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5 on 45: On NATO and Eastern European Stability

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(MUSIC)

PITA: You're listening to 5 on 45 from the Brookings Podcast Network, analysis and commentary from Brookings experts on today's news regarding the Trump Administration.

O'HANLON: It's Michael O'Hanlon of Brookings and I'm here talking about my new book *Beyond NATO*: on the new security architecture for Eastern Europe, and what I'm trying to argue in this book is that however well-intentioned and however successful it may have been so far NATO expansion has gone far enough and really shouldn't continue.

So I'm trying to challenge a strong consensus, in certainly American foreign policy circles and probably throughout much of NATO, that somehow the alliance almost has a *raison d'être* anymore just needs to keep expanding. I think that this is a mistake. I don't think it's backed up frankly in the original NATO treaty, the Washington Treaty of 1949. If you read it carefully there's no permanent presumption of ongoing expansion. It's only going to be advisable and only recommended if and when that expansion would serve the broader interests of European security. That's what Article 10 says in that treaty. And now we are a lot further along in history. Of course, the Cold War is over, NATO's expanded from its original 12 to twenty nine members, and we are still talking about bringing in more including Georgia and Ukraine - former Soviet republics. In fact Vice President Pence was just recently in Georgia saying that he thought the country was on a path towards NATO membership. But that's been our position now for almost 10 years, going back to 2008 when President Bush convinced other NATO leaders that we should at least promise the eventual membership for NATO inclusion for Georgia and Ukraine.

Unfortunately, we have no way of guaranteeing their security in the meantime. We didn't promise to protect them and we sort of left them exposed, therefore, with this half pregnant state to the possibility of Russian mischief making and aggression. I think we've contributed in that indirect to unintentional way to the problem and we need to go back to first principles and ask whether NATO expansion is really even solving the interests or the problems of the countries at issue, whether it can really still be a good idea going forward, and whether maybe we need to create an alternative security architecture which I propose should be, in fact, a zone of neutral states through Eastern Europe and actually into the Caucasus region of Asia and we should negotiate this first within NATO then with the neutral countries themselves and only after that with Russia. And the basic deal should be that these countries, which I'll mention and enumerate in just a second, would not be in NATO as a permanent decision and permanent state but they would have every other right to join any other organization, certainly including the European Union if that someday mutually advantageous. Russia would get no veto over that, would have no special zone of influence or interest in this part of the world, this would not be another Yalta like with Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill in World War II that sort of divvied up Europe into different zones of special interest for the superpowers. This would be, in fact, a preservation of all the sovereign rights of these countries. But with one exception, that NATO membership would not be available to them. And I don't see this as depriving any country of an inherent right. Alliances are designed for specific purposes at specific moments and time and if they don't serve the interests of broader regional security they shouldn't necessarily be expanded. So the basic deal would be that Russia would have to get its military forces out of Ukraine and Georgia and Moldova on terms acceptable to

all those states. We might have to finesse the Crimea issue and I come back to that in a second. But in exchange for that or as part of the same deal these countries would be explicitly promised the right to join any economic and diplomatic and political grouping they wished. Russia would acknowledge that it had no special say over their internal or external affairs. And we would have verification mechanisms and various means of proportionately responding should Russia try to cheat on the Accord and of course if Russia violated the accord we could simply rip it up and offer NATO membership, perhaps on an expedited basis at that point to these countries.

I mentioned that Crimea is a special case. Of course this is the area that Russia took back from Ukraine in 2014 with the so-called Little Green Men without a shot being fired, in contrast to the much bloodier Russian support for separatists in eastern Ukraine that's ongoing. I don't think that it's realistic to get Crimea back into the Ukrainian orbit and I could live with a situation where the United States and the West simply fail to recognize that Crimea is now part of Russia but we otherwise put the issue off to the side. Anyway, I think this big deal would address the state of horrible U.S. Russian security relations we see today. It may not be negotiable for a few more months given the state of the Trump administration's relationship with Vladimir Putin and the election meddling fiasco of last year, it may take a while to get beyond that. But I think that if and when we could get beyond it, it would dramatically reduce the risks of rivalry and even war in Eastern Europe which I consider to be uncomfortably high right now. And I'll conclude by simply summarizing the idea of the endorsement I got for this book on the back cover by former Secretary of Defense Bill Perry. And I'm paraphrasing here but Secretary Perry said he didn't know necessarily find my idea perfect or cost free for the countries involved.

But frankly there haven't been other better ideas that have been offered. And we're in such a bad state of relations with Russia, the other nuclear superpower on earth, that we have to think from first principles and fundamentals about what kind of new arrangements may indeed be needed to change this dynamic which could in fact lead us towards war.

I don't pretend that this would be a solution to all of our problems with Vladimir Putin who I consider an untrustworthy and brutal guy. But I think there's a very high chance that this could at least stabilize NATO-Russian relations at a crucial moment in our history.

(MUSIC)

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