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EVALUATING NATO ENLARGEMENT SINCE THE END OF THE COLD WAR

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Thursday, June 15, 2023

UNCORRECTED TRANSCRIPT – CHECK AGAINST RECORDING

PANEL DISCUSSION:

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PETER BAKER: Also, you're going to hear all year I really do think you're lucky to be here. It's going to be fabulous because we have two things we don't often have with panel discussions in Washington. One, we have a fabulous panel who are really experts on what they're talking about and are talking about it at a really timely moment. I don't think you could find a more mature conversation to be having than the issue of NATO's enlargement at this particular moment with the Vilnius summit about to come up with the war in Ukraine happening right now with the debate you see playing out in books and articles and and throughout the political sphere. I think the other thing you're going to have here today that's really fascinating, if I'm not wrong, is you're going to have disagreement, which is something we don't often have enough of. And I think some of these discussions in Washington, too often, at least the panel I find myself involved with, find everybody sort of just saying, yes, I agree more or less. And I think we should have a robust and and and dynamic debate about some of the issues we're about to talk about today.

We have with us today we have Jim Goldgeier here, of course, the visiting fellow from the Center on the United States and Europe here at Brookings, Joshua Shifrinson, an associate professor at the School of Public Policy at the University of Maryland. Susan Colbourn, the associate director at the Program in American Grand Strategy at Duke University. And of course, we have Jim Townsend, the adjunct senior fellow at the Transatlantic Security Program at the Center for a New American Security. We're going to talk for a little bit here, and then we're going to open up for questions. And there'll be people with microphones who will come around. I'm supposed to remind you that this is on the record. Is that right? And therefore, just keep that in mind. We're here to have a public conversation.

We are, I want to go back to the history of NATO enlargement at some point, but let's just start with where we are right now, because at this very moment, there is a major debate happening between the United States in the form of the Biden administration and its allies in Europe over what to do with Ukraine and NATO in this upcoming Vilnius summit. And while President Biden, I think, has done, you know, surprisingly, I think to a lot of people a good job of keeping the alliance knit together in the year and a half since the invasion of Ukraine. They are really at loggerheads, it feels like. On how far they want to go right now. So Jim why don't we start with you? What do you think we think we're going to see at Vilnius? We think we should see it. Vilnius, What should we be doing with Ukraine? And have you changed your mind on this at all?

JAMES GOLDGEIER: Well, first of all, Peter, thank you so much for for being our our guide here through this subject. Thank you all for coming. It's just so great to be at a public event here in the Falk Auditorium at Brookings after some time not being able to do that. Really thrilled to be with my colleagues here, my coeditor for this volume, Evaluating NATO Enlargement from Cold War Victory to the Russia-Ukraine War. Joshua Shifrinson and I who did this together because we disagree about NATO enlargement and two of our great chapter authors, Susan Colburn and and Jim Townsend, the, you know, the Biden administration has been very clear that they're not interested at this moment in pursuing membership for Ukraine in NATO. And I think it goes back really to where the President has been since the beginning of this war, which is he wants to do everything he can to support Ukraine and wants to push back against this Russian aggression. But he has said over and over again he doesn't want to start World War Three. And, you know, and he doesn't want American troops to have to be directly involved in the war. And, you know, if Ukraine were a member of NATO, it would have an Article 5 security guarantee. It would be, you know, the other members of the alliance would be on the hook for defending Ukraine against Russian aggression. I, so I understand the perspective. The problem for me, and I will say I have over time really felt like there were things that we should do for Ukraine other than membership. I just thought, you know, it was too, the potential for escalation was high, you know, earlier, you know, 2008 when when this really became more on the agenda, I was concerned about escalation, concerned about provoking Putin and provoking Putin. You know, you don't need to provoke Putin. I mean, Putin. Putin wants this territory and believes it belongs to Russia. And I don't think he should be allowed to use force to try to accomplish that objective. And so over time, I have come to the conclusion, first of all, that Russian imperialism is the greatest threat to European security. This is not just the issue. It's not just a Russian elite issue. This is Russian society seems to clearly believe that these lands outside of the Russian Federation, outside the internationally recognized borders of the Russian Federation, Russian many Russian people seem to believe these lands belong to Russia. They don't. And I don't see any

other way to deter Russia from attacking Ukraine other than bringing Ukraine into NATO's, because we have seen that Putin is deterred from attacking NATO countries.

PETER BAKER: So at this point he is attacking Ukraine and therefore admitting NATO's, at least in the short term, a tantamount to a declaration of war, because we would then have to immediately invoke Article 5.

JAMES GOLDGEIER: Right. So that's why I you know, that's why I understand the sentiment about not moving forward on NATO enlargement. I just I do think that the administration's perspective seems to be that really that's not even an issue, looking out that that they they there's a lot of talk within the administration about the so-called Israel model. You don't provide a security guarantee. You provide Ukraine with the weapons. It needs to have a qualitative military edge, the ability to defend itself against Russian aggression. But we should remember, the Israel model includes. Israel has nuclear weapons. I don't think we want Ukraine to have nuclear weapons. So I so again, I understand the sentiment about you want to bring a country at war. And but I think that as we look out over the medium term, we need to think about how Ukraine could become a member of NATO's. And I think that we should be signaling that more than we are and it shouldn't really be off the table, as it does seem to be for this administration.

PETER BAKER: Josh, we're going to get into whether it was wise to expand NATO in the nineties and 2000, but for the moment, looking now where we are, we can't undo what we did even if we wanted to. Is it wise at this point then to say, okay, Ukraine too?

JOSHUA SHIFRINSON: So thanks for the question, Peter. And I also want to thank everyone on this panel wanting Jim also for coming to be a number of years ago, suggesting that we coauthor this thing. That's a preamble to answer your question because Jim and I disagree about Ukraine and NATO as well. I have come to the informed position that taking Ukraine into would be a grave mistake for the United States and for the alliance as a whole. Jim, Jim alluded to the problem. Ukraine and Russia are going to be locked. They're going to have a nationalist dispute over a very fractious piece of territory over the foreseeable future. I am personally anti-Russian on this point. I think the Ukrainian territory belongs to Ukraine. But the question must be posed for the United States to support Ukraine joining it. And I'm an American, so I'm going to focus on the United States role here for a second. For the United States to support Ukraine, join NATO. We have to be willing to say we're going to lay our blood, time, treasure and perhaps lives on the line for the sake of Ukraine. Now, I certainly understand the desire to stop Russian imperialism. I agree that Russian imperialism is a huge problem in motivations there. But as we have also seen in Ukraine today, the Russian military threat to the continent of Europe just isn't there. It's not the former Soviet Union. It's not going to run amok and conquer the continent, even have hegemony in a political sense over the continent. So as a result, when you add all these things up, the risk to the United States of getting involved and having to incur an Article 5 guarantee for a dangerous piece of real estate versus the versus the benefits involved at the end of the day. Ukraine, unfortunately for better or worse, is not central to the future of European security that the stability of the continent. I don't think the benefits exceed the cost. I'm reluctant to take Ukraine into NATO.

PETER BAKER: Does it apply to any kind of sort of half measure or partial measure or future commitment or Israel model or something in your view?

JOSHUA SHIFRINSON: So I'm very sympathetic to the Israel model on this one. I think there is a lot to be said for turning Ukraine to what some people discuss. It needs to be Taiwan. I have a very hard thing for any calculating and calculating actor to swallow, and I think Putin and the Russian. A lead around him. And many of the Russian people have designs upon Ukraine. So if you are asking me what should be done, I think turn your let's build up the Ukrainian defense industry. Let's help Ukraine root out corruption to become a viable, stable society that is impenetrable or hard for Russia to crack in a political sense and turn them into something that can be very hard for Russia to think I can get away with this in the future.

PETER BAKER: Susan, So give us your view of this and tell us a little bit about what you think is going on with the allies being on different pages, because traditionally Washington has been the more forward leaning member of NATO and it's the Europeans who have to be dragged along because they're always nervous and you guys are going too far and so forth. And here we are in this odd position where it seems to be the opposite.

SUSAN COLBOURN: Yeah, I think we're in a very interesting situation right now that tracks with some of the old stereotypes, but in some ways illustrates that the alliance is always more complicated than we than our stereotypes leave it to be. I'm a historian and I have to say it's complicated. We can take that off the list. I've done it up front. So but what I see today is we tend to focus, especially in the American debate, very narrowly on the question of Ukrainian membership in NATO's and whether the costs or benefits are good for the United States, are good for American interests. But there's also a macro question about what a decision to admit Ukraine, what a decision to close the door on Ukraine entirely or to any of the half or potential interim measures in between those two ends of the spectrum, what it means for the alliance as a whole. And I wonder what happens to Polish behavior, Hungarian behavior, French behavior. Right. How do all of the states of Europe, the other members of the alliance, of which there are 30 other members, Right. Think about their own security. We we feel a sort of degree of comfort that NATO will continue on because it has always continued on. But any good historian of data will tell you that virtually every year open a newspaper and somebody is worried the alliance would fall apart. Just because it hasn't yet doesn't mean it couldn't in the future. And so there are bigger things at stake about what role NATO's plays in the broader provision of European security. And right now, it's the only game in town. Right. And and so I think that there is a potential to undermine that and encourage people to sort of freelance about thinking about what future structures might look like.

PETER BAKER: And getting getting all 30 members, 31 members, what we're going to get to on board with any single strategy and any single policy. I mean, that's just not easy, right, is one more reason Washington is basically does prefer a sort of bilateral approach to this, Right?

SUSAN COLBOURN: Yeah, It's incredibly difficult to wrangle all of the allies on the same page. Historically, in any alliance decision, it has meant that a degree of ambiguity lingers in every decision, right. Where it's open to interpretation. So everybody's competing interests can coexist here. I'm very curious about Eastern European lobbying of Washington. That's the the dimension that I'm the most interested in following. But there's also a fascinating question about how much the Germans would be willing to bear, which has historically been been very, very contentious in this issue.

PETER BAKER: Right. So, Jim, we have just admitted one more member in Finland. We're almost maybe going to get Sweden in there, depending on what happens in the next few weeks. What would Ukraine look like in data? Would it fit in? Is this something that actually beyond the exigencies of the moment, makes sense in the longer term? What's your view of that?

JIM TOWNSEND: Well, it's a great it's a great question. And I think that part of the answer is helps to explain why Ukraine hasn't come in already. Because you remember in 2008 at the NATO summit in Bucharest, the communique said that Georgia and Ukraine will be NATO date uncertain, but they will be NATO. And of course, in my chapter, I said that helped to light the fuze and a sense of of where we are today. Both the Georgia and Ukraine were invaded later on. Putin expressing his view about about Ukraine coming in. But the point is well taken, because one thing about NATO enlargement from the very beginning is enlargement was used to help shape these new allies to look like Western Europe, to fit in around that NATO table. If you remember, they came in after being parts of the of the Warsaw Pact. In my career. I was there helping them out of the Warsaw Pact and NATO. And so what I saw were countries that really wanted to be democratic, didn't have a lot depending on the country, they didn't have a lot of experience in it or with a market economy or a military that looked like a Western military. So a lot of what NATO's did both when these nations were in the Partnership for Peace, but then when they join NATO's as well, is those were all helping to to polish and to grind the rough edges from countries. So they did fit in. And so when you look at Ukraine, one of the problems that we have had is. Historically about Ukraine membership is of the corruption issue was loomed very large. It was very hard for us to deal with and they weren't the only country that had that as an issue. But Ukraine had it in a large amount and there were a lot of special NATO programs and things that the US did to try to help them get away from and fight the corruption aspect of it. And that's what really held them back. We were working with their military quite a bit, particularly after 2014. So I do believe that when we pull Ukraine in and let's say they come in after the fighting has has has ceased in some form or fashion. And so that made sense to pull them in. If we did pull them in right away, I think we could still work with them. We've been working with the military now, but we're going to have to deal quite a bit with their civil society. A lot of

reconstruction is going to have to be done. There'll be a lot of assistance, moneys going in there, a lot of private sector investment as well. So there's going to have to be a real wire brushing of a lot of a lot of how Ukraine has done business before this war. So it's not so much the military integration as much as the civil side. And I think that can certainly be done both through membership in the NATO and in the European Union.

PETER BAKER: You mentioned Bucharest. I was at that summit. This is the NATO summit where George W Bush wanted to put Georgia and Ukraine on map with the Called Membership Action Plans, which is sort of like a, you know, a path toward eventual membership. Angela merkel said, no, no, no. There's a famous scene with her being cornered by the Eastern European leaders saying, yes, yes, yes. And Jim rightly points out that the compromise sort of left nobody very satisfied. It was just no map. No map, but a statement just simply saying you will be members, okay, when how I was going to work. So it ended up having in some way, some people argue the worst of both worlds. It provoked Putin, but it also kind of pissed off the Georgian. It also left the Georgians and the Ukrainians feeling not fully satisfied. Saakashvili Of course. What should they have done at Bucharest? What would have changed the where we are today had they done it right in Bucharest near you?

JIM TOWNSEND: Well, I think there's an argument and and we can certainly debate this, but if we were going to make that kind of noise in terms of of the George W Bush administration, and I was so I was out of the Pentagon. I was in the Pentagon for like 35 years at this particular stage. I was out of out of the Pentagon. I was at a think tank for a couple of years before going back in. And so from what I saw from where I was, what the Bush administration was trying to do was to put a finger in the chest of Putin saying, you're not going to have a veto on who gets into NATO and who doesn't. This is up to the nations. They have a sovereign right. And and we're going to you we understand you don't like Ukraine going in or Georgia, but they want to. And we're going to show you right now that that they get to, you know, come to us. We need to decide whether they come in and we're going to give them the membership action plan. You know, So it was a really a kind of a manhood test, as we used to say, between who was who was stronger. And so what it ended up being, though, was that they couldn't get consensus, as was said. And and so they came up with this, this, this neither based nor foul of a compromise address for it. So what they should have done, though, was probably while putting them out there is to say, well, we'll go ahead and bring you into NATO now. I mean, having them having them drift away into this gray zone with promises to be given and fulfilled in some point down the road left them vulnerable. And so if we were going to have this manhood test and we were going to say, you're going to be in, we needed to, at a minimum, give them map or we needed to do something else to show in a very, you know, real realistic way that the alliance was serious about this. And we'd be willing to if the push came to shove, we'd be willing to do a little shoving with the Russians to show them that we were going to we're we're going to bring them in. But we we didn't we just used some wording and a communique, and that was it. And so they were, in a sense, pushed out. And the there's no man land knows no man's land and very vulnerable to be invaded, which is what happened.

PETER BAKER: So my wife was in and I wrote a book about James Baker, who was secretary of state, of course, under George H.W. Bush. And then he course had a famously large role in the unification of Germany and that there's a lot of debate today as to what he meant or what it meant when he, at one point during a hypothetical discussion, said to Gorbachev, Well, we won't move NATO one inch to the east. I have my view about this, but I'm curious. Let's let's go to the elephant in the room. Did we promise the Russians in any way do we give them any reason to think that we weren't going to expand NATO's or is this a shibboleth on the part of Putin to justify behavior that that that otherwise would be unjustifiable is actually still unjustifiable? But why don't you go, Jim?

JAMES GOLDGEIER: Okay. And then we should hear from both Susie. Josh has written directly on this. And Susie, as the historian.

JIM TOWNSEND: And I was there.

JAMES GOLDGEIER: And Jim was there.

PETER BAKER: But let me give you my view. My view is that they're they're. The important for me, the important thing to understand about that period, the end of the Soviet Union and then early into Russia, post-Soviet Russia, is that the assurances that the West gave were that we are not going to as you retreat from Europe, we are not going to undermine your security. And I think the United States and its allies believe they delivered on that promise. The United States cut the number of troops dramatically that it had in Europe. The United States pursued conventional arms control to reduce the amount of heavy weaponry in Europe. The United States created a partnership for peace to which all of the former Warsaw Pact and former Soviet states were invited. The Russians were included in the post Dayton implementation force after the end of the war. The Bosnia war in 1995, there was a NATO-Russia founding act. I think from a Western perspective, everything was done to assure the Russians that in fact there were no, you know, nasty designs against them. And I think there's a great chapter in this book by Kim Marten Barnard, Professor Kim Marten on Russian military views of this. And but, of course, from the Russian perspective, they're looking at what's going on. And there's NATO, the Cold War Alliance directed against them. And it's getting bigger and it's getting closer to them. And I just think you just have to unbridgeable positions there. But I don't think you can argue that the West betrayed Russia, that the West was deceitful. I think you had countries with different interests pursuing their interests and and that you just had these unbridgeable positions.

PETER BAKER: But I'm just waiting to be, you know, you agree. I know you agree with every word you just said.

JOSHUA SHIFRINSON: I don't know, Jim and I are actually in violent acrimony, 95% of this. Look, there are two different questions on the table, right. What was said in 1990 that may have led leaders in Moscow, I'm going to say Moscow, not because it was the Soviet Union, not Russia at the time. That may have led leaders in Moscow to believe, a, NATO's not a non expansion commitment, assurance guarantee, whatever term one wishes to use, something that says we're probably not going to expand it. It was there anything in the record that would support that position? And the second question is, well, how did that play out in the 1990 and beyond, which is what Jim just spoke to? You know, on the first question, I think it is now fairly well-established, and I think the archival record is sufficiently robust that they really should no longer be a debate that, yes, there were assurances given in the course of a German reunification. It was a particularly scope moment in time in the course of German reunification that that NATO that what that Washington said that near to would not expand into the former Warsaw Pact as Jim alluded to and would respect Soviet interests after German reunification. This was offered by Jim Baker at the time as also of by Bob Gates, who is the Deputy National Security advisor. Assurances about respecting Soviet equities were repeated by George H.W. Bush in the diplomacy later on that spring. And lest we think this was just overtaken by events when Germany reunified as late as March of 1991, the political directors in the United States, Germany then reunified Britain and France meeting to plan for the next for NATO's post-Cold War future, talked about amongst themselves how they could not contemplate expansion, because we had promised the Soviets that neither would not expand into the East. So I don't think it's a question now that this was on the table. The question becomes, though, once native question became on the table, what was done to assuage Soviet concerns? And there I think Jim is right. I think many steps were taken to try to reassure the Russians at the no longer the Soviet Union, but the Russians, the NATO expansion, even though it was ongoing, would still take into account Russian equities, Russian interests. The problem and I think Jim kept this nicely, I would just reframe it a little bit, is that for the Russians, the question was, a, would they have influence in post-Cold War Europe? Would they kind of have influence of a European security architecture, I think is the term of. And while there were things done, such as the NATO-Russia founding Act to try to give Russia seat at the table, this was kind of understood as a as not quite the same as what the Russians were asking for. Right. So what we're getting at is one thing that began moving east, and I think the collapse of Soviet power played a large role in this process. The Russians and the Americans and NATO in general were on a collision course where interests were just incompatible in many ways. And Bill Wolff, fourth a professor at Dartmouth, has a nice chapter that complements kindergartens in the book to get at these issues. So in a real sense, what we're seeing after 1990, it's a tragedy. These are rival powers with rival interests that are just in conflict.

PETER BAKER: So, Susan, just as there's no debate about this historically, you're the historian. I read the October treaty on German reunification, and there's discussion there about whether troops and timing of troops of the withdrawal of Soviet troops and NATO's troops in eastern Germany. I didn't read in there any commitment not to expand NATO. So did we. You know, it was not in writing. It was not part of that

agreement. The fact that. Comes up in conversation. Does that as a historical thing. What do you think? Do you think that this is reasonable for the Russian to have interpreted that way?

SUSAN COLBOURN: Yeah, it's a great question because I think the debate hinges in so many respects on semantics. Right. What is the pledge? What is a promise? What is an assurance? Even take the language Josh used here. It was on the table. It was an assurance was made. Was the assurance binding? Right. There are bigger questions. So yes, in there the historical record is very clear that in the conversation surrounding German unification, James Baker did hypothetically raise the possibility of what if a narrow were to expand not one inch eastward. All right. That's a rough paraphrase. At the same time, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the longtime West German foreign minister, was out publicly talking in stump speeches about maybe limiting NATO's role in some places. Right. This is a time where the context is so key. Western leaders are looking for a way to make German unification possible after 40 years. And umpteen proposals bandied about about how that unification might happen, that had not come true. But at the end of the day, what is agreed in the two plus four, what is enshrined in the October treaty for German unification does not include those binding assurances. And crucially, I would I would distinguish here something that I think is often lost in the debate, which is that natto can be many things. And so NATO makes military agreements not to station parts of its forces in the five lender that had been the GDR. So NATO does follow through with at least one interpretation of exactly the assurances that the Joshua's talking about. And then, of course, in the rest of 1990 and through 1991, the context changes as it's clear the Soviet Union is dissolving. So I understand why Russian policymakers looking for arguments love these arguments. But do I think that we should buy them hook, line and sinker? No, I don't. That's not how I read the historical record.

PETER BAKER: I want to come back. I'll come back to Josh. But, Jim, you were there. What do you think? What do we what do we agree to? What do we not agree to? Are we rewriting history?

JIM TOWNSEND: Boy, I tell you, it's you know, Josh was the first one who planted the seed in my mind. After I left the Pentagon in 2017, he planted the seed saying, you know, you guys really screwed up potato in large part about way too late. Yeah. You know, it's I guess I would say a couple of things. One is I never heard anyone at any time refer to agreements or anything that that would limit what we could do and it never was a topic. And I think really is kind of what was just said about the context of the times as this enlargement was beginning in the early 1990s and then into the Clinton administration, the Russia we were dealing with and the Russian leadership that we were dealing with and the outlook of European security that we thought we were heading towards. The idea of enlarging NATO wasn't new. We didn't perceive that action as something that would be threatening anyone. And we you know, and I will say there was probably a lot of assumptions taken in the government that would get starry eyed about this new period, the end of history and all of that. But there just was this feeling that and an assumption that Russia, for instance, should be very happy to have a NATO nation on its borders because that that you would want a nation that was stable and belonging to a defensive alliance so that, you know, that would be a non-threatening nation on your border. So as far as the Soviet Union and then Russia was concerned, that should not be a threat to them, a growing NATO's should not be a threat. That was our assumptions. And I'm not sure if the Russians ever said, Yeah, well, that's ours do. But but what I'll say is that.

PETER BAKER: If Baker actually did ask at one point, Gorbachev, would you rather have a threat from Germany inside of NATO's, therefore, in effect, a stable actor?

JIM TOWNSEND: Right.

PETER BAKER: But those lines were not.

JIM TOWNSEND: Yeah.

PETER BAKER: He didn't say. Yeah, that's not the commitment. No, that's right. The rest of it.

JIM TOWNSEND: Right. And that's a really good point to make, because the 1990s was one thing, but after the end of the 2000, it was a totally different picture and, and not to go on too long but, but, but in the late nineties we really bent over backwards as we did the first round, the first three nations coming in and we

bent over backwards not to be seen as threatening. We even did away with talking about NATO's enlargement, I mean NATO's expansion, that's what we used to call it. Then we said, no, we got to call it NATO enlargement. It's less threatening. And that was the rule. And so there were there we go. And there are all kinds of limitations that we put on ourselves so that we didn't look threatening. And when the three nations came in, it went pretty smoothly in terms of dealing with the Russians on this. And there was constant communications with them. And if you go back. And read the communiques from the Madrid. Some entered from the Washington summit and the late in the late 1990. You'll see all these things about programs with Russia to try to make sure they knew that they were part of this and it was going to be a new Europe and European that Europe would take into account the Russian concerns. I remember going to the Hill with my boss and talking to staff about Russia joining NATO. You know, so I mean, they've got that far. We were actually talking about it, but it's when we crossed into the 2000 and I think when we had the second round, which was very large, it wasn't the three, it was it was the big bang, it was called. And they came in with the three balls. And I think that combined with Putin being in, who had a different frame of reference and other things that were beginning to sour the relationship between Russia and and the West, I think that things began to turn then. And I and I don't think we were listening or believing what we were hearing. We had set in our minds a certain perspective in terms of how the Russians must look on enlargement and how we look to the Russians in terms of enlargement that was in our minds. And as things began to change on the ground, we weren't necessarily changing our assumptions.

PETER BAKER: Well, Susan, let me ask you about this question, because the aforementioned Jim Baker does write an op ed in The New York Times after he leaves office saying, hey, what about Russia in NATO's? Is that a fanciful notion? Should we have actually pursued that? Was it nonsensical or would that have made a difference?

SUSAN COLBOURN: I think if it wasn't fanciful in the 1990s, I think it's sometimes hard from the vantage point of 2023 to remember what the nineties were like. But this is a period of time where people were talking about disbanding NATO entirely, talking about building out the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the CSC, which then became the OSCE into a pan-European architecture. So the prospect of Russia joining NATO's was one of a number of permutations that could have been on the table to take an architecture that had been built for a divided Europe and make it one for what the first President Bush called a Europe whole and free. And so it sounds wild now, right, to say that in 1995, people seriously talked about Russia joining NATO. But but it was it was there as a real option. I think the biggest thing that shines through in the historical record to me is that it wasn't unique to American policymakers, but it plagued the Clinton administration in particular. There was a circle, a square, you know, they couldn't circle the square square, the circle picture you're ordering between how you could atone for what had been done to the central and Eastern Europeans of over 40 years of of being relegated to Soviet rule. And could you do that in a way that didn't alienate the Russians? And that, to me, seems the puzzle of the 1990s and and maybe this is the historian in me but but I look back at that and sort of wonder there's a great temptation now to Monday morning quarterback and say there was a great missed opportunity and I just wonder if there were only bad and worse choices.

PETER BAKER: That's usually Washington.

SUSAN COLBOURN: Yeah.

PETER BAKER: So Josh, we talk about assurances and whether the Russians had the first Soviets and the Russians had reason to think that's what they were being told, even if it wasn't in writing. How do we square that, though, with the Budapest Memorandum in 1994, when Russia did make in writing a commitment to Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial boundaries in exchange for Ukraine giving up its nuclear weapons? And this was then obviously signed by the United States and the United Kingdom as well. How do you know if Russia is going to hold us to and an assurance that was on the table, let's say? How do we you know, how do we what do we think about the way they have literally violated a written agreement?

JOSHUA SHIFRINSON: I know you're 100% right. States lie, cheat and steal all the time. Now, I guess I'll just get my comments at that. You know, written words are often violated in practice. Agreements are often overtaken by events. This sounds cynical on my part, but tragically, international law is only upheld by the

different states involved. It's very hard at a central authority to uphold them. To this, I'll just say to when it comes to Budapest, you know, it's important to remember that at the time people were worried about Ukraine holding on to its nuclear weapons and engage in nefarious activities of their own. So in a way, Russia and American interests aligned when they went on the Ukrainian issue in a way that they don't quite align today. And in that sense, I'm not surprised that when Russia wants to push back NATO enlargement, they point to the assurances of 1990 and that when we want to point out all the nefarious Russian behavior, we point out that they violate the Budapest Memorandum. Yes, this is a tragedy of the highest proportion. And we ought to be we ought to lament it.

PETER BAKER: You know, Jim, I mean, did Ukraine make a mistake? What they wanted out of this was, in effect, writing into permanent ink that they were a country, that they were an independent nation, that they were everything that Putin says they're not. And they gave up the best card they had to guarantee that. In effect for a piece of paper. Did they make a mistake by giving up? I mean, we are glad they gave up the nuclear weapons for all the proliferation purposes that the United States would have. But is that a mistake on the part of the Ukrainians at this point, looking back?

JAMES GOLDGEIER: Well, you know, I meant to say this earlier. The book that Peter and Susan wrote on James Baker was just a fantastic book and and really encourage you to read. And in that period, as the Soviet Union was breaking apart at the end of 1991, it really was James Baker. Within the U.S. administration, there were a lot of different views within the U.S. administration about how to think about the collapse of the Soviet Union at the time of the collapse at the end of 1991, there were four countries that inherited on their territory strategic nuclear weapons Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan, and that it was really Baker who pushed this idea, look, there was one nuclear weapons state when it was the Soviet Union. And when this is all when the dust settles, we want to say there should just be one afterwards. We shouldn't have more than one nuclear weapons state. Not everybody felt that way. And there were a lot of voices in the Pentagon. Wait, you know, Ukraine, this is our chance to have a country like Ukraine being its own deterrent force against Russia. Ukraine wanted our support as a I mean, it's coming independent. It needs Western assistance. It really couldn't afford to alienate the United States. Also, just because the weapons were located on their territory didn't mean they controlled. Those weapons were still controlled from Moscow. And it would have cost it would have cost a lot of resources to maintain it. Let's just say that they kept the weapons and established control over them. You know, that's that's a big resource sink as well for a country that's just developing. So I think at the time the calculation made sense. And I'll just say, as somebody who was working on the National Security Council staff in 1996, I mean, on June 1st, 1996, when that last weapon left Ukraine and something that Bill Perry as secretary of defense had worked so hard on with Ash Carter. I mean, we were sitting, you know, you know, watching this from from watching I was here in Washington and thinking what an amazing, great moment that the last strategic war weapon has left this territory. And sunflowers are, you know, at that there where, you know, the silo was. And so but, you know, and this is you know, since his point about, you know, how things look in 1994 and 1996 compared to how they look in in 2023 and what our expectations were with respect to both Russian ability to carry out military action against these countries and Russian intentions to do so. And, you know, I mean, now we would say, oh, my gosh, you know, Bill Clinton is now saying, well, I guess, you know, they probably should have kept on and kept their nuclear weapons. But I think that would have I think that would have that transition if they had decided to keep them. I think there were a lot of things that could have gone wrong.

JOSHUA SHIFRINSON: I think that's right. Yeah.

PETER BAKER: So, you know, so Jim talks about when things began to turn and maybe we didn't listen enough. I'm reminded that in 2002 and Putin was relatively new in power, he gave an interview to Wall Street Journal, my friend Andy Higgins, and carried out White House and he was asked about native expansion to the box. And this was thought to be at the time, if not a red line, certainly a further expansion or enlargement, whatever the word is beyond simply Warsaw Pact members, but literally into former Soviet territory. And maybe that would be something too far. And Putin said at that time, well, look, you know, we're not happy about it, but basically every country gets to decide its own defensive alignments and agreements. He really didn't make a huge protest about it. So what do you think happened in looking back at this history in 25 years? I mean, at some point they become it was just simply Ukraine and Georgia, just too much, was it? Just again, I want to come back to the idea of a justification. Did his mind change? We get in this debate

about Putin all the time, right? Why is he always who he is today? Was there a point at which he could have done something different? We did do a lot. We brought them into the G-8. We brought them in the WTO. We did a lot to try to integrate them into the world architecture. Could Putin have any? And yet, you know, by 27, he's he's he's talking in Munich about the Third Reich and all that. How do you see that history and that evolution, if there is one?

SUSAN COLBOURN: Yeah, I would love to know what Vladimir Putin thinks, but I suspect Vladimir Putin would also like to know what he thinks. I don't believe he's a remarkably consistent person. I mean, his views have changed over time. I would say on the specific question of expansion, enlargement and where the the Russian red line was, if there was one, anyone who was familiar with Russian imperial or Soviet history, it's maybe not surprising that the Baltics are different than Ukraine in the minds of someone in Moscow. Ukraine has often been seen as an integral part of what makes Russia a truly great power. Right. Zbigniew Brzezinski used to always say this, that when Russia had Ukraine, they were a great power in the world, and when they didn't have Ukrainian territory, they were significantly less important. And I don't think Putin is unusual in that respect. Jim said this at the top, but. Right. We talk a lot about this being Putin's war or act like if Vladimir Putin mysteriously gets hit by a bus tomorrow, this is going to go away. This is our Russia problem. Russians broadly, many Russians believe broadly that Ukraine is not a distinct country. So so there is an element of that. But in laying that out, that's not a question necessarily about NADO. That's a question about Ukraine and what Russians, what kind of Ukraine Russians can live with. And here I would come back to 2013, 2014 and say, of course, the catalyst for the first Russian move against the Donbas and Crimea is not narrow. It's the EU, right? It's the prospect of a truly western and democratized Ukraine, because I think Putin and many Russian leaders believe that if a Ukraine on their borders is independent, thriving, Western looking and democratic, that Russians who see such a great affinity and have so many ties with Ukraine will wonder why they can't have the same thing at home. And so I think it's very difficult to desegregate where NATO fits in the puzzle. But but it is it's not a as neat a story as the one I think Putin likes to tell.

PETER BAKER: Well, Jim, in fact, I mean, we talk about the Bucharest summit and how they didn't give the map. I mean, it really NATO a factor here. I mean, as Susan just said, I mean, you know, you may have been a bigger one. They weren't about to join it in 2022. They were simply not right. And that to that they weren't some day down the road. But there's nothing that would suggest we have to do this now, because if we don't know that, well, gosh, look at me. Tell me I'm wrong.

JIM TOWNSEND: But no, that's that's exactly right. 2022, It was the Maidan. It was the it was the feeling in Moscow that they were losing, that Putin and his people were losing control in Kiev. They had they'd had a history of having pro-Russian leadership there. And it looked like that that was on the run. And things are beginning to shift and that the EU was making inroads and NATO's wasn't part of it. NATO was part of the conversation with Ukraine earlier. And then that shifted and they decided, I think they even took it out of their constitution or something where they were, they still kept the relationship of the focus was on the EU first. So it really was an EU thing. I think that Neto NATO's role in this certainly was as an excuse. I think it made to to to Moscow, to Putin as they were trying to justify this invasion. Blaming it on NATO's blame it on enlargement. You guys are getting too close. That was a very convenient excuse. I will say, though, that the mood music was was part of NATO enlargement. That was I that's how I referred to it. It was it wasn't necessarily the reason. It wasn't it wasn't the fuze, but it was the mood music behind a lot of it. So I and I've wrestled with that ever since Josh planted that seed, I have wrestled with with the role of NATO's enlargement all this. And I think I don't think you can sit there and say it had nothing to do with what's happening. I think that that helped set this nasty mood in the Kremlin. And as the EU was getting closer to Kiev and control was lost in Kiev, it all kind of came together into this chemical imbalance in Putin's head that that also included his view of of Russia's history and Ukraine's history and everything else in that soup that he has in his mind that has led to this invasion. I think NATO's enlargement was was in that, but it was much more of a background thing than as a. Silver bullet reason.

PETER BAKER: So, Josh, let's play. What if? Because why not? And you're now President Clinton's now security adviser.

JOSHUA SHIFRINSON: All right.

PETER BAKER: And he says, okay, Josh, what do we do now? Do we keep it? Do we get rid of it? Do we expand it to enlarge it? Whatever word. What do we do with NATO now that Russia is, in theory, not our friend and Boris while we like Boris?

JOSHUA SHIFRINSON: So we're talking about 93, 94, and.

PETER BAKER: Before the before the main the first three.

JOSHUA SHIFRINSON: Look, I think the history of the 20th century is the history of European internecine warfare. Right. Europe self-immolating a couple of times. And I think the American foreign policy community understandably has a story about this. It's 1919. We went home. Europe went went bad again. 1945. We stuck around Europe. State of peace. Let's stick around. I think that's an understandable I think it's an understandable perspective. I think the argument that was developed is if you build international institutions, if you create lots of liberal democracies, if you encourage economic integration, you can assuage some of these internecine competitive tendencies, avoid a repeat of the first and Second World War. And I think in the early 1990, say 1991, 92, 93, it's reasonable to keep NATO intact. Rights are reasonable as a hedge because you don't know in this highly uncertain time by 94, 95, 96, as it has become so that Russia is not just democratize but also a basket case of a country. I think we if we're you on top of the 1980s, we ought to talk about how really problematic Russia was to the power, how weak it was as a country after we see the spread of democracy across Central and Eastern Europe. Europe largely because of the EU, more so than NATO's at the time, or the choices of Eastern European reformers as well, more so than NATO's. As we see the spread of globalization, as we see the spread of it, as we see European integration calls to transform the CAC into the OSCE, we had a moment of opportunity to say, you know what, maybe NATO's isn't so central. And this is not a call for isolationism. I want to be clear about this. This is a call for saying in some ways the American project in Europe has been a massive success for the 1990s, and everything since that has been adding icing to the cake. I think it would have been a natural opportunist pause for a second and say, Look at a time and it looks like the EU, which was then coming into creation, really wants to take more responsibility for European security. Maybe the United States can play a complementary role rather than being the security provider of first.

PETER BAKER: But presumably NATO's still exists with it down the middle of Europe. Or do we just pull it back and does not not try to create something else go with the OSCE?

JOSHUA SHIFRINSON: Well, so I don't think the OSCE model makes sense, but I do think an EU model with NATO as an ancillary kind of like could be inverse of what we ultimately did, where neither was the primary with EU forces supplementing. I would have advocated for the EU taking on more responsibility with NATO's playing a reinforcing role, holding NATO's probably where it was in 1991 after German reunification, engaging in the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, then the AFP for the rest of Central and Eastern Europe engage Russia through the RFP and other mechanisms and encouraging our Democ democratic, you know, strong, rich and capable allies to take more that take up more of the burden in Europe.

PETER BAKER: EU expansion though eastward even if Jim Baker didn't talk about one way or the other, will provoke Moscow. I mean so I military.

JOSHUA SHIFRINSON: But right so I don't I don't think you expansion is as challenging to Moscow certainly not in the 1990s and I would argue probably not today as much as native expansion. I do think it's worth talking a little bit more about the role NATO's played in the current crisis in Ukraine, the current war in Ukraine, the prior war in Ukraine, because although it's true that that it was EU expansion more so than NATO's expansion 14 that was on the table. I think it's a worthwhile question to ask how distinguishable are these things? After all, the United States and NATO's itself has talked about for years, NATO and the EU moving in lockstep when it comes to expansion. So it is very plausible to me. Often the hypothesis is a very it's very plausible to me that in 14 when we see the Maidan revolution, when we see the EU making inroads or the Ukraine seeking to join the EU, that that distinction between, oh, it's only the EU, it's not going to be narrow, may not have been as sharp as we would like it to be in retrospect. So I would just offer that in current events.

PETER BAKER: So Jim, Keith Gessen wrote in The New Yorker just the other day, he takes his argument, expands it in effect, says that we, the West, were rubbing the Russians nose in it, basically, and that we brought this on ourselves. And I don't know if you saw there was a social media response from Eric Rubin, who had been the DCM, of course, in Moscow at one point when we were there, in fact, saying nonsense. You know, we you know, we're buying into Putin's theory that it's our fault at this point. Are we Are we it's a very debate that we're having. Is this is this conversation we're having right now playing into Putin's hands?

JAMES GOLDGEIER: Well, I don't I think it's important to have this conversation. And I and one of the reasons that we pursued this project, one of the reasons that I wanted to work. Josh, is that I feel like the debate. I don't think the debate over Neto enlargement has been very productive. I think it's been very it's lacked a lot of nuance. Josh and I have been talking about and we write about here and elsewhere, you know, you can't really evaluate NATO's enlargement as a policy unless you compare it to the alternatives to, say, NATO enlargement was terrible and we shouldn't have done it and it ruined everything. The natural thing then to say is, okay, then what would you have done instead? Josh gave you an answer about what he would have done instead. I think to many people who complain about NATO's enlargement, don't say what they would have done instead. A lot of people say to me, How could you have worked with Shepherdson? Like you guys got an and and and said this And I and I say, okay. You know, there were times when there were sentences that we had to negotiate quite some time because, you know, until we could come to agreement. But but the reason we were able to work together is we largely agree on the costs and benefits of NATO's enlargement. We agree that NATO's enlargement created security and stability for Central and Eastern Europe. They they're more secure because they came into NATO's than they would have been absent that. We also agree that NATO enlargement contributed to the deterioration of U.S. Russia relations, but we put different weights on these things. Why do I support enlargement? Because I believe it had huge benefits for Central and Eastern Europe, and I don't think the US Russia relationship would look that different absent NATO's enlargement. If you look at the rounds we've been talking about 1999, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, come in March of 1999, the United States and its NATO allies were going to war against Serbia over Kosovo, a much bigger deal for the Russians. They were much more. Yeltsin, if you look at the declassified memoranda of conversation between Clinton and Yeltsin during the Clinton presidency, that's the thing that set Yeltsin off the most was Kosovo 2004. Jim mentioned the Big Bang, the seven countries that come in, including the three Baltics. You also have at the same time, the Orange Revolution, a much bigger deal for Putin because he thinks were there, you know, promoting democracy in these countries around Russia, trying to change the regimes. And his his is going to be next. That's what he thinks. We're going after him. All sorts of, you know, 2001, walking away from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the 2011 war against Libya and the overthrow and then the death of Moammar Gadhafi. I mean, they're all Iraq war, the Iraq war in 2003. There are all sorts of other things. You know, people focus on Nader enlargement. There were lots of reasons for Putin to be upset, just as there were reasons for us in turn to be upset about the way what Putin was doing within Russia in terms of increasing its repression, in terms of Putin's attitudes toward the neighbors and what that was going to mean towards European security, and then, of course, later interference in me in American elections. So I just I think that that that to to argue sort of we did this to them.

JOSHUA SHIFRINSON: Right.

JAMES GOLDGEIER: I just I just I don't buy it. And I think that we obsess about NATO enlargement when we really should be looking at this broader, broader set of issues. And we shouldn't forget Central and Eastern Europeans wanted to be in this alliance. We now see why they really wanted to be in this alliance. And and it had huge benefits across Europe. I would invite you to think about what Eastern Europe would look like if the rest of Eastern Europe wasn't in narrow role.

PETER BAKER: I mean, to Jim, to the point is this actually, I think Strobe Talbott point to, of course, one of the architects of NATO enlargement in the nineties. He would say, if you're in the Balkans and you're in Poland, aren't you really glad you were NATO's? And we see that there's a result because they have not and probably would not militarily, you know, intervene in those places because of that. And had Ukraine been a member, you know, would they have been safe? But it's kind of a chicken and egg thing, though. Jim is in a little bit. I mean, like, are we they're protected because we put native there, but they're provoked because, you know, you're east European, but the Russians to provoke because we put native there. I mean in the alternative history where we didn't expand NATO's to the Russian border, should we have thought looking

back on it, that they would be unsafe today? Do we think that Putin might have thought about doing something.

JIM TOWNSEND: To the Balts?

PETER BAKER: To the Balts.

JOSHUA SHIFRINSON: Yeah. Well, you know, I have to say Baltic security has always been on the minds of all of the practitioners of practice. You know, it has been on our minds from the very beginning that how, what can we do with the Baltic. The Baltic wanted to come in very, very, very eagerly banging on the door along with Poland, and we kept thinking that how can we even defend them? How can we how will this work? And but feeling like you were kind of alluding to the feeling that they would be a morsel right there on the border. We had a lot of scenarios of what the Russians could do to humiliate NATO, the so-called lava grab, which is that little part of Estonia where Narva is, and that the Russians could put some troops just across the border in there, seize that town and say, okay, NATO, what are you going to do about it? Throw us into this this debate over, you know, do we give up Los Angeles for the Narva Peninsula? You know, and and so and so trying to determine how do you deter. You know, and so that that concern hasn't gone away. When 2014 I was in the Pentagon and when they first went into Crimea, my great fear was that they might also do Estonia. Then if we didn't respond when our response at the time you might remember particular that first year was not of great response. And so my great fear was that we were not deterring enough with our actions in 2014, deterring Putin from going into Estonia. And that was a great concern. So I you know, I think I think I would rather have the three balls NATO and having all of us figure out how can we protect them than have them in a gray area where it's always going to be a concern and a test of NATO, just like Ukraine, even though they're not NATO, if there is a horrific invasion, then they're sucked back into Russia. Do we just sit back and it's, you know, shades of the late 1930s? What do we do? And so I'd rather have them in NATO and protected and tools to deal with deterrence than to let them just dangle out there and and hope that nothing happens.

PETER BAKER: You said that our response in 2014 was not a great response. What should we have done?

JIM TOWNSEND: Well. Well, we should have done something similar to what we're doing now, quite frankly. And there was quite a debate in the Pentagon. I guess I'm getting ready to make some news here. I hope not. But but quite a debate over whether we should provide lethal aid or not. And there was the same concerns and and the White House about escalation and this type of thing. And and the decisions were made that we were going to lean on sanctions and have that be the tool. And and instead we were going to provide, you know, logistical assistance and, you know, worthy assistance to Ukraine in 2014, but not the lethal kinds of things that you're seeing now. And I think and and Europe pretty much followed in our in our wake. And the Poles and others were were angry. They were furious saying, how can you provide them these, you know, radars when we've got to be we've got to give them, you know, weapons. So I think, frankly, we opted to go a softer route. And I think that probably emboldened Putin to go in in 2022, thinking that that would be the same response, because it's the same people, frankly, that are in government today around Biden that were there, too. And I love him. They're all my friends. Please don't tell them I'm.

PETER BAKER: But, Susan, that actually raises the elephant in the room. We have an address and we're going to open it up for questions in just about 3 minutes or so. So get your questions ready. The elephant, the room we haven't talked about, of course, is the president came between Obama and Biden. And that just sort of throws a lot of this up into the into the air. Right. I mean, because in our reporting for our book on on on Trump the Divider, we think he was very serious about getting out of Nieto. And had he had a different group of advisers around him, he might have done it. And we only have NATO today, at least as we think of it today, because he had a few advisers around who basically threw themselves into the into the breach. He might come back. Putin is watching this. What do we think about the impact of that on NATO's and on where we are, you know, vis a vis Russia today, given that he's not done?

SUSAN COLBOURN: Yeah, I think that's the biggest question. And it's the thing that is I would describe it as the elephant in the room of the larger strategic debate. I a lot of people don't acknowledge this publicly, but I think that part of the reason there has been such an appetite in Western European capitals in particular to

rethink the fundamentals of security and strategy in Europe is not just the immediate catalyst of Ukraine and Russia's invasion, but is the prospect that there is about two years before they potentially have a president who is on the record about his feelings about about keeping them safe? And so I don't think it's a coincidence that someone like Macron has ramped up his calls for European strategic autonomy, that the Germans have moved in a way that though you can take issue with how quickly they've moved, have shown a willingness to talk about some things that they haven't talked about in a generation. The British are starting to think about new many lateral configurations pulling out ideas from the 1930s security architecture of Europe, which, you know, we can have some quibbles about whether that's the historical playbook. Do you want to go back to given what happened afterwards? But but the point is, is that they're going back to the drawing board to think about other other arenas. I mean, that I have been surprised that the question about Ukrainian membership in NATO's and what a path to Ukrainian membership in data looks like for those who advocate it. I have been surprised at how little of the debate that has played out publicly has acknowledged that there is this big question mark looming in the near future, which is there's a potential cost if you do not move now, who is in office in 2024?

JIM TOWNSEND: Exactly right.

PETER BAKER: Right, right. Okay. Why don't we go ahead and see what the audience has in mind? We've got a microphone here and a microphone here. What? We start right here and then. And then right here.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hi, Jurgen Andrews. I'm a State Department fellow at the U.S. Institute of Peace. Yeah. If you're thinking about rebranding the NATO enlargement phrase I would offer NATO's in huge mint. And that gives you a window to my question. When we talk about Ukraine membership in NATO's, why do we assume that Article 5 requires boots on the ground? I mean, a careful reading of the actual text as well as the one historical precedent we have when Article 5 was invoked on on the on 911 and the war in Afghanistan. Some NATO allies participated in Afghanistan, some didn't. Some did other things. I mean, we have a country in Ukraine that is able and willing to defend itself. It just needs weapons and some money and some some other support. So why does admitting Ukrainians in-a-row suddenly mean that U.S. boots are going to be on the ground? I mean, I don't question quite I'm quite sure that.

PETER BAKER: Ukrainian membership may just be what we're already doing.

JOSHUA SHIFRINSON: Yeah, no, I mean, look, I am all in favor of reading Article 5 carefully and actually interpreting Article 5 in what I would call the proper way. It doesn't require you to go to war. That's a legal interpretation. I think politically, though, there actually, as we know from the Cold War experience in the post-Cold War experience, as we saw in the discussions with the Baltics in 0304 and beyond. Article 5 is interpreted as support, including up to and very plausibly including the use of force, including American use of force. This was the experience of the Cold War where initially it was needed was going to Article 5 and NIDA was going to help the Europeans stand on their own two feet. We would back away. That was overtaken by events as the Cold War went onward. The US gradually created mechanisms so the U.S. would automatically be required to fight on behalf of the threatened countries for including nuclear weapons. Up to that, up to that level post-Cold War we've seen, and Jim was talking about how the Baltic States and many of the other new member to me want a security guarantee, one Article 5 guarantees, because it brings the United States into the war, not as a supplier, not as a supplier of last resort, as an active combat participant. So I think it is entirely true. And Article 5 could be interpreted as in a legal sense, I think politically we're in a very different world.

PETER BAKER: But I disagree with that.

SUSAN COLBOURN: Yes.

PETER BAKER: Yes?

SUSAN COLBOURN: Yeah. I would say that politically, Article 5 has you can read the alliance's history in another way completely, which is that the huge value of Article 5 has been the promise that it will never be invoked. Right?

PETER BAKER: The Article 5.

SUSAN COLBOURN: No, because the promise matters, right? That the hope has always been that deterrence would operate in a way. Right. I mean, if you look at how NATO's was originally conceptualized, we in retrospect say, oh, it was designed to stop the Soviet army from sweeping across the continent of Europe. That is not what it was designed for in 1947, 1948, 1949. What it was designed for was to build self-confidence in our European partners and allies, to make it so that they would be robust enough societies after the devastation of World War Two to stand up to Soviet political blackmail. Well, why does that logic not obtain today?

JOSHUA SHIFRINSON: Sure, I take the point. I would agree with that interpretation. I would just say that if Article 5 can mean that in the breach will step back. Look, we're already having a debate over American credibility, over how did we do enough for Ukraine even though Ukraine isn't a NATO in this? Never. We have an Article 5 guarantee and then back away. I don't want to if that's the case, I don't want to hear anyone ever mention credibility ever again.

JAMES GOLDGEIER: But I yeah, I just I think, you know, one of the reasons why I support Ukraine coming in to NATO's I just I don't see another path to be able to deter Russian aggression against Ukraine in the long run. You know, we haven't mentioned I mean, there's been talk in the run up to the Vilnius summit. Countries have been talking about security guarantees outside of NATO's. I don't sure what that means and the importance of Article 5. And here's why. I think Suzy's point is, is so critical. There's been a lot of discussion about how, you know, Joe Biden does want to start World War Three. There's limits to what he wants to do because he doesn't want direct U.S. engagement because he doesn't want a NATO-Russia war. We've also seen Putin doesn't want to NATO-Russia war. Putin, you know, if you're Russia, you're watching. Weapons come in from Poland, in the Ukraine. Wouldn't you want to bomb those supply lines so that they couldn't do it? He's not doing that. Why? Poland's in NATO. He is deterred from attacking a NATO country and I think that's why the promise of NATO enlargement for Ukraine is so important to deter future Russia.

PETER BAKER: Way I think or good.

JIM TOWNSEND: Well, it's just interesting to think about what would be going through Putin's mind if suddenly they had the Article 5. And I would one thing I would worry about is a preemptive type of attack if because I think the assumption that Putin and his people would make was, well, that's NATO's intent. They've thrown Ukraine without even, you know, a debate. They've they've given Ukraine veto membership. They've got Article 5 now, that means NATO's going to be involved on the ground very quickly. And therefore, right now, before they start, let's go ahead and start bombing the supply lines. Let's go ahead and do what we can before NATO comes, you know. So I would I think we do have to think a little bit about what the response could be out of out of out of the Kremlin. It could be something that would surprise us. Okay.

PETER BAKER: We have. Right here.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Right. But, you know, after the Second World War, there was a division of Europe where it's, you know, the two agreements in Potsdam and Yalta, and we neutralized Austria. We Russia agreed not to interfere in Greece in all these sort of arrangements were made. And that stability lasted for a long time. And it seems now that we're sort of pushing back on that, or they were saying maybe we should enlarge NATO's, maybe we should improve American influence, European influence in Europe. And I think that's. Concern Putin. And I think that we should think, you know, why? Why weren't the agreements that made after the Second World War are still viable today?

PETER BAKER: Mm hmm. Is there a way to to make those kind of agreements that we made after World War Two, where we were kind of dividing up countries? I mean, Stalin and Churchill and, you know, they're passing around piece of paper with percentages. And I mean, like, are those kind of spheres of influence even realistic in today's world, at least in the Western way of thinking, Jim?

JAMES GOLDGEIER: Well, I just think I mean, again, for me, the problem is that Russia is not content to live within its internationally recognized 1991 borders. It was content to live within those borders. I think the West would do everything it could to assure Russia that its legitimate security interests to have those borders respected and not violated, that the West would be fully supportive of that. The problem is you have a and in my view, that's a big enough country. Like, I'm really unclear as to why Russia cannot be content to live within those borders. Why does it have designs on these territories outside those borders? These other territories don't belong to Russia. And I just don't think you can have an agreement with a country that is that has these designs on other territories and is willing to use force to conquer them. The entire U.N. system created at the end of the Second World War was at its fundamental level, is to prevent what occurred previously, which was big countries taking their militaries walk, you know, marching into other countries and taking their territory. That's what the U.N. is designed to prevent. And that's why so much is at stake in for us in not allowing Russia to believe that it can act the way countries did in Europe prior to the Second World War.

PETER BAKER: We want to go right here.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thank you, Ted from Brookings. Thanks for the history. It's been really interesting. But let's talk about what's happening now. If it's in our, say, U.S. national interests for Ukraine to be a stable democracy with a thriving economy, then what is the best way to get there? How are we going to create incentives that will bring Ukraine in that direction? And it seems to me the EU incentive is more important when you phrase it that way than the security guarantee piece, which is much more complicated. And by putting NATO's back a step, you also put the United States back a step from the front line and you make Brussels the front line. It's more about peace and economic growth. And maybe that has a lot of positive upside for for Russia. On the other hand, of course, the bottom line is that Russia doesn't want a successful democratizing Ukraine next door or Georgia for that matter, but Ukraine being more important. So it seems to me that's the existential issue that both Ukraine and Russia face. Can you comment a bit on how you see the incentive structure and the ultimate endgame here of what Russia is willing to accept next door.

PETER BAKER: Anybody have a strong view?

JAMES GOLDGEIER: Well, I mean, I'm sorry since I had just spoken, but I so first of all, this link between NATO's NATO and the EU. I believe that what paved the way for EU enlargement was natal enlargement. So, for example, I don't believe the Baltic countries would be in the European Union if it wasn't for the fact that their security was guaranteed by NATO's. I think the European Union would have been too concerned about the potential insecurity in the Baltics, and I'm not the only one who believes this way, but believes this because the former chancellor of Germany, Helmut Kohl, told Strobe Talbott that the EU would not have enlarged if it hadn't been for NATO enlargement. And I think that that's a play also with respect to how long it takes for a country to meet the what it needs to do to get into the EU. I do agree with you. Hugely important for Ukraine to come into the European Union, but in my view, it's you know, it's both of these things. The question is, you know, why is it so threatening for Russia to have a successful Ukraine, a successful democratic Ukraine next door to Russia? I don't think it is necessarily a threat to Russia, but it is a threat to Putin. And that's the problem that Putin in power does not want to see a successful democracy next door.

PETER BAKER: Josh, Jim got wrong again.

JOSHUA SHIFRINSON: So Jim and I usually agrees on this one. We will disagree a little bit on, you know, as we establish this isn't a Putin problem. Many people, it's ubiquitous in Russia and they don't want to see Ukraine oriented towards the western sphere and go back to a prior question. I would just say that, yes, the spheres of influence exist in the modern age. The US has a sphere of influence in the Western Hemisphere, which no one talks about, but bracketing that issue. Putin lived with a democratizing Ukraine from 1408 onward for certainly 14. Awkward. And yet he only chose to invade in February of 2022. Why is that? It's hard to explain variation with a constant, right. So I don't think this is about the fact that Ukraine is democratizing. And I guess I would push back a little bit on the premise of the question. If you if a liberal democratic capitalist Ukraine is in national interest, I think that we ought to interrogate that question. I would like to see Ukraine, liberal, democratic and capitalist. I would certainly I understand why Ukraine wants to be liberal, democratic and capitalist, but that doesn't translate into American national security interest. I would

argue that Russia is not in a position to threaten hegemony in Europe. The liberal order is not going to be overturned based on what happened in Ukraine. Native was not going to implode based on what happened in Ukraine and on all these issues. I think it's a tragedy what's happening in Ukraine. I think it's horrific what's happening in Ukraine. But I guess I would dispute the premise that what happens in Ukraine is in American national interests in a visceral sense. It's worth a significant, significant commitment of time, blood and treasure.

JIM TOWNSEND: You say it is not.

JOSHUA SHIFRINSON: It is not.

JIM TOWNSEND: I would disagree, Josh, I'm.

JOSHUA SHIFRINSON: I'm here to throw chum in the water.

JIM TOWNSEND: I think I think, you know, Ukraine is one thing, but we're dealing with something. And Jim mentioned this. This is a tremendous challenge to what we have built since the end of World War Two in terms of the liberal international order in Europe, European security, everything that we stood for, NATO, the EU, everything that we've built, Russia, Russians, Russia, Russia's actions of invading a neighbor is something that that is not just because it's Ukraine and we like Ukraine, but it's what they what Russia is doing to the system that we have set up and what the precedent is and that other nations in Europe are now going to be with the covers pulled over their heads because they assume that they're going to be next because NATO didn't stand up. The U.S. didn't stand up.

JOSHUA SHIFRINSON: NATO has stood up just to push back a little bit. NATO has stood up, he said in February of 2022 that over the course of a year, the needle in the United with it would provide 20 years worth of defense assistance and economic aid to Ukraine. If you would say the U.S. would be willing to go far beyond the red lines established in February of 2022, that looks like a enormous success story. If I could just finish the final thought. I'm sorry to speak over you, but lastly, you say it's a challenge to the liberal system. It seems to me that the liberal system working resoundingly well, we wanted to rebuild a Europe that could stand on its own as soon as you mentioned, a Europe that was self-confident. This is a Europe that is taking steps to balance Russia on its own independent of the United States. This is a resounding success for the system we've created. So I'm curious why we fear that somehow everything else is vital.

JIM TOWNSEND: Well, what I'm what I'm saying is that have we not done all of that? In other words, this is the test that the West has right now that the United States has NATO has. We have responded correctly and we've responded correctly because of what a huge issue this is for us, existential, almost. This is something that really defines what we've been trying to do, which means for me, whether it's Ukraine or whoever it is, once Russia invades its neighbor with impunity, the way it's done that, then we this becomes a tremendous issue for all of us and that we have to step forward. And we've done that. And who knows what else more that we may have to do in the future. But I but the point here is that this isn't just something that we can turn our back on or something that we can say, well, you know, this is this is you know, they're non-NATO. And, you know, I did.

JOSHUA SHIFRINSON: But the question was whether whether the domestic quality of Ukraine, its liberal democratic, bona fide, is a national interest. I'm not you know, if you're talking about the importance of standing up to Russia in Ukraine, that's different than the quality of Ukraine.

JIM TOWNSEND: Which I think is irrelevant because it's really it's the act of the invasion itself that has made this so important, no matter what Ukraine turns into or it's what Russia has done, has now provoked and has tried to undercut what we've built and we have to stand up to.

JAMES GOLDGEIER: It's also worth noting that, you know, Jim's earlier point about the 2014 response. If Josh had been the national security adviser in 2014, what he would have recommended would have been the Barack Obama policy in 2014, Right? Barack Obama's policy was, look, you know, this isn't great, but the main thing for the United States is to keep this conflict limited to Ukraine as long as it doesn't spill out beyond

Ukraine. So we're going to sanction Russia and say you're going to be punished for doing this. We're going to provide Ukraine some assistance, but we're not going to really engage militarily the way we have since February of 2020 to I mean, a very Shifrinson response in 2014 compared to the Townsend response.

JOSHUA SHIFRINSON: There are two different there are two different interpretations here. One is this question of is the conflict in is Russian behavior, is the conflict in Ukraine beyond a deterrence failure, or is it a spiral? I'm inclined to say it's a spiral. Many people in this room and on this panel think it's a deterrent to failure. And that's it's a valid debate. It's the big we're all grappling with in various different ways.

PETER BAKER: Okay. We are basically out of time. We have one last question here real quickly. If we have a microphone up here real quickly and then we'll wrap it up here.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hi, I'm Ken Meyer-Cord. Speaking of Article 5, does isn't there another article in the NATO charter that says the country's commitments to NATO are not are superseded by that country's national laws? And our national law says the president cannot take us into a war. Congress has to do that.

PETER BAKER: Susan, I'm saying to you and.

SUSAN COLBOURN: That's why Article 5 is written the way it is. That's the reason it's not binding is in 1948, 1949, when the allies are hammering out an agreement, the Western Europeans and the Canadians really, really want something that is going to be as ironclad as possible so that if the president changes, they're not being subjected to like every four years they go through a new guessing game about what their security looks like. And an Article 5 is the consensus that they come up with that is respectful of the American political system and the fact that the authority ultimately rests with Congress. But let's be real. In an alliance that relies primarily on nuclear weapons, much of the authority rests with the president because there just isn't enough time to talk to Congress before you fire a nuclear weapon. And so Article 5 is not legally binding, right? People think that it's automatically invoked. That's not true. Right. There have to be consultations before it can be invoked. That's part of why it's only been invoked once in the alliance's history. So Article 5 is or is a recognition of that reality.

PETER BAKER: All right. That's a great way to end it. Thank you very much. And we have a great panel here. Thank you for your conversation. I loved seeing you guys mixed up a little bit. That's fun. Thank you, the audience, for making time today. This is a really important issue And and I'm glad to see everybody here so engaged. So thank you very much.

JOSHUA SHIFRINSON: Thank you. Thank you all. Thank you, Peter.