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[00:00:00] **Mark Medish:** We have a fundamental choice to make. We're clearly in the middle of a new Cold War and we're trying to avoid a new world war, and for my money, I'd rather have cold war than World War iii, but we're edging toward the latter. I just wanna remind our listeners how radical the epiphany was in the early 1960s that rather than pursuing the singular arms race to get to supremacy and dominance, instead, we really needed to hedge our bets and start cooperating to try to reduce the risk that this race to supremacy ends in Armageddon.

[00:00:39] I'm an optimist, but I'm worried.

[00:00:48] **Nate Hagens:** Today I'm joined by geopolitical experts, Chuck Watson and Mark Mesh to discuss the state of humanity's ability to govern ourselves amidst escalating international and domestic. In the case of the United States political tensions, which I feel are both central topics for those working towards better futures.

[00:01:09] In the first 15 minutes of this conversation, we do an overview of some of the necessary definitions on governance, which are critical for understanding the rest of this jam packed conversation where Chuck and Mark dive into the context behind recent global events and the core ideas to consider as we prepare for what might lie ahead.

[00:01:30] Mark Medi is Vice Chair of Pantera, a London headquartered strategic consultancy. He is also a founding partner of the Mosaic Law Group and a co-founder of Keep Our Republic an educational nonprofit promoting democratic governance and the rule of law. Previously, mark served at the White House as a

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special assistant to President Clinton and senior director for Russian, Ukrainian and Eurasian Affairs on the National Security Council.

[00:01:59] Prior to that, he served as US Treasury, deputy Assistant Secretary for International Affairs, and he also later worked at the State Department and United Nations. Chuck Watson worked on the technical aspects of international relations and foreign policy for over 30 years, starting on detached duty from the US Air Force to the State Department, as well as for the National Security Council in the Middle East under Robert McFarland and later Donald Rumsfeld.

[00:02:27] Later, Chuck designed foreign aid projects around the world and coordinated the use of declassified Soviet and American Cold War spy data. More recently, Chuck's work has focused on climate change studies and other natural hazard models, all at the intersection of military aid intelligence, worlds economics, technology, and foreign policy.

[00:02:49] As geopolitical conflicts and relationships become increasingly fragile, like those we're seeing in Venezuela, Russia, and the Middle East, our best hope for preventing the most violent outcomes is through governance rooted in trust, communication, and our shared humanity, which is the focus of today's episode.

[00:03:10] Actually the focus of this entire platform. Uh, additionally with Chuck and Mark, we discussed one important but hugely under-discussed upcoming event, the expiration of the new strategic Arms reduction treaty, AKA new start, one of the last remaining nuclear arms treaties between the USA and Russia.

[00:03:32] Since recording this episode, the current administration and the United States has openly said that the US is uninterested in renewing this agreement, which would result in further erosion of the global arms control measures develops in the 20th century. Unless a new one were to take its place.

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Mark and Chuck dive into the background of these discussions and why this is such a critical moment for mitigating the risk of nuclear escalation and exchange.

[00:03:59] All in all, this is a must watch episode as we head into the rest of. Thousand 26. With that, please welcome Mark, me and Chuck Watson. Mark Mesh. Chuck Watson. Welcome to the podcast. Good morning, Nate. Great

[00:04:16] **Mark Medish:** to be with you, Nate.

[00:04:17] **Nate Hagens:** We have a lot to discuss today. Um, let's get right into it, uh, given the, the state of the world and, and the news cycle seems to be shrinking, uh, in, in its timeline.

[00:04:29] Chuck, you've been on the podcast numerous times and on and off camera. We've had a lot of conversations and you always remind me that underlying all of the problems we discuss on this platform is the issue of governance. So let's start this conversation there. Um, maybe you could define what is governance and how is it different than government?

[00:04:51] **Chuck Watson:** Yeah, Nate, that's great. In fact, this, we tend to have a problem because just as you say, the news cycle, at least as we're recording this, is moving faster than we can keep up with it. And so it's easy to get lost in the minutia without taking a step back and looking at the big picture. So that's why I really appreciate this podcast because we're able to do that.

[00:05:14] And so. What is governance? Well, I take a very broad view of that question. I would say that governance is the process by which a society makes decisions. And so that's, as you say, not just government, it's your economic system. It's the, you know, the hidden hand is, uh, some writers would call it, of how you're.

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[00:05:35] Economic system causes, corporations, and even all the way down to individuals to make decisions. It's your society's moral and ethical underlying principles or lack thereof, depending on your perspective. But it's more than that even. It's a critical piece that's often overlooked is the education system and the, what I call the information ecosystem.

[00:05:58] How does information get to various participants? And just a quick example from even this morning, uh, Joe Lauria, and this, one of the questions that we're concerned about is AI did an exchange with grok. And it was really interesting that GR basically said, well, yeah, I tailor my information. No. Since I know who you are, I'm gonna use more foreign sources than I do for the average person.

[00:06:25] To which he immediately said, well, wait a minute, that means you're biasing. And grock was, well, yeah, but that's how I'm programmed. Yeah. So that's a, a, a piece of it. But the big picture, and I'd be curious about, uh, Mark's perspective on what is this question of governance?

[00:06:41] **Mark Medish:** No, I, I, I think, uh, Chuck gave a very elegant definition of, of governance, um, uh, tied to how humans and societies, uh, organize their decision making.

[00:06:53] It's a combination of rule of law and political culture, um, uh, of, of how we guide ourselves to try to bring, uh, predictability and reliability, uh, and sort of agreed rules of engagement and deliberation, uh, into play. Now, the key thing to observe is that it's different at the national level, from the international level because of the abil enforceability, right?

[00:07:21] National governments are able to enforce the law and, uh, um. Say the political culture within their borders. Among countries, it becomes more complicated because of, uh, the lack of, uh, enforcement mechanisms. Uh, and

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that's something we've worked on, uh, uh, as, as human beings and societies, you know, over the past century or so, to try to get better international governance in place.

[00:07:53] It's not limited to treaties. It, it includes diplomacy and all the interactions that create a culture of. Governance.

[00:08:01] **Chuck Watson:** Yeah, mark, that's a real interesting point because I think even when you start to look internally at a nation, so you've got the formal legal system, but then you also have that societal norms, which is, you know, international norms.

[00:08:16] I've seen as a, some, uh, one of my professors said it's better to think of it as international norms rather than international law. Precisely because of the lack of a formal enforcement mechanism. Whereas inside a society you have that same kind of a structure to an extent, because you're right, government reserves, reserves to itself.

[00:08:38] The ability to use force too. To, to enact laws, but a lot of the secondary and tertiary interactions are actually based on norms rather than a formal legal system.

[00:08:50] **Mark Medish:** That's exactly right. And it, it's actually, I mean, I'm a lawyer by training. Uh, it, it's true of the domestic situation as well, that, I mean, you can write as many laws as you want, but, uh.

[00:09:03] People still have to interpret and implement them. So what the law means actually depends on a sort of interpretive community of understanding and practice over time where we say, okay, this is how we understand the norms and the principles. And that's frankly one of the challenges of constitutional law.

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[00:09:23] I mean, you know, America has the most brilliant constitution ever written, a pioneering one. It's a very elegant document. Very few words actually, uh, that were revolutionary in their time. But the interpretation of those words is actually up for grabs. And as a democracy, we've done that over decades and generations in terms of, uh, confirming how we collectively interpret those norms and implement them.

[00:09:51] And you can imagine at the international level, it's even more complicated. Uh. You know, because we only have things like, uh, treaties and the UN charter and so forth and so on. Um, but no, no, no overarching authority that can, can enforce.

[00:10:08] **Nate Hagens:** I'm tempted to just put my mic on mute and let you guys talk, uh, for the next 90 minutes, but I, I do have a lot of questions.

[00:10:15] Staying on the definitional front. I asked about what is governance, and just real briefly, how is governance different than politics? And, uh, former house majority leader, Richard Gephardt, has been on this show a couple times, and a phrase that he mentions often is politics is a substitute for violence. So how do governance and politics, uh, interrelate?

[00:10:41] And then you, you both mentioned rule of law. What is that and why is it important and a rules-based order, uh, what is that and how has it shaped our, uh, geopolitical landscape? So in any order you'd like.

[00:10:54] **Chuck Watson:** To hit your last question first. Um, you know, there's an interesting, at least in the international world, rule of law versus, uh, rules-based order.

[00:11:06] And this gets into some details that Mark and I have both been involved in tremendously over our careers. That again, any law, any treaty, any agreement

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is subject to interpretation. And so what mechanisms do you have? To arbitrate that. And so with a rule of law, you have a court system within a government.

[00:11:31] And so we by mutual consent say, well, if the court decides it means X, then it means X. Now, that's unraveling a little bit in the US right now, which is a, a scary, dangerous thing, but that's a separate topic. In the international world, there's no, we've, there've been attempts like the International Court of Justice and tribunals like that, but ultimately what something means if it comes under dispute is, is you try to handle that within the treaty mechanisms.

[00:12:02] But that's where this. Rule of law would basically has meant you follow the treaty and you follow the arbitration mechanisms. What has happened recently, particularly with the US is even our presidents now do signing statements. And historically, uh, governments have done this as well to say, well, we think the treaty means x, and the other side may go, well, we don't really agree with that.

[00:12:30] We think the treaty means y. And then you have an arbitration mechanism rule. Uh, rules based order is a term that the West in particular started using to say, well, we get to, to decide what those treaties really mean and when they apply. And I would say that, uh. President Trump, basically here in the last 48 hours or so has put that on steroids in that New York Times interview where he basically said, well, you, I don't care about international law.

[00:13:00] It means what I say it means, and it applies when I think it applies.

[00:13:03] **Mark Medish:** Not to get too abstract, but, and I think, uh, Dick Gephardt. Uh, characterization is exactly right. Politics is a substitute for violence. I mean, what's ingenious about democracy, uh, is that, um, uh, democracy actually acknowledges conflict and difference.

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[00:13:23] It's, it's the, it's the most clever mechanism ever devised for accepting that that's the human condition. That different interest groups will have different views of things. And you need, you need to allow these opinions to play themselves out. But you wanna do it in a framework of, uh, agreed rules of engagement.

[00:13:46] Uh, you know, what and what counts as evidence. Uh, who's the final decision maker in, in a given remit, you know, and the separation of powers is part of that. Right. Executive, legislative, judicial. Um, so, so that's this brilliant scheme that we, we've come up with to deal with, um, conflict or as Dick was saying, violence, but that, that's conflict.

[00:14:12] That conflict is, is part of human nature and part of human society. We civilize ourselves, uh, I think best through democracy, which is to allow, um, the free debate, but also to set certain rules of how decisions will be made. To go back to Chuck's original formulation about, this is about decision making in all of this, we, we are still trapped in a world of interpretation, of applying laws and rules to facts.

[00:14:43] Right. That's the hard, that's our part, right? It's, it's like the law is not self-executing. We like to say we're governed by laws and not men or humans, but in fact, without humans, laws don't mean anything. And that's why I said earlier, you need both the rule of law and political culture. You need a political culture of democracy, of good faith, of good faith dialogue.

[00:15:09] And as a retired federal judge once, put it to me at rock bottom, the US Constitution is a gentleman's agreement to act in good faith and to be decent because there are so many ambiguities in the Constitution that you could blow it up if you acted in bad faith.

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[00:15:27] **Chuck Watson:** And the thing about we're saying politics is a substitute for violence.

[00:15:32] You can extend that because the law and the legal system. And the judicial system, particularly at the national level, this doesn't really apply so much at the international level, you know, is basically if you say there should be a law to do x. Essentially what you're saying is, I authorized the government to use violence on my behalf to make sure X happens.

[00:15:55] And so that's where this concept of law fair within certainly American society and American governments has become kind of toxic because instead of using the political process to convince our fellow citizens that they need to approve of same-sex marriage or approve or disapprove of abortion, or whatever the topic is, instead of convincing them and using the system so that a majority says, well, yeah, we agree with this concept.

[00:16:24] What's increasingly happened is that groups have gone in, gotten the courts and the law to enforce it at gunpoint, and that's a very dangerous process. The law really should be the last resort for that process. Even if it takes longer to get something done that you really want done, you really need to convince your fellow citizens rather than point the gun of the law at them.

[00:16:50] And so I would say that the law is sort of the last step before you end up at, at violence and politics is really a better, and I agree, mark, that a democratic political decision making process is the best way to handle it.

[00:17:04] **Mark Medish:** I think Chuck made a, a hugely important point about, uh, over-reliance on, uh, what some people call judicial, uh, judicial made legislation, uh, relying too much on the courts as a substitute for politics.

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[00:17:18] So it's kind of when we get exasperated with either the divisions or the gridlock of our politics. Now we begin to over rely on courts, uh, to, to tell us what what we mean. And, um, you're always gonna need some degree of that. But if you try to push all policies simply through the court system, uh, it, it's a kind of, uh, an unbalanced, I think, um, constitutional Republic.

[00:17:54] And this goes back to the sense of interpretive community and expectations in any society that once certain issues have been settled for a long time, simply trying to get a court to overturn a decision. And that way change the policy is fraught with risk. Um, it's just, you know, because this, you need this balance point between rule of law and political culture.

[00:18:21] And to use a court simply to try to change the political culture, uh. You know, overnight I think is, is, um, a problematic proposition.

[00:18:32] **Nate Hagens:** I can't help but look at what's going on in the world and, uh, the cluster of interrelated problems, uh, and broader, more than human predicament. And I wonder how much of it, uh, of our current problems with governance are really more of a problem with aggregate human behavior.

[00:18:54] Like wouldn't humans, 500 or a thousand years ago, kind of had the same challenges with the only difference being there's 8 billion of us now.

[00:19:04] **Chuck Watson:** You know, that's a interesting question and that's one that I've thought a lot about. And you know, the thing is, let's America's 250 years old this year. So let, let's look back, uh, or at least the Declaration of Independence is, let's look back 250 years ago, the average educated person.

[00:19:23] Could understand pretty much his whole world. You know, you look at the technology, uh, even skilled craftsmen, artisans like blacksmiths. You know, the average member of Congress of the first Congressional Congress knew basic

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blacksmithing. I mean, he knew how to handle horses. He knew how to do those kinds of, he may not have been good at it, or, you know, may not been skilled at it.

[00:19:48] He'd hire someone to do it. But he basically understood the whole process of, you know, how, how you got to that point of making that shoe for that horse. Well, think of the technology that we're dealing with right here of, you know, we're scattered across several thousand miles of countryside. Now I understand it probably a risk of hubris here a little better than you guys do.

[00:20:08] 'cause I have a degree in electrical engineering, so I, IE, but even I. Would have trouble starting from the, uh, mound of, you know, silicon and rare earths and describing the entire process of how we get to this point where the three of us are, are communicating over the, these digital links. And so if you look at that from a leadership and governance standpoint, what you've done is you've, we, we now are in a very different situation that the average educate, well educated person cannot understand the technical, even the broad sweeps of the technical, uh, processes that make our world function.

[00:20:51] And it gets a little bit worse than that because the people who elect them are, most of them are, are a stage even back from that because a lot of them don't have even that level of education. Uh, I was looking at the statistics on Congress and only. A couple percent of Congress have technical degrees or even doctors or there's I think five or six doctors, but there's only, I think, one physicist in the entire Congress, uh, one engineer.

[00:21:24] And so most people are, no offense to Mark, but they're lawyers. You know, they, they don't have that technical background, so they have to rely on their staffs who tend to be lawyers and politically oriented people as well. And then you go even a stage back from that is you get to an issue that I think Mark and I are extremely concerned with.

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[00:21:45] The issue of trust. Because, okay. What's different now is a congressman at the first Continental Congress didn't have to trust anybody to understand how a horse worked even 150 years ago. The, somebody in the Congress at the time of Lincoln, yeah, he pretty much understood how a, a firearm worked, and he pretty much understood about steam engines and steam trains, even if he didn't have the artisanal skills to be able to do it.

[00:22:12] How many congressmen today understand a hypersonic missile or ai, or even how their cell phone works?

[00:22:21] **Nate Hagens:** Chuck, you and I are, are, uh, good friends. There's this strange pattern that, uh, I like and respect. Uh, you and every conversation we have, I somehow am surprised by a new area of thing that made me depressed, uh, because what you just said, I hadn't really thought about it, um, that way.

[00:22:42] Mark, do you have anything to add to that?

[00:22:44] **Mark Medish:** Again, I think, uh, Chuck has put his finger on, on, uh, this technolo technological challenge we face as a species. Um, you know, we have evolved in many ways. Uh, we, we live longer than our ancestors did. We're certain in better health, probably, you know, IQ li it's a limited measurement, but it's probably improved as a collective, uh, over time, but still.

[00:23:12] The human brain is basically what it was way back when, and that's why we should still read the classics. I would add. That's why you can still, you know, read Homer Shakespeare, the Greek tragedies, whatever, and get something out of it because all of those fundamental core issues about human nature are still at play.

[00:23:35] Uh, the best of humanity and the worst of humanity is at war, sort of inside of each of us. It was what something Soja Nitin wrote long ago that the di

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dividing line between good and evil runs through each individual human soul and play that against the dazzling technologies that, uh, Chuck was, uh, mentioning a moment ago.

[00:23:59] Whether it's the digital, biological, et cetera, um, nuclear ai, all of it together. Uh, that's the challenge that the world is so much more complicated in a technological way and we're still the same. So it brings me to this point, but this key point, it's not just trust. It's let's assume that we can bring out the best in ourselves.

[00:24:24] How can we maintain human agency and control over these technologies that we have ingeniously created and these technologies upon which our societies now depend? Our lives depend, um, for commerce, for economics, for education, but also for military purposes and defense. How do we maintain. Good human governance and human agency in the face of this daunting and dazzling technology.

[00:24:57] **Nate Hagens:** But yeah. Said, said, uh, at an even wider lens is, can humanity express more than raw power, which we are seeing, uh, of late, uh, when times are tough? Um, and, and that is like kind of a. Rite of passage question for our species, I think. Um, so we're gonna get to nuclear risks and the upcoming, uh, new start talks, uh, in a, in a few weeks from now.

[00:25:22] But I wanna double click on something you've mentioned twice, Chuck, about ai because for us to have, uh, interpretation and enforcement of laws requires human to human interaction. Um, but now we've got AI that's, uh, kind of self-trained to your own specifics. And how does AI affect this whole governance and geopolitical dynamics that we're discussing?

[00:25:50] **Chuck Watson:** You know, it's interesting, and again, I think it does in some extent come back to trust and, you know, we, we don't trust other humans

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anymore, like, or trust expertise I should say. So how can you trust. A system that even the people who designed it don't really understand. And that's, uh, taken that on steroids.

[00:26:13] But yeah, you know that the problem with ai, and we ran into it even in the prep work for this podcast and that Nate and I, your busy guy, and so you've got your Nate bot that you use to help you, uh, put together shows and you fed it, my podcasts and you fed it, Mark's works. And so it structured these questions and looked at things and of course my first reaction to it was, yeah, this is taking a lot of stuff that I set outta context because it doesn't apply in this circumstance.

[00:26:50] And so that, again, I mentioned at the very beginning of the article that came out today as we record this, uh, Joe Lauria and his conversation with Grok about the, uh, shipping incidents is that you're so dependent on. How you train the, the device and then how you continue to feed it information and what biases are built in.

[00:27:16] And so what we've done is it's bad enough when we're dealing with other humans where you naturally surround yourself with experts who agree with you or you know, with with information sources, whether you go to the traditional US approach, you go to CNN or M-S-N-B-C or Fox, well now you've got a system that is learning your biases.

[00:27:37] You not just your group, it's learning your specific biases. And so from a leadership standpoint, you've completely screwed the system because you're never gonna get contrary opinions.

[00:27:50] **Nate Hagens:** So all the leaders in the world have their own version of, as you said earlier, Nate Bott, that is kind of doing a positive feedback and self reinforcement of their own training and their own prior conversations.

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[00:28:04] **Chuck Watson:** And it's worse than that. If I can use my, my phrase, because again, one of the issues that we haven't really gotten to is, and it's a problem with democracy, and again, I, I'm very biased towards democracy. I grew up here in the US and shed blood for this country. So this is not something I say lightly, but the problem is that.

[00:28:29] And this does get back to your point, Nate, about human behavior, is that the skills that you need to get elected and become a leader in a democratic society aren't necessarily good decision making skills. It's traits like narcissism. It's traits like traits, like self-confidence. And of course, as you and I have discussed as a scientist, the first thing you're trained to do is to doubt your own work and your, and I can't tell you how many times I've looked at papers I wrote 20 years ago and go, what an idiot who wrote this crap?

[00:29:00] And so if you can't do that, you're not gonna be a good scientist, but you're not gonna find a politician who comes out and says, yes, I tried something 10 years ago and it was wrong. They're gonna double down. Because again, the human dynamic of, we want leaders who are self-assured. We want leaders from an emotional standpoint.

[00:29:19] We want leaders who have this aura of knowing what they're doing and self-confidence and all those dark triad kind of traits that are that. That cause problems. But then AI is designed specifically to reinforce all of that. So if you're a leader using your president bot or whatever, it's just gonna be feeding you stuff that you want to hear because it's trying to keep you engaged unless somebody is smart enough to have programmed that, to make sure that you get contradictory views.

[00:29:52] And is anyone who gets into that position gonna be willing to listen to those contradictory views because they don't listen to them when humans are doing it to them? And what a mess.

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[00:30:01] **Nate Hagens:** Mark, you have anything to add?

[00:30:03] **Mark Medish:** Well, for, for me, uh, this part of the discussion is all under the rubric of, um, how do we keep all our technology pro-human, um, in other words, how do we always ensure that technology is our tool, not our master.

[00:30:21] Um, so it goes back to the human agency point. That, that technology, no matter how amazing it is, it needs to serve our objectives and it needs to be subject to our decision making, not somehow its own decision making. And so, you know, there's a debate in the AI community of what is ai. Uh, you know, there, there's, uh, and it's beyond my technological ability to assess, but, you know, is AI simply, uh, the sort of, not simply, but is it, is it.

[00:30:51] Really limited to large language models which keep iterating our own data sets. Or is it something that is more generative and starts deciding on its own? You know, machines that create their own machines, machines that create their own objectives. Um, we've already seen some early warning signs in AI 1.0 with all the deceptive practices and manipulations that the chatbots seem to be engaging in.

[00:31:20] Um, so they seem to be imitating human, uh, folly, but with their own objectives, if that makes any sense. And that's scary because that means that our tools stop becoming our tools and we become the tools of our tools.

[00:31:39] **Chuck Watson:** That's a great point, mark. And as I've been involved in machine learning and those kind of issues, going back to the old Fortran EIA program and the, you know, when I was in, uh, high school and, you know, the, the thing is what that question, what is ai?

[00:31:56] AI I think is a very deceptive term. And there are other people that have been around the business a long time that agree with that. It's really si it's

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simulated intelligence. It's what you've got behind are these big databases and algorithms that are trying to, they, they make you think the algorithm is smarter than it really is.

[00:32:16] **Mark Medish:** But here's the point on that, that, that there is a risk that AI turns out to be not what the Maximalist claim it can be. And of course, they have a whole liberation narrative about how it will transform human society and make everything good. There's a risk that AI is not that. Yet it is powerful enough to disrupt everything we've been trying to build up in terms of good governance and, and the architecture of human society, both at domestic levels and internationally.

[00:32:52] And that's really scary, um, for me, um, you know, that you, in other words, you don't have to believe that the transhumanist vision of, uh, a SI right, uh, I is necessarily valid and realistic. It could be that it is nonetheless powerful enough to fundamentally screw us up

[00:33:17] **Chuck Watson:** and deceptive enough because we're putting our trust in it, thinking that it's smarter than it really is.

[00:33:21] Yes. You said it better than I did, but yeah, that's exactly it. If we think it's smarter than it really is.

[00:33:28] **Nate Hagens:** So my, my challenge is in my, uh, network, you two are about the most knowledgeable on what the heck is actually going on in the world, uh, geopolitically. And each one of these questions I'm asking you could be its own two hour podcast, but there's stuff going on right now and at the heart of this conversation, I want to, I want to get into, you know, uh, since the beginning of the decade.

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[00:33:52] Actually, since the beginning of this week, uh, we've witnessed multiple international conflicts breakout, including several with direct US involvement across various regions. Most recently in Venezuela, also the, um, taking of the, the, uh, shadow fleet vessel, the oil tankers. So just before we dive into this aspect, um, would it be fair to say that our current international governance structures are eroding or faltering?

[00:34:22] And what are other signals of this? Because from my lay vantage point, it doesn't look good.

[00:34:27] **Mark Medish:** You know, one way to look at the international, uh, geopolitical setting and governance setting is that you have, we have a fundamental choice to make. And, and this has been clear since, you know, world War I post World War II Nuclear Age.

[00:34:40] You can either rely on your perception of objective reality, which is basically means existential deterrence. Or you can say, okay, there is existential deterrence. We, we think we know what you have and what you can do to us. We think you know what we can do to you, and that's gonna maintain a balance. We could either rely only on that or we can try to build more trust.

[00:35:08] Right. And this goes back to our earlier discussion of governance and, and Chuck's point about, uh, uh, trust, building trust. Um, and that's what the whole history of arms control was, uh, in the nuclear age. And it didn't come easily. 'cause the first instinct was to try to get supremacy to try to get dominance and the singular advantage to defeat our enemy once and for all.

[00:35:36] But, uh, after time we. We came to the realization that actually we may have to accept mutual assured destruction, uh, because of the technological might that the two superpowers at the time already had the US and the Soviet Union, and instead work on arms control and risk reduction through a series of

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mechanisms of governance, arms control, treaties, and, and systems put in place to try to reduce the risk of accidental confrontation and escalation.

[00:36:14] Existential deterrence is still in place.

[00:36:17] **Chuck Watson:** That's a great point that we know how to do this. And if you, that's a, in our discussions, you've repeatedly said, and I agree completely, we know how to do this. You look at the history of the, uh, intermediate nuclear forces Trait Treaty INF is I think a, a, a classic case study of this.

[00:36:35] I was in Europe at the time of the Pershing Missile Missile Crisis and how that evolved in, into what became INF. And you look, and just in the last 24 hours, we've seen how that's played out. That by abrogating and terminating INF, we've made the world a much less safe place. And that, and I, I'd like to hear your thoughts on New Start in particular, because we just had a, an example of how that's so critical because last night the US got warning.

[00:37:09] Russia was about to launch their missiles toward le so it wasn't, and since there's no way to know once that missile goes where. Were the Russians targeting Poland? Were they targeting something else in the region or was it going to hit someplace in Ukraine? And so those confidence building measures of early warning of notification that all goes away here in literally a few weeks is, uh, you know.

[00:37:40] The INF would've prevented a missile like renick from being deployed. And so the first stage is, well, that's gone and now, so Mark, yeah. Take it from,

[00:37:49] **Mark Medish:** yeah. Let, let me do a personal digression here because we're, we're opening up a big chapter, but I, I just wanna remind, uh, our, you know, our listeners and ourselves, I remind myself of this all the time.

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[00:38:01] You know how radical the epiphany was in the early 1960s that rather than pursuing, uh, the singular arms race to get to supremacy and dominance, uh, a winnable nuclear war was the phrase. Instead, we really needed to hedge our bets and start cooperating to try to reduce the risk. That this race to supremacy ends in Armageddon.

[00:38:29] And I have a personal connection. I don't wanna be solipsistic, but I have a personal connection. Uh, Kennedy gave this, uh, historic speech June, 1963 on the American University campus about a mile from where I'm sitting right now. And I was actually there. I was a baby in my mother's arms. My father was getting his PhD diploma.

[00:38:51] It was handed to him by JFK before he gave the speech, I guess, and or right after. Um, and that was the famous Deante speech, the strategy for peace speech, where Kennedy said, you know, and this, this was a big deal. He was, he was marketing a new idea. He was saying yes, we're, we have big differences with those godless communists in the Soviet Union, you know, that we've been competing with.

[00:39:18] We have one core shared interest, and that's preserving a world in which we can have those differences and still survive, and therefore we need to get engaged in arms control. And that led to the limited test Ban Treaty, which was a first. Big baby step on the pathway of arms control, and that led to the whole pathway.

[00:39:42] Chuck knows this history so well of the A BM treaty, the Salt Treaties one and two, uh, the non-proliferation treaty, uh, and then the, the star treaties, the INF, which Chuck mentioned, which is a singularly important breakthrough that came out of the Reagan Gorbachev dialogue in the late, in the mid, late eighties.

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[00:40:06] Um, and then it, it all, news start is the thing we ought to be talking about right now because that was a major landmark deal of not just Now remember, what are the steps in arms control treaties? One is about testing, another is about limitation of numbers of warheads, uh, uh, uh, uh, delivery vehicles, meaning systems and launchers.

[00:40:34] Uh, uh, you know, and, and then another category is the research and development around all those things, and then reduction of those numbers, right? So there are a number of elements to the architecture of arms control treaties, but all of it is, uh, made true through implementation and through those systems of cooperation that Chuck was mentioning, it's data sharing.

[00:41:02] Um, the breakthrough in the INF treaty is we finally agreed with the Soviets at the very end of the USSR on the availability of onsite inspection. So it wasn't just sharing information, uh, over a hotline or, or through computer systems or, you know, phone calls. It was onsite inspection going in both directions.

[00:41:25] So we could look at what you're doing. And of course, that's key to the non-proliferation treaty regime as well, right?

[00:41:32] **Chuck Watson:** And these are such interlocking agreements that when it's like that game where you pull the sticks out and eventually the whole thing collapses. Open skies. Which is no longer in effect.

[00:41:43] Totally. That's another, all of these supporting things that the different pieces get pulled out over time. And again, to be clear here, this isn't a Democrat or Republican thing because both parties have, both sides have been, uh, unfortunately in the last, you know, since the early nineties of pulling back on our, uh, engagement in this process.

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[00:42:06] **Mark Medish:** Everything we've said is very bipartisan. It, it really cuts across administrations, you know, it's, uh, a. Republicans and Democrats have, have made huge advances in these areas. They've also made big mistakes individually and collectively. This is all shared responsibility in my view.

[00:42:24] **Chuck Watson:** Yeah, I agree completely.

[00:42:25] And in fact, one other tiny piece of this, you mentioned research and development. Well, this development of the new generation, Nate and I had a podcast about this. The, uh, micro, the small tactical nuclear weapons like the W 76 dash two and the B 60 ones that enable, they make it easier and more palatable to use a nuclear weapon, which of course triggers the whole escalation spiral, that whole nuts versus mad.

[00:42:52] And so, uh, that. It's, again, all related to those issues.

[00:42:57] **Nate Hagens:** So I wanna, I want to get to a new start, um, and, and why that, uh, is important and that's like in a, in a few weeks that's supposed to be, but there are a couple of, uh, more fundamental questions I want to ask first, just as a layperson, are there any international agreements that the United States, uh, is a central part of that have any teeth at all?

[00:43:20] Uh, it seems like we're headed towards, might makes Right. Uh, you know, staring us in the face. Are there any remaining that are, are really important and solid and, and, uh, respected?

[00:43:33] **Mark Medish:** Non-Proliferation Treaty and new start?

[00:43:36] **Chuck Watson:** Uh, yeah. NPT, right. And you're, yeah, that's a good one. CBT is. The comprehensive test band treaty is still in effect.

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[00:43:42] **Nate Hagens:** So a follow up to that, for those who believe that the United States or any other country for that matter, would be better off by simply going down a route of trying to achieve total dominance through Mike makes right sheer physical force. Can you, both of you, walk me through some of the most obvious ways that that could backfire?

[00:44:03] Uh, in other words, can you explain why even the most powerful nation or nations still need this international governance and cooperation for a functioning and and stable world?

[00:44:14] **Mark Medish:** One key point about nuclear arms control, but this also is gonna apply to biological warfare. Ai, all rocketry, space-based weaponry is, is the dual use nature of things so that, you know, we say something is defensive or offensive.

[00:44:34] That's a matter of interpretation. That's a matter of motivation. That's a matter of strategy and policy. It's not hard built into the thing. So you can't look at a missile system necessarily and know what it is. What's the purpose? Is that there as a deterrent or is that there as an attempt to strike me first and win.

[00:44:57] Right. So there's this balance between strategic offense and strategic defense that is not self-defining. It requires engagement, diplomacy, cooperation agreements, that idea of collective understanding of what is it you are up to? What is it I'm up to? Let's talk about this and let's reduce the risk of a misperception, let's call it arms control, right?

[00:45:25] **Chuck Watson:** Yeah. And here we've got a a, an extremely practical example of that that just happened last night as we record this. You look at the Ornick missile, um, 15 minute flight time from launch to impact. Uh, warheads that were used last night weren't even really warheads. They were what are called kinetic, inter uh, they were kinetic devices.

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[00:45:48] They were basically just chunks of metal. Uh, but because they were moving it around Mach 10, they carried so much kinetic energy. They didn't need to explode this. The energy of the impact was sufficient. Well, those could have just have easily carried nuclear weapons, and you don't know, maybe through intelligence you can see whether folks are moving their warheads around.

[00:46:07] But honestly, you don't know what it is until it goes boom. And so you compare that to, say the W 76 dash two, which is the submarine launched, uh, missile that we recently deployed. One of those is launched. If you're sitting there in that command center in the Earl Mountains watching that hot datum and you're seeing that missile coming at you, you don't know.

[00:46:32] Does that missile have a dozen warheads on it or just one you don't know? Is that a. One Kiloton tactical device aimed at Iran, or is it a cluster of 12 300 kiloton devices going after key command centers in Russia? And so that's where, as Mark has repeatedly said, and I want to really, I. Emphasize this point, this communication and verification regimes that were in place between INF, between New Start, that's so critical at risk reduction because if you don't understand and talk to the other party, you don't know what they're up to.

[00:47:14] Open skies plays into this as well that, you know, I was just looking this morning at Western Ukraine and even with radar data, it's hard to see when it's cloudy, what's going on over there. So all of those things interplay that once you start to lose trust and lose information. As a military planner, you're starting to think, I've got to assume the worst that gets us into this.

[00:47:40] Uh. You know, do you start to think in terms of preemptive strike? Do you start to, and and of course once you're down that road and then we keep coming back to ai, but when you're talking about having minutes to make decisions, it's a extremely dangerous situation, particularly with that doubt factor that the AI's not gonna have a doubt it's gonna launch.

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[00:48:05] Whereas is Nate, we've talked about in the past, you have the guy that's sitting there sweating it out, thinking, is this a real launch or not? And rolls the dice on humanity and says, I'm going to, I'm going to take the chance because I don't want to end the world. And we're starting to lose that.

[00:48:26] **Mark Medish:** Well, lemme just complicate that picture a a little bit because this, this is the key point.

[00:48:31] Um, and this is where we need now. Why, why? This isn't just the 1960s situation where you had two superpowers. Really, nuclear was the most urgent issue. Biological, chemical a bit, but really it was nuclear. Today we really have a technological quadrangle that is interrelated. Nuclear space, biological and ai.

[00:48:59] And ai. The the first three are dual use. They can be for the good, for the bad. AI is omni use, it can cut through everything. It can become a platform. And if it, if it's a self deciding platform, it's an even bigger challenge, right? That it, it eliminates human agency. And AI starts developing its own biological weapons.

[00:49:22] AI starts to decide on nuclear positioning. Nuclear, uh, uh, use. We, you know, heaven forbid, but that's the technological quadrangle we face. But we face it with multiple powers. It's, it's the us, Russia, China, and a number of smaller. Great powers who have varying degrees of nuclear, biological, and AI capacity.

[00:49:50] We can name them. It's not a big number, but it, but, so that's the complexity of the current situation that we need to try to get under control through governance and not just relying on existential deterrence.

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[00:50:04] **Chuck Watson:** And again, it's worse than that. Uh, we had an example last year, you look at how hypersonic weapons are influencing that the US came very close to losing an aircraft carrier off of Yemen last year to Yemen.

[00:50:17] And so as these weapons proliferate and as the, the technology, these different technologies proliferate down lower and lower in the food chain, where even quasi-governmental and re, re and, uh, independence groups or however you want to classify them, terrorists, whatever, you know, the, the situation is, um.

[00:50:42] **Nate Hagens:** You

[00:50:42] **Chuck Watson:** know, I.

[00:50:45] **Nate Hagens:** As, at least you, Chuck deeply know this. Um, I care about the biosphere and climate change and biodiversity and the other species and, and all that with respect to human ecological overshoot, but none of that matters if this doesn't go right. Uh, and I, I keep feeling that in my, in my gut, um, that this is the central issue that we need to solve as humans at this 11th hour.

[00:51:16] So, mark, uh, on, on February 5th, the US and Russia are gonna need to decide whether to extend the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, also called New Start, S-T-A-R-T. You've been paying close attention to this situation. Um, we've mentioned it a few times. Maybe just briefly explain to us what this treaty is, why it's so important, and what you hope might happen in February.

[00:51:43] **Mark Medish:** New start. Um, which was, I guess, signed around 20 10, 20 11. So, um, 15 years ago, uh, put in place. Obama, it was an Obama Putin, were the ones who finally signed it. But of course, it, it was the culmination of work that had gone on for years before that, uh. News start has several really distinguishing features.

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[00:52:04] It was a very substantial reduction in numbers of agreed warheads, uh, uh, delivery vehicles and launchers. Right? This in 15 1,550, I think was the warhead limitation on both sides. This is coming way down from both the US and Soviet Union, Russia having tens of thousands of, of, uh, major nuclear warheads.

[00:52:30] So really a, a, a huge numerical reduction, but also very strong data sharing protocols. Uh, so a development of what Chuck was referring to earlier, the, the whole onsite inspection verification aspect. Remember, trust, but verify. So we're always trying to pioneer better verification schemes that, uh, you know, help us have more.

[00:53:00] Assurance that the other side is complying. Okay, so New Start has those protocols. The treaty, on its own terms, expires on Feb, I think February 5th of this year. So we have a window. Interestingly, it was President Putin back in September of last year who said that Russia would be willing to extend by a year or at least a year, uh, implementation of New Start.

[00:53:29] So not a formal extension of the treaty or new negotiation, but just by, by, uh, commitment. We will extend the implementation and, uh, president Trump so far has signaled an interest in that, but we have not formally stated that we're willing to do so. So there's an opportunity window here, I believe, for Washington and Moscow, uh, to indicate formally an intent to continue compliance with New Start, which I think does provide some greater risk reduction in this very perilous nuclear environment, right where we're clearly in the middle of a new Cold War and we're trying to avoid a new World War.

[00:54:16] And for my money, I'd rather have Cold War II than World War iii. We're edging toward the latter.

[00:54:24] **Chuck Watson:** And that's a, uh, even as recently as I was monitoring, uh, uh, Maria Rova, she's the spokeswoman for the foreign Ministry, brought this

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up earlier this week, and that, uh, there had been several, according to her, uh, propo approaches to Washington.

[00:54:44] Uh, to, as you say, it's simple. Just if Trump comes out and says. Let's keep this going for another year. Russia has said, that's fine, that's what we need to do while we discuss whether to extend, or the big complaint the US has always had is, well, these treaties don't include China, but China is, there's still plenty of time.

[00:55:07] And in fact, China just recently published their nuclear philosophy strategy, uh, document and, uh, their nuclear doctrine document. And there's a lot of openings both with, with them as well as some of the lesser powers. And this kind of brings us back to this whole issue of. Of governance, of how do we make decisions?

[00:55:32] Why is it that something simple like this, which again, as you say this is a, would be a great Dees escalatory move. It's tremendous confidence building and trust building move. Why can't, why? Why does it seem like we can't do simple stuff like that?

[00:55:49] **Nate Hagens:** Why wouldn't we do it? What would be the argument for not re restarting the, the start agreement?

[00:55:57] **Chuck Watson:** The argument from the military side has always been that, uh, China's not in it and that we need to build up to counter China. And this is a similar argument that was used for aborting the INF and uh, some of the other agreements was that, well, if China's not in it, they become such a big player that. We are limited because of our agreements with Russia, but we're not, but China's not limited, and therefore we have to abrogate the agreements with Russia so we can build up to face China.

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[00:56:31] But of course, as we've just seen, that's kind of an absurd argument because that screws us with respect to Russia who is already in a position to Right. Take advantage of not being in those agreements.

[00:56:43] **Mark Medish:** Exactly right. And the the other vector, uh, at play here is that, you know, the whole, uh, golden dome, the, the notion of a perfect defense is now, uh, being mooted again.

[00:56:57] Um, and this, this takes us back to the, the Reagan Gorbachev discussions, right? Where, where the, you know, the two leaders had this moral awareness. Moral awareness that isn't it terrible that humanity is threatening its own destruction? And yes, it is. But the problem is we're we, we can't put that genie back in the bottle.

[00:57:20] We have mutual assured destruction and any attempt to create a perfect defense, uh, is likely to trigger paranoia on the other side, um, if it's not done in a coordinated fashion. And so I, I think that the reluctance to continue with the strategic arms control has to do with this pursuit of superiority or perfect defense superiority in AI and perfect defense in, in terms of missile defense, which would have to be space-based.

[00:57:54] **Chuck Watson:** Yeah. And golden domes are already obsolete because you look at weapon systems like Poseidon, um, or you look at that are, are not missile I-I-C-B-M based. Uh, you look at the Poseidon, is the nuclear torpedo that Russia has developed. It can, they can launch them. It can sit out there and cruise around under the oceans for potentially months before it finally strikes nuclear cruise missiles that they've been in, uh, in development.

[00:58:18] And again, this comes back to, uh, this whole question of how is it that we. From a governance standpoint, our decision making process, why are our leaders making these flawed decisions? You know, is it just, we were lucky that

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we had Reagan and Gorbachev in place in the eighties? Uh, why is it the current generation?

[00:58:41] And we have to look at that too, to say, well, if Russia's making reasonable proposals, why isn't the US or Europe reciprocating? And Mark, I'd be curious if, if you agree with that, that Russia has made some reasonable proposals that we've not responded to.

[00:58:56] **Mark Medish:** I agree with it, and I, I think that, um, you know.

[00:59:00] Chuck and I are both old students of, you know, the Soviet period, the Cold War, the, the, the, uh, the rivalry. There's a lot of mirror imaging that goes on, and the two sides are not monolithic. Mm-hmm. Right. We're there are debates going on. We know in our policy, uh, circles and there are debates going on in their policy circles.

[00:59:19] Uh, if you can call it hawks and doves or, you know, there, there are any number of labels you can come up with. But even during the Reagan Gorbachev period, the point was there were, they were getting advice from some of their folks saying, no, no, don't, don't negotiate with the, the Soviets. Don't negotiate with Washington.

[00:59:36] Let's develop our own systems. Let's not trust. And so that's been a battle that's not gone away. Um, you know, look, that's the lesson of the Oppenheimer movie. I mean, I was amazed at a Hollywood movie that's like almost three hours long could gross a billion dollars. Right. And it's about this history of the.

[00:59:57] Nuclear arms race where Oppenheimer, ultimately one of the developers of the, of the atomic weapons and hydrogen bomb ultimately stood for the proposition that we must not go for nuclear supremacy. We must instead

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step back and go for arms control. His rival Edward Teller led a group of physicists and, and military experts who were going for the opposite.

[01:00:21] They were going for supremacy, and we have that debate going on today in and around the Pentagon. Also in Moscow. That's really where the, the debate is, is uh, centered. Um, and it needs to be won politically through leadership.

[01:00:38] **Chuck Watson:** And that's where we get to those. You mentioned, uh, us being, uh, old cold warrior, uh, uh, relics here and you know, things like, uh, game theory, which is something I've talked about with, with Nate before and how it seems to me like some of those old tools are kind of breaking down precisely because you look at these factions don't really share that common.

[01:01:04] Fear of war in general, or fear of nuclear war. And you look at that, something that still exists on the Russian side because again, Putin grew up in then Lenn grad, and he saw the results of World War II and the impact on his family and you, we forget the poverty and stress of the, uh, great patriotic war as they call it, persisted well into the sixties, uh, even I would say seventies.

[01:01:31] Whereas here in the us you know, our veterans came back. We weren't affected directly by the war yet. Those veterans guys like Eisenhower, Kennedy, they had seen war. They knew what it did. And now we've reached a whole generation where, you know, our last few wars have been so clean. And I can assure you, having been in them, they were not.

[01:01:53] I mean, I, you, I was in Iraq, I was in Afghanistan, I was in Lebanon and have the scars to, to prove it. And, but the percentage of population, and in particular the leaders don't fear war and don't fear nuclear war. And so from a game theory standpoint, that's dangerous because how do you model that?

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[01:02:14] **Nate Hagens:** Mark, you were, I believe, involved in organizing the summits between Putin and the United States some 20 some years ago.

[01:02:24] H how, how do things rhyme today with that? And how are things substantially different?

[01:02:29] **Mark Medish:** Yeah. 25 years ago these, I was, uh, senior director on the National Security Council when, when Putin became president. Um, and so we, we organized the first few summit level meetings, uh, between the US president at the time, bill Clinton and, and, and Putin.

[01:02:46] Um. They were hugely interesting meetings. I mean, I, I would say that one of my takeaways is, well, one, the importance of symmetry. The, the importance of leader to leader meeting level meetings. Um, and this, by the way, is somewhere where I applaud President Trump for his willingness to meet with other leaders, right?

[01:03:07] And this attitude that, that. At one point took over Washington that somehow we're rewarding other leaders that we disagree with by meeting with them, I think is absurd. Uh, because the only people on our side who can have these meetings are the Secretary of State, the National Security Advisor, the president.

[01:03:26] You and I can't go and do that. Right? That that's what they're paid for. That's what we need them for. So for us to take a position that we can't talk to other people is self-defeating. It's not in our national security interest. So, um, uh, being, being, uh, playing a role in, in those summit agendas and meetings from just reminded me of how important this level of conversation is.

[01:03:50] Second point is that, you know. Putin evolved. The Putin we see today was not the Putin that was in evidence at that point. I think there was a lot more

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contingency and openness in the way the bilateral relationship could have evolved. And um, I think it's evolved in a very negative and dangerous way for both sides, and both sides bear, uh, a degree of responsibility for, um, for how it has deteriorated.

[01:04:22] **Chuck Watson:** The big criticism of Putin internally was largely that he was an Atlantis. You know, he was very much, uh, he had a great, he had been based in Germany. He had a great relationship with Merkel. And, uh, so that, I agree, that's been a. Uh, I would go so far as to say a sea change in his attitude of abandoning engagement with the West.

[01:04:46] And as you say, there's internal and external factors as to why that happened, and you can get into debates on that, but, uh, I think that was a lost opportunity.

[01:04:56] **Mark Medish:** I agree. I mean, we made certain choices after nine 11, uh, that. That, you know, because that's a wider context. And uh, uh, you know, we thought that our response to nine 11 was, was the correct one invading other countries, uh, in pursuit of, uh, you know, weapons of mass destruction or, or the Taliban or Al-Qaeda and all that.

[01:05:20] Well, Russian, China watched that, right? We made unilateral decisions to, to do these invasions. Those were wars of, of choice, not necessity as folks say. And in, if you're sitting in Beijing and Moscow, what's, what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. And they basically say, okay, so these are the rules of engagement.

[01:05:42] If you have the capacity to do something and you think you need to do it, you do it. And so that created an environment I think of, of increasing mistrust and, and the desire to expand NATO didn't help. Um, so the mistrust built on both

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sides. Um, and Russia made decisions, uh, that, that I think were, were super unhelpful, uh, uh, including Crimea and Ukraine after that.

[01:06:07] Um, so how do we get out of this mess? I don't know. But it, none of it was inevitable. That's the point. Human agency matters, leader to leader.

Conversation matters and we can back out of impasses, but we need to talk in order to do that. Right? Like the Cuban Missile Crisis. We need to engage. If we don't engage, there's great peril of spiraling, escalation of misinterpretation, of actions of the other side due to paranoia, lack of trust, and, and that could lead us to the brink of Armageddon.

[01:06:45] **Nate Hagens:** So we've talked about ai, um, we've talked about face-to-face meetings, uh, game theory, but what role does media play in, in governance? And is our current media environment, which is focused on clicks and virality, is it even capable of properly informing the public about issues that really matter? Like this one, I I don't, that's why I wanted to do this conversation with you because I don't hear this, uh, about governance and, and escalatory risks.

[01:07:15] What, what role can media play here?

[01:07:17] **Chuck Watson:** It's absolutely essential, Nate, that's part of the pro. It's essential in two ways. First off, again, as a democracy, we have to have an educated, informed populace. So that starts with education. And I think, you know, my wife has a or PhD in curriculum and instruction, and she could probably eat up several podcasts ranting about our current education system and how it's too much.

[01:07:45] And Mark mentioned this as well, it's geared too much towards creating workers rather than creating informed, educated citizens. It's too task oriented, but that, that's a almost a, a, a whole separate issue. The problem with

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the media is, again, it's not driven by, there's no incentive really to even inform people.

[01:08:08] The incentive is, as you say, it's entirely commercially driven. Uh, you look at the. Just enormous change in the last 30 years. Uh, you know, just as I blame MI six for all the intelligence failure or all the intelligence nefarious in the world, I'm gonna blame CNN and Ted Turner because that was such a change.

[01:08:27] It used to be that media, the news organizations were prestige. They weren't expected to make money. They were expected to inform people. It was considered the great calling of journalism. But then what it got commodified. Particularly after the nineties when it was realized, Hey, wait a minute, they're making money off this.

[01:08:47] So then you start to have, of course, Fox News was created and once you start to create competition in the sense of competition in a commercial sense, then you start to get to targeting. Then you start to get to the point where what you're caring about is increasing your sales and marketing rather than even what your core purpose is, which was originally informing.

[01:09:14] So we have a double problem here because now you've got this. I'm gonna be blunt here. Uh, you've got an ignorant populace that's now electing leaders, and so they're going to cater, and this again, is not a partisan thing. This, because you can point to just as many on the Democratic party side who are utterly ignorant and ill-informed about the issues that they care about, but they're emotionally vested in them.

[01:09:40] They get their information where they don't hear any contradictory voices. And worse, they've reached the point where when they hear a contradictory voice, they go, oh, that's not real. That's, we don't have a shared

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reality. We're starting to lose our shared moral and ethical systems. And so. That's again, where the whole media ecosystem comes into play.

[01:10:05] **Mark Medish:** No, absolutely. I mean the, the digital social media just sort of, uh, uh, accelerate and amplify the, the challenge and problem that, that Chuck was describing. Um, and again, the human brain has not evolved. We're our synapses are still basically limited to the speed that they had 3000 years ago or a million years ago.

[01:10:25] Um, so that, that's the challenge that how do you, how do we process this, uh, ocean of information, uh, o this overload. Um, uh, Marshall McLuen had the, the great phrase, you know, the medium is the message. Well, that, that's the challenge that we we're getting suffocated by, by the medium. And so it all goes back to this classical challenge of human agency.

[01:10:55] Are we, can we discipline ourselves? Enough to govern ourselves and to control the technology around us. And this has only become more difficult at a time when we need to be paying more attention and we need to be more engaged in actual human dialogue. Our technological media environment is making it paradoxically more difficult for that to happen.

[01:11:23] We're actually more atomized and polarized than ever before, despite this amazing ability to be connected. Um, so somehow we have to figure out how to use this dazzling technology to build community rather than distrust and, and, and division, which is basically what's happening today, all in the name of profit and entertainment.

[01:11:53] **Nate Hagens:** Well, mark, let me just stay with you then and ask you the 10 million. Species question. Uh, do you personally think, and then I'll get to Chuck as well, that humanity has the ability to overcome the issues that you guys have

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discussed today when it comes to governing, uh, such a complex technologically advanced society.

[01:12:15] And then what concrete policies, regulations, or structures might, might each of you suggest or put in place?

[01:12:23] **Mark Medish:** Well, look, I'll be brief. I mean, I'm, I'm an optimist by, by nature. Um, and, uh, you know, I have children, uh, and I wanna believe in, in the forward pathway of, of humanity. Um, so yes, I, I believe that humans can rise to this challenge.

[01:12:39] Um, uh, my fear is that bad things are gonna happen before we, we wake up sufficiently, um, to, to take the actions needed and to, to get back to the governance. Building exercise that we had been engaged in. I think we got too complacent, we got too hubristic and so we fell prey to the old demons of supremacy where Kings of the hill, you know, the sins of pride and that this applies to the west, it applies to other countries.

[01:13:18] Somehow we've gotta get back around a table together and start communicating, start negotiating. We can do this, we can do this. And you know, um, everyone now knows I work for President Clinton, but I'm really quite non-partisan. From a national security point of view, I want President Trump to succeed. So everything I've said at, in this conversation is in the spirit of we're all in this together and, um, uh, uh, we can disagree on other policies, but this we absolutely need to address together as a nation and as a common humanity.

[01:13:59] Um, the, the biosecurity challenges and the governance challenges that confront this little blue planet that, that we're all living on and trying to survive on together. I'm an optimist, but I'm worried.

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[01:14:15] **Nate Hagens:** I, I get the feeling like, Chuck, then I'll let you answer that. Bad things are likely to happen. And looking forward five or 10 years and the various scenarios that unfold, would the people in power today wish they could come back to January 20, 26 and maybe do things different?

[01:14:34] I think that is, it could really central question because now is the time when we can maybe veer off, uh, from the current path. Chuck, go ahead.

[01:14:43] **Chuck Watson:** It's interesting because I've served as, uh, you know, in both, uh, regimes. I, you know, I basically, I, my very first experience was as a very junior officer, uh, with, you know, in the Reagan White House.

[01:15:02] And so I've been there as, you know, as a technical, in various technical roles for, um, you know. Reagan Bush One Clinton. Bush two Obama haven't really had the, and had indirectly, even with the, with Trump and, uh, Trump and Biden as well. And so, you know, I, I can safely say that I found all of them to be problematic on some level, but to answer your, your question and also some very good, you know, you can look at them and say, there's things about that that you've done that's absolutely good and right, and there's things you've done that are not so good and right.

[01:15:44] So I think that, uh, as, and I think Mark would agree with this, that you can see good and bad in both. And we get too hung up on the political tribes in this country, but it's mostly about where you place your priorities. But you ask that, uh, I think Nate, a really key question, and I'm gonna split it, you know, can we get out of this?

[01:16:06] And I think that the answer is humanity. Of course we can, you know, as human beings, you listen to us sitting around here discussing this with our wildly different backgrounds and experiences. You know, if you go out on the streets, I

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have, I'm sure we do both, we all do. We have friends that are, you know, that have the red hat and the the MAGA thing.

[01:16:27] And we have friends that have the, the rainbow T-shirts and the whole bit and one-on-one. We operate perfectly fine. And that's ideally what our political system would encourage that direct engagement that Mark keeps talking about, talking to each other. The problem is, if you, so I think that as humanity, of course, we can meet these challenges, can our leaders meet these challenges?

[01:16:51] And there my answer is no, they can't. And the reason is, as I talked about earlier. The kind of people who can rise to positions of authority in this country are inherently unable 'cause of their personalities and the skills they need to reach that point unable to, to solve these problems. And so how do we fix it?

[01:17:15] And we've dis, we've discussed this a number of times, is that we've really got to figure out how to incorporate Arian views. We have to make it so that we value differences. And I don't mean that in the outward physical kind of way, the superficial way that people tend to talk about diversity, uh, uh, you know, that kind of diversity is trivial compared to the diversity of ideas and concepts.

[01:17:44] You know, I've, you know, as you know, I've been involved quite a bit with, uh, the climate change and climate research, and I've talked to groups across the spectrum. And my point is that I don't care if you, you want me to design a system that is completely in keeping with Mark's dust capital, I can do that.

[01:18:04] If you want me to design a system that's completely in keeping with, you know, Adam Smith and the Rise of Nations, fine Wealth of Nations, you know, we can do it that way. The, the trick is to be able to come up with these consensus systems that keep humanity at the forefront and that are common as. Mark mentioned with the first arms treaties that common humanity is what's

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gonna save us and getting leaders who are focused on that common humanity, and that's where the challenge lies.

[01:18:37] **Nate Hagens:** I have a closing question, but Mark, do you wanna reply to what Chuck just said?

[01:18:41] **Mark Medish:** No, I, I mean, I, I think he, he just put it so well, um, you know, uh, we can do this, humanity can do this. Um, but we've got fundamental choices to make, you know, arms race or the human race. Um, someone in the 1960s said, our problem is that we have guided missiles, but missguided men.

[01:19:00] Um, I don't know if it was Bob Dylan or someone, but it was a good phrase. We have to work on ourselves, on, on, on the leadership, on leaders, um, on public opinion. But we can do this. Uh, we have it in our collective experience. We have it in our, our common sense. We have it in our hearts to do better, um, the better angels of our nature.

[01:19:21] Let's work toward that. Domestically, also internationally. This is a big world. Um, we're, you know, we're not gonna be able to reform Russia, China, these other countries. We need to live together and we need to talk to them. And the biggest danger these days, we have less people to people communication with Russia today than we had at the height of the Cold War.

[01:19:45] That's super dangerous.

[01:19:47] **Nate Hagens:** So we need, we need continued high level conversations without AI face-to-face, uh, interactions on these issues

[01:19:55] **Chuck Watson:** and little things like why can't the cure of, or the Bolshoi, you know, I, I went to see Swan Lake last year from the Aesa, uh, ballet,

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which was really beautiful. And you get to talk to people and, you know, they're touring the us You've got the why, why, why don't we do those cultural things?

[01:20:14] Uh, hockey diplomacy. That used to be the big thing, uh, you know, during, during the, the Cold War. That's those pe scientific connections. You know why it's increasingly difficult even to have scientific exchanges across the, the, uh. A boundary.

[01:20:30] **Nate Hagens:** I had a podcast recently with Anastasia Eva on the biotic pump, uh, um, with forests in the world, and she told me how Russia is denuding its own forest, uh, with industry, but this is a global problem.

[01:20:45] And it just strikes me as humans, the world over are kind of,

[01:20:48] **Chuck Watson:** it's a human problem.

[01:20:50] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah. I mean, but my point is that the average people around in any country, we care about love and our dogs and our family and soup and forests and, and all the things. And somehow we've snowballed into this situation

[01:21:06] **Chuck Watson:** and that there's that famous song that Sting did.

[01:21:09] Uh, the Russians love their children too, if you remember, if you're old enough to remember the eighties. So, uh, you know, we, we've lost that. And gosh, we could have a whole separate. Long discussion about the destruction of the peace movement in this country and how the political left used to be. Uh, very much all about talking to the Russians and going back and forth.

[01:21:34] And now, you know, the political left in this country has become almost as bad war mongering as what we call the political. Right. Uh, was, uh, nice to see

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that representative Luna has, uh, was asking about or getting some members of the Duma to come over and talk. Mark. I see you had something on that.

[01:21:52] **Mark Medish:** Yeah.

[01:21:52] No, I mean, the peace movement, you know, it wasn't all, uh, just touchy feely. There was some wisdom in it. And I go back to that great line from all along. The watchtower, uh, time to stop speaking falsely. Now the hour is getting late. That's where we are.

[01:22:09] **Nate Hagens:** That's probably a good point to stop on. Well, we could stop there.

[01:22:14] Um, but I'd like to end on, on a somewhat, um, engaging note because some people listening might feel this conversation has been even more than most, a bit of a gloom fest. Uh, so do you have recommendations for the viewers, um, for finding and reclaiming agency in this rather fraught situation, uh, either in their own lives or politically.

[01:22:38] **Mark Medish:** Engage in American democracy. This is what we do so well, uh, um, talk to your representatives. Tell them, write to them. Tell them you're concerned about the issues. If you are concerned, tell 'em you're concerned about the issues we've been discussing about, you know, arms control. Write to your congressman and senators about the new start agreement.

[01:22:59] Um, right to the White House. Uh, engage in town hall meetings locally, um, uh, where you can, um, you know, basic democratic agitation. It, the, the, the toque villian level of democracy. We have to believe in that. Um, we, it's not perfect, but it's the best we have. Let's practice it.

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[01:23:22] **Chuck Watson:** Yeah. We're going into primary season now, and so really it's a, we're, we've got such a bifurcated system now, particularly with redistricting and all of those issues that are going on to create safe districts.

[01:23:37] The primaries are where you're going to get the, uh, I and I, I don't like the term moderates, but you're going to, that's how you're going to get a reasonable person into Congress and so the. The problem is primaries tend to be dominated by the activists, and so now is the time to intervene in the process to, if you've got three or four people running in the Democratic pri, for instance, I'm in a district that's absolute solid red.

[01:24:08] There's n, whoever wins the Republican primary is going to be the next congressman from the Georgia First Congressional District. So that's one of the things I plan on doing is talking to some of the candidates and trying to figure out who is most like most reasonable. And we need, you need as individual, we need to recognize that we are.

[01:24:34] Electing representatives, and more importantly, that these people need to be reasonable and willing to change their minds. We're not electing people to go to Washington to hold the line against the evil democratic, or evil Republican hodes. We're electing people to govern this country, to make decisions, make our lives, you know, not necessarily make our lives better.

[01:25:03] Everybody, you know, again, as you know, I'm a contrarian and also I tend to, I just don't wanna make things worse. We, that's you, how to make think what we should do in politics is that follow some version of the Hippocratic Oath where we're just gonna try to not make things worse. And I think we'd avoid a lot of problems that way.

[01:25:22] But again, getting involved in the primaries, this is the season to do it.

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[01:25:26] **Nate Hagens:** So gentlemen, thank you for your lifetime of work, uh, on, on behalf of, um, our democracy and, and the world. Um, I suspect we could have had a two hour conversation on multiple aspects of this, and maybe we'll do that again given that, uh, governance and politics and all these decisions are gonna be front and center this year.

[01:25:51] Uh, and maybe I'll have you both back and take a deep dive on, on another topic in the future. Um, mark, this is your first time on, on the podcast. I will, I'll leave you with the closing word.

[01:26:03] **Mark Medish:** Well, thank you again, Nate. Honored, honored to be with you and, and thank you for this opportunity. Um, uh, let's all work to make this, uh, a happier new year and, and let's not, let's believe in the operating system of American democracy that has accounted for our prosperity and for peace.

[01:26:22] Let's not throw away the operating system. Even if we have policy differences on other issues, we need to preserve the operating system, not throw it away.

[01:26:30] **Nate Hagens:** Thank you both to be continued, my friends.

[01:26:33] **Mark Medish:** Thank you.

[01:26:34] **Nate Hagens:** If you'd like to learn more about this episode, please visit [The Great Simplification dot com](https://thegreatsimplification.com) for references and show notes.

[01:26:42] From there, you can also join our Hilo community and subscribe to our Substack newsletter. This show is hosted by me, Nate Hagens, edited by No Troublemakers Media, and produced by Misty Stinnett and Lizzie Sirianni. Our production team also includes Leslie Ba Lutz Brady Hyen, Julia Maxwell, Gabriela Slayman, and Grace Brun.

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[01:27:06] Thank you for listening, and we'll see you on the next episode. I.