing Overseas Studies Program in Taiwan.

**McFaul:** Great.
For me, I have a long list, but I want to mean two things. One: we need a professor of Ukrainian Studies and a Center on Ukrainian Studies. I was a student here at Stanford. I studied Soviet Studies. I got my MA degree in Soviet and East European Studies. I studied Russian and Polish. And I want to tell you that I have had to decolonize some of the learning I've had over the decades as I've learned more about Ukraine. We need to do that for our students, and that's the way you do it.

Larry and I were involved in starting the Iranian Studies Program here at Stanford twenty years ago. We brought Abbas Milani here, and it had a monumental impact on what our students understood and understand about Iran because of one guy and one center. That's what we need to do on Ukraine here at Stanford.

And the second thing we need to do — this is bigger, and we've got to get the Doerr School up and running first — but we can't wait seventy years to start another school. I think we need a public policy school, and most certainly we need an international public policy school. Look at the top ten rankings, whichever one you want. We're one of the few top schools in the in the country that doesn't have one. We have a fantastic applied economic school; it's called the Graduate School of Business. We should have a fantastic applied international relations school, because we have some of the best and brightest students in the world here today. It is a privilege to teach at Stanford. I learn every day by teaching. I want more of those students to tackle the problems we're talking about, and having a school like that would help.

Thank you all for being here and thank you all for being here!

[END EVENT AUDIO]

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