

Clara Marina O'Donnell Memorial Lecture
The Changing European Security Landscape

January 13, 2015

Bart Szewczyk: I would like to thank Heiko Hesse and Benedikt Signer from the Washington European Society for organizing this wonderful event, and especially Fiona Hill and Karen Donfried for giving the lecture and response. Clara had a knack for phrases and mottos, one of which was “never to miss the best party ever.” And echoing Clara, one can safely say that this event is the “best lecture ever!”

Clara adored both Fiona and Karen, and could not stop talking about their exciting conversations and interactions. Shortly after Clara arrived in DC in fall 2011, I remember how happy she was coming back from a meeting with Karen. Clara also frequently recounted great projects she and Fiona were able to collaborate on. And I remember thinking to myself—as well as telling Clara—I’ve been in DC for over two years and I haven’t been able to meet Fiona nor Karen nor scores of other fascinating colleagues of Clara’s, let alone interact with them as professional peers—as Clara was able to!

Clara loved this town, and her enthusiasm was viral. Not only did Clara attract many collaborators at work, she quickly developed a vast family of friends, many of whom are here tonight. She was very much respected for her intellect and analysis, but even more importantly, she was liked and loved for her humanity and kindness. She was a good soul and had a great heart. It was remarkable how many people turned up on very short notice last year when we organized a memorial

service for her. And two months later, about ten of us—her housemates and friends—flew to London to participate in a memorial mass with her parents and family, and scatter some of her ashes in the Thames, where she enjoyed taking long walks and dream of things to come.

Clara was devoted to her work, colleagues, and friends, and they, to her. In particular, I wanted to thank the Brookings Institution and the Centre for European Reform for providing such a wonderful professional home for Clara, especially in the last months of her life. Once we found out last August about Clara's illness, she determined to continue on as much as possible, and arranged with Brookings and CER to spend time in-between London and Washington. She worked until mid-December, about a month before the end. And now, there is a Clara Marina O'Donnell Fellow, who will also spend six months between CER and Brookings.

Let me turn it over now to Fiona, as Clara always disliked when moderators took too long in their introductory remarks and questions. Indeed, she taught me early on that the main point of think-tanks events like this is for you—namely, her!—to ask the questions and show one's intellectual skills. So, please think about your questions, and in the meantime, over to Fiona and Karen.

Fiona Hill: Clara O'Donnell was a remarkable woman professionally and personally. She was dedicated to international security and European defense issues in particular, but her expertise was wide-ranging, her knowledge deep, and her insights profound. Her personal experience and education in Europe, her facility at languages and research acumen, were all backed by a great intellectual curiosity. Most of all she was a remarkable, brilliant human being—compassionate,

kind, generous, charming, elegant. We felt very privileged to have her at Brookings. We were both stunned and deeply honored by the fact that even in her last months she wanted to be here in DC with all of us working on all the projects we'd collaborated on together, as well with her longstanding colleagues at the Centre for European Reform (CER) in London, which was her home base. We at Brookings and CER were deeply moved to be on Clara's "bucket list."

We miss Clara every day. Given the tumultuous events, in transatlantic affairs in the year since she left us, I often wonder what she would have had to say about the changing European security landscape—what keen, sharp analysis she would have been producing. I know that the world is poorer for the absence of her wise counsel on such difficult issues.

And *how* the landscape *has* changed since January 16, 2014. We are now in the midst of what is arguably the most serious crisis in European security since before Clara's birth, that is in over 30 years. The war in Ukraine, and the confrontation with Russia, is not just a throwback to the war scares of the 1980s when Clara was born. It is a real hot war, even if we, in the West are primarily focused on the economic and financial sanctions aspect of this confrontation. In 2014, Vladimir Putin launched a new 21st century form of hybrid warfare against Ukraine and the West. This hybrid war is a military conflict, an economic/financial conflict; a political, societal, cultural and media war. It is fought everywhere at home and abroad and with everything at Vladimir Putin's and the Russian state's disposal.

Russia formally annexed Crimea from Ukraine on March 18, 2014, breaking a post-Second World War European taboo and overturning the post-Cold War narrative of the shared goal of constructing a Europe free, whole and at peace. There are real military and civilian casualties in Ukraine. The downing of

Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 over the warzone in eastern Ukraine brought the conflict into sharp relief for Europe. Russian jets, ships and submarines are probing European and North American air and sea defenses once again. Vladimir Putin and other Russian officials have made dark warnings about the potential for Russia resorting to its nuclear arsenal if it is pushed into a corner. Media commentators in Russia and elsewhere talk of a new Cold War. And now the issue of European defense is back squarely on the agenda after a long period in which European countries were steadily drawing down their defense spending, cutting their budgets and reducing their capacity for military operations.

After the September 2014 Wales Summit, NATO has declared itself back in action as a transatlantic and Europe-focused military alliance after also expending considerable time and effort devising new roles for itself in out of area missions, including humanitarian and counter-piracy response. Instead of moving on to new horizons with the end of the Afghanistan mission in 2014, NATO is back to its old horizons in Europe. NATO is dusting off all its old deterrence doctrines, to reassure its newer members on the frontlines with Russia that it still has the military and political capacity to deal with an old-style threat that many had hoped had gone the way of the Soviet Union.

Clara would have been in the thick of parsing all of this, if she were still here with us. She would have already come forward with ideas and recommendations for adapting our existing institutions and diminished budgets to address the new European security challenges.

For a European woman working in the field of international security, like Clara, this past year has also changed landscape in which she worked in some unexpected ways. German Chancellor Angela Merkel has become the West's (not just

Europe's) main interlocutor with Vladimir Putin. This is somewhat reminiscent of Margaret Thatcher's role in dealing with Mikhail Gorbachev in the 1980s. But 30 years ago, Gorbachev was, as Mrs. Thatcher opined, "a man we can do business with." This is not likely a line Mrs. Merkel would currently use in talking about Mr. Putin; and, back in the 1980s, Ronald Reagan and a host of other European leaders also had major roles to play in dealing with the USSR. This time around, thirty years on, it is Angela Merkel, who is the most powerful political figure in Europe, and also the lead for the transatlantic alliance on this issue. In 2014, we were all observers to a situation in which one influential woman (with a supporting cast of not quite so influential men, sorry guys!) has been trying to get one very intransigent man to change his course of action. Back in the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher was the one who was never in favor of "turning" or changing course, while Mikhail Gorbachev was all about restructuring and new thinking in foreign policy.

Women also abound in the US and EU/Europe in dealing with Russia. Federica Mogherini has replaced Catherine Ashton as the EU's High Representative for Foreign Policy. In the US, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has been replaced by John Kerry, but behind Kerry and also behind President Obama stand a full phalanx of women at the State Department and National Security Council, but also as the US permanent representative to the UN, which is often the focal point of sparring with Russia. We also have, based in Washington DC, Christine Lagarde at the head of the IMF, which is back to playing a vital role in Europe as the Eurozone crisis drags on. And as the crisis has dragged on through 2014 and into 2015, the severe recession across Europe has fueled great popular anxiety, undermining mainstream European politics by providing fodder for populist parties. Another woman, Marine le Pen, at the head of the Front Nationale in

France, seems set to profit from all of this and present herself as another alternative leader in Europe—and one perhaps more to Vladimir Putin’s liking than Angela Merkel.

In short, all across Europe we have women leading political parties, countries, and foreign and defense departments. But in Russia, in stark and telling contrast, we have no, or almost no, women in the security and political spheres. There are some prominent women in the Russian government circles, for example at the Central Bank, where both the beleaguered head and deputy head of the bank are women. Or they are in the Human Rights and other social sectors. And they are also outside government, in the Russian media and think tanks, commenting on and analyzing everything. For the very senior women at the Central Bank, they are expected to clean up the mess in the economy and also cope with the fallout from the conflict Putin and the boys have made, with the ruble plummeting dramatically in value over the last few months.

Thirty years ago, when there was still a Soviet Union, the system had quotas for women at the top. There were also some real women in politics, members in fact of Putin’s generation, who were there not just because of quotas. There were women active and outspoken on defense issues and related issues, like Galina Starovoitova, who was assassinated in 1998. True, there were not a lot of female or other alternative voices on these issues then; but now there are also constraints on anyone who wants to speak up inside or outside the government. Putin has even got rid of the alternative voice at home—divorcing his wife Ludmila, who had in any case almost completely disappeared from view, along with his two adult daughters. As Nina Khrushcheva, former Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev’s granddaughter and a trenchant observer of things Russian, once quipped, even the role of the first lady in Russia was taken on by a man, by Dmitry Medvedev. He

was the one having tea and cookies with dignitaries, as Russian president from 2008-2012, while Putin kept all the power as prime minister.

I'm not going to embark on some long treatise about women in national security here—although I would like to note the delight in having one of that phalanx of influential women in the US, Karen Donfried, now heading up GMF and serving as our host tonight. But there is an important point to make here. Putin's Russia is a one boy, one man, show. The decisionmaking circle is very narrow, extremely narrow.

In the past few months, I have been in correspondence with a Russian closely tied into top business circles. He had read the first version of our book on Mr. Putin and wanted to make sure that I really grasped how “alpha male” Putin and the Russian system are. He wanted to stress that, from the perspective of these circles, Putin is what the Russians call a “patsan”—a bloke, a lad, a brother, what Brits in the 1980s sometimes call a “wide boy.” Patsan might also be translated as a “good fella” if we think about the mafia in US popular culture. It is a slang term used to refer to a member of a semi-criminal group or gang, sometimes in a jailhouse context. The popular image of a patsan is of a tough guy in his early twenties sitting around in a tracksuit eating sunflower seeds and drinking beer. Not exactly the image of a modern-day tsar more usually associated with Putin these days.

Others in Kremlin circles, however, have made this reference in discussions and interviews, obviously ironically. But the patsan is at the heart of a band of brothers, and this helps describe the current Russian system. Everyone in Putin's circle is related to him one way or another. Everyone is part of a “one boy network,” a tight group of men whose relationships with patsan Putin extend back decades. And one of the taboos, as frequently related in this regard—as my interlocutor wrote—is

“letting a woman [any woman] have their way.” In fact, other European and US diplomats have also related to me how on several occasions, Russian male officials got themselves worked up about the personal and national insult of having all those women from Europe and the US involved in Ukraine or dictating policy to them.

The language of Russian diplomacy these days is the language of force. It is often brutal, very deliberately “male” and intimidating. For example, Putin is obsessed with references to “balls”—particularly hanging people, men obviously, up by them. There are numerous examples of specific, often public, threats that Putin has made about hanging up men from erstwhile Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili to former European commission president José Manuel Barroso by their most sensitive parts. Putin’s Russia is not completely an anomaly in Europe, a few other male-dominated polities come to mind, and Angela Merkel had a tough road to the top in Germany as the excellent article by George Packer in the December 1, 2014 issue of the *New Yorker* makes clear; but the fact that Russia, bristling with nuclear and conventional weapons, is run by a one boy network, a boy’s club, with this kind of crude alpha male, patsan, misogynistic mentality, should give us pause for thought. In many respects, Russia has gone back 30 years, not forward.

There is also another point with this language and playing the patsan. Vladimir Putin wants to make sure that he is taken seriously. He wants to make sure that everyone knows that he will make good on every promise or threat—if Putin, if the patsan, says he will do something, then he is prepared to do it. And he will find a way of doing it, using *every* method at his disposal.

From Putin's biographical materials—beginning with his early interviews in 1999-2000, Putin and his Kremlin team have wanted domestic and international audiences to conceive of him as a scrappy little street fighter (a little thug in Masha Gessen's depiction in *The Man Without a Face*). All the stories laid out in these early materials and the subsequent embellishments were framed by the outbreak of the second war in Chechnya; but they were also intended to have a shelf-life for future events like those of today. Their purpose was to underscore that if Vladimir Putin gets into a fight, then he is prepared to fight to the end. He will keep on fighting, even if he gets beaten up (as a kid), or risks losing his position (as the official leader of Russia), or has to embark on a potential suicide mission (as his father did during World War II). Vladimir Putin may be an underdog—he's small in stature, he seems weaker than his opponents, he was always in secondary, never high-profile, positions until the late 1990s—but Vladimir Putin is a fighter. He won't give up, and he will fight dirty if that's what it takes to win. He didn't give up as a kid in the Leningrad courtyards. He didn't give up in Chechnya. He won't give up in Ukraine or elsewhere in Russia's neighborhood.

Vladimir Putin's rules for street fighting are essentially the same for his principles in domestic and foreign politics. Establish credibility and don't back down until the advantage is yours and you've made your point. Once your opponent has capitulated and you have established your turf and terms, then you can patch things up and move on—until the next showdown comes along. Whether the stories Putin and his team tell about his childhood fights are all true or not, Putin's martial arts training lends them some veracity. It also brings in another dimension. Putin began with judo and the somewhat rougher Russian variant called sambo at an early age. Judo gave Putin a more disciplined and ritualized approach to fighting. It helped him overcome his own weaknesses in terms of his size and strength relative to

others. Judo moved the street kid from anything-goes scraps into formalized matches. It gave him insight and techniques to figure out ways of pushing bigger, stronger opponents to the mat while protecting himself.

In the domestic and foreign policy arenas, Putin constantly sizes up his opponents and probes for physical and psychological weaknesses. Putin has also adapted Nixon's "Madman Theory" approach to help flush these weaknesses out—it helps gauge the reactions of his adversaries: They think I'm dangerous, and unpredictable, how do they respond to this? Have I got them unbalanced and on the back foot as a result? Then Putin tests his opponents to see if they mean what they say—will they also be prepared to fight, and fight to the end? If they are not, then he will exploit their empty threats to show them up, intimidate, deter, and defeat them. If they are prepared to fight, and he is outweighed or outgunned by his adversaries, then he will look for unconventional moves that get around their defenses so that he can outmaneuver them. In judo you can win on points over the course of a series of matches even if you are far smaller than your opponent and lose some of the individual rounds.

Much of this is borne out by events since Putin became president. Putin's tactics at home and abroad are geared toward gaining advantage against his opponents—be they oligarchs and opposition figures in Russia, or Western leaders and international organizations. To maximize the tactical advantage, Putin and the Kremlin have worked very hard at making him as inscrutable and unpredictable as possible. Access to Putin is strictly limited. His image is carefully branded and rebranded. Putin's appearances and public pronouncements are highly orchestrated and well-prepared. They are timed for maximum effect so that his audiences will hang on his every word—looking for any indication of what he might think, or what he might do next. The Kremlin maintains an almost complete unity of silence

and message. When messages seem to be transmitted without approval they are accompanied by equal measure of dis/mis-information. All of this deliberately complicates the task of the political opponent (as well as the outside analyst or biographer). Vladimir Putin is, and is supposed to be, unknowable to the outsider. The goal is to keep everyone confused and off balance.

As a senior US official recently put it in a private meeting: “what Putin knows and thinks is a mystery to everyone,” and yet the key to everything is what Putin knows and thinks. Putin’s tactical prowess is also very popular in Russia. The Russian public loves watching him improvise and change his positions at the last minute to outmaneuver the West. These tactical maneuvers are seen positively in Russia. Only Western commentators criticize Putin for not being a strategist—because they can’t figure out what he’s doing. For the Russian people, they can’t figure it out either, but as long as Putin is seen as being successful and is one step ahead of his opponents, he gets a pass. He keeps his ratings up. Annexing Crimea was of course the greatest of these tactical maneuvers and sent his rating sky-rocketing in 2014.

And this is a real problem for European security. Our current institutions are not equipped to deal with this type of decisionmaker or this type of system. The mechanisms we have adapted in the EU and elsewhere since the end of the Cold War were set up to deal with what we thought was a new Russia that was interested in integrating with, or at the very least in cooperating with, the West. Russia under Putin is more like the old Soviet Union in its stance—but without the formalized decisionmaking and political structures—and not interested in integrating at all, and not especially interested in cooperating either (at least not on issues where the West has set the agenda). Russia is now essentially: “one guy going rogue.” Putin’s Russia is a lone wolf, or perhaps better, as this is Russia, a

lone bear. Putin is an actor who revels in intimidation and obfuscation, and in the unconventional approach to warfare. Insurgencies and operatives are his favored methods. And Putin's idea of a "win win" is: "a win for me, and another win for me." Putin and most European leaders are in very different places in their political and security thinking.

Against this backdrop, we now want Putin to bow to the pressure of sanctions and low oil prices and pull out of eastern Ukraine. We keep looking for cracks in the Russian system, and splits between Putin and his band of brothers and the Russian elite and the oligarchs. We scour the polls (as he also does) for any indication of a drop in his popularity. We look for any rumor, any evidence of the brewing of a palace coup. Mr. Putin retorts that there can't be any palace coups because Russia no longer has any palaces—which is actually, technically, not true, but Putin also doesn't let the truth stand in his way either.

Instead, Putin seems to be set on making new deals at home with the Russian population, preparing them for tough times ahead, and laying all the blame for what's happened in the economy on us, the West, and our sanctions. The sanctions have been compounded by the drop in the oil prices, which is also spun in the Russian media as a US-Saudi conspiracy. Russia's economic performance in 2015 will ultimately depend on the oil price, not sanctions. But Putin is concerned primarily about security, not economics, and he has no way to mitigate the effects of the oil price. He *can* mitigate sanctions—but he is also not looking to make any concessions in order to ease the pressure of sanctions.

First, Putin does not consider the sanctions as terribly onerous. It is the oil price that is really hurting him. Nothing he could do with respect to Ukraine will help that. Second, it is not clear what possible concessions Putin might make in

Ukraine. He will not hand back Crimea under any circumstances. He will also continue to provide military support to the rebels in eastern Ukraine as long as he perceives that there is a risk that Kyiv will launch a military operation to crush the rebels.

As a result, there is no real endgame in sight, even if Putin is making tactical shifts and being more cautious as the strategic landscape continues to change. This is what he does, but he's not stepping back from anything in Ukraine, just adapting to new circumstances. Putin intends to keep Ukraine hanging by the balls, going back to his favorite metaphor. He will keep looking for ways (political and economic, not just military) to inflict punishment on Ukraine (and Europe and the US wherever he can) to soften everyone up and get them to step back. Again, Putin doesn't want to do anything to lift the sanctions, but he would like Europe to lift the sanctions for him. And this is one of things he is working on now, figuring out how to do this, and looking to the spring and summer (between March-July 2015) when the current sanctions come up for review.

So what do we do to counter this? We first need to stick together, the US and Europe. And we need to put all our heads together, male and female, to get our own act in place to deal with the irreconcilable, alpha male, patsan Putin. We can make deals carving up bits and pieces of Ukraine and the neighborhood, but they will be temporary. We are in for a long haul.

Dealing with Putin is not unlike dealing with another band of brothers, the very extreme bands of disaffected young men who are pulled toward ISIS (although as we know it's not all men). And if we think of Putin in this way, we need to think about how we change the paradigm. How do we deny the power of his arguments and offer alternatives to his grievances? How do we deny Putin the ability to upend

European politics, corrupt and co-opt parts of our societies by playing with and paying for populist parties or European businessmen for example, and by drowning us in propaganda? How do we also stop ourselves from overreacting, and trying to play him at his game, militarily, and on the propaganda front? He wants us to play his game, so he can be sure we will lose. Given his skills as a tactician, he will bob, and weave, and dissemble, and frighten, and push us off balance and use all our missteps against us.

Our deeds are what will make the difference, sticking to our principles and values and acting together, doing what we're best at with soft power; standing tough, and showing that violence and use of force is the last, not the first, resort. Getting back to theme I started with, and thinking of Clara, we have an advantage—our openness, our willingness to listen to and understand diverse viewpoints including from the 50 percent the population that the Russian regime systematically ignores. We don't push women into the background. We also don't cut off our leaders from diverse viewpoints and bad news. We don't operate on so much less than half our brain. We can outsmart the one boy network if we really work at it. We can outlast him without even trying very hard. Patsan Putin and the boys club will eventually devour themselves or run out of steam It just may take some time for them to do so.

Karen Donfried: First, many thanks to those of you who conceived this evening. I'm delighted to be a part of this event and to remember Clara in this way. I can't think of a more perfect tribute than an evening devoted to exploring transatlantic relations in this circle, which includes so many people who knew and cared deeply about Clara and valued all she brought to our worlds.

Second, kudos to Fiona: What an interesting and thoughtful set of remarks! I absolutely agree with her starting point that we are facing the most serious crisis in European security since the end of the Cold War. And her analysis of Russian behavior – or more accurately, Putin’s behavior – is both compelling and sobering.

Now, let me complement Fiona’s presentation by picking up one of her last points – her call for us – the US and Europe – to stick together.

To date, the transatlantic community has done a very good job of sticking together. Transatlantic solidarity has been striking. My sense – and Fiona can speak authoritatively on this – is that Putin was banking on the fact that neither EU member states nor the US and its EU partners would be unified in their response. Along with the role of President Obama, the role of Angela Merkel has been key. We have long seen Germany as the critical and most powerful country on the economic side of the ledger – exhibit A is the euro-zone crisis. However, Germany has always held back when it comes to foreign and security policy. This has not been the case on Ukraine. While, arguably, the UK’s position has been the most similar to Washington’s, the UK seems to be isolating itself from Europe and doesn’t seem to have the influence in EU circles it once did. France, while deeply engaged in the ongoing talks with the Ukrainians, Russians, and Germans, seems to be on the train, but not driving it. It is Merkel, who has been solid and unwavering, who is working to hold Hollande close and bring along the rest of the EU.

We, Americans and Europeans, have pursued a policy together that includes three key elements:

- Reassuring our NATO Allies,

- Supporting Ukraine on a path to economic and political health,
- Punishing, as well as engaging, Russia for its actions.

First, let me address the issue of reassuring our Allies, especially the Baltics and Poland. In the immediate wake of Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, the US buttressed Baltic air policing and beefed up the aviation detachment in Poland. The US was joined by other NATO Allies in this reassurance mission and the NATO Summit this past September in Wales showcased an Alliance rejuvenated and ready to recommit to maintaining strong defenses.

Second, on supporting Ukraine, we, Americans and Europeans, are committed to helping Ukraine succeed. The IMF is playing a hugely significant role in terms of economic support. We have seen Ukraine conduct two successful elections, especially impressive given the difficult conditions in the country. We all are pressing Ukraine to implement crucial reforms on both the economic and political fronts.

Third, in terms of Russia, we have pursued a two-pronged approach. On the one hand, we have sought to offer Russia a diplomatic off-ramp from the crisis. There have been countless meetings intended to help broker a compromise. Most recently, the foreign ministers of Germany, France, Ukraine and Russia met yesterday in Berlin, but, rather than announcing progress, they agreed to postpone the summit of leaders in Astana planned for this week due to the failure to implement the ceasefire deal agreed in Minsk last September -- "further work needs to be done," they announced, before a summit can be held. There was no indication when such a summit might now take place.

On the other hand, we have sought to punish and isolate Russia for its illegal annexation of Crimea and ongoing efforts to destabilize eastern Ukraine. The isolation came in the decision to disband the G8 and return to G7 meetings. The punishment came in the form of sanctions, of which we have now had multiple rounds. It was not anticipated that these sanctions would have a serious negative impact on the Russian economy in the short term, but the unexpected arrival of low energy prices in conjunction with the sanctions has seen the value of the ruble plummet.

The question I would like to leave you with is **how sustainable** are the EU's sanctions. Just today the *Wall Street Journal* carried a story reporting that the European Union could significantly scale back sanctions if Russian President Putin takes steps to defuse the crisis in eastern Ukraine, according to an EU discussion paper.

While insisting the EU can't return to "business as usual" with Moscow, the paper proposes the EU consider normalizing, step-by-step, its relationship with Russia, which would represent a significant shift. Such a change would depend on several factors, including that Moscow fully implement the cease-fire it signed with Ukraine.

While the paper is aimed at sparking discussion, it is the first serious effort by EU officials to consider reducing tensions and puts forward a variety of carrots to secure Russian support. The paper seems to reflect the views of those in the European Union, who believe that this is a time for dialogue, rather than further pressure.

European Council President Donald Tusk addressed the European Parliament this afternoon and said EU leaders had decided last month, in December, that “the best thing for now is to stay the course” on sanctions. He said: “We will decide the next steps in March.”

The EU’s three Russia-related sanctions laws expire between March and July. All 28 member states need to approve any extension of those sanctions for another year. As Fiona noted, Putin is waiting for us to soften up and lift sanctions.

Transatlantic unity remains critical to any successful policy regarding Ukraine. We will need to work to maintain it.