THE ECONOMIC CLUB

OF WASHINGTON, D.C.

Signature Event

David Rubenstein's "The Highest Calling" and Admiral James Stavridis' "2054"

Speaker

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Partner and Vice Chair, Global Affairs, The Carlyle Group
Author, "2054"

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Washington, D.C.
Monday, Sept. 9, 2024

DAVID M. RUBENSTEIN: By now, all of you have figured out the trick that I use to get people to come to a book event for me: I have somebody that you actually wanted to listen to more as my – as our guest. And many of you have probably seen Admiral Stavridis on television. And I'll just give a brief bio of his, then we'll go through some questions about his new book and about things that you're interested in, and then we'll have a turn on that, and he'll talk to me about my book.

So, Admiral Stavridis is a person who was – has the best title I've ever heard, supreme allied commander. [Laughter.] It's a wonderful title. He served in that position for four years. And he took the position when he was only 53 years old, I believe it was. And so – but prior to that, he'd been head of Central – of Southern Command, and prior to that a variety of other positions in the Navy. Graduate of the Naval Academy; second in his class at the Naval Academy, where he was also a squash champion. And he has now written 10 books, 12? How many?

ADMIRAL JAMES STAVRIDIS (RET.): Fourteen.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Fourteen books. I can't keep up with them all. [Laughter.] Fourteen books. After he left as the supreme allied commander he went back to the Fletcher School, where he had previously gotten a Ph.D., and he became the dean of the Fletcher School for international affairs. And then I should disclose as well that he's now a partner and vice chairman at The Carlyle Group, so that's his most important. [Laughter.]

And he's written a novel with Elliot Ackerman, and it's "2054." We'll talk about this in a moment.

But first of all, what – when you're called the supreme allied commander – [laughter] – is there a better job title in the world? And is it harder being a supreme allied commander telling people what to do or is it harder to be somebody at Carlyle trying to tell somebody what to do? [Laughter.] What's harder?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Well, first of all, the best job title any of us can have is "dad." And I'm really proud of being a dad of two daughters. [Applause.] I have two daughters, and I have – from two daughters I have six little people who are all under the age of eight. And what you want to know is: What do they call me, my little grandchildren? They call me "jefe." [Laughter.] "The boss." So that's kind of a nice – that's a nice title, "jefe."

In terms of is there another formal title, I'll tell you another one that is really great because it's so historical and really appeals to old admirals such as myself. The head of the British navy is the first sea lord – the first sea lord. That's a pretty good title. I'd still take supreme allied commander over that.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: You don't have any title envy, though, right?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: No, I do not. I'm pretty content. The only problem, David, is when I go home and I ask my beautiful wife, Laura, hey, call me "supremo" – [laughter] – that –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Doesn't work.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: That does not work well.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, actually, what does the supreme allied commander do, by the way? What do you – they do?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Yeah. It's a great title. You're actually the COO – the chief operations officer – of NATO, which is a big deal. I mean, NATO has 3 million troops under arms, almost all volunteers; 800 oceangoing capital warships; 25,000 combat aircraft – big organization. Your job is information, ideas, flow of information, and above all operations.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. And so that's a pretty good job.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: So, in my time as NATO commander, I was in charge of Afghanistan. That was a NATO mission. I was in charge of the Balkans, of counterpiracy, of training Iraqi security forces. And my very favorite, David: I was in charge of counterpiracy, which for an admiral is a really good gig.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Wow. OK. So let me ask you about your decision to get into the world of private equity, which I had previously called the highest calling. I've changed my mind about that, maybe. [Laughter.] But how did you go – you went – you were the dean of the Fletcher School, where you'd gotten a Ph.D.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Yeah.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And how hard was it? Was it more difficult to be in combat or to be the – an academic head?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: [Laughs.] Let me tell you how I got the job as dean of the Fletcher School. I was finishing up my career in the military, and so I started asking different mentors, you know, what do you think I should do next. And everybody kind of had, like, a plan for Stavridis. It was like, hey, you ought to go run a big international organization, or you ought to go to Wall Street, or you ought to be a consultant, or – everybody had a plan. I asked Secretary of Defense Bob Gates, best boss – direct-report boss I have ever had, and Gates said, well, what kept you in the Navy for 37 years? Maybe that would be a clue as to what you'd want to do next. And I said, well, I liked the Navy. I liked being a mariner and going to sea. I liked, you know, wearing a snappy-looking uniform. I liked traveling the world. I liked the adrenaline rush of operations. But what I really loved about the Navy was mentoring young people, helping sailors. And Gates said: You ought to be an educator. And so, I spent five years as dean of the Fletcher School, and Secretary Gates helped me get that job.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, if you have the title of supreme allied commander, one would think you'd be as tall as John Wayne or something like that.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: [Laughs.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: You're not that tall, relatively speaking, so – [laughter].

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Yeah. Let me just clarify that for everybody. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So how did you – I mean, in the Navy, don't they look for people who are six-foot-two to be supreme allied commander?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Yeah, generally. And, yeah, I get that – I get that reaction a lot from people who first meet me. It's like, man, I thought you'd be taller. [Laughter.] And all I can say is people have underestimated me a lot as a result of that. So, it has not been a handicap.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But like when you were in the Naval Academy, there they're not so polite sometimes to the young people. So, you were short then.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Yeah.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Not a – not a problem then?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Well, I have a couple – I've seen at least five Naval Academy graduates here, and they'll know this term: sand blower. And a sand blower – because when you march at the Naval Academy and they form you up, they put you from the tallest to the shortest. And I was always at the back of the formation where all the sand and dust kept kicking up, so I was a sand blower.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: When you entered the Naval Academy, how many people –

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Can we move on from this part? [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: I have to – I just wondered, how many – how many people were in your class in the Naval Academy when you started?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: We started with 1,300.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Thirteen hundred. How many of them became four-star Navy admirals?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: One.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: You're the only one.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: I'm the only four-star Navy admiral.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Wow.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Yeah. [Applause.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Now, when you were there, I mentioned earlier you were a squash champion.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: I was – I was on the squash team that was nationally ranked, and I was a second team all-American in school.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Second team all-American squash player, wow, OK. Now, you told me a story once – if I got it right – that the world champion, who was an Egyptian at the – had been previously the world champion –

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Let me tell the story.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Go ahead.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: This is – [laughter] –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: You probably have it better than I –

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Yeah. The squash coach brought in a Pakistani world champion. He had won the world championship in squash like 11 times. And so, he came to work out with the squash team and the coach said, well, how do you want to do this? You want to, like, show them how to hit the ball, or whatever? And this Pakistani squash champion said, oh, no, I will play them. And so, he played a match with everybody on the squash team. There are nine people on a varsity squash team. This guy was at the time probably 40 years old, had a little potbelly. We thought, can't be that good. He beat our number-nine player 3-0, number-eight player 3-0, blah, blah, blah. Worked his way up to the number-one player, me. And I said to myself: You know, this guy has just played eight squash matches. He's a little pudgy. He's 40 years old. I'm like 21. I'm – you know, I'm going to – I'm not going to – I may not beat this guy, but I'm going to get some points. I'm going to get a game off him. He got in the court, and he said: Would you mind if I smoked a cigarette while we played? [Laughter.] And he lit – [laughs] – he lit up a cigarette, a Winston as I recall, and he beat me pointless. I lost three games without winning a point. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Wow.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: I'll tell you what I learned from that, by the way, is no matter who you are, if you're David Rubenstein at the top of the world, there is always someone better. That's a good lesson.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But you didn't take up smoking, then? [Laughter.]

ADM. STAVRIDIS: I probably should have. [Laughs.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So let me ask you a couple military questions, if I could.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Sure.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: You're on TV a lot in the mornings. I watch you on various MSNBC and other shows. Do they call you the night before to say be ready, or do you just – they wake you up? Or how do you get ready for each of these shows?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Yeah, generally not. There's no initial call. My wonderful friend Andrea Mitchell is here, and I was on her show. Join me in a round of applause for one of the great journalists of our time. [Laughter.]

So, I was on Andrea's wonderful show at noon, and I – you know, I probably had three hours' notice, and the topic was, well, we're going to talk about the Middle East. That's about the most I ever get. But I think – and Andrea would answer this question better than I – it's probably good because you get a more direct, visceral response from the person you're interviewing.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, you keep up with what's going on by talking to people who are currently in the Navy or maybe in the military. You have pretty good contacts there. You ever, when you're doing an interview, worry whether you're releasing classified information because sometimes people tell you something that maybe they shouldn't have told you?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: I do, and that's a serious obligation of anyone who has a clearance. I still maintain a top-secret compartmented clearance. I hold that through Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory. And I am incredibly careful never to reveal anything classified. But what it does allow me, David, is to see what's happening at a classified level, and then I can shape and not put out something that I know is false because of classified material.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: By the way, you are apolitical.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: I am.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Are you registered as an independent, or?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: I am. I have always – and I think this is a good thing for any military officer, any military person – I'm a registered independent. I've never made a political contribution. I've never endorsed a candidate. Yet, I was vetted for vice president by Hillary Clinton, one of six people vetted, and I was offered a Cabinet post by Donald Trump. I think of that as two bullets whizzing by my head at, like, really close range. [Laughter.] The point is, I think our military needs to be quite independent.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. All right, talk about Russia-Ukraine for a moment.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Sure.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: I think the United States has tried to help Ukraine as much as possible, but we didn't give them a lot of weapons they wanted early on. Do you think that was a mistake?

And do you think we could have done a better job of convincing our allies to get involved earlier than they did?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: I do. I think we have been – military expression here – we've been late to need with many of these weapons systems. And it's understandable. Russia is a nuclear-armed power, and we want to avoid this escalating to a situation that becomes – not to be overly dramatic but becomes potentially apocalyptic. So, we want to manage this sensibly.

Having said that – and I've had these conversations with senior leaders of this administration – I wish we had moved faster with M1A1 tanks, faster with F-16s, faster with cluster munitions, faster with ATACMS, faster with HIMARS. You get the idea.

And I'll close with this, David. In a couple of weeks, President Zelensky is going to come here and lay out the case for Ukraine to be authorized to conduct deeper-strike missions into Russia. I support that. I think Russians need to reap the whirlwind that they have sown. [Applause.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: What do you think will ultimately happen? Do you think there will be a truce – a Korean War kind of truce where there's no real peace agreement but they stop fighting? Is that essentially –

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Yes. I think if I were going to bet on an outcome, it is not, unfortunately, going to be Ukraine heroically expelling all Russian forces from Ukraine. I think that's militarily unrealistic. On the other hand, I think Ukraine will be able to control the current military line. I think they potentially could maintain control of this – here's a War College term – this salient they have created inside Russia. And that, in my view, sets up conditions for a Korean War-like negotiation.

And final thought, the quid pro quo for Ukraine would be – it must be – EU membership and NATO membership. And by the way, when people way to me, well, I don't know if we really want Ukraine in NATO, my response as a former supreme allied commander is when this war ends – and it will end – Ukraine will have the most highly blooded, capable, innovative ground forces maybe in the world, and certainly in Europe. We want them on team NATO. We ought to bring them in. [Applause.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Let's talk about an easier subject.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Sure.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: The Middle East. [Laughter.] Middle East is very easy to figure out, but why don't you just tell us what's going to happen there? [Laughter.]

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Yeah. First of all, nothing will ever be resolved in the Middle East until the people of the Middle East decide that they love their children more than they hate their enemies. That's the fundamental problem, is a bitter generational hatred.

So having said that, the best tactical solution I can think of is the one that the administration is pushing, which is a six-week ceasefire, phase one; phase two, bring in an Arab peacekeeping force; phase three, get to some version of a two-state solution. Boy, there is a lot of rough water between where we are and where that comes. That's the best outcome. The Middle East I am fundamentally pessimistic about.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, when I worked in the Carter White House we were trying to get the hostages out, and now we know that the – those who had the hostages didn't want to deal with us because we weren't going to be in power.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Right.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, they waited until Reagan became president officially. Do you think the same phenomenon is at work now, where those who hold the hostages say why don't we want until the next administration, we'll deal with them because we're going to have to live with them for the next couple years? Or do you think it's possible to have a deal done before the presidential election or before the inauguration?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: I think it's highly unlikely but not impossible that a deal could get done in the relatively near term, between now and the election. The reason to have any hope is the talent of our lead negotiator, Bill Burns – Ambassador Bill Burns. It is also the exhaustion of the Israeli people and the Palestinian people. The reason I am pessimistic about a deal being concluded is that for both Bibi Netanyahu on one hand and Sinwar, the leader of Hamas, both of them have little personal incentive to cut that deal. And therefore, I think it's unlikely we'll get there. I hope we do. My heart goes out to Bill Burns, Tony Blinken, Jake Sullivan, who have poured their selves into this.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: How can the Israelis not have known about the extent of the tunnels? I thought you had equipment that could kind of see through the ground and could figure out where there were tunnels here, and they didn't know, I guess.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: October 7th was a massive failure on the part of the Israeli military. Let's start with that. There are no technical systems that can simply look through earth any more than there are technical systems at sea that can simply look through the depths of the ocean and find our nuclear submarines. So, what you have to rely on is human intelligence, which supposedly is what the Israelis are very good at; physical proximity; and a number of different technical means, not to include seeing through the earth. Israel and their vaunted military and intelligence system failed the nation, much as ours did in 9/11. And therefore, they have serious work to do.

Final thought: The military center of gravity in Gaza is not Hamas; the military center of gravity is that complex of tunnels, 400 miles of tunnels. The Israelis must, and they will, decommission those tunnels. They'll blow them up. They'll flood them. They'll seal them off. When that is accomplished, that's when the fighting will stop.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So as a Navy man, I'm sure you know the answer to this. Right now, we have how many ships in our Navy?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Two hundred and ninety.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: We used to have, under Ronald Reagan I think, 600 or something like that.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: It was the objective.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Why have we – do we have so many fewer ships? Don't we need the other ships that we – what happened to them, by the way?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: [Laughs.] We do need more ships. I think our ships are much more capable than they were in the 1980s under Reagan. However, if you ask me as an admiral do we have enough ships, the answer is no. I think the right number, most analysts would tell you, is around 350. We're at about 290-ish. We need to increase that. And oh, by the way, China is building rapidly. Our ships are still better. We have more capability built into them. But quantity has a quality all its own, as the saying goes. Yes, we need more ships.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, there is an aircraft carrier that was built, the Gerald Ford, that cost a little more than $13 billion for one boat – $13 billion, you know, spend a lot of money for one of those ships. Can they be sunk by one torpedo?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: No. They're very capable of absorbing a lot of punishment, both from air, subsurface. But that carrier, that $13 billion engine of war, is the length – if you tilted it up, it's the size of the Empire State Building. It's a hundred thousand tons. It has 5,000 crew members. It has 90 combat aircraft. It's a very capable ship, and it doesn't sail around on the ocean by itself. It's surrounded by nuclear submarines, cruisers, destroyers, frigates. We have a lot of intelligence. If we operate the carriers effectively, they are at risk – your point – but they are far from vulnerable, easy targets.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, on nuclear submarines, they're nuclear for two reasons, I guess. One, they're nuclear-powered.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Right.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But they also have nuclear weapons.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Correct.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Is it possible for a runaway sailor to get mad and to say I'm going to shoot off a nuclear missile? Is that possible?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: No. I hope you believe that, and you should. The best movie if you want to kind of see how it could go sideways, with two amazing actors, is "Crimson Tide." It's the story of USS Alabama with – how's this for a cast? – Gene Hackman and Denzel Washington, commander and second in command. It's an amazing movie. It answers that question. It's not possible for a rogue sailor – you know, Seaman David Rubenstein – to find the keys and launch

the missile. But in that film, you see a pretty plausible scenario of a partially received launch order. That is kind of believable. So, no system is perfect, but, boy, there are enormous safeguards built in.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, we now know that during the Cuban missile crisis there was a Russian submarine commander who had the authority, without going back to Moscow, to launch a nuclear weapon from that submarine, and there was a vote among the top people, and it was 2-1 not to launch it. But could have gone 2-1 the other way. Is that still possible, that Russians can go – don't have to go back to Moscow to launch a nuclear weapon? And do our sailors have to go back to Washington to get something launched?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Because connectivity is vastly better, as you would expect, from 1963 – almost 70 years ago – the controls are better now. And I'm confident we would not see an accidental or inadvertent launch. And I'm also confident one or two people, a cabal on a nuclear vessel – Russian, American; and by the way the Chinese have ballistic missile submarines, other nations do, we get into classification quickly – but I'm confident those safeguards are robust. Having said all of that, we ought to be very mindful of the issues that are raised.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: There was a story – it has been denied – that one president of the United States lost a nuclear code. He has a card and has the nuclear codes, and if you lose the nuclear codes, what happens if a missile comes over and he can't find his card? I mean, we don't – can't launch a nuclear weapon, or what happens?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: I've been on these calls, and immediately – as nuclear threats are emerging, immediately calls are convened. Voices are not only recognized but evaluated. Again, without getting into technology, there are safeguards.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right. On China, there's – some people say China has a[n] interest in invading Taiwan. Are you worried about that? And it's been reported in the press that there have been wargames many times about whether China can overtake Taiwan, and many times our own Pentagon wargames show that China can take over Taiwan. So, are you worried about that?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Well, what I always try and do, both in military assessments and in life, is to put myself in the shoes of the other. So, pretend with me for a minute that you're Xi Jinping in Beijing and you're looking at Taiwan. And you've got three questions, because what you're really watching is Ukraine.

The first question Xi Jinping is asking, I think he ought to ask, is: Hmm, you know, brother Vladimir Putin told me he would sweep across Ukraine in five days. Xi Jinping was told by Vladimir Putin: I'm going to grab that little bastard Zelensky in five days and I'm going to throw his ass in Lefortovo Prison, and I'm going to own Ukraine. How did that come out? Well, Xi ought to be asking, I wonder if my generals are as bad as those Russian generals. Right? And by the way, I'm an admiral; there's nothing I like better than criticizing generals. [Laughter.] These are bad generals.

So, number one, Xi is asking himself, in a nutshell: leadership, military capability, can my folks really do this?

Number two, he looks at Ukraine and he says: Hmm, I wonder if those Taiwanese would fight like hell the way the Ukrainians are fighting. He doesn't know. He's never been to Taiwan. I've been to Taiwan a lot. I've met with Madam Tsai, the former president. I've met with William Lai, the current president. I've met with their senior military leaders. I think they'll fight. They'll fight hard. And that island is a resistance fighter's dream. It's an island surrounded by rough water. It's got mountains. It's got subterranean tunnels that have been built for decades. They'll fight hard. Xi knows that.

And number three, Xi asks himself, David, our world. Xi looks in the mirror and he says: My economy, it's too big to sanction, right? Eh, maybe. But could it be severely damaged by precision-guided sanctions? You bet.

So, bottom line, I think Xi – who is thoughtful, smart, strategic, long-range thinker, unlike brother Putin – I think Xi is not going to lunge at the ball and attack Taiwan. And if I were advising him, I'd say let's look at some other options here.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, are our weapons so precise – without revealing secrets – that somebody can sit in a submarine and/or an aircraft carrier and say I want to kill X, Y, and Z; here's his or her address and they're likely to be in that address that night; and they just shoot the missile, and they're that precise?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Yes. And – [laughter] – so we – I'll give you a nautical example. We have Tomahawk missiles. They fly 1,500 miles. We have a number of different variants. We can program a missile to fly through that door or that door from 1,500 miles away. We are – we're quite good at this. We're very good at launching missiles. We need to get a little better at launching ideas. [Applause.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, the Washington Redskins had to change their name. What about Tomahawk missiles? [Laughter.] People ever been upset about the name of the Tomahawk missile?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Actually, Florida State is who's really mad about it. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right. OK.

Let's talk about your book now. Remember that? We came here to talk about the book. So, it's called "2054." If we can get into that, you have written – before you wrote novels, you wrote how many books?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: I wrote 11 books of nonfiction.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And most of them were, I would say, about naval-related things, military, things like that.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Leadership.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Leadership. OK. So, then you decided you want to write a novel. And never having written one, you decided to have a partner, Elliot Ackerman, who is –

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: – a war veteran, five tours of duty in Afghanistan and Iraq. So how did it come about? Did you say: I want to write a novel, I got to find somebody? Or did he call you up and say: I want to write a novel; I have to find somebody that knows something about military?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Neither one. What happened was I went to my editor at Penguin Press, and I said: Hey, I've written 10 books of nonfiction; I want to write a novel. And he said – and I quote – "Admiral, you're a really great guy. You're not a novelist." And that was very heartbreaking to me. And I said: Yes, I am! I can write a novel. And he said, OK, write an outline, write a sample – you know, it was kind of like author boot camp. You know, after 10 books, you figure you're kind of past that point, but OK. Did all that, gave it to him, and he read it all, and he said: "Admiral, you're a great guy. You're not a novelist." [Laughter.] But, he said, I have a novelist. So, my editor at Penguin Press, Scott Moyers, connected myself and Elliot Ackerman. Elliot at that point had written four novels, including a National Book Award finalist, very accomplished writer, veteran, Silver Star recipient in Afghanistan and Iraq, White House fellow, high-quality person. That's how it came to be.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So when you're writing together, I remember President Carter once told me that – and he said it to other people, not just to me – that he signed a contract to write a book with his wife – late wife Rosalynn, and he said in their long marriage that was the closest they ever came to a divorce – [laughter] – because he found writing a – two people writing the same book is hard.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Yeah.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: You weren't married to Elliot Ackerman, but was it a kind of time that you said I wish I hadn't had been him – had him as my partner, or did it work very well? And does one person write one chapter, one person writes another one? How do you do that?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: The way we did it – and I think all writing partnerships are a bit different – but I had the overarching concept of the three books. This is a trilogy of books. I wrote the detailed outlines, and then Elliot took first crack at the first draft, and then we just would go back and forth. The only thing we really disagreed about – and these are novels about the future, so it's "2034," the year "2054" the one that you all have, and I hope you enjoy, and eventually in about a year "2084" will come out – I kept pushing for more futuristic touches, more flying cars, that kind of thing. Elliot had a more prosaic vision of the future.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right. So, the first one that came out, "2034" –

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Right.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: – that one is now being made into a movie or may eventually be a movie?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Yeah.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So, on that one, for those who may not have read it I won't tell the whole story, but the essence of it is that the United States and China are in a conflict, and ultimately we have nuclear bombs going off sent by the Chinese to the United States and by the United States to China.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Yeah. Right.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And ultimately, the winner turns out to be, after 2034, India.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Yeah.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And Africa, or?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: India.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Right. OK. So, what was the reaction to that? Were people upset when you said we could have a nuclear weapon going off here and the Chinese upset when you're saying that they would do that to us?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: There was a lot of upsetness [sic] about the book. But the essence of the book is not Tom Clancy. This is not good guys, bad guys; good guys win in the end, usually in the last 15 minutes. This is a book about both the U.S. and China who stumble into a war, like World War I, an inadvertent war. And both nations are deeply diminished by the war, and therefore the winner in that context is India. And it's set in 2034. Realistically, that scenario is probably more a 2050 kind of scenario. But I think it's a marker for the way in which the great powers can inadvertently stumble into a war.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right. So, this book, "2054," how long did it take to write "2054"?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: About a year.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: A year. So, you send drafts back and forth, or?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: We did. And "2054," as you will see if you crack it open, is set in that year. The Republican and the Democratic parties are gone. We have new political parties. The book opens with a president of the United States giving an address, and in the middle of his major speech, he collapses from heart failure. And the next scene in the book – this is all in the first 20 pages – is the autopsy of the president of the United States at Walter Reed, Bethesda, up near where you live. And in the autopsy room, his heart is removed, and the coroner holds it in

his hand, looks at the CAT scan that was done a few months earlier, and says: This is not the same heart. So, the book is about remote gene editing. It's about artificial intelligence. It's about the way in which the world of cyber and artificial intelligence can collide in our own bodies.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, in the book you have a character named Mr. –

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Ray Kurzweil.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Ray Kurzweil, who's a futurist. He's invented many wonderful things. And you have him living in Brazil.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Mm hmm.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Did you have to get permission to use his name?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Well, we thought about making the Ray Kurzweil character David Rubenstein, but we – [laughter] – we figured that was too close to home.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Wasn't going to sell any books. So –

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Right. [Laughs.] But we contacted him, and he ignored us.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Oh.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: And, yeah, I was sad about that. Ray Kurzweil wrote a book that inspired our book. His book is called "The Singularity is Nearer," which is about the merge of artificial intelligence, cyber, the human genome. All of those, in his view, are coming together inexorably. And we picked up on some of his ideas and played them out to 2054. He chose not to engage.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, singularity, for those who haven't come into connection with that word, means when human intelligence and manmade or artificial intelligence basically are equal, more or less, right?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Yeah. Let me – let me give you an example you'll understand immediately. Today, the singularity is all of you walking around with this. [Holds up smartphone.] You're walking around. You're connected to the internet every minute, right? That's phase one of the singularity. Phase two is this, probably within 10 years, 15 years, will be turned into a chip which will be embedded in your body, and you will access the internet through that chip. You'll still be Larry Di Rita, but you'll have this immediately accessible to you probably playing on your retina. This sounds crazy; it'll happen probably 15 years from now. Another 15 years, phase three – final phase – you, Larry Di Rita, will be embedded in a chip. You'll be in the internet, and that is your gateway to immortality. That's the singularity.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So, I wrongly assumed that your next book would be called "2074," since the 20 years. Why was I wrong in thinking your next book is "2074," which you've already written?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Yeah. It's "2084," and we chose "2084" for the third book in the trilogy as a bit of an homage to George Orwell's "1984," which many of you will have read. If you think of the three books on an arc, "2034" is great-power war; "2054" is artificial intelligence, civil conflict in this nation; "2084" is climate. It is a war that descends upon us because of climate. And that book will be out in about a year, and so that sketches the 21st century.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. And you're writing another novel by yourself. You don't need a collaborator anymore. You've got another novel.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: No. No.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now that you know how to write novels, you can do one by yourself, right?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Right. I've taken off my training wheels. And in October – October 9 – I have a book looking backwards. It's a book of historical fiction set in the Second World War, in the early days of that war, which is about great-power war in the Pacific – U.S. and Japan, not U.S. and China. It's about massive technology changes. And it's about the enduring human characteristics of love and war, and their impact. And here's the Easter egg inside that book. It's called "The Restless Wave." It comes out in about a month. It is loosely based on Dante's "Inferno."

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, were you always a prodigy when you were in high school or something, or?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: [Laughs.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: You always doing all these things?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Well, I was always short. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But did you – now, your father was in the Marines. Is that –

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Yeah.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: He was. And did you want to go in the Marines?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: I did. I wanted desperately to be a Marine infantry officer like my dad, who fought in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. And I went to the Naval Academy to become a Marine infantry officer, and everything went along fine my plebe year, my freshman year. And then after your first year, they send you out to sea. And I was assigned to a cruiser out of San Diego, and I walked up on the bridge of that ship as the sun was setting and we were getting

underway to go west, and I was – I was overwhelmed by the ocean, by the light, by being at sea. It was like St. Paul on the road to Damascus. You know, the scales dropped from before my eyes and I knew I wanted to be a sailor, not a Marine. So, I went home and – after that cruise and I said to my dad: You know, I think I'm, you know, not going to go in the Marine Corps anymore; I'm going to be a sailor. And what you want me to say is that my dad put his arm around me and said: It's OK. It's a great decision. My dad didn't talk to me for, like, two years. [Laughter.] And then – and he started talking to me again, but he never put his arm around my shoulder until I pinned on my first star as a rear admiral. [Laughs.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, by the way, do you ever get seasick?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: No.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: I mean, how do you avoid it? Some people get seasick. I don't do it. But you just never – have a natural tendency to avoid getting seasick?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: I think the best answer to that question is drugs – [laughter] – is dopamine [sic; Dramamine], scopolamine. There are all kinds of medicants. But if you spend time at sea, you'll overcome seasickness.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Oh. So, my father was a Marine as well. But he said to me, private equity is a better course. [Laughter.] That's what he said. But that's what he said. OK.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Well, let me – let me conclude on private equity. Someone asked me the other day how did I like working in the world of private equity? Which you very nicely recruited me to. And I said, well, you know, if someone had told me about private equity 30 years ago, I wouldn't be an admiral, but I would have a really big boat. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: An aircraft carrier. OK. So, I highly recommend – everybody has a copy of this. And I think the admiral is available to sign it, for those who want it. And everybody has it. I hope you read it. I have read it. It's very enjoyable. I don't want to give away the whole plot. But you'll read it, and I hope you'll enjoy it. I think you will.

So why don't we talk about the second most important book tonight – [laughter] – which is this book.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Well, let me – I hope you all enjoy "The Highest Calling." I've read it. I loved it, as I do all of David's books because they are formatted so often as interviews just like this. They're short. They're snappy. Yet, there are great ideas in it. So, "The Highest Calling," when you hired me to come work for you, you told me private equity was the highest calling. And now I am told the presidency is the highest calling. On the record, which one is the highest calling?

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, in the private sector the highest calling is private equity. [Laughter.] In the public sector, the highest calling is the presidency.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Where did you go to law school?

MR. RUBENSTEIN: University of Chicago.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Yeah, that's a very lawyerly answer, but I'll accept it. So, having written this amazing book about the presidency, what I want to ask – and I get this a lot – is why don't you run for the presidency?

MR. RUBENSTEIN: I'm not old enough. You know, we need to be – [laughter, applause] – you know, in a couple more years I'm more mature, I'd have more gray hair, if possible. And I just think you need more seasoning.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: OK.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But to be very serious, you know, to be – when I was younger, I didn't think I had the charm, the good looks, the money, whatever it takes to be in politics. And also, it's a very difficult career. And you have to think – when I said in this book, you know, think about our presidents. I came into consciousness about presidents when Kennedy was running for president, John Kennedy. And I was a young boy, 11 years old or something like that. And he got elected. I was mesmerized by him. And I did go to work for his top speechwriter, Ted Sorensen, at one point. And I was mesmerized by the idea of working in the White House as a young man. And I got lucky, and I did it.

But think about this. These people really want to be president. Everybody runs for it. John Kennedy, assassinated. Lyndon Johnson, run out of office more or less. Nixon had to resign. Ford didn't get reelected. Carter didn't get reelected. Reagan was almost assassinated. He came close to dying, and then he had the Iran-Contra problem and, you know, got through the eight years but a difficult time for sure. He was succeeded by Bill Clinton, who was impeached. And then – I'm sorry, George Herbert Walker Bush. George Herbert Walker Bush, who didn't get reelected. Bill Clinton, who had the problems we all know about. And, you know, George W. Bush got through those eight years for sure, OK, but he went through a terrible war that really destroyed his popularity in many ways.

And so, you have to say to yourself, why do people want this job? You know, you – sometimes you age dramatically. You sometimes will get killed. But people are obsessed with it. And it is amazing why so many people are so mesmerized by the presidency. And what I try to say in the book is it's the highest – the most important job in the world. When Woodrow Wilson went to Paris to negotiate the Treaty of Versailles, he had hundreds of thousands of people in Paris cheering him. And that was when people recognized, I think for the first time, that the president of the United States was the most important person in the world, certainly in the Western world.

And while it was – some people after him weren't so prominent, when FDR became president – and he really was clearly the most important person in the world, and presidents since then have pretty much been the most important person in the Western world, certainly, maybe in the world. It's a job that drives people to want to get this world – to get that job. And even

though you can get assassinated, you get impeached, you have all kinds of critical problems, people love the idea of being at the most important job. You know, people – it's like a magnet for people.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: So, if you run for president, which I'm sure you will, what would your slogan be?

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Vote for the other person. [Laughter.] No, I –

ADM. STAVRIDIS: No, I have one for you. I'd like you to write it down.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Which is what?

ADM. STAVRIDIS: It's about time for Rubenstein. [Laughter.] Or, more ominously, it could be, we're out of time. It's Rubenstein. So, you just hold that thought. We'll keep –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: I would say, Bill Buckley ran for mayor once. And he said maybe the same thing I would say. Which is, if I was elected, I would demand a recount. [Laughter.]

ADM. STAVRIDIS: So, this book, as you will see – and again, I commend it highly – is the story of 21 presidents. We've had how many presidents?

MR. RUBENSTEIN: We've had 45.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Right. So why these 21? How'd you pick them?

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, my books are not the sellers that "War and Peace" would be, or things. So, I my publisher has a certain view of how many – they have a view of whether people will buy a book if it's too fat or something, too big. So, there's a general view that this is the size that people generally will buy a book at. And that's – so I'm finite in how much I can do it. Now, I have an audio version of it where I put in more presidents and other things I couldn't fit into this version. But so that's the reason. I would have put more in if the publisher said you can sell more books at this price.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: So, does that mean we're going to have a sequel that'll be "The Highest Calling" second tier, or? [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Sequels work in movies sometimes, but they tell me, in the book world it doesn't work as – all the time. Maybe your sequel will work, but mine probably wouldn't. So, my next book I'm thinking about doing is – I have two of them that I've been working on. One is, is something for the 200 – for 2026, which is the kind of an explanation and a citizen's guide to the Declaration of Independence explaining what it's all about, how it works, and why it's important, and why we still celebrate it after 250 years. And then another one is about – the next one I hope to get done is what it means to be owning a sports team, and how other people who have bought sports teams how it changed their lives, and how it can be a plus and a minus. And so those are the two things I'm working on.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: I thought you would say, you know, you've gone from "The Highest Calling," you could have a book called "The Oldest Profession," and it could be about great courtesans in history. Have you considered that?

MR. RUBENSTEIN: I haven't thought about that. I don't have that expertise in that area. [Laughter.] But that's one of the reasons I don't write novels, because I think to write novels you inevitably have to put sex in there, and I'm not knowledgeable enough about it so I can't write that subject. [Laughter.]

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Let me go to the 21 people who are in here, and note an omission, in my view. And that is LBJ. And you have a technique, which is brilliant in here, where – for nonliving presidents, where you can't interview them, you instead interview someone who has studied their life and perhaps knew them. Susan Eisenhower for Dwight Eisenhower. But LBJ is not in here. The obvious person you could have interviewed was Doris Kearns Goodwin, who wrote "Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream." Why no LBJ?

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, I did interview the ultimate writer on LBJ, who's Robert Caro.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Of course.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And I did an interview of him at the Library of Congress once and a congressional dialog series. And in an earlier book, I did the interview – I had that that in there. I didn't want to do another one with Robert Caro at the moment. And Doris Kearns Goodwin wants to talk more about her current book, but it's about Johnson and Kennedy as well. But I'm saving that interview with her for another book. But I didn't have every president in there just because I couldn't fit everybody in, and I already done something on LBJ. That's why he's not in there.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: And so, as we wrap up the evening, I'm going to ask the most obvious question. And I'm curious how you will answer it. Which is, who is your favorite president? You've deeply studied, thus far all men. Who's your favorite? But I'm not going to let you get off that easily. Who's your least favorite? And let me put it in a context, of all the presidents who would you most like to have in the owner's box at the Orioles? And who would you not even let into the stadium? [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, let me answer the first one. That's easier. [Laughter.] To be very serious about it, there is one president who's in kind of head and shoulders above all the rest in my view. And that's Abraham Lincoln. When he was elected – when Lincoln was elected, it wasn't a natural thought that he would save the Union, because there were many people in the North who said if the South wants to secede – and before he was inaugurated, South Carolina did secede – let them go. We'll have our own country. We don't need the South. And that was a very popular view in the North. Lincoln wasn't very popular in the South. In fact, he wasn't on the ballot in some southern states. I think he got a total of 1 percent of the vote in southern states.

But he came in, and – as we all now know – the book – the story – the interview I did in the book is about how he got to Washington, because he came in a circuitous route through 60 different cities making speeches and so forth. And there was an assassination plot against him, and he snuck into Washington and then stayed at the Willard Hotel for about a week before he was inaugurated. When he was president, he agreed to hold the union together. And he did it in a way where it was more likely than not, we wouldn't win, because we didn't have probably as good a fighting machinery as we probably thought we did. The South could have easily won the war. Had they won at Gettysburg won, the South probably would have had a truce in some ways and we probably would have had a different outcome.

But he won the war. And also, during the war, he signed the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed the slaves, and then ultimately supported the 13th Amendment, which constitutionally made it possible to end slavery and then led to the 14th and 15th amendments. But he did all this with humility. Lincoln didn't run around the White House saying, you know, I won the Civil War by myself. I'm pretty good, all right? I freed the slaves. Shouldn't I get a pat on the back? You can't imagine him doing this.

He also had one other quality, which is amazing. Although he never had more than a first-grade education, if that, he could write in a way that nobody else really has ever been able to do about our country. So, the Gettysburg Address is 272 words. It's the best statement about what democracy's all about and what this country's about – equality and freedom and so forth – that anybody's ever come up with. So, for his ability to win the war, to free the slaves, to be humble about it, and also to be so literate and eloquent about it, you know, in my view, he's in a league by himself.

Now, terms of other presidents, who would be the person I wouldn't want to have dinner with? There was – you know, it's hard to know. William Henry Harrison was – died 30 days after he was inaugurated because he spoke for an hour in his inauguration. It was raining, and he caught a cold, and died. So that probably wouldn't be somebody I'd want to have dinner with. [Laughter.] I don't know how good of a president he would have been. Most people, when you have surveys of presidents – and I did a survey for this book, and I didn't really put it all in – but the people would say generally the worst president might be James Buchanan, because Buchanan actually didn't discourage the South from seceding.

One of the states seceded when he was president, and he didn't really care much about it. And he supported an amendment to the Constitution, which said that we are going to reaffirm that slavery is part of the law of the land. So, I don't think he was probably the greatest president we've ever had. But reputations change. Harry Truman left this town very unpopular, and now he's one of our better presidents, people would say. So, surveys change from time to time. And it's often said takes about 40 years after a president leaves office before you analyze the person's positions, and know all the papers, and so forth.

And, you know, I think we have – what I really wanted to get out in the book, though, is this: People should vote. We have about 80 million people in this country eligible to vote who don't vote. So, it's hard to believe, but we had about 160 million people vote the last presidential election, but 80 million people who were eligible to vote didn't vote. And, you

know, maybe we'd have more support for whoever wins the election if we got more people to vote for it. But sadly, we have so many people just don't vote. And I hope more and more people will learn about our presidents, realize how different they are, try to study the issues more, and be an informed citizen.

Jefferson said that a representative democracy only works if you have an informed citizenry. And the reason we have the Electoral College is because, at the time, the founding fathers didn't think we had informed citizens, so they thought we couldn't let the average person vote for president. We let the electors vote. Obviously, we have a somewhat different system, but it gives us now an undemocratic system because now in five cases presidents have been elected with a minority of the popular vote. And I think that's not a great example of democracy.

But interestingly, the only time we've ever had a physical, real protest was when somebody lost the presidency by 7 million popular votes. Usually, you'd say the person who won by 7 million popular votes but didn't get to be president would be upset would be upset, but the person who was most upset lost by 7 million popular votes. And, you know, clearly, if we have a close election again you can expect there going to be lots of challenges and the kind of – the problems we saw before. I hope that's not the case, but it'd be better to have a more democratic system than the one we have.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Well, let me conclude by saying, the thread between these two books, I think, is one of the power of democracy and the need for expression, your point, and finally, unity. Today, we are a deeply divided country. We must find our way out of this dark forest into which we have wandered. And to do that requires these kinds of gatherings, these kind of conversations, and a real sense of engagement in these United States of America. Thank you for spending time with us.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Thank you for your service to our country. I have a gift for you. [Applause.] Here it is. This is a gift.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Wow.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: This is a(n) original map of the District of Columbia.

ADM. STAVRIDIS: Wow. OK. Thank you.

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Admiral James Stavridis is Partner and Vice Chair, Global Affairs of The Carlyle Group and Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Rockefeller Foundation, following five years as the 12th Dean of The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. A retired 4-star officer in the U.S. Navy, he led the NATO Alliance in global operations from 2009 to 2013 as Supreme Allied Commander with responsibility for Afghanistan, Libya, the Balkans, Syria, counter piracy, and cyber security. He also served as Commander of U.S. Southern Command, with responsibility for all military operations in Latin America from 2006-2009. He earned more than 50 medals, including 28 from foreign nations in his 37-year military career.

Earlier in his military career he commanded the top ship in the Atlantic Fleet, winning the Battenberg Cup, as well as a squadron of destroyers and a carrier strike group – all in combat. In 2016, he was vetted for Vice President by Hillary Clinton and subsequently invited to Trump Tower to discuss a cabinet position in the Trump Administration.

Admiral Stavridis earned a PhD in international relations and has published thirteen books and hundreds of articles in leading journals around the world, including the recent novel "2034: A Novel of the Next World War," which was a New York Times bestseller and "To Risk It All: Nine Conflicts and The Crucible of Decision." His most recent book is "2054" which is about artificial intelligence and geopolitics. His 2012 TED talk on global security has close to one million views. Admiral Stavridis is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist and Chief International Security Analyst for NBC News.

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Mr. Rubenstein is Chairman of the Boards of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the Council on Foreign Relations, the National Gallery of Art, the Economic Club of Washington, and the University of Chicago; a Trustee of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, Johns Hopkins Medicine, the Institute for Advanced Study, the National Constitution Center, the Brookings Institution, and the World Economic Forum; and a Director of Moderna, Inc., the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, among other board seats.

Mr. Rubenstein is a leader in the area of Patriotic Philanthropy, having made transformative gifts for the restoration or repair of the Washington Monument, Lincoln Memorial, Jefferson Memorial, Monticello, Montpelier, Mount Vernon, Arlington House, Iwo Jima Memorial, the Kennedy Center, the Smithsonian, the National Archives, the National Zoo, the Library of Congress, and the National Museum of African American History and Culture. Mr. Rubenstein has also provided to the U.S. government long-term loans of his rare copies of the Magna Carta, the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the Emancipation Proclamation, the 13th Amendment, the first map of the U.S. (Abel Buell map), and the first book printed in the U.S. (*Bay Psalm Book*).

Mr. Rubenstein is an original signer of The Giving Pledge; the host of *The David Rubenstein Show, Bloomberg Wealth with David Rubenstein*, and *Iconic America: Our Symbols and Stories with David Rubenstein*; and the author of *The American Story*, *How to Lead*, *The American Experiment*, and *How to Invest*.