



Russia's Threat to Ukraine: The Crisis Unfolds

The Tennessee World Affairs Council in association with the American Council on Germany, Belmont University Center for International Business, and the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce

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Patrick Ryan [00:00:26] Hello, I'm Patrick Ryan, president of Tennessee World Affairs Council. Welcome to our Global Dialog series. Today, we'd like to thank our longtime sponsors, the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce and the Belmont University Center for International Business. We're also pleased to have the Kline Preston Law Group aboard today as a sponsor for this program. Thank you to all our sponsors, and we always welcome additional sponsors for programs in the future. Just contact me at the Tennessee World Affairs Council. My email address is pat@tnwac.org. Please enjoy the program. Hello and welcome to this special edition of our Global Dialog Speakers program. Thank you for joining us today. I'm Patrick Ryan, president of the Tennessee World Affairs Council. Today, we will follow up on two conversations that we've had with Ambassador

John Kornblum on the Ukraine crisis. You can find the videos of those two previous conversations and transcripts in the webinar archive at TNWAC.org.

Let me first share with you the happy news that this week is the 15th anniversary of the Tennessee World Affairs Council. We've been pleased to deliver a necessary public service to our communities, global literacy. Our speaker programs and education outreach have served to inform and inspire people to get a better understanding of the world. We invite you to participate in this work by becoming a member or contributing to the World Affairs Council. Visit TNWAC.org to do so. Now on to this important conversation. Ambassador John Kornblum has a long record of service in the United States and Europe, both as a diplomat and as a businessman. He is recognized as an eminent expert on U.S. European political and economic relations, in particular in Central and Eastern Europe. He served as the U.S. Ambassador to Germany from 1997 to 2001. Before that, he occupied a number of high-level diplomatic posts, including U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, Special Envoy for the Dayton peace process, U.S. Ambassador to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Deputy U.S. Ambassador to NATO, and U.S. Minister and Deputy Commandant of Forces in divided Berlin. Today, we're again pleased to welcome Steve Sokol. Dr. Sokol is President of the American Council on Germany. Previously, he served as president and CEO of the World Affairs Council of Pittsburgh. Prior to that, he was the vice president and director of programs at the American Council in Germany. Earlier in his career, Steve served as the deputy director of the Aspen Institute in Berlin and was the head of the Project Management Department at the Bonn International Center for Conversion and a program officer in the Berlin office of the German Marshall Fund of the United States. Onto our important program. We thank you again for joining us for this important conversation about Ukraine and the response of the European Union, the United States to what has been transpiring. And we thank the American Council on Germany and President Steve Sokol for partnering with us to bring you this important conversation. And thank you, Ambassador Kornblum, for joining us from Berlin. Dr. Sokol.

Steven Sokol [00:03:48] Thank you, Pat. It is always a delight to partner with the Tennessee World Affairs Council. And so on behalf of the American Council on Germany, let me just thank you for this opportunity, and it is a special delight to welcome John Kornblum back to our joint virtual stage. John, it is good to see you. It is always good to talk with you because I learn something whenever we get together and have these conversations. I know that our conversation today is going to be not only fascinating, but that it's particularly timing timely because I think most of our viewers probably saw the news that was just released a little earlier this morning that Vladimir Putin said that Russia has started partially pulling back its troops from around Ukraine. This might be seen as an attempt to de-escalate the military standoff on the border with Ukraine. Obviously, we don't know exactly what's happening and what's going on, but it looks as if diplomacy and negotiations might be back on the table and on track. And so, John, I thought we could maybe start by getting your take on the current state of affairs and where things are and where they might be going.

John Kornblum [00:05:12] Thank you, Steve, and thank you, Patrick. It's a great pleasure for me to be here with you today, both for the American Council on Germany, which I've worked with for decades, literally. And of course, in Nashville, which is my second home, my home in the United States, and I'm very pleased to be able to continue this discussion. The last time we did this, I made a couple of short sentences about why this is important and I'd like to do that again, if I may. Ukraine is a fairly far away country. It is, by the way, the largest land nation in Europe if you leave Russia aside and it has 45 or more million

people. So it's not nothing. It's a regular country. But it may not seem to be relevant to many people in the United States until you remember that much of this is about energy, which the United States is a very major producer, but also a very major consumer. Much of this is about democracy in Europe, which has been something that the United States fought two world wars to maintain. Much of it is about how the new digital world is going to be developed, which is again where the United States is the leading nation in the world. And much of it is about the fact that the European countries are still the reservoir of most of the heritage of most Americans, and that we have over the past 75 years built a transatlantic community which is really unique in history and which brings together all of the Western democracies under one umbrella. And if we were to give up on Ukraine, it would not just be that a country which deserves the democracy, which it also deserves, but we would also be weakening the entire democratic foundation of our partnership. So this is something that I'm very grateful for the invitation to discuss with you because I think it's really very important that we understand what's going on in Ukraine right now is very directly related to the future democracy, future economic prosperity and the future security of the United States.

Now what's going on today? Well, there have been a flurry of visits, some of them more successful than others, perhaps. And President Biden and President Putin spoke on the phone. I believe it was yesterday, in fact. And there seems to be some understanding that it's not going to go as far as we were afraid it was going to go into a military attack, I say, seems to be because we really don't know anything, but it seems from my point of view of an analyst, it strikes me that Putin got way out in front of his supply lines, as we would say in the military, that he thought that he was going to intimidate NATO and the rest of Europe and the rest more than he did. And now that he needs some way to, shall we say, gently pull back without losing too much face. And I think that the basic focus in coming weeks, assuming that he doesn't just change his mind and start a war, which he could at any moment. Let's assume he doesn't do that. I think the next few weeks are going to be very important because they're going to be the discussion of allowing him to pull back with a certain amount of face saving so that he can in fact hopefully become a working partner, a positive partner to the West in the months and years to come.

Steven Sokol [00:08:53] Thank you, John. I would like to maybe add one point about why it matters, you know, to your very first few sentences. And that is while as you pointed out, when we spoke two weeks ago and even in the session with Tom Schwartz a couple of weeks before that, this current conflict between Russia and Ukraine is nothing new. There have been simmering tensions between the two countries and even a sort of more quiet war and conflict beginning in 2014. But I think the reason why this situation matters right now is because certainly up until today and even continuing after today, there was a real concern of a kinetic war in Europe, which is something that nobody thought was imaginable after the end of World War Two and after the end of the Cold War. And so I think the stakes were high, and that's another reason why there's been a lot of attention focused on the current situation. And so, you know, one of the topics that I don't think we talked about last time is what sort of an exit ramp Putin might have. And you just started to talk a little bit about the fact that he seems to have gotten way out in front. Last time we did talk a little bit about the fact that nobody really knows what Putin wants or wanted, but it seems as if he thought NATO would crumble, the European Union would crumble and that there wouldn't be as much solidarity as he's now facing. Can you talk a little bit about how NATO and the West have been able to align and show solidarity and that that might be contributing to this, this sort of apparent exit ramp that we're seeing develop right now?

John Kornblum [00:10:51] Yes, that's very well put, Steve. Well, I think it's always useful to go back to when was it February 9th, 2014, when this all first started, which led to the Russian annexation of Crimea. NATO played no role in this at all. Putin's endless claims that Russia has been endangered, has been put under pressure, that it's being forced to give up its principles by NATO because NATO's expanded so rapidly belies the point that the real problem that Russia had with Ukraine going back before 2014 was the fact that it wanted to be a western democratic country and that the event, which led to the confrontation, led to the famous Maidan demonstrations, which lasted for several weeks and which ultimately ended in the taking over of Crimea, was not anything that NATO was doing. It was, in fact, a fairly minor trade protocol, not even an agreement, a protocol, a piece of paper that that the European Union had negotiated with Ukraine. But that seemed to worry Putin so much that he started a campaign of pressure against Ukraine immediately, which led in a way to the Maidan upheavals, which led then to the Ukrainian president having to take his hat and leave sort of under the cover of darkness, as we say, because he was so - become so unpopular.

So what is really bothering Russia? Well, what is bothering Putin? Lord knows what's bothering Putin, but what is the train of argument that the Russians have chosen and that is NATO. And that, of course, says a lot about Putin, says a lot about him wanting to be measured as an equal partner to the United States and wanting to be seen as a great military imperial leader. But the fact is that Russia's real problems are economic and political. Russia is missing the digital revolution completely. Russia's economy is not doing well. Russia is losing literally tens of thousands, if not more, young people every year who are simply moving to the West. And so the keys to a solution, I think, are partially to debate and negotiate with him over the security aspects, and there are many, many of them to debate and negotiate. And here Russia is not all wrong. We have to remember that going back as far as the Bush Administration, we abrogated some arms control agreements which were not necessary that we, we pushed and I'm far from an expert enough to know whether this was important or not. But we pushed an anti-missile defense system, which actually had rockets aimed at Russia. And so he has some things that he can argue about, and I think we should be willing to discuss these things. I think having a new arms control regime would be a good thing, but also having new trade agreements would be a good thing. On the on the trade of Germany, everyone talks about Germany's trade with Russia, Russia is 17th on the list of German trade partner trading partners and below even some Central American countries. It's not a major trading power at all. It's not a major industrial power and also it's not a major ecological power. It's not dealing well with climate change. So there are a whole bunch of things that we could negotiate with Russia if Russia was willing to do it, and we just don't know if they are.

The dangers here, and I have unfortunately, I've sensed a little bit too much willingness on the western side to get into some of these things, such as the French president who said he thought that Finland, I mean, that Ukraine should be Finland, dies very rapidly. That's not right. That's an insult to Finland and it's an insult to Ukraine, but it's also against the Ukrainian Constitution. But the danger is that we might get into making some concessions on these kind of things that we really have no reason to do and no right to do. But I do think that the - let's hope, I'm saying this with a bit of hope, I do hope that the military confrontation is starting to cool down and then our next job will be to find a face saving device for Putin to get out of this confrontation.

Steven Sokol [00:15:44] So, you know, early, early on in this process, it seemed, as you said, that you really only wanted to deal with the United States and deal with Biden and was almost ignoring his European counterparts and the last few weeks have seen a

tremendous amount of shuttle diplomacy. You alluded to that in your opening comments. Of course, Olaf Scholz is in Moscow today. He was in Kiev yesterday. He was in Washington last Monday. And now it seems as if, particularly following Macron's trip to Moscow in Kiev last week, that there might be some opening up to the Normandy format again, which includes France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine, and actually leaves the United States out. And so I wanted to ask you if you think that that these efforts at shuttle diplomacy and all of this travel over the last few weeks might have helped get us to where we are today of this sort of opening that we're seeing.

John Kornblum [00:16:52] Yes, I do think it has. First place, I think that the Biden administration was very successful in making clear that there was no gap between the Europeans and themselves, that they worked very hard to make sure that the Europeans were consulted, that European voices were being heard. At the same time, we know that politicians are, after all, politicians, which means they want to be seen doing big things. And so it was perfectly fine and not at all undermining of Western coherence that the British, French, Germans and others went to Moscow or talked on the phone or whatever they did with Putin. I think that probably helped in a way which we may not have thought of, just making him feel good to tell you the truth, that he was a desired partner and they are beating the path to his door.

So that's all good. The problem is that that it could always be here. The problem is that it could lead to discussions that we didn't want to have happen. Discussions about what NATO's future is. Discussions about the political situation in countries. A country that I know quite well, which is even more exposed than Ukraine is, is the Republic of Georgia, which is having its own internal economic and political problems. But as only five million people is located right on a border in Russia and which is and is under tremendous threat, for example. So it's going to be a package of extremely delicate diplomacy. I think there are some frameworks to use the organization on. Security and cooperation in Europe is one of them which was tailor made, if I may say so. As someone who took part in these discussions 25 years ago, we built up the OSCE in those days, in fact we even changed the name - it used to be called the CSCE - just for this purpose as a trans-European, multi-European place where both North Americans and Europeans, not just the NATO allies. The OSCE at the moment has 57 signatory countries and literally spans the globe from Siberia across to Alaska and then round again to Siberia, so it is an organization which could play a role here. But it's going to - there's going to be now a second redefinition of the, let's call it the dynamics of Europe and for America, the dynamics of Europe being also the dynamics of America.

Steven Sokol [00:19:37] Well, John, let me push you on this thread about the OSCE and the Helsinki process, because one of our viewers asks the question of whether a new Helsinki 2.0 might not be a way to bring together some of these issues and create a multilateral format for addressing some of these concerns?

John Kornblum [00:20:04] Well, I think so. I've actually been working on an article about this, but there are some dangers also. I personally would never use the word 2.0 to start with, with all due respect, because that might suggest that the whole thing has to be renegotiated. And for reasons which are very complicated, which go back to the mid-1970s, the so-called Helsinki Final Act, which is the basic document of the OSCE, is probably the best statement of modern democratic civil society that you will find in the existing documents at the moment. It's a - really it's a miracle, almost. And it was possible because Brezhnev didn't take human rights seriously. He was there to do something else that is to cement his edge of money in Eastern Europe. And so he allowed all this human

rights stuff to get in there. But now it's there, and it would be dangerous for us to renegotiate that. So I'm not really a fan of the word Helsinki to point to what I am. However, a fan of is using the Helsinki process, which is a very open, loose dialog process. What may not be well known is that there are no formal legal treaty commitments in the OSCE. It's all done as a signature of on a statement of intent and a statement of principles. So that means that the thing is endlessly malleable can be changed according to the circumstances. But on the basis of it's very firm foundation. So I think myself, I'm a big fan of using the OSCE right now as the next step for doing this, and I think the interest seems to be going to be doing that.

Steven Sokol [00:21:52] And I think as we're seeing the multilateral framework is incredibly important in trying to address this and having Russia at the table is important as well in terms of trying to really engage in negotiations and in diplomacy. And so having said that, you know, John, as a seasoned diplomat, I want to maybe talk a little bit about sort of the challenge of diplomacy in this case. I think when we spoke two weeks ago, you said and obviously other people have said it, we don't really know what Putin wants. We don't really know what his end game is. It is seeming like he saw an opportunity to weaken the West and took advantage of that. But now he might not know where to go from here. And so what role can diplomacy play in moving forward and trying to find a face saving solution for Putin without giving up Western values and priorities?

John Kornblum [00:23:08] Well, in this, you know, diplomacy has lots of facets to it. But this this is the major facet that is heading off or sweeping up after confrontation and conflict. The main job is to take a situation which is totally based on confrontation, totally without agreement and finding areas not only of agreement, but finding out areas where the other side has desires or interests and trying to build them together to something that that flies. It's a one - it's sort of like a bumblebee which is not supposed to fly but flies quite well. And diplomatic solutions rarely look very pretty. But they tend to deal with the issues that had the Dayton agreement, which I worked on quite a lot, has now been enforced for 25 years. People thought it was going to be there for two years, and it still is the foundation for maintaining some sort of peace in Bosnia. So sometimes they don't look very good, but they work. This is what's going to have to happen, though we're going to have to get our own heads together and consult with our allies and figure out what we can come up with. As I said, there is a fairly big program already and we could be talking about also about environmental concerns. Even COVID is something which the international community needs to have a better understanding of. So there's certainly enough to be talking about, but you need to have that spark and that bit of agreement to start talking. And we don't have that yet. We don't know where Putin's head is and until we know that until he gives us more signals, we're going to be tapping around a little bit in the dark.

Steven Sokol [00:25:04] We will continue tapping around in the dark and I think part of it comes down to trying to understand better what Putin wants and what his end game is. And one of our viewers actually just submitted a question which goes in a direction that I wanted to ask you about as well, because he writes, Do you think Putin could divide the West by demanding a recognition of the territories that Russia has already seized from Ukraine?

John Kornblum [00:25:38] Yeah, he could and he there are a number of people who think, including in Ukraine, by the way, who think that these territories are lost anyway, and so who cares? But they certainly don't say the same thing about Crimea, so it's very difficult. But yeah, these are the things I just mentioned two things that I thought we might be looking at, but let's think of the things that he might be looking at in the first place he's

become, The Russians have become. It's a sad statement on the way on how they view their educational system. Their best and the brightest don't go to Silicon Valley and become billionaires. Their best and their brightest start becoming world class hackers and people who interfere in the elections and things like that. So he has a whole toolbox of tools that he could use against Ukraine, which he hasn't done so far, as far as anybody knows. He could paralyze the electric grid, for example, he could do all sorts of things. So at the same time that we are thinking about what we may be doing, we have to be thinking very carefully about what he may be doing and what, as you said, what he may want out of it. I think he's probably gotten already the first thing he wanted out of it, which was to be taken seriously. He seems to have really been, really been hit hard by President Obama's statement that Russia was nothing more than a small regional power. And however, that may have been true with the way you looked at the economic and military strength, it certainly wasn't true as far as Russia's size and its ability to disrupt all sorts of things. So Putin wants respect. I think that's a clear thing, and he's been getting it with everybody, traipsing - his table gets longer each time, so to speak. He wants respect. He wants also, and this is not a small thing, he wants to survive. And right now, his situation at home is not very good. The Russian economy is not in good shape. I was just reading today that the number of people in Russia who openly say that they believe Putin should leave office is growing every day, so he needs also, and this, by the way, was the same situation that Brezhnev was in when the OSCE was not negotiated 50 years ago. So it's nothing new. But we need to take account of the fact that he over the short term, we have to in fact help him stay in office now. That's not a popular sentiment, but it's something which is probably part of the process. So the second part of it will be to understand what he wants. And I think we have a picture, but maybe, probably not a comprehensive enough.

Steven Sokol [00:28:27] It's interesting, I mean, you know, certainly Vladimir Putin has gotten our attention even if he has not gotten everybody's respect. We are all following him very closely in each of his moves very closely. And I've actually wondered myself, you know, if it's, if his end game was actually to have the debate over Crimea and in the Donbass be put to bed and just have those be absorbed into Russia and Ukraine to sort of stop saying that it's Ukrainian land and that that could be the compromise that he that he looks for. But since you were talking a little bit about Vladimir Putin's standing in Russia, I'm wondering if you have any sense of how people in Russia feel about Ukraine and about the current tensions with Ukraine.

John Kornblum [00:29:26] Well, there's some polling. You know, there are still a couple of independent polling organizations in Russia, and there has been some polling about this. There also was this very interesting statement by a large number of former generals and security experts in Russia calling on Putin not to drag his country into an unnecessary war. So I think that he - and there's also been some very good reporting on the content of Russian television vis-a-vis the West and vis-a-vis Ukraine, which is which is disastrous. So it's quite clear that they're very worried about it. And so helping him pull down on that would also be part of the job of negotiators. He seems to have in his soul somewhere, assuming he has one, a feeling that he has to be protecting the imperial grandeur of Russia. And there are some people who believe that if Ukraine is allowed to drift away completely, which it more or less has already anyway, but take that as part of it, that the rest of Russia could not continue to be unified, either that Russia is, by definition an imperial power. It lives by imperial conquest. And if it doesn't have any imperial conquest, it's going to start breaking apart because the pieces don't add up to a whole. That's a theory which I'm not experienced enough to know about, but I do believe that that it is clear that the Russians want to have the pride of having developed something. I was quite taken by a statement that Lavrov made now four or five years ago at the Munich Security

Conference, when he said the West must understand that we are now at the end of a western world. We now going to have a non-Western securities that nobody knows what that means. But what it does mean is that Russia wants to have its own view of the world supported and recognized and even honored.

Steven Sokol [00:31:35] Thank you. One of our viewers poses the following question. He wants to know whether the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances for Ukraine has any relevance at this juncture or in future scenarios regarding the crisis in Ukraine, given that Ukraine does not have a realistic chance at becoming a member of NATO.

John Kornblum [00:32:05] Well, I would take - not accept that final statement. I think that in five years, Ukraine is going to be a member of NATO and so will Georgia, because what Putin has done? Why do I think that? Not because I'm totally naive, but because Putin has in fact given a lot of impetus towards NATO and towards NATO being the place that secures democracy in these places. Now you might say, oh no, he's proved that the NATO cannot expand anymore. No, he hasn't proved that at all. And the fact is that NATO had reached a sort of a plateau in its expansion anyway. So but I just say, I take a little bit of issue with that statement. But the question of the Budapest Memorandum, which I was part of writing the first draft of if I may say so, is that it shows how difficult it is to maintain equilibrium and harmony. If one member of your group cares little about legalities, cares little about promises, cares little about their reputation. This was supposed to be, as I said, I was there and I was part of the discussions that this was. This was negotiated as a way of helping the Ukrainians give up several hundred very dangerous nuclear weapons, which they had on their territory. Experts will tell you that the Ukrainians never actually gained control of those weapons. There were still Russian officers tending them, but they were on Ukrainian territory, and it was a very important goal, also the United States, of getting these things transferred back to Russia so they could be controlled according to a control system, which we had, by the way, set up for Russia to make sure that the nuclear material was being protected.

So the Budapest statement is worthwhile to the extent that it's a very solemn statement of four major nuclear powers that they would guarantee the sovereignty of Ukraine. If you would have Mr. Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, with us today, he would say that was that the memorandum was written under different conditions before NATO had expanded at all, which is true in '94. We haven't expanded yet and that NATO has changed the security situation by extending well, what has happened is that the Russian situation has changed, not because NATO has expanded, but because all of its neighbors want to be democratic, western oriented countries. That is the problem, which is, I think, not just the Putin problem. It's a problem for many of the people who care about this in Russia. And so I don't think that the Budapest memorandum is going to have any real importance anymore other than the fact that it shows how ready Russia was to break the commitments that were part of it.

Steven Sokol [00:35:07] So John, you're sitting in Berlin. And of course, the American Council on Germany is co-sponsoring this conversation with you. And so I'd like to ask you where Germany fits in to all of this. Obviously, Scholz, Olaf Scholz, the new chancellor, was in Washington on Monday of last week and conversations about Russia and Ukraine or dominated the agenda with Joe Biden and with others in Washington. And Scholz was in Kiev yesterday and is in Moscow today. Can you talk a little bit about how Germany fits into the puzzle?

John Kornblum [00:35:49] Yes. Well, I would like to. Germany is the fulcrum around both development, but also conflict have developed in Europe since the mid-19th century, and there's the famous saying that Germany is too large to be ignored and too small to be in charge. And that is about the way it is in the 19th century. The in those years it was the five big powers Germany, France and Austria, Hungary and Russia all believed that they were strong enough that no two others could overwhelm them. And that basically was the case until the Germans got to be so strong that they became two others all by themselves. But since World War Two, we have instead had a structure of Europe which is based on American presence.

I wrote an article about 25 years ago with Richard Holbrooke, who was talking about how the main power in Europe is the United States, and I still believe that very strongly. Without the presence of the United States, the European structures would be very delicate to be sure, but we have believed that a commitment to cooperation, a commitment to democratic order and a commitment to not to use force against other countries has been, shall we say, the replacement of the European order of states which existed in the 19th century, and it has been quite successful until this point. But now you have someone who says, I don't care about any of this. That's Putin. I mean, it's changed because you were bad to me. I am going to tell you that I don't care about any of these commitments, that I'm going to do whatever I want to do. This affects Germany more than anybody else because Germany is not only sitting right there in the middle, but it is a country which has more neighbors than any other country. In Europe, it has nine neighbors. It is a country, a country of the east, as well as a country of the West. And this is not a negative thing to say about Germany, it's just the fact, and their optics go as much to the East, maybe not as much as to the West, but to a considerable extent to the East. The problem that Germany has is that this optic to the East does not really have very much to do with Germany's basic interests. Germany's basic interests are with the West. The trade within, the trade and the harmony and the democracy in the European Union. The tremendous relationship across the Atlantic. The cultural and familial and historical ties between the Atlantic nations.

I was amazed, even I who have lived here for quite a long time, was amazed the other day when I saw that every single German newspaper that I was reading, which I read quite a few, had as one of its main stories Tom Brady's retirement. Now, that even people know who Tom Brady is already a pretty big thing, but it was a big story. They were talking about is he going to come back? Who is he going to play for? In other words, American culture dominates Europe completely, and that is sometimes something which makes the Europeans unhappy. But what it does do is mean that Germany is the fulcrum, not just of a European Union, which is a very important organization, not just have relations with Russia, which is, of course, a very important thing, but also that the fulcrum of 500 million Western oriented, democratically governed countries who will make as much a difference to the future of the United States as China will. Now, most people in Washington wouldn't agree with that. They'd say China is our big - okay, you can, they could argue that, but the 500 million people in the European Union are by far more prosperous, more educated and ultimately even more progressive than the one and a half billion who live in China. And so the new world order is, if you want to use that term, it's going to be a triangular one with China, the United States and Europe, but it really means Germany. And so that's why what happens here is really, really important for it, not just for Germany, but for us. And it's going to be very important. People were asking me when Chancellor Scholz went to Washington, I bet you the Americans are really going to give him a head rubbing. They're going to tell him. No. I said, no. Everybody's going to smile at him and hug him and say, he's our greatest ally. And that's exactly what happened because Germany is so large that

you can't ignore it. As the old saying goes, Germany is the center of all of this. And so it's going to be that if it's got a good government or a bad government, if it's got high economic growth or not high economic growth. It is the focus for Europe and which means that for the United States, when looking at this partner of 500 million people that we have, the real focus is Germany. The British have understood this, the French have not understood it.

Steven Sokol [00:41:29] So this reminds me of something that you said two weeks ago that has really stayed with me. You, you said that this crisis is a bad one but you talked about how the world is changing and that Russia is a rapidly declining power while Germany is a rapidly rising power. And you went so far as to say it's the third most important country in the world which ties in with your new world order comment just now between China and the United States and Europe, with Germany at the center of that. But I know from other conversations that we've had over the years that despite this expectation of Germany and the fact that that Germany has a huge responsibility but also a large economy, it's not moving forward in some of the ways that one might expect it to in order to sort of assume the role of assume the mantle of the third most important country in the world. Can you talk a little bit about some of your considerations about Germany's economic and political shortcomings or inability to make this make this transition?

John Kornblum [00:42:51] Yeah, that's a very important point, Steve. Thank you for raising it. First, Germany is never going to be the leading power in a way that France would like to be it or even the UK once was it or even the Italians in their secret dreams think they might be. It is, in fact, the anti-power. And one of the reasons that Germany is so frustrating is because it has - it had a short and truly disastrous flirt with power between 1870 and 1945. Before that, you know, Germany was ours. Known as the weak man of Europe - the APB used to call them the poets and the thinkers. Because, of course, Germany was recovering for 200 years from the Thirty Years War, which is no longer so much on our screens. But in Europe, I can tell you it's very much on the screens and in this part of Berlin that I live in right now was essentially destroyed in the Thirty Years War. It took them 200 years to come back to the population that they had in 1600. So there is a deep, deep, deep trauma in the German public, and so they are not going to be that kind of leader that everybody wants them to be. But what have they done so far? They have designed what was supposed to be a European currency and turned it into the D.M. They have expected and they succeeded in expecting that Europeans, who, shall we say, are not quite as thrifty and as hardworking as the Germans are, start to live according to German principles. They have defined European military security policy as being a so-called peace party policy. The idea of a common European defense is not really very realistic, not because the Europeans couldn't get together, but because the German defense would not be a military defense. It would be a development aid defense or something.

I could go on and on with the things that Germany has done over the past 25 or 30 or even more years to define what Europe is without ever seeming to have done it. And that is the key to understanding Germany is to see what they are just plowing ahead on with their determined German-ness, which we're not really looking at. And most of us woke up in 2010, for example, and found out the Germans had had structured the Euro so that only they knew what was going on, and only they could tell others what to do. It raised tremendous uproar in southern Europe, which is existing until this day.

So, Germany is really an enigma and it's going to stay in the red. Because why? Because it never had the clear, positive national development that other people had, but also because it was right there at the center of Europe. Not my own to jump ahead one step.

My own theory is that a lot of this will be taken care of when the digital age really starts going, because national boundaries and even national power is going to be defined in a different way. We already have seen what was the what was the major subject that everybody's mind around the Christmas. It wasn't Germany, it wasn't Santa Claus. It was global supply chains. For the first time in history, global supply chains became the most important subject of the evening news every morning and ships piling up outside of Long Beach Harbor. You had - you couldn't get your toilet paper anymore or whatever. Global supply chains are going to be the new basic currency, if you will, of this new digital age. It's not yet understood, but managing the flows through global supply chains are going to be a very major subject.

By the way, Patrick, Nashville is the leader in all of this because partially because of its heavy Japanese investment and the Amazon company, where my son works in the in the supply chain area has just made - Amazon made Nashville its supply chain center for the United States. So relative strength, relative roles and relative goals of everybody are going to change rather dramatically. And the Germans are going to find themselves right in the middle of it. Will they mess it up? They could, but they won't, I don't think, but they could. I mean, everybody, I've learned that we could all mess up pretty often so they could mess it up. But I think at the moment they're doing pretty well with it.

Steven Sokol [00:47:36] Well, but I guess that that sort of begs the question on two levels. One is if the future is digital and if you think that that Germany will adapt as digitalization becomes even more prominent than it already is. You know, everything I've been hearing is that Germany is pretty far behind when it comes to having the digital infrastructure that it needs, even though for years at this point people have been talking about digitalization. So you've got that problem on the one hand and on the other, you have Germany's success story through the Wirtschaftswunder, the economic wonder, and its export led growth, largely in manufacturing with the kind of global supply chains that you're talking about. And with digitalization and with a service economy, manufacturing might not play as much of a role anymore, and certainly not the kinds of products that Germany is known for producing, particularly cars. So it seems to me that Germany is in a bind on two levels both the digital side, but also what is Germany producing to try to buoy the economy?

John Kornblum [00:48:54] You're right about that, but in response, I would say take a look at the - I mean large is not even the word - the major humongous, to use American word, establishments that Facebook, Microsoft, Google, Apple have in Germany. They have - in fact, Microsoft went so far as to redo their entire global data package to make sure that it fit German, not regulations, but psychological needs. So it's in a way the Germans are just doomed to be what they're going to be. They're far behind, but - by the way, before 1933, they were one of the most innovative countries in the world. Since 1945 they've always been behind on innovation. It probably has something to do with the traumas or whatever, but when they do it, then they do it right. And so I just think that you're right and it's going to be - don't forget, in 2003, Germany was called the sick man of Europe. It wasn't evolving at all past the task of reunification. And then all of a sudden it made a couple of small changes in employment law, and all of a sudden Germany was booming all over the place. They're an enigmatic country. They're never going to take a straight line towards leadership or towards the lack of leadership that we usually think it should be. It'll be a totally different kind of line. And I could, you know, as you can imagine I have lived and worked here, both in government and in private industry for 50 years. I could give you endless stories about how things don't work. But even so, they seem in the end to work. And that's - we'll see what the what the drive, the push of the digital age is. Whether it's enough to intrude on Germany's sense of reality or not, I don't know that for a

fact. What I do know is that they have the infrastructure and the location to make them the center of what's going on.

Steven Sokol [00:51:08] Thank you for that, John. I'd like to maybe sort of tie the two these two strands together, right? The conversation we're having about Germany. But then the conversation we were having earlier about Russia and Ukraine. And when we spoke a couple of weeks ago and when you spoke about a month ago with Tom Schwartz, you did talk a little bit about Germany's reluctance to address the crisis and one of the observations that many people have made that Germany seems to be absent in addressing the crisis. Given that you're in Berlin and that you have your finger on the pulse of not just what the policymakers and what the elites are thinking about, but also you're able to follow what the public thinks about, can you talk about whether there's been sort of an evolution to the perception of Germany's role in trying to address this challenge and whether there's been a change in perception about the crisis that is posed by Russia, the Russian military buildup on the border with Ukraine?

John Kornblum [00:52:20] Yeah, very good question. Well, first, there's been a certain amount of sheepishness about Germany's lack of willingness to jump in and say, we're for you Ukraine, and we're going to help you. But I can tell you both from personal - shall we call it anecdotal evidence, but also from reading articles and polls, I'd still say a very strong majority of people in this country don't want to be involved. And a very strong majority of the people in this country feel that there is some reason which is very hard for not just Americans, but for other Europeans to understand that they need to have some kind of harmonious relationship with Russia. Not that they like Russia or even want to be part of Russia, but they just feel that Russia is a major challenge out there in the East, it's so unbelievably large, and a country which can affect European reality, which is true, by the way. We can see it right now with Ukraine that they always need to be working to maintain harmony with them. And secondly, of course, there is here, I do call it a trauma with war. This really - that has not changed in the decades I lived here, it has not changed. If anything it's gotten deeper.

And there's a rock band, which they've been around for a while, but they've just come out with a new album, which is a bestseller. And the first song which they have, which is apparently on the hit parade, is called Nie Wieder War - Never Again War, and the whole song is just almost like a Buddhist chant, just repeating that phrase, nie wieder war, nie wieder war. This is very deeply - if you look at recent polls, which I just happened to see on whether the Nordstream pipeline should be built even if Russia were to attack Ukraine, over 60 percent said they should go forward with the project. So Germany has, as we mentioned it earlier, this animatic personality, which other countries have a hard time identifying with, not because everybody disagrees with them all the time, but because most of us - we just finished the Super Bowl. We know how we feel. We pick our team and cheer for it. Germany has a hard time picking its team and cheering for it. It just sees the world as too many problems, too many layers of difficulty of sophistication, and it's very hard for me to say, that's right. We're all together. Let's go do it. They can't, just can't do that.

Steven Sokol [00:55:12] So one of our viewers, in addition to watching our conversation, has been following the news and sent me some information about a press conference that Reuters just reported on, indicating that German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said that Russia was a crucial player in maintaining security in Europe, following that the talks he had had with Putin. And he's quoted as saying for Europeans, it is clear that lasting security cannot

be achieved against Russia, but only with Russia, and our viewer is curious what that might possibly mean and what that security could look like.

John Kornblum [00:55:58] Well, the final question is the hard one. The first part is more or less what I was just saying. They have this feeling that there is this immense mountain sitting there about six or seven hundred miles from their border, and you simply cannot ignore it. And you certainly are not going to destroy it. So if you can't destroy it, what you have to do is live with it and try to cooperate with it. That's the basic, that's the basic, deeply underlying feeling in Germany. And there's lots of history involved with this, which we don't need to go into the basics, but there are historic ties which make a difference also. But the basic point here is that there is - some people might be mad at me for saying this, but it really is true - there is a certain morality involved here that we don't care what we're doing, that it's so important that we have peace with Russia that we're willing to sometimes stretch our principles a little bit further than you might wish us to do so. And they think that this is highly moral to do this because the other option is war, and unfortunately, Putin, of course, has strengthened this idea that the other option is war by literally giving the impression that he's willing to go to war. And this is a big shock in this country, a very major shock because they thought they had taken care of that with the end of the Cold War, even go farther back to the ... and all of that. They thought that had all been taken care of, and it hasn't, obviously hasn't been. But to say, to understand that the way that we would all say, I certainly would, the way that we got rid of the Russian threat 30 years ago now was through solidarity and determination and making clear to the Russians that we wouldn't stand, we wouldn't stand for any of their threats. That's not a widely held view here, and there is a certain core of appeasement involved. There's a certain core of also economic interest.

Of course, there was this week a whole large group of major German companies, every major company you could think of signed a statement saying that they really needed to maintain their economic ties with Russia, whatever Putin did in Ukraine. So in the end the Germans are criticized, and I think rightfully so, if I may say so, for a certain amount of immorality where they think that the results, which is peace, justify the means which might be undermining democracy in places which want to have it.

Steven Sokol [00:58:49] Well, John, on behalf of the ACG, I want to thank you for spending this hour with the Tennessee World Affairs Council and with the ACG. It was informative and interesting as to be expected at the outset, and I really appreciate you making the time to have this conversation with us and with our viewers. And Pat, as I said at the beginning, it's always great to partner with you, so thank you for these opportunities.

Patrick Ryan [00:59:17] Thanks, Steve. I appreciate working with you as always, back in your days running the Pittsburgh World Affairs Council and now at ACG. And what a great conversation. Thanks. We've enjoyed and been informed by this in this session by Ambassador John Kornblum coming to us from Berlin. Thank you, John, for sharing your time and insights. And again, thanks to the American Council on Germany and President Dr. Steve Sokol for your moderation of today's program, you are definitely a master at the task. I remind everybody to sign up for our newsletter at TNWAC.org to be alerted for any future conversations we have with Ambassador Kornblum and with the likelihood that this crisis is not about to end this week, this day, tomorrow or any other day in the near future, we'll continue to invite Ambassador Kornblum and Dr. Sokol to illuminate the headlines. Also, please consider supporting programs like this at the Tennessee World Affairs Council by becoming a member or making a contribution. You can join whether you're in the great state of Tennessee or anywhere else that you might be. Go to TNWAC.org/Join

to become a member. Also, you can find this recording and the others in the series with Ambassador Kornblum at TNWAC.org along with transcripts.

Again, thanks John. Thanks Steve. We appreciate your time today to help us understand better what's happening with the situation in Ukraine, Russia, Germany, the European Union and the United States in dealing with this crisis. So thank you all once again.

John Kornblum [01:01:04] Thank you very much, Patrick and Steve. Thanks very much.

Patrick Ryan [01:01:08] That's it for today. Everyone be well.

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