



Germany's Response to the Ukraine Crisis

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

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

**Dr. Liana Fix
Resident Fellow at the German Marshall Fund Washington office**

**Dr. Steven E. Sokol
President, American Council on Germany**

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

Original Broadcast: February 1, 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] Welcome to a special edition of our Global Dialog Speakers program. Thank you for joining us. I'm Tennessee World Affairs Council President Patrick Ryan. Today we'll follow up on a conversation with Ambassador John Kornblum on the Ukraine crisis. You can find the January 17th video and transcript on our website at TNWAC.org. Just for those who were not familiar with World Affairs Councils, the Tennessee World Affairs Council is a nonprofit education association based in Nashville that works to bring programs like this to our community. Our speakers program is our community outreach effort. We also work closely with high schools and colleges to help inform and inspire young people about what's going on in the world. So, thanks to those who registered and contributed through the sign in page. Anyone else is welcome to make a gift to the World Affairs Council at [TNWAC.org/Donate](https://www.tnwac.org/Donate). Now onto our important topic today. We've been blessed with having a terrific panel today led by Ambassador John Kornblum. Ambassador Kornblum has a long record of service in the United States and Europe, both as a diplomat and 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. We're also joined by Dr. Liana because. She is a resident fellow at the German Marshall Fund Washington office while on sabbatical from the International Affairs Department of the Korber Foundation in Berlin. She's a political scientist and historian, and her work focuses on Russia and Eastern Europe, European security and arms control and German foreign policy. Our moderator today is Dr. Steven Sokol, who is the President of the American Council on Germany. Previously he served as President and CEO, the World Affairs Council of Pittsburgh, and prior that he was the Vice President and Director of Programs at the American Council on Germany. Earlier in his career, Steve served as the Deputy Director of the Aspen Institute Berlin, 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. Now onto our important program, I remind you to please start your questions early and put them in the Q&A tab on your Zoom screen. Now, we thank our guests for joining us today and we welcome Ambassador Kornblum, joining us from Berlin, Dr. Sokol joining us from New York City, and Dr. Fix joining us from Washington DC. Dr. Sokol.

Steven Sokol [00:03:37] Well, Pat, thank you so much. The ACG is delighted to partner again with the Tennessee World Affairs Council. It is always a pleasure to work with you and, as you know, because of my relationship with the World Affairs Councils, having run the council in Pittsburgh, I really appreciate the work that you are doing in Nashville and that the network of World Affairs Councils is doing to to have an educated and informed population in the U.S. about foreign policy and why foreign policy matters. So, Patrick, it is great to be to be back in Nashville with you, and I could not be happier to be leading today's conversation. I'm also happy to welcome John Kornblum in Berlin and Liana Fix in Washington, D.C. I think it's terrific to have an American in Germany and a German in the United States to talk about the subject at hand. And I really look forward to today's important conversation. Each day, the path to a diplomatic solution with Russia over Ukraine seems to be narrowing, and things came to a head yesterday in a pretty public confrontation between Russia and the United States at the U.N. Security Council. Of course, today Secretary of State Tony Blinken will speak with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. And next week, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz will visit it, will visit Washington, D.C., and speak with Joe Biden, and Russia will be at the top of the agenda. One of the key questions in many people's minds and the main focus of today's conversation is how reliable a partner Germany is in addressing the tensions with Russia over Ukraine. John is, as Pat Ryan said, many members and friends of ACG and the Tennessee World Affairs Council had the opportunity to hear from you last month when you provided some very important historic context for the current crisis and really tried to to flesh out the evolving situation. But I'd like to start by getting your take on where we are now and on the German response.

John Kornblum [00:05:56] Thanks, Steve. My great pleasure to be here again and very happy to be with Liana and with you in discussing what has turned out unexpectedly for some people, I guess, to be a major issue that I'm sure the Biden administration didn't have it way up at the top of its agenda when they took office a year or so ago. Why is this the case? The case is not that NATO threatens Russia. If I may make what little advertisement for NATO here. If you look at the data website, you will find a section which calls five myths debunked, which is an interesting word to use in an international

organization. But it's, in other words, refuting Russian arguments. And NATO is not surrounding Russia. Russia is such a big country. NATO even is just a little pinprick on the western part of the country and NATO has not been trying to undermine Russian security for many years. But I think the most important thing that we're talking about Germany is to remind our American watchers and listeners that Russia is a major factor in the consciousness and in the sense of stability of Europeans, not just Germans, but of Europeans. Russia is relatively close, about seven or eight hundred miles away from the German border at least. It is not a major power anymore in the sense that it was during the Cold War, but it is still a very important country. And since it maintains very strong military forces, and in particular it has its nuclear deterrence still in force, which is over 2,000 warheads, as far as I know, it is a force to reckon with and it is even more so a psychological force to reckon with Europeans. And this is not just Germany, but when we do talk about Germany, we have to understand the fact that there is a special corner of the German psychology for Russia. There is no doubt about that. And it is not a corner which is shared with almost anyone else in Europe. It is so deeply entwined with the history between Russia and Germany, with the history of the 20th century, with the history of World War Two, and with the shall we call it the socialization that not only Germans but Europeans have enjoyed, I would say, undertaken in the years since 1990, when the Cold War was over. I have publicly myself spoken out against the term Europe is a peace project or the EU as a peace project because I think it's a it's a deadening factor. It's a backward-looking identity of Europe at a time when Europe needs to be looking forward. But the fact is that World War Two was a, I would say, a trauma inducing event for Europe, a trauma which is still there, and a trauma which caused as Europeans to look at and to deal with Russia in a different way than Americans do. That's simply the fact. Russia, if you take away the Cold War, which was a war in many sense, the United States and Russia have actually never been enemies. We were allies in World War Two. We fought for Russian interests in World War One. And some people don't know this, but Russia actually helped us out in the Civil War and in the Revolutionary War. Not that major, but still did. So Russia has never been our enemy. I can tell you, I worked for 40 or more years with Russians, mostly in Berlin, and we never saw each other as enemies. We saw each other finding a common task of maintaining stability in a postwar Europe, which was not stable, and we in fact succeeded. But for Europeans, it's a different story. They see Russia as a threat. They also are not necessarily attuned to Russia's goals. And so unfortunately, as part of this definition of Europe as a peace process, the approach to Russia has been one of dialog. And shall we say, peace. And as Liana knows, the SPD calls its security policy, the SPD's peace policy. And you could look back to philosophers going back to the 18th century who say if somebody puts peace as his first goal is going to lose out because peace is in the end, something what you cannot maintain unless you're also willing to risk war. And so this leads up to your question is Germany a reliable ally? Well, Germany is very reliable. It's had the same approach to things for 60 years. And those of us who were there can go over the 60 years and show you how Germany's approach to, shall we say, conflict in Europe our conflict with Russia has never been much different than it is now. There was a major change with the Ostpolitik now 50 years ago, but even before that, the Germans were less interested in confrontation with the Russians, in other words. So this is not a question of Germany somehow becoming a weak or a bad ally. It's more a question, perhaps, of the Western allies and not quite understanding the psychology that Germany has and the way it will approach such issues. The way it will approach such issues is to stay away from conflict, to seek consultations and seek consensus whenever possible, and try very hard to influence the alliance to deal with Russia as a political diplomatic issue rather than a military issue. And I think we don't need to go into detail. We can see that happening right now.

Steven Sokol [00:12:03] Well, John, let me let me push you on at least one thing before we bring Liana into the conversation, and that is, of course, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine is not something new. It's not something that's just evolved over the past few weeks with the amassing of of tens of thousands of troops along the border with Ukraine. It's something that has gone on since 2014. And yet I find myself sort of wondering why Putin seems to be creating this artificial crisis right now. Is that something that you can share your thoughts on?

John Kornblum [00:12:46] Well, I could pull out 200 newspaper articles that I've seen recently, and you get different analysis of it. I would say the following. The Russia-Ukraine conflict is not eight years old or 20 years old, it's 300 years old. And Ukrainians have been fighting for their independence from Russia again and again since really at least the early 18th century, maybe before that. If you quote the Ukrainian president, if Russia says that the Ukraine were part of the original Rus, which was a thousand years ago, well, then the Ukrainian flag should be flying over Moscow. And so, the Ukrainians, and I can tell you this, I should probably say this - Patrick knows this - for full closure, my wife is the daughter of Ukrainian war refugees. She speaks Russian Ukrainian. She has spent the last years, much of the time for the OSCE in Ukraine. So, I I have a feeling for what's going on there as well. It is not a difficult question to see that there has been conflict there and that Russia has sought to use Ukraine either as a support of things such as the Soviet Union or as a point of conflict in these years now after 1990. And I'll make one final point. We shouldn't forget to be totally open about it that in, I've not forgotten a month, in 1991, I think it was President George H.W. Bush made what has been, later was called his "Chicken Kiev" speech in trying to convince the Ukrainians not to seek independence from Russia. We shouldn't deny that fact. But the fact is the reason that that speech fell very fast with a thud was that a large, large majority of Ukrainians wanted independence and nobody was listening to them. And even the Ukrainians in the eastern provinces, which are now occupied by Russia, over 50 percent wanted independence. In the western provinces, it was like 99 percent. But in the eastern provinces, even there it was, it was over 50 percent. And we shouldn't forget that if you take a map of Ukraine and impose it on Western Europe, it goes all the way from the Belarus border to the Atlantic. It's Europe's largest country, except for Russia. So, it is a major factor for Russia, and it is going to be a major factor in European structures in the coming years. But right now, that is a long way of answering your question why is Putin now turning this into a conflict? There are many reasons which we could go into, but I think probably his major one is that he's worried that his entire near abroad, as he sometimes calls it, is turning democratic. The entire near abroad wants to become a member of the West and a member of NATO and another member of the Russian CIS, or whatever it's called now. And also, that he sees that his situation at home is not the best and he has tried to, I think, use these as - the pressure that these things offer to get into a different kind of dialog with the West, a dialog which recognizes whatever Russia considers its most important concerns to be right now.

Steven Sokol [00:16:20] So, I mean, obviously, he has gotten the West's attention.

John Kornblum [00:16:26] He did do that.

Steven Sokol [00:16:27] And certainly, you know, there have been opportunities for dialog and the diplomatic approach is the one that that is is front and center. But I now look to bring Liana into the conversation because, of course, crisis over Ukraine is the first big foreign policy crisis for the new German government in Berlin, barely 50 days into into office, and it seems as if the German government has not really been able to address this crisis with a unified voice. John just outlined in in in broad brushstrokes that that Germany

is a reliable partner and yet certainly what a lot of us have been reading in the press has been questionable in terms of what Germany has been able to do to address this crisis. And you, Liana, in some recent articles and some interviews, have outlined why we should not underestimate Germany at this time. Can you tell us why we can expect more from Germany?

Liana Fix [00:17:44] Yes, thank you so much, Steven. I will try to do the difficult job of defending while at the same time criticizing Germany, and I think that perhaps three points that I would like to make to explain Germany's stance and also to explain why it is too early to write Berlin off and basically to conclude that Germany has abandoned the Transatlantic Alliance. I think John has very nicely laid out the special historical connection between Germany and Russia that has been there in the past and which is true. Germans remain thankful for German unification. They have a very special bond towards Gorbachev and this part of Germany's history. But at the same time since 2014, we have seen a process of disillusionment, not only within the Berlin lead with the Berlin foreign policy lead. It was 2014. I mean, the first crisis the annexation of Crimea and the destabilization of eastern Ukraine. This was a shock to Berlin policymakers, and this is not exaggerated. It was a shock because Berlin's approach was always, well, if we work together with Russia and if we get closer to Russia, we will prevent Russia to act outside the rules of the game. So, 2014 was a big shock. It was a realization that Russia is willing to use military means. So, there was a good chance that Berlin would not want to undermine the transatlantic alliance and also would not want to underestimate Russia's ability to act militarily twice. The wakeup call that they had in 2014 was quite strong. So since 2014, this process of disillusionment has continued, and it went through all parties. Apart from the French parties in Germany, it also went through the Social Democratic Party, which in 2014 was led by now the federal president of Germany. What we see now, and you alluded to this Steven, is that we have a new coalition government in Berlin, which is just in power and which is for the first time a three-party coalition government in Berlin. So. this is a historically new constellation, which makes it even more difficult for Berlin at the moment to find a unified voice. We have the Greens in the coalition agreement, which have been very outspoken on Russia. They have a very strong human rights focus. We have the Social Democratic Party that has always been a supporter of Nord Stream 2. So. for the Social Democratic Party at the moment, as the chancellor does to say every option is on the table, which means translated Nord Stream 2 is also on the table. This has already been quite a step. And then we also have the Liberals in the Coalition, so we have intra party fighting about the wide brush approach. We have in fighting between the coalition parties. I'm saying this to sort of explain that some of the confusing signals from Berlin also relate to Berlin domestic developments. But then there's also another responsibility which is special to Germany and which also makes the case for Germany stepping up, which is sort of securing stability in its neighborhood. Germany has been in the comfortable position that UN NATO enlargement, which Germany always supported, created a wing of friends and stability around Germany. So Germany is surrounded by EU and NATO countries, and it doesn't have to fear to sort of - all of the security fears that Germany had throughout the Cold War have been in the past resolved to this very comfortable position in the middle of Europe. And this is again why Germany has not only a special relationship or had a special relationship and responsibility towards Russia, but also has a special relationship and responsibility towards the East. And if we look at the last crisis in 2014, Angela Merkel stepped up very much back then, but again she was in power for a longer period of time than Olaf Scholz now is. So, this is to say there are reasons that explain why Germany is not stepping up in the same way as it has done in 2014. It is not about Germany abandoning the transatlantic alliance - there are domestic reasons to it - but at the same time, we just got the news today that Britain, Poland and the U.K. think about a

security alliance. We have Macron in power who is doing a lot of calls with the Russian president. So at the same time as Germany is rather quiet, we see a fracturing of the debates going on in Europe beyond sort of the European Union member states. And that is something which is worrisome that Germany in the past was very good at keeping everyone together. And the third and my very last point before I finish here is the question of Germany's historical lessons that Germany has drawn from its past was something that was also debated quite intensely in the last two weeks when it came to the question of weapon deliveries. The United States delivers defensive weapons, the U.K. Does. Estonia was also planning to do so. And within Germany, delivering weapons to Ukraine, defensive weapons is very much perceived by the German public as contributing to escalation rather than a moral duty to do so. But the problem here is that if you use Germany's historical lessons as the foreign minister has done due to Germany's historical lessons, we cannot agree weapon deliveries. It becomes, to a certain extent, arbitrary how you use your history to explain your policy decisions. And that has been a point of criticism, which I think is fair. Germany has to be careful with the moral arguments it makes out of its history because they can also, that could also be an argument to support Ukraine due to Germany's history. Let me make the point here, and then we continue.

Steven Sokol [00:23:56] Sorry, I muted myself because there were honking New York street horns in the background, and I forgot for a moment. Liana, thank you. Let me let me ask a follow up question which comes from one of our viewers, which is do you think that the German government would have responded differently to this crisis if Angela Merkel were still chancellor?

Liana Fix [00:24:22] I think she had a position in 2014 as she was already in power for a couple of years that allowed her more leeway. We see at the moment the Chancellor Scholz is very cautious, not only when it comes to Russia policy or foreign policy, but to many issues also sort of on the domestic agenda. So, it seems that he's still growing into this role. And if we look at the at the personal level, Merkel had a special connection to the East. She wasn't East German, she spoke Russian. That's also why her special ability to talk to the Russian president was crucial. This is something that the new German chancellor doesn't have, this sort of background in the East, so it explains perhaps little bit why it takes more time for the German government and the Chancellor, hopefully more time in terms of they will come along in the longer term, but why take them more time to step up in their efforts.

Steven Sokol [00:25:30] Thank you. I'd now like to bring in a couple of viewer questions to both of you that sort of have more to do with geography and and geopolitics, if you will. Tom Schwartz, who moderated the last conversation in mid-January with you, John, writes, to what extent do you think Putin aims to create an alternative Ukraine and an east Ukraine, so to speak? Similar to the Division of Germany during the Cold War. Would such a division of Ukraine prove to be viable? And would the West, particularly Germany, remain united in such a scenario?

John Kornblum [00:26:13] Yes, well, Tom is talking, of course, about a, call it a slip that President Biden made a week or so ago, in which he said exactly it would be hard to maintain Western solidarity with such a solution. Hard to say, of course, but that kind of solution is one that might seem attractive to him, because it's probably one which wouldn't cause the entire reaction of the West. Again, nobody knows what he's going to do, but I think he would be wrong if he believes that if he just were to sort of snap off a couple of provinces or there's another theory that he will take the Black Sea coast [....] I think he will underestimate the success he's had in building a Ukrainian national identity. The

determination of Ukrainians not to become a satellite, if you will, of Russia, and also the fact that he has other countries to deal with, these so-called near abroad. His goal? I agree with those who say that his goal is certainly not to rebuild the Soviet Union. But I think what he wants is a sphere of influence. He wants countries who feel beholden to Russia, and he wants Ukraine in particular to be in that category. And so I think he's going to have to do something. In a way, if you look at it, he's painted himself into a corner right now. He's not getting the kind of reaction that he hoped for maybe in Ukraine. At the same time, he's put himself in this position that if he doesn't do something militarily, he'll look rather weak and rather like he's been pushed away from the leadership. So I think that he must be worried about that, he must be thinking about what he can do. In other words, it's not up to us now to sit back and say, well, he's not going to really do anything. We just don't know what's going to happen. But I don't think he has any good options because this case, and I mentioned my own ties to Ukraine, he has in fact created a very strong Ukrainian national identity, which some people would say wasn't there eight years ago when he grabbed Crimea. So he's in the way, he's put himself in the box, and I'm not sure how it's going to get out of it. I'm worried he will choose a violent solution, which will be difficult for all of us to deal with.

Steven Sokol [00:28:38] So maybe as a follow up to that, to Liana, we have a question from Pittsburgh which relates to this, which is that Russia has well-established territorial ambitions in Ukraine. NATO is a collective security agreement that never had such territorial ambitions. How does Putin justify fear of NATO altogether? And why would Russia fear extending NATO into Ukraine unless Putin is trying to reestablish some sort of a Soviet republic in Ukraine?

Liana Fix [00:29:14] Thank you, Steven, and I think this relates to the question that we had before, the question about why now? So first about the eastern part of Ukraine is that what the Russian president wants. There are different scenarios what he could achieve, and Michael Kimmage and I have tried to lay this out in a GMF paper. But the question with a scenario that would be a small incursion as the president says in eastern Ukraine, the so-called people's republic that are there right now extending this influence a little bit. The question really is why doing that? Because the Kremlin already now has an influence over Ukraine's foreign and security policy because they already control the people's republics there. So, if it is just about having a say about Ukraine's foreign policy orientation, that is already the case, and Ukraine will never become a NATO member with the conflict, with the conflict in the East. And what we have seen in in the last weeks and months has been that Moscow has become frustrated with the sort of initial hopes and President Zelensky would make more concessions towards Russia and would actually grant far reaching autonomy to the so-called people's republics. So, the question is, is the design now just to have a stake into Ukraine's future or is the design now we need to control Ukraine's future in terms of having a government in Kiev, which is Russia friendly? And if the aim is to establish a government in Kiev, which is Russia friendly, then this would include quite wide-ranging military scenarios to achieve this, including installing a puppet regime in Kiev, which would require an extensive invasion. So, at the moment, it seems that Russia's designs are basically preventing any way that Ukraine does not only get close to NATO, and I think we've been almost too focused on the NATO part of this, because this also the EU part. And if we look back at 2014, the conflict about the annexation of Crimea broke out because Ukraine wanted to sign an agreement with EU. It was not about NATO. So, it's not only about NATO enlargement, NATO expansion, the question of promises that have been made in the past. It really is about Russia and the president - the Russian president has said this himself in his July 24 article in July last year that he wrote Ukraine sovereignty can only be secured in partnership with Russia. So it

really is about a broader ambition for Ukraine being a part of a Russian sphere, not necessarily Soviet, because that's obviously not the ideology that we have anymore. But to be part of the power for Russian sphere there. And the question really is what are the costs that, from Moscow's perspective, are deemed acceptable to achieve this goal? And also, we have to ask ourselves whether the cost benefit analysis that is done in Moscow is perhaps not completely different to the cost-benefit analysis that we have because there's much less willingness, obviously, to use military power in the West. And we mentioned sort of the question of war and peace before in our discussion, to be honest. Also, if we look at Germany, not only Germany, but everyone, including the United States and the U.K. said that they will not go to war over Ukraine. So there will be no troops, no Western troops whatsoever on Ukrainian territory to defend Ukraine. That is a red line that has been drawn very clearly by all members. So the the stakes that the West puts into Ukraine are not as high as the stakes that Russia puts into Ukraine because with one hundred thousand troops on the border, Russia is obviously willing to put troops to achieve this political goal.

Steven Sokol [00:33:31] So, Liana, I'm happy that you brought up the role of the EU in all of this because on Friday we hosted a discussion with Bundestag member Metin Hakverdi from the SPD, who had just returned from a trip to Kiev and Warsaw, and in our conversation, he was saying that he thinks that the EU has a much more important role to play than the U.N. in trying to address this crisis right now. And the question that I asked him and that I'd like to ask both of you right now is will the EU rise to the challenge? Will the EU take this on?

Liana Fix [00:34:13] I think it's this one area where the EU really can make a difference, and that's obviously the deterrent scenario, the sanctions scenario because sanctions towards Russia, and we've seen this in 2014, would be a burden that the European Union has to carry. Not only the United States has also announced quite wide-ranging sanctions that they plan to put into effect, but the European Union would have to take a significant part of this and again agree among all member states on the level of sanctions policy that would be implemented. That, I think everyone is clear on that role that the EU should play. The other question really is what role can the EU play in the security pact, in crisis management, and resolving the crisis right now? And that we see the same pattern that we've seen in 2014 that it's basically EU member states that act. It's Germany, it is France - within the Normandy format, but not EU institutions that have been involved or EU representatives, so there's no institutional role of the EU. And while having sort of the EU behind their back strengthens Germany and France's position, it does not strengthen the EU institutionally sort of vice versa. And that has to be part of the criticism that has been raised by the High Representative Borrell who wanted to have sort of a seat at the table. But also, Borrell had a difficult time when he was in Moscow the last time, so he was not able to portray the EU in the strong way that he actually wanted to. He had a very difficult conversation with Lavrov. So, this is really an area where member states are at crossroads and where the EU as an institution, also in this couple of meetings that we had in the last weeks, has not been present, perhaps as strongly as it wished to be.

Steven Sokol [00:36:13] John, what are what are your thoughts on whether the EU can address this challenge?

John Kornblum [00:36:20] Well, I have spent many years working on European security with the EU and in NATO. And I'm sorry to say I've come to the conclusion that the European Union is dysfunctional on these issues. It just doesn't work. And the EU made a very major mistake in the early 1990s in not joining with us to build NATO as the strong joint security structure, but they did. They were - had stars in their eyes in those years.

They thought they were going to achieve everything. And it's turned out that the EU has no global security or even economic personality. It's not going to have one. Liana is right that individual states have to come up and take up the slack, except the individual states never agree with each other. And there certainly is no agreement between Germany and France on any of this right now. But let's not only add to Europe, it's also an American problem. I am a big critic. I have been and I will continue to be of the foreign policy of the Obama administration. When the Russians moved in and took Crimea, the Germans in particular, wanted the United States to be part of the Normandy format, and President Obama wasn't interested. And I can remember - I won't quote anybody - but I can remember high level people telling me in those days, doesn't he understand this is too much for us? We need the United States here to give this some balance. But increasingly already beginning with the second Bush administration, the United States has been neglecting its role as the balancing - as the as a European power. And Biden's seem to be articulating this when he took office. But he hasn't really followed up with any real steps. So, I don't think the EU functions the way it should, the way some people believe it should. But that's, again, not the EU's fault. That's the way - it was not ever, in fact, designed to be anything more than an organization which helped return peace to Europe after World War Two, and really it's the American role, and we have not done well in that role in recent years, I'm sorry to say. And that's probably one of the reasons why Putin feels so energetic at the moment is because he has seen that the United States won't counter him if he moves.

Steven Sokol [00:38:43] I think all of us hope that the diplomatic measures that are being undertaken at the moment will be successful, but particularly from what you just said, you know, there's really a lack of leverage that we have to ensure the success of diplomacy at the moment. And Angela Stent poses a question in the Q&A. She writes, if there were to be an invasion, which measures would Germany and the United States agree on? Which kind of sanctions? How would they coordinate the proportionality of the response depending on the nature of the incursion? I think this is a critical question and would love to hear each of your takes on where the U.S. and Germany could find alignment, since we haven't been able to find the alignment on the leverage in the run up to this crisis.

John Kornblum [00:39:38] Yeah, well, maybe I'll say something first. That's a very important question. President Biden says regularly that he has this package of Wham-O sanctions, which will make the Russians pay attention. But he has never said what they are. At least I haven't seen him say what they are. Maybe they have been leaked somewhere that I didn't read, but I haven't seen them. Germany, on the other hand, and I think this is - it's not a criticism, it's just a fact. The German economy since 1990 has been has not been very innovative. It has in fact built itself on its traditional iron and steel industries. These are industries which are rapidly losing their role in the world and rapidly losing their profitability for Germany. And so Germany, one of the reasons that Germany is so desirous of a more, shall we say, dialog based approach with China is because Germany has so many companies who sell lots of products in China. So, I think that Germany will be less willing to undertake major, major sanctions that the issue which has come up has been the so-called SWIFT system, which is a very complex international payment system. The new CDU chief came out even before he was elected chairman of the party to say that he was against, and he was, of course, speaking for the German industry of this. He was against taking any action against SWIFT. So, I think it's going to be difficult. But the fact is, as Liana mentioned, that the EU has been able to come together and come up with quite serious packages of sanctions in the past. But the fact is, of course, that none of them really have hit as deeply into the Putin apparatus as some people would wish. And I think that if he makes even the smallest military action into the - in the places, by the way, where Russian troops already exist, Russia has been

conducting a war against Ukraine for eight years - even if he makes an even bigger movement there is going to be debate in the West because the Americans probably are going to be focusing on even deeper sanctions. And not everyone in Europe is going to be in favor of them.

Liana Fix [00:41:56] I mean, just to add perhaps one point, which is crucial in the U.S.-German sanctions debate Nord Stream 2, and now everyone has sort of to some extent been following this, this debate. This was one part of the big trans-Atlantic aspect of the rift that we have seen between Washington and Berlin, that we had all these voices coming out of Berlin saying Nord Stream 2 is just an economic project and should be not on the table. So there has been sort of relief when the chancellor and also the foreign minister confirmed the Nord Stream 2 will be on the table. But what is missing and I think what makes the U.S.-German discussion so complicated here is that just the statement that everything is on the table leaves a lot of wiggle room for Germany in case of an invasion. It raises the question that that John already said, that the president, the U.S. president, also alluded to what if it this only sort of a minor incursion, if it is the acceptance of an independence declaration by the so-called People's Republic and a movement of Russian troops, official and formal movement of Russian troops - that would probably in the German public not create a big impression, and there we would have the Nord Stream discussion coming up again. Does this justify canceling Nord Stream 2, and not doing to such - as I said, I think Germany has come a long way to say that it is on the table, but there are strong economic interests in Nord Stream 2. And it is also since the Trump years. Nord Stream 2 has also been framed as a question of Germany's sovereignty. So, it has not only become Russia and Ukraine issue, but a transatlantic and U.S. issue, where the feeling is that the United States is pressuring Germany and dictating Germany its energy policy. And that is something which makes the conversation particularly complicated. And I think what is - what can help in this conversation is what is happening right now. The United States seeking support for European energy supplies with Qatar, for instance, because it demonstrates to the discussion in the German public that this is not all about the United States pursuing the economic interests, but that there was a real security concern. And it would certainly be helpful if there were a little bit more details on what exactly Berlin would be thinking about when they say Nord Stream 2 is on the table. This is not something that has to be made public because perhaps it is also useful to have a sort of - a vague position towards Russia. But it would be helpful to allies, especially in Washington, to make clearer when and how would we move on Nord Stream 2 in case of an incursion? And it would also help the case in Congress because the Republicans, as far as I've been following this, have put quite a lot of pressure on sanctioning Nord Stream 2 immediately, not linked to an escalation in the east of Ukraine. So, I think this is apart from the discussion on SWIFT and how to pay for Russian energy deliveries. The Nord Stream 2 discussion is something with the visit of Olaf Scholz next week would be a good opportunity to reduce the wiggle room and give a little bit more concrete information to the U.S. side on Germany, France.

Steven Sokol [00:45:40] Certainly, the reliance of Germany and other European countries on gas from Russia has made dealing with the situation in Ukraine that much more complicated and that much more difficult to parse. And I think you're right, many people are looking at next week's visit to Washington to see if there is a little bit more clarity about Germany's position. But one of our viewers is is curious about whether the situation can change any time soon, given that Europe already faces difficulties in securing enough energy at a time when it's trying to make a transition to green energy. I mean, this is sort of Germany's energy conundrum at its core, having shut down nuclear power plants last year, shutting down more nuclear power plants this year, relying on brown coal as kind of

a bridging fuel as it tries to make the transition to green energy. In conversations I've had with people over the last week or so, there's been a vehement no to Germany reconsidering nuclear power at this time. So, I guess my question to both of you is how do you see the the energy question unfolding and how much of an impact will that have on the current crisis with Russia?

John Kornblum [00:47:12] Well, it's going to be unfolding, and probably - you mentioned the criteria, the issues in a fairly dramatic way, that is that there could be either major price increases or have been already in Europe or shortages, and that the arrangement that the United States has concluded with Qatar, which included, by the way, I don't know if you noticed it was in the press today designating Qatar as a special American ally. Ally, I've never heard that title before, but there it is. It shows how important their gas supply is for the rest of the world. Japan, for example, essentially lives off of Qatari gas. And so this is going to be a major issue. And probably this is where Putin probably thinks he has some trump cards. But the fact is, of course, that there are alternatives even as difficult as they may be. And if he moves as we fear he might, it's going to be very difficult for anybody to do anything about Nord Stream 2, for example, to build it, I mean, to open it. And it's going to be very difficult for Putin to negotiate any better deal. This, of course, puts pressure also on the pipelines which go through Ukraine, which are at the moment the still transit route for a lot of Russian gas. So the energy thing, the questioner is very right. The energy thing is really almost at the core of everything looking a few months earlier - a few months down the road, I mean, and it could be that Putin thought that he had a beautiful Trump card with the energy situation, which you just found out is not quite as simple as he thought it would be.

Liana Fix [00:48:58] I think it's fair to say that Germany really has missed doing its homework when it comes to diversification of energy sources, so there's no LNG terminal in Germany, and there was always this long held belief that Russia will always be a reliable supplier of energy. It has been the narrative that even in Cold War times, the Soviet Union in the worst of crises has continued to deliver energy to Europe. So there's always this narrative that Moscow would not use energy as a political tool. And we've seen in the last months with the limited storages in Europe that there have been attempts to manipulate the prices through withdrawing, further withholding further gas supplies to Europe. So I think this is a change in thinking which has just started in Germany, seeing Russia not as a 100 percent reliable supplier of gas. And the question really is if the crisis happens, whether Moscow would move to stop all the gas supplies to Europe, which would be quite a dramatic move, we have to say, and also a dramatic move from Moscow itself because Moscow does rely - I mean, the long year contract and Moscow does rely on the income it receives from its gas supplies. This is the reason why Russia keeps keeps afloat and why Russia's economy keeps going. So, shutting down all the gas supplies would be something which would obviously damage Russia itself. Whereas sort of the shutting down some of the supplies, there would be alternatives that could be mobilized for Germany and for Europe. But as John said, it would certainly come along with price hikes and yeah, also probably public discontent about this measure.

Steven Sokol [00:50:54] So let me ask one more sort of geopolitical question before bringing the conversation back to Germany and Germany's response. And that is from what I've been hearing from a number of observers of Russia. The expectation is that we're kind of in a holding pattern right now and that there won't be any further aggression until after the Olympics because Vladimir Putin will be visiting Beijing for the Olympics and actually one of our viewers writes and asks whether there's a possibility that behind the scenes, Putin and Xi are agreeing to coordinate some acts of aggression in Ukraine and

Taiwan, respectively, at the same time later this month. And I guess I'd be curious to hear from both of you what your thoughts are. I mean, certainly my concern has been the world is focused on Ukraine at the moment and on Russia at the moment. And yet there are other hot spots. You know, we have to think about the missile tests in North Korea recently. I was relieved to see that it looks like talks with Iran might resume soon. There are obviously a lot of hotspots, and those hotspots are not necessarily getting the kind of attention that they need. You know, for both of you as people that watch Russia but also watch China, do you think that that Putin and Xi might be thinking about coordinating some activities in Ukraine and Taiwan?

John Kornblum [00:52:40] Well, it could be. I probably - I don't think so for a number of Chinese reasons, but I think, Steve, you put your finger or your collar, put your finger on a real issue, and that is that the West from the United States and Western Europe, NATO members essentially, but also other countries have essentially neglected the worldwide strategic challenges which you went through in your remarks. We have, for a whole lot of reasons - had to do with defense budgets, it had to do with politics, it has to do with things such as the environment and COVID and everything - in other words, we are not really up to speed, as we used to say about what's going on in the world, and we certainly are not unified. That is the western world. I sometimes get a little bit frustrated when I read, which I do a lot in the German press of the Russian-American conflict over Ukraine. This is a European conflict and it is Russia trying to undermine the entire basis of the European Union's security policy. Going back to 2003, they were talking about building a network of well-governed states and eastern and southern borders. So this is as much a western issue as it is an American issue. We haven't spoken about it, but there was a great deal of almost emotion to the fact that Putin seemed to care only about talking with Biden and not with the Europeans. This has been changed a bit, but it still comes home with a strong dose of reality for further Europeans that in the end, the only strategic power remains in the United States. I think there's no question about that, but Europeans have allowed themselves, I think, to be shaken out of the doldrums. They went into a doldrum about security, which is now they're now being checked out. It's not just Germany. I was as unhappy with Germany's response as anybody, but I join Liana in saying this is not a German issue. This is not even a European issue. It's a Western issue, and the West has been asleep at the switch. I think there's no question about it. When President Obama said that Russia was only a regional power, he was technically correct. But he forgot that Russia was a global disrupter, a global disrupter with nuclear weapons. And you know, I'll say this very openly - the Obama administration was a period of inactivity and lack of a concentration on what our security interests were. Biden came in determined to change that. His first speech at the Munich Security Conference last year was an effort to change that. But he's found himself faced with realities, and it's not so easy just to wave your hand and to have things change. Finally, I would point out that Biden has a very complex domestic political situation, and the interesting thing is that Scholz's domestic situation is not much different than Biden's. For every Bernie Sanders that there is in the United States, there's a ... in Germany. And so Scholz has to take care of his left wing, just like Biden has to take care of his. And you can see what a real torture it's been for Biden to take care of his left wing. And I'm sure that Scholz is going to have the same issue.

Liana Fix [00:56:05] I think I would underline the point that John just made. I think it's not only a lazy framing that this is a Russia-U.S. Conflict, but it's also a dangerous framing in some parts of the German debate. It's not sort of dominating the German debate, but it's some parts of the German debate because it suggests that Germany sort of can come back to a middle position in Europe, where basically mediates between the United States and Russia, which is not what Germany's position has been after 1945, the long road

towards the West instead of Germany being anchored in the West. But to come back about the question of the Olympics, I think there has been a lot of reading of tea leaves about when exactly will the invasion happen? What about the map in eastern Ukraine? Does it have to be frozen territory for Russia to move on? So if looking at it from Moscow's perspective, I would probably try to find a time that no one expects and has been discussing so far to if I would want to move along. And what is also interesting is the level of cooperation between Russia and China, which has certainly increased since 2014, since the last crisis that we've seen. And we've also seen this in the public statements coming out from the Kremlin, for instance, about the U.S. and NATO responses to the draft treaty suggestions from Moscow where the official line was we will talk about this with our partners, including China, which very obviously tries to create an impression of China being on Russia's side, and also the UN Security Council discussion - we have seen in the UN discussion, we have seen that China seems to be not too far away from Russia's position. Xi sees an interest in supporting Russia's position. That doesn't mean that Russia and China would too ordinate on Taiwan or Ukraine. I think that's too far away. And obviously, there are also a lot of difficult issues between Russia and China. But this crisis can really become, from the perspective of Beijing, a great opportunity for everyone being distracted from the initial goal of the Biden administration to forge a Western approach towards China and being drawn back to Europe and enhancing stability in Europe. So whatever scenario we will see in the next two weeks, one very likely outcome, and we see it already now, is an increased presence of the United States in Europe, a military presence, a political presence which has not been the plan, as John said, of the Biden Administration, and which will bind resources that will make it more difficult to address China more strategically as the West and as the transatlantic alliance. So, I think we at the moment are very much focused on short term crisis management, but we will have to start thinking about beyond the crisis. What does this mean in broader terms for the strategic priorities of the West? Because we now have both at the same time, Russia and China as a challenge.

Steven Sokol [00:59:24] Thank you, thank you both for that. We are pretty much out of time, but I really would like to to bring the conversation back to Germany if both of you have a couple of more minutes because in our conversation so far, Liana, you talked a little bit about the divisions between but also within the parties, in the governing coalition, and John, you brought up the fact that the the new head of the Christian Democratic Party so has his own position as far as Russia is concerned. And so I think for many of us who who follow Germany, we knew that one of Olaf Scholz's big challenge was going to be to keep the three coalition parties together and to deal with any any splits, even between the parties. But now he's also dealing with some, some different opinions within the party and even within his own party. And so, I'd like to ask you, Liana, whether you think that the Social Democrats, whether the SPD has a Russia problem because of the different viewpoints within the party about Russia.

Liana Fix [01:00:34] The SPD has delayed this discussion for too long. It has started in 2014. As I said this process of disillusionment, which also included the SPD and the SPD has too long adopted recipes from the past. So, it has been too long about the [...] and the tone and eastern policy, which were all very important elements of policy in the past, which might not fit entirely to the situation where we are right now. So, it has been too much backwards looking to past lessons, applying these uncritically to the present. I do think that the chancellor himself and also other prominent figures of the Social Democratic camp, they have a very pragmatist position on this and this is the tendency where the policy towards Russia is going just because Russia doesn't give anything to justify a more, yeah, sort of a softer approach towards Russia. And I think that's basically which will not leave it

- give any other opportunity to basically all actors in Berlin to change the Russia policy because just the way Russia behaves. If it would sort of change, it would give a lot of food and incentive for those who argue we need to try to do a reset with Russia. But as it is right now, with 100,000 troops at Ukraine's border, it is just very difficult to come back to this sort of historical or nostalgic relationship with Russia. So, I think the SPD or other actors in Berlin is on the same path and will come to the same conclusions later.

Steven Sokol [01:02:31] And maybe. Let me ask you both the same final question and starting with you, John, and then Liana, I'd love to get your thoughts on it. We're obviously seeing this mounting pressure coming from Moscow. And I'm curious as to whether you think Putin's actions can serve as a real catalyst to sort of shift and refine German public opinion vis-a-vis Russia, but also to help define Berlin's policy toward Russia.

John Kornblum [01:03:07] Hmm. Well, I would like to as a final comment point out also, and this has directly to do with your question, Steve, that we are in the midst of a millennial upheaval. The world is changing completely. This crisis is a bad one. We really need to work hard to make it go as well as we can. But it is also the end of an era and not the beginning of an era. Russia is a very rapidly declining power. It keeps saying it's not, but it is. At the same time, Germany is a rapidly rising power, even though its economic system may be a little bit outmoded. The advantages that Germany has in Europe in the world make it, and I've argued this in public before, so it's not anything new - I think Germany is the third most important country in the world right now. And so, it is going to be very, very difficult to combine all of these things. It is going to be very, very difficult to bring the United States and Germany and other Western countries into the same direction. Germany's big competitors, as far as global interests are concerned, are not the United States, but rather other Europeans. And with the difference between, say, the view of France and the view of Poland couldn't be farther apart. So we're coming into an era of really major upheaval right now, and so is the public opinion in Germany going to change? Well, already has changed quite a bit. But the European Union needs a drastically needs a new narrative away from the peace process as they call themselves into the fact they are a gathering of 500 million people in 27 very important countries, and that they themselves have a role to play, but that geopolitically that role could only be played with the United States. This is something that's not - I heard, I heard that the the co-chairman of the SPD say exactly the same thing on German television last night. So, this is not something that I thought up. But it's going to be difficult. And so, I think that with all of the other issues that both Mr. Scholz has on his agenda and Joe Biden has on his agenda - really life and death issues for both our societies. We're going to be faced with also foreign geopolitical challenges, which might strain our abilities to deal with them. So I'm not totally optimistic. I'm optimistic about the future, but I'm not optimistic about the near future because I think it's going to be a very difficult phase.

Liana Fix [01:05:43] Thank you, John. Let me perhaps just add very quickly. I mean, Germany's foreign policy has always been slow and incremental, and let me quote the famous line of Helmut Schmidt who said, well, whoever has visions should go to the doctor. So visionary policy is not something which is intrinsic for German or European foreign policy, but to end on an optimistic note, we do see changes in the German discourse on Nord Stream 2, on the role of the former chancellor Gerhard Schroder, with Gazprom. On defensive weapon deliveries, there is a discussion going on about defensive weapon deliveries which might not change the position of the government, but there was a discussion going on. So we do see a shift, a slow shift, and it is very much created by Russia's actions, which again lead to the question how strategic does Russia behave?

Because in the end, it can end up with a Europe and NATO much more stronger after Russia's actions than they have been before.

Steven Sokol [01:06:49] Well, there's certainly an evolving debate in Berlin and one that is well worth watching. And of course, there is a lot to be watching out for along the border with Ukraine. And we'll just have to see how these events unfold. But John and Liana, from my standpoint, I'd like to thank you both for this incredibly thoughtful and insightful conversation. I've certainly learned a lot and I hope that our viewers have as well, and I'd like to thank our viewers for the many questions that you submitted. And Patrick Ryan, thanks to you and to the Tennessee World Affairs Council for partnering with us to hold this event.

Patrick Ryan [01:07:33] You bet, thank you. It was a great conversation - wunderbar. Thanks to everyone for your insights and perspectives and thanks to our audience for such probing questions. The conversation about the Ukraine crisis could go on all day. Fortunately, Ambassador Kornblum has agreed to join us again in about two weeks for another conversation about what's happening in that region. Thanks to the American Council on Germany and thanks to President Steve Sokol for your excellent moderation on today's program, and thanks to our German in America, Dr. Liana Fix, and our American in Germany Ambassador John Kornblum. Lastly, please consider supporting programs like this by contributing to the World Affairs Council at TNWAC.org, and thank you to our new friends from the ACG Network, those joining us from the World Affairs Council of America family, and from our friends in the Tennessee World Affairs Council. Remember to sign up for our newsletter at TNWAC.org to be alerted to our next conversation with Ambassador Kornblum and our other virtual programs. You can find a recording of this program and a transcript at TNWAC.org and in our newsletter later today to share with your friends who missed this terrific program and for you to watch it again. Thank you again, John, Liana, and Steve. Thank you and be well.