

AI Notes

Transcript

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As you know, Helene Cooper of the New York Times has is with us today, and I was struck by what She's said a number of times over the years, I think I've heard you say, that the Pentagon is the best beat in Washington. But, three weeks into Trump's second term. I'm coming. of wondering whether she's reassessing that and whether that's changed. As we all know, the vice president had to break a tie to confirm a former television host as a defense secretary, and who days later was forced to confront the military's involvement in a deadly mid-air collision above Reagan National Airport, a tragic thing for all. Bye! we're fortunate to pull Helene away for this brief visit with you to discuss her excellent work and her approach to it. This is not going to be a formal remarks type of thing. We want to open it up to questions as we go. But her reporting has just been excellent in every way. It's been recognized with two George Polk awards and a Pulitzer Prize. She also is the author of two books, *The House at Sugar Beach* in *Search of a Lost African Childhood* and *Madam President, The Extraordinary Journey of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf*. Please welcome Helene Cooper. and I'll I'll turn it over to you in just a minute. But I think I just wanted to start off by a question everybody's been struggling with and somebody who's covered. the first Trump term as you have, what lessons you're applying that you learn from that experience to your to your work now? Or is it a completely different animal altogether? That's such a great, well, first of all, thank you very much, Kevin, for having me, and thank you guys for letting me start a little early. I've been running around like a headless chicken for three weeks now, so I'm sort of a little discombobulated. It's a great question that you start with, Kevin, because I'm both trying to apply lessons from the first Trump term, but every time I try to do it, it's so completely different, not completely different, but it's so much more. It's everything that the first Trump term, the last three weeks have been everything that the first Trump term was, and then multiply that by 10. So it's all the lessons I thought I was gonna apply, which is take a breath, the constant, the whole chasing your tail around that we did the first Trump term. Those four years were four of the hardest years working of my life. They were also really, they were also, I mean, we did a lot of really good work. It was interesting, it was fun, but it was a lot, you know? And you lose, you lose relationships, you lose friends, you don't see your family. And going into this again, I thought to myself, you know, before Inauguration Day, try to make sure you take a breath, make sure you're not just the constant churn, you're not just churning out one story after another without pulling back to step back to look at the larger picture. And remember, there are stories from the first Trump term that I did that I remember, maybe like 15% of the stuff I did that I can still remember. The rest of it is like, who can remember any of that? And so it's like, so try to make sure, I was trying to tell myself before Inauguration Day, you're gonna be smarter about it this time. You're gonna, you know, you're not gonna let yourself, you're not gonna be waking up at four in the morning to check Twitter to look for the latest tweet that's gonna change how you cover the day. You're not gonna, you know, you're gonna be deliberate. And then like, you know, Inauguration Day happened, literally like 46 minutes after Trump was sworn in, they took down Mark Milley's portrait from the chairman's hallway in the E-ring and we were off and running again and it was immediate like. And so I don't think it's interesting that I'm talking to you guys now because I don't think we've quite figured out yet at the times how we're going to move from reaction, which is where we still are three weeks into it, we're still reacting to everything, to actually trying to set a real journalistic agenda ourselves where, you know, for me, the best part of journalism is like things are happening and you're covering them, but you're also stepping back and saying, this is important and nobody's writing about this and I wanna like, I wanna write this. We haven't gotten to that point yet where we're able to step back and think about the things that are important that we wanna write about. So that may take some time to get there. I don't think this is a realistic pace for either us as the reporters or the journalists covering the administration or for that matter, the administration. You're seeing this flood the zone strategy of, you know, all the stuff that they, you know, all the executive orders and that kind of stuff that they wanna get in, but it's hard to imagine that this is, this is a level that they can keep at. If they can, we're all gonna be run off our feet, I think. Like, do you think that's part of the strategy though? Yeah. To keep throwing things at you. in such a way that there is no time to step back and... take stock of what it means? I think that's clearly part of the strategy, but it's not, you know, at some point, you know, there's a reason we all got into this and we're

already having, you know, we're already talking at the times, we're already, I have a list of story ideas that I wanna pursue. There we have another reporter starting next week, Greg Jaffe is gonna be joining us on the Pentagon team, so we're gonna go from three to four, and we'll figure it out, we always figure it out, because I certainly don't wanna be just churning out live blog items for the next four years on Trump said this and Hex have said that. That's like, we're not gonna, you know, but you also have to remember that we are also here to record, you know, we're here to record history, and we're here to mark what's happening, so you can't take too much of an Atlantic point of view where you're gonna be that high, you know, you wanna be able to ascend to a high altitude, but you also gotta, you know, for instance, I was pulling into the parking lot here, and there's this, of course, I'm driving, I'm looking at my cell phone, which I totally should not be doing, and there's an email from the Democrats, and they're like, you know, we want Pete Hex to answer why he just spent \$49,000 to paint his house, a government-funded house of taxpayer dollars, and it's like, that's so, you know, down here, when you talk about, so you're going from, you know, that low altitude, that micro to all the way to, you know, questions of war and peace and life and death, so it's like, it's gonna be interesting to figure out how we handle it going forward, and how we also handle, at the Pentagon, this shift that we've now seen from fighting wars outward, to it almost seems as if now we're at war inside, we're fighting wars against, Pentagon now is at war with, it's too much to say it's not at war with the American people, but it's these are internal wars now, it's much more domestic, it's much more, we're going after diversity, the Pentagon is, Hexeth did a town hall this morning at the Pentagon, and he was, you know, we're hearing all about the, you know, the stupidest phrase in the world, he says is, you know, diversity is our strength, you know, that's the exact opposite is true, unity is our strength, and it's like all about the enemy within now, as opposed to, he's made no mention of Russia, he didn't mention North Korea, he didn't mention Iran, he mentioned communist China, but it was much more internal looking, and that's gonna be an interesting, I think thing to cover, and it'll be a challenge for us as journalists to figure out how we're gonna do that, and actually provide value to our readers. Well, with all that space over at the Pentagon, I'm not sure where you're going to find any place to put your I'm going to be No, I got my plan. Okay. So last Friday night, last Friday night, I was just the end of week two. And I had literally, I had gotten home. It was like, I don't know, eight o'clock. And I sat, I was so tired and I was like, I am going to make a martini. And I made a gin, a dirty gin martini. And I had, I had like five olives in there and I'm sitting catatonic in front of my TV. I didn't go out. All I wanted was to watch Shetland, which is this, this, is this like TV series takes place in the Shetland islands and nothing happens, which is what I needed. It's like, there's murder at the beginning of each episode. And then all of this is like pretty scenery on the Shetland islands. And I was like, holding my drink in my hand. And I was like, am I going to eat? Should I order Domino's or do I just drink this? I got to sleep. And there's a, my tech, my phone texts. And there's the, Lina Baldor is with AP. And she's one of the, she's like the vice president of the Pentagon press association. And there's a text from her that says, you just received an email I need for you to look at it. And I was like, fuck. And I opened my email. It was just like, it's just gone. I mean, I woke up the next morning, because I was like, it was four hours of this like, intense, what the heck? And I came down when I came down the next morning after sleeping, nothing, no sleep at night. And my full martini is still sitting on the table in front of my TV. So it was, that was supposed, that was going to be my weekend after like working, you know, 14 days straight. And we are pulling in like long, long hours right now. And I was like, nope, it was like, spend the weekend on the phone with the you know, so I have a plan. My plan is because you know, the Pentagon, you guys went to the Pentagon today, right? So there's no cell service inside the building all the cell services on the earring. And if you guys are probably in the earring, and you saw all these people, hey, out near the earring doorways, because that's where you stand to get, but you can't file a story that way. It used to be back in the olden days, before we were filing every second, you could go to the Pentagon, and it didn't matter that you didn't, you couldn't file from there, you go, you listen, you collect your information, then you go back to your office, and you write your story, and you file by 6pm or whatever. But we don't live in that world anymore. So for us, the big problem is going to be, how do we, how do we transmit information? It's not how to get information when you're in the Pentagon for us without a desk and a dedicated line and internet access. It's going to be more how you transmit that, you know, information. So I think I might go to just, maybe I'll just go and, you know, until before, until they pull my parking permit, maybe I'll just go turn my car into an office, you know, find out something, and I'll come back. Go this way, and then we'll go back. It's on. Thank you for being here. My question is, what advice would you give to your younger self when you started out? Don't do it! I don't know. I, you know, I still really like it. What advice would I give to my younger self? You know, don't sweat the small stuff. Don't be so... I was always very aware of slights, I think, when I was younger. I was always worried that I wasn't as good as everybody else. And, oh, they asked these people to do this, but they didn't ask me. And somebody said, this is Simon. I didn't get it. What am I doing wrong? What's wrong? You know, everything was something. This must be something wrong with me. I think, you know, I finally cut that out, like, about 10 years ago. And I wish I had done that. Not to waste so much time worrying about, you know, all the stuff that I think is going wrong and maybe focus more on what's going right. It's still a really... I mean, it's a really fun job. You do serious stuff, and that can be emotionally wrenching, which is a good thing because we're human beings. And you want to be emotionally engaged sometimes. You want to feel. And especially if

you're covering the Pentagon, you're writing about war at peace. You're writing about people getting killed. You're writing about people putting their life on the line. You're writing about all that kind of stuff, which is you want to be emotionally engaged in that. You want to feel some of it because it'll come through in your coverage as well. You want to keep remembering why you're doing what you're doing. But it's also, you know, I enjoy it because I like feeling like I still... I don't like sitting at a desk all day. So they took my desk away. I don't like sitting at a desk all day. I like to be able to be out and about and all over the place. And it's interesting to stay engaged no matter what. Thanks so much for doing this. I had a question about getting started on this particular beat. Kind of how did you kind of gravitate towards this beat? Was it pushed upon you? Did you, had you always wanted to cover that? I'm just really curious to see sort of how you got into Pentagon national security reporting. I'm from Liberia and I actually was an illegal alien for eight years. My family came here as refugees in 1980. We're running away from a coup, a military coup in Liberia. And I was going into the 10th grade and I got here and I was immediately all because I felt we were in Tennessee first in the North Carolina and I felt very removed and I wanted to keep in touch with Liberia, what was going on in the rest of the world. I didn't want to be stuck in Tennessee without any knowledge of all these and I definitely wanted to. The military coup Liberia had sort of upended my entire world and I blamed myself for the fact that I was surprised by it because I clearly had been keeping track of what was going on around me and I think I gravitated towards journalism after that because I didn't want to be surprised. I didn't want for my world to explode the way it had without me having any clue of what was coming and that sort of pushed me towards journalism to begin with and I read 11th grade All the President's Men and I was hooked. So I started off in journalism already interested in foreign policy. I wanted to cover foreign policy for a big newspaper. And when I got hired by the Providence Journal I was there for five years and then I went to the Wall Street Journal and eventually after two years there to the Washington Bureau where they put me on international trade which was my sneaky way of trying to get to foreign policy but if you're at the Wall Street Journal you have to really anybody hear from the journal? Okay that meant me pretending I cared about business and like I knew what it's like which I totally didn't but I faked it for like 12 years but anyway I was on the trade beat they sent me to the London Bureau I was based in London for two years running the Euro currency pretending like I gave a flying whatever or even understood it and then I at the journal I came back to Washington and 9-11 happened and because most of the reporters of the journal are gravitated are sort of shifted towards what does this mean for corporate America and anything remotely international at the journal we all got all the reporters who wrote about trade and international affairs and MF and all that got sent to detail to 9-11 in the aftermath and so I was finally in foreign policy in my backdoor way. I went and I imbedded for the third infantry division for the Iraq war and covered that and then I after that I left the journal and went to the Times I went to do a book first and then I went to the Times and the Times hired me on the editorial page which was all old people and then me and it's like okay I'm way after two years I'm like I'm way too young for this these people are like 80 years old and who am I to be opining on like anything so I went back to news and the Times hired me to cover the State Department I was the diplomatic correspondent in 2006 to 8 covering Condoleezza finally where I wanted to be it was like all my careers like I was the diplomatic correspondent for the New York Times and I really liked it and as soon as Obama got elected my boss was like nope I need you covering Obama blah blah blah he sold me this and I really didn't want to go to the White House because I never really liked politics but I agreed to do it under the we made this like devil's deal that if I cover the first term give me a another book leave and so I did that when I came back from that book leave in 2014 I asked to go to the Pentagon because I liked it. I bet it's granular. I hadn't been that crazy about diplomacy because it's just talking, talking, talking. You spend all this time reading a communique, trying to figure if they put it in blue or yellow and that's supposed to be significant. So it's kind of, it's a little bit arcane, but me, the Pentagon was something you could feel, you could see, it was war, it was peace. Watched people blow things up. You could write about life and death. And I got on the beat in 2014 and I loved it. It's a really, I've already said why. Thanks so much for doing this. I was wondering if you could touch on a little bit more. You mentioned kind of the shift in the new administration of the Pentagon from outside to within and the enemy from within. And I feel like national security reports were so focused on Ukraine and the Middle East the past four years. So are you, I know it's still early days, but how, are you shifting your approach to accommodate that? Like, do you have any insight on how you might change any of, any tactics or anything like that to kind of? It's a really good question. I don't know what the answer is because, and I don't think we're gonna have to, I would like to say, no, I'm not shifting because I don't think the enemy is within, first of all. So it's a matter of covering. You cover what they say, you look at what they do, and you try to write about the things that are happening. You can't, the world is always gonna get a vote. And every time in my, the history in my life as a journalist, every single time an administration has said, we need to focus on the domestic. We need to look, you know, we need to take care of our people here. The world takes their vote and something happens that brings you back into, you know, that's just the nature of what we live with. So it's not gonna be that long before there's the first crisis and we're gonna be, so it's like, it is gonna be a challenge though. You hear all this rhetoric right now, and I have to figure out how to navigate it and write

about what's important to the American people. You know, so I don't know how to answer your question because no, I'm not shifting, I don't think we have an enemy within. I'm not shifting my coverage to that, but I do still have to cover what the administration is doing and how it affects the people who work for the Pentagon, how it affects the careers, how does it affect the military? How do, is it gonna affect recruiting? Are we gonna see fewer people now wanting to join the military and what does that happen? They have this word that they like to use there, which is readiness, and that means the ability for the American troop to be ready to go fight tonight. That's what you have to be ready to fight tonight. And if you take troops, the 82nd Airborne and send them to the border, what happens if you have a conflict in Taiwan or China and stuff like that? Are you gonna move these, is that gonna affect readiness? It's like that. So there are a lot of these kinds of questions that I think are gonna shape my coverage, but I'm still figuring out how we're gonna go from here. And this is totally my fault, but identify yourself in your news organization for Helene's benefit and for the transcript. Hi, my name's Hannah Demise. I cover the White House for eight years. and we are all going through a strange time of how the federal government is being restructured, agencies being dissolved and absorbed. I'm curious if there's a way that you're approaching this, especially for us, like, for me reaching out to people like I don't know what these agencies are gonna look like in the next few months. I'm curious if you have any thoughts about it. or, you know, what might be best way to approach this change that's coming. You mean when you say approach what, the workers or approach, you know. Making sources in that case and like, you know, reaching out to people who might not be there, like in X humans. I mean, it's just like it's a very different structure than what we've had in the past. I have half of the people on my street work for the government, and one just got laid off today, one got laid off last week. Everybody, you feel like you're a little bit around the walking wounded, but the institution of the United States, there are institutions. You know, you have lawsuits going on already, some of this stuff is gonna be slowed down. You just approach it the same way you approach any kind of crisis when you're talking to people. I mean, when I've been in, you know, the Congo with like women who were gang raped and who were like suffering under all these, you know, by troops and rebels and all of that, and you approach them as a human being. And that will always, the same principles that you use when you're talking to, because I think of them as, I think of the man on the street and the normal sort of civilian people, and I kind of put federal workers in that category as different than I do the big officials I cover. And I'm much, I'm just much, you treat the people who are, you know, trying to do their job in the whatever, the way you would, you know, with humanity, as opposed to being mean to the officials. My name's Sophie. I write for the Christian Science Monitor. In terms of, you were talking about thinking about, okay, you know, writing for the American people, what do people need to know? And overlaid on top of that, I feel like, is the question, it was just like the dilemma I've been hearing journalists talk about since I was in school, which is like the fact that half of the American people don't read news. There are probably more than half. More than half. That's generous. Just, okay, so many more than, so many. And just obviously the division and the distrust. And I just wonder if you could talk a little, I just don't even know how to approach thinking about that. I don't know if it's better to think about like, my own writing and shaping my tone in writing to be more dynamic or like catch people's eye more, or whether it's like, whether it's worth going down the avenue of thinking about, okay, do I need to like, use different language or approach this story in a different way that people, you know, an approach that I consider to maybe be just sort of, I've looked at the facts and here's my information. Here's how I'm gonna approach the story. As a reporter, I may know that's, I know that's not biased. I know that I'm just approaching the story in a good faith way, but I also understand that based off of information, like silos now, certain readers will see that as like biased. And I just, but then I feel like that's a rabbit hole because I don't want to change. Yeah. I don't know if that question makes sense. I'm just wondering how you think about that. No, it makes sense. I mean, you can take yourself in circles forever. You're never gonna make everybody happy. But that's why it's like, I'm really glad I'm not an opinion writer. I'm very glad I'm in news. And at the times we have, you're always hearing people saying, oh, she toned me down, my editor, he toned me down. I did, and it's like, but the mantra that you just keep in your head is let the story sell itself. If you've got the facts, if you've got the news reporting, you don't have to worry about your tone and your words and your pretty words. If you just, if you've got a story that you, and you stick to the facts, you can't dispute facts, facts are facts. And you just, so you try to let that be how, that, you let that be not your argument. Saying you're, let that be your argument is wrong because that's opinion data. But if you stick to what is accurate and what is actually, people will pay attention to you. You can hear, I don't know what we have, what, 15 million people who read us on the web and all of that, but when we break a story, it's amplified by a hundred, whatever at times. So if you're pushing and you're writing stories that are like factual, fact-based and you're reporting and you're breaking new ground, people will, it will reach people. You don't have to worry about that. People will find out. Every year, competitors will pick it up. It'll get amplified and that should be, and that in many ways is your best defense. It's your, it should be your calling card. Don't tear yourself up right now over how do I present this in a way that's not gonna seem biased. If you're writing, if you're reporting, let your reporting do your work for you. Hi, I'm Sabell. Um, I also cover on stuff for USA Today. Um, and what I want to ask about is, uh, we're going, we're in this time right now when, you know, we're not actively at war necessarily. Um, but at the same time, there is so much talk about, it's almost like we're in this like new cold war type of

period, uh, the way that, you know, Russia and China are covered. And so I'm wondering how, um, do you cover approach covering the Pentagon? How do you approach covering, um, our position towards this kind of stuff without sort of falling into speculation or kind of fear mongering type of, um, type of rhetoric. You mean when officials are saying China is a boogeyman and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, or when, Yeah, sure. And the general like sentiment also that people like people also take that and they kind of run with it. I find sometimes. Yeah. I mean, but you, you can recognize again, it's like everybody, so many of the people you deal with, they're going to come at this, come at stuff with their own agenda and you just recognize who you're talking to. If you're talking to somebody who's a big China hawk and they're playing up big time, some Chinese military exercises in the, you know, the East China sea and saying that, you know, you, you, you have to at some point trust yourself and look at what are you, you know, sort of what you're seeing or what you want and how do you want to report it? And you talk to, you know, I don't have that many Chinese sources, but I've got some and I don't have that many Russian sources, but I have a few. I have a lot of, I have a lot of Ukrainian sources and you're talking to, I'm, I'm at the embassy. Some of my best sources are like at MI6 who started off as little kids in the British embassy here in Washington and now are like, you know, running a lot of stuff out of in London. You, you create, um, you're, you're constantly meeting people, you have an open mind and you're talking to as many different sides of an issue as you can so that when you sit down to start to write, you have not just one point of view that you've listened to and that's so important. It will, it will make you more cautious. It will make you more restrained. I keep using that restrained word because I had an argument with my editor yesterday cause I was like, you're so restrained, you take out everything I write, but it's like, it's like, it's in my head. It's a good thing. And we, she said everything I just said to you, she was like, you know, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. So it was like, and she's right. She's right. Just because I want to, you know, with a twist stick in a little zinger or something. That's me. It was like, you, you, you, you do that again with reporting and with talking to keeping as open a mind as you can and talking with as many people as you can. And you know that you're going to be listening to a lot of the same officials right now who are now at the Pentagon adopting the Trump line. We're adopting a completely different line, you know, three months ago when it was the Biden presidency. So you got to like, you got to undertake a lot of the stuff you hear too, with a few pounds of salt, you know, at the end of the day, the military, when I'm talking to a military official, I value what they tell me on actual military operations and military, military strategy. I'm not necessarily going to them for like some high concept, you know, what do you want? What can you tell me about why we're doing this, that or the other? Because that argument should be made by the political side. And you know, when you're, you're writing about them, that this is coming from a specific point of view and you say that. So it's hard. It's not, it's, it's, it's definitely hard. And it's really hard right now when you're hearing people saying the exact opposite to you from what they were saying a few months ago. And it's the same people. Somebody used, I remember back in um, Trump, when Trump was first elected back in 2017, our trade reporters, one of our trade reporter had a great story about the same people, because it was all the career people who had been there with Obama and been sitting across the table from like, say, the European Union or whoever they were negotiating trade deals with, they come in again as the American delegation. And now they're saying the exact opposite of what they were saying, you know, during the Obama position, but it's now the Trump one. It's like kind of, you know, you kind of know where that is, where that's coming from. I swear I'm going to stick to one, one minute answers now. Hi, I'm Leah with CQ Roll Call. And I've actually read both of your books, and I'm very excited to see your name. Thank you for reading them. Yeah. But I wanted to ask, you talked a little bit earlier about kind of, it's going to be a lot of like flooding the zone for a little bit, and then kind of maybe we'll have a moment to move to kind of setting a journalistic agenda. Kind of wanted to ask kind of what you think our agenda should be as journalists, kind of maybe taking some lessons from the first Trump administration, like what should our agenda be once we kind of move after this kind of flood the zone? That's a hard question, because the first Trump administration, it was all about, you know, we're going to show the American people who this is, and he's doing this, he's doing that, he's doing this, he's doing that. And we wrote all these stories, and we did all this recording, and you know, and the American people have a vote, and they decided that this is all, they're good with this, or the majority of the American people by a slim margin, but the majority of the American people. So I think people now are very conscious, I think journalists now are very, I am certainly very conscious that this is a democracy, and the people have spoken, you know, so it's, I'm here, I focus right now on recording what is going on, writing about it, writing about the repercussions, writing about how it affects different people, all of that, but I'm not, you know, this is like, I'm not on some kind of, you know, not that it was before, but I'm not on some kind of jihad to show anything, it's like, this is, you know, the most more trans, the most trans, the more transparent people can be, the more you, the more you're able to cover what's happening, and let's just cover what's happening and lay it out there, we're here to tell you what's going on, you know, we'll probably will try to be as unbiased as we can, and just lay it out for you, including how does this affect Joe Blow, how does this, and there's a, you know, we're shuttering, if we shut it down USAID, or whatever we're doing, it's not just, you know, the poor African children who aren't going to get their malaria tablets, it's also, you know, the, to like a nuclear, to a nuclear

watch agency that's, that's screening, for instance, at the airport, whether something going through TSA in some country, in the Philippines is actually, you know, should be on the plane or not, it's like USAID money goes to all sorts of different things, so we look at why, you know, we look at sort of the impact, do you really actually want, you know, the TSA agents in the Philippines to not be looking at the stuff that's going on the plane, or do you want, it's like they're all these different types of ways that we can cover what's happening, and that's our job, and we just put it out there, and then people go with what they want to, you know, people are going to vote the way they want to vote, it's not our job to, to fix that, it's just our job to put it to, not our job to change how people do anything, it's our job to just tell you what's happening, and maybe leave it there, and it does, is as a reporter, it does make you feel a little less important, not important, I'm saying this wrong, makes you, it just, it does humble you a little bit, you feel a little bit like, look, here's my, you know, this is what I can do, I'm putting it out there, it's not your job to change anybody's mind, or to whatever, you can do what you do, and you move on, but it's, we do have a democratic country, this was a very free and fair election, and you know, you move on, it's weird though, because like, the first Trump term, all these people were always coming up to you as a reporter, oh thank you so much for what you do, oh we wish you, you know, blah, blah, blah, I always felt like, what do they think I'm doing, I'm over at the Pentagon covering Jim Mattis, you know, it's like, whatever, but they're all very like, and right now it feels completely different, it's no more of that, thank you so much for what you do, it's much more of a, you know, we're here to, we're just here, we're here to record history. something earlier about you're tending the network of sources that you rely on. And can you talk a little bit more about how you do that? You mentioned the group, some folks that are now MI6 who were British Embassy folks, and how you tend that network over time so that you don't lose touch and you don't lose the value that they represent. It's hard. It takes work. Contact list is quite deep. And I probably have at the very least friendships with a lot of these people. And you keep doing whatever if I'm in London, even for I'm like a football soccer hooligan. So I'm always going to London for Arsenal games. And whenever I go, I'm going to, you know, make sure that I go for a drink or I take some of my sources out to dinner or I meet up with them. It's like you're never not really working. And yesterday, there's a story that we are chasing right now, me and two of my colleagues that could be pretty nice and juicy. And we're trying to confirm this, the three of us. And I had gone to everybody at the Pentagon I could think of and I was just getting blank, blank, blank. No, we don't know. We don't know. We don't know. And so Eric and I yesterday were at the office and we're like, whoo, whoo, whoo. And I thought, wait, I need to go back and put my head in where it was in Trump one and think about all of my because I have a ton of Republican sources and I have a lot of, you know, there are a lot of people who are close to Trump who I used to talk to, who I haven't talked to as much in the last four years. And so I did that and I got really close. We're closing in on confirming this story now. And it's just sort of, but I did when I texted, when I texted her, I was like, how do I even begin this? You know, hey, I haven't talked to you in a while. I hope you're okay. How's your mom? And blah, blah, blah. There's just sort of like, and you know, that's what you do. Hi, my name's I'm a polling and data reporter for the AP and I really appreciate hearing about all of the kind of human sources and kind of the source network that has to be built for this kind of work. I was curious what role documents and data play in the reporting that you do and if the efforts to get that also leads back to human relationships or if there are kind of other ways of going about that kind of reporting. It's huge and I suck at it. We have some really good people in our office who are so good with FOIA and so good with the doc stuff. I am not one of them. I'm much more of Miss Chatty Cathy and I'm gonna be chatting you up and I'll be talking to you about let's go get a drink and stuff like that and that's how I get information and there are people like Eric Lipton who does investigations for us or Mark Walker who's like a FOIA expert who really good at the doc stuff and it's just like it's a different skill but when you bring the two together is when you can get some really good stuff. I was talking to Eric last night at the we had a reception it's like freaking New York Times of all we had a New York we had a reception at this French restaurant for the New York Times was hosting and you know it was like we're all invited to go and AG Salzberger was in town everybody was the managing editor everybody came to town for it so you know we all went but we're all like so tired it's like some people are thinking you know the last thing I want to do is go to a working event tonight it's like I was hoping I could go but right watch season two of Shetland but um but I was having Eric Lipton last night at that and the two of us and it's just like he's got he the way he goes after stuff is so different from how I go after stuff I have dinner parties that I invite sources to and I'm sitting around the table you know cooking for them that kind of stuff and he is like off somewhere deep in the bowels of you know something so it's but you know it takes all us again? Yeah. Fuck. Thanks so much for being here. I'm Skylar, a White House reporter with Bloomberg News. On your dinner party, just like, how did you kind of find your style when it comes to saying, putting yourself out there. I'm sure it's like a lot of trial and error. It is. I spent, you know what, this goes back to the who was it that asked me what would I tell myself to okay, when I started off and for like the first half of my career, I tried to be hard hitting. And I tried to be really smart. And I tried to be really like, I tried to be like Eric Schmidt. I worked very closely with Eric Schmidt, who is like the best reporter I know bar none. He is, he's, he's really, really good. He's a counterterrorism expert. He understands so much. He knows the military inside and out. He specializes in special ops stuff. He's done everything he's like they joke around that Eric has shit before they even leave the tank. The tank is that secure

room that they have all the crisis meetings in and they're all the generals, the four stars and all all of that are always saying, you know, when they're about to leave the tank, they're saying who's going to call Eric Schmidt because Eric already knows something. But I when I started off at the Pentagon, I would go into these interviews with Eric. I remember he and I, this is back in 2014. He took me with him. I just started and he took me with him to talk to the SOLIC special operations, low intensity conflict. The, the head of that, the assistant secretary for SOLIC was Michael Lumpkin, who is his former Navy CEO. He's very like, and I sat down, he's very like serious, but he's like very, you know, very, you can't get anything out of him. And Eric and I go in and Eric quietly probing and I'm trying to keep up with what Eric is doing and asking the same kinds of questions that I hear, but I don't understand anything they're talking about. I literally like they were, they were, they were dropping all these acronyms. I didn't understand. I walked out and I was like, God, that was tough. He was like, no, this was really good. He told us this, this, and this. And I was like, he did. But I couldn't do it. I couldn't like, I didn't understand it. I didn't, you can't get anything if you don't even understand what you're asking. And I did not. And it was like, and I spent years of my career. This was sort of, that was kind of the pinnacle moment where I was just like, I gotta be how I am. If I don't understand, you know, I can't be Eric, I can't be those reporters who were like, very, very, you know, I have my own way of doing it. It doesn't mean I'm not smart. I'm very smart, but I'm not going to be able to get those kinds of stories. So focus on the kinds of stories that I can get and focus on my own abilities and what I'm actually good at. I'm good at getting people to talk to me because I'm this chatty Kathy and I'm asking them about their kids. And I'm like, I very, I, what I definitely do that I think helps me is that I give them something. I want to gossip with you. So I'm going to give you a little bit of gossip. You know, that's my best way for extracting information is if I'm giving something, I'm never going to be standing up there just firing questions at people because I don't get anything that way. You know, they won't tell me. It's like I got the, I remember back when Russia first invaded Ukraine. And do you guys remember when that when that the Moskova, the Russianship Ukraine blew it up in the Black Sea. And this is like two days after and I was doing my, my, my favorite style reporting, which is cocktail party reporting. And I was there with a couple of senior American officials and one extremely senior one and we're chatting and I was how could Ukraine actually, you know, blow this ship up? I mean, come on, it's the technology and he starts grinning and he's like, and I was like, we did it, didn't we? We're the ones who helped them. And he was like, somebody might have told them where that ship was. And it was a very, like, blah, blah, blah, lie. And I go get in my car. And I was like, he just told me that we gave them the targeting thing. And I took that and we started chasing after that other reporters and we all, you know, we other reporters were chasing it too. But that was like, that's how I got that. That's how I got it. And then I took that and I horse traded it for, we horse traded that little detail because then the administration was like, you can't report it, blah, blah, blah. We don't want the Russians to know that we're helping Ukraine that way. National security, you can't report it. So we'll pause and we like have this. And then somebody else told, but we didn't report it. And, but we really wanted to. And then somebody told, traded that Julian, our CIA reporter traded it for another, another, another detail, which is that we were That's who whoever he told him about it said it wasn't as big a deal like you can have this Blah blah blah if you don't you know if you guys don't report this and it was that um God, that was so convoluted. It was that um the u.s. Was giving the Ukrainians Targeting help on where all the Russian generals were out in the field So that's why Ukraine was able to kill all these Russian generals And so we reported that we wrote it and as soon as it ran NBC was like, oh fuck this We've been sitting on this Moskova ship story we're gonna report that if the New York Times can do that So they pulled their Moskova show story Which we had as well as soon as NBC pulled it we pulled ours and it just snowed But it was great because it was a moment where We're able to actually show because at the time all these people was yet We're yelling about the u.s. Isn't doing enough to help Ukraine the you and because the Intel people don't want anybody to know Sources and methods they want anybody, you know Well, we're actually doing to help but we're able to break these stories Which were in the end did not lead to World War three Even though they were telling us that if we reported that you know It could lead to World War three blah blah blah blah because Russia would know how much we're helping Ukraine Etc. Etc. But it is this all goes to say Julie does stuff a completely different way than I do and Eric does things So completely different we all bring but when me Eric and Julian are working together We are so good. We like I have so many bylines with them because we Become at it from different ways And I think I now understand what I can bring to the table in a way 30 years ago I would have just been thinking how much I saw because I don't understand what the hell half of these people are saying And but it's also 241 Like so much stuff going on so sorry Well, we thank you for the time that you spent it's it's been. great. Thank you Kevin. Thank you.