

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

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NATO AT A CROSSROADS:
NEXT STEPS FOR THE TRANS-ATLANTIC ALLIANCE

Washington, D.C.

Monday, July 31, 2017

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. TAUSSIG: Good morning, everybody. Welcome to Brookings this morning for what will be a very interesting and provocative discussion with our two senior fellows, Mike O'Hanlon and Steve Pifer. My name is Torrey Taussig. I am a pre-doctoral research fellow in the Foreign Policy program at the Brookings Institution. It is so nice to see so many faces on a beautiful July, Monday morning, especially hours before August descends and Washington goes on vacation. So thank you for being here.

Today is a formal book launch for Mike O'Hanlon's new book, *Beyond NATO: A New Architecture for* – "Beyond NATO: a New Security Architecture for Eastern Europe." But both Mike and Steve have recently completed persuasive, and what I'm sure will be consequential books on a series of timely and important issues in U.S. foreign policy today regarding the future of NATO and European security.

We will get to discussion on their perspectives in just a moment, but I thought it would be important to first address briefly why these issues are so critical and timely for us to be addressing at this moment in time. And of course, there is, first, the ongoing crisis in Ukraine and Russia that has led to over 10,000 Ukrainian deaths, large swaths of destabilized territory in Ukraine, the Russian annexation of Crimea, of course, and continued sanctions from the U.S. and Europe that continue to this day.

Then there is the U.S.-Russia relationship, which is arguably the worst we've seen since the end of the Cold War. Just this weekend, Putin announced that the U.S. should remove over 750 of its diplomatic staff from the country in response to new American sanctions on Russia. And then, of course, there is the ever-changing and unpredictable wild card of President Trump, who has consistently questioned the value of the NATO alliance, has criticized NATO members, and has instead maintained pro-Russia and pro-Putin sentiments. Until recently, Putin -- Trump had not endorsed NATO central Article 5, the mutual defense clause: an attack against one should be considered an attack against all, which was the first time a U.S. president had maintained this position since the end of the Cold War -- sorry, since the treaty was signed.

So with all of this in mind, clearly there are big questions to be asked, big choices to be made, and Mike and Steve's perspectives help us to think critically about those choices.

So what I'll do is just kind of talk through what I thought were interesting points on both of your books and then we'll turn it over for discussion between Mike and Steve.

First, in Mike O'Hanlon's book, you ask the pivotal question, should the NATO alliance continue to expand? And Mike asked this question with regards to what is arguably the most consequential security issue facing the U.S. today, which is increasing hostility with Russia that if not successfully addressed could spiral into open conflict. And Mike proposes, I think persuasively, a concrete step to lower tensions between these two nuclear superpowers. And that is to create a European security order that excludes currently neutral nations of Eastern Europe from future NATO membership. So stating definitively in answer to the prior question, no, the NATO alliance should expand no further.

And I thought former U.S. Secretary of Defense Bill Perry had an interesting perspective on this proposal. He wrote in a blurb on the back of Mike's book, "It is a controversial proposal and one with real drawbacks for the nations involved, but a problem that has alluded other solutions, and the consequences of not solving it could be catastrophic."

So we will ask Mike in just a second to elaborate on those proposed solutions and outline his main arguments.

First, just a brief note on Steve Pifer's new book, "The Eagle and the Trident: U.S.-Ukrainian Relations in Turbulent Times." Steve asks a related and equally challenging question, how did Ukraine get into its current situation? And Steve's book is a truly comprehensive account, a diplomatic history of sorts, on U.S.-Ukrainian relations covering both the setbacks and advancements that Washington and Kiev have experienced since the fall of the Soviet Union. And the account covers, of course, Steve's 13-year career in the Foreign Service at the Department of State, on the National Security Council at the White House, and as U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine from 1998 to 2000.

And as one might expect, questions regarding NATO and Russia have featured centrally in this Ukraine-U.S. relationship since the end of the Cold War, and so Steve will walk us through his points on the genesis and evolution of NATO expansion and where the European Security Order might go from here.

I would also be remiss if I did not say that today is Steve's last day as a full-time scholar

at the Brookings Institution, so we are even more fortunate to hear from him this morning.

MR. PIFER: But I keep on as a nonresident fellow.

MS. TAUSSIG: But he's still here as a nonresident. We aren't losing him completely to Northern California.

So with that background, I would like to ask Mike, and then Steve, to give their main arguments and then we'll have a discussion and hear from the audience.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you, Torrey. And good morning, everyone. Great to see you here. I appreciate your coming out as Torrey said.

I also want to begin by saluting and thanking Steve, partly as a way to hopefully soften the critique that I'm about to have him unleash on my proposal, because I know, and hopefully you'll find this stimulating and useful, that we'll have probably a fair amount of discussion and even some debate on this whole concept of a new security architecture for Europe. But Steve's been an amazing colleague for a decade here at Brookings.

You might ask how such a young man can think about retirement. It boggles my mind as well. I've been trying to talk him out of it for years. I'm sure it's not going to really be retirement; it's more relocation. And I guess since we don't have that many days in late July like this one, I can't really blame him for wanting to go to Northern California. But I really had the honor and privilege to write with him, to be his colleague, and also learned a lot from him in the course of writing my own proposal. So while I won't blame it on him, because if I tried he would quickly rebut that. Nonetheless, on a number of issues, I've learned a lot by reading Steve. Also, my colleagues Fiona Hill, Cliff Gaddy, Angela Stent, some of the most important Europe and Russia scholars, not to mention Strobe Talbott.

So with that said, let me very briefly just give you a couple of the main ideas in my proposal.

First, I should begin by again summarizing the main problem I think I'm trying to solve. You can judge whether it would accomplish that or not. Torrey alluded to it, obviously. It's the horrible state of U.S.-Russia relations, and to be blunt, the risk of war. I don't think a U.S.-Russia war is out of the question. In fact, neither does Secretary Perry. In another part of that same blurb where he expresses some ambivalence about my proposal, while nonetheless ultimately endorsing that we debate it, he talks

about the risk of war.

About a year ago, or less than a year ago on this stage, we had former Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Richard Shirreff, a British general, who had just written a novel called "War with Russia." And we asked him in the course of the presentation, "Why did you write this?" And he said, "Well, I wrote a couple of those policy papers in a think tank. Nobody reads those so I've got to do it more dramatically, but I'm worried about war with Russia and a real NATO-Russia conflict being possible."

Now, one can still debate whether my proposal would do anything about that or even some people might argue worsen the risks of war, but I think it might help ease them. I do not predict U.S.-Russia detente or friendship with Putin or anything of the kind, even if this proposal is adopted and implemented successfully. I think that U.S.-Russia relations are going to stay poor for quite some time, and even a big idea like this, even if it turned out to be doable and a good idea, and Steve probably thinks it's neither, nonetheless would not end the acrimony.

So let me just sort of set the tone and the context with that kind of an introductory statement as well.

And by the way, even if you don't worry about U.S.-Russia war, even if you think that Putin wouldn't go so far as to do something that could actually run that risk, we're already seeing quite a bit of acrimony on issues like Afghanistan, where there are reports of Russia helping the Taliban. Again, I'm not here to apologize for anything about Vladimir Putin or his behavior. And if my proposal seems as such, let me quickly try to debunk that impression.

We are not clear that Russia is trying to really help with North Korea. There are some reports that Russia-North Korea trade is increasing, even as we're trying to make North Korea feel the heat, and you know, let's not even talk about Syria yet, where I still hope there could be some kind of U.S.-Russia collaboration, but that's a long shot.

All that said, three main elements to my proposal. One, the currently neutral states of Eastern Europe, and also extending over into Western Asia, would not be eligible for NATO membership. We would negotiate an arrangement, starting within NATO, then extending to those neutral countries themselves, and only ultimately with Russia, that would create a permanent neutral zone. And I'm

thinking of Austria and Switzerland as my models, not Belgium just before World War II. I'm hoping that this could be a stabilizing way to think about countries that right now are in some sense contested, and they find themselves at the crosshairs of Russia, particularly, I would argue, because they are considered to be potential future NATO members. And the idea here, therefore, would be to say, we're actually not doing these countries any favor by keeping alive the distant prospect of NATO membership. We're actually doing them a new disservice because it's putting them even more squarely in the crosshairs of Putin.

So the idea here would be that Finland and Sweden, who I hope would go along with this idea, because they are in many ways the most successful, the most western and democratic, market-oriented countries. And therefore, if they could have confidence in this idea, I think it would have ripple effects for everyone else. If they still wanted to keep alive NATO options or NATO membership options themselves, it would be difficult for other countries to feel that they weren't simply being left out in the cold. So I would hope that Finland and Sweden in the north, and then moving down, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, and then moving down further, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and then finally, Cyprus and the Balkans. I would hope that these countries in these regulations would be willing to go along with this proposal. By the way, Russia would have to negotiate acceptable ends to the -- not the frozen conflicts, to the ongoing conflicts that it has in a number of these places, on terms that were acceptable to Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, even if there's no conflict there but there is a Russian presence.

So Russia has got to do a lot to make this plan work. But if Russia is prepared to do that, as well as a couple of other things I'll get to in a second, then I believe it's in our interest to essentially create a permanent neutral zone.

What else does Russia have to do? This is the second main point. Russia has to acknowledge that all these countries that I've just mentioned, have every other option available to them for internal membership, most notably the European Union, and of course, Finland and Sweden are already in the European Union. But I'm suggesting that Ukraine and Georgia and other countries, if the EU wishes and if those countries wish, should be allowed in. And that has to be an explicit part of the deal. I'm sure Steve will say later that, in fact, it was the prospect of Ukraine moving closer to the European Union that created the crisis of 2013-2014. It wasn't specifically and acutely the near-term

prospect of NATO membership. I agree with that analysis, but I think in broader terms we can be flexible on NATO. We cannot be flexible on the EU, the reason being the EU gets to core rights politically and economically than any country should have. And of course, there are various kinds of documents in European history -- 1975 Helsinki Final Act and others that have codified even a Russian agreement to the notion that everybody should have their freedom to join these kinds of bodies.

So I think there can be no Yalta 2. There is no Russian sphere of influence. These neutral states have to be truly neutral. And if they want to call themselves western and be western in every other sense of the word, so be it. This is simply about NATO.

Finally, the last point I'll make, we can't trust Putin even if he signs up to this. We have to verify it. We have to keep doing the European Reassurance Initiative. I'm even in favor of making the U.S. troop presence in Poland permanent. Not large, but permanent. And so there are a number of other dimensions to the overall architecture that I think we have to make sure we are not naïve about.

Two final points and I'll stop. Those are the three big pieces of this that I wanted to get on the table. Let me make two final points. One is some people will say that NATO is inherently open to new members and they'll cite Article 10 of the 1949 Treaty when 12 countries agreed to form the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. And there is a clause in Article 10 that implies, that says that other countries can be considered for membership. However, let me quickly remind you, the Cold War is now over. That was 1949. We've already added 17 new members. We're now talking occasionally about adding a country, Georgia, which is not even in Europe at all, and yet the North Atlantic Treaty Organization says it is about North American and European countries with a focus on the North Atlantic region. So I would simply submit we've got to go back to our basics and our first principles and ask, what was Article 10 about and how applicable is it really today? This is a point we commonly hear because it's often said in NATO circles that NATO is inherently about enlargement. And I think this has become an ideology that needs to be reassessed. People will focus back on Article 10 from the 1949 Treaty to back that up. I don't think it's a very compelling argument.

Moreover, we don't have any other alliance system in the world that we are inherently looking to expand as a matter of just core ideology or philosophy. Alliances are created at specific moments in time for specific reasons. They are not inherent rights for any country and they're not

inherently good or bad. So I would just want to take the debate about alliances and NATO and expansion back to first principles.

And then finally, I would simply say, and I think you've probably gotten this sense already from what I'm trying to convey this morning, I'm not here to apologize or critique anything about NATO's policy over the last 25 years. I was always skeptical of NATO expansion but it was done for reasonable rationales. People like Steve Pifer and Strobe Talbott, Victoria Nuland, and many others, very honorable Americans did a lot to make it work well. Russia should not have reacted the way it did. And Putin uses the narrative of history that NATO is somehow threatening him and his country cynically to justify things that he shouldn't be doing.

Let me just say all those things to be clear that I am not here to apologize for Putin, and nothing about this negotiation concept that I suggest should be done with any sense of redress towards Russia. It's very important that we make that clear going in. And that's part of why I want to, at the same time that we're proposing this idea, station forces in Poland, not just rotate them in and so on and so forth.

So I think that's sort of the relatively rapid fire summary of where I'm coming from, and I look forward to the discussion after we hear from Steve.

MS. TAUSSIG: Thanks.

MR. PIFER: Well, first of all, let me thank both Torrey and Mike for the kind words and say that actually, over the course of my nine years here, Mike and I agree on a lot. Five years ago we wrote a book together. We don't agree on everything, and I'll come to that point in a minute.

But I will start by saying that I do agree with Mike that the European security order that emerged in the aftermath of the Cold War is badly broken. And it's broken in large part because Vladimir Putin and the Kremlin came to a conclusion that that European security order disadvantages Russian interests. And a big part of that is the way that Mr. Putin looks at NATO enlargement. And his narrative is that NATO enlarged, the decision was taken in the early 1990s, in Washington, and in Germany, and in Britain, to him and Russia to bring military force to Russia's border. And Mr. Putin is concerned about that in part because he sees that as undermining one of his goals which is the establishment of a sphere of influence or what the Russians call a sphere of privileged interest in the post-Soviet space.

Now, that's his narrative. I actually think his narrative is wrong and that it is not supported by the history. And I'll just go briefly through that. What really was the genesis of NATO enlargement was you had countries like Poland and the Czech Republic emerge from the wreckage of the Warsaw Pact and basically say if we're prepared to undertake the reforms necessary to become modern European democratic states, we should be able to have the right to belong to institutions like the European Union and NATO.

And I worked at the White House in the Clinton administration, the National Security Council, and the view of President Clinton was, well, there's no reason why we should be saying no to these companies. But he also, he very much recognized that NATO enlargement would be a very delicate issue with Russia. And really from the beginning when the United States began to think seriously about an enlargement track, at the president's direction we were also working, what's the track to engage Russia in a way to make enlargement not such a bigger pill?

And so, for example, President Clinton spoke to President Yeltsin regularly about this, and would usually give him 12 to 18 months' notice of things that were going to happen. And his policy was, let's be completely transparent. No surprises.

In 1997, before NATO extended its first invitation, it took several steps to try to make NATO enlargement less painful to Russia. One was the three noes? The alliance stated no intention, no plan, no requirement, to place nuclear weapons on the territory of new member states. And there was a parallel commitment with regards to conventional forces where the alliance said there's no requirement for permanent stationing of substantial combat forces, conventional forces on the territory of new members. And in fact, up until 2014, you had virtually no NATO combat forces on the territory of new members. That only changed in the spring of 2014 in reaction to the Soviet or the Russian seizure of Crimea with military force and Russian support for arms separatism in Eastern Ukraine.

And then there was also the effort to build a NATO-Russia relationship, a NATO-Russia Council, and the hope there was that you could build a relationship between NATO and Moscow that would be so cooperative that the Russians wouldn't care about enlargement because they would see NATO as a security partner.

Now, clearly, we fell short of those ambitions. I think first of all we underestimated just

how much antipathy, how much hostility there was in Russia, not just to the idea of NATO enlargement but just the very idea of NATO. And second, we overestimated our ability to use things like the NATO-Russia Council to address Russian concerns.

But I would make a couple of additional points. One is, if you look at the history of NATO-Russia relations from 1997 on, you don't see a lot of creativity, a lot of ideas from the Russian side about how to improve that relationship. And second, what you've seen, particularly in the last several years, is a Kremlin that has nurtured, encouraged hostility towards NATO. I mean, watch Russian state television. A lot of this is manufactured by the Kremlin. And part of this, I think, reflects a Russian foreign policy that is driven by domestic political factors.

Mr. Putin, and we saw this when he came back to the presidency in 2012, couldn't talk about economics. So you saw Russian nationalism. Russia is a great power. Russia is a player on the world stage. And that has driven a lot of Russian policy at a time when the Russian economy doesn't give him much to base regime legitimacy on.

So what now? I think it's going to be very difficult to rebuild the European (inaudible) in part because to make it work you're going to have Russian buy-in. I think that's one of the things that has driven Mike's model. But it's a problem because western views, interest in values differ very greatly from those of Russia at the moment, and institutions such as NATO, the European Union, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation all have value to the West. So I think we're looking at a situation now where for the foreseeable future you're not going to see NATO enlargement. And it boils down to the fact, particularly with regards to countries like Ukraine and Georgia, NATO is not prepared to go to war with Russia over Ukraine or Georgia. And that's the problem that those two countries face, is that both of them have ongoing territorial disputes. Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, South Ossetia (inaudible) with Russia, where taking one of those countries in would mean Article 5 kicks in on day one. Article 5 is the commitment of all allies to treat an attack against one as an attack against all. And NATO, and I can understand this, is not prepared to do this.

And therefore, I think it was probably a mistake two weeks ago for Ukrainian President Poroshenko to say we want a membership action plan in the near future. And that's a mistake because he's setting himself up for failure and disappointment because it's not going to happen.

So what should a country like Ukraine do? Several things. First of all, manage expectations. Don't fuel them. Don't fan them. Because failure to achieve a near-term goal with regards to Ukraine's relationship with NATO is going to be bad not only for President Poroshenko but it's also going to be bad for NATO's image. Second, you can still in Ukraine deepen cooperation with the alliance. You can do a lot. Just don't call it a membership action plan.

It's interesting to me that Moscow seems to focus on titles, not content. And it's one thing that we've told the Ukrainians a number of times over the last 20 years is just do stuff. And that's where unfortunately Ukraine tends to be a little bit weak is on implementation.

When I was ambassador to Ukraine in 1998, or it was actually, I think, early 1999, I invited Alexander Vershbow, who was then the U.S. perm rep to NATO. I said, please come to Ukraine and talk to the Ukrainians for a couple of days about their relationship with NATO, and in part, explain to them why Ukraine's quarter (?) reputation in Brussels is so bad. And it was because of weak follow-through.

About two years ago I was at a conference and I heard Ambassador Vershbow, then the Deputy Secretary General of NATO speak, and he talked about NATO Ukraine. And I had the sense it hasn't improve much. Ukraine ought to be focused on doing implementation, implementation, implementation, so it has itself prepared if the opportunity comes open it can then take advantage of that.

And finally, don't press NATO now for membership action plan, but just press to ensure that the NATO view with regards to Ukraine moving towards NATO becomes not never. Not now is acceptable, but you don't want it to become never.

Now, that's not going to be a happy situation for Ukraine or Georgia, and it leaves them in more of a gray security zone than either country would like. But there's not an alternative at the moment.

And that now brings me to Mike's proposal, several points where I agree with him, but I don't think -- first of all, let me actually give Mike credit for trying to come up with a model. And I have to confess, I can't offer a model at this point. I don't know what that next European Security looks like. But having said that, I don't think Mike's model works.

First of all, I disagree on philosophical grounds. If you go back to the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, which Moscow signed, it basically says all states have the right to choose their orientation, including

associations and alliances. But there are several ways where I think Mike's proposal probably would not work.

First of all, many -- I won't say most, but many of the countries that would be in that neutral zone don't want to be there. And I'm not talking about just Ukraine and Georgia, where polls show rising support for association with institutions like NATO, but also Sweden and Finland, where I think in the last three or four years you've seen debates in both those countries about drawing closer to NATO that you hadn't seen in the previous 10 or 15 years. And that's a consequence of what the Russians have done in Ukraine and more bellicose Russian rhetoric and the fact that those countries have three or four times more Russian planes flying around their borders as was the case say in 2012. Sweden now has a status of forces agreement with NATO that allows NATO forces to come into Swedish territory. Both Sweden and Finland are now conducting military exercises with NATO. So it's not just Ukraine and Georgia that would say no. I think other countries would be reluctant as well.

The second point is if you establish that zone. I believe the United States and the West would respect it. The Russians would not. You would still see the Russians using economic leverage, political leverage. The presence in some cases of ethnic Russian minorities to basically establish their sphere of influence, particularly in Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, and the Transcaucuses. And so it would be an uneven struggle and I think, you know, we would see the Russians be playing at ways at variance with the sorts of rules that Mike described.

Likewise, I don't think you'd see the Russians withdraw their military. You wouldn't see military units coming out of Transnistria and Moldova, South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia, or Crimea. The Russian argument would be Crimea is Russian territory. We should have a right to put Russian forces wherever we want on Russian territory. So I think that doesn't work.

And then, finally, Mike's model envisages membership in the European Union. And right now three of the perspective members -- Sweden, Finland, and Cyprus -- all belong to the EU. But the Russian government currently would oppose probably almost as strongly membership in the European Union as it would membership in NATO for countries like Ukraine and Georgia, in part because a Ukraine and Georgia that's in the European Union would have changed so dramatically it will be forever beyond Moscow's reach.

And I go back. Mike did mention the case in 2013. If you go back and look at the pressure that Russia put on Ukraine in 2013, that was at a time when the president of Ukraine was Viktor Yanukovych who had made clear he didn't want a membership action plan with NATO. He didn't want to draw closer to NATO in terms of membership. The pressure was all about the signing of an association agreement with the European Union.

So I do give credit to Mike for trying to come up with a model, but I think the model he's come up with would not work. I regret I cannot offer an alternative. In my view, developing an alternative model for the European Security Order is going to require an evolution and a change in Russian policies, and that's going to lead to more uncertainty than we would like. But at this point, I don't think we have an alternative choice.

MS. TAUSSIG: Mike, I want to give you a chance to follow up on Steve's remarks, but I would also like to ask, in responding, if you could give us all a sense of the view from Moscow. So Steve has outlined a perspective that many in the U.S. and the West hold that NATO expansion was conducted to consolidate good governance in Eastern Europe, to advance democracy, and not necessarily as countering Russia or Russian aggression per se. So that is not the perspective that Moscow, the Kremlin, or Putin hold. So how can we take into account Moscow's perspective on NATO and NATO expansion that differs slightly from the perspective that many in the U.S. and the West might hold?

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. And thank you for the very fair and thoughtful critiques by Steve, which I acknowledge to be very serious points. And frankly, I think his bottom line that the odds are against this kind of idea even if we try, I think he's right. So, and for many of the reasons that he mentioned. But let me try to respond a little bit.

First of all, what motivates Putin and the Putin narrative? At one level, you know, I can try to cite more of Fiona Hill and Cliff Gaddy, and Angela Stanton, and many other scholars, including Steve. But I could also say we don't know. We don't know how Putin would respond if we proposed this idea, where he has to allow the EU option, but we concede the NATO option. I would submit it's worth finding out. And I would suggest that we have to make sure we don't give anything up along the way. The negotiation cannot lead to a slowdown of the European Reassurance Initiative or any other effort to reinforce deterrents throughout the existing NATO territories. But I think we should see how Putin would

respond because, okay, I hate to help Vladimir Putin in any way. It makes, I'm sure, many people's stomachs uneasy in this crowd as well, but here's the narrative that Putin could tell his own people and the history books if he were able to negotiate this. He could say, "I'm the first guy who stopped the West from continually coming eastward into Russian space and Russian territory in history. Throughout every other period in history, some Russian leader would exercise influence and power and move military forces and whatnot, and always get invaded by the Germans, pushed by NATO. We finished the Cold War, finally, and where is NATO 25 years later? A thousand miles closer to Moscow than it was at the end of the Cold War when there's no threat any longer to justify that. We would have to give him the bragging rights to be able to say, "I'm the guy who stopped that."

I don't like giving him these bragging rights. I have no idea that if he ever agreed to this deal he would say things at least as arrogant and unfair, but to me it's a relatively small price to pay in the end for the potential benefit, if we could get it.

So that's a partial answer to your question. It's also a partial answer to Steve's point about the EU potentially being just as much of a problem for Putin as NATO. It might be, but we don't know. And with the EU, he doesn't have to concede that the most powerful military alliance in history is getting closer and closer and closer to his borders.

I also want to make one more point about where we are today, and I think Steve and I have agreed that the European Security Order is badly troubled today, and some of the paths we took haven't always been optional. Let me remind you about a very poignant decision that was made in the Bush administration in 2008, in the NATO Summit that spring, where there had been a debate about whether Ukraine and Georgia should have membership action plans. And ultimately, many European allies said no to President Bush and Secretary Rice, and the compromise was to publicly say that someday Ukraine and Georgia could get in NATO, but there's not going to be any membership action plan or any near-term trajectory just yet.

I would submit to you this is almost to go back to Dr. Strangelove. This is almost like a doomsday machine because what we said to Putin was, someday we want them in, but not yet. In the meantime, they get now interim security guarantees. And by the way, any country that has ongoing conflicts with its neighbors is not eligible for NATO membership. So if you're Putin you're like, okay, let

me put one and one and one together. All I have to do is keep stoking conflicts in these countries and they'll never be eligible.

I would submit the way this has played out has been a net negative for the benefit of Ukraine and Georgia; that we have actually done them a disservice, not because of Steve. But because of the net effects of American foreign policy. So I think it's worth putting that point starkly on the table because I will concede another point of Steve's, which is whenever I've heard from friends in any of the countries that I'm writing about, all the reactions have been negative. I'm not saying every single person in all those countries, all 90 million of them disagrees with this plan. I hope some fraction of them will at least hear of the plan. That's the goal for today in ongoing dialogue.

And by the way, let me acknowledge my debt as well to Jeremy Shapiro, who is here at Brookings. And I'm not going to blame him for these specific ideas, but he's been pushing us to reassess the way we think about the expansion project as well, and he's here today. I'm glad to see him. But I would submit that of those 90 million people, at least the ones I've talked to, they're not happy about this proposal, because they're still hoping for NATO membership, and this happy world in which they're protected and in Europe and in EU, and in NATO, here's the thing. It's not going to happen. It's definitely not going to happen while Putin is president. The next six or seven years, this is the crucial moment, and this is exactly the moment we're leaving them high and dry by a promise of eventual NATO membership that no one is actually going to make happen in this next six or seven years. So I just want to call attention to a little bit of what I see as a contradiction and where we've gotten ourselves, not through malevolent intent. Actually, there is malevolent intention, Vladimir Putin's. He's the only bad guy in this story. But in a Shakespearian way, we have wound up playing into this narrative ourselves. So again, I just wanted to make that point somewhat dramatically.

And one or two other points that Steve mentioned and then I'll be done

I agree that Russia probably would not comply completely with certainly the spirit of this, which means we've got to have various verification mechanisms on the military side and we've got to have countervailing steps in mind that we can proportionately introduce on other economic and covert and other such sides as well.

So I don't expect this to settle the issue, but for example, if Putin winds up funding

political parties beneath the scene or, you know, we can do that, too. We can do it aboveboard, but we can also even potentially play his propaganda game if we need to. We can have various kinds of reprisal measures in mind for how we could respond to Russian subterfuge against some of these countries even in the aftermath of what might be negotiated.

But the bottom line is, and here's the most reassuring thing to me, if they try to do anything big, they can't hide from it. It's going to be visible and then the whole arrangement will be ultimately invalidated. And at that moment I would submit that we probably should consider introducing proposals to have some of these countries come into NATO faster than might be the current situation. In other words, if Putin agrees to the deal and then violates it blatantly, at that point maybe we don't wait for a solution to the frozen conflicts before we consider membership. So I think some of these ideas need to be part of the mix as well because Steve is right; you can't trust Putin.

The last thing I'll say, Crimea. I'm prepared to finesse this one. And so I've been trying to sound tough this morning, trying to sound like I'm not in any way impressed by Putin's narrative, in any way sympathetic to Putin's narrative. On Crimea, I'm just not sure we can solve this one. And I would be prepared to finesse it. What I mean by that, the most likely approach would be to refuse to recognize the annexation of Crimea into Russia, refuse to go to meetings in Crimea that Russia might want to host there, but otherwise, ignore it as an issue relative to everything else that's on the table.

So with that I'll hand back the baton. Thank you.

MS. TAUSSIG: Well, thank you.

Steve, I'll give you a moment to respond.

MR. PIFER: Yeah, a couple of things I think we actually do agree. I have to say I was also very puzzled by the outcome of the Bucharest Summit and the language where NATO said they will be members. What I attribute it to is that Angela Merkel -- this is my surmise -- Angela Merkel saw that George Bush was not getting what he wanted which was membership action plans for Ukraine and Georgia and decided to give him a consolation prize. And my understanding is at that point they'd actually thrown their perm reps out of the room. And so I think that part of the Bucharest Summit shows the lack of wisdom of leaders trying to negotiate, communicate language on their own. I think the perm reps would have actually kept them and that is something that NATO does not say and has not said in the

past.

I think on Crimea, Mike, we're probably very close to the same place. I mean, analytically, I just don't see a way in the near to medium term where Ukraine musters the diplomatic, the political, the economic, the military leverage to get Crimea back. But the way to treat that is we continue to remain a nonrecognition policy. We know how to do this. We did it for nearly 50 years with regard to the Baltic States. We maintain the sanctions that are linked the Crimea, and that issue then is in a box by itself.

But I guess I would come back to a couple points that Mike made. Again, I still think at the end of the day when Putin looks at your plan and sees it means accepting EU membership for countries in that zone, it'll be a total nonstarter. And again, even sort of I think making that offer, if you are going to make that offer, particularly if we didn't have buy-in from the countries, at that point we're going to generate a lot of uncertainty in those countries in terms of where the United States is going.

And I think you didn't suggest this, but we need to be careful at the end of the day. If you were going down that plan, you would have to have the agreement of the countries that were going to be in that zone. This could not and should not be something the United States and Russia negotiate over the heads. Otherwise, that model is just completely going to -- it'll be unsustainable. It won't work.

MS. TAUSSIG: And Mike, to push you on your notion that now is actually a golden opportunity to negotiate such a deal, just to follow up on that, I mean, at the heart of negotiations are people and interests, and there are a few pros and cons I see as negotiating this deal now. On the positive side, you have a President Trump who has proven less interested than the Obama administration, certainly less interested than a Clinton administration would have been on Russia's own internal affairs, Putin's own autocratic tendencies. And we also have two leaders who see the value in transactional deals -- I give you something if you give me something. So those are the pros.

But on the con side, if we look at the broader arc of history, the U.S. has been struggling for freedom and democracy on the European continent for over 100 years, since World War I, through Yalta, through Potsdam, through the Helsinki Accords. Why make this argument now? You've clearly held this argument for a number of years. Why not wait until Putin's time in the Kremlin is up and we have a U.S. leader who is a little bit more invested in Russia's -- sorry, in Europe's future and prosperity?

MR. O'HANLON: It's a great question, Torrey. I think the first reason that I propose it now is, you're right, it's not going to be negotiable now. I mean, in the aftermath of what Russia did in the 2016 elections, in the aftermath of how most of the rest of the United States is concerned that President Trump is too soft on the Russians, in a way this is the last thing I expect to be negotiable any time soon. Another way to put it is President Trump would need to get through some issues -- I think the Election 2016 fiasco at the top of the list -- and then needs some debate in the United States that comes from places besides his bully pulpit before this idea could be taken seriously.

So in a sense, what I'm trying to do is what think tanks are supposed to do -- if one agrees with my idea. I'm not suggesting if you think it's a bad idea, think tanks shouldn't do that. But to lead the debate in places where politicians are in an uncomfortable spot because they may be able to think these thoughts but the forces of politics, domestic and international, prevent them from really engaging in the debate. And so I'm hopeful that we can have that effect, and that's part of why I'm just absolutely thrilled that Bill Perry wrote this blurb. And for anybody -- you don't have to buy the book necessarily, but you should at least read the blurb by Perry because what he wrote was, and Torrey already quoted from, but he basically said, "I don't necessarily love this idea, but the stakes are really high and I can't think of a better idea, so we should at least discuss this." And in a way, that's all I'm trying to get going.

MS. TAUSSIG: Okay. Then to follow up on that, and Steve alluded to this point earlier, Russia has been playing a weak hand incredibly well. It has reasserted power in the Middle East militarily, but it has also destabilized parts of Eastern Europe and has wreaked havoc in western capitals from the U.S., from Washington, but also Paris, Berlin, Brussels. And he's done so -- Putin has done this through cyber and influence operations. And I agree that this proposal, in many ways, NATO needs to reform. There have clearly been shortcomings in its purpose and its mission and its capabilities long before Trump started questioning them.

So how does NATO evolve to take into account these cyber tactics and the influence operations, but also just evolve to meet some of the challenges of the 21st century that it may not have proven its worth for quite yet? And this can be outside the issue of NATO expansion.

MR. PIFER: I think what we've seen in the last several years, and part of it is because

the Russians acquired the means, the wherewithal. My guess is Vladimir Putin might have been prepared to do some of these things 10 years ago, but in large part, due to the weak financials of the Russian state, he was not in a position to do so. You know, he's now -- he now has the military capability at least to pose a visible threat in the way that people did not think of Russia 10 to 15 years in the past.

But I think when you look at Russian power today and you see it as it's applied in Ukraine, as it's applied in Syria, it's a power to disrupt. But they haven't really used that power in a way to create or establish, to build things. And I think in one way that's a signal that Russian power does have its limits, in the same way that I think the move over the weekend of reducing the American embassy staff, which my guess is will largely be a reduction of Russian nationals who work at the embassy. It seems like a powerful step, and certainly, the Russian media played it up that way, but it also, I think, reflected the fact that Putin didn't have a lot of other options. I mean, the Russians don't have, for example, the ability to apply economic sanctions in the United States that would have anything near the impact that U.S. economic sanctions on Russia apply.

But to your question, I think NATO does need to think in ways about how to respond to this more disruptive Russian policy. We need to think in a way about cyber, and NATO is now thinking how do you deal with the cyber domain? I think there are two things that the alliance ought to think about. One is we have to build more resilience into our own systems, and that's not just military systems, but it's electric power grids, it's the sorts of things that computers now run. We've got to make it harder for bad guys to get into those systems.

But I also think it would make sense for NATO, and also for the U.S. Government, to come up with what I would call a cyber deterrence policy. We have a nuclear deterrence policy. People basically know if you strike the United States, or an American ally or American forces with nuclear weapons, there very likely will be a U.S. response. And you can see the exercises and you can look up how many missiles and bombers and weapons we have. We don't have any of that in the cyber domain. And I think one mistake might have been is that we've not defined the source of activities in the cyber world that we would regard as unacceptable and for which we'd deploy consequences. And that's a hard thing to think through. But thinking that through and putting that out, had we done that several years ago, maybe we would have been able to communicate to the Russians certain things like going in and stealing

DNC emails and then turning them over to be released publicly, you know, that crosses a line. So I think it's not just resilience, but we've also got to articulate a deterrence policy if we expect potential adversaries in the cyber world to say wait a minute, if I do that there may be a response that I won't like.

And then on the question of the information wars, that's one that's just going to be really hard. And it's going to be hard because the nature of western societies is to be open. And I can see articles, you know, RT, you know, people say why do we allow RT, an arm of the Kremlin propaganda wing, to broadcast in the United States and the west? And I've got to say I don't like RT. I think it is a propaganda arm, but our society is open and I would not feel comfortable with shutting them down. So we've got to think through some creative ways and accept just in some of these cases the information war, we're going to be fighting on an uneven battlefield.

But we've had this challenge. I mean, the Soviets have posed this kind of challenge in the past. We learned how to deal with it. And when you look at just sort of basic indices, I mean, when you're talking about the United States and Europe, you're talking about countries that combined have a gross domestic product that's between 15 and 20 times the size of (inaudible) Russia. This is the sort of thing that if we organize ourselves, this is a challenge that we can readily deal with.

MR. O'HANLON: Let me pick up on that. It's a great answer. I'm going to pick up on that last point, too, to say, and dramatize the numbers here a little bit, that I think there is a fair amount of Russian deliberate misuse of the narrative of NATO as a threat. But if you look at some of the raw numbers you can at least sort of see how a paranoid Russian might have some worries because NATO is almost \$40 trillion in combined GDP. It's 900 million people. And combined defense spending of about \$900 billion. So 40 trillion in GDP, 900 million in population, 900 billion in military spending. Russia is about 1.5 trillion in GDP, so 25 times less. It is about, given exchange rates these days, 50-60 billion a year in military spending, 15 times less than NATO, 10 times less than the United States. And it's something like, what, 140 million people and shrinking, compared to NATO's 900 million and I guess sort of holding steady when you average out across all the countries. I don't suggest that really justifies Russia's reaction but I'm just trying to make the same point, actually use the same point for a different purpose.

I think on cyber, Steve had great arguments, and I'll just remind folks that in June we had

an event here on cybersecurity featuring the Defense Science Board's work on cyber deterrence in which former Undersecretary of Defense Jim Miller talked about how even our nuclear systems are not necessarily completely impervious to compromise from cyberattacks by Russia or China these days. And we've got to take this as a various serious threat, and we're now starting to think about a September event on election security with the same kinds of concerns. So I take these very seriously. But Steve had such a great answer.

I just wanted to pick up and add one quick point in addition to what I said earlier. Obviously, in terms of thinking about this particular book at this juncture, you know, I had my own reasons having to deal with 2014, '15, '16, '17, but I'll also remind folks, you all know this very well, that this is an ongoing debate in the United States and the West since the end of the Cold War and there have been a lot of people, including Bill Perry, who have had their doubts about the pace and/or the basic idea and the extent of NATO expansion. And some of the others have included Henry Kissinger, the late Zbig Brzezinski, Sam Nunn. And here at Brookings, John Steinbruner, who had an idea for a cooperative security, which had a lot of great concepts and ideas behind it. It needed to be flushed out. It was an idea that really inspired a lot of the work in the Foreign Policy Program in the late '80s and '90s. And the central concept was that we could not allow a recreation of an adversarial alliance relationship with Russia in the aftermath of the Cold War.

So I'm trying to build on all those ideas and keep alive a debate that I think we sort of forgot for a while because we got lulled into a sense of maybe, you know, complacency that NATO expansion wasn't really about relations with Russia but now we've had the return of history. I think we have to go back to some of these earlier thinkers and big ideas.

MS. TAUSSIG: Great. So --

MR. PIFER: Can I --

MR. TAUSSIG: Oh, yeah. Sure.

MR. PIFER: Let me just make three points on that. One, first, I think, you know, in the '90s, with the effort to create a NATO-Russia relationship, you could probably say we tried to have our cake and eat it, too. You know, enlarge NATO but also build a relationship with Russia. And the obstacles to that proved larger than we had hoped.

But I go back and think what if had NATO not enlarged? What if that had not happened? And again, my own view is that a lot of Russian foreign policy that we see today is driven by domestic political factors. Let's assume that NATO did not enlarge in 1997, stayed as it was. You still perhaps likely would have had the 2008-2009 financial crisis, as a result of which was after that Vladimir would no longer have seen the economic success that he had during his first two terms from 2000 to 2008 when the Russian economy was growing at 78 percent per year. And he could say regime legitimacy is based on economics.

So if that gets taken away and he shifts, as I believe he did shift in 2011 to regime legitimacy based on Russian nationalism, Russia is a great power, Russia being more assertive, and you did not have countries like the Baltic States, Poland, Romania anchored in NATO, I think you would have had a lot of concern, a lot of uncertainty there, you know how far his ambitions might have gone. So I will defend NATO enlargement I think as anchoring those states in a way now where at least they're security I think is protected.

MS. TAUSSIG: Perhaps we might see more destabilization had NATO not expanded.

MR. PIFER: Exactly, yeah.

MR. O'HANLON: It's a fair point.

MR. PIFER: And the last point I would make just on numbers, and Mike has all the right numbers, but there are also some other numbers which the Russians don't talk about. If you go back to the early 1980s, the U.S. military presence in Europe was about 300,000 troops, airmen, and sailors. The heart of American military power was four armored divisions in Germany and on top of that there was equipment for an additional four to six divisions there based in Germany. So all you had to do was bring the troops over and they were ready to go.

If you look at the presence today, it's three brigades, two of which are light brigades. One is an armored brigade and there is being deployed one additional brigade and a total military presence of between 50,000 and 60,000 troops. That's the scale of change in the 30 years in terms of the American military presence. And I think if you go and look at virtually every European country from the early '90s up until 2014, all those numbers come down dramatically. What you see is beginning in 2015, across the board, most NATO countries, defense spending going up and continuing in 2016, and I

would argue that's directly tied to the fact that Russia used military force to seize Crimea. They used military force in the Donbass region of Eastern Ukraine, and you now have a bunch of NATO countries thinking, okay, how far does Russia go?

Now, let me say, I don't think, the most vulnerable part of NATO I would say would be the Baltic States. I do not think it is a high probability that the Russians would use military force in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania. It's very, very low. But if we were having this discussion five years ago, I think I would have said it's zero. And so we do have to bear in mind that there are some reasons for concern.

MS. TAUSSIG: Great. I want to take questions from the audience. And I have one final question for you. It's going to seem somewhat of a curve ball, but I want to ask you about China and how China, we might start to think about in looking at issues of European security. Your book prior to this one was on the U.S.-China strategic relationship and competition, and I ask you this also because I think we shouldn't just look at Russia as a regional power with interests in Eastern Europe, but also as an Asia-Pacific power. And it is competing with China for power and influence in Central Asia. At the same time it's made its own pivot to Asia after the sanctions were imposed to look for an external energy market. They've been doing it for years anyway. Just I think a week ago we saw China and Russia carry out a joint military exercise in the Baltic Sea, and with all this into account, and the fact that China will most likely become a more influential power in Europe moving forward, how are you, and maybe this is teeing up your next book, I don't know, how are you thinking about China with regard to all these issues on the table?

MR. O'HANLON: That's a good question. I'll just make a couple of points. First of all, one bit of reassuring news as we think about geostrategy and geopolitics, China -- if China wanted to misbehave around the world, let's say much more than it's doing now, and it was hopeful that Russia could somehow be its alternative friend as opposed to the West, the numbers don't work because Russia can't provide the market that China needs for its exports. So I think there are limits to where this goes. They both have vetoes on the UN Security Council. They can do a lot of trade in natural resources and hydrocarbons. There are some very natural ways in which their alliance -- not alliance but relationship can expand and in which they can choose to make some trouble for us militarily if they wish. But the other thing I would say is that I don't worry about this too much also because I actually think President Xi,

for all of his troublesome qualities, is fundamentally a more responsible actor on the world stage than President Putin. And in American defense circles, we don't always talk that way or defense planning circles or make that distinction because China has the resources and the power and the up-and-coming quality, a 200 billion a year military budget. But I actually think President Xi behaves, by the standards of history at least, pretty well for the head of a rising power, and I don't think the same can be said of Putin. So I think the Chinese, you know, will look for opportunities to engage here and there, maybe tighten things up here and there. I don't think they want to try to create a world in which they and Russia are taking on the rest of us.

MS. TAUSSIG: Right. So Russia, which is using its weak hand, powerfully, China has a powerful hand but is maintaining somewhat more of a reserve cautious posture, unless we look to the Asia-Pacific sphere.

MR. PIFER: I would agree with that. I think President Xi, he has a certain confidence that China is growing; whereas, if you're in Vladimir Putin's shoes, I think you very much have to accept when you look at the economic numbers, the demographics, that Russia is a power in decline, and that is a very different perspective. I also think there are some limits on the Russia-China relationship.

About three weeks ago I spent a week in Shanghai and Beijing, and it was interesting. The Chinese view towards Russia was sort of yes, that's where we get our resources. We get our oil and gas. But you didn't get a sense that a lot of Chinese saw Russia as a model.

Second, I think there are some possible friction points. Because if you look at Central Asia now, and the amount of Chinese engagement in Central Asia, and the money that's going from China into Central Asia, and pipelines that are now moving oil and gas from Central Asia into China, that's a Russian backyard. And my guess is at some point there is going to be some friction. Somebody said, well, no, maybe not because the Russians provide the security influence and the Chinese do the economics, I think there's going to be a certain nervousness in Moscow about just how much China is penetrating that area. And I would just second my point in terms of the Chinese do numbers really well and they look at U.S.-Chinese relationship, trade relationship, about \$500 to \$600 billion a year which compares to a trade relationship between Russia and China that has a goal, I think, of 2020 of \$100 billion a year. That's real money and it has an impact.

MS. TAUSSIG: Great, thanks. So I turn it over to you. And there are microphones walking around.

Please introduce yourself and keep it to a shorter question. Thank you.

SPEAKER: (Inaudible), American University.

Thank you first for the interesting discussion. My question is to Mr. O'Hanlon.

In your view, what role and place does Russia have in a new security order of the European continent? And if it's still being left out, like it currently is not part of the European Security Order, how much really does a strip of neutral countries contribute to mitigating any possible fears of being left out that Russia may have in the future? Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: Well, it's an interesting question, you know, because you're right, I'm not proposing the creation of any new organization that Russia would be a founding member of. I'm a little dubious that Russia wants that. I think that Russia would say, you know, as Vladimir Putin often has, a world of several major competing powers is better than a U.S.-dominated world order. And part of what he sees himself doing is pushing back against the U.S. unilateralism, or almost hegemonism in his mind. So I don't think his goals are that he somehow wants to be part of the club, that Russia could somehow be in a redefined or renamed NATO. There was some discussion about that in the '90s in the United States fairly briefly. And maybe there was an opportunity to have that discussion back then, but I don't think that's where we are now. I don't think that's what Russia necessarily wants. If Russia came to us and said we'd like to beef up the OSCE or something else and make it more of an operational military organization, I think we should listen to that idea seriously and see what it would mean, but not as a replacement for NATO; as a complement to NATO.

MS. TAUSSIG: Right back there.

SPEAKER: I'm Sahara Zimi and I'm from (inaudible) America.

You mentioned about the involvement of Russia in Afghanistan. I was wondering if Afghanistan is still a priority to NATO in the future. And by the time, by now, today -- today happened, that there was an attack from ISIS to the Iraq Embassy, and I want to know if Afghanistan is a priority or not.

MR. O'HANLON: Is that for me or for both of us or for Steve? Okay. Well, feel free to

comment because I know that Steve knows NATO and its inner workings better than I do but I would say that -- I would say that Afghanistan is an important priority for the United States and for NATO because first of all, it's the place we work the hardest as an alliance historically in any military operation, probably even more so than in the Balkans. And it's a place where NATO responded to an attack on the United States with the invocation of Article 5 across the alliance, and then the mission to Afghanistan to some extent was an offshoot of that, and I think Afghanistan is still important, although people will disagree as to whether it's worth the ongoing effort, but there are, you know, everything from al-Qaeda to ISIS to other extremist groups in the region, I see Afghanistan today as sort of the eastern pillar in a generation-long struggle against extremism. And so I hope that we can at least stabilize the situation, even if we're not going to be able to achieve a victory. That's my two cents on Afghanistan.

But I think that regardless of what my view is, and regardless of exactly where President Trump lines up in what's apparently an ongoing debate, the alliance at large would take a serious body blow if the Afghanistan mission were to fail catastrophically, for a number of reasons, both about prestige and history, but also about future security. So I think it's still quite important to NATO.

MR. PIFER: Let me say I agree with everything that Mike just said. But I would add to it. You now see some reports about Russian engagement with the Taliban and Afghanistan, and even Russia providing weapons to the Taliban. I think Russia is playing with fire there because my own impression is that support for remaining engaged in Afghanistan among the western republics and the United States is not strong. And the Russians ought to be asking themselves what happens if NATO and America just give up and say we're done with it? And you see Afghanistan descend into chaos, the Taliban come back in parts, things like that. The Russians ought to be asking themselves is that a good thing? I mean, that's a mess. And it's a real problem but it's a problem 6,000 miles closer to Russia than it is to the United States. And it's right on the border of Central Asia. So they're playing some games here that if those games go badly, may backfire in a way that is usually inimical to Russian interests.

MS. TAUSSIG: The gentleman on the far left.

MR. SCARLESS: I'm Basil Scarless. I've lived and worked in Europe a number of years.

My question to Mr. O'Hanlon is, is there a more limited version of your proposal that might work, or could it be done in stages? For example, could you just start with Moldova and a few

smaller countries? But is Ukraine the lynchpin in this? Do you have to have Ukraine in this from the beginning?

MR. O'HANLON: To me, the most natural fallback option, although I don't favor it, because I don't see all the great advantages of expanding NATO further, so I really want to focus on the idea of a permanent zone, but to me the most natural fallback is a moratorium for all the countries in question. We essentially have a de facto moratorium now, but you could argue that it's given us the worst of all worlds as I tried to articulate a moment ago. And maybe if we could either just unilaterally declare a 10-year moratorium on new membership, especially a former Soviet Republic, or if we could have an informal agreement with President Putin to that effect, that might be a fallback. Also, you could imagine going ahead with this idea without Finland and Sweden and without Cyprus and the Balkans, and focusing just on the former Soviet Republics. So those are the two ways in which you could envision a more limited version. I would still say there would be some benefits to either of those approaches, but I'd rather focus on the bigger idea because I think it's much better than the more limited versions.

MR. PIFER: Let me add, I think some version of that might actually be necessary as a piece if you were ever to really reach a settlement of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. But it's going to be harder to do than say it was three years ago. I think three years ago, if you looked at what then newly elected President Poroshenko was saying, he was basically saying, you know, we don't need NATO membership. We can push that off into the future. And my guess is that had the Russians -- had Putin been serious then about finding a solution, he probably could have gotten Poroshenko to say, look, we're going to cooperate with NATO but we're not going to think about something like a membership plan, action plan for X years. X might be 10 or 15 years. And put that down the road. And I think Poroshenko would have been prepared to say yes.

Today, I think it would be much harder for Poroshenko to say yes because public attitudes in Ukraine have hardened. You've seen not only rising support for NATO membership among the Ukrainian public, but you've also seen, I think, this attitude that really any concession now on Donbass is something that would be very hard for a Ukrainian leader to make because of the 10,000 people that have died over the past three years. And this is one of those things that I'm not sure the Kremlin fully understands, just the public attitudes in Ukraine towards Russia.

When I was there 20 years ago, there was Ukrainian nationalism, and in the far western part of the country you had Ukrainians for whom that nationalism had a very strong anti-Russian stream. Today, I would argue it's in the western part of the country, it's in the center part of the country, and it's even now in some of the eastern parts of the country.

I was struck two years ago when driving out from Dnipropetrovsk, which is now Dnieper, which we'd all say is Eastern Ukraine, to Kramatorsk in Northern Donetsk Oblast. Kramatorsk is the field headquarters for Ukrainian military operations in Donbass. But on that two and a half hour drive, passing through little villages and seeing houses with Ukrainian flags flying, fences painted blue and yellow, you know, that sense of Ukrainian nationalism is pretty much gone towards the east. And I think in a way that limits the sorts of concessions that Poroshenko might be able to make, and it's going to make his challenge harder if there ever was a readiness on the Russian part to negotiate a serious effort to end the fighting in Donbass.

MS. TAUSSIG: The woman in the back in the red shirt?

MS. RUBIN: Hi, Trudy Rubin from the Philadelphia Inquirer. Thanks for doing this, Mike.

The question that I have falls right on what the ambassador said -- how do you convince countries to go along with this? You said you don't want another Yalta, but it would be clear in Ukraine that the public would be against it and that Russia would be unwilling to stop meddling even if just with proxies and Special Forces, which is basically what the game has been. So what could you offer those countries that would possibly make them accept it even if you weren't talking about Sweden and Finland, which probably would never accept it?

MR. O'HANLON: Trudy, I guess one place to start, and again, I think it's going to take a while. It's going to take a while for a lot of things to happen, including our country to reach some kind of resolution on what happened last year with Russia's meddling in our elections. A number of other things have to happen first. But I guess I would begin by going back to these countries and saying, first of all, you know, it's partly on us, but look where we got you. Look at the 2008 oxymoron of the NATO Summit press release. You'll be in NATO someday, just not yet, and not at any future date we can promise with no interim security guarantee. Who does that serve?

And I would also suggest that we look at some of these countries' histories and with

Sweden and Finland, they've had a proud history of neutrality. They found it more advantageous to be western countries outside of NATO. They've got decades of preferring that. And it's the crisis of the last three years that has led them to question it. I'd like to make sure that any decision they make is in a somewhat more balance, long-term perspective.

And then finally, I would reference a Pugh survey that was done a couple of years ago. We had an event here with the authors of that survey and the report that went along with it back in 2015, and one of the things that is underscored is that while European countries within NATO, like Germany, were more than willing to keep sanctions on Russia over the violence that at that point was brand new when the poll was done. They're not interested even necessarily in defending existing NATO members with military force, which means there's a downside here that I should have -- that I've been sort of alluding to but haven't mentioned explicitly, so thanks for the chance. We are actually risking Article 5's integrity by extending it to countries that it's not really clear we're prepared to fight for. And I don't know what we would do if, for example, one day we woke up and Vladimir Putin had constructed some kind of a pretext to seize a town of 500 primarily Russian speakers in Eastern Estonia -- I don't even know if there is such a town, but let's say there were -- because there was some disturbance that he manufactured against those Russian speakers that he blamed on other Estonians. Do we really think we're going to respond with military force? Frankly, I'm not even sure myself what the first response should be, but I know that most western European countries are going to be very ambivalent about it. And I would ask these prospective new members, do you really think that NATO can keep expanding forever with the same kind of integrity and the same kind of mutual defense pledge that it really needs and would back up? And I think the jury is out on that.

So if we have this debate, I think countries will realize that this Nirvana that some of them may have in their minds of fully coming into the West through NATO membership, it's not really a viable option on a number of fronts, and we need to actually get real about what the viable options are.

MS. TAUSSIG: Actually, just to ask a follow-up question to Steve on this point. Speaking from the perspective of one of these -- not that you're speaking for the Ukrainians, but speaking from the perspective of Ukraine, one of these neutral countries, if NATO membership is off the table, and I think regardless of whether or not this deal were to move forward hypothetically, there is no likelihood of

Ukraine being offered membership by NATO in the near future. There has been a longstanding concern in Kiev of falling into what you might call a security gray zone between Russia and the West. And if NATO expansion is not the answer to this gray zone that they find themselves in now, what steps can Washington take to enhance that external security? What steps does Kiev also have to take on internal reforms?

MR. PIFER: Well, I'd suggest maybe two or three steps that can be taken. One is maintain strong bilateral relations with Ukraine. That's not just the United States but countries like Germany and Britain and Poland. Maintain those links on a bilateral basis. Second, again, to continue to do fairly active cooperation between NATO and Ukraine. And you can do that without getting into a membership action plan. And then third, implement the association agreement.

Now, in almost all three of those cases, a lot is going to depend on what the Ukrainians do. The Ukrainians have to be serious about implementing the association agreement with the European Union. That document will hugely change not just Ukraine's trade structure but a lot of the ways in which (inaudible) does business and will make it look like a country that is a member of the European Union. If they implement it.

Likewise, cooperation -- practical cooperation with NATO will benefit Ukraine if they do the implementation. But also, in terms of maintaining support on a bilateral basis, it's going to be important that Ukraine do things internally to reform the country. And first, Ukraine deserves credit for doing some very important things over the course of the last three years. For example, raising energy tariffs to households by a factor or probably five to six, which is something we were asking them to do when I was there 20 years ago and they couldn't do because it was politically hard. So they have done some things, but they haven't yet put together the critical mass in terms of anticorruption steps, in terms of privatization, in terms of reducing regulation. And until they do that, I worry that there's going to be always a chance that western support may fade.

Ukraine has to be serious about reforming itself and doing the hard steps and becoming and building an economic system and a political system that live up to and match European values. And if they don't, if there's backsliding, my worry is if we see Ukraine not take advantage of the Maidan Revolution, after Ukraine failed to take advantage of the Orange Revolution, after Ukraine failed to take

advantage of the opportunity back in 2000, when they had Viktor Yushchenko in what was seen by the International Monetary Fund as the most reform-minded cabinet in Ukraine's history and that fails, at some point I worry that we're going to see western states say Ukraine doesn't get it. They can't change and they're going to be asking, so why do we offer support to Ukraine when that causes problems with Russia and you already see in Europe countries wanting to get back to business as usual from Moscow. So Ukraine has to change not just because it's an interest but I worry that if they don't do better on reform, you're going to see western support begin to drift away.

MR. O'HANLON: By the way, his book launch is September 7th at the National Press Club?

MR. PIFER: Washington World Affairs Council.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. So stay tuned for that.

MR. PIFER: Thank you for that plug after I criticized your idea.

MS. TAUSSIG: Great. Right here in the fourth row. Thanks.

MR. FREED: Richard, excuse me, Richard Freed from -- formerly from Eastern Kentucky University.

You both suggest that Crimea is a done deal that's not going back. I wonder how you feel about the future outcome of the Russian takeover or whatever of Eastern Crimea?

MR. PIFER: Eastern Ukraine? The Donbass?

MR. FREED: Did I say -- yeah. Sorry.

MR. O'HANLON: It's got to be resolved to the satisfaction of Ukraine or my proposal can't work. It doesn't look very good right now.

Over to you. You're following it more day to day.

MR. PIFER: There is a difference between Crimea and Donbass. I mean, the Russians moved within three weeks of the Maidan Revolution to illegally annex Crimea. They made no suggestion that that's the goal with regards to parts of Donbass that are occupied, and I don't believe that Moscow wants to annex that territory. They could have set in motion things a couple of years ago if that had been the intention.

What they do see that territory, it's a lever. It's a mechanism to put pressure on the

government in Kiev. It's a mechanism to prevent that government from becoming successful because they're going to be distracted by conflict. It's a mechanism to make it harder for the government in Kiev to implement the association agreement. So they see that very much in an instrumental way. There's also an economic issue here. One, the seizure of Crimea proved to be economically more expensive to the Russians than they anticipated. The economic seizure of Eastern Ukraine now would be even more given the destruction to infrastructure and housing and industry there. I mean, the place is going to require billions and billions of dollars to get it going, and the Russians don't want to pay that. And it's interesting. To me it seems that over the last six -- and much of what you've seen is the Ukrainians basically saying we're going to do everything that we can to push the economic costs of occupation onto the Russians, including that they've now cut off electricity flows from Ukraine proper into the occupied portions of Donbass. And we'll see how long the Russians want to bear that burden. At this point in time, I don't see the Russians as ready to deal seriously, but at some point in time the economic costs, I still believe that all the economic sanctions on Russia have not dealt or have not delivered a change in Russia's course. They still continue to post costs but most economists say about one percent of Russian gross domestic product. And in an economy that's growing now at about 1.3 percent a year, that's a pretty serious cost. So we need to maintain the costs and look at ways and try to affect the calculation in Moscow and get them to come to a more serious attempt to find a real solution of the conflict there. But it's a different situation from Crimea.

I can see at some point Moscow might get to the point where they're prepared to deal on Donbass, getting them to a point where they would be prepared to restore anything like the status quo ante on Crimea is impossible to see.

MS. TAUSSIG: I think this is an issue for Russia outside the Donbass. In the long term, is it going to be economically viable for Russia to continue a number of the conflicts that they've either instigated or are now mired in, whether it's in the Middle East or in Eastern Europe?

MR. PIFER: Yeah.

MS. TAUSSIG: Yep, we'll go right here. Thanks.

MR. CHECCO: Thank you. Larry Checco.

This is an interesting conversation because it seems that Putin has become synonymous

with Russia. It seems like it's almost a one-man show. I would just like to posit what happens to all these contingencies that we've talked about this morning should Putin leave the scene voluntarily or involuntarily sometime soon?

And two, to Michael's point about Central Asia, and I think there is a huge influx of Chinese involvement there. I was there last year and there's a tremendous amount of fear in those countries, Kazakhstan and Kurdistan in particular, about the Chinese coming in and they're wedged between the Russians. What happens to the dynamic, the world dynamic if one or two of those countries really takes an influential role in these Central Asian countries?

MR. O'HANLON: How about if I take the first and then you can comment on that and then the second, you take the second?

So thank you. It's a good point. And I guess what I'd like to believe is that there really is serious debate and political competition in Russia, or at least there could be some day. And that therefore, putting an idea like this on the table could appeal to those Russian reformers who want to rejoin -- not necessarily rejoin the West, per se, but improve Russia's relationship with the West.

However, you may have noticed I didn't make that claim in my articulation of the plan and its advantages, because I'm so pessimistic about the state of Russian internal debate and the degree to which Putin has skewed every avenue of dissent or discussion that I'm not going to make that claim. The most I would hope is that a few Russian reformers themselves might be interested in an idea like this, and if they felt that the West might reciprocate or might actually negotiate it under different leadership, that could give them some enthusiasm, some morale boosting. And then an argument they could make to Russians the next time they had a chance to really contest a competitive election. That's about the most I could hope because Putin has so taken over the Russian debate, and we all know the figures. You know, he supposedly is 85 percent popular. I don't even know if that really means he's 85 percent popular or if the other 15 percent are the only ones brave enough to voice their real opinion because they assume that Putin's people are the ones asking the questions. It's probably a little of both.

But in any event, with the number of dissidents who have disappeared or been killed off, I don't think it's farfetched to think of Putin as more than just a strong-armed autocrat; maybe even a little worse than that. And therefore, I'm not optimistic about where the debate could go with other people

anytime soon.

MS. TAUSSIG: Well, it's interesting. If you look at Russian public opinion outside of their perspectives on Putin, their approval of the government and the trajectory of the country is far lower. So it's interesting to see that Putin's own popularity has been insulated from where Russians see their country going in their own economic trajectory.

MR. PIFER: There's kind of this historical story that the Russians are always forgiving of the czar. You know, it's just his underlings who don't deliver.

No, I would second Mike's point. I mean, and sometimes, and I fall into this trap myself, we equate Putin too much with Russia. But if Mr. Putin tomorrow made a mistake and stepped off the wrong curb and got run over by a bus, my guess is the person that comes in behind him probably looks a lot more like him than say somebody like Dimitri Medvedev or Mikhail Gorbachev. And part of the thing in Russia that disappoints me is you don't see a lot of bottom-up pressure for change and towards a more (inaudible). Now, I think the one thing inching the watch is demonstrations in March you saw a much higher proportion of young people. So does that begin to affect things? But I think right now when we're looking at Russia, you're going to see pretty much a Putinesque policy, certainly until 2024 because there's no doubt in my mind that he runs for re-election next year. There's no doubt in my mind that he wins. The only question is what happens in 2024, because he did respect the Russian constitution in 2008 and stepped down after two consecutive terms. What does he do then?

On Russia and Central Asia, I just think at some point there is going to be growing concern in Moscow where there already is nervousness about China. I mean, look at China. They see this country with 10 times the population, huge resources, very much on the upswing, and at some point there's going to be concern in Moscow about just how much China is penetrating into the stands and whether some of those stands begin then reordering themselves politically and saying the money is in China, maybe we ought to look more there.

So I do believe at some point, and I can't tell you when, but that's going to be a friction point between Moscow and Beijing.

MS. TAUSSIG: We'll take right here in the pink tie. Thanks.

SPEAKER: Thank you. So what are the benefits to the European Union for

incorporating these countries? I understand what the benefits for these countries would be. How would the European Union really be persuaded into accepting these countries, especially when so many of them have a history of both political and economic instability? I'm not really seeing the benefit there for the EU and really incorporating them.

MR. O'HANLON: Very quickly, most of them would not be eligible now I'm assuming, and all I'm saying is that any kind of agreement with Russia would have to explicitly acknowledge the right of those countries and the EU to join up later on and to have EU membership for any of those states that wished it and that the EU also wished to invite in. So Russia just has to explicitly allow the option. But I agree with your point; it's probably not going to lead to the invocation or use of that option in the near future.

MR. PIFER: I'd say the benefit for the European Union is if the European Union holds out and says, look, in order to apply for membership and be accepted, you need to meet Europe standards. You need to have a stable democratic state. You need to have a functioning market economy. You need to have a whole bunch of human rights observances in place. And that's the benefit of Europe because those are the kind of countries that you want to have on your eastern border. And in the same way that that's what the European Union did with enlargement back in the early 2000s. It was to encourage states like Poland, Romania, Bulgaria to move towards European standards. I think in some cases they probably allowed a couple countries in that had not fully met the standards. But it was in the desire of the Europeans to build countries on their flank that were stable politically, had market economies, and basically were in a zone of security that benefitted the European Union.

MS. TAUSSIG: We have time for two more questions. Why don't we take two at once? We can handle them both as you wish.

We'll do in the back in the gray t-shirt, and then right behind him, the gentleman behind him as well. Thank you.

SPEAKER: Voice of America Turkish Service. What can you say about the relationship between Turkey and NATO? Because a few months ago in Turkey people were discussing about getting out of NATO membership. What can you say about the relationship between Turkey and NATO? Thank you.

MS. TAUSSIG: And then directly behind you?

SPEAKER: Mine is a little bit similar in that we focus a lot on the external threats by looking at the internal threats of certainly Turkey but also democratic backsliding in places like Poland and Hungary and what that means for an alliance that's centralized around democratic values and what sort of steps can be taken if the situation continues to get worse. Thank you.

MS. TAUSSIG: Great questions.

MR. PIFER: I'll take the second one. You take the --

MR. O'HANLON: Sure.

MR. PIFER: No, I think in the case of democratic backsliding there are some mechanisms that the European Union could apply to encourage this, but it's going to involve pressure and continuing to push the countries to live up to the standards that they adopted when they entered the European Union and NATO. And you had some impact, I believe. It seems to me that pressure from the European Union and other western countries probably were a factor in the decision by the Polish president not to sign two of the laws with regards to judicial changes. So basically, it's going to be consistent pressure on those countries that they entered institutions that were institutions not just of shared interest or in the case of NATO, shared defense, but also institutions based on shared values and that they need to live up to those values.

MR. O'HANLON: On Turkey, I don't claim to be an expert, although our colleague, Kemal Kirisci and he's finishing a book on U.S.-Turkish relations which is going to be excellent. Probably out late this year I'm guessing. But I would simply say one of the basic concepts of an alliance like NATO is that you can get out if you want. And once you get out, you may or may not get back in, which is part of why I don't really think Turkey is going to invoke this option. You know, I think there's some understandable angst a lot of countries are feeling in their relations with Turkey and vice versa. I admire, by the way, whatever my feelings about President Erdogan, I admire the way Turkey, as a country and as a Turkish people, have absorbed so much of the consequences of the Syrian civil war and the refugee flow, in particular. It's remarkable. It's remarkable the degree to which Turkey has accepted this burden. And frankly, all of us in the West have benefitted at a humanitarian level, but also in terms of refugee flows to Europe. And so I want to, despite my differences with Erdogan, commend the Turkish people for

that accomplishment. But I don't think that Turkey is going to look around and decide it would be better off outside of NATO. I think that's a pretty unlikely prospect. So we can go into more detail, but you should really wait for Kemal rather than me, to speculate on the nuances. I just don't think it's really going to happen.

MS. TAUSSIG: Okay. I'll give you two minutes. Any closing remarks? Points that you would like the audience to leave with in your final arguments?

MR. PIFER: I guess the main thing I should do, unless you want to go first --

MR. O'HANLON: Go ahead.

MR. PIFER: The main thing I should do is talk about the real -- going back to your earlier question, Torrey, isn't this idea sort of theoretically nice but not at all consistent with where we are today in world relations or U.S. politics.

MS. TAUSSIG: You framed it slightly nicer.

MR. PIFER: Yeah, you did. But I knew what you were thinking.

But I would say that this is a good time to start having a debate in the United States because I don't know how to foresee when Mr. Mueller will finish his investigation and when this will stop being the subject of tweetstorms and firings and everything else, but U.S.-Russia relations are obviously at a very serious point and the Election 2016 problem and Trump's own personal relationships with some Russians are probably preventing this kind of an idea from having a serious chance even at a good hearing for the next few months. But if the debate can start to pick up, then maybe we get into 2017 and the world starts to look at least a wee bit different. So that's sort of why I hope the conversation would start now.

I also want to say one brief word of admiration for Zbig Brzezinski. Of course, we lost him this year. I'm not going to guess what he might have said if he had been up here. I was sort of hoping to invite him to this event because he and I had talked about the need for a new security debate about Europe. But certainly, there had been a lot of people like him, like Kissinger, like Perry, like Nunn, who over the years really thought that we needed to go back to basics and re-conceptualize our whole vision of what we were after in Europe. So if we can at least even begin that debate now, then I'll feel gratified.

MR. O'HANLON: Yeah. And I just built on it by saying I think we are at a very difficult point in the U.S.-Russia relationship. Getting out of this hole is going to take hard, slow, patient diplomacy. I think it'll happen but it's going to take longer than most of us might like.

But one of the questions that we and the Russians are going to have to think about is, you know, what does the European Security Order look like? I don't agree with Mike's model, but I think at some point, you know, we and the Russians and the countries of Europe have to figure out some kind of model that basically makes the countries of Europe feel secure, feel safe, and eliminate some of the uncertainty that you now have in the situation, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. That's going to take a lot of work, and it might as well start now. And again, we're not endorsing Mike's idea. I think these are the sort of things that think tanks ought to be thinking about. As I said, I haven't yet come up with a model but there's probably something out there that we can hit on at some point that could then be something to aim for that we could aspire to get to a Europe that's a bit more secure than its current situation.

MS. TAUSSIG: Great. Well, big questions. Big challenges. Thank you both for being here, for offering your thought-provoking --

(Applause)

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