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Introduction:

STROBE TALBOTT
President
The Brookings Institution

Featured Speaker:

ANGELA STENT
Director, Center for Eurasian, Russian and East European Studies, Georgetown University
Nonresident Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution

Panelists:

FIONA HILL
Senior Fellow and Director, Center on the U.S. and Europe
The Brookings Institution

PETER BAKER
Chief White House Correspondent
The New York Times

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. TALBOTT: I'm Strobe Talbott and I'm getting over a cold as a result of global warming, so I apologize if my voice doesn't carry.

It's terrific for all of you to come out for what I think is going to be a first-class discussion on the relationship both in recent history and, no doubt, contemporaneously as well between the United States and the Russian Federation. In fact, I think we'll probably reach back into the late Soviet period as well.

The occasion for this discussion today, although the front pages of the newspapers, including the one you work for, give us an occasion to have this conversation pretty much every day, Peter, is the publication of Angela Stent's absolutely terrific book, *The Limits of Partnership*. And I'll come back and say just a word or two before I turn things over to my colleague, Fiona Hill, who is going to moderate a discussion among the four of us up here, which is to say she's going to be kind of a player coach because she'll have to moderate herself; has strong views.

Fiona, I think most of you know, is the director of our Center on the United States and Europe. And she has many things in common with the author of the hour, Angela. Both of them served as the national intelligence officers in the intelligence community of our government. Both of them, by the way, have not typically American accents, which is also an interesting point. They served this government and this nation very well, keeping an eye on I guess it was called the Eurasian complex when both of you were there.

And we also have with us Peter Baker of *The New York Times*. They're all authors. Fiona, along with her colleague in our Foreign Policy program, Cliff Gaddy, wrote a book on Mr. Putin. That's the title, in fact, and it's on sale in our bookstore. But you don't all have to go even to the bookstore to get a copy of Angela's book, which is

right outside of this auditorium.

As for Peter, he has a new book out called *Days of Fire*, which covers a great deal of ground, including President Bush 43's ability to look into the eyes and see into the soul of his foreign counterparts. Maybe that'll come up in the course of our conversation. And Peter and his wife, Susan Glasser, a number of years ago, I guess you updated it in 2007, 2008, something like that, called *The Kremlin Rising*, based very much on their own reporting from Russia.

So we have here a panel that not only brings to the topic a certain amount of MRVed expertise, but I think also shows our determination here at Brookings. That is to say Fiona and Angela's and mine to reach out to the larger community of people who are working on the issues that our scholars are here. Angela's very much part of the Brookings family. She is a nonresident senior fellow in Foreign Policy. And Peter, despite the demands of his day job, has been very good about attending a number of our forums.

And speaking of the larger community, I look around this room and I feel this a little bit of a gathering of the clan; I see any number of people, including a couple of people who were sources of mine back when I was an ink-stained wretch. And the diplomatic community is represented here today the DCM from Serbia and the ambassador of Georgia. Thanks to both of you for joining us. And maybe it's a coincidence, maybe it's not, but both of them are former think-tankers. It shows that it's a community that stays together over time.

I'm just going to make by way of getting the ball rolling before Fiona takes over and guiding the conversation one point about Angela's book itself and another point about its title. She gave me a chance to read it in manuscript. And I try to stay current with literature that's coming out about a part of the world that I've been fascinated

with virtually all of my life. And I think it can be said that this is the first book that has both scholarly rigor and accessibility to general readers that covers the full sweep and complexity of the relationship between the USSR/Russian Federation and the United States since the end of the Cold War. So, in that sense, it is a first and I bet that it's going to also be recognized as the best for a long time to come.

Angela takes us back at the beginning of the book a quarter of a century. It reminds me of that line from *Star Wars*. You read about that it makes you think of a galaxy far, far away and a long time ago. She starts basically with the relationship between George Herbert Walker Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev.

And that gets me to the one observation I wanted to make about the title. I think it's a particularly good title and it has its origins, particularly the word "Partnership" has its origins, in precisely the relationship between President Bush 41 and the last president of the Soviet Union. On June 21, 1989, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Bill Crowe, was in Moscow on a return visit. General Akhromeyev had been here to the United States. And in the course of that visit, Crowe we ushered into the presence of Mikhail Gorbachev, who said quite prominently and at least twice in the conversation that he wanted a new word to characterize the U.S.-Soviet relationship. And that word, borrowed from the English, was Партнерство, partnership. Now, once that was translated at Admiral Crowe, he was kind of flummoxed. He did not have any talking points on how to react to the president -- to the top man in the Kremlin saying there is now going to be a U.S.-Soviet partnership. But the fact is, even actually starting before then, going back, I think you could even say, in some ways, to the Reagan administration, the word "partnership" had been, was already, and would for some time to come been translated into the realm of policy, diplomacy, and even strategy on both sides. That was true in dealing with a number of very contentious issues in Europe.

I mentioned the DCM from Serbia is here. There was a period in the '90s, when despite the strong disagreement between the United States and the Russian Federation over the use of NATO force, particularly in the Kosovo operation, there was a high degree of coordination in our diplomacy to bring that war to an end. There were numerous accomplishments in arms control, which basically, at least for the time being put into retirement, as it were, the balance of terror. And I think particularly given the news of the day from Kiev, it's worth remembering that particularly in the early 1990s, the Russian Federation and the United States worked very, very closely to ensure and guarantee the independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine. And in that context, to eliminate and get the Ukrainians to eliminate their strategic arsenal, which is a very, very far stretch from where we are today. And I would say that the concept of -- both the concept and the practice of partnership lasted most of the way, though perhaps not all of the way, through Boris Yeltsin's presidency.

And then entered Vladimir Putin. And I suppose you could say we entered what might be called the Putin Era, not just in Russia, but in international relations. I remember being struck that Putin, who, I guess, would accept the title of Fiona and Cliff's book as "Mr. Putin" rather than "Comrade Putin," he made the adjustment to the vocabulary, including to the vocabulary of partnership. But I remember being struck a number of years ago, including perhaps I suspect you picked this up when you and Susan were in Moscow, when he would say, "Our Western partners," there was a touch of sarcasm in his use of the words.

So that brings us to the title of Angela's book, which is *The Limits of Partnership*, and I think it's important that the word "Limits" is sort of italicized, as it were, as is the first word that you encounter. And the real question, I think, or one of the questions that we'll be grappling with in this conversation and with you joining in due

course is whether limits go far enough. Is it the end of partnership and how do we work within the limits that are still there?

So with that, I'm going to turn it over to Comrade Ms. Dr. Hill. (Laughter)

MS. HILL: Thanks very much, Strobe. As you've just pointed out, we're actually here at quite a momentous occasion. When we first set up the time to do a book launch with Angela, we were initially aiming for Valentine's Day, but a few things kind of got in the way. Many of you might have seen the great website on Tumblr that was devoted to Mr. Putin, "Vladintine's Day," which was a particular favorite. We thought it might be appropriate.

In any case, events got away with us and now we find ourselves with this book launch against competing narratives about what's happening not just in the Sochi Olympics, which is still underway -- that wasn't exactly also the intention to have that as the backdrop -- but also about what's happening in Kiev. And as we've come into the room today, I'm sure many of you saw the news. There seems to be a standoff between the security services and the demonstrators. Many people killed already, lots of violence. This was not, obviously, an outcome that anybody wanted to see.

And that's actually part of the problems, Angela, that you've been grappling with your book is all these competing narratives about major events that have been happening over the last 20+ years. And as Strobe raised at the very beginning, we've even got this constant question about who lost Russia? What happened to the resets? Why do we not have any partnership? And what you're trying to do in this book is to stand back from all of this and the U.S. perspective and to create this rather overarching perspective on where we've been through these last couple of decades.

And as Strobe also just mentioned, it is sort of ironic that it's almost 20 years to the month or the day since the end of that trilateral agreement that you and so

many other people took part in, to find a way of brokering a standoff about Ukraine, the disposition of its nuclear forces, and, ultimately, what was going to happen to much of the rest of the Soviet nuclear arsenal and the military infrastructure that was on Ukrainian soil with the U.S., Ukraine, and Russia all working together so long ago.

So, Angela, what happened? What has gone wrong so many times over the last 20 years?

MS. STENT: Well, thank you.

MR. TALBOTT: And who's to blame, of course?

MS. STENT: Who's to blame? (Russian), right.

MS. HILL: Well, a classic question.

MS. STENT: Who's guilty? First of all, thank you very much for inviting me to be here. I also want to thank the three other people on the panel because you were all very helpful to me when I was writing the book. And you were reminding me, Strobe, when you talked about Ukraine, the agreement in January of '94, that President Clinton -- and it's in your book -- wore a button saying, "*Carpe diem*," because neither Yeltsin nor Kravchuk were very happy about this and they sort of grudgingly signed it.

I'll just maybe say a few words about my book and then I think we can have a broader discussion. So my book shows that U.S.-Russian relations have been on a rollercoaster since the Soviet Union collapsed and we've had these cycles of political boom and bust. And we're certainly in a political bust at the moment, as we've heard. And I would illustrate it by the trifecta of three major issues, and this is Snowden, Syria, and Sochi. And I will start off with Edward Snowden.

President Putin chose to grant political asylum to Edward Snowden despite repeated requests by the White House that he send him back to the United States. It was a conscious choice from his point of view and you could say maybe it was

a rational choice because there were great PR benefits to be gained by showing that Russia was granting humanitarian asylum to someone who had exposed the intrusive policies of the United States. And secondly, there's been an amazing fallout, I think, from the Russian point of view, from the Snowden revelations in terms of the deteriorating relationship between the U.S. and its European allies, particularly Germany. So that may have been quite rational from Putin's point of view, but it also, I think, was a conscious decision and it really led to the lowest point in U.S.-Russian relations, we can argue since when, but certainly for a very, very long time.

So last August, President Obama called for a pause in U.S.-Russian relations. He said we have to reassess what we're doing, where it is that Russia's going. I think we haven't heard that the pause is over yet, and so I think this is part of what you can see and I don't see and we can come back to that, that there's that much on the bilateral agenda for the rest of the Obama presidency in terms of relations with Russia. So that's Snowden.

Then there is Syria. And here, again, you see all the complexities of the relationship because we are cooperating with Russia on this very important multilateral issue in terms of disarming Syria of its chemical weapons. And we saw how Russia took the initiative last fall, when the U.S. was, frankly, not sure what it was going to do. And that process is working reasonably well. But then we also see that we are really fundamentally on different sides in terms of how to end the Syrian civil war, what to do about humanitarian intervention. Secretary Kerry yesterday had very sharp words for Russia and for its unwillingness to stop the slaughter by still providing arms to President Assad. President Obama himself had rather harsh words about that. So we do clash with the Russians over how this war should end, but we're also working with them in terms of the chemical weapons.

And finally there's Sochi. And that, again, shows competition and cooperation, in a way. I would say that the U.S. media was exaggeratedly negative about -- we've talked about this -- in their coverage of Sochi, by and large, before the Games opened and, you know, painting a very dark picture of what was wrong with everything. Since the Games have been on, it's been 10 days now, the media coverage has gotten more positive, the athletes seem to be pretty happy with the conditions except for the weather, which, of course, nobody can guarantee. But there, again, we're kind of grudgingly working with the Russians on some of these issues.

But we certainly have come a very long way from the heady days of the Obama reset. And I remember President Medvedev in this very auditorium giving a speech at Brookings, talking about his relationship with President Obama, opening his Twitter account, and, of course, going to eat hamburgers with President Obama at Ray's Hell Burgers, if you remember that, in Arlington. Anyway, we're a very, very long way from that.

So my book asks why has it been so difficult to develop a productive relationship between the United States and Russia? What would it take to maybe develop a more productive relationship? Or should we forget about resets and find some other way to engage with Russia that doesn't have expectations about finding some qualitatively new relationship? And so in the book I look at four resets, and we've had four resets since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The first, which was a brief one and Strobe's already alluded to the beginning of that, was under President George H.W. Bush. Of course, he only overlapped with the new Russian government for a year. And the great accomplishment of that, and Strobe's already alluded to it, was to ensure that Russia was the only nuclear state, successor state, in the former Soviet space. And then all the wonderful work that

Senators Nunn and Lugar did in cooperation with the Bush administration in terms of dealing with the security of nuclear materials and the whereabouts of Soviet nuclear scientists who could have sold their know-how to rogue states or terrorists groups. But that was a brief reset.

The second reset was, of course, Bill Clinton's reset, President Clinton's reset, the architect of which, of course, is sitting here. And that was a much more ambitious reset. It involved a much broader involvement both with the Russian economy, with Russian society, with building or trying to build the institutions of democracy. It also involved, as Strobe said, trying to get a reluctant Russia to cooperate on the Balkans, on Bosnia, and then on Kosovo. And it was also very much driven by the personal relationship between Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin. And another theme of my book is the relationship with Russia doesn't have that many stakeholders in it for economic and other reasons we can talk about. And, therefore, the relationship between the two presidents is usually disproportionately important in this kind of -- in U.S.-Russian ties and, therefore, the ties that were built up, particularly in the '90s, were very important for moving that relationship forward. It didn't end so well at the end of the Kosovo war and when President Yeltsin was physically not in very good shape. But still, it was a major force in the 1990s.

The problem is that Russia and the United States, or at least official Russia and the United States, tend to view what happened in the 1990s rather differently, and that's another source of one of the legacies between these two countries that you hear many complaints, at least from the Kremlin, about what happened in the 1990s. We tend to see it as a time of greater pluralism, of self-determination, of a Russia opening up to the world. As you know, it's portrayed officially in most of the Russian media as a time of chaos, humiliation, impoverishment. And it's part of the narrative of President Putin

that he's restored Russia from this (inaudible) situation in the 1990s.

Now, the third reset, as I describe in my book, was indeed initiated by President Putin himself. It came after the 9/11 attacks. Maybe Peter will talk about the first meeting between Presidents Bush and Putin in Slovenia; the famous phrase that President Bush looked into his eyes and got a measure of his soul. But it was President Putin who at that point, I do believe, was interested in seeking greater if not integration with the West, a better relationship with U.S. And in the fall of 2001, when we were involved in the first stage of the Afghan war, Russia was really quite helpful.

The problem in that third reset, as one of my Russian colleagues described it to me, is that what Putin was looking for was an equal relationship of unequals. In other words, he wanted the United States to treat Russia as a strategic partner, to recognize its rights in its neighborhood, its sphere of privileged interest; I'm sure we'll come back to Ukraine. He thought that that's what he would get in return for this support. Well, from the Russian point of view what came thereafter was the invasion of Iraq and the color revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia. And from the Russian point of view and the Bush freedom agenda, this was all tied to the question of regime change and the principle that the U.S. believed that it had the right to do this. And so this then soured the relationship greatly. Of course, the lowest point was with the outbreak of the Russia-Georgia war. And I guess the last -- well, yeah, the last formal meeting between Presidents Bush and Putin being at the Opening Ceremony for the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008, when President Bush told President Putin that he was coldblooded.

Now, the fourth reset, of course, is the reset of the Obama administration and that, I would say, started out quite well and was quite successful during the first term. And we know all of the results of that: the new START Treaty, the cooperation on more sanctions against Iran, cooperation on Afghanistan, and Russia joining the WTO.

The issue then was, and this comes back to the personalities of the leaders, that reset was very much driven by the personal relationship between President Obama and President Medvedev, and they seemed to have gotten on really quite well. And even though everyone understood that in this interesting tandem arrangement President, then Prime Minister, Putin, you know, was making the decisions, it was still the fact that the two presidents could relate to each other that made them able to drive forward, you know, a fairly complicated agenda.

Things started to go sour when President Putin announced -- Prime Minister Putin announced, sorry, that the two were going to switch places and he was going to come back to the Kremlin. Then you had the demonstrations in December of 2011. You had Mr. Putin blaming Secretary Clinton for paying demonstrators to go into the street. And after that, the relationship went south. And if you look at the picture on the cover of the book, you'll see the two presidents at the G-20 Summit in 2012, sort of about to shake hands, but neither of them very happy about that.

So I think just a couple more points and then we obviously want to open it to discussion. We have a very different -- the Russians and the Americans, their government let's say, have very different views of what an improved relationship would look like. Again, you come back to the equal partnership of unequals, Russia realizing that in the last 22 years it has not ranked as high in American priorities as America has in Russian priorities. I think that's changing now and maybe we can talk about that.

Russia's -- Putin is looking less to the United States than elsewhere in the world, eastwards and other in places, for recognition, for strategic partners. But for much of this time Russia was a very important second order priority for the United States, but not a first order priority. And yet, it played an important role in enabling us to achieve our goals in our first order priorities. But there's been a sort of an asymmetry and a

mismatch there in how important we are for each other.

And then I think another point that we're seeing very much on display now is in the beginning, in the 1990s, the United States and its allies hoped that Russia would move towards a different system, that it would embrace broadly Euro-Atlantic values and that it would reject, you know, features not only of the Communist system, but other aspects of Russia's past. It hasn't turned out like that. And today, Russia very much presents itself as an alternative model to the United States, to the Europeans; that it respects absolutely sovereignty, right, in most countries in the world; it rejects the idea of responsibility to protect. Now, when we talk about Ukraine and Georgia, we might question the absolute sovereignty, but in general that's what it says.

And it also presents itself as an alternative civilizational model, presenting Russian orthodoxy as the true harbinger of Christian values and, as Putin has recently said, of traditional Muslin values, too, which is a very interesting point given all of the problems that Russia has with its Muslim minorities; and then saying that the West has lost its moral compass and is decadent. And this appeals to a large number of countries in the world. We shouldn't think that this is a minority view, but it's really Russia carving out a role for itself as a separate power and maybe almost as a leader of a conservative international.

So where does that leave us now? And I will just make a few more points. I think it's very difficult to move beyond these jewel legacies of distrust caused by the Cold War and then by what happened in the 1990s. And I think, in fact, it would be much better to try and avoid future resets. And I think that would mean for the United States accepting that Russia is a large country with a hybrid political system, whose movement away from the Soviet system is a matter of decades. I think one German politician at the beginning of this said it'll take Russia 70 years maybe to make -- and I

don't even want to use the word "transition," but to move towards something that's really different from what's come in the hundreds of years before. Anyway, it's a long process and you have to be patient.

I think it would also take for a U.S. Congress, which really has not been a force for change in U.S.-Russian relations, that is in terms of trying to improve the relationship, it would also take the Congress looking at what it does and maybe eschewing future punitive actions against Russia because those have also contributed towards the deterioration of the relationship. But I think it would also involve accepting that it's not a good idea to start another reset, to think that if only we can find a better way of interacting, these issues are going to be resolved, but to be realistic about cooperating with Russia on those multilateral issues where we have to work together, however challenging it is, to keep up all of the civil society contacts that we have and try and nurture them because those really do have to be nurtured.

But I think the immediate thing to realize is that even if you have an *à la carte* relationship with a country like Russia, you still have to have an effective framework to even conduct that *à la carte* relationship. And I think we're really only at the beginning of thinking about what that framework might be.

So I think I'll stop there.

MS. HILL: Thanks, Angela. Of course, it was Condoleezza Rice who also thought we should have an *à la carte* relationship with Russia back in 2000 in her famous piece in *Foreign Affairs*. And I guess we're still talking about the same thing 14 years later.

Peter, you've had a very interesting perspective on this because you and Susan were the co-bureau chiefs of *The Washington Post* just as Mr. Putin was coming into his position. And you were following presidential politics there as they were shaping

on the ground in Moscow and then you switched, coming back to the United States, not just switched newspapers, but switched to actually looking at presidential politics here. And Angela has really put a finger on, you know, the problem that obviously Strobe saw firsthand back in the day with Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin of the importance of this relationship at the very top. And you have a chapter in your book, *Days of Fire*, (inaudible) section that talks about the Bush-Putin relationship.

And I just wonder on how you reflect on looking back at this long span of time, you've been looking for things on the ground in Russia and then from the vantage point of Washington, D.C., about how those relationships have really had an impact on where we are today in the U.S.-Russia -- I don't know what we're calling it now -- interaction, at least for the moment.

MR. BAKER: That's a great question. Thank you very much for having me and including me on this very august panel. I'm an admirer of all three of the people on here, and particularly their books. If you want to know anything about the '90s and the Clinton era relationship, you have to read *The Russia Hand*. It's still to this day a fabulous account of what happened and unrivaled in its completeness and its mix of journalist and I-was-there qualities to it.

And Fiona's book, several books, but the latest on Putin is, in fact, you know, required reading for anybody who wants to understand who he is and to try to get inside of him. She goes in a way few Americans and few Westerners have done to really try to penetrate this sort of impenetrable figure.

And now Angela's book, which I'm great fan of; got a chance to finish it. And it's just terrific because I think she makes a number of -- several very important points, and we'll get to Bush and Putin in a second. One is I think she talks about the reset that we've experience in this last few years is not new. It's part of a cycle. We

have seen this cycle again and again. And it starts off -- you know, I think a foreign policy term is Charlie Brown and the football, right? They teach that at Georgetown, don't they?

MS. STENT: Of course, in (inaudible) theory.

MR. BAKER: You know, of course, there's Lucy with the football, who's, of course, Putin and Charlie Brown is the next president who comes along and is convinced they're the one who can finally make friends with these long-time adversaries. If we simply sit down and talk, of course, we have the same interests. And what you get out of reading Angela's book is this insight, which, in fact, I think is slow to dawn again and again with each new presidency that, in fact, we do have different interests. And not only do we have different interests, we make the mistake in trying to assume that we understand what their interests are because we don't. We try to superimpose our own American ideas of what a Russian interest ought to be into their thinking and they frustrate us again and again because they don't actually see things the way we think they should see them, not just the way we see them, but the way we think they should see them. Why shouldn't they look at Iran the way we look at Iran? They're on their southern border. They're certainly more dangerous to Russia than they are to us. And yet, it looks different from Moscow.

So I think her book is a terrific read and I would recommend it highly. Bush and Putin is a great, you know, fascinating exemplar of this very cycle. Bush, as with Putin, wanted, I think, to create a new environment. I had actually been with President Clinton in Denver when they admitted Russia into the G-8 and I was with President Clinton again when he traveled to Russia in 1998, so I watched a little bit of Clinton and Yeltsin. And then Bush comes along and he clearly wants this to be a legacy for him as well. He declared, I can't remember how many times I heard him declare, the Cold War is now over, forgetting the entire time that Strobe was in office and the entire

1990s as if somehow 2001 was the beginning of a new era, and he wanted it to be.

He did meet with President Putin in Slovenia, famously. The interesting story, of course, to me is not just the soul comment, but the moment behind the scenes when Putin is going through his talking points about Soviet debt and Bush is clearly bored and doesn't find this very interesting and kind of interrupts him and says, well, I heard this story about you and your cross. And Putin, you know, taken off-key for a second, recovers pretty quickly and tells the story about his mother giving him the Orthodox cross and then rescuing it from a fire at the dacha and it was the only thing that survived and how important that was to him and how, clearly, Putin, as a long-time case officer and long-time, you know, student of how to work the other side, you know, figured out how to push buttons that would appeal to Bush, and it clearly did. And then he's asked the question that Condi Rice today will tell you she didn't prepare Bush for afterwards, which is: Do you trust him? And he makes the comment about looking into his soul.

I think that's been hung around President Bush's neck ever since, but I think it actually didn't last that long. I think, as you point out in the book, you know, by the time you get to Khodorkovsky's arrest and by the time you get to the split over Iraq, as much as you want still to be partners with Putin, I think Bush has a much more jaundiced view. In my book, there's some conversations that he has with Tony Blair and with some other visiting leaders in which he expresses his frustration. And he says talking with Putin is like being, you know, in a junior high debating society: the facts don't seem to matter with the guy.

He described this meeting in Slovakia that they had in 2005 afterwards to Blair. He said I was so mad at that interpreter who kept getting on my case. I wanted to reach over and slap the hell out of him. I mean, he was very frustrated. He said, I think Putin, we've lost him, he's become a tsar. But that implies we ever had him to begin with,

right, which we didn't, of course. And the story that -- and I think Bush by the end had a very jaundiced understanding of President Putin just as President Obama presumably does today.

But the next President's going to come along and they're going to want to do something. And the thing that they ought to do before they make that decision is they ought to read Angela's book. (Laughter)

MS. HILL: Well, we're definitely all going to make sure that that happens.

But, Strobe, I mean, one thing, you know, that we -- well, Angela left us off with the *à la carte* relationship and needing a framework. We've tried that so many times. I mean, there was the famous attempt at creating the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission, which got revitalized as part of the reset and these binational presidential commissions. I mean, what was the thinking, you know, back -- if you can think way back to that day when you were then overseeing all of the relationships as they're kind of coordinating all of the relationships in this -- about trying to create that frame? Because it underscores the structural problems that we have in the relationship because we're all talking about it all gets down -- and as you described, you know, so eloquently in *The Russia Hand* -- to that relationship and the chemistry between the people and the chemistry's there or it's not there. But if the chemistry is there, it often doesn't lead to anything in terms of meaningful results in the relationship. But what was our thinking back in the '90s about trying to create that frame to hang that presidential relationship on?

MR. TALBOTT: Well, I think something that Peter said is an important starting point, and that is that most of the time during the period we're talking about, not to mention the decades before, just as Peter said, U.S. and let's use Russia

geographically, as it were, Russia and the Soviet Union before it, we did not have compatible interests. In the mind of Boris Yeltsin and in the mind of names that have a very musty feel to them now, like Andrei Kozyrev, I think that there was -- you could either call it a bright, shining moment or a period of mutual self-delusion when the leaders on both sides did think that there were fundamental compatibilities. And I don't think there is a more powerful example in history that I can think of where personality really matters. Both of you have alluded to that.

Boris Yeltsin obviously has a very, very mixed record. He had one when he was alive and I suspect that Russian and other historians who go back and have more perspective in judging him will make mixed judgments. But this much I am certain of: He felt, to coin a phrase, that the Soviet Union had become kind of an empire of evil and that the Communist Party was the mechanism for that evil, never mind, by the way, that he came up through that system. And Gorbachev, in one of the many ironies of history, I would say Gorbachev and Yeltsin had their own compatibilities and they represented kind of a tag team. The old, you know, WWW, World-Wide Wrestling or whatever it's called. (Laughter) You know, Gorgeous George and whoever.

First up was Gorbachev. And while his aim was to moderate and modernize and civilize the Soviet Union, it was also to save the Soviet Union. And he came to the rational view, which I, by the way, think should resonate today as we talk about the future of Russia, that the only way the Soviet Union could survive and become what he called a normal, modern state was to give up the big lie and the iron fist. And to make a complicated story fairly short, that was true, but the Soviet Union couldn't survive without the big lie and the iron fist.

And then, of course, there was a falling out between Gorbachev and Yeltsin. And Yeltsin comes in as an anti-Communist, a former Communist who was an

anti-Communist, and who really did buy into the idea that Russia was a great country that could finally manifest its greatest at the end of the 20th century by joining the international community with certain internationally, universally accepted norms, including norms of how to govern your own country. And while I think President Clinton has a good deal to be proud of in what he was able to accomplish during that period, he had a huge advantage that his successors, President Bush 43 and Barack Obama, and probably presidents to come, will not have. And that is that there was not an operative in the Kremlin -- that's the subtitle of Cliff and Fiona's book -- but there was a Democrat.

Now, he was a Democrat who occasionally would slip into the vocabulary using the Russian word (speaking Russian), which means to rule like a tsar. So he wasn't a Jeffersonian Democrat, but he really did believe in those values and in the notion of partnership. And that ended even before Yeltsin left office because Putin was increasingly not just -- and I'll end on this -- not just in an increasingly powerful position as prime minister and then as acting president and then as president, he also represented an entire cadre very prominently and powerfully placed throughout the Russian system that felt the way he did. And so we have never been able to get back to this sense of common ground.

Medvedev is kind of a, you know, exception that proves the rule. I think he'll be actually kind of an interesting character to understand himself at some point. I mean, the Medvedev who spoke from this podium, I guess Angela was speaking about, he was Yeltsinesque, but he also had no real power.

The most important thing to understand, I think, about Putin is that he has a classic zero-sum, us-versus-them view of the world. And the "them" is us, if I can put it that way.

I heard a story once, quite reliably, that he was being briefed for a

meeting with a visiting American official. And the briefer, a Russian who worked for Putin, said this person is a friend of ours. And Putin snapped and said we have no friends in the West. And that really says it all. And later in the conversation we should come back to, I think, what the real threats to Russia are, and there are many and virtually none of them are in the West.

MS. HILL: I mean, you've made actually a very interesting point, which takes us off, you know, really where I was putting the question, but I think underscores very much that no matter what structures we put in place, they're not going to be really adequate. So the attempt to actually try to create something broader on a more horizontal level to plug the United States and Russia in together always flounders on the person at the very top.

MR. TALBOTT: But you mentioned the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission. The Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission, which, by the way, was a Kozyrev idea, was going great guns. We had all kinds of quite productive collaboration between our cabinet agencies in Washington and the ministries in Moscow. And then, of course, Chernomyrdin fell from grace and the Gore-Primakov Commission didn't do so well.

MS. HILL: Didn't do so well. And I think it's probably the case, Angela, I mean, in your interviews with people around in the Obama administration, that the binational commissions were also behind the scenes at a lower level actually making some real achievements on some of the more mundane, I guess, cooperative things, the kinds of things that President Bush would have rolled his eyes over if they were kind of talking about it at summit, but, nonetheless, was actually making some kind of impact.

MS. STENT: Well, they were. But, again, that was while Medvedev was president because, you know, your point being that if the people at the top bless this and believe in it, then, you know, however difficult it is and however slow-moving these

different groups and processes are, they do work.

Now, of course, the one that was abolished was the civil society one because, as its head, you have Vladislav Surkov and you had Mike McFaul, and then that didn't work out so well, largely because, you know, the notions of civil society that were represented at the top there, i.e., the Russian notion, and the American notion were very different.

MR. BAKER: I would have paid to go see those. (Laughter) If they would have allowed us into those --

MS. STENT: Fly on the wall.

MR. BAKER: Yeah.

MS. STENT: But so I think -- and yet, you know, the binational commission, you know, presidential commission (inaudible) has lots of working groups, some of them apparently doing, you know, good work, they're advancing. Again, it's very slow progress. But it doesn't filter up to the top, so, again, it's very compartmentalized.

But you have to keep these things going and I'm not sure how much even ordinary Russians know about what's happening in those meetings because it would give us a somewhat more, you know, positive view of what's happening. But instead, what you get, and we read about this in your very newspaper, you know, there's a TV show a couple of nights ago likening the United States to Nazi Germany on at the same time as you have the Olympic Games. So I think these things only work at a lower level if they're blessed at the top.

MS. HILL: Yeah. And Peter, the book that you and Susan wrote together on *Kremlin Rising* was really sort of charting this change that Strobe and Angela have both been talking about. I mean, what we have in the person of Vladimir Putin, as Strobe was saying, is someone from a different cadre. And you saw that moving in real

time when you were there. I mean, you now have a situation where, actually just like Yeltsin, Putin is not part of a political party, but he's also not got an institutional arrangement around him. I mean, you deliberately, obviously, picked the title *Kremlin Rising* as opposed to, you know, really the state itself, the Russian state. I mean, Putin came in saying he was going to restore the state, but the one institution that has loomed over everything in the Russian state is the presidency housed in the Kremlin.

MR. BAKER: Right.

MS. HILL: During the tandem arrangement with Medvedev and Putin, it actually looked like there might be a pluralization of this and more back to the institutions, the prime minister as well as the parliament. But what did you see in that time, and, you know, since you're been covering it from a different angle, that might point in a direction that, you know, we could hang something on for looking to the future?

MR. BAKER: Well, I think -- well, (inaudible) before we went to Russia, we went around and we met a lot of people, including everybody here on this stage and we talked to them about Russia. And what struck me was the division about Russia was always in the optimist/pessimist camp. And it was really hard to find somebody in between. And at the time there were a lot of optimists when we first went there. People bought food and it was going to be a technocratic, professional, new generation cementer of Yeltsin's legacy rather than, you know, looking at KGB as sort of, you know, sort of a finishing school education, like Harvard. And today, of course, it's hard to find an optimist. It's hard to find, you know, somebody who will look positively at the prospects.

I still think -- you know, I like to be optimistic -- I still think long term, you know, Russia is going to be different over time and that it's just not going to be in the direction that we wanted it to go or the straight line that we hoped it would take. If you visit Russia, if you spend time in Russia, and you don't spend time talking about politics,

you're struck by what a modern country this is by comparison by the way it was in the '70s and '80s. This is a country that is of great means, at least in the big cities; not just Moscow anymore, but even in the second-tier cities. You know, people are not worried that their neighbors are going to rat them out for making a joke about the leader. They have cell phones. They travel around the world. They have businesses. You know, in many ways it is a European country today.

And our experience in watching Putin was that it was the people who tried to make a difference, that tried to change things, that were perceived a threat to the Kremlin -- and yes, the Kremlin -- that get whacked down, like Whack-a-Mole. And one of the things that we don't ever fully understand here, I think, is that that is accepted by society there. Putin is not imposing himself on a reluctant society. For all the thousands of people in the streets and as invigorating as that was to see those protests, he still has the support of most of the country. Now, he has control of the TV, he has control of all the mechanisms. That's important, you can't forget that. Obviously, without that, perhaps it would be a different story. But, in fact, you know, this is a country that is being ruled the way it thinks it wants to be ruled.

I always tell Americans, people in this audience will know this, but I always tell my just ordinary friends who don't know much about Russia, you know, that when we were there, anyway, polls showed that 25 percent of Russians would have voted for Stalin for president. And until you understand why that is and what, you know, is part of that different thinking, we're not going to be able to understand them. They look at their country and their history and their leaders in a way that we don't and they don't understand it the way we do.

And one of the great things, again, about Angela's book is she talked to those people. She talked to the Russians about their point of view and the book covers

their frustrations, their disappointments, their view of how we let them down in the Bush era. For instance, after 9/11, we didn't get rid of Jackson-Vanik right away. We didn't reciprocate as far as they were concerned with the outreach that Putin had made with Central Asia. We failed to sort of genuinely create the part in (inaudible). Some of this we could debate. Obviously a lot of this we could debate, but it's interesting to hear it from their point of view.

MS. HILL: Well, Angela, I want to turn it over to our many distinguished people in the audience, but I was thinking as I was listening to Peter talking here and then back to Strobe's comment about the idea that Yeltsin initially thought that we shared very similar values, you know, whether that was mutual, you know, basically delusionment or not, there was certainly a point where it did look like convergence -- an old term that we always used to use when we were doing Soviet studies -- might eventually happen and not in the ways that we're anticipating. But you yourself mentioned at the end of your introduction about now we're back to values again and values as a point of division. And Putin is trying to push forward now with this rather conservative, in a Russian sense, agenda. And as Peter is pointing out, it resonates.

There was a recent poll I just read about today on, you know, attitudes toward homosexuality in Russia. A few years ago, there was a shift in the population to, say, about 30 to 40 percent of the population feeling somewhat comfortable now with the idea that, you know, the homosexual population had the same rights as everyone else. This has now changed dramatically and we're up above 80 percent, you know, kind of basically the population being opposed to any kind of progress towards gay marriage or anything else. Now, this is obviously something that's shifted in European and U.S. society over a period of time, too. You know, we're not today where we were, say, 10 years ago even in the United States. But this, obviously, gets to Peter's point that, you

know, there are shifts in the way that people think about things and this agenda does resonate.

So how do we deal with this? Because we're not actually -- we're not in the old ideological struggle that we were at the end of the Cold War, but we're in a different place than where we thought we might be 20 years ago, in sort of a clash of values.

MS. STENT: Yeah. Well, a clash of civilizations. No, I mean, we don't have an ideological struggle with Russia, but we certainly now represent very different things. I mean, you wrote your dissertation -- also, if you go back to the 19th century, this isn't a new phenomenon that the Russian leadership puts forward Russia as an alternative model to the decadent West, the harbinger of traditional values, right? It somehow got lost during the Soviet period where it was a different ideological struggle.

I mean, the only way we can deal with it is it's tricky, and you see this with the Sochi Games. I mean, on the one hand, you have to respect that this is where Russia is now. As you say, you know, a majority of people support this and particularly the attitudes towards, you know, LGBT issues. On the other hand, you know, the United States and the Europeans stand for certain values and they can't pretend that they don't. But I think probably it's better to take a step back and, again, focus on these kind of pragmatic concrete issues -- Syria, Iran, you know, other issues, post-2014 Afghanistan -- where we have to try to work together and not focus so much on the value questions where we really have serious divisions and where, as President Putin himself said on one of the Sunday talk shows a couple of weeks ago, Russia is not an outlier. He said 70 countries in the world have similar legislation. And then he paused and said in seven of those countries people get executed for it.

So, I mean, the point is that I think it requires stepping back,

understanding that that is the value system that is at least being, you know, propagated there, and that there's not very much we can do about it. There's not much we can do about what's happening inside Russia and, therefore, we should be more sort of modest in what our expectations are about interacting with Russia and focusing on these international questions.

MS. HILL: Well, thanks. Well, we've got half an hour and I'm sure there's lots of contentious issues being raised here. I'll take three questions at a time and then come back to everybody on the panel. I'll take two here at the front.

We've got a mic coming down and if everyone could introduce themselves. And just in the interest of trying to get as many questions as possible, to try to keep them brief.

MR. HARRIET: Judd Harriet, documentary filmmaker. With respect to the tug of war between the West and the East with respect to the former states of the Soviet Union -- Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, so forth -- how is Russia likely to react in this tug of war in the future given this new model that Putin is attempting to put forth?

MS. HILL: Thanks.

MR. MITCHELL: Thanks very much. I'm Garrett Mitchell and I write *The Mitchell Report*. And I want to go back to something that Dr. Stent said and see if I could get you to expand on it just a bit.

It seems to me that the message is let's not do any more resets, but what we need to do is to develop a framework for having this relationship. And the question is both specific to Russia and sort of generally, if you will, about political theory, which is what is a framework? How is it different from a strategy or a policy? And if there is a way to give some specificity to that with respect to Russia, I'd be interested in your thinking.

MS. HILL: Thanks. And then, Cathy, if you could just take the -- on the aisle here.

MR. SHORE: My name is Steven Shore. To what extent does Putin lead or follow Russian public opinion?

MS. HILL: Well --

MS. STENT: Shall I --

MS. HILL: Yes, go ahead with the question on the frame.

MS. STENT: Or maybe the Eurasian -- I'll start off with the question on the Eurasian -- Eurasia?

MS. HILL: Yeah, whichever way you want to do that.

MS. STENT: Sure.

MS. HILL: Yeah, go ahead.

MS. STENT: So I would say Putin's project for his current term, his third term, is the creation of a Eurasian Union. If he were able to create that, that would include most of the post-Soviet states, not all of them. Some of them will clearly not join, but Ukraine would be the key member there. And this would be an economic organization, but obviously also a political one, which would mean that you really had separate block once again in the form of Soviet space that had closer connections with each other than they do with any other part of the world.

And since Ukraine would be the key country here, I mean, this is a pretty tough battle at the moment from the Russian point of view, to ensure that Ukraine does not sign agreements with the European Union that would make it impossible to create this Eurasian Union. And Russia has a number of advantages, right? It's next door. It has a lot of leverage over the economic relationship with Ukraine. Obviously there are different views in Ukraine about the relationship with Russia and the people, not all of the

people who live in the east of Ukraine, but some of the people who live in the eastern part of Ukraine, clearly look to Russia. And then you have all the people who are out on the streets demonstrating, who do want to be European, but for them European means also not having a corrupt, untransparent government. They want to have a modern transparent government and so Europe is a symbol for them of that.

But I think the other thing to realize is that Russia is in this for the long -- this is a long game. Russia's already offered quite a lot of financial support to Ukraine and it's not going to back away easily. And one just has to question how long either the United States or the European Union's attention can be so focused on that area that this really isn't the symmetrical fight. And plus, Russia views this, I think, as a traditional geopolitical struggle. The European Union doesn't see itself in those terms.

And the role of the U.S., I mean, now we're more involved. We weren't that involved six months ago, but this isn't going to be an ongoing situation, an ongoing struggle. And from the Russian point of view, it's a very high-stakes issue because it really will determine the future of Russia's own influence in its neighborhood.

Framework, I mean, it's an excellent question. We do have some frameworks, right? We do have a format whereby our foreign and defense secretaries talk to the Russian foreign minister and defense minister. And we have various other fora where we talk about different issues. And then, you know, on another level we have, for instance, the Arctic is a region, right, that people often bring up as one where we are cooperating with the Russians on a number of these issues. There are various fora to discuss that. So we do have -- and, of course, you know, we have the United Nations Security Council very importantly. So we have different fora where we interact with the Russians.

I guess the idea of having a framework would be one where all of these

parts were maybe better integrated. I mean, I know having served in the government it's very easy to say that, very difficult to do. But to try and have a sense of kind of prioritizing this and looking at the different parts of this relationship and the institutions in which they interact and trying to get more coherence to it would be the way I'd start.

MS. HILL: Strobe, I don't know if you want to say anything about the whole Eurasian Union issue on this because, obviously, that was something that was always on the agenda in the 1990s because of the aspirations in the West with NATO and then, you know, after the fact, the EU; the idea of expanding out and, you know, reintegrating the European space politically and economically.

MR. TALBOTT: Well, I think Angela answered the question very well. I would just underscore something she said at the end with maybe a footnote to it.

Yes, Russia, Putin in particular, have taken a classic geopolitical view and it's in the context of a zero-sum game. What he doesn't buy into and maybe doesn't recognize is that it's a different world and geo-economics is part of geopolitics. And the model, the incentive, that he is offering these other former republics of the USSR is a loser of a model. And so, yeah, he's playing a long game, but it's going to be a losing game. And at some point, we might want to get back to what it means for Russia itself and its own sustainability and its current borders, given the fact that virtually all of Putin's policies threaten to replicate the centrifugal forces that caused the USSR to fall apart.

Just one quick stab at an answer on who's leading whom, he's the leader. And to just sort of play on that word, that word has a kind of force to it and inherent legitimacy, if I can say it, in Russia. We have our leaders here, but we love not to follow them and to point out their shortcomings and to change them and criticize them. That is not part of the -- I don't mean to excessively overgeneralize, but the tradition of the tsar, of the (Russian), which is not a word that is used now because it sounds too

much like *"der Führer"* and *"El Duce,"* but that's a very -- you know, authoritarianism is like the tango: it takes both leaders and the led to have an authoritarian political culture.

MS. HILL: Well, that leads to the question about public opinion, which I'll make a stab at and ask Peter if he wants to come in on this, too, because obviously public opinion is something that all of our leaders spend a long time paying attention to, although George Bush, Jr., always said that he didn't pay attention to public opinion polls. But he's probably the only leader out there that would say something like that because Putin and the Kremlin do pay a lot of attention to public opinion polls. There's actually some very good polling agencies in Russia itself, the Levada agency, for example, independent. So it's not just public opinion polling that's done by the Kremlin for the Kremlin. There's a much broader range of things that are being done.

And then polls, they support a lot of things that, you know, Peter and Angela and Strobe have said about the agenda getting a lot of support, but they also do show some troubling things of Putin down the line. Putin's own ratings have been falling for the last few years. Now, they're falling in a range which most other politicians would be ecstatic about, but, nonetheless, he's fallen in some of the ratings, some of the polling, from a high point in 2008 of 84 percent to around 65 percent in one of the recent polls. Now, that would be fabulous for anybody else in a normal environment, but Putin is running against himself because there is no alternative to him in the political spectrum.

And that is an advantage, but it's also a disadvantage because you constantly have to keep bettering yourself. And as you get on a bit in time and not just in your political tenure, but also in your life, as we know it's always quite hard to out-compete and out-better your younger selves. And although Putin is the master of the different of the costume changes and he's doing well out of Sochi right now and he still looks pretty vigorous, if he's still with us in 2024, which he could quite conceivably be

under the next presidential turn, it'll be a bit harder to play the role of the action hero politician that he's been doing up until now. And he has to transition his political brand into something else. So he spends a lot of time looking at the polls. The Sochi Olympics and the way that they are portrayed are very important to all of this and it's something that's been a real hallmark of this Kremlin right from the very beginning.

Russia is, in many respects, a direct democracy, and Putin actually talks about the historical precedence for this in some of the ancient city states in the broader Russian realm, the city of Novgorod was famous for being like a Swiss canton with everyone getting out onto the town square and making their voice heard. And Putin talks about this, about how important it is to aggregate all of that clamor from around in the population. But it's a very difficult thing to keep on top of and it's something that they've spent a lot of time on since the very beginning.

Peter, I wonder if you have any additional thoughts on this.

MR. BAKER: I think -- not much. I think what Strobe said and what you said are exactly right. I think the way Strobe describes the relationship between the leader and the led is symbiotic. I think there's a symbiosis with Putin and his constituents. He has a masterful instinct, and supplied in part or informed in part by polling, for how to connect to the broad mass of people in Russia.

And I love the costumes change, it's a great line. These sort of, you know -- the symbolism of the macho leader, you know, and the various forms it's taken is brilliant in sort of, you know, associating himself with the broader public there.

And there are ups and downs and there are things he has to be worried about. And every time you see little blips in the polls, ah, you know, Putin may be in trouble here. People are upset about this, that, or the other thing. Boom, comes along some crisis that he manages to either invent or take advantage of or some twist of events

that he has somehow, you know, ridden on like a surfer to get back out in front. So I think we are probably -- we'll be waiting a long time if we think that we're simply going to wait him out for the days that popular opinion turns against him.

MS. HILL: Yeah, let's take another set of three questions. You, please.

MR. MERRY: Wayne Merry, the American Foreign Policy Council. There are people working in both capitals right now to try to put together an agenda for the proposed bilateral summit meeting of the two presidents to take place on the edges of the June G-8 meeting scheduled for, of all places, Sochi. As near as I can tell, for want of anything else, the most substantive thing they're talking about is a bilateral treaty on trade and investment.

Now, a number of the big American companies that are active in Russia favor this, they would like it. There are people who think this would help breathe some life into Russia's WTO membership, that it would fill in a gap between the transatlantic and transpacific trade talks that are ongoing. But I'd like to hear the assessment of the people on the stage, one, as to what the real utility of that is. Is this something we're talking about because we don't have much of anything else to talk about? And in the political climate, how viable is it? I mean, we can negotiate it, but could this administration deliver it even if they could ink the document?

MS. HILL: Thanks. There's another question on that row and then further back.

MR. FLECK: Hi. I'm Martin Fleck with Physicians for Social Responsibility, and my question is about nuclear weapons. Obama has been advocating further cuts beyond the new START Treaty cuts to nuclear weapons between Russia and the United States. He's been advocating an additional one-third cut to the arsenals. And with this collection of talent I wanted to pose the question is Putin likely to support that?

And if not, how could he -- what might convince him to support it?

MS. HILL: Thanks. And a question back here?

MR. THIELMANN: Greg Thielmann, Arms Control Association. This may be a variant of the previous question, but I wanted to ask about the limits of hostility. And I'm inspired by the annual Worldwide Threat Assessment produced by the intelligence community that included 27 pages of cyber terrorism, nonproliferation, climate change threats, but not really one word about the Russian strategic forces, that they're the only threat that can annihilate us all in an afternoon. So my question really is how much longer can the U.S.-Russian relationship sustain a Cold War nuclear force structure and alert level?

MS. HILL: Thanks. Since that was sort of related to the last one, I'll take another question from down at the front, Ambassador Gegeshidze here.

AMBASSADOR GEGESHIDZE: Thank you very much, first of all, for having written this very interesting book. And this has been the primary research question for me as I come from academia. As Strobe rightly mentioned, in my previous capacity I was dealing with this relationship. And, of course, this was the core question that I was trying to answer.

And as I understand from this discussion, and, of course, I will read with great interest this book, the bottom line of this book is that the primary limit to the partnership is the incompatibility of the value-based interests. And it was mentioned a Russian desire to position itself as an alternative Eurasian power to the West. You mentioned several circumstances when previous various resets have been ended. But the bottom line, as I understand, is this incompatibility of the value-based strategic interests.

My question would be where do you see the phenomenon called (speaks

Russian), anti-Westernism? Is it somehow related with Russia's desire to position itself as an alternative Eurasian power to the West or is it derivative of this desire or it's a standalone problem itself which needs to be dealt with? And how can it be dealt with this (speaks Russian)? Thank you.

MS. HILL: Thank you. Well, we've got a set of actually related questions here because I think Wayne Merry's question about the agenda for the summit and its focusing on trade issues. And so far, I mean, I presume we haven't heard about whether any of the nuclear issues and the arms control are going to be on the agenda. I mean, those things kind of tie together. And it's a question actually we're asking across the board: Can trade now substitute for some of the strategic questions in the transatlantic relationship, not just in the ongoing attempts to find somewhere forward on the U.S.-Russia relationship?

And then this final question from Ambassador Gegeshidze about anti-Westernism. And we've seen a lot actually, also, in the pages of *The New York Times* and many of the other papers about the anti-U.S. sentiment that's been alive and kicking in the Russian press. And, of course, we've had the same accusations put back at the United States, especially around Sochi, about the inability to find any bright spot in the Russian firmament. I always explain to Russians that sadly good news seems to never sell newspapers and all the journalists and experts, like ourselves, are always waiting for an opportunity --

MR. BAKER: (inaudible) anymore. (Laughter)

MS. HILL: Something's gone wrong here. That's actually a very good point. But, yeah, everybody's waiting with their story to get out and they all end up coming in a big rush. But, obviously, there's a lot more to that debate.

But, Angela, you started at one time on arms control and, Strobe, you've

done a few things on that. So how do we --

MS. STENT: Well, I think maybe I'll start off with the question of what's on the bilateral agenda, and I'm sure that Strobe and others will say maybe more about the arms control stuff. So I have a separate chapter in my book on economics and energy because it's -- and, you know, it's not divided by administration because that's the one area in U.S.-Russian relations that's relatively depoliticized. Obviously, there have been some exceptions, but where, you know, you have a younger, not all younger, but a different, a new class of Russians in the private sector who interact with their U.S., in this case -- it's the same with European -- counterparts on a completely different basis. They're in the private sector. They want to do business and they speak a different language with each other.

Now, having said that, you always see on the Russian side and, to some extent, on the U.S. side the complaints we should have a more robust economic relationship, right? Trade with Russia is like less than 2 percent of our trade; $40 billion a year with China; 500 billion, for instance. You know, why don't we have a more robust relationship? And then it comes down to one question is, you know, what Russia mainly exports, energy. We don't need Russian energy. You know, on the contrary, we need less energy now to import. And B, military hardware, and we aren't going to purchase Russian military hardware. I mean, occasionally there have been helicopters in Afghanistan, but in general. So what is it, what would constitute that trade relationship?

Now, you do have some firms, for instance, Boeing, that's doing very well in Russia, it's a very important partnership, you know; automobile manufacturers, now more complicated with some of Russia's new legislation. So this is the one element of the relationship that the Obama White House is pushing now is to try and improve and, you know, reinvigorate the economic relationship. And this, you know, trade and

investment treaty is something that's been discussed for years and years, and maybe they'll sign it.

Now, how much difference that will make, right, to the relationship remains to be seen because a lot of these previous event haven't been sort of as successful. I would only question on this business of a bilateral summit whether if Edward Snowden is still in Moscow there's going to be such a bilateral summit. I mean, I don't know the answer to that, but I think we have to watch that.

And I think the only thing I'll say on the nuclear agenda, and then I'll pass that on, is, you know, our administration would like to push forward, clearly with deeper cuts. I'm not convinced that the Russians are interested in that at the moment. I think Steve Pifer has written something quite important about that recently. And that I agree with you, you know, our relationship with Russia is a time warp. I mean, the things that determines it is we're the two nuclear superpowers who can destroy each other many times over, and that really is still what determines the relationship and not more of these kind of more modern 20th century issues.

MS. HILL: Well, you mentioned time warp and, as I bring Strobe and Peter into this as well, you also mentioned when you wrapped up -- not that I'm suggesting that you're in the time warp or you do the time wrap (Laughter) -- that Congress is an issue here. And I think, you know, when Wayne was asking the question can this administrative deliver, can the administration deliver anything on a trade issue where we've got similar questions about TTIP and TPP, the acronyms now for the transatlantic trade agreements and then the transpacific with Japan?

I mean, Peter, you watch this from an interesting perspective. You have to go across and ask people all these questions. I mean, could an administration deliver on any of these issues? It was hard enough trying to get START on the old issues that,

you know, we're more familiar with.

MR. BAKER: That's a great question. It's hard to imagine that. I suppose that you could imagine some sort of a trade agreement that is a relatively modest scale and didn't really do very much in a large sense that might go someplace, but anything of any consequence it seems right now is going to be hard for this administration to get through Congress. A, just look at what happened with Jackson-Vanik. Jackson-Vanik, the PTNR, all that did was simply to keep the status quo, right? To keep the United States in the same trade status it has been for decades, just simply done permanently rather than every year. And even that required the Magnitsky Act as a way of Congress saying we're not approving of the way Russia does business at home, and much to the administration's chagrin. So getting something that would actually require any kind of concessions without, you know, some sort of human rights codicil that will make the Russians go nuts is hard to see. That's A, Russia-specific.

B, in trade in general, you know, Harry Reid just says, no, sorry, no fast track authority for you, Mr. President. Yeah, we're in the same party, but that's done. And President Obama clearly doesn't seem to be all that interested in pushing the matter, at least at the moment. He may wait until he has something more to show for it out of the Asia and the European talks and then make an effort. But for the moment, trade does not seem to be an agenda that the administration is going to find much traction with on the Hill.

MS. HILL: Does this feed into the anti-Westernism that the ambassador asked about, I mean, perhaps to both you and to Strobe? Because if you think back to the Clinton administration, which you don't need to think back to all that hard, I mean, you know it very well, one of the biggest complaints from Yeltsin and those around in the reform as positive and then the whole economics team was that, you know, the U.S. and

the West just never stepped up enough to help Russia economically. And the trade debate is actually just a continuation in many respects of that idea that, you know, we did not embrace the former Soviet Union in the way that we should have done from the Gorbachev days onwards; the idea of the Grand Bargain, the Marshall Plan, the new Marshall Plan, you know, and the trade, you know, kind of basically feeds into that. I mean, what do you think, Strobe, looking back?

MR. TALBOTT: Well, I think that it's kind of been a permanent fact that we, a decade or so ago, two decades ago, hoped would not be a permanent fact, that the major obstacle to a really let's call it a 21st century trade-investment relationship between Russia and the United States, and indeed Russia and Europe and the rest of the world, the major obstacle is that Russia doesn't have a 21st century economy. That's what it really boils down to. The mention of it, I mean, they are still -- it's the classic case of the resource curse. They are totally dependent on what they can pump or dig out of the ground. They don't have a modern service sector or manufacturing sector. And I also agree with Peter that a trade pact -- some really important trade pacts are imperiled by the political deadlock here.

As to the Georgian ambassador's question, I think we're back in -- we're in a version of the 19th century debate between the Slavophiles and the Westernizers. In fact, Angela talked about, what's his phrase, orthodox family values. Guess what? Slavophiles. And it's also part of his we versus the other guys mentality. And it's in keeping with his political mode of operation, which is the vertical of power which inherently makes a joke out of the word "federation," which is in the name of the country. You can't have a vertical of power in a federation by definition. It's got to be a horizontal of power in some sense. And that takes us back to the real nature of Putin as the unmodern man who's mastered a lot of modern techniques.

On arms control, I do think -- I believe it was the gentleman from the Arms Control Association who said we don't wake up every morning wondering if World War III and global thermonuclear war is going to happen, and that's a very, very big deal. And those of us who have made or tried to maintain our optimism about Russia shouldn't lose such sight of that. And the reason is not because the weapons are no longer there because, as you say, the Russian rocket forces are the inheritor of the strategic rocket forces and we'll come to arms control in a second. Your paper had a piece the other day about how the Russians may be cutting very close the edges of the INF Treaty and so forth and so on.

I do not think that there is any chance for further reductions, not least because -- and the Russians here are not wrong. Reductions in offensive weapons would have to be in the context of some sort of restoration of at least the spirit and the consequence of the ABM Treaty, which is to say limiting missile defenses, and there is no appetite for that on our side at all. So the arsenals are still there.

But what is not there is the global geopolitical and ideological contest that really was at the heart of the Cold War. Russia hopes to attract its near-abroad neighbors, the other former republics of the USSR, but it has not even an aspiration of exerting soft power, if I can put it that way, very far from home. In fact, they're having a lot of trouble maintaining it in Ukraine, to take us back to that.

MS. HILL: We have time for maybe one last question. I'll take the lady sitting down over here.

MS. MUDALLALI: My name is Amal Mudallali. I'm a scholar at the Wilson Center. I have a question concerning Syria.

You painted a very gloomy picture of the relationship. And, Angela, you said that you don't expect much in terms of a relationship, a domestic relationship, a

bilateral relationship until the end of the Obama term. Considering everything that we heard, what kind of leverage does the United States have on Russia to convince to work with them on a solution for Syria? I mean, regardless of the chemical weapons deal, as much importance as this, but it does not really focus on the core issue, which is basically solving the domestic problem in Syria, the crisis in Syria. Thank you.

MS. HILL: Thanks. I actually just missed this young lady here who had her hand up before, so.

MS. CHUMBADZE: Thank you. I'm Katie Chumbadze. I'm a visiting scholar at George Washington University. I'm from Georgia; from Tbilisi, not the state Georgia. My question is to Dr. Stent.

How do the U.S.-Russian relations affect on the issues of post-Soviet countries? And where do you see more options for solutions on these issues in case of a U.S.-Russian partnership, like Obama administration's (inaudible) policy or in case of limited partnership or competition between these countries? Thank you.

MS. HILL: That's great. And this gentleman here is wanting to ask a question. You get the last word from the floor.

SPEAKER: My name is Mattin. I'm a student at American University. I was wondering if you guys could talk to the article that Mr. Putin wrote in *The New York Times* back at the end of 2013 regarding the Syrian conflict. I was wondering if you could speak to the idea that Putin sees the West as sort of flouting the rules, especially the U.N., for its own convenience; and the idea that Putin felt the need to speak directly to the American people rather than through other institutions.

MS. HILL: Well, Angela, I'll give you the last word.

MS. STENT: All right.

MS. HILL: But maybe we'll cut that one to Peter because it was in --

MR. BAKER: Okay. (Laughter)

MS. HILL: Actually they all -- that ties nicely together to the first question, in any case.

MR. BAKER: I didn't get a piece, just to stay clear on that. We have a separate op-ed page and a news page. But for one thing, you have to understand about an op-ed like that is that Vladimir Putin and the Kremlin have hired an American PR firm that told him it was a good idea to do this, and he was happy to do it. I don't think he cares too much what American public opinion says, but it was a way for him to jab at the Americans, and particularly at President Obama at a moment when President Obama looked to be pretty damaged already by the handling of the Syria issue. This was Putin's way of saying, you know -- well, you can imagine what he would say. (inaudible) would say a very (inaudible) than I'll say here. (Laughter)

But, you know, I think that -- you know, he loves -- it's not just him, this is an old Soviet thing -- loves the equivalence, the false equivalence often, of saying, you know, you can't criticize us because you do the same thing. And he does it again and again and again, often things that are superficially equivalent but, in fact, really aren't. You can't talk about carpet bombing Grozny because you used airpower in Kosovo. You can't talk about us jailing political prisoners because you've got Guantanamo. You can't talk about press freedom because you, George Bush, fired Dan Rather, right? That's what he actually said to him once. In 2005, he actually says, George Bush, you fired Dan Rather, so I can do what I want with my press because you can't talk to me about that. And Bush says to him, look, you know, guys, if you go out there and say that, the Americans are going to think you don't really understand our system. I didn't fire Dan Rather. I had nothing to do with that. But that's the way Putin saw it and that's the way he makes the argument quite honestly.

Now, having said that, he certainly has a point to make, which is to say that the United States has, in fact, avoided at times the U.N. or other ratifying types of structures for issues like the proposed strike on Syria. I was with the President in St. Petersburg when he tried to get more support out of the G-20 and, you know, didn't really get what he would have liked out of that because, in fact, there was great ambivalence in the international community as there was in the American public, by the way, and as there was, obviously, in the Oval Office because President Obama himself didn't really want to do what he said he was going to do.

So, you know, the op-ed was a nice little jab on the part of the Russian president and I think he got what he wanted out of it. And I was particularly amused by the part where he says that America shouldn't think it's very exceptional this whole notion of exceptionalism.

MR. TALBOTT: It did contain a pretty embarrassing passage, though, that basically asserted that the Assad regime had no chemical weapons and had not used them.

MR. BAKER: Right, which, of course, days later, seems to be the opposite of his point of saying let's get them together, right? We'll go get those chemical weapons together, so.

MS. HILL: Well, (inaudible), Strobe, I'll let you say whatever you want to say to kind of wrap up here, but that actually gets to, you know, some of the points that Peter's just saying there before, that some of the previous interlocutors of Putin have complained about, that sometimes, you know, the facts get melded or molded.

But, Strobe, you've been right there at the forefront of the post-Soviet countries right from the beginning of your career in government. You've had some rather unpleasant experiences. I'm thinking about your time in Armenia, trying to negotiate

Nagorno-Karabakh, where the almost entire Armenian parliament got shot just as you were leaving to go to the airport. Not a cause and effect, but basically a symbol of the terrible times and the difficulty of having that U.S.-Russia relationship over the top of some really rather nasty conflicts, not just Georgia, but many of the other states. So I wonder if you might just have a quick thought about how you think the U.S.-Russia relationship has impacted many of those other relationships.

MR. TALBOTT: Well, it goes back to -- by the way, the only life I can ever claim to have saved was the life of the Armenian foreign minister, who was supposed to go with Prime Minister Sargsyan across the street to sell the deal that we had got to the parliament. And I asked the prime minister if I could kidnap the foreign minister and take him in my car out to the airport to close a couple of parts of the deal. And it was because he was with me that he was not mowed down there.

The Russian instinct continues to be keep stirring up trouble because it's the old -- you know, Stalin's first job, as it were, in the Bolshevik government was people's commissar for nationalities. He had a lot to do with drawing the map and designing the policies, all of which, notably including in his homeland, Georgia, was to ensure that a lot of these old feuds would continue to simmer; keep those parts of the country weak so that they could be ruled from Moscow. And I think that's also their view of the world as a whole.

And as for Syria -- and, Angela, you emphasized this, but just to conclude on it -- there is an ironclad rule of Russian foreign policy now which is not only never again will they be party to a regime change, whether it's in Syria or Ukraine, but they will do everything they can to thwart that. And this is a lesson that they didn't just learn, in their view, in Libya. It's a lesson that they learned in the Balkans and particularly as a result of the Kosovo war. Because what did the Kosovo war end with? And this

goes back to the Slavophile point, if I can. That an orthodox country in Europe had its regime toppled and a subset of that country with a Muslim majority population became an independent state. And the Russians saw that and they said that could happen here. Today, it's bombing Belgrade and freeing Kosovo. Some day, it'll be bombing Moscow and a free Chechnya, and that is very, very deeply rooted.

MS. HILL: Yeah, and I can attest, because I was in St. Petersburg during the bombings, that that was absolutely the view of everybody that I spoke to from the ground all the way up. I was there for several days during that bombing. And I think it's hard, getting back to all the points that we're talking about, not always understanding the perspective to realize that that was a genuine sentiment.

So, Angela, I mean, that kind of gets into all of these last questions that we've had.

MS. STENT: I can't resist on Peter's wonderful points about false analogies. A dinner that we were both at with Mr. Putin, I believe you sat next to him, when a British journalist asked him why is Lenin still in the mausoleum in Red Square, and Vladimir Putin asked him what country are you from? And he said Great Britain. And he said why do you still have statues of Oliver Cromwell? (Laughter)

So I'll, you know, leave you to work that one out, but he has a ready answer for everything. You know, the analogy between Cromwell and Lenin, and then it was pointed out that Cromwell is not embalmed in the Parliament, but still. (Laughter)

I want to actually come back to the question of Syria and I think it's partly been answered. I mean, and you ask what leverage the U.S. has. Not much. I mean, Russia, you know, Strobe's already -- the Libya analogy is absolutely the anti example for Mr. Putin, and he said it in so many terms. Russia has always believed that President Assad would prevail and it looks at the moment as if he will.

The major concern is to have a strong secular government in Damascus. Were an Islamist government to come to power, that has implications not only for the region that Russia would find dangerous, but for Russia itself and for its own North Caucasus and the other and the other Islamic parts of Russia. And, therefore, all of these other issues, this is why Russia won't agree to a vote in the United Nations Security Council that would tie humanitarian relief to sanctions against the Syrian government, right, if they don't allow this humanitarian relief because, again, that could threaten Assad's rule. And they are diehard standing by this view and this policy, and I don't see that they're going to change it.

And, frankly, I think that Russia today views the United States as being in decline, and the Europeans, too, rightly or wrongly, and believes that it has more cards there. And, therefore, I think -- I mean, you can see in both what Secretary Kerry and what President Obama said, great frustration about how can we get over -- you know, it's a terrible, horrible situation what's happening in Syria with the humanitarian crisis. How do we get beyond that?

And the Geneva -- you know, one could have predicted maybe in the beginning that these Geneva talks wouldn't have worked out and, at the moment, obviously, they're at a stalemate. I really don't think the United States has very much leverage and, therefore, it's very hard to see how you can move forward and get a solution that serves, you know, the needs of the Syrian people.

MS. HILL: Well, that also is a fitting but rather depressing, obviously, end to this panel because that's really what your book is about. It's kind of also a chronicle of how we thought we've had a lot of leverage over issues where we've had, in fact, very little.

So it's not just the limits of partnership, but it's just the old limits of our own

efforts at policymaking and to outreach that you describe so well in the book.

Angela is going to sign some copies of the book for those of you who would like to buy them outside. No free copies today, unfortunately. But we also very much hope that we'll have another chance to get together to talk about some of these issues as this year goes on. I'm sure that Mr. Putin and Russia will give us plenty to talk about, at least on the stages of Brookings.

And, Angela, I want to wish you every success with the book, and to thank Strobe and Peter for joining us today and thank all of you for sitting here for so long today when the sun's actually shining outside. So thank you very much. Thank you.

(Applause)

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