



TENNESSEE
WORLD
AFFAIRS
COUNCIL

War in Europe

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

**Ambassador John Kornblum
Former U.S. Ambassador to Germany and Assistant Secretary of
State for European Affairs**

**Moderator LCDR Patrick W. Ryan, USN (Ret)
President, Tennessee World Affairs Council**

Original Broadcast: February 25, 2022

Verbatim Transcript by TNWAC

Video: [YouTube.com/TNWAC/videos](https://www.youtube.com/TNWAC/videos)

Podcast: [SoundCloud.com/tnwac](https://www.soundcloud.com/tnwac)

(and wherever you get Pods, look for “Global Tennessee”)

Patrick Ryan [00:00:25] Hello and welcome to this special edition of the Tennessee World Affairs Council Global Dialog Speaker program. We are glad you joined us today for this important conversation. I'm Patrick Ryan. Before we start a very quick note about the council. We're a unique organization in Tennessee, an independent nonpartisan educational association that works to inform our community about the world. We're based in Nashville at Belmont University and are a tax-exempt nonprofit that is not funded by any government. We rely on you to produce important programs like this speaker's program and our education outreach to high school and university students. So please consider our public service worthy of your support with your contributions at [TNWAC.org/Donate](https://www.tnwac.org/Donate). And thanks to the attendees of today's program who made a donation when registering. One housekeeping note, please ask questions. That's why we're here live. We'd appreciate your participation and you can use the Q&A tab on your Zoom screen to get your questions into the queue. Today, we find the situation to be quite distressing. It's an unprovoked war underway in Europe. Ukraine is on fire and is being eaten by a hungry Putin regime that has stated his animus toward the West and aims to restore the Russian Empire. Ukrainians are paying the price. Today we will follow up on the conversations we've had with Ambassador John Kornblum on the Ukraine crisis. He has been gracious with his time on three previous occasions within the last month to talk about this unfolding catastrophe. Those programs, like this one, will be found on our channel at

YouTube.com/TNWAC. Now that war has come to Europe his insights and analyzes are more important than ever. Ambassador John C. 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. And we're honored to have him as a member of the World Affairs Council's President's Advisory Board. Welcome Ambassador Kornblum.

John Kornblum [00:03:12] Thank you very much, Patrick. Happy to be with you.

Patrick Ryan [00:03:15] Let's quickly jump in here. The second full day of the Russian invasion and attack without any provocation is ending. What is your reaction to what has been happening?

John Kornblum [00:03:26] Well, as you said, it's without any provocation, it is a unique event which we thought would never again happen, at least in modern Europe. But it has. And Ukraine is under attack from many directions by Russian forces. It seems to be holding its own better than we thought feared it would. But of course, it's facing one of the world's largest military organizations. So it's going to be a very difficult situation for Ukraine in the months to come. For us, it's important to understand why this is something that we are paying so much attention to other than the fact that it's an unprovoked military attack. It also, of course, is an attack against democracy because the real problems that Russia has with Ukraine or with the Republic of Georgia or some other countries. It's not that they are a military threat to Russia, as Putin tries to describe, but because they are a political civilizational threat. These are countries who looked around the world and said, we want to be part of the West, not the East. And this bothers Putin. I think both personally but it also bothers the system that he has sought to build within Russia, which is not based on democracy, but rather an autocracy.

Patrick Ryan [00:04:51] The current situation in Ukraine after two days is that it looks as if forces are moving on Kiev. Kiev and U.S. intelligence officials are saying to reporters that it could be 48 hours before the Russians take the capital, although this morning the Pentagon did say that the Russian forces were losing some momentum, but they have capacity to intensify their effort. The aim appears to be decapitation of the Ukrainian government. What do you expect to see if the government falls and Russia takes the capital?

John Kornblum [00:05:33] Well, that seems to be their goal. They made a big point today saying that they have no intention of permanently occupying Ukraine. I think what they hope to do is to establish a regime which is similar to the one in Belarus, which is totally dependent on them and totally follows their instructions. But to not to be directly in the country, that would be too much even for them to pull off. That seems to be the case. President Zelensky of Ukraine is staying at his post very bravely and strongly. And the question is, of course, what would be his fate if the Russians came in and captured him? We don't wish to think of the alternatives, but the Russians certainly would not want him to be politically active. And so the next 48 hours, as you said, are going to be the decisive point. I think the Ukrainian forces are truly brave and truly involved in maintaining the defense as much as they can. But in the end, it's probably not likely that they'll be able to

match the Russian forces, which are many times larger, many times more well equipped than they are. And so it's the decisive point is probably going to come within the next 48 hours.

Patrick Ryan [00:06:46] Today's reporting suggests that there's conversations going on between Zelensky and Moscow, talks of demilitarization or statements of Ukraine becoming a nonaligned nation. What's your take on the conversations that are going on or are we going to see an appeasement of Moscow?

John Kornblum [00:07:06] I haven't seen any discussion of conversations. Maybe I just haven't noticed. What I have seen is Putin making an offer to Ukraine for negotiations which were based essentially on a total Ukraine acquiescence to Russian demands. And Zelensky said no, he was not interested in that. But maybe there are other conversations going on. I think that it's going to be very difficult and Zelensky probably has in the back of his mind, the reaction which erupted is the only word you can use in Ukraine in 2014, when the then president tried to walk back an agreement which he had made with the European Union because Putin had told him to. And this ended up in a major long, many weeks long demonstration and negative reaction in Kiev. And in the end, this president had to leave office, and that was when the new era began in Ukraine. So it's not so simple. You just can't say yes, OK, we give up because the population is in no mood to give up.

Patrick Ryan [00:08:17] Right. The speech on Monday by Putin and Thursday morning was particularly ominous not just towards Ukraine but towards the West. Is it too obvious to ask if we're in a new Cold War?

John Kornblum [00:08:34] Well, we're in a new era, let's put it that way. I was - I spent most of my working life, shall we say operating the Cold War. And so I don't think that you can call whatever comes next now a Cold War. It will be, it'll be a different kind of cooperation or confrontation rather than cooperation - confrontation, in which there are probably no shots fired, as was the case in the Cold War. But it will have a different kind of structure to it than that, partially because Russia is not the Soviet Union and China is not Mao Zedong's China. They are totally different operations. And so there'll be a totally different approach. The interesting thing is that much of what we're talking about right now in the way things are working or what the so-called world order is going to be are probably already overtaken by events and will disappear anyway within the next 15 or so years because we're coming into a new age, digital integrated. That work oriented age in which things such as global supply chains and high-speed data networks and things like that will be the things which determine a country's influence and power more than military forces. And so this is where Russia is losing out. It has absolutely no role in this new world at all, nor will it have if it keeps going the way it is now. And so we have to always have in the back of our minds that while we're dealing here now, what shall we say, a 20th century style confrontation, the world is actually building around this confrontation a 21st century style network, interconnected global structure, which will make it very, very difficult for a country like Russia to maintain its standing with Putin or without Putin, with military forces, without Putin. It will be reduced to that being a raw material supplier. And it's major raw material, petroleum and gas, are ones that are being phased out in the world. So Russia's future is actually quite bleak if you look at it from the longer-term developments. And that's why to call it a Cold War is not quite the right term, but it will be an immense confrontation which is going on and competition between the authoritarian countries, namely Russia and China and the Western democracies, which are mainly the United States and Europe. And that's why this is so important to us, not because we want Ukraine

to be a democratic state, which we do. But the real story here is who is going to have the upper hand in the new order which is coming, which is the network digital order?

Patrick Ryan [00:11:36] And how should we view the response from Europe, the U.S. and NATO. Has a heavy enough price been inflicted on Moscow since the invasion started?

John Kornblum [00:11:46] I think the Western reaction has been almost amazing. This is not - Western democracies always have a problem when dealing with autocratic countries because the dictator in these countries can just tell, say, what's going to happen and then it happens for better or worse. We always have to debate it out first in our own countries and then with our allies. And I think that given that fact, the amount of unity in the and the concreteness of the plans which have been set forward has been approaching amazing.

Patrick Ryan [00:12:22] And what's the mood in Berlin? You come to us from Berlin, Germany today, and as the former Ambassador to Germany, I'm assuming you have your finger on the pulse of what's happening there.

John Kornblum [00:12:35] Well, I don't know about that, but I have been talking to lots of people. I think that there is a phase now of realization in Germany that they took for granted the peace which came after the end of the Cold War 30 years ago. That they were not enough aware of the various tensions and problems which existed, and above all, that they were not well prepared for the kind of confrontation that we're having now. German military forces, as we know, are pretty weak, underfunded, under-trained, under-equipped. But also, Germany has made itself dependent on Russia for its energy supplies. 55 percent of its gas supply comes from Russia, and it has also established structure its economy to depend a lot on trade relations with countries like Russia and China. These are structures which seem to be a little bit more uncertain than they were six months ago.

Patrick Ryan [00:13:37] And the sanctions have not yet included removing Russia from the Swift system, the banking system that allows transfers across borders. What's going on with that as far as a European hesitancy?

John Kornblum [00:13:53] That's the real, shall we say, nuclear option. As people say, it's controversial in Europe, but also in the United States. By the way, there are several eminent people who have said it wouldn't really work for the United States either, because we have so many other things that we try and fit into it. But at the moment, however, it looks as if movement would have been possible towards a closing of the Swift system to Russia, and that movement was stopped by Russia, Germany and Italy and also Cyprus, which as we know, essentially Russian banks anyway. And so there's been quite a bit of debate about it. The Germans are saying, no, there's a lot of things we have to think about it. The Italians, to some people are calling this the second chapter of Nord Stream 2 that Germany, there's a lot of hard feelings against Germany, especially from Eastern Europe, about this. So this is an example of the problems that democracies have. Nobody is forced to say what they are expected to say. Nobody is forced to do what they're expected to do. And so sometimes we have these debates and this is one of them.

Patrick Ryan [00:15:02] The Ukrainians, at least according to anecdotal information and remarks by President Zelensky, see the West as dithering while it's being taken apart - are they right? Should we have taken off the table the option to provide direct support?

John Kornblum [00:15:24] Well, you know, and that's the point I just made. The other thing I can if I were President Zelensky, I would be exactly as tough and exactly as

disappointed in the West as he is. So I'm not questioning his words. But this is what you have when you have democracies as protectors. It's very hard for us to move forward in one way. And, you know, for President Biden, I think he's really been extremely courageous on this. But you have to remember that polls, at least that I've seen over the past four weeks or so have suggested that well over 60 percent of the Americans asked about Ukraine either don't know what it is or where it is or don't want to have any engagement there. So, you know, these people who run democracies are also elected. And so they have to make sure that they maintain their political standing at home also.

Patrick Ryan [00:16:19] Mark Zeshan asks, what more can the Biden administration do?

John Kornblum [00:16:23] Well, what the Biden administration could do would be to move towards, I think my own view is to closing the swift system to the Russians. It could also increase weapons deliveries to Ukraine, assuming there's still Ukraine there to have weapons delivered to. And it could already be thinking of and I mean, I'm sure they are, I'm not saying they're not, but the next step has to be, how do you put this thing back together? The world is not going to live for the next two years with a Russian campaign against Ukraine. The Russians are going to run out of resources sooner or later. They run out of interest. The question is the system, which was set up 30 years ago to try and guarantee cooperation and security after the end of the Cold War has now collapsed completely. So we need a new system. So that's what I hope, what the administration is working hard to think about how to move towards this new system.

Patrick Ryan [00:17:24] Paul Love asked, do you expect the government to move out of the capital to continue to lead the resistance? I guess this is an unanswerable question from the outside as to what Zelensky will do as the Russians continue to encircle the capital.

John Kornblum [00:17:39] Yeah, I think it's unanswerable. I think probably even Zelensky doesn't know at this moment. I think that they have built up structures in the Lviv, which is the largest city in the western part of Ukraine, in fact the American Embassy has moved there, and so I think that's an option which he may take. I mean, I really don't know what's going to happen. An interesting thing. I will say this just as an aside, that part of Ukraine was not a member, not a part of the Soviet Union until 1945, when they went in, the Russians grabbed it as part of the border adjustments, which took place then and after they became part of the Soviet Union, there was a guerrilla movement. Active and successful in that western part of Ukraine until the late 1950s, believe it or not. So that's a part of the country, which really has no interest in being closely aligned to Russia or being part of Russia.

Patrick Ryan [00:18:37] Talking about countries related to Russia, another participant asked, should Belarus also be sanctioned?

John Kornblum [00:18:43] I think so. I think Belarus is nothing but an extension of Russia right now. And Belarus is - the President of Belarus stays in office at the whims of the Russians. So I think that Belarus should be put should be treated as part of the Russian strategy and part of the Russian resources of all of the leading people in Belarus should be sanctioned as strongly as firmly as the Russians are.

Patrick Ryan [00:19:11] We have one question about taking direct sanctions against Putin, and someone asks if he should be given war criminal status. You know, we're constrained by the fact that Russia has a seat on the U.N. Security Council, so the U.N.

sanction capability is somewhat limited in that regard. But talking about Putin, he did make statements that suggest he was willing to escalate to the point of threatening the use of nuclear weapons. What should our reaction be to that level of threats against the West? You know, he said specifically that anyone who threatens Russia or Russian people should know Russia's response will be, quote, immediate and will lead to consequences that you have never faced in your history, unquote. What's your take on that kind of statement?

John Kornblum [00:20:13] It's just talk, basically. But the real issue is, and this has always been the great, one of the great fears. Movies have been made about how rational is the leader who has his finger on the trigger and no Russian leader could ever wish to use nuclear weapons because the response would be would be massive. But you just simply can't be sure this is - that's why this is a dangerous point, and that's why it's important also for our own country to be concerned about it because these weapons do exist. Russia has more than we do right now, as far as I know, partially because we've built down really substantially after the end of the Cold War and Russia didn't. Russia has stationed new short-term weapons in the part of Russia which is surrounded by Poland and Lithuania. Kaliningrad what used to be East Prussia in Germany. There are short range weapons there which could reach Berlin, for example. So this is not a theoretical problem. Also, a good deal has been made about the fact that the Russians made it a point to shall we say capture, Chernobyl. The reactor, which has been encased in a cement cocoon for the past 25 or 30 years. And the question is, what would they want to do with that? They could also threaten with release of radiation, although that would hurt Russia more than would anybody else. So. But the fact that they have it is not, shall we say, a comforting thought.

Patrick Ryan [00:21:54] Right. A number of questions about how the U.S. should proceed. You know, there have been weapons shipments going into Ukraine up until the point of the invasion from the United States and the U.K. and some others, and how do you see this playing out if Putin is successful in Ukraine in terms of support to any resistance safe havens in nearby NATO countries, what are we likely to see at the end of this operation?

John Kornblum [00:22:26] That's a very good question, and I don't think anybody has a good answer to it. It depends a little bit on the behavior of the Ukrainian people. They are truly dedicated to defending their country. If anybody wonders whether Ukraine is really a separate country, you simply have to see the reaction of the people there in the last few weeks. And there are right now brigades of people who are, shall we say, passed their physical prime who are out carrying guns and driving trucks and doing whatever to try and keep the army going. So that means we don't know how they would react afterwards. I think probably they would not take it lying down, as we would say. I think that there is a day anything resembling a Russian occupation would be bothered with recreated Ukrainian town of reaction all the time.

Patrick Ryan [00:23:22] One aspect of this that needs to be explored a little bit is the relationship between Moscow and Beijing. As Putin went to Beijing at the opening of the Olympics a couple of weeks ago, and they released a strong statement of solidarity, however, we know that China is concerned about interference in its sovereign states, and they've stated that Ukraine is a sovereign state. Tim Douglas asks, do you think the initiative by the Russians will have any impact on the Chinese and adds what impact that it might have on their thinking about Taiwan?

John Kornblum [00:23:59] Yeah, that's a question which is being asked. We don't know, of course, but so far the signs from China are exactly the opposite that they wouldn't use this as a poor example, as an excuse to move on Taiwan, that that they are truly unhappy about the way Russia has violated many principles, what they themselves consider important because they live, you know, in a very difficult neighborhood. And they also have a population which is very hard to control. They also have many minorities who are not exactly happy to be in China. So China is interested above all instability. But you see the difference. This is a point that we might focus on a bit. The difference between China and Russia other than size and all the other things, is that China is a nation on the rise, a nation which has mastered the new technological age, which is challenging the United States for the leadership of this new technological age. And Russia is a nation in steady and probably unchangeable decline. It has not at all kept up with the new digital age. It does not have political support. Putin is - one or two polling agencies in Russia which are still more or less acceptable, more or less believable - and his poll numbers go down considerably all the time. And so the mentality and the situation, the time of life, shall we call it between Russia and China is very much different. And one of the reasons that, as I said, that this isn't the Cold War. Is that in in the Cold War, which was really just with the Soviet Union. We had a Soviet Union, which was totally cut off from the rest of the world was totally a target, its economic life, which had no trade to speak of with any Western countries. And we could so we say, isolated. We can't isolate China that way at all, because after all, many of the major American internet companies and high-tech countries make all their products in China. And so there's a whole different relationship between us and China than the one between us and Russia. And so I don't think that there is that much correspondence between the two that they can somehow form a common front. But they do agree on is their rejection of democracy, of pluralistic societies and the rights of minorities. All these things, which are so important to Western countries, both Russia and China, reject.

Patrick Ryan [00:26:42] And in other aspects of what could happen as a result of this situation, we're concerned about the Baltic states and they are part of NATO as well as Poland. We're beefing up the American presence there and our NATO allies are as well. What would you tell people about the potential for escalation beyond Ukraine? Putin's statements to the effect that he wanted to restore the Russian Empire includes the Baltic states. What should we be talking to our allies there about?

John Kornblum [00:27:18] Well, luckily we were able to, and I'm sure Putin is angry about this. He was empowered when we did this. We were able to slip the Baltic states into NATO without the Russians causing too much uproar. So the Baltic states are now in NATO. As is Romania, as is Poland. And so any move against them would be a move against. Article five of WHO's treaty says that an attack on one country is an attack on all so the United States would be bound by a treaty to get involved. And the president has already said that we will defend NATO territory. So it's a big step for Russia, and the Baltic states are a small step - to move against the Baltic states would be a major, major step for us. It would be war against the United States. And I don't think even Putin, in his poorest moments, believes that he wants to have a war against the United States.

Patrick Ryan [00:28:18] You're up to date on the energy situation. I know from previous conversations we've had here. Can you talk a little bit about the impact in Western Europe? You know, the Chancellor of Germany had said Nord Stream 2 is dead the pipeline for natural gas through the Baltic Sea to Germany. What should we be looking for in terms of consequences for Western Europe of the stop of energy supplies? And what does that mean to Russia? You talked about Moscow turning to Beijing for oil and that that

would be a problem, but a comment, if you could, about the impact of this, this invasion on the energy distribution system.

John Kornblum [00:29:07] Well, as far as I know, Russia has not stopped deliveries of either gas or oil to Western Europe, but it is true that as the, shall we say, tensions were building over the fall. Russia did not do what it usually does in the winter and did not, so, they say, top up its reservoirs in Western Europe. Russia, a gas problem over the past five or 10 years, whatever it is, has become the largest purveyor of gas and especially gas, but also oil. In Europe, it has rented massive storage capacity, mostly in Germany, which has a lot of these caverns underneath its surface, and the gas is stored in these underground caverns. And so it has been over the years. No question of the supply because a lot of it was stored in Europe and mostly in Germany. This year, they didn't do that. They didn't fill up their storage. And the deliveries have been less than expected in some places and the prices have gone up considerably. So we already have a reaction or a consequence of all of these tensions. That is that Europe's gas supply is less than it should be. Germany, in a normal year, has gotten 55 percent of its gas from Russia, which is much too much. We did during the Reagan Administration, told them that that was a fool's errand to do that. And they said, don't worry, we'll never become dependent on them. Well, they are dependent on them. But the rate the Biden Administration has already stated plans both to round up gas supplies and to set up a system to make sure that the gas gets to Europe so that Europe doesn't freeze and starve in the winter. And a major partner in this is the kingdom, I guess you would call it, of Qatar, which is one of the largest gas producers in the world. That's why they're so rich with such a small country, and they have already entered into contractual arrangements with, I think with us, I'm not quite sure who's with the contracts with, but they have given the fact that sort of an honorary title something like our preferred close gas supplier or something like that. And so this is where the Biden Administration has been really quite on top of things to help make sure that the gas supplies do not run out in Europe. Luckily, we're coming to the end of the window now. And so it's not going to be as bad as if this were in November. It would be really be difficult that we're in winter should be over quite soon. So the number and the amount of gas that's required will be less than if it were in the winter.

Patrick Ryan [00:32:00] Yeah, Qatar is certainly a player in this equation, and I recall that last month, a U.S. diplomat was talking about providing gas supplies and that Qatar was designated a major non-NATO ally. Speaking of NATO, Christopher Riser asked, Do you see NATO country military buildup in the cards? And I heard a commentator earlier today in a conversation mention that you could put the entire British Standing Army in Wembley Stadium and have 30,000 empty seats. What should we be looking at is NATO's response in terms of kinetic power as a result of this, and Michael Watson asks what are the concrete plans the West is supporting and mentions that you referred to NATO's unity in Western unity as amazing?

John Kornblum [00:32:54] That's right. But we should take that with a grain of salt, because, as you said, the entire British military, it's not the British Army, the entire military establishment can fit into Wembley Stadium. And what has happened is the following. The United States was always the major contributor to NATO going back into the 1950s. And in fact, NATO was important in the 1950s. It changed its role in the 1950s. It was still, of course, a bulwark against Russia. But NATO was also then seen as the, shall we say, the balancing wheel for Europe, which allowed Europe to move ahead with the European Union because the Europeans to this day still don't really trust each other. Above all, they don't trust Germany. And so the American military presence in Europe is as much a structure of trust for the Europeans among each other, so that which allows them to

cooperate with each other as it is a defense against any outside attack. So Americans are always going to be the major part of NATO. I think at the moment, the figure that people use is that we contribute about 80 percent of the forces and that we spend about and we contribute about 80 percent of the budget of NATO. So it is really our organization. But that doesn't mean that the other countries can make important contributions and can help us with the management of whatever the tasks are. I spent, as you mentioned in your introduction, I spent almost four years working very hard on the Dayton peace agreement and the end of the Bosnian War. And after the signing of the Bosnian, the so-called Dayton Agreement, we moved in one of the most amazing military operations I think I probably would ever see. We moved a force of 50,000 people over the Christmas holiday into Bosnia on the basis of NATO, and that force included soldiers from many other countries, including, by the way, Russia. The one time in history, maybe the last, sad to say that Russian forces were under NATO's command. And there is no mention because that couldn't have happened without the very strong support of the NATO military establishments. The United States, we didn't have the capacity, especially the transport capacity, to do something like that. So NATO's an American organization. It lives and dies on an American support. But America can't do everything, and the European contribution is always very worthwhile. And if no other reason simply the interchange, the discussion, also the arguments that we have are very important also for the United States to understand what its role should be.

Patrick Ryan [00:35:52] The contribution of Europeans to defense was criticized by the previous administration. Where do you see the contributions now? Have the European countries that were criticized by that administration stepped up? And also Christopher Riser asks What effect did the previous administration's weakening of alliance contribute to the decision to invade Ukraine?

John Kornblum [00:36:16] Well, I think that for us to answer the last question first, I think we don't know. I'll say this is somewhat speculative thing. We don't know the context between the last president and the current president of Russia, do we? We don't know what the what the assessments are. But I think it's easy to say it's accurate to say that during the last administration, the Russians probably got the very strong impression that the West was on the rocks, that Western unity was collapsing and that the United States was going to withdraw its support of NATO. They would have had a bit blind not to see that. And so that's why when I use the word amazing, that's what I mean. If you go from that low point, which was just a bit more than a year ago down to the show of unity that we've had over the past few days and weeks with the Ukraine issue. You can see, in fact, how deep the relationships are NATO's and how strong the ties are. I spent many years of my working diplomatic life working either with NATO or as part of NATO, and I can tell you it is, it is really a very, very positive organization which United States should want to keep as activities as well functioning as possible.

Patrick Ryan [00:37:38] We have a question from A.G. Norman, who says that Stoltenberg and NATO just suggested, and I haven't seen this report, so I'm taking this as it comes that NATO will provide both humanitarian and military support to Ukraine. What do you think that means or should mean? And I guess a connected question to the humanitarian support. Is there going to be hundreds of thousands, maybe millions of refugees from Ukraine? And we're already seeing lines at the border into Poland and Romania? Comment, if you could, on the impact of more refugees in Europe after the waves we've seen in recent years that in some places have caused political instability.

John Kornblum [00:38:22] Well, both Poland and Romania have already made really massive commitments to take refugees from Ukraine and Poland, I think I may be wrong, but the number of 500,000 sticks in my head and Romania has made something very similar. So they are ready for this and they are glad that the countries involved Germany, as I was very welcoming to choose from countries like this. But we have to remember that a country like Poland needs these people. In fact, Poland has been hiring Ukrainians quite steadily over the past five years to fill its own labor shortages. We're in a totally different era of history, also as far as the meaning of work and the Organization of Workers Command. We read about our home office and what Europe done to the organization of companies and things like that. But population movements are probably going to be taking place anyway over the next few years because of the place where workers is available are not going to necessarily have anything to do with national borders.

Patrick Ryan [00:39:41] Sure. Mark Zeshan makes a comment about the close familial relationships between many Russians and Ukrainians, and I know you have insight into Ukraine and culture and society there. How do you think the Russian population is going to respond to this action in Ukraine and the bloodshed in Ukraine, as well as Russian military casualties coming home?

John Kornblum [00:40:10] Well, you're right, I do have very close links to Ukraine through my wife, who is 100 percent Ukrainian, but it's very interesting the way that the way that Putin has described it, she seems designed to do exactly the opposite to drive Ukraine away from Russia. On the one hand, he says, we are brothers. You are part of the Russian culture. It's really - it's unnatural to that Ukraine is separate from Russia. But then he invades them and starts killing them. And so there's no love lost for Russia in Ukraine. There is a substantial portion of the population who still speaks Russian as their first language. But I have seen from personal experience and also from what I've read and heard that these this mixture of languages is not even an issue. People just talk whatever, whatever language they feel like speaking in their even dialects, which are mixtures of Russian and Ukrainian who people out in the countryside speak. So this is something which Putin has cooked up. And even Russian commentators are scratching their heads, wondering where he has gotten his historical precedent for the kind of relationship he argues that exists between Russia and Ukraine. And so it's going to be a very human thing. There's no question about that. But it's not going to be a human thing in the way that Putin seems to be portraying it. And he is going to give it a step further, which is truly off the wall and saying that his goal is to protect Russian citizens from the fascist governments which exist in Ukraine. Well, there's no fascist government in Ukraine. In fact, the president is Jewish origin, so right, certainly not a fascist,

Patrick Ryan [00:42:06] Or a Nazi as Putin claimed that the goal was de-Nazification.

John Kornblum [00:42:14] So this is that's why I'm saying it's very hard to understand what's going on right now because this stuff is bordering on the irrational. And we don't really want to have a Russian president who's irrational for the reasons we discussed earlier. But some of the things he's saying just don't fit into any realistic picture of what's going on.

Patrick Ryan [00:42:34] Let's talk about the implications for the United States. I'm not sure to what extent the government, the Biden administration is prepared Americans for any sort of backlash that might result from this. Economically, we're looking at energy and commodity prices going up. We're already facing inflation. There's the question of cyberattacks. If the sanctions against Russia bite particularly hard, there's always the

possibility of of cyber against U.S. institutions or infrastructure. We recall last year the attack against the Colonial Pipeline, providing gas and jet fuel to the southeast. What should Americans be concerned about, particularly in the area of cyber?

John Kornblum [00:43:18] Well, I think you really put your finger on a very important point. I think that regardless of what happens in this military situation we, as I said before, we are coming into a new era and this new era is going to include us. It's going to have to include a redefinition of the concept of warfare. Sabotage has always been a aspect of warfare. I mean, it's going back to the Romans, went out and sabotaged their opponents secretly non militarily, shall we say. But now that new tools allow sabotage from a long distance and not just against some troops or some power stations or whatever, but you could destroy the entire power structure of a country, I mean, electric power of a country. Some people have asked, well, if Russia seems to be so backwards, why is it so good at cyber warfare? Well, unfortunately, the answer is, of course, that Russia is a country very educated people. It's scientific and mathematical talents have been well known for 100 or more years. And they've all been put to work for criminal purposes. They have not been put to work to set up new Googles or Sun Microsystems or Cisco or whatever in Russia. These kind of companies don't exist in Russia. What does exist, however, are massive hacking operations, massive hacking cyber warfare operations. My impression is, without knowing any facts at all, that the United States has been very active in understanding these things and countering them to the expected extent it can be counted. And we are not unprepared for what could be happening, and I think we've been, in fact, very much on top of it. But it doesn't mean that this new kind of warfare isn't going to spread over the coming years. And you know, again, this situation in Ukraine is going to come to some sort of conclusion. Maybe a bad one, hopefully a good one. But the challenges of this new digital age, which I mentioned before, are going to be with us for the next century. And so it's going to be very important that we not simply take a deep breath if the military confrontation ends, because the confrontation will continue in a different, different level, probably as long as any of us can think into the future

Patrick Ryan [00:45:53] in a future Ukraine that could be dominated by a Russia, a pro-Russian leader in Kiev. Where would - how would the international community react to a government that has stood up in Kiev post Zelensky as a result of this military action?

John Kornblum [00:46:15] Well, we would, you know, we would treat it correctly. And we would deal with it, but we would not have any kind of positive relationship with it. We do have an example. Again, I've been around so long. I was part of this also, which took place in 1968, when the Warsaw Pact nations also afraid of democracy not up NATO's threats but of democracy in Czechoslovakia, which had there was something called Prague Spring Break, which the whole Communist Party was turned out in and came and occupied it and started an era of really cold war in Slovakia, which really didn't end until 1990. And what did the West do? We put fairly major sanctions on Russia. I was going to be doing that, but the West had relations with Czechoslovakia. But we had no positive relations with them and Czechoslovakia was a sort of a pariah. Not it's own fault, of course, but the people in power were puppets of Russia, and Slovakia was a pariah really until the Cold War ended and then all of a sudden a thousand flowers bloom. The regime in Prague disappeared within three weeks, and Slovakia had its first post-Cold War president and everything was wonderful, but that was 12 years after the invasion. In 1968.

Patrick Ryan [00:47:47] I've got a question here from my boss, chairman of the World Affairs Council, Jim Shepard, and I'll mention that Jim and Karl Dean, who's vice chair of the World Affairs Council here, have an excellent op ed in today's Tennessean. It's online

at the Tennessean. It'll be in print on Monday about the invasion and what could be described as a new Cold War. Well, Jim asks, he has a comment that the recent actions by Russia have resulted in strengthening the resolve of NATO countries, and that's being noticed by countries in the region. What do you think about the prospects of Finland and Sweden joining NATO?

John Kornblum [00:48:26] That's very interesting. I have actually worked on this issue for - I don't do it anymore because I'm not in the government, but I did work on it for 15 or 20 years. Sweden in particular. Not, I hope, exposing anyone here, functioned as a member of NATO for a long time. We coordinate closely. We had the same goals, et cetera. Finland is a very different situation because it has a 1600 km border with Russia. It fought two wars with the Soviet Union in 1940 and 41 to maintain its independence from Stalin, who simply wanted to take it over the way he wants to take over Ukraine now. They drove the Soviets back. And then we're able to maintain their independence. And after World War Two, they, of course, declared themselves to be neutral. And there was a term developed which the Fins are really, really angry when they hear it called Finlandization, which meant, which seemed to me to many people who said it was that a country will appease Russia and Finland did anything but appease Russia. But at the same time, becoming being a neutral country has become part of Finland's identity, the same as Austria, by the way, which is also a neutral country. And they have over the years said they didn't need to join. They didn't join the European Union, however, but now, after Putin kept saying that these countries had no right to join NATO. Finland and Sweden together made a statement saying, if we want to join NATO we're going to do it. And the debate over whether to join NATO has been reopened in both Sweden and Finland. My guess is that they will not join NATO because it would be also destabilizing to the efforts to solve the issues in Ukraine, but the fact is that both Sweden and Finland have been, shall we say, spiritual members of NATO for the last 60 years or more.

Patrick Ryan [00:50:50] Well, in a couple of minutes, I'll ask for your concluding remarks, but we have a couple of more questions. Let's take a look around the neighborhood turkey. We have a comment about Turkey being interested in caring for the Tatars that are in Crimea and in Ukraine, and we have a question from Thomas Deluge about Hungary. Does this action strategically strengthen or weaken Viktor Orban in Hungary? Or is it a wash for the political fortunes of neighbors like Orban?

John Kornblum [00:51:26] Well, I'll start with Hungary and then - because Turkey is very interesting. Viktor Orban is a person who has been trying to define himself away from other European countries, partially because of his own internal situation. I've had several, I've had two, not several, but I've had two long discussions with him, not privately, but with just two or three people. So I think I understand at least what he says he's doing, and he's - what he says he's doing is that Hungary has never had democracy before, that he's breaking Hungary out of its authoritarian past. To do this, he has to have a strong and decisive government. Now the fact is that he wins fair elections, one should say, with 70 or 75 percent of the vote each time. So there are some people in Hungary who don't think he's so bad either now. But as part of this independence that he had, this is what you mentioned, is in fact been sort of saddling up, as what we would say in Michigan, to Putin. And so people are wondering what his reaction to this would be, and there has been no question about his reaction. He's been a strong, positive NATO supporter. Now, Turkey is a whole different situation. It is a country which itself used to be a major empire, as Russia used to be. It controlled I think probably more of the Middle East than Russia controls of the European part ... that's major. But. And Erdogan, the president of Turkey, has been trying to build this kind of, I won't say imperial identity, but a bigger kind of identity. He's

not really succeeding. He's been hurting the economy. And if you believe what you read he's politically on the ropes at the moment. Now, as far as the Tatars are concerned, this is a point I made earlier. The Russian Federation is probably a minority of Russian speakers. I don't know that for a fact, but it probably is. And there are several of these Turkic people who are both in the republics, which came out of the Soviet Union, such as Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and these places, but who are also in their own little autonomous regions in Russia. And Turkey has been so we say, flirting with these people for a long time, and I'm not sure what Erdogan has in mind. Does he mean that as a stabilizing thing or is he trying to sort of play in Russian politics in a less than positive way? I can't tell you. I don't know that.

Patrick Ryan [00:54:12] And let's take one more question, and then I'll ask for your closing remarks, we're coming up on the top of the hour here. Vladimir Putin is going to turn 70 this year, notwithstanding that 70 is the new 60.

John Kornblum [00:54:30] Or 50.

Patrick Ryan [00:54:32] 50. OK, we'll grant that. What do you see as the resiliency within his government or a continuation of Putinism and these? These aspects of his regime beyond his physical presence.

John Kornblum [00:54:54] Well, this is, of course, something that we can only speculate. That's a very good book, which was written, which I have written several reviews written by a former correspondent of the Financial Times called Putin's network. And anybody who is interested in this subject, I can highly recommend you reading it, I read it. It's it shakes you up a little bit because it shows how the networks that the KGB and other internal intelligence agencies in Russia were used as the Soviet Union was collapsing. These people were already making their new deals, even as the Soviet Union still existed. And they have built up networks of financial connections of violence of military, whatever. They're very active in the United States, for example. And so what I'm leading up to is that unfortunately and I think you can even criticize. Maybe the Clinton administration and also the Bush administration give some of this. With all of the hopes that occurred after the Soviet Union collapsed, the traditional not Soviet, but Russian forces for corruption, for internal structures which control the government simply swung into force and they are still there. And so we can't. And unfortunately, that's what's happened that has now dug itself into the tissue of the Russian state. So we can't be sure what's going to happen once Putin is not alone. There's no question about that. And he is supported, as people know, by a group of very rich people who also control things such as the intelligence services. And so you can't be sure what will happen when Putin leaves. But Putin, I'm sure, has very much in his mind the fact that peaceful changes of leadership in Russia have occurred a couple of times in the last 30 years, but not the normal way of doing things. And so he is always looking over his shoulder, I'm sure.

Patrick Ryan [00:57:12] Well, Ambassador, thanks so much for all of your responses to these terrific questions and thanks to our participants for sharing their thoughts and their questions with us. What can you tell us in closing that we should be thinking about as this unfolds?

John Kornblum [00:57:29] Well, first, I'd like to join you in thanking the participants, this is really was a very good series of questions and thoughts about what's going on. I think that the most important thing right now to remember or to think about is that this crisis has blown up in our faces at a time when we were facing other major crises such as COVID.

And also as climate change, our country has been burdened terribly by fires and wind storms and snowstorms, and the Lord knows what over the past few years. So and I mentioned that we are also coming into a totally different political and social era with the digital networks, et cetera. So the world ahead of us could not be more challenging and more confusing. At the same time, the Western world, this is something that I was very determined to stress, the western world is on top of these developments and no other part of the world is. We're doing that well and everything, but we are also dealing with them and we have had a upheavals in our own country, but we are dealing with these upheavals. And so I think the important thing for us is not to lose hope or what sometimes somehow say, as you do see, even in the journalistic community from time to time, that China in particular, but also Russia overwhelming us, that they're going to take our world role away from us, et cetera, et cetera. That's simply not the case. And whatever the problems that we have now and with Russia and the sad, sad behavior that they've had in Ukraine, we shouldn't forget that in the 30 years since the end of the Cold War, we have been able to build a democratic community which stretches from the Russian border in the east of Europe at the Baltic states, but also the Ukrainian border all the way around the world to the border between Alaska and Russia. In other words, the world democratic community now and with small problems, it is a democratic community, encircles the globe. And that is something that we could never have imagined 30 or 35 years ago. In fact, we would have thought exactly the opposite. There are major challenges. The biggest one is, of course, China. It is determined to set forth a system which is not based on freedom of choice, freedom of expression, tolerance and Democratic government. It is - the Chinese traditions are very different in China. This, the new China is trying to do that and we have Russia, which is not on the upswing at the moment, but declining empires are often even more dangerous than rising empires. So it's not that we're not faced with challenges and of course epidemics and climate change are something which are going to be with us essentially forever. And so there's no reason to be overly optimistic, but there is absolutely no reason to be pessimistic. We're doing well at this and the fact that our European allies and we were able to meet this crisis rapidly and in a unified way should show you how important this all is both to us, but how important it is also to the democratic community, which we have been able to build around the world.

Patrick Ryan [01:01:09] To be sure, thanks, Ambassador John Kornblum for being with us today and our previous conversations, and thanks to our participants for joining us. Continue to follow our newsletter for new programs on this and other global issues and the resources we share. Just go to TNWAC.org and you can sign up for the newsletter there. Also, I'm sure if you're watching this program, you're probably keeping up with developments otherwise. But please take a look at the many good sources of information. There are podcasts, video programs, think tanks are endlessly putting out good speakers on these programs. It's important that we stay up to date on what's going on in this crisis and other developments around the world. As the ambassador mentioned, we have many things going on the pandemic, climate change and so forth, and they're worthy of your attention, whether it's through the Tennessee World Affairs Council or other media. So we also ask that once again that you please support the work of the Tennessee World Affairs Council by contributing at TNWAC.org/Donate. Lastly, I mentioned that Ambassador Kornblum has graciously agreed to join us again next week on Wednesday, March 2nd, 10 a.m. Central Time, and we'll get an update on what's going on in the unfolding crisis in Ukraine as a result of the Russian invasion. Again, Ambassador Kornblum, thank you for being with us today.

John Kornblum [01:02:35] I thank you very much and greetings to everyone in Nashville, which is by far my favorite city of the United States.

Patrick Ryan [01:02:42] Well, we look forward to your return. I'm sure you're enjoying Berlin, but we'd like to see you here in Nashville as well. And thanks for your support of the World Affairs Council. Thanks again to all our participants and those who contributed to the World Affairs Council today. Everyone have a great day. Thank you. Goodbye.

John Kornblum [01:03:02] Thank you.

<end>

Copyright 2022, Tennessee World Affairs Council
Reprint authorized for non-commercial use with attribution to TNWAC.org