

CARNEGIE COUNCIL *for Ethics in International Affairs*

Return to Cold War

U.S. Global Engagement, Global Ethics Forum TV Series

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Transcript

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Introduction

DAVID SPEEDIE: Good evening, everyone. Welcome to the Carnegie Council. I'm David Speedie, director of the program on U.S. Global Engagement. Thank you all for coming.

The topic tonight, of course, is Russia and U.S.–Russian relations. It is widely acknowledged on both sides that the relationship between the United States and Russia today has plumbed new depths, uncharted since the end of the [Cold War](#) about a quarter of a century ago—the [two years of civil strife in Ukraine](#), the [tragedy of Syria](#), where the [United States](#) and [Russia](#) have some degree of common purpose; but this is, at best, fragile. But most ominous of all is, I think, the muscle-flexing that is going on by both NATO and Russia in Northeast Europe and the mutually provocative naval exercises in the Black Sea, along with charges from both sides of backsliding on critical arms-control compacts that were reached decades ago.

So the causes for division are legion. This has led to pretty robust debate, again on both sides, as to whether relations are so frigid as to constitute a second Cold War, with one group of wise folks on one side saying, "No. The geopolitical map has changed since the latter part of the last century"; and others equally convinced that the similarities are there and sufficient.

There is no one I can think of better among those sage observers than Robert Legvold to discuss this question of "Are we in a new Cold War?," especially since he has recently written a splendid new book, called [Return to Cold War](#). Bob is the Marshall D. Shulman Professor Emeritus in the Department of Political Science at Columbia University. He had been director previously of the Harriman Institute at Columbia. He is also a director of the national project Meeting the Challenge of the New Nuclear Era for the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in Cambridge. He is also eminently well-qualified on the Russian side of the equation. He is on the advisory board of the Foundation for International Peace and Democracy of [Mikhail Gorbachev](#) and a foreign member of the Russian Academy of Social Sciences.

Bob, welcome to the Carnegie Council.

ROBERT LEGVOLD: My great pleasure. I thank all of you for coming. I look forward to it.

Conversation

DAVID SPEEDIE: Bob, when you began this [book](#), and also in the *Foreign Affairs* [article](#) you wrote

some time ago on the question, it seemed that you began with a degree of skepticism as to whether we have, in fact, reached the depths of a new Cold War. Various factors—the fact that Russia's GDP is about one-eighth that of the United States; the U.S. defense budget is so much greater than Russia's; and, of course, as I mentioned a few minutes earlier, the global profile has changed so greatly since the last Cold War was upon us.

But I think you concluded that the term "Cold War," with all its historical heft and implications, is not hyperbole. Briefly, why is that so? What was the reason for this conclusion?

ROBERT LEGVOLD: The first thing I would say is that this book was a product of the publisher that had read that *Foreign Affairs* article and came and said, "Would you like to justify yourself with a book at this length?" That's why I did it. I had not planned to write this book as such.

But in answering that question—because that article was written in the spring of 2014, about a month into the [Ukrainian crisis](#), and then published in *Foreign Affairs* in the summer issue—I paused for a moment and I said, what we have seen since [Maidan](#) in February and now the growing [war in Donbass](#) after the [annexation of Crimea](#), is this likely to deepen, is it likely to endure or not? The life of a book would cover a period when I could look very wrong if not.

But by the time I agreed to do it in the fall, I was persuaded that we now were not only in a qualitatively different phase of U.S.-Russian relations from anything that we had seen in the post-Cold War period in the 1990s, and even through the first part of the [Putin](#) leadership, and it was likely to endure. And indeed, it was likely to deepen, because other aspects of it would be added.

So the question was, if it is qualitatively different—and I say this to audiences such as this that immediately push back and say, "Well, it's not a Cold War because it's not anything like the original Cold War"—true, in fundamental respects, it's not. But do you disagree that it is qualitatively different from where we were in the 1990s; and, if so, what is your conceptual framework for capturing that, for understanding it? Because only if you have some kind of a framework for understanding what has happened can you then sit down and say, "Okay, what are the consequences of what has happened?" And only if you begin thinking about its consequences, what the stakes are that both have in the circumstances, can you begin thinking about whether it's worth doing something to change things; and, if it is, what that might be, how you would go about doing it.

But you have to be able to justify the label of "Cold War" even if, as I started by saying, it is qualitatively different. This Cold War between the United States and Russia, between Russia and the West, does not engulf or encompass the entire international system the way the original Cold War did. The original Cold War was the international system in a bipolar world. It's no longer driven by the same kind of basic ideological animus that represents competition between two economic and political systems, as before. It's no longer, at least not to this point, under the shadow of nuclear Armageddon, which was fundamental to the original Cold War.

But there are five characteristics that are very much like the original Cold War and my justification for using that as a way of capturing what is qualitatively significant in this instance. And alas, the last time those five characteristics were most prevalent was in the earliest phases of the original Cold War, 1948 until [Stalin's](#) death and shortly after. I won't go through all five, because we want to carry on with this, but to illustrate.

In the first place, then and now each side blames the other side almost 100 percent for what has gone wrong. There is no introspection. There is no sense of what has been the interaction over the 20 years. And it's not merely that we blame the other side 99 percent for what has happened. It's the

reason that we blame the other side for it. It's not merely in their specific behavior; it's the reason for their behavior, and that is the nature of the system on the other side. It's Putinism in Russia under Putin. And on their side, it's the nature of the American political system, not just the [Obama administration](#). That was essentially the nature of the explanation 1948 to 1953 and beyond.

Secondly, the assumption is that the problem is not merely a conflict of interest. Countries have conflicts of interest, and adversarial relations often have very serious conflicts of interest. But it is being driven by a conflict of purpose on each side. That, too, was true from 1948 to 1952. As a result, there is very little basis to hope or assume there is common ground that we can find between the two, if what is driving it is not just conflict of interest that you could try to minimize or reconcile, but conflict of purpose.

Third—and then I'll stop rattling on on the five, but there are two more beyond it—the assumption then—it was at the heart of [George Kennan's](#) famous 1947 piece called "[The Sources of Soviet Conduct](#)," the famous [containment](#)—this situation won't change until something basic changes on the other side; the other side either comes apart or it changes in its fundamental nature. That was the premise of the containment doctrine that Kennan outlined. The same thing is true now. In the Obama administration, which has a milder version of this than the Congress or the media or much of the expert community, the assumption is that it is not going to change soon. Nobody expects things to change in Russia anytime soon. And I can tell you, maybe with the partial exception of what may be some uncertain hopes around [Donald Trump's candidacy](#), that the Russians don't expect anything to improve out of this [presidential election](#).

So lots of things are like the original Cold War that explain why this is qualitatively significant.

DAVID SPEEDIE: One quick follow-up on that. That is, why is the mood just so virulent and, you might say, downright personal? Even some who are not reflexively disposed favorably to President Putin have pointed out that the level of caricature of Putin in the Western media is really extraordinary, perhaps beyond that of any former Soviet leader.

And in terms of actual policy, you said yourself at one point that "never during the Cold War had the U.S. and European allies attempted to blacklist and punish as many senior Russians." And then you also quote another very well-respected analyst, our friend [Dmitri Trenin](#), in saying that "the two sides are utterly devoid of mutual respect."

Given all that you have said, why is just the very atmosphere so poisonous?

ROBERT LEGVOLD: I don't know. At one level, David, I get up in the morning. My job is to come to meetings like this or on occasion go into a classroom or write a piece and try to make sense of what makes no sense.

The original Cold War had a fundamental logic to it. Maybe it need not have been as intense, as exaggerated, as militarized, as universalized as it was. But there was a basic logic to the original Cold War. There is no good explanation for how, out of 20 years, given our hopes at the [end of the Soviet Union](#), we are where we are. So the honest answer to your question is, I don't know.

The rather hapless attempt on my part to explain it, I think, does have basis, probably most particularly in the nature of the political struggles that each of us is going through domestically—from a superior position. I think they feel vulnerabilities at a slightly higher level.

It also is a function of leadership and where leadership has chosen to go in these circumstances. I

don't think Russia, to be frank, is well served by its current leadership, and I think that leadership, for whatever set of reasons, out of, partly, conviction—maybe that conviction comes from what is the background of many of these people, beginning with President Putin. But those that he has surrounded himself with, key advisors were part of an organization that thought in terms of a fundamental hostility from the West. It has been very easy for a recrudescence of those sentiments in the way you thought about the world before in these circumstances.

There is also this tendency on the part of many Russians, whatever may be the level of hardship and poverty or difficulty, to assume that there is a kind of historic right for Russia to be treated with respect and to be treated as a great power. There is this Russian notion of Russian *derzhavnost*. That's a noun. My good colleague [Tim Frye](#) from Columbia, my successor at Columbia, I think would agree with me that it is very hard to translate that into English in a way that makes sense. To translate it literally, it would mean "great poweredness," and you are entitled to it whether you have the wherewithal or not. It goes back—and I did some work—to the ninth century. Each time of periods of vulnerability, such as Russia is going through, they come back to that kind of thing.

In fact, it has practical implications. I think one of the successes, in Putin's mind, about what is going on in [Syria](#) is the fact that the United States and Russia are now the co-chairs of the diplomacy that has to make this work. Russia is back in a way that matters globally. That's certainly true in sort of the visceral, emotional, often puerile way in which he expresses this notion: "Treat us as a major power."

But that would be too trivial a way to explain why things have gone as badly as they have. I think that is a much more complex combination of the way in which they are dealing with the outside world and the fears on the inside.

I think there is a genuine fear on the part of many within that leadership, and portions of the elite that support them, that Russia is a very fragile enterprise at this point, that it could easily come apart, that what happened to the Soviet Union could happen to Russia. In this context, I think they do a number of things that probably in the end are capable of producing a self-fulfilling prophecy rather than solving the problem. But I think it helps to explain the impulse.

On the U.S. side, I would finish briefly by saying I think in many ways we are where we are because we spent 20 years not thinking seriously about Russia and not taking Russia seriously. So it was very easy, once Russia became a pain the ass, to treat it the way we are treating it. Once it was back on its feet and troublesome, not having thought about it in its weakness, not having recognized the stake that we had in the relationship—once they come back and they come back for the worse, I think it ends up in this disdainful fashion.

One of the wise statements—and I stop with this—was by [Henry Kissinger](#) in *The Washington Post*, when everybody was trying to figure out what the Ukrainian crisis was all about and the way we were reacting, whether it was late-night television or [Hillary Clinton](#) or [John McCain](#) or others commenting on Putin in the way they have commented on him: "The demonization of Putin is not a policy; it's an alibi for the absence of a policy."

DAVID SPEEDIE: Added to that is the observation: If one can possibly look at something from the point of view of Russia, it's hardly encouraging to hear Russia equated with [ISIL](#) (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant/Syria) and the [Ebola virus](#) as the three grievous threats to the United States and to mankind.

ROBERT LEGVOLD: But in turn—this drifts a bit from your point. You are absolutely right. I note one

Russian in the book who comments on this, how not merely insulting, but how dangerous it is that we are compared to a virus, literally to be dealt with by exterminating us, which was hyperbole at that level.

But it also shows up—I have spent the last two falls, half of the fall, in Moscow teaching a course. One of the students in that seminar, sitting in the back from the Fletcher School—it was joint Fletcher School in Boston and Moscow State Institute of International Relations in Moscow. I was there for half the semester and tried to understand things by watching television. Television is incredible.

But the week after [Paris, November 13](#), Putin immediately began talking about softening the tension in the relationship. He said he had delivered an order to his navy to cooperate with the French navy in the Mediterranean in dealing with ISIS. That morning I picked up my *Izvestia*. There was an article by two female reporters in *Izvestia* with a big picture of [John Tefft](#), our ambassador in Moscow. That article said that the American Embassy is financing the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) community in Russia in order to destroy the social fabric of Russia, and then added that the United States has been providing medicine to Russia for its women to deal with cervical cancer, even though the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) knows that it causes infertility in women, and therefore the United States is contributing to the demographic problems in Russia.

That's the level at which we are talking to one another today.

DAVID SPEEDIE: The most important part of the book, obviously, it seems to me, is your "where to" section. Or "what is to be done" I suppose would be another way of putting it. I won't quote at great length, but it does bring up something that you just said a few minutes ago, and that is the question that each side blames each other—this is one of the things where we may overlay and find an equivalency with some of the darker days of the Cold War—and that something basic must change. You made these two points. You list three necessary things that must happen to get us out of this impasse.

The first is: "the emergence on both sides of a clearer sense of why it matters, why it's important for the United States and Russia to reintegrate their approach to current challenges, including the crisis in Ukraine," etc., etc.

Then you went on to say "to contemplate what part it played in producing the train wreck." That's getting back to this question of each side blaming the other.

Then, the third point you make is "each government needs to plan policy within a wider compass. Rather than confining policy to the day's immediate problems, defined in narrow terms and addressed tactically, Russia and the United States need to set these problems in the larger context of where they want the U.S.-Russian relationship to be several years down the road."

I think that is eminent good sense. How optimistic are you of this coming to pass?

ROBERT LEGVOLD: First, David, thank you for starting there. I'm impressed. It's very rare that in audiences we can get to that point. We spend an awful lot of time arguing about whether it is a Cold War or not. We spend a fair amount of time figuring out why it has come about, and therefore who is to blame, in what form. But that is not what this book, in the end, is really about. It's about where you start in this context.

Let me be clear about one thing. I have no difficulty assigning blame at certain critical points. We went over the cliff in the context of the Ukrainian crisis, and we went over the cliff, in my view,

because of what Russia did in Crimea and then set out to do also in Donbass. But one then has to understand how that came about. That was a product of a dance we did together for 20 years. That is not to justify what he did or their side, the Russian side. When I say "what he did," it was his decision in the case of Crimea, the annexation, or the "little green men." But it comes to the first major point for this book.

On both sides, including much of Europe, within the policy community, within the parliaments, within the media, within much of the expert community, the preoccupation is with the challenge posed by the other side, the problem the other side represents to them, and there is virtually no thinking about the relationship itself, where we are and what its consequences are.

Now, it is very important to deal with the short-term problems—what's going on, what Russia may do from their point of view; what the United States, NATO, and others may do in a Ukrainian context, or in Syria, or over INF (Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty), an arms-control treaty that is under enormous pressure. You don't ignore that. But in order to get at that problem in a way that doesn't destroy the future, I'm arguing for what is a very difficult analytical and policy-planning challenge or chore. That is, how do you develop policy in dealing with Ukraine if you are in Washington—dealing with Russia and Ukraine, Minsk II, implementation of Minsk II; dealing with a regime that is under immense economic and political problems in that context, or any of the other problems—in a way that doesn't destroy the relationship you want to have with Russia and that you need to have if you properly understand the larger stakes 10 years from now?

They have to do the same thing. It has to be reciprocal. One side does it alone, it fails. It goes no place.

But you can't begin to do that unless you start by saying—in realistic terms, not as pie in the sky—"Where do we want this relationship to be 10 years from now, in realistic terms?" You don't do that, you don't invest in that, and you don't think about it wisely, unless you come back and you ask, "What are the stakes in this relationship?" That is something that neither the Russian nor the American leadership—from Bush Senior through Clinton through Bush Junior, to even the Obama administration—let alone Yeltsin and Putin on their side, have thought about sufficiently. That's why the other part of the book that is in the section that you now refer to talks about the stakes. What are the stakes, in a realistic way, short term and longer run?

Then you are back to the problem, if you wish—at some point I hope we can talk a little bit about the way we should be thinking about the stakes and the consequences—then you come back to this question: Okay, Ukraine is a real problem; Syria is a problem; INF is a serious problem; you can list some other things—how do you deal with that optimally in a way that doesn't destroy where you want this relationship to be in the longer run?

We don't do any of that right now. We are simply responding tactically to the immediate set of problems—when I say "we," I mean Moscow, I mean Washington, I mean Berlin, I mean Brussels—the immediate set of problems and trying to make some headway.

Some of that is on the positive side at the moment, in terms of what Kerry is trying to accomplish with Lavrov and others in dealing with Syria. Some of it is in what Ash Carter and Shoygu are trying to do in terms of deconfliction agreements in Syria and so on. And maybe we will be able to take some steps to deal with the item that you referred to at the outset, the same kinds of dangerous incidents that are now occurring too frequently in the Baltic and the North Atlantic.

By the way, I didn't answer your question, "how hopeful are you?" That can be in a sentence. I have

spoken to now a number of audiences in Europe and here, and I have learned to start by saying, "If ever there was an idea whose time has not come, it's in this book." So I'm not optimistic anytime soon.

And the logical follow-up question is, "Well then, why did you write the book?" I wrote the book because I want conversations like this.

Questions

QUESTION: Thank you very much. Andrew Medvedev, a private equity investor here in the city.

I have to say this is an excellent talk. I was a little startled by your admission of "I don't know." I have thought about this for many years.

I am wondering whether the framework of Russia being really the only state-sponsored actor that has shown the willingness to act contrary to U.S. interests with military force is the reason why the United States is so opposed to Russia's actions. And, on the other hand, the United States standing for values that are orthogonal to the way Russia operates in the world and secures its destiny makes Russia view the United States as an existential threat. Is that too simplistic a way of perceiving this?

ROBERT LEGVOLD: No. I think that has to be part of it—certainly the intensification of it recently, when the Russians have actually acted and used military power the way they have, including Ukraine. But I would elaborate that point, add something to it.

First of all, I think there is an element, at least within circles—whether they are media, expert community, politicians, some of them; or even within the executive branch—that have been invested in the Russia question ever since the Soviet Union came apart, going back to both [Bush Senior](#) and the [Clinton administration](#), of immense disappointment. This was supposed to be a grand transformation from a Soviet system, with all the problems that that entailed, to a rapid embrace of democracy, the assumption that Russia—and Yeltsin and his foreign minister, [Kozyrev](#), at the outset gave every impression—wanted to be part of the West, wanted to be a partner of the West. It was called a "pro-Atlantacist" orientation on their part.

And then, gradually, things became muddy, whether that's where they were going. And then you get Putin, who looks as though, in fact, he wants to go in the other direction. He is strong and insulting in his language. He is very sensitive. Even early, long before there was any of what we regard as the mischief or the challenging, there was the nasty language. It was in the context of the [color revolutions](#), when he blamed the West for those, or other things that were happening fairly early in the new century that were very negative.

So I think that the first part of it was disappointment. We are not expecting a major transformation of China at this point, a slow evolution. We are not at the point where we can expect it of Iran. And Cuba we have just hid on a backburner for a very long time; I don't know what we expect in that case. But in Russia it was to be the bellwether of a transformation of this communist world, including the other states in the area. So considerable disappointment.

And then, secondly, you are right, Russia has been the most ostentatious and the most overt in challenging U.S. foreign policy. The Chinese have been much more clever. They have essentially operated under the skirts of the Russians, whether it was the [Iraq War](#) or whether it is what's going on in Syria and that part of the world at the moment. The Russians have been willing to put themselves out front on these issues, for whatever set of reasons.

And they have in this context more or less invited it, because the condemnation of the United States—long before Ukraine, President Putin, at the Munich Security Conference in February 2007, came to an audience of distinguished participants, with [Bob Gates](#) sitting in the front row, and he [said](#), "At a session like this, I can dispense with diplomatic nicety," and then leveled a scathing attack on U.S. foreign policy for the unilateral use of military power, the disregard of international law, the assumption that the United States can impose its will on anybody that doesn't agree with it. It was in very sharp language.

So I think a series of things have pushed in this direction. But it still, I don't think, ends up answering the question why sensible people in this context nonetheless are so devoid of any level of respect, even if you are critical. You can be critical in ways that aren't insulting at the primitive level that we are insulting one another right now.

DAVID SPEEDIE: Just one really quick question. I don't want to monopolize any more here. But I'm sure you would agree that, to the extent that the waters in the 1990s were muddied, or even fouled, again the blame is not 100 percent on one side. I don't want to rehash the old reasons for Russian neuralgia—NATO expansion, the Frankenstein laboratory experiments with Russia's fledgling market economy. I mean, again from the Russian point of view, there were causes for grievance that happened in those early years—as you said, the muddying of the waters.

ROBERT LEGVOLD: No, no. As I have said, you can pick any one period, and I have no hesitation about assigning blame to both sides. I think often blame on the U.S. side, from Bush Senior through the Clinton administration and into [Bush II](#), was less of commission—that is, malevolent policies that were really designed to undo Russia or to harm Russia in some way, even though in retrospect that's the way they interpret them. I think more than anything else it was omission.

In doing this book and trying to understand the 20 years in order to get to the consequences of where we are now, one of the things that seemed to be the case to me that I hadn't appreciated as I lived through it was that the malignant seeds that would cause deterioration in the relationship were there almost from the beginning. They weren't recognized as such, as early as Bush Senior and the Clinton administration, and they remained there and were still more serious and more damaging in the next phase.

So that when you go from the Clinton administration, with a series of issues that were there—already Russian concerns about what the West and NATO might be doing in the context of [Kosovo](#) or, by extension, within Russia; or concerns about the extent to which the United States really had Russia's best interest at stake when it was offering the domestic template that it was for economic and political reform and the other things.

In the Bush administration, this up-and-down thing at the outset is a high point. In the book I tell the story that after [9/11](#), when people in this room know that Putin was one of the first to call and rally to the administration and say, "We will defend you and work with you in Afghanistan if you go after the [Taliban](#)," and so on—in 2001, after that, the administration was moving toward the unilateral abrogation of the [ABM agreement](#) (Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty). The Russians had been fighting that tooth and nail up to that point.

He arrives in the fall and he gives a press conference in November before he [goes down to the Crawford ranch](#). This is Putin. In that press conference he says that: "We now are putting the Cold War behind us. We are in the process of creating a strategic partnership, Russia and the United States, and there are no major global issues that we can't make progress on if we are working

together." He then went down to the Crawford ranch. They had a barbecue together. They practiced dancing the "Cross-eyed Joe," for those of you in the room that understand this square dance, together. The next day they went to a high school and they joked about what's more difficult, to exercise in the Siberian cold or the Texas heat.

Well, the relationship is in a very different place, and our attitude and the interaction between [Obama](#) and Putin is in a very different place, from that event at the Crawford ranch.

But coming back to your basic point, at each stage along the way, we didn't recognize the way in which what I call the "malignant seeds" were growing increasingly malignant. That would happen at each point. Think of the relationship. It never gained traction for sort of steady-state improvement. It was a period of hope and then decline, then a period of hope and then decline. The last part of that was reset under the Obama administration, then declined already by 2011, [the elections](#), and then we go over the cliff with the Ukrainian crisis, which makes it fundamentally different. No more ups and downs. No more chances at constructive relationship anytime soon. That's why it is qualitatively different.

QUESTION: Ron Berenbeim.

I'm glad that David brought all this stuff about the early days of the end of the Soviet Union and the expansion of NATO in and that some of these other facts were brought in.

I see the whole thing—and I'm not alone in this—that the key question is, how can we manage Russian decline? That is clearly what is going on here, I think. Russia historically, as we all know, has felt that they needed an enormous landmass in front of them that was either Russian territory or subservient to Russia to protect them from invading armies.

So how do we manage Russian decline? If you look at it through that prism—and that may not be correct, but I think there is a lot to be said for it—how would you do that?

I think that [Reagan](#), instinctively, had a sense that that was what was going on and that was what he had to do. So can you tell us whether or not you accept this view, or are willing to work with it to some extent, in formulating next steps?

ROBERT LEGVOLD: Several points.

First of all, I think almost anybody that studies Russia today, including many in Russia—this week Putin is entertaining two alternative plans of what he should do from senior economists, one of whom would certainly argue that Russia is in decline at this point. The first question is whether this is secular decline that is permanent, and therefore there is no prospect that the thing is going to turn around, and how do we on the outside react to that reality?

I'm not in that camp. I do believe that Russia is in decline now and it is going to have to find some other alternatives in order to resuscitate itself in the future. It's not clear that this current leadership—it's what I said earlier—is capable of doing that.

The second point I would make is that at the end of the day it is not for us to manage Russia's decline; it's for Russia to manage its decline or not. The question is how we cope with how well they do or do not do that and how we approach Russia, not only in terms of decline, but in terms of what Russia is, the challenge that it poses. Here, although I believe, in terms of return to Cold War, the policy that we have set in place, we—not just the United States, but with our European allies and the

others that we have brought along, the Japanese—even more reluctantly in the case of the Japanese and others—I criticize that policy in dealing with what we have been referring to, the consequences of the Cold War, the opportunity costs that we are losing, the stakes that we haven't yet talked about—that is, that we are ignoring in this context.

But as a secondary issue, I would argue that if you are really worried about Russia, at least in the moment, in decline—and possibly some would argue that it is secular and permanent or durable—then the last thing you do is what you are doing at this point, which is isolating it, putting it under [sanctions](#), creating what is the "[perfect storm](#)," as Russians refer to it: the low oil prices and the sanctions.

As I found in Moscow, critics of the Putin administration are arguing that the third part of the perfect storm is incompetent economic policy within Russia. There is a big fight, and you will see it coming out this week, when, Tim, as you know, he gets the report from the two sides, including [Kudrin](#) and the counter group from within the presidency itself, including [Klepach](#), formerly in the Ministry of Economic Development. That is over austerity versus stimulus. There are those that have argued that the so-called austerity policy has been part of the perfect storm.

In any event, what we are doing—not just the sanctions, but suspending any negotiation of a business and investment treaty, kicking them out of the G8, trying to isolate them within the G20, and all of the other things that we have done—in a practical way, cutting off the U.S.-Russia Business Council meeting and the working groups under the U.S.-Russia Presidential Commission, attempting to isolate them rather than work with them on energy—all of that, it seems to me, is to contribute to the perfect storm and the decline you are talking about.

But I treat that as secondary to what I see as the immediate foreign policy stakes that we have in our own national security and stability of the international environment.

QUESTION: I'm Tory Hall [phonetic], with the *Executive Intelligence Review*. I'm also a U.S. military veteran. I most recently spent some time in Ukraine.

What I studied there, before we went into this area—and this is open information—was that through our [secretary of state](#), through our State Department, [Nuland](#) particularly, we introduced forces into Ukraine that, in a way, disrupted their government and installed members of what is known as the [Svoboda](#) party, which is an openly residue of [World War II](#) Nazism, a form of it that still existed—and this is studied by Colonel [Glantz](#), if you guys want more information on the expert in this area—has basically classified this group as a neo-Nazi party. This is not a strange thing in this part of Europe, but it exists. That's what was installed into their government.

So when we talk about Putin moving into Crimea, it has to be understood within this context, that this is what happened and this is what really happened. It's not that some other thing happened. That is what happened.

So Putin moved into this area knowing that "Hey, these guys are in charge now. So what do I have to do to protect our interests in this area, particularly our military, high-energy, high-equipment in that area, in the form of even nuclear power?" So how do you protect that? You have to move in and control that area. That's what he did. And he did a similar thing in Syria. What he is doing is very easy to understand from that perspective. It's not difficult to get. And it's easy to work with, if you have the right perspective from the U.S. leadership as well. It's easy to work with him. It's not that difficult. The difficult part is our thinking, usually in the form of "How are we going to prevent this type of leader from ever arising."

ROBERT LEGVOLD: Partial agreement, substantial disagreement. Let me reframe parts of what you have said.

First, from the opening proposition, neither [Right Sector](#) nor Svoboda control decisions in Kiev, what came out of it. They are an influence. The Russians have exaggerated their influence. They talk about the entire [Poroshenko](#) regime as being under neo-Nazi influence, even control, along the way. Whether they really believe that or whether that is part of the way in which they choose to convey it, I'm not sure.

On Crimea itself, and then the Ukrainian problem, let me say a couple of things.

First of all, I'm not somebody who believes that Putin and others around him, even though [Luzhkov](#), the mayor of Moscow, years ago and other politicians had long been talking about reacquiring Crimea and rectifying [Khrushchev's](#) error in 1954 in [placing it within the Ukrainian Republic](#), had a plan for doing that.

I think it was event-driven, and I think the events that you are pointing to were key in their decision. That is, in [February](#), when the disturbances and the resistance grew within Maidan, until you got to that fateful [evening](#) before February 21, where 80-plus were killed on the square, the [French](#), the [German](#), and the [Pole](#) foreign ministers were there with [Vladimir Lukin](#), the ombudsman from Moscow sent to observe it, negotiating with [Yanukovych](#) about some kind of transition that would begin addressing the concerns of Maidan. They were basically to go back to the earlier constitution, which deprived the president of some power, and move the elections up to no later than December of that year to begin getting change.

Well, the opposition leadership that was part of this had lost control of the streets at that point. For whatever reason—it's not entirely clear—Yanukovych fled. The Rada then took this set of decisions that put that government in place. Here in the book I argue that that is the first point at which the West makes a mistake, including the United States, as outsiders. Nuland, as assistant secretary of Europe, is the point person for it.

We should have at that point made a much stronger effort to keep that compromise in place in a way that created a government of national unity in which the East Europeans had a legitimate and real voice. We didn't do that. We simply capitulated to the alternative. And there were good reasons—it's a complicated story—that we gave up on that government.

Now, in Moscow everything I understand—some of this is suspect, because there is always the rumor mill, but you try to discount for that and go to sources that you find more trustworthy—there was uncertainty about what precisely should be done in this fast-moving environment. Putin actually didn't get clear-cut decisions from people like [Patrushev](#) and [Ivanov](#) and the others that were around him at the time. He took the decision. He took it within 12 hours, as this thing was falling apart, to begin the "little green men" operation in Crimea. But that's not annexation. That is essentially to secure a position within Crimea where something is changing very rapidly.

He then, at some point—they, maybe—did take the further decision that it probably would be annexation. That's when they moved the [referendum](#) up. It was originally scheduled toward the end of March and they moved it up to March 16. When he was asked about it—I was on CNN talking with [Fareed Zakaria](#)—because Putin had said, "Well, we'll let the Crimeans decide it in a referendum." Fareed said, "That's hopeful. Maybe they are not going to do it." I said, "No. What that means is they decided they are going toward annexation."

I think there the point that you are making comes into play. That is, having a spoke in the wheel of politics in Ukraine, with the little green men more or less controlling the political environment in Ukraine with a dominant Russian population is one thing. But not having full strategic control of that peninsula, if you are getting a government that would be drawn toward NATO and working toward NATO, and therefore creating uncertainty about Sevastopol, the Black Sea Fleet, Russian rights—that, I think, pushed the issue toward annexation. I don't think that was part of the original plan.

I'll finish by saying two things. I think annexation was a critical historic mistake on Russia's part. They would have had considerable leverage had they simply maintained their preponderant role within Crimea politically in this context and been able to negotiate whether Ukraine becomes stabilized or not in this environment. What it did was to push the relationship over the edge. That's what persuaded the West that Putin was committed to destroying the European order, which is the language they use now, by seizing territory, violating the [Budapest agreement](#) where he had guaranteed the sovereignty of Ukraine when they gave up nuclear weapons. That's what created the whole Western current attitude toward Russia and a historic vendetta, a historic grudge, between a very important neighbor from here on, and then left to inherit the problem they have within Eastern Ukraine.

The final point I would make, so that you don't misunderstand me, is that I argue that we ought to be engaging Russia. I argue that we ought to be following a two-track policy. But it is a two-track policy. I'm not in favor of sanctions. I am today in favor of reconsidering or rethinking conditionality on sanctions—because we are going to lose them next year, so let's try to do it in a way that we get something for them. But I have argued from the beginning, and from the beginning in a way that was difficult to argue, because it had real dangers, that the real answer to the threat, which is military, should have been in those terms. Our primary policy at this point should be creating a defensible Ukraine in this context. That means military reform. It means modernizing that military. It means aiding that military. It doesn't mean NATO coming to the assistance of Ukraine in the context of a military confrontation.

But I'm not someone who argues that Russia ought to have a free pass to decide how they are going to use military power or covert means or hybrid warfare in order to shape events in Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, or that neighborhood. That's not where I am.

QUESTION: I'll make this as quick as possible. Good afternoon, Professor. My name is Kevin McMullen.

It seems to me that the person we need in this situation is one who is no longer available and for whom I never voted, [Richard Nixon](#). Nixon understood that U.S. resources are not infinite, that the greater problem was the Soviet Union. So even though the [Vietnam War](#) was on, he was able to reach an accommodation with Red China in order to focus his attention on the Soviet Union. And it was successful. It seems to me at the moment, if we recognize that it is Red China that is the rising power, we need to reach an accommodation with Russia in order to deal with the problem of Red China. We have that problem in common, and with several other countries around the rim of China and in the Far East, all the way to the Philippines.

The objection that I read to that in the professional journals, like the *Naval War College Review* and the *Military Review* from Leavenworth, is that we have already expended so much money and equipment and personnel and public support that this change in policy would no longer be possible in the United States.

QUESTION: Don Simmons.

At the beginning of the talk, you characterized one of the points of difference of the current state of play as "no nuclear tensions," and you added the word "yet."

ROBERT LEGVOLD: No nuclear Armageddon shadow, yes.

QUESTIONER: We now have anti-ballistic missiles in place. Do you think this is a strategic challenge or threatens the balance?

Secondly, what would be the next couple of steps up a ladder of escalation that would most concern you?

ROBERT LEGVOLD: On the first question, don't we, in fact, in thinking about the real challenges we face, geostrategic and strategic, in China actually need Russia, and shouldn't we be thinking about it in the way in which Nixon and Kissinger were thinking about it? They were thinking about it in reverse. It was essentially a China card as a way of strengthening their hands in dealing with [Brezhnev's](#) Soviet Union.

That I don't think is the way we want to think about managing the China relationship, a Russian card, not the least because the Russian card isn't available to us. They have their own stake in the relationship, and if anything, they are trying to use a bit of a China card against us at some point. So I think we do have to figure out a way by which we are managing both relationships in a way where we get constructive interaction among them, which will bring me back to the question that has just been asked. That will be a different kind of a game.

But I grant your point on Nixon, because, after all, remember the period of [détente](#). Who was president during the period of détente, where we tried to engage and we tried to do the Cold War in a different way? It was still containment, but containment by another means, and Russians were drawn out. It's when we began negotiating the first of the strategic-arms limitation talks in 1969 and then achieved them. In which administration? The [Nixon administration](#). So if you believe that what we need now in this phase of this new Cold War is to figure out somehow how to get back to détente and make it work, yes, you have a model. You're not wrong.

On the nuclear issue, that does allow me to say a word about at least one of the very large stakes. I think there are four or five very large stakes that we have in the relationship.

You can argue that Russia doesn't matter to us because it has an economy one-eighth the size of ours and a defense budget one-eleventh of ours. But that is the wrong metric. What my colleagues in IR (international relations) and IR theory, the realist school, say is: It's power and polarities and structure in international politics, balance of power. Wrong metric.

What country matters more than Russia, as [Bill Burns](#) said, to more aspects of U.S. foreign policy? China may be more important to us, and certainly over the longer run, but Russia—think about it. Pick up your newspaper on the issues that we are worried about, whether it's Syria, whether it's Iranian nuclear weapons, never mind Ukraine or elsewhere. What other country is more important to us right now?

And what's the reason for that? It's not what my political science colleagues in IR will tell you. It's what the real estate agent will tell you. The most important thing, what is it? Location, location, location. And Russia is right at the center of everything that matters to us in international politics, the

Eurasian core.

Therefore, one of the great stakes is, rather than feuding and failing to address the question of how both countries commit themselves to what I call, as part of this strategic vision, stable change and mutual security—and I emphasize mutual security and the Eurasian core—which, in turn, affects everything from the Korean Peninsula to the volatile South Asian picture between India and Pakistan, through Central Asia, to the Middle East and Syria, as it radiates up into the Caucasus to Ukraine and then around to the Baltic. What is more important than promoting stable change and mutual security in and around the Eurasian core?

And if you are going to do that, whom do you have to do it with? And whom do they have to do it with? Because that is their world.

Now on the other issue, nuclear. David referred to something that I am involved with now. We are just beginning it. It's a large project at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences to think about how we deal with the new nuclear age, the challenge of the new nuclear age. This is a world that is multipolar nuclear. It has nine nuclear powers. It's not the old world, even though the United States and Russia still have 92 percent of the weapons. But the other players no longer simply are our allies, the British and the French, but the Chinese, the Indians, and the Pakistanis.

That world is getting geometrically ever more complex, because there is now a very lively, important, and threatening dimension to the U.S.-Russian relationship, already driven by the fact that both countries are modernizing their triads. We are going to spend \$358 billion in the next 10 years modernizing the three legs of our nuclear triad and more than a trillion dollars over the next three decades in modernizing all aspects of our nuclear weapons program. They are doing the same thing.

There is a China dimension to the U.S.-Russian nuclear relationship. India and Pakistan are both building new triads of their own. The Pakistanis have the most rapid development of short-range, including battlefield tactical nuclear weapons, in a theory that if India attacks again conventionally, where they have conventional superiority and another [Mumbai terror attack](#), they will respond with battlefield nuclear weapons that will be delivered by a missile called the Nasr. That can be done without nuclear escalation if it is done on their own territory.

India's only nuclear doctrine at this point is, if any nuclear weapon is used against us, even if it is a battlefield tactical nuclear weapon, our response will be with massive retaliation, countervalue. That means cities and otherwise. There are four to six minutes between any major population center on both sides, not enough for any kind of early warning system to work. Both countries are nuclearizing the Indian Ocean, first the Arabian, now the Bengal Sea.

The Chinese will soon, as they build their triad, have the largest set of SSBNs, strategic submarine forces, in the Pacific, even as the Russians move theirs to the Pacific from the northern area.

And that is before I tell you the technology frontiers that we are passing as we move into cyber and otherwise, including a new notion on the U.S. side in terms of dealing with missile defense, which is called "left of line." That is that we will use magno-electronic pulses done by nuclear explosions in order to create the kind of radiation and effect that can knock out their missile sites before they ever depart, or their control-and-command system. So it won't be the missile system that we are trying to build.

That is only the beginning. I could give you 50 other points on why this is now a far more complex—and indeed dangerous—nuclear world than the original one. I think the chances—not now,

but in the next 10 to 15 years—of a nuclear weapon being fired in anger are far greater now than they ever were during the Cold War, including the [Cuban Missile Crisis](#) and [Berlin Crisis](#).

The final point is, not only is no one in either government or anywhere else even beginning to formulate this problem, but we are, as David said in his opening comment, presiding over the liquidation, the disintegration, of the patchwork system that we had in place before. The ABM agreement is gone. The INF agreement is under tension and pressure. The fissile material agreement has never been implemented because of veto. The [Nunn-Lugar program](#), the Russians pulled out from securing nuclear weapons last December. The conventional forces and European agreement adapted, never was put in place, it is lost. And the idea of negotiating conventional arms control, at a time when we are remilitarizing a new central front move to the East, is gone.

The only thing that remains at this point is the [New START](#) (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) agreement. That expires in 2020. Unlike every past agreement that we have signed since 1972, when the sides immediately begin thinking about follow-on, what we negotiate next, there isn't the beginning of any kind of a movement to do anything in that area. I think that is a very big stake in U.S.-Russian relations, not in this case because of real estate—that is, location, location—but because we have 92 percent of the weapons together.

QUESTION: Susan Gitelson.

Can Columbia and the other universities and think tanks and so forth emphasize the economic situation more? It's not just strategy. One thinks of Crimea, and even Syria, as warm-water ports for Russia, which has always been a major goal. And trade is so important. The price of oil is important. But can the Europeans help Russia diversify more and engage in more trade so that they will have a better economy and maybe relax a bit?

QUESTION: [Daniel Stein](#).

I was here last month [speaking](#) about this larger growth of Russian imperialism coming back. Using what you said before of the Cold War as warring ideological systems and our going back to the 1990s, I was wondering if that could apply to the 1890s and the 1900s and some of the work that Carnegie was doing, looking at the bookends of the Cold War being [conflict in Serbia](#), [conflict in the Middle East](#), that led to [Sykes-Picot](#), and if we can even look back at [Russia's taking of the Crimea from the Ottoman Empire](#), how much the return to that mindset is fueling the modern conflict.

QUESTION: Mine is actually a short question. Tim Frye from Columbia University.

Thanks a lot for a really terrific talk and a really great book.

I'm still a little bit of a Cold War skeptic, although I agree that this is a qualitatively different phase, the nuclear problem. I agree with a lot of your points.

What worries me a little bit in using the term "Cold War" is that you use it in a very sophisticated way, and what I worry is that people won't be so sophisticated in the way they use it, that it will be used to justify a lot of policies that might have been appropriate for 20 years ago but are just going to have very different consequences today. I think it's really great to come to a talk where I'm not holding the chair because of simplifications about Russia just driving me crazy. It's nice to get all the nuance. But out in the broader world, this term is so loaded and so powerful—that's my worry, that the term gets hijacked for all kinds of policies that aren't well thought through. Is that something you think about?

ROBERT LEGVOLD: I'll do it in reverse.

Tim, that is a legitimate concern. I have that concern. People that I normally agree with that have been in the policy world—[Tom Graham](#), Bush's senior advisor; [Jim Collins](#), our ambassador—they're friends and we agree on many things. They say, "No, Legvold, don't say 'Cold War' because if people think Cold War, they will think of behaving as they did in the Cold War and that will produce a counterproductive, too hawkish foreign policy. So it's the wrong way to think about it, as a cost."

I realize that is a risk. But I need—we all need—some way of capturing just how deep the tragedy is and what has happened in the relationship and the potential consequences of it. Therefore, first of all, in the book I acknowledge that concern and why people object to the use, on precisely the basis you have just laid out. Secondly, I try to be very clear about the fundamental ways in which it's not the original Cold War that would justify that kind of behavior.

But you're right, if people really bought this argument—"Yeah, it's a Cold War"—they almost certainly would go in the wrong direction.

But up to this point, quite frankly, the real problem is that they haven't been thinking about how deep the hole is, what the consequences are, where we should go. They sort of take it in terms of next Tuesday or the next six months or the November elections or whatever it is here, unfortunately.

I apologize for having gone on so long on the nuclear stuff. I could do the same thing for you on the Arctic. I could do the same thing for you in terms of the military contest that is now emerging again. After having demilitarized European security, for whatever set of reasons—some out of attrition, some out of change of mission of NATO, some out of the collapse of the [Warsaw Pact](#)—we are now going in the other direction. We are remilitarizing Central Europe. We now have a new European security problem. So I could go on at length about what the real stakes are and where there will be further problems around the Eurasian core. You think Ukraine or Crimea or Syria is the end of this in that part of the world?

So the stakes are very high. I'm hoping that somewhere along the line, whatever it is—if you start by saying, "Yes, it is qualitatively different," okay, give me some description that allows me to get to the consequences.

On the notion of history coming back, if I understand correctly, and we have a Russia that is reliving millennia of history, and how are we going to deal with that—there is an element of that. There is a very interesting aspect about Putin's Russia these days that some of us began noticing a year ago, particularly at the time of the dedication of the [World War I](#) memorial in Moscow, where he delivered a [speech](#) in which he praised the imperial soldiers who fought that war. Then he attacked the [Bolsheviks](#) for everything that they gave away after they [came to power](#).

So there is an interesting thing that has further developed. Putin is a fan of Stalin—not because of the [Terror](#), but because of his strength of leadership. Putin is a critic of [Lenin](#), doesn't like Lenin, and doesn't like Yeltsin and doesn't like [Gorbachev](#), and sees himself as somebody who will save Russia in the way in which strong Russian leaders in the past—and there are very serious friends of mine who argue that there is a kind of megalomania now, and it is a further source of the tension in dealing with Western leaders. He now sees himself historically in the same category with [Peter](#) or [Ivan Grozny](#) or other great Russian leaders that have been essential to save Russia, even though there are a lot of people on the outside who would say, "What are the grounds for that?"

And then to sit down with Obama or to sit down with [Angela Merkel](#), who then treat him as though he

doesn't even have political legitimacy within his own society, really burns him, they would argue. That's secondary, so I don't want to stress that.

I think the way in which he is thinking about Russia and Russian history—he is a reader of Russian history. He spends a lot of time reading Russian history. What he takes from it, what he understands, or what others around him take from it or understand—you will notice that even Lavrov, who is sort of a quintessential professional foreign policy figure, leader, diplomat, lately in the stuff that he has been doing has been justifying Russian foreign policy in the same context. So at least it is now in the Kool-Aid.

But how profound it is I don't know. It comes back to and is linked to this, if you will, clash of civilizations and the new notion that Russia represents a different set of social and political values in opposition to a desiccated Western set of values and so on. How deep that is—Tim knows, as others in the audience, there is a serious discussion among us of how much of this is essentially instrumental that could be turned off tomorrow through the media; how much of it is, in fact, something that is real that they are tapping, and, even if they are not fully convinced themselves, how difficult it would be to reverse what they are tapping.

I tend to believe that something is being created. They couldn't turn it around tomorrow, in my view, in terms of the way I understand what's going on in Russia today. But whether they could in the longer run—then you have to come back to the other side of Russian history. What we are seeing now may be [Eurasianism](#), it may be the modern extension of [Pan-Slavism](#). But we also have the [zapadniki](#), the Westernizers, and there is still a large component of that within Russia, including a fair portion of the business community, an intellectual community, and otherwise.

So I don't know how it will all play out in the long run. I think we have to be sensitive to these things.

Economic cooperation? Yes. I think that for us to be cutting ties, as I listed the many ways in which we are doing that—I didn't list the fact that we are no longer continuing any negotiation for Russia's entry into the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), which they were interested in for a period of time. The other stuff that I said—I think that is all unfortunate.

We say it's a price they have to pay. It's the way we punish them. It's the way in which we think we are creating deterrence to further bad behavior. And it is that there can be no "business as usual," given their behavior, particularly in Ukraine. I think that may be too short a way to think about it, not merely in terms of this business of managing Russian decline, the earlier question, but simply in terms of the long run, where the interests are.

Russia was, until this current crisis, emerging as Europe's largest consumer market and a potential important economic partner in a global system. We have to think about where we are going to get growth in the longer run. Where do you think we are going to get growth in the next 20 years other than in this post-Soviet space, given its human and natural resources? It is in our interests for that to be prospering. Every American administration has said, "We want a prospering Russia that is integrated into a global economy"—and they mean it. But that's not what we are doing. We are not acting on those words at this point.

What could we do? I don't know. That also requires the Russians doing what they need to do in order to become good economic partners. And they are not, at any level, in energy or in the other areas.

But in 2009, when we were trying to get follow-up to the reset and the agreements that we signed then, what both sides, the European Union formally and we from the June Summit in 2009, when

[Medvedev](#) as president came here and went out to Silicon Valley—was what? A modernization agenda. Now, there are a lot of Russians who thought that neither Medvedev nor Putin was serious about their modernization agenda. But were they to be serious about a modernization agenda, we ought to be invested. We ought to care about that along the way.

Anyway, thank you very much for your patience, your time, your questions.

DAVID SPEEDIE: Let me just finish by saying that the only downside of a discussion so rich as this is that so many things are left.

Bob mentioned Eurasianism. We at the Council have been at work for two years now on a [project](#) that deals with Eurasianism, new Eurasianism in Russia, and how it may have links to/impacts on extremist movements in Europe.

We may at the end of the day have still differences over whether we are in a new Cold War. We may differ as to who didn't pull the brakes on the train wreck, Bob—assigning a blame, although that is not particularly useful. But we always look for one takeaway from a session like this. I think, clearly, back to the earlier point—and that is that a clearer-eyed sense of what the stakes and consequences are of what is happening now, a more introspective, reflective sense of how we got here, and a more over-the-horizon view rather than the issues of the day addressed strictly tactically—that to me is the valuable takeaway of the book and of your talk. For that, we are profoundly grateful.

ROBERT LEGVOLD: My gratitude to you.

Audio

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