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HOW SHOULD THE TRANS-ATLANTIC ALLIANCE COUNTER RUSSIAN AGGRESSION?

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Welcome:

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Panel:

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Closing Remarks:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. EISEN: Good morning, everyone. Good morning. I want to welcome you to Brookings. I'm Norma Eisen; I'm a senior fellow in Governance Studies here. And to our program today, the program is being sponsored by Brookings Governance Studies, by Brookings Foreign Policy, and in particular, the Center on the United States and Europe, and by the Transatlantic Democracy Working Group, a bipartisan coalition of former government officials, think tank members, and experts co-chaired by myself and Jeff Gedmin, who you'll hear from in a moment.

We are very pleased to welcome today's audience that is here with us live, as well as those who are joining us on the internet. For those who are just coming in, there are a few stray seats here and there at the front. Please don't be shy about coming up to the front. The idea for this emergency gathering on Russian aggression on both sides of the Atlantic was -- we call it an emergency gathering because every event that takes place at Brookings requires at least 6 months advance notice (laughter) and we put this one together in a matter of weeks -- we were concerned that with the news tsunami, the accelerated news cycle in which we all dwell, that the revelations of recent weeks, the actions of Russia against Ukraine in and around the Sea of Azov, the revelation by Secretary Mattis that Russian meddling in American elections had continued into the 2018 midterms, that those and a like pattern of other events dating back to the episode, the scandal with Georgia, would just be swept back under the rug in the news cycle. So I'm very grateful to the co-sponsors of this event, to the Transatlantic Working Group, and my co-chair, Jeff, and to our panelists, and Mary Louise Kelly who will lead the panel for attempting to maintain a focus. And today we are not just going to wring our hands about the problem, as profound as it is, but Mary Louise is going to take the panel through a discussion of solutions. And both here at Brookings, in our

Transatlantic Working Group, we are going to be pivoting to a deeper analysis and a more enduring analysis of how the friends of democracy on both sides of the Atlantic can stand up to these issues. We will hear from our distinguished panelists -- I'll let others introduce them -- and then we will have a question and answer from you in the audience. And I hve been designated to monitor my Twitter feed @NormEisen. And for those who are either in the audience or watching from the internet, please do Tweet your questions to me. You'll see me passing a note or two up to Mary Louise in the Q & A section of the program.

So I welcome you all. So pleased that you're here for this standing room only event. I think those stray seats that I talked about have now all been filled. Help yourself to a wonderful morning of discussion and conversation.

And with that, I'd like to call up my co-chair, Jeff Gedmin, to say a few works and introduce the panel.

Thanks, everybody. (Applause)

MR. GEDMIN: So, good morning, everybody. It's a pleasure to be here at Brookings. Thanks to Brookings and you, Norm, for our colleagueship and friendship and the opportunity to chair this Transatlantic Democracy Working Group with you.

A couple of framing thoughts, and then we'll want to get to the bread and butter, which is the panel on the discussion with you all today. Jeane Kirkpatrick, the political scientist, Georgetown profession, Ronald Reagan's ambassador to the United Nations, used to say sometimes we Americans have to face the truth about ourselves no matter how pleasant it is. (Laughter) And one thing that comes to mind is we Americans tend historically to be exceptionally good at forgiving our enemies, if you think about it for just a moment. George Herbert Walker Bush, at that moment after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, when suddenly people were talking about German unification -- and if you

recall the Soviet Union was against and Mrs. Thatcher in Britain was against and the French were against -- they were reminding themselves of that adage, we love Germany so much, we're glad there are two of them. And it was President Bush in the Oval Office who said, with kind of American nonchalance, for Pete's sake, it's time to let a guy up -- the Germans. After proving themselves in West Germany as a stable, reliable partner in democracy. And that helped lead the process of unification.

Similarly, if I may say, with the Soviet Union, when the Soviet Union began dissolving in 1990 and 1991, after 7 decades of aggression, after 7 decades of tyranny, and domination of Central and Eastern Europe, what did the United States and what did NATO do? Just to tick off the list very quickly, in 1991 we reached out and we said we want to cooperate with you, Russia, through the North Atlantic Cooperation Council. In 1994 we said we've got another idea, we'll call it Partnership for Peace. We need you in, not outside. In the mid-1990s, if you recall, when the newly liberated countries of Central and Eastern Europe wanted to join NATO, what did we do? Appropriately, we Americans debated, we agonized, we fretted because we thought well, wait a second, they want in, but we don't want to upset Russia, we don't want to provoke Russia. In 2000 Bill Clinton said if Russia wants to join NATO itself, I don't object. And then you remember, President Bush, George W., Bush 43, he met with Putin his first term in Slovenia, famously looked into President Putin's eyes and said this is a man -- looked into his soul -- his eyes, his soul, both -- I can't remember all of it -- and he said this is a man I trust, I can work with him.

And then by the time we got to President Obama, the first term President Obama was worried that things were getting wobbly, so he introduce reset, because whatever was wrong or broken we could fix through good intentions and dialogue. The trouble is, as they say, it does take two to tango. And what did we learn the last decade

and a half? Well, we learned that Russia would launch massive cyber attacks on Estonia, Russia would invade and occupy Georgia, Russia would invade and occupy Ukraine, Russia would launch disinformation campaigns that would make the Soviet Union proud, Russia would interfere in elections in the United States, and across Europe, so much so to such an extent that some of our European friends inclined toward dovishness, if I may say, kind of an accommodating approach to these problems, became bewildered. So much so that a friend of mine close to German Chancellor Angela Merkel once said to me, Angela Merkel has a stable relationship and a healthy basis for working with Vladimir Putin. It works like this, she knows that he lies and he knows that she knows that he lies and we have no illusions. (Laughter)

That brings us up to date, I believe, for the problem of if we assess the situation in a certain way, I suggest we do. There may be quibbles and quarrels today, but if we assess the problem in a certain way, a Norm said, what do we do about it? So for that we have a kind, gentle panel with Bill Kristol and Sandy Vershbow and others to walk us through our options, what has worked, what we might consider to advance our interests, defend our values, and of course to reinvigorate our alliance around a problem with is a threat to our unity and in some sense to our democracies.

So, with that, we have a great panel. It's my job now to invite them up. Please join me in welcoming them and we'll get right to this session. (Applause)

MS. KELLY: Good morning. Welcome. I'm Mary Louise Kelly. I am a journalist at NPR. I anchor our afternoon/evening flagship program, All Things Considered. But I think what has earned me my spot up here today is that before that I covered national security and intelligence for many years, which has brought me to Russia a few times in these last few years.

So we convene, as you have just heard, at a moment of many questions

about the state of the U.S.-Russia relations, about the state of the Transatlantic Alliance, about the state of NATO, and about how to respond to Russian aggression, most recently, to do with Ukraine, about how to respond to Russian interference in our elections in 2016, maybe again in 2018, and who knows what 2020 may bring. I don't know if when you have had occasion, if you have had occasion to travel to Russia in recent years. If you've had the same experience I have, which is this kind of through the looking glass moment. Washington at the moment can be so chaotic that you land in Moscow and think, it's all clear. I have this moment of -- it's so transparent, it all makes sense now. Obviously what's going on beneath the surface is more complicated than that, but on the surface, when you speak to people on the record in Russia it aligns with Putin's priorities and views. You do not have the complexity of what Angela Stent -- who some of you may know from her work here at Brookings and at Georgetown the government before then -- she's talked about a trifecta. That the U.S. basically has three policies towards Russia. There's President Trump's policy, there's his Administration's policy, which sometimes aligns and sometimes does not, and then there's congress. And if you're trying to see this from a Russian point of view, where their system does not work like that, they can be as perplexed by our system and motives as we are sometimes by theirs.

I was struck by a quote this week where I had to feel for, of all people, Dmitry Peskov, Putin's spokesperson. He was asked about the latest twists and turns in the Mueller investigation and he said the Kremlin is pretty tired of trying to keep with all of this, to which you could only say, Dmitry, we feel your pain. (Laughter)

With that, let me welcome our panel. We're going to dive right in. I'll start at the end with Ambassador Sandy Vershbow, who you may know from the Atlantic Council, former Ambassador to NATO, which is relevant to our conversation today,

former Ambassador to Russia, and most recently to Korea. Welcome.

Next along, Alina Polyakova, who is here at Brookings as the David M. Rubenstein Fellow on Foreign Policy, Center on the United States and Europe and who was born in Ukraine, she was just telling me, so brings that perspective to our conversation.

Bill Kristol, who you all know form *The Weekly Standard*, who has written extensively about Russia, and seemingly everything else. You are prolific. I don't know how you do it. Welcome.

And Andrea Kendall-Taylor, Senior Fellow and Director, Transatlantic Security Program, Center for a New American Security, and recently out of the government yourself.

So welcome to you all. We're going to have -- it has been laid out for us -- the overarching theme of what is Russia up to and what should be done about it. And I want to start with the most recent and ongoing provocation in the Sea of Azov, and put you -- maybe we'll start with you, Ambassador, and work our way down -- what should we make of Russia's actions, why do they matter, why should Americans, many of whom would be hard pressed to find this place on a map, why should we care?

MR. VERSHBOW: Okay. Thanks very much, and great to see such a big crowd interested in trying to solve the insoluble problem of how to deal with Russia.

The events of November 25 on one hand were just a continuing example of Russian aggressiveness toward Ukraine, but they were significant in a number of ways. First of all, it was not an ambiguous act of aggression using little green men and trying to be deniable about it. It was openly an attack by Russia's security services against the forces of a sovereign state. At the same time, it's important to remember that these events weren't a one off; it was part of a series of measures that have been rolling

out over several months. Kind of salami tactics, which the Russians are masters. There have been continued artillery and rocket attacks on the Ukrainian forces and civilians in the Donbass all through the year, increasing interference with international shipping through this Kerch Strait and into the Sea of Azov costing Ukrainian economy billions of dollars. And Russia imposed sweeping sanctions on Ukrainian business leaders and political leaders at the beginning of November, and then they allowed elections by the so-called separatists later in November in the flagrant violation of the Minsk Agreements.

So all this is, at a minimum, an effort by Russia to kind of further destabilize Ukraine in the run up to their elections next year, to try to show that Ukraine is a failed state that can't defend its own borders. And I think they may be hoping to bring more pliable leaders to power in these elections. But because this is part of a pattern of activity going back several years, I think we have to recognize that Ukraine's very sovereignty and its aspirations for a European future are being challenged yet again by the Russians, but also that our credibility, in terms of trying to defend the liberal international order, but also to defend Helsinki principles, like sovereignty, like territorial integrity, like the right of nations to choose their security relationships. Those too are under direct challenge by the Russians.

And so far, the U.S. response and the NATO response have been pretty limp. Basically there's been no response. The U.S. has demanded the return of --

SPEAKER: Beyond limp, it's been nonexistent, right.

MR. VERSHBOW: The U.S. has demanded the return of the ships and the sailors who were illegally seized, but hasn't kind of said what would happen if the Russians don't do it, and they don't show any sign of being ready to do it. And I think other steps just for this immediate crisis that could be taken, such as beefing up NATO's naval pressure in the Black Sea, more security assistance to Ukraine, such as coastal

defenses, intelligence and reconnaissance assets. None of that has happened either.

So the danger is if Putin continues salami tactics where each individual transgression is too small to respond to --

MS. KELLY: Forgive me, the term you're using, "salami tactics"?

SPEAKER: Slicing

MS. KELLY: Oh, explained. Okay. Okay.

MR. VERSHBOW: The other metaphor frequently used is boiling the frog. Turning up the flame one or two degrees at a time, the frog doesn't know that he's about to die. And I think the West may not appreciate what it's about to do in terms of encouraging Putin to keep going and maybe carrying out further aggression, maybe annexing new bits of Ukrainian territory. But definitely he's trying to, if not topple the government, bring to power leaders who are ready to defer to Russia, accept the sphere of influence. And that would be a big defeat for the West, as a well as a crime against the Ukrainian nation and it's aspirations of sovereignty.

MS. KELLY: Alina, let me flip this to you. I mean the Ambassador is describing this as part of a pattern, is this Russia almost literally testing the waters waiting to see if there's a big U.S. or NATO or European response -- which there hasn't been -- then they could quietly back down. If there hasn't been, then green light, gates are open?

MS. POLYAKOVA: Well, just to take everything that Ambassador Vershbow said in a bit of a broader perspective, this particular act of aggression in the Azov Sea, as he said, an area where most people have to put on Google Map to even understand what we're talking about here and why it matters, I think is important for three reasons from a bigger perspective. One, Ambassador Vershbow was starting to outline, is that if we looked at the international response, many countries, including the EU,

including NATO, put out these statements of either concern, moderate concern, or deep concern. And that was essentially it.

MS. KELLY: And it took weeks for the EU, for example, even to do that.

MS. POLYAKOVA: Exactly. It took us also some time --

SPEAKER: Some said deep concern. Serious concern.

MS. POLYAKOVA: Exactly. It was actually quite comical, if you put all these together, to see these almost cut and paste style statements without anything really behind them. I think what that clearly tells us is that the Russians don't have to continue to test. That was your question. They already know. We had a very tepid, weak response to Russian military takeover of Crimea, we had a very tepid response to Russian aggression against Eastern Ukraine. It goes all the way back to the 2008 war with Georgia. So now the Kremlin has over a decade, if not more, of experience knowing exactly how the West will respond, so they know they can keep pushing. That's exactly why they didn't use these little green men. This was an open aggression, it wasn't hidden, because they don't need to hide it. And, in fact, that calculus has been absolutely correct from Putin's perspective. So now they know, and they have known for a long time, they can basically do whatever they want in that specific region without much of a response. And it is absolutely critically important because it's not just about this regional conflict, it also sets a precedent for China. Trust me, they are looking at the Western response to Russian aggression, the slow creep. And they're looking at their own territorial aspiration for the South China Sea, for the East Asia Sea, and others around the world as well.

And so I think the question we have to ask ourselves is are we ready to draw those red lines and follow through if we don't want to really undermine the stability of the international order, which has already been undermined significantly.

MS. KELLY: All right. Thank you. Bill, hop in. What do you make of what's going on in these last few weeks?

MR. KRISTOL: I mean I think I have the privilege of knowing less about Russia than anyone else on this panel, so I will benefit I hope from the soft bigotry and low expectations. (Laughter) I've never been there, unfortunately, and I'm not sure I'm going to be going in the very near future, so. But I have followed, obviously, these events and I so cheered up as an old Cold Warrior to see this #RussianAgression. It really brings me back to my first days in Washington in 1985. The reason I came to Washington, like so many people of my generation and of my persuasion, was basically the Cold War and to help in that fight. And so we're back in a somewhat different fight.

Look, I have no great insights. In '08 I think the combination of '08 and the reaction, or not too much of a reaction to it, and '14 with Ukraine, is pretty devastating. You know, Ukraine obviously isn't part of NATO, but there was a direct treaty obligation I would say from when they gave up the nuclear weapons that in some ways you could almost argue is not stronger, obviously, than Article 5, but a very serious obligation which was being just directly challenged and flouted by Putin, who was taunting and taunting us to do anything. I think he learned a lot from that. I very much agree with Alina that the world is one -- we have Middle East experts and Russian experts and panels on Russia and panels on China and Japan, but of course the world is one world, people look at what's happening elsewhere. U.S. credibility is indivisible in a certain way, not entirely. People understand we have different obligations to different parts of the world, to different countries.

I'll tell just one very quick story. I was in Japan -- which I also know very little about -- in November '13 with a group of foreign policy types, you know, editors of magazines, think tank, and mostly republican-ish, and it was November '13, and Prime

Minister Abe, who had been in power maybe a year, wanted to meet with us. And so it was a very formal meeting, they have the cameras in there. At the beginning he was showing he could meet with alleged big shots -- little did they know. But, anyway, out of power types from the U.S. We had about six or seven of us -- I think some from Brookings, but people from familiar think tanks around town, more on the center right side, I guess. And I remember before the meeting we said, you know, this is going to be one of these formal meetings where there will be the Prime Minister in one seat and then the sort of head of state normally in the other seat. So who's the senior member of our delegation gets to sit across from the Prime Minster and sort of being the conversation. And I was the oldest and had been in government two decades before, and they remember maybe how these things are supposed to work, and so I was selected. And so at the beginning of the meeting their cameras leave and the people are lined up saying he's been to a million of these things, you know, particularly -- we're on the couch and I'm there with Prime Minister Abe and the translator behind us. And I'm vaguely remembering from two decades before how to do this. So, Mr. prime Minister, thank you so much for having us, we great staunch supporters of the U.S.-Japan relationship. And I start to blither on for two or three minutes, sort of the appropriate courtesies. And he interrupts me, in English, which he understands I guess and speaks some. Obviously wouldn't speak at a formal diplomatic setting, but this was a small group and nothing crucial at stake in what words he chose. And he interrupts me and says, Mr. Kristol, do you mind if I ask you a question. And I said, certainly, Mr. Prime Minister. And he said, what happened in Syria. And it actually like was so out of context, of course, that I actually thought for a minute that is Syria some little island in the East China Sea that I don't know about. (Laughter) And I'm desperately looking at the people in our delegation who actually know about East Asia. It's like, is there something I missed here.

And then I realized that he was talking about the red line. And he was worried, he said he has just come from the ASEAN meeting and the main discussion had been that President Obama -- and I'm not getting into the merits of all this and whether it's fair or unfair -- but did President Obama's failure to follow through -- or I should say the U.S.'s failure to follow through since the congress has some responsibility here -- on the red line in Syria around Labor Day of 2013, did that affect sort of our commitment to Japan. And I found myself in the slightly comical position of reassuring the Japanese Prime Minister that no, on that issue -- and I really did believe of course, I was defending -- you know, President Obama, both parties, are pretty seriously committed to the U.S.-Japan relationship and you shouldn't over interpret this, this was a particularly difficult situation, et cetera, et cetera. But it really brought home to me how much it is about U.S. credibility.

And it wasn't maybe entirely an accident -- I'm not familiar with Russian decision making and timing -- but I'm not sure it was entirely an accident that it was -- what -- a few months later --

SPEAKER: It was not

MR. KRISTOL: -- that Putin goes into Ukraine.

So I do think at the end of the day that the Russia problem is an America problem. It's very much compounded by the current Administration, obviously. And with an Administration that isn't willing to be forceful, to say the least, how much our European allies can do to get a head of us, I think they're actually not doing as badly as one might have expected, but of course I remember -- Sandy knows this so much better -- for -- what -- really 15 years under President Bush and President Obama, it was the U.S. complaining about the Europeans being unwilling to be tough on Russia. Now we're in the situation where the Europeans are probably a little bitter than they were actually and

we're not. So I'm sort of gloomy about the current moment.

MS. KELLY: And you raise a couple of things that we'll follow up on. But, Andrea, let me let you get in on this first question of -- stay with the theme of Russian decision making and game this out from how this looks from Moscow and from the Kremlin's point of view. Why pick this fight with Ukraine and why now?

MS. KENDALL-TAYLOR: I think it's important to add to the great points that the panelists have already made, but kind of step back and put this in that broader context of what the view looks like from Moscow.

But before I do that I also think it's really worth highlighting or underscoring that this incident in the Sea of Azov I think caught a lot of Western observers by surprise. It is true that tensions between Russia and Ukraine had been escalating for some time around the Sea of Azov, but I think the particular timing of the event and also kind of the sheer blatantness by which Russia instigated this particular provocation was surprising to many. I think the conventional wisdom had really been that Russia had little incentive to destabilize the status quo, that Russia was largely satisfied with the way that things were going in Ukraine. They had basically thwarted any forward progress on resolving the conflict, and Ukrainian President Poroshenko, who they opposed, was hugely unpopular heading into elections in Ukraine in March.

And yet the Russians were willing to take this action. And for me it underscores -- again, this is another instance I think where Russia was able to take the West by surprise. And it also underscores I think just how hard it is for Russia watchers to project with foresight just how far Russia is willing to go to advance its national interests.

In hindsight, it does fit a long pattern of rising Russian assertiveness on the international stage since Putin returned to power in 2012. So if we think about when

Putin came back, he came back in the wake of significant protests in 2011 and 2012 over alleged electoral fraud. They were the biggest protests, most significant protests Russia had seen since the collapse of the Soviet Union, and they were also on the tail of the Arab Spring, which unseated four of the world's longest standing dictators. So from Putin's perspective, this underscores his belief that the United States is looking to unseat regimes we perceive as unfriendly and that we had designs on Russia itself.

There were also some changes domestically for Putin. In his first two terms in office, 2000-2008, oil prices were incredibly high. That made it much easier for Putin to keep people happy, to share the spoils with the elite. And he was largely popular because he had such success containing the insurgency in the North Caucasus. But the Putin that returns in 2012 no longer has those alternative mechanisms of control, and so kind of his diminished popularity, along with this belief or this fear of the West, sets him down a path of a much more assertive foreign policy. And I think that's really paid dividends. The view from Moscow is success in thwarting forward progress on resolving the Ukrainian conflict, the intervention in Syria, where they totally shifted battlefield dynamics and shored up Bashar al-Assad in power. Then using their using intervention in Syria really as a springboard to increase influence throughout the Middle East, including with a lot of long-time allies and partners, including Saudi Arabia and Egypt. They positioned themselves to at least play a role and shape events in Libya, North Korea, Afghanistan.

And even kind of beyond Putin's actions, when he looks out in Europe he definitely calculates that he's benefitting hugely from what's happening in Europe. You know, the kind of --

MS. KELLY: Chaos suits his purposes.

MS. KENDALL-TAYLOR: The chaos suits his purposes. And it feeds

this narrative that Russia advances, along with China, that democracies don't deliver, they're chaotic, they're ineffective, they're dysfunctional. And so the authoritarian alternative is more important.

So when he looks out at Europe, you've got a UK that's totally consumed by Brexit chaos, a Sweden who hasn't been able to put a government in power since elections they held in September, Hungary and Poland are testing the resilience of European institutions, Italy has a populist government that's vocally advocated for lifting sanctions on Russia. And so all of these things are benefitting Russia hugely. And then you kind of juxtapose this kind of chaos in the West with I think some momentum that he's looking --coordination and collaboration that he's fostering among authoritarian counterparts, and the picture I think from Russia looks quite good. You know, in 2017 you had the very first visit by a Saudi king to Russia. They just had a very high profile visit; Venezuelan President Maduro was there in Moscow. And so there is this kind of camaraderie, collaboration. Russia-China relations are deeper than they've been, Russia-Iranian relations are at a historic high, largely based on their shared interest in countering the United States in the Middle East.

So I think the Sea of Azov, from Putin's perspective I think he's feeling quite confident. And as I'm sure we'll kind of turn to now, it really raises the stakes I think for the West to be able to confront the rules breaking behavior and to try to stem some of this momentum that I think Putin really things is on his side.

MS. KELLY: And just briefly to follow up on something you touched on, it part of the calculation also that if you're trying to rally domestic support, which has fallen off since his reelection this spring, that it helps to have a fight, it helps to have an enemy if you're trying to rally the population behind you. And he can say, look, we've got Russian ships defending the country and defending Russian sovereignty in this important

area.

MS. KENDALL-TAYLOR: I think that's one narrative that we've definitely heard. I tend to put less stock in that narrative. I don't think Putin is necessarily concerned about his popularity. He's down to 60 percent and it's not at the 80 percent where he was before. But my sense is that he feels pretty secure that's he's going --

MS. KELLY: That's a pretty big drop off just since March.

MS. KENDALL-TAYLOR: It is. It's a drop. But I think that would be kind of on a secondary or even like a lower down on the decision calculus.

MS. KELLY: American leaders would kill for 60 percent ratings.

MS. KENDALL-TAYLOR: Exactly.

MS. KELLY: Yes, Sandy.

MR. VERSHBOW: I would agree that -- well, Putin does watch his polls very carefully. That's not his main concern. And I do agree with Andrea's earlier point, that a lot of this is driven by his insecurity about his position domestically. Fear of regime change, conviction that the West's strategy is regime change. And in this he's not afraid of NATO or military threats, he's afraid of Western ideas, Western values, and our efforts to spread those -- at least up until this Administration.

But because of what he saw in 2012 in Russia and the toppling of Gaddafi, I think Putin sees himself at war with the West and with Western values. And one of his many fronts in this war, including the domestic front in Europe, in the United States in terms of the information war, subversion, disinformation -- every discredit or at least sow doubts about the strengths of our democratic values and institutions. But the main front for Putin is Ukraine. And that's the hardest part of the battle for us to wage. I mean we can do a lot in terms of deterring direct aggression, and NATO is still on track even with the histrionics by the President about defense spending. NATO is still

continuing to improve its deterrence posture. You know, we have to do a lot at home to at least reduce our vulnerability to the disinformation, the subversion, expose what the Russians are up to, recognizing they're probably never going to stop, but at least we can make ourselves less vulnerable.

But supporting the countries in between, which Putin clearly wants to re-subjugate to some kind of new Soviet Union light, or whatever you want to call it -- Yalta II -- that's where we're kind of holding the line, but it's not even a standoff. I think the events in recent weeks in the Azov Sea just remind us that Putin has many tricks up his sleeve. I mean between now and the Ukrainian elections, something dramatic could happen that we haven't imagined. A lot of people talk about the fact that this bridge may be on shifting sands and it may not last for more than a few more months. But what will happen if it collapses? Putin will blame the Ukrainians, says Ukrainian terrorists -- who, by the way, he already said were on those ships that they seized -- use that as a pretext for some much more decisive military blow against the Ukrainians and we'll be scrambling as we are right now in response to --

MS. KELLY: All right. Well, let's explore what pushing back against Russia might look like. And, Alina, I'm going to throw this at you first. Everybody else, please chime in as you have thoughts.

You described in your opening remarks drawing red lines and what that would look like, and how Russia, not to mention China and the rest of the world, is watching this. So what does that look like? What would cause Russia pain? What would cause Putin to rethink, maybe this isn't the right way to be going, to be proceeding on the world stage.

MS. POLYAKOVA: That's the big question.

MS. KENDALL-TAYLOR: The million dollar question.

MS. POLYAKOVA: I think what Andrea was pointing to, this notion that we keep being surprise. So the question to my mind is how do we avoid getting surprised and how do we actually get ahead of understanding the threat that Russia represents and having a realist threat assessment of Putin's ability to take risks, his capacity and capabilities, meaning the Russian military and non military capacities and capabilities to cause harm in the near abroad and also in the West. And I think the one place we could look at to not be caught by surprise, which is of course Ukraine. And I'm not just talking about what happened recently, but in terms of this broad political warfare that the Kremlin has waged against the West, cyber attacks, disinformation campaigns, that all of us have now too much familiarity with I think in the United States. And, again, we were surprised in 2016 by the Russian operations here to try to influence the U.S. elections.

But, of course, Russia has been doing this in Ukraine at least since 2004. Ukraine is a country that has been the test bed of attacks on critical infrastructures, electrical grids and blackouts. This has been happening relatively consistently.

And so I think or us to understand what we might see come here, we should look at what's happened in Ukraine over the last 10 years, and also in Georgia.

And I think that tells us a few things. One, we need to be realistic that Russia is not 10 feet tall. It is a declining power in some ways, as people say, economically, demographically, yet the big conundrum and the paradox and why it's been so difficult to craft an effective deterrence policy against Russia is because it is still a global player despite being -- or because of being a declining power, they're constantly desperately trying to cling to everything.

Just to give you one quick example, I read a news story just this morning

that there was a Russian television varietal show where they showed off this new robot that was supposed to be -- it was walking, it was talking, really advanced robotics. It turns out this was a person in a robot suit (laughter), but that was never fairly presented. And I think to this to my mind encapsulates what Russia really is. It's a country that great aspirations, but not the capabilities and capacities.

And so just a very last specific idea of what can be done, I think we need to focus now on the military space because we do have the infrastructure there and I agree we need to sure up the Eastern flank of NATO. We're already doing this, this Administration is actually doing that in a quite effective way I would say. But how do we craft a deterrent strategy when it comes to information warfare, when it comes to cyber attacks. And the basics of a deterrent strategy is basically saying if you do X here's consequence Y. And that message needs to be sent by the President, first and foremost. It needs to be sent quietly between the intelligence community, between the military relations between the United States and Russia. But that is what I think we need to start thinking about, is what are those sets of consequences we're willing to impose, because the sanctions regime obviously, as good as it has been, I think, has not deterred Russian aggression. You know, just what happened in Ukraine seems an obvious counter example to that.

And so the question is, are sanctions the appropriate policy tool?

MR. VERSHBOW: I would say that --

MS. KELLY: Just to quickly follow on your point about messaging, do you buy this theory that the messaging from the U.S. is confusing even if you're here, and certainly from the outside. Congress is all for sanctions, not clear that the rest of the U.S. government is. How much does that complicate thing?

MS. POLYAKOVA: Well, from the Russian's perspective -- just like from

anybody's perspective, not just the Russians.

MR. KRISTOL: Exactly.

MS. POLYAKOVA: Yes, this gap between rhetoric and policy I think is difficult for the Russians to interpret. Also because they have a consistent kind of misreading of the role of the U.S. congress. Because the Russian parliament, the Russian Duma, has no effective power in Russia, it's a rubber stamp parliament. So they always misread and misinterpret the power that congress actually has to push the Administration to take certain actions, like sanctions. But certainly, you know, (inaudible), as you mentioned, when the G20 meeting was cancelled just recently by President Trump, they learned about it through the Tweet, just like everybody else did -- so they said. So to them this just I think is very confusing. The Russians, despite everything, are really keen on protocol, I think as Sandy knows from being an Ambassador.

So I do think that the messages that we're sending are not serving that deterrence effective function.

MS. KENDALL-TAYLOR: Yeah, I think that's really important. But it's not just confusing, it undermines the whole policy that follows behind it. So we all know that the Russians see divisions as opportunities. So as long as there's a division between Trump -- or even a perceived division between Trump and the rest of the Administration, the Russians will continue to see opportunity, Putin will continue to see opportunity, and it's no longer an effective deterrent, no matter what we do.

MR. VERSHBOW: But there's also the problem that even though the President has disappointed them probably in terms of delivering the cost free reset, which they may have been hoping for two years ago, at the same time the Russians exaggerate in their own minds the role of domestic Russophobia, hatred of Russia, as the reason why we're not able to engage with them and cooperate more. I think they underestimate

the fundamental differences in terms of aggression against sovereign states and interfering in internal affairs of our country and of our allies. They think we would kind of gladly sweep that under the rug if it weren't for domestic pressure on Trump.

So maybe the underestimate, maybe they overestimate the role of congress, but congress has filled the gap, pushing the Administration to tighten sanctions when the Administration at the beginning was willing to waive them all unilaterally.

MS. KELLY: Bill?

MR. KRISTOL: This is one thing I would say is I think the question is how do we respond to this particular to this particular action in that same sphere, or how do we deter a subsequent action in that same sphere. That's a difficult question and I think too much of a self limiting question for the U.S. So they go into Georgia, Senator McCain says we're all Georgians now, he's widely ridiculed by most of the foreign policy establishment I would say, and certainly by his opponent in the presidential election, and nothing happens much. Bush doesn't even do very much. And, you know, they're left with that.

The go into Syria. Obviously, in a big way, violating -- what -- 35 years of U.S. policy, keeping Russia out of the Middle East. They get away with that with the daunting challenge, what are we going to do now. We're going to go into Syria more aggressively and I want to really -- I would, but no one else has a summit for that. So that's not going to happen. Ukraine, 2014, same problem. You could get them a few arms -- and I don't mean to minimize that, but ultimately are we going to really do much? The intervention here in 2016, which certainly we should not minimize. Of all these different sequences of events, getting away with intervening in the U.S. debate during an election campaign is kind of a big deal. I would also say poisoning people in major NATO allies who have been given safe haven is kind of a big deal and it would have been sort

of a -- had a pretty big response in the Cold War and a pretty big response anywhere. I mean it's just sort of an unusual thing to do, you know, against another sovereign power.

But if you think of each of these things, how do we respond in an appropriate way in that sphere. You're going to have trouble. And I think the way to think about it is less that and more okay, what is the whole arsenal we have at our disposal to make Putin's life miserable. And it doesn't have to be in the same area. The response to Ukraine doesn't have to be Ukraine specific, the response to Syria doesn't have to be Middle East specific. We have a lot ways I would think to make Putin's life much less happy and cozy than it is right now. And I have no sense that the U.S. government is doing a lot to look at these ways.

MS. KELLY: But what is that arsenal?

MR. KRISTOL: Cyber.

MS. KELLY: Andrea, do you want to take this? What is the whole arsenal at our disposal to make Putin's life miserable?

MR. KRISTOL: I'll mention one, which is very targeted use of cyber to make his financial operations and his financial comfort and his friends' and oligarchs financial operations and comfort extremely miserable. And that could be done by sanctions, but it can also be done by a lot of covert actions. Maybe we're doing some of them.

MS. POLYAKOVA: The Panama Paper style leaks, which I'm convinced were intelligence leaks.

MS. KELLY: You think that got under his skin?

MS. POLYAKOVA: Absolutely. There have been multiple reports that it got very, very close. And the environment in Russia, the political environment, is that even the anti-corruption opposition crusaders know never to touch Putin because they

know there will be consequences for their livelihood for that, but that's clearly a sore point and that's clearly somewhere where our intelligence can have a big impact.

MS. KELLY: Mm-hmm. NATO. Speaking of organizations, set up with the express purpose of containing and countering Russia. Talk to me about the state of NATO. Now, I will say my context is I was in Europe anchoring NPR from London and then from Helsinki in that remarkable week that began with the NATO summit in Brussels and then President Trump went on to the UK for what we thought would be a boring visit, and it was anything but, and then ended up in Helsinki, which was definitely not a boring summit. I was in the room in the presidential palace in Helsinki as that press conference unfolded, which is another thing we could spend an hour and talk about.

But to the role of NATO, Alina, you mentioned in your view that you described the shoring the Eastern flank of NATO and that that's actually going pretty well.

MS. POLYAKOVA: I mean I will leave the specifics of the NATO alliance to our former Ambassador. But if we just look at the spending numbers that this Administration has committed to U.S. spending, shoring up our military presence in the Baltic States, in Europe's Eastern members, like Poland, that amount is $6.5 billion, which is a huge increase from I believe if was around $700-something million in the last year of the Obama Administration. So that's a huge increase over a very, very short period of time. And we are now thinking more about how to really defend the Baltic States. There was a very famous study -- well, maybe not very famous -- very famous in my world (laughter) -- that assessed --

SPEAKER: Get a life. (Laughter)

MS. POLYAKOVA: You know what I'm talking about.

SPEAKER: I know exactly what you're talking about. I do too.

MS. POLYAKOVA: That Russia could basically take over Estonia in like

60 hours, if not less than that. And so that's a huge liability. But I think in terms of our military presence, that continues to be a point of debate that I think Sandy could speak to.

MR. VERSHBOW: Yes. This is one of those cases where there's the Trump Administration policy, which has been superb, you know, even better than Obama -- continuing on a lot of tracks that were started under the Obama Administration -- but definitely both doing more under the European Deterrence Initiative to bolster the U.S. posture in Europe, which depends heavily on rapid reinforcement. But getting the allies to do more, coming up with new initiatives that were kind of the good news from the Brussels summit, on readiness, on military mobility. Technical, but very important in terms of the credibility of deterrence.

But at the same time there's still this anxiety that the President could kind of pull the rug out from under all these good things because of his inconsistent support for the Article 5 commitment, you know, his comments about Montenegro starting a war, why should I have to defend Montenegro. And his continued bashing of the European Union, which is these days playing a very complementary role in actually trying to help solve the problems of mobility and funding infrastructure that will enable trains with a heavy load of tanks to actually cross Europe safety and quickly.

So there's always this anxiety in Brussels, which came out in the second day of the summit when the President has his tantrum, even though the communiqué, thank god, had already been approved, that caused Europeans to wonder whether this commitment could kind of suddenly disappear just when push comes to shove with the Russians. So nevertheless, actions do speak louder than words in the actual policies and the spending is good news. And Trump has shamed the Europeans into spending more than they might have done otherwise.

MR. KRISTOL: And I would say, to counter that, words sometimes

speak louder than actions. I mean honestly, words are actions of course. And I don't minimize all of that, but there's a little bit of the -- there's a famous phrase, retail sanity and wholesale madness to describe policies or ways of thinking where the individual things that happen are reasonable. It's the whole thing is just nuts, you know. So (inaudible) very particular decisions were made that were perfectly reasonable and well thought out by extremely intelligent people and executed pretty well in certain cases, but at the end of the day, if you're going in the wrong direction or into a quagmire, down a rabbit hole -- whatever metaphor you like, it's a certain kind of madness. And I do worry about that with Trump. And my friends -- I have a few -- in the Trump Administration or the Trump world are very big on these actions. And I don't minimize them at all because in the real world they matter. I take that point.

On the other hand, doing nothing about Russian destabilization of major NATO members in Central and Eastern Europe, to say nothing of core NATO members -- using that distinction colloquially, I don't think it's a real distinction. But, you know, in Western Europe, and having a U.S. Administration that seems to think it's just fine, that riots in the streets of Paris, let's cheer them on a little bit because those often end well in history. Mob violence in France really has a great history. I mean that is really bad news.

And so I'm all for doing what you can do, and if what you can do is the retail actions, we need to do them. But I am very worried that the broader America first, contempt our fellow democracies, tolerance -- not to say nationalization, but authoritarians around the world, you know, the Saudi-Russia thing is actually kind of a wonderful symbol of this I think.

MS. KENDALL-TAYLOR: And the handshake at the G20.

MR. KRISTOL: Yeah, the kind of high five at the G20 of the two

murderers cheerfully reassuring themselves that basically they're both going to get away with it. I mean that really is -- I'm not just trying to be doom and gloom, but I think we need to confront that because really in terms of -- and this is where congress can do some things because congress can also do very narrow things, which they've done a decent job on I guess with sanctions and so forth. But they can also at least make clear that Trump's view of American foreign policy of course will be dominant for the next couple of years presumably, but isn't the permanent view going forward. I do think that's extremely important to the people I've talked to, and I think everyone on this stage talks to more foreign leaders and diplomats than I do, but I think it makes a big difference in people's minds if they think that it's kind of a weird moment, we have to get through this, we have to manage some of the retail stuff and manage the bigger stuff as much as we can and we'll sort of reemerge reasonably. Or this is sort of the future of America.

SPEAKER: The new normal.

MR. KRISTOL: If this the new normal, all the retail is going to --

MR. VERSHBOW: You ain't seen nothing yet.

MR. KRISTOL: Yeah, then we are really in deep trouble.

MS. KELLY: Andrea?

MS. KENDALL-TAYLOR: Yes, just to make one more point on the NATO question. I think everything that you guys said about NATO is doing a lot of things right. There was a very successful 2018 summit on the kind of defensive posture. NATO is looking strong, more commitments to do more to counter Russian aggressive in the kind of below sub Article 5 types of activities, like hybrid. NATO is doing more and more along those lines.

But I think the thing that I am also concerned, maybe to add a little bit to the bad news, is what's happening within NATO countries themselves. And it's

democratic decline and the slow kind of erosion of democracy that I think will have significant implications for the cohesion of the alliance, for the capacity of NATO member states to coordinate the close coordination that will be required to confront emerging challenges, not just from Russia, but migration, terrorism, and all these other things. And so --

MS. KELLY: You're talking about the rise of authoritarian governments within NATO countries?

MS. KENDALL-TAYLOR: In NATO countries themselves. So what's happening in Hungary and Poland, that is creating divisions within NATO that I think have the potential to affect kind of the operational capacity of the alliance. And that's really concerning. And I think that is something that Putin will be taking note of.

MS. KELLY: Let me make this personal. The G20, Putin and Trump were going to meet, then they were going to meet, then they weren't going to meet, then they were going to meet, then they weren't, and then, as was mentioned, we all learned by Tweet that they weren't going to meet. Am I right in thinking you've written -- they should have met, this could have been really constructive?

MS. KENNEDY-TAYLOR: Yeah.

MS. KELLY: Persuade me. Because I was at Helsinki. Why would that have been a good idea?

MS. KENNEDY-TAYLOR: I think there certainly were a lot of people who thought cancelling the meeting was the right course of action because people rightly said that I think President Trump didn't have the desire to deliver the strong messages that were required at the G20 summit. That's true, but I think from my perspective, that it's important that we talk about what the President should be doing to advance national interests. When we kind of drop that should from talking about what we expect of the

President, I feel like we're going down a slippery slope. That if we're not laying out the criteria through which we kind of evaluate a president's performance, then we lose that mechanism of accountability. How do we make the case to American people if we're not talking about what the President should be doing?

And I also think there were a few kind of downsides to not meeting. So the Russians essentially I think took away the same message from Trump cancelling the meeting as they would have from a poor performance. By Trump cancelling the meeting the Russians still concluded that Trump doesn't have the desire to stand up to Russian rule breaking and doesn't have the desire to confront the Kremlin head on. And so this really was a key opportunity to deliver the strong messages that Alina was talking about. And so for that it was a lost opportunity.

MS. KELLY: Anybody else want to agree, disagree?

MR. VERSHBOW: I sort of agree in theory, but not necessarily in practice because, yes, it would have been an opportunity to read him the riot act on the Sea of Azov situation and on INF violations. And there were other important issues that we do need to talk to the Russians about, just to kind of manage crisis situations, prevent the relationship from getting even worse than it is. You know, North Korea, Syria, you could make a long list. The problem is would Trump have done that or would it have been a repeat of Helsinki where he buys Putin's lying through his teeth about --

MS. KELLY: But what if we don't know exactly know what exactly happened (inaudible).

MR. VERSHBOW: It's all Ukraine's fault, it's all somebody else's fault, and there was no interference. And Trump says because you've denied it so vigorously I will believe your denial. So in theory it would have been nice, but maybe we were all spared another Helsinki.

MR. KRISTOL: And I would qualify it in this way, I think -- I mean I'm all for holding to the appropriate standards of presidential behavior and sound foreign policy, but I think not at the expense -- and we're all executive branch types here -- in the real world I don't think he's going to do that, so where are we. Where we are is you do have the U.S. congress. We have new chairmen of the relevant committees coming in in both houses, either because of retirement or switch of party control, certainly in foreign relations, and I think actually that will be true of the other -- well, certainly in the House of all committees, and in the Senate new leadership in the key committees. And they really need -- in my opinion, this is a more practical thing to urge -- they need to act like serious committee chairman once did, and even in recent memory did, or serious members of congress did, leave aside if they're chairman of anything, and actually speak for the country and show leadership and really advance legislation and make arguments and meet with people abroad. You're allowed, if you're chairman of the Senate foreign relations or Senate armed services committee, to actually meet with foreign leaders. I believe Sandy must have ushered through people in many, many meeting. And, you know, McCain, Kerry, people like that, were actually important in shaping overall U.S. foreign policy. Not as important as the president, not as important as the secretary of state, obviously. And now there are people -- and the passivity over the last couple of years -- which has mostly been an intra republic problem, I will grant -- but that needn't be the case anymore obviously in the House. And in the Senate I would say there's a change in leadership.

I don't know how that will work out, but I they at least should feel somewhat emboldened, I would hope, to behave like serious leaders in the American political system and not merely a sort of minor league functionaries in the President's party, or frankly, on the democratic side sort of minor league critics of the President. I

mean they could really do some good. I mean in the real world those committee chairs and other members, and even back benchers who just know a lot, could do more good than they have been.

And they did a lot of good in the past. Ben Cardin and others, (inaudible). That was not a huge Obama Administration priority, to say the least. And taking on his own party -- the President of his own party. But that's really dissipated. And the absence of Senator McCain in particular, obviously, I think is very damaging.

MS. KELLY: Alina?

MS. POLYAKOVA: Just quickly before we get some feedback from the audience, I want to go back to what Andrea brought up, if I may. To kind of pan out from these questions of NATO institutions and military spending, all of that. You know, there's a big picture of democratic decline and recession and the attacks on democracy in what we thought were countries that were well on their path towards the end of history, this liberal democratic path. And now we see this profound backlash against that which is undermining these multilateral institutions, not just NATO but also the EU. Of course, we talked about Hungary, which just expelled a university, talking about Poland, where the government has been pushing to basically make the judiciary branch irrelevant, to try to consolidate power. And we see similar warning signs in the Czech Republic and in Slovakia. And if we pan out a little bit further, Turkey is a NATO member state, is a huge issue.

But I also think just to connect a few threads here. You know, we talked a bit about what's happening in France right now and the protests there. And I've seen some quite disturbing commentary that Russia's really behind all this. That we're seeing the Russia hand everywhere. When we see our own domestic internal problems, people's real grievances being expressed about their concerns of the quality of life, to

have a conversation where this is blamed on external force.

And I just want to say a word of caution that yes, of course, this goes back to the notion that Russia is not capable of that. If Russia was capable of inciting mass protests that are presenting the biggest political crisis in a major Western European country, then we're in deep trouble. That's deep trouble. That's not what's happening here. What's happening here is that in our own societies we're seeing what has been a very slow simmering and now an explosion of momentum for these anti liberal, you could say, counter democratic political forces. And the demonstrations in France are also this I think emotional -- it seems like an emotional explosion against some real grievances.

And so I think we have to understand that first and foremost we need to shore up our democratic constitutions at home because other adversaries, not just Russia, will exploit our weaknesses and divisions. They can't make them, they can't create them, but they will exploit them. And I think having a more coherent understanding of what that means also presents a very clear set of policy solutions. So how do we shore up the Transatlantic community's commitment to democratic norms and values? How do we make those appealing to a younger generation which doesn't see the value of democracy the way their parents did, they think military rule is not so bad. And I think connecting those with the external effects we face is the real challenge that I think we should be talking about here.

MS. KENDALL-TAYLOR: Just to underscore -- I mean I couldn't agree more with what Alina just said and also just to add, one complicating factor is also the China question. So we haven't yet talked about that, and I think it's worth noting that there is kind of a deepening and broadening of relations between Russia and China. And so that type of approach that Alina just described, the shoring up and building the resilience of democratic societies is not only effective for countering Russia, but it's also a

very successful approach for dealing with a rising China.

MR. KRISTOL: Can I just say, cutting the other way a little bit, you could have a lot of deep problems, and they are real problems, they should be addressed, and they would manifest themselves anyway. But just that extra 10 or 20 percent from Russian intervention, that matters too. It's like you're in the hospital and you've got this disease and you have this problem and these things are all very serious, and then just a little infection can make things a lot riskier, a lot more toxic. And I think the Russians are pretty good at exploiting these things.

MR. VERSHBOW: It doesn't help to call it all a hoax.

MR. KRISTOL: Yeah. So look, honestly, maybe the easiest thing in the very short-term is to push back on. So I totally agree we shouldn't delude ourselves that this is somehow fantastically brilliant Russian machinations.

MS. KENDALL-TAYLOR: But it amplifies.

MR. KRISTOL: It amplifies and it's something we could de-amplify conceivably, or counter-amplify, or amplify in the other direction in places the Russians don't want to see this kind of thing happening.

MS. KELLY: Good. Very important context. I'm going to open it up to questions. We have two microphones, so raise your hand, we will get a microphone to you. We'll hope to squeeze in a few of you. Please tell us your name, if you have an affiliation you want so hare, let us know, and please make your question a question. If it's a speech I will cut you off.

I saw this gentleman in the second row first, so we'll bring it right to you here.

SPEAKER: I'm Bazel Scarless (phonetic 23:48:38). I used to deal with foreign policy issues. I have a question. I'd like to ask the panel what specific actions

would they recommend to counter Russian aggression. And particularly given recent development, political developments in Germany, would the panel think that German cancelling Nord Stream 2 would be an effective action against Russia's recent aggression targeting Ukraine?

MS. KELLY: I'll repeat in case you couldn't hear that in back, specifically what should be done to counter Russia, and look at the German example of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.

MS. POLYAKOVA: I can start on Nord Stream 2.

MR. VERSHBOW: I was going to say, we have to respond, first of all, to this immediate challenge in the Sea of Azov. If the Russians don't return the ships, for example, we should have some targeted sanctions, banning Russian ships from European ports, or something like that.

And I think by the way, that sanctions have worked to a point. And I think they've deterred the Russians from even more aggressive behavior in Ukraine, taking more territory back in 2014-15. They may not have fundamentally changed Russia's calculus, but I think the bigger problem with sanctions is that Europe isn't doing enough. I mean we have an agreement from 2014 and those get renewed all the time, but the Russians have been escalating and Europe just pats itself on the back for renewing the same old, same old sanctions. Nord Stream 2 could be a bit of a shock to Putin if the Germans did surprise everybody and decide to, if not cancel it, at least suspend it until problems in Ukraine is resolved, Minsk is implemented or some serious strategic demand of the Russians.

The CDU seems to be debating that, the new party leader of the CSU sort of has questioned but not yet come out against Nord Stream 2. So we should try to persuade them. And if they don't take persuasion we should think about sanctioning the

companies involved in Nord Stream 2.

MS. POLYAKOVA: Just to follow up on that, Russian influence flows through gas pipelines. And so it's not a commercial deal, Nord Stream 2. Russia's own analysts have said this in a massive report and they were quickly fired for saying this, so the Russians know what it is. The Germans have been in this kind of illusionary space for a long time trying to convince themselves this is a commercial project. And I would just say that disinformation isn't just on social media. There is a great amount of disinformation about Russian gas and energy and the kind of dependence that it creates vis a vis Europe. So I do think Nord Stream 2 is a bad project. I don't necessarily think the way the U.S. has tried to get the Germans to act on it is resonating with Germany because the narrative there is, of course, well the U.S. just wants to sell LNG to us, so they want us to be dependent on U.S. gas versus Russian gas. But, clearly, for Russia, this is very much about Ukraine, it's about cutting off transit through Ukraine, it's very much about keeping dependence on Russian gas within Europe. And so I think this project should have never been approved from the start and should be suspended and halted.

I think we all talked about some very specific ideas as well when it comes to deterrents. I mean very clearly we don't have a deterrent strategy when it comes to information war. And we did, we did in the Soviet days, effectively deter the Soviet Union. We should remember that. And Russia is not the Soviet Union. It doesn't have the same weight globally as the Soviet Union had. And so we dismantled these institutions after the end of the Cold War, like the USIA, the U.S. Information Agency, and we never reinvigorated them for the digital age.

And so what I would want to see is a coherent well funded governmental inter agency effort to come up with a strategy of how our messaging capabilities and our

messaging to Russian speakers outside of Russia, maybe Russian speakers in Russia, maybe re-expanding RFERL to Hungary and Poland again. All of these things that we used to do. And, you know, from my experience growing up in the Soviet Union, I can tell you that the way we learned about what was really happening in the world was not from the Soviet media, it was from the BBC, Russian service, it was from Voice of America, and it was from Radio Liberty. And all of these things have been completely disseminated in terms of their funding and finance.

So these are some very clear thing that I think congress could start thinking about doing.

MS. KELLY: Another question? The gentleman four rows back. Right here. Yes, sir.

MR. ABDUL-MALIK: Thank you. Omar Abdul-Malik. I'm executive director of the Cambridge Center for the Study of Religion and Public Policy. My question has to do with Trump's message of isolationism and I'm a nationalist and things of that nature. And how does that counter or how does that juxtapose Putin's kind of emerging sense of Russian exceptionalism and a kind of a Soviet version of the Monroe Doctrine? And does that make it difficult for the U.S. to have influence in that area since it doesn't -- Trump is almost seen as a friend and ally of Putin?

MS. KELLY: All right. So a question to do with American versus Russian nationalism, exceptionalism. Andrea?

MS. KENDALL-TAYLOR: My first reaction when you're asking that question is kind of the focus that this Administration has placed on notions of sovereignty and the nation state. And Pompeo was just in Europe and delivered a key speech to our European allies and partners that put front and center this idea that this is a world order that we're going to advance that's based on the nation state and sovereignty. In my mind

that's an incredibly dangerous focus for U.S. foreign policy. Ideas of sovereignty and nation state, and the sovereignty in particular, are the exact narrative that Russia and China use to convince other countries that they should avoid at all costs U.S. efforts to support democracy. And so in many ways I think it gives these countries a free pass to say like we don't have to pay attention, we're going to pursue our own national interests regardless of what the United States says.

It also makes very difficult issues like the Nord Stream 2 project. So if we now have a Germany that's saying we want to pursue Nord Stream 2 because it's in our, Germany's, national interests, it's our own sovereign decision, then kind of what recourse does the United States have to engage in that kind of world?

And so for me I think this is a really counterproductive, unproductive focus for a U.S. foreign policy.

MS. KELLY: I mean you're hitting on a big theme, which is do we still have a common vision for the world order at a point when America is under President Trump, currently pursuing an America first agenda. We discussed London today in chaos, Paris not faring so much better, Merkel cycling her way toward the door in Germany. Do we still have a common view of what the Transatlantic Alliance and the world order should look like?

Bill and then Sandy.

MR. KRISTOL: I'm hostile to Trump's view, understanding of nationalism, and aspects certainly of his touting of sovereignty. Maybe slightly less hostile than Andrea. But, fine, if he's for national sovereignty, what about the Ukraine's national sovereignty or Georgia's national sovereignty? I mean I don't actually believe all that stuff. I mean that's just Trump's -- that's rhetoric which just disguises a desire not to get involved and a desire in some respects to side, frankly, with authoritarians against

messy democratic allies who have less money and less money personally for the Trump family and less, arguably -- you know, this is complicated with the Saudis, but less money generally for various aspects of the U.S. economy or of the U.S. political class or of Trump supporters or whatever.

So I think, actually, I'm very interested personally in these intellectual debates, but I also think we shouldn't give them too much dignity and think that well, there's a real like, gee, if you believe in sovereignty I guess we can't do anything about Ukraine. Like really? Aren't they a sovereignty nation? Or sovereignty is only sovereignty for Russia and for Saudi Arabia, if that even is a nation state really, and for China, where we can't say anything about a million Uighurs in concentration camps. There there's sovereignty, but for Ukraine, Georgia, for Russian intervention in funding a lot of -- some of what's happening -- I don't want to overstate it -- some of what's happening in Central and Eastern Europe and so forth. There what happened to that great concern about sovereignty?

MS. KELLY: Sandy, quick thought? And then we'll try to get a question over here.

MR. VERSHBOW: I mean I agree with Bill. Reading Pompeo's speech, we shouldn't turn this into a doctrine because I think it really was in a sense an expression of cynicism and a totally transactional approach. And I think that's what the Russians pick up on. And, you know, they can be much more cynical than we are because they don't have to pay lip service even to Western values of the liberal international order. But that I think is the danger, we give Putin the sense that it's all transactional and if he wants to subjugate Ukraine, we get something return we might make some kind of dirty deal. That's what I think the Ukrainians are worried about and that's why I hope the healthier minded folks in the Administration will continue to do what

they can to work with the Europeans to help the Ukrainians to provide them more military aid. Also to keep their feet to the fire on democratic reforms and building their own democratic institutions rather than succumbing to a more cynical fatalistic approach.

MS. KELLY: Question from over here, this gentleman right here, about midway through the room. Good morning.

MR. LEIBOWITZ: Thanks. Alex Leibowitz, formerly also with international organizations. I was very interested in the comments about the -- it seemed like the one thing that people really could point to was the increased sort of military actions in the Eastern part of NATO. And although I also take Bill Kristol's point that sometimes in fact words maybe do speak louder than actions. But what about the fact that the Eastern European countries seem to be -- some of them at least -- the least hostile to Russia, the least sort of willing or eager to stand up to Russia. Like Hungary, for example. Doesn't this sort of undermine what we're doing, or am I missing something here?

Thank you.

MS. KELLY: Who wants to jump on that one?

MR. VERSHBOW: There's a danger of that. So far we haven't seen that inside NATO on sort of fundamental issues where there's been strong support for all the different initiatives that came out of the last summit. And Hungary is increasing its defense spending.

On lesser issues, though, there are warning signs. Hungary has been blocking high level meetings with Ukraine because of an issue regarding the Ukrainian education law and not allowing as much Hungarian language instruction. Turkey has disrupted some of NATO's partnerships with Israel a couple of years ago. But when push comes to shove on big issues, you know, they're part of the team. So NATO has no

mechanism for suspending membership or ejecting members, so we have to somehow continue to work things out. It's a consensus based organization.

But these kinds of cases of countries who are playing footsies with the Russians or even developing separate relations that we don't feel comfortable about, it could go from kind of minor irritant to disruption.

MS. KENDALL-TAYLOR: I also think it's worth noting, too -- I mean even from political science research, when you look at the impact of regime type on cooperation between states, countries that have share regime type tend to find more common ground in cooperation. And so as we see some of this democratic erosion in places like Hungary and Poland, I think we should expect that there will be a greater foundation for cooperation with Russia.

And when you kind of just look anecdotally about where we've seen democratic decline in some key countries, Turkey, Hungary, even places line Sri Lanka and other -- Sri Lanka is actually the converse of that. But I think regime type is an important foundation for cooperation between states and it does open up the door I think for increased Russian influence and cooperation between states.

MR. KRISTOL: I'm a huge believer -- just quickly -- the regime type question. But I mean to be fair, if you're a small country right near Russia, you're going to be -- especially if you see an uncertain U.S. and uncertain big countries in Western Europe, you're going to be more accommodating. And this was a big problem in the Cold War, or was perceived to be a problem in the Cold War -- Finland, Austria, and so forth. And we managed. I mean, honestly, if you just step back 30,000 feet, these are all important problems to deal with, but I mean sure, you really could have a crisis in 6 months that's way beyond any of this that I think Germany would be the key. I mean there is no NATO and no Western alliance without Germany. I mean there is one, but it's

a very different one. And I don't know, how confident are we that Germany is just going to be chugging right along as a pretty -- you've got to say, to be fair, Bush made a bet in '90-91 and it's paid off pretty well for 25 years. And before that, West Germany. I mean how confident are we that Germany just chugs along as a partner? How confident can they be of us?

So, honestly, we're not in much of a position to be doing too -- I mean I'm for the U.S. doing finger wagging at Hungary and Poland and actually putting real pressure on them. At least we still are -- leader of the pro-democracy forces, so to speak, the pro liberal democracy forces. On the other hand, it gets hard to a degree. We're not living up to those standards. And Germany, I think it's a slightly different question. But there I just really worry about that, what's going to happen there.

MS. KELLY: Alina, last word.

MS. POLYAKOVA: We do need to parse a few things out. Poland has been very clear eyed on the threat of Russian aggression. And there is no sense that I hear from anybody that we're going to see a flip toward some sort of pro Russian view in that country. I think Orbán is very clearly playing on both sides. But at the end of the day, these countries have been good players on the defense side, they have not waivered on their commitments, and I don't think it's productive (inaudible) is going to pour, you know, I don't know, acid on Eastern Europe, saying the problem is really there. Yes, there's issues on democracy, but that's a separate issue from their views about Russia and their continued commitment to NATO military spending.

MS. KELLY: All right. We've got time for one last one. I'm going to take it to the back of the room. The gentleman standing right under the clock with his hand up. There you go. Hi.

MR. KENNEDY: Thanks. Hi. Matthew Kennedy. I've recently finished a

Master's degree in Chinese politics from SOAS in London. My question -- well, two of them -- first, how can existing sanctions be improved or enhanced to give Russia pause in future actions against be it the Ukraine or Georgia? And, secondly, how can Washington entice or encourage the EU to improve its own sanctions against Russia?

Thank you.

MS. KELLY: How do we make the sanctions better? Alina?

MS. POLYAKOVA: I think one very obvious area on sanctions is some of the legislation has been under consideration in congress already. The so called DASKA legislation that's being considered would impose quite harsh sanctions on the Russian energy sector. That's the Russian lifeblood for the regime. But I think we have to be very careful how we proceed because we don't ever want to send the message in my view that we're punishing the Russian population. They are also suffering under this regime, as we've seen in some of the recent poll numbers, for example. And the quality of life and Russian life expectancy, all these numbers are quite shocking if you look at them. The disparity between men and women, all of these things.

So there are ways in which we can make the sanctions hurt pretty badly, but I think the smarter move would be to focus specifically on those in the elite, in the Kremlin, on Putin and his cronies, who he uses to hid his own stolen assets that he steals from the Russian public. And I think that should be the focus, freezing those assets, exposing those assets. Beneficial ownership legislation is long overdue in this country. We're like the Cayman Islands right now when it comes to this. And that makes us very vulnerable to illicit financial flows, money laundering, all of these things. We're allowing our institutions to be used for corruption and for supporting what is an adversarial regime in the Kremlin today.

MS. KENDALL-TAYLOR: I just maybe will just put really quickly a focus

on the Russian elite as the kind of most effective strategy for sanctions. In my view I don't think sanctions are going to dramatically affect Putin's calculus. I just don't think that's going to happen under this regime. So I think what we're playing for is a much longer view of Russian politics. And so I think it's important to put the sanctions also in the context of what's happening domestically in Russia. Putin is at the end of his kind of fourth kind of constitutional term that ends in 2024, and of course he can extend and find ways to stay, but I think for any dictatorship, this is kind of a perilous moment where there will have to be a decision when he announces what his plans are to come next. And I think at this moment in Russia you have a lot of elites who are probably at least lifting their head up a little bit to try to identify who is going to be the person who can best protect their own interests.

And I think the questions are growing as to whether that's Putin. Will he be around after 2024? We don't know. And as sanctions mount and increase the cost to the elite, I think it starts to kind of weaken the loyalty bonds. And it's not going to be enough certainly to destabilize the regime, but I think at least it positions us should there be some sort of other exogenous thing that happens in Russia that people might be more willing to jump ship. And so the sanctions that target the elite I think help us kind of plan, or at least be prepared in a contingency situation.

MR. VERSHBOW: I agree with what was just said. I mean we imposed a sort of graduated sanctions after the immediate aggression against Ukraine in the hopes that the Russians would live up to what they agreed to in the Minsk agreements. They clearly haven't. And so we do have to convince the Europeans and we have to, you know, be more energetic in our diplomacy, because without a united front it's not going to have any impact on Russia.

I agree with targeting the cronies and the elites. We shouldn't expect this

to change Putin's calculus, at least in the short or medium-term. We have to recognize we're in a long-term competition with Russia, and I think that's the Administration's articulated policy in the national security strategy. Sanctions are only one part of this struggle to kind of hold the line. We have to push back when it comes to Russian military encroachments, keep doing what we're doing in NATO, support the neighbors directly, help them become more resilient, fight back, as Alina was saying earlier, in terms of information warfare of our own. I mean we need to revive more --

MS. POLYAKOVA: That's not what I was suggesting.

MR. VERSHBOW: No, but don't fight falsehoods with falsehoods, fight disinformation with the truth. But we have tools that are now underfunded and we could be doing a hell of a lot more, as well as encouraging civil society, the private sector, to engage more in reaching out to the younger generation in Russia, which is I think not as enamored of Putin as some of the older Russians could be. Sort of the long-term solution, you know, the revival of interest in democracy and Western values could happen. If not while Putin is still in power, then in the years following his departure.

MS. KELLY: And there you have it, a tool box for months and years to come. Sandy Vershbow, Alina Polyakova, Bill Kristol, and Andrea Kendall-Taylor, thank you all. (Applause)

Welcome back.

MR. EISEN: Thanks, everybody, for that fascinating discussion and in particular the focus on outcomes. I'm going to introduce the head of the Secretariat of the Transatlantic Democracy Working Group, which Jeff Gedmin and I co-chair. The Secretariat dwells at GMF, at the German Marshall Fund. Susan will talk to you a little bit about the purposes of our bipartisan Transatlantic democracy efforts. Our members include scholars from Harvard, Stanford, and Georgetown, think tanks all over, not just

GMF and Brookings, but also the Bipartisan Policy Center, CNAS, the Atlantic Council, both of which are represented on our panel today, AEI, Carnegie, and civil society organizations, like Freedom House and Human Rights First, all coming together to host, co-host together with Brookings, GS, and FP today, events like this one. We will have many more in the coming year, together with other activities.

And I'd like to introduce Susan Corke now to tell you a little bit about that. Come on up, Susan.

MS. CORKE: Thank you, Ambassador Eisen. And thanks. It's humbling to stand up here after such an amazing group of speakers. The size of the audience I think shows the importance of having this event. And thank you to our co-chairs and my bipartisan partners, Bess Reisen (phonetic 22:35:04) and Jeff Gedmin. And, Mary Louise Kelly, thank you for masterful facilitation of a lively conversation.

I think all of our speakers today clearly showed the need for all of us, republicans, democrats, Americans, Europeans, Jews, Christians, Muslims, to see President Putin's incursions into the territory integrity, political independence, and security of Europe and the United States as an existential threat to our way of life that must be countered with clear eyed resolve and follow up.

Andrea noted that Putin sees any division as an opportunity. We can't give him that opportunity.

Our Transatlantic Democracy Working Group came together to fight this very kind of threat. We came together out of alarm that if we don't put aside our partisan bickering here in DC and stand together for democratic principles and institutions, our Transatlantic security is at risk. The escalation of the Russian threat has given new impetus to this fight. This is not Putin's first provocation, nor will it be his last.

President Trump's initial response to the Russia-Ukraine crisis was we

don't like what's happening either way. Hopefully it will get straightened out. There's not either way, there are no sides. There's a way that's seeking peace and democracy and there's one that is illegally posing an aggressive threat to our democratic security. That only gets straightened out if we take action together. The United States needs to be united with Europe through NATO and showing Russia unequivocally, and with consequences, that we will not tolerate or appease aggression.

Putin is essentially putting forward a dare, he's gambling that he will be able to get away with this aggressive gamble and assert power beyond Russia's actual capacity. I loved Alina's man in a robot suit. I think anytime we think that we're worried about Russia, think about that, the man in the robot suit.

But our shared Transatlantic history has taught us through devastating loss of life, treasure, and territory, what happens when we fail to respond adequately to the Russian regime's aggression.

I wanted to just briefly conclude by remembering Lyudmila Mikhailovna Alexeyeva. She was one of the fiercest and most inspiring human rights defenders in Russia and the world. She sadly passed away this weekend at 91. For seven decades she defended the cause of human rights. As we stiffen our own resolve to counter Russian aggression, she can be our light to lead our way. She was always crystal clear about what she was fighting for, why it matters, and why Soviet Power and the autocratic Putin regime needed to be held accountable. And she knew how to get the message out. My fondest memory of her was sitting with her in her little kitchen, surrounded by blue and white pottery as she recounted with a twinkle in her eye the New Year's Eve protest in Moscow when she dressed up as an 82 year old snow queen. That night the police beat her with a baton. She was delighted by that by the way. That was an image that went around the world. She was then herded into a police van, and then the police

realized who she was. They tried to avert a public relations disaster by letting her go and she refused. She said I will not go until you let everybody else go. And they reluctantly did let everybody go. And she planned that strategy too. She knew that they'd let them all go and she had planned already a festive New Year's part for all of the protestors to go to after jail.

She made fighting for freedom and democracy fun. So I think we need to find again that sense of ascendency and optimism. She stood up to Russia time and again, never backing down, never lost her optimism. And the fire she brought to fighting for our freedom kept her alive fighting until the end. She said today's young people give me the feeling of not having lived in vain.

I think that she would have a sense of how to respond to Putin's dare. The question is, will we? We have many important anniversaries in the year ahead for NATO and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Let's use this as a call to action.

Thank you, everybody. (Applause)

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