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TRUMP'S RETURN AND THE FATE OF UKRAINE

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WITTES: Hey, folks. Welcome to the Brookings Institution. My name is Benjamin Wittes. I'm a senior fellow in Governance Studies and the editor of Lawfare. And I can't think of a more unpleasant occasion on which to gather here. This is, as you know, the third anniversary of the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. And we are here to talk about a variety of related to that and related as well to an immense ongoing change of US policy with respect to the war. We are also here to introduce a project that we have been working at Lawfare for the last year or so, which we will talk about and introduce, which is a project that we've done with our colleagues at Goat Rodeo on the history of US-Ukrainian relations in the post -Soviet period vis -a -vis Russia. So if that sounds well -timed to the moment, perhaps it is. I can't think of a group of people that I would rather talk about subject with than the group that is sitting on stage with me. First of all, let me just go from left to right. Constanze Stelzenmüller is the head of the Center for the United States in Europe, which is hosting this event and to whom we are all guests. And seated next to her is Tyler McBrien, who is the managing editor of Lawfare and one of the co-hosts of the Escalation podcast. Seated next to him is Anastasiia Lapatina, who is the other co-host of the Escalation podcast and is joining us from Kyiv. And to my left is the great Fiona Hill, who is a senior fellow here and among other things plays a sort of starring role in a number of the episodes of the podcast, including the first one, and we're going to talk about that momentarily. Before we do, however, we arranged this event when there was one major government change that was affecting western policy toward Ukraine. That was the transition from the Biden administration to the Trump administration and the shock therapy maybe that that is applying to the situation. There is now a second one, which is that we did have elections in Germany yesterday and these produced something of a mixed message with respect to Ukraine policy. And so I wanted to ask Constanze to get us started and give us a sense of what happened in Germany yesterday, how we should understand it vis-à-vis Ukraine and how we should understand it vis-à-vis the American shift in policy ongoing with respect to Ukraine.

STELZENMÜLLER: So thank you very much and it is a distinct pleasure to co-host this with you because the Center on the US and Europe has taken the the changes wrought on Europe and on the transatlantic relationship by the Russian's full -scale invasion extremely seriously. It has literally reconfigured the way we work in every possible way and I couldn't think of a better thing to do today with a better group of people. So thank you. Well thank you. As for the German election, I'm still processing but to those of you who occasionally follow the news it will not have escaped you that the incoming new chancellor of Germany, Friedrich Merz, has made some newsworthy comments both yesterday and in previous days on Europe's need for nuclear weapons, on what seems to him like the end of transatlantic relations and so on. Suffice it

to say that this is a Chancellor who in all fairness, like his predecessor Olaf Scholz, is deeply committed to Europe and also to the transatlantic relationship and the friendship with America except that he's committed to the old transatlantic relationship and the America that he grew up with. So the current shifts in Washington are I think going to make that slightly difficult for him. Now I don't want to joke about what is a deeply serious situation. I have just come back from three weeks in Europe and the real turmoil in the transatlantic relationship started with JD Vance's, the vice president's speech in Munich on Valentine's Day, February 14th. I was in the overflow of the overflow of the overflow room listening to it because every single participant of the Munich Security Conference wanted to hear it and Fiona was there as well and I think it is fair to say that Europeans were profoundly shocked by it. I have been making the rounds in Europe, not just in Germany, but also I'm coming from Stockholm and the Swedes who thought they had joined NATO just in time are now finding that they are joining a slightly different NATO than they thought they joined. So there is turmoil everywhere and people are processing things everywhere. But a very, let me give you a capsule version of what I think happened last night in Germany. We always knew that the conservatives were going to win this election. They polled at double the polling levels of the governing SPD. The question was how many parties would Friedrich Merz have to govern with and that was settled very late last night with a real nai -biter of a counting of votes. BSW, the extreme left party led by the firebrand Sahra Wagenknecht, missed entry into the parliament, missed the five percent threshold by 13,000 and something votes. It will not surprise you to learn that they are going to go to the courts over this and demanding a recount which is unusual in Germany. But there we are. I think we're catching up with other countries. So Friedrich Merz, based on that result and unless it is overturned by the courts, which I have a hard time seeing because we all use paper ballots, it's slightly more difficult to sort of fake results there. It is that Friedrich Merz is going to govern in the grand coalition with the social democrats and I don't think that he will have any compunction in supporting Ukraine. I think he intends to be a strong player in Europe. The reservations I have about that is that last night also saw a doubling of the AFD seats in parliament, nearly a doubling of its vote share with extremely high shares in eastern Germany of up to 37 percent.

WITTES: The AFD, Neo-Nazi.

STELZENMÜLLER: No, They're not neo-Nazi, that's not precise. They are good friends with neo-Nazi groupings but they are not by definition neo-Nazi and I think that is an important thing to say. The German domestic intelligence service have determined them to be in part or in some of the state level organizations fully extremist, right-wing extremist, but they have been very careful in avoiding, except for some French

figures and one or two of their leaders, in avoiding actual Nazi language. I say that because they are doing this very deliberately and strategically and it is one of the things that makes it difficult, for example, to outright ban them, which German law would allow, which I'm sure no doubt the vice president of the United States would consider yet another suppression of free speech and if that was attempted. But that is where we are. I think Friedrich Merz will be quite constrained by an opposition headed by an extreme right -wing party that will be out to hunt him and that we will be out to split his party. I think he will try to reach out to Europe, he will try to reach out to NATO, but I am going to put out there that ultimately I think he may end up being a transitional figure in what is going to be an even more fragmenting German political landscape and I'll leave it at that.

WITTES: All right, Fiona, you were also at Munich. Give us a sense of your impressions of where the United States is right now with respect to Ukraine and with respect to European interactions on that subject.

HILL: Well, thanks very much and I would say it's great to be here today, but I guess for all of us it isn't really, is it? It's quite a depressing, as you said at the very beginning, anniversary and commemoration, especially for Anastasiia and others who are from Ukraine itself. And I think before we start to do this analysis, we just want to fully process what Ukrainians have been through during this last three years. And this is an absolute tragedy for Ukrainians. It's one of the reasons Anastasiia is here and we have to always remember the human side of this. And I just wanted to say that I listened to Vice President Vance's speech standing next to Andriy Yatsenyuk, the former prime minister of Ukraine, who I happened to meet as I went into the overflow room of the overflow room. I was not quite sure which overflow room I was in, but there were many. And I did actually try to attempt to intercede on his behalf with people who were guarding the main room to see if he could enter. I tried the old former prime minister of Ukraine routine for him, but it didn't work. So he was stuck standing next to me, and he literally turned to me and said he thought he was going to cry after hearing the speech. And this is obviously a kind of a man who's been through quite a lot. So that will just put things into perspective. There is a human side to all of this that we must not forget. And I want to, in a way, I'm going to answer your question, but I'm going to kind of flip it around a little bit, because it's what has the United States done to itself in the eyes of Europeans, which was really depressing to listen to. When I came to the United States in 1989, when there was a complete shift in the Cold War, and I came here with, I guess, starry, rosy eyes. I became a U.S. citizen. I never thought that I would find myself in a position where I was listening to Europeans. And the UK used to be part of Europe, before Brexit. And also, UK and other politicians talk about the United States as an adversary, and that was exactly what started to happen

after the vice president's speech. Because suddenly, it was as if a switch had been flipped. I was also standing next to a prominent member of the German Green Party whose family were refugees from the former Soviet Union, who is extraordinarily well known. He said he was sick to his stomach. He never expected that the beacon of freedom and opportunity that everybody had looked towards from the Cold War onwards was suddenly basically lecturing Europeans about free speech and also openly siding with, as Constanze has discussed, an extreme right -wing party. It was not something that anybody in that hall could have fully processed. Now, the Europeans also know that they have themselves, and this is kind of writ large, something to blame for this predicament and this state of affairs. So like Constanze, I've been spending a lot of time going around Europe. Two years ago, I lived in Germany for five or six months, just after the so-called Zeitenwende, the period when the previous Chancellor Scholz realized that the world had changed rather dramatically after Russia's invasion. And it was also very sobering to see that there was a sense of helplessness and paralysis in Germany over this, which Merz is obviously the response to in some respects, though, as Constanze says, a very fractured electorate. I've been spending a lot of time in the United Kingdom, my home birthplace. I still remain a dual citizen there. I've also just been in Paris, coincidentally at the same time that many of European leaders showed up for a kind of an emergency meeting in the wake of the Vance speech. And like Constanze, Scandinavia, and all kinds of other countries in between. And there's a real feeling that the Europeans really mismanaged and wasted, not just the last several years after the invasion of Ukraine, but the last decade plus since the Wales summit, where President Obama basically exhorted all of them to think about taking their own defense more into consideration and to all reach 2% spending of GDP. So that was 2014. That was coterminous with the first invasion of Ukraine and the seizing of Crimea. And now the realization has set in, in the kind of 10 years, that the 10 years behind are being really serious about their own defense. So that was also that moment where it became obvious that basically farming out your security to the U.S. was no longer an option. And they've been told that nicely for quite some time. Now they were told in a rather brutal fashion, not just by Vice President Vance, but also by new Secretary of Defense Hegseth that Europe is no longer a priority for the United States. And we've always thought when we're looking at Ukraine, getting back to your initial question, as we got into a war of attrition, and some of you will remember this from earlier discussions we've had here at Brookings and all kinds of writings that various people have had, that the one way that you get a shift in a war of attrition is where the external environment has a major change. And this has been the major change. Not, as many might have hoped, a shift in the dynamics inside of Russia, which has been a bit of a solid rock for the last 25 years, so Putin hasn't really budged in terms of his world view, but the shift has been here in the United States. The United States, as we all know because we've been living in it, has been

in a process of constant change for the last 25 years, going back to 9/11, the interventions in Afghanistan, invasion of Iraq, et cetera, et cetera. And we have been literally all over the place. And finally, it's the United States that has changed. And in Moscow, the feeling is the United States has converged with Russia and with Russian views. And that's what shifted the entire dynamic. And so that's actually where we are now with Ukraine. The United States has shifted and Europe has realized that if it wants to be serious about its own security and also about a long-term settlement for Ukraine, which is essential to European security, then they need to change as well. And that's going to be the big question as we look ahead. We have President Macron of France coming into town today. He may already be here. He's not joining us, as I learned, for our session.

WITTES: Yeah, he's welcome on the stage. Yeah.

HILL: It would be great to hear from him, but I'm sure we'll be hearing plenty from him. And we've got Prime Minister Starmer of the UK coming in on Thursday. And the writing is very much on the wall for everybody that Ukraine's future is also the future of European security. And the Finns and the Swedes who did join NATO also joined precisely because they realized that you need to have a new look of European security. The Finns, let's just remind ourselves, are actually all ready to go. They are probably one of the best equipped, most battle -ready at all times militaries because they had the Ukraine experience back in the beginning of World War II when they were invaded also by the Soviet Union and had to fight them off all on their own. And they've never basically lost that dynamic and that importance. So I think it's a really consequential time today where every chicken has come home to roost.

WITTES: Yes, thank you. I want to pick up on something you said at the beginning, which is that we have to not forget the personal tragedy and experience of Ukrainians in this conversation. And so Nastiia, I want to ask you to tell us two stories. The first is what were the circumstances in which you learned about the American change in policy? You literally were on your way from Kyiv to here to do this event and to launch this podcast when all of a sudden the United States switched sides. So first of all, I want you to just tell us about that experience. And then secondly, in the back, although she may be here, is your one -year -old daughter. And I want you to tell us the circumstances of Ava's birth.

LAPATINA: It will be relevant, I promise.

WITTES: The details may not be important.

LAPATINA: We'll omit the gruesomeness of it all. But thank you, and thank you for arranging all of this. It's amazing to have an opportunity to speak about it all. So yes, when Trump, I don't think Trump decided to flip a switch. When a bunch of Ukrainians realized who he actually is, that's more like it. I was somewhere between the three trains and two planes and the four-day long travel from Ukraine to here. And I couldn't help but think that my whole life, I've had an image of the US as this kind of standard of what is right and what is good. And when the Revolution of Dignity happened in Ukraine, I was tiny. I was 12 or 13. And since then, I have conscious memory of my life and what's right and what are my values.

STELZENMÜLLER: That was 2014.

LAPATINA: Yes. And since then, I've always known that this is who we are as Ukrainians. We align ourselves with the West. We look to the U.S. for guidance. We look to Europe for guidance. This is what's right. And what's on the East is very, very wrong. And we never look there. And so I always joke that we don't mind American meddling when some of my more leftist -leaning friends would accuse the US of neocolonialism or something. When it comes to Ukraine, I'd be like, we actually love it. Please come and clean everything up. Get rid of corruption. Get involved. And many people would joke about this because the alternative for us has always been Russia, right? Because the geography really messed us up. We were really stuck in there in between two sides. And so this whole image of the US is this barometer of what's good and bad. It really shattered for me in the last week. And I keep hearing people say that there is no going back, that this damage that Trump has done is kind of irreversible. And you will explain to me later whether that's true. You know better than I do. But that's just really depressing because now I feel like the U.S. is sort of gone and whatever it is that it's doing, Europe isn't really doing anything. And as one friend of mine put it, it would be nice if Europe was a thing. That would be helpful. So that's certainly how Ukrainians view it because Ukrainians, and we'll get to that, have had bad experiences with the US over history and with Europe as well. And so we now really feel like we're once again just like left on our own. And it's really not a position that anyone should be in. And we now don't even have tender of institutionalism or of values and liberty. We're now being accused of being a dictatorship, which is laughable. And so there is this just prevailing feeling of disappointment that everything I've always thought of as right and good connected to the U.S.. It's all shattering in front of my eyes and it affects the entire country. So that's just really depressing. So the spicier story about how I was birthed. So my daughter, she's sleeping, thank God. She's very much

cooperating with this event and I'm grateful for it. She was born on December 31st in 2023. And that's already crazy enough. The whole thing is crazy enough. What's even crazier is that the next day after Russia launched one of its biggest ever aerial attacks against Ukraine. I think it was January 1st or January 2nd. So at the time that we were still at the hospital, we haven't checked out and left home yet. At 5 a.m. at some point, there is this massive attack. I mean, it's like almost a hundred drones or something. I may be exaggerating, but it was really big. At that point, it was called one of the biggest attacks in years. And so it was just incredible. And we were fine. We were all taken to this undergrown shelter with dozens of very pregnant women. And I was only very thankful that I've already got her out. So I don't have to go through that experience in a bunker. So that was helpful. But I distinctly remember the feeling that me and people around me, other moms with one-year -old babies, we weren't scared because we've been at this for years at that point and we've lived there since the very beginning. We were just very annoyed. There was this frustration that we really shouldn't be dealing with this, in any circumstance, but especially right now. And I really didn't spot fear in people's eyes. It was more of like, okay, when is this going to be over? Can we just go and have a life and take care of our babies? And I think it's so tragic that those were the emotions that we were feeling because that means that we're all, not all, I can't speak for all, but a lot of us are pretty much numb at this point because we see this gruesomeness and this tragedy every single day. And at some point, unfortunately, even though I'd prefer that we kept feeling the strongest empathy and the strongest sense of loss, at some point something in your body on a biological level just adapts and that just becomes a part of your life and you end up being in interviews with Iranian drones flying around you and you're not going anywhere because God bless American air defense, and you know you'll be fine, most likely. And you just keep on living with it and people tell you stay safe and you don't even know what that means anymore because that's just your reality. And so it's just, the fact that we've been at it for three years is insane to me because I remember having a conversation with a friend in April, early April 2022, so just around a month since the political invasion started, after the political invasion started, and I was in Lviv at the time, a city in eastern Ukraine, and I wanted some of my friends to come stay with me and they fully seriously told me that they don't want to live Kyiv because they want to be there for Victory Day. And so my friends didn't come because they had this distinct feeling that they were on the precipice of this historic moment, right? They were ready to march through Khreshchatyk in their vyshyvankas and flags and celebrate it, but now it's three years later and I'm sitting here and we're going to talk about how our biggest ally is turning into something of an enemy. And so that's, I guess, is where we're at.

WITTES: So I just want to say, if that sounds dramatic, Nastiia is actually understating it. I woke up that morning to a set of texts from her, which I think I still have, that this was January 1st, 2024, and the first one said, the good news is I have a beautiful baby girl, the bad news is I'm in a bomb shelter under the hospital with a whole bunch of laboring moms.

LAPATINA: And you don't know what to think because on one hand it's a hospital, no one targets a hospital, but then you're like, no, they're Russians, they actually might.

WITTES: Because there was an attack on a maternity hospital at one point. All right, well, I don't mean to be glib, but the good news is we got a rip roaring podcast out of it. You got to take lines where they present themselves. So Tyler, tell us a little bit of the story of escalation and how this project had its genesis and where it came from. Give us a little bit of the sort of institutional history of the project we're releasing today.

MCBRIEN: Yes, thanks, Ben, and thanks to everyone. I'm honored to be up here with this panel. I think the past three weeks especially have been a bit of a proof of concept for escalation, to say the least. This podcast started, I mean, I guess three years ago, you could say, with the full-scale invasion. And about a year in, maybe, I had joined as managing editor, the biggest story in foreign policy and the world at the time, and in many ways still is, Russia's invasion of Ukraine. So it just seemed like, on the one hand, an obvious choice to think about how we could tell the history of the US and Ukraine and how to explain what we were seeing. I am certainly no Russia expert, I'm no Ukraine expert, so it's not surprising that I was surprised at the full-scale invasion, but I got the sense that even people who have been watching this closely were also surprised. So we wanted to answer that question. Around that time, I believe Nastiia had been doing amazing reporting for the Kyiv Independent, and Ben was hosting a show called Live from Ukraine, and Nastiia had joined one of those episodes. And what was really important, I think, of that show was to get a sense of what it was like for Ukrainians in Ukraine at the time. I think this conflict especially has been the victim of a lot of misinformation and revisionism. And so a podcast that really lays out the history of the U.S.-Ukraine relationship we felt was so important to set the record straight. And I'll just say one more thing, that working with Nastiia over the past year, I think you got a good sense of how it was a really healthy dose of perspective every time I was maybe feeling tired and trying to finish up an edit or something, and it was quite humbling then to have someone on the other end of Zoom who is eight years younger than I am, has an infant, is under bombardment, is in an air raid shelter. And I think that's also what we're trying to do with this podcast, is really drive home what this experience is like and what the stakes are.

WITTES: So I want to, one of the key voices, perhaps the key voice in the first episode, is Fiona, who tells this incredible story about, that I think most Americans have, if they ever knew of, and I certainly did at one point because I lived through it, but I had completely forgotten about it, which is how reticent the United States administration was about the idea of Ukrainian independence to begin with. And one of the themes that we've been exploring in the podcast is this recurrent cycle of American policy makers not being as fully on board for the idea of an independent Ukraine as they later imagine themselves to have been. And a lot of these episodes seem to involve European cities that begin with BU, but this one actually involved the president going to Kyiv and making a speech not quite against Ukrainian independence, but almost against Ukraine.

LAPATINA: I'd say it was against. Just saying.

WITTES: It was certainly not for. And so Fiona take us back. You have this incredible line in the first episode where you say, you know, I graduated from my master's program and then the field that I was in went out a few months later. But tell us the story of President Bush and his speech to the Ukrainian parliament.

HILL: You know, I'm catching the eye here of an old colleague of mine, Marsha McGraw who will remember all of this very well. We worked together at the Eurasia Foundation, you know, back in the early 1990s. It kind of kicked off thinking about this new transformed landscape after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Yes, I did a master's in Soviet studies, which soon became history. And I did a PhD in history afterwards, thinking I needed to rapidly retool after I got my degree in the June of 1991. At the same time as Eduard Shevardnadze, the last foreign minister of the Soviet Union, was getting an honorary degree at the same ceremony and was looking very perplexed, you know, sort of sitting on the stage. And he was soon to be the first president of an independent Georgia. So I mean, this is taking us back, you know, a long time to 1991, because by the end of that year, the Soviet Union had, it hadn't really collapsed actually. And that's actually something that's also very important to remember, that it got picked apart by some of the elites at the top, including Boris Yeltsin, the first president of an independent Russia, because they wanted to get rid of Mikhail Gorbachev, because they needed a reconstitution, a reform, a revamping of, it sounds a little familiar about where we're sitting at the moment, of the Soviet system. And the heads of the republics of Russia, Belarus, Belarus and Ukraine got together to basically dismantle the Soviet Union, intending to keep together in some part. But before that, as this starts to kind of move through the whole system towards this amazing

and really kind of dramatic set of events, George H. W. Bush indeed goes off to Kyiv and starts to make an appeal for, you know, the guys to keep the band together. And I mean, it's very interesting to think back in this next year, of course, is our 250th anniversary of the U.S.'s own independence, sloughing off the mad King George and the United Kingdom. And it's quite remarkable to come in 250 years, we start to think about what that anniversary is going to look like next year. And yet we've had a hard time, despite the fact of being a revolutionary power, a power that's fought for its independence, of really kind of going along with others when they've come to that moment as well. And I think that's because in the meantime, the United States started to become something of an imperial power itself over time, after being helped by the French to keep the Brits, you know, kind of out of the picture again, you know, during the whole period of 1812, etc. You know, after that, we kind of moved on, you know, pretty much doing the same thing as other great world powers were doing at the time too, expanding our territory, etc, etc. And so George H. W. Bush is feeling very uncomfortable at the idea of a really kind of what he fears will be. And he was quite right in many respects, a chaotic becoming a part of the Soviet Union. We've always told ourselves that in fact, it was almost violence and conflict free, and that was not the case at all. And in fact, what we're still in the middle of is the wars of the Soviet succession. And so this is kind of like 1812, it's, you know, kind of the whole uproar all over again, because Ukraine had been independent, you know, for 30 plus years by the time Russia tries to kind of take it back in the fold again. And some respects, remember that George H. W. Bush had been the head of the CIA at one point, he might not have been far wrong in thinking that we were heading, you know, to some kind of, you know, disastrous outcome down the line, if all of this kind of came apart.

WITTES: Yeah, it's a it's an extremely powerful little story that I think represents something larger, both in Ukraine's relationship with the United States, which is the subject of the podcast, but also Constanze in Ukraine's relationship with Europe, because you have this moment where Ukraine becomes independent, but everybody continues to look at Ukraine through the lens of Russia. And that includes particularly European countries who see Ukraine some degree as a transit situation for Russian national natural gas. And, and I guess, you know, there's this week, we clearly see from the Trump administration, that this has not changed. In the case of the United States, we are, we are back to thinking of Ukraine as something that you negotiate directly with Moscow about me without even having Ukrainians at the table. Has Europe learned the lesson that we clearly have not learned?

STELZENMÜLLER: All right. I knew when I signed up for this that I was going to be the damn European on this panel.

WITTES: No, you're the blessed European. Are you kidding?

STELZENMÜLLER: That's all right. It's all good. Look, I think there is a lot of fair criticism to lob at Europe and at Germany over its behavior in the past 10 years, including the fears of the Scholz-led coalition of escalation, right? That said, that said, I do think that circumstances have changed completely. The other place I went to before the Munich Security Conference was Brussels. I spent three days running around NATO, the European External Action Service, and the European Commission. And I think, you know, well, before I get to that, I want to perhaps say something slightly more personal, because Anastasiia like you, I was a reporter for a long time. And my time as a reporter began in the years after the fall of the war. But because I had trained as a lawyer and as a human rights lawyer, my paper said, human rights stories, human rights stories Rwanda, the Balkans, Afghanistan. So I spent a lot of time covering war crimes and finally war crimes tribunals. And I am angry every time I read about Russian bombardments of Ukraine. I wake up angry every bloody morning and I go angry about this, right? This is not, this is not okay, right? And I think I can tell you that many of my fellow Europeans and people in my field feel the same way, a visceral, profound anger at Russia. There is no going back for my generation, right, to a comfy relationship with Russia that goes over the head of a country that has been attacked and is attacked every day. I want to make that very clear. Okay. I also want to say, Anastasiia, that if we are completely fair, some of those air defenses that are protecting Kyiv right now are Danish and German.

LAPATINA: Yes. And Norwegian.

STELZENMÜLLER: Right. And so and if you look at the numbers, we have the president of the United States currently telling us that we don't do anything for Ukraine financially or with military support. I think we all know that if we look at the numbers, those tell another story.

WITTES: And Sweden just made a major commitment.

STELZENMÜLLER: Yeah. And the Danes and so on. I mean, and I will say the other thing here that's operating here, apart from profound anger, right? About about what is being done to Ukraine and the lies being told about that in Moscow and elsewhere.

LAPATINA: And in Washington now.

STELZENMÜLLER: Why don't you just let me put it my way? The other thing that, of course, is motivating Europeans is a very real, very visceral fear about the degree of Russian disinformation and sabotage in Europe and in Germany. There was especially an amount of meddling in the German election that we have not seen, I think, since the Cold War and maybe not even then. And the intelligence services across Europe, but also in Germany, even in Germany, I should say, because they were long very reticent about this, have been extremely forthright and calling this out and attributing it immediately. And I think the Russians have stopped bothering trying to trying to hide their signatures. The people I met in Brussels were working day and night. We're working day and night to cobble together support for Ukraine. We're working day and night to cobble together additional money for European defense. And we're working day and night. And literally, I mean, one of my meetings started at a quarter of nine in the evening, not in the morning. And so let me perhaps end on a point that is easy to say that this is all performative, but the entire European Commission and its leadership and the leader of the council and 13 heads of state are today in Kyiv to mark the anniversary. That has to turn into policy. That has to turn into money. That has to turn into more weapons. But I think it would not be quite fair to say that that's not meaningful. All the people that I met meant it deeply. And I think my generation knows that this is the conflict of our lifetime and that the future of Europe depends on its resolution in favor of Ukraine.

HILL: I'd just like to add something important to what Constanze has said here, because although it might not feel it from the United States, and the further, obviously, you get away from Washington, D.C., it definitely doesn't feel it. And over the last three years, I've spent a lot of time going all the way around the country talking to audiences about why Ukraine actually is relevant for the United States, not just because of Ukrainian Americans, but because of actually the dependence that America has had on the larger international system that was really rooted in the Transatlantic Alliance and how we've actually prospered from it over this time. And again, we've kind of forgotten all of that as time has gone on. I mean, in the U.K., they forgot about why Europe was relevant and very blithely voted for Brexit, for example. So it's not unheard of to kind of lose the plot over time and forget about where things are. But in Europe right now, people know that they're under siege from Russia all the time. So as we're sitting here talking, an inquest has been going on in London about the death of Dawn Sturgess, which is not probably a household name here, but I'm sure that some of you know who she is. She is the from the bottle of perfume that the Russian GRU, the military intelligence, discarded in a charity donation bin that her partner found and brought home. And they spread

this perfume on each other, discovering, in fact, that it was a deadly weapons-grade nerve agent that had just been used to poison a former Russian spy, Sergei Skripal and his daughter, Yulia, in the town of Salisbury. Now, the only reason this was uncovered is because the UK has a facility near Salisbury port and down where they, a bit like we have in Frederick, Maryland, where they can do testing for nerve agents, biological and chemical weapons. So only eight countries knew that this Novichok even existed. So it was by chance that this actually happened there. And it was able to be And this is only one, of course, of assassinations that have taken place on British soil. There was Alexander Litvinenko, who was poisoned by polonium, again, radiological agents of the first dirty bomb that was used on British soil, and also spread polonium all the way around the United Kingdom. There's lots of evidence of pretty much every European election, assassinations, exactly, in the Tiergarten, and, of course, constant attacks on critical national infrastructure through cyber attacks. In fact, the biggest threat to Europe today is the critical national infrastructure and pipelines and cables under the Baltic Sea, the Estonians, the Swedes.

STELZENMÜLLER: And that's a bigger threat than the threats to our freedom and democracy.

HILL: And so all of this is real in Europe. So Europeans know that what Ukraine has experienced, the destruction of its critical national infrastructure, all of the interventions that have been made in Ukraine's politics before is what they're facing as well. So although, again, we may be remote here, it doesn't feel remote in the US. And I would say if you look actually now in polling that I saw like last week in the UK, for example, where, of course, the relationship with the United States is extraordinarily important. 48 percent of people said in a poll that it was more important to stick by Ukraine than it was to improve the relationship with the United States at this point. 48 percent. In terms of favoring sticking by the United States, it was in the 20s, 20 percent. There was a lot of people said they didn't know because it's a hard point to be put. But we're seeing really a shift here where people in Europe now see that their situation is on the line. So, again, that rupture that we mentioned before is real. And it's a really sobering thought. And again, as I said before, chickens have come home to roost. A lot more should have been done. Many of us have been putting this on the agenda for Europe for a long time. But it is real, the security threat in Europe. It's not just imagined. It's not just disinformation. And it's now viscerally felt.

WITTES: So, Tyler, I want to ask you. I referred earlier to this cycle that began with what came to be called George H.W. Bush's Chicken Kyiv Speech, so named by the columnist William Safire, in which, you know, sort of Ukrainians expect American backing and they don't get it at the level that they expect it or that we

promise it. And this is a, we may be going through what I think is the sort of fourth and most dramatic cycle of that, where we actually side with the Russians. But all of these episodes have to do with Ukraine's relationship with Russia. And one of the roles that you play in the podcast is kind of as the sort of naive American who's kind of never --

MCBRIEN: It came pretty naturally.

WITTES: It's a persona because Tyler is anything but naive. But you're the guy who's like, gee, I didn't know this happened.

MCBRIEN: Yeah, I mean, it's a good point. And to any other naive Americans listening or younger listeners, Chicken Kyiv is used pejoratively, which is, you may not know because it's a delicious dish and it's a, but no, I mean, you're absolutely right. It is the history of the U.S. and Ukraine since independence in 1991 has been one of misunderstandings and betrayals. And one of our episodes is called the worst of both worlds because.

WITTES: Also features Fiona.

MCBRIEN: Exactly right.

WITTES: In one of her prior lives.

MCBRIEN: The New York Times had an editorial, I believe, over the weekend in which it condemns what they called a complete 180 in U.S. foreign policy toward Ukraine. And I was thinking that that's not maybe absolutely true. You mentioned that the U.S. has viewed Ukraine for a long time through Russian lenses, through a Russian lens. There was a Ukrainian diplomat named Borys Tarasyuk who we speak to on the podcast who said the very same thing. He says that the U.S. always looks at Ukraine through Russian glasses and sort of plays by their terms. And so, it seems that the Trump administration is looking at this history and picking the worst lessons and accelerating them and acting on that. I will say, though, that there was reporting, I believe, this morning out in Bloomberg that the U.S. may commit to a sovereign Ukraine in the negotiations, which is heartening whether or not they listen to the first episode of Escalation. I'm not sure. I can't confirm or deny that. But it just seems like that's obviously the bare minimum.

WITTES: Can I just point out that we've done that before. Like, that's the Budapest Memo, right?

LAPATINA: Yeah.

STELZENMÜLLER: [off-mic]

MCBRIEN: Exactly.

WITTES: So, walk us through a couple of those cycles because there are, as I joked earlier, they do tend to be named for cities in Europe that start with B-U. And the first cycle is the independence of Ukraine itself, right? The chicken Kyiv speech. The second cycle comes only a few years later. What happens?

MCBRIEN: Right, so I believe you're referring to the Budapest Memorandum, which I think maybe a few years ago you asked Americans who, even Americans who are very well-versed in foreign policy and in U.S. foreign policy history, it's not a household name, let's put it, but in Ukraine it very much is.

WITTES: And by the way, the only moment of true comedy in the entire podcast is at the beginning of the second episode where our producer Max, who's sitting here in the front row, asks a young Ukrainian activist who is sitting back there, Maria Khlyton, what do you think of the Budapest Memo? And she exclaims, oh my God, it's a total fail. And, you know, this is something that is not in the consciousness of the average American, but you ask a Ukrainian about the Budapest Memo, this is fresh in the front of their mind.

LAPATINA: You have to hear how she said it, though, for full drama. So make sure to listen to that.

MCBRIEN: So to catch us up to speed, in broad strokes after the fall of the Soviet Union, a large part of the nuclear arsenal left by the Soviets actually was in Ukraine. They couldn't really operate it. A lot of the command and control was back in Moscow. It was very expensive to maintain. But nuclear weapons comes with some degree of security. But the deal that was struck was that Ukraine would give up the nuclear weapons for financial incentives as well as, from the American perspective, assurances of Ukrainian security. From the Ukrainian perspective, I think there was an understanding that it was more of a guarantee. There was two different translations, actually. And I think this is emblematic of the relationship. The US wanted

some sort of ambiguity to give it more room to maneuver, but that maneuvering or that room only left room for Russia to take advantage of the ambiguity, basically. I'll also just end by saying, in learning about this, I think it was very important for Ukraine to give up nuclear weapons. Nastiia disagreed. And we sort of had this thing come where it was a microcosm of the U.S.-Ukraine relationship every time we would argue about an episode in the narrative arc and everything. But I think the Budapest memo is a great example.

WITTES: One of the striking things about that story, when we talked to diplomats at the very senior levels, when we talked to people who were literally, in one case, my sister's college roommate who was a 22-year-old diplomat at Embassy Kyiv at this time, is how guilty they feel about the Budapest memorandum. And there's actually sound from Bill Clinton talking about how much he regrets it. It's a remarkable thing that I learned from the reporting of this, which is just how many people have regrets about what we did in that context. Fiona, there's another city in Europe that begins with BU, another European capital where there was an understanding reached that you played a substantial role in a number of years later that also shows up as one of these kind of recurrent cycles of our not being able to kind of form a coherent policy. Tell us about what happened in Bucharest.

HILL: Yes, and I just wanted to quickly add on the Budapest memorandum. I'd mentioned Eduard Shevardnadze before. Eduard Shevardnadze, when he was president of Georgia, actually told his Ukrainian counterparts, see if you can keep one or two of the nuclear weapons. When they were giving them up around the time of the Budapest memorandum, they were like, what do we do, stick them in a closet? Because he had been, of course, the Soviet foreign minister, and he said he'd seen documents about what would happen if any of the Soviet republics had tried to secede. And he said they might come in handy later. Which, of course, if Ukraine had still been a nuclear state, and Belarus had been as well, Belarus has been pretty much swallowed up by Russia. I mean, Ukraine probably wouldn't have been invaded. And the non-proliferation consequences of all of this are real, too. Because Constanze and others have been noting that in Germany and in many other places now, there's talking about Europe needing to have a bomb. And what's also the message to Japan, South Korea, other countries who feel threatened. And Bucharest, just so we can get back to this point as well, becomes important in that context because it's another effort to give Ukraine and Georgia, at the time, some kinds of guarantees for their future security. Now, Bucharest was actually more about Georgia than it was about Ukraine at the time. And this is where the reference to a worst of both worlds comes. In Ukraine, at the time of the Bucharest NATO summit, which was in 2008, there wasn't a great deal of enthusiasm for joining NATO at that point. So we have to remember the Ukrainians,

the politics in Ukraine have taken all kinds of twists and turns. The Ukrainians are kind of aware that, and this was at the popular level of the population, there wasn't a great overriding support for going into NATO. It was more of a kind of an elite project thinking around the Ukrainian president. But in Georgia, there was a full-throated desire at the popular and elite level to become part of NATO. And Georgia had been supporting the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan, and was pushing for a membership action plan to NATO. And it was thought, and I'm still trying to, I'm still years later trying to piece together who thought this, because it seems to have been a whole collection of people from all kinds of different backgrounds, that Georgia's case would be strengthened if Ukraine joined in as well. And so this was the kind of fateful decision. A letter was written to George W. Bush asking for Bush's support. President Bush, being a good Texan – this is W rather than HW – was more enthusiastic about supporting the feisty countries of Georgia and Ukraine. This was, of course, after the United States had well and truly waded into Iraq and was trying to pursue the freedom agenda. Bush thought that Ukraine and Georgia and their freedom should also be supported. I mean, I know this because I did a deep dive, a series of them, for the president. These were the kinds of things that he said. And he said that if they made an appeal and that on military terms, it looked like they had the wherewithal to contribute to NATO, and Georgia already was, and Ukraine at that time, as we now know, actually still had a sizable and capable army, and certainly in terms of being able to, as we've seen over these last years, keep the Russians somewhat at bay, then he would support the membership action plan. Problem is, nobody else really supported it elsewhere in Europe. Partly this was to do with Mikheil Saakashvili and perceptions of him and his role. Others knew that Ukraine wasn't fully on board at this particular point, and there was a lot of resistance. And so what happened, although we briefed the president, I, and others, that this wasn't likely to happen, we actually briefed against it because we think that under the idea that if you push for something you can't get, it's not a great idea because it just sort of shows up weaknesses and all the kind of divisions. Once President Bush decided to go ahead, there was, at Bucharest, as we now know, we've heard from Chancellor Merkel's memoirs, it was Chancellor Merkel herself who kind of opined trying to find some kind of solution to some of her Eastern European counterparts at a side table. Well, one day they'll get into NATO. And that kind of rather casual aside of one day that they might get into NATO was pounced on by many of the East Europeans at the table who were quite supportive, a handful of them who were supportive, of pushing for Ukraine's membership action plan as well as Georgia's. Yet that was kind of turned into the text of the Bucharest Memorandum. And why it was the worst of both worlds that one day they will get into NATO was it wasn't really a promise. It was a kind of an open door. And Putin, of course, wanted to slam that door and jam everyone's foot in it and bash the door off Ukraine and Georgia's face. And of course, in August of 2008, Russia does invade Georgia at the pretext of

basically exchanges with peacekeepers in South Ossetia, which frankly, myself and other colleagues have been warning for some kind of flashpoint in Georgia for a good year before that. There were certainly tensions building up between Georgia and Russia. And Ukraine realizes at that point that it's completely exposed in terms of security: membership action plan is not Article 5, it doesn't bring you any security at all, and the big floor in all of NATO, as far as Russia was concerned, was it was backstopped by the United States. Because at this point, Europe hasn't really been contributing, as we all know, to the extent to which it was required. So all of this comes down to a single point of failure in NATO at this point, which is United States willingness to really backstop Article 5. And from then on, Putin's trying to test whether the United States is actually willing to in fact defend any of its allies, because it knows, and finds out pretty quickly, certainly not Georgia, and later on in 2014, certainly not Ukraine.

WITTES: Constanze, did you have something to --?

STELZENMÜLLER: Well, I just wanted to point out, since Fiona mentioned proliferation, right, there's been a, in my view, intellectually rather academic debate about nuclear weapons, you know, just in case the Americans, for one reason or another, decided to pivot to Asia, and that academic debate has just gone live, with comments by the incoming chancellor, before the election, saying that we, in response to the speeches by Secretary of Defense Hegseth at NATO and at the NATO Ministerial in Brussels, and then by Vice President Vance in Munich, that Europe was going to have to develop its own nuclear deterrent, and that would mean that the French and the British deterrent, which is per se not enough to replace the American deterrent, would have to be expanded and Germany would have to somehow join in that. I cannot overemphasize what kind of a sea change that is in the politics of my country. That used to be an absolute and complete taboo, and we are in fact signatories of the nonproliferation treaty. But I think that what we are seeing here, coming out of this White House, is taking the lid off of many things, including of proliferation worldwide. I think that is, and I do not need to describe to you what is going on in the United States. We have similar debates in Asia, namely in Japan and in South Korea, and I will say that I was at a dinner at NATO before the Munich Security Conference where an Eastern European said, well, we are going to have to get nuclear weapons, too. That is where we are, and that is not a good thing. Let me end this by saying, I personally feel, not only do I think that that is ill-advised, but it is of course a response to the fact that Russia has successfully employed the threat of nuclear weapons use in its invasion of Ukraine, and that that has served as a significant deterrent against escalation by both the Biden White House and the Scholz Chancery. So you can understand the political mechanics of this, but the truth is that if we, that discussing a

European nuclear deterrent is in many ways a distraction from a much more urgent issue, which is our conventional deterrent deficiencies, and the need to dramatically increase our defense industrial production and defense spending. So there are, I just want to point out that there is a NATO summit in The Hague this summer, and there are a lot of extremely urgent questions hanging over that summit, and you can see from the calendar of EU emergency summits that is now beginning on March 6th, the Council, then a European Union summit and the third week of March, I think you will see a ticking up of news out of Brussels and out of Europe on developing an independent deterrent of whatever kind.

WITTES: All right. We're going to go to audience questions momentarily. If you have a question, flag for me. If you do not formulate your question in the form of a question or you prattle on, I will cut you off with a shocking lack of due process. Please do wait for the mic, and while we are, you know, he who moderates most aggressively keeps the show going. While we are, while you wait for the mic, I want to ask Nastiia one more question, which is in this conversation we have focused a great deal on American follies and betrayals, but, you know, in the podcast we actually spend a bit of time on some Ukrainian follies, and Fiona alluded earlier to the politics of Ukraine being a little bit all over the place. So as a Ukrainian who was not born when any of that happened, but or some of it was more recent, you know, tell us a little bit about the experience of looking back on Ukrainian history in the course of doing this work.

LAPATINA: That was actually extremely fascinating for me because, as you said, a lot of it I haven't lived through, but I was walking into this show with, you know, being aware of the responsibility of, you know, spreading Ukraine's message, and that's why we have an American co-host and a Ukrainian co-host. You know, I had to make sure that Ukraine's history was written right and given justice, so we covered a lot of extremely important topics that are Western audiences don't understand. Like, for example, we spent a great deal of talking about language politics because everyone is utterly confused about it. So we had to explain it. But yeah, there were moments where it was very uncomfortable for me and also quite eye-opening that actually it's not just evil Americans who messed it all up. And I mean, I'm exaggerating, of course. I always knew that's not the case, but it was very interesting to see that Americans and Europeans had their great deal of problems, but also very often the Ukrainian government has messed up badly again and again, and we really made ourselves look unreliable, corrupt, and often a lot like Russia as well. And so that was very interesting and very important for me as well, too. Hi, baby. And so it was very important for me to, of course, be as objective and as truthful as possible and to put my Ukrainian hat off and my journalist hat on. And I'm proud of all of the work that we've done, and I think it's going to be amazing to see that each issue that we've

covered, each summit, each city, each event has these two distinct viewpoints of it and kind of new roots from the American and Ukrainian point of view. So I really hope all of you enjoy it. So we have a lot of people who want questions, so please keep questions brief, and if you can direct them to an individual, that would be great.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Michael Schur, I'm with The Insider. This is probably for Fiona and Constance. The United States government was in possession of at least an approximate Russian invasion plan in October of 2021. The Russians knew we had that plan because Bill Burns went to Moscow and told them. Russian Kremlin-controlled domestic media was showing in the three months before the start of the invasion all of the airplanes coming into Kyiv with Javelins and NLAWs and Stingers, and they were portraying Ukrainians as preparing for war. The 21st of February at the Security Council meeting --

WITTES: We need this to head toward a question.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Shoigu talks about how Ukraine is armed and prepared for war. And on the evening the Russians are actually sent in, the soldiers are woken up in the middle of the night, they're stripped of their cell phones, they don't even see Putin's announcement of the special military operation in which he calls Ukraine a hostile anti-Russia pumped up with modern weapons.

WITTES: Okay, we need a question.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Does anybody think that was weird?

WITTES: I don't know how to interpret that.

HILL: Well, if we think about the preparations that Putin -- I mean, look, I know this period inside out because I was constantly being asked to comment on it and I was watching these things very carefully. I mean, the Russians were preparing the ground, as we knew, for what they were calling a special military operation, and they wanted to have a pretext. There were a number of other things happening around this time. I mean, given all of the machinations in Ukrainian politics in this kind of period a gentleman named Viktor Medvedchuk who is a Ukrainian very close to Putin and Putin is the godfather of Medvedchuk's one of his daughters was also basically arrested by the Ukrainians. And Putin is always one person never to let one

of his men go. I mean, if you know Mr. Krasikov the assassin in the Tiergarten, one of the reasons that Evan Gershkovich and all kinds of other people were taken into custody was to basically trade for Mr. Krasikov and that kind of worked as well. So there's all kinds of things happening that are certainly affecting Putin's calculus about the reasons that he wants to go into Ukraine because he feels irrespective of what you're describing there that's showing out on Russian television is that Ukraine is getting away from Russia's going on for a very long time. In 2014 when Russia moved in to seize Crimea there were also efforts to take not just the Donbass but also Ukrainian cities back all the way down to Odessa. So if you want to go back and look at YouTube and all kinds of other missives from 2014 you will see that Russia had launched a campaign called Novorossiya, New Russia to retake the territory that was first brought into Russia by Catherine the Great. If we go back to 2006 Russia turned off the gas that was transiting across Ukraine and if we go back to the early 1990s before you were probably paying any attention to what was going on in Russia there were all kinds of assassinations of Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians because Russia didn't want Ukraine to pull out of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Now I'm going to be 60 next year so I wish I have a long memory and I've been living all of this kind of stuff since basically the 1980s when I was a student in Moscow. My first visits to Ukraine were when it was still part of the Soviet Union. So I've been working on this issue for an extraordinary long time and if you take all of this in all of the totality what you will see is right from the very early 1990s when Ukraine was being pushed to give up nuclear weapons there were constituents in Moscow and in Russia who saw every move that Ukraine made as basically a violation of the relationship between Ukraine and Russia and didn't want Ukraine to have any other options to go anywhere else. So every move that Ukraine makes from all this way on can be very well documented as seen as being offensive from Russia's perspective. So by the time you get to the things that you're discussing there, Putin has decided that Ukraine has no right and should not go anywhere at all. It's not just Ukraine of course, it's also Belarus, it's also Moldova, it's also Kazakhstan. So it's not just about how things are being depicted about Ukraine; you can see these depictions about many other places and when Georgia was invaded by Russia in 2008, exactly the same kind of depictions were happening on Russian television. So you may think it's because I think that you're presenting something looking at your face as well that you're saying that Russia had cause for this, but Russia only has cause if you still believe that everywhere is part of Russia's influence. Perhaps we can take this outside so you can clarify but of course it's weird from the point of disinformation because it wasn't actually accurate but Russia has been gunning for the return of Ukraine basically since the 1990s when Ukraine first got away.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Thank you so much. This is a question for Fiona. What would be your advice to UK Prime Minister Starmer when he is approaching those conversations concerning Ukraine later this week?

HILL: Well I think the prime minister has probably figured out very clearly that this is an enormously consequential meeting and it's not just because of Ukraine but it's also for the whole future of European security and for the United Kingdom itself. The UK and the United States have extraordinary important defense relationships and it's going to be very difficult for European members of NATO to be able to make basically the transition to taking charge of NATO as they are being exalted to without some kind of transitional period or some bridging by the United States. And also the UK has made some pretty strong commitments to Ukraine and I also already referenced polling in the UK showing that there's very large, sizable, considerable support in the UK for still supporting Ukraine as there is across the rest of Europe. So the case is going to have to be made and Prime Minister Starmer has already made some commitments about the depth of UK even willingness to deploy some troops onto the ground in any peacekeeping operation. So the important thing is to get all of this across to President Trump in the best way that he possibly can and again I don't want to put words into his mouth, I'm sure he's thinking very carefully and Macron, President Macron is already here. So look, we're seeing that all European leaders at this particular point are realizing that this is the dawning very much of a new era and that they have to really figure out where they themselves stand but how they're going to manage the relationship with the United States not just with Ukraine moving forward.

WITTES: We have time for one more question and it is yours.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: So let me thank you so much for an intellectually stimulating but also emotionally troubling discussion. I'd like Constance and Fiona to follow up on their points that there has been a reversal of the world view of the United States and Russia vis-a-vis Europe. Could you contemplate how this could affect policies to punish Russia assuming there's a ceasefire? For example, if Russia take -- if the United States takes one approach to sanctions to lift, but Europe doesn't, if Europe wants to punish war crimes but the United States doesn't what will this do to the dialogue? Thank you.

WITTES: Constanze?

STELZENMÜLLER: It's a good question to be honest. I think that there are a number of things here that are in play. Sanctions. The use of the Russian frozen assets as collateral for further expenditures on behalf of Ukraine. Ukraine's EU membership Ukraine's NATO membership to which we have paid lip service but which I think is requires some sort of commitment. And then of course a security guarantees of whatever kind. A German friend of mine commentator has said that security guarantees is a pompous word for further weapons deliveries which at this point I think is a correct description of what we're talking about. There is still this proposal of putting European troops into the theater most notably endorsed by Keir Starmer. That is something that the Russians violently oppose. And I frankly to be completely honest here I can envisage a situation where the Europeans want to be more muscularly supportive where the White House says that's not what we want and we are doing the opposite of that. And where there might be quite unpleasant conversations between the White House and individual European countries on whether it was advisable for us to do what we're trying to do. And I'm not sure I think that will then be another sort of very decisive moment for the transatlantic relationship which, like the German chancellor, I have grown up with and which every German has a sort of, you know, all Europeans like to say that they have a special relationship with America, right? I think arguably German feelings about America which was a benevolent occupying power for West Germany for more than 40 years and then midwifed the, not just the reunification of Germany but the creation of Europe whole and free through the enlargement of the EU and NATO. This is very hard for a country of 80 plus million Germans to digest that this is no longer a benevolent relationship. But this appears to be, I would not call America an adversary or an enemy but what we are certainly seeing is hostility.

WITTES: Fiona, you get the last word today.

HILL: Well, I think one thing for us all to bear in mind as well -- that Marsha also gets to your question -- is that this is actually a global conflict and we haven't mentioned that and we open up a whole door as we are kind of closing the session. But for most of the rest of the world, Ukraine is a proxy conflict with the United States. China is supporting Russia. North Korea is supporting Russia. North Korean troops are in Europe fighting in the Kursk region against Ukrainian troops and we are always watching to see where they are spilling over and then also into Ukraine. And Iran is also supporting Russia. And Nastiia talked about Shahed drones. Shahed is obviously an Iranian word for martyr and Iranians are helping to construct drones on a mass scale in Russia because the Russians don't have the capability of doing that themselves at the moment with so many people at the front for this conflict. The peace talks that President Trump has called have been in Saudi Arabia. The Middle East I mention because of Iran there is very influential. One of the

people involved in the talks is Kirill Dmitriev, the head of the Russian sovereign wealth fund who was also behind the scenes involved in the Abraham Accords. So you can see here that there's all kinds of linkages and points here. And South Korea and Japan have been supporting Ukraine because the South Koreans wonder that North Korean troops are being prepared or exercising there for some kind of action against South Korea. And Japan is extraordinary concerned about what the implications are of China supporting Russia in all of this. So as we talk about a negotiation between the United States and Russia we've left out all of these global dimensions as well. And the Chinese have told the Ukrainians, as I learned from one of the Ukrainian former foreign ministers ,look this isn't about you, it's never been about you. China was a massive investor in Ukraine before the war and they said we'll invest again when this is all over because this is really just about the United States. So as we kind of contemplate the way that we've flipped on Europe there's a whole host of other discussions going on around the globe about what this war is and what the aftermath of it might be. Will North Korea turn its attention towards South Korea? What will then South Korea and Japan be facing? And will China really be kind of the beneficiary in some respects of this as the country that then reconstructs Ukraine or also then moves back basically into a relationship with Europe at the Munich Security Conference. There were several very prominent Chinese officials trying not to gloat over the rift between Europe and the United States but saying to the Europeans -- they weren't succinct because they were very open -- we'll be there for you Europe you know kind of when this is all over as well. But they have also, China, been aiding and abetting the largest land war in Europe since World War II and they were also on the other side of the war in World War II as well so, to be continued, I think.

WITTES: Indeed. We are going to leave it there. Please join me in thanking our spectacular panel and please if you could remain in your seats while the panel evacuates the room and heads to a shelter underneath a local hospital. Thank you to Constanze, Tyler, Nastiia and Fiona.