THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

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MEETING THE RUSSIA CHALLENGE:
LESSONS FROM THE FOREIGN POLICY TRANSITION
FROM BUSH TO OBAMA

Washington, D.C.

Friday, February 24, 2023

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Suzanne Maloney: Good morning. I'm Suzanne Maloney, vice president and director of foreign policy here at the Brookings Institution, and on behalf of all of us at Brookings, I'm delighted to welcome you to this very special event on meeting the Russia challenge. We're here today to mark the release of an important new book published by Brookings Institution Press, "Hand-off: The Foreign Policy George W. Bush Passed to Barack Obama," edited by former National Security adviser Stephen Hadley, who joins us on stage today. “Hand-off” represents an incredible resource for all who care about American national security. The book offers a repository of newly declassified transition memos on core challenges facing Washington and the world as the Obama administration took office, together with contemporary reflections on how that guidance has stood the test of time. All told, the book offers an unprecedented glimpse into how the Bush administration managed an array of international challenges, including Russia, China, Iran and profound transnational threats that continue to dominate the U.S. foreign policy agenda today.

Even more importantly, the book illuminates for scholars, practitioners and the general public the complexity of navigating epic crises that signal historic shifts in the international order. These lessons are especially relevant today as we are living through a transition from the 9/11 era dominated by counterterrorism and threats to the homeland from non-state actors to a new and even more dangerous landscape of strategic competition among powerful great power rivals to the United States. In that respect, it's especially fitting that Brookings's launch of Hand-off falls on the one-year anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Our conversation today comes on the heels of a historic visit by President Biden to Kiev, an active war zone to meet with President Zelensky and reaffirm the United States' unwavering and unflagging commitment to Ukrainian democracy, sovereignty and territorial integrity. In his own countervailing speech, President Vladimir Putin suspended Russia's involvement in New START, the last remaining arms control agreement between the United States and Russia. The war appears to be entering a grim new phase, one in which the conflict drags on. This will compound the immense and tragic human toll in Ukraine and the wider ramifications on food and energy security around the world. Ukraine's brave and inventive defense of its people and its territory over the past year will be tested, as will the readiness of Americans and others around the world to ensure that democracy can prevail over the thuggery of authoritarian states.

Brookings is doing an enormous array of work in this arena. You've seen, no doubt this week the publication of our Ukraine Index on our website and in the Washington Post. We'll also host another really important public event on Monday on the implications of the Russian suspension of its participation in New START with the Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control, Verification and Compliance. So please join us again. But for today, let me say what an honor it is that we're able to gain from the deep well of knowledge, wisdom and experience of our distinguished speakers here today. I'll take a brief moment to introduce them. We're honored to have on our stage today, Dr. Condoleezza Rice, the 66th secretary of state. You all know Dr. Rice is a renowned scholar of Russia and a pathbreaking public servant who also served as President George W. Bush's national security advisor from 2001 to 2005, the first woman to hold that position. She's currently the Tad and Dianne Taube director of the Hoover Institution, senior fellow on Public Policy, the Denning Professor of Global Business and Economy at the Stanford Graduate School of Business and a founding partner of Rice, Hadley, Gates and Manuel LLC, an international strategic consulting firm.

Stephen Hadley, the editor of this book, is a former assistant to the President for National Security Affairs from January 2001 to 2005. Steve was the assistant to the president and deputy national security adviser serving under Dr. Rice. He is also a founding partner in Rice, Hadley, Gates and Manuel. We are joined today by my colleague and good friend, Dr. Fiona Hill, an acclaimed authority on Russian and European geopolitics at Brookings foreign policy. She served in senior positions on Russia and Europe, on the National Security Council and the National Intelligence Council under Presidents Bush, Obama and Trump. She is the author of the New York Times bestseller "There Is Nothing for You Here: Finding Opportunity in the 21st Century."

Lastly, it is really a privilege to have with us today award-winning journalist and author David Ignatius, who will be moderating our panel conversation today. As you all know, David writes a twice a week column for The Washington Post, which is essential reading for all of us in the foreign affairs community. He's a recipient of many awards, and as the Post's foreign editor, David supervised the paper's Pulitzer Prize winning coverage of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. I also want to pay brief tribute to the three coeditors of the volume Handoff. Peter Feaver, who directs Duke University's program on American Grand Strategy, Will Inboden, executive director of the Clement Center for National Security at the University of Texas at Austin, and Meghan O'Sullivan, our good friend and former Brookings

colleague who just this week was named director of the Belfer Center at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

I would be remiss if I did not note that you can purchase a copy of “Hand-off” at the Brookings Bookstore in the auditorium outside or online for those of you who are joining us digitally. Finally, before we begin, we're currently livestreaming this event and we're on the record. Please feel free to send your questions to events at Brookings dot edu or use the hashtag handoff on social media. For those of you joining us live here today, there will be a Q&A period at the conclusion of our discussion. Thank you. On the floor is now yours, David.

David Ignatius: So thank you, Suzanne. I want to first begin just by congratulating Steve and the coeditors for this book. If you're a journalist, if you're a historian, if you want to understand the history that we've lived through, this book is going to be invaluable. So, Steve, thank you very much. Let me ask you to begin our conversation by just saying a few words about why you embarked on this project and because we're focusing today on Russia, what in particular you think emerges from this material about Russia that we ought to think about?

Stephen Hadley: So thank you, David, and thank you all for coming today. And thanks for Brookings to host this event. As Martha Kumar is here and who contributed an essay to the books, recounts, President Bush early in 2008, really told Josh Bolten, his chief of staff, that the new team coming in, whether it's going to be, whoever it's going to be, are going to face enormous challenges. And we needed the best, the best presidential transition possible. And part of that presidential transition was to prepare these 40 transition memos on all the issues of the day, Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, you name it, they're covered.

And they all had the same format. What we, what we found, what have we got there, what was our strategy, what we thought we accomplished, and what remained to be done for the new administration, what are the challenges they were going to face? So that was the purpose to help train, help prepare the new administration to take the responsibilities that they were going to have beginning in January of 2009.

I had recalled these memos as pretty good. So about three years ago, three years ago, I went down to Texas, and I re-read them, and I thought they were as good as I remembered, but, you know, I'm biased. And, but I also thought they were a good legacy for the Bush administration as to what was going on and what we did and why. And the book, which concludes 30 of these 40 transition

memos and then in each case updates the memos as to what has happened subsequently and then tries to say what Bush got right, what he got wrong, and looking back now on 20 years and four administrations trying to deal with these issues, what are the lessons learned for future presidents? There is to each memorandum, there is an attached set, a long set of attachments, presidents' speeches, policy statements, memcoms and meetings and phone conversations the president had, NSC meetings, a whole bunch. All of those attachments, plus the transition memos, are going to be on an online archive at SMU.

And the hope is that a combination of the book, plus the access to the online archive with all the attachments, it becomes a place where scholars, historians and those just interested in foreign policy can go and see what we thought we were doing. They can say whatever they want about it, but there will be a record that they can consult. And if they do that, there's sort of three or four things I think they will see in it. The fourth one is exactly, I think, where you want to go. The first is there's a myth out there that all Bush did was Iraq, Afghanistan and the war on terror. And what you see from these transition memos and from just the table of contents of the book, we were doing— as you would expect— a whole range of things all at the same time. You have to if you're the United States.

Secondly, that a lot of the initiatives and conceptualization of the steps taken by the administration were conceptualized by the president and then handed over to a team of trusted agents that he built, secretary of State, secretary of Defense and others in whom he reposed confidence, he empowered them, and they in turn share that vision and tried to implement it on the ground. It was, it's what great leaders do. And I think you will conclude from this that as a president, he was a great leader.

Third thing that you can, I think we'll see from this book is nothing much good happens internationally on global issues unless the United States leads. That was clearly true in our administration, and I think is still true today. The fourth thing that jumps out at you— and I think it'll frame the conversation here— is how different was the China and Russia that the Bush administration faced from the China and Russia we see today? And one of things we can talk about is to why that is.

David Ignatius: So let me take off from there and turn to Condi, who's a Russian speaker, a Russia specialist. The story that you read in these pages is of a Bush administration effort to engage Russia, try to bring it towards a modern world, democracy, some kind of working relationship with, with the West. And that arrives at 2008 and the Russian invasion of Georgia. And the memos

describe for the incoming Obama team the strong response that you made to the invasion of Georgia; you decided no business as usual tried to send a strong message. But there are critiques included in the book that ask, was that enough given the strong lean toward engagement? And I want to ask you to think about, about that with us.

Condoleezza Rice: Well, the invasion of Georgia was not a surprise. That's the point that I first want to make. And so a lot of the efforts early on going back into the summer were to try to forestall a Soviet or Russian invasion of Georgia. I worked very closely with the foreign minister of Germany with Frank, Frank-Walter Steinmeier at the time, because we could see that there was a tinderbox there of Russian peacekeepers inside of Ossetia and Abkhazia. And I remember saying to Saakashvili over and over, don't let them provoke you, because if they use military force, it's going to be hard for anybody to come to your aid. And sadly, they were provoked. They fired on Russian peacekeepers. And my first thought was, why would anybody have put Russian peacekeepers in Abkhazia and Ossetia? And so I just want to note that you don't get to choose the circumstances into which you entered. This was a exist extent set of circumstances.

And then you have to decide what can you do and what can you not do. We were not going to use American military force against the Russians. And I remember a national security meeting in which everybody was getting all kind of spun up. And, you know, and with all due respect, the testosterone was flying around the table. And my colleague Steve Hadley said, are we saying that we will go to war against Russia? So you have to recognize your limitations. And then you have to set goals within your limitations. And our principal goal at the end of this was to have Georgia as an independent country with its democratically elected president intact and Russian forces not in the capital. And that we achieved.

Indeed, we, I had a conversation with Sergei Lavrov in which he tried to make a secret deal in which the removal of Saakashvili would have been one of the Russian warnings. And I told him, I said, Sergei, the American secretary of state and the Russian foreign minister don't have a secret talk about deposing a democratically elected leader. I think we stopped them from going to Tbilisi. And finally Russian forces ended up pretty much where they started in Abkhazia and Ossetia. So I think that is a success.

Now, would we have liked to have done more. You said no business as usual. I think that there was a strong view that we ought to do more in the way of sanctions in the war, way against the

economy. But remember, you're never dealing with one event at a time. And there was another little crisis out there called the financial crisis. And not too many countries were in the mood to start thinking about sanctions and the like in the middle of a financial crisis.

And so, again, this is a constraint. When I teach about foreign policy, I try to get my students to see that decision makers aren't just stupid. They're not just making bad decisions. Very often they're choosing between not very good options. And I think in the case of Georgia, we were choosing between some not very good options. I wish we had been able to sustain the sanctions, but in that context, it simply wasn't going to happen. But I'm grateful that we were able to preserve an independent Georgia with Russian forces not in its capital.

David Ignatius: You describe a fascinating scene where the testosterone is flying around the room and people sound like they want to go to war with Russia. And it sounds like good sense prevailed. But there is a question, looking back at Georgia 2008, certainly looking back at Crimea and the Donbass in 2014, about whether we have been too cautious in, you know, showing the sword, as it were.

Condoleezza Rice: Well.

David Ignatius: Let me ask, let me ask as you look back, you know, maybe a little more testosterone should have—.

Condoleezza Rice: Well, yeah. I mean, we had a little bit. All right. So we did bring Georgian forces back from Iraq and we brought them back by military transport. We had destroyers in the Black Sea, I think, too, if I remember. We delivered humanitarian assistance by military means. And so there were signals to the Russians. But one of the challenges is not to get into a situation that you then can't control.

And so one of the points that I would make and it's something that's actually I'm a little— you'll get to arms control eventually— a little worried about. We actually kept very good communication with the Russian military through the then chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Mike Mullen, who was in almost constant discussion and conversation with his counterpart, the chief of staff. One of the things that the United States and Russia, even before that the United States and the Soviet Union have learned, is how to keep open lines of communication to, so that escalation doesn't happen by accident. And one of the questions that we have to ask, given the state of US-Russian relations at this point, is can we still say that?

David Ignatius: Steve.

Stephen Hadley: David, let me just elaborate on to two things. One, that meeting that Condi refers to with the testosterone flying, I said, is anyone recommending to the president of the United States that we use U.S. military force to go to war with Russia and Georgia? The president looked at me like I was out of my mind, and I said, Mr. President, I just think it's good for the historical record that the principles be clear as to whether that's something they're recommending, because I was worried about post administration memoirs where people are saying, I told the president we should have been tougher. And to his credit, the vice president was the first one to say, no, I am not recommending use of military force against Russia. But we tried to do everything short of that to signal that the military option was on the table.

Why did we do that? Because it was, we said very clearly at the time, within our internal discussions, if we do not inflict a strategic defeat on Putin for going into Georgia, tomorrow it'll be Ukraine and the day after it'll be in the Baltic states. And that is an article five provocation that could result in war between NATO and Russia. So all this cooperation and it was enormous that we tried to do with Russia, over Georgia, we threw all of that into the toilet.

So this outreach that we'd done actually we thought would, might give us leverage to send the message, Putin, you cannot have a relationship with the West if this is going to be your behavior. Unfortunately, the, that posture was revised in the next administration, they had their own reasons for doing it. But we then got into the reset for Russia. And I think in some measure that tempered the message we were trying to send in the wake of Putin's going into Georgia.

David Ignatius: So, Fiona, let me turn to you. You are one of our country's best Putin watchers. The book you co-wrote about Putin, I've quoted in my, in my columns, and I recommend to everybody in the audience. I think we'd all be interested in hearing your evaluation of Putin. Then during the Bush years, as you observed him, analyzed him, now as you see him in Ukraine and, and where you imagine he's going to end up at the end of this story.

Fiona Hill: Well, thanks very much. I was the national intelligence officer for Russia and Eurasia at that point and actually was in some of those meetings, but on the backbenches, observing all of this, having put forward some of the analytical perspectives. And Tom Graham, who's sitting in the second row of the audience, he, was, of course, the senior director who was in charge of Russia

at the time and in the hot seat with both of these two distinguished speakers here. So he had to man the front lines in terms of some of the policy issues here.

But in terms of the analytical perspective, there's a couple of things that I wanted to raise here. I was quite struck at the time by how little perhaps we understood about Putin himself and some of his motivations, which was actually one of the reasons for writing that book later. He was somebody who managed to keep a pretty tight grip on information about him. And, you know, when the president would meet him, obviously, Putin was always kind of trying to look of how he could manipulate the situation. As Dr. Rice said, there was always a secret deal that he was looking for, which is something that we continue to see up until this particular point. And he was also extraordinarily good at making you sort of think that there was one set of objectives, when maybe there was multiple objectives as well.

So we focused on the issue of Georgia, but as Dr. Rice and Dr. Hadley have both said, he also had a much larger set of issues and objectives at that particular time, including Ukraine. And in fact, the intelligence community warned that we believe that he would invade Crimea as well at the time, we didn't talk about Ukraine writ large, which of course is what we've seen a year ago. But we did think that Crimea would be on the agenda. And why wasn't it on the agenda at the time? Well, that was because after seeing what had happened in Georgia, President Yushchenko of the time of Ukraine, pulled back on basically Ukraine's desire to join NATO and also extended in the subsequent months, the lease for the Russians on the Black Sea fleet in Sebastopol in Crimea. So they were reading very closely the same trends that we were seeing there as well.

When it came to Georgia, what Putin was able to do was to present all of this as if it was a spat with Mikheil Saakashvili. And he indeed, as Dr. Rice said, lured Saakashvili into a trap. You did, I mean, I remember President Bush even saying Condi told Saakashvili a thousand times not to do this, you know, in the, in the aftermath. What was he thinking? And in fact, when he was asked later what he was thinking, somebody said to him, you know, basically President Saakashvili, I mean, your house was a tinderbox. You know, you were running around there like an arsonist. And he said it was my house. I mean, it was basically for Saakashvili's point, testosterone was flying around there, too. And Putin was able to take advantage of that, which was something that we learned about Putin, that he's very good at goading people, he's very good at finding their vulnerabilities and weaknesses and really egging them on and drawing them in to a conflict.

But I think what we failed to get across at the time was the fact that he had a much bigger agenda. We weren't really perhaps in that mode of intelligence sharing that we are now, which I think has been a great breakthrough on the part of Bill Burns, who, of course, and it was one of also President Bush's ambassadors at the time, and who would, you know, really understood Putin and the nature of the Russian system. And we did allow Putin, in many respects, to get ahead of us in his agenda setting.

And one item that we haven't really mentioned is when we've talked about the importance of U.S. leadership, it's a really having the allies are behind us as well, along with us. And as Dr. Rice was mentioning, we had the financial crisis back in 2008 and 2009. But also, none of our European allies wanted to have anything to do with what was going on with Georgia. And in fact, there was a very quick move on the part of at the time, President Sarkozy of France to, you know, basically come down the Caucasus Mountains like the cavalry to kind of sweep in and try to stop the war right, right away in the first ten days before really anybody else had much chance to really you can reflect on that because it was the Beijing Olympics and Sarkozy was in on the first plane that he could to try to settle this off.

And he actually literally drew up a peace plan, not quite a secret plan, but it was on the back of a napkin that was in French and Russian and later translated into Georgian but had never been translated into English either. And part of the problems for the next administration, which I think were, you know, kind of highlighted, at least in private, was there was no extent English version of this. And Putin took advantage, along with Lavrov, of the definition of forces, peacekeeping forces, basically to get several steps ahead. And we were kind of thwarted in some respects in terms of continuity of policy by the French intervention.

Condoleezza Rice: Well, we did have, fixed some of it. I actually went to France and of course, it was August, so we had to go to the south of France. And, and I saw this plan and I said to President Sarkozy, did you look at a map because Russian forces were going to be 15 kilometers from Tbilisi. And the French insisted that they had looked at the map until they then looked at the map and realized that actually they'd made a huge mistake.

And actually, thanks to Alexander Stroop, who at the time was the Finnish foreign minister, but also was the head of the OSCE, we were able to undo some of the things. And I remember showing up in Georgia and the Georgians were exhausted. They'd basically been told, just sign this.

And we did manage to undo some of the failures there of French diplomacy. But I think you're right. We were, they were trying very quickly to get this solved and didn't, didn't really pay attention to what they were doing.

David Ignatius: Before I let Fiona go on this question of Putin, I'd really be interested, although it obviously is separate from the Bush administration experience, but interested in your assessment of where he stands now. A year into the war, a war going badly, this extraordinary situation in which his former oligarch crony Prigozhin is, is lobbing spitballs at the general staff. I mean, it's, it's amazing. You've been watching this guy a long time. Where's this going to end up?

Fiona Hill: Well, nowhere good, unfortunately. And, you know, I think if we look back to this period of the transition, which also is important signaling because Putin himself was orchestrating his own transition at the time. He'd run out of runway in terms of being president. He only had two four-year terms at the time. And he was basically doing his own handover to Dmitry Medvedev, who had been his prime minister, and then he made himself prime minister, of course, he's looking over Dmitri Medvedev's shoulder the whole time when Dmitry Medvedev was acting as president. So we can't discount that. And it's during the Obama administration, this reset.

But I think this starts to be a kind of a, Putin's gone from the scene. Of course he hadn't gone from the scene. He just kind of, he hadn't even faded to gray. He'd just moved himself into the background where he was still having a major impact on things. And the reset then failed to calculate that Putin was actually still there as a presence. And now we see, of course, that Putin is essentially saying he could be here with us for eternity or as much of eternity, and he has his own kind of life span there. I mean, technically, he can stay in power until 2036. He has the possibility of another two full year, six-year terms. And every signal that we get even a year into this absolutely catastrophic war in Ukraine suggests that Putin intends to stay.

And we can speculate about the Yevgeny Prigozhins and all the other people who might wish to succeed Putin. But part of that is to try to signal to us that there's a lot worse than him. And that was actually one of the dilemmas that we had all of the time when we were kind of looking back. But it was always seemed to be somebody else who was out there in the arena that looked worse than Putin. Of course, Putin helps to create that kind of image because he has every intent of being there in the driving seat. And so when you say where does this end, what Putin wants to make sure is it's an end on his terms. And that's really what we've got to push back against.

David Ignatius: Steve, I want to turn to a question that was asked by one of Brookings's friends. This is a U.S. Army officer named Thomas Schwende. But it raises the question I think we're all thinking about now whether China will end up being really the great beneficiary of the Ukraine war. Your policy as it emerges in this book really was to try to drag China like Russia into a kind of global community, rules-based community. Thomas Schwende, our questioner, asks, what are the odds that Russia and China form a strong alliance in the future? And maybe as part of that, you could speak to the Kissinger question about Russia and China and how we split them and how you thought about that triangulation back in the time of President Bush.

Stephen Hadley: So we had a common strategy, which was to try to bring Russia and Ukraine into the international system.

David Ignatius: Russia and China.

Stephen Hadley: Sorry, Russia and China into the international system. It seemed to be what they wanted to be part of the international system rather than trying to redefine it or overturn it. They seemed to want a constructive relationship with the United States for different reasons. We did not see at that time, and I think there is very little evidence of the kind of alignment between Russia and China that we've seen now. But there is an alignment, and I think the main element of that alignment is both of them see the United States as threatening the legitimacy of their individual regimes. They see the United States as the enemy to be therefore opposed, not only to purge Western influence and American influence at home out of China and Russia, but also to confront American influence and try to undermine America's standing, both internationally and, quite frankly, undermine our democracy here at home and accentuate our divisions.

So it's a very different relationship both between the United States and those two countries and between those two countries themselves. Is it an alliance, I don't think so, but I think they have a very shrewd strategic alignment. Where there is commonality, they will work together. But it's not insisting on lockstep compliance with each other's policies. And China with respect to Russia, I think is trying to walk a very delicate road. On the one hand, they are trying to say we're sympathetic with Russia, we think it was America's and the West failure to take into account Russia's real and legitimate security interests that caused this. On the other hand, they continue to say, but we stand for the principles of sovereignty, respect for borders, territorial integrity, and no use of force to change

borders. On the one hand, they are providing a lot of, they are, China is buying a lot of cheap Russian oil and gas, selling them a lot of products.

But China, for the moment, for the moment, is still complying with our sanctions and with the export controls and so far has not provided lethal weapons that are showing up on the battlefield in Ukraine. I hope that China will continue to try to walk that line. I think the, there will be stresses over the long-term. Russia certainly needs China now, but Russia is the junior partner in this relationship. And I think that is not something Russia will be comfortable with over the long term. And the problem for China is that they pledged that the US, that the Chinese Russian relationship was this open-ended relationship. And then within two weeks, Putin goes into Ukraine and Russia doesn't look like a great partner to go out to the world and bring a different kind of agenda to the world as an alternative to that in the West.

So I think they have an alignment of convenience at the moment. I hope China will not throw their hat in the ring in terms of providing weapons to Russia. And I think over time, we can't separate them, but we should not assume that they are allies. And we should do those things that we can to have independent relations with each and, you know, separate them slightly to encourage, if you will, encourage the inherent tensions in the relationship.

Condoleezza Rice: I would just pick up on that point of the inherent tensions in the relationship. You know, we made this mistake once before. We did not see the Sino-Soviet split coming. And in fact, it was well under way before we recognized, and Henry Kissinger recognized that there was something there to split. And so I do think they have alignment. I believe it's probably temporary for a number of the reasons that, that Steve mentioned. You know, that, that really embarrassing moment for Vladimir Putin when he was made to say by the Chinese that we understand that the Chinese have concerns about what we're doing in Ukraine. I can tell you that that was diplomatic speak for the Chinese asked us if we were out of our minds and told us that if we didn't say it, they would. Right.

And so there are inherent tensions because Vladimir Putin doesn't play second fiddle very well. And Xi Jinping is clearly first violinist here. And so I think that's an interesting tension. There are ethnic tensions there. The Russians are not known for their tolerance of or respect for Asian populations, going back to their willingness, I'm sure Fiona has experienced this to talk to you about

the Mongol hordes some several centuries later. And so I do think there are tensions there and we ought to try to exploit them.

I would just make one other point about Vladimir Putin. You know, by 2008, after Munich, it was very clear that he had a broader agenda. I remember sitting at the, we invited him to the NATO-Russia Council in Bucharest, and this was problematic because we'd had the discussion of Ukraine and Georgia for membership action plan in NATO. And he came and it was kind of late in the day and he started his speech. And I remember because I was trying to listen to him in the Russian because he spoke much more harshly than anybody interpreted him. And so he said, Ukraine is a made-up country. And I remember thinking, did I hear that right? Did he just say it's a made-up country?

And he was already, I visited him sort of one of the last couple of times that I visited with him, and he said, you know, Condi, you know us. Russia's only been great when it's been ruled by great men like Peter the Great and Alexander the Second. Now, he did say Catherine the Great, she was a woman, I guess she didn't count. He also didn't say Lenin or Stalin. And it was very obvious then to him the greatness of Russia was in its empire. And how dare the communist— you remember when he gave the speech just before the invasion— how dare Lenin and Stalin make the mistake that broke up the Russian Empire? And so I think his imperial tendencies were beginning to, to become evident, but perhaps not soon enough.

David Ignatius: Let me ask one more of these audience questions. This is from Robin Matthewman, an oral historian. And it's kind of a thought exercise, I can imagine our friend Graham Allison posing this one. What is the event or combination of events that could help convince Putin that he needs to back down?

Stephen Hadley: It's very tough.

Condoleezza Rice: I'll say.

Stephen Hadley: Yes, he's not going to he's not going to give up this dream, which is of a restoration of a Russian empire, not a Soviet empire, a Russian empire within the territory of the former Soviet space. And that starts with Ukraine. Russia, plus Ukraine, plus Belarus has aspirations for empire. Without Ukraine, it's a regional power. So he's not going to give up the vision, but he may take a pause if he cannot achieve his objectives and if he looks at risk. So the kind of thing that, I mean, this is a longer discussion, I think time is not on the Ukrainian side. And what we ought to be

seeking is to give Ukraine the weapons and training and intelligence and other support they need, so that sometime this year they can do a counteroffensive.

And the kind of counteroffensive they might think about is to go through Zaporizhia to towards the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, and to try to break the land bridge between Russia and Crimea, which goes over Ukrainian territory that the Russians now occupy to break that land bridge or threaten it and to put Crimea and Russian forces in Crimea under risk from Ukrainian attack. At that point, Putin could face the possibility of losing Crimea. And if he loses Crimea, he loses his job. That kind of thing might give Putin some cause to say, I'm going to take a pause here. Either I'm going to negotiate something or it's just going to be a cease fire and in place like the war in 2014, a frozen conflict, though, with Russia sitting on more of Ukrainian territory.

And then at a later time, Putin will have the option of resuming his effort to make Ukraine a failed state, and in the interim, pressure the Ukrainians and try to make it sure that they do not succeed in building a sovereign, secure, prosperous state. He's not going to give up the vision, but we may be able to deny him and force him to sort of stand down on the current iteration of his effort to achieve that vision.

David Ignatius: Fiona, what would be your answer to that thought exercise or response to what Steve was saying?

Fiona Hill: Well, what Steve says makes a lot of sense. And there's just three points that I wanted to add to that. First of all, Putin was very proficient in judo, and I think all of us know this by now, 23 years, I mean, we all know quite a few things about Putin that we didn't before. And judo is done in tournaments and bouts, bouts and then through tournaments. And if you lose in one, then you might then overturn your opponent later on. So he plays a much longer game perhaps than we give him credit for at times. And I think that's consistent with what Steve just said, that if he doesn't prevail this time around, he's going to look for an opportunity to do that over the course of the tournament, which, you know, could be the next God knows how many years out until 2036, when perhaps that might be the end of his presidency if it doesn't come sooner.

The second thing is this issue of history, which, as Dr. Rice said, I mean, he's steeped in it and has been and we should have been picking up on that and telegraphing it a lot earlier than we've been, we have been. In fact, for people who met him in the 1990s when he was in Saint Petersburg as the deputy mayor, he was going on about history then, too. And that's the part that we as

Americans are not so good at because we tend to always move on to the, into the future, and leaving, you know, trying to leave the history behind. But Putin's living in this history all the time. And among those kind of great czars and czarinas like Catherine the Great that Putin has in the past invoked is Nicholas the first who wasn't called great, but was actually the father of kind of Russian nationalism, autocracy, orthodoxy in the people, but was also the person who almost pretty much lost Crimea.

Getting back to Dr. Hadley's point here about the risk of losing Crimea, because Nicholas the first presided over the Crimean War with, after overextending and finding that the Brits and the Ottomans and the French basically fought back. And it was after Nicholas the first passed on and he literally died, you know, towards the end of that conflict that Alexander the Great, who Putin did invoke came in and had to fix things, emancipated the serfs, but put Russia back on the national stage. There could be some lesson that he learns from that history that might make him decide to pause for now.

But the third thing is what's happened in Georgia. Mikheil Saakashvili, who Putin had [inaudible] is actually in prison right now in Georgia. He left power in 2013. In fact, his health is imperiled at this particular moment. And Georgia has turned off in a very different direction. Putin's reading of that would be if he can't prevail on the battlefield, then he might be able to prevail over time. And we no longer talk about Georgia in the way that we did. This is an enormous tragedy. And, you know, basically decades on, Georgia looks like in a different place, a place that is very comforting for Putin because it looks vulnerable and weak and no longer able to exert itself as the beacon of freedom and democracy that we touted it to be, you know, back in 2008, 2009. So Putin will be looking for another play in which, you know, perhaps he doesn't win everything that he wants to on the battlefield in Ukraine, but in which he can weaken Ukraine and prevail on Ukraine over time.

David Ignatius: So we're about to go to questions from the audience, be thinking of what you'd like to ask the panel. I want to close with just a final question for Condi. You said something fascinating earlier to me, which was that in conversation with Putin, Putin said to you, you understand us. And that's often seemed like one of modern Russia's complaints, you don't understand us. So you do understand Russias, as Fiona does with years of deep study. If you were going to pass a message to Putin as somebody who understands Russia and him, what would it be?

Condoleezza Rice: This will not end well. And because I think Nicholas the first rather than Alexander the second might be the right, the right analogy. You know, the fact is I agree completely

with Steve and Fiona that he may bide his time, he may wait and so forth. But boy, he's put an awful lot on the line, including the, the 800,000 Russians who've left the country, the best and the brightest. He has put on the line the economy of Russia, which is quickly becoming a backwater. He has put on the line any sense that the Russian military was anything to reckon with. He's dependent on the Wagner group and prisoners to try to fight this war and his international standing about which he does care, he likes, that's why he keeps inviting people to Moscow. His international standing is a subordinate to Xi Jinping.

And so if I could send him a message, I would say you, you have lost what you had hoped. And the fact is, you will now, if you continue down this road, your country will be a large North Korea. Is that what you're looking to do? Because he took great pride in the Russia that was a part of the international system. I'll never forget all of us being dragged off for the 300th anniversary of the founding of St. Petersburg in this huge event that was done. He dragged every leader to it. President Bush went, Angela Merkel went. And, you know, it was one of those things that reminds you is of Russia and is that sometimes things don't change. I walked behind these beautifully now restored golden palaces and the backs of them were not painted. This is a reminder of the Potemkin villages of the past. And they had tried to get out of this. And I would try to appeal to that part of Putin. Maybe, I think it's unlikely, but that's the message that I would give. This is not going to end well because your country is going to be a large North Korea. Is that going to be your legacy?

David Ignatius: Wow. Audience, it's your turn. I see hands up. I'll start here in the first row, there'll be mic runners who will be bringing microphones. Please identify yourselves, keep your questions short, if they're to a specific panelist, please say so.

Audience Member: This is for the overall panel. George Nicholson, Washington liaison for the Global Special Operations Forces Foundation. I found it interesting you talked about history. Remember a few years ago, I was with Stan McChrystal and also with Jim Stavridis. And they said the problem at West Point and Annapolis, we, we teach engineering, the war we live in, we'd better be teaching religion, history and everything else. And this goes back to Putin's perspective, a historical perspective. Did we make a mistake after the collapse of the Soviet Union, basically turning to the Russians and saying, you're a second-class power. We're going to go ahead and assume all your Warsaw Pact countries and everything of creating that kind of animosity. The same thing after World

War One that we did with the Treaty of Versailles, of going ahead and creating a climate in Germany where it appealed to their nationalism where Hitler was able to come in.

David Ignatius: Good, good question, one people often think about. If I just to summarize it, did we push too hard in that moment of victory after the Cold War in a way that ended up being counterproductive?

Condoleezza Rice: Well, I was a Soviet specialist for George H.W. Bush, and I left just before the Soviet Union collapsed. But I can tell you that I think that the latter half of the Bush administration, number one, the Clinton administration, the Bush two administration, the Obama administration, even the Trump administration did everything they could to, to cast Russia as a partner and not a junior partner. President Bush was particularly, President George W. Bush was particularly attuned to this, that he had to show respect for the Russians.

Now, you can do the counterfactual. Let's say we didn't expand NATO. That assumes that Vladimir Putin did not have certain interests and certain, certain ambitions, and that therefore, if we didn't expand NATO, he would have been just fine with the circumstances, and he wouldn't have done all of the things that he's doing now. I could give you the counterfactual that, in fact, he would have done them without Article five guarantee for the Poles and the Czechs and the Hungarians and others. And they now look like the Georgia that Fiona just described, which is a kind of vast continued vassal states of Russia. Would that really have been the right moral case to make for the people of Poland and those countries that suffered under Soviet occupation for 45 years?

And so when I hear the, don't expand NATO, I think to myself, okay, so the alternative is vassal states in Eastern Europe that have no control of their future. And I don't really like that picture for the United States. We did that once it was called Yalta. Didn't work out so well. And oh, by the way, I would make the argument that there are two periods with Putin. After 9/11, he became our best partner in the war on terror. In Afghanistan, in intelligence cooperation across the board, because he thought he'd found the strategic concept that worked with the United States, we can both be warriors against terror. And President Bush actually took him up on that. I remember when the Beslan bombing of the kindergarten happened. It was only President Bush who said that was a terrorist act, not some Chechen nationalist, which is what the Europeans have a tendency to say.

Now, that worked until Putin realized that the other part of the Bush doctrine was people ought to be able to choose their freedoms, and democracy begins to spread in places like Georgia

and Ukraine and so forth. And so I, I, I think we sometimes as Americans, we have attended to say if we had just done something differently, this would have turned out differently. That had to mean that Vladimir Putin was a different person with different ambitions than he had. And boy, I don't like the world without Article five for those countries.

David Ignatius: Fiona.

Fiona Hill: Yeah, I just want to reinforce a couple of things that Dr. Rice has just said. First of all, leadership matters. So I think the emphasis on Putin is absolute right because Boris Yeltsin wasn't like that. Boris Yeltsin, in fact, there's now a whole set of other documents that have now been declassified, where he's telling Bill Clinton, President Clinton, look, I'm not an imperial person. I can't imagine, you know, trying to take Ukraine back and Yegor Gaidar, prime minister at the time, saying there's no way that we would have a war with Ukraine. Well, of course there is a way, because now we have one, and that's because of Putin and the mindset of the people around him being very different. And you can trace that going back to the early 1990s before there's even an expansion of NATO to some of the people who are now around Putin, some of the people like [inaudible], for example, who was briefly in charge of the whole events in Ukraine, were involved in the emergency committee that was set up around the coup against Gorbachev at the end of the 1980s.

So I think what we didn't factor in was how leadership really matters in Russia and the mindsets of people. And that's why Putin himself and the people around him become so important. And I just want to say, you know, from the point of view of all the other countries, you know, Russia remains an empire. I mean, I grew up in Britain, which is still an empire, ask any Irish, Scots, or Welsh person about how they feel about Britain. And that's the kind of Russia is a land empire. And Ukraine and Belarus and some other parts of the Russian Federation today, like Chechnya, are still part of all of that. But Russians themselves and many of us can't conceive of that fact that Russia is still an empire. But when we started to interact with Russia, I mean all of the titles in my work, I was the, an IO for Russia and Eurasia, I was the national security director for Russia and, or Europe and Russia. We always put Russia first and then we tended to ignore Ukraine and Georgia and Belarus and all the other places to their detriment.

I mean, we don't go around calling Poland the former Grand Duchy of Warsaw or Hungary as the former part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. We certainly don't go around calling India or the United States or Canada or New Zealand, the former colonies of, of England. So, I mean, the thing

that we're dealing with is the last empire in Europe, the last great empire. Spain, and I suppose the UK still, but Russia is still behaving like an empire. And in 1956 the United States slapped back the United Kingdom and France when they made an imperial, you know, rush towards the Suez Canal and the Suez Zone and said, no more to this. So this is consistent with the US practice, which is trying to push back the empires when they overreach.

David Ignatius: Steve.

Stephen Hadley: I'm the one person on this dais who is not a Russia expert, but I'll give you my perspective. My wife and I are reading "The Icon and the Axe," which is Jim Billington's book. And what you, what you take from that is that for four centuries, Russia has been trying to get its relationship with the West right. And never has succeeded. We thought that the Russia coming out of the Soviet experience, there was a chance that we could convince Putin, that this was his opportunity to bring Russia permanently into the West. And Condi will remember, Bush would say that explicitly to Putin, and Putin would say, that's what I want to do. But there are dark forces in Russia that we must not awaken. So let me do it in my way and at my time. So we tried to do that, and we've tried to build a relationship.

And if you look at the book and look at the chronology of the Russia memorandum, we're dealing with Russia all the time. The president's dealing with Putin all the time, Condi's dealing with her counterparts. But we also hedged. We hedged in the possibility that history could not be overcome, and Russia would go south. We hedged by expanding NATO, strengthening our NATO partners, strengthening our own presence in Europe in some important respects, to prevent a, provide a context which might encourage Putin to move in a positive direction and give a hedge if it did not.

Now, Tom Graham, in the postscript to the transition memorandum on Russia, says, did we get the balance right between outreach to Russia and hedging? And I've struggled with that myself for a long time because I was a big advocate in NATO enlargement down to the nineties. And I struggled with it until I read Putin's speech on the eve of his going into Ukraine, where he came out even more explicitly that this is about empire, and this is about liquidating Ukraine as a way of bringing it in to this bid for a revitalized Russian empire. And at that point, I, I laid that burden down and I concluded that all this NATO enlargement, missile defense was a pretext for what was a real vision. And you need to, if you think about Ukraine, you need to think about the Sudetenland. And that's what we're faced with now.

David Ignatius: So we have only a five-minute segment, I'll bundle two questions, you sir, you sir, and we'll do, let me see if I can somebody all the way in the back, yes, those three and then we'll let the panel respond.

Audience Member: Oh, thank you very much. I'm Benjamin Tua, a retired civil servant. Shifting the geographic focus a bit, Meghan O'Sullivan and her hand over memo writes that the Bush administration had to deal with an Iraq threat. My question has three parts. Can you tell us what the.

David Ignatius: Keep it maybe to one, to one part because we have so little time.

Audience Member: What was the nature of that threat? Was use of force the best way to achieve it? And how did that impact on Iran's role in the region?

David Ignatius: Okay. Yes, sir.

Audience Member: Hello, my name is [inaudible] I'm from Republic of Georgia. I would like to thank you for the support for our democracy during the crisis. I was a child during that period, but I remember those events very well. So I would like to ask you about political goals with regard to Russian war in Georgia and towards the things that all of those goals were achieved, especially with regards to Georgia's prospects of becoming a NATO member in the near future. Thank you.

David Ignatius: And the gentleman there in the, yes, all the way, in the back. Sir.

Audience Member: Thank you very much for a fascinating discussion. My name is Johnson. I'm a second-year master's student at Johns Hopkins SAIS. My question is, would the Russian society as a whole, be willing to accept and bear the consequences of a potential Russian military defeat. Thank you.

Condoleezza Rice: May I take the first, the second two.

David Ignatius: Each panel, starting with Condi, make, respond to those questions and make any closing remarks then Condi has a hard stop, I'm afraid.

Condoleezza Rice: Let me take the Georgia question first. I'm very worried, as Fiona said, about Georgia, and I think we've lost focus on Georgia. And if we could refocus again on Georgia, because I think there are a lot of younger people in Georgia who expected something different than Georgia now has. And we've done very little in terms of the human rights abuses in Georgia, freedom of the press issues in Georgia. And so I would like to see us put Georgia back at the center of the agenda, because I don't think currently this is going in a direction that we, I think we achieved a lot in 2008, 2009, 2010. It's reversed and we need to to worry about that.

I'll just mention on the question, I'll leave Iraq to, to Steve, on the question about the Russian population. Look, I think that you have to talk about multiple Russian populations. Clearly, older, less educated people out in the hinterlands who watch Russian television believe this is an attack on the Russian, the Russian state on the rodina, on the homeland. And I don't think they would accept defeat, but they're being told that they're winning. And the only thing that's beginning to change is that lots of body bags are coming home and that is tending to change. But I don't know if you read that Putin quote to the mother, which is one of the most callous things I've ever heard. Well, at least he didn't die in a drunken brawl, he died for something good. That gives you a sense of the lack of respect for, for Putin for his own constituencies.

For younger urban dwellers, many of them have just left the country. And the sad thing is that a Russia that over 30 years was emerging as having a relationship with the West that was going to help Russia and the rest of the international community, I think that Russia is, is dying day by day. And to me, we've got to have a policy that isolates Putinism and what is going on in Ukraine from the Russian people, because I still think that there are enough Russian people who want to be part of the international system, and we need to keep them in our universities and in our, working in our law firms and in the other places, because they, they didn't sign up for this.

David Ignatius: Steve.

Stephen Hadley: Well, we could have a whole hour of Iraq discussion, and I won't do your questions justice. Let me give you a down payment, if you will. Richard Hass has made famous this notion that wars are either wars of choice or wars of necessity. And he says that Iraq is a war of choice, I think that's wrong. I think Iraq was a war of last resort. For 12 years through a variety of measures, we tried to get Iraq to comply with 17 U.N. Security Council resolutions, we said, stop supporting terror, terrorism, either destroy or disclose that you've destroyed your weapons of mass destruction, stop terrorizing your people and stop invading your neighbors.

And in order to try to achieve compliance, the international community not only passed those 17 U.N. Security Council resolutions, we had no fly zones in the north, no fly zones in the south. We had dumb sanctions, smart sanctions, smarter sanctions, we had inspections regimes. We had a congressional resolution that made regime change the policy of the United States in 1998. And the Clinton administration used force on the territory of Iraq to get them to accept inspectors. None of it

worked. And George Bush then tried coercive diplomacy, building up our forces, trying to get Putin to comply. And I think, Saddam, excuse me, to comply, there are parallels there.

Condoleezza Rice: Yeah, I just didn't want that to be the headline.

Stephen Hadley: Tried to get Saddam to comply. And I think President Bush thought that it would succeed until the point that Schroeder, Chirac and Putin said publicly that they would not support any use of force against Iraq for, under any circumstances. And at that point, Bush was faced with the choice. Do you basically say to Putin, sorry, we were only kidding? 17 resolutions didn't mean a thing, bring our troops home and give, give Saddam a get out of jail free card? Or do you enforce the will of the international community? And Bush made that choice. And I think given what we knew at the time, it was the right choice.

Stephen Hadley: We're going to have to, we're going to have to leave it there I think—

Fiona Hill: Yeah, and I think I can pick up on this somewhat here because the consequences of Iraq, at least how they're interpreted outside, have a long tale until today, because Putin actually likes to refer back to Iraq as a kind of a justification in many respects for what he's done in Ukraine as well. And in part, he read what was happening there as the United States being in the business of regime change. And although Steve absolutely did not make, to mean to make these slips here, Putin's always convinced that we're out to get him or someone's out to get him, which is kind of one of his own fears. And he plays on that with his relationship with Iran as well, because Iran is helping Putin today in the world in Ukraine. And he's reaching out, as we know, also to North Korea.

So all of these kind of other states come into play here. And I think the idea for Putin there's a very good op ed today by Sergey Radchenko, actually one of the SAIS professors, we've got lots of SAIS students in here today, making that analogy with Korea and the Korean war and about the, the demilitarization and the split of the Korean peninsula and positing that that could be one of the many scenarios that we see in Ukraine. I mean, Putin is, is observing all of this. And every time one of us talks about something like this, it actually gives Putin a whole kind of sense of either risks or things that he actually needs to do himself.

So one of the, you know, the problems that we have ourselves in interpreting things and answering questions is they're often perceived very differently from the outside. And Putin is trying to justify both what he's doing right now based on what the United States has done in the past, but also trying to avoid outcomes that might be seen as somewhat detrimental to him. So history is very real.

And all of these precedents, precedents are very real for Vladimir Putin. So all of these questions, you know, things of that extent and that we're living with right now, the legacies of everything that's happened in the past, I know we have to wrap up now, but more books.

David Ignatius: We, we Condi has got, has got a hard exit. So we will wrap up here, Hand-off. Please stay in your seats and let our panelists leave but join me in thanking them for a really terrific discussion.